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LABOR AND WRITING: FOR FREDERIC WILL ON HIS 90TH BIRTHDAY**Frank Shynnagh (Frederic Will)**

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Abstract. The essay is a study of patterns and perspectives in the work of one person's extensive writing career. The author began as a classicist – Greek and Roman literature – and a poet, of stark lyrics. In a long subsequent career he has gone on to write a number of fictions – several novels and a collection of short stories – cultural history and philosophy, labor commentary – especially on trucking and farming, poetry of an increasingly acerbic flavor, and enough autobiographies to satisfy a pantomimist. The essay that follows is a long look at this Odyssey of mental turns, as narrated by the favorite pseudonym, Frank Shynnagh, the Manx eponym of that doughty redbear, the fox.

Keywords: autobiography, writing, self-reflection, irony, time, direction, language.

Thank God I am not ninety – how old are you, you asked? Pressing the big six– and have no need for the real Frederic Will, in order to praise his dangerous liminality. I can sit back and watch the old guy consume himself. Not too grateful of me, I know, especially since the old guy, himself a moving target, was the one that slipped me the moniker Fox, in Manx, Shynnagh, thinking I could sneak him down the sidelines while the crowd was looking toward the quarterback. Took me for a *bouc émissaire*, eh? Figured he could wave to me hefting the pigskin, crossing the goal line, proclaiming *his* greatness, while all I could do was make his guilt tolerable. Childhood chums, we took the long path together, and yet here I am, hardly more than a National Health Service bum, hanging out on the same sleepy island while Fred continues to shlurp up the world, a bit of Russia now, an annual feed from the chaotic sunshines of Nigeria, and only rarely an hour or two to spend with this stay at home. I honor him. That’s what I do. When he’s in town I buy him a drink, check his pulse, and ask him what he’s writing. It’s always new, it’s always old – to me, because I *know* where he’s coming from. The ninety year old lucky start bastard! And me, jes a settin here in Doolish, while ye take the catamaran down the final slip.

Live it, name it. In the recent “Downloading the Poetic Self”(2018), Fred

rubbed *my* nose in the earliest poems – who knew he wrote “Fragments” when he was fourteen, for a dad already suspecting he didn’t know the guy! A profusion of pre pubertal fantasies – “Love a green frog, Princess” – to which, six years later as a grad student at Yale, he had added the marble hard “An Emphasis for Easter,” which split the seams of language. The intellectual background, to this “Emphasis,” was a snarfing around in language; what was the guy working on, down at the school, if not the Gortyn Law Code, Mallarmé’s sonnets, the Symbolist Movement in Britain? Two books of poems – gave a rest point for the no longer totally juvenile, as he settled in with “Mosaic” (1959) and “A Wedge of Words” (1962), the romantic effervescing through the historical daily; skill but little sweat on the wrist. And it’s that that he wants me to replace, as I scoot down the sidelines?

Then what about “Intelligible Beauty in Aesthetic Thought” (1958), written out of the same life world as these poems? The platform across which Plato and Plotinus thought their lives into the noosphere lay down as charmed as Sir Walter Raleigh’s suit coat! 1958, he opens the package from Niemeyer “Intelligible Beauty in Aesthetic Thought”, and thinks *truly mine, for the first time*; and to complete the step toward manhood he gets the phone call in State College, Pa., letting him know that Marianne Moore has sponsored his first book of poems, “Mosaic”, for the Penn State Press. Ain’t *he* the big boy

now! Tidy writing and tidy thinking about art ply a single water, and leave a smile as indelible as a cat's. He knows what he wants to know, this guy!

Seminal moment: Frederic, snapped with Bill Arrowsmith, University of Texas, 1962, visiting Harry Ransom, regal rex of University of Texas, in sweeping marble halls; they march out, an hour later, Frederic and Bill editors of the radiant, and culture changing, classical journal *Arion*; they sniff the fresh Texan Renaissance. In 1965 the editing of "Hereditas: Essays on the Modern Experience of the Classical", glued Will's adhesive mind to fellow tipplers of the 'classical tradition.' The vast undercurrents of the Hellenic tradition swept him up anew by the ankles, as it had done so many years before in Greece, when a poet like Kostas Palamas– "The King's Flute"; "The Twelve Words of the Gypsy"– had come before him with the intricate powers of Sophocles. To which "Metaphrasis" (1965) added itself on a whim; Will's ultra diverse paean to the flexibility of imagined English. Pegasus neighs!

Frederic needed me! Who doesn't need a jocular twin? Did Will make me up, that I, his *bouc émissaire*, might save him with a goal, streaking down the sidelines? Ears open, Will chugs on. He writes a dissertation – it was on Victor Cousin and his versions of Plato – and it hooks

into corresponding mindsets; fellow but regional scholarly bricklayers, Isidore of the *Encyclopedia*, Apollodorus no less. The collective of the whole scholarly enterprise, global and incremental, takes Will's young cap and makes him fly. It is the largeness to which he tries testifying language – yuk, yuk – in "Flumen Historicum"(1965), an onseaming of the yes global concern for the relation of knowledge to beauty. It will be only whiffing distance, and a mound of cadavers, from here to 1993, "Literature as Sheltering the Human", and the introduction of the fictive character, Hentscher-Dompal, whose dream is to have read all that has been written, at the crux moment of death, the supreme moment of equalization. Tell me about it, I mutter, nursing my Mephistophelean grimace, as numero uno waves like Benito M from the Balcony of the Borghese.

