

A GIANT OF THE THIRTIES TURNS FIFTY:
THE PUBLISHING HISTORY OF
ANTHONY ADVERSE

TIM ZIAUKAS

WHEN Hervey Allen's *Anthony Adverse* was published fifty years ago at the bottom of the Depression, the young publishing house of Farrar and Rinehart was heartened by the advance sale of 17,000. At the time, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was closing the banks and hundreds of thousands were out of work. Not the time, it would seem, to bring out a twelve-hundred-page first novel about Napoleonic Europe and post-Revolution America by an obscure Pittsburgh poet. By the end of its first year, though, *Anthony Adverse* had sold a half-million copies at a hefty three dollars apiece. After that it continued to sell a thousand copies a day for two years until *Gone With the Wind*, a book whose audience *Anthony Adverse* had prepared, took over as the popular entertainment of that bleak decade. *Anthony Adverse* became a "St. Christopher for the booksellers, lifting them on its back and carrying them through the slough of the depression. . . ." ¹ Fifty years later, it remains a landmark in the history of publishing.

William Hervey Allen was an accomplished writer before he began the five-year task of writing *Anthony Adverse*. He had published a war memoir, *Toward the Flame*, as well as eight books of poetry, one of which, *Wampum and Old Gold*, was in the prestigious Yale Series of Younger Poets. But it was *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe* that earned the admiration of John Farrar. "It was Nelson Doubleday and my husband," explained Margaret Farrar, "who, during a walk in Garden City, mulled over our first list of books and authors. Doubleday said 'Hervey Allen. Take him along. He's a poet.' No one could have foreseen something like *Anthony Adverse* was on the way." ² Farrar bought out Allen's contract with Doubleday

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1 Robert E. Spiller et al., eds., *Literary History of the United States*, 2 vols. (New York, 1979), 1: 1267.

2 Interview with Margaret Farrar, New York City, Aug. 15, 1982. All subsequent quotations from Mrs. Farrar are taken from this interview.

and got an option on “a long novel yet untitled” that Allen was working on in Bermuda. That would become *Anthony Adverse*.³

Allen left for his new home in Bermuda in 1927 with the idea for a novel based, in part, on the logbooks and library of his great uncle, a steamboat captain and bibliophile. The book would be an adventure tale that chronicled the life and times of an illegitimate foundling born on St. Anthony’s Day in 1776. The intercontinental adventures of Anthony Adverse from the Napoleonic Wars in Europe to his death fifty years later in the American Southwest would be a panorama as huge as *War and Peace*, amusing like *Tom Jones*, episodic as in Cervantes, and ribald like Rabelais. Allen hoped the book would be an accessible allegory of how the modern age grew out of the ashes of Napoleonic Europe and “a protest against the futility of materialistic civilization.”⁴ After years of reading, Allen started writing full-time in 1927 and hoped he would have the manuscript to Farrar and Rinehart in time for their first list in 1929. He did not.

John Farrar’s and Stanley Rinehart’s first list, however, did include *The Romantics*, a novel by the publisher’s mother, Mary Roberts Rinehart, DuBose Heyward’s *The Half-Pint Flask*, and another called *Speculation*, a book about playing the market that coincided with the Wall Street crash. It was a total failure — as was the entire publishing season. “Although *Speculation* was a conspicuously ironic failure,” remembers Margaret Farrar, “we didn’t take the crash as hard as other publishers. In a way, we were lucky. It was our first year, so we didn’t undertake any really big advances. We had some money still in hand so we were able to weather the shock. As a result, too, we were able to take the chance on Hervey who was still down in Bermuda making the book longer. But at the time, though, there was no *Anthony Adverse* and *Speculation* was hard to take. We later shuddered at the sight of it.”

As it turned out, *Anthony Adverse* would not appear for quite a while. The Depression led Allen to reconsider the scale of the book. He would give himself room to make the kind of novel he had had in mind from the start. He wanted to depict “some of the richness and beauty, the enormous complexity, and yet something of the great and simple principles upon which I conceived life to be conducted.”⁵

3 A biographical sketch of Allen and a selection of his major works appear at the end of this article.

4 Ronald J. Williams, “Hervey Allen: A Modern Fenimore Cooper and Dr. Johnson,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 55 (Apr. 1972): 127. This article, with its introduction by Allen’s friend and associate Carlton G. Ketchum, is the best biographical introduction to the novelist.

