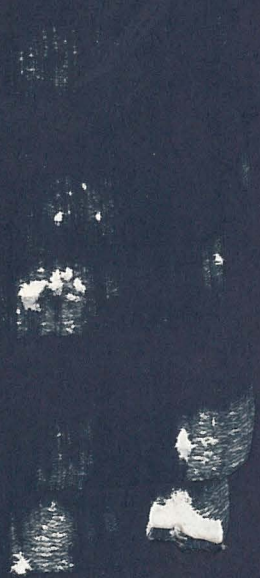
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS OF LEWIS MUMFORD

A STUDY IN LITERARY AUDACITY

FRANK G. NOVAK, JR.



The Autobiographical Writings of Lewis Mumford

The Autobiographical Writings of Lewis Mumford

A STUDY IN LITERARY AUDACITY

Frank G. Novak, Jr.

A Biography Monograph
Published for the Biographical Research Center by
University of Hawaii Press

General Editor: George Simson

Copyright acknowledgments appear on page 64.

Copyright © 1988 by the Biographical Research Center
All rights reserved
Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number
88–50558

ISBN 0–8248–1189–5

The Autobiographical Writings of Lewis Mumford

A STUDY IN LITERARY AUDACITY

The Autobiographical Texts

> I think every person of sensibility feels that he has been born "out of his due time." Athens during the early sixth century B.C. would have been more to my liking than New York in the twentieth century after Christ. It is true, this would have cut me off from Socrates, who lived in the disappointing period that followed. But then, I might have been Socrates! (FK 7)[1]

So wrote the nineteen-year-old Lewis Mumford in 1915. His bold proclamation—"I might have been Socrates!"—provides an important key to understanding the man and his life's work. While this statement certainly reflects a good deal of idealistic and youthful presumption, the undaunted confidence and high ambition it suggests are not merely the ingenuous boasts of callow youth. For the spirit of audacity reflected here has been an essential and enduring quality of Mumford's thought and writing throughout his sixty-year career in American letters. Well before he began to establish a literary reputation, the aspiring young writer who so glibly imagines himself as Socrates reveals his profound confidence in his potential and destiny. This confidence in his literary abilities, in the accuracy of his judgments, and in the possibility of achieving his ambitious goals never wavers. While as a young man he may have longed to live amidst the glories of ancient Athens, as a mature writer he courageously confronts the often dismaying, seemingly overwhelming realities of the modern world. By dint of his imperious self-assurance and his unremitting commitment to his writing, the teenager who dreamed of being Socrates eventually created a distinctive and significant body of work and became one of the major intellectual figures of the twentieth century. The scope of Mumford's writing and the boldness of his interpretations are, I think, unprecedented and unparalleled in contemporary letters. Whether or not one agrees with Mumford's views, his work, in its persistent inde-

pendence and striking originality, unquestionably represents a signal achievement of literary audacity.

If for no other reason, Lewis Mumford is distinguished among contemporary critics of culture because of the extraordinary variety and range of his books. His most recent three works are a narrative account of his life through 1940 and two autobiographical miscellanies; these books contain a diverse and interesting collection of autobiographical writings. In addition, two volumes of his correspondence (with Van Wyck Brooks and Frederick J. Osborn) have been published, and there are two other books (both biographies) that also contain significant autobiographical information—his critical study *Herman Melville* and *Green Memories,* the life of his son Geddes who was killed in World War II. These seven books comprise the primary texts for the present study. In spite of this substantial body of biographical material, however, one who seeks a detailed, balanced, and conventional sort of life story will likely be disappointed in what Mumford reveals of himself in these works. Rather than presenting a comprehensive account of the quotidian facts and events of his personal life, Mumford's autobiographical writings ostensibly reveal more about his books than the person who wrote them. The autobiographical texts describe the evolution of his thought and emphasize the themes and purposes that dominate his work; collectively forming a personal intellectual history, their essential purpose appears carefully designed to present the motives and important themes underlying his writing and to trace the development of his literary career. Yet this is not to say that the portrait of the man depicted here is a partial or significantly limited one. Although lacking the sort of factual detail and personal confession that typically appear in such writing, Mumford's autobiographical works are nonetheless honest and revealing. These books convey a vivid sense of the essential man: they reflect his diverse interests, present his personal philosophy and values, and affirm his commitment to the literary life. The autobiographical works, in short, reveal the extent to which Mumford's life and work are one. In this respect, the autobiographical writings are closely related to his other books; indeed, they provide a comprehensive introduction to his thought and work. Reflecting the evolution of his career, they provide a convenient synopsis of the major ideas and accomplishments of this original and wide-ranging writer. Furthermore, like all autobiographical writing, these works represent Mumford's effort to give coherence and purpose to his life; they project the "self," the *autos,* that constitutes the essen-

tial reality of the man. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the autobiographical works in both respects—what they reveal about both the man and his writing—and to show the extent to which the two are one.

The publication of Mumford's narrative autobiography *Sketches from Life* (1982) was preceded by two autobiographical miscellanies, *Findings and Keepings: Analects For an Autobiography* (1975) and *My Works and Days: A Personal Chronicle* (1979). These two books consist of a diverse assortment of "literary gleanings": letters, "random notes," unpublished works and fragments, previously published essays, selections from his books, even samples of his rare efforts at poetry, fiction, and drama. These two anthologies serve as something of a "Mumford log" containing pieces of writing that represent key events in his personal experience, education, and intellectual development. Mumford compares *Findings and Keepings* to "the modern painter's *collage*" (FK 5) and says that the book is deliberately designed to reveal "how seemingly unconnected events . . . might in fact reveal vital aspects of the inner life" (FK 3–4). The items in *Findings and Keepings* are generally organized in the form of a dramatic sequence; there are four "parts," two "interludes," and one "postlude." He similarly describes *Works and Days* as "the crazyquilt of my life I am here piecing together" (WD 37), yet each of the "fragments" is carefully placed according to an overall thematic pattern. Although each of these two books is structured according to a different organizational principle, *Works and Days* contains very much the same kinds of material as that in *Findings and Keepings. Works and Days* is more detailed and comprehensive, and the chapter headnotes, lacking in the other book, are particularly valuable as biographical material. Both books have the basic purpose of presenting a picture of "a mind in the making" (WD 25), and approximately fifty percent of the material in *Findings and Keepings* is repeated in *Works and Days.* Although one can only guess at the various reasons why so many pieces appear in both volumes, one can at least assume that Mumford considers these items important to revealing his "inner life"; they describe key events of his experience or reflect his major concerns. In particular, each of the miscellanies contains essays that mark crucial points in his development or introduce key ideas: "Dante as Contemporary" (1929), "Our Present Dilemmas" (1930), "What I Believe" (1930), "The Task of Modern Biography" (1934), and "Prologue to Our Time" (1975). Each book also contains the autobiographical novelette "The Little

Testament of Bernard Martin" (1928) as well as substantial material concerning Herman Melville and Patrick Geddes. These two collections comprise an anthology of the essential Lewis Mumford; they provide a précis of his personality, philosophy, values, and purposes. They also serve as a documentary supplement to his "formal" biography, *Sketches from Life.*

The two autobiographical miscellanies contain a diverse and unusual assortment of biographical documents, and they present some interesting problems for the student of Mumford, as well as anyone interested in the genre of autobiography. Mumford assumes that several different kinds of writing, not traditionally considered to be part of the genre, comprise one's autobiography. He asserts, for example, that his two major works of fiction, "The Little Testament of Bernard Martin" and the play *The Builders of the Bridge* (included in *Findings and Keepings*), contain important biographical material; in fact, he describes *The Builders of the Bridge* as "an essential contribution to my spiritual autobiography, revealing much that a more explicit narrative of my life would leave out" (FK 217). In *Herman Melville,* Mumford finds the most revealing biographical material in Melville's fiction, and he discloses the story of his own life according to the same general premise: the essential man, the "self," is inseparable from his thought and work; what he publishes and even what he attempts to accomplish more accurately and completely define the person than details of a private and personal nature. In depicting his own life, as with Melville, Mumford assumes that the essential person is to be found in his writing, whatever sort of writing he may have produced. The total effect of Mumford's unconventional collection of autobiographical writings is to present an intellectual biography rather than the more conventional, personal narrative of the life.

Mumford's autobiographical writings hold the interesting possibility of being read as a self-conscious literary exercise—perhaps one should say doubly self-conscious, given the nature of the genre—for he is both a theorist and practitioner of the art of biography. His biographical theory and practice serve as illuminating commentary on the methodology and purposes of his autobiographical works. It is significant, as mentioned above, that the 1934 essay "The Task of Modern Biography" appears in both autobiographical miscellanies. Mumford argues here that the biographer should seek to depict his subject's "inner life" rather than to focus on the more evident external facts. This "inner life," in his view, constitutes the essential reality of a per-

son; it is "the hidden life of the unconscious, welling up in dreams, obscure impulses, secret promptings." And, he continues, "it is better to make mistakes in interpreting the inner life than to make the infinitely greater mistake of ignoring its existence and import" (FK 182–83). Another basic task of the biographer is to present a coherent and unified portrait of the subject. Such a portrait will be "necessarily selective," since the biographer creates from "the original welter" of dreams, emotions, ambitions, and accomplishments (FK 185). A life without some sort of unifying focus and central purpose, Mumford seems to be saying, is no life at all; the biographer's task is to identify the important elements and purposes and to create such a coherence and significance in his subject's life. This was certainly Mumford's purpose in his study of Melville, and I believe that it is also the motivating and shaping principle of his several "self-biographies": "if the biographer has worked well, the biography will be a concentrated symbol of the subject's life" (FK 185). Mumford says that his study of Melville "was concerned with biographic data only in so far as they threw a light on Melville's mind" (HM ix). Similarly, in *Sketches from Life* and the two miscellanies, Mumford's principle of selection emphasizes the personal and factual information that reveals the development of his thought and writing. He selects the items included in the two anthologies and the events narrated in *Sketches* in order to achieve the purpose described in his essay on biography: "to make explicable the inner and outer events that formed the character, shaped the destiny, and made the life significant" (FK 185). Mumford's autobiographical writings, which assume the fundamental premise of his Melville biography, aim to present just such a selective "symbolic" portrait by reflecting the essential themes and aims of a lifetime's literary activity. This self-portrait is more symbolic than conventionally realistic insofar as it depicts Mumford's own "inner life," which is composed of the writer's mind, concerns, and purposes. The resulting portrait reveals the extent to which his thought and writing are one with his life experiences; it demonstrates, in short, that his life *is* his writing.

Mumford's "formal" autobiography *Sketches from Life* (1982) is a narrative, generally chronological account of his life from his birth in 1895 to the beginning of World War II. In the book he describes and evaluates the formative influences on his thought and traces his intellectual development; he is particularly concerned to describe here his efforts to discover an appropriate role and purpose as a writer and to

establish his literary career. The book depicts the environments that shaped him, significant experiences, key elements of his education, and influential personal relationships; and he presents all of these in a skillfully constructed, artistically wrought book. He began working on this autobiography as early as 1955; this and the fact that he intended it to be his final work testify to its importance in the Mumford canon.[2]

The most prominent of the shaping devices in *Sketches* is, quite obviously, the organization of the chapters and topics. Mumford arranges the chapters according to a thematic rather than a strictly chronological sequence. Much in the manner of Thoreau's *Walden,* the chapters unfold in what might be described as an organic process of development from beginning to end, and a contrapuntal relationship often exists between or among certain chapters. For example, the chapter "Sunlight on Prison Walls," which emphasizes the regimentation and confinement of his early public school education, is followed by "Roots in the Countryside," which describes the nourishing and liberating influence of childhood summers spent on a Vermont farm. There is a similar unifying effect created through thematic contrast in the juxtaposition of "The Great Hiatus," an account of the dismal years of the Great Depression, with "The Domain of Troutbeck," something of a paean to the idyllic aspects of life at his country home near Amenia, New York. *Sketches* focuses on those crucial events and influences important to Mumford's intellectual development and the evolution of his career. These experiences are depicted in a series of vivid and significant scenes or "sketches": each of these brilliant scenes has the general effect of flaring forth, as it were, and then gradually fading away in anticipation of the next. The autobiography is also characterized by many digressions from the sequential narrative of the life. Not confined to a strictly chronological approach, Mumford moves freely between youth and maturity, often tracing out and assessing the later effects on his thought and career of an important early experience or influence. *Sketches,* therefore, not only relates the story of a life but also serves as a vehicle for introducing the reader to his diverse interests, the important themes in his work, and his opinions on a number of topics. These "digressions" include his analysis of urban Pittsburgh past and present, observations on education, advice to young writers, views on marriage and childcare, and commentary on other social and cultural matters. More importantly, perhaps, Mumford introduces the reader to his general theories concerning such matters as American culture, urban planning, and technological

development. In this respect, the book is as much a work of philosophy and cultural criticism as it is a narrative of Mumford's life—and again, one is reminded of *Walden.*

The reader who has a general familiarity with Mumford's career will likely be surprised by the proportion of the book that deals with his early life. Since he does not plan to publish a subsequent autobiographical narrative, the fact that Mumford devotes most of *Sketches* to his life prior to becoming an established writer is an unexpected emphasis. The descriptions of his childhood environment and memorable early experiences, which comprise the first hundred pages, are particularly vivid and detailed (Mumford was eighty-seven when the book was published). As the narrative proceeds to recount the remainder of his life (up to 1940), the coverage becomes increasingly less comprehensive, balanced, and detailed. Mumford places such emphasis on his childhood because he believes that certain essential personality traits, habits of mind, and interests originated then; these characteristics have had a profound influence on the development of his thought and literary career. Upon reviewing his early writings, he discovered that many ideas contained in this work, selections from which are included in the two miscellanies, anticipate themes and concerns it would take him a lifetime to develop. Similarly, not until he began writing his autobiography, it appears, did Mumford recognize the extent to which the events and conditions of his childhood shaped his personality and writing. Certain events of his early life, he believes, help to illuminate the essential character of the mature writer, what he elsewhere describes as the "inner life." He writes in *Sketches:* "In many lives it is the beginnings that are most significant: the first steps, though seemingly effaced, leave their imprint on everything else that follows" (SL 103).

Much of *Sketches,* then, consists of his effort to uncover and recreate those crucial, early factors and experiences that had a lasting influence on his thought and writing. He believes, for example, that the "deep inner confidence" tinged with a sense of superiority, which has been a motivating and stabilizing force throughout his career, was engendered by the conditions of his early childhood. He attributes this sense of confidence to the influence of the matriarchal household in which he was raised; he says that he had "two mothers," his natural mother and the housemaid "Nana," who nurtured, encouraged, and flattered him (SL 56). He describes how he inherited a sense of "rectitude . . . a tradition of personal self-respect and independence, indeed of complete

unbribableness" from his uncle and grandfather (SL 67). Even the mystery of his parentage—which he unravels only after he is well into middle age and which, apparently, he fully evaluates for the first time in the act of writing *Sketches*—did little to trouble his sense of secure self-identity. He views the absence of a father's influence and financial support as an incentive rather than a barrier to his development. As a "child of the city," Mumford believes that his native New York filled the paternal role, transforming a liability into an asset: "I made my own way without patronage or favor, indeed without any external advantages except those which my native city offered me" (SL 35). The "long periods of solitude" and sense of separateness he experienced as a child comprise another significant, formative aspect of his early years. Such isolation, he believes, promoted his introspective thoughtfulness; it encouraged him to accept that "natural loneliness" that is an inevitable part of the intellectual's "vocation." He writes that "the sense of being apart was there from the beginning. . . . I took it for granted that I was different" (SL 63). The story of his relationship with Beryl Morse during his late adolescence is, again, typical of the book's emphasis on crucial early experiences. He says that he describes this relationship "in far greater detail than may seem justified" because it provides "a clue to something that runs through my life and work." The episode, as he interprets it, reveals certain "characteristic traits . . . in embryo: the fusion of the emotional and the intellectual, the equal awareness of past and future as essential components of the present . . . the unwillingness to put any part of life in a separate compartment detached from the whole" (SL 117). These and other early, formative experiences reveal the nature of his personality and, perhaps more important to his purposes, provide keys to understanding essential features of his thought and crucial stages in the development of his career.

