

**Radical Politics and Emotional Liberation:
Thane Summers' Road to the Spanish Civil War**

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Introduction

The worker is made a radical by actual economic conditions, but the young student with a more fortunate background is made radical by contact with conservatives.¹

Thane Summers was something of an anomaly among the members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Few of the 3,000 Americans who volunteered to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War shared his background. Thane was white, of native born parents, bourgeois, and college educated; all very unusual for a volunteer in the Lincoln Brigade.² From 1933-1936 he was an honors student in Philosophy at the University of Washington (UW) in his home town of Seattle, and he was Harvard bound, by all accounts, for his PhD. In short, he was exactly the kind of person one might expect to make no waves. All he had to do to achieve the kind of life most Americans could only dream of during the Depression was keep his head down and perhaps hide out in an ivy league library for a while. Instead, Thane left school, joined the Communist Party at 23, joined the International Brigade at 24, and died at 25, in 1938, fighting to preserve the elected government of a distant foreign land.³ A bizarre case, by most reckonings.

I would propose, however, that if Thane's case is bizarre, it is probably due to an inadequacy in our methods of reckoning, rather than to any extreme peculiarity on his part. Of the methods we have for understanding Lincoln Brigaders, one of the most generally insightful

¹ Thane Summers, to Sophie, Arthur, and Elizabeth, Feb. 28, 1936. Thane Summers Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington, 4473-001.

² For information on what was "usual," see Peter N. Carroll, *Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 15-19, 30-38.

³ For dates of attendance at U.W. and approximate date of death, see "Ex-U.W. Man, Volunteer, Dies in Spain." *Seattle Daily Times*, June 21, 1938.

might be provided by Peter N. Carroll in *Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*. Carroll's primary assertion is that the Lincolns have to be understood as people animated by powerful political convictions, informed by personal experience. Many had experience in domestic radical movements, and most had experienced discrimination; because they were Jewish, for example, or the children of Russian immigrants, or both, or black.⁴ The experience of injustice - via discrimination - seems crucial to Carroll's recipe, because it generated anger which, in turn, generated political conviction. However, to identify something like social differentiation as an injustice requires a pointed deployment of emotion against it, which is not a given. As with any social arrangement, a hierarchy with racial delineations (and other mechanisms of exclusion) can be considered grossly unjust in one time and place while in another time and place it can be considered merely irksome, while in yet another it might be regarded as completely normal and justified. Thus in the face of Carroll's study, basic questions remain: why and how did Lincoln Brigaders come to deploy emotion as they did, so that it imbued their political commitments with intense personal meaning? Additionally, while a strength of Carroll's analysis is that it can be applied broadly, it is at the same time very exclusive. It can only make sense of subjects who shared certain experiences of broad social disenfranchisement. Therefore Carroll's methodological approach cannot speak to the mobilization of volunteers from more privileged

⁴ Peter N. Carroll, 20-33, 15-19, 30-38.

backgrounds; in cases like Thane's, it retains very little power.⁵ This paper, in contrast, will operate on a far more limited track. I will ask how one brigader, Thane, became mobilized for radicalism and the International Brigades. While I am interested in emotion, the experience of emotion will not be my focus. Rather, I will investigate how Thane constructed and managed emotion in his specific social and cultural context.

For this investigation I will borrow from William Reddy the term “emotional regime” to refer to a particular set of internalized, enforced conventions that govern emotional expression and emotional evaluation.⁶ I will also adopt a related term, “emotional community,” from Barbara Rosenwein. If the term emotional “regime” pertains directly to a set of conventions that regiment emotion within a specific group, then emotional “community” will refer to a people who share the same regime.⁷ Thane came to reject the emotional regime of the American upper middle class, which he inherited from his family and his immediate community. He found this emotional regime deeply alienating, which led him to attempt to extricate himself from it and adopt, instead, the regime of a community of political radicals at UW. Thane's transition was not a painless one. As a consequence of his transformation, it became difficult for him to relate to

⁵An approach similar to Carroll's can also be found in scholarship of American Communism. For example: Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?*, (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982). Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1983). Frasier M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States*, (London: Rutgers University Press, 1991). Scholarship of Communism and the Brigades tends to be related because the Comintern recruited for, organized, and administered to the International Brigades. Also, about two of every three volunteers for the Lincoln Brigade was a Party member. A tradition of scholarship counter to Carroll's is concerned more with how the Brigades and the American Communist Party were co-opted by Soviet foreign policy. This interest tends to steer author's like Harvey Klehr and Cecil Eby away from questions of why people became involved in the organizations, and how they maintained their commitment. See Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*. (New York: Basic Books, 1984). Cecil Eby, *Comrades and Commissars*, (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2007).

⁶ Jan Plamper, “The History of Emotions: an Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns,” *History and Theory, Studies in the Philosophy of History*, 49 (2010): 239-245.

⁷ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2006), 22-28.

people with whom he had longstanding connections. However, for all the difficulties of Thane's "regime change," he also reported some very positive results, including an expanded ability to express and explore emotions, which energized him. Thane also found, in political radicalism, a hospitable cognitive framework for his emotions, so that he could use them to make sense of the world in ways he had been denied before. This produced in him a highly charged sense of justice which drove his radicalization, informed his sense of ethics, and inspired him to fight in Spain.

To investigate Thane's transformation I will rely heavily on a collection of letters he wrote during his radicalization and while in Spain, from 1935-1938. Of the roughly 200 pages archived, most were written to Sophie and Arthur Krauss, family friends of his parents generation to whom Thane was very close. Sophie and Arthur were bourgeois, like Thane's family, if a bit wealthier. In the collection there are also letters to Thane's older sister Elizabeth, who was two years his elder, and a few letters to his two younger sisters, Elane and Jenness, who were respectively six and nine years younger than Thane. There are no letters addressed to Thane's parents. His mother passed away a few years before the letters began, and Thane's relationship with his father was distant and turbulent, as we shall see in the next section.

The Old Regime: Conservatives, Reactionaries, and Dad

Thane describes his 1933 arrival at UW as the moment he experienced a profound revelation. He discovered a worldview that contradicted the one he had accepted his entire life. This new worldview was that of the radical left. Thane saw radicals as centrally concerned with social justice and the general welfare of the people. Their core concerns seemed far more compatible with Thane's sensibilities and sensitivities than those of the petite bourgeoisie, who

he though were concerned primarily with personal gain and material comfort. The distinction Thane drew between radical and the bourgeois ideologies is explicated throughout his letters. Frequently and in various ways he tried to express why he believed radical thought offered a more ethically sound approach to life. In the subtext of his explanations, Thane also narrated the process of his radicalization, whereby he came to see the bourgeois and radical emotional regimes in very clearly defined terms, and ultimately to unequivocally identify with the radicals. As Thane worked through the reconstruction of his perceptions and evaluations, it seems one way he made sense of his transformation was to describe it, in letters, to people he trusted.

The first step of Thane's radicalization is described in a letter to Arthur Krauss. Thane claimed he came to UW "ignorant of economics and social questions." Therefore he remained unperturbed when a group of students, who were staging a political demonstration on campus, assailed him with "radical arguments." Though Thane knew he was not equipped to argue with these students, he took for granted that his father or UW's economics professors would be able to provide answers to the arguments posed. This was not to be the case. Instead:

What kind of answer did I get? My questions were evaded, I got insults, threats of being taken out of school, fallacies. Unfortunately for their fallacies I had been studying logic. I still know pitifully little about economics, but that does not mean that the conservative can help me to his point of view by calling me names and giving me jingoistic phrases. It's not that they're [uninterested]; they seem to be interested enough to turn red with rage... This attitude of the conservatives is a strong factor in confirming youths in their radicalism.⁸

In other letters, Thane goes so far as to call this "attitude of the conservatives" *the strongest* factor confirming his radicalism.⁹ What appeared to bother Thane most about the

⁸ Thane Summers, to Arthur, June 1936.