On which wings Will let travel itself guide the finesse of classics meeting the big world; philhellene wings soaring in tandem with Patrick Leigh Fermor's "Mani", or Henry Miller's "Colossus of Maroussi". The Will of many a month on Delos! the intricacies of lived history: chiseled architraves, Victrolas playing in the blazing Maniote sun; capers on Rheneia, the island of the Dead. Will responds with "From a Year in Greece" (1967), sewing his cloak tightly to the whole body of the Hellenic experience, Homer to Seferis, Monemvasia to Stamboul, an alliance he will latterly rethink, as destiny keeps putting both Asia and the Silk

Road in his face. “Literature Inside Out” (1966) opens a way in through popular psychoanalysis and *Kulturkritik*, to walk literature directly into the proteomics of being-here. Two late in the sixties brewings – “Archilochos” (1969) and “Herondas” (1972) – prove how rampantly Will sticks with his Hellenism, and with his optimistic noetic, even as the gates of the American city are being shaken by dissent. His soul is with the armies of the night – he refuses to carry on academic work, during the hot spring of 67– and yet the frame, into which he aspires to place this passion, is the flame of continuity with the death life gives us, and the life we give to death. Scholarship is the intergenerational speech of the ancestral. Poetry and scholarship seem, in this cooking mind, to be simply the mirrors thinking one another, and glimpsing yours truly, the *bouc émissaire*, fleet on the sidelines, proffering the pigskin at the edge of the camera.

Unhistorical, unmoral, self-centered; Will can only barely escape the stamp of historicity: the sequence that led from the pastoral landscapes of the early thirties, through the suckering in bludgeon of Hitlerian world politics, to the genitalia of wrecked marriage – into a sixties that seemed to let it all hang loose, the fury, the wreckage, the insanity of governance; escape he does, by the skin of his narrow ass, into a personal seventies in which text accrual proliferates, and the limits of social-marital control crumble from ceiling to floor. And in their midst reveal little smiling you know who, the dimwit of death.

From within, worldly, time things like children’s births and marital playgrounds swim through the Will brain like fish in an aquarium. He is there among them, from time to time being their turmoil, at other times being their observer. To himself he wonders at his monstrosity, the sectioning off of a writing testimony from a personal life in which he breaks faith, crashes into lives, self-exalts and thinks none the less of himself. “Brandy in the Snow” (1972) heralds the break out into a surrealism which dines on the unrealities of a culture no longer sure how to caption itself – a culture which since the early sixties had been one of wars, murders, greenings – and which finds itself in Will out through such apertures:

I hacked your face away
From a portal of burst stone.
It freed itself into a gull
Which wheeled desperately over Buda.
In the middle of the afternoon you became a god.

Praying to the god I stubbed
My sharp knees.
They fell apart like twigs.
Children collected them in baskets and when
I rose
They sold me for ten forints
As used furniture

When you came back,
 Testing the place I was
 You sat down.
 Your handsome wings fell apart.
 We were dust on the floor.

[Will 1972: 27]

In worlds like these, the crookedly maturing Will finds himself registering anomalies and distortions. He will let the angular, often distressed, out through many corners of the seventies, a time of divorce for him but threaded through the comforts of what was still, during the Texan Renaissance, the mind life of studious classicism.

You too will rest
 Somewhere – he is pointing – over the bony ear
 of the mountain
 Where it seems cocked at the sky

Nothing, he remembers, ruins the sky like a hearing,
 Like the dark black of the ear
 Floating in the endless heavens...

[Will 1975: 48]

One of the pressures, from which Will was moving literary historical materials, was at the center of “The Fact of Literature” (1973). That pressure churned from Will’s lifelong conviction that literature targets, enflames, and displays *fact*; the premise for Will’s always snudgy reservations about *poésie* or the Romantic Movement, which

he valued as *gnosis*, but saw incomplete without the sciences that would harden it. Holism of the literary body is the condition Will himself targets, in an effort to consider the work-world such ‘poems as the above live in’: we have seen his earlier work with translating Palamas, and in the translation workshop’s production of “Metaphrasis”; and in this same productive year of 1973 Will joined a colleague in making English out of Theodor Adorno’s “Jargon der *Eigentlichkeit*”, “The Jargon of Authenticity”.

“The literary work exists as a thrust toward completeness, and as a revelation, in its existence, of a totality of works behind – or should we say ‘around’? – it. This description is only the best we can do. What it attempts to account for is the central perception of the wholeness of literature, and it is natural enough that such wholeness cannot in itself be analyzed... This wholeness is not deduced from the experiences of a finite number of literary works, but accompanies that experience” [Will 1973b: 120].

