

SOCIETY
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STUDY
OF

MIDWESTERN
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Society for the Study
of Midwestern Literature
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Volume II, Number Three

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The Second Annual Conference

The Second Annual Conference was held at the Kellogg Center, Michigan State University, on October 14, 1972. Featured were two panel discussions, a business session, a luncheon speaker, and a convivium. Attendance was about fifty.

The morning discussion, "Midwestern Elements in the Works of Major Writers," included Alma Payne, Paul Ferlazzo, Blair Whitney, and Ronald Primeau, and the afternoon panel, "The Significance of Writers Who Remained Midwesterners," included Linda Wagner, Clarence Andrews, William V. Miller, and Arthur W. Shumaker. John Ferres moderated the morning session and Eugene Huddleston the afternoon session. A summary statements by each panelist appears elsewhere in this issue.

At the business session Linda Wagner of MSU, Eric Rabkin of the University of Michigan, and William Miller of Ball State were elected to three-year terms on the Executive Council.

The featured speaker was Madison Kuhn, Michigan State University Historian. The program was taped for broadcast over radio station WKAR and for the Society's archives.

David D. Anderson

The Midwesterner may be "almost too elusive to capture," but he is prolific and expert in the art of writing.

That was the consensus at the Second Annual Conference on Midwestern Literature, held Saturday (Oct. 14) at Michigan State University's Kellogg Center for Continuing Education.

Trapping the "elusive" Midwesterner in a luncheon address was Professor Madison Kuhn, University historian.

Kuhn laid out the great diversity of the area and its people, bounded on the south by the Old National Road (now U.S. 70) from Wheeling, W. Va., to St. Louis, Mo., and stretching all the way to the North Country, where copper mining once brought in Scandinavians whose descendants now live on "fish and strangers."

The optimistic people who inhabit the Midwest, Kuhn said, were recognized to have "the hurry of the New Yorker with the calmness of the southerner." They built windmills to harness the wind on the prairie where they had no wood to burn for power. They planted Osage orange hedges to fence their cattle until DeKalb, Ill., developed barbed wire. They tied themselves to the coasts with canals, Kuhn said.

Many of the canals, which lasted until they were demolished by the use of trucks in World War I, were built by Irish workmen, he said. Along the routes of these canals are found Catholic churches and democratic principles in a thin line across the Protestant and Republican area.

The Midwesterner's crops shaped his politics, Kuhn said. Wheat is radical, corn is not. Corn could be fed to pigs if the price went too low, but wheat could only be stored, leaving the wheat farmer to grumble, curse the speculators and join radical movements, Kuhn pointed out.

North Dakota was the scene of a great Socialist experiment, Kuhn said, and the Socialist Eugene Debs found his main support in Oklahoma. But the politicians of the left never forgave William Jennings Bryan for leading the only genuine radical movement to come out of the Midwest, based on free silver, wheat and peace, Kuhn said.

Tracing the rise of unions and the manufacture of automobiles, Kuhn brought the Midwest through the time when Chicago was "the center of modern dance" with Little Egypt and Sally Rand and the Aragon and Trianon ballrooms.

Continued

From friendship with families left in Europe shaping the political thoughts of many in the Midwest, Kuhn said, the area swung to worrying about Soviet domination of those families and moved willingly into the policies of the Cold War.

"But now the pendulum may be swinging back again," he said, "and one may ask how the Midwest will vote."

Midwest writers were the focus of the morning and afternoon panels. Those discussed ranged from Vachel Lindsay, "who committed suicide by drinking a bottle of Lysol," to Pulitzer prize winning poet-novelist Gwendolyn Brooks, who has moved the Black experience in Chicago from "lyricism to social comment."

Between these two were a whole army of Midwest writers, some still read and loved and others faded and forgotten -- by all but the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.

Sam Wetmore

Midwestern Elements in the Works of Major Writers

Sandburg's "Chicago" is perhaps the most famous, yet it is only one expression of literary ambivalence toward that city as expressed in American literature. From 1893, when Adams, Howells, and Garland wrote Of the Columbian Exposition's "White City", to the naturalism of Wright's ghetto, major American writers have been attracted yet repelled by the dynamism which they felt inherent in the "Hog Butcher for the World."