⁹ Thane Summers, to Sophie, Arthur, and Elizabeth, Feb 28, 1936.

conservatives was that they assumed they had a right to treat certain people with great injustice, or with a total lack of consideration. In fact, when Thane tells the story of his first encounter with radicalism at UW, he prefaces the narrative by stating his intent to show “the injustice with which the conservatives have treated me.” No other statement in his letters is phrased like this. Here is the only mention of an injustice personally suffered, which indicates that to Thane, it was the definitive experience of injustice. He might have been able to stay “unimpassioned... about the hungry masses - since my belly is full, I can view them objectively,” but it was beyond Thane to stay objective in the face of the conservatives’ dismissive, insulting bullying. Thane’s experience “embittered” him towards those he considered conservative. Before he found anything right with the radical worldview, it would thus seem Thane found something wrong with the conservative worldview: they believed that they had the right to deploy blunt force, to treat others in a degrading manner in the defense of social structures, cultural norms, and policy that was indefensible both rationally and ethically.

Significantly, Thane’s father - Lane Summers - was among the conservatives whose behavior so offended Thane. The elder Summers was a prominent Seattle lawyer who specialized in admiralty and maritime law. After two years as a Deputy District Attorney for Seattle he began to work for a private firm, and by the time Thane was at UW, Lane was a partner in his own firm.¹⁰ In private practice, Lane’s clients included a number of shipping companies. Shippers figured prominently during the West Coast Strike strikes of the 1930s, arraying themselves against striking longshoremen and maritime workers. On numerous occasions, Lane’s firm defended shippers, and sometimes stevedore companies, against the suits of workers injured

¹⁰ “Lane Summers, 77,” *Seattle Times*, Dec. 9, 1966.

while working aboard ships: the firm seemed to specialize in arguing that shipping companies were subject to very limited liability under the stipulations of maritime law.¹¹ In effect, it was Lane's business to protect the interests of companies that would fight maritime workers in the labor struggles of the 1930s.

In addition to being connected to the region's economic elite through his profession, Lane Summers also moved within the top tiers of the elite in his private life. He was a member of the Rainier Club, Seattle's first private club and one of its most exclusive, and the Seattle Tennis Club.¹² Private clubs were spaces in which captains of industry, members of government, and others of the professional classes came together to form social networks in luxurious settings over dinners and card games, lectures and sport. Exclusivity was assured in these organizations because their resident membership was limited, their fees were prohibitive, and their bylaws restrictive (the Rainier Club's by-laws, for example, admitted only white men until 1978).¹³ Thane would have had cause to view his father's clubs as "conservative" simply because their membership was elite, and hence had much to lose if U.S. society's wealth and status were spread more equitably. More significantly, however, the Rainier Club appears at this time to have been widely considered "the bastion of the conservative establishment" in Seattle. One reason

¹¹ The following legal briefs are undated, and were prepared by Lane's Firm or Bogel, Merrit and Bogel, for whom Lane worked for before he was a partner. They all involve shipping companies that workers filed suit against: William Coutts and Mary A. Coutts vs Canadian Steamship Lines; Evelyn M. DeBuse et al. vs Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad; Henry C. Holmes vs Steamship "Thomas P. Beal" and Crowell and Thurlow Steamship Co.; Peter Larsen vs Northwestern Fisheries Co.; Walter E. Lorang vs Alaska Steamship Co., et al.; T.S. McEachern, T.S. vs Yamashita Kisen Kaisha; H.H. McLellan et ux. vs Alaska Steamship Co.; Robert Randall vs Osaka Shosen Kaisha, Inc.; Carl Sundquist vs Motorship "Frank Lynch"; John Strom vs Dollar Steamship Lines, Ltd.; Lane Summers Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, 660.856.

¹² "Lane Summers, 77."

¹³ Celeste Louise Smith and Julie D Pheasant-Albright, *Private Clubs of Seattle*, (Charleston: Arcadia Pub., 2009), 7, 66.

may have been the presence, on the club's executive board, of *Seattle Times* publisher Colonel Clarence Blethen, an outspoken conservative who "had made his reputation as an 'anti-Red' crusader following World War I."¹⁴

An important distinction should be made regarding the term "conservative" as it is used in Thane's letters. He usually employed a very narrow definition of the word, especially when he was referred to his father or men of the same ilk. Than, by calling Lane a conservative, was not just saying that his father wanted to "conserve" the extant social and political structures. Thane was rather declaring his father to be part of the reactionary right, a group that responded in anger and distain to demands, from progressives and labor groups, for U.S. society to be radically restructured and made more equitable. So when Thane refers to conservatives in his letters, he almost always means people like his father, who dismissed the grievances and claims of the poor and the working class, and who wanted the political maneuverings of radicals crushed. Thane regarded his father's behavior as part of a nascent fascist movement, which would preserve the traditional social elite by mobilizing the full violence of the state to crush all who would agitate for a more egalitarian and inclusive society.¹⁵ If blacks, immigrants and Jews faced social disenfranchisement along racial, ethnic or religious lines, then it must be because there's something wrong with them, not with the society; if workers didn't like the terms of their employment, they could keep quiet about it and keep working; and as for the unemployed, they would have to accept whatever measures the state, and private institutions, might doll out. In Thane's perception, these were the attitudes of both conservatives, like his father, and fascists.

¹⁴ Walt Crowley and Ronald M Gould, *The Rainier Club, 1888-1988*, (Seattle: Crowley Associates, 1988), 35, 41.

¹⁵ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Arthur, Nov. 13, 1935.

In Thane's understanding of the conservative view the the poor, the unemployed, and discriminated against were not considered appropriate objects of empathy and compassion. If Thane's "conservatives" can be thought of a as distinct social unit governed by a particular set of enforced norms, then within conservative society to express emotional concern for the poor, unemployed, and discriminated against broke the rules of emotional conduct. In theory developed in the history of emotions, every society or culture has a set of standards regarding emotional expression which govern how emotions are to be deployed and displayed. These standards are expected to be internalized by group members. William Reddy calls this framework of enforced rules an "emotional regime." In the conservative emotional regime discussed above, empathy and compassion were certainly not to be deployed to form solidarity with workers or the poor. On the other hand, compassion might appropriately be deployed through some form of charity work. Lane, for example, worked for the Legal Services Bureau of the Social Welfare League. The Bureau connected people who needed, but could not afford, legal services with lawyers in Seattle who were willing to take cases pro bono.¹⁶ In the conservative emotional regime compassion was generally not allowed expression in ways that implied the social structures of the United States were in any way responsible for the suffering and degradation experienced by the poor. On the other hand, it would have been appropriate to express compassion by recognizing that the poor were dependent on the patronage of their betters to survive, and to consider such patronage the duty of a responsible citizen.

¹⁶ Evelyn Gardner to Lane Summers, May 20, 1920. Judge George Donworth, to Lane Summers, April 28, 1920. Lane Summers Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington.

Thane provides a story in a letter to Arthur and Sophie Krauss that illustrates his understanding of conservative notions of compassion. During a dinner with his father and a Mr. Mendese from New York, the conversation apparently turned to the subject of the poor.

He [Mr. Mendese] and dad were discussing how happy the poor are. In fact, said Mr. Mendese, they are happier than he could ever be. Furthermore, they went on, I was immoral in being interested in bettering their condition, because that was just pricking their bubble of blissful ignorance. And then to top it off they justified their position by Christianity.¹⁷

Thane does not elaborate on how his father and Mendese justified themselves with Christianity, but the fact that they invoked Christianity in this context implies that they believed they had a better understanding of compassion and benevolence than did Thane. If Thane was expected to play by the rules of the conservative regime, as demonstrated here, then any impulse he had to openly identify the poor as victims of economic exploitation and social indifference, he certainly would have had to stifle; and Thane did appear to have such impulses, which will be discussed at length later.