Of the many scenes and experiences that Mumford describes in *Sketches,* one event in particular stands out because of its significance in his development and also because of its beauty and intensity as a piece of writing. This scene depicts the experience of the young writer (in 1917) that occurs as he is walking across the Brooklyn Bridge towards Manhattan one twilight evening in early spring. The passage demonstrates Mumford's abilities as a gifted stylist whose prose can be quite powerful and poetic. The scene is a classic of the literary epiphany: emotionally intense and poetically evocative, it marks a crucial, unforgettable moment of realization in the life of the young man

on the threshold of his literary career. The young Mumford here absorbs something of the mysterious will and power that animate the city scene; he acquires a profound sense of confidence and purpose; and he anticipates his mission and destiny as a writer. Mumford describes the beauty of the city spread before him as the "halo" effect of sunset behind the skyline fades to be replaced by an equally "dazzling" electrical illumination:

> Here was my city, immense, overpowering, flooded with energy and light. . . . And there was I, breasting the March wind, drinking in the city and sky, both vast, yet both contained in me, transmitting through me the great mysterious will that had made them and the promise of the new day that was still to come.
>
> The world at that moment opened before me, challenging me, beckoning me, . . . raising all my energies by its own vivid promise to a higher pitch. In that sudden revelation of power and beauty . . . I trod the narrow, resilient boards of the footway with a new confidence. . . . The wonder of [that] moment was like the wonder of an orgasm in the body of one's beloved, as if one's whole life had led up to that moment and had swiftly culminated there. . . . I have carried the sense of that occasion . . . through my life . . . as a momentary flash reminding me of heights approached and scaled. . . . That experience remains alone: a fleeting glimpse of the utmost possibilities life may hold for man. (SL 130)

Like the Joycean epiphany, this remarkable scene possesses religious and mystical elements. Mumford describes his response as emotional and spiritual in nature rather than rational. It depicts the young artist receiving inspiration and creative energies from the city, his spiritual father. The cityscape, the harbor, and the sky combine to become for Mumford what Mircea Eliade has described as a "sacred place," a place of "hierophany" where certain "primal revelations" are disclosed.[3] In this case, the hierophany is also an epiphany; both the place and the experience become sacred and symbolic for Mumford. On one hand, he apprehends the wonder of technology and culture and the romance of urban life—interests which he would develop extensively in his writing. And on the other, he acquires a profound sense of purpose and confidence in his literary potential. His mission will be energized and sustained by the powerful, primordial forces that animate the cosmos. True to the pattern of the literary epiphany, here an ordinary, familiar scene suddenly assumes deep significance and mythic dimensions. Mumford acknowledges again and again that he

was nurtured and influenced by the great city; and throughout his work the Brooklyn Bridge symbolizes the highest possibilities of art, technology, and human achievement in the modern world. This scene stands out so prominently among the other events and experiences of the book that there is a sense in which everything Mumford describes earlier serves as an anticipatory prelude to this moment; the remainder of the autobiography, accordingly, relates the writer's efforts to grasp the possibilities he glimpses in this epiphany. Even though the many other events recounted in *Sketches* are vivid and interesting, one could view the rest of the book as a frame, a mounting for this one magnificent scene of intense brilliance and power. This power resides both in the language used to describe it and in the event's enduring symbolic significance for Mumford's career.

Shortly after this scene on the Brooklyn Bridge—apparently only a few weeks—while he is stationed at Newport, Rhode Island, during his navy service, Mumford experiences another, though less significant epiphany. This occurs as he approaches the bridge connecting the mainland to the island "under the slowly deepening violet sky." He writes: "I had for the second and last time an indescribable but exalted sense of my whole future spreading out before me. . . . In that breathless moment past and future, my past and the world's past, my future and the world's future came together." He experienced here "the exaltation of pure being." As in the earlier epiphany, he describes this event as something of a religious experience; it was a "vision" in which he apprehended "the ultimate reality for which all visible bodies and passing experiences were only a preparation" (SL 198–99).

A mystical element imbues both scenes of epiphany; both convey a Whitmanesque sense of oneness with the cosmos ("the city and sky both vast, yet both contained in me"); both describe his recognition of a pervasive cosmic reality as well as a heightened awareness of self-identity and purpose. Making his passage to manhood, these two scenes occur in near conjunction during the initial stage of Mumford's literary career and dramatically affirm his decision to dedicate himself to a life in letters. Both are aspects of the book's emphasis on "beginnings," those early experiences which exerted a formative influence on the development of his thought and career. Finally, the full significance of each epiphany becomes apparent only in retrospect; in the act of creating his own life story, Mumford endows both events with symbolic meaning—a meaning he could not have known when he first experienced them. One senses that Mumford has continually created

afresh and discovered anew both events since he initially experienced them.

This sort of re-creation and recognition, in fact, typifies the essential nature and purpose of the book: Mumford—his fundamental identity, his essential "self"—*is* what he has learned. His "lessons," so to speak, are depicted in his series of "sketches from life." In this respect, *Sketches* represents the assimilation and culmination of his life's work and experiences: "it has taken me a whole lifetime to single out, to assemble, to evaluate, to reorganize, and to integrate the varied components of my own education. That, in fact, is what this whole autobiography is about: *the ways and methods and goals and meanings and rewards of a lifetime education*" (SL 334–35). This purpose explains, at least in part, why he ends the narrative story of his life at mid-career (1940). In Mumford's view, his essential identity is defined by his thought and writing and the experiences and influences that shaped them. The man becomes his works, and after 1940, he seems to be saying, the identity of Lewis Mumford is to be found in the words he has written. One who seeks to know the man—who he is, what he has experienced, what he values—can find him in his books.

The Education of a Writer

Perhaps most renowned as an urban historian and critic of architecture, Mumford begins *Sketches* with the simple yet revealing statement: "I was a child of the city" (SL 3). His forty-one year residence in New York City profoundly influenced his personality, interests, and career. Having spent much of his career "wandering about cities, studying cities, working in cities, stirred by all their activities," he writes, "this original envelopment by the city constitutes an important clue to my life" (SL 4–5). The city itself, with its diversity, pageantry, and cultural resources, provided a special kind of university education for the young writer: just as Melville found his Yale and Harvard aboard the whale-ship, Mumford claims that "Manhattan in all its richness and variety was my university, my true Alma Mater" (SL 144). He writes: "though the formal part of my higher education came mainly from the City College, it was reinforced and enriched by all that the city offered me in its museums, art galleries, and theatres: indeed so vivid and stimulating was this larger university, that never for a moment did I envy my friends who went to Harvard, nor did I feel in any way deprived" (VWB 4). Beginning with his earliest walks

with his grandfather in Central Park, the young Mumford responded to the urban scene and took advantage of the city's resources.

The institutions and architecture of New York made up the campus of this larger city university that Mumford attended. He nostalgically describes the crucial role that the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art played in his early intellectual development. And he retrospectively observes that the early essay "The Marriage of Museums" (1918), his proposal to construct a pathway that would link the two both physically and symbolically, "struck the essential chord of the rest of my intellectual life, taken up, amplified, intensified, in book after book" (FK 5). The aspiring young writer also frequented the central public library on Fifth Avenue. This building was significant to Mumford not only as a great storehouse of books but also as an example of monumental architecture whose original interior spaciousness symbolized—and seems to have inspired in him—an exuberant intellectuality (SL 123–25). And he considers the Brooklyn Bridge, one of his favorite haunts as a young man and scene of the epiphany discussed above, to be the city's supreme work of architecture—a structure symbolizing the potential and beauty of urban life. The bridge receives extensive critical praise in one of his early books, *The Brown Decades* (1931), served as a stimulus for his play, *The Builders of the Bridge,* and figures prominently in his last book, *Sketches.*

Growing up in New York, then, Mumford early on acquired the habit of what he describes as "one of the most constant and significant phases of my experience—my response to architecture in its most fundamental and inclusive aspect" (SL 422). As "a child of the city," Mumford avidly experienced and sensitively responded to his native New York from his earliest years; he describes how he "systematically" walked about the city "reading the buildings as if they were so many pages of a book" (SL 18). The firsthand understanding of the varied dimensions of urban life, which he so methodically studied, largely determined the scope and content of his thought and writing. Moreover, he became intrigued at an early age by the challenge of determining how a large and diverse urban population might live productively and meaningfully. His explorations of New York stimulated his interest in the history of cities and the problems and possibilities of urban life—concerns which eventually came to dominate his writing. Indisputably, his background in the city has been the single most important factor shaping his literary career.

Patrick Geddes, the Scottish biologist, philosopher, and city planner, was the most important personal influence during Mumford's early career. Although he unsuccessfully attempted to enlist Mumford as an imitative disciple and amanuensis, his example helped the young writer shape a literary career centered on the interests he had derived from his background in the city. Rather than to bequeath specific doctrines or tasks, the effect of Geddes's influence was to encourage Mumford to develop a wide-ranging, independent approach as well as to impart certain purposes and values. The autobiographical works reveal that Geddes's most important contribution to the young Mumford was to serve as a model of the independent intellect that inspired him with the confidence to pursue his own interests and concerns—predilections that had largely been formed before he met the older man.

Mumford admired Geddes as an original thinker whose concerns were not confined to a conventional field or discipline and whose approach was a comprehensive one. His remark that Geddes "refused to recognize the no-trespass signs that smaller minds had erected around their chosen fields of specialization" (SL 220) could apply just as well to himself. Geddes's unorthodox approach and wide-ranging activities convinced Mumford that he too could create a role that would allow him to pursue his diverse interests under the rubric of an all-embracing purpose. He calls Geddes the "teacher who helped to bring all the diverse parts of my education and my environment together and transform them into an increasingly intelligible and workable . . . whole" (SL 144). Geddes, then, provided a general pattern of the intellectual vocation that Mumford shaped to fit his own interests and purposes. Geddes gave the younger man "the confidence to become a generalist—one who sought to bring together in a more intelligible pattern the knowledge that the specialist had . . . sealed into separate compartments" (FK 101). Geddes also taught him to appreciate the complex and delicate structures of life in both nature and urban communities—"historic filiations and dynamic biological and social interrelationships" (WD 115). This passionate "reverence for life" in its variety and intricacy was the essential, unifying element in Geddes's thought, and it soon came to inform Mumford's personal philosophy, ultimately becoming one of the central themes of his work.

Mumford was particularly impressed by the independence and courage that Geddes exhibited in his thought and life. He often

describes the "audacity" of his mentor's "original mind," a mind that was "never content blindly to follow established conventions, still less the fashions of the moment" (SL 145). Far more significant than any specific doctrines he may have acquired from Geddes was the example of his "audacious insurgency" (SL 158), and Mumford came to consider this quality to be an essential component of the intellectual life. Rather than supplying a ready-made philosophy or literary agenda, Geddes's example, Mumford writes, "gave me the courage to build an original structure with new materials in a different style: radically different, necessarily, from his own" (SL 158). As a model of the independent intellect, then, Geddes inspired Mumford to pursue his own "audacious" course that ignored the restrictive boundaries of conventional literary specializations and academic categories.

Another important dimension of Geddes's influence was his belief that one's thought and work should have contemporary relevance and practical applications. Having been "molded" by Geddes's example, Mumford says that he found it "essential to live out my ideas in everyday practice" rather than confining his work solely to "literary affairs" (SL 165). Mumford believes that had he not encountered Geddes he "could easily have drifted into a purely bookish life, short in tether, prudently bridled," a course "that might have been the smooth road to conventional academic achievement" (SL 409). Such a "conventional" career would have lacked both the broad scope and the compelling relevance that have made his work distinctive and significant. Mumford never undertook the sort of practical activity that preoccupied Geddes towards the end of his career—arranging exhibitions, planning cities, establishing colleges. Yet, as did Geddes, he does attempt to describe in practical terms the goals and means of a balanced, rich, and purposeful life, and he dares to confront those urgent contemporary problems that limit and threaten mankind.

The quality and extent of Geddes's influence on Mumford, "closer in personal indebtedness, remoter in intellectual adhesion" (SL 408), may come as something of a surprise to students of Mumford. Geddes demonstrated the possibilities of a comprehensive approach that both encompassed and unified conventional academic disciplines and scholarly specializations. He also exhibited an attitude of "audacious insurgency" and a passionate reverence for life in all its manifestations. Rather than giving a permanent form to Mumford's interests and goals, however, Geddes served as a model of the intellectual vocation that helped the younger man to shape his own career and purposes.

Geddes's example inspired Mumford to develop a comprehensive approach and an "audacious" quality of mind—"to deepen and reinforce the foundations that other minds had already laid" (SL 158) and to pursue interests both borrowed from and developed independently of his acknowledged master.

Though none had so fundamental an influence as Geddes, there are several other people who, according to the autobiographical writings, had a significant effect on the development of Mumford's thought and work. Like Geddes, these men were independent intellects; they were important to Mumford because he saw them as models of the literary vocation—not because he sedulously imitated their philosophies or critical views.

While Mumford has often praised the work of Van Wyck Brooks as the spark that ignited his own revaluation of American culture, it was Brooks's function as a model of the literary life, rather than his critical views, that most influenced the younger writer. Mumford describes the "excitement" that Brooks's early, "ice-breaking" criticism of American literature aroused (SL 357). Brooks's writing and personal influence encouraged Mumford to undertake his own studies of American art and culture, but he soon found that area, vast as it was, too confining. Of more enduring importance for Mumford was the role that Brooks played as the "central figure" in American letters: "he was dedicated to literature, as a craft, as an art, as a social responsibility" (SL 362). Just as he responded to Brooks's encouragement during the initial phase of his career, Mumford continued to be stirred by Brooks's dedication to "the writer's task," a commitment which "absorbed his whole being" (SL 362). His words to Brooks, written nearly a half century after the beginning of their friendship, well describe the nature of this influence: "your integrity has kept before me . . . the image of the true man of letters, following his mission, to stir up the creative forces in our life in defiance of all that deadens the spirit" (VWB 416). While Mumford's work took a radically different direction in content and purpose from that of Brooks, their friendship and correspondence over a forty year period were mutually sustaining as they pursued their literary careers. Profound differences in temperament and literary vocation, however, lurked ominously beneath the placid surface of friendship, occasionally erupting in sharp though temporary disagreements.[4] Yet their respect for one another's work and mutual dedication to the literary life enabled their friendship to survive these painful altercations.

Another literary mentor during Mumford's early career was his Amenia, New York, neighbor Joel Spingarn. Like Brooks, Spingarn exemplified certain ideal qualities of the writer and intellectual—a life of commitment, independence, and integrity. Mumford emulated Spingarn's attempt to "do justice to the creative activities of the human spirit" by unifying "the inner and outer world" (WD 504). He came to share Spingarn's scorn of the kind of scholarly specialization that "aimed at easy targets in order to be sure of hitting the bull's-eye" (WD 506). And Mumford has often echoed Spingarn's criticism that the "academic establishment" does not produce "mature minds capable of actively meeting the social, political, and moral demands of modern life" (WD 510). While they were philosophically poles apart, Spingarn a proponent of Crocean aesthetics and Mumford much more pragmatic, Mumford responded to the vitality of his thought and, perhaps more significantly, to his gracious magnanimity and dedication to the life of the mind.

Another personal influence who figures prominently in the autobiographical writings is Victor Branford, whom Mumford met in London in 1922 during his brief tenure as editor of the *Sociological Review.* Like Geddes, Branford exemplified a passionate intellectuality that sought to unify diverse disciplines. Mumford describes him as "a sociologist, a historian, and a philosopher" whose unflinching objectivity enabled him "to appraise all the mischief and madness of his fellows" (WD 73). The fact that this thumbnail analysis aptly describes the role that Mumford himself was later to play suggests the extent of Branford's influence. Mumford's homage to Branford in *Sketches* reveals how deeply the young writer was impressed by this intense and versatile man, "a unique combination of the man of affairs and the speculative thinker" (SL 263).

Thorstein Veblen also served as a model and catalyst for the unique literary career the young Mumford eventually established. His sometime colleague on *The Dial* and teacher at the New School for Social Research, Veblen—like Geddes and Spingarn—was "a suspected heretic in the academic world." In fact, Mumford responded to those "very traits" that caused him to be rejected by the academic establishment: his "unconventional approach, his insidious criticisms of the business establishment" as well as his vast "cultural range." Furthermore, Mumford says, "his literary aptitudes brought him closer to me in some ways than was Geddes" (SL 220–21). Again, the qualities that Mumford admires in Veblen's work are very much those that came to characterize his own.

