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"TIGHTLY-WOUNDED LITTLE BOMBS OF TRUTH"... BIBLICAL REFERENCES IN THE FICTION OF WILLIAM GOYEN

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The American novelist, short story writer, poet and dramatist William Goyen (born 1915) has been for some thirty years a respected if never extremely popular member of the American literary establishment as both writer and teacher. His Texas background, part Roman Catholic and part Methodist, includes (as he says in the Preface to his Collected Stories, 1975) what he calls "Deep South Evangelism" and that, along with the manageable amount of fiction he has produced, recommends him here as an example of the kind of writer in whose works biblical references function to place regionalism in the larger context of cultural tradition and conscious literary onomastic devices are employed in a palpable quest for artistic resonances and even avant-gardist complexity.

Other American and foreign writers spring to mind, some of them more likely to be familiar to this audience than Goyen, in whose work biblical allusions and biblical names occur more often, even more effectively, but what we want now is a writer whose work in this respect can be adequately treated in but twenty minutes, one whose fiction provides interesting but not too numerous examples and can be intelligently discussed without what we may call the Falstaff Syndrome of essays on literary onomastics, so common at these conferences. You will recall the objection in Henry IV, Part I to "but one half-pennyworth of bread,
to this intolerable deal of sack"; too many examinations of names in literature spend too much time recounting plots or creating other perspectives that the onomastic analysis is scanted indeed. I contend that in speaking of biblical references and names in Goyen's fiction we can keep our eye pretty much on our main interest and make some useful points about literary onomastics even in a brief essay.

To begin with, we might just note that Goyen's fiction abounds in colorful names, from Son, and Boy, and Old Somebody, to Rhody, Jessy, Jewell, Prinici's and others of odd spelling, to typically Southern (actually 'Texan) names such as Uncle Jimbob and Sue Emma (called Swimma) and nicknames such as Old Fuzz and Little Pigeon to names which hint at interpretations (such as Folliè for a homosexual, actually Folner) or instantly bespeak individuality: Opal Ducharm, Thwaite Cumberly, Cusby Hall, Leander Siggins, Ace Adair. Goyen delights in the eccentric. A list of his characters would include some crippled grandfathers and sexual misfits, a boy who plays a "cardboard piano" (actually a printed keyboard) and bearded ladies who play the xylophone, a bullfighter employed as a coroner and a show-biz female bishop of the black Light of the World Holiness Church, a castrated horse (which has also lost his'gold' teeth and golden hooves) and a cat named Zamour (who gives his name to "A Tale of Inheritance" in its German edition), a diamond-backed rattlesnake named Jake and a flagpole sitter named Moody, the King of the Flowers at an ill-fated Texan May fête and Gli Maravigliosi (a carnival act), Firedevil Prescott and Cleon Peters the Oil King (the Restorer, impotent snake preacher of The Gospel of Good News of Oil Glory), and Mr. de Persia and Borley Benson (whose sexual organs generate plot in different stories), to name a few. Goyen's extraordinary world calls for odd names for odd people; he gleefully confesses them.
Many names he draws from The Bible; for his fiction often concerns itself with Christ. Son ("Children of Old Somebody") is a Christ figure, reminding us," writes Robert Phillips, "of the famous painting of Christ at the door [The Light of the World] by the Pre-Raphaelite Holman Hunt [1827-1910]." So are several others, writing in a presentation copy of his A Book of Jesus (1973) for Robert Phillips (April, 1973), Goyen said:

He was on the flagpole, and he was with the white rooster and he helped Swimma Starnes pack her suitcase for the hundred time.

