

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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(name of student) (degree)

in Musicology presented on May 8, 1992
(major) (date)

Title: CONTEMPORARY MUSICAL CULTURE AS REFLECTED IN THE
FICTIONAL WORKS OF WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

Abstract approved: James A. Starr

William Allen White was an internationally respected editor who is probably best remembered for his years as editor of the Emporia Gazette. He was also a fine author and had a great interest in music. This thesis examines and compares the musical references in biographies about White, the fictional works of White, and White's autobiography revealing not only the role of music in White's own life, but the important role music played in his culture.

Each section of this thesis examines the role of a particular type of music in White's own life and in the lives of his fictional characters. A biographical sketch of White and a summary of his fictional works are included in Chapter one. Chapter two examines the role of vocal music,

including popular songs and vocal ensemble experiences, but excluding opera. Chapter three examines instrumental music, such as the jew's-harp and mouth organ, accordion, guitar, mandolin and instrumental ensemble experiences, excluding keyboard music. Keyboard music of the organ and piano are covered in chapter four, and symphonic and operatic music are discussed in chapter five. Chapter six is an overview of musical activities of White's culture as represented in his novels.

CONTEMPORARY MUSICAL CULTURE
AS REFLECTED IN THE FICTIONAL WORKS OF
WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

A Thesis

Presented to
the Division of Music
EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Musicology

by

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May 1992

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to Dr. James Starr for his help in the writing of this thesis and my appreciation to my parents for their prayers and support. I would also like to express my gratitude to my husband for all of his computer assistance and encouragement.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

William Allen White was not only a famous newspaper editor, but also an accomplished musician and writer of fiction. He drew heavily from his own experiences. Since a large number of his personal reflections were related to music, his fictional works clearly reflect the musical culture of his day.

Brief Biographical Sketch

William Allen White was born in Emporia, Kansas on February 10, 1868, the son of Dr. Allen White and Mary Ann (Hatton) White. When he was one year old, the family moved to El Dorado, Kansas. He graduated from El Dorado High School in 1884. From the fall of 1884 until the spring of 1885, he attended college in Emporia. The following summer, he worked for the Democrat, a local newspaper in El Dorado. He then returned to college in Emporia, working for the Emporia Daily News. From the fall of 1886 to the spring of 1890, he attended the State University of Kansas in

Lawrence. Leaving college to work on the weekly El Dorado Republican, he never graduated.

In 1892 he left the Republican to become Topeka correspondent and editorial writer for the Kansas City Journal. In the same year he also became editorial writer for the Kansas City Star. In 1893 he published a volume of poetry with Albert Bigelow Paine: Rhymes By Two Friends. In the same year, he married Sallie Moss Lindsay. Also in 1893, the Whites lost all their savings with the bank failure at Manitou. Having little money, White borrowed \$3000 and bought the Emporia Gazette in 1895. He also became its editor.

On August 15, 1896, he wrote his famous editorial, "What's the Matter With Kansas?," as an angry response to the growing spirit of economic revolt. His interest in politics earned him the reputation of "the Sage of Emporia". He had two children: William Lindsay White, born in 1900, and Mary Katherine White, born in 1904. In 1912 he was elected Republican National Committeeman. In 1917 he was sent to France by the American Red Cross as an observer, and in 1918 he attended the Paris Peace Conference, regularly sending back articles to the Gazette. In 1919 he was in Russia as a delegate to the Russian Conference at Prinkip. In 1921 his daughter Mary became immortalized as a result of a very moving tribute written by her father at the time of her death.

In 1922 he won a Pulitzer Award for an editorial on freedom of speech. In 1930 he was a member of Hoover's Commission for Conciliation, which went to Haiti, and in 1931 he became a member of President Hoover's Organization for Unemployment Relief. In 1933 he again visited Russia and in 1935 sailed to the Orient. In 1938 he was elected president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors and in 1940 became head of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. He was a member of the Congregationalist Church and the editor of the Emporia Gazette until his death in 1944.

Musical Interests

In his autobiography White states that, "Music since I can remember, has always been one of my chief delights."¹ Although most widely known for his editorial skills, he was also a fine fiction writer with a cultivated interest in a variety of music. In an article in the Kansas Music Review, James Kerr said that if White's father had not interfered with his music lessons,

...America might have recognized another accomplished musician in its ranks of national statesmen. And the "sage of Emporia" could have been familiarly known as "Lyon County's Casadesus."²

¹William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1946), p.58.

²James Kerr, "Lyon County Casadesus," Kansas Music Review 12, (May 1950): 11.

Biographical sources reveal White's abilities on a variety of musical instruments such as the jew's-harp, the accordion, the mandolin, the guitar, the organ and the piano. He participated in a number of vocal and instrumental ensembles as well. As a youth the atmosphere of his life was filled with songs, most of which were folk and black American. As he matured, his musical tastes also matured, resulting in an informed appreciation of symphonic and operatic music. When he first took a trip east in his college days, he sampled the theater and "good music" for the first time. David Hinshaw, co-worker and biographer of White indicates that these two expressions of the arts fascinated and interested White throughout his life. He had a keen interest in music while in college, and in many of his writings he expressed events in musical terminology. For example, the famous editor who never graduated from college said of his approach to education and wisdom:

...I was not one to get my education out of books. I have read many books. In college I read many, but they were the obligatory and not the theme that I pursued in seeking wisdom.³

Significance of Fictional Works

Sociological Importance

As a writer in general, Hinshaw indicates that White sought to interpret the problems of his culture in such a way that readers of his work might "see how to improve and

³White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.558.

strengthen his beloved America."⁴ These efforts qualify his fictional work for serious consideration because they are "symptomatic of his time and place."⁵ These works contain the history and attitudes of an era. Jay E. Jernigan, biographer of White, indicates that White is often regarded as a third rank figure in American literature because of his use of sentimentalism. Jernigan defines this sentimentalism as contrived appeals to the heart which bring about unlikely character changes and melodramatic endings. But Jernigan also indicates that although such sentimentalism destroyed his stories as art, it did make them representative examples of American popular culture.

White relied heavily on personal experiences in his fictional works, and in his autobiography alone there are over thirty references to music. As Kerr puts it, "Woven like strands of a bright-colored thread through his autobiography are his reminiscences of experiences with music."⁶ These fictional works clearly reflect a very active musical culture.

⁴David Hinshaw, A Man From Kansas: the Story of William Allen White, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1945), p.290.

⁵Jay E. Jernigan, William Allen White, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), p. 75.

⁶James Kerr, "Lyon County Casadesus," p. 11.

Summary of Fictional Works

When he was in his thirties and forties, White became nationally known as a popular regional fiction author, who as Jernigan states "was as much a spokesman for small-town America in that medium as in journalistic commentary."⁷ He had published his total output of eight fiction books between the years 1896 and 1918. Of these books, five were collections of short stories, two were novels, and one was a novelized travel tale. Many of White's stories are set in small towns in Kansas and trace the development of a region following the Civil War and the changes of its inhabitants. This period of time is often referred to as the Gilded Age, covering roughly the years 1865-1873. It was a period of currency inflation, overexpansion of industry, and loose business and political morals.

In his first book, The Real Issue (1896), White writes about common people and local matters in the Gilded Age of Kansas. Although half of the stories in this book have no specific locale, the book was reviewed as containing truthful stories of Kansas life in the January 1, 1897, issue of the Chicago Dial. The title story, "The Real Issue," deals with Gilded Age politics and introduces a character, Tom Wharton, who later appears in another book, Stratagems and Spoils. The fourth story, "The King of Boyville," is based on White's boyhood days in El Dorado. Sam McClure asked

⁷Jay E. Jernigan, William Allen White, p.75.

White to write more, similar type stories, resulting in his second book, The Court of Boyville. The first book, The Real Issue, was a moderate success in print.

White's second book, The Court of Boyville (1899), a collection of six short stories, received favorable reviews from many newspapers. This book has always been considered juvenile literature, even though it was written for an adult audience. Although he sets his cast in the frontier village of Willow Creek, Kansas, he claims universality for the stories in his prologue because boyhood is a timeless state of mind. Related to this book is Boys-Then and Now (1926), which was originally an article in the American Magazine that was later issued as a small book. In this volume, White reminisces on childhood of the 1870s and how it had changed by the 1920s.

Stratagems and Spoils (1901), White's third book, is a collection of five short stories which take place during the Gilded Age in Pleasant Ridge, Kansas. The plots focus on love and Missouri Valley politics. Theodore Roosevelt viewed this book as, "the best picture of American politics he knew."⁸

White's fourth book, In Our Town (1909), is a collection of eighteen short stories told through the eyes of the local newspaper editor of a small Kansas town. Jernigan

⁸William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 320.

describes most of these stories as, "candid photos taken by a county editor, with the help of his staff...

[portraying]... a diversity of human attitudes against accurately delineated backgrounds."⁹

In his fifth book, A Certain Rich Man (1901), White traces the impact of the Gilded Age on the citizens of Sycamore Ridge, Kansas, from a frontier village to a twentieth century town. He relies heavily on his childhood in El Dorado and his early adulthood in Emporia, Lawrence, and Kansas City for details. White later would refer to this book as the story of the prodigal son as well as a self portrait. Hinshaw indicates that the villain-hero, John Barclay, appears to be a "conscious replica of the author, as in his delight in music, his trait of drawing thought and creation from it."¹⁰ Because of White's skill as a writer and his "exact knowledge of his material"¹¹, Everett Rich, biographer of White, declares this book an important part of the social history of an era.

White's sixth book, God's Puppets (1916), was his last collection of short stories. All four of the short stories in this collection take place in New Raynham and deal with Gilded Age morality.