In Seattle during the Depression, Thane would have been confronted by the conditions of deep poverty prevalent in the nation at the time. By 1933, Washington's unemployment reached 30%, well over the already staggering national average of 25%. In Seattle, that number was even higher. Washington's relatively high unemployment was partly due to its economy's dependence on the export of extracted resources. As markets for the state's resources contracted, industries suffered. Cheap grain from Argentina, for example, displaced Washington wheat in Europe, and lumber stopped flowing to Japan when that country ceased importation of U.S. timber products.

¹⁷ Thane Summers, to Sophie, Arthur, and Elizabeth, Feb 28, 1936.

Because there was less tonnage to export, the shipping industry too contracted dramatically. Those who faced unemployment in this terrain of disappearing jobs found themselves in dire straights, with almost no social safety net in place to sustain them before the Roosevelt administration began to implement New Deal programs. In Seattle and across the nation, shantytowns began to spring up, dubbed “Hooverilles” by those who believed President Herbert Hoover’s policies were responsible for conditions of poverty in the United States.¹⁸

Surrounded by the facts of Depression era life, a growing number of people began to reject explanations that the basic social and political structures of the United States were sound. Demands for changes to remedy the situation became numerous and heated. The unemployed began to demonstrate for unemployment insurance on a mass scale, and chapters of the Unemployed Citizens League sprung up around Seattle and across the country, demanding funds for relief programs, and forming networks of barter and exchange in an attempt to keep the unemployed fed and clothed.¹⁹ Workers, whose livelihoods depended on the caprice of employers bent on extracting maximum profit, also began to organize, to use the weight of collective bargaining and the weapon of the strike to win more rights and better pay. For example, in the West Coast Longshoremen’s Strike of 1934, local Longshoremen’s unions came together under the banner of the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) to bargain for better wages, recognition of the ILA as the official representative of dock workers, and union control of hiring. When negotiations broke down and a strike was called for, every union in the

¹⁸ James Gregory, “Economics and Poverty,” *The Great Depression in Washington State*, https://depts.washington.edu/depress/economics_poverty.shtml (accessed March 10, 2011). Ronald Magden, *A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934*, (Seattle: Washington Commission for Humanities, 1991), 188-189.

¹⁹ James Gregory.

shipping industry went on strike in support, including sailors, engineers, and cooks, from San Pedro, California to Alaska. For the first time on the West Coast, employers were not able to use divisions among workers in the shipping industry to circumvent the demands of one group of workers by turning to another group for labor.²⁰

Lane Summers was a member of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce during the strike, an organization that liaised with the Washington Employers of Seattle (WES). Throughout the strike, the Chamber repeatedly stressed the need to immediately and unconditionally reopen Seattle's docks, in keeping with WES policy. Reopening the docks was given clear precedence over addressing the problems and demands of the workers.²¹ While the Chamber of Commerce's policy was probably the result of a complex process, the general message it sent was that worker complaints were not legitimate enough to merit redress. Strikers were treated almost as if they were spoiled children, as if their demands were simply the manifestations of a misguided sense of entitlement.

Such an attitude would have been in keeping with Lane's sentiments. He seemed to believe that it was essential for one to earn one's position in the world through the proper channels, to prove oneself worthy of rights and privileges. This belief can be seen in Lane's attempts to instill proper values in Thane by sending him away from Seattle, beyond the

²⁰ Ronald Magden, 190-216.

²¹ Since its formation as the Puget Sound Shippers Association in 1907, the Washington Employers of Seattle had represented the consolidated interests of the region's leading shippers, stevedore companies and dock managers. During the 1934 strike, the WES liaison to the Chamber of Commerce was William Dawson, a charter member who had been on all of WES's previous policy committees. Magden, 59-60, 204-207. For Thane's election to the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, see Robert S Boyns, to Lane Summers. Lane Summers Papers.

“influence” of his mother and sisters, to work for the summer at the age of 15.²² Lane exposes an element of his emotional regime here, one that he deliberately tried to instill in his son and that Thane probably associated with “conservatives” like his father. To Lane, men who did not follow the correct path to establish entitlement had no right to demand they be given things they never earned. In this light, the actions of the longshoremen made them appropriate targets for derision and disdain, while men who worked to establish their quality, such as himself and, presumably, the people he associated with at the Rainier Club, were appropriate targets of admiration, praise, and respect. Thane seemed to internalize this attitude rather uncomfortably and, ultimately, unsuccessfully.

The New Regime: Radicalism and Communism

It is not difficult to imagine why Thane might have come to see Communism as the counterpoint to his father’s emotional regime, and thus to the agenda of the conservatives who had so thoroughly offended him. Communist policy may have notoriously changed direction during the 30s and 40s, but during the time of Thane’s radicalization the Party’s priority was to address the social problems that reactionaries like Lane dismissed; the CPUSA (Communist Party of the USA) lent support to efforts of labor organizations like the ILU, instead of backing attempts to cripple, crush or disperse those organizations; and while reactionaries would not budge from their assertion that society was structured as it should be, even in the face of the widespread suffering of the Depression, Communists proposed methods of interpretation and

²² In the letters available, Lane tried to get his son hired by a lumber company, a stevedoring company, and on a farm. Lane Summers, to Thorp Babcock and Victor Owens, April 2, 1928. Lane Summers to Mrs. Margaret P.Bull.

analysis that systematically identified the causes of economic and social inequality. What's more, they postulated ways to achieve an equitable society through political restructuring.²³

Thane saw, married to all of Communism's assertions, which ran so counter to conservative ideas, standards of emotional conduct that ran entirely counter to those of his father's emotional regime, which Thane had, to a certain degree, internalized himself. In the American Communist emotional regime, it was not workers who were the appropriate targets of scorn when they made demands upon their employers. Rather, the great sin was exploitation, instead of the precocious assertion of rights. Accordingly, to Communists, it was appropriate to target outrage and anger at the economic elite, the power holders who mobilized their considerable resources to extract as much profit as they could from the labor of others. The Communist attitude towards the deployment of scorn must have resonated well with Thane, who claimed to experience an uncontrollable sense of "embitterment" towards conservatives, an embitterment that he repeatedly credits with pushing him towards radicalism.

If the exploiting class was the correct target of scorn in the Communist emotional regime, then it almost automatically follows that the correct targets of compassion would be the exploited, and especially those who responded to their exploitation by mobilizing in opposition to it. During the mid to late 1930s in particular, the CPUSA was very amenable to most any organization that engaged in struggles against labor exploitation, poverty, and racism. Thane would have had contact with American Communists when the Party was in a phase in which its directive, from the Comintern in Moscow, was to work as closely as possible with other leftist groups to further their social causes, rather than condemn them for the ways their agendas

²³ Harvey Klehr, xi-xii, 123-128, 167-170.

diverged from Communist doctrine.²⁴ The CPUSA was thus at its most inclusive point, emotionally speaking, regarding those who were appropriate targets of compassion, for whom one should feel such depths of empathy as to associate oneself with them, and join in struggles against their foes.

