# Recollections of Erskine Caldwell—A Georgia Hero

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*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher,*
*vanity of vanities; all is vanity.*
. . .
*One generation passeth away, and another*
*generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.*
—*ECCLESIASTES*

Erskine Caldwell, the great and controversial American author who described the wretched life of poor white sharecroppers in his native Georgia in *Tobacco Road, God's Little Acre*, and other novels, died of lung cancer on April 11, 1987, at his home in Paradise Valley, Arizona. He was eighty-three. A private memorial service was held, and later he was cremated. I vividly remember his death, but soon we will commemorate the hundred anniversary of his birth.

A heavy smoker from 1918 to 1972, Caldwell endured three bouts with lung cancer. In the first two, in 1974 and then 1975, he underwent surgery for removal of portions of his lungs at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. In the third instance his cancer was diagnosed as inoperable, and chemotherapy was attempted. Caldwell left a moving record of his experience as a terminal cancer patient. His illness was a devastating one, but he responded to it by showing his mettle as a novelist. His doctor had told him that the chemotherapy treatments were not succeeding and asked what Caldwell wanted. Caldwell said, "I want a miracle." It could not have been an easy thing for this self-reliant writer of dogged determination to confess to.

One month before his death, after some larger publishers quibbled with the 545-page manuscript, a small publishing house in Georgia, Atlanta's Peachtree Publishers, accepted his memoir, *With All My Might: An Autobiography*. The Peachtree Press editor accepted it five

minutes after it was received. Said the editor, "I'm not going to read it. I'm going to publish it."

I believe Virginia Caldwell helped her husband stay alive until he finished that last book. She fed him the soul food he needed and did everything else that required doing at that time. She worked tirelessly to bring Erskine out of his own shell, and she restored the confidence he had lost due to his broken health. Even now it is impossible to find any suitable words with which to convey her great efforts.

A month after Caldwell's death Virginia wrote to me: "There are no words to express the depth of my sorrow and when it seems too much to bear I remind myself of Erskine's great strength throughout the long months of illness, his determination and fortitude and the fact that he never once complained, and just remembering that gives me courage."

*With All My Might* is Caldwell's third autobiography. *Call It Experience* in 1951 described Caldwell's career from his teens onward. Caldwell said of the book that it was a "literary autobiography." *In the Shadow of the Steeple* (1967) is an extended memoir about Caldwell's minister father and what Erskine felt about being his father's son. The book describes Caldwell's travels through the interior landscape of memory. It contains a loving and dutiful son's reminiscences of his father, who had once been secretary of the Home Missions Board of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. *With All My Might* was thought of by Caldwell as a "biographical autobiography." It begins with Erskine's infancy and extends to his eightieth birthday. Some of its contents duplicate material in *Call It Experience* . What he added were mainly early sexual initiations, reports on his four marriages, and lengthy depictions of his travels in the States and elsewhere.

Born December 17, 1903, in the pine-and-cotton country of White Oak Church Community in Coweta Country, Georgia, about forty miles southwest of Atlanta, Caldwell was the only son of the Reverend Ira Sylvester Caldwell and Caroline Preston Bell Caldwell, the father's first

pastorate for the A. R. P. Church there.

Generations before, the Caldwell family had settled on an original land grant in York County, South Carolina, near the site of the Battle of Kings Mountain in which William Caldwell, Erskine's ancestor and founder of the family line, fought. Erskine's grandfather, John H. Caldwell, left York County as a young man and settled in Hunterville, North Carolina, where Ira, the father of Erskine, was born December 23, 1872. In 1896, Ira Caldwell received his B.A. degree from Erskine College in Due West, South Carolina. He enlisted in the Hornets' Nest Riflemen of Charlotte, South Carolina, and saw service in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Upon returning to Due West to study at the theological seminary connected to Erskine College, he met Caroline Preston Bell, a teacher of English and Latin at Due West Female College, which consolidated in the late 1920s with Erskine College. Ira and Caroline married on October 18, 1901, and moved to a three-room manse in White Oak Community. Caroline, a native of Staunton, Virginia, and the second of eight children of an old Virginia family, had previously taught Latin and French in an Episcopal School for girls in Chatham, Virginia. She was the daughter of Richard Henry Bell and Katharine Withers Bell. Caroline was proud of her heritage. Her great-grandfather had founght under Lafayette during the American Revolution.

*With All My Might*, Erskine's last autobiography, makes swift strides beginning with Erskine Caldwell's Southern boyhood as the son of the itinerant A.R.P. preacher. Erskine's formal education was skimpy--a few semesters at Erskine College, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Virginia. But his experience was profound as a mill laborer, cotton picker, cook, waiter, taxicab driver, farmhand, cottonseed shoveler, stonemason's helper, soda jerk, professional football player, bodyguard, stagehand in a burlesque theater, and a crew member of a boat running guns to a Central American country in revolt. Equal in importance to any of these odd jobs was a stint as a reporter on the *Atlanta Constitution* and work as a

book reviewer for the *Charlotte Observer* and the *Houston Post.* He had started his career as a writer while working as a teenage printer's devil without pay for the *Jefferson Reporter* in Wrens, Georgia, and later as a paid string correspondent for the *Augusta Chronicle* and for Macon and Atlanta papers.

In the middle of the 1920s, Caldwell moved to Maine to devote himself to writing stories. For the aspiring author, life in Maine consisted of writing reviews, raising potatoes and rutabaga for the family table, and chopping wood for below-zero winters. He survived in part by reviewing books sent to him by the *Charlotte Observer* and *Houston Post.* In addition, Helen Lannigan, Caldwell's first wife, opened a bookstore stocked entirely with copies of books he had been sent to review.

Caldwell persisted in writing in his spare time. For ten or twelve hours a day, and often through the night, he wrote story after story, revising, correcting, and rewriting, always with a rugged determination regardless of time or hardship. That he was a determined aspiring writer is reflected in a letter to his parents written from Portland, Maine, on March 24, 1930:

> I am also sending a notice of this year's Guggenheim Fellowship awards. I've made up my mind to win one if it [is] possible. If I get my novel published this fall by Harcourt Brace I will apply then. I don't know yet if that will be too late for the 1930 awards or not. Anyway, I'll be in time for the 1931 awards. The[y] amount to a year's residence abroad with all living and traveling expenses: about two or three thousand dollars. . . . My ambition is to write a novel that will win the Pulitzer Prize, and if I could win one of these awards it would give me a lot of help on account of the weighty name. I may be disappointed and win neither of these because it may not be in me to amount to much, but I am going to try. I was determined to get in

> the Caravan [sic], and after that Scribner's [sic]. I've got this far and I've got to go further. (The stories will not appear, by the way before the June Scribner's). If I can get my book published this fall I'll have enough work to submit to the committee. Some of this year's winners have only written one or two books so far. I will perhaps be handicapped because the committee is a bunch of professors, and I'm not in that kind of a boat, but if my work is good enough it should carry me over. I'm going to do my best anyway. And after that I'm working for the Pulitzer Prize, so help me God! [1]

By 1931, his stories had begun to appear in literary magazines, among them *Scribner's*, edited by Maxwell Perkins, who in 1932 published *Tobacco Road* without any changes, much to Caldwell's satisfaction.

