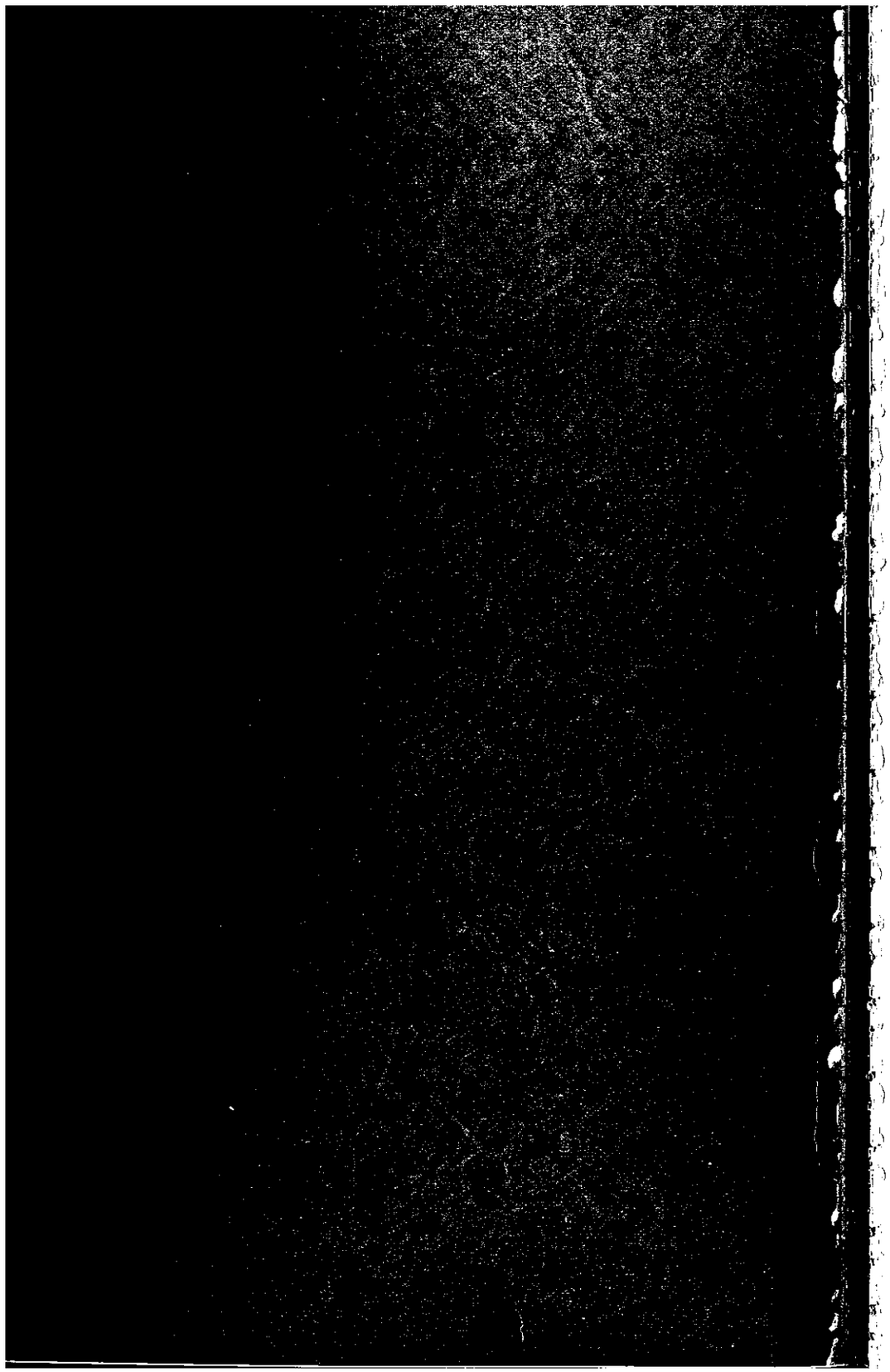

MIDAMERICA VI

The Yearbook of the Society
for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Edited by

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PREFACE

The appearance of *MidAmerica VI* marks the ninth year of the Society's existence, and it marks, too, several important advances in the Society's growth: the accelerated evolution of the Center for the Study of Midwestern Literature and Culture; the success of the first of a series of symposia on "The Cultural Heritage of the Midwest"; the growing membership; and the increase in scholarly and creative activity suggested by the greater number of essays and the longer bibliography in this volume. Current efforts to increase the numbers of life and institutional members of the Society will, if successful, provide a financial foundation strong enough to support continued growth.

During the coming year the Society will pass another milestone with the retirement of Russel B. Nye, founding member of the Society, author of such seminal works as *Midwestern Progressive Politics* and *The Unembarrassed Muse,* Distinguished Professor of English at Michigan State University, and recipient of the *MidAmerica* Award for 1978. The dedication of this volume to him is testimony to his past contributions to the Society and to scholarship, and it anticipates his continued contributions in the future.

DAVID D. ANDERSON

November, 1978

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GRASS/GRASSROOTS— AMERICAN METAPHOR/AMERICAN CLICHÉ

EMMA S. THORNTON AND PAULINE ADAMS

When you begin, begin at the beginning.
Begin with magic, begin with the sun,
Begin with the grass. (Helen Wolfert, "The Grass")

The recent bicentennial era stimulated interest in our national experience. This is simultaneously real and superficial, authentic and mischievous. The words, phrases, maxims that we have latched onto as true reflections of our national experience are the same buoys that the cynical manipulators of our society have latched onto as the expedient means to their ends. Out of the myriad examples of this phenomenon of the union of sincerity and cynicism, the term *grassroots* stands out. In any presidential election year many speakers celebrate the quadrennial appeal through its use. Through *grassroots,* the cynical politician calls up a folk wisdom; he embraces masses of people; he hopes to attract the majority. The expensive public opinion pollsters he consults are prima facie evidence of his concern. Once the election is over, the grassroots are forgotten for the next four years. But not by the people. The politician's appeal stems from his intuitive belief that there really is an American grassroots and in that he is right.

I

The term *grassroots* is so basic to our national ideology ("the consent of the governed"), to our popular culture, and to our treasury of literary symbols that it is startling to discover that the first record of its use appears to be as late as 1876 in the description of a new gold strike. "Gold is found almost every-

where, in the bars, in the gravel and sand of the beds, even in the 'grass roots'." H. L. Mencken reported that Dr. Frank H. Vizetelly told him in 1935 that the phrase "to get down to the grass roots" was in use in Ohio circa 1885 but that there was no written record to that effect. We do know, however, that Senator Albert J. Beveridge in a speech at the Bull Moose Convention in Chicago in 1912 claimed: "This party comes from the grass roots. It has grown out of the soil of people's hard necessities." Exactly where and exactly when the term was first used may be a matter of speculation, but it is clear that its various meanings started to gain currency in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the Midwest. And that should not come as a surprise given the American adventure of settling the prairie in the post-Bellum period.

Homesteaders, such as Robert Shore[1] in Minnesota early in the 1870's, saw the grass accosting them like the waves of the sea. Its above-ground growth was tall, seemingly unlimited as it rolled to the far horizons apparently unmarked by tree or bush. And when the homesteader, his horse, and his plow were tested against the sod, the stubborn resistance and the depth of the roots flung up an awesome challenge. A botanist, David E. Costello, marveled at these roots. "The roots of grasses are fibrous and their branches may be so abundant that a square yard of soil four inches deep may contain roots that would stretch for twenty miles if all were placed end to end."[2] In *Giants in the Earth,* Ole Rolvaag's fictional homesteader Per Hansa, in common with all his real-life counterparts, discovered that "The sod, which had been slumbering there undisturbed for countless ages, was tough of fibre and would not give up its hold on earth without a struggle . It almost had to be turned by main strength, piece by piece; it was a dark brownish colour on the underside—a rich, black mould that gave promise of wonderful fertility; it actually gleamed and glistened under the rays of the morning sun, where the plow had carved and polished its upturned face." In this description lies much of what grassroots meant to the original settler of the prairies. The grass grew tall and lavish; the roots fulfilled a rooting function, strongly fixing the plant and drawing water and nutrients from the soil. The roots were deep, intertwined, and resistant to dislodgement. More than one season's

cultivation was required to rout their hold; if the cultivation was even briefly neglected, the grassroots would return—though never becoming as strong as they had originally been. True, the breaking of the virgin sod, in the incessant series of pioneer difficulties, engaged only a relatively brief span of time. But an original pioneer farmer never forgot the meaning of grassroots. (Ironically, in dust bowl times, he or his descendants had a bitter occasion to review the implications of this extensive conquest of the sod.)

Naturally, in the settler's muscles and mind, grassroots became inextricably entwined with his notion of rudimentary principles, of first things first, of pragmatic choice, and of his own (and others') basic worth. This universal experience dealt with the exigencies of daily life and in the course of these dealings reenforced many of the dreams and authenticated many of the realities of America.

A century earlier, Thomas Jefferson realized that all of us, in some part, are products of our environment. Hence, he believed strongly in the importance of rural life in shaping a nation of citizens able to participate in the democracy he envisioned as the ideal for America. Jefferson associated the virtues of "loyalty, prudence, frugality and indeed common honesty" with rural more than with urban dwellers. Another major concept from the Jeffersonian legacy rests upon "the essential dignity of man and worth of the individual"; it asserts that the government draws its authority from the consent of the governed. Jefferson, an astute politician as well as a political philosopher, knew instinctively where the political power was, where indeed it must be, in the nation. He would have embraced the metaphor *grassroots* to express the philosophical foundations and practical reality he was helping to build. In truth, Jefferson did not create a political and social legacy, but rather he set down in words the grassroot beliefs of his compatriots. As he himself wrote almost half a century later about the Declaration of Independence: "Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind." Perhaps that is why, more than a century after, Robert Frost would write:

But never mind, the Welshman got it planted
Where it will trouble us a thousand years.
Each age will have to reconsider it.

Because of the American experiential milieu, the phrase *grassroots* became a philosophical shorthand connoting the linkage between man and nature, man and his neighbors, man and his government. Just as "every American knows what the term [democracy] means—at least he knows what *he* means when he employs it," so, every American knows what the term *grassroots* means—at least, he knows what *he* means when he employs it. Consider some of these meanings:

It is intrinsic to democratic principles and processes.
It symbolizes a spirit of local community initiative, of independence, of home rule.
It implies the specific, the concrete, the immediate.
It speaks of anti-elitism.
It is an expression of people's honest beliefs that develop from their own experience.
It is associated with the rural scene and its attendant virtues of innocence, hard work, practicality, prudence, and honesty.
Recently, its anti-big-city connotation has been disappearing, leaving only anti-boss connotations. So politicians seek support "from the grass roots and the sidewalks of the nation."[3]
It is synonymous with democracy: no tribunal or leader is above or beyond the people.

What is more, it is a source of regeneration for democracy. In sum, *grassroots* is associated with everything good and virtuous in American life.

Paradoxically, yet predictably, once *grassroots* had become an almost universal symbol, its use often reflected only incidental regard for substance. The political campaigner was quick to seize upon this nebulous but meaningful idiom that lines our collective consciousness. So when Senator Beveridge said his party came from the grassroots, he struck a responsive chord on Americans' harp of memory and experience. As Mr. Dooley noted about this earthy appeal, "Ye can waltz to it." Senator Beveridge's

contribution to political rhetoric entered the standard guidebook for political communication.

The Farmer-Labor Party used *grassroots* as its catchword in 1920. In June of 1935, the Republicans organized a Grass Roots Conference in Springfield, Illinois, in a vain attempt to discover the grassroots issues that would unseat Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the upcoming election. In September of the same year, Republican Governor Alf Landon of Kansas spoke out in behalf of "democracy at the grass roots" and a year later conducted a "Grass Roots" campaign for the presidency. But the Democrats were more successful, and in 1949, when V. O. Key looked back on the Roosevelt administration, he concluded that: "the New Deal . . . reached down to the grass roots and actually had some bearing on the course of human events."

Political appointees as well as politicians themselves invoked the phrase. David E. Lilienthal, who headed the Tennessee Valley Authority (a creation of the New Deal) in the nineteen-thirties and forties, spoke enthusiastically of the participation of the people in multiple TVA projects. He delighted in talking of the "decentralized grass roots administration," for example, or of the "emigration of talent to the grass roots," or of the fact that "To see each citizen as a human being is far easier at the grass roots. That is where more of the functions of . . . government should be exercised." Another appointed official, Harold D. Smith, then Director of the U.S. Budget, affirmed in 1945 that "there are dynamics at the grass roots. These dynamics should be harnessed and used for the preservation and extension of democracy."

Without the metaphor (at times, now, a cliché), political commentators and writers would be hard put to describe the political drama constantly being enacted on the national scene. According to *Newsweek* in November of 1953, the voters of the Ninth Congressional District of Wisconsin uttered a "grass roots warning" in electing Lester Johnson, a Democrat, to the House of Representatives. A March 17, 1955, editorial in the *Register-Guard* of Eugene, Oregon, asserted that "every man is a grass root in the mind of the Foreign Policy Association [whose program is] based on the theory that people do count." On June 23, 1976, Neal Peirce, a columnist for the Gannett News Service,

opened his article "Grass Roots Democracy" with "Across this far-flung, multi-splendered Western state [Montana], the citizens of every county and town are engaged in an exciting Bicentennial year exercise in grass-roots democracy—deciding afresh the form and powers of the local governments they choose to live under." A *New York Times* (July 6, 1976) front page article on "The Star Spangled Banner" and its unsingability referred to the "hardly grassroots movement" to replace it by a different national anthem.

Parenthetically, we cannot refrain from mentioning the recent use of grassroots in a cartoon by Koren in the *New Yorker*. The scene is a modern apartment-house living room overlooking a typical cityscape. The room is crowded with the sophisticated avant garde, drinks in hand, buttons (political?) on breast, all of whom seem remote from the American grassroots we typically envision. These people, seated on the floor, on couches, or standing in rows, are delighted by a speaker, who, with arms outstretched, says, "You are *my* grassroots."

And so it goes.

There are several near-synonymous metaphors for *grassroots* to help the speakers of the language of politics. "Stumping" was practiced before *grassroots* was used. We all recognize the "whistle stop campaign" which even today, despite the decaying state of America's railroads and the availability of TV, has not yet become an anachronism. Senator John Sherman of Ohio spoke of "fence mending" back in 1879. And members of Congress still return intermittently to their home districts to mend those same fences. The Nixon administration spoke of the "heartland," asked "Will it play in Peoria?" and was comforted by "the silent majority."

The philosophical shorthand of *grassroots* in the political arena has worked so well that politicians and politician observers have turned an authentic metaphor that "Ye can waltz to"—a metaphor stemming from the American experience and American conviction—into an American platitude. However, American writers have been less mischievous in their use of the symbol. To them *grassroots* (often *grass* separately, but with no implication of dismemberment of root, stem, leaf, flower, seed) became a valid metaphorical shorthand that retained its freshness.

II

When Americans first think of it beyond their own back yards or favorite golf courses, they think of the Midwest, our great prairie lands. After all, wasn't the old time prairie "a grandmother's quilt of color and form that shifted constantly as the wind breathed life into the grasses [?] Willa Cather remembered Nebraska when 'there was so much motion to it; the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running'."[4] This mid-continental running of the wind in the tall grasses beneath a high sky is something we may no longer know first hand. Our magnificent central grassland is disappearing. There remain few samples of the original vegetation. Such vast vistas of grass are gone, but their presence remain in our imagination. Our writers will not let us forget. Before the loss, Emily Dickinson mused:

> To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
> One clover, and a bee,
> And revery.
> The revery alone will do,
> If bees are few.

Hamlin Garland, in *A Son of the Middle Border*, recorded "the unforgetable epic charm" of his journey through the Northern Iowa and Southern Minnesota border region.

> Each mile took us farther and farther into the unsettled prairie until . . . we came to a meadow so wide that its western rim touched the sky without revealing a sign of man's habitation. . . .
> The plain was covered with grass as tall as ripe wheat . . . "The Big Prairie," we looked about us with awe, so endless seemed this spread of wild oats and blue-joint.
> . . . The majority of this primeval world exalted me. I felt for the first time the poetry of unplowed spaces.
> . . . [My father] was in his element. He loved this shelterless sweep of prairie. . . .
> It burned deep into our memories, this wide, sunny, windy country. The sky so big, and the horizon line so low and so far away, made this new world of the plain . . . majestic.

And Garland recorded his own mixed reactions to the historic American battle with the prairie sod.

> One day late in May my uncle David . . . drove over with four horses hitched to a big breaking plow and together with my father set to work overturning the primeval sward whereon we were to be "lords of the soil."
> I confess that as I saw the tender plants and shining flowers bow beneath the remorseless beam, civilization seemed a sad business, and yet there was something epic, something large-gestured and splendid in the "breaking" season. Smooth, glossy, almost unwrinkled, the thick ribbon of jet-black sod rose upon the share and rolled away from the mold-board's glistening curve to tuck itself upside down into the furrow behind the horse's heels. . . .

Like Garland, Carl Sandburg, in *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years,* also described a journey, not his own but the Lincoln family's:

> Around them as they crossed the first stretch of the Grand Prairie was a land and soil different from Indiana or Kentucky. There were long levels, running without slopes up or hollows down, straight to the horizon; arches and domes of sky covered it; the sky counted for more, seemed to have another language and way of talk, farther silences, too, than east and south where the new settlers had come from. Grass stood up six or eight feet; men and horses and cattle were lost to sight in it; so tough were the grass-roots that timber could not get rootholds in it; the grass seemed to be saying to the trees, "you shall not cross"; turf and sky had a new way of saying, "We are here—who are you?" to the ox-wagon gang hunting a new home.

Conrad Richter "fancied that in the milky mist I could see the prairie as I had seen it all my life and would never see it again, with the grass in summer sweeping my stirruped thighs and prairie chickens scuttling ahead of my pony; . . . and when the sloughs of the home range greened up in the spring, with the scent of warming wet earth and swag after swag catching the emerald fire, with horses shedding and snorting and grunting as they rolled, and everywhere the friendly indescribable solitude of that lost sea of grass."

Ole Rolvaag repeatedly captured the overbearing presence of the land. He wrote of the "open, endless prairie," the "endless blue-green solitude that had neither heart nor soul," "the vast, wind-swept void," the "bluish-green infinity," "the quivering bluish-green haze, that glowed all around," "the vastness and endlessness surrounding them on every hand."

Walter Prescott Webb quotes Edwin James' 19th century account. Though James does not use the word *grass,* he implies its omnipresence.

> Those vast plains, in which the eye finds no object to rest upon, are at first seen with surprise and pleasure; but their uniformity at length becomes tiresome. . . . The shadows of [the flying clouds] coursing rapidly over the plain, seemed to put the whole in motion; and we appeared to ourselves as if riding on the unquiet billows of the ocean. The surface [was] *rolling,* and will certainly bear a comparison to the waves of an agitated sea. The distant shores and promontories of woodland . . . rendered the illusion more complete.[5]

Both James and Richter felt the need of an analogy to convey the essence of the Great Plains and they chose the sea. This choice must have been authentic, for starting with the records of the first explorer, Coronado, the plains/sea comparison is echoed and re-echoed in the literature. Webb observes that quotations such as James' could be duplicated by the hundreds. Yet all the quotes share certain common elements: surprise, pleasure, elation, and the sea analogy. "Joshia Gregg speaks of the 'grand prairie ocean,' of the caravans 'making port'; he proposed a law based upon maritime law for the control of the prairie caravan, and gave the wagons the name of 'prairie schooners'."

Again Ole Rolvaag: "A small caravan was pushing its way through the tall grass. The track that it left behind was like the wake of a boat—except that instead of widening out astern it closed in again."

Colonel Richard Irving Dodge, in the 1870's, likewise noted the similarity between these two great natural phenomena: the sea and the plains.

> Like an ocean in its vast extent, in its monotony, and in its danger, it is like an ocean in its romance, in its opportunity for heroism, and in the fascination it exerts on all those

> who come fairly within its influence. The first experience of the plains, like the first sail with a "cap" full of wind, is apt to be sickening. This once overcome, the nerves stiffen, the senses expand, and man begins to realize the magnificence of being.

"The plain has moods like the sea. . . ./ The plain grows dark; like the sea/ It holds no shelter." So Hamlin Garland poeticized. And Mari Sandoz, another chronicler of another sector of the vast Midwest, wrote in *Old Jules*: "Some settlers saw it as a great sea caught and held forever in a spell, and were afraid."

Are these literary evocations factual? What does the naturalist have to say about prairie grasses? Listen to Millard C. Davis:

> That was back in the days when grass was *really* grass. A man got his view of the long shadows below from saddleback or by climbing bur oak of one of these scattered "oak openings." I have never been surrounded by acres of the eight-foot variety of grass, but having been in some of Wisconsin's highly regarded preserved prairie, I imagine the experience was kin to that which we used to have as children running through a neighbor's corn. After the fun, we nursed fine sawtooth slits in our skin drawn by corn leaves. Corn, incidentally, which later took over much of the prairie, is a "grass" that probably came from Central America. It grows rapidly rather than carefully and doesn't sink thick roots deep into the soil, as most of our other prairie plants do. . . .
>
> The upland prairie gradually changed [because of the Indian custom of repeated burning off of the land], so that in most ways the first farmer saw what I saw. The grass shortened. The prairie giants fell before his scythe and then, under heavy grazing, blinked out like cooling sparks. Within perhaps a decade the prairie grasses had given way to exotics like bluegrass, quack grass, orchard grass, clover and dandelions. . . .
>
> Prairie grasses and their companions sink their roots deep and put a lot of faith in them. More than ninety percent of their bulk may be underground. As a matter of fact, during the first year of growth so much energy goes into rooting that twelve inches of root may develop for each inch of top. Like trees, prairie grasses store carbohydrates in the roots over the winter. Its slow transfer out of the leaves, and the response to cold, bring out the autumn colors, just as in trees.[6]

But lest we mistakenly assign a restricted area, the Midwestern prairie land, to the grass, let us remember again with Whitman that "it is a uniform hieroglyphic . . . sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones." Actually, grasses are not uniform but diverse and various, adapting to the diverse and various areas where they grow. Whitman would have known the dune grasses of Long Island Sound more intimately than the various grasses of the prairie. John Hay, another naturalist, describes this beach grass so vital to the definition of our continental land mass.

> The beach grass has had much deserved honor heaped upon it, in the proportion that it is able to live with the tons of sand that are also heaped upon it. It is perfectly adapted to being covered over by sand since it sends up stems which in turn root themselves, and then grows on, letting the old roots die. As a sand hill builds up, the beach grass is able to maintain itself in this fashion without being buried and to hold down the sand with a network of roots and stalks. It stabilizes such hills until the point where the wind may sweep so constantly around them as to expose them and cut away the sand, leaving the grass in splendid isolation with its outer roots hanging in mid-air. So beach grass and sand have a special collaboration which man does his best to encourage, especially after he has made rescue work necessary.[7]

It is possible to distill the above observations into a list of facts about grass. 1. It is omnipresent. At one time, grass covered one-quarter of the earth's land surface. 2. It is flexible and adaptable to varying natural elements. Grasses are found in polar regions with two months or less growing seasons as well as in warm, humid, tropical climates. Not only does grass adapt to various climates, it modifies these climates. 3. It is not grass everywhere the same, but grasses, copious and diverse. In the United States alone there are at least 1440 varieties. 4. Its variety offers necessary nourishment to diverse forms of life. We tend to forget that rye, corn, rice, barley, wheat, oats, clover are all grasses. 5. It is an integral part of the community of nature.

". . . in the grassroot jungles of your own back yard, you encounter strange and incredible forms of life. . . . In one suburban back yard Dr. Frank E. Lutz, curator of Entomology at the American Museum of Natural History, New York City, found more than 1,000 different members of this vast family."[8] 6. It is tough, not fragile. There is slough grass which grew ten feet tall in Illinois and was known as "rip-gut" because of its saw-edged blades. Another prairie grass is the Devil's Darning Needle because it makes darts for the naughty to throw at people's clothing. 7. It is firmly embedded. Many a naturalist has been overwhelmed with the prodigious root empires of the grass. Durward L. Allen, ecologist, marvels that "If we were to stake out an acre in one of these thick stands of western Iowa, skim off a surface layer four inches thick, and then wash out all the soil, we would leave a great spongy pile of grass roots weighing four and a half tons!"[9] Annie Dillard, in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,* is astonished at an experiment with a single grass plant (winter rye). "They let it grow in a greenhouse for four months; then they gingerly spirited away the soil . . . and counted and measured all the roots and root hairs. In four months the plant had set forth 378 miles of roots—that's about three miles a day—in 14 million distinct roots. This is mighty impressive, but when they got down to the root hairs, I boggle completely. In those same four months the rye plant created 14 *billion* root hairs, and these little strands placed end-to-end just about wouldn't quit. In a single *cubic inch* of soil, the length of the root hairs totaled 6000 miles." 8. Finally, it is ever-renewing. The more you cut it, the more it grows. It springs alike from root and seed.

III

These facts of nature have been taken by many of our writers to make rational or at least comprehensible both the landscape and the humanscape. For example, the poet, Theodore Roethke, knew that "All natural shapes become symbolical." The artist, Andreas Feininger, believes that "in the last analysis, everything made by human hands and most things conceived by the human mind have their prototype in nature."[10] We are all aware of the injunctions of Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman to

discover ourselves in nature. And so the natural facts of grass led to the literary metaphor. And what are the meanings of that metaphor, a metaphor now more often *grass* than *grassroots*? A metaphor sometimes implicit as meadows, fields, etc., rather than explicit. Consider some of these meanings:

Its omnipresence connotes democracy. Its commonplaceness is antithetical to elitism.

Its symbiotic relationship to multiple natural elements connotes the unity of all things—human and non-human.

Paradoxically, its myriad varieties connote pluralism and individualism.

Its diversity and adaptability connote the flexibility demanded of humans for survival.

Its toughness connotes no nonsense, down-to-earth pragmatism—a tough-minded facing of the facts—a resiliency of "traditional American values." Thus:

> This is the way things are.
> Here is the grass,
> So green and coarse, so sweet and delicate,
> But with some brown rubble in it. . . .
> (Thomas Wolfe)

Its fertility ("rank fecundity," one naturalist quipped) connotes hope, optimism, faith in the future—an affirmation of life.

> The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows,
> My scythe whispered and left the hay to make.
> (Robert Frost)

Its deeprootedness connotes the terra firma of our lives—that which we always come back to.

Just as grass insinuates itself into the eco-system, so it insinuates itself into the consciousness. Grass is there as the air is there. It is both background and foreground. It is an invisible visible element like air, water, earth. A. R. Ammons is aware that:

> The wind came as a grassy sound
> and between its
> grassy teeth
> spoke words said with grass. . . .

The literary metaphor closely tallies the political metaphor. This is not unexpected. The metaphor (literary and political alike) is particularly American because the natural fact and the symbol which has sprung from it are intrinsic to the process by which Americans understand the realities of life. Whitman's *grass* embodying all the nuances is so universally recognized, it has an earthhold on the American imagination. It is fresh, simple, true. It has "the splendor of the authentic." (Denise Levertov) One would suppose that after Whitman, no poet would dare use *grass* in fear of cultivating a cliché or trivializing a truth. To the credit of subsequent writers, though in them we hear resonances of Whitman or sense his function as guru, they have not allowed his "leaves" to wither by abuse or neglect. "The Grass [that] so little has to do" seeds imaginations over the broad poetic plains.

The following are just a scant sample of the myriad of poems employing, in one way or another, the metaphor. We have here deliberately chosen, for the most part, to let the poets speak for themselves, believing with Paul Klee that "art does not reproduce what we see. It makes us see." But in so choosing, we have arbitrarily and ruthlessly omitted poems and poets whose use of the metaphor is endemic. We realize that to single out any specific poems to be representative is to be unrepresentative. Thus, with this caveat in mind, we proceed.

We see the union of the elements in Dickinson's immersion in "A Sphere of Simple Green" where she could "dream the Days away," and in Donald Hall's immersion in "The Grass."

> Under grass,
> among stones and the downward
> probe of trees,
> everything builds
> or alters itself.
> I am led
> through a warm descent
> with my eyes covered,
> to hear the words
> of water. I listen, with
> roots of
> the moist grass.

In "Composition" May Sarton explores the "spaced and subtly joined elements" from a more distant perspective.

> Here is the pond, here sky, and the long grasses
> That lean over the water, a slow ripple
> Under the slightest wandering air that passes
> To shift the scene, translating flat to stipple
> On still blue water and troubling the green masses.
>
> Three elements are spaced and subtly joined
> To rest the restless mind and lift us where
> Nothing in us is baffled or constrained,
> Who wake and sleep as casual as they are,
> And contain earth, and water, and the wind.
>
> Take blue; take green; take the pale gold sand;
> Take the slow changing shimmer of the air;
> Take a huge sky above a steadfast land;
> Take love, the tiger ocean in its lair,
> And gentle it like grass under the wind.

In her collection of "Field Poems," Barbara Drake dedicates her work to "vacant lots, abandoned fields, and deserted marshes, and to the lives that flourish in such untended spaces." The poems resound with grass. Here is one.

> 2.
>
> In the golden houses
> of summer grass,
> the tenthouses
> of tall straw grass
> tied at the top
> with more golden grass
> and some green
> and hollowed
> by backing in slowly
> bottoms rounding a space
> in the still rooted
> sheaf of grass,
> we lived for a summer
> on the wild blackberries,
> the small and large kinds,

and made another house
under the bramble patch
of berry vines
and another house
in the morning glory
and houses we didn't even
stop to live in, just forgot
as soon as we'd finished them,
and houses so perfect
there have been no such houses
since in my life, and ate
apples and three kinds of plums
from the old trees,
were self-sufficient,
and sometimes ate clover
which grew at the edge
of the field and the woods
where we seldom went
because it was dark
and an old woman
was said to have died there
alone. And we were
too young to die,
ever.[11]

In William Stafford's "From the Gradual Grass" we find the metaphor extending to different dimensions.

Imagine a voice calling,
"There is a voice now calling,"
or maybe a blasting cry:
"Walls are falling!"
as it makes walls be falling.

Then from the gradual grass,
too serious to be only noise —
whatever it is grass makes,
making words, a voice:
"Destruction is ending; this voice

"Is promising quiet: silence
by lasting forever grows to sound

endlessly from the world's end
promising, calling."
Imagine. *That voice is calling.*

Robert Duncan affirms that:

Whitman was right. Our names are left
like leaves of grass,
likeness and liking, the human greenness
tough as grass that survives cruelest seasons.

Since Whitman, few poets have been so nourished by the presence and poetry of grass as A. R. Ammons:

The Grass Miracles

The grass miracles have kept me down all autumn
purpose turning on me like an inward division
The grasses heading barbed tufts
airy panicles and purple spikes
have kept me stalled in the deadends
of branching dream
It is as though I had started up the trunk
and then dispersed like ant trails
along the branches
and out on the twigs
and paused dipping with a golden thought
at the points of the leaves

A black stump hidden
in grass and old melon vines
has reined my hurry
and I have gone up separately
juggling like a bubble flock
in globes of time
I have not been industrious this autumn
It has seemed necessary
to accomplish everything with a pause
bending to part the grass
to what round fruit
becoming entangled in clusters
tying all the future up
in variations on present miracle.

Even the following from "Still" illustrates this nourishment:

I said I will find what is lowly
and put the roots of my identity
down there:
each day I'll wake up
and find the lowly nearby,
a handy focus and reminder,
a ready measure of my significance,
. . . . . .

I said what is more lowly than the grass:
ah, underneath,
a ground-crust of dry-burnt moss:
I looked at it closely
and said this can be my habitat: but
nestling in I
found
below the brown exterior
green mechanisms beyond intellect
awaiting resurrection in rain: so I got up
and ran saying there is nothing lowly in the universe:
. . . . . .

In such poetic explorations as these we find the fusion of experience and expression, of outward reality and creative imagination. In a word, *poetry*. The poet's respect for words as extensions of themselves deepens our respect for experience, words, poems, and poets. And the metaphor, so used, remains fresh. From Whitman to Ammons and Drake, in each age of American poetry, notable writers have found *grass* such a symbol. And in the first half of the twentieth century, Carl Sandburg employed it more than any other writer. In his usage, too, the function is both intrinsic and extrinsic. Sandburg's expressions about grass evolved from his Illinois boyhood experience. He knew "Grassroots down under put fingers into dark dirt." He knew, too, that grass, at work, would, with the passing of years, "cover all" the piled-high bodies of war.

True, in Carl Sandburg's *Complete Poems* and particularly in "The People, Yes," the distinction between the metaphor and cliché become blurred, made so, we suspect, by the poet's own design. Sandburg recognized that the grassroots awaits the politician. Here, the yearnings of the layman and the yearnings of the politician meet; here, the reassurance sought by the one to be heard and by the other to hear the "common truth" inevitably elicits the ploys of the manipulator. In the process we often meet ourselves—both as yearners and manipulators. And here the cliché takes over. Yet, the reader who breaks the sod of Sandburg's verse and apprehends its roots and above-ground growth running from banality to commonplace to sublime may raise in himself a new understanding of the creed lying under the thatch of American clichés.

Sandburg knew that in "Poetry and politics, the relation of poets to society, to democracy, to monarchy, to dictatorships—we have here a theme whose classic is yet to be written."[12] In his work he blended poetry and politics just as the metaphor grass/grassroots has been blended by poet and politician alike. And even, yes, by the people:

The people is a monolith,
a mover, a dirt farmer,
a desperate hoper.

The prize liar comes saying, "I know how, listen to me and I'll bring you through."
The guesser comes saying, "The way is long and hard and maybe what I offer will work out."
The people choose and the people's choice more often than not is one more washout.
Yet the strong man, the priceless one who wants nothing for himself and has his roots among his people,
Comes often enough for the people to know him and to win through into gains beyond later losing,
Comes often enough so the people can look back and say, "We have come far and will go farther yet."
The people is a trunk of patience, a monolith.

Thus, the apparent tragedy of symbols, grass/grassroots for example, particularly when they are valid, is that they become platitudes. But paradoxically, platitudes have a grassroots function particularly appropriate to the subtle meanings of the idea. Clichés in their redundancy, we commonly assume, cover a vacancy of meaning, and they often do. But they may embed

the cadences of the familiar, providing verbal conduits for the inarticulate and insecure; they may form a convenient screen behind which the shy can be mentally and emotionally private and free; they may gather in ever-widening circles of meanings; yet they may imprison like a dogma or a thick layer of stone. And to some extent both great and small, all this applies to grass/grassroots—authentic metaphor/American cliché.

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NOTES

1. Emma S. Thornton's grandfather whose life is described in Emma S. Thornton, *Heirs and Assigns Forever*, 1951, privately printed.
2. David F. Costello, *The Prairie World* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1969), p. 63.
3. William Safire, *The New Language of Politics* (New York: Collier Books, 1972), p. 249.
4. Les Line, ed., *This Good Earth: The View From Audubon Magazine* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1974), p. 162.
5. Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1931), p. 487.
6. Millard C. Davis, *The Near Woods* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), pp. 23-26, passim.
7. John Hay, *The Great Beach* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963), pp. 48-49.
8. Edwin Way Teale, *Grassroot Jungles* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1957), p. 1.
9. Durward L. Allen, *The Life of Prairies and Plains* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967), p. 24.
10. Andreas Feininger, *Roots of Art* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), p. 7.
11. Barbara Drake, "Field Poems," in *Centering: A Magazine of Poetry*, ed. F. Richard Thomas (East Lansing, Michigan: Years Press, 1973), unpaged.
12. Carl Sandburg, *Complete Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1950), p. 346.

