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According to Anni Albers, the arts at Black Mountain College, where she taught weaving and textile design between the time of its opening in 1933 and 1949, were based on the growth of the individual artist. "To see oneself leave the safe ground of accepted conventions, to find oneself alone and self-dependent. It is an adventure that can permeate one's whole being."[2] In the summer of 1947, James Leo Herlihy, then twenty years of age, travelled to the campus on Lake Eden to experience that adventure. He stayed for twelve months, returning for the last time during the summer of 1953.[3] The experience showed him how to live as a writer.

But he also had doubts about that experience, doubts that began to surface in the early 1970s after he had given up published writing as a vocation. I want to begin my essay by briefly tracing Herlihy's path to the College, before exploring his double-minded reflections of his time there. I will finish by considering the extent to which the social adventure of College life—its community atmosphere, its close friendships—shaped one of the key preoccupations of his work; that is, how to be a person.

Perhaps the immediate inspiration for attending Black Mountain came from his short time in the US Navy during the last few months of the Second World War. Here he met John Lyons, a former English professor from Loyola University, Chicago. Lyons became a mentor, helping his close friend refine an appreciation for good literature, especially the forms Herlihy would go on to master—short stories, plays, and novels.[4] As his term in the navy was coming to an end, Herlihy had no desire to return to his family in Detroit and the expectations of living a normal, suburban life. Instead, he wanted an education: one that taught him how to write and, of equal importance, how to be amongst writers and other artists. Knowing his friend lacked formal entrance qualifications and disliked "play[ing] by the rules," Lyons suggested Black Mountain College.[5] Herlihy applied and was promptly rejected. Refusing to give up, he travelled to Asheville, North Carolina to confront the person responsible for admitting students.

"'How come you turned me down? I'm just what you need.' And so they looked me over and they said, 'Well, indeed you are. Come in September.'"[6]

In an extensive interview with Mary Emma Harris in 1972, Herlihy reflects on the "beautiful situations" he discovered as a student.[7] After all, this was the beginning of a new world, a new life, and he wanted to learn just about everything the College had to offer: writing, of course, but also drawing, acting, psychology, painting, literature, and sculpture. And he would make life-long friends here, friends who would help shape a perception of himself as an artistic person. One of these friends was Lyle Bongé, with whom Herlihy shared an attic dorm. As a budding photographer, Bongé was fascinated by the grotesquery of city life, and this fascination had an important influence on Herlihy's later aesthetic preoccupation with gothic-like landscapes and grotesque characters. Another friend was the poet and potter M.C. Richards, then teaching courses like "Reading and Writing," who offered her student clear advice on ways to improve his literary style, advice that Herlihy respected and acted on.

Even after their times at Black Mountain had come to an end, Herlihy helped keep these friendships alive through regular correspondence and visits. A selection of these letters, housed in the University of Delaware's Special Collections and the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, are beautifully crafted documents, fragments of a life, invaluable for our appreciation of a writer who has been unjustly missing critical and biographical attention.

There was also the matter of the College's communal life. Certainly in the years to follow, Herlihy believed that communal life, especially the life practiced by the counter-cultural hippie movements of the 1960s, offered a distinct hope for the freedom of humanity. And there was a sexual aspect to this freedom, too. Although he would talk about this freedom in heterosexual terms, as a gay man growing up in a traditionally structured environment, he must have felt exhilarated by the possibilities of what he called the "intensity and intimacy of the community."[8] Perhaps he agreed with Bongé that Black Mountain could be "a crazy and magical place…the electricity of all the people seemed to make for a wonderfully charged atmosphere, so that one would wake up in the mornings excited and a little anxious, as though a thunderstorm were sweeping in."[9] Indeed, daily life on the banks of Lake Eden represented a marker for the

maturing individual and writer; a separation between the old and a new, or golden, age of possibilities.[10]

But it was a four-day visit from Anaïs Nin in November 1947 that had the most profound impact on Herlihy's life and career. At the time, Nin was a diarist, avant-garde artist, and model. Her visit, as Herlihy remembers, "was just the most glamorous thing that ever happened to me … [a]nd I didn't take my eyes off her the whole time."[11] They were to become intimate friends for the next thirty years, readers (though a little reluctantly on her part) of each other's work, she referring to him as "my spiritual son."[12] In an interview conducted over twenty years later, Herlihy vividly recalls the influence Nin's visit had on him as a person and fledgling writer:

> One of the things she asked me was what I hoped to do with my writing. I said I hoped I could write a novel—I was strongly under the influence of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*—and I hoped I could write a novel…that would make people feel how treacherous and sad it was …that we all have such suffering in our lives. If we could just feel the suffering and somehow affect it and cause people to be more concerned with the idea of maybe making less of it. That was my ambition. She said that seemed like a really good idea. And I said, "What do you do? What do you do with your writing?" She said: "I want to contribute to the world one fulfilled person—myself." And that was like the beginning of—for me—a life-long double-mindedness. There was this part of me that wanted to do something for the world and part of me that wanted to understand what it meant to be a fulfilled individual….I think she was the first person I ever encountered in my life who really understood that the great art form of the Twentieth Century is the Art of the Person. That, if you want to affect the world you live in, first of all you have to affect yourself, you have to affect the kind of being that you really think the world should be populated with. And that's what Anaïs did. It was the central and strongest and most enduring influence on me and I'm very grateful for it.[13]

The art of the person. And that, I believe, is the single, most important lesson Herlihy took from Black Mountain College and, as a theme, it weaves a pattern through his work. How to be yourself? How to give to the world a complete and satisfied individual? How to be a friend? How to write, how to act, how to sculpt, how to love? How to just live?

Herlihy continued at the College for several more months, of course, and learned so much from the courses taught by Richards, John Wallen, Ilya Bolotowsky, and Josef Albers. But something was missing after Nin's departure. To make matters worse, Isaac Rosenfeld, then teaching creative writing at the College, disliked intensely his young student's short stories, encouraging him to take an aptitude test to discover what he should do with his life. Herlihy listened: the test told him to be a writer. But the second vocation on the list was acting, which was another passion.[14] Following that prompt, he decided to leave the College, hitchhiking across America as many of his characters would also do, before enrolling as a student of acting at Pasadena Playhouse from 1948 to 1950.

All these experiences contribute to a double-mindedness about his time at Black Mountain. We hear the overwhelmingly positive aspects of that experience conveyed in an interview with Roy Newquist in 1967.

> A progressive school. It has a strange and interesting history. It was created in 1933 by six educators who had a great passion for education; the only rules they created concerned the fact that you couldn't carry firearms on the campus. There were ninety students and thirty-five faculty when I went there. Some of your classes would be with one teacher, and many had six or seven students in them, no more. They really cared about education only in the sense that they led and inspired the student rather than beating him to death with things that had to do with standards and degrees and getting jobs. It was more concerned with training your mind to learn, to absorb the world, to reach out. [15]

But this positive reflection does change quite dramatically. A year after Newquist's interview, for instance, Herlihy invited Richards to dinner to help encourage his friend to

write a book on Black Mountain. The friend was Martin Duberman, who published in 1972 *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*. During dinner, Richards told Duberman that the College was "relevant to the life lines of the people involved." Such a declaration was wonderful for Duberman to hear. Herlihy interrupted: "I don't think the teachers at Black Mountain did feel that way." Then, an afterthought: "except M.C."[16]

If we move ahead five years to 1972, we have Mary Emma Harris's extensive interview with Herlihy. What strikes me most about this interview is the way Herlihy goes back and forth between a positive, negative, and positive reflection of his time at the College, as if he felt guilty about the criticism. Of course, this may have had something to do with the fact that he took regular marijuana breaks during the course of the interview, but I feel it tapped into a genuine unease about his education. After all, in Herlihy's words, "I was in the wrong place as a writer."[17] We know that he wanted to learn how to write well—with a story-telling aesthetic and clarity that would interest readers—but he felt that students were generally looked down upon for that inclination. During the traditional Sunday evening readings in the Community Center, for instance, he would listen with a growing sense of unease. "I'd listen and I couldn't imagine what that was all about, never knew….It had to be, obscure may not be the word…murkiness. And it's like you couldn't really just say how…you couldn't just convey an experience either as a poet or as a prose writer, but you had to murk it up so that, you know, you didn't know if somebody was writing about a pin cushion or a horse's ass."[18]

We reflect on the past through the prism of the present. Perhaps all these double-minded reflections on Black Mountain College were fueled by his anger at the political present of the early 1970s, especially the anti-Vietnam War movement which Herlihy was active in, and the turmoil of Watergate. Perhaps the lack of critical attention accorded his work shaped an annoyance with the past. Perhaps his decision to give up writing entirely frustrated that reflection even more.[19] But Herlihy did leave BMC in 1948 with a greater sense of selfhood, with a vision of himself as an artistic person. The theme of personhood became a dominating motif in much of his creative work.