⁹Jay E. Jernigan, William Allen White, p. 87.

¹⁰David Hinshaw, A Man from Kansas: the Story of William Allen White, p.156.

¹¹Everett Rich, William Allen White, the Man From Kansas, (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941), p.143.

The Martial Adventures of Henry and Me (1918), White's seventh book, is a novelized travel tale resulting from a six-week American Red Cross tour of the Western European war front that he took with Henry Allen. White intended the book as a period piece and gave his own account of European wartime conditions in 1917, portraying the effects of war on social and moral order in France and England.

White's eighth and final novel, In the Heart of a Fool (1918), is a lengthy account of America's industrial revolution. The story, set in the industrial town of Harvey in Wahoo Valley, located somewhere between Kansas City and Omaha, was made into a movie by the same name in 1920, despite less than favorable reviews. White, however, was disappointed with the movie version.

Of his fifty collected short stories, the first fifteen appeared originally in limited circulation Kansas newspapers. The remaining thirty-five were published in nationally known journals, such as McClure's Magazine, The Saturday Evening Post, Scribner's Magazine and Collier's Weekly.

CHAPTER II

MUSICAL INFLUENCES: VOCAL

Early Experiences

White had an early love for singing and a good sense of pitch. He recalls in his autobiography that often in his pre-school years, knowing that his voice was in tune and on key, he would misbehave and then sing, "I 'anta be a nangel and with the angels stand."¹² He also recalls singing in his father's grocery store such songs as "The Ballad About Barney O'Flynn" and "Oh, Buckle up my Shoe Johnnie." He recalls loving the applause from the customers and turning everything into song; he even made up songs of his own, such as "The Little Bee Song."¹³

His early love for singing was not discouraged in the White home. Hinshaw describes Mary Hatton White's love of good literature and music as her "two passions of the spirit."¹⁴ She would often sing around the house, and to her

¹²White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 29.

¹³Ibid., p.26.

¹⁴Hinshaw, A Man From Kansas: the Story of William Allen White, p.18.

son, songs of her generation such as: "Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still," "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming," "The Long Weary Day," and "Lorena." In A Certain Rich Man, White frequently captures glimpses of his own mother in the mother of his villain-hero. This mother's name is Mary Barclay, and as her son is preparing to leave home for the university, he observes her "bending over her work, humming a low happy-noted song, though the hour was late."¹⁵

His father, Allen White, also sang around the home. In his autobiography, White remembers his father's use of songs in times of stress. He recalls that when his mother was about to cry, she would sit in her rocker and begin to rock:

Pa would stand for a moment, quizzically smiling and looking at Ma as she sat in her rocker, and then would begin humming a little song -- he was a great hummer of little songs under his breath in times of stress and joy...[he would]...sing just low and sweetly enough for her to understand, he would sail out with his cane on his arm and the little dog at his heels, as the tempest rolled higher and higher from the rocking chair,
 "Sister, thou art mild and lovely.
 Gentle as the summer breeze."¹⁶

He creates a very similar scene in the story, "The One Pharisee" in God's Puppets. This too is a stressful situation in which a husband, Caleb Hale, is attempting to calm his wife with the same tune White's father had used:

¹⁵White, William Allen, A Certain Rich Man, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1923), p.56.

¹⁶White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.35.

She [Mrs. Hale] stood glaring at the Colonel a fierce moment, then vanished, and Caleb Hale looked up unruffled and began to hum:

Sister, thou art mild and lovely.
Gentle as the summer breeze.¹⁷

White also recalls enjoying music in school. Gospel hymns were sung each morning and noon in primary school, and, although the words did not mean much, "it was a fine exercise for our lungs."¹⁸ In the upper grades the students were taught to read music and were given secular songs to sing. He recalls these experiences in writing such books as The Court of Boyville. In one incident from this book, one of the young boys, Piggy Pennington, is disturbed to see his friend, Harold Jones, sharing a songbook during opening hours with a girl whom White only names as Piggy's "Heart's Desire." Concluding that she would not have invited Harold to sit and sing with her, Piggy makes a desperate attempt to attract her attention away from Harold:

In his anguish he tried to sing alto, and made a peculiar rasping sound that tore a reproof for him off the teacher's nerves.¹⁹

With such influences in his life, it is not surprising that White began to find in music a natural outlet to express his feelings about life while growing up. When he was about nine years old, Leila Heaton, a childhood "love," died

¹⁷White, William Allen, God's Puppets, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), p.180.

¹⁸White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.38.

¹⁹White, William Allen, The Court of Boyville, (New York: Doubleday and McClure Company, 1899), p.115.

of scarlet fever. He recalls reflecting on her life and death under a tree alone and whispering her name many times, saying it aloud and making up a little song of which he would later write:

Of course they [the words] were silly, but they seemed beautiful. They are gone now. Heaven... may know the tune I used; probably the melange of all the tunes I knew was my song of sorrow, little above a bee's hum -- repeating over and over weird meaningless phrases, lifting my voice sometimes and suddenly muffling it in shame...²⁰

The young boys of White's fiction books also seem to find in music an opportunity to reflect on and express their feelings. Young John Barclay of A Certain Rich Man, is often found playing alone in the woods, making up his own songs:

His [John Barclay] hands were still, and as he ran from tune to tune with improvised interludes, he droned a song of his prowess. Sometimes he sang words and sometimes he sang thoughts. He sank farther...down and looked up into the tree and ceased his song, chirping instead a stuttering falsetto trill, not unlike a cricket's, holding his breath as long as he could to draw it out to its finest strand...²¹

Later in the same book, John is portrayed as a boy with a serious face -- almost hard, with something burning in his eyes that was more than ambition, which, "...lighted his face like a flame, and he was always whistling or

²⁰White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.53.

²¹White, William Allen, A Certain Rich Man, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1923), p.2.

singing."²² In The Court of Boyville, a young boy is found waving his arms in the moonlight, and singing a simple song which he chants "croakingly":

His soul was listening to the faraway music from the breakers of the restless rising sea of ambition, and the rush of life and action that were flooding into the distant rim of his consciousness. The music charmed him.²³

Songs of His Day

Black American Songs

White recalls in his autobiography how he and his friends would sing songs of the day, among which were negro minstrel imitations of the spirituals of the slaves, such as "Golden Slippers," "In the Morning by the Bright Light," and "The Gospel Raft." Real spirituals like "Go Down Moses," "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "Nobody Knows the Trouble I Seen," and "The Old Arks A-Moverin," were also sung. White was probably first introduced to these songs as a boy in El Dorado, Kansas, where he and his friends first saw and heard black railroad laborers working and singing. The boys imitated building railroads and singing these songs in their play. They would also imitate the singing of songs they heard in minstrel shows, including popular negro songs.

The influence of Black American songs can be found in two stories in The Real Issue. In "The King of Boyville,"

²²White, William Allen, A Certain Rich Man, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1923), p.55.

²³White, William Allen, Thy Court of Boyville, p.355.

Young Piggy Pennington is found "howling" out the following doleful ballad:

You ask what makes this darkey wee-eep,
Why he like others am not gay.²⁴

In "The Chief Clerk's Christmas," the janitor and office boy make up a song to the tune of a "darkey break-down" called "Sho 'thun Braid:"

What's Hawkins do-un'?
Sittun at 'is desk.
What's Hawkins do-un'?
Gawd knows best.²⁵

Folk Songs and Popular Ballads

Other songs of the day, as White recalls, were Stephen Foster's folk songs, and dolorous ballads like "Marguerite," and waltz songs such as "Sweet Violets," "Only a Pansy Blossom," and "When the Leaves Begin to Turn."²⁶ Often White portrays characters singing folk songs and popular ballads to more vividly color a cultural picture. In The Real Issue, Colonel Hucks and his wife have just returned home to Kansas, and Colonel Hucks' "...eyes are dimmed with tears,...while he listens to a little cracked voice in the kitchen, half humming and half singing:

Home again, home again,

²⁴White, William Allen, The Real Issue, (New York: Way & Williams, 1896; reprint ed., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), p.71.

²⁵White, The Real Issue, p.124.

²⁶White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.93.

From a foreign shore.²⁷

These songs are also hummed and sung by characters in love. In "The Tremolo Stop" in In Our Town, Mehronay's marital engagement period is depicted by a fellow office worker in the following way:

It became known about the town long before we knew it in the office that if Mehronay kept sober for three years she would have him, and when we finally heard it he was on the last half of the third year and was growing sombre. "In the Cottage by the Sea" was his favourite song and "Put Away Little Playthings" also was much in his throat...²⁸

Another character in love is John Barclay of A Certain Rich Man. After saying goodbye to his date, he begins walking home in a kind of "swoon of joy," and tries to whistle a bar of Schubert's "Serenade."²⁹ This passage reveals that not only were folk songs popular, but also, to a certain extent, classical music. This passage continues:

...he tried whistling the "Miserere," but he pitched it too high and it ran out, so he sang as he turned across the commons toward home..., "How Can I Leave Thee -- How Can I Bear to Part?"³⁰

In "The King of Boyville," in The Real Issue, Piggy is often found singing such ballads as "The Gypsy's Warning," "The Child in the Grave With its Mother," and "She's a

²⁷White, The Real Issue, p.167.

²⁸White, William Allen, In Our Town, (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1906), p.331.

²⁹White, A Certain Rich Man, p.65.

³⁰Ibid.

