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REAMS, GAIL MILLER. The Critical Reception of Reynolds Price from 1961 through 1966. (1971) Directed by: Dr. Robert O. Stephens. Pp. 109

The purpose of this study is to determine the critical reception, from 1961 through 1966, of Reynolds Price's first three books: A Long and Happy Life, The Names and Faces of Heroes, and A Generous Man. Chronological checklists of reviews indicate each critic's reaction to each book, whether favorable, mixed, or unfavorable. Thirteen tables indicate different studies such as which novel and which short stories the critics consider superior. Where pertinent, Price's own interpretation of his work is given.

Unfortunately, no books evaluating Price's work have been published. Therefore, the sources of information for this study are primarily book reviews in magazines and newspapers. In addition, a few articles and interviews are cited.

This thesis reveals that all three of Price's books have received more favorable than unfavorable criticism. Price has received almost unanimous praise for his characters, especially Rosacoke in A Long and Happy Life and in "A Chain of Love" and also Uncle Grant in The Names and Faces of Heroes. The critics' favorite stories in The Names and Faces of Heroes are "Uncle Grant" and "A Chain of Love." Most critics feel that A Long and Happy Life is superior to A Generous Man. Whereas most praise the

hw

plot of A Long and Happy Life for its simplicity, most criticize the plot of A Generous Man for its complexity and large number of coincidences. Although a majority of critics feel that Price has neither effectively combined the real with the supernatural nor has created meaningful symbols, they do believe that his myth is effective and that his serious and comical elements are well blended. Most of the critics believe that Price's style is effective and that his themes are presented with clarity. The themes mentioned most often are as follows: (1) giving, from which is learned the fulfillment of love; (2) the reinforcing of love by death, separation, and reminiscence; (3) the acceptance of life with its duties and responsibilities; (4) liberation from youthful innocence, often through an understanding of sex; (5) that givers and takers need not be separate; and (6) that youth is the best time in one's life.

A majority of critics feel that Price's writing shows autobiographical influences. In addition, several critics point out that Price's work often shows similarities to that of other writers; however, in interviews and articles, Price strongly denies that any other writer has influenced him and adds that critics often misinterpret his work, especially those who overlook his pessimism.

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF REYNOLDS PRICE
FROM 1961 THROUGH 1966

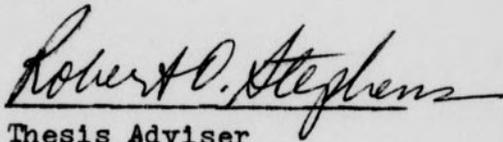
by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Edward Reynolds Price was born in Macon (Warren County), North Carolina, on February 1, 1933. He was graduated from Needham Broughton High School in Raleigh in 1951. He won an Angier B. Duke Scholarship and was graduated from Duke University in 1955 with an A.B. degree. He attended Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar for three years and in 1958 received a Bachelor of Letters degree from Merton College. In the fall of 1958 he began teaching at Duke University and continues there now as an Assistant Professor.

Price has published five books: A Long and Happy Life, a novel, published in 1962; The Names and Faces of Heroes, a collection of short stories, published in 1963; A Generous Man, a novel, published in 1966; Love and Work, a novel, published in 1968; and Permanent Errors, a collection of short stories, published in 1970. In addition, he has written short stories, articles, poetry, and book reviews.

In 1962 Price received the William Faulkner Foundation Award, given for the most notable first novel published in that year. He was also awarded the Sir Walter Raleigh

Cup for the best fiction written by a North Carolinian in 1962, and one of his short stories, "One Sunday in Late July," was included in the 1961 collection of O. Henry Award short-story winners. Another mark of Price's acceptance is his being the subject of interviews in Shenandoah, the New York Times Book Review, and other professional and popular journals.

This paper concerns the critical reception of Price's first three books: A Long and Happy Life, The Names and Faces of Heroes, and A Generous Man. Each new author is viewed as a novice. His efforts are met with varying degrees of approval and disapproval. Reynolds Price is no exception. He has met with unconditional praise by some and has been cynically derided by others, although his supporters have generally outnumbered his detractors. It is important to remember, however, that many critics are consciously or unconsciously subjective. A Northern critic, for example, might feel his regionalism as much as a Southern one. A North Carolina critic might be overly enthusiastic because of state pride. And an older critic might resent Price's youthful success. Such differences produce the variations in critical reception as shown in this paper.

This evaluation and study of critical reception is essential in order to place Price in a proper perspective in relation to his literary predecessors and contemporaries.

It establishes, as well, a foundation for a better assessment of Price's future works.

CHAPTER II

A LONG AND HAPPY LIFE

I. INTRODUCTION

When the editors of Harper's Magazine decided to publish in its entirety Reynolds Price's A Long and Happy Life in April, 1962, they broke a 112-year tradition to do so. John Fischer, editor-in-chief of Harper's Magazine, has explained this unusual action in the following way:

During the sixties we were experimenting with special supplements about twice a year, primarily in an effort to increase newsstand sales and to call the magazine to the attention of new categories of readers. All of the early supplements had been non-fiction, but for some time we had been on the look-out for a good, short novel--that is, under sixty thousand words, which was about the maximum feasible length for a supplement. The Reynolds Price novel was the first to come along that met these specifications. If I remember correctly, it was called to our attention by Mr. Simon Michael Bessie, editorial director of Atheneum Publishers. The first reader, I think, was Robert Silvers, then one of our editors and now editor-in-chief of the New York Review of Books He liked it and commended it to the other editors. All, or most of them concurred, and since I liked it too, I decided to publish it. . . . The novel was a critical success Bessie had expected to sell about three thousand copies or less, which would be normal for a first novel of some quality. I believe that the final sale came close to twenty-five thousand copies¹

¹Personal letter from John Fischer to Gail Reams, September 3, 1968.

Many critics in newspapers and magazines have attempted to explain why A Long and Happy Life has been so popular. Apparently one reason is that the story portrays the popular and contemporary "coming of age" of its heroine. A Long and Happy Life is the story of the coming to maturity of a North Carolina girl. Rosacoke Mustian, young and sensitive, is in love with the young happy-go-lucky Wesley Beavers, who does not share her love. The book opens as Wesley is giving Rosacoke a ride on the back of his motorcycle to Mildred Sutton's funeral; Mildred, a Negro friend of Rosacoke's, had died giving birth to a son whose father remained unknown. The same day, Rosacoke and Wesley go to a family picnic, after which he attempts to seduce her and she refuses. Wesley leaves for Norfolk, Virginia, to sell motorcycles; Rosacoke faithfully writes him long letters, only to receive short postcards or nothing in reply. When Wesley returns for a brief visit, in desperation Rosacoke gives herself to him in an effort to hold him. She fails, however, and he again leaves for Norfolk. When Rosacoke later realizes she is pregnant, she is hurt, baffled, and lonely. None of the relationships with the rest of the family help her. Her mother, although well-meaning, lacks Rosacoke's sensitivity. Her brother Milo, with whom she was once close, is drawn into a shell because of his own problems: first, his pregnant wife, Sissie, and second, later, the birth of their stillborn child. Rosacoke's other brother,

Rato, is miles away in Oklahoma in the army; and even if she wrote to him, he could not understand since he is somewhat mentally retarded. Rosacoke keeps her secret until Christmas time when Wesley returns. When Rosacoke tells him she is going to have his baby, he offers to marry her. Ambivalent about what she has done, she at first refuses. Later, however, after she portrays Mary in the Christmas pageant at the Delight Baptist Church and holds the Gupton baby on her lap, something makes her respond to the call of new life inside her. Gaining new serenity, she agrees to marry Wesley and hopes for "a long and happy life" with him.

As the narrative outline suggests, this work had much in common with other coming-of-age novels. Yet it achieved a significantly wider reading than most novels of its time. One explanation of this fact is the extensiveness and favor with which it was received. This critical reception had a major bearing on the success of the novel in the literary world and, in a wider sense, on the shaping of the author's career. It is my contention, therefore, that a detailed examination of the critical reception of Reynolds Price is crucial to the more general question concerning the development of his art.

The topics most often mentioned by Price's critics --Price's similarity to other writers, his plot, his characterization, and his themes--will be discussed one by one.

The following questions pose the issues most frequently commented on by the critics: Is Price influenced by or does he resemble other writers? Does the novel have an effective plot? Are Price's characters plausible? What are the themes and how do the characters reveal them? The answers to these questions form the basis of the critical reception of A Long and Happy Life.

II. THE QUESTION OF INFLUENCE

The question of whether Reynolds Price has been influenced by other writers is debated by a large number of critics as well as by Price himself. Price denies that he has been specifically influenced by other writers. He admits that he resembles other writers simply because he is writing about similar subject matter, namely the South. Some critics, however, insist that he has been heavily influenced by his literary predecessors. They emphatically state that William Faulkner's influence is prominent in Price's work. Price denies this allegation, almost as if he were refuting an acrimonious accusation in a criminal court. His denial seems emphatic, not because he is irritated by a comparison with Faulkner but rather because he wishes to be judged for his own originality.

One of the most venomous critical reviews of A Long and Happy Life is by Whitney Balliett, who accuses Price of writing in imitation of Faulkner and, consequently, of

having "a wearisome and hopeless style."² Charles W. Mann, Jr., more gently says that Price's novel is only occasionally marred by a Faulknerian sentence, although he gives no example.³ Lodwick Hartley's more generous criticism does not belittle Price for resembling Faulkner but asserts he does so, especially in sentence structure and prose rhythm.⁴ It is significant to note that Hartley does not cite any examples from Price's work which resemble Faulkner's style.

Not all critics, however, agree that Price has been influenced by Faulkner. William Blackburn, Price's former professor at Duke University, declares that Price's setting and style are un-Faulknerian.⁵ Unfortunately, he does not elaborate. Both Edwin Yoder and William Hogan see Price's characters as different from Faulkner's. Yoder, for example, notes that Rosacoke and Wesley do not belong among "the degenerate bestiary of Faulkner's Bundren class."⁶ Hogan says, "Rosa is a country girl, Wesley

²Whitney Balliett, The New Yorker, April 7, 1962, p. 178.

³Charles W. Mann, Jr., Library Journal, December 1, 1961, p. 4208.

⁴Lodwick Hartley, "An Eastern Carolina Pastoral," The [Raleigh] News and Observer, March 18, 1962, p. III-5.

⁵Davis Merritt, "And a Lot of People Like It," The Charlotte Observer, March 18, 1962, p. 10-D.

⁶Edwin Yoder, "Long, Happy Leap," Greensboro Daily News, March 30, 1962, p. A-6.

a country boy--but from very different country than . . .
Faulkner's."⁷

Characterization, however, is not the only trait by which critics have linked Price with Faulkner. John Cook Wyllie and Catharine Hughes propose that Price's tone of writing is different from Faulkner's. Faulkner pricks the public conscience, notes Wyllie, but Price leaves the reader feeling good;⁸ and Hughes, without defining the tone of either Faulkner or Price, finds them a "far cry" apart.⁹

In response to such critical description, Price has felt it imperative to deny the influence of other writers, especially Faulkner. To four literary critics who interviewed him--Garry Blanchard, Wallace Kaufman, Jonathan Friendly, and Harriet Doar--Price insists the reason that the prose rhythm of his writing is similar to Faulkner's is that they are both copying the same thing: the way people talk in the South.¹⁰ Price insists that Faulkner has influenced him in no way, "technical or otherwise,"¹¹ and that,

⁷William Hogan, "Prospects of a Long, Happy Literary Life," The San Francisco Chronicle, March 26, 1962, p. 39.

⁸John Cook Wyllie, The New York Times Book Review, March 18, 1962, p. 5.

⁹Catharine Hughes, The Commonweal, April 27, 1962, p. 124.

¹⁰Garry Blanchard, "Price Isn't Faulkner--Just from the Same Seed," The Charlotte Observer, December 9, 1962, p. 54.

¹¹Wallace Kaufman, "A Conversation with Reynolds Price,"

in fact, "Faulkner would be the last person" by whom he would be influenced."¹² He even goes so far as to say that critics always get the influences wrong.¹³

In an essay entitled "The Thing Itself," Price again feels compelled to refute the critics on the question of influence. He says he would regret, if not lament, the influence of Faulkner, whether formal or emotional. All Southern writers, of necessity, write about the region that they comprehend, he says, but they do not necessarily imitate the themes and language of Faulkner: "They imitate the South, their South as Faulkner imitated his South."¹⁴

III. THE PLOT

In an interview with Eugene Moore, Reynolds Price remembered that

the entire plot sprang up and developed in my head within, oh 15 minutes time. . . . And there, contained in small compass in a first plot, in a given situation, was a work of considerable complexity

Shenandoah, 18 (Spring, 1966), 9.

¹²Jonathan Friendly, "The Fast and Happy Rise of Reynolds Price," The [Raleigh] News and Observer, July 22, 1962, p. III-3.

¹³Harriet Doar, "'I Do Work That Occurs to Me'--Reynolds Price," The Charlotte Observer, April 10, 1966, p. 1-F.

¹⁴Reynolds Price, "The Thing Itself," context of an address presented at Duke University, April 28, 1966 (mimeographed paper filed in the Woman's College Library, Duke University), p. 3.

which requires a good deal of geographical space in the working out.¹⁵

Price told Moore that, realizing the complexity of the plot, he decided to make elaborate notes and plans in an orderly notebook. He spent ten months (January-October, 1957) composing these notes, he reports, before he even began to write the book. The main body of these notes (January 14-April 13, 1957), published in the Virginia Quarterly Review, Spring, 1965, and entitled "A Long and Happy Life: Fragments of Groundwork," indicates Price's intricacy of thought on the basic elements of the novel: plot, character, theme, and those problems which he thought might beset him when he actually began to write the book, as well as possible solutions to those problems.

Price substantiated the complexity of the novel in an interview with Jonathan Friendly. He told Friendly he had begun the book as a short story, but as he wrote, the story enlarged itself. "I crept up on the novel through the back door. As I wrote it, the middle became enormously complex."¹⁶

But if Price's plan was complex, its forthright presentation deceived several critics. William Hogan's

¹⁵Eugene Moore, "An Interview with Reynolds Price on Writing, Readers, Critics," Red Clay Reader, No. 3, 1966, p. 18.