THE MIDWESTERN TOWN IN MIDWESTERN FICTION

David D. Anderson

The final sketch in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* is called "Departure." Rooted in the reality of the countless young men and women who left the small towns and farms of the Midwest during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth to find success, fulfillment, or survival in the cities, and particularly in Chicago, that sketch quickly moves beyond reality; it defines in terms both mythical and poetic the essence of what had brought young George Willard to that moment in that time of his life, at the same time bringing us to a meaningful moment in our collective past that Anderson etched indelibly upon the American consciousness and American literature in our time.

In the sketch Anderson touched for a moment—and he was convinced that it could be done only in moments—a collective dream that each of us brought into the Midwest—and each of us, in this generation or in the past, ourselves or our forebears, came into what geographers now conveniently define as the twelve states that lie between the Appalachians and the Rockies, the Canadian border and the Ohio Valley and its westward extension, the area that gives much of its water to the great river system that makes the Mississippi. Out of the materials of that dream we in the Midwest constructed a society, a way of life, a greater dream, and a literature, and we have, in turn, made substantial contributions to the reality and the myth of the America of which we and our region are so fundamentally and centrally a part.

The collective dream that each of us shared when we came to this region is, at least in part, older than the nation, and, as have many dreams, it has been transmuted in the human mind from

the tangible to the metaphorical, at the same time remaining intensely personal. Sherwood Anderson captured the essence of that dream in both its personal and metaphorical dimensions in "Departure"; dozens of other Midwestern writers of his generation and ours have done the same in their own works, often, however, with less success, perhaps because they felt it less deeply or experienced it less intensely. These other writers, prominent or not, do, however, make clear its existence, its origins, and its effects on their people.

That dream is a paradoxical montage of change and stability, of permanence and flux, its origins in the age of discovery and the search for gold that marked the beginning of European migration to this continent; as the colonies became a nation and then a continental power it became the movement West and the ideal of an open society, both intrinsically part of the beginning, the growth, and the identity of what we now know as the Midwest. The statistics of the first half of the last century, the century that saw the Old Northwest become the Midwest at its midpoint, define the nature of the geographic dimension of the movement that made the Midwest and motivated its people; its philosophic dimension has been most clearly defined in the towns that resulted from that movement and the works that describe them and determine their meaning, the works of Sherwood Anderson and his generation.

By the end of the Civil War the Midwest had become a reality, the heartland described by Abraham Lincoln in his Annual Message to Congress on December 1, 1862. It was a reality that was largely agricultural, studded by villages in transition, rapidly becoming towns or cities, or, with the vagaries of settlement and railroad construction, stagnant, many of them destined to disappear from the map and eventually from the Postal Directory.

The legal foundation of the Midwest was documentary, the Ordinance of 1787, the Northwest Ordinance that antedates the American constitution by two years. Providing an instrument for the rational and orderly transition of wilderness to civilization, it provided too a clear statement of the philosophy that made the transition inevitable, that ultimately resulted in the Midwestern dream and reality, the paradoxical faith in change and stability that marks its people even yet. It provided a rational plan for

transition and a promise that whatever states emerged from the wilderness would be admitted "on an equal footing with the original states in all respects whatsoever." More important, it provided a bill of rights guaranteeing religious freedom, due process, trial by jury; it rejected primogeniture and entails; it provided for moderate fines and punishments, and it contained two clauses expressive of the highest ideals of the eighteenth century, both of which were to become major goals of the Midwestern nineteenth. The first reads, "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged"; the second states that "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in punishment of crimes, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted."

The Northwest Ordinance promised, in other words, a new relationship between the individual and his peers and an equally new relationship between him and his government. It promised an open society, plentiful, cheap land, and the opportunity to rise as far as one's talents and ability might take him. It promised, too, an orderly, rational society, with the rule and power of law to assist him. But it made demands, too: the act of migration across mountains and down or up rivers demanded a good deal of hard work by which the dream might become real and happiness achieved. It provided, in other words, the opportunity; seizing it was for the individual to accomplish.

As the West become the Midwest and the nation went to war aganist itself, the promise had become an article of faith, sending Abraham Lincoln from Springfield to the White House, Ulysses Grant from the obscurity of Galena to the fortifications of Fort Donelson; William Dean Howells from Columbus to Boston, each of them in microcosm the working out of the dream, the proof of its reality, the living example of the path to success, and each of them in his own way the embodiment of a reality becoming myth, an American myth that is essentially Midwestern in its origins, inception, and influence upon an emerging nation.

The Midwestern world into which the writers of Sherwood Anderson's generation had been born was the world in which

that myth, together with faith in the Republican Party as the party of freedom, the sanctity of the agricultural way of life, and the virtue of life in the towns, was the foundation upon which a society had been constructed. It was a society that valued the simple, the practical, the efficient, the ambitious. It was a world, too, that was to see its foundations shaken, its faith challenged, before the end of the century. But the dream was still bright, the goals clear, and the threats had not yet reached the towns as they—Anderson in Clyde, Ohio, Theodore Dreiser in a series of Indiana towns, Sinclair Lewis in Sauk Center, Minnesota, and many others—saw a new dream, new opportunity, beyond the horizons of the towns that had taught them to see and pursue the dream.

No Midwestern writer has been closer to the Midwestern town than Sherwood Anderson, and in *Winesburg, Ohio* Anderson's memory of what George Willard had learned in the town is clear: Winesburg was a town in which people lived and died alone, but it was a town, too, that in microcosm reflected the values, traditions, and structure of the Midwest of the last decade of the nineteenth century. It was a town in which virtue—the traditional virtues of hard work, thrift, conventionality, and sobriety—was rewarded, often in material terms, but more frequently and importantly in acceptance and, for the young, in encouragement, in trust, and often in support. Vice, public vice, defined in the town's terms, was punished, but that punishment, for the minor transgressions possible in the small town, was largely the withholding of acceptance. But the lack of acceptance meant the intensification of isolation, and lack of success, and the emergence of a group—much too small to be called a class—to whom the dream of success was forever no more than a nightmare.

Significantly, however, that disapproval and isolation was rarely extended to the children of the misfits. Thus George Willard, the son of a woman who had been the subject of town gossip for much of her life, might aspire to love the daughter of the town banker, a girl who represented goodness and beauty as well as success in the town. Just as George had functioned as the voice of the town in his role as reporter for the Winesburg *Eagle*, he had also functioned as its ear as the townspeople, many but not all of them misfits, Anderson's grotesques, seek him out,

determined not merely to make themselves understood to him but to teach him at the same time.

For George the society of the town had been open, and he might have chosen to remain there, undoubtedly doing well and perhaps marrying Helen White. Unlike the young men portrayed by his earlier fellow Midwesterners, especially Hamlin Garland and Ignatius Donnelly, he is not driven from the countryside or the town to the city; he choses to go because the envolving myth of the town had begun to insist that opportunity and the promise of success in the world of the late nineteenth century could be best found and seized in the city.

As the train leaves Winesburg and George becomes the archetypical young Midwesterner, not only following the setting sun but moving from the town to the city in search of an undefined success and fulfillment in a society he was convinced was open for him in Chicago as it had been in Winesburg, the town is behind him; it had become, in Anderson's terms, "but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood."

For George the town had been the microcosm for the nation, the small arena in which the American myth might most clearly be seen as it worked out an individual reality, and at the same time it was prefatory to its working out in the much larger arena of the city. Not only, however, did its working out demand virtues that the town had tested and approved, but it demanded as its price the eagerness and ability to cut ties and move on, just as had the earlier manifestation that had brought the Midwest and its towns into being a half century before. By the end of the century the towns for George and his generation had themselves become a dream, a myth; like Anderson himself, "Jobby" Anderson in Clyde, departing from the only town he had known intimately in 1896, George anticipated no return, no looking back, as he moved on to the West, to Chicago, where the same virtues would open larger doors to greater rewards and richer fulfillment.

Anderson had earlier explored the theme of the young man who had met the test of the town in *Windy McPherson's Son*, published in 1916, and set in a mythical Caxton, Iowa, and Chicago, and he was to return to it in *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* in 1926. In each case the town had grown out of the fertile countryside and had remained close to it; it had maintained the

traditional vision of an open society together with the test of character that determined access to it; and it accepted the vision of greater opportunity and potential reward in a greater society beyond it. Each of Anderson's young men—Sam McPherson, George Willard, Tar Moorhead—accepted and pursued the values of the town and the vision of the world beyond the horizon.

Anderson's young men and their towns have their counterparts in much of the fiction of his Midwestern contemporaries, not only in the well-known and thoroughly studied works of Theodore Dreiser, whose *Sister Carrie* remembered Columbia City as she sought the success of Chicago, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose *Great Gatsby* denied his origins while accepting its values, but also in the works of lesser writers too frequently ignored today, among them, Homer Croy, Booth Tarkington, Brand Whitlock, and Martin Flavin, all of whom I shall talk about in this paper.

Homer Croy, perhaps the least known of the group, wrote two novels dealing with the small northern Missouri town of Junction City, *West of the Water Tower,* published anonymously in 1923, and *R.F.D. #3* a year later. Although Croy's novels are set a generation later than Anderson's, in both, the town is defined in much the same terms Anderson had used in *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Windy McPherson's Son*: its social structure is open and clear, it deals harshly with those of whatever economic and social level who fail to meet its standards of virtue and talent; it supports, encourages, and opens doors for those who meet or surpass its standards. In the first novel, the better of the two, set just before World War I, the protagonist is much like George Willard and Sam McPherson: a young man of quick mind who rises from obscure origins to make a mark in the town as hardworking and thrifty. A skilled debater, he is destined for greater things via the state university, the path to success for young men a generation later than George Willard. *R.F.D. No. 3,* Croy's second novel, set just after World War I, parallels the first, but the central character is a young girl of the same age, talented and beautiful, whose ambition to become a movie actress is supported enthusiastically by the townspeople.

In both novels, the similarity with the social structure described by Sherwood Anderson is striking: the town is only seventy years removed from its settlement; "old" families have

lived there little more than a generation; "good" families are those who have met the test of virtue and ability and prospered; others have not, but advancement is possible for their children if they demonstrate the ability to rise above their origins, and they are encouraged by the townspeople to do so. In the eyes of the people of the town each of Croy's young people has the ability, each has received encouragement and support, and as the novels open, each, like George Willard and Sam McPherson, is on the verge of seeking that success in the greater world that lies beyond Junction City.

But at this point Croy's young people depart from the pattern set by Anderson: each of them, like their less successful counterparts in Junction City, is flawed; when a major test of character appears, each fails; the failure becomes public knowledge; and the greater success beyond the town is forever precluded. The young man falls in love with the daughter of the town lawyer, she becomes pregnant, and, determined to keep it secret, he gives her his college savings to go away and have the child. But his savings are not enough, and he robs the office of the town's commission merchant. The adultery becomes public knowledge; gossip links him with the robbery; and he is arrested and convicted.

The girl's flaw is not unlike the boy's. Disappointed at losing a statewide popularity contest in which she was the town's candidate and which promised a screen test as a prize, she becomes enamoured of a traveling salesman who also has movie ambitions. He promises to marry her and take her to Hollywood, and she leaves with him. In St. Louis he is arrested for car theft, convicted, and sent to prison. She is forced to return home, pregnant and unmarried.

In both novels, the town's judgement is harsh, not only because the young people have violated the morés of the town, but because its judgement and support of them have not been justified. But in both cases the punishment is not permanent. The young man is released from jail, and there is nothing for him to do but to remain in the town. A series of menial jobs, each of which he loses because of town pressure, finally leads him to a clerkship in a hog-breeding association, the officers of which were scattered about the state and whose manager disliked the town, and hence the job was secure. After five years of hard, menial, obscure

work he is asked to speak for the town before the state highway commissioners to secure a highway for the town, and his ambition stirs again: to read law, pass the examinations, and find a place for himself in the town, and as the novel ends, it appears that he can.

The young girl is also humbled and redeemed: an older, wealthy, and widowed farmer, who, it is rumored, had worked his wife to death and whom the girl had earlier spurned, offers to marry her and give a name to her child, and she accepts. The conventions of appearance satisfied, she is not immune from gossip, but she becomes "respectable." At the same time, however, it is evident that an obscure justice has somehow been served.

Both novels explore a particular dimension of town life and moral value often stereotyped by those who see fiction of this time and place as representing the author's "revolt from the village": the attitude of the town toward the transgressor. Invariably to those critics it has been seen as harsh, intolerant, and unforgiving, but these novels describe another dimension: the opportunity for expiation and redemption. The morés are rigidly demanding, gossip is rife, and punishment is harsh. The town never forgets, nor does it forgive entirely. But it is also practical and human; it recognizes that ability may not be extinguished by vice and that many transgressions do not become matters of public concern. As indignation and outrage ease and expiation on the town's terms, another of the town's tests, is carried out, self redemption, the product of humility and acceptance, becomes possible, and it, too, becomes a test imposed upon the individual, a test that he can pass only if he is strong and courageous enough to do so.

Booth Tarkington's first novel, *The Gentleman From Indiana* (1899), has much in common with Anderson's and Croy's vision of the Midwestern town at the same time that it introduces a dimension new in fiction but much older in the factual traditions out of which the town came. Like Anderson's Winesburg and Croy's Junction City, Tarkington's Carlow is a scant two generations old, and its only importance lies in its closeness to the countryside. Set in the last decade of the nineteenth century, like *Winesburg*, and about thirty years earlier than Croy's *R.F.D. #3*, *The Gentleman From Indiana* nevertheless depicts the society recognizable in both men's works: a society in which one is judged by his fellow townsmen in terms of the town's standards of behavior and job performance, and such judgement, for a newcomer, is withheld until a substantial amount of information, most of it factual, has been accumulated and discussed by the people of the town.

As in the other novels, the term "the people" is applied to those who have presumably already met those standards and have taken on the responsibility of preserving them and passing judgement on those who aspire to acceptance in the community. "The Gentleman From Indiana" of this novel's title is, although born in Indiana, a newcomer to the town and the state, having been reared and educated in the East. As the novel opens, a young stranger appears in the town, having purchased, sight-unseen, the town's failing weekly paper. Early in the new editor's administration he leaves a note on his office door: "Back in fifteen minutes." To it the town wag appends the word "Why?"

From this low point, with the newcomer on the verge of being branded a failure and a fool for having taken over a failing enterprise sight unseen, thus fitting the frontier concept of the greenhorn still extant in the town, the new editor quickly demonstrates his concept of the nature of small-town journalism as it should be: as an instrument of political reform and as a means of communication and education in the town. His targets are the entrenched corrupt Congressional delegation and the "White Caps," the organized Ku-Klux-Klan-like thugs of nearby Six-Cross Roads. He adds news and features to the paper, publishes three times a week, and as his political leadership and innovations are accepted, resulting in increased subscriptions and advertising, he aspires to make it a daily paper, the first in a small town in the state. As the novel ends, about seven years after the new editor had come to town, it is evident that not only has he met standards and gained its approval and support but that the town's growing demand for honest, courageous political leadership will send him to Congress as "The Gentleman From Indiana."

Although Tarkington's Midwestern town shares with Anderson's and Croy's the important characteristics of testing the individual and accepting and supporting him when he meets the

town's standards, it emphasizes a characteristic that had been present in The Old West but that tended to disappear as that area became the Midwest in the years before and during the Civil War. This is the image of the town as the place in which one rises, with, as perhaps the highest honor the townspeople can bestow, the election of the successful one as the District's representative in Congress.

The origins of this portrayal are obvious: as Abraham Lincoln learned as early as 1831, when he chose to live as a townsman in New Salem rather than join his father and step-brother in breaking the virgin prairie sod, the place in which one might employ his talents to rise most quickly in an open society was the town, and Lincoln found his place, his identity, and his reputation in the towns, in New Salem until 1837 and thence in Springfield, leaving there only to represent his district in Congress in 1847 and 1848, until his final departure for Washington on February 11, 1861.

Tarkington's Midwestern town is portrayed in the classic post-Lincolnian, pre-industrial image that antedates the movement to the city: success and fulfillment are the result of the movement Westward, to the arena in which the individual, his merits, his mettle, and his virtue are tested and judgement rendered by his peers. Perhaps the nearest to the Jeffersonian concept of the perfect democratic society of any novelist's portrayal of the small town, Tarkington's small-town society is that in which the natural aristocrat, whatever his origins or antecedents, can and will rise, as had Lincoln, and he who is not, cannot do so, regardless of birth or wealth.

Interestingly, not only does Tarkington make evident the belief that talent and virtue can and will be rewarded in the town, but unlike Anderson and Croy, he insists that the small Midwestern town is the preserver of the old American virtues that are all too often overlooked, trampled, or forgotten elsewhere, particularly in the East and the city; he says that the town's most significant virtues are "fearlessness, honor, kindness," "where people are kind to each other, and where they have the old-fashioned way of saying 'Home' "—all qualities long gone in a decadent East or a degenerate West contaminated by the values that lust for wealth and power. In the town of Carlow, where

virtue is intolerant only of vice, the old verities, the virtues that brought a nation into being and led a people to move West, defeat the threat of degeneration, and they continue to be, in Tarkington's terms, "simple country people, and they know that God is good"; they recognize and support virtue when they see it. Tarkington's town is unquestionably the clearest sustained celebration of America as nineteenth century Americans saw it to be, an America in which the town is the microcosm of a nation that values the true, the good, and the brave.

Unlike Tarkington's imaginary Carlow, Brand Whitlock's Macochee in *J. Hardin & Son* is a thinly-disguised version of the Urbana, Ohio, of Whitlock's youth, in the seventies and eighties of the last century. The novel was published in 1923, nine years after Whitlock put the unfinished manuscript in a drawer in the American legation in Brussels as German troops began their invasion of that country, and it represents a return in fiction that Whitlock was never able to accomplish in fact: a return to the town of his grandparents and his youth, to the town in which, he often admitted, his concepts of justice and human rights had been formed, long before his own political and literary career had begun.

Like the other towns, Whitlock's Macochee is a scant seventy years removed from the wilderness, but Whitlock stresses the semi mythical background that includes Simon Girty, the renegade, and Simon Kenton, the Indian fighter, the eloquent Chief Logan and the silent Johnny Appleseed, all part of a disorderly past that made all the more necessary an orderly late nineteenth century present in the town. Whitlock's Macochee is the product, too, of forces scarcely mentioned by Anderson, by Croy, or by Tarkington: the strong impact of New England Puritan values carried overland unmitigated from their place of origin until they were reinforced in Macochee by the frontier religious revival doctrine of personal responsibility. Macochee strived, as Whitlock comments, to be a moral town, and it demanded morality from those who sought its favor.

But to Macochee and to J. Hardin, one of the two name characters in the novel, morality was not merely defined in terms of the virtue, talent, and hard work demanded by the citizens of Winesburg, of Junction City, and of Carlow of those who

would rise in an open, essentially democratic society; it was also defined in terms of absolutist fundamental religion, the standards of which were measured by a righteous God and enforced by his equally righteous agents in Macochee, among whom was J. Hardin. For those whose strength and/or salvation was still in doubt, including Paul Hardin, the son of the title, the issue was clear: he was free to choose righteousness or not; if he did so, he could find the strength within him to carry on in the path of his father. If he chose vice, whether or not God and his agents punished him in Macochee, he was forever damned in the hereafter.

Whitlock's Macochee is neither idealized nor romanticized, nor is it a town which encourages its young people to seek a greater success in material terms in the city, the West, or elsewhere beyond its boundaries. As Paul observes, "in the perfect democracy of the small town, the business of one was the concern of all," and flight, either romantic or practical, as a search for material gain or for personal fulfillment, was neither encouraged nor approved.

As in Tarkington's Carlow, success is possible in the town, and Paul rises to a higher social and economic position than his father, a maker of buggies, had either sought or wanted. Paul's success, however, is not the result of a high standard of morality, as his father's had been in an age when his word and his buggies were unbreakable; Paul's success is the result of conformity to the rules of a new age in the town, an age that valued and accepted the appearance of virtue rather than the substance demanded by the earlier generation, those whose faith, like that of J. Hardin, had made order out of a wilderness, destroyed slavery, and preserved a nation, all in the name of God's will.

Significantly, in this examination of the life of a Midwestern town as its values change from those of a rigid, demanding generation of realists to those who will accept appearance for reality, Whitlock gives the town a dimension and a role unlike those in the other novels. Like Thomas Hardy's heath country, Whitlock's Macochee takes on a life of its own so pervasive that it is not merely background or setting, as in the other novels, but it becomes a participant in the drama of change that dominates the lives of the townspeople as a post-pioneer society with synthetic pioneer values emerges from a changing economy and way of life.

In this sense, like Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White,* Whitlock's *J. Hardin & Son* is the biography of a Midwest town in transition, a town that had passed from its chaotic pioneer origins to a time of relative order and stability and had then been swept up in the changes in values and structure inherent in the coming of industrialism. For Paul Hardin and Macochee, the discovery of natural gas and oil made greater wealth and growth inevitable, but it also precluded forever the orderly, virtuous, and responsible society J. Hardin and his generation had attempted to construct in what had been the Black Swamp of Western Ohio.

The most recently published of this group of novels is Martin Flavin's *Journey in the Dark* (1943), the Harper Prize Novel for 1943-44. Not only is it the most recent, but it differs from the others in other ways: in the period of time covered, from the 1880's to the 1940's; in the description and rôle of the town, Wyattville, Iowa, during that period; and in the relationships between the town and its people, and particularly between the town and the novel's central character, Sam Braden.

The sixty-year span in the life of the town and the novel's central character begins in the period in which most of the novels in this study are set: the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the town is two generations removed from its pioneer origins and a decade or more before the impact of mechanization on the life of the town and the nation. In Wyattville, the Mississippi is still the important means of trade and transportation, as it was for a good many small towns in the Mississippi Valley until the impact of World War I and the acceleration of industrialism ended the nineteenth-century way of life, even in the towns.

As the novel opens, the town has become a society, but its values are still rooted in the frontier past: the founding family, the Wyatts, are the wealthiest, the most powerful, and most active examples of Jefferson's concept of the natural aristocracy; in the town they established there are no artificial barriers, but a rough, individualistic, democratic opening of doors; the newest family, the Bradens, have not yet found themselves on a frontier rapidly moving on nor do they in Wyattsville, in a town and a time in

which only another kind of mobility, that within the structure of the town itself, is available.

Because Jim Braden, father of Sam, could not, like Windy McPherson, find or make a place for himself in the town, the town made a place for him, as town marshal in a crimeless community because, as Flavin comments, "folks could not be let to starve—or couldn't in that day in Wyattsville," and so he received twenty dollars a month and a house to live in for the rest of his life. Of his four children, three—a daughter and two sons—sought to advance in the new post-turn-of-the-century society beyond the town. The older son died in a Memphis gambling house; the daughter spent her life in a mental institution after failing in show business. Only Sam, the younger son, actually rose, and, by working hard and living by the rules, he became independently wealthy, eventually returning to a town essentially unchanged to own the big house on the square that he had envied as a child.

For all four of the Braden children—the older daughter remained in the town, first to care for her father and then for her wealthy, widowed brother—the town, the Wyatts, and their father provided both impetus and pattern; the older daughter and the younger son accepted the town's values and rules, worked hard, and prospered in spite of their origins and their father, and Sam, like Sherwood Anderson's Sam McPherson, went on to a much greater success beyond the town. The other children rejected the town and its values, sought a glittering success, and went down to ignominious defeat. The values and standards of the town, it is evident, are in microcosm those of the nation as it comes of industrial age in the years during and after World War I, and the apprenticeship served in the town becomes the foundation for greater success or grimmer failure in the world beyond it.

All of these novels deal directly with the Midwestern small town as it affects and shapes the lives of its people, particularly its young people. Reference to the town as singular is, I think, particularly important because the towns in which the novels are set have far more characteristics in common than elements that distinguish them from each other. Not only are these characteristics historical and geographic—each of the towns is close to its

pioneer origins and to the countryside—but more important, they share common values, common standards of behavior, and common attitudes. Like Louis Bromfield's "Big House," erected in 1940 on the watershed between the Ohio River (and the Gulf) and Lake Erie (and the Atlantic), these characteristics are Eastern in origin, from New England and from the Upper South, and in the Midwest they have, as Russel Nye and Frederick Jackson Turner before him have pointed out, constructed something new, of the East, yet apart from it and different. If, as Keith F. McKean suggests in his monograph *Cross Currents in the South*, the Southern migrant to the West took with him from South Carolina and coastal Georgia to the red clay hills and pine forests of West Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi the idea of the patriarchical manor-based society of the East, the migrant to the Old Northwest carried with him the idea of the town, of individual and collective responsibility, and of the society open to those who meet the set standards of virtue and talent.

These ideas, a fusion of New England Puritanism and Upper South Jeffersonianism, came over the mountains and down—and up—the rivers, meeting and fusing in the towns, close to the countryside, that sprang up at regular intervals as settlement moved West; these were the towns that filtered ideas and manufactured goods from the East to the countryside, that sent their young people West—note, for example, the sequence of town names that move from East to West along the path of settlement: Lansing, New York, Michigan, Illinois; Clyde, New York, Ohio, Iowa; Marion, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana; Norwalk, Connecticut, Ohio; and then, as the nineteenth century became the twentieth, began increasingly to send them to cities—Cincinnati, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Chicago, which, as Carrie Meeber, Sam McPherson, George Willard, and Sam Braden believed, was the greatest of them all.

Because of its nature as focal point for the countryside and way station in the course of the American dream, whether of fulfillment in the West or in the City, it was inevitable that the Midwestern small town became important in the growing literature of the area as so many of those who moved West, as did Ambrose Bierce; East, as did William Dean Howells and F. Scott Fitzgerald; abroad, as did Louis Bromfield and Glenway Wescott;

or to the City—Chicago—as did Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Floyd Dell, Ben Hecht, George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, and dozens of others came from the Midwestern towns to shape and direct American literature as it came of age in the most productive era of its history.

Interestingly, in spite of the insistance by a number of literary critics, beginning with Carl VanDoren in 1921, that Midwestern writers were, in effect, "revolting from the village" in describing the movement from the towns to the cities of young people, real or imaginary, during the first two decades of this century, there is no evidence to support that contention in any of these novels, nor, in fact, is there much evidence to support that assertion in any of the other novels or memoirs of the period. Conversely, there is little evidence of the reverse, of the celebration of the village or the creation of a new rustic, romantic myth, as Larzer Ziff suggests.

The Midwestern town, as these novelists make clear, has two dimensions: as environmental reality and as metaphorical point of departure for the continued search into a new dimension, a search that had begun on the Atlantic coast or in western Europe at some point from three to ten generations ago. The search for fulfillment, for personal advancement in an open society, saw a literal search as the movement West beyond the Appalachians began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and as it continued in more diverse directions as the last century ended. But at the same time, as the nineteenth century was becoming the twentieth, the search itself began to take on mythic dimensions, just as more than a century earlier, Jefferson's Declaration of Independence had suggested not a literal but a metaphorical search for happiness.

When George Willard left the station in Winesburg, Ohio, bound West for Chicago, he was indeed the archetypical young man from the Midwestern small town, off to the city to seek his fortune, but at the same time he had become something more: not only had "the town of Winesburg . . . disappeared and his life there had become but a background upon which to paint the dreams of his manhood," but the town had become for George, as it had for countless others, the place where he had been initiated into acceptance of the American dream, of the conviction that in America the individual, no matter how humble his origins, may advance as far as his ability and virtue may take him. For George, for countless others, the Lincoln story, nurtured in the Midwestern towns of their youth, had become the American story, myth and reality had become one, and their fellow townsmen had shown them the way to success, to fulfillment, to the new ways in the new century. The towns had taught them, too, that only they could determine the end of that search, its conclusion in reality or in the metaphor of which reality is a part. The Midwestern writer of the first half of this century is, in effect, recording one more manifestation of the age-old human search, American search, Midwestern search, for an ill-defined, vaguely-perceived but convincing ideal, a myth brought to the towns, nutured there, and disseminated to their young people just as it was to the young people in the novels, as perhaps it still is in the towns that Anderson, Croy, Tarkington, Whitlock, Flavin, and the others fixed for us in time, in space, and in the continually unfolding myth of America.

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THE GENTEEL POETRY OF WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

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William Dean Howells is honored by the literary historian as the chief spokesman for American realism, for the new mode of writing that attempted to present the observed facts of experience in the industrialized, post-Darwinian age. But Howells also retained strong affiliations with the older sentimental idealism that the historian now labels genteel romanticism. Romantic values associated with the agrarian tradition no doubt enabled Howells to perceive and criticize the evils of industrialism. But at the same time the idealization and its accompanying measure of sentiment kept out of his prose the harsher facts of existence in his time, even as the realistic emphasis on the ordinary in language and experience kept out of his poetry some of the heightening needed for strong expression.[1]

In Howell's work the cleavage between the idealized and the realistic is only somewhat sharper than it is in the writing of his peers. Most of them showed the same inability to abandon the sentimental idealism which by their day had often dwindled down to petty moralism. Mark Twain, for example, lampooned James Fenimore Cooper's inaccuracies, yet cleaned up his own picture of smalltown boyhood and steamboat life with the zest of Aunt Polly abrading Tom Sawyer's ears. Realism, after all, grew out of romanticism, and few early realists freed themselves entirely from it. Their upbringing gave them a fondness for old values associated with agrarian ways, and they perhaps sensed that the discipline of realism restricted their picture of life. At any rate, just as Twain escaped into a mythical innocence, Howells turned, with less success, from the taut craftsmanship and careful thinking of his best novels to the writing of verse as

skillfully conventional, and as softly sentimental, as that of his eastern contemporaries Edmund Stedman, George Henry Boker, Bayard Taylor, Richard Henry Stoddard, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

Howells' most important ventures in idealism were his arguments for Tolstoyan ethics and his dream of a utopian Altruria, arguments he made in prose. Such work was inspired by his revulsion at the grimness and the grotesque ethics of industrializing America. But it also developed from the ethereal idealism which, as a reading of his poetry shows, persisted in his thinking even as he spoke vigorously for the realistic and in his prose condemned what he called devotion to the ideal. Whether this condemnation of the falsity to experience which he to an extent reproduced in his own verse was the result of recognition of error within himself is a question for the psychobiographer.

Though Howells turned early to prose, he was not a poet manqué, a tender-minded Bohemian starving in the attics of a hard-hearted world. He simply made the practical decision that in order to support himself he had to write prose. He kept a hand in, as we say, at poetry, but he did not waste time or strength lamenting society's unwillingness to reward him for it. One reads such poetry as Howells wrote not to seek out signs of idled talent but to add to understanding. It is fair to say that, like the other romantic idealists, Howells wrote nothing memorable in verse. But minor poetry is as worth examining as minor fiction. To overlook Howells' poetry because it is not first rate is to falsify comprehension of Howells and of his era.

Howells grew up in a home where the father read poetry aloud to the family, in a culture that still valued poetry above fiction. When he began to write he thought of himself as a poet until the difficulties of achieving publication of his verse and the success of his essays caused him to turn to prose.[2] Thereafter verse remained for him an honorable craft, but he recognized that the household budget demanded prose. Poetry seems to have been for him an avenue of escape and indulgence, an avocation wherein he could relax the discipline he demanded of himself and others in the novel. Yet it was perhaps too an opening to a more profound world, to a realm of possibility he could not confirm by observation and therefore excluded from his prose.

Howells' poetic sensibility was that of the sentimental genteel school whose chief spokesman was Stedman. In 1861, Howells wrote to Stedman's mother, Mrs. W. B. Kinney, that "I think Mr. Stedman the best of our young American poets."[3] That this was not simply polite flattery of the poet's mother is demonstrated by Howells' support for Stedman's position when that poet and critic derided Whitman's work as vulgar. In 1865, Howells' review of "Drum-Taps" praised, not very convincingly, faint gleams of talent but said that Whitman's methods were "unspeakably inartistic"[4] (an opinion shared by Henry James, who in his review of the same book found Whitman to have "an essentially prosaic mind").[5] In 1866, Howells assured Stedman that "the small but enthusiastic admirers of Walt Whitman could not make him a poet."[6] Howells did later come to a not entirely wholehearted recognition of Whitman. And he was perceptive enough to see the artistry in Melville's poems, as he later welcomed the writing of Emily Dickinson and recognized the merit of E. A. Robinson and Robert Frost. But Howells certainly never thought of himself as a modernist, remaining in his own practice the pallid romantic.

Certainly his Midwestern upbringing did nothing to unify his esthetic temperament. As he wrote, the literary theories and criticism valued in the Midwest of his boyhood years were those of New England.[7] And though he said that New England's emphasis on "the ideal" had kept its writers from succeeding as realists,[8] he did not apply this understanding to his own work in verse. The specifically Midwestern in Howells' poetry is rare. He made occasional use of Midwestern farm and forest and river settings, and of characters associated with them. But these were taken from the rural, almost pastoral Midwest of his boyhood, not from the industrializing times of his maturity. The relation of the Midwest to Howells' realism is complex. Gordon S. Haight suggests that the American realists were back-trailers, Midwesterners who had moved East.[9] But some back-trailers were not realists. American literary realism had European as well as native sources, and it was practiced by southern and eastern writers as well as by former residents of the Midwest. Perhaps the accurate view is that his upbringing in the then post-pioneer Midwest, together with his early entry into the work force, disposed

Howells, like Twain, to practice the realism which James, coming from markedly different origins, also accepted. A Midwestern upbringing, that is, may have been one road to realism. There were other roads.

In his verse, at any rate, Howells was thoroughly conservative. His professed models were Heine, Tennyson, and Longfellow. But the reader will detect that his practice through most of his career in fact resembled that of the earlier sentimentalists. Since his poetry indulges in the practices which he excluded from his prose, it reminds one of that junk food junkie who, as the 1970s pop song had it, when out in public dines sparely on wheat germ and unpolished rice but when at home behind drawn blinds gulps down platters of gravied beefsteak and bales of Twinkies. A kinder way to put it is that Howells exemplified the writer working at the time when the literary was separating from the popular. His prose became a model for other serious writers, even as his verse followed the practices which would soon be relegated to the greeting card, the local poetry society, and the pop song.

Howells' lyric poetry is generally meant to present a mood, a momentary feeling of melancholy, pathos, joy, wonder, and similar uncomplicated emotions. Whether lyric or narrative, the aim is to hold up a feeling, an impression, or an event for static contemplation, rather than to develop idea or character. His verse rarely attempts the skepticism, doubt, sarcasm, or irony of the twentieth century, and it does not try for epic sweep or for philosophical profundity. The language is the ordinary—too ordinary—"good English" of the classroom and the editorial desk, with much use of the inversions of syntax and the special diction characteristic of romantic writing. Even his narratives with Midwestern settings make little attempt to employ the supposed vernacular that appeared in some of the writing of John Hay and Bret Harte and the prose humorists. And his verse avoids "exaggeration" as carefully as his prose, a discipline acceptable in realism but nearly fatal to poetry. Most of his prose celebrates a world of ideality, purged of the cantankerous and ugly and malicious and dull. Even his occasional poems set in the Midwest or in the Venice that he knew well are intended to arouse sentimental responses rather than to develop new awareness. Only

in his fifties, after setbacks in his career and his personal life, did he recognize that the blows delivered to romantic idealism by the forces we sum up as Darwinism and industrialization might prove fatal.