Daisy, She's a Darling, She's a Dumpling, She's a Lamb," in the hope of conveying to his "heart's desire," some hint of the state of his affections.³¹

Civil War Songs

White relates in his autobiography that he and his friends often sang songs from the Civil War. Such songs are frequently found in his books. One such song is, "The Girl I Left Behind Me," which is whistled by a passing boy "...with all his might but sadly off the key," to the irritation of Miss. Morgan in The Court of Boyville.³² The old Civil War ballad, "John Brown's Body," is sung by Colonel Huck's mother in The Real Issue and brings back memories for Hucks:

[As]...he drove out the front gate he was whistling "John Brown's Body." As he stopped to latch the gate, he could hear a thin, quavering, little voice,...singing with his own, "His soul goes marching on."...Hucks recalled how proudly that little voice had sung that song...way back in the seventies. He remembered how she had taught the children at...Sunday school to sing the song, before they could afford singing books.

His memory was wandering back to the time when little Link had died...and...seemed to hear the children of the neighbors, as they gathered around the little rough coffin singing that song, the only song that every one knew: "But his soul goes marching on."³³

³¹White, The Real Issue, p.63.

³²White, The Court of Boyville, p.79.

³³White, The Real Issue, pp.170-171.

Vocal Ensembles

White's fiction books clearly reflect his knowledge of vocal ensemble literature. For example, in The Heart of a Fool, Margaret Muller is found singing with her friends:

[She]...put some feeling into her singing voice and they struck...a barbershop chord...and held it...And the frosty air rang with their voices, and the rich tremulous voice of the young woman thrilled with passion too deep for words.³⁴

In the final story from The Real Issue, entitled "Nocturne," two older men are portrayed singing "older songs" with younger people:

...the younger man lifted his voice in an old song that had been an outlet for their effervescent spirits in other days. In those days they had roared it out, dwelling on the garish cadences, bearing down on the rude and imperfect sequences of harmony, and welling forth their youthful exuberance in a bubble of song. ...They crooned rather than sang the ballad; there was no spring, no clink of youth to the voices...He who took the tenor part could not reach the high notes, so he sang in unison with the other in places.³⁵

These same two characters comment on the song "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" and the manner in which the young people sing it:

...it was such a lusty song; the notes were so full of animal vigor. The holds in the tune were clutched firmly by the virile tenors and voluptuous contraltos.³⁶

³⁴White, William Allen, In the Heart of a Fool, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1918), p.57.

³⁵White, The Real Issue, pp.208-209.

³⁶Ibid., p.209.

Revivals and Hymns

Some of White's knowledge of vocal ensemble music may be partially credited to his participation in a chorus in El Dorado in 1884 when he was seventeen. In the same year, he was cast as a "gentleman of Japan" in "The Mikado" in a local production under the direction of a music teacher from Wichita.³⁷ Other early influences may be traced to his participation in revivals and singing in church.

Although White was a congregationalist, he participated in many frontier revivals and camp meetings, which were the scene of a very emotionalized religion. In his boyhood and college-age years, White was fascinated by these revivals and meetings. He once said,

[They were]...the survival of the sylvan orgies of the ancients. A camp meeting in those days was an emotional outbreak...I first realized as a boy the fundamental psychological facts of life. That emotions are dangerous, for at the camp meeting of my boyhood there was always a love-making obligation in the brush around the camp meeting...³⁸

Hymns sung during the revivals held a great attraction for White. When he and his friend, Ewing Herbert, were home from college, they pretended to be detached philosophers observing these meetings and were fascinated with the impact of the old hymns. White recalls in his autobiography the hymn "Just as I am:"

³⁷White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.120.

³⁸Johnson, Walter, William Allen White's America, (New York: H. Holt, 1947), p.24.

It is a beautiful song..., packed full of stress and strain, and emotion. In the timber, with the arching trees above, with the flickering torches around, and with the great hulking gospel preacher crying aloud, calling men unto repentance out of sin. We found it easy to open our mouths and let the overcharge of feeling come out in song.... Naturally when the singing began we all...joined in and enjoyed it. Then we slipped back and considered the words.³⁹

White writes of a similar experience in his short book, Boys-Then and Now, of a boy sitting in the back seat of a revival and singing, "...not without joy but usually without much conviction."⁴⁰ Revival hymns are conceived in the minds of White's characters such as Colonel Hucks, in The Real Issue, who is found trudging up the bank from a stream whistling "Oh Lord Remember Me," and, "...trying to reconcile the things he had seen, with those he had expected to find."⁴¹

White refers to one song phrase that would repeat over and over again in a person's mind as a powerful mental suggestion. In reference to the revivals which White and his friend Ewing Herbert attended, he recalls:

...Ewing had a beautiful bass and sang well, and I was not unmindful of my tenor....I remember one song that repeated over and over again the powerful mental suggestion: "I can, I will, I do believe," and then ended after a mounting climax of melody, "I can, I will, I do believe that Jesus

³⁹White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.122.

⁴⁰White, William Allen, Boys-Then and Now, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1926), p.12.

⁴¹White, The Real Issue, pp.156-157.

saves me now!" And our conclusion was, "That certainly gets them!!!"⁴²

The same forceful impact on a person's mind of remembering a favorite hymn is shown in Mary Barclay's instructions in A Certain Rich Man to her son John as she pleads:

Don't you remember the old song I used to sing -- of course you do, child...: "Let Him in, He is your friend, let Him in, He is your friend; He will keep you to the end -- let Him in!" Of course you remember it boy, and you have been fighting Him with all your might for six months now and since Jane went [died], the fight is driving you crazy -- can't you see John?⁴³

Church Singing

White's favorite hymn was an old camp meeting song, of which the chorus is:

I shall arise and go to Jesus,
He will receive me in His arms.
In the arms of my dear Jesus,
Oh, there are ten thousand charms.

He says of this hymn, "...even as a boy emerging from childhood I got the potency of that hymn as a rouser of romance and religion at the same time."⁴⁴ White mixes romance and religion often in A Certain Rich Man. In a duet sung by John Barclay and Jane Mason, church members perceive that the two are falling in love:

...Mrs. Culpepper had heard Jane Mason sing in church with John Barclay and the elder woman had heard in the big contralto voice of the girl some-

⁴²White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.122.

⁴³White, A Certain Rich Man, p. 394.

⁴⁴Johnson, William Allen White's America, p.29.

thing not meant for the preacher. And Mrs. Culpepper heard John answer it.⁴⁵

One of John's friends also recalls the singing romantic communication between John and Jane during church:

...Jane was in town that day -- I remember that, and man -- man -- I heard her voice say things to him in the duet that night that she would have been ashamed to put in words.⁴⁶

Later in life, after John and Jane have been married about thirty years, John himself recalls singing with his wife:

...he remembered well that in the Congregational choir he and Jane sang a duet in an anthem, "He Giveth His Beloved Sleep." And he hummed the old aria, a rather melancholy tune, ...and her voice came back -- a deep sweet contralto that took "G" below middle "C" as clearly as a tenor and in her lower register there was a passion and a fire that did not blaze in the higher notes. For those notes were merely girlish and untrained.⁴⁷

White's knowledge of the singing voice is again reflected in a later description of John Barclay's voice:

...a throaty baritone, with much affection in the middle register, a tendency to flat in the upper register, and thick fuzz below "C"..⁴⁸

⁴⁵White, A Certain Rich Man, p.78.

⁴⁶Ibid., p.83.

⁴⁷White, A Certain Rich Man, p.86.

⁴⁸Ibid., p.189.

CHAPTER III

MUSICAL INFLUENCES: INSTRUMENTAL

The Jew's-Harp and The Mouth Organ

Of the various musical instruments White learned to play, two of the first were the jew's-harp and the mouth organ (harmonica). In his autobiography White recalls:

...through the twanging jew's-harp to the mouth organ was but a step;...before I had the organ I could play the mouth organ, put it in a tumbler for resonance or put it in my hand and make a grand fortissimo, as I played.⁴⁹

These instruments served a comparable purpose in his boyhood to that of singing, in that he used them to play popular songs of the day. Often he would find a quiet isolated spot to emote expressively and reflect on life experiences.

After the experience of Leila Heaton's death, he recalls singing for a while, and then he began playing his jew's-harp, which he kept in his pocket:

...there on my haunches in the spring's sunlight,
[I] thrummed the jew's-harp to some sad old tune,
and so looked forward out of my childhood far

⁴⁹White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.58.

forward into my teens, and thus through sorrow, at the mystery of life.⁵⁰

Many of the young boys in White's books share this reflective fondness for the jew's-harp and mouth organ and highly value the instruments. Young John Barclay of A Certain Rich Man owns a fife, a jew's-harp and a mouth organ. He prefers the jew's-harp to fife and has a more varied repertoire with it. Young Barclay is described as:

...a freckled, barefooted little boy with sun-burned curly hair, in home-made clothes, and with brown bare legs showing through the rips in his trousers

...[sitting] alone in the woods breathing his soul into a mouth-organ, -- a priceless treasure for which he had traded two raccoons, an owl, and a prairie dog. But he mastered the mouth-organ, -- it was called a French harp in those days,..."⁵¹

Barclay actually owns four mouth organs, one each in "A," "D," "E," and "C." This knowledge of mouth organs in different keys may have come in 1890 from an acquaintance with a boy who owned, "...half a dozen mouth organs in various keys that he could play."⁵²

For White, the mouth organ and jew's-harp appear to be instruments of the boyhood of his day. The characters he depicts with these instruments are all young boys living in a place and time similar to that of White's own youth during the 1870s in El Dorado. One such book is The Court of

⁵⁰White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.54.

⁵¹White, A Certain Rich Man. p.8.

⁵²White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.183.