¹⁶Friendly, p. III-3.

perception of the book seems shallow when he speaks of "this little love story" that is as "simple as a nursery rhyme."¹⁷ William Barrett also seems to miss important elements of the book when he states, "His plot is slight: the seduction of a young girl by her young man, his return to discover she is pregnant, his proposal of marriage and her acceptance."¹⁸ Barrett seems to forget that much of the "action" of the book takes place in Rosacoke's mind, for it is Rosacoke who determines what the plot will be: what actions she will take, what her relationship with Wesley will be, and, hence, what the outcome of the book will be.

Perhaps it is a compliment to Price, though, that a novel which required so many months of agonizing effort to compose seems so simple to his readers. It appears that Price did not entangle himself in the maze of his own complexity but rather plotted out a pathway of unobstructed steps. His clear chronological sequence of events with no retrogressive action seems to have given the book an air of simplicity, although, in truth, the label "simplicity" seems a misnomer.

Perhaps the words of Charles Poore in the New York Times throw the best light on this question of simplicity:

¹⁷Hogan, p. 39.

¹⁸William Barrett, The Atlantic Monthly, 204 (April, 1962, p. 160.

There is nothing quite so complicated as simplicity. Infinitudes of distractions and irrelevancies must be forced into perspective to achieve it. And when it is achieved--as it is in A Long and Happy Life by Reynolds Price--we have a moment of truth that is art.¹⁹

Price's elaborate notes and careful construction have produced a novel which possesses, in the eyes of several critics, the important attribute of unity. William Barrett sees that "the plot is . . . interwoven with all the textures of family life."²⁰ S. J. Rowland, Jr., also praises Price for successfully uniting "Rosacoke's interior groping" with "the exterior scene."²¹

The ending of the novel has raised some controversy among the critics. Some say that the ending is a natural culmination of the preceding action, that Rosacoke's acceptance of Wesley's proposal is a proper consequence of their continuing relationship throughout the novel. They praise Price because, rather than expressing himself on the probable success of Rosacoke and Wesley's marriage, he leaves the question up to the reader to decide. William Hogan asks, "Yet could this be the beginning of the long and happy life? In lady-or-tiger fashion, the reader is left to

¹⁹Charles Poore, The New York Times, March 20, 1962, p. 35.

²⁰Barrett, p. 160.

²¹S. J. Rowland, Jr., The Christian Century, June 27, 1962, p. 810.

decide."²² John K. Hutchens echoes Hogan when he says, "Long and happy indeed! Possibly, just possibly, a light of hope glimmers in the distance as the story ends. But that is for Mr. Price to tell you, or rather, as he artfully arranges it, for you to surmise according to your bent."²³

Others say that Wesley's proposal and Rosacoke's acceptance of it come about too suddenly. Honor Tracy balks at accepting Price's ending because she sees Wesley's quick reversal from a heel to a hero as being unbelievable. She believes that an ending to a novel should open a window in the future but that Price's ending leaves us facing a blank wall; we are left wondering how long "the dreadful misalliance can hold." She also insists that we cannot believe in Wesley's noble offer of marriage after he has acted as an irresponsible scoundrel and oaf throughout the novel.²⁴ Lodwick Hartley objects to the ending for another reason. He believes that the nativity pageant is "too artfully symbolic as a final device for Rosacoke's tragicomic search for love." He also insists that Rosacoke's assumption of the role of the Virgin is too patly ironic.²⁵

²²Hogan, p. 39.

²³John K. Hutchens, "A Long and Happy Life," New York Herald Tribune, March 21, 1962, p. 25.

²⁴Honor Tracy, New Leader, 45 (August 6, 1962), 21.

²⁵Hartley, p. III-5.

Price anticipated this criticism in his notes for the novel. On January 26, 1957, he wrote about the possibility of Baby Sister or Rosacoke giving an Address to the Babe of Bethlehem, but "the difficulty there would be to prevent its sounding too 'symbolic,' too ironic. That's going to be a problem with the whole pageant ending."²⁶

Did Price succeed in preventing his closing pageant from becoming too ironic, too symbolic? Whatever the answer, the majority of critics have concluded that Price has effectively organized his action so that it unfolds naturally, so that its very complexity appears to be simplicity. He succeeds also in uniting the internal ruminations of his characters, particularly Rosacoke, with their external actions. Finally, even though Wesley's proposal may seem somewhat sudden, Price intentionally leaves his readers puzzling the question: "Will Rosacoke and Wesley lead a long and happy life?"

IV. THE CHARACTERS

Perhaps the most logical approach to a discussion of Price's characters would be to begin with Rosacoke, continue with Wesley, and end with the minor characters. But the lives of Rosacoke and Wesley are so inextricably

²⁶Reynolds Price, "A Long and Happy Life: Fragments of Groundwork," The Virginia Quarterly Review, Spring, 1965, p. 239.

bound together that they cannot be treated as entities. Nor can the life of Rosacoke be isolated from the lives of the minor characters.

It seems advisable, accordingly, to deal with three questions which the critics most often discuss concerning Rosacoke and Wesley. The critics' views will be presented for each of the following questions: Has Price succeeded in making Rosacoke seem real? Has Price succeeded in making Wesley seem real? Is Rosacoke's love for Wesley believable?

It is interesting to note that these three issues were confronted by Reynolds Price in his original notes, later published as "A Long and Happy Life: Fragments of Groundwork" in the Virginia Quarterly Review. Price completed his elaborate notes in England before he returned to the United States, where he wrote the novel itself. His aims and goals for Rosacoke and Wesley, as stated in his notes, will be presented as each question is posed.

Concerning the first question--has Price succeeded in making Rosacoke seem real?--Price himself says:

Almost every character in "A Chain of Love" is what E. M. Forester would call a "flat" character, everyone perhaps except Rosacoke

. . . I'm inclined to think "Chain" succeeds too, and it succeeds, surely, because Rosacoke seems, for all her rustic native qualities, a large, a spacious person. So perhaps my problem is already solved by simply having Rosacoke in

the scene, a little older and finer-grained and a good deal more fluent.²⁷

Rosacoke's central importance in the novel leads to the further questions of how Price conceived the character and how he sought to develop Rosacoke as a credible and living person. In his interview with Jonathan Friendly, Price reveals that Rosacoke is typical of girls he knew in grammar school in Warrenton--girls who had a surprising sensitivity but who were soon married and burdened with children and cares. Ralph Thompson shows keen perception in his criticism when he says he would expect to see Rosacoke "wanly herding, a few years later, a sudden brood of children up and down the aisles of the local supermarket."²⁸ Price echoes this same idea in an interview with Eugene Moore when he speaks of the girls he knew in the eighth grade who were

very much like the sort of girls who appear in A Long and Happy Life . . . country girls who at the age of 12 or 13 seemed to have an extraordinary fineness and yet seemed also doomed to the life of their mothers, which was a life of rapid incessant childbearing, domestic labor, farm labor for that matter. . . . By the age of 24, 25, one would see them in the streets of Warrenton on a Saturday with a pick-up full of children, looking as old and drained as their mothers.²⁹

²⁷Price, The Virginia Quarterly Review, pp. 239, 241-242.

²⁸Ralph Thompson, Book-of-the-Month Club News, April, 1962, p. 14.

²⁹Moore, pp. 21-22.

The country girls of Price's youth were not, however, the only basis for the creation of Rosacoke. In an interview with Wallace Kaufman, Price tells about his first sight of a particular Vermeer in The Hague during the summer of 1956: a picture of a young woman in her early twenties, apparently pregnant beneath a blue smock, standing before a window and reading a letter. Price tells how he circled the painting for long minutes and then bought a reproduction which he propped up on his work table at Oxford. He states:

It was almost two years before I began to think of and plan in great detail the novel which would be about a girl reading letters from a lover at a distant place and that girl pregnant with that lover's child. I'm sure, though, that Vermeer's image had worked in my mind for those two years upon questions and needs and knowledge of my own to produce the story which later became A Long and Happy Life.³⁰

The fact that he had in his own mind the visual image of Rosacoke's background, personality, and looks does not, in itself, mean that Price has succeeded in making this image seem real to his readers. However, critics are in almost unanimous accord that he has created in Rosacoke a real and believable character. Rosacoke is described as "memorable and . . . worth saving,"³¹ "beautifully

³⁰Kaufman, p. 24.

³¹William D. Snider, "For Reynolds Price: A Long and Happy Literary Life," Greensboro Daily News, April 22, 1962, p. 3-D.

imagined,"³² "three-dimensional,"³³ and "a likable, skillfully drawn character."³⁴ Other critics add that she is a type "seen every day in rural America"³⁵ and that she is a "completely successful literary creation."³⁶ Davis Merritt believes Rosacoke has passed the supreme test for a character, explaining: "She's enchanted them all, including the well-nigh unenchantable Saturday Review."³⁷

Other critics praise her because the reader can get inside her mind or her life. G. Glenwood Clark praises Price's picture of Rosacoke's "daily life amid her family circle."³⁸ William Barrett, who is impressed by "Mr. Price's feeling for the girl and what passes in her mind,"³⁹ is supported by Granville Hicks, who says that "Price takes us inside her mind, so that we feel with her as we rarely feel with a character in fiction."⁴⁰

³²Book review in Times Weekly Review, March 29, 1962, p. 10.

³³R. G. G. Price, Punch, March 28, 1962, p. 513.

³⁴Book Review in Time, March 23, 1962, p. 88.

³⁵Mary Snead Boger, "Yes, Young Price Wrote Himself a Book," The Charlotte Observer, March 18, 1962, p. 10-D.

³⁶Hughes, p. 124.

³⁷Merritt, p. 10-D.

³⁸G. Glenwood Clark, "Carolina Tragi-Comedy," Greensboro Daily News, February 25, 1962, p. C-3.

³⁹Barrett, p. 160.

⁴⁰Granville Hicks, Saturday Review, March 10, 1962, p. 18.

Edwin Yoder, apparently saturated with "puppets and stick-figures," praises Price for his use of real and refreshing characters.⁴¹ Robert M. Adams says, "Miss Rosacoke is beautifully envisioned, without sentimentality or, it seems to me, cynicism." In addition, he asserts that "she is a young woman . . . with resources of strength and gaiety in which we have to believe because of the metaphors which her tongue mounts as naturally as a jaybird."⁴²

Other critics find Rosacoke a believable character because the reader can share her emotions. Arthur Lerner states that her "dreams of happiness are shared by readers with amusement and respect."⁴³ In contrast, the Virginia Quarterly Review says, "Mr. Price holds us paralyzed by the despair and anguish being suffered by his heroine."⁴⁴

Other critics agree with William Hogan, who comments that Rosacoke is "compelling and precisely right."⁴⁵ The Times Literary Supplement points out that she "sees the physical world around her with a clarity and freshness The words, and the rhythms imposed on them, fit

⁴¹Yoder, p. A-6.

⁴²Robert M. Adams, The Hudson Review, 15, No. 3 (Autumn, 1962), 427.

⁴³Arthur Lerner, Books Abroad, 37 (Summer, 1963), 339.

⁴⁴The Virginia Quarterly Review, 38, No. 2 (Spring, 1962), 40.

⁴⁵Hogan, p. 49.

her emotions and perceptions as faithfully as a skin does a skeleton."⁴⁶ Catharine Hughes praises Rosacoke as "a fictional rarity: a character who moves through the pages of the novel with complete consistency."⁴⁷ Perhaps Granville Hicks gives the best summation of the critics who concur that Rosacoke is a believable character when he states, "To have created Rosacoke Mustian is an achievement that the most mature novelist might envy."⁴⁸

Only two critics contend that Rosacoke is not entirely believable. The first, in Time magazine, says, "Although his observations are intended to be Rosacoke's, Price sometimes betrays a man's melodramatic uneasiness at the workings of women." As noted earlier, however, Time also describes Rosacoke as "a likable, skillfully drawn character" and adds that "the working-out of Rosacoke's young womanhood is touching and true."⁴⁹ The second critic, Edwin Yoder, says, "One finds himself almost wishing (horribly enough) for a Southern heroine who along with her sex problems also worried occasionally about the H-bomb, or collected stamps--just did anything to raise her horizons

⁴⁶Book review in The Times Literary Supplement,
March 23, 1962, p. 197.

⁴⁷Hughes, p. 124.

⁴⁸Hicks, p. 18.

⁴⁹Time, p. 88.

a notch above No. 1." However, Yoder tempers his negative criticism when he says, "Her keen pride and longing for dignity qualify her for the reader's concern."⁵⁰

The most unfavorable criticism does not concern Rosacoke as a character but rather Price's choice of her name. Betty Hodges says, "His heroine (and where did he find her name?) is Rosacoke Mustian"⁵¹ Whitney Balliett remarks, "Rosacoke Mustian (seriously?)"⁵² John C. Wyllie agrees when he says, "The girl (Rosacoke Mustian--a nice touch)"⁵³ And the Saturday Review concurs: "Among its other attributes, the first novel boasts a heroine with the improbable but memorable name of Rosacoke Mustian."⁵⁴ On the other hand, Christopher Derrick thinks that "Rosacoke is well-named, being half pink fragrance and half just the old dope in the familiar curvaceous bottle"⁵⁵

The first of our questions, "Has Price succeeded in making Rosacoke seem real?" must be answered affirmatively.

⁵⁰Yoder, p. A-6.

⁵¹Betty Hodges, "Book Nook," Durham Morning Herald, January 7, 1962, p. 5-D.

⁵²Balliett, p. 178.

⁵³Wyllie, p. 5.

⁵⁴Book review in Saturday Review, 48, No. 31 (July, 1965), 26.

⁵⁵Christopher Derrick, Tablet, 216 (June, 1962), 523.

Both Price's description of the young country girls he knew and the relating of how he was influenced by Vermeer's picture show us how Rosacoke became real in Price's own mind. Although Time magazine and Edwin Yoder offer negative criticism, both generally agree with all the other critics who maintain that Rosacoke is believable for one of five reasons: (1) she is a skillfully drawn character, (2) Price takes us inside her mind and her life, (3) she is not sentimental, (4) we can share her emotions, and (5) she is completely consistent.