What is the role of the intellectual? What is the content and purpose of the literary life? Geddes, Branford, Brooks, Spingarn, and Veblen served as examples who guided and inspired Mumford in formulating his own answers to these questions. His analysis of their effect on his development reveals much about his own ideas, values, and goals. One can summarize the nature of their influence by saying that in each case Mumford responded to the aspects of the man's work that were original, if not radically unconventional. Each in his own way was an intellectual gadfly who boldly attacked stubborn prejudices, narrow perspectives, and unjust institutions; each sought to expose and debunk widely held myths and misconceptions grounded in ignorance or complacency. These men tried to formulate a new basis upon which to evaluate life and culture, and they attempted to integrate traditionally disparate fields of study; such are the aspects of their work that Mumford emphasizes in his autobiographical writings. In each case, it was the spirit of the man's thought and criticism, rather than any specific doctrines, that most influenced the young Mumford.

One might say that Patrick Geddes and Herman Melville represent two dimensions in the development of Mumford's thought and career: Geddes contributed to its horizontal scope and inclusiveness, Melville its depth of philosophical and tragic understanding. If Geddes is the most important personal influence, Melville is the most important literary influence. If Geddes provided Mumford with an inspiring model of intellectual independence, courage, and expansiveness, his "wrestling" with Herman Melville endowed his career with a sense of profound purpose, adding important elements of tragic awareness and moral concern to his thought. Each of the autobiographical books testifies to the crucial significance of his encounter with Melville; however, none of the previous studies of Mumford have acknowledged the extent of Melville's influence on him. Melville profoundly affected Mumford's outlook and significantly influenced the course of his career after 1930. Little did he realize, when he accepted in 1928 an assignment to write a critical biography of Melville, that the experience would provoke a disturbing and painful self-analysis and substantially alter his philosophical orientation. Emphasizing the extent and nature of Melville's influence, I believe, accurately reflects the testimony of the autobiographical writings. In fact, like his analyses of various personal influences, *Herman Melville* reveals as much about Mumford as it does about Melville. It is the most significant of his "biographies of major intellectual figures" that, as Philip West quite correctly observes, "serve as avatars of Mumford himself."[5] Mum-

ford's encounter with Melville and Dante (discussed anon) occurred at a crucial period in his life, coinciding with certain personal and professional dilemmas. At the risk of exploiting what has become a literary cliché, in the company of Melville, Mumford pursued his own white whale, elusive and terrifying; as a result of his encounter with Melville, he experienced for the first time what he calls "the ordeals of reality."

The experience of writing *Herman Melville* at a critical point in his development had an immediate, striking effect on his personal philosophy and shaped the content and direction of his career as it evolved from that point. Mumford says that Melville forced him to confront "the more basic religious and cosmic questions, for until I had wrestled with Melville I had never formulated my reasoned beliefs or even been sufficiently conscious of my oversights and evasions" (SL 441). Studying Melville prompted Mumford to undertake an introspective analysis of his own deepest values and purposes, to come to grips with dark, potentially destructive forces within his life and personality that he had theretofore not been aware of or able to face. Mumford encountered Melville concurrently with what appears to have been a harrowing mid-life crisis: he experienced then unsettling doubts about his marriage, his literary vocation, and his deepest beliefs. In addition to his own philosophical and spiritual struggle during this period, he, his wife, and son each experienced severe physical illness; he made an ill-timed, disappointing, and soon aborted return visit to Geneva; and he began an extramarital affair with Catherine Bauer.

Not only did Mumford's encounter with Melville have its personal aspect, but it also made him acutely conscious of certain malign and destructive forces pervading modern civilization and threatening man's very existence. He attributes to Melville his ability to identify and to interpret the hideous miscarriages of contemporary life: "my wrestling with him, my efforts to plumb his own tragic sense of life, were the best preparations I could have had for facing our present world" (VWB 254). Mumford believes that he acquired from Melville the sort of penetrating insight that enabled him to discern the emptiness and error of widely held assumptions and ideologies—particularly those which glorified the machine and its attendant "pentagons of power." Melville, he says, "brought me close to the underlying realities of human experience, and released me from the current faiths of our generation . . . our too hopeful liberalism, our glib futurism, our pious belief in the progressive solubility of all human problems

through science and technology" (WD 288–89). Mumford saw the plight of twentieth-century man anticipated in Melville's work: modern man's separation from the sources of a whole and purposive life and his inability to contend with the immense, insidious forces that threaten to destroy him. Mumford describes Melville as one who dared to plunge "into the cold black depths of the spirit" and to peer into the infinite unknown that lay beyond "the cosy hangings of Victorian parlours" (HM xvi). Melville, in other words, boldly confronted problems that most men blithely ignore or are incapable of recognizing. Studying Melville provided Mumford with the insights and understanding that helped him to anticipate and to interpret the forces of disintegration in the modern world, those forces which precipitated World War II and which may culminate in nuclear holocaust. In this respect, Melville's forebodings corroborated Mumford's interpretation of the images of horror that he was observing in modern art. He must have also been stirred by the example of Melville's unsparing honesty and audacity: here was a writer willing to take an independent stand and confront both the problems in his own world and the metaphysical terrors beyond. *Herman Melville,* therefore, marks the point of transition from the early phase of Mumford's career, whose books are concerned almost exclusively with American art and culture, to the middle phase, which produced the unprecedented, wide-ranging Renewal of Life Series—a series of books which surpasses his earlier works as much in depth as it does in breadth.

Mumford's interpretation of *Moby-Dick* in *Herman Melville* comprises a terse and intense essay that succinctly reveals the nature and extent of Melville's influence. In fact, one can view this interpretation, the central and most powerful section of *Herman Melville,* as something of a psychoanalytical deposition revealing much about Mumford's personality, thought, and concerns. Adumbrating a theme that was to become important in his writing, Mumford views *Moby-Dick* as a work that prefigures the terrible bifurcation that has rent modern life. The novel, he says, "brings together the two dissevered halves of the modern world and the modern self—its positive, practical, scientific, externalized self, bent on conquest and knowledge, and its imaginative, ideal half, bent on the transposition of conflict into art, and power into humanity" (HM 131). The book symbolically depicts "the demonic energies in the universe that harass and frustrate and extinguish the spirit of man" (HM 107). He asserts that the novel "is, fundamentally, a parable on the mystery of evil and the accidental malice

of the universe" (HM 125). Of course, Mumford's subsequent work has assumed the reality of those "demonic energies" that exist in the contemporary world. He sees the story of the "effort to combat the whale" as a symbolic expression of Western man's struggle to create order and purpose amidst life's chaos and "empty malice" (HM 125). Through Melville, Mumford recognizes that "the way of growth is not to become more powerful but to become more human" (HM 126). Mumford sees the final message of *Moby-Dick* as an affirmation of life in its highest significance: "Life, Life purposive, Life formative, Life expressive" (HM 128). If the novel portends the destructive split in twentieth-century life, it also advances a synthesis that enables man to achieve unity and coherent purpose. Mumford believes that Melville "conquered the white whale that threatened him: instead of horror there was significance, instead of aimless energy there was purpose, and instead of random power there was meaningful life" (HM 127). In the process of writing *Herman Melville,* one might say, Mumford encountered and conquered his own white whale: he confronted, for the first time, the evil and terror that may reside within both the individual life and the wider community. Much of Mumford's writing after 1930, consequently, attempted to analyze these threatening and destructive forces—tracing their historical origins to their present manifestations—and to provide a means for overcoming them.

Consistent with his own propensity as well as the example of Geddes, Mumford saw in Melville's work an attempt to establish a meaningful synthesis from among the fragmented components of life by affirming an integrated, comprehensive view. He says that Melville "philosophizes out of a completer experience and a more coherent consciousness" than any of the "partial" characters presented in his writing; he views *Moby-Dick* as an "imaginative synthesis" based upon his "integrated life and consciousness" (HM 116, 122). In Mumford's view, Melville sought to embrace and to unify all aspects of human experience—man's individuality and his social connections, the "inner" and "outer" worlds, buoyant happiness and tragic depths, good and evil. And this is, in general terms, the sort of comprehensive, life-affirming orientation that soon was to characterize Mumford's analysis of the development of Western civilization and the problems of the contemporary world.

Mumford was also significantly influenced by Melville's prose style and use of symbolism. He tells Van Wyck Brooks that *Moby-Dick* represents the sort of style and symbolic technique he sought to achieve in

his major books. This type of writing balances "the imaginative and subjective" against "the objective, the external, the scientifically apprehended"; it combines "personality and individuality with impersonality and collective research" (VWB 369). He describes Melville's "free transposition of confused impressions into orderly art, telescoping many similar incidents into a symbolic whole" (HM xi). Although he was "closely chained to the document, the fact, the experience," Melville "could endow these things with imaginative life" (HM 44). Mumford's descriptions of Melville's writing style and symbolic technique apply with equal accuracy to that which would become his own. Like Melville, Mumford at his best, I believe, is "a thinker . . . who clothed his thoughts in poetic vision" (HM 69), or at least this is the sort of writer he consciously sought to become.

Mumford's encounter with Melville at a crucial point in his life, then, helped to develop both a dimension of depth—which included an understanding of suffering, tragedy, and the nature of evil—and a concept of the manifold possibilities of human experience; these insights were to motivate and inform the rest of his career. He states that "until I wrote my study of Herman Melville, I had never pushed myself to my limits" (WD 298). He wrote to Joel Spingarn that "there is much of me" in the Melville biography: influenced and inspired by Melville, he says, "I plan to do something larger, more terrible than the ordinary novel or play" (FK 172). In fact, his interpretation of *Moby-Dick* (a statement that should be read alongside "What I Believe") reflects both his personal philosophy and the goals and values to which he would from that point dedicate his efforts. He writes in *Herman Melville* that man's hope lies in the cultivation of "that social self which we share with our fellows" and in the effort "to foster and protect the things we have recognized as excellent"; to be fully human, man "in short must create a realm which is independent of the insensate forces in the universe" (HM 127). Mumford's writing after 1930 has continually reiterated these ideas.

Mumford's "discovery" of Dante, which occurred as he was completing his study of Melville, also had a profound effect on his personal philosophy and future career. His study of Dante accompanied an assignment to review Karl Vossler's *Medieval Culture: An Introduction to Dante and His Times,* which resulted in the essay "Dante as Contemporary." In *Works and Days* Mumford calls this crucial period of his life (1927–31) the "Dantean Prelude"; as described above, it was a period in which he confronted and came to terms with unsettling

personal problems and began to chart the course that would guide the rest of his career. Like *Herman Melville,* "Dante as Contemporary" is a work of literary criticism that also has great autobiographical significance; it reveals much about the development of Mumford's views and values and provides keys to understanding his own concerns and purposes. Mumford sees Dante as an artist who, like Melville, unflinchingly confronted life's dark side and whose work evinces a comprehensive synthesis. Dante, he says, "absorbed the most diverse elements of his culture and presented us with the completest image of his age" (FK 175). Created "from the abyss of his soul's darkness," Dante's poem assimilated the entire range of medieval thought and "gave his age a common territory in the imagination" (FK 176–77). Just as significant, Mumford sees Vossler's study as a model of the kind of scholarship he would soon attempt. He describes the work as a "living synthesis" and asserts that reading it comprises "the better part of an education" (FK 174)—and the student of Mumford might well say the same about *The City in History* or *The Myth of the Machine.* He later writes that Vossler's "exhaustive study . . . furnished a timely demonstration, for me, of the way in which . . . one can do justice to the whole man" (WD 273).

As a result of studying the works of Dante and, especially, Melville and applying them to his own experience, Mumford underwent what he calls a "profound inner change" (WD 299). He says that the experience of encountering these two writers concurrently with certain "crucial events" in his personal life was "to reconstitute and energize all my later work" (WD 273). The fact that these two "literary" influences were so important reveals much about the responsiveness and character of Mumford's mind; Melville and Dante contributed to the development of his thought and shaped his career just as much as Geddes or any other personal influence. In this respect, his studies of Dante and Melville represent what is, in my opinion, literary criticism of the highest order: he responded not only to the aesthetic and intellectual aspects of their work but also, and more importantly, to the philosophical and spiritual elements. Mumford absorbed their writing and made it relevant to human experience—to both his personal life and the condition of the contemporary world. Their work, in his view, is great because it shows one how to think and live; it reflects life in its fullest, most expressive, and most meaningful forms. The influence of Melville and Dante prompted him to develop and articulate a personal philosophy, setting forth a set of ideal values and goals, that radically

altered his thought and work. The dramatic difference in scope and purpose between the American studies books that he wrote during the twenties and the sort of writing contained in the Renewal of Life Series indicates the profound change in outlook he experienced. Discussing the nature of this change, he writes: "this transformation penetrated and illuminated every part of my being, and gave me the courage to explore other fields which my contemporaries had neglected, and to open up human potentialities that the contemporary axiom of automatic and inevitable progress had sedulously dismissed" (WD 299). Studying Melville and Dante, therefore, provided an impulse that was to shape and motivate his writing for the rest of his career. If he had not yet discovered the specific content, he had determined the general scope and purpose of his future work; he acquired a set of values as well as certain insights that were to inform all of his subsequent writing. His encounter with Melville and Dante, therefore, represents an important milestone in Mumford's intellectual development. It is a notable example of the power of literary influence, testifying both to the power of such writers as Dante and Melville and to the receptivity of Mumford's mind. This encounter also reveals the seriousness, the utter determination with which Mumford pursued his literary career.

Mumford's study of art, particularly modern art, during the twenties and thirties comprises another important aspect of his development during his early career. In fact, he says that his years as art critic for *The New Yorker* (1932–37) "played an essential part in my emotional education" (WD 211). His response to art as both critic and casual observer had two important consequences for his work and thought. First of all, it gave him a deeper understanding of the nature and possibilities of symbolic expression—in particular as a projection of unconscious fears, conflicts, and forebodings. Second, yet closely related to the first, he saw in certain abstract and surrealistic paintings visionary premonitions of the "disruptions" and terrors that would soon beset the world. Much in the manner of his interpretation of Melville and Dante, he believed that these paintings had a profound significance and relevance for contemporary civilization. He sees them as metaphors of culture: they reflect not merely the personal views of the artists, but their greatest significance lies in what they depict and prophesy about civilization. Rather than emphasizing the "inherent" values of these works, Mumford used the art "as a diagnostic of the inner life"—the inner life not only of the individual but, more generally, of the contemporary world. He believed that the images and inno-

vations of art reflected and anticipated "profound transformations both within the psyche and in visible Western society" (SL 433). Moreover, he saw in "the artist's unconscious symbols . . . a prophecy of events that the artist is quite unaware of" (WD 211). Consequently, his study of modern art, he says, "gave me a deeper understanding of contemporary civilization, especially of its approaching disruptions, than anything I found in books" (WD 224). Of course, Mumford attempted as one of his primary tasks to describe and to analyze those "profound transformations" that were occurring and to warn against the dangers that accompanied them; he did this in his art reviews and, more fully, in the books that followed.

On the basis of the attention devoted to them in the autobiographical writings, the three artists who most vividly communicated these messages to Mumford were Goya, Van Gogh, and Picasso. He praises Goya's "combination of an intense realism and a high regard for fact on one hand, and an imagination that stops at nothing, and understands that nightmares can be realities and realities can be nightmares" (FK 333). The sort of style Mumford describes here—which reflects an "organic" relationship between the "inner and outer" worlds—closely resembles his analysis of Melville's style, and is, in fact, a style that he would soon make his own. Mumford interprets the violent, terrifying images depicted by Goya as anticipations of the brutalities that would soon ravage twentieth-century life. Similarly, his interpretation of Van Gogh reveals as much about his own role and concerns as it does about those of the painter. He admires Van Gogh as an artist who was "fully absorbed in the thought of his own age" and who was able "to absorb the most devastating experiences without losing his own vitality and faith." He believes Van Gogh's "animal faith" in life and humanity to be the sort of sustaining purpose that will enable mankind to overcome the vast and terrifying forces which threaten him (FK 164). As for Picasso, Mumford sees him not merely as "a great artist" but also as "a barometer, sensitively recording in advance the state of the cosmic weather." Picasso developed a new style and idiom radically different from the conventionally realistic emphasis that separated "the inner and outer world." In Mumford's view, his paintings present images that mirror the scientific and technical forces becoming dominant during the early twentieth century as well as the dehumanizing horrors attending this new orientation. Like Goya's, Picasso's work provides "a portrait of our civilization." Mumford acknowledges him as the most important and the most prescient artist of the early

twentieth century; his paintings reflect the impending horrors and dehumanizing forces that would soon ravage the world. This recognition, paradoxically, endows his work with greatness yet also imposes significant limitations: "At the top sheer genius; at the bottom, emptiness, sterility, a failure to find material sufficient to justify that genius" (FK 335–37).

