

# MIDAMERICA VII

*The Yearbook of the Society  
for the Study of Midwestern Literature*

Edited by  
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*In Honor of*  
WALTER HAVIGHURST

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## PREFACE

With the appearance of *MidAmerica VII*, the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature marks its tenth year of existence, a fact which, as Abraham Lincoln said of his marriage, "to me is matter of profound wonder." It is also to me a matter of deep pleasure. The anniversary will be marked at the Tenth Annual Conference, "The Cultural Heritage of the Midwest," at Michigan State University on May 15, 16, 17, 1980. Membership continues to increase, as does the scholarly and creative work of its members, as the essays and bibliography in this, the seventh *Mid-America*, give ample evidence.

This volume is inscribed to Dr. Walter Havighurst, one of the pioneers in the study of the literature and culture of our region, with the gratitude of the members.

DAVID D. ANDERSON

November, 1979

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DANIEL DRAKE, M.D.:  
THE FRANKLIN OF THE WEST

DAVID D. ANDERSON

On September 23, 1834, a forty-nine-year-old Cincinnati physician was called upon to address the Union Literary Society of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. The Society was nine years old, the University forty, and the physician, Daniel Drake, M.D.—the Society's second choice for the address; its first was Judge David Lane of the Ohio Supreme Court—had, in the previous thirty-five years become the leading medical practitioner in Cincinnati during his residence there, the author and editor of the first books and journals concerned with the peculiarities of disease in the Ohio Valley, and a medical educator whose ambition was to found a great medical school in the Ohio Valley.

We can only speculate on the reasons why the young men of the Society had invited Drake as their second choice. The topic of Drake's discourse to the young men of the Society was one that he was better qualified to discuss, one that he had done more to define, than anyone else in the Ohio Valley, perhaps in the entire nation. His topic was "The History, Character, and Prospects of the West," a subject that to a great extent was the focus of his life's work to that date as it would remain to his death in 1852 in his beloved Cincinnati.

Unlike others who had already earned greater reputations in the East as spokesmen for the West and creators of a Western literature and intellectual tradition—Timothy Flint, Judge James Hall, James Kirke Paulding, James Fenimore Cooper—Drake was a Westerner who had grown up on the frontier, and rather than an observer of its evolution, he was one of those who were determined to shape its development. Born in rural New Jersey in 1785, he was taken by his parents to Limestone (now Maysville),

Kentucky, before he was three, and near there he experienced what were to be his first memories: clearing the forest so that crops might be planted and the hard work that was demanded of those who would make and maintain a home in the wilderness. Not until he was fifteen, in 1800, did he see what was to the frontier a city, the thriving community of Fort Washington as it was becoming Cincinnati. But his twelve years in the family's growing clearing on the Ohio remained his most important experience, providing the foundation for a curiosity about and reverence for the West that remained with him the rest of his life. So important, in fact, was this early experience that in a note appended to the published version of his discourse he commented that

The failure of Mr. Cooper in his *Prairie*, and Mr. Paulding in his *Westward Ho*, is conclusive evidence, that in delineating the West, no power of genius, can supply the want of opportunities for personal observation on our natural and social aspects. No western man can read those works with interest; because of their want of conformity to the circumstances and character of the country, in which the scenes are laid.

This comment was not mere disparagement of successful authors, however; Drake's curiosity, reverence, and observations had been made evident as early as 1810 in a brief volume entitled *Notices Concerning Cincinnati, Its Topography, Climate and Diseases*, the work that marked out the path of his future interests. Published when Drake was 25, after having served a five-year medical apprenticeship with Dr. William Goforth of Cincinnati, briefly practiced medicine as Goforth's partner, and then studied at the Medical College of the University of Pennsylvania for a term before practicing in Mays Lick, Kentucky, and then returning to partnership and practice with Goforth in Cincinnati, it was the distillation of ten years of close observation of virtually every facet of life around him from climatic conditions to the examination of individual patients.

During those ten years Drake had not only become a practicing physician and a pioneer in medical education in the West, but he had taken an active part in the intellectual life of Cincinnati in the Lyceum and the Library Association; he kept careful meteorological

records; he gathered, recorded, and tested botanical specimens, particularly for medical use; he catalogued mineralogical and fossiliferous data; and he gathered Indian artifacts and data, excavating the large mound that is now commemorated in Mound Street in Cincinnati and in the remarkable remnants that he contributed to museums in Ohio and elsewhere.