5 Williams, “Hervey Allen,” 127.

He built the book on what he called a "three times three" structure — three books with three novels in each book with three themes pervading the nine novels that constituted *Anthony Adverse*. "The three various themes . . . I called: The Vision of Light; the religious, or ethical, or philosophical theme, mystical if you will, shadowed forth by the Madonna; the Dionysian theme of the eating and drinking, the lusting and loving and hating, which, in contrast to the Madonna or spiritual theme, represented the things of the flesh and the lure of the world."⁶ In short, Allen wanted to illustrate all the emotions, all the experiences of a well-rounded life, in the form of a fast-clipped adventure story for a general audience. It would be a complete life, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, he argued, without the devices and time games of modernism.

Rinehart, whose patience with Allen and his expanding manuscript would not always be so firm, wrote to him after finding out the book was not ready for production. "I am anxious to see the completed manuscript of *Anthony Adverse*. John, of course, is terrifically enthusiastic over what he saw, and I know that it's going to be a damn fine book. Fortunately, it wasn't published this season. Probably never again will we have such adverse conditions."⁷

The financial talent of the publishing house, Rinehart started to fear that the book might never come. He wanted a manuscript, not tales of "three times three" and Madonna images. The more artistically minded Farrar was always more tolerant of writers' eccentricities. "I have the greatest faith in your novel," Farrar wrote to Allen in late 1930, adding three months later, "I am convinced that you are in the midst of writing a great novel."⁸ By early the following year, with the book no nearer completion, Farrar, in characteristic understatement, wrote, "I am excited to know that the novel goes so well." Month after month passed and as the Depression got darker, the novel grew longer. Allen had used all his savings (except \$30.00) and Farrar and Rinehart could not provide more than the \$4,500 they had already advanced the untried novelist. Despite Rinehart's growing impatience, Farrar wrote to Allen, "I think the best thing for you to do is to go right ahead with *Anthony*, making it the best book in the world. Cer-

⁶ Hervey Allen, "The Sources of 'Anthony Adverse,'" *The Saturday Review of Literature* 10 (Jan. 13, 1934): 409.

⁷ Stanley Rinehart to Allen, Oct. 21, 1930. All subsequent citations from Allen's correspondence, unless indicated, are from the Hervey Allen Collection in the Special Collections Department of the University of Pittsburgh's Hillman Library.

⁸ Charles A. Madison, *Book Publishing in America* (New York, 1966), 360-61.

tainly if it goes as it began, it will be a great book." *Anthony Adverse* grew still longer.

Allen was, in fact, having enormous trouble finishing the book. And in a sense, Farrar actually finished the novel for him. Farrar called Allen to New York (itself unusual, as the novelist was often distant and reclusive) to talk about the ending. They read the book aloud to each other, often going over it word by word. "That was John's way," explained Margaret Farrar, "he considered himself a failed writer turned publisher. He realized he was never going to be a great writer, so he decided to be a great publisher and live through other people's writing. He took enormous interest in individual writers and their problems. Stanley worried about contracts; John cared about writers. His work on *Anthony Adverse* is a good example."

"Hervey," continued Mrs. Farrar, "just wanted to go on and on writing the book, perhaps a little afraid of finishing it. Well, after he and John had gone over the book very carefully, John got Hervey a room in the Yale Club and told him not to emerge forth until he had finished the final chapter. Hervey wasn't heard from for about two weeks. When he was, though, he had the end of *Anthony Adverse*, and to everyone's relief the book was finally put into production."

In its way, the production proved as big a problem as the writing. The manuscript was now enormous: 1,698 pages weighing nineteen pounds, the size of five conventional novels. They thought about bringing it out in three volumes in the grand Victorian manner. Scores of letters and telegrams zipped from New York to Bermuda, to which Allen had again retreated after finishing the book. Allen wanted the big, three-volume treatment, but Rinehart worried that no one would buy three volumes of a first novel. The Depression was entering its bleakest years and a lush, three-volume edition did not seem practical. It was decided to bring it out as a single tome. Allen, not originally keen on the decision, relented but was worried about the appearance of the book, insisting it not be squat and fat. "How," Allen wrote in a manner particularly irritating to Rinehart, "are we going to get this book under one cover without making it look like a Dutch fishwife eight months gone with triplets, and the marvel of Bergan-up-Zoom?"⁹

Often coy and difficult, Allen then lectured the publisher on his business: "We want it to look like fiction, but let it stand up and stand out a little and have good heft. Isn't that good counter 'psychology?' . . . 'Well, well, well,' you say, 'I propose to publish other books, and here is this curious fellow in Bermuda writing a letter like

⁹ Allen to Farrar, Mar. 18, 1931.

this as if he were the only author in the world and I had an eternity of leisure.' . . ." "Fortunately," Allen smugly went on, "we live in a wonderfully mechanical age, and I see lying about me several fine examples of literary compression." He then described one-volume editions of *Moby Dick*, *War and Peace*, Emerson, and Hugo that met with his approval. Allen then ended the letter with a macabre touch: "Yes, I sometimes seem a little balmy now, but this letter is as sane a one as you will ever get, so do stretch your hands over it, my dear fellow, and let me touch your fingers in the darkness."