Boyville. In this book he writes of a character named Bud Perkins. Bud is a child of the 1870s who plays both of these instruments. Like White and John Barclay, Bud often finds an isolated area and pours his soul into his playing. The popular songs that boys chose to play, and the manner in which they played them, indicate that these instruments were most often used to express somber or melancholy feelings. This point is reflected in White's description of Bud's manner of playing:

...[His] features [were] drawn into a painful grimace, as his right hand passed to and fro before his mouth, rhythmically twanging the tongue of the jew's-harp.⁵³

The songs that Bud plays reflect his somber mood brought about by the death of his father:

He played "Dixie," partly because it was his dead father's favourite tune, and partly because, being sprightly, it kept down his melancholy. Later he took out a new mouth-organ, which his foster mother had given to him, and to satisfy his boyish idea of justice played "We Shall Meet, But we Shall Miss Him..."⁵⁴

The repertoire of the jew's-harp and mouth organ is usually melancholy. This is reflected in the manner of playing as well as the selected songs that Bud plays for his friends, such as "Ol Shadey" and "Dey Stole My Child Away:"

...Bud began to waver his hand for a tremolo upon the mouth-organ as he played "Massa's in de Col',

⁵³White, The Court of Boyville, p.260.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp.265-266.

Col' Groun," a peace fell upon the company and they sat quietly and heard his repertoire.⁵⁵

Bud is described as:

...a southern boy -- a bird of passage caught in the North -- and his music had that sweet, soothing note that cheered the men who fought under the stars and bars.⁵⁶

Bud had both a rowdy and a gentle side. Bud's foster mother "...did not know that Bud, ...whose music on the mouth-organ seemed to come from a shy and gentle soul, was the Terror of the South End."⁵⁷

White associated the jew's-harp and the mouth organ primarily with his boyhood. These instruments and the songs of the day appear to have played a major role in the lives of young boys of the 1870s in frontier villages.

The Accordion

When White was about fourteen years of age, he played the accordion and sang in a male quartet called the "Screech Owls." Although he only gives brief mention of his own use of the instrument in his autobiography, his use of it in A Certain Rich Man, indicates that he was quite familiar with the instrument. The references to the accordion continue to portray the concept of an instrument being used to express feelings privately. The accordion also seems to reach and

⁵⁵White, The Court of Boyville, p.266.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., p.277.

touch other people, as well as encompass a broader range of emotions. This instrumental role is reflected in the character of Watts McHurdie, a friend of the villain-hero John Barclay.

During the Civil War, Barclay, Watts McHurdie, and some other friends steal away as stowaways with the troops to war. The night before they disappear, they serenade their girls with a guitar and an accordion. The soldiers that night seem merry with song, but the boys notice the next morning that they sit in silence. "The song was all out of them; the spring of youth was crushed by great events."⁵⁸ On the third day of the journey, they ride with the troops through the streets of Leavenworth to the Fort:

Watts McHurdie was playing his accordion and the people turned to look at the uncouth crowd in civilians clothes that went bellowing "Oh My Darling Nellie Gray," across the town and out to the Fort.⁵⁹

After the first battle scene, the two boys find themselves wounded in a hospital and waiting to go home. The reality of war has affected them and Watts expresses this by writing a song and singing it to the accompaniment of his accordion:

With his soul stirred by the events around him,
Watts...wrote the song that made him famous...
Once his heart took fire and burned for a day

⁵⁸White, A Certain Rich Man, p.28.

⁵⁹Ibid., p.34.

sheer white, and in that day he wrote words that a nation sang, and now all the world is singing.⁶⁰

Life experiences, such as war, were often inspiration for White's time. The experience of falling in love was also expressed musically by White. Years after Watts plays his accordion in the hospital, he proposes to his girlfriend Nellie. After she says "yes," Watts happily returns home playing, "Silver Threads Among the Gold." As he beats time with his left foot and closes his eyes, he sees visions, "...that by all rights of this game of life should only come to youth."⁶¹ The accordion serves as an outlet for Watt's feelings of "triumph," even though this particular instrument is not often associated with romance:

And thus the town heard Watts McHurdie's song of triumph -- the chortle that every male creature of the human kind instinctively lets out when he has found favor in some woman's eyes, that men have let out since Lemech sang of victory over the young man to Adah and Zillah! And in all the town no one knew what it meant. For the accordion is not essentially an instrument of passion.⁶²

While Watts' playing is a response to love, for some town members it causes different responses. Both Molly Culpepper and John Barclay write letters to their friend, Bob Hendricks, at the same time that Watts is performing. As Watts had provided music in the minds of soldiers, he now provides it for others in love. Molly Culpepper and Bob

⁶⁰White, A Certain Rich Man, p.43.

⁶¹Ibid., p.153.

⁶²Ibid., p.155.

Hendricks are deeply in love, but John Barclay has separated them and manipulated Molly into being convinced that she must marry another man whom she does not love. After she has written to Bob that no matter what happens, "...through all time and eternity the innermost part of my heart will always be yours," she closes her painful letter:

I have just been standing at my bedroom window.... It is quiet.... And I cannot tell whether it is real, but now and then there comes to me a faint hint of music, -- it sounds almost like Watts' accordion, but of course it cannot be at this unholy hour, and the tune it makes me think of some way is "Silver Threads Among the Gold." Isn't it odd that I should hear that song, and yet not hear it, and have it running through my mind?⁶³

Watts' song of triumph becomes Molly's song of sadness. But for John Barclay, the music from Watts' accordion represents a poor old friend who could have been in a better financial situation. John writes to Bob:

Well, Bob, as I sit here with fifty letters written this evening and ready to mail, and the blessed knowledge that we have 18,000 acres of winter wheat all planted, if not paid for, I can hear old Watts wheezing away on his accordion in his shop down street. Poor old Watts, it's a pity that man hasn't the acquisitive faculty -- he could turn that talent into enough to keep him all his days. Poor old Watts!⁶⁴

Although John Barclay is a greedy man, he is deeply moved after reading a poem written by Watts. Watts' poem motivates Barclay to pick up an accordion and play. The

⁶³White, A Certain Rich Man, pp.154-155.

⁶⁴Ibid., p.153.

playing inspires a speech Barclay is writing for a bond preparation:

It had been a dozen years since he had played an accordion, and the tunes that came into his fingers were old tunes in vogue before the war, and he thought of himself as an old man, though he was not yet twenty-five. But the old tunes brought back his boyhood from days so remote that they seemed a long time past. And that night when he addressed the people..., he was half an hour getting on to the subject of the bonds; he dwelt on the old days....Pleasant township endorsed Barclay's plan overwhelmingly....His evident sincerity made up for what he lacked in oratorical charm, and he left an impression on those about him.⁶⁵

The Guitar and Mandolin

In addition to the jew's-harp, mouth organ, and the accordion, White also played the guitar and the mandolin. In both his autobiography and his books, these instruments are used by young men and boys in small ensembles to serenade young women.

While White was home for the summer from the University of Kansas, he organized his friends into an ensemble. He played the guitar, and the ensemble would play for dances and serenade for money. At the University of Kansas in the fall of 1888, White acquired a mandolin, upon which he became fairly proficient. At this time he belonged to a fraternity, from which he assembled a guitar, banjo, and mandolin ensemble of six to eight players. This ensemble sang on the steps of the fraternity boarding house and

⁶⁵White, A Certain Rich Man, pp.155-156.

serenaded young women. While working as a full-time reporter in El Dorado, White would assemble with a local fiddler, a boy who owned and could play about six mouth-organs in various keys, and a banjoist or guitar player for evening serenading. In his books White often associates guitars and mandolins with courting and love. In In the Heart of a Fool Laura Nesbit is courted by both Thomas Van Dorn and Grant Adams. One Sunday afternoon Grant gives Laura a great bouquet of woods flowers. That night as Laura is looking at the stars and smelling her flowers, the evening is enhanced by Morty Sands' mandolin playing:

As her day dreams merged into vague pictures flitting through her drowsy brain, she heard the plaintive, trembling voice of Morty Sands's mandolin, coming near and nearer, and his lower whistle taking the tune while the E string crooned an obbligato; he passed the house, went down the street to the Morton's and came back and went home again, still trilling his heart out like a bird. As the chirping faded into the night sounds, the girl smiled compassionately and slept.⁶⁶

Another example of guitars and mandolins being associated with youth and love is found in the final story of The Real Issue, entitled "A Nocturne." Two elderly friends are sitting side by side: "The old days to these two meant the dear days -- the very young days of guitar strings, and love songs, and oar-locks."⁶⁷ This linking of guitars and mandolins with youth and love is also found in A Certain Rich Man

⁶⁶White, In the Heart of a Fool, p.72.

⁶⁷White, The Real Issue, p.207.

when John Barclay and his wife Jane, in their old age, listen to young people serenading each other with guitars and mandolins on mill-pond:

Suddenly they realize that there is youth in the world -- yet there has been singing on the mill-pond ever since it was built. It has been the habitat of lovers for a quarter of a century, this mill-pond, yet Jane and John Barclay have not known it, and not until their own child's voice came up to them, singing "Juanita," did they realize that the song had not begun anew after its twenty years' silence in their own hearts, but always had been on the summer breeze.⁶⁸

Other Ensemble Experiences

The first band that White heard as a child was the El Dorado Silver Cornet Band. White had a toy brass trumpet with four notes. He would make other trumpets of green pumpkin stems which he and a friend would "play" upon. David Hinshaw indicates that although White and his friends were considerably rowdy, his main interest was "playing band" with any instrument at hand. Such instruments included the jew's-harp, a tin whistle and a battered brass trumpet. White and most of his friends graduated from these little concerts into the town band.⁶⁹

Like White himself, John Barclay of A Certain Rich Man achieves skill on several instruments as a child and organizes his friends into an ensemble. He learns to play the

⁶⁸White, A Certain Rich Man, pp.306-307.