Alma Payne

Carl Sandburg has expressed and interpreted the region of the Midwest both as a biographer of its greatest son, Abraham Lincoln, and as a poet. In Chicago Poems and The People, Yes he gives voice to the energy and ideals of its people, broadly capturing the feelings of Midwestern Populism. In numerous brief lyrics throughout his work, especially in Cornhuskers, he renders with unsurpassed simplicity and beauty the Midwestern countryside. And in the six volume biography of Abraham Lincoln, Sandburg not only portrays Lincoln the man and great political leader, but helps create the mythic folkhero who grew from humble prairie origins to lead his nation through war to unity.

Paul J. Ferlazzo

Vachel Lindsay: The Midwest vs. Utopia

Vachel Lindsay committed suicide by drinking a bottle of Lysol. One of several reasons for his suicide was that the world did not live up to his vision of it. In both poetry and prose, he preached a "Gospel of Beauty," and he dreamed of transforming Springfield, Illinois, his hometown, into a utopia. His poems on Midwestern heroes - Bryan, Lincoln, Altgeld, Mark Twain, Johnny Appleseed, and others - use these men and women as examples of the good life.

Blair Whitney

While there are many 'regional' studies of Afro American literature in the South and East (particularly in Harlem), Midwestern influences on Major Black writers are generally overlooked. Ranging from patterns of Northern migration and movement in cities to the quest for freedom & challenge on the open plains, midwestern elements play an important part in the fiction of Richard Wright, the drama of Lorraine Hansberry, the autobiography of Malcolm X, and the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks.

Ronald Primeau

The Significance of Writers Who Remained Midwesterners

In this century, the Middle-West has produced a great number of poets, most of whom continue to write as Mid-Westerners. Among the most modern poets are James Wright, John Logan, Robert Hayden, Robert Bly, William Stafford, Gwendolyn Brooks, Karl Shapiro, and Theodore Roethke. Before them, the Middle West had been the home of Archibald MacLeish, Langston Hughes, Vachel Lindsay, Marianne Moore, Sherwood Anderson, Hart Crane, and Carl Sandburg, not to mention the two most influential men in modern poetry, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

Linda Wagner

Four Iowa writers have remained in the middle west. James Hearst, crippled in a boyhood accident, has remained on the family farm, written poems about the farm, and taught creative writing at UNI. Paul Engle, like Hearst a descendant of 19th-century Iowa farmers, has served his career as Director of the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop, 25 miles from his home. John Towner Frederick, also a native son, founded Midland, and was a major contributor to the establishment of an atmosphere in which middle western writers could work and publish. Frederick Manfred, whose parents were farmers, created Siouxland, a literary landscape, in his novels.

Clarence Andrews

Gwendolyn Brooks has remained closely identified with experiences of the south side of Chicago, a city which is perhaps the literary locus of Midwestern literature. As her critical reception and our own reading can attest, her poetry is significant not only as the social record of an urban black woman but for its intrinsic merit as art.

William V. Miller

Many Indiana writers remained midwesterners even though they achieved national reputations and could have moved elsewhere, such as to New York. Sarah T. Bolton, Edward

Eggleston, Lew Wallace, Maurice Thompson, Meredith Nicholson, Kin Hubbard, Evaleen Stein, Charles Major, George Ade, Carolyn Virginia Krout, George Barr McCutcheon, Gene Stratton Porter, Booth Tarkington, Ross Lockridge, Jr., Jeannette Covert Nolan, and several recent writers not only spent most or all of their lives in the Midwest; they usually retained a midwestern flavor in their production.

Arthur W. Shumaker

Research in Progress

Bill Sutton is continuing his search for episodes and items related to Carl Sandburg. He has now gathered 7,000 - Bill is also editing the 275 letters from Sherwood Anderson to Marietta D. Finley between 1916-1933.