This scientific and medical data provided the substance of his *Notices Concerning Cincinnati*, which was the first attempt to provide an ecological cross-section of a region west of the Appalachians. Reflecting the influences of his teachers, Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Barton, as well as Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Drake's *Notices* makes clear two important principles that were to direct his thinking and activities for the rest of his life and that he attempted to communicate to students, medical or literary, on every possible occasion. For Drake, medical science was and would remain a part of natural philosophy.

The first principle, stemming perhaps from the eighteenth century, is his belief in the ultimate unity of all knowledge, based upon the conviction that in a fixed, balanced universe each aspect of the physical world reveals a portion of the natural laws by which the universe is governed by a rational God. The second principle, also based in eighteenth century philosophy, is his conviction that man and his institutions are perfectible. For Drake as a medical practitioner these principles implied that for each disease in the universe somewhere there existed a specific cure. As a scientist, an educator, and a man of strong social conscience, the principles meant that the attainment of all knowledge was a rational, attainable goal for him, his students, and his professional colleagues.

Evidence of the impact of these eighteenth century ideas lies in Drake's intent in writing and publishing his *Notices*. In his preface, he comments,

Such a *Calendarium Flora* as would exhibit the progress of vegetation at this place, and answer for insertion in the Medical and Physical Journal, or some other Magazine, and nothing more, was at first intended. But the physical sciences are so intimately connected, that the narrow limits then prescribed, have been overstepped, and the addition

of notices respecting our soil, climate, and diseases, now renders the floral calendar the most inconsiderable part.

Further evidence of the eighteenth century philosophy underlying the *Notices* is Drake's insistence that his readers "make a careful distinction between what is given as fact, and what as hypothesis, or deduction: The latter *may* be correct, the former can scarcely be incorrect." The first four sections, devoted to topography, geology, climate, and "Conditions of the Town," are factual, based on careful observation and recording of data, although he combines morality and medical theory in his comments on the use of tobacco and alcohol in the latter section. The last section, diseases, is composed of both fact and deduction as he seeks to combine the observations and experiences of his medical practice with deductions concerning the relationships between specific diseases and the physical environment. *Marsh miasmata* is thus the result not only of natural swamps, easily drained, but of putrefied refuse, a behavior pattern readily correctable. Excited if not caused by variations of atmospheric temperatures are "Catarrh, Consumption, Pleurisy, Peripneumony, Rheumatism, and Tooth-ach." However, he comments, specific relationships between diseases and causes of death are difficult to determine because "No bill of mortality has yet been kept in this place."

Although Drake's attempt in the *Notices* to generalize from his observations left much to be desired—he had not yet mastered the technique of inductive reasoning but instead relied heavily upon intuition, carefully qualified, for the means by which he joined generalities with the specific observations upon which they were based—he made a clear case for the premise upon which his future work and his philosophy of education were to be based. This premise was his conviction that the inductive method was the only path to truth, a conviction that he propagated to students at every occasion. Although he recognized the shortcomings inherent in the *Notices*, he felt that he had made a good case for the principle at the same time that he had demonstrated its use.

Unfortunately, however, the reception of the *Notices* was not what he had expected. Western editors did not see the book as a breakthrough in scientific and medical research in the Ohio Valley; they saw it as a slanderous attack on the reputation of the

area. Developers and speculators as well as journalists were presenting the area to prospective settlers and purchasers as the "Garden Spot of the West," indeed, the "New Eden," and they were impatient with Drake's effort to describe and interpret it objectively.

The *Notices* consequently had very little circulation, probably accounting for its rarity today, and Drake was disappointed but not discouraged. Instead, in conjunction with others, he began to plan a new "School of Literature and the Arts" in Cincinnati, and he continued work on an expanded version of *Notices*, which, he felt, would meet some of the criticism directed at the shorter version and expand its usefulness at the same time. The School became a reality in 1813; in keeping with Drake's concept of the nature of learning, it was designed to encourage scientific inquiry as well as pursue the more traditional activities of a literary group, to carry knowledge of the arts and sciences to the larger community, and to encourage discussion and debate among its members. It was the first such society in Cincinnati and probably the first in the West. On its first anniversary, November 23, 1814, Drake reviewed its accomplishments for the members:

. . . We have assembled, for literary exercise, more than twenty times; and our President (Josiah Meigs) has delivered, on Astronomy and Natural Philosophy, a variety of Lectures, equally eloquent and perspicuous. . . .

The essays of the members . . . consist chiefly of original matter, while others manifest a degree of research, which is honorable to their authors, and auspicious to the School.