Allen got his way. The book would be in one volume but would have "good heft." It would also have a quality binding to hold the 1,224 pages and Indian paper to hold the ink. Farrar and Rinehart then began to promote the book even before it appeared between its blue covers; for, given its size, they felt they could waste no time in acquainting the booksellers with the novel. Farrar took the then unusual step of sending galleys of the book as they were proofed to the booksellers. In this way, he gave them the extra time to begin the novel, and he hoped that once they got into it, the book would then sell itself. With a set of convincing letters, Farrar let the booksellers feel that they were being let in on something long before it would be available to the general public. Good counter psychology, as Allen might have said.

"I must use superlatives," Farrar wrote in one of his letters "To The Trade" about the book.

Anthony Adverse is 500,000 words long, three volumes published as one. Nothing like it has been attempted in America ever. You have to go to the great Russians to find any book with as much magnitude and richness. As I read the final chapters last week, I realized that not for one moment does Allen let the reader down. The prose style is sturdy and flowing. The story is full of adventure, of beauty and, of course, thousands of characters, so vividly drawn that I could sit down and tell you about them for hours. The book is worth all the trials of publishing — it is the sort of performance one dreams of. It is impossible to describe the emergence of the modern world from the ashes of the Napoleonic days. You might call it an American FAUST, yet that would make it seem unrealistic, which it is not. Oh well, you'll be reading it soon.¹⁰

They were, indeed. *Anthony Adverse* was published on June 26, 1933, with some advance sales, but no inkling at all of what was to come. At the time of publication, Allen was simply relieved that the thing was finally out of his hands. "Oh God, what a relief!" he wrote to Farrar. "We are anxious, of course, to hear how *Anthony* carries himself. We have high hopes but we count not upon them in these parlous times beyond the natural longing of the heart." Allen thanked his patient publishers and said that no matter how the public received

¹⁰ Farrar to the Trade, Mar. 4, 1933.

the book, he appreciated their efforts, "even if only three old ladies buy the book and two of them are shocked."¹¹

Allen was right about the shock but wrong about the number of readers. Before the controversies began, however, the reviews started to come in, and, as Farrar wrote to the novelist in Bermuda, "what marvelous reviews they are!"¹² He was right; they were generally ecstatic. *The New York Times* and *Tribune* both reviewed it on their front pages — extraordinary for a first novel. The *Times* said *Anthony Adverse* "is essentially a story and a very great story, but it gathers up so much wit and wisdom by the way that Mr. Allen is revealed on every page as that rare thing nowadays, a creative humanist. . . . We should not be surprised and we could not be anything but pleased if his "Anthony Adverse" became the best-loved book of our time."¹³ *The New Republic* wrote, "It will not be known, either immediately or hereafter, as the Great American Novel, but it will at once take its deserved place among the very good, the mostly true and the rather beautiful."¹⁴ *The Saturday Review of Literature* bluntly stated that *Anthony Adverse* "is the best historical novel that this country has produced."¹⁵

Readers stampeded the bookstores. The publishers could not fill the orders fast enough, despite the fact that a number of presses ran twenty-four hours a day for two-and-a-half years to fill the demand.¹⁶ When there were enough books in the stores, price wars broke out. Macy's, for example, set a limit on the number of copies anyone could buy and reduced the price from \$3.00 to \$2.75, outraging other vendors. A happy but bewildered Allen began to receive thousands of fan letters from around the country. At its peak, *Anthony Adverse* sold an astonishing 75,000 copies a week. "The extravagant reviews made the novel the reading bargain of the year — days of enjoyment and escape from the dire problems of the real world."¹⁷

Of the thousands of letters Allen received, this is typical: "Last night," wrote an editor from Longmans, Green and Company, "I finished *Anthony Adverse* and this morning I find myself wishing that I hadn't — for though a new and tremendous experience is now a part of me, I no longer have Anthony to look forward to — a stolen hour

11 Williams, "Hervey Allen," 126.

12 Farrar to Allen, June 20, 1933.

13 *The New York Times Book Review*, June 25, 1933, 12.

14 *The New Republic* 75 (July 19, 1933): 268.