It was Maxwell Perkins who gave Caldwell a piece of advice he embraced with a vengeance throughout his life. Perkins said, "Don't talk to anybody about a novel you are thinking of writing. That would not be good. Talking is a form of creation. Talk, and you dissipate your enthusiasm and much of the spirit will disappear from what you write later." Perkins also advised Caldwell not to live in New York, and Erskine Caldwell, the last of Perkins' great discoveries, never did:

> "Young writers should never let themselves be lured to New York to live and try to write," Max remarked while we were waiting for our lunch to be served. "Young writers should live among their own people so their roots can thrive and take nourishment from their heritage. It makes me sad to see promising young writers come to New York and lose their direction. Flustered and confused, they flutter to their doom like moths to a flame. And editors and publishers with their elaborate lunches and cocktail parties are the ones who strike the match to light the

candle."[2]

The rapid-fire appearance of *American Earth, Tobacco Road, God's Little Acre, We Are the Living*, and *Kneel to the Rising Sun*, all commercial and critical sensations, quickly enhanced Caldwell's fortunes. The incredible success of *Tobacco Road* in Jack Kirkland's adaptation for the stage made Caldwell a celebrity. The first performance of *Tobacco Road* was on the night of December 4, 1933, at New York's Masque Theater, and by its final presentation, *Tobacco Road* had established a record number of continuous New York performances. Its run was 3,180 performances in seven and a half years, Caldwell earning two thousand dollars a week from stage royalties alone during the 1930s.

Caldwell's literary success emboldened him to try new forms of expression. He was always as much a sociologist as a novelist. In fact, from the mid-1930s until after World War II, he published very little new fiction. Instead, he wrote a number of documentary works depicting the miserable lives of ordinary people, beginning with *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), which helped to substantiate his fictional assessment of destitution in the South. Similar books followed. He observed Eastern Europe in *North of the Danube* (1939), the United States from coast to coast in *Say! Is This the U.S.A.* (1941), and the Soviet Union in *Russia at War* (1942).

His collaborator on these four documentary volumes was Margaret Bourke-White,the famous Life magazine photographer. In these books, illustrated with her photographs, he achieved a blend of reality of fact buttressed by techniques of fiction that made the studies exceptional.

But Caldwell and his wife's extended travels in the late 1930s put an inevitable strain on Caldwell's first marriage, which ended in 1938. Soon after, in 1939, Caldwell and Bourke-White married. The famous author and the famous photographer made a dashing pair. Yet in spite of their past travels, Caldwell yearned for routine and domesticity, and

in Arizona he bought a cozy house for Margaret. Yet she was a tireless worker who wanted to continue as a photographer. Before long she chose to put her career ahead of marriage, and they divorced in 1942.

After World War II, Caldwell returned to his prolific rhythm of writing fiction, turning out a book a year for many years, although he started writing for the Hollywood screen from time to time in the '30s and '40s. He continued to write and to travel extensively, but his books from this period did not measure up to his early work, although they continued to be popular, especially in Europe and Japan.

In 1949, Erskine Caldwell met the "gracious and vivacious" Virginia Moffett Fletcher, the landscape painter, and their friendship developed into marriage on January 1, 1957.

Victor Weybright, the publisher who introduced Virginia to Caldwell, wrote in his essay in *Pembroke Magazine* 11, which devoted a special issue on Erskine Caldwell: "When I introduced Erskine Caldwell to Virginia Moffett Fletcher during a Maryland weekend in 1949, I did not realize that I was adding a new dimension to Caldwell's later career. Virginia, a charming, intelligent, petite Maryland girl, proved to be the perfect ultimate helpmeet for an author. She has been a noncompetitive spouse, occasionally collaborating on juvenile and travel books with her pleasant illustrations, but otherwise serving as the record-keeper and administrative aide to an author with scores of titles in print in many languages throughout the world. "

Virginia found a house with a superb location on the northerly slope of Twin Peaks in San Francisco. When the famous fog came creeping inland from the Pacific, it was like a magic kingdom floating high above the clouds on another planet. According to Caldwell, "Indeed, the view from Twin Peaks was so spectacular that until I could become accustomed to such entrancing splendor I had to force myself to draw the curtains over the windows day and night when I was determined to concentrate on my writing."

After living at Twin Peaks for almost three years, they rented a splendid townhouse on Nob Hill. Then in January 1960 they made plans for a long delayed trip to Japan.

No sooner had Erskine Caldwell touched down at Tokyo International Airport for a one-week pleasure trip than he said to Japanese reporters: "I have assured various Japanese intellectuals that I am not here gathering material for a Japanese *Tobacco Road* or a *Buddha's Little Acre."*

After arriving in Japan early Monday morning on February 1, 1960, he attended a Japan PEN Club meeting that evening, accompanied by Virginia. The author of the world-famous *Tobacco Road, God's Little Acre,* and *Georgia Boy* also appeared on a KR-TV "News Radar" program Tuesday morning and attended a cocktail party at the Foreign Correspondents Club in Tokyo in the afternoon.

During his first visit to Japan, a story made the rounds that he joked with the gathering that the main purpose in visiting Japan was that since the Asian flu was rampant in the United States, he had come to Japan in the hope of catching the disease in its native land if he were to catch it at all. Caldwell always had a sense of humor.

Caldwell and his wife hoped to make a brief visit to Nikko, to see a Kabuki play, and to shop for Japanese art objects in addition to meeting friends and holding discussions with publishers and college professors.

It is hard for us Japanese today to appreciate the gigantic impact of *Tobacco Road* with its angry picture of oppressed Georgia sharecroppers bursting like a storm over America in the midst of the Great Depression. Said Caldwell, "For a while, my mother used to beg me not to come back home because she feared for my life."

"The land was desolate," Caldwell recalled, depicting the novel's setting ten years after its publication. "Not far away across the fields

were several tenant houses, shabby and dilapidated, two-room shacks with sagging joints and roofs. Around the buildings were groups of human beings. The children were playing in the sand. The young men and women were leaning against the sides of the houses. The old people were merely sitting. Every one of them was waiting for the cotton to mature. They believed in cotton. They believed in it as some men believe in God. "

The poverty he described so vividly more than thirty years ago still exists in isolated pockets of the South, Caldwell said. Commenting on the changes industrialization had made in America's Southern states, Caldwell said the earthy characters of *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre* have been little changed by time: "They are still there, but no longer as numerous or so spread out. Today they are drawn together into small areas." The Georgia-born writer said he did not think it was so much a matter of "resisting change" as a matter of the impoverished sharecroppers being passed by when progress came to the cities. "The educated can change," said Caldwell, summing up briefly. "The uneducated draw close together."

Caldwell said he thought *Georgia Boy* was his most successful work because "I like it," and Virginia, accompanying him to the cocktail party, chose the same book as her favorite from among her husband's works.

Asked if he was planning another novel, Caldwell said he had no plans at that time, observing that there would be "time enough to think of that next month when I get back to work."