Frances Dodson Rhome is engaged in development of an anthology of Midwestern literature, specifically Hoosier authors whose works deal with urban issues encountered in the growth of the city of Indianapolis. The title is From Country Village to a Model City.

Ron Primeau is carrying on a study of The Midwestern elements in the works of major Afro-American writers. He is also preparing an introduction for the next Clarke Historical Library reprint in their facsimile series.

Lynne Waldeland is currently working on Wright Morris. Particularly interesting is the relationship between the Midwest, particularly the Great Plains, and man's perception of reality as Morris develops it.

Betty Ann Burch is analyzing the novels of Vera Lebedeff of Detroit and Michael DeCapite of Cleveland and New York, with special emphasis upon their assimilation experience as the children of immigrants.

The World of Willa Cather:

The Years That Shaped the Vision

In 1922, at the peak of her career, Willa Cather wrote that "One of the few really helpful words I ever heard from an older writer I had from Sarah Orne Jewett when she said to me: 'Of course, one day you will write about your own country. In the meantime, get all you can. One must know the world so well before one can know the parish.'" This advice she received in a letter from Miss Jewett in December, 1908, and so closely was the advice anticipated and then followed and so accurate the implied prediction that twenty years of discovery, experiment, and accomplishment preceded the publication in 1913 of O Pioneers!, Miss Cather's first novel about her own Nebraska country.

The period of literary apprenticeship, during which Miss Cather followed Sara Orne Jewett's advice in "getting all she could," extended over twenty years, during which she wrote at least 520 articles and columns for newspapers in Lincoln, Nebraska, and Pittsburg and for the Home Monthly and other periodicals, many poems, at least 45 short stories, and one novel.

At the same time, during those apprenticeship years she edited the Home Monthly, worked on the Pittsburg Daily Leader, taught high school English and Latin at Pittsburg's Central and Allegheny high schools, and finally moved on to the editorial staff of McClure's Magazine in New York. With the publication of her first novel, Alexander's Bridge, in April, 1912, completed while she was on leave of absence from McClure's, she felt that her years of apprenticeship were over, and, as she began O Pioneers!, she left the periphery of the literary life and, resigning from McClure's, determined to enter the main stream.

Unfortunately much of her literary accomplishment during the years before O Pioneers! has been ignored, although many of the short stories were collected in the thirteen-volume limited Library Edition of The Novels and Stories of Willa Cather (1937-1941). Nevertheless, as her scholars and aficionados have long known, her uncollected writings at the time of her death in 1947 would equal another thirteen volumes. A substantial amount of this uncollected material dates from the years between 1892, when the story "Peter" first appeared in

The Mahogany Tree, and the publication of O Pioneers! and her sudden prominence in 1913.

In 1962 the editors of the University of Nebraska Press determined to rectify this situation by publishing, in an anticipated three-volume series, a representative selection of Miss Cather's writings from her apprenticeship years, featuring material that would supplement the fiction in the collected edition of 1937-1941. Each of the three volumes would be devoted to one phase of her early work: Volume I to poetry, Volume II to short fiction, and Volume III to articles and reviews.

Before the manuscripts were completed, the discovery, in 1964, of a substantial body of heretofore unknown work from 1895-1896, a period previously assumed to be inactive, indicated that research into those early years was still incomplete. Experience has since validated that judgement, and, although no subsequent discoveries have equaled that of 1964, unknown works continued to turn up during the following several years. The University of Nebraska Press revised its publication schedule, including much of the newly-discovered material in The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather's First Principles and Critical Statements, 1893-1896, edited by Bernice Slote, published in February, 1967. It was then anticipated that the revised publishing schedule would conclude with the two-volume collection of articles and reviews, The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893-1902, edited by William M. Curtin.

Again the University Press's publication plans were premature, and additional discoveries and further recognition of Miss Cather's substantial work led the Press to revise its plans once more, until the schedule became as nearly open-ended as is possible in the publishing business.