According to Lane Summers, the first indication his son gave of being interested in Communism was early in his studies at UW. Lane discovered that Thane had a list of twenty books that he could read for extra credit. Upon examining these books himself, Lane determined they were “radical in their essence and influence.” This story was related by Lane to the Joint Fact Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in the Washington State Legislature in 1949, more than ten years after his son had died fighting in Spain.²⁵ This Committee’s job was to identify anyone who was or ever had been a member of the Communist Party, ostensibly because party members supported the overthrow of the government, and were thus a danger to the nation.²⁶ Lane told the committee Thane had been “indoctrinated” in a “Communistic attitude” by four professors at the University of Washington: Ralph Gundlach, Hugh DeLacy, Melvin Rader, and Herbert Phillips. He claimed his son quoted these professors at home.²⁷ If Lane’s testimony is to be believed, then Thane began to develop his conception of radicalism from interactions with these four men.²⁸

²⁴ Harvey Klehr, 167-170.

²⁵ Washington State Legislature, *Joint Fact Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, 2nd Report*, (Olympia: The Committee, 1948), 299.

²⁶ Vern Countryman, *Un-American Activities in The State of Washington*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951) 1-3,10-12.

²⁷ Washington State Legislature, 2nd Report, 300.

²⁸ Ralph Gundlach to the American Association of University Professors, Feb. 1, 1949, Ralph Gunlach Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington, 686-3.

Gundlach and Phillips would eventually be dismissed from their posts at UW as a result of the “Canwell Committee” hearings.²⁹ Gundlach refused on principle to ever directly answer questions posed by the Canwell Committee and the UW board of regents regarding whether or not he had ever been a member of the communist party. After his dismissal, though, the professor maintained he had never been a member. What he was, by his own account, was an activist. In his words, written to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) after his dismissal:

I have been a joiner of social causes and have no apologies for so doing. Far from keeping my beliefs concealed and hidden, I joined and worked to encourage others... to assume some civic leadership. On the whole I think that the causes have been good ones. I have been selective, and my affiliations have focal centers.

And later in the same letter:

I joined these organizations as a citizen and as a psychologist with special knowledge. I joined them because I believed in the particular cause which each espoused. I have no doubt that in some of them there were Communists... I am not afraid to rub shoulders with whoever may be interested in the same efforts and goals, whatever may be his race, creed, sex, occupation or political affiliation.

The picture Gundlach creates is one wherein people involved in “liberal reform movements and civil rights activities,” found themselves working alongside communist allies in the mid to late 1930s (exactly the time Thane’s letters were written and his radicalization took place). Not because they sought to align themselves with Communism, but because the CPUSA had been directed to form a “Popular Front” with other left wing organizations. This order may well have been issued to fulfill nothing more than the immediate needs of Soviet foreign policy.

²⁹ “Fired Faculty Men to Seek Professional Aid,” *Seattle Times*, Jan 23, 1949.

Moscow was, at the time, seeking to woo Britain, France and the U.S. as allies against German aggression.³⁰ Regardless of what prompted the policy, however, the CPUSA undertook the program with genuine gusto, and threw their efforts into popular causes across the country, working in conjunction with activists like Gundlach for the same goals.³¹ To understand what Thane saw as the Communist cause, then, it may be instructive to look at some of Gundlach's social and political goals, since Gundlach appears to have reached Thane early in his radicalization, at a time when the professor's goals and the goals of the CPUSA were more or less in synch. In a letter to the AAUP, he lists his seven "major interests of the last twenty years."

- (1) to improve race relations
- (2) to protect consumers from false and misleading advertising and from economic exploitation
- (3) to foster the growth of democracy through a healthy trade union movement
- (4) to foster the growth of democracy through the protection of civil rights for all, including communists, aliens, trade union leaders, government employees, and teachers
- (5) to foster the growth of democracy through political reforms (such as the New Deal...)
- (6) to foster the growth of democracy through opposing the growth of fascism here and abroad and aiding the victims of fascism
- (7) to aid the growth of democracy by establishing the conditions for world peace³²

If Ralph Gundlach truly made a profound impression on Thane, as Lane Summers thought he had, it was probably because Gundlach showed Thane an alternative way of perceiving the world, quite different from the view Thane had inherited, and showed him alternative ways of responding emotionally to his perceptions. Gundlach's sense of ethics was

³⁰ Harvey Klehr, *Heyday*, 167-170.

³¹ Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?*, (Middletown: CT, Wesleyan Press, 1982). xxii, 9-12, 18-22.

³² Ralph Gundlach, to AAUP.

informed by a very different set of emotional standards than those Thane had lived with, and Thane came to associate these new standards with Communism. Not because Gundlach was a Communist, but because the Communists had come to share the professor's set of causes, and because they mobilized emotion in a similar way, with similar targets.

Another influential figure in Thane's radicalization had experiences with Communism similar to Gundlach's. However, Howard Costigan, the executive chairman of the Washington Commonwealth Federation (WCF), decided he would join, rather than simply work alongside, the Communist Party in 1936, after local CPUSA representatives demonstrated to Costigan they shared his social and political agenda. He would later explain: "I didn't join the party in the true sense of the term. The party joined me... I was at no time asked to perform functions other than that which I would have performed in any instance, because I was completely supporting the W.C.F. policy and the W.C.F. policy became their policy"³³

Costigan, a founding member of the WCF and its parent organization the Builder's Union Inc., was another person Thane quoted at home, according to his father.³⁴ These quotations were probably not the result of direct contact, but rather taken from Costigan's political commentaries, broadcast nightly on KPCB radio.³⁵ Thane probably had little contact with the WCF chairman while at UW. After quitting school in 1936, however, Thane worked closely with Costigan's organization, as a member of the communist party. He may then have met and worked with the man whose rhetoric had previously influenced him. The WCF was, according to Costigan, "an

³³ The first quote is from Klehr, *Heyday*, 254. The second is from Washington State Legislature, *Joint Fact Finding Committee on UnAmerican Activities 1st Report*, (Olympia: The Committee, 1948), 360.

³⁴ Washington State Legislature, *2nd Report*, 300.

³⁵ Gordon Black, "Who's Who," *Communism in Washington State*. http://dept.washington.edu/labhist/cproject/whos_who.html. (accessed May 10, 2011).

organization of liberals, of labor, and of generally progressive groups that were supporting the Roosevelt administration.” It was a formidable power in electoral politics, fielding numerous candidates for the Democratic ticket (especially at the state legislature level, where WCF candidates often won) and energetically campaigning for Democrats at all levels of government.³⁶ It is very likely that Thane worked in conjunction with the WCF in its campaign activities, because by 1936 he was, according to his father, “either a member of, or working for the Communist Party’s campaign committee.” Costigan and most of the WCF board were also Party members by 1936, and the CPUSA was closely tied to the WCF in electoral politics by this time. The Communists at times openly supported Federation candidates and opted not to run Communists against them.

In addition to being active in electoral politics, Thane participated in strikes alongside Hugh DeLacy, who later became one of the Federation’s most prominent members. DeLacy was an English Professor at UW, cited by Lane as one of those who indoctrinated his son. DeLacy was fired from UW in 1937 after he decided to campaign for Seattle City Council, but he won that council seat as a WCF candidate, and went on to be elected to the U.S. Congress in 1944, where he served one term. He was also president of the WCF from 1940 to 1945.³⁷ Lane reported that Thane and DeLacy participated together in a strike by workers of the King County Road Department, and picketed the Seattle Post Intelligencer.³⁸ As an academic, DeLacy, like Gundlach, was anything but cloistered. These two professors must have set a powerful example

³⁶ Harvey Klehr, *Heyday*, 253-256.

³⁷ Daren Salter, “Who’s Who,” *Communism in Washington State*. http://depts.washington.edu/labisd/cproject/who_who.shtml. (accessed March 10, 2011).

³⁸ Washington State Legislature, *2nd Edition*, 302-303.

for Thane. They were unabashedly active in the community, engaging in political and social reform. The theme of the engaged scholar, not afraid to step out of his ivory tower, is recurrent in Thane's letters, always written about as an ideal he wished to embody.