Caldwell, who described himself as a "writer, not a reader," said he had not read anything by Japanese authors, was not gathering material during this first visit to Japan, and did not intend to write about Japan.

During this trip the only untoward incident occurred at a Tokyo geisha party. The embarrassing situation developed long after midnight

following an evening of leisurely Japanese dining. Caldwell needed to lie down on the tatami mats and close his eyes for half an hour. The combination of "late hours, exhaustion, ear-piercing music, unfamiliar geisha customs, seductive surroundings, and an overabundance of warm rice wine" had left Caldwell prostrate. Wrote Caldwell:

> Visas in hand and reservations at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo confirmed, we arrived in Japan in the latter part of January 1960 for what was a memorable sojourn. Charles Tuttle, my literary agent in Tokyo, with the cooperation of two publishers who had issued translations of some of my novels and short stories, arranged to have me autograph books at several shops the day after our arrival.
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> Although World War II had been over a long time, there was still lingering antipathy towards Americans among the older Japanese. This was particularly evident when some of the ubiquitous saki [sake] bars posted signs in English stating that the premises were off-limits for Americans.
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> However, the younger generation of Japanese, most of them being students, were avid readers of books by Americans and crowds of eager young men and women sought autographs or permission to take photographs whenever I appeared. In fact, during the entire length of our visit, from early morning until late at night, there were few times when several polite but persistent students were not waiting in the hall of the hotel for Virginia and me to leave or return to our room.
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> The greater part of an entire day was spent at Waseda University at the invitation of Professor Tatsu [Tatsunokuchi] to visit with his twenty-two young women students of English. Accompanied by our young interpreter, Toshi Nikura [Niikura], himself a professor in the English department at another Tokyo university, we went to

Waseda in late morning and where we were entertained at great length by the group of smiling young women dressed in elaborate variations of traditional Japanese kimonos.

First there was a lengthy musical recital performed with modern versions of ancient Japanese harps and other stringed instruments. This was followed by group and solo dances, some being demure and sedate, others being as sensual as an unrestrained Hawaiian hula-hula. The remainder of the day's entertainment was devoted to a program of vocal music, recitations of poetry in Japanese and English, and finally at the close of day there was the performance by the twenty-two young women of the elaborately staged traditional Japanese tea ceremony.

Undoubtedly incited by the singing and dancing of the twenty-two girls in Professor Tatsu's English class, I suggested to Toshi Nikura on the way back to the Imperial Hotel that Virginia and I would like for him to arrange for us to visit a geisha house of entertainment.

With a startled expression coming to his face, Toshi hesitated for a long time before making any reply. When he did speak at last, he said he would have to ask his brother who, unlike him, had been a visitor to a geisha house and would know if Virginia would be permitted to enter.

The next morning Toshi told us that his brother, having obtained approval, had arranged for the three of us to go that same evening to one of the most renowned geisha houses in Tokyo.

At some hour after midnight, in an evening of leisurely dining combined with native refreshments, Virginia was saying she was enjoying one of the most delightful times of her life. I thought I was having a pleasant time, too, until I realized I was experiencing the sensation of gradually losing my sensibilities. In other words, I was passing out.

This embarrassing situation occurred when

> suddenly I was overcome by the exotic music rendered by two of the geisha girls on their formidable, unearthly looking, stringed instruments. Both Virginia and Toshi advised me to close my eyes and recline on the cool, smooth-as-silk, rice straw matting that covered the floor. It was their assumption that I had been overwhelmed by the combined effects of late hours, exhaustion, ear-piercing music, unfamiliar geisha customs, seductive surroundings, and an overabundance of warm rice wine.
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> After half an hour's rest on the soft matting with a pillow placed under my head by one of the geisha girls, I had recovered enough to accept an offering of more saki but asked that no more geisha house music be played for the remainder of the night.
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> All the way back to San Francisco a few days later I had moments of wondering why the same music played on similar instruments by both the Waseda students and the geisha girls had had such [a] distinctly disparate effect on me.[3]

I first met Erskine Caldwell in the fall of 1971. Before this memorable encounter, I received a letter from him telling me that he and Virginia would be paying a second visit to Japan in November of that year. He wrote he would be delighted to meet me at the American Cultural Center in Tokyo, where he had been asked to give lectures and lead informal discussions.

Since I thought it a rare opportunity, I happily went up to Tokyo to listen to his lectures. Caldwell was craggy-featured, tall, six-feet-two, and weighed over two hundred pounds. He impressed me as being a Southern "nature" man rather than a writer. His expressions changed vividly as he spoke: "I am a practitioner of the story in print. I am finished with short stories, and I want to write stories of great expanse," Caldwell told an informal gathering of Japanese professors of English

literature and of journalists at the American Cultural Center in Akasaka on November 19, 1971. "My only interest is to tell stories of live people and write what they do, no matter whether I approve of them or not." He continued: "I have written one book a year for the last fifty years, and maybe one hundred and fifty short stories published in magazines and books. To me, fiction is the real heart of writing. I think I am a romanticist, though others say I am too realistic, too hard. The purpose of all the books of fiction I have written is to provide a mirror into which people may look. Whatever good or harm my books do depend[s] on an individual's reaction to the image he sees in the mirror."

Asked if the characters appearing in his novels are real people or his own creations, Caldwell said: "Fiction is creation. So conversation and dialog must be authentic, but people in fiction must be created anew. They are not real people." He explained: "In writing a novel, I usually start with an idea, but I do not know the ending until I come to the end. The ending builds up as I proceed with my story."

Strict self-discipline and dogged perseverance characterize him as being an independent writer. Caldwell seldom read what others wrote. But he felt an affinity with Sherwood Anderson and Theodore Dreiser, whom he greatly admired and who had given him the impetus to write: "I read few books, perhaps half a dozen novels a year," he said. "Many years ago I divided the population into two parts: those who read and those who write. I wished to belong to the latter category."

Caldwell described himself as a hard-working writer. For ten months each year he worked regularly from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. five days a week on beginning a novel and for six days a week or even seven as he proceeded and the work became more intense.

For the benefit of aspiring writers, he passed on his writing principles: "Never use a word of many syllables when a shorter word will do. Never use a word that has to be looked up in a dictionary for definition or spelling."

Caldwell believed that every writer should begin with writing short stories before he writes a novel. "Learn the meaning and usage of words," he recommended. "Learn how to construct a sentence to convey a desired thought. Have something worthwhile to say before beginning a story. And learn how to employ the emotional force of a story to produce lasting impressions upon the mind of the reader."

This roundtable discussion and reception at the American Cultural Center that was attended by some sixty professors and journalists lasted almost five hours. Caldwell's voice became hoarse, and the many events of the day and evening made him look exhausted.

The only thing I felt sad about was that Caldwell said he would not write any more short stories in the future. I had known Caldwell had once said to Professor Carvel Collins in 1958: "I'll go back and write a book of short stories again, because I like them. I don't think there is anything to comparae with the short story. I think it's the best form of writing there is. . . . It's hard to accomplish a good short story because you have to concentrate it so much. So I like the discipline of it."