As a result of the revised schedule, currently in print are The Kingdom of Art (1967) and The World and the Parish (1970), together with April Twilights (1903) (Revised Edition), Miss Cather's first volume of verse, edited by Bernice Slote, and Willa Cather's Collected Short Fiction 1892-1912 (Revised Edition) (1970), edited by Virginia Faulkner and introduced by Mildred R. Bennet. Currently planned and in preparation are at least one more volume of articles and reviews, a Willa

Cather bibliography, to appear in the mid 1970's, an interim bibliographical and critical checklist, a Willa Cather picture book, to appear in 1973, and a critical biography by Bernice Slote to conclude the ambitious schedule.

The question that demands an immediate answer is whether or not all this completed, on-going, and projected publishing activity is worthwhile or justified, and the immediate answer, validated by the works already in print, is an unqualified yes. The publishing achievement thus far is impressive, and it opens up a new and important dimension for the study of Miss Cather's literary art as well as for the sheer pleasure of reading new first-rate material.

The Kingdom of Art and The World and the Parish combine to provide a medium of expression to one of the most vital literary voices of Miss Cather's generation as she examines the artistic world of her time and extracts from it the synthesized principles and values that were to give shape and direction to her art. April Twilights provides a further perceptive and clear voice for a growing artistic talent.

But the major interest must inevitably lie in the short stories, those works that anticipate the significant accomplishment of the second and third decades of this century. In the collected short fiction one finds the early sketches of Nebraska pioneers: "Peter", "Lou, the Prophet", "The Clemency of the Court", and "On the Divide"; such gems as "The Enchanted Bluff," later to be transmuted into one of My Antonia's finest chapters; such new material as the recently proved unsigned story "The Elopement of Allen Poole", published in 1893, that anticipates her last published novel, Sapphira and the Slave Girl, which appeared in 1940.

In the stories Miss Cather is particularly impressive as her literary growth becomes apparent, and she is at the same time most eloquently Midwestern, so much so that one might say of her, as she wrote of William Jennings Bryan in 1900, that she "...synthesizes the entire Middle West; all of its newness and

vigor, its magnitude and monotony, its richness and lack of variety, its inflammability and volubility, its strength and its crudeness, its high seriousness and self-confidence, its egotism and its nobility." And in so doing her work grows beyond apprenticeship and into artistic maturity.

David D. Anderson

Announcements

This is the last issue of the Newsletter in which lists of new Members will be published. Beginning next Spring, we will publish an annual list of all paid-up members.

Jerry Nemanic of Northeastern Illinois University announces two new projects: The Bibliographic Guide to Midwestern Literature which is projected for the end of 1973, and The Great Lakes Review; a Journal of Midwest Culture, which will begin publishing in Fall, 1973. Manuscripts are not yet solicited, but further details about both can be had by writing Jerry.

The Newsletter welcomes its new office mate, The American Examiner: A Forum of Ideas, the quarterly newsletter of the MSU American Studies Association. Vol I, No. 1 appeared Spring, 1972. For details, write Paul Somers, Dept. of ATL, MSU, East Lansing 48823.

Clarerce Andrews has a concise, barbed response to Time's recent essay on "Sispeak", which appeared in Time, Nov. 13, 1972, p. 5:

Sir/And from now on who will lie in wait in dark corners, the bogeman, the bogeywoman, or the bogeyperson?

C.A. Andrews
Houghton, Mich.

Like many a metropolitan celebrity before her, Marianne Moore, who in the 1960's was regarded by the press and City Hall as the poetic voice of New York City, was a native midwesterner. She was born in Kirkwood, Mo., near St. Louis. Miss Moore's midwestern life was brief, however, because her family moved to Pennsylvania in 1894. She went to college at Bryn Mawr, became the successful editor of the prestigious Dial in the 1920's, won esteem from Eliot and Pound and Stevens and Auden, and achieved celebration in the pages of Life and in Mayor Lindsay's mansion.

