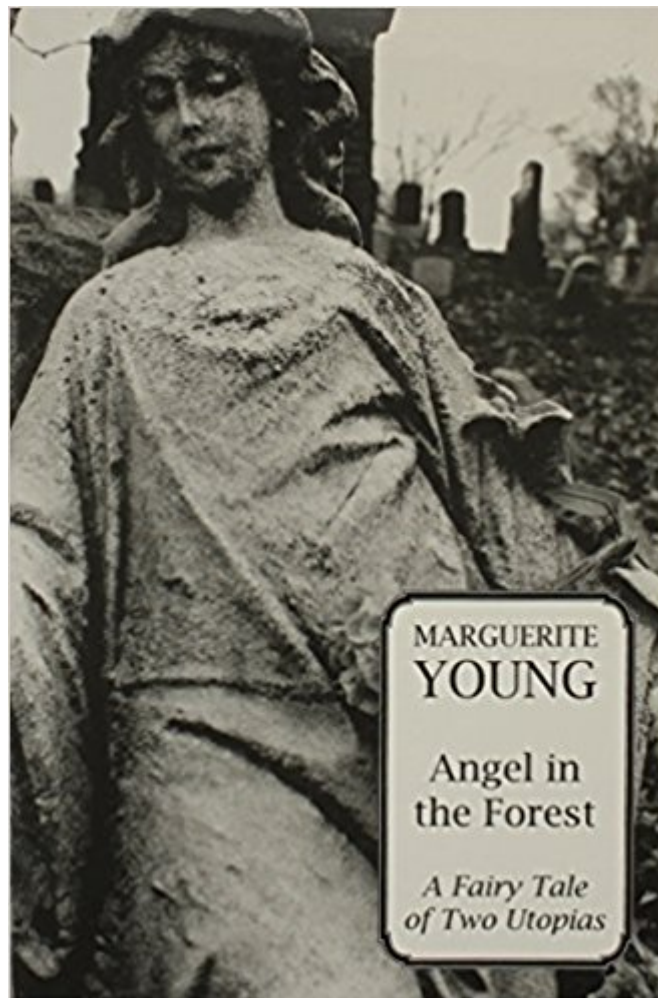




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Angel In The Forest: A Fariy Tale Of Two Utopias (American Literature (Dalkey Archive))



Synopsis

This is the first paperback edition of Marguerite Young's fascinating chronicle of two attempts to establish utopian communities in nineteenth-century America. "Angel in the Forest" recounts the strange tale of New Harmony, Indiana. The original community was founded in 1814 by the German mystic Father George Rapp, who, with a group of English immigrants, implemented his own theories for a perfect community, this time based on rationalism. Both experiments failed, but Young finds in both a distinctively American yearning for utopia, which continues to characterize the American spirit to this day: a tradition of faith and folly can be traced from Owen's New Moral World to George Bush's New World Order. Written with the same elegance, wit, and lyric beauty that distinguishes her fiction, "Angel in the Forest" was widely praised upon its first publication in 1945. This edition includes Mark Van Doren's introduction to Scribner's 1966 reprint.

Book Information

Series: American Literature (Dalkey Archive)

Paperback: 331 pages

Publisher: Dalkey Archive Press; 2nd edition (August 1, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1564780546

ISBN-13: 978-1564780546

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 2.5 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #807,047 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #100 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Utopian](#) #1238 in [Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Political Science > Political Ideologies](#) #1353 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Communism & Socialism](#)

Customer Reviews

With the extravagance of a poet rather than the pedantry of a historian, Young's long out of print study conjures up the spirit of two failed 19th-century attempts to establish utopias in New Harmony, Ind. The first was the celibate, spiritual society of Father Rapp (1814-1825), the other the rational, socialist order of Robert Owen (1825-1827). Father Rapp presided over a strict, regimented community (dictated by the visitation of an angel), guiding his people to prosperity through the sale

of everything from hogs and shoes to gunpowder and whiskey, but creating a repressive regime that required slavish obedience--sexual abstinence was enforced, even when it meant emasculating his own son when that son fathered a child. Owen, by contrast, preached a doctrine of rationality, equality, happiness and social sympathy, that people are not innately sinful but molded by institutions. To put his ideals into practice, he transformed the Scottish mill town of New Lanark according to humanitarian principles, and then purchased New Harmony from Rapp to create a model of socialist perfection--a vain but splendid dream. Young relates all this in a lavish style that evokes the magic and pathos of the experiments. She is a superb storyteller whose allusions, images and digressions are even more telling than the story told. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

She is a superb storyteller whose allusions, images and digressions are even more telling than the story told. (Publishers Weekly)

I read this book only for the content about George Rapp's Harmony Society. I found the style tedious and sarcastic. Young portrays George Rapp as a mystical despot and members of the society as under his thrall. However, she presented several points which interested me, especially regarding Rapp's views on celibacy. She implies that he emasculated his son (who subsequently died) when that son and his wife conceived a child. This may be true, but there are no bibliographic references in the book. I can't tell if this is an exaggeration for literary emphasis or fact. This book seems to belittle the dignity of the Harmony Society members. As someone with ties to the original Harmony Society, I found this unsettling.

This book is difficult but so marvelous that it is well worth the effort required. If you are wed to the idea of so-help-me-God facts, this book isn't for you. It is full of magic and mystery and sheer out-and-out glorius poetry. It is full of moonlight, spiderwebs and golden raintrees. If this book were visual art it would be a William Morris wallpaper. It is full of the sadness and glory of the Sirens chapter of Ulysses. It has the heartbreaking beauty of nostalgia. It has the life affirming strangeness of Moby-Dick. It is like a thousand other things and utterly itself.

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