The second of the three questions concerning characters is whether Price succeeded in making Wesley seem real. It seems appropriate to consider first what Price had in mind when he created Wesley. In "A Long and Happy Life: Fragments of Groundwork," he poses the question: "Is Wesley going to be much of a character? That is, full and round with sides and a top and bottom?" He answers his own question positively by saying, "Yes, I think he must have a very real life of his own."⁵⁶ Price was influenced by a painting in his creation of Wesley just as, we noted earlier, he was in his creation of Rosacoke. In his interview with Kaufman, he explains:

There are other pictures [besides the Vermeer woman] deeply embedded in A Long and Happy Life. One of them is the portrait of a young man by

⁵⁶Price, The Virginia Quarterly Review, p. 246.

Botticelli which hangs in the National Gallery in London, a full embodiment of the sort of man I imagined Wesley to be in A Long and Happy Life.⁵⁷

Although critics readily praise Price's creation of Rosacoke as a real character, they fail to comment on Wesley's credibility. The one who comes closest is Ralph Thompson: "Wesley is every good-looking joker in a leather jacket who ever loafed along the main street of a Southern town."⁵⁸

Most critics, however, agree that Price has portrayed Wesley's two main traits--selfishness and wildness. All describe him as selfish or inconsiderate. Thompson notes that "sometimes he wouldn't even bother to answer Rosacoke's letters."⁵⁹ One critic sees that "Wesley is no giver of himself,"⁶⁰ and another agrees that he is "given . . . to muteness in regard to Rosacoke."⁶¹ They uniformly see wildness in Wesley's interest in easy women and in his concern with motorcycles, evidently a symbol to them of irresponsibility. Wesley is spoken of as "a bit of a philanderer,"⁶²

⁵⁷Kaufman, p. 24.

⁵⁸Thompson, p. 14.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰The Times Literary Supplement, p. 197.

⁶¹Gene Baro, New York Herald Tribune Books, March 18, 1962, p. 4.

⁶²The Times Literary Supplement, p. 197.

"a twenty-two-year-old hellion,"⁶³ and "the local Lothario"⁶⁴ who "evidently has run around with all sorts and kinds of easy women"⁶⁵ and has done "stretches of billygoating with anybody else who was available."⁶⁶

The motorcycle is Price's vehicle for portraying Wesley's selfish immaturity. Two critics point out that "he seems more interested in his motorcycle than Rosacoke"⁶⁷ and when Rosacoke "refuses him, he roars sulkily back to Norfolk to sell motorcycles."⁶⁸

The last of the three questions which the critics most often discuss concerning Rosacoke and Wesley is whether Rosacoke's love for Wesley is believable. In "A Long and Happy Life: Fragments of Groundwork," Price emphasizes that Wesley

. . . must manage to convince me that Rc. [Rosacoke] might have loved him to distraction--for some reason beyond the physical, which was certainly a big reason too. . . .

I wondered last night why [Rosacoke] loves Wesley? The problem is to make Wesley--for all his insensitiveness and callous hunger--somehow a person whom [Rosacoke] can, believably, love. The scene when she sees him playing the harmonica

⁶³Balliett, p. 178.

⁶⁴Friendly, p. III-3.

⁶⁵Richard Sullivan, The Chicago Sunday Tribune, March 18, 1962, p. 3.

⁶⁶Time, p. 88.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Sullivan, p. 3.

will do a good deal to solve the problem

Of course, one of her great troubles is that she hasn't fully admitted how much her love for Wesley is based in desire.⁶⁹

Perhaps this is one area where Price did not succeed as well as he would have wished. Most of the critics seem to think that Rosacoke's love for Wesley is not believable. Those who do hold that Rosacoke's love for Wesley is believable--G. Glenwood Clark, Mary Snead Boger, and Catharine Hughes--state that this love is credible because Rosacoke was physically attracted to Wesley. Clark mentions that even though Rosacoke had seen Wesley earlier, "she became aware of him as an individual, as a sex and as a potential husband, when he shook down pecan nuts for her on a fall afternoon."⁷⁰ Mary Snead Boger agrees that Rosacoke has loved Wesley since she first saw him "spraddle-legged against the sky in the fork of a pecan tree," and that Rosacoke has a strong physical interest in Wesley, whom she describes as one of "the handsome, hard-thighed boys who join the Army."⁷¹ Catharine Hughes believes that Rosacoke reveals her desire when she says about Wesley, "Anybody who looks like that--you ought to give them anything you have."⁷²

⁶⁹Price, The Virginia Quarterly Review, pp. 246, 241.

⁷⁰Clark, p. C-3.

⁷¹Boger, p. 10-D.

⁷²Hughes, p. 125.

Price recognizes that physical desire is "a big reason" for Rosacoke's loving Wesley. Wesley "must manage to convince me," he says, "that Rosacoke might have loved him to distraction--for some reason beyond the physical."⁷³ This, according to the critics, Wesley does not succeed in doing. None of the critics comment on the harmonica scene even though to Price it is one of the most important scenes in the novel and the one on which he depends to convince his readers that Rosacoke loves Wesley for other than physical reasons.

Perhaps one critic, Granville Hicks, does understand that Wesley has other elusive qualities, although Hicks is too general for one to know exactly what he has in mind. He is possibly thinking of the harmonica scene when he observes, "We suspect, as Rosacoke does, that there may be more to him [Wesley] than is immediately apparent."⁷⁴

Other critics, not recognizing Rosacoke's physical interest in Wesley, are completely baffled by her love for him. They feel that Price has succeeded so well in portraying Rosacoke as a sensitive person and Wesley as an insensitive one that her love for him is unbelievable. "The story," Charles W. Mann insists, "concerns an unhappy affair between a sensitive girl and a crude boorish mechanic

⁷³Price, The Virginia Quarterly Review, p. 246.

⁷⁴Hicks, p. 17.

with whom she has had an eight-year, monosyllabic, and unsatisfactory romance."⁷⁵ Charles Poore similarly observes, "The heroine, a pretty girl called Rosacoke Mustian, makes you wonder, sometimes, why she has spent eight years or so--more than a third of her life so far--enamoured of her glitteringly worthless lover, Wesley Beavers."⁷⁶ John K. Hutchens speaks of Rosacoke's "sad passion for a middle-grade moron,"⁷⁷ and Lodwick Hartley says he cannot figure out why Rosacoke is "enmeshed in a nagging passion" for such an "unpromising youth."⁷⁸

Olivia Manning, baffled that Rosacoke can love one who does not love her in return, views Wesley as "the sort of young man who will always be more devoted to his motor-cycles than his mate."⁷⁹ Honor Tracy's criticism is that the author does not "indicate what, if anything, there was to see" in Wesley.⁸⁰

It becomes clear, then, that in the eyes of most critics, Price does not succeed in revealing Rosacoke's physical attraction for Wesley nor in making Rosacoke's

⁷⁵Mann, p. 4208.

⁷⁶Poore, p. 35.

⁷⁷Hutchens, p. 25.

⁷⁸Hartley, p. III-5.

⁷⁹Olivia Manning, The London Magazine, 2, No. 3 (June, 1962), 81.

⁸⁰Tracy, p. 21.

love for Wesley believable. According to the majority of the critics, Price achieves his greatest success with his creation of Rosacoke; she does, according to all of the critics, approximate reality. Wesley, on the other hand, does not reach the fullness of character that Rosacoke does; critics agree that Price has made him real only by emphasizing his personality traits--wildness and selfishness: his reality is that of a vivid but flat character. Finally, Price's greatest failure with Rosacoke and Wesley is that he does not succeed in making her love for him seem believable.

V. THE THEMES

In a review entitled "Country Mouse, City Mouse," Price states, "All bad novels are alike--they do not tell sizable, understandable truth."⁸¹ Attempting to uphold his standard for a good novel in A Long and Happy Life, Price wished to convey his truth through certain apparent, although unstated, themes. This naturally brings us to the question of what these themes are and whether they are presented effectively. And, in light of Price's critical fortunes, we must ask whether the critics are conscious of the themes and, if so, whether they are in agreement as to the importance of the themes.

⁸¹Reynolds Price, "Country Mouse, City Mouse," Book Week, May 10, 1964, p. 1.

In evaluating the critical response to Price's themes, we have the additional help of his own statements on his thematic intentions, given in his notes on A Long and Happy Life. These statements and the responses of critics furnish an illuminating counterpoint of intention and result.

In his notes he speaks first of Rosacoke as a tragic character: "Her greatness as a woman, a person, was her desire, her obligation, always to make the kind gesture, the touch, the thing which seemed to her dearly, if not always desirably right, and right because she thought it would make somebody else happy." He later adds that "when we give these gestures--especially when we give them for some kind of personal reason (Rosacoke's desire to hold Wesley)--we might as well be prepared to have them lash back upon us, sometimes."⁸² This explains why Rosacoke is a tragic character. She gives herself to Wesley, not only to make him happy but also to make herself happy by holding him. When he does not profess his love for her, she is hurt and suffers. And yet Price, in making Rosacoke the central character and an admirable one, projects his theme that no matter what pain and suffering result, one must try to reach out to his fellow men, to help meet their needs in the best way one can--usually through love

⁸²Price, The Virginia Quarterly Review, pp. 238, 239.

and understanding.

The picture which Price conveys throughout the entire book is that of man isolated from his fellow men. It seems significant that Rosacoke, the central character, is a telephone operator. The incessant babble of the operator finds a parallel in most of the daily conversation of all the characters. Few deep ideas or meaningful words are exchanged.

One of the saddest scenes in the book, the one in which Rosacoke tries to assuage Milo's grief, emphasizes this isolation between people. Milo's wife, Sissie, has just delivered a stillborn child; sick with grief, she needs consolation from Milo, but he will not go to her. He is too wrapped up in his own personal grief. Mama, realizing that Rosacoke was once very close to Milo, suggests that she ride with him and say to him, "Milo, Sissie needs you bad."⁸³ Rosacoke agrees to go, and there is the possibility that, for the first time in the book, one character will really speak to another with understanding, that he will reply with understanding, and that the two will achieve a meaningful bond. However, the moment is lost for when Rosacoke picks up a letter from Wesley at the post office which says, "And speaking

⁸³Reynolds Price, A Long and Happy Life, Avon Books (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1961), p. 120.

of the coast being clear--I hope you aren't having any more old or new worries about our deer hunt and that the coast is all clear there too. Is it? Time enough has passed so it ought to be,"⁸⁴ she suddenly realizes she might be pregnant. Frantic for her own future, Rosacoke dismisses her earlier plan to help Milo and commands him, "Take me home."⁸⁵

This intentional isolation and selfish concern for one's own welfare seems, to Price, to be synonymous with the immature striving for one's own personal desires. Both Rosacoke and Wesley possess this isolation and immaturity at the beginning of the novel. But as the novel progresses, each makes gestures toward the other: Rosacoke, when she first gives herself to Wesley; Wesley, when he offers to marry her; and Rosacoke, when she later accepts his proposal of marriage.

A second thematic intention, as Price observes in his notes, is that "the most important thing (the solution?) is knowing what to do when one's initial gestures fail. And I'm still not sure of that--except that one must go on making gestures, only trying even harder now to make the right ones."⁸⁶ Even though Rosacoke's initial gesture of

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 123.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 124.

⁸⁶Price, The Virginia Quarterly Review, p. 240.

offering herself to Wesley does not succeed in bringing her his love, she must not stop making the freely given gesture. Gouverneur Paulding says that the novel concerns "the only achievement that counts, the attainment of love, . . . [and] the only failure that matters, the inability to be generous." He adds that Rosacoke makes the "leap from the happiness of receiving to the joy of giving."⁸⁷ Catharine Hughes similarly sees that for Rosacoke, love's realization comes only through giving.⁸⁸

Price implies that some gestures may not be the right ones: for instance, giving one's body for the wrong reasons may result in tragedy. Without any real reason except desire, Mildred gives her body to several men, becomes pregnant by one of them (she does not know which one), gives birth to an illegitimate son, and dies herself. Rosacoke gives her body to Wesley to win his love but fails, and she is burdened with his baby and forced either to be disgraced or to marry a man who does not love her.

Even so, Rosacoke's dream for her future, although somewhat romantic, does not seem unreasonable:

All this time [she thinks] I have lived on the hope he would change some day before it was too late and come home and calm down and learn how to talk to me and maybe even listen, and we would have a long life together--him and me--and be

⁸⁷Gouverneur Paulding, The Reporter, 26 (April 12, 1962), 52.

⁸⁸Hughes, p. 125.

happy sometimes and get us children that would look like him and have his name and answer when we called. I just hoped that.⁸⁹

Perhaps the key phrase in this dream is "learn how to talk to me and maybe even listen." As mentioned earlier, Rosacoke's greatest frustration is that she feels she has no really meaningful communication with Wesley. She sends him long effusive letters, and he sends her curt, ambiguous-sounding postcards in reply. She keeps wanting Wesley to tell her he loves her. Finally, ironically, he says, "I thank you, Mae,"⁹⁰ after she has given herself to him. Hurt and bitter, she realizes that Wesley is not thinking of her at all but probably of some loose woman he has known in Norfolk.

Price states that the freely given gesture often lashes back and results in a great deal of pain and suffering, as it does for Rosacoke. First, she suffers the desperate loneliness of isolation. After giving herself to Wesley in an attempt to overcome this isolation, she has to endure his continued indifference. When she realizes she is pregnant, she suffers guilt and shame. Finally, she feels obligated to marry Wesley from a sense of duty to the baby.

In accepting the responsibilities and duties of

⁸⁹Price, A Long and Happy Life, pp. 159-160.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 95.

adulthood, Rosacoke realizes her own limitations and weaknesses as well as those of others. She realizes she cannot live alone. Even though Wesley's love and understanding might not be as complete as she would desire, she knows she has to accept what love and understanding he does offer.