It is as an artist, of course, rather than as a celebrity that we remember her. It's not the "plunder" that makes metropolitan life useful to a poet," she wrote in the poem "New York": it's that life's "'accessibility to experience.'" Careful -- indeed, meticulous -- in statement, accurate in observation, her poetry is thought difficult. One who slows himself down from the skimming speed appropriate to notes from the Physical Education department will find her observations precise and her recognitions moving: her experience is accessible if one reads with imagination and intelligence

She is a poet of delight who is also a moralist, not because she starts as a propagandist but because she finds within the object of her attention illustration of values she recommends for confronting the dangers and greed of the world, values that armor the spirited individual. She says in the poem "Nevertheless" that one should cling to the fortitude that makes survival possible; in "He Digesteth Harde Yron," that Spartan endurance, a spare purposefulness, is superior to waste and vanity; in "The Pangolin," that a certain grace -- physical, behavioral, and spiritual -- is necessary. Reading Miss Moore's work is an exploration of such values. Courage, fortitude, endurance, purposefulness, and grace are so much the patter of moralizers that we customarily tune out when we hear assertions of them. But Miss Moore's assertions convince because she presents them as demonstrated and exemplified in the world she observes.

Some hyperardent clamors now exalt even the fourth rate if its author is female. There is no need for this. We have in Miss Moore one American woman who determined early to be a poet, not a "lady poet." Miss Moore abstained from the swoons and sentiment thought proper by Millay and Teasdale, resorted to even by such recent writers as Levertov and Plath and Sexton. One need not believe that poetry should always be sexless; he will see in Miss Moore's work evidence that a writer need not always bruit her gender.

There is nothing specifically Midwestern in her writing, not even those occasional reminiscences we find in the work of her fellow St. Louisian, T.S. Eliot. Her work is a general American art that has as much claim to universality as that of any Midwestern and American writer of this century.

Bernard F. Engel

The Lincoln Library and Museum

The Lincoln Library and Museum at 1301 South Harrison Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801, is sponsored in part by the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company and houses the largest collection of organized information ever gathered about a single historical figure.

The Library contains approximately 10,000 volumes solely about Lincoln, 400 books which Lincoln himself read, and about 6,000 collateral publications consisting of biographies of Lincoln's associates, histories of communities he lived in, reminiscences by his contemporaries, and discussions of political subjects. More than 7,500 magazine articles on Lincoln have been bound separately and indexed, and the complete files of leading historical magazines are also available. A number of newspapers from Lincoln's day are filed and indexed, and over 100,000 pages of clippings filed under more than 5,000 specific subjects pertaining to Lincolniana are available for reference.

continued on next page

The Museum features 28 original paintings of Lincoln by some of America's best known artists, a large collection of Lincoln photographs, and over 6,000 different prints of Lincoln systematically displayed or filed. Over 1,500 rare broadsides of 19th century political posters and addresses have been assembled, as well as numerous Lincoln sculptures and medals.

The Archives department contains documents relating to Lincoln's ancestry and Kentucky history, and the Richard W. Thompson collection of 575 manuscripts from 19th century Indiana. There are thousands of letters relating to Lincoln and approximately 85 original writings and documents of Lincoln. The complete Lincoln Papers (18,350 documents), and the Herndon-Weik collection of records and reminiscences are available for reference on microfilm strips.

A complete duplication department for items in the Library and Museum is available, and visitors are welcome Monday through Friday from 8 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Paul J. Ferlazzo

On First Looking Into Baker's Hemingway

The following was found among the papers of a distinguished writer, long since deceased, who shall remain anonymous. In it, there are two voices -- that of a Little Young Lady (LYL) and that of a Grizzled Author (GA). The reader is cautioned against trying to identify either. Such attempts are always made on false or insufficient evidence, and are invariably inaccurate.

Little Young

Lady: Papa--what is a critical biographer?

Grizzled

Author: Why do you ask, Daughter?

LYL: It is a term which has much currency lately, and I would like to know exactly what it means, for it seems to describe writers who write about writers, and the writers they write about are often favorites of mine. Like Dickens.

GA: Dickens. I see.