Christian, too, are the references to St. Peter and the cock ("The Faces of Blood Kindred") and Cleon Peters and his search for the "Promised Land (Come, The Restorer), the working title of In a Farther Country (Surely the People is Grass--from 1 Peter, says Phillips, but I assume it is Isaiah 38:6) and certain suggestions of resurrection (including the "egg" of the name Chalmers Egstrom and the resuscitated "road runner," which is really a drooping macaw in Woolworth's pet department), Noah and the ark (the animals rescued from the flood in "A Rescue"), and obscure Christian saints (Honey Benson, his forename suggesting mortality, in "A Shape of Light" alludes to "Bruder Klaus," patron saint of Switzerland) and well-known Christian holidays (Easter in "Nests in a Stone Image") and names (such as Peter) as well as Old Testament ones (Canaan Johnson, a villain). 2

Christopher Isherwood was correct to greet Goyen's first novel as the product of "a truly original and arresting voice in our literature," but that is not at all to say that Goyen cannot and has not ever since used the fairly common (and still effective) device of biblical allusion. In fact, his very first published story ("A Parable of Perez") uses a word of biblical significance
prominently. Other fiction followed, much of which was to be included in *The House of Breath,* a somewhat auto-biographical novelistic tour de force couched in a rhetoric partly derived from the religious-colored common speech of Goyen's native Texas. It is, as critics have long noticed, "deeply rooted in Old Testament locutions," just as are his non-fiction *A Book of Jesus,* King James in its cadences, and the dialogue of both whites and blacks in his fiction: "Woman, what do you have to do with me?" asks Addis as he leaves his mother in *Come, the Restorer,* and Ruby Drew in *The Fair Sister* says "mine eyes was dazzled" by her lighter-skinned sister Savata's trunkful of pretty clothes.

But *House of Breath's* names are not drawn from the Good Book but from the good people of East Texas; the story swirls around families named Ganchion, Starnes, and Glegg, lexically opaque, "just names" and conveying little or nothing more than the simple Texan origins of their bearers. It is in the language and in the narrator's perception that "everything flows into everything" the Bible is echoed, though it must be noted that an important character in the novel is named Christy, a fact which critics who have made much of Joe Christmas in Faulkner's *Light in August* or Christie Mahon in Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* will hardly ignore. In this book even the river has a story to tell and secrets to hide. The author nostalgically fondles colorful bits of fact the way his Granny Ganchion does her string of cheap red beads, the token of a moment of love in the past, and the structure is that of "beads on a chain" or "the form of a rosary."

One fact is that Christy was sired by an itinerant circus performer; Granny Ganchion reveals that her husband was not the boy's father. Phillips writes:

Christy's conception through an unseen father...
heightens the Christly comparisons already apparent in his name, his exile, and his long suffering.4

We must be careful, however, not to make every "bastard into a messiah. Many will think Phillips is carrying ingenuity too far when he describes Roma, a cow shot in an icy ditch, as "almost a sacred cow, named for 'Rome, mother-seat of the church and world-navel of Christianity." Charity, (the small town in which the novel is set) may cover a multitude of sins—but this is too much, from critic or author or both. If noticed, it can propel us right out of the world of the novel into sharp dissatisfaction with the games these arty modern novelists play. In John Barth and more recently Jeremy Leven, characters are aware they are in novels; it is worse for readers to be too conscious of the artificiality confronting them, for art should conceal art and readers want to "get into" a book, not to be frequently reminded that the fiction is all lies.

One observation that can be made about the use of biblical or other allusions in fiction is that they distance us from the work to some degree or another and may on the one hand destroy the "willing suspension of disbelief" while on the other they make us conscious of the author and his methods and message. When names in literature are cute rather than acute, when they shriek Significance at us, we may be called upon to pay more attention to the writer than to his work. In the case of Goyen, a highly self-conscious writer and one who is clearly trying to commit Literature with malice aforethought, I believe the literary onomastics are often employed to draw attention to the writer, and I believe they can be partially explained in terms of attempts to avoid autobiography and reportage while still making fiction out of what is
basically observed rather than imagined material. In such stories as "Figure Over the Town" (part of a failed novel called Half a Look of Cain, written when Goyen was at Rice Institute in the 'Thirties and still unpublished though partly mined for material) I suspect we have real events recalled, though perhaps exaggerated or deliberately distorted, just as in "Bridge of Music, River of Sand" we have Riverside, Texas, and basic fact. When names or literary allusions too obviously enrich a fiction's significance, there is the distinct danger that the result is what one of Goyen's characters might call "gussied up" writing.