While Lane's accusation was a dubious one, that Thane's professors indoctrinated him into Communism at UW, it is not completely unfounded. What Thane found at UW was a network of people who shared a worldview that allowed for the kind of emotional expression to which he seemed to be predisposed. Exposure to this alternative set off emotional standards, which comprised the radical emotional regime, presented Thane with an opportunity to shed his father's conservative regime, which he had internalized despite finding it alienating, to become part of a new community that encouraged emotional expressions and evaluations that the conservative model punished harshly. The affirmation Thane found in the radical emotional regime did not necessarily come from a community of Communists, but it did come from a community that Communists had integrated themselves into. The concern for humanity, for the downtrodden, the bullied and manipulated, the starving and devalued; the anger at those responsible for maintaining the system that perpetuated widespread suffering - these were the sentiments that drew Thane into radicalism, and they were the norms of emotional expression that appeared to be at the core of American Communism when Thane decided to join.

Having it Both Ways

Thane may have jumped at the opportunity to escape from the conservative emotional regime of his father, but there was a broader category of conservatives Thane also belonged to, from whom he found it far more difficult to disassociate. This group of conservatives had a

different, if related, set of emotional standards. A way to conceive of the relationship between these two conservative communities and their emotional regimes is offered by Barbara Rosenwein, who in *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, offers the term “emotional community” to refer to a group of people who share a common set of normative standards of emotional behavior, and who “have a common stake, interest, values and goals.” Rosenwein maintains that emotional communities are not monolithic. On the contrary, in any given time and place a number of communities will exist in the same general sphere, some overlapping where they share emotional norms, others not overlapping at all, but all with a basic set of values common to the entire sphere. In Rosenwein’s model, people can belong to more than one of these groups, and can adapt “to different sorts of emotional conventions as they move from one group to another.”³⁹

In Thane’s case, the specific emotional community of his father existed within a general conservative sphere. In this same sphere, but in a separate, partially overlapping community were people to whom Thane was very close - Sophie and Arthur Krauss, and Thane’s older sister Elizabeth. These people were conservative, in that they wished to conserve traditional social structures, but they also felt those structures caused a certain amount of unjust suffering, and concluded that some sort of reform was probably in order. For the sake of easy differentiation, from here forward I will refer to this group as the “bourgeois” emotional community, and the emotional strictures they lived under will be the “bourgeois” emotional regime.

While Thane was willing to face ostracism from his father, he seemed deeply attached to Sophie, Art, and Elizabeth, and desperate to maintain connections with them. Maintaining these

³⁹ Barbara Rosenwein, 22-28.

connections, however, proved tricky and painful for Thane. In his efforts to preserve his relationships to people who continued to endorse the conventions of his old, “bourgeois regime,” Thane became quite frustrated. He found he was attempting to communicate with people who no longer spoke his language. That is to say that Thane’s new emotional life had imbued the world around him with meanings not comprehended by his old connections. In consequence, his priorities were incomprehensible to them. Still, Thane found it difficult to find substitutes for the intimacy of old connections, so he persevered.

Sophie and Arthur Krauss were a married couple near in age to Thane’s parents. In terms of social status, the Krausses were upper middle class, at the very least. From 1921, Arthur was the owner of Krauss Brother’s Lumber Company. Just before he retired at the age of 55, in 1938, Arthur spent over two years living abroad with Sophie in Europe.⁴⁰ That Arthur had the means to retire as early as he did, during the Depression, and immediately after an extended European tour, would seem to imply he had done fairly well in the Lumber business. Sophie, for her part, was the founding member of the Arboretum Foundation, which funded and oversaw the creation of the University of Washington Arboretum, a massive project Sophie was very actively engaged in from 1934.⁴¹ The Krausses were friends of the family and had known Thane’s mother, Hazel, who died of chronic kidney failure in 1932, in Oak Park, Illinois, where she had moved with

⁴⁰ “Krauss Rites to be Tomorrow,” *Seattle Times*, September 17, 1934. For the length of the Krauss’ stay in Europe, see BOLA Architecture and Planning, and Karen Kiest Landscape Architects, *Washington Park Arboretum Historic Review*, (Seattle, BOLA Architecture and Planning, 2003), 63.

⁴¹ “Mrs. Krauss, Arboretum Founder, Dies,” *Seattle Times*, January 16, 1970. BOLA Architecture and Planning, 55-78.

Thane and his three sisters after she and Lane divorced.⁴² Thane only mentions his mother once in his letters, so it is difficult to know the extent of Hazel's relationship with the Krausses, and impossible to ascertain whether the strength of that relationship had anything to do with how close Thane appeared to be to them. What Thane's letters do make clear is that Sophie and Arthur were quasi-parental figures to him. This relationship might have taken on particular importance to Thane during the years he wrote his letters, considering the proximity of his mother's death and the emotionally distant relationship he had with his father.

In addition to the emotional bond they provided, the Krausses acted as benefactors to Thane. Throughout his letters, Thane thanks them for the gifts of money they send to him and his sisters, for Christmas, for theater and symphony tickets, and for other occasions not fully explained.⁴³ More substantially, the Krausses sent Thane clothes from Europe. This gift was received about the time Thane joined the Communist Party and began to work as an activist. In a long letter that talks about becoming active in the CPUSA, Thane jokingly mentions that they should not imagine him as a long hair rebel dressed in rags, because he is "dressed like a captain of industry with those clothes you sent me."⁴⁴ Perhaps the most striking example of the Krauss' role as benefactor, however, is that they planned to help Thane through Harvard. It is not clear

⁴² Information about the divorce of Hazel and Lane Summers, the children's residence in Oak Park, and Hazel's cause of death come from an interview with Professor Mark Jenkins of the University of Washington, who in turn had interviewed Hazel's daughters in connection to a play Jenkins wrote based on the life of Thane Summers. Mark Jenkins, in discussion with the author, March 2011. Hazel's date of death was obtained from Illinois State Archives, *Illinois Statewide Death Index, 1916-1950*, <http://www.ilsos.gov/GenealogyMWeb/IDPHDeathSearchServlet> (accessed March 10, 2011). Regarding the friendship between the families - Lane Summers mentions staying in cabins on the Olympic Peninsula with the Krausses, in Lane Summers, to Mrs. AJ Singer, Aug. 29, 1922. The only time Thane mentions his mother in his letters, is when he makes an inside joke about something she did that betrayed that she was bored, an idiosyncrasy he expected the Krausses to be familiar with. Thane Summers, to Sophie and Arthur, Dec. 3, 1935.

⁴³ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Arthur, Nov 13, 1935, Dec. 3, 1935, Dec, 23, 1935.

⁴⁴ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Arthur, June 03, 1936.

what this “help” would have entailed. The Krausses’ intention to provide assistance does come up, though, in a letter to Arthur in which Thane explains he would never expect Arthur to “help” him through school if Arthur thought it would be unethical to do so. If Arthur supposed Thane would become a professor who would “influence people to a false view,” then Thane understood that there were ethical grounds on which to withhold support.⁴⁵

Throughout his letters to Sophie and Art, Thane demonstrates trust and intimacy. He confided in them, for example, that he had become a member of the Communist Party shortly after he joined.⁴⁶ While in Spain, he wrote them several pages of humorous, detailed commentary regarding a very personal experience - dysentery.⁴⁷ Furthermore, on three occasions he wrote to them about his girlfriend Naomi. The first mention of Naomi reiterates an earlier promise Thane must have made to send Sophie and Arthur a selection of love letters from Naomi, to get their opinion about how she really felt about him.⁴⁸ The second mention of Naomi tells of how she had talked to Thane about marriage. Though he loved her, Thane told the Krausses, he felt he could not marry yet, and maybe never, because with a wife and child to consider he could not, when called upon, make sacrifices for the good of society. As Thane put it: “I doubt very much if Christ would have been the fearless revolutionist that he was if he had been concerned with the immediate happiness of some particular woman.”⁴⁹ Also in this letter, Thane mentions that Elizabeth did not like Naomi’s “lack of fine etiquette.” This comment might lead one to believe

⁴⁵ Thane Summers, to Arthur, June, 1936.