Lyl: And Robert Frost.

GA: Of course. Your taste is impeccable, Daughter, but hardly catholic. You failed to mention Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis.

Lyl: Yes, I did, didn't I? And there was Eugene O'Neill, and probably some French and Russian writers---

GA: Eugene O'Neill is sufficient, Daughter. You have made your point. To expand the list further would be unnecessary and perhaps embarrassing.

Lyl: Embarrassing?

GA: Never mind. Now, to your question. A critical biographer, Daughter, is a combination leech and vulture. He fastens himself upon the still warm corpse of the writer to suck his blood, and when that's done, he proceeds with the carrion. A critical biographer---

Lyl: You sound bitter.

GA: Please do not interrupt me, daughter. I have just successfully mixed a metaphor, and I should like to proceed before it is noticed. The truth often appears bitter, simply because it is true.

Lyl: I see.

GA: No, you don't. But that is neither here nor there. A critical biographer takes the peripheries of a writer, takes his biographical leavings, and tries to rebuild the man himself. And when he has succeeded--for one should note, Daughter; he never fails -- he has arrived at irrefutable evidence which supports whatever critical theories he had in mind when he began.

Lyl: Oh. Well. And how does he differ from a literary critic? You have spoken unkindly of them too, in the past, though without such--truth.

Page Eight
On First Looking Into Baker's Hemingway
Continued

GA: Daughter, you are a wise guy. But you are also a fine straight man.

Lyl: Thank you.

GA: De Nada. There are great differences. A literary critic, if he is good and if he is honest, deals with a writer's work, not his life. And he deals with it, sometimes courageously, while the writer is still alive and writing. He may be wrong, and if he is the writer can respond vigorously, even violently. The critical biographer waits until a man is dead, then paws through words he never published to find his fears and his sorrows, his snotty noses and his ass wipes, so that he may stand upon his grave, unassailable, and pontificate about "The Man and His Work."

Lyl: Now, that is nasty. That is almost as nasty as the remarks you made about the humanist literary critics some years ago. Next you'll be saying something like you obscenity in the milk of their mothers.

GA: No longer, Daughter. Times have changed. Now I can do almost anything I want quite explicitly in the milk of their mothers. And it is nasty. I mean it to be. But you must admit it is funny too. Snotty noses and ass wipes is funny.

Lyl: Really?

GA: Maybe not. I meant it to be, partly. I often failed at being funny when I tried too hard. But consider this: Imagine a writer so aware of his own ability to last that he knows the hyenas will rip and tear his corpse. So he intentionally leaves behind letters, fragments which can lead or mislead them into making of him and his work what he wants it to be. He writes his own critical biography, you see? You must admit that that is funny.

Lyl: No, sad. You said many times that a man must never under-estimate his adversary. To consider him a fool does not make him one. The critical biographer -- I don't like leech, vulture, hyena; the words make me uncomfortable -- would see through such deception in a moment, and the result would be disastrous for the memory of the writer.

GA: You are right, Daughter. Of course. I commend you for the astuteness of your observation if not for your squeamishness about metaphors. It was just a dream-joke. It is the sort of thing I would never do.

Lyl: I know. I'm glad.

GA: Good. Now, have I explained the term sufficiently well for you?

Lyl: Yes. Though in rather personal terms.

GA: There is no other way. I'm sorry.

Lyl: Don't be. This has been most instructive.

GA: Fine. Ciau, Daughter.

Lyl: Ciau, Papa.