In addition to dramatic verse and a small number of uncollected magazine pieces, Howells brought out what amounts to two volumes of poetry. His first three books were in reality one. His first book appearance was in the second half of the volume *Poems of Two Friends* (1860). (The first half of this book was filled with poems by John J. Piatt, a lifelong friend who would become one of the best known Midwestern poets of the day. As of 1860, there was little to choose between them: I suspect a large measure of hindsight in those who profess to find promise in Howells' early verse which they say is lacking in Piatt's.) Most of the poems from this first book reappear in *Poems* (1873). As was the publishing custom at the time, the works in this book, in turn, are reprinted almost unchanged except for four additions in *Poems* (1886). The 1886 volume therefore represents Howells' work from youth to middle age (in 1886 he became 49).

Prominent in the volume are several longish narrative poems. In these, as in his lyrics, Howells' aim is not to tell of an action for its own sake, nor to use action to achieve a "statement." The goal rather is to enable the reader to enjoy contemplation of an experience arousing melancholy or pathos or other standard emotions. In most of these poems Howells used the hexameter line which had been revived in the middle of the century by Kingsley and by Longfellow. Hexameter tends to be a bold meter, one that forces attention upon itself by creating a swinging rhythm that emphasizes the artifice, the fact that what is conveyed is at a remove from ordinary existence. Few users of the hexameter cow the line as did Whitman, who forced it into so many variations to match the turn of his thought that it often seems a mere nod to convention. Howells, like Longfellow, let the line dominate his expression.

Howells modeled his tales on the domestic narrations of Longfellow and Tennyson, not on their retellings or imitations of classics. Three of his narrative poems are set in Ohio. "The Pilot's Story," perhaps the best known of his poems, was first published in *Atlantic Monthly* in September, 1860. The approximately 120 lines give the setting, a spring evening on a steamboat laboring upriver. The pilot carefully watches the channel but meanwhile spins his yarn to a group of passengers. He tells them how a well dressed white man once brought aboard a beautiful woman who though white in appearance had enough Negro blood to be held as a slave. The two seem to be in love. But the man is soon fleeced by the boat's professional monte players, and coldly tells the woman that he has sold her to meet his losses. Stunned, she shrieks at him—he has broken a promise to set her free, and he is disregarding their son, who lives in St. Louis. Section IV is an interlude, probably intended to give time for the story to take hold of its readers. It shows the pilot pausing in his tale as the steamboat passes a settlers' boat where peacocks cry and white-headed children laugh, elements meant perhaps to add a note of terror and to deepen the sentimental feeling about the couple's son. In the last section the pilot says that though other passengers gathered around the woman as though to protect her, the master seized her. But she broke away, ran to the stern, and, giving one last proud look at the crowd, leapt off the deck. She fell on the paddlewheel, which crushed her into the water. As he turns the steamboat toward a town, the pilot says that he never likes to pass after dark the spot where the event took place. The narrator ends with the report that everything in the scene was "serene and calm" but "the odorous breath of the willows / Smote with a mystical sense of infinite sorrow upon us." The "odorous breath," that is, is to smite the reader with a sense of pathos. Howells avoids the didactic and the consolatory, two elements that could have been expected if Longfellow had written the story. The Midwestern setting and the implied nostalgia for the river as it was before it became an industrialized canal give the poem appeal. But it lacks the dramatic conflict necessary for tragedy; it is, finally, little more than a report of a happening. Sophisticated moderns of course are not likely to make the mistake of those country editors who, it seems, sometimes printed the popular poem in prose paragraphs. They may, however, make the mistake of reading the poem as an anti-slavery tract. But the fact that the woman is a slave is only a necessary ploy for the story (a free woman would have had other alternatives than surrender or suicide). Howells,

indeed, was pleased that on the day after publication a man known for pro-slavery sentiments stopped him on the street to congratulate him.[10] Our century finds it difficult to accept the fact that our ancestors read poetry for its "sentiments" rather than for its sociointellectual content.

Another well known hexameter narrative with an early Midwestern setting, "Louis Lebeau's Conversion," is even more static. The narrator is an American poet in Venice, where Howells served as U.S. consul from 1861 to 1865. Howells wrote to his sister that the idea came to him after hearing his parents describe an oldtime camp meeting.[11] The narrator recalls his "story of free, wild life in Ohio," reflecting on the beauties of the forest scene and praising the religious faith of the people. The event takes place on an evening in a clearing lit by pyres of wood (a setting much like the camp meeting scene in the 1916 novel *The Leatherwood God*). The title character in the poem is a "wild river man" who loves the daughter of the exhorter. The father has forbidden Lebeau to court the girl unless he will undergo conversion. Though a non-believer, Lebeau remarks that he prefers his old religion—Catholic, one supposes, from his French ancestry—to this frontier belief that has made "man so hard and women fickle and cruel."

If he had pursued this criticism of evangelical faith, Howells might have produced an original poem. But he stayed in the tradition of sentimental religiosity. At the camp meeting one sinner after another surrenders, but Lebeau remains on the edge of the crowd, the last holdout. His friends appeal to him, then several preachers and the exhorter. The pitchmen for piety even bring to him an old woman in whose arms his mother died. Though her appeal causes him to weep, he remains aloof. The decadent might wish that Howells had ended at this point, with Lebeau as an example of sturdy refusal to give in to crowd pressure. And in a non-religious context Howells might have presented such a figure. But the author who would later punish but not condemn the wretched faker of *The Leatherwood God* could not let integrity remain in conflict with faith. When the girl herself finally takes Lebeau by the hand and leads him up front to kneel with her, he becomes converted.

The poem is a failure as an account of a dramatic happening. Lebeau himself says nothing at the moment of crisis, and neither he nor the narrator supplies any reason for him to give in after standing firm for so long. His conversion happens after Howells has accumulated a sufficient mass of sentimental appeals. Feminists may note that pleas from well meaning strangers and from religious leaders, and even the reminders of his love for his mother, do not crumble Lebeau's icy resistance, but a touch from the young woman brings his immediate downfall. Foreknowledge that later decades would label as the power of sex this triumph of the empedestaled female over the super-macho male would have scandalized the Howells who carefully hid away "in discreet corners" the free-spoken letters of Mark Twain.[12] In Howells' eyes, the motive power was the "tender" love of a young woman, a female figure he made as ethereal as the person of Christ as portrayed in *Reader's Digest*. A third narrative with a Midwestern setting is the short poem "The Bobolinks Are Singing," an implausible mood piece related by a speaker who feels that a house is haunted because a girl who once lived there had drowned herself nearby.

The best narrative poems, at least to modern taste, engage some complexity of thought and feeling. Both are set in Venice. "No Love Lost" is an epistolary poem concerning Americans in Europe. Philip, a young man, had been reported killed during the Civil War, but in fact had only been taken prisoner. When he reappears, he hears from Bertha, his bethrothed, that she has taken up with another man. When Philip sees Bertha in Venice, he renounces her. Some of the story is told in letters from Clara, a young woman who meanwhile has fallen wildly in live with Philip, and accordingly sees his every action as heroic. The narrator ends with the half humorous remark that "I don't exactly see where the heroism commences"—the best line in the poem both because it is given in natural English and because it suggests that the story is not quite so unusual and wonderful as the participants believe it to be. The line has the effect of upsetting expectations slightly, enabling Howells to pose as a bit too sophisticated to believe entirely in the melodramatic story. The reader will note that Philip does not make a serious attempt to regain Bertha's love, presumably because in the nineteenth cen-

tury the fact that she had involved herself with another man made her soiled goods. One wonders what the alternative would have been: was Bertha to remain forever celibate even though she understood that Philip was dead?

The best of the narrative poems is "Pordenone." The narrator is a modern man who studies the peeling frescos on the wall of a Venetian building that once was a monastery but now is a barracks for Austrian soldiers. He begins to imagine the Renaissance times when the artist Pordenone painted these walls, perhaps modeling some figures on the girl Violenta. An amusing participant in the imagined scene is an old friar who mistakes one Biblical event for another. Pordenone thinks of his contemporary Titian as a rival, and at first rejects the greater artist's offer of friendship. This gives Titian an opening to make a long esthetic and moral statement of the belief that artists are only "Pencils God paints with," and that it is "the delight of doing" that keeps an artist at his work. The narrator then comes back to the present, never to know what happened to the characters. He says that he would like to know their histories, and observes that he is "ill content with the metaphysical phrases," in Titian's speech. Howells of course must have been rather proud of the speech but apparently felt, like Heine, that a direct statement of views would go down better if he pretended distaste for it. It is unfair, but inevitable, that the reader will compare Howells' procedure with Browning's: the material would make a fine dramatic monologue, but Howells' conception of it is too lax for such craggy, taut presentation.

The most unusual of the narratives almost succeeds in achieving the charm Howells could never quite produce. This is "Bopeep: A Pastoral," a tale set in never-never land that is so openly sentimental and conforming that it almost works as a delightful story (or as a sly put on, if the reader is a skeptic). The characters are those of nursery rhymes, not the grotesque or foolish or wicked people such poems often actually have, but the ultra-good personages they are popularly thought to have (and may indeed have in versions improved by uneducational psychologists). Out herding her sheep one day, Bopeep is "stung" by a snake and, as we have heard, loses the flock. Wandering about in a directionless way, she finds, of course, a bright

little cabin in the forest which, of course, is inhabited by a handsome and friendly young hermit who, of course, turns out to be the son of good old King Cole, who, of course, rejoices to have his son return to the family castle with a charming young woman. Bopeep learns that Boyblue, awakened we assume for the occasion, is tending her sheep, and all, of course, ends in rosy expectation of happy marriage. One can imagine a Marianne Moore version of this story with bite to it, or a Tennyson version with verbal felicity so great that objections to its sentimentality would be almost overridden. Howells apes Tennyson's diction, using "mossy-bearded rock" and "'ware" (for "aware") and "awearily," as well as "thee" and "thou" and other anachronisms intended to locate the story in the times of our funny-talking ancestors. But the tale has neither bite nor delight. It is commonplace because of Howells' usual flatness of language, as in these lines from the third stanza:

> Bright silver spangles hath she on her dress,
> And of her red-heeled shoes appears the sheen;
> And she hath ribbons of such blue or green
> As best suits pastoral people's comeliness.

Among topics and themes of the narratives are love, death, nostalgia, and the sense of loss which may come with such changes as maturity and the cycle of seasons. Most of the lyrics in *Poems* center on one or another of these matters, generally assembling clichés of idea and feeling in such inherited forms as the sonnet, couplets, and a variety of other rhymed patterns. The poems "Caprice," "Before the Gate," "Through the Meadow," and "The Sarcastic Fair" all show women who are more clever by half than their men at perceiving the quality of a love relationship. As in a television comedy, the men are bumbling, fairly straightforward but bewildered; the women are ingenious and manipulative. Other love lyrics show a girl crying as her man rides away, a lover who feels jealousy, and (in "Forlorn") the not very convincing despair of a lover who "came too late" to find his sweetheart. The models are not so much Heine and Tennyson as earlier English poets of the Elizabethan and Restoration eras—without, of course, the earthy honesty of those ancestors. The best of the poems, "Feurbilder," deals not with young

love but with a marriage relationship. A couple sit before a fire with their young daughter. The child sees in the flames a young woman who loves a man her own age, but then sees her marrying an older man even as a funeral procession—presumably for the young man—passes by. The child's mother pales, but the father is pleased. The reader assumes that the child's vision is analogous to the parents' marriage. The poem "Clement" is, like "No Love Lost," interesting for the student of morality, for here the failure of love to result in marriage is clearly caused by the fact that the woman has been married before.

Several poems deal with death. Though this topic is of interest in every era, Victorian writers—as Leslie Fiedler is always observing—gave it the attention we now reserve for sex. This was the period when the redoubtable Mrs. Lydia Sigourney of Connecticut set some sort of record by publishing in *The Weeping Willow* 70 poems, every doldrumic one of them on death. Her supporters could have cited as literary authority for her practice the statement of Poe in "The Philosophy of Composition" that "the death . . . of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world." In the mid-century the English-speaking world reveled in the deaths of Little Eva, Little Nell, and Paul Dombey. A bit later, Twain could by satirizing the verse of Julia Moore—that Sweet Singer of Michigan—sneak the topic into *Huckleberry Finn*. And after Lincoln's assassination Walt Whitman could put forth the rhetoric of "O Captain- My Captain!" and the unconvincing reconciliation with death of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"—poems which, along with others, caused Fiedler to assert that Whitman is to be viewed as the laureate not of democracy or the self or sex, but of death.[13]

How did this topic become so dominant in the supposedly optimistic, self-confident America of the mid-century? The answers are several, none of them wholly convincing. Our recent taboo on the topic had not yet developed; the age was much concerned with what was taken to be the war between science and religion, hence with the question of immortality; the century valued the individual, so that his or her ultimate fate was of great concern. Carl Bode suggests that the high mortality rate—half of all the deaths in New York City in 1850 were of children

under six—made death a visitor in every home and thus a familiar.[14] But surely the death rate through much of human history has been equally high. The most likely explanation is that Americans were continuing the emphasis on pathos which they had inherited from writers of the sentimental movement, particularly from the poets of the "Graveyard School." Pathos is an emotion welcomed in a confident age when it appears to hold no threat. If our age rejects overt pathos, it is perhaps because in our bedeviled uncertainty, or mere weariness, we do not feel secure with it. The taboo, incidentally, may be disappearing. Both Russell Baker and Sylvia Porter found the topic of death so prominent in the 1977-78 Broadway theatrical season that they wrote newspaper columns on the phenomenon.[15] And news reports told also of the astounding success of a "death shop" on Long Island which in the summer of 1978 sold thousands of books, cards, pictures, tapes, and records on death, dying, funeral practices, and similar topics lately held to be in poor taste. When the Victorians bothered to defend their practice, they asserted that the purpose of indulging the morbid feelings was to improve morality. Every age has its cant—the twentieth century social critic is saying the same thing when he proclaims that pop treatments of sex are sophisticated, liberating, or scientific. Perhaps the critic will soon find the same justification for the funeral.

Whatever the reasons, Howells as a man of his time wrote several poems on death. "Pleasure-Pain"—an early piece sometimes printed in later books under the title "Summer Dead," and sometimes given in shortened versions—is in the mood of Heine's "Das lyrische intermezzo" sequence but is simpler in both phrasing and thought, a domesticated story with bobolinks, a rural village, and an old man telling a tale to a child. The source for its rhythms and feeling appears to be Longfellow, as in these lines from the third section:

> Through the silent streets of the city,
> In the night's unbusy noon,
> Up and down in the pallor
> Of the languid summer moon,
>
> I wander, and think of the village,
> And the house in the maple-gloom,

And the porch with the honeysuckles
And the sweet-brier all abloom.

The lines lack Longefllow's felicity, of course. Though "unbusy noon" is apt for nighttime quiet, lines three and four are fillers; and "maple-gloom" and "abloom" are used merely to make a rhyme.

The poems "Rapture," "Dead," "In August," and three pieces on the Civil War ("The Battle in the Clouds," "For One of the Killed," "The Two Wives") all present standard emotions in standard ways. The poorest of the poems on death is the hastily written "Elegy on John Butler Howells," a piece honoring Howells' younger brother, who died on April 27, 1864. The poem is datelined Venice, May 16, 1864, and apparently was dashed off just after Howells received the letter informing him of the death. Howells can hardly be criticized for the failure: the list of good poems in English on the death of an individual is short indeed.

Poems on the theme of the loss of freshness as one matures are, like several on the sadness which may come with autumn, entirely ordinary. Four poems on nostalgia also are trite, especially the collection of worn notions entitled "The Empty House." Little more originality appears in two pieces which allude to the poet's old home in Ohio. The speaker of "The Song the Oriole Sings" hears in New England an oriole that reminds him of Midwest boyhood. The speaker of "The Mulberries" is in Venice where, seeing fruit for sale on the Rialto bridge, he remembers berries he ate in Ohio. The best known of the poems of nostalgia, "The Movers," dated Ohio 1859, gives a static scene intended, as usual, to arouse pathos. A young couple with children and dog pass in their wagon, toiling up the side of a valley and turning for a last look at their log cabin; their memories are held for a moment before they turn to resume their westward move. Nothing happens to make the moment dramatic. Howells again has assembled a poem out of the storehouse of sentimental objects and motions.

Prolonged immersion in so much traditional sentiment is likely to make the reader welcome too effusively the poems in *Stops of Various Quills* (1895) which show Howells facing up to the difficulties confronting the idealist in the last third of the century.[16] What these 43 poems show, however, is not a new Howells but the old one thwarted. He is still a romantic idealist, he still aims to evoke the standard sentiments. But he is aware that the received values are in trouble. He critcizes not the values themselves but the human condition which does not live up to them—and, meanwhile, enjoys the chance to stir the feelings, especially pathos, by using the criticism as a device for approaching from a new direction such conventional themes as the sadness of change, the persistence of "Care," the problems of why we are born and what happens after death, the esthetic nobility of disillusion, and the existence of guilt, despair, and cruelty. The forms remain traditional also, most of the pieces being presented in couplets or as sonnets, the rest in other conventional rhyme schemes. Ambrose Bierce, at one extreme, indulged in similar romantic poses but with considerably more bite; E. A. Robinson, at another, was more profoundly troubled and thoughtful. Howells' typical response was in the last poem in *Stops*, "What Shall It Profit?," asking what "gain" had come from the undoing of traditional belief:

If I deny the things past finding out;
Or if I orphan my own soul of One
That seemed a Father, and make void the place
Within me where He dwelt in power and grace,
What do I gain by that I have undone?

Two poems suggest survival of Emersonian thinking. The ten couplets which make up "Statistics" conclude that evil and crime average out about the same from place to place, but men are on a "spiral" and that "somewhere there is a God." Another set of couplets, this one entitled "Time," is reminiscent of the earnest moralism of Emerson's "Days." Time warns that once it passes it never returns, implying that one should take advantage of it while he can. The newest note in *Stops* is a touch of social criticism. This, of course, is still based on the morality of romantic sentimentalism rather than, for example, the practical-minded recognition of social reality in the *Fables* of Jean de La Fontaine or Howells' own prose speculations on the need for social reform. In "Twelve P.M.," the speaker gratefully concludes that to come

home from a dinner party and become "one's sheer self again" is to drop the social facade and confront "the eternal Verity." Two poems show a man discovering that his supposedly deserving fellow men may be deceptive on evil. In "Parable" a young man who follows Christ's admonition to give his goods to the poor discovers that his beneficiaries engage in crime. Like Andrew Carnegie and other contemporary stewards of wealth, he decides that hereafter he will keep "for some wise purpose" what Providence has bestowed on him and will give only to the "Deserving Poor," those "not intelligent / Enough to use the gifts of God aright." In "Materials of a Story," a friend tells the narrator how upon the death of an ex-convict he had helped, the man's mother asked for the plate from his coffin and for the flowers—not out of love for her son, but in order to sell the items to buy liquor. The narrator does not moralize: he simply goes "on up town," accepting the story as one version of the way people are. The poems with most appeal to present day readers move into strong criticism of the way the economic system treats some of our fellow men. "Labor and Capital" suggests that the horse which draws a freight wagon and the man who drives it are on the same level: both are slaves of "the Company." "The King Dines" is a heavily ironic picture of a poor working man on a cold park bench, gnawing on the bone his wife has brought him for lunch. The poem is comparable in feeling to Edwin Markham's "The Man with the Hoe," but is more diffuse.

Like most other Americans, Howells was late in recognizing the new forces which English and Continental writers had confronted half a century earlier. To his credit, he did in middle age attempt to deal with them. Yet, if only because there was no model for him to follow, he did not develop a new mode of poetry but simply used the old ways to ponder the effect of the new forces—and, again, employed the new as material to stir the same sentiments he had earlier sought to produce.

Howells lived on until 1920. Five late poems are interspersed among the prose sketches in the collection *The Daughters of the Storage* (1916). Though during his career he had written five verse dramas, as well as some 30 other plays, the late poems are as static as his earlier ones. "Captain Dunlevy's Last Trip" is a narrative in hexameters, to be enjoyed partly for its picture of

good fellows telling yarns on a slow steamboat, partly for its description of spring, and partly for its thin anecdote of an old river pilot who suddenly finds his sense of directions reversed. The pilots are roughs with hearts of gold, descendants no doubt of the character types Harte had taken over from Dickens. "The Face at the Window" is a well told ghost story, and "Breakfast Is My Best Meal" is a slight, humorous contrast of an old man's toast and black coffee with the bountiful meals his wife had given him. "City and Country in the Fall," contrasting places of residence, is a genial piece, of interest now only because the two principal characters talk over the long-distance telephone. The reader of these four poems might suppose that Howells had given up concern with the troubles of idealism, preferring in old age to deal with a world that has neither social nor moral nor philosophical problems.

In "Black Cross Farm," (1904), however, Howells gave one of his better treatments of the idealist's problem. The narrator and his friend go back through the fields to visit an abandoned farm. Howells writes his usual detailed description of the natural scene, and pauses to mourn over the gravestones in the yard and the thought of the inhabitants who have vanished. The purpose of the walk is to see a large black cross someone had nailed to the barn. The friend tells the narrator that no one knows why the cross was placed there; there is no explanation for it, no legend about it. The narrator observes that the boards could not have crossed by chance, and that in that area the farm's owner would not have been Catholic; he asks if the maker of the cross could have intended a secret expiation. The friend's answer, a suggestion that appeals to the narrator, is given in lines that in thought, attitude, and phrasing sound much like Robinson:

> Suppose
> That some one that had known the average woes
> Of human nature, finding that the load
> Was overheavy for him on life's road,
> Had wished to leave some token in this Cross,
> Of what had been his gain and been his loss,
> Of what had been his suffering and of what
> Had also been the solace of his lot?

The narrator decides that he likes uncertainty better than a "more definite" and thereby "vulgarer" story.

The pace is a bit slow. But in its suggestion of a resigned yet faintly buoyant idealism as a way of confronting the difficulties of existence, and in its use of pentameter couplets that are natural in phrasing and free of special diction, the poem is comparable to the work of Frost as well as that of Robinson. We have not answered the questions or solved the problems of the romantics but, as generations have a way of doing, we have turned aside from them. If Howells had written more often as he did in "Black Cross Farm," he would hold a place in our esteem as one who made a major attempt to deal with the esthetic problems of his time. Since he seldom got out of the well-worn, however, we must view him as a potentially fine poet who only fitfully moved toward achievement.

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NOTES

1. Howells' opposition to "exaggeration" is discussed in Clara and Rudolf Kirk (eds.), *William Dean Howells* (New York 1950 (American Writers Series), pp. cxxxix-cxlvi.
2. Of numerous statements on this decision, his fullest is "The Turning Point of My Life," *Harper's Bazaar* XLIV (March 1910), pp. 160-5.
3. Printed in Mildred Howells (ed.), *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells* (Garden City, N.Y. 1928), I, pp. 44-5.
4. In *The Round Table* II (November 11, 1865), pp. 147-8. I have consulted the printing by William Coyle (ed.), *The Poet and the President* (New York 1962), pp. 132-5.
5. In *The Nation* I (November 16, 1865), pp. 625-6. I have used the printing in Coyle, pp. 136-40.
6. Letter of December 5, in Mildred Howells I, pp. 115-6.
7. David F. Hiatt and Edwin H. Cady (eds.), William Dean Howells, *Literary Friends and Acquaintance* (Bloomington, Ind., 1968), p. 100.
8. Hiatt & Cady, 101-2.
9. "Realism Defined: William Dean Howells," in Spiller *et al* (eds.), *Literary History of the United States*, 3rd ed., rev. (New York 1953), p. 885.
10. Letter to James Russell Lowell, August 31, 1860, in Mildred Howells I, p. 31.
11. Letter to Victoria Howells, January 18, 1862, in Mildred Howells I, p. 49.
12. Hiatt & Cady, p. 256.
14. *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture 1840-1861* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1959), p. 192.

15. The Porter column, headed "A Basic Guide for Bereaved," appeared in the Lansing, Mich., *State Journal*, August 1, 1978, p. 20; the Baker column, headed "Dying Is Bad for You," was in the *New York Times Magazine*, July 2, 1978, p. 4.
16. Carlin T. Kindilien, for example, in *American Poetry in the Eighteen Nineties* (Providence, R.I., 1956), pp. 151-3, is over-impressed by the apparent change.

IMAGE OF WOMANHOOD IN THE *SPOON RIVER* PORTRAITS

EVELYN SCHROTH

Following the Civil War, our nation turned to the gospel of practicality. Machinery, economic competition, and the capitalistic system—all did their part to create a new God—success. The ideal man of this day was the practical man who devoted his energies not to the life of personal realization but to the goal of material or social advancement. Hostile to experience, he made the pursuit of success his central goal, and life was reft of human values.

It is this stifling of the world of realization, this adhering to narrow morality and practical prudence at the expense of the full life that Edgar Lee Masters is decrying in his *Spoon River Anthology*, and the fact of its village locale is simply the accident of early conditioning and his first-hand acquaintance with this setting. Such stiflings as he depicts can take place anywhere—in the narrow conventionality and "dour Puritanism" of Spoon River or in the "odious respectability" of the Chicago circles which his wife and her family represented, but Masters chooses to use the village setting. Through the village he presents the macrocosm, and his aim is not to revolt from the village as many proclaim, but to revolt from anything that nets waste in one's potential, anything that cramps men and women and lets them settle for less than the ideal and the whole, anything that confines the understanding heart and the "magnanimous understanding."[1]

In his treatment of women, who occupy a typical pre-liberation existence in Spoon River, we can see Masters exemplifying his theme with a minority group during a particularly significant era. Women, he finds, are extremely vulnerable to stunted growth and unfulfilled lives, since they are held in bondage by the mores

of the day. The tragedy of their plight is more obvious in a small town, where they are unable to lose self in a larger context and are constantly exposed to the judgment of narrow minds, bound by rigid, stultifying codes.

The era from 1840 to World War I which Masters presents was one which was revolutionizing the sphere of women. Early nineteenth century society was governed by a double standard of morals. Woman was a creature to be flattered, cajoled, and indulged; after marriage she was to be suppressed, guided, and often pitied. Marriage was not a partnership; it was a pure sex relationship. Woman was dependent upon masculine approbation for her very existence. As the century progressed, women organized and fought for the suffrage; women's colleges were opened; in greater numbers women continued to push into the professions; women's clubs were born—opening new fields of activity and influence for women; but the vote had yet to be attained when Edgar Lee Masters wrote his Spoon River portraits.

Against this background of oppression and strife, then, and within the setting of a small rural community, Masters presents his portraits of women characters speaking from the grave and interpreting their lives—attestations of the state of nineteenth century womanhood in America—, and the cry of defeat and embitterment is loudly sounded, with a few victories interspersed.

Inevitably the Spoon River portraits divide into groupings. (Louis Untermeyer divides them into poems of plain statement heightened by matter-of-fact humor, poems with disillusion as the motive, and poems which lift both statement and disillusion to a place of exultation.[2] Masters, himself, uses a three-way grouping: the fools, the drunkards, and the failures; the people of one-birth minds; and the heroes and "enlightened spirits."[3]) The portraits of women can be grouped into a four-way classification, and this grouping can then constitute a framework through which one can conceive Masters' interpretation of the state of nineteenth century womanhood. We have the fulfilled group, those who find satisfaction because of uncomplicated natures, who go contentedly down the straight, socially approved path; the compromisers, those who sublimate, who settle for "half a loaf," who "buy" conventional respectability outside the role of wife and mother but at personal cost; those who are the beaten,

either because they violate the conventional code or fail to realize their own potential; and finally the revolters, those who defy the conventional code and establish for themselves a new one, the forerunners of the present emancipated women.

In the fulfilled group we have Lois Spears, born blind, the happiest of women:

> As wife, mother and housekeeper,
> Caring for my loved ones,
> And making my home
> A place of order and bounteous hospitality.[4]

And Mrs. George Reece, who was "left with the children / To feed and clothe and school them" and did it with a code of "Act well your part, here all the honor lies."[5] Here, too, is the immortalized Lucinda Matlock who lived together for seventy years with her husband, raised twelve children, eight of whom they lost, who asks

> What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
> Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?
> Degenerate sons and daughters,
> Life is too strong for you—
> It takes life to love Life.[6]

Fulfillment for such women, then, as Masters defines it, is one where a woman not only fills the conventional social role of wife and mother but also finds satisfaction and personal fulfillment therein. Such women are probably an exaltation of Masters' pioneer grandmother—a "venerable woman," he calls her. It is her virtues that he is extolling in this group—" the peace, the order, the plenty, the old-fashioned charm" of her home, where he loved to visit; her magnetic nature with its laughter and fun and never exhausting cheerfulness and affection; and her way of life—one of happiness, peacefulness and affection, representing the pioneer element that founded the land and exemplified the more durable virtues. And these women of "one-track minds" Masters seems to suggest need no assist. They have found happiness and have realized contentment in a conventional feminine role without any emotional conflicts. But other women more complex in nature and/or more unfortunate in their lots do

need the chance to tell their own tales and to evaluate them from the perspective of distance.

Inside the peripheral groups—those who compromise and those who are "beaten"—are those Masters can empathize with from his early home situation—with its strained marital relationship, and his father's "trapped" way of live—, from his own at best "second level" marriage,[8] from his Chicago sojourn, and from his recollections of village characters. He speaks of the tragedy of his father's being caught in the circumstances he was, among small-minded people: "the life of Petersburg or Lewistown was his fated lot . . . a misfit in the life he lived among the people. . . ."[9]

Masters' own life in Chicago, he says, gave him vast understanding of human nature and of the world. Thus he came to know the people who ride "the wheel of fortune," shaped by fate, some for better and some for worse. These, then, composites of the people he knew, he presents as real people, and in so doing he gives us a literary presentation of woman's lot and of his own philosophy of love and its role in the human sphere.

Among the compromisers we find pragmatics, women who escape their indiscretions by convenient marriages, who settle for safety and shelter and outward respectability. Here is Julie Miller who at thirty marries a sixty-five-year old man because she is pregnant, and Russian Sonie, who had been a rouée for many years, who then met Patrick Hammer on the boat and came to Spoon River [to live] here / For twenty years—they thought that we were married!"[10] We have here, too, the uprighteous wives who insist upon the sanctity of their legal marital roles and rights even when love has disappeared, for says Mrs. Purkapile,

> . . . A promise is a promise
> And marriage is marriage,
> And out of respect for my own character
> I refused to be drawn into a divorce
> By the scheme of a husband who had merely grown tired
> Of his marital vow and duty.[11]

Here, too, are the sublimators, those who turn to socially acceptable service. Emily Sparks, who says, "I, the teacher, the

old maid, the virgin heart, / Who made them all my children,"[12] and Lydia Humphrey, who trudges

> Back and forth, back and forth, to and from the church,
> With my Bible under my arm
> Till I was gray and old;
> Unwedded, alone in the world,
> Finding brothers and sisters in the congregation,
> And children in the church.[13]

These women represent those who seek contentment in the life role that they have of necessity carved for themselves. While they are not beaten, in the sense that they still live within the social bounds of respectability, neither are they fulfilled, since they have denied themselves valid human relationships.

And as a last group, we have the beaten. These include women who have fallen into the "marriage trap" and have thereby abandoned development of their own potential. Here is Margaret Fuller Stack who "would have been as great as George Eliot," but who married the rich druggist, gave birth to eight children and "had no time to write," as she warns: "Hear me, ambitious souls, / Sex is the curse of life!"[14] For such the conventional role of the first group does not satisfy; theirs is not the uncomplicated nature that can adjust to such confines.

We have those who attain only hollow victories. Amelia Garrick gloats: "I know that I vanquished your spirit; . . . / I am really the unconquerable power over your life / That robs it of complete triumph."[15]

Here, too, is the outcast—". . . Daisy Fraser who always passed / Along the streets through rows of nods and smiles. / And coughs and words such as" there she goes. Also here are the martyrs who pay a price that embitters. Constance Hately reveals her truth:

> You praise my self-sacrifice, Spoon River,
> In rearing Irene and Mary. . . .
> But I poisoned my benefactions
> With constant reminders of their dependence.[17]

Others among the beaten are the misfits and the frustrated—those who expend their emotions inwardly into futile self-pity,

waste and destruction: Mabel Osborne, who "Withered before your eyes, Spoon River—Thirsting, thirsting, / Voiceless from chasteness of soul to ask you for love,"[18] And Louise Smith, the jilted, who bemoans,

> If I had let my love for him alone
> It might have grown into a beautiful sorrow—
> Who knows?—filling my life with a healing fragrance.
> But I tortured it, I poisoned it,
> I blinded its eyes, and it became hatred—"[19]

Women then in Spoon River are still bound by a culturally defined conventionality that permits them to function only in a male dependent role within the institutionalized roles of wife and mother, or within some culturally approved occupational role as teacher or mother substitute, or in some service role connected with the church or charitable institution. But, Masters is contending, unless one's nature is attuned to such a role, such confinement nets waste of human potential.

If the women break from convention, they most often become recluses or eccentrics or "fall" victim to the pitfalls of an outside world which is defined by man and for which they have not been prepared, since they have not learned to establish their own identities, or to rely on themselves as sources of strength, or to fend realistically with the machinations and manoeuvers of men who are accustomed to pitting themselves against each other. And these, Masters is saying, represent thwarted lives, lives of vacuous existence and despair.

Had Masters confined his women portraits to these three groups, he would have emerged as a man stating that women unable to fit happily into the first mould or unable by native endowment or by Fortune to find such a niche have the choice either of compromising and settling for "half a loaf" or of ending up with disillusionment, frustration, and despair. Not so—more hope than this is offered by a fourth group, Masters' "enlightened spirits." Formed by forces not of their own making, these natures refuse to be oppressed, and plunge into the unknown to live life and to wrest from the living if not Paradise a release from Hell[20] and freedom to experience life, a struggle which provides them with broad understanding.

The fourth group, the revolters, who triumph because they refuse to be licked by the stultifying efforts of Spoon River, bespeak Masters' liberal, free-thinking credo. Masters early threw out the Bible as revelation. He saw miracles as nonsense. Because he couldn't abide the "men of small natures and inveterate prejudice and village ignorance of the good and beautiful"[21] who controlled the church, he threw aside organized religion.

Having determined not to marry, he sought "varietism" in his sexual life until he eventually married a society girl with a "Golden Aura" who captivated his fancy, that he might allay unending loneliness—his father advising that he had to marry someone, that the girl was "as good as anyone," that a "man has got to have one of them."[22] Prepared to offer her fidelity, he found enroute that their "bloods did not mix," that their differences were too great for a harmonious life. Though attractive and dutiful she lacked magnetism for him, so he sought extramarital comfort with the easy rationalization that women rather expected such light-hearted adulteries and were not threatened by them so long as their own favored positions were secure,[23] and that for him there was nothing wrong in erotic indulgence. This philosophy is reflected in the portraits of his revolters.