If Roma the cow was really intended to suggest what critic Phillips suggests, then Goyen has been exposed to Creative Writing courses too much--the wrong kind of writing courses, the sort that produces dreadful students such as the one Mary McCarthy once reported, a student who told her she had finished a short story--all except going through once more and "putting the symbols in."

The manipulation of the distance between reader and work by the use of literary allusions and obvious examples of literary onomastic devices deserves a full-scale discussion of its own somewhere. So does the changing concept of what is obvious, over time. When Ibsen has Gregers Werle in The Wild Duck use the phrase "thirteenth at table" he is writing for an age when familiarity with the New Testament made it possible to be certain that most or all of the audience would ask (thinking of The Last Supper): Is Gregers Jesus or Judas, messiah or murderer? Today many or most people are too ignorant of The Bible to get that point, though Ibsen here is not being anywhere near as subtle as he is when he calls the play about Hedda Tesman, Hedda Gabler, thus emphasizing that she is inescapably General Gabler's daughter and fundamentally incapable of being George Tesman's wife.
(though she is already married to him as the play begins). Call your new murder mystery *Death in the Pot* and no one will think of II Kings 4:40. The same book of The Bible once gave us Jehu for a wild driver ("for he driveth furiously," that son of Nimshi); today slang has forgotten that. I have a liquor cabinet which some Victorian thought amusing to decorate with the motto (along with carved Bacchus and grapes), "Wine is a mocker," None of my friends has ever observed, "Oh, Proverbs 20:11"

I do not think this proves my friends are unusually untutored or ungodly. I find my students more ignorant of religion. Discussing a story of Nadine Gordimer's which involved Jacob's Ladder, no one in a large class could explain the reference, not even a boy named Jacob wearing a yamulka. When I teach Marlowe, not even the Catholic students can discuss The Sin Against the Holy Ghost and nobody has heard of The Vulgate or can list all The Seven Deadly Sins. One student identified the Ladder as "a very old movie by Ingmar Bergman." Teaching the literary heritage of Christian Europe to the largely pagan or "assimilated" Brooklyn population, I often feel like a lecturer on obstetrics in a nunnery. If I jokingly advise before a test they "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" I do not expect to find another person in the classroom who uses The Book of Common Prayer. If I note biblical names in Cooper's The Deerslayer, I do not expect any student to be able to translate Nathaniel or Judith or see Esther in Hester. But I am astounded when I discover they do not know what a magdalene is or what the mark of Cain means or who Joseph of Arimathea was.

I advise them all to steal Gideon bibles from motel rooms and to read them, but I do believe that a good deal of the literature of the past, the product of eras steeped in The Bible, will soon be incomprehensible to a great
many Americans if it has not already reached the point where Portia's "A Daniel come to judgment!" and such has simply to be ignored if one is not to spend forever explicating The Merchant of Venice. They have never heard of Daniel, they claim; nor of Job's wretched comforters (not bed-clothes) nor Pilate. In my classes I have students who can list all the characters in Star Wars or identify all the Sweathogs on television but who honestly cannot list the twelve apostles, let alone the sorrows of Mary or the sacraments or the seven last words of Christ.

In such an intellectual climate, how can writers make allusions to The Bible? Has it become precious (rather than valuable) to do so? There's an essay in this, too.

But back to Goyen, writing interesting novels that none of my students, indeed few of my countrymen, read. His second book and first collection of short stories was Ghost and Flesh (1952) and it commences with a story that brings up an important fact about literary onomastics, for "The White Rooster" is a tale in which one might say that the biblical names dropped are unspoken.