⁴⁶ For joining the communist party see Summers, 6/3/36.

⁴⁷ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Art, Aug, 26, 1937.

⁴⁸ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Arthur, Nov 13, 1935.

⁴⁹ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Arthur, Dec. 3, 1935.

that Naomi was from a less privileged background, and that may have been the case. When Thane knew her, however, it would seem Naomi was a woman of means, because she offered to send him through Harvard.⁵⁰ Through all of these developments in his relationship with Naomi, Thane turned to Sophie and Arthur as confidants.

When Thane began to identify with radicalism, he also began to develop new relationships with likeminded people. However, these new relationships, formed with people from within the radical emotional community, proved not to be as satisfying to Thane as were his old connections. Through the last years of his life he continued to place a high value on long standing relationships with people like his older sister, Elizabeth. Soon after he joined the Communist Party, Thane wrote Sophie and Arthur, telling them of how impatient he was to see Elizabeth, who had been staying with the Krausses in Europe. “I have been going through so many fundamental changes in the last few months and she will be the first one close enough to me to talk to.” From this statement there would appear to be things Thane could say to Elizabeth that he could not to others, or perhaps there was a kind of communication he shared with her that was satisfying in a way that it could not be with others. Whatever the case, Thane’s statement implies that he considered his connection to Elizabeth as different from, and somehow deeper than, any shared with his new compatriots. Later in the same letter he explained that he was “quite isolated” during his time of break out political activism. This might seem ironic since Thane had, at this point, moved out of his fathers house and moved in with Professor Ralph Gundlach, with whom Thane ostensibly should have had a much easier time communicating.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Arthur, Feb 4, 1936.

⁵¹ This was in the spring of 1936. Ralph Gundlach, to Dr. Sieg. Also, Lane Summers’ testified that after Thane lived for a few months with Professor Gunlanch, he stayed with another UW professor, Herbert Phillips for a few months as well. See Washington (State) and Albert Canwell.

“Ralph is a close friend of mine,” Thane explained, but he doesn’t know me: he simply knows a transitional and turbulent me.” From this statement it seems that, while Thane was willing to leave his old emotional regime behind, he still felt that he belonged to a community under its sway, and only people from that community knew the true him.⁵²

Just how greatly Thane continued to value his old relationships is perhaps most strikingly demonstrated by the gestures he made to Arthur and Sophie, through which he tried to ensure he didn’t overstep his bounds and push them away with his social and political rhetoric. Early in his letters, Thane tried to offer them a way to approach his writing, “to keep from being completely bored” if they were not interested in the subject matter.⁵³ From this offer it seems he did not necessarily expect understanding, but found it important to keep up correspondence just the same. In a more dramatic statement reflecting the same sentiment, Thane wrote: “tell me if my economic problems bore you, because I won’t discuss them with you if they do. I am realistic enough to admit that you might become fascists, and the fascists don’t like to discuss such things.” Thane indicates here that he wishes to preserve his intimacy and emotional connection with these friends, even though he acknowledges that they may ultimately align themselves with his most reviled political enemy.⁵⁴ He seemed to believe, or at least dearly hope, that his personal connections could transcend any political or ideological distinctions. This is spelled out explicitly in Thane’s reply to a letter from Sophie. “Your letter thrilled me,” he wrote. “It gave

⁵² Thane Summers, to Sophie and Art, June 3, 1936.

⁵³ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Art, Nov. 16, 1935

⁵⁴ Thane Summers, Nov. 15, 1935, Nov. 19, 1935, and Nov. 28, 1937.

me the feeling that even if in the course of events the world may be split into two armed camps, and even if we are in opposite camps, still our love can be greater than that.”⁵⁵

Emotional Liberty

Thane’s new political interests may not have always been the most welcome topics of discussion for his old connections. Thane was obviously sensitive to this, but he simply could not contain himself. In a letter to Sophie and Art, he wrote: “I imagine you hate to have me harping on this subject of economics all the time, but I was thinking the other day that the reason I enjoy writing now, while I used to hate it before, is because now I have something that seems to me significant.”⁵⁶ Thane is here juxtaposing his exuberant present to his past, when he found nothing to be of particular significance and tended to find communication uncomfortable. This change he cites as the result of a new subject he has to discuss. Which leads one to ask: what exactly made economics so significant to Thane? How could his interest in it spur such a dramatic shift in attitude towards life and communication?

Thane found himself “harping” on economics in 1935 because to him, economics was ideologically connected to issues of inequality, exploitation, and human degradation, issues that had become emotionally resonant to Thane when he found himself in a group that allowed him to direct his feelings more freely. The economic and political model Thane was most attracted to was Communism, as he states in the earliest letters available.⁵⁷ Communism allowed Thane to mobilize feelings of outrage against things he reacted to with repugnance, and allowed him to

⁵⁵ Thane Summers, to Sophie, Feb. 4, 1936.

⁵⁶ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Arthur Krauss, Nov. 16, 1935.

⁵⁷ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Art, Nov 13, 1935.

identify with, through compassion, the perceived victims of capitalism, the system his father unflinchingly continued to support, and the system Thane previously believed was the only tenable economic model. After being exposed to radical economic thought what changed for Thane was, in short, his ability to be emotionally involved in his life; his ability to use emotion to inform his evaluations of right and wrong.

The importance of emotional evaluation to Thane's interpretations of the world is apparent in the arguments he made to Sophie and Art in the defense of Communism and in condemnation of fascism. Thane argued that one might not see the difference in individual tactical moves made by Communist and fascist organizations, but when the "ends" of each ideology are considered, it should become clear that communism is more worthy of support on moral grounds. Thane tells us why he believes this moral superiority is the case in the same letter: Communism's social aim is to take care of people, to alleviate the suffering and degradation of the traditionally disenfranchised, who are numerous; fascism's aims, on the other hand, are to entrench the inhumanities of capitalism, and to streamline capitalism's machinations without challenging the privileged positions of the traditional elite.⁵⁸ Thane's certainty of the moral superiority of Communism was not based on rationality, but on his emotional response to what he perceived to be Communism's ultimate ends. Thane conceded that if rational considerations had predominantly informed his outlook he might, as a member of the "petty bourgeoisie," have concluded that capitalism's preservation was in his self-interest, even if it had to be fortified by fascism to survive. Thane recognized that Sophie and Arthur also had vested interest in the preservation of the capitalist system, due to their social positions, and because they

⁵⁸ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Art, Nov 13, 1935.

were not on board with him emotionally, he had a frustrating time trying to explain why radical political and social restructuring of the United States was the only ethical solution to the country's problems.⁵⁹

In several instances, Thane expressed his belief that rationality alone cannot lead one to sound ethical conclusions. In fact, he found this idea so compelling that he wanted to use it as a central motif in the book he was writing while a student at UW.⁶⁰ "The purpose of the book," he wrote, "will be an attempt to develop the radical point of view from considerations of social ethics. Something which, so far as I know, hasn't been done adequately." It is telling that this exceedingly busy student, who as an undergraduate was a reader for Professor Herbert Phillips, felt he needed to make time to write a book on ethics. He admitted he was not producing an academic work, but rather something he had to get out of his system before he could give himself willingly to "purely academic differentiations."⁶¹ In his plans for his book, Thane shows a predilection for using emotion to infuse foundational but abstract concepts of right and wrong with meaning and urgency. Part of the task Thane laid out for himself was to "show the implications of the true Christian ideals to the church goer." While he does not elaborate further on what these ideals are, it seems likely he is talking about compassion and love, about concern for one's fellow man and the willingness to make sacrifices for the good of others, as these are qualities he endorses throughout his letters and qualities he associates with the radical left. It was

⁵⁹ Summers, Nov. 13, 1935 and Nov. 19, 1935. For Thane's declaration of his bourgeois background, see Summers, Feb. 28, 1936, and June 26, 1937.