Calwell has been considered one of the most distinguished short story writers in America.

Early on the morning of November 20, it had been arranged by the United States Information Service for Caldwell to take part in a seminar and brief talk before students at Kyoritsu Women's College. Fortunately I was able to attend. Caldwell emphasized enthusiastically that he had "an unquenchable, undying liking for the people I am living with. I write as I find people from year to year, from decade to decade. My favorite book is always my most recent. After that, it is the next one that I am going to write." Wrote Caldwell:

> With Tokyo our destination since leaving London, we arrived on schedule on a misty November afternoon and were met at the airport by Warren Obluck of the American

Embassy who was in charge of my USIS mission. On the way to the New Japan Hotel, we went zigzagging through the city to avoid as much as possible the thousands of Japanese who were demonstrating in the streets against the government's unpopular policy regarding the return of Okinawa from American occupation.

When we reached the New Japan Hotel, Charles Tuttle and Tom Mori, my literary agents in Japan, were waiting for us. They had made tentative plans for meetings with Japanese publishers which were subject to adjustment in order to avoid conflict with the USIS schedule.

Registering alongside us at the hotel were several professional wrestlers from California who were in Tokyo to give exhibitions of American-style wrestling. The beefy athletes had immediately drawn an admiring crowd of chambermaids, waitresses, and hotel clerks. There was a large group of students in the lobby with cameras and notebooks and Japanese translations of some of my novels and short stories but only two of them succeeded in making their way through the crowd to ask for autographs.

The following three days in Tokyo were spent in the usual manner when plans were made by the United States Information Service for appearances for a writer who had volunteered to go on tour abroad. In this instance, it had been arranged for me first of all to take part in a roundtable discussion and reception at the American Embassy that was attended by sixty or more professors and journalists. That session lasted almost five hours and I was hoarse and weary through the afternoon and far into the night.

Other duties performed included interviews mornings and afternoons and visiting five universities to speak to students. All the trips through the city were taken in a roundabout manner in order to avoid being stalled and delayed by one of the many daily protest demonstrations that often blocked the streets.

On the fourth day after our arrival in Tokyo, it was a relief after almost constant activity during waking hours to take the Bullet Train to Kyoto for a relaxing three-hour trip that was much more comfortable than travel in an airplane for the same length of time.

On the train, there were no bumpy landings, no turbulence aloft, no stuffing of bodies into crates for seating. As if it were standing motionless, the speeding train created a sensation I had never before experienced. When watching the changing landscape through the window, it was like seeing the earth itself rapidly moving backward instead of the train speeding forward. In the distance, only the fabulous white-clad Mount Fuji maintained an eternal stillness.

The two days in Kyoto were similar to the time spent in Tokyo. The schedule there included receptions, seminars, and brief talks at Sophia University [sic], Doshisha University, and Kyoto University. The American Cultural Center, acting for the USIS, was in charge of our visit in Kyoto.

After returning to Tokyo on the Bullet Train, we had one full day to spend as we wished before leaving for home. Following a farewell lunch with Charles Tuttle and Tom Mori, we decided to go to one of the nearby bathhouses for a few hours of relaxation. The one we selected was advertised in a weekly entertainment guide. Its name was Tokyo Hot Springs.

At Hot Springs we were introduced to the unfamiliar custom of being repeatedly soaped, sponged, splashed with hot water, rinsed with tepid water, sprayed with icy water, and vigorously massaged by several giggling eighteen-and nineteen-year-old girls. The young women now and then interrupted their soaping and massaging to walk barefooted up and down the customer's back.

Becoming pleasantly relaxed by the unaccustomed treatment, I soon began to wonder if the American

wrestlers we had seen at the hotel would be coming to Tokyo Hot Springs while they were in Japan. That thought then led me to wonder if the girls who were massaging Virginia and me had been the same ones who had soaped and massaged four American Indians the previous year and had had to be rescued by the police.

I had been told about the incident involving the Indians by Al Manuel. Al had heard the full details of what had happened from a client of his who wrote the screenplay for a typical cowboy-and-Indian film. The four American Indians, as the incident was told to me, were from a reservation in Montana and had been taken to Hollywood to appear in one of the scenes in the motion picture. Afterward, the Indians had been taken to Tokyo on a promotional tour by the film company.

To help make life more bearable for the four homesick Indians in a strange country, they had been taken by the film company representatives to the Tokyo Hot Springs for an evening of relaxation.
What took place at the bathhouse, as told by Al Manuel, was that the four Indians from the Montana reservation, all soaped and massaged, grabbed the girls who had been walking on their backs. Then, stripping the clothing from the girls, the Indians began soaping and massaging them until their screams brought the bathhouse manager to the scene.

Being physically unable to restrain the brawny Indians and prevent the girls from being raped, the manager ran to a sub-station a block away and sent a small squad of policemen with clubs running to the aid of the screaming bathhouse attendants.

At the end of our evening at the Tokyo Hot Springs, Virginia and I, both of us pleasantly rinsed and towel-dried and pampered with dabs of talcum powder, reluctantly left the giggling girls and their long-to-be

remembered smiling faces and the farewell waving of dainty hands.[4]

In April 1982, the Caldwells visited Japan again. They came to Tokyo as guests at a banquet at the Okura Hotel for members of the Erskine Caldwell Literary Society of Japan. Many university professors came to hear him. But Caldwell's third visit was a private one, undisturbed by journalists. Beginning with the happy reunion at the New Tokyo International Airport, I spent an unforgettable week with him. His wife, whom Caldwell described as "gracious and vivacious," was quite a Japanophile. She loved the cherry blossom season. She took part in tea ceremonies—and even composed some haiku during this short stay.

Still fresh in my memory is the short short story that Caldwell reeled off at a publisher's luncheon party. It was one of those bright and sunny days which do not come frequently in April. At a lunch party held on the top-floor restaurant of a Tokyo hotel, Caldwell related the following tale to his Japanese friends (including Professor and Mrs. Masami Nishikawa, close friends of the Caldwells for more than twenty years) and some publishers, Caldwell saying he would do so "to thank you for this wonderful lunch."

The tale concerned an automobile salesman handling large expensive cars in Detroit, America's automobile capital.

The salesman was a highly capable man dealing in Cadillacs, Lincolns, and other larger luxury cars. But the advances of Japanese minicars into the U.S., coupled with a gasoline shortage, made it difficult for him to keep going. Now customers had lost interest in larger cars.

The only way out for the salesman was to commit suicide. He bought a "suicide pill" at a drugstore. After taking the pill, he fell fast asleep and had a dream. A genie appeared in his dream and told him

that he would grant him one wish before his death.

The salesman rejoiced. He asked the genie to make him a salesman dealing in imported cars in a large city where he had many customers. The genie agreed to grant him the wish.

A moment later, the salesman awakened and found himself in Tokyo. As he had wished, he had many imported cars to sell—Cadillacs and Lincolns!

Looking out the window at the forest of high-rise buildings in the heart of Tokyo, Caldwell, a man with charming blue eyes, whispered: "Today the poor salesman is going around Tokyo, trying to sell Cadillacs and Lincolns."