There were, of course, many other important experiences and influences that comprised Mumford's education and contributed to his development as a writer. If he is the natural child of New York, he became the foster son of London during the year he spent there (1920) as editor of *The Sociological Review.* Beginning with this visit, he says, London "has had a deep influence over my life." Living there gave him "a sort of post graduate education" to supplement and "round-off" what he had learned in his native city (SL 254). Mumford also vividly recollects the diverse and invigorating urban ambience and intellectual life of Greenwich Village as he knew it during the twenties. Especially influential were the gatherings in Harold Stearns's basement apartment—which included such men as Hendrick Van Loon, Van Wyck Brooks, Paul Rosenfield, and Joel Spingarn; these meetings provided another "post-graduate course in literature and philosophy, full of intellectual stimulus" (SL 367). Finally, any list of the formative experiences of Mumford's early career must include the month in 1925 he spent in Geneva lecturing at the International Summer School directed by Alfred Zimmern. This opportunity, Mumford says, "served to swing me back into my permanent orbit as a man of letters, preparing me for an even larger and broader career by inciting me to come to terms with my own American heritage," particularly those writers of "the Golden Day" (Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, and Melville) from whom he "drew special sustenance" (SL 387). This "Fulfillment in Geneva," as the chapter is titled in *Sketches,* was an idyllic and stimulating experience for the young writer. It confirmed his nascent but steadily growing reputation and augmented his confidence and determination to pursue his literary career and to develop his special interests and concerns. It was, in short, "one of those marvelous months that add extra years to a lifetime" (SL 392).

However, one can describe the effects of these experiences and influences only in general terms, and one can only estimate the extent to which they shaped Mumford's thought and career. As discussed above, often it was the comprehensive view, the general impression, or force of personality that had the most significant effect on Mumford;

whatever specific ideas or insights he may have gained from a certain influence underwent a complex dialectic of assimilation and revision before they were expressed in his writing. Geddes, Brooks, Branford, Spingarn, and Veblen taught and inspired the young writer. Melville, Dante, and certain modern artists helped to invest his thought with a dimension of depth and suggested a motivating purpose as well as a style and form for his writing as he reached a critical juncture in the evolution of his career. Yet, as *Sketches* demonstrates, these influences abetted, rather than created, interests and tendencies that already existed constituently—though perhaps unconsciously—and that owed their origin to Mumford's family environment, background in the city, and innate temperament. In evaluating the extent to which these influences shaped his thought and career, therefore, one must also balance their effect against his native concerns and proclivities, his deep commitment to the literary life, and the unpredictable vagaries of fortune.

As in all evaluations of influence, the intractable, perhaps ultimately irresolvable problem remains here: assessing the precise nature and extent of various external influences and accurately balancing their impact against that of native interests and abilities. Mumford responded to various personal and literary influences because each exemplified an approach, a value, a philosophy, or way of living that he esteemed and sought to make his own. Although these influences were certainly important, his thought and writing, in both its central concerns and general structure, developed independently and uniquely. In fact, throughout his career Mumford has assiduously cultivated the role of the maverick, the independent thinker, who, like Whitman, holds "no chair, no church, no philosophy." Perhaps it is most accurate to say that the influences described above encouraged rather than determined the manner in which his thought and career evolved. Reviewing in 1970 his early letters to Geddes, he finds that "most of the important themes of my books were already present in the germ at a much earlier moment than, off-hand, I would have supposed" (FJO 485). Many of the very early pieces, the "sallies and experiments" (FK 5) included in the two autobiographical miscellanies, are premonitions of themes and ideas that became important in the books he produced as a mature writer; moreover, many of them antedate an experience or influence that stimulated a more complete development of the germinal idea. He stated that one purpose of *Works and Days* is to depict "the picture of a mind in the making"; to his surprise, he finds that "long before my flitting intuitions were seasoned by actual experience

. . . some of the earliest jottings reveal ideas about nature and human culture that it has taken the better part of my life to substantiate and develop" (WD 25). The major, enduring themes and concerns that appear in his earliest writings include the meaning of literature, art and architecture; the problems and possibilities of urban life; the dangers of unchecked technological expansion; the "organic unity" that ideally exists among man, his cultural heritage, and his present environment. All of these may be subsumed under the primary concern: realizing what it means to be fully human.

According to the autobiographical account, Mumford has been able to integrate his innate personality, interests, and proclivities with certain external influences and experiences without compromising his independence and unique purposes. Moreover, the development of his thought and career, as he depicts it, has followed a natural, almost inevitable course. Reviewing his early life and education from a sixty-year retrospective, he writes: "it now seems to me that intuitively, certainly unwittingly, I was preparing myself for a new, still unidentifiable and unnameable career" (SL 334). When questioned about the evolution of his wide-ranging, unprecedented style and subject matter, he replied: "I never decided: life made the decision for me. . . . I followed the currents of life where they took me" (FJO 350–51). Certainly, an essential purpose of the autobiographical works is to identify the "organic" processes that have given unity to his life and work. To give coherence and purpose to the life is, of course, a basic intent of all autobiography. And in Mumford's case this aim is particularly important because it is also a fundamental principle that informs both his writing and his personal philosophy. His was a versatile and responsive mind, receptive to the influence of books, art, his environment, his teachers, and certain key experiences. The effort to integrate thought and experience into a harmonious and meaningful whole dominates his books of cultural criticism as well as the autobiographical texts. And, at least from an autobiographical perspective, the development of his thought and career generally followed a natural—if not logical—course of progression from beginning to end.

This is not to say that there were never moments of uncertainty and even trepidation as he sought to plan and establish his career. He writes that after the publication of his first book (*The Story of Utopias*, 1922), "I still had no firm sense of where I was going, or what I should write next" (SL 315). Determined to communicate "a vision to live by again" yet not aware of the content and form of the work by which he

would do that, in 1925 he writes: "I am a little frightened when I contemplate the size of my task" (FK 99). His diverse interests and the varied aspects of his education began fully to cohere only with the Renewal of Life Series—which he started to outline in 1930. Up to that point he had kept himself "under wraps" (SL 448). But as the meanings and significance of the influences and experiences described above began to converge and with the recognition that his preliminary education and literary apprenticeship had been completed, he began to contemplate and plan his major work: "I feel like a diver on the edge of a high diving platform, ready for the exhilaration but a little afraid of it" (SL 448). Yet the decade of the thirties, he says, "not merely concentrated and magnified all my potentials for further development, but put them to work" (SL 441). Whatever moments of uncertainty he may have experienced concerned only the specific content and direction of his work. From the moment of his epiphany on the Brooklyn Bridge in 1917, he maintained a confident sense of his essential identity and goals as a writer: his commitment to the literary vocation never wavered. Even while pursuing his short and irregular college career, he says that—on the basis of what he describes as inflated self-opinion rather than actual achievement—"somewhat prematurely, I considered myself a professional writer first, and a degree-seeking student only in a minor way" (SL 137). That the various influences and experiences of his education would eventually find expression and coherence in a substantial body of written work was, it appears from the autobiographical writings, inevitable.

The Writer's Personality

While Mumford's urban background, Patrick Geddes, and the writings of Melville have certainly been important influences, a more decisive factor in shaping Mumford's career has been his determination not to become a "specialist," to avoid any role or task that would limit or dictate his work. During his college years, he entertained the idea of taking a Ph.D. and becoming an academic philosopher, but he soon abandoned this plan to pursue an independent literary career. In fact, he came to believe that a Ph.D. would be a liability rather than an asset for him; in 1926 he wrote to Geddes: "My lack of a degree has become a valuable distinction in America. The Ph.D. is such an inevitable sign of mediocrity" (WD 107). He also considered careers as a sociologist, a dramatist, and a literary critic before, as he says, "I found the coat of

many colors that actually fitted me" (VWB 2). Rather than conforming to a more conventional academic or literary role, Mumford describes himself as "an *Anti*-professor in all my ways and works" (FJO 69), as a "deliberate anti-expert" (FJO 83), and as one "dedicated to the . . . role of a generalist" (WD 251). In his role as a generalist, Mumford seeks both to "complement" the role of the specialist and to expose "the inadequacy of the single-track thinking of the expert" (FJO 83). He describes his "characteristic achievements" as those that have come about "through breaking down the formal barriers between academic compartments, and drawing freely on whatever sources of valid knowledge were needed to unify theory, experience and practice" (WD 187). He says that he has "felt free to explore neglected areas or unorthodox approaches without current academic sanction" (SL 189). Mumford's "specialty," if he has one, is interpretation rather than description, integration rather than concentration. As a generalist, he has developed a unique style of cultural analysis; he employs this comprehensive, wide-ranging approach both to interpret historical development and to expose contemporary problems. His methodology combines the broadly based, Geddesian style of sociological analysis with the penetrating philosophical insights of a literary artist like Melville. Mumford is a historian and critic who draws upon personal experiences and his empirical studies of the urban landscape, as well as more conventional scholarly resources, and, like Melville, he "clothes" all of this in a "poetic vision."

Mumford views his vocation as a man of letters with the utmost seriousness, and he aims to produce writing that is significant and relevant to a general audience. While his books contain a wealth of factual and historical detail, this data is shaped by a moral and philosophical purpose; he uses historical fact and narrative not only to recreate the past but, more importantly, to show its relevance to the present. Rather than attempting to accomplish the traditional aims of historical scholarship or art and literary criticism, Mumford seeks to interpret and integrate on a broad scale, to warn, to provoke action. He assumes that his readers have some familiarity with the backdrop of his books (the entire course of Western Civilization!) yet lack, as he says, "certain elements of humanist discipline that I, by reason of my varied heritage, could bring to the subject" (VWB 368). Very early in his career (1925) Mumford assumed the responsibility of conveying to the modern world nothing less than "a vision to live by again"; he described this vision as "a synthesis of attitudes, which will lead out toward the

knowledge and the life in which we can find satisfaction" (FK 99). Communicating such a vision and creating such a synthesis became enduring constants in Mumford's work. He assumed as his "vocation" the challenge of confronting the profound change in "the climate of the world" that occurred in the twentieth century: "to interpret that change, to become acutely aware of its menacing possibilities" while working "to forfend them" (FK 379). An important clue to understanding his purposes as a writer lies in the comment of one of his Stanford students whom he delightedly quotes: "Mr. Mumford hasn't taught us anything new, but what we already knew now begins to come together, so we can use it" (FJO 33). This deceptively understated evaluation quite accurately describes the fundamental intent of Mumford's writing: to reveal and evaluate the meanings beneath and purposes beyond the entire range of historical fact and cultural forms and to relate these meanings and purposes to contemporary life and what it means to be human. Such an effort, whether successful or not, certainly qualifies as a conspicuous example of literary audacity.

The central theme, which is also the fundamental premise, of the autobiographical writings is the assumption that the man and his work are one—that the life is inseparable from the writing, that the identity of the man, the essential "self," is to be found in the words he has written. The autobiographical works reveal the unity that exists among Mumford's experience, thought, and writing; they emphasize the organic relationship between the personality, including its unconscious aspects, and what has been published. The autobiographical works also disclose a web of interconnections that extends throughout his writing, from the earliest to most recent. They convey this sense of unity and coherence by calculated design—a unity that exists, I think, owing to the inherent nature of his thought and method. The sources of his thought and writing, as discussed above, reside in a personal, inner stimulus as much as in the outward influence of people and events. A major purpose of the autobiographical works is to depict the quality of "organic unity" that characterizes the evolution of his thought and work: to present "the imperfect, embryonic form" of a certain idea that eventually matured to completeness; to demonstrate that, as he says, while "some of my most original intuitions arose in the very act of writing this or that book, . . . the seed . . . may have been dropped half a century before" (WD 187). All the things that he has experienced or written included in the autobiographical texts are, therefore, relevant to defining the self or understanding his work. He

discovers, in fact, that "many of my written fantasies have turned out to be gropings, forebodings, formative anticipations of unconscious urgings that were soon to take on outward shapes" (SL 128). The two most significant of these written "fantasies" are the novelette "The Little Testament of Bernard Martin" and the play *The Builders of the Bridge:* both works, as autobiographical documents, provide important clues to his inner life as well as "anticipations" of themes and concerns he develops in his works of cultural criticism. In this effort to define his essential "self" by representing in his autobiography the whole of his experience, Mumford qualifies as what James Olney describes as the "autobiographer duplex"—one for whom "the whole self" exists "symbolically complete in the metaphors" of the autobiography. For Mumford, as with any other "autobiographer duplex," "the autobiographic process is not after the fact but a part and a manifestation of the living, and not only a part but, in its symbolic recall and completeness, the whole of living."[6] And since in Mumford's case the man is his writing, much of the work published as "autobiography" consists of writing produced in a conventionally non-autobiographical context.

In the autobiographical texts Mumford several times describes each of two events that he believes reveal much about his personality, abilities, and literary inclinations. He is impressed with the accuracy of Eleanor Brooks's evaluation of his life and character based upon, of all things, her palm-reading expertise. She says to him: "you have sacrificed your happiness by erecting a series of purposes and goals, which will give you a more interesting life, but a more difficult one"; she speculates that perhaps a woman will enter his life "in early middle age" (as in fact Catherine Bauer did) but neither she nor any other woman will "mean enough to deflect you from your purpose" (FK 355). He also views the Rorschach test that he underwent in 1947 as an accurate evaluation of his mind and personality. To Mumford's delight, the tester discerned a "beautiful balance of the intellectual, the emotional, and the practical"; in fact, the psychologist quite accurately described the "Balanced Personality" Mumford had long advocated as an "ideal goal." The test also detected "a failure to resolve the conflict between the pragmatic scientist-intellectual and the artist-philosopher" (WD 430). Just this sort of conflict exists throughout Mumford's thought and writing, and he undoubtedly recognizes it. Yet its effects are productive rather than restrictive; the conflict produces a creative tension, manifest both stylistically and thematically, that animates much of his writing. This creative dialectic is another way in

which the personality and the writing are bound together inextricably in an "organic unity" of theory and practice.

Mumford's persistent commitment to the discipline of writing and his undaunted determination to establish a literary career have been, perhaps, the most important factors responsible for his success as a writer. In order to achieve his literary aims, throughout his career he has consistently sought to preserve his vocational and personal freedom. Giving priority to his own writing projects above all other work and opportunities, he has not, in general, sought foundation grants or permanent university appointments. Although Mumford has held teaching posts at Stanford, Harvard, and Pennsylvania, he claims that there is no comparison between the life of a professor and that of a writer: "I had rather live lean in the latter than wax fat in the former" (VWB 233). Even during his early career, he attempted to free himself from the sort of literary hackwork required to earn a living, for at least part of the year, so that he could devote a substantial portion of his time and energy to his books. Although he has worked intermittently in such capacities as editor, professor, and city planning consultant, he considers his role, above all else, to be that of a writer; particularly during the early stages of his career, he carefully planned and sacrificed, even to the extent of turning down opportunities promising substantial remuneration, so that he might have the time and freedom to write his books. Very early in his career (1920), he writes to his future wife that to achieve his ambitions "I ought to stick to literature, pure literature, and shun anything that looks like a sufficient and lucrative job" (FK 48). Confirming the accuracy of Eleanor Brooks's palm-reading analysis, Mumford says that even during adolescence he had certain "inhibitions against having any premature commitment in love that might hamper my vocation as a writer" (WD 426). And in "The Little Testament of Bernard Martin," the narrator indicates the extent of his commitment to writing, describing it as that to which he will devote his energies, psychic as well as physical: "this is he at last: readier to starve than write of servile nothings, readier to transmute his lust in work than spend himself half-heartedly" (FK 142). Mumford believes, in fact, that his commitment to a literary career as an independent generalist has been a crucial factor responsible for whatever significance his writing may possess: "If my work survives, it will be because I never joined the fashionable scramble or looked elsewhere for support than on the seat where I sat" (WD 433). At the risk of echoing a book jacket blurb, I believe that as the story of a literary

career the autobiographical writings recount a tale of personal and intellectual courage; they depict the life of a dedicated writer who has successfully maintained his independence and the integrity of his work in spite of literary tradition, academic convention, and financial pressures.