Translation grows, in this early seventies time-zone, from one of a variety of ways of letting language define us, to a maximally tangible step inside world culture. “The Knife in the Stone” (1973) is particularly involved with the way in which translation involves us in *thinking the other*. (Will goes intricate, carefully dragging the translator’s act over into zones of philosophy: seeing translation, for example, as a third language conjured up, a working condition in

which intelligibility – the Word of theology? – is invoked to guarantee mutual intelligibility. The work the translator is translating is diverse, is many voices of his own, he might say, but is no way at odds with the interior voices of imagination, which are entering space as poems during these years.) “Belphegor” (1977) presses these insights back into the existential, helping Will remember that stepping into the world in language is stepping into the world. Nothing about the orienting act of naming does not invoke the full metal armor of being here, now – in the omnivorous now. Such thinking as that of Kazantzakis, in the “Saviors of God”, smashes its way into the present circle of thoughts, finding in careful language work the attention germane to belief, belief we are creating god in our moves of language and thought. This reversal of the theific, in Will’s theory of the making of god, lies comfortably beside his youthful preoccupations with the construction of selfhood out of consciousness. Me, I’m Catholic. For me the god was there from the start. He is giving me the words to make Willy boy. For him we are building together. Putting God together like the parts of a TV set.

Poieo, the Greek making-word that slips like a knife through all the glories of the imagination, and links the poem on the page straight back into the Neolithic movement of hand and touch. The poem is a tough fist object working its way through the clay of time: Will’s “Guatemala” (1973).

If the brick had run out.
Stone is too ardent to resemble his hand.
Wears a glove of stone.
The temple droops like a glove on the hand.
Though the brick had run out
Mortar swelling the glove came to silence.

If the brick had run out.
Poptun is trailing its one red flower
Spills its flower like a temple of bleeding.
The temple rises to sing in its bleeding
Gloves its anger in a ring of leather.
If the brick had run out.

[Will 1973a: 4]

The poem aims to be about the length of the breath which ferries it. There is nothing, in this kind of performance for oneself, which cannot be congruent with the scholarship of world equality. (Scholarship, we are trying to say, is a standing inside of what is, and at every step a training for saying the poetry in what is.) Can I say that we move, in such poetry, a Jack in the Boots stride forward from the testimonial poetry of “Mosaic” or “A Wedge of Words”? The following, from “A Wedge of Words”, dates to 1963.

Naming World

Not every poem is born from
Troy’s destruction or Laura’s smile.
This one was not.

Once and a while
I think of my losses.
They are my plot.

How a bird flew
Away, or a friend came,
While I was gone.

How when I write
A poem
I have to be alone.

How a man's eyes are shaped
So that he only sees
Ninety degrees.

How I am forced to be
Here in this chair
Not over there.

When I assemble such
Proofs of a fallen state
I must take pause.

I ask at every door
How a man goes about
Winning back loss.

I have an answer now
Into the naming world
Of poetry

Write all the turning world
You failed to hear
You failed to see.

[Will 1963: 7]

See how the line tightens and the being-here takes fire between 63– “A Wedge of Words”, and 73 – “Guatemala”? Is Will taking fire with his world – Vietnam, Kennedy and MLK killings, urban warfare? – or is he just learning to read the ferocity of the given, as he breaks and rebreaks the world of his heart? One could say the latter, noting, just around the corner from “Guatemala”, a scholastic thought-thing called “The Generic Demands of Greek Literature” (1976). Nothing arid sticks to these Greek probes, which are spooned right out of the living cup of Solon, as he mocks his own pretensions to statesmanship, of Archilochos, as he pretend swaggers, on the other end of what is only a distich, not a stick, or of Sappho as she measures desire spatially, pulsing in the air of what she loves. It is as though he's cooking poetic empathy at every point, in the hubbub of serving universities with his ‘love of knowledge.’ The tension – how to see life steadily and see life whole – breaks in the course of tracking a culture in disaggregation, and by the time of the “Epics of America” (1977) we are ready to see the wry curdling up into the macabre.

Starlight in the American Stable

Red stables filled with whole horses.
A leather window taped to prairie.

He picks up a rock, holds it
 Coldly against the moon.
 Takes a knife, peels off the shell.
 Cuts back into naked
 Central rock.
 Starlight, dead in the rock.
 He holds a jar,
 Pours in starlight,
 Puts the light back in the rock.
 He holds a jar,
 Pours in starlight,
 Puts the light back in the rock,
 Closes the rock. Closes the red stable
 Filled with whole horses.
 Takes a knife, peels
 Horses back. He pours light
 Softly under the peel,
 Watches the manes glow.
 Then he closes the horses.
 He closes the red stables.
 Everything is surface.

[Will 1977: 12]

Fitting the poem to its time is tricky business. Go back to “Naming World,” in the early sixties. Track its maker. He and his wife sit it out in Austin, consumed by poetries and languages, are still at the front end of forming their value systems. (His will unravel like wool in a kitten’s claws, at the prying of lust, and, far from a milieu like today’s “Me Too”, which anxiously evaluates its chances of real change, he will live out male pre-war values with an only-child abandon,

happy if happy.) He falls for the most formative thing American classrooms have given him, and the fragile house of value cards comes tumbling; with it, respectability comforts but not, he notes, whatever gift he has for making language curative. Odd dark territories.