The tale was quite timely, since it was told at a time when daily newspaper reports noted that advances of Japanese minicars into the U.S. market was causing economic friction between the two countries. The tale was also spiced with Caldwell's keen sense of humor and irony.

What enchanted us most, however, was the great eloquence with which he told the story. Speaking in a thick heavy voice and with a slow drawl which is unique to the South, he paused here and there in his narration as if he were trying to find out how we were reacting to his story. This enhanced the effect of the ending. His narration was perfect. It afforded a vivid glimpse into Caldwell's craft as a storyteller.

When Caldwell left Japan, I alone saw him off at the Tokyo City Air Terminal. As usual, he was tender to his wife. I kept standing after they were gone, a big red rose one meter long in my hand, that Virginia had given to me. Suddenly I remembered Satchel Paige's words: "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you." Caldwell, the great writer and footloose Southerner, whose name is synonymous with Georgia, was slightly bent but not broken under the weight of his eighty years. He was still going on in his own way and, like that great American sage Satchel Paige, was never looking back. I believed that the Caldwell juggernaut would forever roll on. Wrote Caldwell:

> *Item*—In the spring of 1982, and cherry-blossom-time in Japan, Virginia and I were in Tokyo again. This time we were not there for a college speaking tour or for geisha house entertainment or for massages at the Tokyo Hot Springs. We had gone to Japan as guests at a banquet in the Okura Hotel for members of the Erskine Caldwell Literary Society. At the large gathering, we were in the company of Hisao Aoki and Fujisato Kitajima both of whom were university professors and translators of some of my books. It was a memorable occasion where many speakers had something to say and where I was not called upon to utter a single word. Consequently, there and then, I became a profound admirer of traditional Japanese consideration for letting me remain silent throughout the evening.[5]

In October 1983, shortly before his birthday, Caldwell and his wife flew to Paris to attend a writers' conference in Nice. At the meeting he delivered a speech and was awarded the Order of Commander of Arts and Letters. This was dubbed "Commandeur De L'Ordre Des Arts Et Des Lettres."

As many as 500 people attended, among them playwright Eugene Ionesco, novelist Anthony Burgess, and other noted authors. Everyone held a lighted candle in an advance celebration of Caldwell's birthday. "They all sang Happy Birthday in English with a French accent," Caldwell said happily. He enjoyed it all, except when they showed John Ford's film version of *Tobacco Road* (1941), which he detested, saying that the screen censorship of the time distorted his story. Instead of the tragic ending he wrote, the Hollywood film showed Jeeter Lester's relations. After they had lost their farm and were heading for the poorhouse, they were happily singing folk songs and hymns.

In *With All My Might*, Caldwell wrote: "By the beginning of the third day in Nice, I began wondering why I was not expected to appear at any meetings of the five hundred writers in the large civic

auditorium. Both Ruda (Dauphin) and Michelle (Lapautre) assured me that plans were being made for me to take part in the program on the fourth and final day of the writers' convention.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, only an hour before the scheduled closing of the assembly, which was to be followed by a banquet in the evening, I was escorted from the Meridian Hotel to the stage of the crowded auditorium. I had no idea what would be expected of me as I stood facing the audience in a state of nervous perplexity until finally I was led to the center of the stage.

What followed immediately was a lengthy presentation speech by the director of the Ministry of Culture and at the conclusion I was decorated with the Republic of France's Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters.

The reason for the invitation to come to France and all the preceding secrecy was revealed so suddenly that the best I could do to express my appreciation for the honor was to mutter a few nervously spoken words of thanks. And, as I was to discover that evening at the banquet, the ceremony in the auditorium would lead to a tribute that was even more surprising to a grateful and appreciative American writer.

At ten o'clock that evening in the grand ballroom of the Plaza Hotel, slightly more than five hundred persons had gathered for a gala dinner. It was a colorful assembly of fashionably dressed men and women and the huge ballroom was filled with gaiety and laughter.

Following the serving of dinner, the lights were dimmed and the orchestra began playing the familiar Happy Birthday music. Then each person was handed a lighted candle by a waiter and other waiters brought in an immense cake decorated with eight large flickering candles. As I was being given a knife to cut the first slice of cake, everyone in the ballroom rose to his feet and began singing the birthday song in English.

It was an overwhelmingly sentimental moment for me, so unexpected and unbelievable that I could only gaze around me in silent wonder. Over and over in the twinkling candlelight the five hundred softly accented French voices sang the birthday song in English until

everyone at our table was blinking with tears. And, like others and in view of all, I did not hesitate to dab at my eyes with my napkin.

Finally near the end of the tribute, several shouts of *Vive! Vive!* were heard above the music and the words of the song. In response, I stood up and waved my arms to betoken my appreciation for the ever-to-be-remembered homage I had received in a foreign land." (pp.328-29)

After Erskine Caldwell celebrated his eightieth birthday, his wife Virginia collected the congratulatory messages and arranged them in two massive leather-bound volumes, my letter included among them.

Among those writers who paid their respect were Malcolm Cowley, Robert Penn Warren, William Styron, John Updike, John Hersey, Wallace Stegner, Richard Wilbur, Peter De Vries, Shirley Hazzard, and Saul Bellow, who told Virginia her husband should have received the Nobel Prize.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. wrote: "In the 1930s, you and a handful of contemporaries pulled off a revolution in American literature. . . . If, without older brothers and sisters of your sort, persons my age had had to conduct such a revolution for ourselves, I wonder if we would have had the guts or brains to pull it off."

Norman Mailer wrote: "One of my first literary heroes, and always one of the best." (In December 1984, Caldwell and Mailer were inducted into their nation's most exclusive intellectual society, the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Caldwell was given Chair 28, which had belonged to Lillian Hellman, and Mailer inherited Chair 19, last held by Tennessee Williams.)

Ralph Ellison, in his long birthday letter to Caldwell, recalled his own reaction to the play: "There, in a darkened theater, I was snatched back to rural Alabama. When Jeeter Lester and the horsing couple went into their act, I was reduced to such helpless laughter that I distracted the entire balcony and embarrassed both my host (Langston Hughes)

and myself. . . . I became hysterical in the theater because by catching me off guard and compelling me to laugh at Jeeter you also forced me to recognize and accept our common humanity."

Truman Capote once paid a visit to Caldwell in the late 1950s. Caldwell was living in a rather prosaic house except for a wall lined with Caldwell's books, including every edition and translation. An impressive sight, Truman Capote stood open-mouthed: "Just to TYPE that much, let alone WRITE," he kept mumbling.

The famous Japanese novelist Takeshi Kaiko said of Caldwell: "This man with broad shoulders and long legs wandered across the American continent, spending his time freely working, watching. Even after he gained fame, he refused to sit nice and cozy on it. He yearned for odyssey without a reward. He strove constantly to keep himself hungry for people and life itself."