15 *The Saturday Review of Literature* 9 (July 1, 1933): 676.

16 John W. Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, 3 vols. (New York, 1978), 3: 564.

17 Madison, *Book Publishing in America*, 361.

of reading every night, an hour that expired out the difficulties of the day and gave through vicarious experience the perfect realization of complete change. God, man, but you have written a book." ¹⁸ Another letter from a New York judge: "The book was a sort of Magic Carpet for me. As soon as I took it in hand I was instantly transported to those parts of the world where Anthony's destiny led him." ¹⁹

Soon, however, Farrar and Rinehart — if not Allen — began to realize that the book was affecting people as no mere best seller does. Readers wrote amazingly detailed exegeses of the novel, elaborate interpretations of Allen's allegory. Scores combed the text for errors and anachronisms. Others were convinced that the book was a thinly veiled *roman à clef* and that it was their ancestor who was the model for Don Luis or Brother Francis, John Bonnyfeather or Anthony himself. Through it all, sales boomed.

"As you know," Farrar wrote to Allen eight months after publication, "it is almost impossible to get accurate sales figures on *Anthony*, all I can simply tell you is about printings. We have 5,000 left out of the 330,000 printing. Of course, as you know, many of these are out on consignment. The next 20,000 will come off the press just in time to catch the slack, and we have ordered paper for another 20,000 which will take us to 370,000. Naturally, the book has slowed down slightly with the other books coming up, but not appreciably. It is amazing." ²⁰

It was. While the book was the most talked about in the country, *Anthony Adverse* started to penetrate the culture as a social and economic entity. The Paris and New York offices of *Vogue* magazine ran displays of the *Anthony Adverse* fashion line for the coming fall season. Furniture designers picked up Napoleonic motifs and allusions. Hairstyles reflected the new interest. Lord and Taylor advertised ladies' dresses called "Anthonia Adverse."

Farrar and Rinehart were shrewd in picking and choosing the products and services with which *Anthony Adverse* would be associated. The National Federation of Textiles was denied permission to use Anthony Adverse as a textile fabric name as well as a set of playing cards using characters from the novel. Too common, thought the publishers. A tobacco company, however, was given the right to quote from the novel in its national advertisements. Chess sets with characters from the novel were pirated and appeared around the coun-

¹⁸ Robert Green to Allen, Aug. 26, 1933.

¹⁹ Lafon Allen (no relation) to Allen, July 14, 1933.

²⁰ Farrar to Allen, Feb. 2, 1934.

try. To the amazement of both publisher and author, Anthony Adverse had a life of his own. He was famous far beyond the large but limited audience of book-reading America. He was a genuine, artificial celebrity capable of commercial endorsement. At the publication's first anniversary, Allen got 75,000 birthday cards addressed to his fictional hero. One family actually named their son Anthony Adverse. "Really," Farrar noted, "what people are doing in relation to this book gets stranger and stranger."²¹

Anthony Adverse had become a phenomenal success because it told an accessible, fast-paced tale, in exotic settings spiced with sex. But most important, it was long. Allen's book appeared — after all its delays in writing and production — right at the time when people really needed their entertainments to last. *Anthony* offered nights of diversion for three dollars or less. But the fan letters often reveal a real sense of accomplishment on the part of people who finished the tome. In short, *Anthony Adverse* offered a bargain and a sense of accomplishment at a time when neither was ever needed more.

A sure sign that a book has really penetrated a people, however, is when jokes circulate about it. With Allen's book, it again was its size that set it apart. Readers quipped about the forests that were sacrificed to produce so many *Anthony Adverses*, especially ironic, they felt, in light of the book's elaborate tree metaphor. John Tebbel in his history of American book publishing wrote: "A reader was said to have sued the publishers when he dropped a copy on his foot and broke a few bones. A member of the Byrd Antarctic expedition was reported to have taken a copy with him to last the long nights."²² One library patron reputedly piled up overdue fees of \$47.00 before he could finish the book.²³ The novel was the most talked about in years. Farrar, Rinehart, and Allen were, of course, happy — if not a little bewildered.

With the book on top of all the best-sellers' lists, Allen was beginning to feel the pressure of sudden celebrity. Requests for interviews poured in — especially after the film rights to the book were sold to Warner Brothers in 1934. Always intensely private, Allen was particularly annoyed by the radio and its way of shrinking and trivializing the world. The publishers periodically begged Allen to participate in the publicity, but to no avail. Allen's letters to them

²¹ Farrar to Allen, Oct. 8, 1934.

²² Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing*, 486.

²³ Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York, 1947), 254.



Hervey Allen in his study at Bonfield, Oxford, Maryland.