It is clear that Mumford finds his essential identity in his thought and writing rather than in the outward events of his life. Having achieved a measure of stability and contentment in his marriage and family, by 1940 his life, as he depicts it, is one almost completely involved in and committed to his writing. He describes his life at middle age as one "already narrowed and concentrated on my work . . . already turning away from disturbing personal intimacies, perhaps prematurely," so that he might devote his "undistracted energies" to his writing (WD 329). Mumford's rigorous and disciplined program of writing produced a "tense purposeful household, [a] narrowed routine"—against which his spirited son Geddes often rebelled (GM 233). As his career evolved, Mumford became increasingly absorbed in his writing. So intense and complete became this progressive involvement that after 1940, one might say, the man has become his work. The fact that *Sketches,* his "formal" autobiography, ends at mid-life (1940) supports this view.

Dedicated to the writer's craft and pursuing its independent course, Mumford's life is marked by an emphasis on withdrawal and seclusion. He often describes in *Sketches* the solitude, frequently self-imposed, that he has continually experienced since his boyhood. These moments of withdrawal and solitude have contributed significantly to his development as a writer. Throughout his career he has tended, as he says, to go his "own way," to play "the lone wolf," and this "has been more a matter of choice than of temperament" (SL 94). He describes, for example, the formative influence of the "many lonely evening hours" he spent during his early sojourn in London "dreaming, hoping, planning, yearning" (SL 255). His reluctance to accept a long-term academic appointment and even his removal to Amenia from New York are indications of both his commitment to "literature, pure literature" and his determination to pursue a career as an independent generalist. This habit of withdrawal and isolation is, of course, related to the necessity for undisturbed reflection required by any intellectual. In fact, in *Sketches* he discusses the importance of "withdrawal and return," as described by Arnold Toynbee, to both "the most creative periods of every historical culture" and "individual

thinkers"; such a cycle, he believes, is essential for "continued creativity" and "renewal" (SL 450). In Mumford's case withdrawal is an important component of the career he so conscientiously designed for himself.

In the autobiographical works, Mumford's analysis of what he considers to be his distinctive literary assets and his explanation of how he went about writing various books provide illuminating insights into his work and purposes. He describes his role as that of "a fairly courageous and venturesome scout, at my best when working over fresh ground" (VWB 424). As such a "scout," seeking new approaches and fresh interpretations, he believes that he can make original and important contributions and that he can discover "the deeper more important things . . . that all the pack-donkeys of scholarship would never, with all their diligence, even get a smell of" (VWB 227–28). He describes his plan for the Renewal of Life Series as "a piece of unmitigated and unpardonable impudence" (VWB 95), yet he devoted most of his energies over a period of twenty years to the project. After beginning work on *The City In History* (1963), which he initially envisaged as a relatively uncomplicated historical documentation and amplification of certain ideas presented in *The Culture of Cities* (1938), he is surprised to discover that "the book has taken command of me, as if . . . I should not leave this subject for good without making a fresh contribution to it" (FJO 281). His account of writing *Technics and Civilization* (1934) also reveals something of his creative process. He finds himself fully absorbed in the job: "writing steadily, firmly, relentlessly . . . with the feeling that nothing can stop me, and that at the end I shall have a very powerful and important book to show for it" (VWB 92–3). In both instances, he feels somehow as if he is driven by a force beyond himself; in fact, I believe that in the process of translating his visionary ideal into words he is sustained by little more than sheer confidence and courage. The powerful sense of purpose, the uncompromising ambition, the fearless audacity: these are the hallmarks of the writer.

Personal Philosophy

Because of its inherent nature and purpose, Mumford's personal philosophy resists succinct description or a structured, categorical sort of analysis. In fact, his philosophy—using the term in a general sense to describe his basic assumptions, values, and purposes—is not a rigidly organized system of thought nor is it ever fully and consciously articu-

lated as a "philosophy" outside of the essay "What I Believe." Rather, his life's work constitutes his complete philosophy, and, as several commentators have pointed out, there is a remarkable consistency throughout his writing, from first book to last.[7] The autobiographical works exhibit this consistency and emphasize those ideas, themes, and purposes that are fundamental to understanding the man and his writing.

Mumford's philosophy is that of a humanist deeply committed to the value of life and believing in its rich complexity and manifold possibility. The life and potential of each person, he believes, are inextricably bound up in the social and historical fabric that envelops him—a fabric delicately woven of language, tradition, art, and the environment, both natural and human. Man's purpose is to realize all that it means to be fully human. However, he fears that much of man's energy, as well as the earth's resources, is wasted in enterprises that hinder him from realizing his humanity. In particular, the vast and pervasive powers that are associated with "the myth of the machine"—powers which enthrall and threaten mankind—prevent contemporary man from achieving what should be his "central concern, his own self-humanization" (WD 14–15). Because of the immense power structures and weapons systems that now dominate and endanger the world, he believes that mankind's future is an exceedingly perilous one. The means and purpose of man's self-humanization are not to be found in science and technology: "it is not in extensive cosmonautic explorations of outer space, but by more intensive cultivation of the historic inner spaces of the human mind, that we shall recover the human heritage" (WD 483).

Much more than mere intellectuality, this "historic" aspect of the human mind, as Mumford describes it, consists of a comprehensive consciousness. Composed of a complex amalgam of emotions and experiences, nothing less than the entire "human heritage" has contributed to forming it: "The mind of man is his own supreme artifact" (WD 470). At the outset of his career while attending the stimulating evening sessions of City College, Mumford recognized "that every life-furthering intellectual experience is always tinged, sometimes deeply colored, with emotions and feelings," and this belief permanently kept him "from accepting any more desiccated version of the mind's activities" (SL 132). Much of his writing has, in fact, sought to recover "the willing, wishing, urging, passionate part of man's life that has been slighted, stifled, and even banished altogether in favor of

practical routines" (FK 363). The essay "Surrealism and Civilization" (included in both miscellanies and quoted in *Sketches*) provides an important key to understanding his view of the nature and workings of the human mind: "Demons, for the modern man, are no less real than electrons. . . . Before we can become sane again, we must remove the greatest of hallucinations—the belief that we are sane now. . . . Even in perverse or sinister or silly forms, the surrealists are restoring the autonomy of the imagination" (FK 363). Fundamental to Mumford's thought, then, is the view that the human mind, individual and collective, is much more than the seat of intellectual activity: in addition to being the repository of language, history, and tradition, it is comprised of emotional and imaginative components that are just as significant.

Congruent with his view of the human mind, Mumford's philosophy is an inclusive one that attempts to take account of diverse cultural forms and the varied dimensions of human society. Language, art, literature, architecture, technology, science, politics, religion, philosophy, education, cities, agriculture, sexuality, family life: all facets of human experience and accomplishment are important in the process of man's "self-humanization," and Mumford has sought to interpret and unify all of these areas. A self-described "anti-expert," Mumford might also be described as an "anti-philosopher"; his Whitmanesque inclusiveness seeks to embrace the best of all schools of thought, philosophies, and religions without being rigidly confined to any one interpretation or set of doctrines. He says that his view, like Emerson's, "includes the skepticisms as well as the faiths of mankind" (WD 520). He seeks unity among man's inner consciousness, his experience, and the world about him: "We live in a world where no single event exists by itself, but, on the contrary, is organically controlled by its entire environment" (FK 321). Without succumbing to a Melvillian bitterness and despair, he accepts both good and evil as necessary and significant components of life. In the spirit of his early master Patrick Geddes, he recognizes and reverences a complex, delicately balanced "human ecology": "Life . . . implies these manifold cooperations, and the finer life becomes, the more complicated is this network, and the more highly conscious does one become of it" (FK 318). To become aware of and to nurture the intricate complexity and rich potential of life are the basic imperatives of Mumford's philosophy.

The principle of "organic unity," a concept which Mumford emphasizes in "What I Believe," is a distinctive and very important feature of his philosophy. "Organic unity" implies balance and inte-

gration among the varied components that contribute to a meaningful and purposeful life. He believes that the principle can be embodied in works of art, personalities, cities, even periods of history. He says that "the place to achieve organic unity primarily is in living itself, in encompassing all the activities that make a full life" (FK 322). Man's purpose, according to Mumford, is to seek this sort of balance, to create order, to discover meaning, to live purposefully—in both the individual life and in the social community. "Organic unity," for Mumford, is also synonymous with "culture," and the acquisition of culture is the aim of the balanced life: "the end of all practical activity is culture: a maturing mind, a ripening character, an increasing sense of mastery and fulfillment, a higher integration of all one's powers in a social personality; a larger capacity for intellectual interests and emotional enjoyments, for more complex and subtle states of mind" (FK 319–20).

Mumford's philosophy, then, embraces all aspects of life; in fact, life is significant for him because of the diversity of experiences it offers. In his view, life provides sufficient opportunities and rewards to engage and challenge man's highest energies and aspirations; it also possesses the resources to gratify his deepest emotional and spiritual needs. He regards "all attempts to prove the littleness, the transience, or the insignificance of life . . . to be false to the facts of human experience" (WD 186). Yet far from unrealistically ignoring the painful and perplexing aspects of existence, Mumford believes that life's tragedy contributes to its manifold richness. Man achieves greatness through his efforts to overcome the ineluctable, ultimately insurmountable "human problems" that life presents—problems "that spring from life's shortness, its pain, its accidental defacements and destructions, its lack of assured justice or rational purpose or creative fulfillment" (WD 186). In addition to whatever happiness and success he may enjoy, therefore, man must also come to terms with the contradictions, evil, and suffering that are a part of life. Such difficulties are integral components of existence that can provide meaning and further human development: "Evil and good are phases in the process of human growth; and who can say which is the better teacher? Illness, error, defeat, frustration, disintegration, malicious accident, all these elements are as much in the process of life as waste, nutrition, and repair" (FK 319). When he wrote this in the 1930 essay "What I Believe," Mumford could have hardly imagined the sort of global horrors or the personal tragedy World War II would bring—the concentra-

tion camps, the atomic bomb, the death in action of his son Geddes. Yet he maintained his passionate humanism and reverence for life through it all. In fact, nearing the age of ninety, he writes that confronting the reality of death and learning to live with grief are important aspects of the full "human experience" (WD 400). In *Sketches* he asserts that his life has been richer and more meaningful than one characterized by a "bland happiness"; he rejoices in the diversity of a life that has known "dramatic conflict, joy, antagonism, suspense—and alas! tragedy!" (SL 302).

While admitting life's contradictions and recognizing the existence of evil, Mumford's philosophy is neither a desperate stoicism nor a pusillanimous acquiescence that accepts without struggle or criticism whatever fortune dispenses. Rather it is an affirmation of the significance of the entire range of human experience: "for me the great end is not to be happy but to be *absorbed,* and pain and grief are as capable of effecting that as pleasure" (FJO 176). Elsewhere he writes: "Life is measured by the capacity for significant experience, and not by power or riches or length of days" (FK 323). In fact, one might say that the fundamental purpose of his autobiographical works, particularly *Sketches,* is to validate this principle by depicting his own "significant experiences." Mumford asserts in *Sketches* that a line from a letter written to his wife in 1920 can serve as "the key to this whole autobiography": "When I say that I wish you happiness, I mean that I hope as you grow older you will become more intensely alive" (SL 239–40). This belief in the value of life, in its rich diversity and possibilities for significant experiences, constitutes Mumford's essential "faith." It is ultimately, he writes, a faith that "cannot be expressed . . . that deeper urge of life, that rationality beneath all reasons, which bottoms one's existence" (FK 317). "Life itself," therefore, in all its aspects, is "the central good and the source of all other goods" (FK 382). Mumford's own life, as depicted in the autobiographical works, is a testimony to his "faith"; in other words, he consciously depicts his life as the expression of his philosophy.

While one may not be able to absorb from firsthand experience the full range and possibilities of human existence, Mumford believes that he can "realize" much of its diversity and meaning in the imagination. Symbolic expression in art is the primary means by which one achieves this realization, for art, ideally, is the expression of the full and balanced life. The creative act forges a variety of elements into an "organic unity": "our whole social heritage, all the forms and symbols

that have aided human expression in the past, the cumulative effect of many cultures and many different modes of life" (HM 38). He writes that "it is not what one does" but rather what one *"realizes"* in the imagination that "keeps existence from being vain and trivial" (HM 38). Moreover, he says that "the highest product of art is not a painting, a statue, a book, a pyramid, but a human personality" (HM 188). In Mumford's view, therefore, art is the expression of the balanced personality, and the effect of good art is to inculcate in its audience the balanced life, the life of full realization. Art constitutes "a realm which is independent of the insensate forces in the universe"; it "is the means by which man circumvents or postpones his doom, transcends his creaturely limitations, and bravely meets his tragic destiny" (HM 127). The fact that Mumford first elaborates this view in *Herman Melville* (the source of the quotations above) is significant; as discussed earlier, studying Melville deeply influenced Mumford and revealed to him what art at its best could do.

Consistently promoting the ideal of the full and balanced life, Mumford has long been wary of what he terms "the fallacy of systems." This concern is a prominent theme throughout his work. He views with suspicion those doctrinaire theories that attempt to regulate or inhibit the life of the individual or the community. He has little patience with aesthetic theories or reductive methodologies that insist on a single interpretative approach or recognize only one level of meaning. Such limited points of view may include rigid critical, philosophical, or religious doctrines as well as political and ideological theories. The most pervasive and threatening of these "systems" are those associated with what he terms "the myth of the machine." He believes that there exists "a general failure in every rigorously formulated philosophic system to meet all of life's diverse occasions and demands" (WD 205). "This skepticism of isolated systems," he writes, "is basic to my thinking; but it has another name: the affirmation of organic life" (WD 208). Consequently, he mistrusts those approaches and theories whose interpretations invariably confirm a fixed thesis or inflexibly follow a set of critical principles; nor does his own "anti-philosophy" dictate a specific set of purposes and values that comprise the highest ends of art and life—other than assuming the inherent value of life itself. Much of Mumford's work has, of course, sought to analyze and interpret the ideological and technological power systems that enslave man with the purpose of liberating humanity from such domination. Throughout the autobiographical writings, Mumford pro-

motes the whole and balanced life, a life free of the "fallacy of systems" be they technological or philosophical.

Related to his view of the "fallacy of systems" is his impatience with the limited perspectives that accompany the myopia of over-specialization. In his role as a "generalist," as an avowed "anti-expert," he practices what he advocates by refusing to specialize in a traditional academic discipline or to pursue a conventional literary career. In "What I Believe" he writes: "That specialization inevitably leads to efficiency is a specious argument; for as there is, in Ruskin's words, no wealth but life, so there is no efficiency except that which furthers life" (FK 321). The "specialization" he speaks of here refers, I think, to a narrow focus of the individual's activities as well as ideological views and systems that attempt to limit or control the life of the community. Here again, Mumford's philosophy is exemplified in his practice.

Man's acquiescence to "the fallacy of systems," Mumford believes, is largely responsible for the repression, terror, and destruction that have plagued the twentieth century. In his view, the "debasement" of contemporary life has come about because of a failure to recognize the value of the balanced life. He decries "the kind of mental decomposition that takes place in those who have never consciously savored life's feast, for their unlived life takes its revenge, now sinking into docile acceptance of their prisonlike routine, now erupting in fantasies and acts of insensate violence" (FK 383). Such consequences are reflected in "the cult of anti-life, with all its psychotic violence and its infantile debasements" (FK 378), which he analyzes at length in *The Pentagon of Power.* Mumford acknowledges the reality of evil and is not afraid to confront it; he condemns the cynicism, violence, and horror that pervade the contemporary world; his work attempts to grapple with those seemingly intractable forces that demean and threaten mankind. Mumford unsparingly depicts, often in terrifying images, the hideous abuses and monolithic "pentagons of power" that imperil the contemporary world; yet he also continues to believe devoutly in the value of life and potential of man to overcome such threats. Man's hope lies in assiduously cultivating the balanced and full life: "People cannot rebuild a rotten world unless they have a sounder and richer one inside themselves. Whatever exemplifies life assists in this process of growth and renewal" (FK 334).