The characters in "The White Rooster" are Grandpa Samuels, Mrs. Marcy Samuels, and her wimpy husband, Watson. Now, Watson may, after Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's character, carry a hint of the ineffectual, the slow, the subjugated character, ineffectual by comparison with The Great Detective but sympathetic; but Watson does not seem to be chosen to do that in this story. Samuel is a biblical name, but the biblical names that spring to mind and suggest the pattern of the story are David and Goliath and, most especially, Samson and Delilah. Phillips (p. 48) asserts that

Goyen has staged his battle of the sexes on the symbolic level, in the conflict between the rooster (which has invaded Marcy's pansy
patch] and Marcy, as well as on the literal level, between Grandpa Samuels and Marcy. To reinforce his theme, moreover, he has borrowed heavily, I suggest, from the biblical legend of Samson and Delilah as a controlling framework for this story.... Grandpa Samuels, of course, is the Samson figure, his last name one clue to his legendary role.

I agree with the Samson and Delilah interpretation, well aware that "split level" is as conventional in modern literature as in modern suburban architecture, but why Samuels? Would Sampson have been too obvious, so that only the initial S and another biblical name can be used?

He is the figure of the incapacitated male at the mercy of a female in league with the Philistines.

Goyen's work is full of incapacitated males and traces of homosexuality and misogyny (though there are some very appealing and rather powerful women depicted as well, including the black Savata). He is clearly on the side of Grandpa (confined to a wheelchair, while Samson was blinded) as 'the old man ravages the temple of Philistine Marcy and brings "utter finish" to her home, "bringing the very house down upon himself."

The question which I have never seen addressed in any discussion of literary onomastics, so far as I can recall, is this: Samson and Delilah are names suggested to the reader and yet not stated, so to what extent can they, or indeed any names of archetypal figures, be said to function in the text to enrich and direct interpretation? In "The White Rooster," Marcy and Watson and Samuels (though the last has a biblical suggestion about it) as names accomplish nothing compared to Samson and Delilah, inescapably invoked by such phrases as "bringing the very house down
upon himself" and yet never articulated per se. The names that we find on the surface are no more biblical than that of Sammye in the story which follows this one ("The Letter in the Cedar chest") in this collection and yet. "The White Rooster" can be said to be informed by ideas invoked by names themselves invoked by details (not names) in the actual text.

There is no name for this way of names functioning in a literary text and yet, on reflection, the device is not uncommon. Son Wanger (in another story in this collection) by his "dark, complexion, rumored Semitic blood, and unfulfilled quest, recalls the figure of the Wandering Jew," says Phillips (p. 48). But no name is mentioned to evoke this archetype some seven centuries old, no phrase from Goethe, no quotation from Sue or Schlegel or Shelley. We are not even certain that the author intended what the critic has "found." In Goyen's second collection of short fiction, "A Novella and Ten Stories" called The Faces of Blood and Kindred (1960), one story of which was elaborated into his third novel, The Fair Sister (1963), religious names with significance are few but we feel we are on firmer ground when we see in the Reverend Mr. Peters a reference to a cock other than the kind that crows for St. Peter in The New Testament or a reference to The Old Testament in a short story title such as that of the tale that concludes the collection, "There are Ravens to Feed Us." I still have a framed eighteenth-century embroidered picture, handed down in the family from some pious female relative of long ago, which depicts the prophet Elijah receiving what looks like a Big Mac from an awkward-looking bird; I have thus known about ravens since I was a small child, but I suppose (as I have said) that for many this biblical reference is for the birds, probably evoking no biblical background, any more than titles such as Lilies of the Field in the cinema or Keys of the Kingdom on a novel, for many.
Can one of the pleasures of literary allusion be comparable to being elect when others are damned, being in the "in" group that catches the hint and realizing that may may miss it? Will socialist equality eventually destroy this elitist privilege? Is literary onomastics or literary reference going to be democratized out of existence? Or will new referents be devised? Latin and Greek quotations, employed first for documentation and authority and later for mere decoration or ostentation, have all but disappeared from modern writing. Will bibliocal and other such references have to go next? What will take their place? Will names become games, as IBM yielded HAL (the talking computer), and writers start making jokes? In the novel Creator, by Leven (previously mentioned), Harry H. Wolper's name shrinks to H. H. Wolper and Wolper and, eventually, is represented by a blank space. Structuralists and deconstructionists tell us we have to stop reading fiction and just play with it. Will authors play with it until it is devoid of any referent outside itself?