⁶⁹Hinshaw, A Man From Kansas: The Story of William Allen White, pp.31-32.

accordion from his friend Watts McHurdie and the guitar from his mother Mary. She uses a yellow covered book called Winner's Instructor on the Guitar and teaches John what she can about reading notes. With his musical knowledge John organizes a neighborhood band:

For a consideration in marbles he taught Buck Culpepper the chords in "G" on the guitar and for further consideration taught him the chords in "D" and "C," and with the aid of Jimmy Fernald, aged nine, Molly Culpepper, aged eleven, one with a triangle and the other with a pumpkin reed pipe, John organized his band, which he led with his mouth-organ, and exhibited in Culpepper's barn, appropriating to himself as the director the pins charged at the door.⁷⁰

White and his boyhood friends were always fascinated by music. When White was about twelve years old (around 1880), the ultimate in social distinction was to hire "The Italians" for parties as dance-makers. "The Italians" consisted of one or two violinists, a flutist, and a harp player. They came from Wichita or Kansas City and played throughout country towns. They played in the streets for dimes and nickels, and White and his friends would follow along to hear the music. White recalls:

Hearing "The Italians" was a step up in my musical education...I had never before heard such music and my ears drank it in greedily.⁷¹

John Barclay, of A Certain Rich Man, also drinks in musical experiences greedily. He recalls a childhood memory from

⁷⁰White, A Certain Rich Man, p.47.

⁷¹White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.74.

the army camp at Springfield, Missouri, before the battle that day: "And a band came roaring by -- with its crashing brass and rumbling drums..."⁷²

This fascination with bands probably began with the El Dorado Silver Cornet Band, but it was further cultivated when White heard Pat Gilmore's band in 1891 at the Warder Grand Theater in Kansas City. At that time White was twenty-three years old and a reporter for the Kansas City Journal. His best friend, Dean, worked in the Journal office as a dramatic critic, and both young men went to Gilmore's concert together. This was the first professional band "of any competence" that White had heard, and he said of the experience:

The music overwhelmed me. I had not realized before what man could do with instrumental music; and a sixty-piece band was like something from another world, created by other creatures than the human beings I had known. I reveled in its memory for days. The clarion notes entwined in the harmonies from the various instruments kept calling in my heart -- for the first time -- tunes that I could not whistle, airs that I could not even hum. After that, while I worked on the Journal, I heard good music wherever I could, and Dean, who covered the theaters as well as the concerts, was forever taking me with him to see good plays and hear good music.⁷³

White found band music thrilling and enjoyable. The evidence of this can be found in White's descriptions of his

⁷²White, A Certain Rich Man, p.38.

⁷³White, The Autobiography of William Allen White. p.211.

characters. For example, in "A Most Lamentable Comedy" from Stratagems and Spoils, he describes Dan Gregg:

Imagine a sombre, gloomy face, illumined by a lime-light smile and vocalized by a voice that has the range and power of a slide trombone, and you have Dan Gregg of Hancock County, who might be called "First Conspirator" in the movement.⁷⁴

Further influence is shown later in this same story when an alliance procession is described:

For an hour and a half it [the procession] had been filing past them; bands playing, pyramids of children on hayracks singing;...fife and drums thrilling and throbbing, and all inspired by the blind frenzy that moves mountains.⁷⁵

⁷⁴White, William Allen, Stratagems and Spoils, (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1901), p.210.

⁷⁵Ibid., p.225.

CHAPTER IV

MUSICAL INFLUENCES: KEYBOARD MUSIC

As a child, White learned to play both the piano and the cabinet organ. Throughout the remainder of his life, the keyboards of the organ or the piano were never far from him.

Organ

On White's tenth birthday, he was given a Mason and Hamlin cabinet organ. The organ came from Chicago and cost \$240.00. It became the town pride of El Dorado where there were not more than three or four pianos. He had learned to pick out tunes by ear on the school organ earlier and could fake a little bass for the tunes. He picked out tunes that his mother sang. Some of these came from her exposure to grand opera. He learned to play airs from "Il Trovatore" by note, and songs from "Fra Diavolo" by ear. She was attentive and encouraging in his organ playing. His father did not praise his playing as openly as did his mother, but would whistle the tunes he played. Years later he discovered that his father had once owned and loved to play the

flute, but after losing his trigger finger in an accident took up whistling instead.

White first took music lessons from Mrs. Charley Hobson and then from Mrs. Fannie DeGrasse Black. Mrs. Black tried in vain to keep him to his exercises but he could learn as well and more rapidly by ear rather than by note. He never had to be forced to practice, he recalls in his autobiography:

Always I had my lesson, for I loved to play the pieces I heard on the street or at school or at the minstrel show or at the circus. The atmosphere of my life seemed to be charged with song and dance. Even though I had to fight my way across town when I went to my music teacher, carrying my music roll, still I did not weary of my delight. I was willing to meet the jeers and rebuffs and the hootings of the boys. Fighting was not the chore it seemed to be.⁷⁶

White recalls that music had threatened to envelop his life and his father noticed this. When his father became aware of White's obsession with music, he put an end to the lessons. One day White's father pointed out the town drunkard, Professor Mecham, and said to his son:

Music! Just too damned much music. He wasn't such a bad feller when he was young. I knew him back in Leavenworth, kinda dressed to kill and very sporty. But he just let himself go on music. And he's a dead beat and a whiskey sot and everything that's mean, and it's music. And now Willie, what do you say that we stop music lessons? I don't want you to grow up like that.⁷⁷

⁷⁶White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.59.

⁷⁷Ibid., p.59.

So the lessons stopped, much to his mother's dismay, but the playing continued.

When he was about fourteen he began earning his first real money playing for country dances with a blind fiddler (Dol Cowley) and a cornetist (George Yonkman). White played the cabinet organ and often called off square dances. He often faked the accompaniment for Cowley's tunes. This ensemble also played polkas, schottisches and, on occasions, a waltz.

White frequently played the organ in high school and could successfully fake most any hymn he knew. In 1884 at age seventeen, he confidently volunteered to play for opening day at the College of Emporia. He earned the reputation of a being a "smart aleck" when he did not know and so could not fake "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." During college his appreciation for classical music was cultivated. He took his girlfriend Helen to all the concerts of the university course and began to enjoy classical piano music. He recalls in his autobiography:

When I went home from a concert in a cloud of exaltation that was partly music and partly Helen, I tried to reproduce on the cabinet organ the great melodies and the amazing harmonies that had stirred me so deeply.⁷⁸

⁷⁸White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.154.

Use of the Organ in Fictional Works

The new cabinet organ in the White home became the town pride of El Dorado. In his fiction books, acquiring an organ of any kind is a significant event for a community. In "The Passing of Priscilla Winthrop," from In Our Town, Mrs. Worthington gives a reception for political delegates in her home. One of the highlights of this reception is a concert by a Kansas City organist on the new pipe organ which she has had erected in the music room of her house. In "A Babbled of Green Fields," also from In Our Town, the delirious Joe Nevison is nobly remembered by the narrator for giving the school a cabinet organ with "...more stops than most of the children could count."⁷⁹

In A Certain Rich Man, the greedy John Barclay has the privilege of picking out an organ for the Congregational Church. The organ costs a total of \$4.000. Barclay, like White, enjoys hearing as well as playing the organ and is readily inspired by it. After an organ recital at the church, featuring works of Wagner, John begins to generate ideas for his business ventures. As he and his wife Jane sit on a terrace in front of their house, John says:

I'm getting to like music with a go to it -- with bang and brass. Wagner does it;... when I hear his trombones coming into a theme, I get ideas enough to give the whole force in the office nervous prostration for a month.⁸⁰

⁷⁹White, In Our Town, p.186.

⁸⁰White, A Certain Rich Man, p.281.

As Barclay continues to reflect on the organist's rendition of Wagner, his thoughts become more clearly defined:

"He played the Largo well -- didn't he? That was made for the organ. But some way I like the big things. The Largo is like running a little twenty-horse-power steam mill, and selling to the home grocers. But 'The Ride of the Valkyries,' with those magnificent crashes of harmony -- ... I've got an idea -- Wagner's work is the National Provisions Company set to music, and I'm the first trombone." He laughed and stood before her [Jane], admiring her in the starlight, as he exclaimed: "And you are those clarinets, sweet and clear and delicious, that make a man want to cry for sheer joy."⁸¹

Listening to organ music helps Barclay define his ideas, and often playing the organ helps him express his emotions. This emotion of rage is expressed after John has an angry encounter with the father of his daughter's boyfriend Neal. Neal's father tells Barclay not to callous his son's soul as Barclay's own. Barclay goes home, where he sits at his organ and makes it "...scream and howl and bellow with rage for two hours."⁸² Emotions of a different nature are expressed later in Barclay's life. Following a deserved indictment and the death of his wife Jane, Barclay finds himself feeling unable to play the organ or mourn his wife's death. Finally he brings himself to approach the organ, turn on the motor and put his hands on the keys:

As he played the hymn to the "Evening Star," John Barclay looked up and saw his mother standing upon the stair with her fine old face bathed in tears.

⁸¹White, A Certain Rich Man, p.281.

⁸²Ibid., p.322.

And then at last -- ...soul-healing tears -- tears of repentance...

