

Theatrical Interlude 1

András Szántó: All right. Welcome back, everyone. It is customary for lunches during conferences to stretch out a little longer than planned, but I'm glad to see that many of you who were here this afternoon have rejoined us. And we're preparing now for two back-to-back panels—actually there's a coffee break in between—and there's a certain amount of high tech involved in the next panel, as one of our panelists is going to be beamed in via the wonders of satellite TV, or whatever it is. So once again, I'm András Szántó, for those of you joining just this afternoon. I'm director of the National Arts Journalism Program. It's one of several organizations that have been involved in creating today's event, which is primarily an NAJP and American Studies conference.

And in the morning we've been hearing a panel of historians lay out sort of the foundations and background about Bourne, and we've learned a whole lot about different strands of his thinking, his influences. And now we will delve deeper into particular facets of his writing, and the implications of his writing. Allan, what's next?

Should we ask our next panel members to join us on the podium? OK, let's do that. So, if you would, all of you. Sorry, sorry. OK. In a minute they will be joining us at the podium. So hold on.

"Randolph Bourne": I understand that you have all eaten, a little cheap box lunch back there with sandwiches. But I am on my way to the Century Club. Now I have a bit of a disability. I had spinal tuberculosis at four. I was pulled out of mother's womb with a pair of forceps like this. And I bet you didn't know I could skip like this. Because I am off to the Century Club to meet Mr. Ellery Sedgwick, the publisher of the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine that has published several of my articles. And he has yet to meet me. I am so excited to meet him, and I am so excited to be going to the Century Club. I hear that on a cold day like today they have the most delicious leg of lamb. And as usually is my case, I'm running a bit late, so. Mr. Sedgwick, hello.

"Ellery Sedgwick": Oh, yes, hello. Randolph?

"Randolph Bourne": Yes, I'm Randolph. It's good to meet you.

"Ellery Sedgwick": Yes, yes, me too.

"Randolph Bourne": I thank you for inviting me here. The support of the *Atlantic Monthly* has been so crucial to my intellectual development.

"Ellery Sedgwick": Yes, well, without the benefit of mentorship how could we pass on the knowledge of the past to our young thinkers? You are one of the youngest writers we've ever published.

"Randolph Bourne": Yes.

"Ellery Sedgwick": And your new book?

"Randolph Bourne": Yes. *Youth and Life* is the title of it. And my publishers they tell me that it's selling fairly well.

"Ellery Sedgwick": And you'll be a staff writer for that new magazine.

"Randolph Bourne": The *New Republic*.

"Ellery Sedgwick": Your work is gaining quite a following.

"Randolph Bourne": Yes, thank you. Perhaps we could go inside. It's rather cold and I would like some lunch.

"Ellery Sedgwick": Yes, that restaurant is the Century Club.

"Randolph Bourne": Oh yes, of course, of course, I've heard of it.

"Ellery Sedgwick": It's a very exclusive place. I have many friends who dine there.

"Randolph Bourne": Well, yes. Then perhaps we could go in there and get some

lunch. I'm actually quite hungry. And this new article that I'm working on, the one about the war in Europe—oh, Mr. Sedgwick, I would love to get your advice on it.

"Ellery Sedgwick": Yes, I have many friends who dine there.

"Randolph Bourne": Oh. Oh, perhaps I should be going.

"Ellery Sedgwick": Well, if we go in, if you wouldn't mind keeping your scarf on, since it . . .

"Randolph Bourne": This scarf is made of wool. It would be much too warm to wear inside the restaurant.

"Ellery Sedgwick": Yes. Well, I certainly look forward to publishing more of your essays, yes. And I have to tell you how happy I am to have finally had the chance to meet you face to face.

"Randolph Bourne": Yes, face to face.

"Ellery Sedgwick": I—well, you didn't tell me that you were handicapped.

"Randolph Bourne": Yes, well, as you clearly can see, I am.

"Ellery Sedgwick": And why did you never mention it to me?

"Randolph Bourne": I . . . I . . . I should be going. Standing out here has left me, well, I'm cold, and I would like a sandwich.

"Man": Mr. Bourne, here's a sandwich.

"Randolph Bourne": Thank you.

The Century Club. I am going to write that essay. "The Handicapped—By One of Them."

It would not perhaps be thought, ordinarily, that the man whom physical disabilities have made so helpless that he is unable to move around among his fellows can bear his lot more happily, even though he suffer pain, and face life with a more cheerful and contented spirit, than can the man whose deformities are merely enough to mark him out from the rest of his fellows without preventing him from entering with them into most of their common affairs and experiences. But the fact is that the former's very helplessness makes him content to rest and not to strive. I know a young man so helplessly deformed that he has to be carried about, who is happy in reading a little, playing chess, taking a course or two in college, and all with the sunniest goodwill in the world, and a happiness that seems strange and unaccountable to my restlessness. He does not cry for the moon.

When one, however, is in full possession of his faculties, and can move about freely, bearing simply a crooked back and an unsightly face, he is perforce drawn into all the currents of life. Particularly if he has his own way in the world to make, his road is apt to be hard and rugged For he has all the battles of a stronger man to fight, and he is at a double disadvantage in fighting them. He has constantly with him the sense of being obliged to make extra efforts to overcome the bad impression of his physical defects

[. . .]

The deformed man is always conscious that the world does not expect very much from him. And it takes him a long time to see in this a challenge instead of a firm pressing down to a low level of accomplishment. As a result, he does not expect very much of himself; he is timid in approaching people, and distrustful of his ability to persuade and convince. He becomes extraordinarily sensitive to other people's first impressions of him.

[. . .]

For at the bottom of the difficulties of a man like me is really the fact that his self-respect is so slow in growing up.

[. . .]

And that is the best thing the handicapped man can do. Growing up will have given him one of the greatest, and certainly the most durable satisfaction of his life.

[. . .]

So to all those who are situated as I am, I would say—Grow up as fast as you can. Cultivate the widest interests you can, and cherish all your friends. Cultivate some artistic talent Do not take the world too seriously, nor let too many social conventions oppress you. Keep sweet your sense of humor, and above all do not let any morbid feelings of inferiority creep into your soul.

[. . .]

But if I am not yet out of the wilderness, at least I think I see the way to happiness.

“The Handicapped—By One of Them.”

Now, I believe that I will step out and walk back up to Columbia and enjoy the best sandwich I've ever had in my life.