Three critics, William Barrett, Charles W. Mann, Jr., and Julian Mitchell, are perhaps more pessimistic about Rosacoke's future than other critics. Barrett says that Rosacoke "sees her future life with him [Wesley] suddenly deflated and common, and yet she must go forward to that future."⁹¹ Mann observes that in the end Rosacoke sacrifices herself to Wesley, "only dimly aware that things might or could have been different."⁹² And Mitchell insists that Rosacoke comes to accept the fact that her love for Wesley is "to be fulfilled in terms other than those she would have chosen, that Wesley is not very nice, and that he is certainly not going to get any nicer."⁹³

These three critics, Barrett, Mann, and Mitchell, seem harsh in that they overlook the fact that Rosacoke has succeeded in overcoming her sense of isolation. They all agree on a point, however, which many other critics miss: Rosacoke will be a lesser person in the future than

⁹¹Barrett, p. 160.

⁹²Mann, p. 4208.

⁹³Julian Mitchell, The Spectator, March 23, 1962, p. 376.

she is now. This view is substantiated by Price himself in his notes. He speaks of how Milo in A Long and Happy Life is less of a person at the age of twenty-four than he was at fifteen in A Generous Man. And in his interview with Eugene Moore, he says of Milo's "withering" that "life has changed him, narrowed him, reconstructed him; and I'm sure this will be the process on Rosacoke."⁹⁴

Thus, we see that this theme of maturing to adulthood, pervasive in contemporary writing, is given a different meaning by Price. Where most authors seem to think the maturing process betters a man, Price thinks an adolescent loses more than he gains in becoming an adult. In his notes he states that the meaning of the pageant scene with the baby is that

Rosacoke suddenly realizes the tragedy of growing up: involvement and responsibility. But the peace, the really terrifying peace, and the beauty (beauty because it promises decay) of this baby must flow through the end like love, when it's new.⁹⁵

The key words here are "involvement," "responsibility," "peace," and "beauty"--all of which to most people have a pleasant connotation. It is significant, therefore, that Price associates the words "involvement" and "responsibility" with the word "tragedy," that he associates the word "peace" with the word "terrifying," and the word

⁹⁴Moore, p. 21.

⁹⁵Price, The Virginia Quarterly Review, p. 240.

"beauty" with "decay."

Price emphasizes, further, that Rosacoke emerges in the end as a changed person: ". . . the way she changes is what the story 'means.'" In other words, the way she changes is the theme of the novel. Price adds pessimistically, "She has learned a tragic fact about love and responsibility and honesty: now what can she do with the fact which she so sadly learned?" He also states that Rosacoke is older than she was in "A Chain of Love" and "therefore infinitely more dependent on other people (nothing on earth is as independent as a child), more entangled--to the point, finally, of suffocation."⁹⁶

Few critics in their analyses of the novel seem to have perceived these intentions. Most are not specific enough in their statements of the theme. For instance, Betty Hodges says that Rosacoke finally wins "her case only to come to a new understanding of the nature and needs of love."⁹⁷ She leaves the reader of her critical review wondering: What proof is there that Rosacoke has won her case? What new understanding of love has she obtained? What are the needs of love? Both G. Glenwood Clark⁹⁸ and Mary Snead Boger⁹⁹ correctly see that Rosacoke learns her own limitations and weaknesses and also those

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Hodges, p. 5-D.

⁹⁸Clark, p. C-3.

⁹⁹Boger, p. 10-D.

of others, but they do not answer the important questions: What are these limitations? Of what value will they be to Rosacoke now that she has recognized them?

Not all the critics are so vague, however. The most perceptive statements of the theme are made by Gene Baro and Richard Nye. "What she learns in the course of the novel," says Baro, "is that there is no cure for the vagaries of the human heart, for life's essential loneliness, uncertainty, confusion and sadness."¹⁰⁰ At the end of the novel, Rosacoke remains uncertain and confused about the future. She is still lonely and sad when she realizes that complete communication and union with Wesley is impossible. Nye sees that Price's "moral may be: love makes all hearts gentle, after it has broken them."¹⁰¹ This is what Price meant when he spoke of the "terrifying peace"; it is a surrender or acquiescence to life and love as it is, not as one had hoped it would be.

Other critics believe that Price states his theme in the epigraph, which is from Dante's Paradiso, XIII, 133-135. These lines have been translated as follows: "For I have seen first all the winter through the thorn display itself hard and forbidding and then upon its summit

¹⁰⁰Baro, p. 4.

¹⁰¹Richard Nye, Manchester Guardian, March 30, 1962, p. 7.

bear the rose."¹⁰² Another interpretation speaks of "the allusion to the thorn which brings forth the rose when the summer comes."¹⁰³ In reference to this epigraph, John Wyllie states, "Eventually she permits the hard and forbidding thorn to bear its flower."¹⁰⁴ In other words, Rosacoke decides to give birth to her child; and by accepting Wesley as her husband, she permits him to father a legitimate child. In his notes Price mentions the possibility of having Rosacoke think about suicide or abortion.¹⁰⁵ In the novel, however, even though Rosacoke is desperate and confused, she does not even consider these possibilities. This seems to give a certain amount of hope to the ending and optimism to the book even though Price does seem pessimistic about Rosacoke's future.

This optimism is expressed by Granville Hicks, who says, "The ending is ambiguous, but the epigraph, which is from Dante, permits us to believe that the briar may blossom, that Rosacoke may realize part of her dream."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰²The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, trans. J. A. Carlyle, Thomas Okey, and P. H. Wicksteed. The Modern Library (New York: Random House, 1932).

¹⁰³L. Oscar Kuhns, Treatment of Nature in Dante (New York: E. Arnold, 1908), p. 115.

¹⁰⁴Wyllie, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵Price, The Virginia Quarterly Review, p. 240.

¹⁰⁶Hicks, p. 18.

Hicks associates the briar with Rosacoke's dream, mentioned earlier: that Wesley would change, calm down, talk and listen, marry her and give her children, and that they would be happy sometimes and have a long life together. That Wesley will marry her and give her children seems to be the only part of Rosacoke's dream she can definitely count on happening; however, the hopes of that dream become fulfilled in reverse order. Price also leaves us doubtful as to whether the other parts of her dream--that Wesley will change, calm down, and communicate meaningfully with Rosacoke--will be fulfilled.

In summary, Price proposes two main themes with which the majority of critics agree: First, no matter what pain and suffering may result, one must try to reach out to his fellow men, to help meet their needs in the best way he can, usually through love and understanding. Second, one must realize that life and other people cannot always be what he wishes them to be, but he must accept them as they are; in so doing, he must accept the duties and responsibilities of adulthood.

VI. CONCLUSION

As John Fischer points out, A Long and Happy Life was considered a great success by the general public, who bought about twenty-five thousand copies, over eight times

the normal expectancy for a first novel of some quality.¹⁰⁷ In addition, the critics have been in agreement with the general public. Of the forty-one reviews of the book published in newspapers and magazines throughout the country, thirty are exclusively favorable; ten are mixed, with all ten having more favorable than unfavorable comments; and only one is unfavorable (for a chronological checklist of the reviews of A Long and Happy Life, see List of Works Consulted, pp. 103-105).

Although several critics find Price's style in A Long and Happy Life to be an imitation of Faulkner's style, Price strongly denies this and insists, instead, that his writing resembles that of other writers because they are all imitating the same thing--the South.

Most critics praise Price's simplicity of plot, but this praise becomes somewhat ironic when one realizes Price prepared such elaborate notes for the novel. Some find the pageant scene too symbolic, but most praise the ending which lets the reader speculate as to whether Rosacoke and Wesley will lead a long and happy life.

Rosacoke is unanimously extolled by the critics as a well-drawn, believable character. Wesley, on the other hand, is criticized for being too shallow; except on rare occasions, he displays only two traits: selfishness and

¹⁰⁷Personal letter from John Fischer (see my p. 4).

wildness. For this reason most of the critics find Rosacoke's love for Wesley, aside from mere physical attraction, unrealistic.

Critics point out that Price has two main themes:

- (1) that no matter how much one suffers, he must continue to give to others through love and understanding, and
- (2) that one must accept life as it is with its duties and responsibilities.

Except for minor criticisms, Price's book has received unusually strong praise and, therefore, in the opinion of the critics, deserves the Sir Walter Raleigh Cup as well as the William Faulkner Foundation Award.

CHAPTER III

THE NAMES AND FACES OF HEROES

I. INTRODUCTION

The Names and Faces of Heroes, Reynolds Price's second book, is a collection of seven short stories that had appeared, some in different forms, in the Archive, Country Beautiful, Duke University Alumni Register, the Virginia Quarterly Review, and an anthology, Winter's Tales. The stories center around old people and young people, white people and black people, all in Price's home state of North Carolina.

The following topics concerning the critical reception of The Names and Faces of Heroes will be discussed: (1) a résumé of the critics' responses, (2) autobiographical influences, (3) an evaluation of the author's characterizations, and (4) a discussion of the main themes. A synopsis of each plot will be given in the section on the analysis of themes.

II. RÉSUMÉ OF THE CRITICS' RESPONSES

It is interesting to note that of the eighteen reviews of The Names and Faces of Heroes, twelve are exclusively favorable, four are mixed, and only two are entirely

unfavorable. Chronologically, the mixed reviews are among the earliest and the unfavorable among the latest, with the favorable ones interspersed throughout (for a chronological checklist of reviews, see pp. 105-106 of List of Works Consulted). Like A Long and Happy Life, therefore, The Names and Faces of Heroes is generally considered quite successful.

Most of the reviewers who discuss the stories individually either recite the plot or discuss a character but make no evaluation. "A Chain of Love," for example, is commented upon most often; but of the thirteen critics discussing it, only seven provide critical analyses (all favorable), and the rest make no appraisals.

A statistical analysis of value judgments of each of the stories (see Table I, p. 45) shows that out of the eighteen critics, only four refrain from mentioning at least one story individually. It is interesting to note that only two stories, "Michael Egerton" and "The Names and Faces of Heroes," receive any negative comment. "Michael Egerton," Price's first story and basically an apprentice piece, would have to be considered closer to failure than the others since negative criticisms outnumber positive evaluations of it. "The Names and Faces of Heroes" is, undoubtedly, Price's most controversial story. As the Times Literary Supplement states, "Mr. Price is here attempting something very difficult--a story in which two

TABLE I
 NUMBER OF COMMENTS ON EACH STORY
 IN THE NAMES AND FACES OF HEROES

Stories Listed as They Appear in the Book	Total Number of Comments	Positive Comments	No Evaluation	Negative Comments
"A Chain of Love"	13	7	6	0
"The Warrior Princess Ozimba" . . .	8	4	4	0
"Michael Egerton"	4	1	1	2
"The Anniversary"	7	4	3	0
"Troubled Sleep"	3	2	1	0
"Uncle Grant"	11	9	2	0
"The Names and Faces of Heroes" . .	11	6	1	4

planes of meaning are developed together."¹ This story deals not only with a man remembering a boyhood ride with his father but also with the two things the boy realizes: (1) that his father, whom he had taken for granted, was his long-sought hero, and (2) that his father would die in a few years and he would be left alone.

"Uncle Grant," receiving nine positive comments, can be considered the most successful and most popular of the stories. But all of the other stories in the collection, with the exception of "Michael Egerton," have also been well received.

III. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCES

Of the eighteen critics reviewing The Names and Faces of Heroes, seven see some of the stories in the book as autobiographical; the other eleven do not consider the question.² Of those who do pose the question, most feel that this autobiographical influence has benefited the stories. Paul Pickrel states that "all the stories deal with simple people in North Carolina; several are obviously

¹The Times Literary Supplement, September 27, 1963, p. 730.

²Those critics who consider some stories autobiographical are as follows: Mary L. Barrett, Mary Snead Boger, Charles Clay, Richard Gilman, Granville Hicks, Paul Pickrel, and Walter Sullivan.

autobiographical,"³ and Richard Gilman observes that "in some of them the autobiography is straightforward and complete down to place names."⁴

Charles Clay points out that in "'Uncle Grant' not even the names or dates are changed."⁵ The narrator-author, studying at Oxford, reminisces about Uncle Grant, an old Negro man who had worked for the elder Price when Reynolds was a boy. Besides "Uncle Grant," the story the critics mention most often as being autobiographical is "The Names and Faces of Heroes," in which Price identifies himself with a nine-year-old boy who is riding home with his father after attending a sermon. And Mary Barrett sees Rosacoke in "A Chain of Love" and also the boy in "Michael Egerton" as being based on real people.⁶

IV. THE CHARACTERS

Price writes all of the stories in The Names and Faces of Heroes from one of two points of view: the young or the aged. Of course, there are other characters of

³Paul Pickrel, Harper's Magazine, August, 1963, p. 96.

⁴Richard Gilman, The New York Times Book Review, June 30, 1963, p. 4.

⁵Charles Clay, "The Human Heart in Conflict," The [Raleigh] News and Observer, July 7, 1963, p. III-5.

⁶Mary L. Barrett, Library Journal, June 15, 1963, p. 2538.

varying ages, but the main character in each story is either notably young or old. In "A Chain of Love" the main character is a young girl; in "Michael Egerton," "Troubled Sleep," and "The Names and Faces of Heroes," the main character is a young boy. In "The Warrior Princess Ozimba" and "The Anniversary," the main character is an old woman; in "Uncle Grant," an old man.

In the opinion of most critics, Price's portrayal of Uncle Grant is his most effective characterization. One reason is the exact pictorial description:

Only the shape of his skull would be clear--narrow and long, pointed at the chin, domed at the top--and the color of the skin that covered it, unbroken by a single hair except sparse brows, the color of a penny polished down by years of thumbs till Lincoln's face is a featureless shadow but with red life running beneath.⁷

According to John W. Stevenson, "Here again is the recognition, revealed suddenly in later years and far away from the original setting, of the strangely paradoxical knowledge of dependence found in the dependent, of strength in simplicity, of wisdom in innocence."⁸ Another reason Grant is successful as a character is that Price has revealed him as a unique individual. As Walter Sullivan describes him, "Grant

⁷ Reynolds Price, "Uncle Grant," in The Names and Faces of Heroes, Avon Books (Atheneum Publishers), 1963, p. 91. Hereafter referred to as Names and Faces.