And as John Barclay let his soul rise with the swelling music, he felt the solace of a great peace in his heart....⁸³

White also uses the organ as a descriptive device for characters. For example, in In the Heart of a Fool, one of the characters is described as having a "...deep, mellow pipe-organ of a voice."⁸⁴ In The Court of Boyville, Jimmy's father is described as a pump organ:

...in a frenzy wherein anger furnished only a sub-conscience motor, and joy pumped wildly at the expanding values of his blissful heart, Henry Sears threw his thirteen-year-old son [Jimmy] across his knee and spanked him...⁸⁵

Piano

Everett Rich suggests that while White was in college, he really preferred to be involved with the music curriculum above other courses of study:

Had White been honest with himself and taken the course which he really preferred, he would have become a music teacher. But music "was sissy," and he, therefore, avoided the music school.⁸⁶

Although he avoided the music school, he did volunteer to play the piano for the university orchestra at Lawrence, Kansas. He played mostly by ear, faking accompaniment with a very slight knowledge of reading music. He continued

⁸³White, A Certain Rich Man, p.403.

⁸⁴White, In the Heart of a Fool, p.70.

⁸⁵White, The Court of Boyville, p.236.

⁸⁶Rich, William Allen White, the Man From Kansas, p.37.

undetected until the afternoon of an evening performance when the student conductor discovered his faked harmonies and dismissed him. However his playing was welcomed by his fraternity brothers. He enjoyed playing the piano at many fraternity dances and preferred it to dancing himself.

In a comparison of William Allen White with Theodore Roosevelt, David Hinshaw comments that: "Playing the piano was his [White's] only diversion except intelligent conversation."⁸⁷ This comment is certainly true of many of White's fictional characters.

Use of the Piano in Fictional Works

Before White's father put a stop to his music lessons, White recalls that music had threatened to envelop his life. In A Certain Rich Man, twelve year old John Barclay's musical interest in the melodian threatens to envelop his life also:

His [Barclay's] weakness was music. He kept two cows in his herd in the summer time in return for the use of the melodian at the Thayer house, and moved it to his own home and put it in the crowded little room, and practiced on it at night when the other boys were loafing at the town pump.⁸⁸

John Barclay's fascination for the melodian was further enhanced by his discovery of the piano. His interest in playing the piano would draw him to the home of one friend

⁸⁷Hinshaw, A Man From Kansas: the Story of William Allen White, p.109.

⁸⁸White, A Certain Rich Man, p. 47.

instead of another. Barclay spent a great deal of time at the Culpepper's house because it reminded him of his uncle's home, and he felt more at ease there. But then the Hendricks acquired a piano, and White writes:

...the boy's heart was opened afresh; and he spent hours with Bob Hendricks at the piano, when he knew he would be welcomed at the Culpeppers.⁸⁹

Playing the piano and intelligent conversation were often elements in White's relationships. Keyboard music played an integral part in White's moments of solitude as well as in his relationships with others. After his uncle Murdock's death, he visited his aunt in El Dorado. While waiting for her in her home, he began playing old familiar songs at the piano. When she descended the stairs she asked him to continue playing and sat down to listen. White recalls:

Her lips moved as she whispered in her heart the old words of the old times she dared not try to sing, fearing she would croak. When I got up she went to the piano..., and sat down to play with a curious rolling style that I had often heard her use when she rendered a flashy polonaise or mazurka. She did not play one of those now, but one of Chopin's poignant nocturnes, as I remember it; a heartrending thing, in her flourishing style, but pathetic. She got up after her performance, smiled depreciatingly, and sat down; and we talked of the old days....⁹⁰

This incident may have possibly served as source material for an incident in "A Bundle of Myrrh" from In Our Town. In

⁸⁹White, A Certain Rich Man, p.54.

⁹⁰White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.433.

this story a young woman, Miss Larrabee, finds Aunt Martha playing the piano after Jimmy Purdy's death. The character of Aunt Martha is similar to Mrs. Murdock in her piano playing style:

It was a bright October morning as she [Miss Larrabee] went up the walk to the old brick house, and she heard someone playing on the piano, rolling the chords after the grandiose manner of pianists 50 years ago. A voice seemed to be singing an old ballad.⁹¹

John Barclay uses the melodian in A Certain Rich Man, as a way of privately emoting about and reflecting on a date with Ellen Culpepper, from which he has just returned:

He [Barclay] stood at the window a moment, and then turned to his melodian. His hands fell on the major chord of "G," and without knowing what he was playing he began "Largo." He played his soul into his music, and looking up, whispered the name "Ellen" rapturously over and over, and then as the music mounted to its climax the whole world's mystery and his personal thought of the meaning of life revelled through his brain, and he played on, not stopping at the close but wandering into he knew not what mazes of harmony.⁹²

As the young boys in White's fiction books find an emotional outlet in the jew's-harp and mouth organ, young men and adults seem to find this same outlet in keyboard instruments.

White reveals the role of music in his life and in the lives of his characters as a vehicle for outwardly expressing mental reflections, but he also shows the role that

⁹¹White, In Our Town, p.133.

⁹²White, A Certain Rich Man, pp. 65-66.

music can play as mental preparation for various activities. As Barclay used the accordion to prepare himself mentally to write a speech, he uses the piano to prepare himself to write to Ellen. After he leaves home to attend college, he corresponds with Ellen by letter. While preparing to write to her, he goes downstairs in the house in which he lives and plays the piano. When he ascends the stairs ready to write, he is, "...as one in a dream, with the mists of music in his eyes."⁹³

White often portrays piano music as a calming agent which promotes memory of and reflection on life experiences. This effect is seen often in A Certain Rich Man. While John Barclay is playing the piano at the Hendrick's house, White writes:

...he played the piano for an hour in the fire-light, and dreamed old dreams. And his hands fell into the chords of a song that he sang as a boy, and Molly came from the fire and stood beside him while they hummed the words....⁹⁴

John's mother realizes the capability of music to promote memory and reflection. She often asks her son John to play specific pieces for this purpose:

His mother sighed and said: "John, play some of the old pieces -- the quieter ones; play "The Long Weary Day" and some of the old songs. Have you forgotten the "Bohemian Girl" and those Schubert

⁹³White, A Certain Rich Man, p.70.

⁹⁴Ibid., p.126.

songs?" His fingers felt their way back to his boyhood.⁹⁵

Piano playing is also portrayed by White in his fictional works as a means to promote social interaction between men and women. For example, in A Certain Rich Man, Neal Dow Ward comes to call on John's daughter Jeanette. The couple begins to talk about popular songs as they proceed to the piano in the Barclay home:

...the moonlight fell across the piano, and upon her face as she sang the little Irish folk song, all in minors, with her high, trembling, half-formed notes in the upper register, and...she flushed and looked up abashed and had to be teased to go on,...And Neal thought that she was beautiful.... And...to hide her confusion when her heart knew what he thought, she put one foot on the loud pedal of the piano and began singing "Oh Margery, O Margery," and he sang with her and...they thrilled...as their voices blended in the rollicking song....⁹⁶

White loved to play keyboard instruments, especially the piano. In an article which appeared in The Etude, he commented on the great delight he took in playing from memory scores of old tunes he knew. While voicing his sincere appreciation of listening to symphonic works, he adds:

...but one gets something from actually playing that never comes from merely hearing music.⁹⁷

⁹⁵White, A Certain Rich Man, p.282.

⁹⁶Ibid., p.302.

⁹⁷White, William Allen, "What Music has Done for Me," The Etude, December 1938, p.780.

One of his favorite pieces to play was Wagner's "Oh Thou Sublime Sweet Evening Star." Wagner's "Evening Star" is also a favorite of John Barclay's in A Certain Rich Man. This piece is referred to repeatedly throughout the story. White realized that playing this piece and other favorites was extremely gratifying:

[These pieces]...leave a complete definite musical picture in my mind, just like the face of a friend; and I like to play them over and over again, just as I enjoy seeing my old friends repeatedly.⁹⁸

In summary, keyboard music becomes an integral part of the lives and relationships of White's fictional characters. They turn to keyboard instruments in times of quiet reflection, joy, sorrow, anger, and love. They enjoy using keyboard music as a means to initiate social interaction as well as a vehicle for emoting their feelings privately.

⁹⁸White, A Certain Rich Man, p.126.

CHAPTER V

MUSICAL INFLUENCES: SYMPHONIC AND OPERATIC
MUSIC

William Allen White's interest in music matured as he matured. Many of his early encounters with opera were introduced through popular tunes of the day. He recalls in his autobiography that as a child he learned to play all the old tunes his mother could sing and that somewhere she had been exposed to grand opera. Based on what his mother could sing, he could play tunes from "Il Trovatore" and "Fra Diavolo." Later in life, at age seventeen, he was cast as a "gentleman of Japan" in a local El Dorado production of "The Mikado" in 1884. As a college student, he heard a string quartet from Boston play and was drawn to the music department to learn more about music. In his biography of White, Rich recalls:

One night when he heard a string quartet from Boston play the chamber music of the masters, the door was "opened into a new life." After that experience he "used to cut classes in study hours" to sneak into the assembly room in Fraser Hall to listen to members of the music faculty lecture on music.⁹⁹

⁹⁹Rich, William Allen White, the Man From Kansas, p.38.

In 1888, White was a university student at Lawrence, Kansas. He and his close friend, Vernon Kellogg, worked for the Lawrence Journal and could occasionally, "...wangle a complimentary ticket to the opera house," where they heard Emma Abbott sing "Faust."¹⁰⁰ In his autobiography White recalls that in addition to his regular school work and studies, he was by choice involved in his own curriculum:

I was also bootlegging music. I used to cut classes to go the fourth floor of the main building of the university to listen to lectures on musical theory, on harmony, and on musical history.¹⁰¹

After a summer vacation in Colorado, White returned to the university at Lawrence in the fall of 1889. He tried to hold his job as a reporter for the Journal and do his class work; however, the attempt was unsuccessful. He recalls that, "Some way I had ceased to be a student and had become a reporter."¹⁰² In December, Mr. Murdock of the El Dorado Republican offered him \$18.00 a week to take over the paper while Murdock would be away for some time. White accepted this offer and returned to El Dorado. During his time in El Dorado, he assembled a small group of musicians -- a fiddler, guitarist, banjo player, and himself on the mandolin. In 1891 he accepted an offer from the Kansas City Star to write editorials for \$25.00 a week. White refers to this

¹⁰⁰White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.154.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p.154.