Anthony Adverse
Book I
Chapter I
The Coach

Original manuscript page

Holograph ms. page 1

Cayanan, New York

August 1929

Full notes of road

begin at Tisbury Hall

Harriet, Vermont,

May 1929. Just

completed at Cayanan

after receiving from

question in Boston

H. A.

Between the villages of Aubiere and Romagnat in the ancient province of Auvergne there is an old road that comes suddenly over the top of a long, high hill. To stand south of this ridge looking up at the highway flowing over the skyline is to receive one of those inscrutable and impossible impressions from the landscape which requires more than a philosopher to explain. In this case it is undoubtedly, for some reason or other, one of spotted expectation.

From the shallow notch in the hillcrest where the highway first appears, to the bottom of the valley below it, the fields seem to sweep down hoistly for the express purpose of widening out and waiting by the road. From the low hills for a considerable distance about, the stone farm buildings all happen to face toward it, and although most of them have stood thus for centuries their expression of expectancy remains unassaged. Somewhat to the east the hill of Bergonia, where the Gauls once withstood no less a person than Julius Caesar himself, thrusts its shoulder against the sky, and continually stares along the highway

ANTHONY ADVERSE



HERVEY ALLEN



Author's edition of *Anthony Adverse*.

ANTHONY ADVERSE

HERVEY
ALLEN
REGÉNYE

Első kötet



PRINTED IN HUNGARY

A Hungarian language edition of the book. Ultimately *Anthony Adverse* appeared in nineteen languages.

about his aversion to the radio offer a curious look at this distant and contradictory man.

"Perhaps I was not entirely frank in my last letter about radio talking," he wrote Farrar when the book was first published. "The truth is that this is 'religion' with me, and I just can't imagine myself talking over a radio system in order to sell my book, by some silly in-direction, any more than I can see myself taking a bath in the Ganges in order to go to heaven."²⁴ Allen felt that it was devices like the radio that were destroying the kind of world he depicted in his novel and poems.

"I loathe the radio. I regret its invention and its outrageous infiction on the public for purposes of exploitation. I am in favor of strict government control of the radio, somewhat as they have it in England, where people are given what they ought to hear and not what they think they want to hear. I have nothing to say on the radio just now and so I am not going to say it. I could go on for a long time about this and sometime, when the opportunity comes, perhaps over the radio, I shall be glad to advocate the setting up of a strict board of censorship."

Rinehart bit his lip but went along with Allen until Lowell Thomas, the most respected and influential radio journalist of the time, wanted Allen. This was not just another radio interview request, Rinehart argued; the book was a news story, not just a feature story, and Thomas's was the most listened-to show in America — a bonanza of free advertising. After all, he argued, it would be just this once and it would coincide with a huge *Anthony Adverse* casting contest mounted by Warner Brothers to publicize the forthcoming film. "I hope you can see your way clear," the publisher wrote, "to do the broadcast with Lowell Thomas, both for the benefit accruing to book sales and for the future of a really magnificent casting contest."²⁵

"I cannot and will not do the Lowell Thomas radio broadcast," Allen shot back.

Without burdening you, I now have on my shoulders all that I can carry, in many directions, and I must clear the tracks ahead, or I shall come a cropper. Also, I want some time to get down to doing some literary work, and unless I have my affairs in thorough order, I cannot do that. There is also a very real fear that radio publicity, in particular, will bring upon me and (my wife) Ann, and possibly the children, some very uncomfortable, or even fatal thing. That is not silly, but the kind of thing that is happening every day, and I do not intend to have it happen to me, even at the cost of not getting the most out of publicity. Please bear with me in looking at this matter from my personal side,

²⁴ Allen to Farrar, June 19, 1933.

²⁵ Rinehart to Allen, May 25, 1934.

because in the end, if there are to be more books, that has to be considered. The mail already is all I can do. That must be put an end to sooner or later, and further personal publicity is not the way to do it. Therefore, concentrate on the book and count the author out.²⁶

The same day Allen wrote to the more sympathetic Farrar: "Stanley and you both have written me, asking me to do this radio broadcast with Lowell Thomas, in connection with the contest. Dear John, I am never going to do any radio broadcasting for any reason whatever. Let us just understand that, and not have every request that seems feasible to carry a possible chance of my conceding this one instance. The point is, as you know very well, that if I do one radio broadcast, I am gone, and will have to do a whole lot of other ones. The other reason, at the present time, is that I do not want to have a lot of personal publicity leading, very possibly, to annoyance in one way or other to myself and Ann, or the children, in connection with this movie publicity. Concentrate on the book and leave me out."²⁷ It seems that Allen was never interviewed on the radio.