It would be amusing to review their contents, but being restricted to limits too narrow for the undertaking, I will submit a catalogue of their titles, that, by a single glance we may see the number and diversity of the subjects to which our attention has been directed. I shall enumerate them in the order of their delivery:

1 An Essay on Education—2 on the Earthquakes of 1811, 1812 and 1813—3 on Light—4 on Carbon—5 on Air—6 on the Mind—7 on Agriculture—8 on Caloric—9 on Gravitation—10 on Instinct—11 Notices of the Aurora Borealis of the 17th of April and 11th of September, 1814—12 an Essay on Water, considered chemically and hydro-

statically—13 on Common Sense—14 on Heat—15 on the Mechanical Powers—16 on the Theory of Earthquakes—17 on Enthusiasm—18 on the Geology of Cincinnati and its vicinity, illustrated with mineral specimens and a vertical map—19 on the Internal Commerce of the United States—20 on Hydrogen—21 on Rural Economy—22 on the Geology of some parts of New York—23 on General Commerce.

As pleased as he was with the productive record in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, Drake was equally pleased with the fact that "our Album of poetry already exhibits specimens indicative of a cultivated taste." But his greatest concern was not with what had been done but what would lead to an enlightened future, and he was particularly sensitive about comparisons between East and West:

But it will, perhaps, be asserted, that in a state so young as this, *no* literary distinction is attainable, that would out-value its cost; that academics and colleges are as yet scarcely instituted; that libraries, philosophical apparatus and scientific teachers are equally rare and imperfect; that associations for improvement, animated and impelled by a persevering spirit, can find no habitation in these rude and chequered settlements; and, lastly, that our countrymen are accustomed to look with frigid indifference on every species of literary effort. This is, indeed, pouring cold water on the flame of literary ambition: but that noble passion is not to be thus extinguished; and if a single spark remain, it will enable us to perceive, through the Gothic darkness which envelopes our literature and science, the certain tho narrow paths to a brighter region.

The path to that brighter future was clear to Drake: it consisted of work, education, and leadership, and, as he had in the past, he continued to follow it. His family was growing, with a son born in 1810 and another in 1813; he founded the First District Medical Society in Cincinnati in 1812, organized the Cincinnati Manufacturing Company in 1813 and the Cincinnati Lancasterian Seminary in 1814, meanwhile continuing to work on his *Natural and Statistical View, or Picture of Cincinnati and the Miami Country*, which he anticipated would be published as he made plans to spend another term at the University of Penn-

sylvania Medical School. The book appeared as he returned from Philadelphia with his new M.D. degree, but it carried an 1815 copyright date.

Although Drake indicated in the Preface to what became known as *Picture of Cincinnati in 1815* that the new book was essentially "a more extended, and less professional" version of his *Notices of 1810*, that is, a book that might be useful to travelers and prospective settlers, it was much more than that. Drake's concession to such a function is, however, evident throughout, and much of it seems to be directed at his journalistic critics in the West rather than prospective emigrants, to those who would more likely skim the book for review purposes rather than read it carefully for factual information. The first of his qualifying statements appeared in the introduction to Chapter I, "Geographical and Historical," but even then he refuses to deviate from the factual or to omit statements that may discourage prospective emigrants. Thus, although he begins with a statement that might appear in almost any prospectus, that "The principal inducements for immigrants to this state are, the fertility of its soil; the low prices of lands, and entire security of title; the high price of labor, and the exclusion of slavery," he then cites factors that have both contributed to and inhibited Ohio's increase in population:

The progress of increase, in this state, has been equally rapid with that of immigration. From the abundance of subsistence, the preventive checks to population do not operate, and marriages are both early and productive. Males frequently marry before twenty-one, and females before seventeen. The positive checks are neither numerous nor powerful. The diseases peculiar to new countries, and incidental to those who change their climate, have an effect, not susceptible of estimation, but which is unquestionably considerable. This, however, is the only cause to which much should be ascribed. . . .

Much of the work is descriptive of the topography, mineral resources, prehistoric mounds, settlement pattern, and political structure of the Cincinnati area and Ohio in general, and the conclusion is devoted to projected future improvements—bridges, roads, and, an idea entirely his own, a canal that would connect



the Maumee River of the north with the Miami River of the south, thus connecting Lake Erie with the Ohio River and making Cincinnati the river terminus. The canal was not authorized until 1825, and it was completed to Toledo in 1845.

Chapter V is devoted to Drake's favorite topic: "Medical Topography," the relationship between climate and physical geography and disease. "We have," Drake says, "most of those which are common in the same latitudes, east of the Alleghenies. Some of them, however, are less violent and frequent here than there." They include "Pulmonary Consumption; which, in the Atlantic cities, destroys from a fourth to a sixth of all who die; while in this town, it produces not more than one-twentieth of the deaths." In difference to his avowed purpose of usefulness to prospective emigrants, he adds, "So favorable, indeed, is this place to those who are threatened with Consumption, that a migration to it from the Northern states might be advantageously recommended, when this complaint is about commencing, or not very far advanced."