Richard B. Harwell, also a native of Georgia, was a friend of Caldwell and appreciated his works. Harwell says in his essay "Erskine Caldwell: Georgia Cracker World-Class": "Sales of Caldwell's books in authorized editions (through 1979) total 79,046,605 copies and unreported sales from various pirated editions in Egypt, India, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, Taiwan and Turkey probably place the number actually distributed at close to a hundred million." Harwell noted that "Caldwell is as American as McDonald's. He is as southern as kudzu, as Georgian as Coca-Cola."

It was the summer of 1980 that under the guidance of Harwell I visited the University of Georgia in Athens in order to have a glimpse of the Caldwell Special Collection. As I reviewed in the University of Georgia Libraries Caldwell's life and work, I wondered if he would survive his lung cancer and emphysema. At the time Americans were hearing about the connection between heavy smoking and cancer. A heavy smoker since 1918, Caldwell had already suffered twice from attacks of lung cancer .

I became sad as I watched Caldwell grow old in the many pictures and scrapbook clippings I found during those few summer days at the libraries. I became conscious of humanity's own mortality. At that time I felt very close to Caldwell because I had spent so much time on his work and life.

But I was glad that I had tried to keep a distance from him because I felt it gave me the objectivity I needed to criticize him and to point out his deficiencies, although some who have written about him have not been able to do that. Either because they knew him personally or because they wanted to emphasize the importance of their own work, they exaggerated his achievements. This, I believe, ultimately trivializes their criticism as well as their subject. And yet I too have felt caught up by this man, so much so that his was a life I could only admire.

In his third autobiography Caldwell recorded the "accusations" he had heard directed at him: "Some of the less than kind accusations over the years had been that I was hardheaded, perverse, single-minded, stubborn, selfish, and took delight in inflicting mental cruelty on other persons by insisting on having my own way without compromise," he related. "True it was, the compulsion to write with all my might had become an obsession that was driving me to success or failure in the end at the cost of endangering my own happiness and probably the happiness of anyone close to me."

Yet Caldwell himself was kind and conscientious. He always replied punctually to my own letters. I once found one of his books priced at $100 in a catalogue sent from a secondhand bookstore in the States. I wrote to him asking whether I should buy the book. His reply: "Don't spend your good money on that costly book. It cost too much to start with."

However, I did buy it and sent it to him to be autographed. It came back with an insurance slip enclosed. "The insurance," he wrote," is for $200. Hope you don't have to claim it."

In his last letter to me, written in late November 1986, he said, "I am existing at this stage of chemotherapy and waiting to find out if the treatment will have any effect on lung cancer. In the meanwhile, I am short of breath, short of strength, and somewhat short of patience." On receiving this letter, I phoned Caldwell at his home in Scottsdale, Arizona. First Virginia answered; then Caldwell, removing his oxygen mask, said, "I'm still all right. There's nothing to worry about. How about your condition?" From his strong voice I did not have the slightest suspicion that a few months later he would pass away.

Despite having to wear an oxygen mask even at home, he remained active, assigning me the task of putting together a Japanese translation of his autobiography *With All My Might.*

Caldwell also wrote to me about a scheduled trip to France to celebrate the publication of a French edition of the same book: "I had to forego the trip to Paris but the French-language edition of *With All My Might* was published on schedule. It is a handsome volume in the way that the French have the ability to produce."

Responding to mail might have been a nuisance, though it was the kind of attention Caldwell valued most. Virginia recalled that when they were checking out of their hotel in Reno after their wedding night, the porter noticed the name tag on Caldwell's suitcase. "May I just shake your hand?" the porter said. "I've enjoyed your books so much." Later in the taxi, Caldwell turned to Virginia and said, "I would rather have a comment like that than the praise of all the great critics."

Caldwell's works are based on his experience of the ignorance, illiteracy, poverty, and human degradation he encountered as a young man in America's South. His stories are also filled with his unique sense of humor. One finds in his stories, the nervous giggle, the quiet chuckle, the high-pitched cackle, the deep chortle, and the out-and-out guffaw. Of Caldwell's creation of comic characters, Robert Cantwell says Caldwell made poverty unforgettable, and we "howl with laughter

at the comic besitary we encounter in his novels."

But Caldwell's first novelette, *The Bastard* (1929), was ruled obscene by the county attorney of Cumberland County, Maine. Sale of the book in Portland was stopped, and charges were brought against Caldwell for writing it. This official suppression was brought about without a trial or hearing of any sort. The county attorney simply judged it "obscene, lewd, and immoral."

Yet the trouble that county attorney caused Caldwell proved good in the long run. It brought about Caldwell's answer, a broadside headed "In Defense of Myself."[6] It is a blazing document, too little known in the history of freedom of the press.

Caldwell was a most prolific author, so popular that as late as 1958 the only book outselling *God's Little Acre* was the Bible. In a foreword to the novel, Caldwell wrote: "So far it seems that its readers have mainly been those seeking sensation and pornography. I would willingly trade ten thousand of those for a hundred readers among the boys and girls with whom I walked barefooted to school in snow-crusted Tennessee winters and with whom I sweated through the summer nights in the mills of Georgia."

In *With All My Might,* Caldwell was determined to spill his entire life in his own way, and a remarkable life it had been. In July 1985, Caldwell wrote to me: "I am finishing the 545-page autobiography now and will let it season on the shelf until September when I will ship it to my lit. agent. After doing this book for two years, I do not wish to be born again and have to do another one like it." Apart from his books, his had also been a remarkable life. Four marriages—in fact, Caldwell fell in and out of love quite frequently. Furthermore, Caldwell's history of compulsive travel makes Sir Francis Drake or Captain James Cook look lazy. We are presented the spectacle of Caldwell roaming the world in a restless and endless search for the next story. Erskine Caldwell would not second-guess himself; his self probably wouldn't let

him anyway:

> My goal from the beginning has been to be a writer of fiction that revealed with all my might the inner spirit of men and women as they responded to the joys of life and reacted to the sorrows of existence.
>
> What I have resisted doing as a writer was glorifying the sensational and knowingly falsifying the anguish or the jubiliation of men and women who have been brought to life and were captives in a story of mine. Like the physical body of a person real or imaginary, the human spirit should not be ravished and outraged in print by ghouls at large.
>
> Perfection in writing is rarely achieved and I would be reluctant to attempt to improve a published story with latterday revisions. Likewise, I would not willingly consent to relive my life for the purpose of rectifying the mistakes I have made and attempt to correct the errors I have committed along the way. I accept my own failings together with the knowledge that my writings and I must exist with all our imperfections to the end of my time.[7]

Victor Weybright, the New American Library editor and publisher wrote in *Georgia Boy—A Recollection From The Inner Sanctum:* "My chief regret, when contemplating the career of Erskine Caldwell, is that he was never awarded a Pulitzer, let alone, the Nobel prize for literature. He has deserved both. If, even indirectly, my promotion of Erskine Caldwell in the paperbound mass market has contributed to the omission of supreme critical acclaim, it is indeed my only regret as his publisher."

This neglect probably struck Caldwell as perfectly reasonable and no different from the literary world's neglect of his works. Though he was a contemporary of William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and John Steinbeck, all of whom became Nobel laureates, Caldwell was not to be so honored. "I never expected to win," Caldwell said. "I don't consider myself a great writer. I'm just an ordinary writer. It would be a fluke of

nature for me to win anything of great consequence."