⁶⁰ Thane appears to have completed a draft of this book. He writes his sister Elizabeth, in his last archived letter, that it's "swell" of her to type his book while he's away. Summers, to Elizabeth Summers, Jan. 18, 1938.

⁶¹ Grading exams is mentioned twice in his letters, 36 final exams mentioned at one point. See Summers, Feb. 4, 1936 and March 5, 1936.

important to Thane to show that radical politics was driven by compassion, “because the struggle is so often thought to be only economic, whereas the spiritual values involved are really of prime importance.” Perhaps what he meant when he wrote that radical social ethics had not been “adequately” developed, then, was that its core “spiritual values” had not been properly explicated. While spiritual is not synonymous with emotional, it is a word that denotes the intangible, the inner, the transcendent. In the context of Thane’s book, it seems a word chosen to discuss feeling more than rationality.⁶²

Thane made two other statements that spoke directly to emotion as giving meaning to ideological conviction. The first was in response to a challenge Arthur posed to Thane during his first month in Spain. Arthur questioned what good Thane, or any individual person, could do there. The implications seem to have been that individual efforts could do little in such a large struggle, so why, at great personal risk, partake in it? Thane responded:

Shall I play a small role in working for ends of world-wide significance, or shall I choose an important role in attaining insignificant ends? The determining factor is whether or not I am intellectually and *emotionally* socially conscious. (emphasis added)

In Thane’s description, social consciousness has two essential components: the intellectual and the emotional. In his thinking, both must be present for full social commitment to arise. and without this full commitment, one would likely not be concerned enough with the well being of others to join the International Brigades. Without the emotional component of social consciousness, a person might be more likely to pursue goals of individual self satisfaction. For one to be spurred into action in the defense of “social interests” at the expense of “personal

⁶² Quotations about the book are extracted from Summers, to Sophie, Feb. 4, 1936.

interests,” one must be led by one’s feelings to the realization that “a limited sense of self is not worth satisfying.”⁶³

The second statement Thane makes about emotion is not in regards to compassion, but instead is concerned with resentment and outrage, the emotions that really seem to have motivated him as a militant anti-fascist. “The positive arguments of socialists and communists,” he wrote, “made me intellectually a radical, but left my emotions in a terrific conflict.” It was indignation that tipped the scales for Thane. The dismissive, bullying behavior of reactionary conservatives “helped to resolve” his conflicting emotions, and pushed him fully into the radical camp.⁶⁴

This section has shown Thane expressing emotions and conceptually exploring the world around him in ways that had been disallowed by his previous emotional communities. He found that a greater degree of emotional liberty was afforded him within the radical emotional regime, so that he was able to explore in directions he had long wanted to. The next section will show how the radical emotional community encouraged Thane to make cognitive connections between his emotions and the outside world, in ways the conservative and bourgeois regimes had stifled. This stifling had caused emotional suffering that alienated Thane from his surroundings, imparted a malaise that made him feel he was drifting, dissociated, through life. The shift in emotional regime therefore resulted in what Thane felt was full emotional liberation. When granted the liberty to integrate emotional experience into life in a way that affirmed his intuitive tendencies (or at least what he portrayed as such), a huge amount of energy arose in Thane, which inspired his activism and bolstered his political commitment.

⁶³ Thane Summers, to Art, June 26, 1937.

⁶⁴ Thane Summers, to Art, Sophie, and Elizabeth Summers, Feb. 28, 1936.

Emotional Integration - Emotional Liberation

Thanks to whatever God may be that I am no longer a Peer Gynt! I am not looking for my self or soul, and consequently my emotional conflicts are minimized. I no longer have to face the strange paradox of fearing to act ethically for fear my soul might become soiled. As I look back on it, it was the shedding of my soul that caused my despair [sic] at Cal-Tech. Now, if I have a soul at all, over and above the miserly thing I have outgrown it is a soul that doesn't require me to remain pure by refraining from action...⁶⁵

The "soul" that Thane refers to above does not appear at all to be the essence of his spiritual being. Instead, it is the carapace that crushed him into a distorted shape, something to be "outgrown" or "shed." It sounds as though Thane is using the word "soul" to describe an emotional regime, one that forced his nascent ethical sense into the background, where it operated below conscious level, disconnected from emotions that could have animated it but that were, in accordance with the requirements of the conservative and bourgeois regimes, suppressed. At Cal-Tech Thane, who just a few years later would be a Harvard bound honor student at UW, failed so miserably that he left after less than a full academic year.⁶⁶ It seems at Cal-Tech Thane hit "rock bottom." Judging from his debilitated state, one could postulate that he had followed the internalized strictures of the only emotional regimes he knew until the effort began to cripple him. Thane makes clear in his letters that, in the world that his father, Sophie and Arthur wanted him to join, standard practices caused great wrongs. The conventions of his emotional regime at Cal-Tech, however, did not allow him to cognitively process perceived wrongs as such, and did not allow him to acknowledge his own participation in the system that

⁶⁵ Thane Summers, to Sophie, 2/4/36. Peer Gynt is the main character of a Henrik Ibsen play by the same name. Gynt embodies a kind of perpetual selfishness by procrastination.

⁶⁶ Thane Summers to Sophie, June 3, 1936.

perpetrated these wrongs. The only conclusion Thane could have come to at the time, with the reasoning he allowed himself, was that there was something wrong with him, not with world as it was.⁶⁷ Cal-Tech seems to be the point where it was no longer tenable for Thane to continue as he had. This may be what he meant when he wrote that it was the place he shed his soul. Before his melt down at Cal-Tech, Thane may have felt many things to be wrong but could not conceive of them as such. He could not use his emotions to make sense of experience so had to find ways to manage his emotions that were in keeping with conventional behavior. This had been the norm for Thane, until at UW he made a discovery. Here he realized the conventions he had uncomfortably molded himself to were not the universal truths of a monolithic society, but were rather the structures of a specific social group, and belonging to that group was not his only option.

The split between egoism and altruism, between the individual and their full capacity for ethical reasoning, was identified by Thane not only as a problem that had caused him great suffering personally, but also as a problem that many experienced: anyone from bourgeois or conservative emotional communities, for example. Thane spent a considerable portion of one letter describing how one group of people, who he called the “occultist,” managed this split. “Occultist” seems to be Thane’s way of referring to people who use spiritual ideas to reconcile their consciences with the immoral world around them, a tactic that Thane condemns as serving only to perpetuate mass victimization and allow for “evil” actions to go unchallenged. “To take concrete action,” he wrote of the occultists, “might offend someone; and that they must not do. So far as I can tell, all their love amounts to is a grin on their face, a sparkle in their eyes, and a

⁶⁷ Thane does admit to having had “a very bad inferiority complex.” Thane Summers, to Jenness Summers, Oct 28, 1937.

good feeling in their viscera.” What Thane is identifying here is a spirituality that, instead of informing one’s ethical sense, is used as a kind of opiate to deal with emotional reactions against perceived “evil” that must not be allowed expression. He gave a short list of rationalization techniques that the occultists employed, which allowed evil to go unchecked; using the notion of karma or divine punishment to assert that poverty exists because people deserve to experience it, for example, or subscribing to the belief that evil is but an appearance that in truth might be good, might be “the discord that heightens the greater harmony.” Talking about the coping mechanisms of occultists may have been Thane’s way of talking about the mechanisms he had once relied on. At one point he did directly state that he had once practiced “occultist ethics.” Thane’s discussion of occultism was thus probably a way for him to talk about the how he used to manage his emotional responses to fulfill the perceptual requirements of his old social unit.⁶⁸

Perception and behavior go hand in hand in Thane’s description of occultism. By keeping one’s perceptions in check, despite the contradictory information imparted by one’s emotions, behavior is also kept in check. One example Thane gave of the bourgeois regime putting controls on perception and behavior was Sophie’s contempt for Harry Bridges, a labor leader associated with Communism, who was involved in organizing the West Coast longshoremen’s strikes of the 1930s.⁶⁹ Bridges’ disruptive actions appear to have made Sophie suspicious of communism in general, though Thane argues the disruptions were justified given the context: Bridges was organizing for the “right to work decently” for the unemployed. Thane juxtaposed the actions of Bridges with those of president Herbert Hoover, a man he thought Sophie approved of. Hoover, wrote Thane, stuffed the ballot boxes in South America and sent the marines there to enforce

⁶⁸ All quotations are from Summers, March 25, 1936. “Evil” was Thane’s choice of words.