Horses

Horses block the way. Here, over here.
 Nothing budes. Manes and tails wave.
 He goes around them. Damnable horses.
 Here horsey come. He slaps the horse
 Passing its withers. Auction this baby.
 Horses scatter. Here dapple, here roan.
 Horses vanish. He sells a horse,
 Buys horses to sell: bets on horses.
 He wins, seven horses. He pens them,
 Runs looking for halters. They break,
 Easily, reach the highway. He catches
 All but one. It flees. He cries
 Here horsey. No luck. Horsey is gone.
 Horsey goes wild. He shoots horsey.
 Here horsey, he says to it, lie at my feet.
 Horsey kneels before him. A game?
 He pats horsey. Nothing to fear.
 Angels take horsey covered with feathers.
 He pats horsey! Withers! Horsey
 Sinks to the ground. A big smile grows.
 Horsey laughs at himself. I took that
 Seriously? His flank hurts though.
 He looks at it closely. It really hurts.
 Then he lies down softly. He stretches

One leg at a time. He dozes.
 Horsey, am I really horsey?
 He puts his head down. Here
 Horsey he says to himself
 Here horsey here horsey horsey.
 And then he dies.

[ibid.: 4]

The value gray zones our Frederic is plying are not macabre, and are not without tentacles reaching as far back as “Naming World” (1962), which in its way is also about loss, loss assessed fifteen years later in a life ever better able to hear St. Paul talk about the ‘wasting of the body.’ The same maturing sense of fall in things grows on into the prose and poetry of the author’s post Viet-Nam late seventies and early eighties. There is not only more hurting of animals, the obverse of what the author can endure, and hence his argumentum with time, but there is the thrilogy of *thought in its time*, “The Fall and the Gods” (1988–1991.) What does he think about? What kind of hurting is tolerable to him? What kind of hurting, of all that he loves, must he tolerate in order to feel on top of things – his formula for being where the thought of not-being is excluded.

“The Fall and the Gods” is an autobiography of the mind, in its sensuous setting. “A Portrait of John” (Volume 2 of the trilogy) interweaves poetry making with love making, splicing divine names, rinsing settings with legs, and beards with couplets, until Mr. John settles for handing

you from one site to another, New Mexico to Querétaro, Chobham to Urbana. This text is a decadent low flyer, but visionary, coursing through landscapes of hurt and beauty. John, Frederic Will, is convinced that good thinking and good imagining invite one another; the logical positivism of vision is no anomaly to this thinker, for whom order, if often hidden, crowds the universe with attention. Ryle and Ayer open windows onto a being world not unfriendly to metaphor or self-projection. In “Founding the Lasting”, the third volume of the trilogy, it is obvious, if requiring a meticulous working out, that value, thinking, and imagination thrive on one another.

“Criticism is in some respects a discovery about itself– about, say, the maker of criticism– even while he tries to sidestep his own glance. (The critic can really not prove himself to be an invisible body at the source of his work, as the philosopher has to hope to be.) The self-reflective dimension of criticism is, of course, partly identical with that dimension of philosophical inquiry, in which Being is disclosed to itself by the philosophical proposition. In criticism as in philosophy, Being is induced to return to itself more adequately stated, through the expression of itself in propositions and responses. But in criticism the thinker’s body is present as a point of reference – indispensably, of course, because that body is the point at which the critic realizes his affiliation with the bodiliness of literature or another art” [Will 1991b: 126–127].

The thrust of argument, here, will construct itself in later work like “Being Here: Sociology as Poetry, Self-Construction, and our Time as Language” (2012) and “Daily Life” (2018), volume 9 of the decalogy “Inside Selfhood and History”. In the perspective of those texts the tag of materiality clings precedingly to every act in the world, and guarantees to consciousness a condition of ‘being anticipated,’ as well as, to writing in consciousness, a continual limitation to where it comes from. This tagline of bodiliness, which will inevitably have tracked Will’s course through language and history, must at times, as in “The Sliced Dog” (1985) or “Entering the Open-Hole” (1989), have found in physical drag the exemplary expression of the loss in a time: in this case the eighties – when breakup breakup was the color of daily life.

Bare realia piled in a bare room
 He senses that there is a corner in existence
 And that it is off to the side
 And that by leaning to the side
 And that by peering over into it.
 Hours later he sleeps in that place

[Will 1989: 48]

The side, which is the part of our sensorium we can barely control, makes itself into a common reminder, in Will’s poems, of what is incremental, not to foreground. A drag, as in the three “Side Poems” [Will 2018: 232–

234]. What else is more surprised than the side, to find itself the provocation of an historical right?

“In the morning my arm was terribly swollen. I said nothing to mother, just went down to breakfast. They saw me lifting the weight, from my lap to the table. They saw the pressure against my cotton shirt. At first they paid no attention. Then, one by one, they approached and touched the arm. It hurt me terribly. But something impelled me. I longed to be touched. I longed to be welcomed. I longed to be included in their discovery of my pain” [Will 1984: 25].

It is not simply that the body we all share makes its obstructive will clear that the teller of this tale wishes to share in the common understanding of the way the body ‘works.’ The impertinence, of this kind of existential voyeurism, is the driver for the distinctive attention Will devotes to existential conditions like *sideness*. He prides himself on standing at the angle where direct statement is consciously obstructing itself. It is there, he is convinced, that being discloses itself. It is in this kind of thinking-stance that Will finds himself in returning again and again to the job translation does. Common understandings – what we used to call common sense, in the Middle Ages – is the basis of what Will calls ‘the third language,’ that sustains and makes translation possible. The word, of orthodox Christian theology, supports the following explanatory structures, fleshing out the sense

that for two textualities to share a meaning, to meet in translation, is a grounded example of the way intelligibility keeps trumping and further growing itself. Will's earlier examples of translation from translations of Palamas, or in the "Metaphrasis" anthology, exemplify objective verbal intelligence.