¹⁰²Ibid., p.176.

period between El Dorado and Kansas City as being closely related to the theme from Flotow's "Martha," a piece his small ensemble played:

Some way the whole season of my farewell seems to be threaded on a new tune we had learned -- the theme from Flotow's ancient opera, "Martha." And when I think of the hiatus between El Dorado and the world, even now I begin to whistle that old tune. I must have emotionalized my farewell in that melody.¹⁰³

By 1892 White was managing editor of the Kansas City Star and was courting his future wife, Sallie Lindsey. White recalls hearing their first symphony orchestra together:

Together we heard our first symphony orchestra, conducted by Walter Damrosch. It was to both of us a momentous experience. It was far above Pat Gilmore's band, which had set my spirit aquiver, as Pat Gilmore's band was above the Eldorado [sic] silver cornet band. That night with Damrosch, I heard for the first time Wagner with a full-throated orchestra. And Sallie and I nearly squeezed our hands off with delight as we listened.¹⁰⁴

In 1896, at the age of twenty-eight, White had the opportunity to cover the national republican convention in St. Louis as a reporter for the Kansas City World. By this time he was the owner and editor of the Emporia Gazette, and was married to Sallie Lindsey. In his autobiography he recalls seeing "The Bohemian Girl" in an outdoor beer garden in St. Louis:

¹⁰³White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 200.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p.234.

Though I knew all the tunes taken from that old opera, it gave me an added thrill to hear them in their proper setting.¹⁰⁵

Much later in life, shortly after the Armistice in 1918, John S. Phillips, editor of the Red Cross Magazine, commissioned White to go to Europe and write articles about the European postwar demobilization. The night before setting sail for Europe, White and his son Bill saw "Boris Godunov" in New York. At this time White was fifty years old and deeply moved by this opera:

The night we passed through New York before sailing, Bill and I heard Chaliapin in "Boris Godunov" at the Metropolitan Opera House. That fact of itself is set down here only to indicate how much music meant to me in that day and time. Chaliapin was Chaliapin to me, just another man singer. But the orchestra and the choral pieces, in short the harmony and swing and cadence of it, all without the words, which I did not understand, and the plot which I never could make much of, thrilled me deeply. I had heard opera at the Metropolitan before; but it had been comparatively trivial -- "Aida" and maybe "Il Trovatore" or "Faust -- and the light music of those operas did not attract my attention as much as the spectacle of the people in the boxes and the pit. As for the music, I had no great sense of emotional upset as the tunes went through my head like strands of pulling taffy. But "Boris Godunov" did something, left a deep impression.¹⁰⁶

In short, William Allen White was fascinated by good music. As a child he made up songs or tried to reproduce melodies and harmonies he heard. Throughout his life he eagerly sought out and absorbed good music. David Hinshaw

¹⁰⁵White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.274.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p.547.

conveys his impressions of attending an opera or symphony with White:

Going to the opera or a symphony concert with him was an experience. That was an occasion when he didn't care for good conversation, no matter how wise or witty. It was like a boy's going fishing with his father; you were not supposed to say a word for fear of driving the fish away. A single word seemed to bring his spirit back to earth from a distant sphere in which harmony opened great visions of beauty that kindled his mind with noble inspirations and ideas, put him into closer communion with our unfathomable mysterious, awesome universe.¹⁰⁷

Use of Symphonic and Operatic
Music in Fictional Works

With a few exceptions, symphonic and operatic music are used figuratively or to emotionalize a particular thought or vision in White's fictional works. One exception is found in "The Tremolo Stop" from In Our Town, in which an orchestra's musical selections are described:

After "Turkey in the Straw," the orchestra struck up something quick and devilish, which Charley Hedrick, who played the snare drum at Gettysburg, and is therefore entitled to speak on musical subjects, says was "The Irish Washerwoman." After this appropriate overture the curtain rose and the real show began.¹⁰⁸

Another exception is in The Martial Adventures of Henry and Me. This is a novelized travel tale that resulted from a six-week American Red Cross tour of western Europe in 1917.

¹⁰⁷Hinshaw, A Man From Kansas: the Story of William Allen White, p.86.

¹⁰⁸White, In Our Town, p.302.

White relies heavily upon symphonic and operatic music to describe wartime conditions in France and England:

Bands and orchestras play in the theatres, but the music lacks fire. It is beautiful music, carefully done, artistically executed, but the orchestras are made up for the most part of men past the military age. We heard "La Tosca" one afternoon and the orchestra sat twenty men with grey hair and the tenor was fat! As the season grew old, we heard "Louise," "Carmen," "Aphrodite," "Butterfly" (in London), and "Aida" (in Milan), and always the musical accompaniment to the social vagaries of these ladies who are no better than they should be, was music from old heads and old hearts. The "other lips and other hearts whose tales of love" should have been told ardently through fiddle and clarinet are toying with the great harp of a thousand strings that plays the dance of death. That is the music the young men are playing in Europe today. But in Paris, the music that should be made from the soul of youth, crying into reeds and strings and brass is an echo, an echo altogether lovely but passionless!¹⁰⁹

In A Certain Rich Man appear many figurative and metaphoric references to music. In the story, John Barclay waits one evening in his office for a client to come, and White sets the scene as follows:

The yellow lights in the street below were reflected on the mists outside his window, and the dripping eaves and cornices above him and about him seemed to mark the time of some eery music too fine for his senses, and the footfalls in the street below, hurrying footfalls of people shivering through the mists, seemed to be the drum beats of the weird symphony that he could not hear.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹White, William Allen, The Martial Adventures of Henry and Me, (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1918), p.645.

¹¹⁰White, A Certain Rich Man, p.165.

When Barclay's client, Adrian Brownwall, arrives, Brownwall's greeting is described as a, "...rather gorgeous cadenza."¹¹¹ When Brownwall leaves, his departure is described as a, "...flourishing crescendo finale."¹¹²

Another example of this figurative use of music is found in a description of a grand New Year's Eve party given by the Barclays at the turn of the century. The Barclays have invited a number of older people in for dinner who are now making their way into the ballroom:

Then they filed into the ballroom with its fair fresh faces, its shrill treble note of merriment, -- these old men and women, gray and faded, looking back on the old century while the others looked into the new one.¹¹³

In the same book, John Barclay drives his daughter, Jeanette, and her lover, Neal, apart. After Barclay has had a change of heart, he attempts to reunite them by talking with Neal:

...Neal, I can't propose to you -- but that's about what I've got you out here to-night for.... All we need now is a chorus in fluffy skirts and an orchestra with me coming down in front singing, "Will you be my son-in-law?" for it to be a real comic opera.¹¹⁴

White also uses music to show a character emotionalizing a thought or a vision. As White had emotionalized his

¹¹¹White, A Certain Rich Man, p.165.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 167.

¹¹³Ibid., p.315.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p.424.

farewell to El Dorado in the theme from Flotow's "Martha," John Barclay uses Wagner's "Evening Star" to help him concentrate on his visions and plans for power:

After Hendricks left the office..., Barclay sat whistling the air of the song of the "Evening Star," looking blankly at a picture of Wagner hanging beside a picture of Jay Gould. The tune seemed to restore his soul. When he had been whistling softly for five minutes or so, the idea flashed across his mind that flour was one thing used in America more than any other food product and that if a man had his money invested in the manufacture and sale of flour, he would have an investment that would weather any panic. The idea overcame him, and he shut his eyes and his ears and gripped his chair and whistled and saw visions.¹¹⁵

While Barclay is deep in thought, his good friend Molly Culpepper interrupts him to plead for financial help but he refuses to help her and is eager to continue his vision:

She...gazed at him piteously....But his eyes did not move [from the picture of Gould]....The vision was flaming in his brain, and with his lips parted, he whistled "The Evening Star" to conjure it back and keep it with him.¹¹⁶

When Molly finally leaves, Barclay continues with his "dream of power":

The girl [Molly] looked at the hard-faced youth a moment in silence, and turned without a word and left the room. Barclay floated away on his "Evening Star" and spun out his dream as a spider spins his web, and when Hendricks came into the office for a mislaid paper half an hour later, Barclay still was figuring up profits, and making his web stronger.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵White, A Certain Rich Man, p.183.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p.184.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

The narrator comments later that, "...John Barclay rode his 'Evening Star' to glory...."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸White, A Certain Rich Man, p.186.

CHAPTER VI

AN OVERVIEW OF MUSICAL ACTIVITIES OF
THE DAY AS REPRESENTED IN
WHITE'S FICTIONAL WORKS

William Allen White wrote of the culture he knew. His fictional works are all set in time periods somewhere in his own life time. Not all, but many of his stories are set in the Gilded Age. This period would have been White's childhood. The young boys of White's day are exposed to negro spirituals, the folk songs of Stephen Foster, occasionally an aria from an opera, hymns, and music from traveling bands and gypsies. Recalling his boyhood, White refers to the atmosphere of his life being, "...charged with song and dance."¹¹⁹ In his book Boys-Then and Now, White describes a similar atmosphere partly influenced by the social derelicts. He defines these derelicts as thieves, bad men and their women-kind, and swindlers:

¹¹⁹White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p.59.