⁸ John W. Stevenson, "The Faces of Reynolds Price's Short Fiction," Studies in Short Fiction, 3, No. 3 (Spring, 1966), 303.

is a man, peculiar and dignified, cantankerous and noble, universal and unique. He is never a symbol, never a representative of an attitude or a force or movement."⁹ Granville Hicks adds that he is "an uncommonly self-reliant, self-respecting individual, living out his long and arduous life" ¹⁰

Another effective characterization is that of Rosacoke in "A Chain of Love." She is portrayed at an earlier age than in A Long and Happy Life, and Price succeeds, in a few short pages, in imbuing her with great vitality and compassion. R. G. G. Price, in describing his reaction to the story, declares:

I felt I was going to remember it for the rest of my life. . . . what I remembered about the story of the girl taking her grandfather to die in the hospital . . . was not just the freshness and the compassion; it was the obstinacy with which it did not take the easy way¹¹

Perhaps for more than any other attribute, Price deserves literary acclaim for his very accurate description of the Negro. Two of his major characters are Negroes-- Uncle Grant and Warrior Princess Ozimba. He includes, in addition, many Negro minor characters such as Wash in "The

⁹Walter Sullivan, The Sewanee Review, 73 (Winter, 1965), 130.

¹⁰Granville Hicks, Saturday Review, 46 (June 29, 1963), 23.

¹¹R. G. G. Price, Punch, October 16, 1963, p. 577.

Anniversary," Vesta in "The Warrior Princess Ozimba," and Snowball Mason in "A Chain of Love." Because Negroes helped to rear Price and because he played with them in his youth, he possesses a very close awareness of them. Unlike many of his literary contemporaries, Price treats each Negro as an individual. One of his most remarkable portrayals is that of Warrior Princess Ozimba, who is blind, almost deaf, and toothless. Nevertheless, she gives a recital to the boy of how she took care of his father when he was a boy and how she longs for his visit again on her birthday (not realizing that his father has died). Price thus awakens in the reader an admiration for Aunt Zimby's nobility of service which testifies to her royal title, the Warrior Princess.

A majority of critics praise Price's characters, agreeing with Charleen Whisnant, who insists that:

Price has no quarrel with the world, and little anger in him. What he does have is obsession to see these people as whole. Surprisingly, they are not the standard guilt and perversion-ridden characters of much of contemporary literature. They are instead strong and selfless and often, we feel, are revered by him.¹²

V. THE PLOTS AND THE THEMES

Price's main themes concern, on the one hand, love and giving, and, on the other, death, separation, and

¹²Charleen Whisnant, "Price: Poignant and Pulsing," The Charlotte Observer, June 23, 1963, p. 5-D.

reminiscence.

The Theme of Love and Giving

Critic John W. Stevenson has given the most extensive discussion of Price's theme of love:

The controlling theme of Reynolds Price's fiction is the revelation that comes through the quest for self-knowledge, not in any intellectual sense but in the discovery that meaning and identity are found in giving, and in giving is learned the fulfillment of love.¹³

All of the stories in The Names and Faces of Heroes reveal this theme of love and giving.

Indeed, "A Chain of Love," the first story in the collection, would have been a more appropriate title for the book than The Names and Faces of Heroes since all of the stories involve a main character linking himself to another by giving and receiving love. At the same time, however, the main character in many of the stories seeks to identify with a hero, so perhaps the title The Names and Faces of Heroes is not inappropriate after all--for one receives his identity only in terms of those with whom he associates and, hopefully, to whom he gives and from whom he receives love. The person with whom one can exchange love is the one Price means when he says "hero" and, as such, is found in all of his stories.

In "A Chain of Love" the heroine, Rosacoke, possesses

¹³Stevenson, p. 300.

a trait Price greatly admires: the ability to give fully with no expectation of receiving in return. In this instance, the giving is even more admirable because it is directed toward a complete stranger, a dying man in the hospital. Rosacoke brings her gift of flowers silently and leaves silently, unnoticed and unthanked. Hicks speaks of the "compassion Rosacoke feels for a stranger."¹⁴

In "The Warrior Princess Ozimba" a young man, Ed, carries on a tradition his late father, "Mr. Phil," had initiated--that of taking a pair of blue tennis shoes to an old Negro woman, known as Aunt Zimby, on the Fourth of July. Aunt Zimby, blind and almost deaf, does not even know who Ed is--at times she calls him Mr. Phil and at other times asks him if he knows Mr. Phil. Ed does not identify himself but kindly, patiently, listens to her ramble on about Mr. Phil, whom she had helped rear and whom she had obviously loved dearly. By his thoughtfulness, Ed gives to the old woman a pleasant afternoon of enjoyable reminiscences and gains an understanding himself of how the feeling of devotion, of having loved and of having been loved, can exist when all else has been lost. As the Times Literary Supplement points out, "Mr. Price, writing with exactness and affection, gives her a strange majesty, so that in the 'warrior princess' of the title there is no

¹⁴Hicks, p. 23.

hint of mockery."¹⁵ Charles Clay observes that "The Warrior Princess Ozimba" is "a story which seems to say that sight isn't so much in the eyes as in the soul."¹⁶

The two stories "Michael Egerton" and "The Anniversary" show how disastrous it can be when the chain of love is broken. The main character in "Michael Egerton" is a young boy whose roommate at camp, Michael, desperately needs a friend, one with whom he can share his problems of a broken home and relatively loveless life. When Michael learns that his mother has remarried, he is greatly upset and needs someone; but the boy turns away. Michael is not able to seek out the friendship he needs, nor is the boy able to offer it, unasked, freely to Michael.

In "The Anniversary" Lillian Belle Carraway is an elderly lady who is telling the story of her lost lover, Pretty Billy Williams. He had died when she was twenty-seven, two days before they were to have been married. Her whole life seems to have stopped on that day forty-five years ago. Price effectively portrays a pathetic old lady who, when Wash asks her, "'That's all you remember, Miss Lillian Belle?'" replies, "'I'm a mighty good forgetter.'"¹⁷

In "Troubled Sleep" nine-year-old Edward Rodwell

¹⁵The Times Literary Supplement, p. 730.

¹⁶Clay, p. III-5.

¹⁷"The Anniversary," Names and Faces, p. 74.

feels as though he is always the one making the overtures of friendship, compassion, and forgiveness to his cousin Falcon Rodwell. They go at night to their secret hiding place. Being superstitious, they believe that if they lie down, the moonlight will kill them. Edward lies down and falls asleep. Falc, finding him there and believing him to be dead, gives his first and great gesture of reciprocal love as he lies down next to Edward to await the same death he believes his cousin has met.

"Uncle Grant," like "The Warrior Princess Ozimba," tells of the undying devotion of the Negro for his late employer. In both instances, the story is told by the son, who describes the incredible kinship established between the two. In "Uncle Grant" it seemed strange to Price, when he was a boy, that Uncle Grant had never returned to his wife and son but preferred to stay and work for Price's father. It seemed strange, too, that after Price's father died, Uncle Grant would not mention his name even though he would talk freely about others who had died. Only later, looking back as a grown man, does Price realize fully Uncle Grant's deep devotion for his father. "The short study of the Negro handyman and friend could have been trite," Mary Snead Boger points out. "It is, instead, moving and permeated with an apparent Reynolds Price trademark: Human dignity."¹⁸

¹⁸Mary Snead Boger, "Price's Truth: It Has Unsentimental Strength," Greensboro Daily News, June 30, 1963, p. 3-C.

"The Names and Faces of Heroes" is, according to Charleen Whisnant, "a story of love and life and the growing capacity for both."¹⁹ The main theme concerns the mutual love between father and son. The story opens with the boy thinking, "We are people in love. We flee through hard winter night. What our enemies want is to separate us. Will we end together? Will we end alive?"²⁰ The boy, knowing in his heart that his father loves him, says, "Father would no more sleep without kissing me goodnight than he would strike me."²¹ He is, however, fearful of losing this love. He remembers how terrified he was the evening his father, playing a joke on the family, came to the door disguised as a stranger: "'He has come for me' (as I say, it is my darkest fear that I am not the blood child of Jeff and Rhew McCraw, that I was adopted at birth, that someday a strange man will come and rightfully claim me)."²² The story ends with the father's expression of his love: the two arrive home in the car during a snowstorm, and the father gathers the boy up in his arms, saying, "I mean to save your life, to carry you over this snow."²³ As Granville

¹⁹Whisnant, p. 5-D.

²⁰"The Names and Faces of Heroes," Names and Faces, p. 112.

²¹Ibid., p. 115.

²²Ibid., p. 121.

²³Ibid., p. 143.

Hicks emphasizes, "What emerges is a strong and poignant feeling for the tender relationships that exist between father and son."²⁴

It becomes apparent, therefore, that Mary Barrett is right when she maintains that all of Price's stories "are motivated by love and are without abnormality, degeneracy, or any hatefulness--both the Negro people and the white."²⁵

The Themes of Death, Separation, and Reminiscence

In direct contrast to the theme of love are the themes of death, separation, and reminiscence. Throughout the stories people who love one another are constantly being separated by death or distance. Then the only thing they have to fill their lives is memories of the one they loved. Only one critic, John W. Stevenson, has analyzed this contrast of themes:

The tension that dramatizes this contrast in all the stories is the nostalgia, the memory of an enfolding relationship that death cuts off. Because this loss involves a break up of the security and sense of community, the character perceives, if only briefly, the fragileness and the strength of the "chain of love."²⁶

Death appears often in Price's stories. In "The Names and Faces of Heroes," the boy is frightened that the

²⁴Hicks, p. 23.

²⁵Mary Barrett, p. 2538.

²⁶Stevenson, p. 302.

love he and his father possess for one another will not last: "What our enemies want is to separate us. Will we end together? Will we end alive?"²⁷ The boy, who is only nine years old, realizes that the greatest of their enemies is death. Years later, after his father's death, the boy looks back and cherishes in his memory that moment when his father carried him over the snow. As an adult, he speaks sadly of "my own swelling foes,"²⁸ knowing he has lost the comforting dependency on his father and knowing they will no longer be able to meet their foes together. Charleen Whisnant notes: "Intensely, beneath the talk, the emotional reactions of the boy deepen until they produce in him a fear for his father's life and a dream of death."²⁹

John W. Stevenson concurs:

In a tortured dream (he falls asleep during the long ride) he foresees as in a vision the death of his father; and filled with the sense of pain and despair at the rending of this bond, he perceives at the same time the overpowering obligation toward the physical and symbolic tie that joins them in love but which he must drain and take if he is to be redeemed through the very act of creation that by its commitment takes on its own destruction.³⁰

"'Troubled Sleep' goes deeper into the melancholy

²⁷"The Names and Faces of Heroes," Names and Faces, p. 112.

²⁸Ibid., p. 143.

²⁹Whisnant, p. 5-D.

³⁰Stevenson, p. 305.

of childhood," says Granville Hicks. "Here are the boyish speculations and anxieties, the thoughts of death, the disturbing dreams."³¹ These thoughts of death are mentioned throughout the story. For example, when Falc asks, "Where do you wish we were?" Edward replies, "Dead."³²

"The Anniversary" emphasizes the themes of death and reminiscence. Sadly, Miss Lillian Belle tells a young Negro boy, Wash, about her fiancé Pretty Billy, their courtship, and his death. This story, perhaps even more than the others, effectively demonstrates what the critic Annie Lee Singletary means when she says that "the short stories have the same mood of nostalgia."³³

Granville Hicks points out that "Michael Edgerton" attacks a familiar theme, the grief of a boy whose parents have separated, and treats it freshly."³⁴ Michael's sense of loss is further intensified by his being away at camp and completely separated from either parent. Even though he is handsome and is the best athlete in camp, he is the loneliest boy there. In this story Price has succeeded in portraying a character, similar to Miss Lillian Belle, who

³¹Hicks, p. 23.

³²"Troubled Sleep," Names and Faces, p. 80.

³³Annie Lee Singletary, "Price's Book: Both Short and Happy," [Winston-Salem] Journal and Sentinel, p. D-3.

³⁴Hicks, p. 23.

is isolated, pathetically cut off from a happy, loving relationship with another.

"The Warrior Princess Ozimba" combines the themes of death and reminiscence. The story is told by a young man, Ed, about his visit to Aunt Zimby; her reminiscences about Ed's father, Mr. Phil, create a mood of nostalgia. "Although the portrayal of the old woman is excellent," stresses Granville Hicks, "the poignance of the story comes from the narrator's memories of his dead father."³⁵

"A Chain of Love" concerns the theme of love seeking to overpower death. Rosacoke, in making the loving gesture of giving flowers to a dying man, copes with death the only way she knows how. As John Stevenson says:

Later in the quiet but certain security of her grandfather's sick room, where death held no lonely fear, Rosacoke could console her own sorrow at the death of Mr. Ledwell, "who had died in that dark room" with the knowledge that "She had done what she could, being away from home,"³⁶

"Uncle Grant" reveals the themes of separation, death, and reminiscence. Price reminisces about Uncle Grant's friendship with Price's father. When the elder Price could no longer afford to pay Uncle Grant three dollars a week to wash dishes, Uncle Grant refused to work for anyone else and moved to Price's aunt's smokehouse. When she asked

³⁵Hicks, p. 23.

³⁶Stevenson, p. 301.

Uncle Grant if he were all right, he said he would be as soon as he got his bearings.³⁷ After the death of Price's father, Uncle Grant "would listen and laugh a little [when someone remembered one of Will's jokes] if that was expected but at the first break, get up and leave the room."³⁸

VI. CONCLUSION

Price's second book and first collection of short stories has been considered a great success. Several of the stories are thought to be autobiographical, especially "Uncle Grant" and "The Names and Faces of Heroes." Only "Michael Egerton," which was written early in Price's career, has received more negative than positive criticism. According to the critics, the most successful characterizations are of Uncle Grant, Rosacoke, and Aunt Zimby.

The critics agree that the main theme is giving, from which is learned the fulfillment of love. In direct contrast to this, however, several critics observe how Price brings in the themes of death, separation, and reminiscence, thus, by antithesis, reinforcing the theme of love.