Revolter Marie Bateson concludes:

> It is well to abstain from murder and lust,
> To forgive, do good to others, worship God
> Without graven images.
> But these are external means after all
> By which you chiefly do good to yourself.
> The inner kernel is freedom.[24]

And
/Sarah Brown:

> Go to the good heart that is my husband,
> Who broods upon what he calls our guilty love:—
> Tell him that my love for you, no less
> than my love for him
> Wrought out my destiny—that through the flesh
> I won spirit, and through the spirit, peace.
> There is no marriage in heaven,
> But there is love.[25]

Here for Masters, then, are advances as women develop personhood and inner freedom to form their own codes to live by.

The World War having destroyed the era out of which Spoon River was born, *The New Spoon River*, a sequel to the first book, represents World War I urbanized village life. It, in limited fashion, does reflect some of the changing attitudes toward women, ás "progress" reaches Spoon River:

Lulu Kay, the stenographer, speaks of

> The equal rights of men and women,
> And their intimate association [which]
> Made Daisy a useless functionary
> In the changing life of Spoon River![26]

Mrs. Gard Waful tells of the different modes of life in three generations of women:

> My grandmother kept house and made the garden,
> And spun and cooked and raised ten children.
> My mother headed a house that was kept
> By servants, and raised three children.
> But I knew the art of running a club,
> And how to select a receiving committee.[27]

Lucile Lusk defends premarital sex:

> There is nothing makes me sorrier for men
> Than their emotions about virginity:
> How they prize it, how they rave for its loss,
> And revenge its loss.
> Lucius Atherton took my virginity.
> And wasn't I as well off for losing as he for winning?
> I married another man afterwards,
> And lived happily enough.[28]

Thelma Ehrgott emancipates herself from the parochialism of village morality as she says to Spoon River:

> Divinity never clothed your customs or rules,
> Your laws, now even your creeds![29]

While Clara Viall strikes a cry for the full life:

> Tell men and women to repress, to sublimate
> Passion to service, life to duty,
> . . . . . .

> But carve for me a granary afire,
> From which a swallow is swiftly flying
> to smokeless skies![30]

The earliest rebels are now well established in post-World War I Spoon River. Masters' own "way out" has been adopted by others, as Spoon River tastes post-war "progress." Here are manifested spirited defenses of a freer morality, wider social roles for women, an enlarged perspective.

So we have Masters giving approval to the heroines of group one and to the enlightened spirits of group four, women who refuse to be stifled by oppression. A question we may well ask is which of these two groups does Masters approve? We can attempt an answer by turning from the Spoon River books to his own "apologia," his autobiography, *Across Spoon River*. Here he states:

> There are levels of truth, lower and higher . . . erotic love is like wine, and the intoxication of both is similar, attended with the same exaltation and reaction. That is truth, but a higher truth is that love is the warmth of wine that flames through the heart with vital power, and brings no relapse to self-contempt, to achieving regret.[31]

Masters here seems to be concluding that the highest form of realization is that attained by the first group, love with warmth and no after regrets. But when such doesn't come, there is an alternative with its own rewards. And he cites his own case:

> I wrote that a man like myself will go, through dis-illusionment again and again, and then will enter the enchantment again and again, just as he will be dupe again and again by wine. It is true, because such a heart will search until it finds; and then if it never finds it should be philosophized and filled with magnanimous understanding.[32]

Masters himself philosophizes. He turns to Shelley and to the thought that love launches the self out of oneself and "creates in the infinite a world for itself alone, how different from this obscure and fearful den."[33] And such a love, which brings with it experience, gives him then power and understanding to write. This, coupled with his sense of responsibility to lead a socially constructive life, brings us the Spoon River portraits, where

women from the grave insightfully lay bare their lives and evaluate them. Their judgments are, of course, those of Edgar Lee Masters, whose pen thus becomes a powerful force in interpreting for us the lot of women in the nineteenth century America and in pointing out a forward direction.

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NOTES

1. Quoted phrases are from *Across Spoon River* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936).
2. Louis Untermeyer, *American Poetry Since 1900* (New York: H. Holt, 1942), p. 119.
3. Edgar Lee Masters, "The Genesis of Spoon River," *The American Mercury* (January, 1933), p. 250.
4. *Spoon River Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 74. All quotations from Edgar Lee Masters' works are used by permission of Mrs. Ellen C. Masters.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
7. *Across Spoon River*, pp. 289-290.
8. References in this article are to Masters' first marriage; he married a second time in later life.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
10. *Spoon River Anthology*, p. 106.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
20. *Across Spoon River*, p. 290.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 299.
24. *Spoon River Anthology*, p. 245.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
26. *The New Spoon River* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 17.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
31. *Across Spoon River*, p. 406.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 406.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 409.

THE POPULAR WRITER, PROFESSORS, AND THE MAKING OF A REPUTATION: THE CASE OF CARL SANDBURG

PAUL FERLAZZO

January 6, 1978 marked the centennial of Carl Sandburg's birth, an appropriate time to begin a reconsideration of his work and of his position in American letters. I say "*begin* a reconsideration" because for a long time not much new has been going on in Sandburg studies. Since Sandburg's death in 1967, for example, there have been fewer than twenty significant articles published in the journals about him, and only two books have appeared, a volume of his letters and a biography.[1] This does not seem like much when one considers the extent of Sandburg's 53 year writing career—poet, novelist, biographer, historian, journalist, lecture, folksinger, writer of children's literature, recipient of two Pulitzer Prizes and numerous other awards and honorary degrees, a friend of Presidents, kings, governors, congressmen, New York entertainers and Hollywood stars, and of nearly every major and minor literary figure of five decades.

During his lifetime Sandburg's face and large frame had been made part of the American pictorial scene by members of the mass media, and he has the distinction of being one of our most photographed writers. Pictures of him exist in varying poses and for a variety of occasions with a healthy cross section of other famous faces of our age—with President Kennedy and President Johnson; with Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas and with Richard Nixon when he was Eisenhower's Vice-President; with Andres Segovia and Andre Kostelanetz; with Charlie Chaplin and Frank Lloyd Wright; and with a number of America's most popular actresses, including Bette Davis, Elizabeth Taylor, Ingrid Bergman, and Marilyn Monroe.

Sandburg's audience was on occasion larger than any poet could possibly have dreamed of before the invention of television. Sandburg talked about Lincoln, sang songs, and read poetry on some of television's most popular programs, including the Bell Telephone Hour, the Ed Sullivan Show, a Gene Kelley Special, and the Milton Berle TV Show. In addition, Sandburg can still be seen and heard on at least seven educational films and on some 50 phonograph records. Interviews of him are available on tape, film, and in print, conducted by such respected figures of the media as Alistair Cooke, Howard K. Smith, Edward R. Murrow, and Russell Baker.

Nevertheless, after all of this exposure and popularity, after having been part of America's popular consciousness for so long, and having been identified as one of its great cultural heroes, Sandburg has all but slipped from the literary memory of many academics. As a poet he is confined largely to the secondary schools. A dissertation written in 1970 at Ohio State confirms the trend: its title, "A Study of Carl Sandburg: A Major Writer for the Secondary School of Today."[2] Michael Yatron has written an article for the *English Journal* deceptively titled, "Carl Sandburg: The Poet as Nonconformist," in which he shows how the good secondary school teacher might introduce the subject of poetry to students who have an aversion to it by beginning with the work of Carl Sandburg.[3] From Sandburg, Yatron argues, the teacher can lead his or her pupils on to more complex and more rewarding poetry.

In the college anthologies of American literature Sandburg has not done much better. Out of the nearly 1,000 poems he wrote, he is represented usually by only a half-dozen or so lyrics, the most popular of which are "Fog," "Chicago," "I am the People, the Mob," "Cool Tombs," and "To a Contemporary Bunkshooter."

As a writer of prose, Sandburg has done a little better, although on the whole it appears a dubious achievement. His six volume Pulitzer Prize winning biography of Lincoln has been relegated to serving as part of the Book-of-the-Month Club membership drive. If you enroll in a one year trial membership, and promise to buy four other titles, you may purchase the six volume *Lincoln* for $18.50 as opposed to the publisher's list price of $120. The other books offered as options in this same membership appeal

are interesting to note because it gives one an idea of the status of Sandburg's *Lincoln*. As a new member you may also choose from among the following: Will and Ariel Durant's eleven volume *Story of Civilization*, the *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, which is the thirteen volume original photo-reduced to two large volumes, and the massive *New Columbia Encyclopedia*. All of these are reference works apparently meant to adorn the shelves of a good average household. They are not meant to be read through from cover to cover, but only dipped into on occasion. It would seem, then, that in the eyes of the publishing trade, at least, Sandburg has written a timeless, though readerless classic, a piece of literature more likely to be bought than read.

Sandburg is not the first writer to whom something like this has happened, nor is he likely to be the last. Others have been given honors and money while they were alive and then had their monumental reputations buried with them, or resurrected when it was profitable or fashionable, and this will happen again. Putting aside for the time being a consideration of the actual merit of his art, Sandburg is a good case in point for examining how a once popular and respected writer can slip into a literary limbo.

The truth of the matter is that Sandburg's admirers, his "people—the mob—the crowd—the mass," may have cherished and rewarded him while he was alive, but upon his death new figures and idols were readily found to fill whatever void he left in what can be the circus atmosphere of the public consciousness. Solid reputations finally are made or preserved by professors and literary critics who are in or who are close to the academic world. To the greatest extent it is they whose task and privilege it is to keep an artist's life's work before the eyes and in the minds of the public through their teaching and publication. And this was the class of readers Sandburg was largely unable to win over during his lifetime, and to this day they have conceded to recognize him only as a minor figure.

Whether he deserves the status of minor figure, or whether he should be moved over to the category of major figure is something which at present cannot be decided. In time opinion and analysis may evolve or solidify on the matter of his poetic achievement. But what is presently interesting and what may be observed is the process by which Sandburg became a minor figure in the face of his popular support and mass appeal.

It appears that there are at least three major circumstances which worked against Sandburg's ability to form a successful relationship with the scholar-critics. The first was his popularity. Until very recently academic critics have not known what to do with a poet who was financially comfortable, famous, and loved by a wide audience. Such a poet, it was automatically thought, must not be very good. He must be writing to the lowest level of the public's comprehension on subjects that are dull, common, or insignificant. His own degree of sensitivity and his power to render human feeling must both be very low. In all of this there was mingled the academic's suspicion that the masses really do not know what is good in literature.

Until the closing years of his life, Sandburg accepted almost any invitation to speak, to sing songs, or to recite poetry in a public forum. He was without discrimination in this regard and would go before a joint session of Congress, or to a University auditorium, or on the platfrom of a local Grange Hall with the same vigor and enthusiasm. Sharing a TV stage with a Gene Kelley or a Milton Berle, or showing up on the Ed Sullivan Show between a high wire act and a ventriloquist might seem tasteless, unbecoming, or ridiculous for a poet in the eyes of an academic, but not so in the opinion of Carl Sandburg. He did not separate himself from the people, or consider himself better, smarter, or different from the common man in the way that a traditional scholar-critic might expect a poet to feel.

In fact, Sandburg brought himself closer to the common people and further away from the critics by emphasizing the immigrant background he shared with many other ethnic Americans at a time when it was not fashionable to talk about one's roots. Instead of trying to align himself with a pre-established American tradition and jump into the warm bath of the so-called American melting pot, he kept alive the uniqueness of his Swedish heritage. He travelled to Sweden on several occasions, visited the home region of his family, and accepted an honorary degree from Uppsala and an award for literary merit from King Gustav.

The image of Sandburg as a farmer is another aspect of his popularity which never quite set right with the urbanized scholar-critics. His folksy, casual bearing, his pronounced love of the land and reverence for nature appeared quaint to them, but unconvincing as a source for wisdom or poetic beauty. It is interesting in this regard to compare Sandburg with Robert Frost who also from time to time has had associations with a farm and has fared on the whole much better with scholars. The difference is that the farming image for Frost was always something of a pose, colored with sophisticated irony. Commentaries about Frost remind us of his unorthodox farming practice of milking cows at midnight when neighboring farmers were fast asleep. This freed Frost from the necessity of having to be taken too seriously as a farmer-poet. Also, there was the sly suggestion that milking cows at midnight might be slightly superior to milking them at 5 A.M., as did his neighbors who remained bound to the routine of their animals.

A second major reason for Sandburg's failure with the scholar-critics was his social philosophy. Until World War I he had been a Socialist and much of the revolutionary spirit of Socialism informs the *Chicago Poems.* After his break with the Social Democrats Sandburg continued his interest in Socialist policy although his ideas began to mellow into a general feeling of faith and hope in the future of mankind which found its greatest expression in *The People, Yes* of 1936. His mellow optimism and faith in the future became the dominant motifs in his poetry for the rest of his life. In the view of Oscar Cargill, one of the few important scholars who supported Sandburg, this mellowing was a positive good, a sign of moral and intellectual growth, and a by-product of Sandburg's research and writing on Abraham Lincoln.[4]

However, many critics preferred the early Sandburg to the later, the discontented Socialist rather than the optimistic singer of folk wisdom. Kenneth Rexroth voiced this general feeling when in 1958 he reviewed *The Sandburg Range* for *The Nation.*[5] He opened the essay with something of a eulogy for Sandburg, even though Sandburg had an active eight years of life ahead of him. Rexroth's point, bitterly made in the course of the review,

was that for him Sandburg had died in 1925 when he stopped writing poetry in the vein of *Chicago Poems.*

Other critics saw this optimistic faith in the people as a failure to fulfill the authentic social role of the poet. Both Daniel G. Hoffman and Roy Harvey Pearce regret the fact that Sandburg only registers the sentiments of the people and does nothing to enhance or change them.[6] Behind their criticism is the time-honored notion that the poet must also be a teacher and a prophet, one who instructs and inspires the people to an appreciation of high culture and a desire for feelings that are exquisite and refined. Also, behind their criticism is the elitist assumption that what the people feel, do, or believe is necessarily in need of improvement, an idea antithetical to Sandburg's most basic premise.

A third circumstance which worked against the establishment of Sandburg's reputation as a major poetic figure was the long reign over American scholarship of the New Critics. Their stated principle of illuminating the center of a poem without special regard to the author or his intention, or to the cultural background of the work, was perhaps one of the most innovative developments in the art of criticism during this century. But, with their emphasis upon the tension, irony, imagery, and structure of a poem, they effectively excluded from serious consideration the bulk of Sandburg's poetry. By their standards Sandburg appeared to write his poems by either intuition or whim, and he presented few subtleties or ambiguities that needed explication. As might be expected, the explication record of Sandburg's poetry is very small. Since it began publication in 1942, *The Explicator* has published a total of five explications of Sandburg's verse.[7]

Except for R. P. Blackmur, who criticized Sandburg's poetry for being mere reportage, most of the New Critics simply ignored Sandburg.[8] John Crowe Ransom, for example, in his 1951 article evaluating the poets of the first fifty years of the twentieth century, lists as major American poets Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, and T. S. Eliot; the minor American poets he lists are Vachel Lindsay, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Marianne More, E. E. Cummings, Hart Crane, and Allen Tate.[9] He made no mention at all of Sandburg, who just the year before had pub-

lished his *Complete Poems* and been given the Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

The influence of New Criticism has been far-reaching and pervasive. Literary students, scholars, and critics educated since the late 1940's have all been touched to a greater or lesser degree by the values and opinions of the New Critics regarding culture, civilization, and literature. It is only in recent times that we begin to witness a diminishing of the authority of their principles. Nevertheless, it would seem that the traditional academic opinion of Sandburg is largely a New Critical opinion which, once crystallized, has been handed down to succeeding waves of baccalaureates without re-evaluation.

Outlining these three conditions which seem to have worked against Sandburg's reputation as a poet—his popularity, his social philosophy, and the existence of a powerful school of criticism that ignored him—is not special pleading for Sandburg. It is one observer's attempt at explaining the manner in which a poet, once popular and honored, may fade in literary history. With the conclusion of his centennial year it may be hoped that another evaluation of Sandburg can be made, one that will see his poetic merits and failures for what they actually are, and will see them out from under the burden of opinion we have inherited.

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NOTES

1. The most recent bibliography of Carl Sandburg is by William White in *The Vision of This Land: Studies of Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, and Carl Sandburg*, ed. John E. Hallwas and Dennis J. Reader (Western Illinois University Press, 1976), pp. 123-28.
2. Michael J. Quigley, *DAI*, 31: 1767 A (Ohio State), 1970.
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4. "Carl Sandburg: Crusader and Mystic," *English Journal* (April 1950), 177-84.
5. "Search for Sandburg," *The Nation*, CLXXXVI (Feb. 22, 1958), 171-72.
6. Daniel G. Hoffman, "Sandburg and 'The people': His Literary Populism Appraised," *Antioch Review*, X (Summer 1950), 265-78; Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Continuity of American Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 269-71.
7. Ralph P. Boas, "Early Lynching," I 67, June 1943; Richard Crowder, "Caboose Thoughts," IV 52, May 1946; Daniel G. Hoffman, "Cool Tombs," IX 46, May 1951; Bernard S. Oldsey, "Broken-Face Gargoyles," VII 50, May 1949; Selma Wagner, "A Fence," XXVII 42, February 1969.
8. *The Expense of Greatness* (Philadelphia: Russell Press, 1958), pp. 208-211.
9. "Poetry of 1900-50," *Kenyon Review*, XIII (1951), 445-54.

MYTH AND THE MIDWESTERN LANDSCAPE: SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S *MID-AMERICAN CHANTS*

PHILIP GREASLEY

The dichotomy between nature and civilization has existed throughout American literature. Cooper's forests and garrisons, Hawthorne's forests and scaffold, and Twain's Mississippi River and riverbank society exemplify the romantic impulse to contrast idealized natural landscapes with despoiled man-created environments.

This recurrent dichotomy gains new and terrible associations with the rise of Midwestern industrial cities. America's westward expansion occurs in and through the Middle West. The resulting Mid-American industrial cities, like Chicago, possess all the failings of Cooper's garrisons along with many that author never imagined.

Despite the cities' promise of bright lights and excitement, early twentieth century Midwesterners often respond with shocked rejection. Several elements combine to foster this reaction. Even from a distance, turn-of-the-century cities come as a shock. Skyscrapers begin to thrust into the air, disturbing the hypnotically somnolent horizontal of Midwestern landscape. From a closer perspective, the cities are ugly. They are a response to the needs of commerce and industry, not those of beauty. Furthermore, industry, experiencing unprecedented expansion, beckons rural Midwesterners to the cities and then exploits them ruthlessly. As rural people join the ranks of the urban proletariat, "robber baron" capitalism, the industrial milieu, and the vastness of the cities undercut Midwestern identity with the land, the community, and Christianity.

But what are Midwesterners to do? By the early twentieth century it was clear that America's future was in the night-

marish industrial cities. Like many Midwestern writers, Sherwood Anderson was horrified by American industrialism. But in *Mid-American Chants* Anderson confronted his fears and moved beyond romantic rejection of the present. Using Mid-American land- and city-scapes as the focus of his vision, he forged an optimistic myth for twentieth century urban-industrial man.

Anderson's quest for the future begins with emphasis on traditional American landscapes themselves. References like, "the long fields and standing corn . . . the west winds . . . the vast prairies . . . (and) the black swampy land" abound. Indeed, whole poems are given over to nostalgic reminiscences of rural Middle America, as these lines from "Evening Song" illustrate:

> Back of Chicago the open fields—were you ever there?
> Trains coming toward you out of the West—
> Streaks of light on the long gray plains?—
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Back of Chicago the open fields—were you ever there?
> Trains going from you into the West—
> Clouds of dust on the long gray plains.
> Long trains go West, too. . . .

Anderson joyfully affirms traditional American experience. He expresses wonder and awe at the immensity, fertility, and power of the land. Thus, the poet announces himself as one of the people, saying,

> I am of the West, the long West of the sunsets. I am of the deep fields where the corn grows. The sweat of apples is in me. I am the beginning of things and the end of things.

Next, Anderson presents ecstatic Whitmanesque catalogues proclaiming America's unique greatness. He begins with "Keokuk, Tennessee, Michigan, Chicago, Kalamazoo—don't the names in this place make you fairly drunk?" Later, he adds, "I am one with the old gods—an American from Dakota—from the deep valley of the Mississippi—from Illinois—from Iowa—from Ohio." Sharing Whitman's enthusiasm at America's burgeoning numbers and power, Anderson concludes, ". . . Wait! Try to believe. / Stronger, deeper, stronger . . . over the land—wide—wide—

over the land. . . . / Ninety, a thousand, a million, a nation. . . . See my young strength how it grows."

Yet beyond simple love for the land, Anderson—like earlier authors—uses landscape to affirm certain values. His desire for fixed values, personal and national identity, and closeness to the divine order produces an almost pantheistic reverence for the land and traditional agrarian pursuits. Thus, long straight rows of corn and dark, rich soil take on associations of fertility, permanency, and fulfillment. In this same way, Anderson maintains, "Out of the land of my fathers, from Huron to Keokuk, beauty shall come—out of the black ground, out of the deep black ground." This beauty, he believes, will go far beyond the physical. It will attach itself to all aspects of American life.

If the American rural past offers security, identity, and fulfillment, the urban-industrial future seems at first to threaten just the reverse. Both emotions are present as Anderson's persona asserts,

> I am mature, a man child, in America, in the West, in the great valley of the Mississippi. My head arises above the cornfields. I stand up among the new corn.
>
> I am a child, a confused child in a confused world. There are no clothes made that fit me.

The second half of this quotation expresses his unpreparedness for the experiences and values of the twentieth century. The old philosophical garments no longer seem to fit.

The city initially means more than confusion. It is frustration and degradation. The city means "factories and marts and the roar of machines—horrible, terrible, ugly and brutal. It crush(es) . . . things down and down." The urban-industrial order seems filthy and spiritually contaminating. Dust and the roar of man-killing machines symbolize Anderson's early response to the city. The persona tells us,

> . . . in the streets of my city I stood. My clothes were foul. In the woven cloth that covered my body the dust of my city had lodged. The dust of my civilization was in my soul.

Anderson initially believes people in the cities are smothered. They need the beauty, the communion with the land, and the values fostered by agrarian life.

Increasingly, however, Anderson moves beyond idealization of the past and rejection of the present. Here, as before, natural and urban-industrial environments carry the theme. Though the city still remains threatening, Anderson begins to find some basis for hope. He starts negatively, with

> . . . there are the broken things—myself and the others. . . . We are all that, here in the West, here in Chicago. . . . There's nothing but shrill screams and a rattle.

But then he adds the assertion of divine plan, saying,

> That had to be—it's a part of the scheme.
> Now, faint little voices do lift up.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Little faint beginnings of things— . . . a life lived in Chicago—in the West—in the whirl of industrial America.

The poet begins to see purpose in the hitherto apparently meaningless brutality. He comes to accept that, "In denser shadows by the factory walls, / In my old cornfields, broken where the cattle roam / The shadow of the face of God falls down."

At this point Anderson is able to integrate images of traditional American landscapes with those of the twentieth century city and show the possibilities for positive new values and modes of living. He finds that even urban-industrial life can become fulfilling. The negative portrayals of the city—which Anderson had previously viewed as man's ironic response to the natural landscape—give way to an understanding that the city is the environment of the present and future. Within it man *will* be able to work out his destiny.

> We're just a lot of muddy things caught up by the stream. You can't fool us. Don't we know ourselves?
>
> Here we are, out here in Chicago. . . . We are like the sewerage of our town, swept up stream by a kind of mechanical triumph—that's what we are.
>
> . . . . . .

> By God, we'll love each other or die trying. We'll get to understanding too. In some grim way our own song shall work through.
>
> We'll stay down in the muddy depths of our stream—we will. There can't any poet come out here and sit on the shaky rail of our ugly bridges and sing us into paradise.
>
> We're finding out—that's what I want to say. We'll get at our own thing out here or die for it. We're going down numberless thousands of us, into ugly oblivion. We know that.
>
> But say, bards, you keep off our bridges. Keep out of our dreams, dreamers. We want to give this democracy thing they talk so big about a whirl. We want to see if we are any good out here, we Americans from all over hell. That's what we want.

The traditional American rural landscapes and the contemporary urban-industrial milieu have then become synonymous with the values, opportunities, and restrictions of past and present. Systematic presentation of nature and industrial society has developed and clarified these. These symbolic landscape references become even more important because the Chants are a collection of impressionistic, sometimes surrealistic, topical poems. They lack a logical statement of theme and even a consistent unifying, clarifying voice. Each poem records the emotional intensity at a specific moment without a direct statement of theme. The totality of these emotional responses is at first a nightmarish stream of consciousness. Only the consistent recurrence and juxtaposition of landscapes make clear Anderson's moods, themes, and changes of perspective. Without references to "oil on their boots" and "the roar of machines," poems like "The Beam" would be simply incoherent screams of pain. With these references, however, the sacrifice of human lives and hopes to the industrial order becomes clear.

> Eighteen men stood by me in my fall—long men—strong men—see the oil on their boots.

I was a guest in the house of my people. Through the years I clung, taking hold of their hands in the darkness. It rained and the roar of machines was incessant. Into the house of my people quiet would not come.

Eighteen men stood by me in my fall. Through their breasts bars were driven. With wailing and with weeping I ran back and forth. Then I died. Out of the door of the house of my people I ran. But the eighteen men stood by me in my fall.

With Sherwood Anderson's recognition of the importance of the role of landscape to his message and an understanding that the city can offer man a viable future, he moves toward the creation of new song—a new set of values, a spirit, again based on man's relation to the land. In the "Foreword" to *Mid-American Chants* Anderson maintains that

> Song begins with and has its birth in the memory of older things than we know. . . . In the beaten paths of life, when many generations of men have walked the streets of a city or wandered at night in the hills of an old land. . . . But in our towns and fields there are few memory haunted places. Here we stand in roaring city streets, on steaming coal heaps, in the shadow of factories from which come only the grinding roar of machines. We do not sing but mutter in the darkness. Our lips are cracked with dust and with the heat of furnaces. We but mutter and feel our way toward the promise of song.

Mid-American Chants ultimately asserts the possibility of song, but here again, the chants start negatively. They ask, "Can a singer arise and sing in this smoke and grime? Can he keep his throat clear? Can his courage survive? Soon after, the poet refers to the urban landscape, exclaiming, "We have to sing . . . in the darkness." By the middle of the chants, symbols associated with the urban-industrial environment show that a commitment has been made. The city will be man's new home:

> It is day and I stand raw and new by the coal-heaps. I go into the place of darkness at the beginning of the new house. . . . New song is tearing the cords of my throat. I am become a man covered with dust. I have kissed the

> black hands of new brothers and cannot return to bury my beloved at the door of the long house.

Later, landscapes again mirror the progress toward Anderson's dream of new song. He calls the workers to song, saying,

> In denser shadows by the factory walls,
> In my old cornfields, broken where the cattle roam,
> The shadow of the face of God falls down.
>
> From all of Mid-America a prayer,
> To newer, braver gods, to dawns and days,
> To truth and cleaner, braver life we come.
>
> Lift up a song,
> My sweaty men,
> Lift up a song.

Finally, the chants end, reaffirming that the industrial environment will not destroy man. The last poem concludes in a call to song:

> I look far into the future beyond the noise and the clatter.
> I will not be crushed by the iron machine.
> Sing.
> Dare to sing.
> Kiss the mouth of song with your lips.
> In the morning and in the evening
> Trust to the terrible strength of indomitable song.

Landscapes express, then, the poet's growing willingness to work out his destiny in the industrial city. His growing faith in the industrial future is mirrored in the increasing emphasis on song. Anderson sees the problems, but he moves forward, knowing the values of the Midwestern past, those of the long straight rows of corn and the black swampy earth, will guide man as he moves into a newer world. The old world will bring forth the new, and the cornfields will become sacred,

> . . . our cornfields, the old dreams and prayers and thoughts . . . sweetening our broad land and getting even into our shops and into the shadows that lurk by our factory doors.
> It is the time of the opening of doors.

No talk of what we can do for the old world.
Talk and dream now of what the old world can bring to us—the true sense of real suffering out of which may come the sweeter brotherhood.
God, lead us to the fields now. . . .
May our fields become our sacred places.

Yet Sherwood Anderson is not content to simply express the joy and faith in the American landscape or to invest the landscape with meanings and values. Having accomplished these in *Mid-American Chants,* he attempts to build support for the values he favors. Anderson chooses myth as his tool. As such American landscapes and cities acquire mythic overtones. These descriptions consistently use the language and symbols of Christian and classical mythology. Christian myth contributes "the flood," "fires which do not burn," "the beginning of things and the end of things," and "the upper room (and) . . . down below the others . . . waiting—Judas and Peter and John—He was crucified for them."

Classical mythology suggests references to "Ulysses," to "soldiers emerging from the corn and killing each other in battle," and to a "hoarse and terrible singer, half man, half bird, floating in cold bleak winds. . . , wings burned by the fires of furnaces."

Anderson heightens the intensity by employing repeated mythic references to sexuality and to the annual fertility cycle. Mid-American cornfields become shrines, and the American growth cycle assumes mythic stature commensurate with the Eleusian mysteries. Often, Anderson links his fertility myths in *Mid-American Chants* with sexuality. For example, in "Spring Song" comes the declaration,

In the spring I press your body down on wet cold new-plowed ground. . . .
I would have my sacred way with you.

Thus, Anderson closes the circle. He joins land and air, body and spirit, life and death in support of his vision of fulfillment. This combination of mythic appeals lends an air of importance, inevitability, and divine sanction to Anderson's program for America. The myths encompass the major theologies of western civilization, the central fertility myth of birth and death, and

the most primal human urge—sexuality. Together they assert the possibility for fruitful life in the present and future based on Mid-American land and the traditional values derived from it.

Thus, Anderson's *Mid-American Chants* offers a new myth for urban-industrial man, building the future on the bedrock of the Midwestern past. The poems themselves become the Holy Book, the Song which men will carry with them into the future.

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THE FAMILY IN BOOTH TARKINGTON'S *GROWTH* TRILOGY

CHARLOTTE LEGATES

Booth Tarkington wrote his *Growth* trilogy—*The Turmoil*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, and *The Midlander*—during ten of his most productive years, 1914 to 1924. The three novels investigate the industrialization of a city modelled on Indianapolis, Indiana, and its progress from a slow-moving, post-Civil War town to a grimy and brisk commercial and industrial center. Throughout the novels, Tarkington examines the effect of capitalistic growth on the traditions of persons living in an industrial region. His characters and his city evolve by accepting the necessities of the new era without entirely losing sight of the past.

The phenomenal popular success of the whole *Growth* saga among readers of the first quarter of this century has been considerably undermined by the lack of current critical appreciation for Tarkington. Modern critics often see the trilogy as simplistic, arriving at compromises which are not psychologically justified and failing to demonstrate the real drawbacks of American life that the early Sinclair Lewis satirized so acutely. Unfortunately, such judgments overlook one of Tarkington's most subtle and effective psychological devices: his use of the family to focus character development and the choice between the old and new ways of life. Tarkington's major characters are torn between the poles of mother and father, representing old and new, and must develop adult characters by choosing the father without totally abandoning the mother.

All three novels in *Growth* begin with children—Bibbs Sheridan, George Amberson Minafer, and Harlan Oliphant—dominated by their mothers, women who are or who want to be members of the traditionally accepted upper class of the city.

Their fathers are shadowy figures throughout the first part of their lives. It is not until late adolescence or early manhood that Bibbs, George, and Harlan encounter strong, dominating men. These men, who emerge as father-figures for the three characters, promote industrial organization and the growth of the city which the heroes have up to this point ignored or rejected. For Bibbs Sheridan this emerging father-figure is his own father, who has previously ignored this son. In the case of George Minafer, the father-figure is Eugene Morgan, his mother's former suitor and his own eventual father-in-law. Harlan Oliphant's father-figure is his own brother, whose energy and drive transform a farm into the city's first residential suburb.

These three father-figures all promote an industrial growth which the heroes initially reject but later grow to accept. By the end of the novels, all three are promoting capitalistic progress. They all accomplish this change by realizing that the values and attitudes inherited from their mothers are no longer completely applicable in the new era, and that their roles as men demand actions from them of which they had not previously thought themselves capable. Tarkington convinces the reader of the necessity of this change by creating situations in which the heroes cannot form and retain the family ties dictated by their mothers without involvement in capitalistic progress. Thus Bibbs accepts a business career to rescue the woman he loves, Mary Vertrees, from poverty. George, in order to live up to his chivalric duty towards his penniless aunt, takes a job in an explosives factory. And Harlan ultimately realizes that he cannot pretend to be a true brother to Dan if he does not help him avoid financial ruin.

Each hero begins his young manhood dominated by feminine-oriented ideals of the importance of family and cultural traditions. Eventually, each faces a crisis by choosing to accept a masculine, achievement-oriented lifestyle. To demonstrate his approval, Tarkington rewards each with the woman he has always loved, and shows that, intellectually, each of the heroes retains something of his old traditions while accepting industrial growth through his actions. Tarkington is, as many critics have pointed out, attempting to show the value of retention of an older value system in the new industrial order; but he demonstrates the pos-

sibility of this by using a sex-based choice, a test which all of his heroes must and do pass.

The division between the masculine and feminine worlds is made subtly in *The Turmoil* (New York, 1914), the first novel in Tarkington's trilogy. Bibbs Sheridan, named by his mother for his mother's side of the family, is horrified by his father's factories, and he becomes so ill when his father forces him to work in one that he is sent to a sanitorium. On his return home, he discovers that, even though his two older brothers have made successful business careers for themselves in his father's model, his father is still determined to have him work his way up in industry.

Bibbs' personal inclinations lead him to write, although he does not seek publication. His father's attitudes toward literature are very clear: it is acceptable in women—he is so proud of a poem that his daughter has stolen from Bibbs and passed off as her own that he has it printed and framed—but not in a "serious-minded" young businessman. When Bibbs reveals his writing ambitions to his father, the reaction is immediate and clear. " 'Poems and essays'! My Lord, Bibbs, that's *women's* work! . . . I'm not sayin' a word against poetry. I wouldn't take ten thousand dollars right now for that poem of Edith's; and poetry's all right enough in its place—but you leave it to the girls. A man's got to do a man's work in this world" (p. 91). Sheridan feels his son's actions as direct reflections on himself and his future; " 'That's my son! . . . That's my one chance to live.' " Even though he has virtually ignored Bibbs during the boy's childhood, and even though he did not visit or write while Bibbs was in the sanitorium, he is determined to dominate this son's destiny too.

During Bibbs' convalescence, and after the death of his older brother James in the collapse of a warehouse, he becomes friends with Mary Vertrees, a neighbor whom all thought was destined to be James' wife. Mary, the daughter of impoverished gentility, initially determines to marry a rich man in order to rescue her parents, but ultimately refuses Jim because she cannot bring herself to marry simply for money. The Bibbs-Mary relationship is a gradual growth fostered by similar interests in music and literature. Again, Tarkington reinforces the idea of cultural interests as women's territory.

His friendship with Mary enables Bibbs to accept the inevitable return to a zinc-cutting machine in one of his father's factories. Looking forward to evenings with her, Bibbs is able to regard the machine with an air of defiance, for it does not occupy him so much that he cannot think and dream. His physical recovery continues, to the surprise of the family doctor and the justification of his father. Thus Bibbs forms, in the central part of the novel, a truce between his cultural interests and the business world. Not wanting to be a financial burden, he accepts the necessity for the latter while not giving up the former. But this truce is not to last.