The 'clarification' process, which is at stake here, takes muffled revenge on flat being, in prose poem texts which cluster around each other in the early nineties.

"In late afternoon and early evening the beach goes on darkening so slowly and richly it takes you over, possesses you. In summers the tide is just gaining strength in the course of this gradual twilight; a slow background rhythm increasing its intensity as the light loses force. Birds move into the space left between these alternating pressures. Gulls and hawks coast noiselessly over. Under them curlews prink along the thin skin of the delicate waves, plucking out of them tastes too fine and juicy for us to imagine. The evening fades off into scenes like this, against which eventually you close your eyes, and tent, into the absolute darkness of inner night. The world rolls on through that stillness. In the earliest morning light you can find the sea in retreat, and walk barefooted down through the memory of waves, and pick up things the night has abandoned. A beautiful death has left these ornamental lives in the sand. By now the receding ocean is gray and spitting, as though angry to be leaving the shore. But the drying sand is at peace with its menagerie of corals, etched sand dollars, pink grey crabs, brown rubber kelp,

fish skulls, an occasional twitching lobster. You walk through them like one of them, and before long you are only your shadow trailing invisible through the fog..." [Will 1993b: 53]

Making literature, being in literature, these conditions are defining for the person of our moment, who is, in our wild profusion of 'literate self-memorials,' for what else is the digital revolution?, swamped by what the world says, and composed by what he says. In the early nineties, Will makes an effort, in two books – "Literature as Sheltering the Human" (1993) and "Singing with Whitman's Thrush" (1993) – to totalize in mind the language world experience, as it achieves its most gluttonous energy, in the world of 'literature.' The Faustian, in this effort to remain equal to the literary verbo-sphere, is enshrined in the essay, "Hatred, Love, and Literary Study", in "Literature as Sheltering the Human", pp. 40–57.

Professor Hentscher-Dompal, in the tale we follow, was an oddball outsider, with a Faustian passion to consume all of literature 'up to his moment,' to be read up to date, so to speak, so that in a privileged instant he could implode into a condition of totality. Why? Why was this kind of equality with what one studies to be seen as a kind of personal consummation? Reference Faust again, the figure for whom unlimited knowledge boiled down to infinite power – an acquisition for which it is worth selling your

soul to the Devil. Yet Hentscher-Dompal was unable to realize his identity with the whole Body of Literature, the Dame in whom his life practice taught him salvation lay:

“The agonizing defeat of this scheme, we later learned, took place at a specific instant, under specific conditions. Sometime on the night of April 19, 1972, Professor Dompal closed toward his vision. He had read almost everything, inwardly, thoroughly, from the standpoint of its own coming to being. He had gone beyond himself in every direction. He had anticipated even the killer-clause, frankly putting to himself, and over the course of years, the problem of time. No sooner would he finish his total reading than someone else would publish a significant new novel, a new poem, would break the jelly, and the known body of literature would dissolve. This too he had anticipated. Union, he had convinced himself, was union, simple and enough, and by inner definition limited to the known at a particular instant.

Meeting and union took place – to judge from the final entries Dompal left us, from that cruel Walpurgisnacht. The face of subsumption, Dompal’s, stared into ‘all man’s imaginative life,’ and was engulfed by it” Will 1993a: 50].

The living of literature at one’s spar, as the narrator explains earlier in the same essay, is foredoomed because the body of literature has always grown up behind and around us, even as we try to scope its progress. We inhabit a moving loop belt; when we look back over our shoulders we catch a glimpse of the past just becoming the future

out beyond us. The sense of labor engendered here is in one aspect Sisyphean – culture and its products are no sooner participated in than they reconstitute themselves as our defining horizon – yet the freshness reassured in us, by the energies of history allowing us into it, is vivid, and musters Will’s upcoming concerns, at just this moment in the early 2000’s, with labor on the cultural landscape. Already in “Big Rig Souls” (1991) Will had listened as empathetically as possible, to fellow laborers – transport in goods, transport in words – in truck stops and motel parking lots – from whom he valued the dynamic of a culture industry seemingly driven from its position in history. (“May they realize what kind of second nature cowboys they are! Only then can they become the long awaited New Person, hardened but passionate, historically formed but not simply a product of history”; p. 149.) From that romantic stance Will’s inner sociology of labor, into which he fed his own self-awareness as a feeder-through-language, opened out into panoramas of account: “Social Reflections on Work” (2002) and “Field Research in Three North American Agricultural Communities” (2002), in both of which works Will tinkers hard with the relations between physical and mental labor.

“In extending my own repertoire, from the academic / writer into a modest grasp of other labor ways, I should be extending my own capacity to labor. I should, at the same time, be toughening my sense of the stuff-moving labor the mind carries out. I should,

whether or not I can, be creating myself as a kind of living bridge between pragma (deed; act) and dianoia (thought.)” [Will 2002: 135].