Despite the lack of critical attention, Herlihy's body of work was extensive and successful, lasting just over a decade. His first published play was *Blue Denim* (1958),

which he wrote with William Noble, a drama instructor he met at Pasadena Playhouse. It tackled the then-taboo subject of teenage pregnancy and back-street abortions and had a fairly successful run on Broadway before being adapted to film by Philip Dunne, starring Carol Lynley and Brandon de Wilde. His first novel, *All Fall Down* (1960), again about teenage angst in a family setting, was made into a movie two years later by John Frankenheimer, starring Warren Beatty and Eve Marie Saint. But it was the novel *Midnight Cowboy* (1965) that brought Herlihy media attention and financial security, due in large part to John Schlesinger's iconic film adaptation. With stellar performances by Dustin Hoffman and John Voight, the movie picked up three Academy Awards for best director, best picture, and best screenplay by Waldo Salt. The characters in all these novels, including his final novel, *The Season of the Witch* (1971), manage to obtain self-fulfillment, or at least appreciate how they may obtain it. (Interestingly, though, in his two collections of short stories, *The Sleep of Baby Filberston* (1959) and *A Story that Ends with a Scream* (1967), the reverse is true. Here, characters' journeys to self-fulfillment end in grotesquery, bitterness, and angst.)

I could use any of the novels to illustrate in depth this sense of self-fulfillment, but I'll stay with *Midnight Cowboy*. As we know, the story follows Joe Buck. He moves from a troubled and unstable upbringing in Albuquerque, New Mexico to Manhattan to make his fortune as a cowboy prostitute. But all he encounters is intense lonesomeness (a key word of the book) and poverty. He meets Enrico Salvatore Rizzo of the Bronx, a poor petty hustler and trickster—a direct opposite to the mythical figure of the cowboy. But Rizzo turns out to be more than this, instead becoming a guide, a comrade, a friend; another human being, perhaps the first, that Joe can connect with and love. As Rizzo takes Joe further and further into the underworld of New York, the reader is exposed to the utter lonesomeness of its inhabitants, the poverty that becomes more visible at night, and the destruction of old immigrant communities by the likes of the city's powerful urban planner throughout the post-war period, Robert Moses. "What a splendid thing you had done," wrote Bongé to his friend in the summer of 1990, "you had taken people who were at best statistical fragments and made them real, doing this with such love that these become rich living people."[20]

By the mid-1960s, Herlihy was convinced that the cities had to be evacuated. This conviction invests both characters' dream of leaving New York for a shared life in Florida. But Rizzo's illness becomes too acute, his fantasies of Florida too great, and he dies on the bus journey south. We will all experience the death of a friend. We can all understand the profundity of Joe's grief. But Rizzo's death also signals a new life. Joe gets rid of the cowboy outfit and buys new clothes. He is filled with a realization that he is capable of leading a regular life. This is a new man, an American Adam. This new man is capable of self-sacrifice and love for another human being. He is filled with the Emersonian sense of self-reliance but also the Whitmanian sense of commonality and human bonding. What we sense here is Herlihy's aesthetic refining of Nin's philosophy of personhood and connecting it with its definition in Richard's mesmerizing *Centering: In Pottery, Poetry and the Person* (1964), published just a few months before *Midnight Cowboy*:

> This is the main thing. This is what I care about, it is the person. This is the living vessel: person. This is what matters. This is our universe. This is the task, the joy and dollar: to be born as person, to live and love as person, to dwell in the world as in a Person. The living spirit, the moving form, the living word, life-death, art-life, corpus, body, being, all, persons. Truly life is absent in the moment when person is eliminated. This is the urgency of my speech - for this occasion and all human occasions - to bring man into man's consciousness. It is the presence of person that compels my energy. For life - I am sure of this - is not transforming energy, but transforming person.[21]

We hear Emerson in the words of Nin, Richards, and Herlihy. The idea of *Bildung*, which Emerson borrowed from Goethe, is the idea of the individual's holistic growth.[22] I feel that Herlihy knew this. And this realization played a part in his decision to give up writing. Writers shut themselves away like monks, he thought, and he wanted to be with and amongst people.[23] He also wanted to concentrate on his acting, which he did in such films as Arthur Penn's wonderful *Four Friends* (1981). But even though he had given up writing, he was still very much a letter writer. Bongé again: "There was

never more than a sentence about current affairs in a letter of five pages. It was all personal and intimate. About sex and death, but also about his joys, and not much about sorrow; on working on his garden, on cooking, with often a whole page devoted to a supper he had the night before; how he fixed the meal; something new that he had learnt."[24]