⁶⁹ Harvey Klehr, 125-127.

U.S. business interests. Thane clearly considered Hoover's actions immoral, but he also recognized that "custom condones men like Hoover, but not men like Bridges. It's so easy to let customary morality blur the facts!" Again, Thane here is explaining that when feeling and reason do not work together to inform ethical reasoning, rationality or emotion alone will settle on erroneous, harmful ethical evaluations, and skewed perceptions of the world. In Sophie's case, emotion was uncritically guided by custom to form a moral sensibility that attached emotion (scorn, approval) to the wrong targets. This led Sophie to condone actions that were flagrantly immoral, and to condemn actions that were ethically justified, by Thane's standards. Followed to its logical conclusion this thinking implies that Thane's old emotional regime compelled people to support unethical causes, and condemn ethical ones.⁷⁰

From the above statements, it is clear that Thane was aware of a splitting, a dis-integration of self required by the society in which he grew up.⁷¹ Thane identified this self-alienation as the source of his personal problems (such as self-doubt, or listlessness), and thought reintegration, facilitated by participation in radical social movements was the cure. "Solving social problems," he wrote, "automatically solves most of one's personal problems... granting... that most personal problems can be traced to this inner conflict between egoism and altruism."⁷² Implied here is that involvement in radicalism allows for a fundamental reintegration of self. Active radicalism thus become a treatment for the malaise of alienation/dissociation, and all its attendant self-loathing. It energizes and affirms, as Thane made evident when he wrote: "it is a

⁷⁰ Thane Summers, to Sophie, March 25, 1936.

⁷¹ Thane certainly believed this to be the case. I am not arguing here Thane's beliefs should be taken as mirroring an objective reality.

⁷² Thane Summers, to Art, June 26, 1937.

revelation to see the mental and spiritual integration that Communists get after they have been freed from the defeatism which is the inevitable result of the conservative's point of view."⁷³

Thane's belief that becoming a radical was responsible for his restoration is also evidenced in the prescription he gave his youngest sister, Jenness, to involve herself in "the movement" as a means of treating her "very bad inferiority complex" (a condition Thane states he once faced) and her hopelessness.⁷⁴ These recommendations to Jenness were part of a pattern in Thane's letters, which demonstrated that he very much correlated his entrance into radicalism, and into the radical emotional community, with a diminution of emotional suffering.

Conclusion

When Thane arrived at UW, he seemed primed to become a part of a new emotional community, especially if we take seriously the somewhat dramatic and metaphorically loaded explanation he gives us of his Cal-Tech experience, and the "shedding of his soul." At UW, Thane's life changed dramatically because he discovered he was able to make sense of his world through the deployment of two different emotions. One, compassion, seemed to foster a sense of social obligation in him, a sense that there were problems he could not turn away from. Second was "embitterment," or resentment and outrage. Thane's embitterment may have been something he wrote about as an uncontrollable response, but considering his descriptions of earlier life, it seems strange that he would have let an inappropriately target emotion go uncontrolled. By his own account, he had been keeping such emotional responses in check for most of his existence. The behavior that provoked his embitterment, too, would have been nothing new, because

⁷³ Thane Summers, to Sophie, Art, and Elizabeth Summers, Feb 28, 1936.

⁷⁴ Thane Summers, to Elane, Sept. 2, 1937, and to Jenness Oct 28, 1937.

Thane's father was among the conservatives who stoked his ire by avoiding argument and going straight to verbal degradation. Is it likely that this was the first time Thane had ever prompted a reaction like that from his father? Probably not. It is far more likely that Thane had already begun to break from the standards of his old emotional regime. When he began to react against conservatives, he was thus already experiencing more emotional liberty, and using emotions to shape his perceptions in unprecedented ways. The way Thane could perceived his father's behavior was likely what had changed.

The cultivation and targeting (applying to a target) of compassion and outrage were essential components in Thane's choice to become an activist and a volunteer soldier in the Brigades. The two emotions worked as a push/pull. Thane experienced a desire to alleviate the suffering of people with whom it was irresponsible, according to standards of the conservative regime, to share solidarity. Thane also felt utter contempt for fascism, and this loathing was the strongest force that pushed Thane towards radicalization, by his account. Thane allowed these emotions to arise and be mobilized when exposure to radical political thought and communist doctrine provided him with an intellectual framework in which to justify his emotional experiences. At the same time, these emotional experiences imbued Thane's conceptions of ethics and justice with spiritual meaning, which he placed at the heart of the radical movement.

The feedback loop between emotion and political activism remained a prominent feature of Thane's life throughout the writing of his letters, according to accounts therein. The intensity and urgency of his politics only intensified over time, despite Thane's regular interaction with a grey area, a place where it was not at all clear how he should apply his emotions. This grey area was his relationship with Arthur and Sophie. While there has been no detailed discussion of

formal doctrine in this paper, it is almost certain that, as a communist, Thane would have been confronted with very strong arguments for making the Krausses his enemy. He doubtless would have faced strong arguments that they should be reviled. Thane did not, however, follow any such directions, even though his relationship with them was compromised, and the communication strained, as is evident in one of the last letters Thane wrote to them before his death.

When I joined the communist party it was with the realization that it would entail tasks of this sort [the war in Spain], so whatever sacrifices I might need to make, always think of me as making them as a matter of course. This would be the highest compliment you could pay me.⁷⁵

Thane wrote this in response to an offer from Sophie and Arthur to get him out of Spain, should he decide to leave the Brigades. While he received their offer as a demonstration of love, one can detect in the above statement a subtle request, asking to be shown a different expression of love. Thane is requesting that his friends take seriously and respect his decisions, even if they can never understand those decisions.

The way that Thane constructed emotion might be very different from the way other Lincoln Brigaders did, so it would not be appropriate to try to extrapolate Thane's experience to other brigaders. It would perhaps be fruitful in the future, however, to look at how other volunteers constructed emotion, particularly those with backgrounds similar to Thane's. After all, these brigaders cannot be very well understood by existing methodological approaches, which stress the importance, in the making of Lincoln volunteers, of direct experience of discrimination

⁷⁵ Thane Summers, to Sophie and Arthur, Aug. 13, 1937.

and disenfranchisement. One need not confine further research on emotional construction in Lincoln Brigaders to volunteers who were demographic anomalies, however. One advantage of the approach is that there are no demographic constrictions. An investigation of emotional life, and the role of emotional regimes, can apply to anyone who has experienced emotions. A question might need to be answered to determine the value of the approach in the future, however: is there a way to get useful results from a group study of brigaders, using an analysis of emotional construction, or must investigations be done painstakingly, one individual at a time?

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