Their roistering songs, their bitter and miserable wit, ...were all spread before the boy of the seventies in that prairie town.¹²⁰

In this same book, reference to a singing school for children of the 1870's is made:

Of music there were only the songs the boy's mother taught him and the banalities of the prairie-town singing school. The singing-school, incidentally, was more or less of a romantic adventure, where if he was old enough, the boy went that he might take a girl home, and perhaps, if the moon was right, steal from her a good-night kiss.¹²¹

In A Certain Rich Man, John Barclay's youth is set in the same era as White's own boyhood. As the narrator, White makes the following observation about this time period:

Was it an era of music, or is childhood the period of music? Perhaps this land of ours was younger than it is now and sang more lustily, if not with great precision; for to the man who harks back over the years, those were the days of song. All the world seemed singing -- men in their stores and shops, women at their work, and children in their schools.¹²²

God's Puppets is set sometime in the late 1860's or early 1870's. One of the stories, "A Social Rectangle," reveals a few of the musical activities available to a small midwestern town. The story involves a Mrs. Nixon, who is in charge of a Monday Music Club, and a man named Jim who sings

¹²⁰White, William Allen, Boys-Then and Now, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), p. 10.

¹²¹White, Boys-Then and Now, pp. 11-12.

¹²²White, A Certain Rich Man, p.4.

by ear and who becomes known to the town as her "golden musical discovery:"

...in the spring he [Jim] had a solo part in the oratorio at the musical festival and bellowed most feelingly through several hours of pure music.... She [Mrs. Nixon] played all his accompaniments and took him to the city to hear grand opera. She bought...music of a kind new to the town, which had become fairly used to Wagner; and at the Monday Music Club she would set Jimmy to barking on the new scores -- tuneless, formless, and often inharmonious musical chatter, full of emotional yelps and groans and moans and complainings....¹²³

In the Heart of a Fool is set during America's industrial revolution in a very industrialized fictitious town. Community members are found taking advantage of their opportunity to hear a new composition for solo violin with organ accompaniment performed in a local church. This is the first performance of this new composition and the following observation is made:

The composition is simplicity itself -- save for the mystical questioning that runs through it in the sustained sevenths -- a theme which Captain Morton said always reminded him of a meadow lark's evening song, but which repeats itself over and over plaintively and sadly as the stately music swells to its crescendo and dies with that unanswered cry of heartbreak echoing in the last faint notes of the closing bar.¹²⁴

In this same book is a scene at a house wedding where the members of the wedding party are creating a "special effect" with the music:

¹²³White, God's Puppets, pp.59-60.

¹²⁴White, In the Heart of a Fool, p.286.

...because she had the best voice in town, Margaret Muller sang "O Promise Me," in a remote bedroom to give the effect of distant music, low and sweet, and after that song was over, ...[she] mingled with guests...¹²⁵

The book In Our Town was written in approximately 1906 while White was living in Emporia. He began writing a series of short stories reminiscent of his life in newspaper shops. Each story is complete alone but all are connected as an account of country newspapers in the 1880's and 1890's. All stories are told through the voice of the editor. In these stories are glimpses of the musical life of small country towns in the midwest. In "Scribes and Pharisees," of In Our Town, is a discussion of some typical problems found in church choirs of the late nineteenth century:

We know about the row the Baptists are having to get rid of the bass singer in their choir, who has sung at funerals for thirty years, until it has reached a point where all good Baptists dread death on account of his lugubrious profundo. ...[We] know that the Methodists are having the same trouble with their soprano, who "flats" -- and has flattened for ten years, and is too proud to quit the choir "under fire" as she calls it; and we remember what a time the Congregationalists had getting rid of their tenor. So that the choir troubles are to us only a part of the grist that keeps the mill going.¹²⁶

As mentioned in Chapter IV, when White's parents gave him a cabinet organ for his tenth birthday in 1878, he recalls there not being more than three or four pianos in town. By

¹²⁵White, In the Heart of a Fool, p.119.

¹²⁶White, In Our Town, p.4.

the late nineteenth century there were enough pianos in small towns to require the services of a town piano tuner, for in this same book the following comment is made:

Every man -- even a piano tuner -- thinks his business leads him a dog's life, and that it shows him only the seamy side of the world.¹²⁷

In the summer of 1917 William Allen White took a six-week American Red Cross tour of the Western European war with his friend Henry Allen from Wichita. This trip resulted in a novelized travel tale entitled The Martial Adventures of Henry and Me. Although the book is fictional, it is a valuable period piece in which White gives his own account of European wartime conditions in 1917 to his American readers. One effective method of conveying his account of these conditions is by discussing the conditions of European musical culture. The following is White's account of musical activities in London:

Curiously enough in musical programs one finds no prejudice against German music in London as one finds it in Paris. To get Beethoven in Paris one had to lower the windows, close the shutters, pull down the shades and pin the curtains tight. At the symphony concerts in London one can hear not only Beethoven, but Wagner, who is almost modern in his aggressive teutonism. But the English have little music of their own, and so long as they have to be borrowing they seem to borrow impartially of all their neighbors, the French and the Slavs, the Germans, and the Italians. Indeed, even when British opinion of Russia was at its ebb, the London Symphony Orchestra put in an afternoon with Tschaiikowsky's Fourth Symphony. And yet if, in a few months we could form even a vague notion of the public minds of England and France,

¹²⁷White, In Our Town, p.18.

one might say that England seemed more implacable than France. In France, where one heard no music but French and Italian music in the concerts, at the parks, in opera, one heard a serious discussion going on among school teachers about the history to be taught after the war.¹²⁸

And of the follies in Paris he writes:

The music at the follies was Victor Herbert of 1911! Old American popular songs seemed to be in vogue. One heard "Oh Johnny" and "Over There" at every vaudeville house this year. Sometimes they were done in French, sometimes in English. In Genoa, one may say in passing that we heard one of the songs from "Hitchy-Coo" done in Italian. It was eery! American artists are popular in Paris. We saw a girl at three show houses in Paris, under the name of Betty Washington, doing a gypsy dance, playing the fiddle....Great throngs of soldiers filled these gay show houses. The French, the English, and the Australians seemed satisfied with them. But the Canadians Americans sniffed. To them Paris is a poor show town.¹²⁹

William Allen White was always aware of the musical culture surrounding him. Whether at home or abroad, he was keenly aware of the role music played in the lives of himself and others. In a later book, Boys-Then and Now, White makes the following observations concerning musical opportunities for American children of the early 1920's:

All sorts of musical contests occupy the children. They have bands, orchestras, glee clubs, quartets, from the time they can toddle until they pass out of the public school into the two colleges of the town, where all of the care of youth, which has begun in the public schools, is continued and multiplied.¹³⁰

¹²⁸White, The Martial Adventures of Henry and Me, pp. 312-313.

¹²⁹Ibid., pp 210-211.

¹³⁰White, Boys-Then and Now, p.32.

As the frontier towns of White's childhood grew rapidly and expanded, the musical interests of these town's inhabitants also grew and expanded. As a product of this background, he successfully presented insights into the different roles music played in the lives of the people of his day through his fictional works.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND FINAL COMMENTS

The fictional works of William Allen White are symptomatic of his time and place in the history of America. Music in his lifetime was an important element in the overall cultural scene. His fictional works provide significant insight into this musical culture.

The children, especially young boys, in these fictional works find in music an outlet for their feelings and emotions. Music is portrayed as a very personal and private experience, as well as one to be shared and enjoyed with friends. The young boys in these works are usually seen with harmonicas, jew's-harps, or in groups with other children playing homemade instruments. These children's musical knowledge is usually very limited; most play and sing by ear, imitating the musical influences which surround them. Some of the musical influences of White's youth, as reflected in his fiction, include: Opera arias, folk songs, civil war songs, hymns and revival songs.

Other instruments of White's youth portrayed in his fictional works are the accordion, guitar and mandolin.

These instruments are often used by young men to serenade young ladies. The accordion, however, is also portrayed as an instrument used to express one's feelings privately or for introspection and understanding of one's self. Any musical group passing through a town or any musical event was usually well attended and provided musical source material that was later imitated or played by ear by local amateur musicians.

Several different types of keyboards are described in White's fictional works: the organ, the melodian, and the piano. The scenes depicting the later 1800's and early 1900's usually portray younger and older men and women playing these instruments rather than young children. Similar to the use of harmonica and jew's-harp, characters find in keyboard music an outlet for their feelings and emotions. Keyboard music is enjoyed privately and is often used for personal introspection. It also provides a means of social interaction and entertainment. Characters often play by ear and try to reproduce music they have heard. One of the great composer influences referred to repeatedly is Richard Wagner. John Barclay often plays, or whistles, Wagner's music to help himself generate new business ideas. Other musical memories of the characters' past, such as old hymns and folk songs, are played in order that the characters may reminisce or reflect on their heritage.

White's love of symphonic and operatic music is often manifested through the use of figurative language in his fictional works; but the influence of this music is mostly apparent in the mental thought processes of John Barclay and in the musical literature White's characters try to reproduce instrumentally. In The Martial Adventures of Henry and Me, White also offers a detailed account of the musical culture of Europe, of which both opera and symphonic music play a large role, in order to convey to his American readers the conditions of wartime Europe.

Music in White's works is most often portrayed as a participatory activity. Characters are most often described playing instruments or singing -- seldom merely attending a concert or recital. These characters enjoy making music with friends as well as privately. They are often found turning to a musical instrument at times of personal introspection and reflection. Often they play or sing by ear. By making their own music, they are able to inspire, motivate or calm themselves.

The characters of White's fiction -- of his culture and generation -- are not always portrayed with highly sophisticated musical tastes. However, they all share a keen appreciation and appetite for music. Music is a vital part of their relationships with each other, as well as a tool for understanding themselves.

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Contemporary Musical Culture as Reflected in
the Fictional Works of William Allen White
Title of Thesis

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