After losing both of his other sons, Mr. Sheridan demands that Bibbs, who has now proved that he can perform a man's work if he puts his mind to it, become a partner in the Sheridan enterprises. Bibbs resists, feeling that such a career is impossible to reconcile with his writing, which he has been able to continue during the months on the machine. Bibbs tries to explain his own set of values to his father. He is content; "I have healthful toil—and I can think. In business as important as yours I couldn't think anything but business. I don't—I don't think making money is worth while" (p. 256). Bibbs sees serious limitations in the city's growth: "what's the use of its being rich and powerful? They don't teach the children any more in the schools because the city is rich and powerful. They teach them more than they used to because some people—not rich and powerful people—have thought the thoughts to teach the children" (p. 256). Growth has made the city hideous. "Wasn't the whole country happier and in many ways wiser when it was smaller and cleaner and quieter and kinder?" (p. 256).

But Bibbs cannot hold onto his ideals. "He was a sleeper clinging to a dream—a rough hand stretched to shake him and waken him" (p. 255). He gives in to his father when he discovers Mary's poverty, which she had hidden from him. Recognizing at last that what is most precious to him—Mary—cannot exist without a strong financial support, he agrees to enter into the full business relationship with his father, and then asks Mary to marry him.

A comic misunderstanding delays Bibbs' and Mary's inevitable wedding. Bibbs is sure Mary cannot love him, and Mary is sure

Bibbs is only taking pity on her because of her financial situation. They are finally united as the result of a traffic accident. Mary sees Bibbs walk in front of a trolley car; his father rescues him by pushing him out of the way. Mr. Sheridan, who has wanted to reward Bibbs' business efforts by playing Cupid, uses the occasion to reunite the couple. Thus Bibbs, who has accepted fully the necessity of a business career, and of the city's growth, wins the woman he loves.

In a final vision, Bibbs hears the voice of "Bigness" saying, "so long as you worship me for my own sake, I will not serve you. It is man who makes me ugly, by his worship of me. If man would let me serve him, I should be beautiful" (p. 346). Bibbs sees a vision of a city, "unbelievably white" (p. 347), which he will build for the generations of the future Thus a remnant of cultural idealism helps him accept the unpleasant, though tolerable, necessities of the present.

In *The Turmoil,* then, conflicting male and female worlds are a clear undercurrent to the action. Mr. Sheridan's worship of industry, bigness, and growth is supported by his two oldest sons. Mary is the strongest representative of the female interests —cultural heritage, interest in music and literature, the reliance on heritage to give one social standing. Edith and Mrs. Sheridan try their best to participate in Mary's definition of the female sphere, insisting that Mr. Sheridan build a house in an "established" neighborhood, filling the house with what they believe to be valid art objects, and using Edith's poem to prove that she is a worthy marriage partner. As a child and adolescent, Bibbs has taken refuge from the masculine business world in the feminine world of literature. As a young man, he bases his friendship with Mary on mutual cultural interests, until he discovers that an equal partnership in these interests is not enough to preserve them from the financial encroachments of the outside, masculine world. Thus to preserve Mary and her interests, he must adopt a role in the masculine world as defined by his father, a world in which he eventually finds satisfaction if not joy. Ultimately, Bibbs' choice as defined by the novel's plot—his decision to enter as a partner into his father's business—is strengthened by his symbolic choice between the masculine and feminine worlds.

This symbolic choice between masculine and feminine worlds is also a significant feature of the second novel in the *Growth* trilogy, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (New York, 1918). George Amberson Minafer's ties to the feminine world are very strong. George is named for his mother's side of the family, and chooses to identify himself as an Amberson, as his mother, Isabel, does. At the ball at which he first meets Lucy, his future wife, he does not bother to introduce her to his father, or even to point out this insignificant gentleman, who dies conveniently in the middle of the novel. George's attitude toward his father is one of extraordinary condescension; when his father's business fails, George suggests that he and his mother "build him a little stone bank in the backyard, if he busts up, and he can go and put his pennies in it every morning. That'll keep him just as happy as he ever was" (p. 85). George has adopted his mother's belief in the superiority of the Ambersons, and concurs in her opinion that he can do no wrong. Thus the child who is the terror of the neighborhood, indulged and never disciplined by his mother, becomes the strong-willed and destructive adolescent, willing to sacrifice the feelings of both his mother and himself to keep the Amberson name free from scandal.

Tarkington uses the split between the masculine and feminine worlds in his description of Indianapolis and its past. He identifies the thrifty element of the town which is opposed to the Ambersons' luxuries as the "sons or grandsons of the 'early settlers'" (p. 13). A newspaper article describes "*fin-de-siecle* gilded youth," more decadent even than those of the Roman empire, as being spoiled by "indulgent mothers." These are contrasted to the hard-working "young men" laboring on farms. Women are referred to as an "idle lot" by Isabel, a description with which George concurs, even though he too is idle.

George meets his first strong masculine influence when Eugene Morgan, his mother's old suitor, returns to town as an automobile manufacturer. George takes an instant dislike to Eugene, not only because of his odd appearance and his attentions to Isabel, but also because Eugene's energy and business sense are a constant reproach to George. Lucy, Eugene's daughter, recognizes George's lack of ambition as a fault, the first fault any marriageable woman has ever seen in George, to his knowledge. George's

pride will not let him change just to please Lucy, and the knowledge that Lucy does not think him perfect makes the break with her easier when he decides to abort his mother's plan to marry Eugene.

Eugene, of course, represents the industrial growth that is just beginning to take over the Midwest. George is openly hostile, rejecting the automobile industry as not being "precisely the thing a gentleman ought to do" (p. 123) and criticizing cars in front of Eugene as "a nuisance" which "had no business to be invented" (p. 138). George's ideal life is one lived on inherited wealth, not one in which a gentleman vulgarly makes money.

But when George, unprepared for a gentlemanly profession, loses his money, he is forced to take a common laboring job in an explosives factory in order to preserve his remaining idealization of family ties by supporting his aunt. George does not convert immediately to values compatible with industrialism. He still regrets the passage of time and of his family's influence from the city. He is conscious of the industrial pollution which has turned the city into a grimy pit. But he also recognizes that his job allows him to begin to regain the self-respect he has lost at his mother's and grandfather's death, when he realized that not only had he behaved wrongly toward his mother in preventing her happiness through a second marriage, but also that he no longer has the financial position which has been the backbone of his arrogant personality.

Thus a conversion to a new attitude toward life begins, and Tarkington rewards George further, like Bibbs, through a traffic accident. George is run over by a car. Lucy, reading of the accident in a newspaper, comes to visit and to forgive him. Eugene too uses the accident and the memories it awakens to review his relationship to Isabel's son, and to decide to protect and help him. Thus the old and new traditions of the city are reunited through the new relationship between George and the Morgans. George will marry Lucy and enter Eugene's business; but not without the insights gained from his family and his experiences. Lying in the hospital, George, unlike other proponents of growth, sees that the new industrialists "would pass, as the Ambersons had passed, and though some of them might do better than the Major and leave the letters that spelled a

name on a hospital or street, it would be only a work and it would not stay forever. Nothing stays or holds or keeps where there is growth" (pp. 247-248).

Because he has once been mistaken about his position in the city and then has had to change, George has a much firmer grasp on the reality of the city's life and of his own place in it than the new industrialists have. He understands the negative as well as the positive aspects of change, and the value of tradition as well as money. Thus George, like Bibbs, changes as an adult into a person whose actions will be on the side of growth and continued prosperity, but whose intellectual life is tempered by the knowledge of a lifestyle different from the one he now lives, in which tradition, family heritage, and culture are important.

The pattern of a young man's change from a feminine world of family-and-culture centeredness to masculine business-centeredness is repeated in the third novel of Tarkington's trilogy, *The Midlander* (New York, 1924). The novel has regularly been seriously misinterpreted by critics who have seen only one hero in the novel, Dan Oliphant. While Dan is the most flamboyant and active character, his story is only half of the novel. In fact, Tarkington has created a dual-hero novel, in which the tale hangs on the division in the lives of two brothers, Dan and Harlan Oliphant. The theme of the desirability yet negative influence of industrial growth rests primarily with Harlan's development.

The Oliphant brothers' background is similar to that of George Amberson Minafer. Their family is wealthy and dominated by their maternal grandmother, Mrs. Savage. Their father, a lawyer, is not seriously occupied with his practice. After college, Harlan joins his father's firm for a time, but eventually drops it and lives on the money he has inherited from his grandmother, who leaves the family fortune to him because she knows that he will keep it intact.

Dan is the family entrepreneur, from his inventive youth, to his involvement with the transformation of the Ornaby Farm into a residential subdivision, to his later manufacturing enterprises. While Harlan spends his adulthood doing nothing, by his own admission, except organizing a local symphony, Dan makes and loses vast sums of money. Dan marries a girl from New York

who despises both him and the Midwest, while Harlan vainly pursues Martha Shelby, who had hoped to marry Dan.

Dan, then, is the active brother, constantly boosting growth, progress, and industrial prosperity. Harlan, like Bibbs and George, remains detached from the city's growth, a critical spectator of the increasing noise and smoke. He receives little guidance from his father, and is instead dominated by his grandmother's conservative views on finances—the importance of husbanding funds and making safe investments. He is throughout his life interested in books, travel, and music, marshalling spirit only when lashing out at Dan for "ruining the one decent thing the city possessed—a splendid dignified old street" (p. 410) or when criticizing the "flimsy and dreadful bungalows and the signboards screeching at the trees" (p. 395) of the Ornaby Addition.

As the brothers approach middle age, a subtle but definite change comes over Harlan: he gradually falls under Dan's influence. Having listened for years of Dan's grandiose schemes and promises, he finally begins to hear to some extent what Dan is trying to say. The reader does not see in great detail the change in Harlan. Indeed, it is a flaw of the novel, and the root of the problems in interpretation of it, that Tarkington does not explore the process of change in full with the reader. But we do see the result. Dan assumes the role of leader and father-figure in Harlan's life, so that when Dan enters what proves to be his final downturn in fortunes, Harlan uses the capital he has hoarded for so many years to rescue Dan from financial collapse. He recognizes, in middle age, that "I've been just nothing; but even if he [Dan] falls, he's at least been a branch of the growing tree, though we don't know where it's growing to, or why" (p. 478). He recognizes that Dan's success has personal meaning for him, that he can't allow Dan to "fall off" the edge of his precarious financial position, not just because "Dan's my brother" (p. 485), but also because Dan really has achieved something, more than Harlan has ever dreamed of accomplishing for himself. This achievement is part of the Oliphant name; and Harlan's own respect for his brother, plus his ties to his family heritage, enable him to lend the money and prevent "the name of Oliphant [being] dragged through all the miserable notoriety of bankruptcy" (p. 485).

The end of Dan's life and the recognition of Harlan's development are precipitated by Tarkington's third "traffic accident." Dan has given his son, Henry, a car, which encourages even further the wild tendencies Henry has exhibited. Dan is forced to go out in a severe storm to find Henry, and as a result catches the chill that leads to the pneumonia that kills him. Once again, Tarkington uses an automobile to bring about a major realization on the part of one of the main characters; it is Harlan's realization of Dan's importance to him, and Dan's death, that enable him to change from the passive dilletant to the somewhat more active bank director that we find at the end of the novel.

Martha respects the change in Harlan, and so marries him and persuades him to move to Ornaby. Harlan is stll skeptical of growth and progress. "It's all ugly. It's all hideous" (p. 490) he exclaims of the city at the end of the novel. But he also comprehends Dan's perception of the beauty of industrial smoke. Harlan, at the conclusion of the novel, is an active part of the growth of the city—not an entrepreneur as Dan was, but still a participant rather than a sideline critic. He will not lose the cultural and family ties he has nurtured for most of his adult life, but neither will he return to the dillentantism of his previous existence. He has entered a new era, like Bibbs and George, reluctantly but inevitably, with mental reservations which do not seriously impede action.

In forcing the three heroes of *Growth* to reject their preferences for female-dominated cultural ideals and accept a male-oriented business life, Tarkington is, of course, following a normal pattern of our society. The business-oriented male and the home-and-culture-oriented female are patterns which go beyond our own time and society. In the archetypal concepts of psychologists like Jung and Neuman, women are traditionally endowed with characteristics centering on the preservation of the home and family. They are spiritual, loving, and nurturing. Men traditionally have opposite characteristics which are still necessary to the development of society—they are demanding, rejecting toward threats to the preservation of growth of society, powerful, oriented towards reality, and authoritarian. (For a full discussion of this concept, see Sven Armens, *Archetypes of the Family in Literature.*) Male children are traditionally reared in the

loving, nurturing female atmosphere, and expected to participate in the values of that atmosphere, until puberty, when they must choose to be men, like their fathers. Whether in primitive puberty rites or in our own tradition of "getting a job" and "settling down," male adolescents are expected to take on the roles of their fathers.

But not all male adolescents succeed in making this transfer of identity. In *Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype*, Jung recognizes the existence of a "mother-complex" in adult males which may have many positive effects. Such men may have a great capacity for friendship, as Harlan does; they may have good taste and an aesthetic sense, as both Harlan and Bibbs do. They may have a feeling for history, and cherish the values of the past, as do all three heroes, especially George. But there are significant negative effects of such a complex too; in the novels, these effects are represented in the heroes' inabilities to form families of their own.

The three heroes of *Growth* are deprived of an early opportunity to recognize the necessity of the choice between the masculine and feminine worlds. All three have fathers who are either very weak or who ignore them; thus they do not recognize their fathers' life patterns as ones they will eventually have to emulate. Instead, they spend their adolescence and young manhood in a world dominated by "feminine" interests—preservation of the family name, a rather dilatory pursuit of literature or music, the nurturing of close personal ties (Bibbs with Mary, George with Lucy, Harlan with Martha) in which they bear no permanent responsibility toward the other person.

All three of the heroes eventually realize that they must alter their life patterns and actions, because they exhaust the value of the feminine interests to their lives. Bibbs realizes that, if he truly values Mary and her interests, he must preserve them financially in the traditional masculine way. George realizes that his family obligation toward Fanny demands that he give up his false sense of pride in his family and go to work in a nongentlemanly profession. Harlan also confronts a conflict between his desire to preserve the family fortune in a conservative way and his desire to preserve the honor and integrity of the family by helping his brother. All three recognize that they can preserve the family only by linking themselves to the masculine world of

business instead of by passive acceptance of a life-style dominated by dilletantism and inaction. The choice is made much harder for these heroes than it is for the average male because the realization for the necessity of the choice comes so much later in their lives, after they have lived as mature individuals dominated by "feminine" actions. And in fact, it is the lateness of the realization of necessity on which Tarkington hangs all three of his plots. By delaying a culturally familiar choice to a time at which the heroes are fully mature and intellectually aware of the nature of the choice and the personal sacrifices that are involved in it, Tarkington links his heroes to the growth of the nation, which came to maturity under an agricultural way of life, and which was, at the turn of the century, forced to re-evaluate its goals and future. Americans were not fully prepared for a new, industrial life-style which brought with it evils like pollution as well as benefits of rising standards of living.

Tarkington, as many critics have pointed out, does see the acceptance of industrial growth as vital to the future of the nation. Yet critics have generally failed to realize that his having his heroes convert to industrial life-styles while preserving some remnant of the old systems either through memory or through marriage is not a simple-minded solution. In linking the choices the heroes make to traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity, Tarkington is emphasizing the universality and significance of the choice, and demonstrating that the acceptance of industrial growth is in fact a part of the very nature of things, a part of our tradition which goes beyond a tension between agriculturalism and industrialism, and reaches to the very roots of our archetypal beliefs about sex roles. While Tarkington can be criticized for not allowing his heroes to change gradually, and for failing to prepare his readers adequately for the change, he cannot justly be criticized for discovering a simplistic solution to problems faced in the industrialization of the country. In fact, he has explored those problems in terms of extremely strong archetypal beliefs about the nature of society and sex roles, beliefs which, in spite of contemporary questions and dissent, have not significantly changed in Western societies.

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TWO MIDWESTERN STORIES BY DON MARQUIS

JOHN E. HALLWAS

Don Marquis (1878-1937) was one of the most famous American humorists of the early twentieth century, but his works are now seldom read and rarely discussed.[1] Between 1912 and the year of his death he wrote thirty books—collections of stories, poems, and essays, along with a few plays and novels—most of which are now out of print. If he is remembered at all, it is for his columns in the New York *Sun* and *Herald Tribune,* in which Archy and Mehitabel (a cockroach and a cat) figured prominently, or for his one successful play, *The Old Soak* (1922). This year marks the centennial of his birth, but it is not likely to witness a revival of interest in his work. Too much of what he wrote is topical and shallow, the result of a brief inspiration rather than extensive reflection and serious craftsmanship.

However, among his works are two short stories which—along with the best Archy and Mehitabel pieces and perhaps a few poems—have some claim to a continuing readership: "How Hank Signed the Pledge" and "Country Doctor." Although Marquis disliked much about Walnut, Illinois, and its environs—where he was born and raised—and he seldom wrote works that relate to his experience there, these two stories are based on that area.[2] "How Hank Signed the Pledge" is a humorous tale that was published in *The Revolt of the Oyster* (1922), while "Country Doctor" is a serious story that appeared in *The American Magazine* in 1935. Both were later included in *The Best of Don Marquis* (1939). Taken together, they indicate that Marquis has achieved a small but respectable reputation as a Midwestern author.

I

In "How Hank Signed the Pledge" the narrator recalls an episode from his youth, in which Hank Walters (his foster father) fell into a cistern and was forced to sign a temperance pledge before being let out. The story is a character study of an ignorant, temperamental, profane, small-town ne'er-do-well and a satire on village society in the Midwest at the end of the nineteenth century.

The characterization of Hank Walters was, to some extent, inspired by a man who lived in Marquis's home town when he was a boy. According to the latter's autobiography, a certain "Hank W." brutally murdered his wife and was sentenced to life in prison, but he later claimed that he underwent a religious conversion, and so some of the "good Christian people" of Walnut managed to get his sentence commuted. He returned to the community, where Marquis frequently saw him in church, the object of much attention:

> In more mature years M[arquis] has begun to suspect that old Hank was a kind of subtle, savage humorist. He had repented, officially, and he enjoyed making the church people live up to the letter of their creed; he saw to it that the Repentant Sinner got all the glory that was coming to him. Hank liked the whole show. His old murderer's heart leaped in hellish glee when he saw how his hypocrisy succeeded. His children . . . wouldn't have anything to do with him; but the professed Christians were helpless. They *had* to forgive him or acknowledge that they weren't really Christians. Besides the harm he did with the murder, he went on doing harm as long as he lived, as a focal point for all the maudlin sentimentality of which these half-baked little churches are capable.[3]

However, the fictional Hank's problem is drink, not bloodshed, and far from being a hypocritical Christian, his refusal to submit to the standards of "good Christian people" forms the very center of "How Hank Signed the Pledge." In other words, Marquis used Hank W.'s name and his notoriety as a sinner in creating the short story character, but he did not attempt to portray the man more closely. It is also evident from the above autobio-

graphical passage that the author's negative view of small-town church members—which is apparent in the story—is at least partially related to the circumstances of Hank W. in Walnut.

In the writing of "How Hank Signed the Pledge," Marquis was influenced by Twain's use of an uneducated narrator in *Huckleberry Finn.* Indeed, an earlier version of the tale is part of Marquis's first book, *Danny's Own Story* (1912), which presents, like Twain's novel, the serio-comic adventures of a boy who runs away from home. In fact, Huck's drunken father also stands behind the figure of Hank Walters, although the latter is far more comic than Pap Finn.[4] Toward the outset, the narrator describes him in this way:

> About the meanest man I ever knew was Hank Walters, a blacksmith in a little town in Illinois, the meanest and the whiskey-drinkingest. And I had a chance to know him well, for he and his wife Elmira brought me up. Somebody left me on their doorstep in a basket when I was a baby, and they took me in and raised me. . . .
>
> Not having any kids of his own to lick, Hank lambasted me when he was drunk and whaled me when he was sober. It was a change from licking his wife, I suppose. A man like Hank has just naturally got to have something he can cuss around and boss, so as to keep himself from finding out he don't amount to anything . . . although he must have known he didn't, too, way down deep in his inmost gizzards.[5]

The narrator recalls that he was six years old when Hank came home drunk one day, "got to chasing Elmira's cat, because he said it was making faces at him" (p. 277), and fell into the cistern. Oddy enough, this occurred inside the house, for the cistern was beneath a trap door in the kitchen floor. Hank was in no danger of drowning, for the receptacle contained only a few feet of water. However, since the narrator had been warned by Elmira that if he ever fell into the cistern he would be a corpse, all that he manages to blurt out when she returns is, " 'Hank is a corpse!' " (p. 278). This circumstance, together with the fact that the frightened boy closed the trap door, allows Elmira and the neighbors to jump to the conclusion that Hank must have killed himself at work, in the blacksmith shop.

While someone is sent to investigate, Elmira and her friends sit down to lament Hank's death, and so the latter decides to listen in from beneath the floor. Each of the women tries to think up something nice to say about him, but they have a hard time doing so:

> Mis' Rogers, she says: "Before he took to drinking like a fish, Hank Walters was as likely a lookin' young feller as ever I see."
>
> Mis' White, she says: "Well, Hank he never was a stingy man, anyhow. Often and often White has told me about seeing Hank treating the crowd down in Nolan's saloon just as come-easy, go-easy as if it wasn't money he'd ought to have paid his honest debts with." (p. 286)

And Hank doesn't appreciate the effort anyway, for as the narrator says, "They sat there that way, telling of what good points they could think of for ten minutes, and Hank hearing it and getting madder and madder all the time" (p. 286).

Hank finally reveals that he is in the cistern and that he has not at all been reformed by the experience. He yells to Elmira, " 'When I get out'n here . . . I'll give you what you won't forget in a hurry! I heard you a-forgivin' me and a-weepin' over me! And I won't be forgive nor weeped over by no one!' " (p. 288). She then decides to take advantage of the situation in order to force Hank to sign a temperance pledge and join the church. Thus, Elmira and her friends are soon praying for his salvation—while Hank's cronies from Nolan's bar are outside "laughing and talking and chawing and spitting tobacco, and betting how long Hank could hold out" (p. 291).

The town's commitment to Hank's reformation increases as more and more people show up, and a regular revival is started:

> They sung revival hymns over Hank. And Hank, he would just cuss and cuss. Every time he busted out into another cussing spell they would start another hymn. . . . Two or three old backsliders in the crowd came right up and repented all over again. The whole kit-and-biling of them got the power, good and hard, and sung and shouted till the joints of the house cracked and it shook and swayed on its foundations. But Hank, he only cussed. He was obsti-

> nate, Hank was, and his pride and dander had risen up. (p. 292)

Finally, cold, hungry, tired, and "cussed out," Hank agrees to sign the pledge.

As he does so (still in the cistern), the local preacher suddenly baptizes him from above. Hank is too ignorant to realize that the baptism is invalid, and he is exasperated by the thought that the central principle of his character—his resistance to the church—has been taken from him:

> "You knowd I always made by brags that I'd never jined a church and never would. You knowed I was proud of that. You knowed it was my glory to tell it, and that I set a heap of store by it, in every way. And now you've gone and took that away from me! You've gone and jined me to the church!" (p. 294)

But the story closes with a superb comic irony, for the baptism has an adverse effect on Hank's character. As the narrator says,

> Hank always thought he had been baptized binding and regular. And he sorrowed and grieved over it, and got grouchier and meaner and drunkener. No pledge nor no Prohibition could hold Hank. He was a worse man in every way after that night in the cistern, and took to licking me harder and harder. (p. 294)

Aside from being a delightful tale about the unregenerate drinker who obstinately stands against the efforts of an entire town to reform him, "How Hank Signed the Pledge" satirizes those people who put stock in temperance pledges and other outward indications of decency, such as church membership. Marquis recognized that such matters often became important in a Midwestern small town simply because everyone in the community knew who was or was not a drinker or a church member. Set against the folly of trying to reform people through this kind of community pressure is the narrator's viewpoint, expressed at the beginning of the story: "If meanness is in a man, it usually stays in him, in spite of all the pledges he signs and promises he makes" (p. 275).

II

"Country Doctor" is also a character study, but instead of presenting the meanest man in a small community, it portrays the most admirable one. The central figure, Dr. Stewart, is a physician who is driven by his sense of concern for the people in his area, and who faces the challenge of the natural world during a storm to emerge as an individual of heroic proportions.

The character was unquestionably inspired by Marquis's father, a physician in Walnut, as Edward Anthony has pointed out.[6] (In fact, "Stewart" was Dr. Marquis's middle name.) Moreover, the setting of the story is a vast swamp along the Green River, where Dr. Marquis carried on part of his practice. The author describes the area (which was later drained) and the people who lived there in his autobiography:

> West of the town where M. lived, and with its outposts of slough and lake not more than a mile or two from the village, was a large swamp. It was sixty or seventy miles long in wet weather, and anywhere from fifteen to eighteen miles broad. Through the middle of it wound a big creek, or little river, called Green River, which drained westward into Rock River, which, in turn, emptied into the Mississippi, not far away. The swamp was wild at its heart when M. was a boy; wolves were still found there about 1890, and, once or twice, eagles. It was beginning to be crisscrossed with drainage ditches. . . .
>
> In this swamp were the remnants of a peculiar people, when M. was a lad. They were the descendants of some westward-trekking tribe of white trash who had stopped there, and stuck in the mud, from very early days. A backward, ignorant people, they seemed to bear little resemblance to the most respectable settlers in the farms and villages about the borders of the swamp. The swamp itself was dotted with hillocks, wooded islands, swales, and ridges and hummocks of higher land. . . .[7]

It is this region which poses the challenge to Dr. Stewart in "Country Doctor." At the outset of the story, the Green River swamp is described, along with the doctor's attitude towards it:

> It was still raining; the water had been flung turbulently down out of the sky all day long. And now it was early

> dark, an October dark, and the world outside the Doctor's windows was a chaos of cold, wind-driven rain and lowering gloom and mud, the sticky black mud of northwestern Illinois which clings and clogs and overwhelms. Dr. Stewart peered out at the village street . . . and breathed a little prayer that he would not have a call; especially a call out to the Swamp.
>
> He shuddered when he thought of what the Swamp would be like tonight. Green River, which drained the vast tract westward to Rock River and the Mississippi, would be up and roaring and tearing at its low clay banks; and the swamp roads . . . would be roiled and brawling creeks themselves in places, almost rivers. And here and there would be a melancholy twinkle of light, flickering through mists and scrub timber across the bogs and bayous, from some lonely farmhouse perched on a wooded island.[8]

The doctor is depicted as a man "now past eighty" who "did not know what it was to spare himself" (p. 446). And it is made clear that the elements were his biggest challenge: "He had been going hard all last winter and spring—battling through prairie blizzards, battling through flooded spring swamps, to some remote house of suffering . . ." (p. 446). However, the doctor himself is now sick, and he is concerned about leaving his people temporarily in the hands of two young and inexperienced physicians:

> there were the Rays, and the Tuckers, and the Prices and the Smiths—sickness in all these families, and what did the two young doctors, Hastings and Jones, know about them? Good doctors, no doubt; fine conscientious boys—but boys. They had never fought through more than half a century of chill midnights hand to hand with death. And these were *his* people that were sick, in the village, on the prairie farms round about, out in the Swamp—*his* people, and they needed him, and what right did he have to be nursing himself here at home? (p. 447)

A challenge from the stormy natural world, and from the heart of the swamp, comes to the doctor's door in the form of Jason Tucker, "A mud-splattered man on a mud-splattered horse," who was "one of his own Swamp Angels [i.e., patients who lived in the swamp]" (p. 448). The man comes to ask the doctor's help for his wife, Myra, who is both ill with the grip and about to give birth to their first child. Dr. Hastings has a broken leg, and Dr. Jones is already in the swamp attending to another case; hence, Dr. Stewart knows he must go, even though he thinks to himself, "'it's probably my death'" (p. 449). Indeed, he feels that he may be coming down with pneumonia, and moreover, he has had an occasional "pain in the cardiac region," traceable to a strain on his heart during the previous winter.

The doctor's heart problem is later the cause of his death in the swamp, but it is also metaphorical for his sense of concern for the patient he is going to see. He had not only brought Myra Tucker into the world but, four or five years earlier, had "practically built a new face for her" (p. 450) after she had been kicked by a horse.[9] In fact, he had constructed a better looking nose than she had had before, which "made a different person of her" (p. 451)—and made her more marriageable. For this reason, he felt especially "responsible for this baby that was trying to get itself born out there in the Swamp" (p. 451). In short, Myra Tucker was a living emblem of his medical skill and concern for his patients, and so her baby, more than the countless others he had delivered, would be a product of his own devotion to the people of that area.

After sending Jason Tucker for a prescription, Dr. Stewart heads for the swamp in his buggy. Wind and rain soon bring about the deterioration of his own condition (p. 453), and by the time he gets to the swollen Green River, he has a severe pain in his chest (p. 457). Because the bridge is out at one end, he unhitches his horse and decides to ride it through the water. The raging river is representative of all the adverse natural conditions that he had had to cope with, and so when he mutters to himself, "'by God, I'm going through,'" it is "a challenge to the night and the storm and the treacherous swamp and the wind and all the physical elements; the challenge of the old man's undaunted spirit" (p. 457).

He is soon knocked off his horse and finds himself "clinging to the roots of a willow tree" (p. 458) to keep from being swept away by the rushing water. After managing to crawl upon the riverbank, he lies in the mud with a pain in his chest until the

storm subsides. He then recovers his horse and, leaning on it for support, walks on to the Tucker house.

Ironically, Dr. Hastings is already there, in spite of his broken leg. They deliver the baby together, and then Dr. Stewart collapses, saying only, " 'Heart, Hastings' " (p. 462). At this point, the word "heart" not only refers to Dr. Stewart's physical problem but alludes to the quality which he now recognizes that Dr. Hastings shares with him; an unflagging concern for the people who need them. Indeed, the final words he says to the young man, " 'By God, boy . . . *you're* a doctor!' " (p. 463) display his sense of spiritual kinship with him.

As Dr. Stewart dies, his mind returns to his recent experience in the raging river:

> He let the tide carry him on down stream, with no further effort at resistance. He had time now, time to let himself be carried away. He was leaving his people in good hands. There was the wail of a baby from the bedroom.
>
> "Another dam little Swamp Angel squawking," said Old Doc Stewart, and smiled; and, smiling, went on with the rushing waters. (p. 463)

As this suggests, the old doctor finally succumbs to the natural forces that he has been battling for so many years, but not until he has met all the challenges and left his people in the hands of someone like himself, a man devoted to their welfare.

In this way, "Country Doctor" portrays a turn-of-the-century rural physician as a man of heroic stature. The story is, on the one hand, Marquis's attempt to pay tribute to his father, but at the same time, Dr. Stewart's struggle is universal. Driven by his sense of concern for those around him, he battles the natural forces with which all men must ultimately contend. The story may be a little sentimental, but all things considered, it is a well constructed narrative that ought to be better known.

There is, of course, a certain irony in the fact that, among all of Marquis's short stories, "How Hank Signed the Pledge" and "Country Doctor" are the most successful, for they portray the world that he was so anxious to leave behind as a young man. On the other hand, it is common for a Midwestern author to be at his best when interpreting the life of his home area—even if he found that place to be restrictive. In any case, for these two stories alone, Marquis deserves to be recognized as a Midwestern author who made a small but distinctive contribution to Midwestern literature.

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NOTES

1. Early discussions of Marquis include Thomas L. Masson, "Don Marquis," *Our American Humorists* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1922), pp. 247-60; Carl Van Doren, "Day in and Day out: Manhattan Wits," *Many Minds* (1924; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1966), pp. 191-94; and Stuart P. Sherman, "Don Marquis, Poet," *Critical Woodcuts* (New York: Scribner's, 1926), pp. 209-21. Shortly after his death two notable commentaries appeared: Benjamin De Casseres, *Don Marquis* [pamphlet] (New York: Beyold Press, 1938), and Christopher Morley, "Don Marquis," in *Letters of Askance* (Philadelphia; J. B. Lippincott, 1939), pp. 22-42. More recent studies include Christopher Morley, "Don Marquis: An Appreciation," *Tomorrow*, 9 (May, 1950), 52-53; E. B. White, "Don Marquis," *The Second Tree from the Corner* (New York: Harper, 1954), pp. 182-89; Hamlin Hill, "Archy and Uncle Remus: Don Marquis's Debt to Joel Chandler Harris," *The Georgia Review*, 15 (1961), 78-87, and Norris W. Yates, "The Many Masks of Don Marquis," *The American Humorist of the Twentieth Century* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 195-216. The only major study of Marquis is Edward Anthony's biography, *O Rare Don Marquis* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1962). No one has discussed Marquis as a Midwestern author.
2. There are also two other short stories by Marquis which relate to his Illinois background: "The Saddest Man," in *The Revolt of the Oyster* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1922), pp. 102-32, and "Getting a Start in Life" (formerly entitled "Willie Takes a Step," in *The American Magazine*, 1935), in *Sun Dial Time* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1936), pp. 159-82. He also drew upon memories of his youth in Walnut for his incomplete and posthumously published novel, *Sons of the Puritans* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1939). These three works are not very successful, although one of the characters in "The Saddest Man" tells a long and amusing tale about the undoing of a backwoods braggart.
3. "The Egobiography of Don Marquis," as quoted in Anthony, p. 29. Anthony prints large selections from the unfinished autobiography, which otherwise has never been published.
4. Marquis's debt to the character of Pap Finn is evident in that both Pap and Hank are inveterate drinkers who frequently whip their boys (the narrators). Moreover, Huck's comment that Pap would always "whale me when he was sober" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 2nd ed., ed. Sculley Bradley, et al. [New York: Norton, 1977], p. 15) is virtually identical to the remark made by Marquis's narrator about Hank: he "whaled me when he was sober" (p. 276).
5. "How Hank Signed the Pledge," in *The Best Of Don Marquis* (1939; rpt. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1946), p. 276. All references will be to this edition of the story, and page numbers will be given in parentheses.

6. Anthony, p. 168.
7. "The Egobiography of Don Marquis," as quoted in Anthony, p. 32.
8. "Country Doctor," in *The Best of Don Marquis*, pp., 444-45. All references will be to this edition of the story, and page numbers will be given in parentheses.
9. This reference is based on an actual surgical feat performed by the author's father. See Anthony, pp. 58-59.

FITZGERALD'S MIDWEST: "SOMETHING GORGEOUS SOMEWHERE"—SOMEWHERE *ELSE*

BARRY GROSS

Reviewing *The Beautiful and Damned* in 1922 Edmund Wilson informed his readers that, to understand Scott Fitzgerald's work they must realize,

> . . . he comes from the Middle West—from St. Paul, Minnesota. Fitzgerald is as much of the Middle West of the large cities and country clubs as Sinclair Lewis is of the Middle West of the prairies and little towns. What we find in him is much what we find in the more prosperous strata of these cities: sensitivity and eagerness for life without a sound base of culture and taste; a structure of millionaire residences, brilliant expensive hotels and exhilerating social activities built not in the eighteenth century but on the flat Western land. And it seems to me rather a pity that he has not written more of the West: it is perhaps the only millieu that he thoroughly understands. When Fitzgerald approaches the East, he brings to it the standards of the wealthy West—the preoccupation with display, the appetite for visible magnificence and audible jamboree, the vigorous social atmosphere of amiable flappers and youths comparatively untainted as yet by the snobbery of the East.