Even without Lowell Thomas, Allen found his name and his book all over the media. He was charged with plagiarism and with writing pornography. Both charges were untrue, but they took weeks to play out in the newspapers and broadcasts across the country. At the same time, *Anthony Adverse* was being translated into nine foreign languages (it would eventually be published in nineteen languages), and a particularly gaudy Hollywood casting contest ended up with Fredric March to star in the film version that was beginning to get under way. "All these things," wrote Allen to explain his inaccessibility, "leads up to creating a kind of secondary publicity that tends to keep the book a la mode."²⁸

Anthony Adverse would be "a la mode" for quite some time. The plagiarism charge grew out of speculation that the book was really an actual account of a historical figure. Readers wrote editors with evidence from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts which, they claimed, Allen had pilfered in order to put together the life of this popular hero. Allen was both hurt and outraged; Rinehart was delighted.

"I feel this is going to be a grand thing,"²⁹ Farrar wrote Allen to explain the good publicity in this bad press. Farrar suggested that they let the story simmer — and the book sell — while Allen prepared

26 Allen to Rinehart, May 28, 1934.

27 Allen to Farrar, May 28, 1934.

28 Allen to Farrar, June 16, 1934.

29 Farrar to Allen, Dec. 21, 1933.

a "defense" that the publishers would arrange to appear in an appropriate vehicle. "It will be grand," continued Farrar, "not only from the standpoint of protective publicity, but from the standpoint of positive publicity." The article, Farrar advised, "should really be in effect a statement of the method by which the historical novel is written. . . . Also, it would contain some references to the way a novelist approaches a period, his use of diaries of that period, etc., etc." Farrar ended the letter in the now routine litany of sales, after which he concluded: "We have worked out the new advertising campaign, and I will tell you all about it. We will be out of the book (again) at the end of this week, which is amazing. The depositories, we think, have enough books to carry them through until the book is in stock again. No one could have foreseen it."

In working out the piece, Allen wrote long letters to Farrar, which he called "ammunition" for the publishers to use on those who were now assailing the book. In these letters Allen explained how he was obviously aware of the books with which *Anthony Adverse* had been compared — *Don Quixote* and *Tom Jones* most often — but added that the impulse to hang a narrative on structures used in these novels was not personal and plagiaristic, but cultural, archetypal:

The idea of making the hero travel about a great deal was first of all inherent in the material and in the biography of the hero himself as the book took shape in my mind. I was not copying any other person's idea, I was writing my own book. Sometime after the story had taken shape, for the whole plot and philosophy was thoroughly in my mind almost a year before I began to write, I came across someplace, a remark of S. T. Coleridge to the effect that one of the distinguishing characteristics of occidental literature was that of movement, that whereas much of the literature of the east dealt with contemplative themes and static scenes. The genius of the West demanded thought in action, a hero who constantly changed his conditions and exhibited his character by his actions and reactions under various circumstances. In an oriental poem such as "Job," for instance, you have the hero sitting upon a dung hill in one place while he is afflicted from without by God and man, and makes certain remarks upon how it feels. In a poem which embodies the western idea like the *Odyssey*, you have, after all, the most popular form of hero which the West has evolved, you have in fact the prime example of the best method of story telling in western literature in *Ulysses* and his wanderings.³⁰

In *Anthony Adverse*, Allen wanted to use this story-telling technique to write a historical romance.

It seems Allen was particularly stung by readers and critics who accused him not only of literary piracy but of stealing old-fashioned, outdated ideas and structures. *Anthony Adverse*, many implied, was a narrative dinosaur, quaint baggage from centuries past, softheadedly untouched by the revolution in literature that occurred

³⁰ Allen to Farrar, Aug. 31, 1933.

in the 1920s with Joyce, Eliot, Hemingway, and others. "The publication of *A Farewell to Arms*," Allen argued,

gave all those who had been proclaiming that short sentences, short words, short cuts to thought, short sustaining of emotion, in fact everything from short books to short cakes was demanded by modern people, an apparent triumph for their contentions. A general howl and ballyhoo went up from school marms to critikins [*sic*] that communication in English must henceforth, if it was to be read by a modern public, be phrased in the manner of a Western Union telegram, and in a rhythm resembling that of a machine gun constipated from being oiled by sirop of squils. All that was to be disregarded was the entire tradition of the past, the genius of the English language itself, and the fact that various types of emotion must, if they are to be adequately conveyed, be phrased in variable rhythms unless frightful absurdity of feeling, such as burying one's grandmother to the sound of penny whistles, or receiving a spiritual realization by the emission of drunken grunts, is to be tolerated.