The maieutic of which Hentscher-Dompal seems to fancy himself capable, breeds precisely the sense of the globality of labor Will is prying at here. Reaching beyond the geo-economy of Iowa, Will (and his friend and co-author Rick Molz) diversify a palette of models: bananas, corn, and cheese become the mottos of a pan-North American *nisus* to enter history through labor.

“The Male’s Midlife Rite of Passage” (2006) transfers the *nisus* of fictive labor, which in one sense explains Will’s entire life workload, into a blend of novel fiction and social psychology. Will himself plays the palpable role of narrator, for the three long fictions that compose this trilogy. In each instance he places his surrogate fictionizer *dans une situation*. In “Adventure in Algiers”, Charles Morot is from line one caught up in a bank heist and kidnapping, in downtown Algiers; from that moment until the end of the tale, in and out of every possible discomfort, suffering, romantic *éclat*, Charles is thrown together with the stately Frenchwoman with whom, as fate had had it, he was from the first moment captured by the Jihadists. In other words, the Charles we know is from the get go totally swept into history, history and the desert of southern Algeria. His travail, you might say, is a birthing, like the processes of organized

labor in field or factory. “The Poppy Web” takes its launch from a beach in the Peloponnesus, where another American prof, Hayes Straglund, is stretched out along the shore, enjoying the total freedom of a summer break. Suddenly he is waked by a heroin trading ship that knocks him out cold and transports him, trussed and kidnapped, to their hangout and distribution point in Bulgaria. Death is on the horizon, but what is pertinent, here, is the suddenness with which the midlife male is snatched up into history; Charles Morot and Hayes Straglund enact the history that has made them part of it. In the third volume, “The Disparition”, Alfred (and his wife Ideokuta) return from an outing at the beach, to find his laptop gone, stolen and loaded with the extensive files he had been researching on African culture. The theft is a shock. The moment is rivetingly historical, the projection into history, on the part of Alfred and his wife, so total that the immediately following international existential thrill search, for the computer and its own history, seems to occupy only the time breath of its initial occurrence. History labors with its products, and fictions are simply footnotes on that genetic.

That given, it is no surprise that Will peppers his opus with gestures of fiction. It appears that when he freed those gestures, in another language, he gave birth to historical landscapes manufactured from dream. In “Miroirs d’éternité: une saison au sahel” (2003) he builds out the possibilities – what else are

the products of labor? – of a trip in the mind through the landscape of a country, Mauritania, of which the narrator had always presumed the max in transformative surprise. He was to find the virgin births of the imaginary throughout this panorama of jungle priests, prophets of sacrifice, and of a marabout emerging covered with wisdom from a forty-day season of self-maceration. The inner panorama of this trip through an invented land culminates in a mass of the minerals, in which a certain jungle priest, Darrin, helps the narrator and his friends to taste the earth's hungriness to be transformed into the sacrifice of our mouths and hearts. The miraculously fertile landscape, over which the narrator passes in a journey to heal – divorce, divorce – and reshape.

In both “The Male’s Midlife Rite of Passage”, and “Miroirs”, a narrator sets forth into the trick filled maieutic of being born, born into an historical condition within which, bracketed though it is by consecrated language, is what we indeed move through, more or less compellingly, as we take sledge hammers of language to our emotions.

The press of these fictive sorties can be as ideational as “Miroirs”, or as concrete as Charles Morot in the midst of a kidnapping, but the common theme of the generative in labor binds them. (Historicity and generation shape themselves increasingly, in Will’s thought at the end of the millennium, into leitmotifs for advancing awareness.) One might say the same

of Will’s short stories or of the kind of mystery story the narrator creates both in “The Concept of the Momen” (2008) and in “Frederic Will’s Short Fiction: Literature as Social Critique” (2009). The former of these two books suggests the intersection point between Will as fabulist and Will as negotiator in philosophical issues. A tangled tale of alternate loves, disparities, transgendered self-overwhelmings, pushes Will’s global fiction over edge after edge. We might seem in another country from the narratives of labouring through which we scoped above, and yet we are in a transformative universe so potentially benign that from within it it is given the powers to evolve, which we would in everyday life expect to have to earn. Frank, the narrator, meets an old friend and the two of them treat themselves to lunch in ‘an old-fashioned Aussie pub.’ Charlie, a long haul lorry driver, is a man of long spaces and private thoughts, and he makes clear, as the two guys settle to talk life, that he is dancing along certain edges of life. ‘I’ve gone underground,’ he says, then adds that ‘you can’t see that part of me. Tryin to break from weight. Tryin to find an opening.’ A few minutes later, Charlie unpackages a little further. ‘I thought of sheddin myself. All it requires is a detail or two; eatin ever day til you’re full, then not another mouthful...feeling all the time you’re sheddin, comin free of flesh...I’m tryin to get out of here alive.’ The news from Charlie’s secretary, ‘heart failure in the gym,’ was clarified by a posthumous note found in Charlie’s office:

“Watch for the moment when your entire life gathers around you. When you can feel all of it on every side of you, in every cell. Then snap your life off, everything implicit, everything complete. Snap it off how? Break its history. Give it no place to go. Look over your shoulder so fully, with all of your life in your glance, that you are only a seeing, that there is nothing else to be seen. Then you’ll see nothing just appearing over your shoulder. None of you will be there for you to see. You’ll be all in the seeing. That will be it” [Shynnagh 2008c: 8].