Wilson concluded with the hope that Fitzgerald would "some day do for Summit Avenue what Lewis has done for Main Street."

For once, Wilson was wrong. What Fitzgerald knew of the West he knew well but what he knew was limited by the relatively few years he spent there.

He was born in St. Paul in 1896 but the family moved to Buffalo in 1898 when he was two. They moved again in 1901, to Syracuse, then back to Buffalo in 1903. They returned to

St. Paul in 1908 when Fitzgerald was twelve. From 1908 to 1911 he attended St. Paul Academy but in 1911 he was sent East to Newman School and in 1913 he entered Princeton. In 1917 he enlisted in the army, in 1918 he met Zelda Sayre while he was stationed at Camp Sheridan in Alabama.

He was discharged in February, 1919 and went immediately to New York to make his fortune—or at least a future—in advertising. At night, in his one-room flat in the Bronx, he tried to imitate the popular short stories the *Saturday Evening Post* paid good money for. He amassed eighty-seven rejection slips, selling only one story in that four-month period, a story he had written at Princeton and for which he received twenty dollars. He was no more successful at advertising. Zelda, growing restless in Alabama, assessed the situation, and, "on the basis of common sense," broke the engagement. Fitzgerald went on a three-day drunk, packed up, and left New York in July. He was twenty-three, had no skills, no proven abilities, no future.

He went home—to St. Paul—dusted off *The Romantic Egotist* which had lain in a dusty drawer since Scribner's had rejected it the year before, and through a hot July and August rewrote it frantically. He was, he said, "in a desperate race against time": the novel was his last chance to win Zelda before she slipped finally and forever from his grasp. In September he sent *This Side of Paradise* to Scribner's; two weeks later it was accepted. In October he sold his first story to the *Saturday Evening Post,* one which had been rejected a few short months before, and in November he and Zelda were re-engaged.

Aside from those nine months from July 1919, when he went home in despair, to April 1920, when he returned to New York in triumph to see *This Side of Paradise* in the shop windows on Fifth Avenue and to marry Zelda in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Fitzgerald spent only one other adult year in the Midwest. While he was in the army he had written his cousin that he was "lonesome . . . for the old atmosphere—a feverish crowd at Princeton sitting up until three discussing pragmatism or the immortality of the soul—for the glitter of New York with a tea dance at the Plaza or lunch at Sherries," and, almost as an after-thought, "for the quiet, respectable boredom of St. Paul." It was to this quietly respectable St. Paul that Scott brought Zelda in August

1921. As he put it in "My Lost City," "It was typical of our precarious position in New York that when our child was to be born we played safe and went home to St. Paul." Their daughter was born in October. By January of '22 Fitzgerald was restless. He wrote Edmund Wilson he was "bored as hell" and vowed to come "East for ten days early in March." In July he again wrote Wilson, "Life is damn dull." They went East, permanently, in the fall of '22.

In all, then, Fitzgerald spent about seven of his first twenty-six years in the Midwest—two of them years of infancy and only two of them adult years. So it is not surprising that when Fitzgerald did write about the Midwest he wrote about adolescents, adolescents of the particular class of country clubs and holiday dances, popularity, petting, and parties, and adolescents excluded from that class.

In either case it is a narrow world, as circumscribed as the carefully detailed opening of "Bernice Bobs Her Hair." "From the first tee of the golf course" we "see the country-club windows as a yellow expanse over a very black and wavy ocean"—"the heads of many curious caddies, a few of the more ingenious chauffeurs, the golf professional's deaf sister. We then enter the club and sit on the balcony with

> . . . middle-aged ladies with sharp eyes and icy hearts behind lorgnettes and large bosoms. The main function of the balcony was critical . . . for it is well-known among ladies over thirty-five that when the younger set dance in the summer-time it is with the very worst intentions in the world, and if they were not bombarded with stony eyes, stray couples will dance weird barbaric interludes in the corners, and the more popular, more dangerous girls will sometimes be kissed in the parked limousines of unsuspecting dowagers.

Finally we go on to the dance floor itself to meet

> . . . sixteen-year-old Otis Ormonde, who has two more years at Hill School . . . G. Reese Stoddard, over whose bureau at home hangs a Harvard law diploma . . . Warren MacIntyre, who casually attended Yale . . . little Madeleine Hogue, whose hair still feels strange and uncomfortable on

> top of her head . . . Bessie MacRae, who has been the life of the party a little too long—more than ten years . . . Genevieve Ormonde, who regularly made the rounds of dances, house-parties, and football games at Princeton, Yale, Williams, and Cornell . . . black-eyed Roberta Dillon, who was quite as famous to her own generation as Iram Johnson or Ty Cobb . . . Marjorie Harvey who was already justly celebrated for having turned five cartwheels in succession during the last pump-and-slipper dance at New Haven.

This is all sharply observed, evocative and precise, a milieu Fitzgerald thoroughly understands. But it is also limited and small, as constricted as the baseball world to which Fitzgerald attributed Ring Lardner's deficiencies. In a posthumous tribute to his friend, Fitzgerald wondered if Lardner's troubles as an artist were not attributable to those adult years Lardner spent in the world of "a boy's game, with no more possibilities in it than a boy could master, a game bounded by walls which kept out novelty or danger, change or adventure. . . . However deeply Ring might cut into it his cake had exactly the diameter of Frank Chance's diamond."

The Midwest Fitzgerald knew was, similarly, a boy's world and a boy's game, without novelty or danger, change or adventure, a diamond of occasionally glittering surfaces but only a carat or two in weight. Perhaps that is why Fitzgerald had Amory Blaine spend only two years there in the largely autobiographical *This Side of Paradise,* a merely pleasant hiatus when Amory struggles to conceal "from 'the other guys at school' how particularly superior he felt himself to be" and, discovering that athletics is "the touchstone of power and popularity" in the Midwest, makes "furious persistent efforts to excel in the winter sports." He enjoys the two years, enjoys, as he puts it, adapting himself "to the bourgeoisie" and becoming "conventional," but, he tells his mother, he must "go away to school"—East. Thereafter, and only into his first college year, Minneapolis is the place to return to at Christmas, for a holiday, for "hundreds of summer hops, parlor-snaking, getting bored."

In the thirties, his and the century's, Fitzgerald, in a series of nostalgic stories about a boy named Basil Duke Lee, returned to this pre-war world in which the innocence of adolescents mirrors the innocence of a nation. We follow Basil from twelve to fifteen, the years Fitzgerald spent in St. Paul, through prepubescent hi-jinx and adolescent discoveries. The stories are charming but they also have a peculiar and unexpected tension attributable to Basil's early and constant awareness that however pleasant and even idyllic this world is, it is only a preparation for the bigger—the "real"—world which lies to the East, no more than an attractive way station between childhood and adulthood. In the very first story Basil, only twelve, already plans to "go to Yale and be a great athlete." In the second story he spends his time imitating a boy Basil thinks is the "living symbol of the splendid glamorous world of Yale." When he finally does go East to prep school and has his first glimpse of "the long-awaited heaven of New York," he is not disappointed:

> Broadway was a blazing forest fire as Basil walked slowly along toward the point of brightest light. He looked up at the great intersecting planes of radiance with a vague sense of approval and possession. He would see it a lot now, lay his restless heart upon the greater restlessness of a nation. . . . The conquest of the successive worlds of school, college, and New York—that was his true dream that he had carried from boyhood into adolescence.

New York "arouse[s] . . . longing[s]" in him for "new experience[s]" and he concludes that "a foothold on this island [is] more precious than the whole rambling sweep of the James J. Hill house at home." (Hill was St. Paul's most famous magnate; his imposing mansion dominated young Fitzgerald's adolescent imagination and his reputation as an Empire Builder is admired by the lower-class fathers of Rudolph Miller in "Absolution" and Jimmy Gatz in *The Great Gatsby.*)

That it was fortunate Fitzgerald did not follow Edmund Wilson's advice is made indubitably clear in the only story he wrote about an adult Midwesterner, the delightful but wholly trivial "Camel's Back." Though the hero is twenty-eight with a Harvard law degree, his world is Basil's and Amory Blaine's, a world of costume balls and holiday dances. The setting is Toledo but, Fitzgerald tells us, we have met Perry Parkhurst

> . . . before—in Cleveland, Portland, St. Paul, Indianapolis, Kansas City, and so forth. Baker Brothers, New York, pause in their semi-annual trip through the West to clothe him; Montmorency and Co. dispatch a young man post-haste every three months to see that he has the correct number of little punctures in his shoes. He has a domestic roadster now, will have a French roadster if he lives long enough, and doubtless a Chinese tank if it comes into fashion. He looks like the advertisement of the young man rubbing his sunset-colored chest with linament and goes East every other year to his class reunion.

The time is Christmas, the occasion a costume ball at the Howard Tates who

> . . . are, as every one who lives in Toledo knows, the most formidable people in town. Mrs. Howard Tate was a Chicago Todd before she became a Toledo Tate, and the family generally affect that conscious simplicity which has begun to be the earmark of American aristocracy. The Tates have reached the stage where they talk about pigs and farms and look at you icy-eyed if you are not amused. They have begun to prefer retainers rather than friends as dinner guests, spend a lot of money in a quiet way, and, having lost all sense of competition, are in the process of growing quite dull.

This is the Midwest as seen through the myopia of H. L. Mencken, Fitzgerald's intellectual model in the early twenties, a point of view distant and cold. Fitzgerald saw the adult Middle West from the jaundiced vantage point of his adopted East, superficially and contemptuously, with the facile eye of the outsider who does not even bother to conceal how particularly superior he feels himself to be.

Fitzgerald was able to legitimize and humanize his criticism of the Midwest in "The Ice Palace" by choosing as his point of view a likeable Southern girl who, like Lewis' Carol Kennicott, is predisposed to like what she sees. But what Sally Carroll Happer sees from the train are "solitary farmhouses . . . ugly and bleak and lone in the white waste" and she feels "compassion for the souls shut in there waiting for spring." She is equally distressed by the library in her fiance's home,

> . . . a large room with a Madonna over the fireplace and rows upon rows of books in covers of light gold and dark gold and shining red. All the chairs had little lace squares where one's head should rest. The couch was just comfortable, the books looked as if they had been read—some—and Sally Carrol had an instantaneous vision of the battered old library at home, with her father's huge medical books, and the old oil paintings of her three great-uncles, and the old couch that had been mended up for forty-nine years and was still luxurious to dream in. This room struck her as being neither attractive nor particularly otherwise. It was simply a room with a lot of fairly expensive things in it that all looked about fifteen years old.

The comparison is unfair, her fiance warns her, because "this is a three-generation town. Everybody has a father, and about half of us have a grandfather. Back of that we don't go." But Sally Carrol's objections are not social and she is not really a snob. It is not so much that the library isn't old; it is that it is not lived in. It is too neat, too orderly, too structured, too narrowly and self-consciously defined as, and therefore limited to being, a room. Like the frozen landscape and the lone farmhouses, it is lifeless. She means something similar when she calls her fiance "canine," canine meaning "a certain conscious masculinity as opposed to subtlety," as opposed to feline meaning "some quality of appreciation." All the men there seem canine to Sally Carrol, except one whose "eyes had something in them that these other eyes lacked"; he turns out to be "a Philadelphian imported from Harvard to teach French." What they lack is a responsiveness, an openness, a flexibility and suppleness. So do the women: Sally Carrol's future mother-in-law seems to her "to typify the town in being instantly hostile to strangers," her future sister-in-law seems "the essence of spiritless conventionality, . . . utterly devoid of personality." The town strikes her as no different than the countryside, similarly im-, *de*-personal: "sometimes at night it seemed to her as though no one lived here." The Philadelphian from Harvard thinks the people are "freezing up" and have given in to a "brooding rigidity" because of the "long winters"; he thinks they are "narrow and cheerless, without infinite possibilities for great sorrow or joy."

The Midwest in "The Ice Palace" is rendered in images of physical confinement—inside solitary farmhouses and comfortable homes, inside great coats and mufflers and mittens, finally inside the maze of the ice palace itself where Sally Carrol wanders in panicked delirium. Worse, however, are the images of mental and emotional confinement—unappreciation, xenophobia, conventionality and impersonality, cheerlessness and spiritlessness, narrowness and rigidity. It is this muffled world that Basil and Amory must leave for the East, the world Fitzgerald could not continue to write about because, as far as he knew it, it, like Ring Lardner's baseball diamond, walled out possibility.

It is the pursuit of possibility that Fitzgerald's great Midwestern works—*The Great Gatsby,* and the two stories he wrote in preparation for it, "Absolution" and "Winter Dreams"—deal with. "Absolution," which Fitzgerald wrote as a "prologue" to *The Great Gatsby* but decided that it would give too much away about Gatsby too soon, is his only Midwest story not set in the geographical and social locale of Summit Avenue with its country clubs and holiday dances. Rather, it is set where Jimmy Gatz grows up, a "lost Swede town" in North Dakota surrounded by wheat and prairies. Rudolph Miller, like Jimmy Gatz, thinks he is "too good to be the son of [his] parents"; in his imagination he becomes someone else, someone who lives "in great sweeping triumphs." His conviction that there is "something ineffably gorgeous somewhere"—somewhere *else,* not in this town, not on this prairie—is confirmed by the priest who absolves him of his sin of pride when he tells him of the wonders of an amusement park: "They have lights now as big as stars. . . . I heard of one light they had in Paris or somewhere that was big as a star. A lot of people had it—a lot of gay people. They have all sorts of things now that you never dreamed of." But Rudolph *has* dreamed of them and knows he will have to go in search of them, of the infinite possibilities not present in his narrow and prescribed milieu.

Fitzgerald calls such dreams "winter dreams" in the story of the same name, those dreams dreamed throughout long winters in solitary farmhouses, dreams of spring when life will return, dreams of "the richness of life." Such dreams prompt Dexter Green "to pass up a business course at the State university . . . for the precarious advantage of attending an older and more famous university in the East." It is because "his mother's name had been Krumplich," because "she was a Bohemian of the peasant class and had talked broken English to the end of her days," that "he recognize[s] the value to him" of the "particular reserve peculiar to his university." Like Gatsby, Dexter personifies "the richness of life" in a beautiful young girl "who had already [been] loved" by men who, unlike Dexter, entered "college . . . from the great prep schools with graceful clothes and the deep tan of healthy summers." He feels he is "better than these men, . . . newer and stronger, yet [he] acknowledg[es] to himself that he wishe[s] his children to be like them."

Fitzgerald combined Rudolph Miller and Dexter Green in Jimmy Gatz. Like Rudolph, Jimmy Gatz "never really accepted his parents [shiftless and unsuccessful farm people] as his parents at all." Like Rudolph, he has another "name ready for a long time"—Jay Gatsby—and invents "just the sort of [Platonic conception of himself] that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent." Like Rudolph, he envisions "something gorgeous somewhere." His "grotesque and fantastic conceits" conjure up "a universe of ineffable gaudiness," of a "vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty" he first sees objectified in Dan Cody's yacht, representing "all the beauty and glamour in the world," then in Daisy's house with its "air of breathless intensity" and "ripe mystery," and then finally, as Dexter Green did, in the girl herself, all "the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves." His pursuit takes him inevitably and progressively Eastward. When Nick first sees him, Gatsby stands at the tip of West Egg, "stretch[ing] out his arms toward the dark water"; Nick "glance[s] seaward"—Eastward, toward East Egg and the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. When Gatsby finally arrives at East Egg—on the day he forces the moment to its crisis—he pauses in his pursuit to survey "the green Sound, stagnant in the heat," and then "follow[s] . . . one small sail" as it "crawl[s] slowly toward the fresher sea," East toward "the scalloped ocean and the abounding blessed isles." Gatsby is that sail, forever outward, Eastward-bound, Daisy the blessed isle, perpetually just over the horizon.

After Gatsby's death, Nick thinks Gatsby's father "might want to take the body West," but Mr. Gatz knows better. "Jimmy always liked it better down East," he tells Nick, "he rose up to his position in the East." The West is where Jimmy dreamed his winter dreams but they could not possibly be fulfilled there. He knew that early, whenever it was he wrote his schedule and resolves on the flyleaf of *Hopalong Cassidy*. The West of Hopalong Cassidy may be the background on which those dreams are formed, but cannot be the place where they are to be pursued or realized for the West has been won—or lost—the frontier closed, as the pioneer debauchee Dan Cody clearly proves. Jimmy will rise in the East, guided by the pragmatic get-ahead philosophy and spirit of self-improvement of Ben Franklin and *Poor Richard's Almanac*, which his schedule and resolves so evocatively parody and mirror.

Nick Carraway comes from another Midwest, the Midwest of Basil Duke Lee and Perry Parkhurst and Sally Carrol's fiance, from a city where his "family have been prominent, well-to-do people . . . for three generations." He, too, is sent East to prep school and then to college, "graduat[ing] from New Haven in 1915, just a quarter of a century after [his] father." Then East again to the Great War, which Nick flippantly refers to as "that delayed Teutonic migration."

Though Nick would probably deny the attribution, he is one of the Lost Generation: the war has done something to him, has made him "restless"; the Midwest he left, which seemed to him "the warm center of the world," now seems "the ragged edge of the universe." Once again he "decide[s] to go East." His family talk "it over as if they were choosing [another] prep school for" him, though Nick is nearly thirty, and finally agree. In the spring of '22 Nick comes "East, permanently," he thinks.

But it is never to be permanent because, unlike Gatsby who has nothing to lose, Nick does not really want to leave the West behind. Although "the practical thing [is] to find rooms in the city," especially if he is to make a new life for himself, he settles instead on Long Island because it reminds him of the "country of wide lawns and friendly trees" he has just left. Although one reason he has come East is to avoid "being rumored into marriage . . . to a girl out West," he never "definitely" breaks off that

"vague understanding . . . signing them: 'Love, Nick'" because he does not want to forget "how, when that certain girl played tennis, a faint mustache of perspiration appeared on her upper lip."

Moreover, he maintains a Midwest angle of vision. Who but an unreconstructed—and perhaps unreconstructable—Midwesterner would compare the valley of ashes to a "fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens" and Wilson's garage—the "small block of yellow brick sitting on the edge of the waste land"—to "a sort of compact Main Street ministering to it"?

Nick's Midwestishness is not only a point of view; it is also a morality. The narrowness and rigidity we have seen in "The Ice Palace"—the carefully structured library Sally Carrol deplores—function in Nick as a positive rage for order. Superficially it impels him to wipe from Chester McKee's "cheek the remains of the spot of dried lather that had worried [Nick] all the afternoon" at Myrtle Wilson's apartment and to note down the names of Gatsby's guests according to point of origin—East Egg, West Egg, New York—although there seem to be no other differences among them. More importantly it impels him to do "the unpleasant thing" and say good-bye to Jordan Baker before he leaves because he wants "to leave things in order, and not just trust that obliging and indifferent sea to sweep [his] refuse away" and to erase the "obscene word . . . some boy had scrawled . . . on the steps of Gatsby's house."

His morality, what he calls his "provincial squeamishness," is also a source of judgment. He condemns Daisy's sophistication—"You make me feel uncivilized," he tells her, "Can't you talk about crops or something?"—Daisy's insincerity and selfishness. He condemns Tom's philandering—Nick's "instinct [is] to telephone immediately for the police" and to have Daisy "rush out of the house, child in arms"—Tom's nibbling at racist ideas, his brutality and immaturity. He condemns them all as "a rotten crowd" who "smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made."

He also condemns Gatsby, "disapprove[s] of him from beginning to end." Edmund Wilson was naive to think that Midwesterners were "untainted as yet by the snobbery of the East" for Gatsby's pink suits and wild parties, his incredible car and "huge, incoherent failure of a house" constitute that "preoccupation with display," that "appetite for visual magnificence," that absence "of culture and taste" that Wilson deplored and "represent everything for which [Nick has] an unaffected scorn." That is, everything for which he has been *taught* to have an unaffected scorn by his father who "snobbishly" told him that "all the people in this world haven't had the advantages [he's] had" and that "a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth." Nick comes East believing that the most advantaged are the most decent yet he is forced to conclude that only Gatsby, the least advantaged of the bunch, "turned out all right at the end" and that crude, vulgar, criminal Gatsby is "worth the whole damn bunch put together."

Why the turnabout? Because Nick has learned something. His relatives were right: Nick *has* come East to yet another prep school and Jay Gatsby is his unwitting tutor. Though he is nearly thirty and a veteran of the war, Nick has come East, like Basil Duke Lee and Dexter Green, Rudolph Miller and Jimmy Gatz, to learn, to find, to discover "the richness of life." Too "full of interior rules that act as brakes on [his] desires," he is perpetually "within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life." He has grown "solemn with the feel of those long winters," those same winters to which the French teacher in "The Ice Palace" attributes the Midwesterners' "brooding rigidity," their "narrow[ness] and cheerless[ness]," their inability to posit "infinite possibilities," to feel "great sorrow or joy." It is in hopes of being able to take his foot off the brakes, to let the enchantment overcome the repulsion, to explore infinite possibilities and experience great sorrow and joy that Nick really comes East, and it is Gatsby who points the way.

Like Gatsby's other guests Nick comes to the parties "with a simplicity of heart that [is] its own ticket of admission." Although Nick criticizes them for "conduct[ing] themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks," it is

precisely for that reason that they—and ultimately Nick—come, to the same amusement park the priest tells Rudolph of in "Absolution" with its "lights . . . as big as stars" and "a lot of gay people" and "all sorts of things . . . you never dreamed of." But, more than the parties, it is Gatsby himself who serves as Nick's objective correlative—his "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life," his "extraordinary gift for hope," his "romantic readiness," his "capacity for wonder." When Jordan tells Nick about Gatsby's reckless expense of self in pursuit of Daisy, a phrase begins "to beat in [Nick's] ear with a sort of heady excitement: 'There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy, and the tired.'" Nick knows he is none of these, and also knows that time is running out.

He begins to like "the racy, adventurous feel of [New York] at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye," *his* restless eye. He likes "the dark lanes of the Forties . . . lined five deep with throbbing taxicabs" in which "forms leaned together . . . and voices sang, and there was laughter from unheard jokes, and lighted cigarettes outlined unintelligible gestures inside." But liking is not enough. The priest in "Absolution" tells Rudolph to "go and *see* [my italics] an amusement park," to "stand a little way off from it in a dark place—under dark trees," but an amusement park is not to be *seen*—it is to be felt, enjoyed, experienced. Nick remains under dark trees, a watcher in the shadows, one of the "young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner—young clerks in the dusk wasting the most poignant moments of night and life." For Nick, New York City "*seen* [my italics] from the Queensboro Bridge is always the . . . first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world," as Cody's yacht and Daisy's house and Daisy herself are for Gatsby, but it is only "*over* [my italics] this bridge" that "anything can happen . . . anything at all."

That is infinite possibility, inexhaustible variety, and thus both promise and threat, great joy but also great sorrow, enchantment but also repulsion. For Nick it is too large a risk to cross over the bridge, to emerge from the dark places, which is why he "pick[s] out romantic women from the crowd" but only "*imagine[s]*

[my italics] that in a few minutes [he is] going to enter into their lives, why he follows "them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets" only in his "mind" and why *even* in his mind he does not force the moment to its crisis but watches as they turn and smile "back at [him] before . . . fad[ing] through a door into warm darkness." Like the priest in "Absolution" Nick is afraid to "get up close" where he would "feel the heat and the sweat and the life."

Given Nick's extraordinary reserve and strong distaste for intimate personal revelation we cannot know for certain why he is so timid, but he gives us enough hints for us to make a qualified guess. Although Nick denies that "the wheat and the prairies and the lost Swede towns" where priests go mad from unrequited longing, those "bored, sprawling swollen towns beyond the Ohio with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old," constitute *his* Middle West, he has not been spared. He follows those women only in his imagination and even in his imagination only so far, because there, he says, "*no one would ever know or disapprove* [my italics]." His background has rendered him more than "a little solemn"—it has traumatized him.

Nick concludes that his "has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us unadaptable to Eastern life," but if "Eastern life" means "infinite possibilities" and "inexhaustible variety" only Nick is "unadaptable," deficient. For Nick it is too late: "even when the East excited [him] most," even when he was "most keenly aware of its superiority" to the Midwest, it had for him "a quality of distortion," it was "a night scene by El Greco" in which

> . . . four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. . . . Gravely the men turn in at a house—the wrong house. But no one knows the woman's name, and no one cares.

That could never happen in Nick's Middle West where he has grown up "in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through the decades by a family's name." Nick's need

for certainty and security is greater than his need to experience "the richness of life" and inimical to it. "Infinite possibilities" are too threatening, "inexhaustible variety" too dangerous. As Fitzgerald did when Scottie was about to be born, Nick plays safe and goes home, wanting "the world in uniform and at a sort of moral attention," walled, predictable, sure.

That Midwest, that "warm center," exists on no map. Nick's Middle West, he admits, is "the thrilling returning trains of [his] *youth* [my italics], and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow." *His* Middle West is

> . . . coming back West from prep school and later from college at Christmas time. Those who went further than Chicago would gather in the old dim Union Station at six o'clock of a December evening, with a few Chicago friends, already caught up into their own holiday gayeties, to bid them a hasty good-by. [He remember[s] the fur coats of the girls returning from Miss-This or That's and the chatter of frozen breath and the hands waving overhead as [they] caught sight of old acquaintances, and the matchings of invitations: 'Are you going to the Ordways'? the Herseys'? the Schultzes'?'

He wants his youth back, the way it was before the war, before the Midwest became "the ragged edge of the universe," for now he is thirty—not quite "the end" journalists mean but certainly the end of one's twenties, those years when "infinite possibilities" might be pursued and realized—and what Nick sees ahead is "the portentous, menacing road of a new decade, . . . a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning briefcase of enthusiasm, thinning hair."

Though it is Nick who lectures Gatsby that "you can't repeat the past," in a novel in which *everyone* wants to repeat the past—not just Gatsby but Tom who will "drift on forever, seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game" and Daisy who still dresses in white in tribute to her "beautiful white girlhood in Louisville" before she'd "been everywhere and seen everything and done everything" and even Meyer Wolfsheim who "brood[s] . . . gloomily" about "the old Metropole" and the "friends gone now forever"—

Nick Carraway wants to repeat the past most fervently of all, specifically that "one strange hour" on the returning trains of his youth when he was "unutterably aware of [his] identity with this country." It is Nick who "beat[s] on . . . against the current" only to be "borne back ceaselessly into the past" because that is where he really wants to be.

For Scott Fitzgerald there were two Midwests—the secure and stable country of Basil Duke Lee and Nick Carraway and Amory Blaine, the narrow and constricted country of Rudolph Miller and Dexter Green and Jimmy Gatz. They were both Fitzgerald's because he was a "have" who could be sent East to prep school and college and also a "have-not" who was affected early by his father's financial failures and conditioned early to suffer the slings and arrows of the outrageous fortune that always made him the poorest boy at a rich boy's school. In either case, whichever Midwest, it was for him "the country of illusion, of youth," where the "winter dreams . . . flourished," dreams about girls, about money, about yachts, but always about "the richness of life," about "infinite possibilities," about "inexhaustible variety," and, by definition, to be pursued and realized somewhere else. As such, the Midwest was *another* country for Fitzgerald, the past, not a place but a time, and he knew, always, if his characters did not, that it—and the dreams it nurtured—was always "behind him, somewhere back there in that vast obscurity where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night."

Michigan State University

PENMAN FOR THE PEOPLE: JUSTICE VOELKER (ROBERT TRAVER)

John C. Hepler

I

Former Michigan Supreme Court Justice John Donaldson Voelker has always considered himself a backwoods lawyer and one of the boys from Michigan's remote Upper Peninsula. It is a harsh land in which rugged, tough men mine iron ore deep within the earth, fell and drag great trees from the vast pine and balsam forests, and haul in wet nets to their fishing boats in the Great Lakes.

A less likely area to spawn the combination of writer and legalist is hard to imagine. Yet in 1958, Voelker (whose pen name is Robert Traver) vaulted to fame and fortune with his best-selling novel, *Anatomy of a Murder*. Two years later, he resigned from the Supreme Court and fled that urban congestion called Lansing and the Lower Peninsula, and hustled home to the Upper Peninsula.

At 57 he was prepared to indulge himself. He wanted to write and fly fish in the miles of trout streams that ripple over the terrain of his beloved homeland. He confessed he was returning to the country in which he had been born and grew up and in which he hoped to await eternity.

His deep love for the U. P. is proved by the fact that the settings of his 10 books are in or originate from that area. There, over 100 years ago, his grandfather, driving a span of oxen and a wagon, trekked westward across the swampy, mosquito-infested land to Copper Harbor. Cannily, he built a brewery at Eagle River, close to Old Fort Wilkins, where regiments of thirsty soldiers were quartered.

Yet to conclude that he extolled only the virtues and vices of what was a frontier culture would be a great mistake. For two threads dominate the fabric of his work—the significance of the law and the joy of trout fishing. He expressed these themes in six books dealing with jurisprudence and three with his favorite out-of-doors sport.

Only one book, *Danny and the Boys* (1951), fails to fit the mould. In it he portrays a group of society dropouts who, in Hungry Hill, live happily on the fringes of civilization and a community called Chippewa. The Judge's book parallels, in many ways, John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* (1935).

The Justice's contribution goes beyond writing books. For 14 years he was the Prosecuting Attorney for Marquette County and in 1956 was appointed by Governor G. Mennen Williams to fill an unexpired term on the Supreme Court. In the spring of 1957 he had to run to fill that brief term and, a year later, again run to retain his seat for another eight years. In both instances, he campaigned like a seasoned politician and won. At the same time, he helped create the moving picture of his famous novel. Finally, between 1967 and 1969, he wrote a weekly column for the *Detroit News*.

By the time his first novel had climbed to the best seller list in 1958—remaining among the top 10 for 63 weeks—he had also composed in his three years on the bench 100 opinions in legal disputes involving actual people "fighting each other or the state," sometimes not only for money or power, but often for the "pure unholy joy of fighting."

No wonder he was glad to flee north to the land of frozen tundra. Today, at the age of 74, he's likely to be found at a local bar having a beer with old friends or, in season, wading a trout stream to a secret pool where he'll make one of his notorious roll casts in hopes of seducing the elusive native brook trout to strike an artificial fly.

II

The Judge's desire to write was no whim. At the age of 12, in 1915, his first deathless prose was a story titled "Lost Alone in a Swamp All Night with a Bear." Voelker laughs when he says that after such a title, all that remained to be added was "Woof!"

Through the years before the jackpot cash-flow virtually drowned him, he had been composing brief essays based on his personal experiences as a D. A. and citizen.

He became, literally, a Jamesian observer-participant watching and listening to the human activity of his native bailiwick. Even as a youngster he had whiled away hours by eavesdropping at his father's saloon which, near the beginning of the century, housed the longest bar in the U. P. From the Finns, Irish, Scandinavians, Italians, Cornishmen, French-Canadians, and the Scots, a mixed bag of miners, woodsmen, trappers, and teamsters, he drank in yarns and anecdotes.

Along the way, he acquired a taste for beer and "Old Cordwood," a mythical bourbon that affects the lives of many of his characters. This noble man-made dynamite is as indigenous to the U. P. as three of nature's most noble creatures: the white-tailed deer, the ruffed grouse, and the wild brook trout. At the same time, he was studying the various dialects of these workingmen. They were the people he wanted to know and understand and whom later he wanted to protect and to write about.

In those early years, the lad was living in a frontier land. If it lacked the celebrated status of the TV west—Dodge City, stage coaches, gun fights, posses, and lynchings—the U. P. was every bit as tough. He concluded that civilization in the wilderness was merely skin deep. On the slightest of provacations, naked emotions erupted into violence.

And as he matured, another fact impressed him. Society's "little guys"—the iron workers and the Indians, for example—seldom got a square deal in the courts, particularly if cases pitted laboring man or ethnic against the monied interests. The law almost invariably supported, protected, and ruled in favor of big business, big industry, big real estate, and banking interests. As D. A., lawyer, and court justice, he helped reverse an industrial tide that considered working men as mere chattel, to be discarded if injured, ignored despite legal contract, and shrugged off if death resulted from accident or illness. One of his 100 Supreme Court opinions included the prevailing one in the case that finally moved automobile corporations to recall annually the many cars on which they had "absently forgotten, say, a fourth wheel."

Laughing Whitefish, one of his novels, also deals with the theme. An Indian girl successfully sues a mining corporation in a "rights" struggle centering on the firm's contract with her dead father.

Later, as a trained lawyer and a judge, Voelker was thrown into the maelstrom of human troubles of infinite variety. By that time, he could not escape the human conditions which from his childhood had so intrigued him. As he saw it, existence for the U.P.'s little people—and everywhere else for that matter—was pretty grim. His compassion for their trials and travail led him to write about them. His awareness of how the law could help induced him to prepare himself to understand its processes. The combination of these two conceptions are matrices which shaped his developing life and guided his pen.

III

One of Voelker's trout fishing tales relates an incident in his life as Prosecuting Attorney. He loses a jury case against a poacher caught red-handed with 47 illegally taken brookies. The reason: the six-man jury included five Paulsons. The defendant's name was also Paulson. The humorous anecdote demonstrates how pervasive the Judge's concern for the law, even in expressing the joys of the out-of-doors. That "spillover" into sports occurs despite the fact that his experiences as prosecutor, lawyer, and judge are the focus of six of his books.

Three volumes of essays present the Judge's opinions about the law. They are liberally endowed with anecdotes and vignettes. Three novels use the narrative form to dramatize the law. All are written with a missionary zeal that approaches reverence. As a devoted believer in the rule of law in American culture, he wants to spread the word. His accounts treat the law realistically—the clash of plaintiffs and defendants in a social milieu called the law.

These six books might be required reading in law schools for students who hope to join the approximately 462,000 full-fledged attorneys and judges in the United States.

But Voelker aims as well to contribute to the layman's understanding. In these times, a citizen in a legal-conscious society

can scarcely live a life-time without at least one professional confrontation with the law through its practitioners. So it is that in the volumes of essays, the Judge explains most fully his ideas about the law. These books include *Troubleshooter: The Story of a Northwoods Prosecutor* (1943), *Small Town D. A.* (1954), and *The Jealous Mistress* (1968).

When Voelker began to write these pieces, he assumed a pen name: Robert Traver. His father had married a music teacher named Annie Traver. From her, he derived the pseudonym. He believed that writing under his own name while he was being paid by the taxpayers was not "politic."

Although his books have a general appeal, *The Jealous Mistress* is more suited to lawyers, judges, and law students. The 14 essays originate from research in law books—"a vast accumulation of an almost untapped reservoir of some of the most absorbing stories on earth." His aim is to "disinter" a few cases which show the law's continuity and resilience in adapting and extending itself to new and even "explosive" times. At the same time, he praises those judges and lawyers, "unsung foot soldiers" who guard the people's hard won liberties.

Finally, his book speaks to the thesis that despite the chaos of modern life, our society lives by the rule of law—perhaps our greatest claim to being moderately civilized. The sketches deal with actual cases of modern slavery, prosecuted nudists who "barely" escape the law, rapists, and victims of injustice mills. The older cases lead him to discuss comparable contemporary trials.