Although The Names and Faces of Heroes has not been as widely acclaimed as A Long and Happy Life, having received only eighteen reviews as opposed to forty-four,

³⁷"Uncle Grant," Names and Faces, p. 102.

³⁸Ibid., p. 106.

it is considered by most critics to be well written. Richard Gilman contends that the stories present "a nearly perfect fusion of observation, of detail and revelatory act, with feeling and significance."³⁹ And Granville Hicks says, "I do not know where one finds greater depth and purity of feeling than in the best of [Price's] stories."⁴⁰

³⁹Gilman, p. 4.

⁴⁰Hicks, p. 36.

CHAPTER IV

A GENEROUS MAN

I. INTRODUCTION

A second novel must be a very difficult undertaking, especially for an author who has been overwhelmed with praise for his first novel. Although Reynolds Price has not received the same unanimous approval for his second novel, A Generous Man, as for his first novel, A Long and Happy Life, he has received favorable reviews from a majority of the critics. Of the twenty-eight reviews of A Generous Man, fifteen are predominantly or exclusively favorable, five combine favorable and unfavorable remarks, and eight are predominantly or exclusively unfavorable (see Table II, p. 63; see also pp. 106-108 for a chronological checklist of reviews). It is significant to note that six of the eight negative reviews are among the last nine reviews examined in this paper. Thus, it seems that, with the passage of time, the reviewers have become more critical of Price's book.

Nine critics are concerned with the question of whether this second novel is superior or inferior to the first. Nineteen reviewers do not consider the question, but of the nine who do, three consider A Generous Man to

TABLE II
 FAVORABLE VERSUS UNFAVORABLE REVIEWS
 OF A GENEROUS MAN

Predominantly or Exclusively Favorable (15 reviews)	Favorable and Unfavorable Remarks Combined (5 reviews)	Predominantly or Exclusively Unfavorable (8 reviews)
Mary Snead Boger <u>Choice</u> Oscar Handin Lodwick Hartley Granville Hicks William Kennedy J. Kitching Conrad Knickerbocker William McPherson <u>Newsweek</u> Walter Spearman Daniel Stern <u>Time</u> <u>Virginia Kirkus</u> <u>Service</u> Geoffrey Wolff	C. Michael Curtis Elizabeth Janeway Charles W. Mann Wilfrid Sheed Richard Sullivan	Roger B. Dooley Arthur McGillivray James G. Murray <u>The New Yorker</u> Stanley Trachtenberg <u>The Virginia</u> <u>Quarterly Review</u> John Wain Rosemary Yardley

be the superior work, and six consider A Long and Happy Life the superior one (see Table III, p. 65).

Eight topics considered in reviews of A Generous Man are (1) the effectiveness of the plot, (2) the originality or the stereotyping of characters, (3) the effectiveness of style, (4) the effectiveness of myth in the work, (5) the effectiveness with which Price combines the real world with the supernatural one, (6) the success of his symbols, (7) his success in presenting philosophical insight, and (8) the effectiveness with which he combines the serious and the comical.

Critical opinion is divided on all of these issues. The following conclusions are drawn from a statistical analysis of the twenty-eight reviews:

1. Price's plot is not effective (15,0,4 [this means that of the 19 critics who commented, 15 agreed with the majority opinion, none were undecided, and 4 disagreed]).
2. His characters are real rather than stereotyped (8,2,5).
3. His style is effective (9,3,5).
4. His myth is effective (8,1,3).
5. He fails to combine effectively the real world with the supernatural world (9,0,2).
6. He fails in using symbols effectively (7,1,2).
7. He succeeds in conveying certain philosophical

TABLE III
 CRITICS' COMPARISON OF A LONG AND HAPPY LIFE
 AND A GENEROUS MAN

<u>A Generous Man</u> Considered Superior (3 reviews)	<u>A Long and Happy Life</u> Considered Superior (6 reviews)
William McPherson	Roger B. Dooley
Walter Spearman	Elizabeth Janeway
<u>Time</u>	James G. Murray
	Wilfrid Sheed
	Richard Sullivan
	Rosemary Yardley

insights (11,0,3).

8. He effectively combines the serious with the comical (3,1,1).

The significance of these findings becomes apparent in the following discussions of the particular issues associated with the critical reception of A Generous Man.

II. THE PLOT

Of the nineteen critics commenting on the plot of A Generous Man, fifteen judge it as not effective and four view it as effective. A summary of the plot itself will, I think, show the basis for these critical judgments.

Milo Mustian, the main character, is fifteen and is the older brother of Rosacoke, heroine of A Long and Happy Life. Milo's mentally retarded brother, Rato, is concerned because his dog Phillip is sick. The whole family--Milo, Rato, Rosacoke, Baby Sister, Emma (their mother), and Papa (their grandfather)--climb into the truck to take Phillip to a veterinarian. They meet Lois Provo, who the night before had become Milo's first woman, and give her a ride back to the fairgrounds, where she helps her aunt with the snake show. Phillip chases Death, the Provos' eighteen-foot python, and both, in turn, are pursued by Rato. All three vanish into the woods.

The next day Sheriff Rooster Pomeroy organizes a

posse to hunt Phillip, Death, and Rato. From a still discovered in the woods by the posse, Milo has his first taste of corn liquor. In the resulting camaraderie, Rooster, who is impotent but wants a son, suggests that Milo visit his young wife, Kate. Milo, not realizing that he closely resembles his dead cousin, Tommy Ryden, who was Kate's would-be lover, welcomes Kate's advances and spends a happy afternoon in bed with her. And in a moment of reminiscence, Kate tells Milo how she had fallen in love with Tommy and how circumstances had prevented the fulfillment of their love.

After leaving Kate, Milo meets Tommy's ghost, who helps him repair his car and seems quite friendly until Milo talks about his good time with Lois Provo the previous night. The ghost then hits Milo over the head. Although this seems rather puzzling at the time, we later learn that Lois is Tommy's illegitimate daughter (Lois's "aunt" is actually her mother). Tommy, in hitting Milo over the head, is showing his fatherly instinct of protectiveness.

When Milo recovers, he makes his way to the privy at the old Ryden place where the python falls on him and nearly strangles him before he is saved, just in time, by the posse. Death, in pouncing on Milo, knocks down a shoe box containing \$10,000, money given by the government to Tommy Ryden's closest kin, his Aunt Jack, after he was killed in the war. Since Aunt Jack is now dead, Hawkins

Ryden, Tommy's cousin, believes the money should be his. However, Tommy's nearest relative turns out to be, not Hawkins, but Lois, Tommy's illegitimate daughter, who happily claims her inheritance.

Milo is concerned because Rato has not returned; with his new sense of maturity, he decides that if Rato is dead, he will leave home and go out into the world to do some great mission. But Rato and Phillip wander back home, and Milo realizes he will marry some local girl and live on the land, raising crops, as his father had done and his grandfather before that.

Fifteen critics think that the plot of A Generous Man is ineffective (see Table IV, p. 69). One major criticism is that there is too much coincidence in the story--a legitimate criticism when one considers the number of episodes that involve hidden identities and remarkable timing: the uncanny resemblance between Milo and his dead cousin, Tommy Ryden; that Tommy Ryden was both Kate's lost lover and Lois's father; that Milo should be the one to find the snake, to say nothing of the money; and that he should be saved from Death (or death) just in time.

Disparagers of the plot say it is too "complex and complicated,"¹ "improbable,"² and has too many "bizarre

¹James G. Murray, America, May 28, 1966, p. 782.

²Oscar Handin, The Atlantic Monthly, 217 (June, 1966), 136.

TABLE IV
 CRITICAL REACTION TO THE PLOT
 OF A GENEROUS MAN

Plot Considered Ineffective (15 reviews)	Plot Considered Effective (4 reviews)
Mary Snead Boger	<u>Choice</u>
C. Michael Curtis	<u>Newsweek</u>
Roger B. Dooley	Walter Spearman
Oscar Handin	<u>Time</u>
Lodwick Hartley	
Elizabeth Janeway	
William Kennedy	
Arthur MacGillivray	
William McPherson	
James G. Murray	
Wilfrid Sheed	
Richard Sullivan	
Stanley Trachtenberg	
John Wain	
Rosemary Yardley	

events."³ Also, insists one critic, the story is confusing because it is told sideways rather than from beginning to end with two long flashbacks.⁴ Those who praise the plot present no strong, specific arguments; vaguely describing it as "compact"⁵ and "artfully woven,"⁶ they cite no incidents from the book to substantiate their remarks. Rosemary Yardley sums up the general feeling of the critics on this issue: "A Generous Man is burdened with a plethora of disparate parts that are too dissimilar and unrelated to finally coalesce into a neat, snug fit as the author has them do."⁷

III. THE CHARACTERS

On the question of characterization, the critics are more evenly divided than on any other issue. The majority feel that Price's characters in A Generous Man are original rather than stereotyped (see Table V, p. 71).

Unfortunately, the critics often group all the

³Roger B. Dooley, The Catholic World, 203 (July, 1966), 246.

⁴John Wain, "Mantle of Faulkner," The New Republic, May 14, 1966, p. 31.

⁵Walter Spearman, "Reynolds Price Closes 'Second Novel Hurdle,'" The Greensboro Record, April 12, 1966, p. A-15.

⁶Time, April 1, 1966, p. 102.

⁷Rosemary Yardley, "The Wild Days of Milo Mustian," Greensboro Daily News, April 24, 1966, p. D-3.

TABLE V
 CRITICAL REACTION TO THE CHARACTERIZATION
 IN A GENEROUS MAN

Characters Original (8 reviews)	Characters Usually Real, Sometimes Stereotyped (2 reviews)	Characters Stereotyped (5 reviews)
Mary Snead Boger	Conrad Knickerbocker	Elizabeth Janeway
Lodwick Hartley	Richard Sullivan	James G. Murray
Granville Hicks		Wilfrid Sheed
Charles W. Mann		<u>The Virginia</u>
<u>Newsweek</u>		<u>Quarterly Review</u>
Walter Spearman		John Wain
Daniel Stern		
Rosemary Yardley		

characters together and make a general statement about them instead of analyzing Price's success in portraying each individual character. Such comments as "believable characters"⁸ and "an interesting set of characters"⁹ are typical. Three critics agree that the finest attribute of Price's characters is their genuine compassion for one another.¹⁰ One critic praises Price's insights into several character relationships: Rosacoke and Milo, Milo and Sheriff Pomeroy, and Tommy Ryden and the women in his life.¹¹

Only four critics discuss Price's success in creating characters other than Milo.¹² One thinks Price successful in his creation of Rosacoke, Rooster, and Tommy Ryden;¹³ another mentions only that Rooster "is rather good."¹⁴ On the other hand, another critic believes that Price does not make it clear whether Tommy Ryden is "a helpful apparition

⁸Lodwick Hartley, "Tar Heel Pastoral Absorbing," The [Raleigh] News and Observer, April 3, 1966, p. III-3.

⁹Charles W. Mann, Library Journal, 91 (March 15, 1966), 1447.

¹⁰Mary Snead Boger, "Price's Book is 'Beatnest,'" The Charlotte Observer, March 27, 1966, p. 6-C; "A Snake Called Death," Newsweek, March 28, 1966, p. 4-A; Spearman, p. A-15.

¹¹Granville Hicks, "In Pursuit of a Snake Named Death," Saturday Review, March 26, 1966, p. 27.

¹²Hicks, p. 27; Mann, p. 1447; Richard Sullivan, Books Today, April 10, 1966, p. 8; and Wain, p. 31.

¹³Hicks, p. 27.

¹⁴Mann, p. 1447.

or . . . a flesh-and-blood character."¹⁵ The fourth critic chides Price for describing in detail such insignificant characters as the veterinarian and the Negro child in the woods.¹⁶

The critics do not agree on the success of Milo as a character (see Table VI, p. 74). One praises Milo's close brotherly relationship with Rosacoke which is threatened by Milo's entering manhood, as well as his affection for Sheriff Pomeroy as a father figure;¹⁷ another commends Price for the way "lives are gathered and offered in a look or gesture, such as the hand Milo extends to his girl in token of himself."¹⁸ On the other hand, one critic objects to the "inconsistencies in the boy's characterization"¹⁹ but fails to elaborate. Two critics think that as more supernatural elements are brought into the story, Milo becomes less real.²⁰ One of them suggests that:

So much fuss is made, in fact, of Milo's growing up that he finally ceases to be a boy altogether and becomes a metaphor for adolescence. . . . he is

¹⁵Sullivan, p. 8.

¹⁶Wain, p. 31.

¹⁷Hicks, p. 27.

¹⁸Newsweek, p. 4-A.

¹⁹Murray, p. 782.

²⁰Elizabeth Janeway, "Milo Comes of Age," The New York Times Book Review, March 27, 1966, p. 6; and Wilfrid Sheed, Book Week, April 17, 1966, p. 7.

TABLE VI
 CRITICAL REACTION TO MILO AS A CHARACTER
 IN A GENEROUS MAN

Milo Considered Successful as a Character (3 reviews)	Milo Considered a Failure as a Character (4 reviews)
Granville Hicks <u>Newsweek</u> Daniel Stern	Elizabeth Janeway James G. Murray Wilfrid Sheed <u>The Virginia</u> <u>Quarterly Review</u>

not made real enough to need a specific history.
 . . . For all his vaunted growing, Milo is really a unicellular attitude or detached sensibility which doesn't grow at all, but can only restate itself in different terms.²¹

Thus, while a majority of critics praise the characters as Price's compassionate creations, a significant minority find them, particularly Milo, losing their individual reality as they become symbolic.

IV. STYLE

Of the sixteen critics who discuss Price's style, nine find it effective; five, not effective; and two have mixed opinions (see Table VII, p. 76). Assessments of Price's style reveal considerable confusion on the part of critics regarding the essential style of the work. J. Kitching says the book is "written in spare and artful style,"²² whereas John Wain believes it is "mannered in style."²³ Daniel Stern speaks favorably of the "pastoral 'sound' in the language and the . . . poetic southerisms,"²⁴ but James G. Murray complains of "a style so thick you can chew on it."²⁵ While Kennedy says Price "avoids . . .

²¹Sheed, p. 7.