Charlie had of course not died but he had become what, being what he is, he could not fail to become. The point is that being-here is implicitly self-transcending. And why? The book “Being Here: Sociology as Poetry, Self-Construction, and Our Time as Language” (2012) is a sketchbook of the conditions under which we live the moment. That moment is a condition in which things have not yet been named, but in which they are on the brink of becoming their names, a manifestation in which they begin their daily work of anticipating us.

He has tried in every way to dominate
One unprotected object, a coat
That looks like a corpse.

He addresses that oddity
Which has none of the sobriety of a commodity.
Did he glimpse the thing without the name,
Before someone had time to name it?

[Will 2012:73]

This fertile moment, in which we are co-present to the things of the world, which are simply about to assume their names, is nailed again and again in Will’s work. (Cf. ‘Optical Illusions,’ in “Time, Accounts, and Surplus Meaning: Settings of the Theophanic” (2011), which confronts the viewer with a momentarily undefinable object in the distance up the road, an object which could be either a coat or a corpse. The question is raised, which is it? The question isolates a gray zone, for the perceiver, in which the answer is that the bifform object could be either a coat or a corpse. Its *attente* of a naming is the moment of its existence in which it compels us; it is language on the cusp, and in its primordial awesomeness it heralds that upcoming condition in which, perhaps but a few seconds later, language will indeed govern us, take priority over us. Driven by language, we are, as “Being Here” highlights, never masters even of our own sensorium:

Philosophers are as bad as Tupus
When it comes to edging the world.

They go linearly through the mess and then around
the outside

And if they are theologians they also go back far
enough to where

They can draw a line across the beginning.

But that’s a trick ordinary language philosophers

Don’t even try. They’ll take this sentence, which has
no beginning or end,

And carve it into little pieces.

They’ll say beyond this is God

Or how about a door frame for separating?
 Tupus finds himself all over the issue
 And is redolent with building blocks
 Like shroud or sor7u that can't be undermined.

[ibid.: 113]

Underlying these sallies into 'philosophy,' there lies a steady interest in the ways *available* to us, for perceiving and naming the world. Maker of poems, maker of ideas about how and why we make poems, Will breaks a path into contemporary creative consciousness, in "The Long Poem in the Age of Twitter" (2011). (The word *twitter* was just assuming its robust political dimension at the time of Will's book; for him *twitter* simply connoted staccato frivolous low concentration gibberish.) The poems in this new fractured series seemed to come from somewhere in the fashion by which ordinary life is constructed – and undoubtedly reflected the new insights digitization was lending to consciousness; forcing mind to invent moment by moment, and to rely ever less on phrasal or conceptual continuity. A confluence of this new sensibility, which flooded consciousness in literature from the mid-20th century on, with (in Will's case) the awareness provided by poets he valued – Olson, Oppen – led to his making what was new to him:

The dark mediate
 Lip of frozen energy

Tumbles into Scottsdale.
 They pick it in pieces
 Away from the frame of the tire.
 Dripping retreats.

The furious scholar
 Touching his brow like a migraine
 Formulates the azimuth;

Trenches, barking from the sky,
 Dictate his path.
 At the request for laudanum

– He takes it in snuffpacks –
 The old soldiers' home
 Turns spindly and miraculous.

And a crackerbox of zoophytes,
 Tracking the lonely shore,
 Makes its way into a boxcar.

Now there's a long trauma
 Of characterless movements
 To the silt edge of the shore.

A dripping teacup
 Of semen samples
 A lone bodice –
 Is it Martha Stewart's?
 Hackneyed but zipper tight
 Pees on the San Bernardino

Freeway. Too many Mexican
 Zoophytes, zoophytes
 Fighting a stiff north.

[Will 2011b: 138-140]

The parameters of Will's writing are wide, and I have stressed a fairly narrow pathway through the profusion; the pathway that runs through poetry, fiction, and the thinking, about both those acts, which Will calls *philosophy*.

Another theme is the confession box: "A Portrait of John" (1990), "Flesh and the Color of Love" (2002), "The Concept of the Moment" (2008). Will's fiction and poetry constantly border on corporeal romance, sexual self-confession, the complex dance of fidelity and longing.

Then there is a triad of small prose poem volumes – "Recoveries", "Trips of the Psyche", "Textures, Spaces, Wonders" (all published in 1993) – which are among Will's most polished work; there are travel writings – ("Frederic Will's Travel Writings" (1957–2007), published in 2008 – and "Frederic Will's Short Fiction: Literature as Social Critique", published 2009. (Unashamedly proud, I take credit for the just mentioned duo of anthologies: the voices of alterity across which Will and Frank manage to transact their cumulative senses of one another.)

We bypass these regions of work, in order to touch down (and wrap up) with the ten volume sequence, "Inside Selfhood and History", which Will began creating in 2014, and which now stands at Volume Nine.