The final essay—entitled "The Lady Has the Last Word"—is an opinion piece. In it, he argues that international law—"The Jealous Mistress" adopted the world over—is the last chance for man to survive on earth. Only that way would war, international violence, and the "monstrous pall of mushroom cloud" disappear. His is an idealistic solution to world problems and a dream for a better world.

The volume contains some of the author's most mature prose. From time to time, however, as he traces the law's continuity, the essays bog down with legal intricacies and technicalities. For ordinary readers, such details are heavy duty.

On the other hand, *Troubleshooter* and *Small Town D. A.* picture the delights and woes from Voelker's first-hand experiences in "Iron Cliffs County," an area "twice as big as Rhode Island and almost the size of Delaware." Together, the 54 essays in the two books are purgative monologues that confess, explain, entertain, characterize and pass judgment on a variety of legal matters.

They originate from Voelker's "daily collision" with life at the most elemental level—his confrontations with drunk drivers, wife beaters, pregnant, unmarried teen agers, adulterers, murderers, sexual perverts, conservation violators, and those involved in assault and battery. It's an anatomy of the busy office of a public servant, and likens the prosecutor's role to that of a young intern on a Saturday night when he faces the consequences of naked emotions in the emergency room. If this seems to recapitulate newspaper horror stories of human woes, the similarity is undeniable. But Voelker's heart is plainly on his sleeve, and his compassion is a constant spur to readers.

There is the case of James Jorick *(Small Town D. A.)*. In the Great Depression, the lad, an immigrant's son, can't go to college. He is hired by the local bank and is rewarded by felt chevrons, not greater salary, for his years of service. Despite his "know how," he is by-passed for promotion by an act of nepotism. At 33, still broke, still unwed, he begins to steal and is caught and sentenced to prison. Voelker deplores the "monstrous machinery" of the law which must judge a man caught in such damnable circumstances.

In another case, a 29-year-old lifer—sentenced for armed robbery—is accused by another inmate of a prison murder. The defendant tries his own case and discredits his accuser who is in jail as a child molester. The accuser had pleaded insanity in the molestation case. The defendant proves that the accuser is really schizoid. In the touching conclusion, the "hero," apparently overwhelmed by the hopelessness of a prison life, commits suicide. (in *Troubleshooter*)

One of the Justice's passions is to reform the penal system by banishing the appalling waste brought about by iron regimentation and a work ethic which forces intelligent men to crouch in

"squalid cages weaving children's baskets and endless plots to escape," as he comments in *Small Town D. A.*

In "Injustice Mills" in *Jealous Mistress,* he excoriates courts in which prejudice against race, creed, and color supersedes justice. Despite admitted shortcomings of the jury system, Author Voelker approves of it. He recognizes the advantages of the rich as plaintiffs or defendants, deplores public rip-offs by con men, decries politics in the D. A.'s office, and sympathizes with the overburdened keepers of the public conscience who have to face juries. On the other hand, he tends to respect most judges.

In his concern for individual rights and his sympathy for the workingman, Voelker was a liberal and a Democrat, when those labels were unpopular in Michigan. But he was interested in a better world through law for the people and had dedicated himself to that work. Long before the term became popular, he was anti-establishment. His essays reflect these values. At times, his discussions are poignant, incisive, and readable. At others, they are trivial or mere gimmickry—as when the point of one piece is a down-zippered D. A. before a jury. In his efforts to reproduce the dialects of ethnic groups like the Finns and Swedes, he is not very successful. He seems to lack the ear to reproduce oral speech patterns. In the March, 1978, issue of the *Smithsonian,* Judge Voelker discusses the writer's pitfalls and difficulties in rendering dialect, "even the simplest," into prose.

Yet fortunately, the trivia and poor writing are more than offset by discerning, readable memoirs, often tinged with the Judge's quick wit, his sense of humor, and his anecdotal mastery. Two fine essays include an out-of-doors experience and the downfall of a trusted attorney. "My Pal the Buck" in *Troubleshooter* touches on the Faulknerian theme expressed in "The Bear." A sensitive young lawyer, after pursuing a buck, finds himself within gun range and is unwilling to pull the trigger. The piece is an insightful, felicitous statement of the writer's love for nature and respect for living things.

Also in *Troubleshooter* his story of the 74-year-old revered attorney who misuses hospital funds is touched with pathos.

At the heart of his essays is Voelker's desire to hold a mirror up to the law, the courts, and their cohorts. He wants to discuss the myriad of legal circumstances and the people involved. In

this aim, he succeeds admirably. Yet until his first novel appeared in 1958, the Judge claims the sum total of his readers could have been accommodated in a "small broom closet"!

In the last analysis, the purview of the law is people, and it is natural that popular essays dealing with the subject portray human beings: judges, attorneys, and citizens. Thus, in Voelker's analyses of legal ideas he brings to his pages an array of people. The essays include mere glimpses and mini-portraits of men and women, the way they talk and behave under varying conditions of stress and occasional moments of normal behavior. His humanizing usually illustrates a point in question because his focus is idea, not character analysis or development.

Nonetheless, it was merely a matter of time until the Judge was tempted to turn to fiction—to try to represent people against a backdrop of the law. In short pieces he had mastered the narrative skill. That encouraged him. So some time before 1956, he began to pen his first novel. It would be followed by two others. The three show the trials and tribulations of lawyers—two in the courtroom, and one in politics.

The books are characterized by some similarities. The heroes are youthful attorneys—all nice guys. They run afoul of bad guys or old pros, smooth-talking, experienced lawyers who are also showmen. A love affair, subdued, moral, and a bit unbelievable, plays a role. All narratives are first person stories. The setting is the U. P. or originates from it.

And each novel demonstrates the author's dilemma. His legal background endowed him with an unfathomable well of knowledge, information, and conviction. Time and again, in his legal work, he had passed judgment, and in doing so he had developed a propensity to talk, to moralize, to analyze, and to teach.

Ideas certainly are the bases of great novels, but successful novelists have been able to objectify their personal views of the human condition and social problems with such skill that the relationships between idea and characters give the illusion of real life. The Judge has trouble creating this sort of credibility.

He takes pride in his desire to be an old-fashioned story teller. As he has said, "None of his characters is alienated or declaims out of a garbage can or open manholes, or sleeps with his sister

or indulges in similar engaging practices." These characteristics to him are the substance of much modern fiction.

But it is not really this concept that hurts his stories. It is among other things that his narrative urge conflicts with his impulse to talk through the mouthpiece of a character. Sometimes his spokesman is a besotted but reformed alcoholic attorney or a sophisticated friend of the hero. But the roles are ploys, and the endless rhetoric is tedious. *Hornstein's Boy,* for example, opens distressingly: 10 chapters and 80 pages of ceaseless talk. Readers are hardly encouraged to continue reading.

Paradoxically, these ideas are belied by his first novel, *Anatomy of a Murder* (1958). Its success baffled critics and fellow fiction writers. The late James M. Cain, an accomplished novelist, has confessed he was "rarely so entertained as by this strange novel." But he was unable to understand its popularity. Other bemused commentators criticized its clinical quality, typed characters, and "writing as limp as a watch by Dali." By 1958, however, the novel, handwritten on 840 legal-sized pages, had sold 168,000 copies.

Like the *Caine Mutiny, An American Tragedy,* and other trial-centered spectacles, the heart of "Anatomy" is a murder trial. The drama of the trial and the details of its origins and its long preparation for the courtroom procedures attracted thousands of readers. The basic story is simple. An army officer's seductive wife is assaulted and raped by a local tavern owner. The lieutenant shoots, killing him instantly.

Readers are beset by questions. How will the case end? Will Paul Biegler, the idealist defense attorney, outsmart the State Prosecutor from Lansing? Will the haloed Judge Weaver—one of Voelker's venerated judges—allow certain of the defense's evidence? Will the psychiatrists' testimony destroy Biegler's chances for victory? How will the jury respond?

These and other problems become the encyclopaedic details of the novel. The author slowly and methodically builds the case, carries the story through the courtroom and intensifies the built-in drama of a murder trial that has its own unique fascination.

The defendant is an arrogant, bemedaled army veteran of W.W. II and Korea. His wife enhances her natural femininity

with tight sweaters, swinging skirts, and ungirdled hips. The murdered man—Barney Quill—is as odious as the officer. An Irish lawyer, Parnell McCarthy, a good old guy and a reformed drunk, helps the young hero to prepare the case. And Claude Dancer, Esq., the old pro, distasteful in his pomp and bombast, encourages the reader to root for the sentimental favorite—Backwoods Biegler.

In his early 40's, Biegler has little love for Client Manion, but he defends him with the "irresistible impulse" strategy. The story's end takes an ironic, but well motivated twist. It marks a genuine fictional achievement in Voelker's plotting. All this has credibility for readers who are willing to wade through pages of tedious talk, awkward dialogue, and a bland love affair.

Laughing Whitefish (1967) is also trial-centered. It is "Willy" Poe, a 26-year-old legal neophyte, who accepts the case of a young Indian girl whose name, "Laughing Whitefish," derives from the name of a river. She seeks justice against an iron ore company which has failed to abide by a contract made years before with her father, now dead. In the Circuit Court trial, Poe loses. In the appeal before the Supreme Court, he triumphs—and wins the girl.

In one of the finest, most moving moments in all of Voelker's fiction, young Poe pleads the case before the sober, bewhiskered justices at Lansing. The incident generates an amazing emotional intensity because the novelist captures the precise combination of prepared ideas and extemporizing by a youngster who exhibits both the fervor and the righteousness of an evangelist. No other of the Judge's fictional characters is ever so spontaneous and convincing as the cherry-soda-drinking novice in this scene. The novel, incidentally, derives from a documented case. Voelker has told of the background of the book and his compositional problems in the Clarence M. Burton Memorial Lecture in 1970, at Oakland County before the Historical Society of Michigan.

Hornstein's Boy (1962) is a political novel. An Upper Peninsula attorney is persuaded to run for the lawyer's Valhalla—the U. S. Senate. Three characters—Emile Hornstein, a Jew, Leon Falconer, a black, and Candidate Walt Whitman Dressler, a 44-year-old attorney—form a political strategy board. The troika seems to suggest that if the unity of black, white, and Jew can

be achieved, a better nation will result. The spokesman in the novel is Emile Hornstein, an intellectual, who prattles endlessly about a variety of social problems.

"Hornstein" is another anatomy novel, a thinly disguised narrative of Voelker's political campaigns and experiences. There are good guys and bad guys, dirty tricks, public speeches and appearances of the candidates, an anemic love affair, and talk about communism, race relations, unions, prejudice, love, idealism, and violence. The opening ten chapters foretell the book's rhetorical quality.

Justice Voelker's three novels show readers the operations of the law and law-men, not gun-toting sheriffs nor lynch mobs, but youthful heroes unswervingly dedicated to justice by means of courts of law and a better world through politics. He describes the drudgery and frustration of the law's daily routine and preparation for court trials. The political trial is a period of intense grind.

Although the Judge has opened the doors to the court-room and attorney's office, he has tended to oversimplify human behavior. His heroes are pretty much of the same mould. Nonetheless, he writes effectively about the way the law functions, and his fiction, for this reason, is more important than has been recognized. The law is a societal force, important in its interpretive and restrictive functions in American culture. Few writers have tried with such conviction and understanding to popularize, to explicate, and to demonstrate this facet of American life.

As incredible as it seems, his fiction is in the tradition of the adventure story. The most important question centers on the ending. What will happen in the court room or on the political scene? As a story teller, he is a master of anecdote and has a strong scenic sense. He structures his stories with a feel for developing suspense, and his court scenes have power.

With the final two novels, however, the strong following who flocked to the "Anatomy" fled back to the woodwork.

IV

Shortly before the dedication of Michigan's Big Mac Bridge, the committee in charge received a note from Justice Voelker, who had been invited to the ceremonies. It read: "Sorry, but

I must confess I've just been named Chairman of the Bomb the Bridge Committee."

Back of this wry humor lay an ulterior motive. The Bridge would open the isolated peninsula to an invasion by swarms from the infernal regions of lower Michigan and the less fortunate states like Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and so on. Voelker loves the wild beauty of the big forests, the changing moods of the great lakes, the untidy farms, and the nondescript towns. His country was the land of solitude without loneliness. In the woods, he could lose himself in the "call of an unknown bird, the sharp cry of a strange animal, or the mystery of a flower." The coming of hordes of intruders meant that this Eden would disappear forever. He has used the term BBC to mark the U. P.'s turning point. BBC means Before Beer Cans, a symbol of the debris and destruction that identify the trashing by the general public since the Bridge. For Voelker selfishly wanted to maintain the northland's *status quo*. He sought to hold fast to nature's virginal yesterday to preserve the native trout. His "long drug addiction to the dream world" of trout fishing lured him time and again to secret places to duel with the wily adversary.

Although the law and trout fishing are strange bed-fellows, they have at least two common demonimators—the ritual of procedures and the challenge of the unknown. In both, the battle of wits intensifies dramatic relationships with an unforeseen outcome. These captured the mind and heart of the Judge.

From his 50 years of trout madness—the craft introduced to him by his father—he published between 1960 and 1974 a number of essays. They explain his ideas and recount his trout fishing experiences. To Voelker, the art and ritual of fly casting is a joyous and poetic experience, "fish or no fish." Fundamentally, the trout fisherman is the master of fakery and sham—and he needs the full play of his art with the artificial fly to lure strikes from one of nature's noblest creatures.

Both reel fishing and spinning he finds tedoius and time-consuming. Anglers who toss out gobs of worms or plugs chiefly thrash and splash. Fly fishing, however, requires more than muscle. Art and finesse are necessary to roll cast a size 16 Adams fly (as big as a minute) and lay it "just so" on the surface tension membranes with the delicacy of a kiss.

Fisherman Voelker, incidentally, owns over a thousand different trout flies and a fishing car jammed with gear and an over-burdened bar. From 1936 on, he has recorded in his journal the details of who, when, where, and "the score" of his every fishing expedition. To him, the journal is to fishing as the endless volumes of legal cases are to law professionals.

The "Anatomy" cash flow freed him to fish, to indulge himself in stalking the trout, and fishing placed a premium on quietude, humility, and endless patience. These qualities and the lure of the unexpected and the unknown contributed to his life-long mania.

His fishing essays appear in three books: *Trout Madness* (1960), *Anatomy of a Fisherman* (1968), and *Trout Magic* (1974). Some of these compositions were published also in magazines. The books contain his consummate achievement as a prose writer. His frequently published "Testament of a Fisherman," a 200 word declaration, speaks for all trout sportsmen as well as to sportsmen who love the out-of-doors. The statement is the "lead" essay in the *Anatomy of a Fisherman*, a collector's treasure.

In the late 60's, *Life Magazine* sent Robert W. Kelley, one of its professional photographers, to the glaciated hinterland to do a picture story on trout fishing and the Judge. Kelley took 1,400 photographs; *Life* used three. Later the author and photographer —in a labor of love—chose from among the remaining color pictures those they liked. The Judge wrote a slender text. The result: a synthesis of graceful writing and magnificent photography.

In *Trout Magic*, his latest book, the title essay combines an elegant statement of fishing, observations on the out-of-doors, and the discovery in the forest of cunningly hidden forts which the Judge thinks date to pre-Columbian times. In another, he satirizes academicians who have pursued "Hemingway's Two-Hearted Secret." The Judge contends that the famous sportsman, a true trout fisherman, would never have identified the actual site.

No male chauvinist pig, he identifies a woman as one of the very best "top fishermen of any gender" whom he's ever known

or fished with. Another of his effective trout adventures is called "The Intruder." It leads up to a climax centering around the Judge's pique over a canoer's intrusion at a secret fishing spot. The narrator is shamed by his selfishness. The essay has the suspense and situation of a fine short story.

Although his essays originate from trout fishing, in them he is a latter-day Thoreau—interested in nature, mankind, and the mystery of existence. His pieces meander among ideas and impressions with a leisurely pace, augmented by anecdote and a conversational tone. The clichés and affections of his earliest books have disappeared. He has obviously paid attention to the how of composition. The result is writing that exudes a mature wit and the charm of a complete angler, a man who loves what he's writing about—the out-of-doors and his happiness in it.

As readers adventure among his volumes devoted to trout fishing, they will discover that *Trout Magic* probably best unifies the man, the matter, and the method in that intimate relationship that produces the finest kind of expository art.

The pity is that trout fishing—the nominal subject matter—masks an inquisitive mind with interests beyond the craft. Readers, as a result, are not likely to be numerous.

V

The few critics to evaluate Voelker's work usually discuss only his fiction and dismiss it with brief, denigrative comments. Yet the author deserves fuller treatment. His fishing essays express his joy not only with the sport but with the world of nature and its mysteries. His non-fiction prose about the law reveals the mind of a modern jurist who helped shape the law's new direction. And his fiction has illustrated aspects of everyday law and politics. If he has failed to appeal to a widespread audience and the critics, he has been true to himself—writing to please himself. And he has found happiness in the kinship with those who read him.

At this kind of analysis, the Judge shrugs his shoulders. He is satisfied to know this his "clients"—so to speak—may not be numerous but they are discerning and loyal.

Central Michigan University

EVAN S. CONNELL JR.'S *MRS. BRIDGE* AND *MR. BRIDGE:* A CRITICAL DOCUMENTARY

Ray Lewis White

Both scholars and general readers could justifiably think that Midwestern literature peaked by 1920 with the works of Edgar Lee Masters, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, and Carl Sandburg . . . and ended in the 1930's with *Studs Lonigan.* So little attention is paid to recent Midwestern writing that this regional literature seems already "historical," in contrast to Southern literature with its vitality and continuity. Perhaps because Midwestern authors have often abandoned the heartland as home and subject-matter, the student of recent Midwestern literature becomes discouraged into seeing the seeming diffusion of native literary culture, the apparent lack of tradition, and the usually unloving treatment of the homeplace by successful MidAmerican authors.

Yet there have surely been successes in Midwestern literature since the age of James T. Farrell, works of great native strength and enduring national value. Among successful Midwestern authors of recent years who have written brilliantly of their territory is Evan S. Connell, Jr., whose *Mrs. Bridge* and *Mr. Bridge* I consider absolute triumphs of satiric realism. The companion novels *Mrs. Bridge* (1959) and *Mr. Bridge* (1969) dissect in cameo-like vignettes the respectable life of Kansas City in the 1920's and 1930's. To write that I was as shocked into recognition of genius by these two novels as I first was by *Winesburg, Ohio* indicates how enthusiastically I encourage study of Evan Connell's Midwestern fiction.

To further such rewarding study, I have collected 125 contemporary reviews of *Mrs. Bridge* and *Mr. Bridge,* published in newspapers and magazines across the United States (and, occa-

sionally, Canada) from 1958 through 1970. I present here a digest of these reviews; for the use of all students of Midwestern literature, I have given the entire collection to The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.

Biographical note:

1. *Mrs. Bridge.* New York: Viking Press, 1959; 254 pages; $3.75; published 19 January 1959.
   Paperbound—New York: Fawcett World Library, 1970; 224 pages; $0.95; published August 1970.
2. *Mr. Bridge.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969; 369 pages; $5.95; published 22 April 1969.
   Paperbound—New York: Fawcett World Library, 1970; 255 pages; $0.95; published August 1970.

Mrs. Bridge

1. "Meet Two Midwesterners." *Library Journal* 1 October 1958.
   "Mrs. Bridge is 'a rather wealthy, pleasant, kindly, and somewhat ineffectual Kansas City matron'; she lends her name to the title of Evan Connell's first novel. Mr. Connell (who lives in Kansas City, Missouri) believes that she may be found 'in any city or fair-sized town in America. . . .'"
2. Review. *Booklist* 15 December 1958.
   "A series of very short chapters depict in understated, realistic prose the everyday incidents of marriage. . . . The cumulative effect of these episodic snapshots is a discerning full-length portrait. For a feminine audience."
3. Nyren, Dorothy. Review. *Library Journal* 1 January 1959.
   "This must have been a difficult novel to write, lacking height, depth, and forward progress—as Mrs. Bridge's life did—but Mr. Connell has been most successful in his dissection of one life of quiet desperation which stands for many such lives. Written in classic prose, illuminated by wit and compassion, this novel belongs in all fiction collections."
4. Fishwick, Lucy F. "A Woman's Quiet Duel With Life." *Roanoke Times* [VA] 11 January 1959.
   "A painter as well as a writer, Mr. Connell has worked out a technique that reminds one of impressionist—or better yet, pointilist—painting. He gives us a myriad of small, shimmering episodes (the book has 117 divisions), from which emerges a single picture. . . . Not that we should consider this a masterpiece or major work. Think of it instead as a genre painting, true to its locale, and not meant to shake the world."
5. W., C. "A Look at Mind That Led a Good Woman to Fail." *Buffalo Evening News* 17 January 1959.
   "Mr. Connell delves into the feminine mind, probing the tragedy of the insignificant that can swell to huge proportions. His final sketch depicts the ultimate depth to which the soul can fall, to cry for help and hear no answer. Mr. Connell possesses that unusual faculty for a man, true perception of a woman's inmost feelings. His often amusing light episodes add up to full penetration into the heart of a lady."

6. Baxter, Maxine. Review. *Cincinnati Enquirer* 18 January 1959.
   "The book ends on the . . . desperate note of futility, and the reader is left with a sense of disappointment. Yet Evan Connell shows so much mature talent in his portrayal of an empty-headed, nice woman that I found myself actually shocked into admiration."
7. Chamberlain, Anne. "An Ironic and Pitying Portrait of a Suburban Wife." *New York Herald Tribune Books* 18 January 1959.
   "Evan Connell, Jr., who made an impressive debut with his collection of short stories, *The Anatomy Lesson,* this time achieves a triumph of ironic characterization. In his heroine, who appears at first meeting the acme of mediocrity, he manages to create an interesting, a pathetically comic, a tragically lonely figure. . . . This one, you will understand. This one, you won't forget."
8. Corddry, Mary. "A Women Only Too Familiar." *Baltimore Sun* 18 January 1959.
   "Her tragedy is her superficial, convention-ridden relationship to life and to humanity as a whole. . . . Where lies the blame for the lack of an answer? In Mr. Bridge, more the provider than the husband and father? In American life and society in general? In her own underdeveloped spirit? It is difficult to say. But the greatest tragedy of *Mrs. Bridge* is that she is so recognizable. To her credit, she cannot fail to inspire in the reader, male or female, admiration for a top quality writer."
9. Snyder, Marjorie B. "Delightful." *Boston Herald* 18 January 1959.
   "Here is a delightful story to start the new year off in a pleasant direction. At a certain age you'll say, 'I remember Mamma'; at another, 'why I remember me.' Mr. Connell obviously has gazed at families with clear eyes that enable him to show us Mrs. Bridge and her three children with amused affection. . . . If she doesn't live in your house, she lives next door—and charms you."
10. Troy, George. "'Hello? Hello out There?' Was Anybody Listening?" *Providence Journal* 18 January 1959.
    ". . . with dozeens of vivid little episodes, and never drawing a moral in so many words, Evan Connell builds an extraordinarily fascinating picture of a futile woman in his new novel, *Mrs. Bridge.* . . . If one begins by jeering at this altogether exasperating female who seems to minsunderstand everything, pity is the emotion that dominates at last—testimony to Author Connell's unusual insights. Mrs. Bridge's heart is always in the right place, if muffled in clouds of incomprehension about other hearts. We thank God that we are not like Mrs. Bridge—and then we stop a moment."
11. Review. *New York Post* 18 January 1959.
    "This is a sad little tale beneath its veneer of humor, an empty life, a woman who winds up like a dead leaf hanging from a tree. But don't let the gloomy undertones head you off; Connell gives Mrs. Bridge the wry treatment, and artistically too. He's a very accomplished writer."
12. Review. *Washington Post and Times* 18 January 1959.
    "*Mrs. Bridge* by Evan Connell, Jr., will be a sharp disappointment to those who admired his short story 'The Anatomy Lesson,' published in a collection under that title several years ago. His first novel uses a technique of disjointed episodes to tell the story of a Kansas City housewife from marriage through middle age. Her life seems dull to her, and she appears to be right."

13. Hogan, William. "A Bookman's Notebook." *San Francisco Chronicle* 19 January 1959.
"The emergence of a true literary talent—the shock of recognition, as Edmund Wilson calls it—occurs all too infrequently. . . . *Mrs. Bridge,* by Evan S. Connell, Jr., carries this shock of recognition. . . . His social satire is never the raw stuff of Lewis' Gopher Prairie, nor the unvarnished realism of Dreiser's work. Connell is an original. We will look this over tomorrow in more detail, for I think it is the season's memorable novel."
14. "Lonely Mom." *Time* 19 January 1959.
"When catastrophe breaks into his heroine's hot-house existence, the author flinches nearly as much as she: the event is seen from the outside, and the reader cannot know if Mrs. Bridge feels any more deeply than the clichés she utters. He is a gentler observer than Philip Wylie, but Connell's conclusions about U.S. womanhood may not be too different."
15. "It's Possible." *Newsweek* 19 January 1959.
". . . Evan Connell has suggested the full pathos of a loving life. Mrs. Bridge is a woman of good intentions, but it is perfectly clear that Connell connects her in no way with the road to hell. Summing Up: Tender and detailed portrayal of a completely unexceptional but good and loving woman."
16. Review. *Los Angeles Mirror & News* 19 January 1959.
"The life of a wife and mother is told in a series of 117 seemingly unrelated episodes in a long life, some of them less than 100 words long. But skillful writing and perception build the pieces into a cohesive and appealing portrait of a woman, always busily engaged with family and society, who never quite knew what she was doing nor why she was doing it. Surely you know someone just like Mrs. Bridge."
17. Hogan, William. "A Bookman's Notebook." *San Francisco Chronicle* 20 January 1959.
"I cannot categorize either Connell or *Mrs. Bridge.* But I predict that this unique literary mosaic of a Kansas City country club matron to whom nothing very much happens during her overly protected, poignant adult life, is a candidate for next year's National Book Award. . . . This is a fine and revealing American novel, the best I have read in a long time."
18. Hanscom, Leslie. "Leslie Hanscom's Bookshelf." *New York World-Telegram* 23 January 1959.
"The trouble with the lady whose 'bald soul' is touchingly exposed in this funny and frightening novel is, not that she is a lady, but that once you have called her a lady, there is absolutely nothing left to say. . . . Mrs. Bridge is a hopeless figure but a figure that is probably representative of many American women."
19. Baker, Mary Louise. "Distaff-Side Babbitt Is Skillfully Portrayed." *Columbus Dispatch* [OH] 25 January 1959.
"Just as it takes an excellent musician to feign poor playing and a Whistler to produce beauty from muted grays, it takes a skilled writer to accurately portray a woman of such unutterable dullness as Mrs. Bridge. Perhaps in succeeding so well, he has only defeated his purpose. Those looking for adventure or instruction will be disappointed. But for those curious to see a difficult literary feat well performed, this is a highly rewarding book."
20. Butcher, Fanny. "Portrait of Womanhood." *Chicago Tribune* 25 January 1959.
"Connell tells the story of Mrs. Bridge with understanding, tenderness, humor, and great literary skill, in a manner which is unusual but somehow perfectly fitted to that telling. . . . The author's method of telling the story is touching, funny, and deeply convincing. This is a book in which somewhere nearly any woman would find at least a fleeting image of herself."

21. Downey, Hugh F. Review. *Lowell Sun* [MA] 25 January 1959.
"Mr. Connell's subtle portrait of her and the tragic human waste that she represents is at once critical and sympathetic. An excellent character study, it will appeal to a good many ladies who are themselves not entirely unlike Mrs. Bridge. . . . Thoroughly delightful, the feminine clientele will have cheerfully pleasant reading experiences as it wryly smiles, guffaws and here and there sympathizes with Mrs. Bridge."
22. Fitzgerald, Julia Morris. "Depressing Picture of American Family Life." *Nashville Banner* 25 January 1959.
"There are 117 chapters in this novel, some only a sentence or two in length, each of them citing one incident in the life of Mrs. Bridge whose type, unfortunately, is all too common in the United States. In themselves the incidents are not unusual but this method of pinpointing them marks them as milestones in the disintegration of Mrs. Bridge's personality. . . . This chilling picture of American family life and the futility of Mrs. Bridge's existence makes most depressing reading."
23. Gentry, Curt. "'A Writer's Job Is Not of Total Recall but of Selection.'" *San Francisco Chronicle* 25 January 1959.
"Evan S. Connell, Jr., last week published *Mrs. Bridge,* a graceful and provocative first novel which observes that 'lost' American type, the upper-middle class matron. Some background on the author is provided here by a friend and fellow writer." [Editorial note]
24. McG., M. "The Trials of a Hapless Housewife." *Washington Star* 25 January 1959.
"Mr. Connell has told with sardonic sympathy the life story of a Midwestern matron as timid and fearful as any citizen of the Soviet Union. . . . Mrs. Bridge is a kindly, well-dressed lost soul in the jungle of mid-twentieth century American civilization. Mr. Connell recounts her trials in a series of brief chapters each containing a moment of truth not faced."
25. May, William. "Good First Novel." *Newark News* 25 January 1959.
"Evan S. Connell's *Mrs. Bridge* is one of the most interesting first novels we've read in a long time. It demonstrates the intriguing twists a writer with style and wit can give to a basically simple idea. . . . *Mrs. Bridge* is a superior novel. The grace of the writing and the manner in which the story is shaped and moulded make it a rewarding reading experience."
26. Robb, Mary. "A Capable Chronicle." *Pittsburgh Press* 25 January 1959.
"*Mrs. Bridge,* by Evan S. Connell, Jr., is an unusual presentation of a not very unusual story. Although it contains little of excitement or climax, and although the characters are not especially appealing, the chronicle of the married life of Mrs. Bridge is constantly interesting. . . . It is capably written, tightly organized and moves swiftly through the events, important and unimportant alike, with which it deals."
27. Smith, Dorothy Lois. "Appealing." *Portland Journal* [OR] 25 January 1959.
"This is an appealing and convincing novel giving 117 phases or episodes in the life of a warmly human woman of the upper middle class. Through this technique the reader comes to feel that he really knows the likeable Mrs. Bridge and to find her relatively unexciting experiences fascinating because

they are so true-to-life and traditional. . . . There is some sorrow and much humor in her life."

28. Winship, Elizabeth C. "She Is a 'Nice' Woman." *Boston Globe* 25 January 1959.
"This is a most unusual little book. The story does not have a dramatic plot. It is rather the small daily events in a woman's life, and the image of her character that emerges from them. . . . Mr. Connell writes about a woman with deep insight. Sometimes her clarity is almost painful."

29. Review. *New Orleans Times-Picayune* 25 January 1959.
"This is a novel in which nothing really extraordinary happens, but the 117 chapters, each an episode, bring out characterization which is strong in reader-identification."

30. Summers, Hollis. "Kansas City Lady." *Saturday Review* 31 January 1959.
"The book appears casual, as if one incident, by the way, reminded him of another possible incident. The little scenes move almost idly with quiet humor, like life, through the unspecified time of changing relationships: Mrs. Bridge ages, life ceases. The difficulty of such telling lies in the danger of hiccoughing the reader into boredom as actual as Mrs. Bridge's own. But Mr. Connell is a skilled pointillist. Rarely does he fail to place his dot of character in the proper place. The novel, for all its fragility, is sturdy. Although the heroine does not realize her moments' significances, the reader does understand—and cares."

31. Jordan, Cliff. "Books." *Dartmouth Alumni* February 1959.
"Author Evan Connell (*The Anatomy Lesson* and other stories) has skillfully dissected Mrs. Bridge into a sort of literary jigsaw puzzle with each of the more than one hundred pieces or episodes fitting together within the framework of the novel to form the completed portrait of Mrs. Bridge and her world. However, as is frequently the case with jigsaw puzzles, the final result is a trifle disappointing with the completed portrait lacking the brilliance promised by some of the individual pieces."

32. Review. *Harper's* February 1959.
"It is the story of a wife and mother in a fashionable suburb of Kansas City, from the time of her marriage to her death, unfolded in a series of brief chapters, many of them hardly more than anecdotes. Yet the cumulative effect of these trivial events is peculiarly impressive, and by the end *Mrs. Bridge* has become a character study of considerable subtlety, often humorous and as the years pass increasingly moving."

33. Crowther, Florence. "Stranded Matriarch." *New York Times Book Review* 1 February 1959.
"Although *Mrs. Bridge* is easy reading—there is often a touch of humor, sometimes mild pathos—it is somewhat unconvincing. It's hard to believe that a lady from Kansas City with a house in the best residential section, one full-time maid, one mink coat and a Lincoln for her very own, should finish up as timorous and ephemeral as a lunar moth on the outside of a window."

34. Follin, Anne B. "Aimless Housewife Is Depicted As Part of the American Scene." *Chattanooga Times* 1 February 1959.
"The crises in her life are so underemphasized by Mr. Connell that they seem minor, and it is not until you look back that you realize how exceedingly well her character has come alive for you in tiny particles of this and that. Here is no grand tragedy, no heroic choice between good and evil, but one smiles through sympathetic hurt at the perfect ending."

35. Gutwillig, Robert. "Ruthless Selection," *Commonweal* 1 February 1959.
"The Bridges are as vivid a family as I have encountered in modern fiction, and as individuals they are scarcely less immediate. But they are terribly, deliberately and predictably limited—for two reasons. First, we have met the Bridges many, many times before, both in life and in literature. They are what we like to consider 'ordinary people leading ordinary lives.' Mr. Connell does not want to make the ordinary extraordinary; he does not want to surprise and appall us, he merely wants to make the ordinary interesting and entertaining. He succeeds, but it isn't quite enough. Second, his method admits no irrelevancies or discrepancies, no real narrative or plot. It permits only the most ruthless selection."

36. "Closeup View of Suburban Wife." *Miami Herald* 1 February 1959.
"What the author has given us is a terrible picture of the reasonably wealthy American woman of today. He is the ruthless spectator of the slow decay that lies at the root of our national life, exemplified by a gentle, well-meaning woman of the upper classes. It is a book that will hit any American woman over 40 with a secret dread."

37. Maslin, Marsh. "The Browser." *San Francisco Chronicle* 3 February 1959.
"If any Mrs. Bridge should happen to read Evan Connell's *Mrs. Bridge*, she is not likely to recognize herself in the novel, although she may become aware of a vague familiarity with the lady. . . . She is still a small gray moth fluttering feebly on a pin in the hands of her author."

38. "Briefs." *Lynn Item* [MA] 4 February 1959.
"In 117 brief episodes, he presents a candid 'photographic' album of the prosaic life of a simple-minded, good-hearted woman who is never able to come to grips with life because she is surrounded and protected by conventions and platitudes that do not permit her to think and feel for herself. Written in compassion, yet with the edge of irony, it is a tragicomic expression of the grey, neutral lives of many women dominated by their families and friends in a culture which is often but erroneously termed a matriarchy."

39. Poore, Charles. "Books of The Times." *New York Times* 7 February 1959.
"*Mrs. Bridge*, by Evan S. Connell, Jr., is a searching and memorable portrait of a lost lady. The time and setting may remind you of Booth Tarkington's midland-America. But neither the style nor the point of view is Tarkingtonian."