Mumford's optimism, his faith in life's potential and in man's ability to overcome the forces that threaten him, has been an enduring

theme in his thought and writing. He attributes this sanguine view, in part, to the confident and optimistic spirit that prevailed prior to World War I, a spirit that he well remembers and still, to a significant degree, retains: "These cheerful thoughts entered my bloodstream and today, in whatever dilution, continue to circulate through my body. Indeed they provide a certain almost physiological sustenance, . . . [a] deep animal faith" (FK 378). He responds to those who accuse him of being an excessively pessimistic writer, if not a mordant "prophet of doom," by maintaining that his temperament is a "buoyant one"; rather, he says, "it is the facts themselves that are gloomy" (FJO 456). In spite of the "dismaying" evidence testifying to the precarious predicament of the contemporary world, Mumford has continued to write and to maintain hope for man's survival: "If I didn't think that there was indeed a chance for recovery, . . . I would throw up the whole job: in so far as I continue to write at all I still, if not an optimist, have faith" (FJO 457).

Mumford grounds this "faith" in man's capabilities and future on what he sees as two fundamental sources of renewal. The first is the latent capacity of man to respond to a crisis with resilience, courage, and commitment. This view was confirmed for him by the response of the American soldiers during World War II: the transformation of "millions of men, softened, and made overly self-indulgent by the kind of civilian existence conjured up by the gadgeteers and advertising men, was one of the conspicuous miracles of our time: proof enough that, if the demand were sufficiently inexorable, there was no degree of physical or moral reconversion that might not be effected" (GM 278). The soldiers' response exhibited a human potential that Mumford had always assumed but had never at first hand seen so dramatically illustrated. The second source of renewal lies in the cultural heritage of the past. What he calls "the living stream of human history" carries the resources that can enable man to survive—an "accumulation of values and meanings in language, art, religion, and science." These cultural accomplishments have given Mumford himself "the emotional energy" that sustains his faith in the future of civilization in spite of "an endless series of frustrations, crippling injuries, and disasters" (FK 378). As a historian and critic of culture, Mumford seeks to identify and to interpret such sources of energy. His view that art and culture are necessary to nourish human life and to inspire renewal is an important aspect of his inherent and persistent humanism: he believes both in the sustaining value of man's cultural achievements and in

man's innate ability to conquer those forces that threaten to destroy him.

In spite of this fundamental optimism, however, one cannot ignore the strain of pessimism and, sometimes, caustic bitterness that appears in the autobiographical works. After 1930 it became increasingly clear to Mumford that vast and insidious forces were beginning to pervade and infect contemporary life—forces man neither recognized nor comprehended how to control. Echoing the language he had used nearly two decades earlier to describe Melville's outlook, in a 1947 letter to Van Wyck Brooks he expresses his fears of an impending global catastrophe to which man seems oblivious: he describes his "underlying and persistent sense that everything is going wrong, that the captain is drunk and the mates are mad and the crew is afflicted with sleeping sickness" (VWB 309). He claims that his so-called "pessimism" is rather "an attempt to awaken a reaction sufficient to prevent my worst forebodings from coming true"; yet, he continues, "unfortunately, all too often, I have been dismally right" (FJO 455). The sources of Mumford's pessimism lie not only in what he considers to be a realistic appraisal of the ubiquitous and inexorable forces of "anti-life" but also in what he perceives as the ineffectiveness of his warnings, measured by the lack of public response to his writing. He describes his disappointment in the reception and effect of his books by drawing another parallel with Melville: because of the lack of response to his work, he writes, there are "moments when a Melvillian bitterness and a Melvillian scorn, if not a Melvillian despair, seize me" (VWB 318). In his view, his writing has largely failed to have a significant impact on urban improvement, the commitment to dehumanizing technological systems and nuclear weapons, and national politics. Experiencing one of his moments of despair, he writes in 1956: "Plainly I must face the fact that whatever the merits of my work, I am unable to speak to my own countrymen: what I say is by now so foreign to their ways of thinking and their general way of life that they will not even bother to read it, much less to discuss it" (FJO 257). Yet his dedication to his literary career and purposes never succumbs to such moments of doubt and frustration. It is quite significant that the preceding statement was written well before the publication of the three long books that he considers the most significant of his career: *The City in History* (1963) and the two volumes of *The Myth of the Machine* (1967, 1970). The major purpose of these books is to interpret and to forfend the insidious and pervasive forces, both human and technological, that threaten the

future of man. Mumford's optimism reasserts itself in these books; although the forces and dangers which he describes in these works are vast and intimidating, he assumes man's potential to recognize and to combat such threats to his survival, his capacity to "rebuild a rotten world."

Just as Melville throughout his career had to endure what he considered the indignity of being permanently tagged as the author of *Typee,* his one "important" book, Mumford has often bridled at being characterized as a utopian idealist—a label affixed to him by those who know little more of his work than the title of his first book, *The Story of Utopias* (1922). Mumford views such a description of his work as inaccurate, if not downright insulting: "If anything, I am an anti-utopian, who knows that a blessing repeated too often may become a curse, and that a curse faced bravely may become a blessing" (WD 531). In fact, Mumford's fundamental opposition to "the fallacy of systems," a stance that opposes any prescriptive ideology or rigid organization, is emphatically anti-utopian. His view of the "balanced life" as one that finds purpose in trial and tragedy as well as in life's happier, more fulfilling moments presupposes a utopian idealism. Consequently, there is, if anything, a dominant "anti-utopian" theme in his thought and work.

However, at the risk of introducing a contradiction, one might argue that Mumford does believe in a utopia of sorts. His personal version of utopia promotes liberation rather than conformity; it is a balanced community that enables and encourages each inhabitant to realize his potential. In "What I Believe," he describes a Geddesian "conception of life, unified at the center and ramifying in many inter-relations and comprehensions at the periphery"; this ideal life would be one "organically grounded and pursued with a little courage and audacity. . . . My utopia is such a life, writ large" (FK 322–23). Elsewhere he writes: "My utopia is actual life . . . pushed to the limits of its ideal possibilities within the existing culture" (WD 191). The only utopia that man can achieve, in his view, is one that evolves in the act of living—not one structured according to predetermined design or arbitrary principles. And he believes that such utopias have actually flourished in certain historical periods. Mumford's analysis of civilization assumes that "each great historic period has a real, and to a certain extent, a realized Utopia, . . . the pure form of its actual institutions," a form which may be "abstracted from them and examined by itself" (FK 74–5). This definition of utopia, first presented in *The Story of Utopias* as the "idolum," becomes a paradigmatic form in his histories

of culture; he describes the "idolum" as a "diffused subjective environment," which includes both "the physical scene" and "the social heritage of ideas" (FK 186). Some versions of utopia that he has described include fifth-century Athens, the medieval monastery, the eighteenth-century country house, and the New England village. Mumford, then, accepts the concept of utopia insofar as it represents an ideal community that promotes the development of the balanced personality, yet he does not believe that such a utopia can be planned or methodically created. Rather it develops spontaneously and organically within a certain culture, society, or community under the appropriate yet largely unpredictable conditions.

In the autobiographical works, particularly in *Sketches,* Mumford describes situations and experiences that may be viewed as versions of his personal utopia. Just as there exist certain "utopias" that embody the best of various cultures and historical periods, certain events or aspects of his personal experience represent the highest possibilities and rewards of life, communal or individual. His 1922 visit to Geneva was a formative and memorable experience; it exemplifies for him the possibilities of intellectual fulfillment integrated with a beautiful urban setting. Vividly recalling the responsive minds of his colleagues and students as well as the delights of the city itself, he describes the experience as one of the most memorable and meaningful events of his life. His evocations of the Greenwich Village that he knew during the twenties, which include nostalgic descriptions of both the city scene and encounters with his literary friends, depict another sort of ideal urban environment; living there during that period, he writes, "taught me what a city could and should be" (FK 45). Similarly, his descriptions of living at the Sunnyside, New York, housing development depict, if not a utopian existence, at least a balanced community exemplifying some of the possibilities of life abetted by effective urban planning. Mumford vividly describes in particular one memorable, almost magical evening during which the residents emerged from their homes to observe the freshly fallen snow and "the muted rosy beauty of the night sky over Manhattan." "We embraced each other then," he writes, "and we embraced the world in the pure joy of being: knowing that life at that moment held nothing better" (SL 420). In the context of the two previously described scenes in *Sketches,* one might describe this as a communal epiphany: the community environment, the beauty of nature, and the human concord combine to create a symbolic moment of utopian perfection. Mumford's country home near Ame-

nia, New York, also represents a version of his private utopia. In *Sketches* and *Green Memories,* he describes the idyllic aspects of his life here. His home is outwardly non-descript, but inwardly "dear"—"the house of our realities" (SL 485). And he frequently mentions how the "underlayer of rural experience" (SL 486) acquired there has enriched both his life and work. While Mumford disavows any faith in the abstract, regimented utopia as classically described, therefore, the utopia realized in actual living is an abiding ideal in his thought and writing. Mumford's utopia is not a theoretically formulated model that dictates the shape and purpose of an "ideal" society; rather his utopia evolves organically within the living human community. He writes: "Damn utopias! Life is better than utopia" (FK 353).

To summarize, the essential quality of Mumford's thought is more akin to a religious faith—emphasizing certain moral values and an intuitive understanding—than a rigorously formulated, logically cohesive philosophy. His outlook is squarely in the transcendental tradition of Emerson and Whitman, rather than following a more contemporary realistic or naturalistic mode. As Mumford puts it: "by natural bent and by training I am of the tribe of Euripides and Aristophanes rather than of Pythagoras and Aristotle" (SL 328). Mumford's fundamental outlook is characterized by a cosmic inclusiveness, an emphasis upon discovering the meaning and value of human experience, and a belief in the sacredness of life in all its organic manifestations. The imagery of fertile, salubrious organicism pervades his writing; in his analyses of history and culture, he describes the processes of growth, renewal, and efflorescence. His view emphasizes balance, wholeness, and breadth of experience. He believes that man has the capability and the obligation to endow his life with meaning, value, and purpose; he sees man's fundamental task as the "realization of experience." To achieve this realization, one must come to terms with the intellect as well as the emotions, the outer as well as the inner man; the process involves a commitment to that which promotes "life expressive and life purposive." A passionate humanist, Mumford believes that an awareness of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the past is essential to attaining the full life and understanding the present. Mumford has devoted much of his career to analyzing those forces that prevent man from achieving these goals and that now threaten to annihilate civilization itself. The autobiographical writings demonstrate that Mumford himself has sought, cultivated, and often realized in experience the sort of values and ideals his personal philosophy endorses.

The Evolution of a Career

Mumford's concern with what he perceives as threats to culture, civilization, and the future of man has been the dominant motive in shaping the content and purpose of his work as a mature writer. If there is anything more important to Mumford than his dedication to the literary life, it is the deep commitment to moral values inherent in his personal philosophy. This moral element, his determination to preserve and enrich human life and culture, began to be a prominent aspect of his thought around 1930 and became increasingly important as a motivating impulse for his writing. Mumford speaks of the "break" in his work that occurred after *The Brown Decades* (1931). He writes: "Up to then I was largely though not entirely concerned with interpreting the formative forces in our culture. . . . But after 1930, the field of American studies, as such, no longer occupied my mind: I . . . was ready to cope with a larger world, whose disorders were becoming increasingly formidable."[8] Mumford's native interests and the varied components of his education had prepared him for such a role; and one must also take into account the effects of his encounter with Melville and Dante —not to mention what he viewed as the perilous state of things both nationally and internationally—in understanding the dramatic change in the content and purpose of his work that occurred at this point in his career.

As this moral concern and the sort of work that it required began to dominate his thinking, Mumford feared that such purposes might divert him from the areas in which he was most interested and the kind of writing and analysis at which he was most adept. In 1945 he finds himself somewhat perplexed as to why his career during the preceding several years seemed to have taken a turn so remote from the interests that previously had been "uppermost in my mind" (FJO 83). And in 1975 he writes: "For the last thirty years, . . . I have been forced, much against my native interests and talents, to confront the suicidal nihilism of our civilization" (FK 382–83). However, I think this statement belies what actually occurred; it appears unlikely that such concerns deflected him from the direction his "native interests and talents" would lead. The evidence, in fact, indicates that just the opposite is true: rather than distracting him from his natural métier, Mumford's moral concern for the fate of the contemporary world motivated his greatest literary achievement. Generally speaking, his work evolved from an emphasis on American cultural criticism—dur-

ing the twenties—to a concern with nothing less than confronting, analyzing, and overcoming the most urgent contemporary global problems. After 1930 he began to apply one of the lessons he had learned from Geddes: the importance of one's ideas having practical relevance, if not tangible effects. A 1942 letter to Van Wyck Brooks indicates something of his deep moral commitment and concern for the fate of man; describing his fears regarding the precarious condition in which the world finds itself, he writes that had he anticipated the crisis: "I would have given up all thought of pursuing my literary career in 1937 and turned seriously to politics: because it is for lack of political fortitude that we are now in such a desperate condition" (VWB 215). Elsewhere he writes that he has never accepted the "divorce" between the reclusive, aloof life of the writer and "active responsibility and participation without a certain inner resistance" (WD 428). Therefore, Mumford's characterization of his career as an "exclusive commitment to a writer's lonely life" (WD 428) is, in certain important respects, a partial and deceptive description. For, given the content and purpose of his last three major books and assuming the accuracy of his thesis, one can hardly imagine any other sort of writing that could be more significant or relevant for contemporary man.

Whatever apprehensions Mumford may have had that writing which sought to address contemporary problems would deflect him from a "higher" literary mission were therefore unwarranted. This important point is worth reiterating: rather than resulting in a diversion of his interests and an unproductive use of his talents, Mumford's response to crises besetting the contemporary world—a response prompted by his moral commitment—far from wasting his "native interests and talents" inspired what he ultimately considered his most significant books. The motive and concerns that momentarily caused him to consider entering politics profoundly influenced the content and purpose of his writing; his books have been the means whereby he has sought to avert the dangers besetting the modern world. In this respect, the intellectual became the moral activist. Just as undertaking what seemed at the time to be the uncomplicated task of expanding the historical sections of *The Culture of Cities* resulted in his massive and original masterwork *The City in History,* planning what he initially envisioned as a "rather neat little book on the origins of the machine" put him "on the trail of some important ideas about the early life of man" (FJO 345). This "neat little book," of course, evolved into the monumental, two-volume *Myth of the Machine*—his most direct and

comprehensive assault on contemporary problems. While working on these books, he said that the project, which he began at age seventy-one, "has given a fresh point and meaning to . . . my life, when I had thought . . . I would be living effortlessly on my intellectual capital" (FJO 421). Mumford had, somewhat reluctantly and almost inadvertently, become involved in a literary mission that would engage and challenge him well past the age at which most people are content to settle into an easy retirement.

The City in History (1963), *The Myth of the Machine: I. Technics and Human Development* (1967), *II. The Pentagon of Power* (1970): these three books, collectively forming Mumford's *magnum opus,* were motivated by his unflagging humanism and deep moral commitment. While these books are, in one respect, historical surveys of the evolution of cities and the development of technics, they also seek to remedy contemporary problems and to inculcate his "values for survival." The culminating works of his long literary career, these three books comprise Mumford's final and most complete response to the challenging task that a much younger writer set for himself in 1930: the urgency of resolving "our present dilemmas," he wrote, demands "a wholesale rethinking of the basis of modern life and thought, for the purpose of eventually giving a new orientation to all our institutions. . . . It is a matter of altering the entire basis upon which our present mechanistic and life-denying civilization rests" (FK 206, 208). The ultimate expression of these purposes occurs at the end of his career—a conclusion that is also the climax. In his last three major books of cultural criticism, Mumford advocates what he describes as "a more adequate philosophy which shall take full account, not merely of our great human achievements, but also of our irrationalities, our frustrations, our perversions." Mumford hoped that these books would enable man to "overcome the forces and institutions which have so far bedevilled human development"; to accomplish this, he offers what he describes as "a radical reinterpretation and revision of human history" (FJO 421). This moral response to contemporary dangers, his aim to confront urgent problems and to offer relevant solutions, may have indeed led him far afield from the original purposes and interests of his early career. However, this impulse endowed the work of his mature years with an unprecedented originality, scope, and vitality. For the salient quality of these books is their audacity: Mumford's intention to do nothing less than to alter the "entire basis" of contemporary life and thought.