Joseph J. Waldmeir

Sutton, William. The Road to Winesburg.
Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow Press, 1972
L.C. 73-181997 \$15.00

Subtitled "A Mosaic of the Imaginative Life of Sherwood Anderson," this study is also a mosaic of many years of painstaking research by a veteran Anderson scholar. It deals with the author's life up to the publication of Winesburg, Ohio in 1919. Neither biography nor literary criticism in the strictest sense, 'mosaic' seems as appropriate a term as any to describe the diverse elements that go to make up the total picture; for example, a series of chapter-heading epigraphs drawn from Anderson's letters and autobiographical volumes; more quotations (from letters by and to Anderson and from articles in the Clyde Enterprise and Chicago papers) to lend background and

The Road to Winesburg
Continued

shading to the mosaic; a reworking of Sutton's previously published account of the period leading up to Anderson's mental breakdown, Exit to Elsinore; two sections, Family Addenda and Appendices, occupying one third of the book, in which Sutton's discourses on Anderson's Italian grandmother, his father's second marriage, parental portraits, and miscellaneous travel references, among other matters; several Chicago newspaper reviews of Winesburg, Ohio; and some decidedly mixed reactions of Anderson's friends, Waldo Frank and Floyd Dell, to the manuscript of Sutton's book.

The reader often finds himself in a maze devised by a scholar with a taste for both the eccentric and the encyclopedic, rather than travelling the high road to a genuine understanding of the imaginative life of Sherwood Anderson. There is no question that Sutton knows the facts and background of Anderson's life better than anybody; and that he is, as he claims, "a careful curator" of those facts. But after reading The Road to Winesburg one is as far as ever from understanding how and why craft and sensibility suddenly crystallized in the Winesburg stories after years of plodding apprentice work, and virtually disappeared thereafter. This is not to deny that Sutton's research, especially his scrutiny of the vast Anderson collection at the Newberry Library and the Clyde Enterprise files for the years that Anderson lived there, uniquely equips him to analyze the sources of and influence on the pre-Winesburg books. Indeed The Road to Winesburg contains some of the most astute and detailed discussions of these books in print. And the book itself is unique; nothing quite like it has been attempted on other American authors, at least not to my knowledge. Furthermore, though it is far from the definitive biography of Anderson we have long awaited, it should at least supply an abundance of raw material when that book is eventually written.

John H. Ferres

Oscar Micheaux's Forgotten Homestead Novel

Although Oscar Micheaux has received brief mention in literary histories devoted solely to the work of black novelists (see, for example, Robert Bone's The Negro Novel in America or Hugh M. Gloster's Negro Voices in American Fiction), he seems to be little known to other scholars in American literature. However, now that his first novel The Conquest (1913) has been reprinted by McGrath, making it readily available for the first time in fifty years, students of Midwestern literature may find it of particular interest.

Generally, The Conquest belongs to the group of fictional works dealing with small town and farm life in the Midwest of the late nineteenth century, works such as Eggleston's The Hoosier Schoolmaster (1871), Howe's The Story of a Country Town (1883), Kirkland's Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County (1887), or Garland's Main Travelled Roads (1891).

The Conquest is the story of Oscar Devereaux, born on a farm near Cairo, Ill., in the 1880's. Leaving home at the age of seventeen, Devereaux works in various places throughout his home state, including a coal mine, the Chicago stock yards, and a steel mill in Joliet. At last he lands a job as a Pullman porter and gets a chance to visit other parts of the country. When he sees South Dakota and hears of Indian land being opened to homesteaders, he decides that farming offers the best opportunity to break out of the economic class in which he has become trapped. The major portion of the novel treats his experiences as a homesteader and land speculator.

In spite of melodramatic elements in the main plot of the novel, Micheaux gives a realistic view of the mechanics of setting up homes and communities on the prairie. The lottery system of assigning priorities for land is thoroughly described, as is the process of proving up on the land -- building sod houses, buying horses and mules from unscrupulous horsetraders, and breaking the tough prairie sod. Also noteworthy are several chapters on the politics involved in establishing new towns and attempting to attract the railroad to them, after which the winning towns experience soaring real estate prices and the losers become ghost towns.

Page Ten

Forgotten Homestead
Continued

While The Conquest is not a lost masterpiece, it is a worthwhile addition to the list of midwestern farm stories.