40. Betts, Doris. "You'll Find Yourself Among the Characters." *Raleigh News & Observer* 8 February 1959.
"This novel is like a live organism; it returns in like measure whatever the individual reader invests in it. It would be possible for the *Good Housekeeping* set to read and even treasure these little chapters on womanhood, motherhood, and bridge club sisterhood; but hardly without wincing and wondering. *Mrs. Bridge* has even more to offer the sensitive reader. He will find real human beings here. . . . Mrs. Bridge is recommended not only without reservations, but with the full gamut of enthusiasm. Do read it."

41. Caperton, Helena Lefroy. "Amusement . . . And Tears." *Louisville Courier Journal* 8 February 1959.
"That the near-crises of Mrs. Bridge's life are not unimportant to the reader is proof of Evan Connell's sensitivity and insight. Here is amusing and delightful reading. Any woman whose children have flown from the nest will

have a smile tinged with bitterness recognizing the book's many truths, and will laugh with genuine amusement yet will feel the sting of tears, the lump in the throat and, throughout, a pang of recognition and sympathy."

42. Hutton, Mary. "Mrs. Bridge Has Problems." *Denver Post* 8 February 1959.
"This is a gentle story of a gentlewoman who has lived her life with her gloves on and has missed all its texture. The quiet humor and the easy identification with its characters makes *Mrs. Bridge* a book well worth reading and remembering."

43. Keese, Parton C. "Brilliant in A minor Key." *Worcester Telegram* 8 February 1959.
"Written brilliantly in a minor key is this novel by Evan Connell. . . . Mr. Connell's craftsmanship can be likened to a life-sized jigsaw puzzle. He has cut up Mrs. Bridge into a hundred chapters, each one a single, isolated incident in her life. Individually, each view affords a remarkable insight, tragic and hilarious, into Mrs. Bridge's character. Altogether, the pages meld into a delightful reading experience and one of the most artful I have come across in years. It would not be surprising if *Mrs. Bridge* found itself the 'sleeper' book of the year. It is that good."

44. VanFleet, Virginia. "Story of Frustration Told in Brief, Meaty Chapters." *Fort Worth Star* 8 February 1959.
"The frustrations of parenthood give depth to a unique novel about a woman who is the antithesis of unique. . . . But the author has managed to convey that, despite her complete lack of understanding of her children, there is a flash of some deeper, stronger quality in her soul, which more adverse circumstances might have strengthened."

45. Review. *Oklahoma City Oklahoman* 8 February 1959.
"In spite of the irony and delicate satire implicit in the author's picture, he enlists a good deal of reader sympathy for the carefully protected and protective Mrs. Bridge."

46. Scott, Margaret. "A Very Neat Piece of Work." *Toronto Telegram* 11 February 1959.
"*Mrs. Bridge* is a very neat piece of work. It is expertly written, the style is economical and the 116 [*sic*] chapters each of which is a single episode in her life, build up a very complete picture of Mrs. Bridge. As I finished its last chilling chapter, I felt the wind whistle around me, too, as I wondered if in the end I should prove to have been any smarter than she."

47. Morse, Jane C. "Family Life." *Hartford Courant* 22 February 1959.
"This is an interesting and successful way to tell a story about one of the many Mrs. Bridges in America today whose lives are full of these brief snippets of busy family life. Often it is fun to see oneself as others do. Mr. Connell has provided the perfect opportunity."

48. Review. *Catholic World* March 1959.
"This is a startling performance, one of brilliant wit and, despite a surface coldness of satire, a sympathetic one. Mr. Connell's characters are not notably depraved or wicked or even ungenerous, but they are small. They seem bent upon making spiritual midgets of themselves, or perhaps it is the thin air they breathe that makes them so small, so disappointing to themselves. . . . In spite of the superb technique many readers may find this a chilling book, but for others that very astringency will be part of its individuality and impact."

49. Review. *Diplomat* March 1959.
"Out of the many episodes, commonplace and incredulous, that make up a woman's life, Evan S. Connell, Jr., has woven the shattering story of *Mrs. Bridge*. . . . Mrs. Bridge is a familiar figure made extraordinary by the author's technique and penetrating insight."

50. Armbrust, Marianne S. "'. . . of Quiet Desperation.'" *Omaha World-Herald* 1 March 1959.
"What is so common and perhaps dull as a typical middle class American woman to whom nothing very exciting happens in an entire lifetime? Probably nothing, and yet Mr. Connell has drawn in Mrs. Bridge a figure so realistic that one becomes deeply interested in and sympathetic with her various problems."

51. Daniel, Frank. "'Mrs. Bridge' Promises Rewards For Reader." *Atlanta Journal & Constitution* 8 March 1959.
"Her life is all small scale, and her creator matches it with a narrative of small episodes, forming a portrait no less complete, no less powerful, for being a mosaic. This style, indeed, lends itself to emphasize the theme Mr. Connell presents with great charm and dignity. The period is from the late 19th century to World War II, the material poignant Americana beautifully handled."

52. Quincy, Jan. "Quiet Glimpses Into Wife's Life." *Tulsa World* 8 March 1959.
"Holding up a mirror to the upper middle class married American female is the task Evan S. Connell has set himself in *Mrs. Bridge*. . . . Perhaps this pleasant novel will jolt some complacent wife and mother into questioning her own importance."

53. Notice. *Fort Worth Star* 8 March 1959.
"Evan Connell's *Mrs. Bridge*, a recent publication of Viking Press, has been selected by the New York Bookseller's Association as the top novel of the winter season. *Mrs. Bridge* has raced through three printings, and a fourth is being planned."

54. Lunn, Janet. "American Woman Described As Frightened, Confused." *Toronto Daily Star* 14 March 1959.
". . . *Mrs. Bridge*, by Evan S. Connell, Jr., is sometimes pitying, sometimes tender, but always tolerant and understanding. Connell sees the American woman as a groping, confused creature whose only real support in life is the set of rules given her early in this century by an unimaginative, middle-class family."

55. Haymaker, Marion B. "Books at the Library." *Provincetown Advocate* 19 March 1959.
"The reason for this novel's climb to such fictional success is the astonishing manner in which Evan S. Connell, Jr., presents his plot. . . . So weep and laugh together, if you are the sort that always must have a lace trimmed handkerchief to take from the folds when you go to a matinee."

56. "Soundless Scream." *Good Housekeeping* 26 March 1959.
Mrs. Bridge is "a brilliant portrait of that most difficult of all characters to grasp, the average American woman. . . . It sounds bitter, but it isn't. Mr. Connell, by understating the story of his heroine, makes his point better—that a life of garden clubs, teas, gentle self-improvement, minor frustrations, and muted tragedies can be moving and fascinating and poignantly significant,"

57. McNiff, Mary Stack. Review. *America* 28 March 1959.
"In his oddly lifelike presentation of the fragments that comprise these notes for a portrait, Mr. Connell has written with clear-eyed sympathy and a talent for making a variety of characters come to life with his much-in-little method. His book has that rare but blessed quality of leaving a goodly share to the reader's imagination—and there will be wide variations of interpretation in the completed portrait of Mrs. Bridge."
58. Notice. *Kansas City Star* 18 April 1959.
"*Mrs. Bridge,* on the national best seller lists for eleven weeks, has gone into its fifth printing by Viking Press. This quiet novel of a frustrated Kansas City lady by Evan S. Connell, Jr., sold over 500 copies in the single week ending April 3, according to *Publishers' Weekly* magazine."
59. Preslar, Charles. "Powerful Novel of Great Vitality." *Greensboro Daily News* 10 May 1959.
"The plot is an old one. But Connell pounds life into it to the extent it never was more vital. He accomplishes the feat through mood, a style which heralds him as a most promising author, and authenticity and sincerity of limitless quantity and quality."
60. Review. *America* 16 May 1959.
". . . the tone in *Mrs. Bridge* is not dismal. Through countless little vignettes which stick with the reader, Mr. Connell writes with much sympathy and with a compression that stirs the imagination. This is worlds apart from the 'tell all' school of fiction."
61. Review. *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* 18 June 1959.
"In this, his first novel, the author has taken a seemingly unproductive character and managed to invest it with complexity."
62. Review. *Ladies Home Journal* September 1959.
"It is sometimes very funny. But half hidden beneath the all-too-familiar household scenes lies a bitter indictment of superficiality and of false values that are only too common among us all. Actually in its unemphasized way it is a shocker."
63. Review. *Cleveland News* 2 December 1959.
"A hauntingly witsful story about a wife-mother-widow who goes through all the proper motions of life yet seems curiously untouched by the emotions of people around her. In the end she is lost in loneliness."
64. Letter. *San Francisco Chronicle* 30 May 1960.
"I would not have minded seeing *Mrs. Bridge* take it over *Goodbye, Columbus* for the National Book Award, though Philip Roth is a brilliant writer; either one would leave no argument. But it is discouraging to see what amounts to nonfiction getting fiction awards."
65. Review. *Grand Rapids Press* 10 February 1963.
"One of the best novels of 1959, or any postwar year, is available in *Mrs. Bridge* by Evan Connell. He tells the funny-sad story of a suburban matron in a series of short scenes written with sympathy, irony and much understanding."

Mr. Bridge

1. Review. *Virginia Kirkus Reviews* February 1969.
"Mr. Connell like Mr. Bridge is a literalist but there are saddening, softening moments which redeem the latter from the prosaic bind of his predictability. Once again the particular appeal of the book is Mr. Connell's ability to elevate these circumscribed commonplaces so that they will speak to a great many people in a fashion which is reminiscent and reassuring."
2. Curley, Dorothy. Review. *Library Journal* 1 April 1969.
"The tone is very quiet, almost a monotone, but the detailing is exquisite and the total effect very impressive. While Mr. Connell writes as a critic of the unexamined life, he also writes with sympathy and compassion."
3. Review. *Phoenix Gazette* 9 April 1969.
"Mr. Bridge is a man who can be read two ways. He can be scorned as a self-righteous square, and made fun of. Or he can be admired for adhering to his ethics when the price begins to be the things for which all his efforts are expended."
4. Menn, Thorpe. Review. *Kansas City Star* 13 April 1969.
"Connell is an entertaining literary artist for mature readers . . . and in *Mr. Bridge* gives us a companion novel to *Mrs. Bridge* as a work of literary high art in a wholly original form. . . . In their lives Connell presents for posterity a picture of how inadequate for civilization it has been for many people to be affluent Americans of the mid-20th century."
5. Phillips, Jane B. "No Life, No Love." *Chattanooga Times* 13 April 1969.
"The tragedy of this man and his kind is that he somehow knew that there was an emptiness in his life; he vaguely yearned for fulfillment, but firmly and sternly resisted all opportunities for it. . . . This is a very skillful portrayal of a pathetic cardboard figure of a man, who—sad to say—lives all around us."
6. Notice. *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* 13 April 1969.
"A sensitive dissection of American midwestern man of the 1930's, by the distinguished author of *Mrs. Bridge.*"
7. Hogan, William. "Evan Connell's Mr. Super-WASP." *San Francisco Chronicle* 14 April 1969.
"Connell's new novel, *Mr. Bridge,* completes a double portrait. It is a devastating comment on a recognizable American type. Walter Bridge is not the cartoon that Sinclair Lewis's George F. Babbitt was; Babbitt, essentially, was a buffoon, as standard as his electric cigar lighter of 1922. Mr. Bridge is a frightening anachronism, a good husband and provider, yet an enormously selfish fellow . . . For me *Mr. Bridge* lacks the surprise and spontaneity of *Mrs. Bridge.* . . . Yet Connell has performed a classic job of surgery on this marvelous cliché of the uptight American"
8. Washburn, Beatrice. "Series of Episodes Covers a Family." *Miami Herald* 14 April 1969.
"The popular novel *Mrs. Bridge,* by the same author, appeared 10 years ago and dealt with the upper middle class housewife and her futile efforts to kill time and achieve a meaningful life. The present book has nothing to do with it and the title concerns another character, a successful executive, a WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant), living in Kansas City with his wife and three children. It is, in a sense, the same background as *Dodsworth,* but Mr. Connell is no Sinclair Lewis."
9. Earl, Pauline J. "Fiction." *Best Sellers* 15 April 1969.
"Mr. Connell has a sharp, satirical way with the language. He is right to the point and develops his 'hero' masterfully. The reader has no doubt as to what the author is trying to say to his audience. The book is a series of episodes, one built on top of the other, rather than the typical storytelling

format of the novel. Though generally this is not my favorite method of finding what an author has to say, I must admit it is most effective in this volume. *Mr. Bridge* is a readable book and should provide much thought for a reader to digest. I enjoyed it."

10. Bensky, Lawrence M. "Meet Evan Connell, Friend of Mr. and Mrs. Bridge." *New York Times Book Review* 20 April 1969.
According to Connell, "What's really intriguing about him is that he's going through experiences which many people go through—losing his children to their own lives, for example. . . . It seems there will always be some sort of conflict between generations, some sort of rebellion by children against the hypocrisy of their parents. But it wasn't my intention to draw morals. All I was getting at was that *this* experience happened to one man, Mr. Bridge."
Published also: *Kansas City Star* 20 April 1969.
11. Davenport, Guy. "The dilemmas of a solid citizen of Kansas City, who had everything and nothing." *New York Times Book Review* 20 April 1969.
"Mr. Connell has rewritten his own novel because there was more to tell. *Mrs. Bridge* was essentially a comedy of manners masking extensive critical surgery of life as it is conducted with success and decency in Kansas City. *Mr. Bridge* is equally comic and satiric, but is more openly interested in the tragedy of success. For all their satire and dark implications, however, the novels of the Bridge family remain in the memory as triumphs of faultless realism. Mr. Connell's art is one of restraint and perfect mimicry. His characterizations are admirably short, his style is brevity itself. Alongside all this enameled charm, we soon discover, there is a slyness of implication that is more puckish than serious. Rarely has a satirist damned his subject with such good humor. His good nature is not about to fail Mr. Connell, for he loves the Bridges as much as we do."
12. Eisen, Jacqueline. "Mr. Bridge, Pompous, Pathetic." *Raleign News & Observer* 20 April 1969.
"Evan Connell has drawn a perfect, if unbearable, portrait of Mr. Bridge. . . . It is to Mr. Connell's credit that he can make the reader feel anything but sheer disgust for this creature he has created. At the end, we do realize we feel sorry for Mr. Bridge for having missed so much of life."
13. Hayes, Elizabeth. Review. *Savannah News* 20 April 1969.
"The Connell style is going to stand unmatched for it is brilliant that a novel could be created from the life of an unromantic, rigid, authoritative husband and father, who himself abides by the strictest of Victorian principles. Through *Mr. Bridge*, a classic figure of modern Americanism has been created."
14. R., K. "Back to the 30's." *New Haven Register* 20 April 1969.
"Although the jacket copy for this novel hints that we will discover, at the end, the inner Mr. Bridge in all his agony, the author seems to dwell, rather, on the apparent calm of those years when the United States, like an ostrich, had its head buried in the sand, and the reader is happy enough to follow along and enjoy it. Although he discovers, at the end, that while he has known happiness, and satisfaction, Mr. Bridge has never known joy, this comes as no great surprise to the reader nor does it seem like much of a hardship."
15. Notice. *Erie Times* 20 April 1969.
"Mr. Bridge is a sort of upper class Babbitt, a WASP, a good husband and provider. . . ."

16. Review. *Grand Junction Sentinel* [CO] 20 April 1969.
"He is, perhaps, as good a portrait of the 1930s as we'll have at this level and Connell has done a remarkable job of making his short, pointed vignettes of this unexciting life into a novel with breadth and depth. Mr. Bridge will irritate, but he will also warm the heart sometimes. Because he is very much an American of his time, he cannot be dismissed."
17. Karns, Catherine. "'Mr. Bridge' Recalls a Peaceful Era." *Lafayette Midweek Sun* [CA] 23 April 1969.
". . . it is a portrait of many of our fathers. Hard working, conservative, a good and reliable Dad who insisted on good manners; who loved his family enough to be insured for their welfare if anything happened to him; generous to those deserving and loyal. It was a peaceful era with no stark confrontations to mar the orderliness of daily living. Connell is authentic, too."
18. Lehmann-Haupt, Christopher. "Books of The Times." *New York Times* 23 April 1969.
". . . for all the sadness and humor of the book, there is something vaguely unsatisfactory about Mr. Connell's tour de force. The movement of *Mr. Bridge*—the development that keeps us reading—is that of gradually revealing an essentially static situation. . . . This is no great fault in the book; you are still likely to find it quietly devastating. But it does lack the central symbolic disease that afflicted the hero of Leo Tolstoy's 'The Death of Ivan Illyich,' a not dissimilar story. In *Mr. Bridge*, what might have been a major social portrait turns out to be a satirical miniature. One's response never transcends wry amusement and an occasional strangled cry."
19. Martinetti, Ronald. "The Bookshelf." *Wall Street Journal* 25 April 1969.
". . . Connell's portrait of Mr. Bridge is less convincing—and far less sympathetic—than the one he had drawn of his wife. In fact, Connell endows his subject with so few saving graces . . . that the portrait borders on caricature. Ironically, the case against Mr. Bridge might have been brought into better focus if his own defense were not presented so flimsily. . . . It is perhaps unfair to constantly measure *Mr. Bridge* against the splendid achievement of Connell's earlier novel. It does not capture the quality of its predecessor. But then, in the past decade there have been very few other novels that have."
20. Schott, Webster. "Last Half of a Superb American Saga." *Life* 25 April 1969.
"Evan S. Connell has our number. He has penetrated the monotony barrier of suburban Kansas City—and Minneapolis or Evanston—to lay open the quietly desperate, secret life of Midwestern noninvolvement. He began this act of purification several years ago with *Mrs. Bridge*, a best-selling novel about a Kansas City housewife and mother disenfranchised from purpose and femininity. With *Mr. Bridge*, Connell completes his saga of sweet joylessness and blunted sensibility, of marriage, family and middle age on the plains of Protestantism. Together the *Bridge* novels achieve an understanding of provincial upper-middle-class U.S. life beyond anything in our literature."
21. Gilliam, Stanley. "Companion for 'Mrs. Bridge.'" *Sacramento Bee* 27 April 1969.
"*Mr. Bridge* is the picture book WASP . . . unaware of any hypocrisy, self-satisfied (with only occasional bouts of self-doubt) of every religious conviction and in every ethnic group. And that is what makes this such satisfying yet disturbing reading, because everyone will see a little of himself in

Walter Bridge—sort of like looking in the mirror after a close shave with a new blade and taking satisfaction in a job well done but wondering whatever happened to that young fellow who was there as recently (so it seems but really is not) just the last time you looked."

22. Sandberg, Peter L. "He Who Had It All." *Saturday Review* 3 May 1969.
"The vignettes in *Mr. Bridge* are readable, often insightful, sometimes brilliant; but they lack the consistent precision and dazzle of the earlier work. The story itself has less of a cumulative effect. What is more, something has gone awry with the characters. . . . The humor and compassion that infused Connell's first book are evidenced here in fits and starts. The wine has soured, not much, but enough to make a difference. Taken alone, *Mr. Bridge* is not a bad book, in spite of its defects. But is is not as good a novel as the one with which it will inevitably be compared."
23. Edwards, Isabel. "American Gothic: A Masterpiece." *Minneapolis Tribune* 4 May 1969.
"The technique is comparable to the way Andrew Wyeth has of precisely detailing his paintings throughout, so that the whole of some homely scene—a sun-lit loft, perhaps—reverberates with a mysterious, even mythic, intensity. Both novelist and painter manage to make us aware of how significant and worthy of interest the mundane truly is. In each case, the technique is not facile trickery, but a convincing expression of the artist's view of life. All in all, Evan Connell's *Mr. Bridge* is a truly outstanding novel. Any mature reader will enjoy it. For students of American society or of American prose, it is a must."
24. Ginzel, Nancy K. "A Man With No Joy." *San Antonio Express* 4 May 1969.
"Connell knowingly creates a character so human that he constantly hits the nerves of self-recognition in his readers. Mr. Bridge, a Midwesterner in the '30s, is so many people we know today. He is not a bad person, really. He is well-meaning. But he is so cold, rigid, orderly and afraid that he is incapable of living life to the fullest—or outside his patterns. If Mr. Bridge read this excellent novel he would be extremely bothered as he recognized himself. But he would finally convince himself that the trouble-making author had misjudged him and was not worth wasting a thought on. And he would smugly proceed with his life."
25. Serviss, George. "K.C. Family." *Garden Grove News* [CA] 4 May 1969.
". . . life holds many shocks that jar Mr. Bridge to his heels. Some of them are humorous, some dramatic, some pragmatic, but none of them dull, except as life itself is sometimes dull. This is a book that is fun to read. Those who know Mr. Connell's *Mrs. Bridge*, published in 1959, have some idea of what to expect."
26. "Sequel Surpasses the Original." *San Rafael Independent Journal* 10 May 1969.
"Connell builds, usually with formidable effect, in brief, fragmentary little episodes, that mirrored exactly the trivial bits and pieces that made up Mr. Bridge's day, and the reader may find, as this one did, that there are places where this approach seems contrived in Mr. Bridge's larger world. . . . Mr. Bridge seems destined to haunt the American consciousness as persistently as Mrs. Bridge has done."
27. Stalder, Marjorie Bright. "Books." *Hemet News* [CA] 10 May 1969.
"This exceptional novel is written in a series of vignettes. Some are only a half page. Others are a few pages. But for the most part each is an incisive insight, not indictment of the Bridges. The author probes their combined personalities mercilessly but with remarkable empathy. Though he does not condone nor even have total compassion for their frailties, he actually loves them all. So does the reader even though pity rears its ignominious head more than occasionally. Long ago, the late Sinclair Lewis attempted to dissect the innermost ids of Midwesterners. But despite his accepted abilities, Lewis missed the mark. Perhaps he was too incensed to show the empathy Evan Connell employs."

28. Barnes, Harper. "With a Long Lens on a Kansas City Suburb." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 11 May 1969.
"Even more than its predecessor, *Mr. Bridge* is a masterful etching of the narrowness, loneliness and icy propriety of much of life in upper middle-class America. The work, which is set in the 1920s and 1930s but is in no sense irrelevant for today, is reminiscent of Sinclair Lewis. However, *Mr. Bridge* is written with more compassion and less scorn than *Main Street* or *Babbitt*."
29. Walker, Robert. "A Good House . . . In an Anglo-Saxon Neighborhood." *Houston Chronicle* 11 May 1969.
"Connell has done what few writers would dare. He takes the same characters used in his award-winning novel *Mrs. Bridge*, in which he fashioned a complete portrait of a wife and mother that might be considered representative of the leisure class American woman. Now 10 years later he carves out of the rock of 'solid citizen' Mr. Bridge, a classic figure in American life."
30. Weinberg, Helen. "The Dissection of Walter Bridge." *Cleveland Plain Dealer* 11 May 1969.
"This is a novel of sociological—not psychological—realism. With remarkable objectivity Connell gives us an accurate picture of a certain kind of American and permits us to make our own judgments about him and his society. There is a hint of irony in Connell's tone, but nothing of satire. . . . While Connell does reveal the terrible complacency in such simplicity and its final willingness to sacrifice higher values to middle class respectability, he reminds us, not always ironically, that simple pleasures and small comforts did seem realistically possible in America, especially in the heartland, up until the last moment before the Second World War, right up to the edge of the abyss."
31. Tarr, Tommy. "'Mr. Bridge' Is Sensitive Novel of Middle Class." *Baton Rouge Advocate* 18 May 1969.
"The ever present question is whether the middle-class businessman arbitrarily becomes a law-abiding, self-motivated, self-styled segment of the American social structure, that is to say a mean, prejudiced, stuffed-shirt puritanical Protestant Anglo-American whose life is void of all drama other than the melo-dramatic, because of a peculiar set of emotional, environmental and hereditary factors unique to him or is this indeed the finality of all existence? Are we all fated for a living purgatory where we have no control over our direction in the maze?"
32. Kiely, Robert. "He makes the banal exotic." *Christian Science Monitor* 22 May 1969.
"In writing so very well about a middle-class American family in a comfortable frame house just outside of Kansas City in the 1930's Evan Connell has done an almost exotic thing. When you think of all the cheap myths and fatuous exposés that have been erected around the reality, you realize that it takes almost a miracle of artistry and self-restraint to treat the subject

and still avoid them. Evan Connell's gift is not of a blunt or head-on sort. His is not the technique of the ice-breaker, the myth-debunker, the prophet or the iconoclast. He darts agilely from perception to perception like a man engaged in a breathtaking literary slalom. His range is not vast, but his ability to balance wit and sympathy is nearly faultless."

33. Mullen, Shaun D. "Books in the News." *Wilmington News* [DL] 22 May 1969.
"The place and time are Kansas City in the mid-1930s, the world of Roosevelt and Hitler. But Evan Connell's *Mr. Bridge,* like his *Mrs. Bridge* of a decade ago, is actually without time or geographic boundaries. With a good bit of satire and irony, Connell has presented Mr. Bridge as a pathetic figure, his virtue and righteousness overwhelming, his happiness artificial. The satire is that in his utterly meaningful moments, Mr. Bridge is self-defeating. The irony is that today he is everywhere."
34. Stella, Charles. "Stuffy Hero Fails to Seem Real." *Cleveland Press* 23 May 1969.
"In *Mr. Bridge* Evan S. Connell, Jr., has gone Sinclair Lewis one better, or worse, in creating an impossible stuffy, cliché-ridden, hard-hearted, small-minded midwestern lawyer in the 1930's. The novel is a failure precisely because no one could possibly be as joyless, cloddish and stereotyped as Walter Bridge. Apparently the author intended a satire, but it is so one-sided and venomous as to be unbelievable."
35. Wallace, Robert. Review. *Book-of-the-Month Club News* June 1969.
"Perhaps because *Mr. Bridge* can only repeat the larger story of the family as we know it from *Mrs. Bridge,* it seems less brilliant, less startling. But it is a sensitive novel, moving, funny, deeply nostaglic, at once ironic and compassionate as it searches among the parts of a man's life. And, despite being about a time thirty years ago, it tells a good deal about the way we live now."
36. Review. *Booklist* June 1969.
"An incisive, pitiless examination of the man inside the stereotype."
37. "Book of the Day." *Boston Globe* 12 June 1969.
"I am convinced that I knew Mr. Bridge. In fact, I once worked for him. For, have no doubt about it, Mr. Bridge exists. The solid citizen of the '30's, he knows for a certainty that there is only one proper way to live—his way, and that his standards are the true standards."
38. "Main Street Remembered." *Time* 20 June 1969.
"Connell perceives the humor in Bridge's predicament, which is probably necessary: a good man is hard to stand. But his restrained tone of voice and inhumanly cool, cruel irony convey the impression of barely repressed personal rancor, such as a son might feel in trying to discuss his father. Perhaps this, and the fact that it is set in the 1930s, is what makes *Mr. Bridge* more than an objective caricature of the uptight Mr. Bridge so often under attack today. What emerges is a muted image of an American type as pure, enduring and applicable as George F. Babbitt ever was."
39. Scrutin, Judson. "Exploring the WASP's Nest." *Baltimore Sun* 22 June 1969.
"White Anglo-Saxon Protestants have been the villains in much of contemporary thought. While much of this criticism is certainly justified, often the figures which emerge are obvious mouthpieces for their authors or are such transparent caricatures that they are hardly recognized as the human beings. . . . Walter Bridge, Connell's protagonist, restores a full and flawed humanity to an archetypal American. In understanding Mr. Bridge we understand a main ingredient of the American alloy."
40. Abel, Bob. "In 'Mr. Bridge,' A Solid Citizen's Detailed Portrait." *National Observer* 23 June 1969.
"If it were not for Mr. Connell's brilliant forays into the depths of his character's soul, Mr. Bridge would be not only a singularly uninteresting fellow, but also, and this would destroy the impact and entertainment value of the book, a very broad caricature of a type of American. But Mr. Connell brings moments of rare feeling from this material time and again. . . . There is a temptation to compare *Mr. Bridge* to *Mrs. Bridge,* but they are two different books, each valuable. With this, his seventh book, Mr. Connell joins the small band of American novelists whose forthcoming books are automatically cause for excitement."
41. Review. *Portland Oregonian* 27 June 1969.
"Many readers will admire Mr. Bridge as an upright man of good conscience even while they will recognize the blindness of that conscience with respect to 20th century facts of life."
42. Oates, Joyce Carol. "Mr. Bridge—the last Puritan." *Detroit News* 29 June 1969.
"Connell has written a small masterpiece, its structure exactly matched with its story. The novel 'begins' nowhere and ends 'nowhere'; readers accustomed to conventional plots will be disappointed. And the tone is constant, deliberately monotonous, for if anything disgusting or disturbing enters Mr. Bridge's world, he usually does not talk about it . . . as he does not talk about his peculiar feeling for his older daughter, or his vague, unsatisfied longings for a different life. Mr. Bridge's longings must remain inarticulate, for he is a genuine Puritan."
43. Review. *Virginia Quarterly Review* Summer 1969.
"As an old-fashioned analysis of character Mr. Connell's new book is a pleasant relief from the highly scented potpourris commonly offered these days as novels. . . . Writing on this level about so conspicuous a dullard must be quietly compulsive, enough to stimulate the reader without breaking the spell. Mr. Connell has more than met the challenge in narrative technique; he has produced a first-rate specimen of its particular genre."
44. Review. *Rochester Times-Union* [NY] 1 July 1969.
"This is a difficult style to write but Connell handles it well and we get a credible picture of a middle-class mid-western family. This one will sting us a little, too."
45. Lambert, Marian. "Society WASPs Given Purposeful Exposure." *Indianapolis Star* 6 July 1969.
"Connell is an author who is perceptive, discerning and penetrating in his ability to delineate a living, breathing character. And he sets out to portray his understanding of a WASP—that character known in our society today as the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. . . . Though the author's flagellation of Mr. B. is untiring, the reader eventually entertains a gnawing suspicion. If Mr. B. is so nauseating, how come you are getting the sneaking feeling he'd be a good man to have aboard in case of emergency?"
46. Thornberry, Robert A. "Two-Dimensional Robot." *Louisville Courier Journal* 6 July 1969.
"If you fed into a computer all of the statistical components of a so-called typical middle-aged white Anglo-Saxon Protestant male who is financially

successful and a respected member of his community, the end result might come out neatly labeled *Mr. Bridge.*"

47. Morton, Tim. "Mr. Bridge, Who Has Never Known Joy." *Norfolk Pilot* 13 July 1969.
"So many headliners on the literary marquee published books this spring that Evan S. Connell, Jr.'s *Mr. Bridge* may be left off summer's reading lists. I recommend that this oversight be corrected immediately. Not only is this one of the best novels of the year, but if I am not mistaken the central character in this remarkable study promises to become a classic representation of a sizeable portion of middle class America in the first half of the 20th century."
48. Couzens, Jean. "From the Bookshelf." *Colfax Weekly Record* [CA] 17 July 1969.
"Now Connell has written *Mr. Bridge*—again, unexceptional, unremarkable and yet memorable for the sturdy way he faces a life he doesn't quite understand. . . . So here is the average person—neither hero nor villain, but a little of each. Today's parents, fighting inflation, worried by the nationwide unrest, bewildered by rebellious children, will easily identify with this parent who, even thirty years ago, was trying to hang onto the comfortable world he worked so hard to make."
49. Review. *Berkeley Gazette* 22 July 1969.
"Describing the period between the wars, Connell's book captures the insularity that accounts for the permanent spiritual drought that plagues the mid-west, not much different now than it was in Willa Cather's time. . . . Connell creates a convincing picture of the emotionally constipated man with a terse, herky-jerky style that slowly opens up but never enough to reveal a completely free man. Although somewhat over controlled and a bit contrived in effect, the book is an excellent study in middle-American middle-class mentality."
50. Cook, Lloyd A. "American dream in the 40's—youth in revolt." *Mason County Journal* [Shelton, WA] 14 August 1969.
"Here are, in sum, two true to life characters, as true to their times as anyone in *Main Street* or in *Babbitt.* They are persons, one might say, who have everything. They are living out a part of the American Dream. . . . I feel that Mr. Connell should go for extra innings in his hit series. There should be at least one more book which would tell us what happened to these troubled youngsters, these potential revolutionaries."
51. Loyanich, Peter-Paul, Jr. "A Remarkable Portrait." *Cincinnati Enquirer* 14 September 1969.
"It may be that Connell is too severe in his characterization, too biting, to dehumanizing; nevertheless a vivid, tragic figure comes to life in these pages, possibly a minor classic. Many scenes are abrupt, yet rich in perception. . . . One can read this novel on several levels; as the portrait of a sociological archetype, as an example of an excellent craftiness, or a mere piece of fiction. However one wishes to interpret this narrative, reading it is a rewarding experience."
52. Erno, Richard B. "Remember 'Mrs. Bridge'?—here's her husband." *Phoenix Republic* 25 September 1969.
"The newest Connell book, *Mr. Bridge,* is both a success and a failure. It succeeds in making its own way despite the comparison it invites with the earlier *Mrs. Bridge.* But it cannot be a true success, for to succeed truly, it would have to be better than its predecessor, and it is not better. It is not at all as good. . . . As a picture of a typical 1930's middle class midwesterner, *Mr. Bridge* is a success. It may lack those qualities of feeling and love which made *Mrs. Bridge* a novel of lasting value. But it captures a time and a type with an accuracy and a skill far superior to that possessed by the fashionable novelists of our time."

53. Tytell, John. "A man who can't cross over." *Catholic World* 1 November 1969.
"Mr. Connell has created an unusually unappealing protagonist, a man who cultivates his own boredom and emptiness with an unrelenting earnestness. The result is dry, almost arid. This might be justified by an extraordinary sense of time and place, but Mr. Connell is scant with such details. Some of the social conditions emphasized by the novel seem to reflect the present more than the past. . . . The vigorous sense of evil which animates the fiction of a true realist like Sinclair Lewis is missing from *Mr. Bridge,* and the result is the sentimentality of inaccuracy."
54. Notice. *Kansas City Star* 30 November 1969.
"This 'other view' of the Bridges belongs on all listings—a widely acclaimed novel of life in Kansas City's upper middle class."
55. Notice. *New York Times Book Review* 7 December 1969.
"This companion piece to the superb *Mrs. Bridge* (1959) is a portrait of a solid citizen of Kansas City and a quietly harrowing American success story."
56. "Book About Lawyer Reviewed." *Elko Daily Free Press* [NV] 10 December 1969.
"There are probably not many successful men past the age of 60 who will not see a little of themselves in the person of Mr. Bridge. . . . Too disturbing to be dull, the book is actually so beautifully written, that it is truly engrossing."
57. Review. *Astoria Astorian* [OR] 12 February 1970.
"Using the technique of a short, compelling episode to intensify what has come before, Connell shows Mr. Bridge in his various roles until the human being behind the facade is dramatically revealed."
58. Faist, Russell L. "Novel about same folks." *Catholic Universe Bulletin* 13 February 1970.
"While there is no seat-end suspense about the novel, there is a serious casualness about it. The narrative is clean and simple; perhaps you have never read a novel like it. Call it anecdotal or episodic. . . . For Mom and Dad especially; but anyone who likes the work of a craftsman writer will enjoy it."
59. Review. *St. Albans Messenger* [VT] 6 June 1970.
"Once again the particular appeal of the book is Mrs. [*sic*] Connell's ability to elevate these circumscribed circumstances so that they will speak to a great many people in a fashion which is reminiscent and thus reassuring."
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Illinois State University

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