

Chapter 1 : Exterior Parts for Mack MR for sale | eBay

*I met Mr. Paul Elmer More several times, but had an extended conversation with him only once. I wrote down a record of it at the time and give it here, as I wrote it then, embedded in a Princeton.*

See also Contemporary Authors, Vols. All his experience compels him toward the shoddy material of a Butterfield The material of I Thought of Daisy is drawn from the impoverished manners of Greenwich Village in the twenties. For the young narrator of the novel, it is American life that must be entered; and it is Daisy, a chorus girl, who represents that life to him. Daisy is seen in a different perspective"so that she is constantly appearing as a new person"each time the narrator tries to fit her into one of a series of different intellectual systems"succesively, social revolution, romanticism, animalism, materialism, metaphysical idealism, and, finally, democratic realism, at which stage the common life is attained. The story thus arranges itself into the traditional pattern of the novel of the developing consciousness or Bildungsroman. The result is some of the most embarrassingly bad writing he has ever done, reminding us that even as a young man he had a defective ear and no sense of humor, and that the peculiarly frigid passion one feels behind the language of Memoirs of Hecate County was no mere defect of old age. Like some Puritan Matthew Arnold, he has always thought of the intellectual as a prophet on whose uses of intelligence depend both the quality of our society and its freedom from the dangerous fanaticism of uncontrolled passions. How powerful are the passions he himself has to control is evident in Memoirs of Hecate County, where the devils that pursue him and his society squeak and gibber and that pitiful doppelganger, Ducky Bunny Flick, practices his purposeless magic. He is like the Dr. Johnson he is often compared to. He argues like a neo-classic critic or a psychoanalyst or a student of comparative literature, but his motive is always a deeply felt moral purpose. He could turn any literary subject back into the personal drama it had been for the writer. He could bring out all the implications of a book in his portrait of the writer as a creative consciousness. He, too, was trying to turn his life into a work of art. Like them, he had a passion for journals and memoirs, for the biographical context of literature and history, for the personal setting, that explained the charm of his writing and the gripping tension behind it. He had exposed himself to literature as the maximum experience of his life; I felt that he lived in literature as he did not anywhere else. It was exactly the communicated depth of this experience that I missed in other American radicals"this absorption in the actual work in hand, this visible pressure on him of every fresh thought, that made him so absorbed and cranky, unselfconscious and a "character. It may be just the strongest of the lot. The main part of Upstate, drawn from diary-notebooks of the past two decades, has an emotional shape and plot missing from A Prelude, the reconstruction of his early life which appeared four years ago. What he has written, Wilson says, shows "the gradual but steady expiration" of the old order of local life as he knew it not only in childhood but in the first years of his return. The mass of the book is by no means so elegiac as this may sound. It has in fact the fascination of a marvelous new archeological dig, delivering up treasures that reveal a whole civilization in the perspectives of time and change. The house is a sort of historical museum by which the human life that has moved through it can be measured and understood. The great theme of Upstate is the old American dream of a better life, rooted in a new civility, over against the spreading anarchy-tyranny of what has actually supervened. It is almost impossible by now to write about a new book by Edmund Wilson without feeling that one is writing about an incorruptible but distant public monument. I suppose this is as it should be. Longevity and consistency should grant a writer at least this much immunity from the kind of cultural Nielsen ratings we see around us. For Wilson has maintained himself as the very model of a writer whose allegiances are to intelligence and communication during a time in which so many of our nearer contemporaries seek to outgun each other with a rhetoric that becomes more and more hysterical as it makes less and less sense. If he has, over the past two decades, maintained a kind of Olympian distance from the problems of American life, his writing still represents one of the standards of sanity in this culture. Simply by having done his work, along, I suppose, with having out-lived most of his generation, he has become a literary showcase. And even if he now chooses the life of the literary patrician, his allegiance to the values of literature remains firm. He never considered them unquestionable. And it is exactly this that