²²J. Kitching, Publisher's Weekly, February 7, 1966, p. 88.

²³Wain, p. 31.

²⁴Daniel Stern, "Notes on Reputation," Harper's Magazine, 232 (April, 1966), 120.

²⁵Murray, p. 782.

TABLE VII
 CRITICAL REACTION TO PRICE'S STYLE
 IN A GENEROUS MAN

Style Considered Effective (9 reviews)	Mixed Opinions (2 reviews)	Style Considered Ineffective (5 reviews)
C. Michael Curtis	Roger B. Dooley	James G. Murray
Granville Hicks	William Kennedy	<u>The New Yorker</u>
J. Kitching		Stanley Trachtenberg
Charles W. Mann		<u>The Virginia</u>
Arthur MacGillivray		<u>Quarterly Review</u>
William McPherson		John Wain
<u>Newsweek</u>		
Daniel Stern		
<u>Time</u>		

derivative convolutions, and writes with simplicity and high beauty,"²⁶ the New Yorker speaks of "the convoluted connective passages full of knotted non-sentences and stunted poetic effects."²⁷

Just as the critics disagree about Price's style in general, they disagree also about his dialogue: three praise it and one finds fault with it. Those who praise Price's dialogue say it "is a joy,"²⁸ it "delights,"²⁹ and it "accompanies like counterpoint the searching silences in which people who scarcely know themselves are revealed in a moment's gesture."³⁰ But the critic who finds fault with the dialogue says that even though it is amusing, it is improbable.³¹

Two critics especially commend Price's metaphorical style. Newsweek calls the metaphors "bald and angular,"³² and Arthur MacGillivray quotes some similes he particularly likes such as "she is cracked as deep as the Liberty Bell,"

²⁶William Kennedy, "'A Generous Man': Second Success for New Talent," The National Observer, April 11, 1966, p. 23.

²⁷The New Yorker, May 7, 1966, p. 186.

²⁸Hicks, p. 27.

²⁹William McPherson, "The Exuberant Choice of Growing Up Generous," Life, April 8, 1966, p. 10.

³⁰Time, p. 102.

³¹Dooley, p. 246.

³²Newsweek, p. 4-A.

"weak as a wormy pauper in winter," and "as much good as an old maid with asthma."³³

Two critics believe Price compares favorably with other writers, but two do not. C. Michael Curtis lauds Price's similarity to Erskine Caldwell "in the affectionate and scrupulously direct confrontation" of his characters and also his similarity to Carson McCullers as a regionalist.³⁴ Also Charles W. Mann compares Price's baroque style favorably with Eudora Welty's.³⁵ Both Curtis and Mann feel Price's touches of Faulkner are good, whereas William Kennedy says, "He is still paying a stylistic debt to Faulkner--unnecessarily,"³⁶ and Stanley Trachtenberg criticizes Price's "Faulknerian stylistic elaborations."³⁷

In conclusion, although some critics seem baffled about the essential style of the novel and two critics judge Price's Faulknerian style burdensome, the majority praise his dialogue and metaphors, as well as his similarity to William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Erskine Caldwell, and Carson McCullers.

³³Arthur MacGillivray, Best Sellers, April 1, 1966, p. 14.

³⁴C. Michael Curtis, "A Sharp Ear--and Happy Coincidences," The Christian Science Monitor, April 7, 1966, p. 9.

³⁵Mann, p. 1447.

³⁶Kennedy, p. 23.

³⁷Stanley Trachtenberg, Yale Review, 56 (October, 1966), 136.

V. MYTH

Although all the critics recognize mythic implications in A Generous Man, they are not unanimous in finding the myth an effective part of the novel. Eight critics believe the novel to be an effective myth whereas three do not (see Table VIII, p. 80). For purposes of this survey of reviews, the terms "myth" and "allegory" may be considered synonymous, as indicated in Webster's Third New International Dictionary. The majority of critics believe Price has created Milo Mustian and the other characters in the novel to be symbolic and to present through their actions a moral or spiritual truth. The exact nature of this truth will be discussed later. The present concern is the effectiveness of the mythic truth.

Price's characterization of Milo can be compared with the mythical character who slays a dragon to save a girl. In this case, Milo captures a snake and saves a girl, Lois, not from death but from poverty. Granville Hicks believes the myth succeeds because of Price's insight into Milo as both a real person and a mythical character.³⁸ Other critics praise the myth because it is "elaborate and thorough-going,"³⁹ because it adds "depth and significance to the commonplace and the familiar,"⁴⁰ and because

³⁸Hicks, p. 27.

³⁹Janeway, p. 6.

⁴⁰Spearman, p. A-15.

TABLE VIII

CRITICAL REACTION TO A GENEROUS MAN AS A MYTH

Considered an Effective Myth (8 reviews)	Considered an Ineffective Myth (3 reviews)
<u>Choice</u>	Charles W. Mann
Lodwick Hartley	Wilfrid Sheed
Granville Hicks	Stanley Trachtenberg
Elizabeth Janeway	
William Kennedy	
<u>Newsweek</u>	
Walter Spearman	
<u>Time</u>	

it is handled with "delicacy."⁴¹ On the other hand, one critic believes that Milo's mythical significance is unclear,⁴² and another thinks that the novel, as an allegory, "nearly strangles on its own involutions."⁴³

In conclusion, although Sheed and Mann disagree, a majority of critics believe that A Generous Man is an effective myth because it is self-explanatory on the literal level as well as on the supernatural level.

VI. THE REAL AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Although a majority of critics feel Price has presented both real and supernatural elements in A Generous Man, as testified to in the preceding section, most do not feel that these real and supernatural elements are effectively combined because Price changes the world of his narrative from a real to a supernatural one and thus misleads the reader (see Table IX, p. 82). Granville Hicks observes that Price does not immediately bring the supernatural into the novel. Instead, Price begins the book as a realistic novel; about halfway through, after Milo takes his first drink, "the novel drives further and further away from plausibility."⁴⁴ Hicks says that as he read the first part of the book, he accepted Milo as

⁴¹Newsweek, p. 4-A.

⁴²Sheed, p. 7.

⁴³Mann, p. 1447.

⁴⁴Hicks, p. 27.

TABLE IX

CRITICAL REACTION TO THE COMBINATION OF REAL AND
SUPERNATIONAL ELEMENTS IN A GENEROUS MAN

Real and Supernatural
Ineffectively Combined
(8 reviews)

Real and Supernatural
Effectively Combined
(2 reviews)

C. Michael Curtis
Roger B. Dooley
Granville Hicks
Elizabeth Janeway
William Kennedy
Wilfrid Sheed
Stanley Trachtenberg
Geoffrey Wolff

J. Kitching
Walter Spearman

a realistic character; but as he read on, he became dubious: "Is not Milo too precocious, if not in what he does, then certainly in some of the things he says?"⁴⁵ Only later did Hicks realize that it was Price's intention to make Milo "too precocious" in order to fit the mold of the mythical hero who possesses supernatural qualities. Hicks therefore criticizes Price for first presenting Milo as a realistic person and then suddenly transforming him into a supernatural person.

William Kennedy likewise says:

The annoyance is logical--at this point. For the author has led us to believe that this is a realistic story of the Mustian family

But then the realism of the story begins to wane, and we see that the author is willfully suspending realism⁴⁶

Elizabeth Janeway agrees that the intrusion of the supernatural is "too neat and self-contained," that "ideally, of course, myth and fiction should mesh so intimately that no strain is felt and . . . should produce not bewilderment but revelation. Well, Mr. Price has not achieved that."⁴⁷ Geoffrey Wolff thinks Price has brought in too much of the supernatural: "A Generous Man lives so close to fantasy that incredibility threatens to consume it."⁴⁸

Three other critics see Price's combination of the

⁴⁵Hicks, p. 27. ⁴⁶Kennedy, p. 23. ⁴⁷Janeway, p. 45.

⁴⁸Geoffrey Wolff, "A Joyous Eden Regained," The Washington Post, May 9, 1966, p. 23.

real and the supernatural as forced. They believe that Price, by bringing together such disparate materials, has sacrificed all plausibility,⁴⁹ that he "disguises with romance the original meaning of the ritual,"⁵⁰ and that the first book was told more or less the way it happened, but in this one, "Milo is going to grow up and learn his lesson if it kills the novel."⁵¹

A majority of critics thus feel that Price has not effectively combined the real and the supernatural: the reader is deceived into believing that this is a realistic novel when suddenly, halfway through, it becomes a myth, and the intruding myth is forced onto an otherwise realistic story.

VII. SYMBOLS

Although most critics praise A Generous Man for its effective myth and allegory, paradoxically, they find the symbolism of the novel less than successful. The python, Death, is particularly the subject of such deprecatory labels as "strained symbolic conceit."⁵² And critic John Wain of the New Republic reports that too many characters and events of the novel, which he does not identify, have only a symbolic rather than an integral relationship to

⁴⁹Dooley, p. 246.

⁵⁰Trachtenberg, p. 136.

⁵¹Sheed, p. 7.

⁵²Stern, p. 120.

the remainder of the narrative.⁵³ But by a margin of seven to two, the verdict is against the symbolism of the book (see Table X, p. 86).

Perhaps the critics are justified in their criticism that Price's symbols are not adequately defined. William McPherson finds that "the book is thick with looming symbols,"⁵⁴ and John Wain adds that it is "booming with symbolic overtures."⁵⁵ Even though they do not say so specifically, both McPherson and Wain seem to wish that Price had defined his symbols more clearly. The only critic to explain any symbol is Wilfrid Sheed, who states that the python symbolizes the pleasure principle; it is given the name "Death" because it "must be hunted down and either killed or tamed."⁵⁶ One wishes that other critics would be more specific; for example, it would have been helpful if James G. Murray, who says that "symbols overburden" the book, had indicated which symbols he means and why they overburden the book.⁵⁷

Lodwick Hartley seems to have come closest to Price's intention when he suggests that Price's religious and allegorical symbols are "deliberate and essentially part of the central joke."⁵⁸ This view is supported by Mary Snead

⁵³Wain, p. 31.

⁵⁴McPherson, p. 10.

⁵⁵Wain, p. 31.

⁵⁶Sheed, p. 7.

⁵⁷Murray, p. 782.

⁵⁸Hartley, p. III-3.

TABLE X
 CRITICAL REACTION TO THE SYMBOLS
 IN A GENEROUS MAN

Symbols Considered Ineffective (7 reviews)	Symbols Considered Effective (2 reviews)
William McPherson	Lodwick Hartley
James G. Murray	Granville Hicks
Wilfrid Sheed	
Daniel Stern	
Stanley Trachtenberg	
<u>The Virginia Quarterly</u>	
<u>Review</u>	
John Wain	

Boger, who imagines Price's amusement when the critics "dissect and mouth over the symbolism involved."⁵⁹

Thus, a majority of critics believe that Price's symbols are unsuccessful because they are strained and lack adequate definition.

VIII. PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS

A majority of critics believe that Price succeeds in presenting significant philosophical insight (see Table XI, p. 88). They all agree that he uses Milo as the vehicle to convey this insight. Often, however, they have different opinions as to what this insight is. Seven critics, the largest number to concur, state that Milo learns about the glory of selflessness. Other themes that more than one critic mention are learning about sex, liberation from youthful innocence, learning about giving and taking, the satisfaction of love, achieving identity, assuming responsibility for one's personal acts, learning that youth is the best time of one's life, acceptance of life, and the rewards of fortitude (see Table XII, p. 89).

The value which critics identify most often is, in the words of C. Michael Curtis, "the glory of selflessness."⁶⁰ Three critics, in fact, use the same passage from the book to point out Milo's most important lesson: "The

⁵⁹Boger, p. 60.

⁶⁰Curtis, p. 9.

TABLE XI
 CRITICAL REACTION TO THE QUESTION
 OF PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS
 IN A GENEROUS MAN

Significant Philosophical Insights Presented (10 reviews)	Significant Philosophical Insights Lacking (3 reviews)
C. Michael Curtis	James G. Murray
Oscar Handin	Richard Sullivan
Granville Hicks	Stanley Trachtenberg
Elizabeth Janeway	
J. Kitching	
William McPherson	
<u>Newsweek</u>	
Walter Spearman	
<u>Time</u>	
Geoffrey Wolff	

TABLE XII
 CRITICS' IDENTIFICATION OF THE THEMES
 IN A GENEROUS MAN

Themes	Number of Reviews	Critics
Glory of Selflessness	7	C. Michael Curtis Elizabeth Janeway William McPherson Walter Spearman <u>Time</u> Stanley Trachtenberg Geoffrey Wolff
Learning about Sex	6	Granville Hicks James G. Murray Richard Sullivan <u>Time</u> <u>The Virginia</u> <u>Quarterly Review</u> Geoffrey Wolff
Liberation from Youthful Innocence	5	C. Michael Curtis Elizabeth Janeway J. Kitching William McPherson James G. Murray
Learning about Giving and Taking	4	Granville Hicks William McPherson James G. Murray <u>Newsweek</u>
The Satisfaction of Love	3	C. Michael Curtis Granville Hicks William McPherson
Achieving Identity	3	Elizabeth Janeway William McPherson <u>Newsweek</u>
Assuming Responsibility for One's Personal Acts	2	C. Michael Curtis William McPherson

TABLE XII (continued)

Themes	Number of Reviews	Critics
Learning That Youth Is the Best Time in One's Life	2	William McPherson James G. Murray
Acceptance of Life	1	Oscar Handin
Rewards of Fortitude	1	C. Michael Curtis

worst thing of all is not paying your debts--and paying in time; that you got to give people what they need in time, not years too late when they've famished and fell."⁶¹

Related to this theme of selflessness or generosity is the idea that life includes both giving and taking. William McPherson has selected a passage from the book that supports this theme: "Givers and takers need not be separate, can be two joined hands locked yet shifting, each becoming the other a while (if the gift from one hand at least is love--the attempt to accept, forgive, pledge shielding)."⁶²

The idea of "liberation from youthful innocence"⁶³ is mentioned often. Three critics speak of Milo's reaching manhood,⁶⁴ and one speaks of "the corruption and decay" Milo sees in a man's world.⁶⁵

All of the themes mentioned by the critics seem to be the same ones Price stressed through the character of Rosacoke in A Long and Happy Life, a primary one being that youth is the best time in one's life. William McPherson

⁶¹Reynolds Price, A Generous Man (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 263; quoted in Spearman, p. A-15; Curtis, p. 9; and Time, p. 102.