"People are tired," he summed up, "of incomplete and inadequately phrased experiences, of shallow books about abnormal people and neurotic experiences with which they have no genuine sympathy and no need to have a technical understanding, phrased in constipated and staccato style. They are tired of the superficially smart and of the abnormally esoteric form of novel. Above all they are tired of the prime assumption of all modernists, conveyed directly or indirectly, both in criticism and in their attempted works of art, that there is something very different about modern times from all other times. People who try to live on that assumption, I notice, generally become tremendous emotional and economic croppers, and people who write on that assumption have never been able to tell just what the difference is."

While Farrar and Rinehart issued new posters and such devices as bon voyage editions of the novel for vacation reading, Allen worked out his anger in these letters to the publishers and prepared his "defense" for *The Saturday Review of Literature*. When it appeared on the cover of the review, it was reprinted around the country. In it, Allen identified the books that influenced his reading and thinking. He outlined the contents of his grandfather's Pittsburgh library and made account for the heavy use of his great-uncle's log-books. In the process of explaining himself, Allen made insightful statements about the process and production of the historical novel. "There is only one way," he said, "to write an historical novel and that is to use fully any material out of any book anywhere, always providing the material is reworked and reshaped into that new entity which is from the novelist's own mind."³¹

³¹ Allen, "Sources of 'Anthony Adverse,'" 401.

"There is no doubt," he continued in obvious irritation, "that many incidents in 'Anthony Adverse' came from old books, etc. I should think that fact would have been too obvious to be seriously pointed out. The mere fact that 'Anthony Adverse' is an historical novel *admits it.*"³²

The Saturday Review defense set the plagiarism charge to rest about the time when the pornography issue started to heat up. Some clergy and readers felt that Allen's use of sex in the book was exploitative, smutty, even depraved. He explained in replies to scores of letters from readers troubled by a few of Anthony's experiences that

when one describes sex in a novel, in any of its aspects, one is not pandering to the lower nature of people because sex is, if properly exercised, one of the highest functions in life, and one of the novelist. . . . You see, it all depends upon *how* one discusses sex in a literary work. In *Anthony Adverse* the discussions of sex were included in order to give a full understanding of the moral implications of various sexual acts of the hero. How can you understand the man's character if you don't know one of the most important things about him? I did not want to leave that to other people's imagination because I was, I think, properly afraid that they would not supply the various experiences which Anthony underwent just as he did undergo them, according to my notions.³³

The clergy, however, was not so easy to convince. Monsignor Lavelle, pastor of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, for example, repeatedly used the book as a sort of antitext for his sermons on the decline of morality in America. The pastor "threw the book into the furnace" because of its "descriptions of vice."³⁴ This, of course, caused even more stories to appear in both the secular and the religious media. Again, the author felt an odd combination of hurt and anger, but the publishers were delighted.

"M. Lavelle's attempt to set himself up as the moral censor of modern literature is," Allen wrote to Rinehart,

typical rather of the isolated crusaders led by the ignorant zealots of certain puritanical sects than of the liberal and understanding attitude to be expected from a great catholic tradition. In particular, his choice of *Anthony Adverse* as an example of vice in modern literature can only be described as enormously ludicrous. It is true that certain experiences in the life of *Anthony Adverse* are frankly described in the novel, but they are so treated for the sole purpose of making real, and so doubly understandable, the human difficulties to overcome on the development of the hero's moral character. . . . Burning a book without reading it is one of the strangest methods of becoming acquainted with the moral or immoral significance of its pages that anyone has ever heard of.³⁵

32 *Ibid.*

33 Allen to Susan M. Bridgeman, June 15, 1934.

34 Allen to Rinehart, undated.

35 *Ibid.*

Allen's use of sex in *Anthony Adverse* is somewhere between the transparent birds/bees metaphors of *When Knighthood Was in Flower* and the steamy innocence of Scarlett O'Hara's relationship with Rhett Butler. This scene in which Anthony loses his virginity is as explicit as *Anthony Adverse* ever gets: "In a patch of moonlight near the door stood a naked woman. He was just in time to see the folds of her dress rustle down from her knees into coils about her feet. . . . The faint aroma of her body floated to him. A sudden tide of passion dragged at his legs. He could not help it. He swayed slightly, away from her. Then he felt her arms wind around him in the dark. They were smooth and cool, smoother than his own. Her hand pressed his head onto her breast. . . . She threw herself down and clasped him about the knees. 'Stay with me,' she begged him, her mouth writhing in a whisper, 'I will make you die with pleasure.'" ³⁶ Excerpts like these caused sales to swell even more, especially when advertised from the pulpit of St. Patrick's Cathedral. The pornography charge eventually and innocently receded as other writers climbed the charts with even bolder work, but not before Farrar and Rinehart had moved an incredible number of books. "Everytime we did anything about *Anthony*, no matter what," Farrar recalled years later, "sales jumped." ³⁷