Mumford's effort to effect such profound changes is most prominently and comprehensively articulated in what can be termed his Great Theme—a concern which finds its ultimate expression in his analysis of "the myth of the machine." The autobiographical writings devote considerable attention to detailing the evolution of this Great Theme throughout his career, and the discussion that follows reflects this emphasis. Motivated by his humanistic and moral values, the Great Theme represents his response to the inimical forces that began to pervade the world during the thirties; by 1945 it had assumed paramount importance in his thinking and writing. As the autobiographical texts make clear, the origins of the Great Theme are evident in some of his earliest writings; yet only after the crises and dangers that beset the world in the decade before and during World War II did it begin to shape and dominate his work. And the two volumes of *The Myth of the Machine,* which trace its historical origins and describe its contemporary manifestations, comprise his final treatment of this theme.

Mumford's concerns and fears regarding the totalitarian ideology of Nazi Germany, and to a lesser extent that of Soviet Russia, did much to focus his attention and energies on developing the Great Theme. In a 1938 essay he described the "pathological condition" of fascism: "its predisposition to suspicion and hatred, its violent paranoia, its readiness to exalt the maimed ego through collective sadism and murder" (WD 385). And in 1939 he lamented the existence of what he perceived as "the moral debasement that subtly has made its inroads everywhere," in the United States as well as Europe. His early and (it often seemed to him) lonely opposition to fascism prompted him to denounce those who advocated isolationism—most notably the historian Charles A. Beard. He saw isolationism as a "narcotic" that made Americans oblivious to the "moral degradation" spreading insidiously, inexorably from Europe to their own shores. He attacked those "debunking journalists and cynical professors" who "eviscerated in their students and disciples every trace of moral judgment, every potentiality for action, every capacity for rational choice" (GM 252). Although his fears concerning Nazism and his urgent yet unheeded appeals that America should take decisive military action against it were soon vindicated, he believed that the crucial content and long-range relevance of his warnings were ignored. By causing certain fundamental, pernicious changes in the political and ideological structure of the Western World, "Hitler had," he asserts, "nevertheless won the

war. Well before the end, Nazism's methods had infiltrated the minds and plans of his enemies and had begun to dominate the science, the technology, and the politics of the so-called Nuclear Age" (SL 436–37). Mumford began to clarify and develop his Great Theme in response to this threat. He undertook to trace and to analyze the historical development of "the myth of the machine" from past to present; he sought to evaluate its assumptions and to identify and interpret its various manifestations.

Mumford's Great Theme attempts to explain why man throughout history has forfeited his essential humanity to technology, the machine, and, in particular, the destructive apparatus of war. Such has occurred, he believes, because man has long been in the thrall of "the myth of the machine": an unquestioning and unfounded faith in the infallibility of science and technology and in the pervasive, highly regimented power systems that such a belief permits. Machines and their systems, in his view, have come to control and dominate human life. Mumford grapples with the perplexing problem of why man's technological "advances," the so-called achievements of "progress," have been more destructive than productive and, in fact, currently threaten to obliterate civilization and human life altogether. Questioning man's obstinate belief in technological expansion "as a good in itself," he seeks to explain why science and the machine have become the "emotive center" in the life of modern man and why the "Pentagon of Power" has "taken command of every other human activity" (WD 471). In his view, the "miscarriages of mind" that have resulted from this unquestioning deference to technics are not merely modern phenomena, for such delusions "have limited the highest achievements of every historic civilization" (WD 483). As Mumford explored these problems and developed this theme over the course of four decades, he ultimately concluded that "the basic ideology" dominating the modern world "was only a scientifically dressed-up justification for the immemorial practices of the ruling classes. . . . The dominant institutions of our time, far from being new, were all in the thrall of a myth at least five thousand years old. Only one value was acknowledged, and that one was taken for granted: the reality of power in all its forms" (FK 375). He describes these dominant institutions as "pentagons of power"—forces and systems spawned by "the myth of the machine," a myth that has beguiled human thinking throughout history. He sees the proliferation of awesomely powerful nuclear weapons under the direct and complete control of a small, elect "priesthood" as the con-

temporary manifestation of a long process of historical evolution. This process involves man's obsessive, continuous glorification of power that is inherent in the origins of the city and that can be traced directly to the Pharaohs. Like the slaves of ancient Egypt, modern man is caught in the cogs of a massive, unrelenting, dehumanizing "megamachine"—a machine which at any moment might capriciously obliterate him.

Not only does Mumford trace the development of "the myth of the machine" and analyze its attendant problems, but, more importantly, he seeks to debunk this myth and to avert its dehumanizing consequences by affirming certain values and describing tactics whereby man can survive. Not only does he endeavor, in his words, "to present a more adequate picture of the relationship between technological progress and social change and human development," but he does this with the purpose of abetting man's development and insuring his survival: "I shall endeavor to restore a more life-favoring ecological and cultural equilibrium. . . . I shall seek to expose the irrational factors that have led man to forfeit [his] essential expressions of human creativity" (WD 469). If man does not embrace certain values, revise his assumptions, and confront the forces that threaten him, the inevitable consequences of his present orientation will be catastrophic. Consequently, Mumford emphasizes the necessity for courageous "moral judgment" and affirms man's "capacity for rational choice" as well as his "potentiality for action." Mumford's development of the Great Theme, then, involves historical interpretation, moral teaching, and incitement to action. If he is correct, the Great Theme is, obviously, vitally significant for contemporary man—and with the passing of time the evidence supporting his analysis appears to be mounting. He argues that the future of civilization and even of human life itself faces grave peril: "*if the forces that now dominate us continue on their present path* they must lead to the collapse of the whole historical fabric. . . . Unfortunately, if we continue upon the premises that have increasingly automated all human activities, there will be no stopping before the ultimate terminus: total destruction" (FK 381). Even if such "total destruction" were not to occur, nuclear warfare would almost certainly result in "the blackout of collective memory" (WD 473). Whatever disastrous consequences might ensue, there is no question about the cause: man's total, ominously "fatal commitment" (WD 453) to technology and his obeisance to its power systems.

When the first atomic bomb was dropped in 1945, Mumford saw

the dreadful vindication of his fears and warnings regarding man's purblind faith in technology. He views obliteration by means of nuclear weapons as the "ultimate terminus"—the logical final consequence of man's worship of "the myth of the machine." It is clear that the threat of global nuclear warfare was the catalyst that led him, after 1945, to devote the greater part of his work to exploring the origins of man's apparent obsession with such destructive power and to formulating a means to avert impending catastrophe. Mumford became so horrified by the threat nuclear weapons posed, as well as the power systems that accompanied their deployment, that the Great Theme increasingly absorbed his attention and energies. This concern informs most of his writing after 1945—obviously in *The Myth of the Machine* and, perhaps less obviously but no less significantly, in *The City in History* and *The Transformations of Man* (1956).

The Great Theme, then, became the single most important concern of Mumford's writing during the most productive and most important phase of his career—which was also its culmination and conclusion. And he denounces the "ethics of extermination" (FJO 236) in some of his most vivid and powerful prose. Since it is so central to his thought and writing, the Great Theme perhaps deserves a bit more elaboration here. Mumford details the history of the "megamachine" as it has evolved throughout civilization, from its earliest forms to its present manifestations. He views the commitment to a nuclear strategy as the "logical" extension of the mentality that advocated the use of "obliteration bombing" by the Allies during World War II; this decision, he argues, "made us the same kind of moral nihilists as our enemies" (FJO 97). By relying on nuclear weapons and the systems that accompany them, America is basing its future welfare on yet another version of "the myth of the machine." The country has committed its future to the schemes of "imprudent, fallible minds and to those who have sanctioned their de-moralized plans," and, he continues, it is highly probable that "at some unpredictable moment their sick fantasies may become unspeakable realities" (WD 459). These stratagems are mere "delusions of grandeur," based on the "supposedly absolute" power afforded by nuclear weapons: they have spawned "a vast network of secret agencies, armed with secret weapons, prepared with secret plans" (WD 465). Such agencies and power systems are, of course, specialized, regimented, and mechanistic in form rather than organic or human. These "pentagons of power," whether in Washington or the Kremlin, are the contemporary manifestations of the ancient "mega-

machine," which has enslaved and terrorized mankind since the beginnings of urban life. Mumford's fears of nuclear catastrophe, therefore, prompted him to explore the historical origins of man's obsession with a power of such devastating potency that it imperils his very existence. The urgency and gravity of the problem have intensified the moral dimensions of his writing; he condemns on moral grounds the destructive potential of atomic weapons and the dehumanizing effects of a strategy based on their use. After the initial military use of the atomic bomb, he wrote that the only hope for man's survival lies in "an absolute submission to a universal standard of humane conduct: a morality built on new foundations to repair the world we have devastated during the last thirty years" (WD 438). Much of his work thenceforward sought to define and advocate such a morality.

The horrors of World War II and, especially, the prospect of nuclear catastrophe significantly influenced the development of Mumford's career after 1945, just as his roots in the city and various personal influences had shaped it earlier. Just as he turned from the American studies books to the wider scope of the Renewal of Life Series around 1930, his concern with developing the Great Theme, beginning in 1945, represents another major shift in emphasis and purpose. After 1945 what is perhaps best described as an ideological element became increasingly important in Mumford's work. An integral component of his Great Theme, Mumford's ideology arises from his moral response to the crises of contemporary life; emphasizing life's value and the importance of "organic unity," it seeks to promote and apply the values of his personal philosophy as solutions to contemporary problems. The autobiographical works demonstrate that this ideological element —which as the motivating impulse behind the Great Theme inspired and informs his major books—was anticipated in some of his earliest writing. The autobiographical works also show the extent to which Mumford's literary career has been shaped by his moral commitment —a commitment which assumed progressively greater prominence in his work and which saw its ultimate expression in the ideological aspect of the Great Theme. Mumford initially feared that in following the insistent demands of his moral conscience he would betray his native talents and interests; however, just the opposite occurred: this moral response motivated what he came to consider his best, most important books—books which enabled him to draw on his diverse interests, unique education, and significant experiences. Moreover, I believe that much of Mumford's literary power resides in his ability to

survey and interpret human development in the context of his deeply held values and ideological purpose. Beginning with the Renewal of Life Series and developing with an increasing sense of purpose and urgency after 1945, Mumford writes as a historian and critic of culture whose work has the utmost relevance for contemporary man.

Mumford's encounters with Geddes, Melville, and other important influences were not "merely" educational or literary experiences remote from the realities of contemporary life. He fully absorbed their work and example and found in them both the inspiration and the means to address the crises besetting the Nuclear Age. It appears, in fact, that he consciously sought to become the sort of writer he calls for in the Dante essay: "The poet who would resolve our chaos . . . will not order experience by turning away from it and renouncing it, . . . but, confronting it, absorbing it, dominating it, he will convert it with implacable will into the materials of art." He will be "such a poet that men will mistake him equally for a scientist, a technician, a philosopher, a statesman" (FK 179). This is an apt description of the unique literary vocation that Mumford eventually shaped for himself. His effort to come to grips with contemporary, technologically related problems led him back to his early literary and artistic interests and provided him the opportunity to reaffirm, refine, and apply his philosophy of the balanced life. Describing the development of his career after 1945, he writes: "I was digging deeper into man's whole development, giving primacy to language and art rather than to far later utilitarian artifacts" (WD 427). Mumford's moral response to what he sees as the crises of contemporary life, therefore, has been both a purposive and liberating force in his writing. Developing the ideological orientation of the Great Theme has enabled Mumford to realize and to exploit the potential of his avowed role as a generalist. Essentially, perhaps, a creative artist, Mumford might be described as a writer accomplished in any one of several specific fields. His grave fears about the prospect of man's surviving the terrible weapons he has created have focused and intensified, rather than diminished, his reverence for life, art, and the delicate cultural fabric that has evolved since man's beginnings. These concerns have given a compelling and pertinent thesis to his analysis and interpretations of man's cultural development.

The development of Mumford's thought, outlined above, is reflected in the content and pattern of his major books. The four books treating American art and culture, published between 1924 and 1931, reflect various early influences and experiences: his friendship with

Van Wyck Brooks (who challenged Mumford's generation to seek a "usable past"); his involvement in the New York literary milieu of the twenties; his Geneva lectures on American literature; his delving into the work of Melville. The full measure of Geddes's influence and Mumford's wider, more diverse interests—including his urban background—are reflected in the ambitious Renewal of Life Series, which he began to plan in 1930 and whose four volumes were published between 1934 and 1951. One suspects that his ostensibly facetious statement to Osborne, as he is finishing the last volume of the series *(The Conduct of Life),* reveals his estimation of his achievement and the future of his career at that point: "the only graceful thing to do will be to die promptly at the height of my private glory if not my public fame, before I become an embittered old man" (FJO 144). However, what he viewed as the imminent, nearly inevitable possibility that mankind would destroy itself with the weapons of technological "progress" prompted Mumford to launch an enterprise even more audacious in purpose and scope than the Renewal of Life Series. As part of this work, he undertook further explorations into the past—particularly concerned with the origins of language, culture, and urban life—and formulated an original interpretation of human development as well as a penetrating critique of contemporary culture. *The Transformations of Man* adumbrates the ideas and purposes of the Great Theme that are developed much more extensively in *The City in History* and *The Myth of the Machine.* He describes *The Transformations of Man* as a summary of human history that "overthrows, or at least badly tilts at, many well established assumptions in history and philosophy, and repairs the damage, I believe, with a better interpretation" (FJO 251). Upon completing *The City in History,* he calls it "by far the solidest and best and most original work I have done" (FJO 315). Yet he later writes that *The Pentagon of Power* is "probably the most original work I have written" (FJO 454). He believes that the three books written during the final phase of his career—works that develop the Great Theme—comprise his most significant literary achievement. In 1970 he writes that *The City in History* and *The Myth of the Machine* volumes are "the three books on which my reputation will probably ultimately rest" (WD 179).

As the challenge to formulate an appropriate response to the world crises that became threatening during the forties began to command Mumford's attention, he hardly suspected that his analysis of these problems and their historical roots might result in the books he would

ultimately consider his masterworks. His interests in technics and the city had long figured prominently in his thought and writing, but the autobiographical writings reveal a persistent assumption—particularly during the early stages of his career—that his first priority, albeit an often repressed one, was to "literature, pure literature" (whatever that was). During the twenties, he concentrated on American cultural criticism and seriously considered a career as a dramatist or novelist. Inspired by the example of Geddes, and others, and following his inclination to pursue his diverse interests, Mumford created instead a unique literary vocation for himself—a career that never conformed to a more traditional pattern. Determined to write as an independent generalist, he obviously faced considerable problems in creating an appropriate style and genre; yet the autobiographical works are remarkably free of doubts or hesitations regarding his literary abilities or the significance of his purposes. Developing his varied interests, seeking to affirm his personal philosophy and values, prompted by his deep moral concern, Mumford was able to discover his true métier: books that are significant and comprehensive as history and cultural criticism, that are relevant to contemporary problems, that seek to affirm and enhance the value and possibilities of human life and experience.

The Art of Audacity

There is a sense, however, in which Mumford has never forsaken his primary commitment to "literature, pure literature." In addition to their comprehensive content and ambitious aims, Mumford's books also contain a powerful "literary" element, which includes, in particular, a striking use of symbolic motifs.