⁶²Price, p. 246; quoted in McPherson, p. 10.

⁶³Curtis, p. 9.

⁶⁴Janeway, p. 45; Murray, p. 782; and McPherson, p. 10.

⁶⁵Kitching, p. 88.

quotes four lines from Robert Herrick to illustrate this idea:

That age is best which is the first
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.⁶⁶

McPherson notes that Milo seems to have reached the summit of his life during these three days of the novel, days filled with generous acts; Milo's only projection for the future is the dismal one of assuming the burdens of responsibility for an aging mother and grandfather, his retarded brother, and, when he marries, his own wife and children. Similarly, in A Long and Happy Life, one feels that Price has portrayed Rosacoke in the fullest, happiest months of her life and that, again, the projection is for a life burdened with taking care of Wesley and their children.

Only three critics believe that Price fails in presenting valid philosophical insights. "The insights," suggests Stanley Trachtenberg, "become buried under participial accretion."⁶⁷ James G. Murray proposes rather cynically that Milo grew up "through knowledge of what it means to get drunk, to sleep with a woman, to chase a boy chasing a dog chasing a snake. So what?"⁶⁸ And Richard

⁶⁶Robert Herrick, "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," as quoted in McPherson, p. 10.

⁶⁷Trachtenberg, p. 136.

⁶⁸Murray, p. 782.

Sullivan says he thinks the only experience Milo gains is sexual and also implies that the book is too narrow in scope.⁶⁹

In conclusion, although Trachtenberg believes Price's involved style hides his insights, although Murray thinks Milo's experiences are of little profit, and Sullivan thinks Price stresses only Milo's sexual experiences, the majority of critics by a count of ten to three think Price has effectively created a true and significant learning experience in the making of "a generous man."

IX. THE SERIOUS AND THE COMICAL

Critics have to deal with humor in A Generous Man whereas they did so only occasionally in A Long and Happy Life and The Names and Faces of Heroes. Humor is another way of presenting an experience sympathetically and, in this sense, is good. There is, however, a question as to whether Price's serious insights are destroyed by the comic hilarity of the book. A majority of critics say these insights are not destroyed and that Price has effectively combined the serious with the comical (see Table XIII, p. 94). Oscar Handin speaks of "a nice alternation of humor and pathos,"⁷⁰ and C. Michael Curtis praises the way Price manages "the dramatically fortuitous with such artful good humor."⁷¹

⁶⁹Sullivan, p. 10. ⁷⁰Handin, p. 136. ⁷¹Curtis, p. 9.

TABLE XIII
 CRITICAL REACTION TO THE COMBINATION
 OF THE SERIOUS AND THE COMICAL
 IN A GENEROUS MAN

The Serious and the Comical Effectively Combined (3 reviews)	The Serious a Success; The Comical a Failure (1 review)	The Serious and the Comical Ineffectively Combined (1 review)
C. Michael Curtis Oscar Handin William McPherson	Wilfrid Sheed	Richard Sullivan

William McPherson sees that "the novel itself, though deadly serious, is saved from oppressive grimness by an exuberant good humor."⁷²

Wilfrid Sheed observes that Price writes his "sober narrative . . . with precision and a kind of attractive diffidence" but fails with his "robust imaginings."⁷³ And he maintains that although Price's serious writing is successful, his comical writing is not. Opposed to this is Richard Sullivan, who holds that neither one is successful or, at least, that the two types of writing are not effectively combined: "This seems intended as both a serious, sensitive treatment of a boy's growing up and a hilariously exaggerated account of antics in the backwoods. Trying to be both at once, it is never quite either one."⁷⁴ He goes on to say that:

Comedy, of course, can be very, very serious. And grave matter may be treated in a comic spirit. But a deft and precise, mysterious touch is needed, always; and despite the lively efforts made here that sure touch is unfortunately lacking.⁷⁵

Thus, by a narrow margin of three to two, critics commenting on the blend of serious and comical material in the novel think it represents a gain in dimension. Significantly, though, those applauding the combination do so out of an appreciation of the extra dimension, whereas those

⁷²McPherson, p. 10.

⁷³Sheed, p. 7.

⁷⁴Sullivan, p. 8.

⁷⁵Ibid.

pronouncing negative judgments assume the necessity of the added dimension but find it ineffectively carried out. They are not amused.

X. CONCLUSION

Although a majority of critics give favorable reviews of A Generous Man, most of those who compare it with A Long and Happy Life feel that the first novel is the superior one. Most critics feel that Price's plot in A Generous Man is ineffective because it depends too much on coincidence, because it is improbable, and because its numerous flashbacks make it too complicated. A majority of critics find the characters real because of their compassion, but several critics feel they lose their reality, especially Milo, as the novel becomes more supernatural. Although critics disagree about the clarity and character of Price's style, the majority praise his dialogue, his metaphors, and his adaptation of useful elements from other writers. Most critics believe that the novel is an effective myth because the main character, Milo Mustian, possesses supernatural qualities and spiritual insight. A majority, on the other hand, feel that Price has not effectively combined the real with the supernatural because he starts the novel as a realistic story and shifts suddenly, without an adequate transition for the reader, to the supernatural. Similarly, because Price does not adequately define his symbols and because

he fails to make clear whether he means them to be taken seriously, most critics find his use of symbols to be ineffective. As is obvious from the title of the book, the main theme is generosity, and most critics believe that Price effectively explores this theme through Milo's liberation from youthful innocence, his growing understanding of sex, the wider meanings of giving and taking, love, identity, responsibility, joy of youth, acceptance of life, and the rewards of fortitude. And a slight majority of critics think that Price accomplishes this through an effective combination of the serious and the comical.

Therefore, although most critics feel Price fails in creating a credible plot, in combining the real with the supernatural, or in creating effective symbols, they do find his characters real, his style imaginative, his myth effective, his themes enlightening, and his serious and comical elements well blended.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Reynolds Price once said that "the act of writing is an act of extreme enthusiasm in the literal sense of the word, and of extreme excitement for me" ¹ We noted in the preceding chapters to what degree of enthusiasm and excitement the critics have heralded Price's writing. Also we noted that, as a whole, more reviewers have considered A Long and Happy Life to be superior to A Generous Man (see Table III, p. 65). Another meaningful examination is of the nine individual critics who have reviewed more than one of Price's books (see Table XIV, p. 99). It will be noted from this table that two critics remain impressed with Price's two books after A Long and Happy Life, two become more impressed, and four less impressed.

According to Price, the critics often misinterpret his books. For instance, three critics speak of Price's genuine compassion for his characters, ² but the author

¹ Eugene Moore, "An Interview with Reynolds Price on Writing, Readers, Critics," Red Clay Reader, No. 3, 1966, p. 19, quoting Reynolds Price.

² Mary Snead Boger, "Price's Book is 'Beatinest,'" The Charlotte Observer, March 27, 1966, p. 6-C; "A Snake Called Death," Newsweek, March 28, 1966, p. 4-A; and Walter Spearman, "Reynolds Price Closes 'Second Novel Hurdle,'" The Greensboro Record, April 12, 1966, p. A-15.

TABLE XIV
 CRITICS WHO REVIEW MORE THAN ONE
 OF REYNOLDS PRICE'S BOOKS*

Critic	<u>A Long and Happy Life</u>	<u>The Names and Faces of Heroes</u>	<u>A Generous Man</u>
William Barrett	+	o	
Mary Snead Boger	o	o	+
Lodwick Hartley	o		+
Granville Hicks	+	+	+
Charles Poore	+	o	
Richard Sullivan	+		o
<u>Time</u>	o		+
<u>The Times Literary Supplement</u> . .	+	+	
<u>The Virginia Quarterly Review</u> . .	+		-

*The reviews are labeled as follows: favorable (+), mixed (o), and unfavorable (-).

refutes this view:

I don't think of myself as an affectionate person or a person who feels great tenderness toward his characters

On the contrary, I think there's a good deal of harshness in all my work toward various kinds of people, relationships, events. This is something which very few people ever comment on in my work.³

Also, Geoffrey Wolff gives the impression that A Generous Man has a happy ending: "Milo has eaten the apple, rejoiced in his sex and the fruits it enables. His heart is seeded, his loins alive. When the hunt is over, he celebrates."⁴ Price, however, states that "the ending of A Generous Man is a grim ending, that it is by no means an ending suffused with the light of dawn . . . it's not a happy ending."⁵

Sometimes reviewers confuse the facts in the story. For example, Honor Tracy says that Rosacoke in A Long and Happy Life was riding "with Wesley to Delight Baptist Church for the funeral of her friend Mildred,"⁶ whereas actually she was going to Mildred's funeral at Mount Moriah Church.⁷ Also, some reviewers say the python in A Generous Man was

³Moore, pp. 20-21, quoting Price.

⁴Geoffrey Wolff, "A Joyous Eden Regained," The Washington Post, May 9, 1966, p. 23.

⁵Moore, p. 21, quoting Price.

⁶Honor Tracy, "Happily Ever After," The New Leader, August 6, 1962, pp. 21-22.

⁷Reynolds Price, A Long and Happy Life, Avon Books (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1961), p. 12.

twenty feet long⁸ when actually it was eighteen feet.⁹

Although Price is compared by some critics to various writers such as Faulkner, Carson McCullers, and Salinger, their comparisons are superficial. The reader of the reviews is left baffled as to what Price's position is in literary history. The critics, in analyzing Price's books individually, have been unable to arrive at what this position is, and now it seems time for extended critical studies of his work. This thesis concerns the reviews written through October, 1966. Since then, a few general analyses of Price's work have appeared.¹⁰ It does seem encouraging that Price is being recognized by outstanding literary critics such as John M. Bradbury,

⁸Elizabeth Janeway, "Milo Comes of Age," The New York Times Book Review, March 27, 1966, p. 6; William Kennedy, "'A Generous Man': Second Success for New Talent," The National Observer, April 11, 1966, p. 23; and William McPherson, "The Exuberant Choice of Growing Up Generous," Life, April 8, 1966, p. 10.

⁹Selma Provo says, "I've raised him thirteen years from a baby--three feet long to eighteen foot. I say he's twenty foot when I show him on the road, just to round it off" (Reynolds Price, A Generous Man [New York: Atheneum, 1966], p. 96).

¹⁰Daniel R. Barnes, "The Names and Faces of Reynolds Price," Kentucky Review, 2, No. 2 (1968), 76-91; Clayton L. Eichelberger, "Reynolds Price: 'A Banner in Defeat,'" Journal of Popular Culture, 1 (1968), 410-417; and Frederick J. Hoffman, "Varieties of Fantasy," The Art of Southern Fiction (Illinois University Press, 1967), pp. 115, 137-143. And in "News for the Mineshaft," The Virginia Quarterly Review, Autumn, 1968, pp. 641-658, Price himself has contributed additional explanation of his work.

who says:

More remarkable still are the young, who have already proved the intense fecundity of Southern letters in the Sixties. . . . These include . . . a young man whose novel was printed complete in an issue of Harper's Magazine, Reynolds Price's A Long and Happy Life (1962).¹¹

Even though Price has not succeeded in obtaining the horizontal audience of some of his contemporaries such as Jacqueline Suzann, the test of a great writer is whether, over the years, he wins a large vertical audience, and this we must wait to find out.

¹¹John M. Bradbury, Renaissance in the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 196.

LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED, INCLUDING CHRONOLOGICAL
CHECKLISTS OF REVIEWS

I. CHRONOLOGICAL CHECKLISTS OF REVIEWS

For an easy survey, the reviews are labeled as follows:
favorable (+), mixed (o), and unfavorable (-).

A. REVIEWS OF A LONG AND HAPPY LIFE

- + Virginia Kirkus Service, July 1, 1961, p. 561.
- o Mann, Charles W., Jr. Library Journal, December 1, 1961,
pp. 4208-09.
- + Hodges, Betty. "Book Nook," Durham Morning Herald,
January 7, 1962, p. 5-D.
- o Clark, G. Glenwood. "Carolina Tragi-Comedy," Greensboro
Daily News, February 25, 1962, p. C-3.
- + Hicks, Granville. Saturday Review, March 10, 1962,
pp. 17-18.
- + Baro, Gene. New York Herald Tribune Books, March 18,
1962, p. 4.
- o Boger, Mary Snead. "Yes, Young Price Wrote Himself a
Book," The Charlotte Observer, March 18, 1962, p. 10-D.
- o Hartley, Lodwick. "An Eastern Carolina Pastoral," The
[Raleigh] News and Observer, March 18, 1962, p. III-5.
- + Merritt, Davis. "And a Lot of People Like It," The
Charlotte Observer, March 18, 1962, p. 10-D.
- + Sullivan, Richard. The Chicago Sunday Tribune, March 18,
1962, p. 3.
- + Wyllie, John C. The New York Times Book Review, March 18,
1962, p. 5.

- + Poore, Charles. The New York Times, March 20, 1962, p. 35.
- o Yoder, Edwin M. "Long, Happy Leap," Greensboro Daily News, March 20, 1962, p. A-6.
- o Hutchens, John K. "A Long and Happy Life," New York Herald Tribune, March 21, 1962, p. 25.
- + Mitchell, Julian. The Spectator, March 23, 1962, p. 376.
- + Taubman, Robert. New Statesman, March 23, 1962, p. 420.
- o Time, March 23, 1962, p. 88.
- + The Times Literary Supplement, March 23, 1962, p. 197.
- + Hogan, William. "Prospects of a Long, Happy Literary Life," The San Francisco Chronicle, March 26, 1962, p. 39.
- + Price, R. G. G. Punch, March 28, 1962, p. 513.
- + Jebb, Julian. "As Good as the Blurbs Say," Time and Tide, March 29, 1962, p. 40.
- + Times Weekly Review, March 29, 1962, p. 10.
- + Nye, Richard. The Manchester Guardian, March 30, 1962, p. 7.
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