So many questions!

More another time. Stay tuned.

We must continue, with Goyen, the writer whose work we have chosen to prompt all these points or, in suggesting topics for further investigations, we shall fail to conclude this one.

In The Fair Sister a black called Prince o' Light (suggesting Lucifer) is head of the Church Zealous (recalling such religious concepts as the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant) in Philadelphia and gets involved with the sisters operating the spectacularly named Brooklyn church. We have already mentioned. In this comic novel of types, not unlike Steppin Fetchit, Butterfly McQueen, and the characters played by the late Godfrey Cambridge, names help to create some of the humor, though the extent
to which ethnic pride--"We don't get much call for that in my business," remarked a character in one of Ossie Davis' plays, but times have changed--will prevent the mocking of black or other stereotypes in this way has yet to be seen. There was a time when the comic use of biblical names was considered to be in very bad taste, if not blasphemous. Today we seem to be freer to speak slightingly of divinity, but not of race.

The way in which the frequency and handling of literary allusions (biblical names included) function as a barometer of public education and prejudice, tastes and interests, has yet to be documented. I recommend it as a subject for research.

In *Come the Restorér* (where there may be a vulgar pun in the first word), Goyen's fourth and latest novel (1974), the Christ figure is called Addis Adair. He is the offspring of a gypsy girl--where Son had a gypsy father--and the mysterious Mr. de Persia (whose name has been taken to suggest exotic and artistic origins), though he perishes (like Absalom) not nailed to a "tree" but accidentally hanged in one. He had "a Virgin Mother and was a son without a father," or rather his father was unconscious at the time of his conception; he was a "Wonder-child, a holy child." His father, Mr. de Persia, also is accidentally hanged in a tree and his mother Jéweil is hanged in a tree and even a (castrated) horse is hanged in a tree in this extraordinary novel. Critics have not been able to do much with Addis but have noted the air part of his surname, for three of the four elements figure largely in this confused and confusing short novel, one which has received some respectful notice but little elucidation from the critics; they seem to suggest that words such as "experimental," often heard in connection with *The House of Breath*, will no longer
suffice to characterize what Goyen is writing of "estrangement," Jungian psychology, and "extravagant symbols." A novel that has an erection as "probably the main character," according to a French critic (Patrice Repusseau), may pose at once too bawdy and too baffling a game for those who, despite recent French principles of literary criticism, at least until the pendulum swings back toward Foucault, still strive for interpretation and explication de texte. It is almost too easy to note in "The Thief Coyote" (a story in Southwest Review for 1971) that the boy who identifies with the animal (and is killed when mistaken for it) is named Jim Cooper and that the initials J C suggest Christ. It is much more difficult to use names (or any other approach) to wring meaning out of (or read meaning into) Come, the Restorer.

In modern literature, if one makes the puzzle too difficult for the critics, one loses even the professional audience.

Goyen has also written plays and a musical (Aimee! was produced at Providence, Rhode Island's Trinity Square Repertory Theatre, 1974, the year of Come, the Restorer) but these derive from his fiction and really add nothing to our understanding of his use of literary onomastics. His poetry drops a few names (such as that of D. H. Lawrence, whose Frieda brought Goyen to Taos in the late 'Forties) but is not important.

Goyen is admittedly a minor American writer, popular at least with some critics and abroad and not unworthy of greater attention from that admirable if endangered species, the General Reader. I recommend you read some of his best pieces in the very convenient Selected Writings of William Goyen (Random House, 1974) or his Collected Short Stories (Doubleday, 1975) or a recent story such as "Bridge of Music, River of Sand" (The Atlantic, 1975). "The White
Rooster" and "Figure Over the Town" have been anthologized in several short story texts. I found that, studying him in connection with writing for the forthcoming *Cyclopedia of the Short Story*, he rewards second and third readings.