"Inside Selfhood and History" takes off from the concern with language, creativity in language,

and the nature of thought about language; takes off and spreads wings. A number of themes move to the front, which were only germinating in Will's earlier work. The nature of narrative and of the time it creates around it; the cognitive role of imaginative thinking – does metaphor target what really is?; the degree of exactitude possible in historical accounts; the antinomies inherent in personal value attitudes – polarities of attitude and evaluation; the replacement of self by writing, and how to live that condition; the texture of everyday behaviors, and the place of friendship in them; arguments poetry can make, about the nature of poetry; attitude and character as determinants of the poetic thing. From this range of germinations, rising from a long planting of texts (1958–2014), we should find that in "Inside Selfhood and History" we harvest some insights only in the making during the earlier period of Will's work. Let's isolate three of those insight areas.

1. "Essays on the Condition of Inwardness: Pieces of Otherness" (2016) extrapolates from the writer's wishes and fears to find a condition of interiority, which is vulnerable to the other. This being vulnerable is cognitive as well as 'spiritual.' It allows the contours of the other to become part of one's own action as brain. The narrator, and his fellow retired academic pal, meet (in Detroit) an African savant who lures them to visit him in the Nigerian Delta, and to meet his own superior, a high savant holed up in a jungle cabin. Claude, the savant,

prepares a jungle hut dinner for the visiting Americans, and to it lures an errant monitor lizard, on whom he performs a curdling act of cruelty designed to elicit the otherness-awareness of the narrator. The Americans curdle. *Le divin marquis de Sade* would have perked his ears, at Claude's address to his American visitors: 'Have we not put back the claustrophobia of time and space through this knife? Have you not acquired an unclogged opening before you?'

An intentional act of cruelty brings relief from endless being anticipated by oneself.

To open out to the other, in compassion or cruel symbiosis, was as close to you, Claude said, as the language by which you say it. You become drenched in the other.

2. "Historia: Profiles of the Historical Impulse" (2016). The thesis of this book meshes with the existential threading in all Will's concept work, but this time the drift is sharper. One clear drive in it: to use language, to be in language, is the max of being in history. It is to step inside the variegated maneuvers by which our kind has for ten thousand years been fitted to his world through shaped and configured sound. Speak of access to otherness, of the sort Claude played out on his two American guests, in the example above: language use is the history of our human presence revealed not by some act of 'compassion or cruel symbiosis,' but by brain guided phonology. "Historia" scopes the multiple lenses through which any historical

event can be languaged up before us. Relativism is hardly the word, for the fractured and volatile relation past plays to even the most skilled inquiries of the historian-standing-present.

3. "Downloading the Poetic Self" (2018); "A Tactical Sequence: Poetry and Philosophy as Handlung" (2018). Two volumes of aesthetics. Aesthete by construction, way back into the sunlight of a privileged childhood, Will has remained faithful to beauty, even as the portal into virtue – a reason, one might give, for his startling defects of communal morality. In the texts in question, here, he searches poetic creation for the points at which it lives as a character download. Fully aware that the poet's self comes transformed onto the page, and that the personal womb only indirectly yields its fruits, he nevertheless sees the poem as a piece of the person, detectable evidence of what made it. There is a moral diktat overhanging the poem itself. Not only that creative transaction, however, lies into the morality of the poem. The work in "A Tactical Sequence", the final (and at this point not yet published) volume in the series, wrings the ethical directly from poem construction, illustrating the convergence point between these two 'practical' domains of self-construction. The whole of the aesthetic construction – the whole organic poem or novel – is a sequence of cola, whether you choose the line (of poetry), the sentence or chapter of a novel, or the phoneme of the epic: each construction in language is sequential and particulate. To move one colon, in an aesthetic whole, is to read it into its

successor. That ‘read it’ is tricky. To some degree – wouldn’t this be a model of Romantic thinking? – the organic novel whole or poem whole is known as just that, from its start, is known as an organic whole. Pre known, what else is a whole, the parts of the organic poem belong in advance to one another. But those parts have to earn one another, and to be constructed even if they are foreknown. (Shall we say there is some connection here between foreknown destiny and the free will that activates it; a hallowed paradox of much of the most seasoned theology.) Each part must belong to its predecessor and follower. That ‘belonging to one another’ must be constructed; must be the consequence of choosing futures and ratifying pasts which is the ethical transcourse taking place throughout the minima of aesthetic formation. Ethical, after all, is the realm of practical choice, while aesthetic, our first step into consciousness, is the platform from which in the poem we decide to say this and not that.

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LABOR AND WRITING: FOR FREDERIC WILL ON HIS 90TH BIRTHDAY

Frank Shynnagh (Frederic Will), Ph.D., writer and critic, author of 53 books in various genres: cultural criticism, poetry, technical philosophy, fiction, travel accounts, autobiography, and translation. President of Humanities Institute (USA). Frank Shynnagh is both a pseudonym and an alterior voice; email: samuelw981@gmail.com

Abstract. The essay is a study of patterns and perspectives in the work of one person's extensive writing career. The author began as a classicist – Greek and Roman literature –and a poet, of stark lyrics. In a long subsequent career he has gone on to write a number of fictions – several novels and a collection of short stories – cultural history and philosophy, labor commentary – especially on trucking and farming, poetry of an increasingly acerbic flavor, and enough autobiographies to satisfy a pantomimist. The essay that follows is a long look at this Odyssey of mental turns, as narrated by the favorite pseudonym, Frank Shynnagh, the Manx eponym of that doughty redbear, the fox.

Keywords: autobiography, writing, self-reflection, irony, time, direction, language.