Mumford's aesthetic theory emphasizes the essential relationship between impulse and act, thought and work, that characterizes his writing. In an early (1925) exposition of his aesthetic principles, "Aesthetics: A Dialogue" (a piece included in both autobiographical miscellanies), "Adams," a character who represents Mumford's personal views, states: "I can't accept the Crocean divorce between the practical and the aesthetic or ideal" (FK 92). Elsewhere he writes that "my standards in architecture and literature are one, so that the good life that hovers in the background has, at all events, a unity of interior and exterior" (VWB 30). Despite his commitment to "pure literature," even during the initial stages of his career, he has never recognized any arbitrary distinctions between life and art. He was one of the early and

more influential American critics to explore and develop an aesthetics of architecture and technics. According to his aesthetic theory, the basic purpose of art is to reflect "the good life that hovers in the background," and he is fond of citing William Morris's dictum that "no one should ever possess anything he did not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful" (WD 222). This approach is obviously well-adapted to architectural criticism, but Mumford uses essentially the same criterion to evaluate the other arts. Throughout his criticism of literature, art, and architecture, he has sought to promote the full and balanced life as both a moral imperative and an aesthetic ideal: "The capacity for exuberant expression symbolized by efflorescence—this is the primal gift of life; and to consciously maintain it and guard it and expand it is one of the ultimate reasons for human existence" (WD 205). His aesthetic theory emphasizes results and meanings rather than technique or style; it reflects an awareness of cultural history as well as the nature of the human spirit. His interpretation of modern painting illustrates his view of the function and significance of art. When the distorted and haunting images of surrealistic art began to appear, he saw in them clear evidence that there was something profoundly amiss in the collective psyche of Western man. These images were "a symptom of the disorder and brutality and chaos of the 'real' world" (FK 362). In his view, life and art are inseparable; ideally, art *is* life. A statement in his essay on Albert Pinkham Ryder, I believe, succinctly describes the basis of his aesthetic theory: "Originality does not consist in avoiding the influences of history, tradition, and contemporary life, but in completely assimilating them and making them into new flesh and blood" (FK 350). Achieving such an "original assimilation" has been one of Mumford's basic purposes as a writer, affecting his style and images as well as the structure of his ideas. Both the cultural forms that he analyzes and the prose symbols he creates to represent and interpret them possess significance beyond their materials and the technical virtuosity that went into their making. He is more interested in the meanings and values behind the object—in prose or plastic arts, in cultural forms or his own literary "art"—than what are to him the more superficial elements of technique or style.

Yet Mumford's sensitivity to style is no small part of his unique literary vocation. In addition to providing an introduction to the basic themes in Mumford's thought and writing, the autobiographical works constitute a rich sampler of his various writing styles. These examples reveal him to be a versatile and articulate writer whose style

varies with his subject and purpose. It ranges from the graceful, lucid, often poetic narrative of *Green Memories* and *Sketches;* to the lambent, sometimes impressionistic descriptions and interpretations of *The Golden Day* and *Herman Melville;* to the more formal and forceful prose of his three major books. He strives to create a style that he describes as "organic," which catches "the right mood and accent and rhythm for each new book" (VWB 370–71). He says that an ideal style would be appropriate for "the greatest variety of occasions," would reflect a unity of "form and content," and "would be readable over long stretches, by reasons of variations in tempo, and yet be pithy and epigrammatic when necessary" (VWB 376). Throughout his career he has sought not to allow his concern with presenting original interpretations and, sometimes, urgent warnings to preclude a sensitivity for style, for the "literary" aspects of his writing. For he wants his writing to have merit as "literature" as well as being "scientifically respectable." He writes: "in my ideal world of thought I would gladly forfeit quick results for statements that would be as aesthetically satisfying and humanly as attractive as Plato's dialogues, even if it required more time and effort to achieve this result" (FK 102). Ostensibly writing as a historian, critic of culture, or philosopher, Mumford has made unremitting dedication to the craft of the artist and stylist an important aspect of his work. And *Sketches,* his last book, perhaps shows him at his stylistic best.

One of Mumford's distinctive accomplishments has been his ability to encompass diverse facets of human expression and achievement. His histories and criticism take account of art, literature, architecture, philosophy, science, and technology. Basing his interpretations of human development and his analyses of contemporary problems on these varied forms of human endeavor and expression, he seeks to present a balanced and accurate view of culture and society. Neither his books nor his autobiographical writings reveal a man inflexibly committed to a predetermined thesis or preoccupied with an ideological purpose that distorts his criticism or historical accounts—as important as such a purpose may be to him. He writes: "To interpret any given stretch of history as all of one piece seems to me basically false. Every period has its historic dominants, so to say, and its historic recessives, to say nothing of its still active survivals" (FK 341–42). For example, he discovers "an ideal and esthetic aspect" in what he terms America's "Brown Decades"—a period that he, and others, had earlier interpreted "solely in terms of the manufacturer, the inventor, and the

businessman" (FK 191). He recognizes the importance of diversity and balance in his criticism of cities and cultures just as he attempts to inculcate these values in the individual personality. Renewal, growth, and integration are essential for the meaningful development of society as well as the individual, and his writing seeks to identify and interpret these creative processes when they appear: "Cultures cannot be isolated; they grow by perpetual intercourse across the boundaries of time and space; without cross-fertilization they are sterile—sterile and sour" (FK 316).

Given Mumford's emphasis on comprehensiveness, balance, and integration both as qualities essential for the meaningful life and as ideal aesthetic forms, it is appropriate that the symbolic image serves as the distinctive mode of expression, the pervasive rhetorical feature of his writing. In his epic surveys of civilization, he seeks to depict the characteristic achievements and the dominant forms of thought and expression that distinguish a culture, society, or period; and he often uses a symbol, a concentrated image exhibiting certain typical characteristics, to embody and reflect these forms and accomplishments. Mumford combines historical facts and descriptions with his own interpretations to create a symbol that may represent both achievement and possibility or the ideal form of a city or community. For example, he sees Dante as a figure who personifies a balanced integration of thought and art, the supreme achievement of the Middle Ages; and he presents the Brooklyn Bridge as a symbol of the highest possibilities of art, technology, and human aspiration in the modern world. His description of the methodology and purpose of *The Golden Day* provides an important key to understanding his concept and use of symbolic forms: he writes that "the emphasis is not on information but on evaluation: not on facts, but on forms and meanings." The book, he continues, "concentrated on relationships and values, and sought to produce a unified image out of a vast welter of details" (WD 251). This description also applies to the general technique he employs in each of his cultural histories. To evaluate and interpret a mode of thought, a work of art, a society, a culture, or a historical period, Mumford's approach is *not* to categorize, to separate, to reduce an entity to a number of smaller and isolated parts. Rather, in his role as "anti-specialist," his analysis seeks to identify and describe the "organic unity" that, in his view, underlies any successful community or meaningful form of human expression. One might describe him as a historical artist who, again, aims "to produce a unified image out of a

vast welter of details." Mumford is, of course, particularly responsive to the power and significance of symbolic forms, as his interpretations of Melville and modern art demonstrate; this awareness complements and is, in fact, part and parcel of the pervasive symbolic structures in his writing. As an epic historian and literary artist himself, Mumford seeks to transform raw fact into vital meaning and significant form. The assumption that to be fully human one must know the past is implicit throughout his writing; this knowledge involves more than mere factual awareness, for one must experience the past as one would a work of art. This understanding involves an aesthetic response; the past assumes coherent, meaningful, and relevant form only when one can visualize and apprehend it symbolically.

Lewis Mumford's autobiographical works portray a unique type of the man of letters. His lengthy and undaunted literary career has followed an independent and unprecedented course. As a generalist he has spoken with originality and authority in many diverse fields, and he has sought to unify traditionally separated disciplines. Ever alert, informed, and sensitive, he roves comfortably along city streets, through museums and art galleries, among the classics of literature and philosophy. Never obscure or esoteric, Mumford is a dilettante in the classical sense: he loves art and culture for their power to enrich life, to reveal the significance and potential of human experience. Never trivial or modish, he is not absorbed in or limited by critical trends and styles. He is the public scholar who writes not only to inform and to interpret but also to affirm his moral convictions. Mumford dares to confront and to denounce the colossal and intimidating structures of technology and totalitarian ideology that threaten the contemporary world. In all of this he is guided by a philosophy and ethic grounded in a rational poise and sanity, a passionate humanism, a reverence for the "efflorescence" of life in all its aspects. He inculcates the "balanced life" as an ideal for the individual personality as well as for the urban community. Through his uncompromising dedication to the writer's craft, Mumford gives focus and expression to these diverse interests and purposes. Rather than deflecting him from his native interests and inclinations, as he once feared, his moral values and response to the predicament of contemporary man inspired the three books that will likely endure as his greatest achievements. Mumford's description of the character in *The Builders of the Bridge* who represents Washington Roebling aptly describes, I believe, the essential

quality of his own life and career: "Baumgarten has caught the rhythm of his own era, and has timed himself to it with a complete sense of fitness and accomplishment" (FK 228).

Conforming to the traditional purposes of the genre, Mumford's autobiographical writings represent his effort to establish his identity, his sense of *autos.* He attempts in these works to capture, to recreate, and to identify the elusive, "enigmatic" face in the mirror, the image "transformed, perhaps disfigured or distorted by life—and as time goes on, *de-faced*" (WD 226). In *Sketches,* he describes his efforts to recreate that "bright lad" whose image becomes more evanescent the more one seeks to identify it, yet this "lad" is "indissolubly" part of the person who presently exists (SL 24). Elsewhere Mumford describes his impressions upon viewing himself on film; he sees there an unfamiliar and "foreign" person (WD 423). Yet such a self as these images represent is perhaps always fugitive, for it is not the form that constitutes Mumford's essential, significant identity. The autobiographical writings show that Mumford discovers and defines his *autos* through his work. He finds a certain sort of identity in various important personal influences and memorable experiences, to be sure, but the essential "self" is to be found in his writing, which is the complete expression of his personality, thought, and values. Ever since his late teenage years, writing has consistently been the center of his life, the object of his highest energies. The innate qualities of his "self" have motivated and shaped his writing, and his writing in turn has created his identity: "who can study the nature of man in all its manifestations, its animal inheritance, its historical social roots, its personal and communal choices, its many unplumbed potentialities, without having a better grasp on his own life, a better insight into his own duties, purposes and opportunities?" (WD 397).

It is significant that the two autobiographical miscellanies consist largely of previously published writings, which represent major themes and key events in the development of his literary career, rather than documents of a purely personal nature. In these two books and in *Sketches,* it is clear that Mumford views his life above all else as a literary life. His thought and work are the fundamental components of his existence, giving coherence and meaning to the rest. Beginning early in his life, his writing began to assume progressively greater importance; it eventually became an activity inseparable from and essential to the experience of living. This perhaps helps to explain the relative paucity of biographical information after 1940 contained in the three

primary autobiographical books (*Sketches* and the two miscellanies). After this point, his energies, interests, and identity became almost completely absorbed in his work: the *autos* is realized in and defined by the writing. In this respect, Mumford's assessment of Melville also serves as a key to understanding his own career, at least as he perceives it: "In a great degree, Herman Melville's life and work were one. . . . [H]e lives because he grappled with certain great dilemmas in man's spiritual life, and in seeking to answer them, sounded bottom" (HM xvi).

Mumford's autobiographical writings reveal his historical consciousness, aesthetic sensitivity, and moral commitment. They describe the influences and experiences that have shaped his thought and survey the ideas, themes, and concerns that have been important to him. His writing and career, I think, are characterized by a profound sense of confidence and courage as well as something of Geddes's "audacious insurgency." Whatever his faults and omissions, one cannot accuse him of lack of ambition or significant purpose, and perhaps this is the aspect of his career that deserves final emphasis. Mumford has often lauded the value of high ambition; in his play Robert-Owen Benns, a character who very much resembles Mumford himself, says: "Life knows something better than a great achievement: it is the failure to encompass something beyond one's powers, but not beyond one's conception" (FK 291). For Mumford, identity, significance, and value in life lie not only in what one has accomplished but also, and perhaps more importantly, in what one has attempted: "A man: a life: a culture: they may be a tissue of defeats and failures, but so long as they have aimed at something beyond, which is full and rich and whole, they endow us with life" (FK 172). Although, as he writes, he "might have risen to eminence in four or five careers" (FJO 197), Mumford has courageously chosen to pursue the vocation of the "balanced life" as interpreted in a literary career. "Though such a life seems to leave less of a mark than a highly concentrated, special existence," he is confident that "those who have sought for balance rather than success will be hailed as the saints and prophets of the new age" (FJO 196–97). He has indeed created an unconventional, independent literary vocation of comprehensive scope; he has shunned the easy security and quick recognition that might have been his had he followed a more traditional, specialized path.

If anything has been more important to him than pursuing his unique vocation as a literary generalist, it has been his commitment to

grapple with the dire problems that beset contemporary man. Yet the shape of Mumford's career reveals what appears to be a carefully fashioned symmetry (if not the hand of a benign providence); there seems to be, overall, a sense of inevitable purpose, for his varied interests and abilities have abetted his efforts to articulate his Great Theme. This moral endeavor has provided purpose and coherence for the major works of his career: "every fibre of my being revolts against the fate which threatens our civilization, and revolts almost equally against those supine minds that accept it as inevitable, or, even worse, seek treasonably to justify its 'inevitability' " (FK 382). The autobiographical writings depict an impressive, often dramatic achievement—or at least an *attempt*—of intellect and courage. They comprise a portrait of an independent mind boldly charting his ambitious voyage between the heritage of the past and the promise of the future. Given the nature and scope of his writing, this man who in another age "might have been Socrates" is as qualified as anyone to be hailed as one of "the saints and prophets of the new age."

Copyright Acknowledgments

Excerpts from *Findings and Keepings: Analects for an Autobiography* by Lewis Mumford. Copyright 1975 by Lewis Mumford. Reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Excerpts from *Herman Melville: A Study of His Life and Vision.* Copyright 1962 by Lewis Mumford. Reprinted by permission of Lewis Mumford.

Excerpts from *The Letters of Lewis Mumford and Frederick J. Osborn: A Transatlantic Dialogue, 1938–70.* Copyright 1971 by Lewis Mumford. Reprinted by permission of Praeger Publishers, a division of Greenwood Press, Inc.

Excerpts from *My Works and Days: A Personal Chronicle.* Copyright 1979 by Lewis Mumford. Reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Excerpts from *Sketches from Life.* Copyright 1982 by Lewis Mumford. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday, a division of Bantam, Doubleday, Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

Excerpts from *The Van Wyck Brooks Lewis Mumford Letters: The Record of a Literary Friendship, 1921–1963.* Copyright 1970 by E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission.

Notes

1. References to Mumford's works containing autobiographical material are abbreviated and indicated parenthetically in the text. FJO = *The Letters of Lewis Mumford and Frederick J. Osborn: A Transatlantic Dialogue, 1938–70,* ed. Michael Hughes (New York: Praeger, 1972); FK = *Findings and Keepings: Analects for an Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt, 1975); GM = *Green Memories: The Story of Geddes Mumford* (New York: Harcourt, 1947); HM = *Herman Melville: A Study of His Life and Vision,* rev. ed. (1929; New York: Harcourt, 1962); SL = *Sketches from Life* (New York: Dial, 1982); VWB = *The Van Wyck Brooks Lewis Mumford Letters: The Record of a Literary Friendship, 1921–1963,* ed. Robert E. Spiller (New York: Dutton, 1970); WD = *My Works and Days: A Personal Chronicle* (New York: Harcourt, 1979).

2. Mumford describes *Sketches* as "in some ways an original work—and my final one. There will be no later book by me" (Letter to the author, 12 May 1984).

3. *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), pp. 367–68. Mumford lists this book in the bibliography of *The City in History,* noting in particular the chapter "Sacred Places."

4. Their most significant, and painful, disagreement concerned their differences over the decision of the National Institute of Arts and Letters to honor the historian Charles A. Beard. This rift led to unsparing criticism by each of the other's work (see VWB 313–30).

5. "Mumford as Archego," *Salmagundi,* 49 (Summer 1980), 120.

6. *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 39–40.

7. See, for example, Eddy Dow, "Lewis Mumford's Passage to India: From the First to the Later Phase," *South Atlantic Quarterly,* 76 (Winter 1974), 31–43. Dow writes: "What is astonishing about Mumford's work is its coherence" (31). See also Joseph Duffey, "Mumford's Quest: The First Decade," *Salmagundi* 49 (Summer 1980), 43–68. Duffey writes: "All his work has been marked by conclusions and curiosities which developed in the early stages of his career" (43).

8. Letter to the author, 30 January 1975.

About the Author

Frank G. Novak, Jr., was born in 1949 in Nashville, Tennessee, where he attended Montgomery Bell Academy. He graduated from Harding College, B.A., and the University of Tennessee, M.A., Ph.D. He has taught at Delta State University and David Lipscomb College. Since 1982 he has been Associate Professor of English at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. In 1984–85 he was Visiting Professor with the Pepperdine Year-in-Europe Program in Heidelberg, West Germany. During that year, he studied Mumford's autobiographical works and retraced the writer's steps in London and Geneva. Novak is the author of articles on Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Willa Cather, and John Fowles. He is currently working on a book about contemporary American academic fiction. He lives in Malibu with his wife and two daughters.

Work on this monograph was assisted by a grant from the Reassigned Time Committee of Seaver College, Pepperdine University. The author wishes to thank the Committee, Professor James Smythe, and Dean John F. Wilson for their support.