This was not false modesty. In addition to being painfully shy, Caldwell was unassuming. He may be the most unliterary serious writer that ever wrote, which may account for his indifference to literary laurels.

When Faulkner made his list of the five greatest American novelists of his generation, he upset many of his admirers by placing himself second behind Thomas Wolfe and ahead of John Dos Passos. Even more shocking, especially to many Southerners, was his continuation of the ranking with Erskine Caldwell in fourth place and Ernest Hemingway last.

"I abhor," Caldwell said, "the idea of being literary. To me that's a pretence, and I'm not a pretentious person."

When in Tokyo in 1982, he had lost half of both lungs in two operations some seven years earlier. He was slightly stooped, a bit feeble, looking like a man who had spent many years leaning into unfavorable winds--the winds of criticism, the winds of censorship, and now the winds of neglect. Perhaps his Scottish ancestry and Presbyterian upbringing contributed to his practical outlook tinged with fatalism. But the patrician profile was still there—the Roman nose shaped by a pro-football injury rather than genes. His gray hair combed forward and snipped off in front as if with hedge clippers gave him the appearance of an ageing Caesar. Old as he was, his voice rang with melody.

In his last years Caldwell often spoke of death. At one point he ticked off the names of friends now dead and remarked to Virginia, "I guess I'm next."

Virginia told me, "Five days before he died, I asked Erskine if he still wanted to have his ashes scattered over the water. . . this was something he had occasionally said that he wanted. 'No,' he said. 'That's

a silly idea. It really does not matter what happens to them. Maybe the best thing to do is take a shovel, go to the end of a dead end street and dig a hole.'

"'A DEAD END street?' Virginia asked.

"'Well, wouldn't that be appropriate?' Erskine responded."

In Virginia's letter to me dated December 29, 1987, she wrote: "Erskine was interested in all religions and their creeds. His book *Deep South* demonstrates that and yes, we have some books on Buddhism, including one from Burma. His belief was eclectic and not tied to any specific religion. Although he called himself an agnostic he did say 'no one can be certain what happens after death.' A few hours before he died I said to him, 'I truly believe there is a heaven and you will go there, and I will, too, because a love like ours can never die. Do you believe this?' He could no longer talk, but he was mentally alert and nodded his head, 'Yes.' This gives me great comfort."

Caldwell was one of those rare men in human experience who have done both what they wanted and what they have thought they wanted to do. In childhood and youth he began his travels—more accurately described as vagabondage—through six Southern states as an amateur tramp, but with the mind of an artist and observer. Caldwell's tramp experience was as closely related to him as his ploughing, planting, and harvesting. His stories came out of the soil on which he had lived and over which he had wandered.

As stated in Genesis: "You are dust and to dust you shall return." Caldwell returned to the dust. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. His wife took his ashes to Ashland, Oregon.

On his death I felt like saying the following: FAREWELL to SKINNY, old Georgia Boy, our world's most widely read serious author. Caldwell was like Pa Stroup in the perfectly delightful stories in *Georgia Boy*. I believe he was the most important neglected American novelist of his time. But I believe time will correct this injustice. A great deal of nonsense has been written about him, but that too will

doubtless end. I have always felt that Erskine Caldwell should be saluted for his fine achievements and revered for them as well. I think now of his unpublished poem which he wrote in his early twenties and which he gave me in Tokyo in 1982, produced here without his permission, but I believe he would say with his broad heavenly smile, "Sure, go ahead. I gave some 'unpublished poems' to you as a gift."

*WHEN I DIE*

*When I die/ Must I lie/ Buried deep/While you weep?*
*Plant a tree/ Over me/ For our love/ Up above.*

**Postscript: On Dr. William A. Sutton**

On the first day of the Millennium 2001, I had a marvelous celebration, for I experienced two happy New Year days through the magic of time difference, one New Year day in Japan, the other in Florida. At that time I was travelling with Dr. Muneharu Kitagaki, president of Keiwa College.

My main purpose on this trip was to meet Dr. William A. Sutton. More than twenty years ago he had been an English professor at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. I had visited his office that summer of 1975 for the first time just after he had published his excellent book *Black Like It Is/Was: Erskine Caldwell's Treatment of Racial Themes.* He had just completed the official biography of Caldwell which would make its appearance later that year. Dr. Sutton was also an authority on Sherwood Anderson, and I keenly remember his driving me to a place representative of *Winesburg, Ohio.* In 1980, I had again met Dr. Sutton in Indianapolis. Since that time we have exchanged hundreds of letters, his instructive words over the decades stirring kindred feelings in me.

This was to be the third time I met Dr. Sutton, the place Dunedin, Florida. He was over 85 and it seemed to me that the upper part of his left leg was not functioning properly. Without using a cane, he walked around with a great deal of pain and uncertainty. He told me two vertebrae were pressing on a nerve, but he felt the steroid shots he was taking in epidural tissue could solve his difficulty. Yet he was still energetic, his eyes still burning with scholarly curiosity.

Dr. Sutton was kind enough to drive me to the house Erskine Caldwell had lived in during the 1970's. I was moved to see the ex-Caldwell study in which the famous American author probably wrote such novels as *The Earnshow Neighborhood* and *Annette*, his last novel.

Dr. Sutton had already donated to the University of Illinois Library all his valuable materials on Erskine Caldwell that he had collected

throughout his life. But he was generous enough to give me a large box full of precious Caldwell information. Now that box is in my office at Keiwa College, and it is always encouraging me, again and again, to continue my studies on Caldwell.

## A Caldwell Chronology

1903 Born 17 December at R.R.6, Newnan, Coweta County, Georgia, the only child of Ira Sylvester Caldwell, an itinerant minister of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and Caroline Preston Bell Caldwell.

1920 Graduates from Wrens High School in Georgia. Begins freshman classes in September at Erskine College, Due West, South Carolina.

1921-1923 Leaves Erskine College in his sophomore year. String reporter for various local newspapers.

1923-1927 Enrolls in the University of Virginia; attends irregularly.

1924 Enters the summer session of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

1925 Marries Helen Lannigan, with whom he has three children (divorced 1938).

Newspaper reporter for *Atlanta Journal*, Georgia.

1927 Leaves Atlanta for Maine, to devote himself to writing.

1929 Breaks into printing for the small magazines with "Joe Craddock's Old Woman" in *Blues* and "July" (a version of "Midsummer Passion") in *transition*. Alfred Kreymborg publishes "Midsummer Passion" in *The New American Caravan*.

*The Bastard*, his first novel, is published.

1930 *The Bogus Ones*, unpublished 127-page novella about a struggling writer in northern New England. Maxwell Perkins accepts "The Mating of Marjorie" and "A Very Late Spring" for publication in *Scribner's Magazine*. Second novel, *Poor Fool*, appears.

1931 Scribner's publishes *American Earth*, a short story collection.

Works on *Tobacco Road* in New York for several weeks in the Sutton Hotel.

Applies for a Guggenheim Fellowship, but does not receive it.