stands between his books and his audience. It is difficult to be critical of a monument. Monuments are simply there, a part of the landscape. As he says less and less that seems of immediate significance to us, we more and more envy his being able to say it at all. He belongs to the Nineteenth Century because his world is self-contained, for he speaks out of a consciousness in which past and self have been merged. He has never been able to capture the kind of vision that his involvement with Marxism gave to him. A great deal of his work over the past decades, even the much-praised study of the literature of the Civil War, *Patriotic Gore*, seems to me a kind of inverted Proustianism. And yet, it seems to me one of the finest books I have read in years, a record that proves to be deeply and fundamentally moving even in what one first thinks of as inconsequential. He has written a book that Americans will be reading for generations to come. In preserving the past, the writer makes it usable. Once again, Edmund Wilson has done exactly that. Leonard Kriegel, "Edmund Wilson: It was a sad irony that [Wilson] found himself increasingly a stranger in the America he had spent a lifetime making the acquaintance of and staking a substantial claim for in the world. Few writers have labored so hard to know a country and its people, and not alone from books. Despite a constitutional diffidence, he became a superb reporter, out in all weathers to observe and record at first hand the American jitters of the Depression years, the American experience in Europe during and after the Second World War, the American debacle at home that he saw as the consequence of our intervention in Vietnam. He was tireless in pursuit of facts, tireless in speculation. For his part, he would perhaps have liked more attention to be paid to his short stories, poems, and plays. In a recent laudatory piece, the *London Times Literary Supplement* described him as our foremost man of letters, and by his standards a man of letters was one who could accomplish any literary task that happened to come his way. His one novel, written in the twenties, continues to read well, and there are from his hand certain fugitive Christmas verses that will go on giving amusement for decades to come. For a writer, the rarest privilege is not merely to describe his country and time but to help shape them. Wilson was among the fortunate handful of writers who have succeeded in doing this, with books that are like bold deeds and that will live a long time after him, keeping him with us against our need. Edmund Wilson was a hard man to categorize it must have been a satisfaction to him because, in his time and place, there was no category for him. We have had scholars and critics, historians, novelists, poets and dramatists in some profusion and of considerable distinction; Wilson, at one time or another, was all of these, but he transcended his particular pursuits and gave them unity by being always a man of letters. And when you have called him that, you at once find that you cannot name a contemporary to place by his side. From the start, he called himself a journalist, and it is true that the bulk of his great output appeared first in one or another journal. But it seems probable that Wilson was using the term in a deeper sense, as a way of calling attention to his unswerving preoccupation with the social background of whatever intellectual, creative or political episode had caught his imagination. And he had the energy to master the subject his imagination found for him. Typically, he found his most suggestive clues in language itself, and if the tongue were one he did not know, he immediately set himself to learning it. In one respect, Wilson was never a reporter—you could not give him an assignment. We tried, and so doubtless did many others, but it almost never happened that what interested the editor simultaneously interested him. He could not be diverted, and one awaited his proposal. For that reason, his journalistic works reflected a consistency of judgments and values unique in contemporary journalism; for that reason, also, he could bring them together into a series of books that constitute a deeply studied, openly opinionated but ultimately compassionate verdict on the half century in which he flourished. The reason Wilson [in *Upstate*] has sought to identify himself with the community at Talcottville and with the old stone house is precisely because they symbolize for him something of the freedom and solitude of an earlier and more commodious America, an America where a man was not yet confined by rock-ribbed social habits or by the dictates of his profession, where one could have adopted a vocation like that of literary critic, for example, without being necessarily enslaved by its jargon and habit of thought. And this is the very reason why we esteem Wilson and his work so highly. He is, as Van Wyck Brooks once remarked, "a vanishing type, a free man of letters," so that even when we find his ideas eccentric, perverse, and opinionated, as at times all of his readers must, we cannot but admire his ability to think through all of his problems for himself, his ceaseless endeavor to understand the world that confronts him and bring

some order to it through his own freedom of movement. It is no mere exercise in topography, or description or local color. Rather it is Wilson once again struggling to get on paper the deep resources of his psyche as it interacts with the microcosm of Talcottville and, more importantly, with the larger American experience which is, and always has been, his prime subject matter. They all aimed to tell us something about ourselves in the middle of the 20th century. Edmund Wilson was a historical critic, which means that he found the locus of criticism at the transfusion point between art and experience. In order to know something about literature, you have to know something of the conditions that give rise to it. And by "know" we mean knowledge of intimate particularities, not knowledge of lifeless abstractions. If you have no knowledge of the richness and diversity of the world of immediate experience, then you have no way of understanding much less interpreting for another person the literature that comes out of experience. Of course, it is precisely in his role as spokesman for American democratic traditions that Wilson was most often misunderstood. In the s and s Wilson was very much a part of the liberal movement, and like a great many of the younger writers of the time, flirted with Marxism. But it is obvious that Wilson was no more a conservative in the s than he was a Marxist in the s. For in its most common contemporary usage in America, conservatism is the view that the powers of big government should be reduced so that business, or "free enterprise," has more room to bustle in. But Wilson had not one jot more faith in big business than he had in big government; indeed, like many who were brought up in the Progressive era, he believed that it was the ethics of Wall Street that had destroyed the old Republican America. By and large, Edmund Wilson was an independent thinker over the years. But he always retained his strong faith in our American democratic traditions, even though he found the original dream of the founding fathers foundering in a sea of commercial ethics and impersonal, insensate government. What is important, though, was that this faith pervaded all his work and was not simply a political creed. Eliot for English professors. For Wilson much recent criticism has a strong aristocratic tendency in the worst American sense, a hankering after exclusiveness, a strong desire to hoard the private subject matter, and these leanings are no less reprehensible in the intellectual realm than in the political or economic realms. Writing, to be worth anything, must be a free and open offering to society. And even if it is obvious that not all members of society can appreciate the fruits of literary scholarship, one must write as if they could. The true critic is one who can talk with his fellow man. Which is another way of saying that the heart of criticism is art—poetry in the broadest sense. He who has the gift of tongues, who can speak to his fellow man because he has taken the full breadth of humanity as his subject matter, will alone have an honest and democratic outlet for his writings. Edmund Wilson was such a man. He was not only an imaginative writer of the first rank but a great democratic idealist, and a spokesman for liberal learning in the best old sense. And the combination of these virtues produced for us a remarkable body of work which is sure to remain one of the great contributions to American literature of the 20th century. Before he was done Wilson tried his hand at all the literary tasks—novels, stories, poems, plays, history, literary anthropology, social reportage, and political pamphleteering. He was, of course, best known as a literary critic, though he seems never to have been quite comfortable to be thought that alone, and instead styled himself a "journalist," meaning the term in the quite literal sense of someone who writes for journals. And he was, in fact, more than a critic. His plays uniformly suffer from an excess of literary, and an insufficiency of dramatic, content. His book of stories, *Memoirs of Hecate County*, however, never received the attention it deserves. Without any special tics, quirks, idiosyncrasies, or any of the other mannerisms imposed on prose that often pass for style, Wilson nonetheless possessed a prose style distinctly his own.

## Chapter 2 : Edmund Wilson: Literary Essays and Reviews of the s and 40s | Library of America

*Mr. More had at that time just built himself a new house in the new residential section of Princeton near the Graduate School, and we approached it along a rainy new-laid pavement.*

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