Herlihy clearly had some misgivings about his time at Black Mountain College. But it is also true that he discovered the seeds of how to live as a person and as an artist, seeds that would flower in his best literary work. I would like to see that body of work coming back into print, and I feel there is a compelling case to be made for publishing his letters, not least because they show correspondence with some of the notable artists of the age—Christopher Isherwood, Nin, Bongé, Richards, Tennessee Williams—but also because of the utter charm of their prose. Here's a fragment of a beautiful letter Herlihy wrote to Richards in 1974:

> The garden here is terrific. The tomatoes have flowers on them. The lettuce has been thinned out. The Swiss chard is healthy. The beans and peas have begun to climb the maze of rainbow yarn on the fence, the sunflowers are a foot tall already, the cauliflower and broccoli are growing by leaps and bounds, the bell peppers are holding their own, the zinnias and marigolds have appeared.[25]

Perhaps the garden is the final metaphor for Herlihy's adventures in artistry and personhood and it whispers, between the lines, about cultivation, about growth.

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[1] My essay includes some material previously published in my book, *Understanding James Leo Herlihy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012). I have permission from the publisher to use this material.
[2] Vincent E. Katz, ed., *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003, 31.
[3] There is a little confusion about the length of Herlihy's first stay at the College. In the *New York Times* obituary of Herlihy by the meticulous William Grimes, the dates are 1946-1948. But in Mary Emma Harris's interview, Herlihy, after a little uncertainty, says the dates were 1947-48. See Mary Emma Harris. "Interview with James Leo Herlihy." Nov.1972. North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, 1., 6, 21. See William Grimes, "James Leo Herlihy, 66, Novelist Who Wrote 'Midnight Cowboy." *New York Times*, Oct 22, 1993, B9.
[4] Kay Bonnetti. "Interview with James Leo Herlihy." (April 1982. Columbia, MO.: American Audio Prose Library, 1982), audiocassette.
[5] "Obituary." *Daily Telegraph* (London), Oct. 28, 1993, 23.
[6] Harris, "Interview," 1.

[7] Harris, "Interview," 2.
[8] Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 110.
[9] Lyle Bongé. "Some of the Greats and the Grands," in *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds: An Anthology of Personal Accounts*, ed. by Ben Mervin Lane (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 236-239 (239).
[10] Martha Macgregor. "The Week in Books." *New York Post*, Apr. 24, 1971, n.p.
[11] Harris, "Interview," 36, 38.
[12] Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, ed. by Gunther Stuhlmann, Vol. 5: 1947-55 (London: Peter Owen, 1974), 98.
[13] James Leo Herlihy, "The Art of Being a Person," *Anaïs: An International Journal* 1 (July 1983): 67-68 (67).
[14] Roy Newquist, *Conversations* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967), 134.
[15] Newquist, 134.
[16] Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: Am Exploration in Community* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1972), 295-6.
[17] Harris, "Interview," 11.
[18] Harris, "Interview," 10.
[19] Actually, this is not entirely true. He went back and forth on his decision to give up writing. In a 1973 letter to M.C., for instance, Herlihy admitted, "I'm trying to stage a reconciliation with the typewriter with which machine I've been on the outs for some years, and it is an uphill path." Herlihy to Richards, Oct. 30 1973, Box 2, Folder 41. James Leo Herlihy Papers, University of Delaware Special Collections, University of Delaware Library.
[20] Lyle Bongé to James Leo Herlihy. Summer 1990. Box 2, Folder 20, James Leo Herlihy Papers, University of Delaware Special Collections. University of Delaware Library.
[21] Mary Caroline Richards, *Centering: in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person*, (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1964), 7.
[22] For more on the idea of individual growth, see Emerson's classic essay, "Self- Reliance" (1841). For more on the associations between Emerson and *Bildung*, see Heikki A. Kovalainen, "Emersonian Self-Culture and Individual Growth," in *Theories of* Bildung *and Growth: Connections and Controversies Between Continental Educational Thinking and American Pragmatism*, ed. by Pauli Siljander, and Others (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2012), 183-97.
[23] Lyle Bongé, "Obituary of James Leo Herlihy." *Independent* (London). October 29 1993, 6.
[24] Bongé, "Obituary," 6.
[25] James Leo. Herlihy to Mary Caroline Richards. Feb. 18 1974. Box 34, Folder 42. James Leo Herlihy Papers. University of Delaware Special Collections. University of Delaware Library.

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