The total sales for 1933 were just over a half-million, with an additional 176,000 in 1934, before the book finally started to slow down. During 1935 and 1936, the novel sold 65,000 and 63,000 copies respectively. After that, it continued to sell 10,000 copies a year until Allen's sudden death in 1949. By the time the incredible sales subsided in the late 1930s, Allen was finishing his novel of the Civil War, *Action at Aquila*, and was gathering materials for a cycle of books on the American Revolution, *The Disinherited*, which he left incomplete at his death. While none of these was nearly so popular as *Anthony Adverse*, that novel left Allen with the resources to pursue the kinds of fictions that occupied the last fifteen years of his life. *Anthony Adverse* still sells enough to remain in print and, now with about two million copies sold, is one of the most commercially successful historical novels of all time.

A popular success the size of *Anthony Adverse* is never explained. It is a combination of timing and taste, promotion and luck. The book had clearly struck a real chord with the public that helped the publishing industry through the Depression. But more important,

³⁶ Hervey Allen, *Anthony Adverse* (New York, 1933), 249, 252.

³⁷ George Stevens, *Lincoln's Doctor's Dog* (New York, 1938), 25.

Allen's novel turned public tastes back to historical fiction for the first time since the turn of the century. The long historical romances that would now appear, culminating in *Gone With the Wind* in 1936, became, along with detective fiction, the most characteristic genre of 1930s popular literature. Allen had started it all with a novel that filled three continents with action and adventure. Fifty years later, *Anthony Adverse* remains, in the words of its author, "the publishing marvel of the age."³⁸

HERVEY ALLEN, A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Novelist, poet, and biographer Hervey Allen (Dec. 8, 1889-Dec. 28, 1949) was born William Hervey Allen in Pittsburgh, son of William Hervey and Helen Eby (Myers) Allen. His father invented the automatic blast furnace stoker. After growing up in Pittsburgh, Allen attended the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. As a result of an athletic injury, he was honorably discharged from the academy. He then entered the University of Pittsburgh and in 1915 graduated with a degree in economics. After college, he enlisted in the Pennsylvania National Guard and in 1916 served on the Mexican border. Allen's regiment was called into service after the United States entered World War I. He was wounded at Fismes and after recovering, he taught English at Favernay. He was in Paris when the Armistice was signed. Returning to America, Allen was, from 1920-1922, a special student at Harvard University and then went on to teach English at the Porter Military Academy in Charleston, South Carolina.

In 1921 his first volume of poetry, *Wampum and Old Gold*, which contained the famous war ballad "The Blindman," was published. While in Charleston, he collaborated with DuBose Heyward on *Carolina Chansons, Legends of the Low Country*. Allen went on to teach at Columbia University, Bread Loaf School of English, and Vassar College. His later books of poetry included *The Brides of Huitzel, An Aztec Legend* (1922), *Earth Moods and Other Poems* (1925), *Songs for Annette* (1929), *Sarah Simon* (1929), and *New Legends* (1929). His prose writings were *Toward the Flame*, a diary of his war experiences (1926); *Israfil: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe* (two volumes, 1926); *Poe's Brother*, with Thomas Ollive Mabbott (1926); *Anthony Adverse* (1933); *Action at Aquila*,

³⁸ Allen to Farrar, Feb. 28, 1934.

a historical novel of the Civil War (1938); *It Was Like This*, war stories (1940); and a series of American historical novels, *The Forest and the Fort* (1943), *Bedford Village* (1944), and *Toward the Morning* (1948). Intended to constitute one panoramic work of fiction under the title of *The Disinherited*, this last series of novels was uncompleted at his death, and the three already published and a fragment of a fourth were brought out in one volume as *The City in the Dawn* in 1950. He also edited the *Rivers of America* series.

He was awarded honorary Litt.D. degrees at the University of Pittsburgh in 1934 and at Washington and Jefferson College in 1948. Allen was married in Cazenovia, New York, on June 30, 1927, to Ann Hyde, daughter of Charles W. Andrews, an attorney of Syracuse, New York, and had three children: Marcia Andrews, Mary Ann, and Richard Francis. He died in Miami, Florida.