1932 *Tobacco Road* published by Scribner's Sons. Leaves Scribner's for Viking in dispute over next manuscript, *A Lamp for Nightfall*, published twenty years later.

1933 *Tobacco Road*, dramatized by Jack Kirkland, runs for more than seven years and 3,180 performances. Viking publishes *We Are the Living*, second short story collection. *God's Little Acre* published by Viking. (New York Society for the Suppression of Vice brings charges against *God's Little Acre*.) Receives *Yale Review* award for story "Country Full of Swedes."

1933-1934 MGM script writer, replacing William Faulkner, in New Orleans.

1935 *Kneel to the Rising Sun and Other Stories*, third short story collection.

1936 Travels Deep South gathering material with Margaret Bourke-White, photographer.

1937 *You Have Seen Their Faces*, text by Caldwell with photographs by Bourke-White.

1938 *Journeyman* fails on the stage. Becomes script writer in Hollywood.

1938-1941 Foreign correspondent in numerous countries. Caldwell and Bourke-White are in Soviet Union when Germans invade Russia.

1939 Marries Bourke-White (divorced 1942).

1940 Darryl Zanuck, head of production at Twentieth Century-Fox, purchases rights for *Tobacco Road* for $200,000.

1941 John Ford's film version of *Tobacco Road* is released.

1941-1955 Editor, *American Folkways* series.

1942 *All Night Long*, propagandistic war novel, published and rights purchased by MGM.

Marries June Johnson (divorced 1956).

1942-1943 Script writer for Warner Brothers, Twentieth Century-Fox.

1943 *Georgia Boy* published by Duell, Sloan and Pearce; stage version fails. *Tragic Ground* banned in Boston. Hollywood salutes a wartime ally with *Mission to Moscow*; Caldwell's name does not appear on credits for "political reasons."

1944 Makes war bond rally tour.

1945 The Caldwells featured in *Life*.

1946 *God's Little Acre* reaches sales of 4.5 million.

1951 *Call It Experience: The Years of Learning How To Write* published (literary autobiography).

1957 Marries Virginia Moffet Fletcher, who studied painting and

drawing at the Maryland Institute of Art.

1958 Movie *God's Little Acre* is released.

1960 Visits Japan for the first time.

1961 Movie *Claudelle Inglish* is released. *Wordsmanship* (pamphlet: 500 numbered copies).

1965 *In Search of Bisco* published.

1966 *In the Shadow of the Steeple* published in England.

1968 *Deep South: Memory and Observation* published.

1971 Visits Japan for the second time.

1974 First operation for lung cancer.

1975 Second operation for lung cancer.

1976 *Afternoons in Mid-America* published.

*The Sacrilege of Alan Kent*, Paris: Maeght. This edition was illustrated by Alexander Calder and limited to a hundred copies in English and a hundred in French. (The price of $1,500 per boxed volume put it beyond the reach of most Caldwell readers.)

1977 *Recollections of a Visitor on Earth* (pamphlet).

1980 *Stories*. Pennsylvania: The Franklin Library. This limited edition is published by The Franklin Library for subscribers only.

1982 Visits Japan for the third time.

1983 *Stories of Life—North & South* published.

1984 *The Black & White Stories of Erskine Caldwell* published.

1987 *With All My Might: An Autobiography* published (biographical autobiography).

Succumbs to lung cancer, 11 April in Scotsdale, Arizona.

# NOTES

1 Letter to Mr. and Mrs. I. S. Caldwell, Portland, Maine, March 24, 1930. Erskine Caldwell Collection, University of Georgia Libraries.

2 *With All My Might* (1987), p. 119.

3 *With All My Might*, pp. 266-68.

4 *With All My Might*, pp. 293-95.

5 *With All My Might*, p. 327.

6 Broadside "In Defense of Myself" (Portland, Maine, 1930.)

"*The Bastard*" was conceived and written as an important and untouched phase of American mores. That this custom of life in the nation had previously been unknown outside its own sphere was its own necessity for expression and valuation. It so happens that this sphere is at times realistically uninhibited. Among those who live there and die we find a man who, when his belly is content, and when he feels no immediate fear of violent death, takes a female of his own stratum for relaxation, beauty and contentment. He plays no golf, he has no club; the churches were not built for him. He cannot read. . . .Here is a woman, a girl in years, who has no friends with whom she can play bridge. She works in a cotton mill. She is a lint-head. She earns eleven dollars and fifteen cents from one Saturday to the next. The mill lays her off six weeks. Neither her mother, nor her father, if either she has, can afford to give her money to buy a pair of stockings and a hat. Somebody else can. A man. . . . She gets along the best she can. We all do.

[The broadside turns from the background for the book to a consideration of the charge of obscenity.] Declared Caldwell:

"I did not write this novel with obscenity, lewdness, and immorality in mind. . .It has faults, grave faults. For ten years I have tried to

overcome them. Ten, twenty, thirty years from now I hope to be still trying to overcome faults. But I have not finished what I have to say about the people in this novel that has been suppressed. I have an intense sympathy for these people. I know them and I like them. I have slept with them in jails. I have eaten with them in freight cars. I have sung with them in convict camps, I have helped the women give birth to the living. I have helped the men cover up the dead—but I have said enough. . . .I could not stand silent while the story of their lives was branded obscene, lewd and immoral; because this story belongs to them even more than it does to me. It is of no concern to me that I, too, have had this same brand placed upon me by Cumberland County. But these friends of mine—I shall defend them until the last word is choked from me. I cannot disown them."

[These are the people of the great cyclorama of Caldwell's Southern novels: *Tobacco Road*, *God's Little Acre*, *Journeyman*, *Trouble in July*, *Tragic Ground*, *A House in the Uplands*, *The Sure Hand of God*, *This Very Earth*, and *Place Called Estherville*.]

Charges of pornography were brought against *Tobacco Road*, both the novel and the play, and *God's Little Acre* met similar charges upon its publication. The appendix to Viking's fifth printing of the novel is a record of the case brought against *God's Little Acre* by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, its secretary John S. Sumner. On May 2, 1933, Magistrate Benjamin E. Greenspan ruled that the book is "very clearly not a work of pornography." In *God's Little Acre* (New York, 1933, fifth printing, "Appendix of the Fifth Printing," Judge Greenspan stated: "This is not a book where vice and lewdness are treated as virtues or which would tend to make lustful desires in the normal mind. There is no way of anticipating the effect upon a disordered or diseased mind, and if the courts were to exclude books from sale merely because they might incite lust in disordered minds, our entire literature would very likely be reduced to a relatively small number of uninteresting and barren books. The greater part of the classics would certainly be excluded. In conclusion, *God's Little Acre*

has no tendency to incite 'lustful desire.' Those who see the ugliness and not the beauty in a piece of work are unable to see the forest for the trees. I personally feel that the very suppression of books arouses curiosity and leads readers to endeavor to find licentiousness when none was intended. In this book, I believe the author has chosen to write what he believes to be the truth about a certain group in American life. To my way of thinking, *Truth* should always be accepted as a justification for literature" (pp. vi-vii).

7 *With All My Might*, p. 330.

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