But what we really need in literary onomastics study are not more and more studies of more and more difficult individual writers but larger theoretical and methodological studies, more precise and straightforward terminology, and both models for small reports such as this one and more extensive general studies illustrated with selected examples from a number of writers. I regret that I have not been able to offer you the overview, *Biblical Names in Modern Literature* or, better, *The Art of Literary Onomastics*. I feel somewhat like the character in Swift who, wishing to sell his house, went about with a brick, as a sample.

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NOTES

1 The Light of the World (1854) is in Keble College (Oxford) but most people know the copy in St. Paul's Cathedral. The inspiration was Revelation 3:20 ("Behold I stand at the door, and knock") and the model for Christ, by the way, was a Cockney girl of the Rossetti set (the beard is false). Throughout I am indebted as all students of Goyen must be to the comprehensive William Goyen (1979) by Robert Phillips in Twayne's United States Authors series. There is only one child ("Christlike, the babe in the log represents perfect innocence," continues Phillips, p. 53) but in his insignificant beginnings (his mother places him in a log; Christ was placed in a manger) and miraculous birth he has larger implications: "Goyen titled the story not 'Child of Old Somebody' but 'Children of Old Somebody,'" says Phillips, "enlarging the implications and referring to us all."

2 "Bruder Klaus" was St. Nicholas of Flüe (1417-1487), declared patron of Switzerland by Pope Pius XII (1947) when canonized. Elsewhere in Goyen are characters called Christy and Chris, and Goyen plays with suggestions as when, in A Farther Country, which is both Spain and the world of the imagination, the heroine Marietta McGee-Chavez (combining, says Frederick J. Hoffman in The Art of Southern Fiction, 1976, Latin romantic urges with Scots-Irish Calvinist repressions) lives over (doubting?) Thomas McGee's shop where reproductions of Spanish art are sold (it is called "Artificés of Spain"). From his first novel, The House of Breath (1950), which the Kirkus review characterized as "for the more selective reader," to the latest (Come, the Restorer, 1974), which the Dallas Morning News hailed as a "virtuosic feast," Goyen has always been elusive and allusive, poetic and a trifle obscure, densely-textured and deliberately manipulating names and symbols in the now-fashionable creative-writing
style he has taught at The Southwest Writers' Conference, The New School, Brown, Princeton, and elsewhere.

3 Phillips, p. 40. He also quotes an unpublished master's thesis (Institut d'Anglais Charles V, Paris, 1974) on The House of Breath in which the writer, Patrice Repousseau, uses the "rosary" idea. Actually, musical structure is more common in Goyen's works than unrepeated and equal episodes, "beads." I have often thought that literary onomastics should address the way names can mark or define structural elements by repetition, parallelism, and other devices, the way a recurring chord in music or word in literature (consider honest in Othello or the changes wrought on honorable in Julius Caesar) can effect the architectonics or rhetoric of a piece or a passage in a piece. The reader will notice that the leit motif of the present essay is to encourage broader studies in literary onomastics, for I believe that: first, papers at conferences ought to lead to discussion and discovery, not to be what the French at a meeting I attended in Montreal a day or two before the meeting in Rochester this year called communications (which suggests reporting and closing a subject in its English sense and which is better suited to papers read than delivered orally to groups); and, second, these conferences have too often served more to encourage research by offering the opportunity to read an article aloud (and see it later in print) than by stimulating exchange of ideas, widening the horizons of literary onomastics, and creating cooperation leading to bigger projects.