Robert E. Fleming

A Literary Anecdote

Dear Dr. Anderson:

Here's something else that may or may not interest the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature:

Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap---so far as this admittedly prejudiced observer is concerned the greatest editors in the history of American magazines of the Arts --- brought The Little Review from Chicago, where, as you doubtless know better than I, they started it, to a fourth or maybe fifth floor ---of a brownstone house on W. 16th st., near Sixth avenue, New York City, around 1915. These two great Midwestern women, whose comprehensiveness of intellect I believe to have been superior to that of their contributors (oh I know one shouldn't make these sorts of unnecessary comparisons) who included Wallace Stevens, Wyndham Lewis, Hart Crane, May Sinclair, James Joyce, Djuna Barnes, Sherwood Anderson, William Carlos Williams, and those other midwesterners (?) Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, etc., etc., set me afire in August 1916 (I was 15) when Jane Heap wrote in that issue: "I loathe compromise, and yet I have been compromising in every issue by putting in things that were 'almost good' or 'interesting enough' or 'important.' There will be no more of it. If there is only one really beautiful thing for the September number it shall go in and the other pages will be left blank." And the September number --- at a time when all those now celebrated writers were clamoring to get into The Little Review - except for the letters to the editor sort of thing, consisted of 30 or 40 absolutely blank pages! The finest issue of an American arts magazine ever published! So-----

Of course I decided to rescue these women from the torrent of worthless stuff they were receiving from Joyce, Pound, etc., so

one day I took a fistfull of poems from my yards and yards of them I had been writing since about 13 or so, climbed to the top floor of W. 16th street and knocked on the door. It was opened by Jane Heap, rather short, blocky as a fullback, close cropped hair --- the same figure as Gertrude Stein's. At a window, looking out and gorgeous, was Margaret Anderson, in a great flowered hat. But what really fixed my attention was the room itself. If it had any chairs I didn't see them. Nor did I see any tables, or any other furniture in this great room that occupied the entire floor except, right in the center, hanging from heavy chains, without legs, an enormous bed! It was the most amazing scene my teenage eyes had ever run into. (Guess I was sexually immature!) I couldn't take my eyes off the bed until I heard Jane Heap (the whole thing must have taken two seconds but it seemed a lifetime) say "Yes?" I can't recall responding except by thrusting a half dozen poems in her hand and plunging back down the stairs.

* That bed!

(They did publish the poems over the next three years, four under my own name and two with a pseudonym I was fond of -- John Ketch, a celebrated British hangman of some centuries ago---just the kind of person who would appeal to a teen-ager).

Regards,

Robert Reiss

P.S. It occurs to me that anybody connected with something called "Department of American Thought and Language", particularly somebody who wrote such a fine book on Louis Bromfield, should be interested in how we celebrate the Bicentennial of the Declaration. I'm now busy reviving the Committees of Correspondence that did so much in the 1770's to bring on the great events of 1776. If you're not interested yourself (although I hope you would be), how about some of your associates?

Announcements
Continued

David D. Anderson has published "Journey Through Time: the Poetic Vision of Hart Crane" in Ohioana XV (Summer, 1972). It is the fourth in a series of essays on Ohio writers that will be published in collected form when the series is completed.

The current issue of the Ball State University Forum XIII (Summer, 1972) is devoted to works by Jesse Stuart.

Bob Fleming has two recent articles, "The Novels of Ronald L. Fair" in CLA Journal XV (June, 1972) and "Overshadowed by Richard Wright: Three Black Chicago Novelists" in Negro American Literature Forum.

Donald S. Pady of the Iowa State University Library has volunteered to serve as the Society's bibliographer. As our archives grow, his responsibility will also. We hope to develop this aspect of the Society's role during 1973.

The editors continue to invite contributions to the Newsletter: short reviews, descriptions of collections and libraries, announcements, items for research in progress, and any other material of interest to the members.

The Editors continue to solicit manuscripts from the members for the first issue of the Midwest Annual, to appear next year.

Elsewhere in this issue there is a letter from Robert Reiss, who is interested in reviving the Committees of Correspondence for the bicentennial celebration of 1976. If you're interested, please write Mr. Reiss for details: 2617 Marcey Rd., Arlington, Va. 22207.

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