4 Phillips, p. 42.

5 "The tiny town of Charity, in The House of Breath," Goyen told Phillips in an interview (1975) appearing as an appendix in William Goyen, "is really Trinity, Texas, truly, accurately described." The "memorable, single
image, exact and cryptic" (as Louis K. McKendrick describes it in "Fiction Chronicle" in Ontario Review 4, 1976) of "Bridge of Music, River of Sand" is from real life, as (I suspect) are essential details of stories such as "Pore Perrie" and "The Tenant in the Garden" and "Figure Over the Town" (though the flag-pole sitter as odd-man-out performing artist gets his name Moody from a writer trying to point up life--Hawthorne changed the name Moody which history gave him for the clergyman in "The Minister's Black Veil" to avoid an interpretation he did not want in the story--and something of his significance, I believe, from the haunting figure of Kafka's "A Hunger Artist"). We should ask ourselves, when dealing with the work of an artist who makes what Goyen calls "medallions" out of pieces of reality (and his biggest difficulty is putting them together into coherent patterns) how the necessity for changing real names and the choice of invented names affects the final product and assists the artist in putting meaning into his work and communicating insights and larger "figures in the carpet" to his readers. How does this differ from the task and technique of writers who invent more and cut out of whole cloth?

A good deal of literary onomastic scholarship has been concerned with the etymology of character and place-names without consideration of whether the "meanings" of the names were chosen or manipulated by the writers or can legitimately be expected to register with today's average intelligent reader. To a greater extent than these clever critics imagine or admit, literary names may be or have become opaque. Footnotes may bring to a reader a subtlety the author intended but which time has obscured (especially as classical and biblical learning become less common) but the new criticism has emphasized that what historical scholarship provides and what the text offers are not
exactly the same thing. What can be made clear to a reader, to some extent, will always be different from what is clear to him as he approaches the work of art for himself. Novels as puzzles for professors rather than pleasure and parables for the public point (I feel sure) toward decadence and disaster in literature. I should like to see literary onomastic scholarship more oriented toward explaining how writers communicate to their public and why the public enjoys that than in attempting to find in literature things which the ordinary reader cannot perceive or even credit and which the writer himself may never have intended.

With regional and realistic writers it is helpful to know something of the extent to which the names they choose are credible in context. Goyen's name for a black Brooklyn church is not as odd as it may sound to non-Brooklynites. As I write this (in May, 1980), born-again rock star Little Richard (Penniman) has just appeared (in a three-piece maroon suit and conservative Afro) to preach from the pulpit of The Calvary Tabernacle Church of Brooklyn in a show-biz and onomastic context which makes The Fair Sister look more like sociology than exaggeration. I can assure you that black personal and church names in both Brooklyn and Philadelphia make the names in Goyen look quite ordinary and I can read the book as comedy rather than farce. Moreover, I believe that Texans may find Uncle Jimbob and such names less odd than I do. We need to study literary onomastics in terms not only of time but of place and custom; this is much too infrequently done.

"The erection is probably the main character, the hero of this book, which tells us the good and bad fortunes, the ups and downs of the male organ." Quoted in Phillips, p. 96. The subject of what Phillips calls "penile power" seems to lend itself to sniggering or
awkward prose: in the novel Goyen writes of a "world of quick fortunes" in which "one man went down and another rose up before you could tell what happened," but one is never certain when the writing is punning, slap-dash, or slang-bang.

9 The novel *The House of Breath*, originally bits of fiction stitched together, has been recycled into three plays (*The House of Breath*, produced at Circle-in-the-Square, New York, 1955; *Christy*, produced at The American Place Theatre, New York, 1964; and *House of Breath: Black/White*, produced at Trinity Square Repertory Playhouse, Providence, Rhode Island, 1969), a ballet (*Holy Jungle*, choreographed by Martha Graham), etc. "Rhody" has been made into a CBS television drama (*A Possibility of Oil*, 1958) and a stage play (*The Diamond Rattler*, produced at Charles Playhouse, Boston, 1960). "The White Rooster" was made into an experimental film (though Goyen's only real brush with the movies was writing song lyrics for the film *The Left-Handed Gun*, 1956).