Other evidence of the healthiness of Cincinnati's climate abounds: "The *Croup* is a formidable disease in this place (but) I have never seen it of that malignant and epidemic character at Cincinnati, which it exhibited in Virginia in 1799 . . . *Rheumatism* occurs; but is not so frequent and formidable as in the Northern states . . ." and, with his tongue in cheek, suggesting, perhaps, his attitude toward his new profession of promoter, he adds, "*Drowning* in the Ohio, is an accident which often happens, and one which we are entirely unprepared to remedy, not having the instruments necessary, either for the recovery of the immersed body, or the restoration of life." Perhaps more telling, however, is his revelation that "As no bills of mortality are kept in this place, it is not known what proportion die annually; what diseases carry off the largest number; or which of the seasons is attended with the greatest mortality. . . ."

Drake concludes his section on "Medical Topography" with what was becoming a matter of increasing interest to him. Just as he was convinced that there was a relationship between disease and topography, he was also convinced that there was a similar relationship between topography and the cure or alleviation of disease. The final section of his chapter on "Medical Topography"

deals with mineral springs within easy traveling distance of Cincinnati. Included are descriptions of the springs, comments on diseases which may be eased by the waters, and specific doses. He concludes the section with a reference to his own attempt to construct fountains by which the residents of Cincinnati would be supplied with artificial mineral water as well as a brief description of "Bone Valley," a fossiliferous site near Cincinnati. "And if, according to Mr. Jefferson," Drake writes, "the passage of the Potomac through the Blue Ridge, be a scene worth a voyage across the Atlantic—the tomb of the mammoths will certainly reward the traveller of taste and science, for a journey from Cincinnati."

*Picture of Cincinnati in 1815* proved to be the success that had eluded Drake in his *Notices*. Not only does it contain the only thorough and trustworthy account of the prehistoric mounds obliterated by settlement in the Cincinnati area, but it was popular with Western editors, emigrants, and armchair travelers. Widely distributed and translated, it was a commercial success as well. However, Drake was determined to devote his energies to establishing a medical college in the Ohio Valley and to continue his observations, and the success of the book was valuable to him only insofar as it provided support for that cause.

Upon his return from Philadelphia in 1816, he established with his father and brother Benjamin a firm, "Isaac Drake & Co.," for the sale of medicines, artificial mineral waters, and a variety of other goods; he resumed his medical practice; and early in the new year he and Dr. Goforth reformed their partnership. Upon Goforth's death on May 12 he formed a partnership with Dr. Coleman Rogers for medical practice and the instruction of medical students. However, on January 7, 1817, he had been elected to the medical faculty of Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, and that fall he took up his duties as professor of materia medica and botany at Transylvania.

However, his brief tenure at Transylvania—he resigned on March 24, 1818, amid charges of attempting to ruin the medical department—suggests the tenuous and controversial nature of medical education in the West at the time. Equally evident is the fact that Drake's heart and his planned future were in Cincinnati. Upon his return he lectured upon botany at the Lancas-

trian Seminary, inaugurated a series of medical lectures at the same place, organized the "Western Museum Society" and the "Cincinnati Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Manufacture and Domestic Economy," and petitioned the Ohio General Assembly for charters for the Medical College of Ohio and the Cincinnati College. In November, 1820, instruction began at the Medical College, with Drake as president and professor of medicine.

During the decade of the 1820's circumstances were as confused as Drake was determined. Controversy in the Cincinnati Medical Society over the founding of the Medical College—Cincinnati physicians, led by Coleman Rogers, were perhaps understandably upset because the College was reducing the number of medical apprentices available—led to Drake's resignation and founding of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Cincinnati, whereupon Rogers challenged Drake to a duel. Drake refused, but voted to expel Rogers from the College faculty, whereupon their partnership was dissolved. Further controversy developed within the College in 1822, when Drake was dismissed as president and professor by vote of the faculty. Reinstated by demand of the citizens of Cincinnati, he resigned and returned to Transylvania University as professor of materia medica and medical botany, becoming dean of the medical faculty in 1824. He remained in Lexington until 1827, when he resigned to return to Cincinnati.

During the decade he had petitioned the Ohio General Assembly for a charter to establish a "Commercial Hospital and Lunatic Asylum" to be established in Cincinnati; he began work on his "Treatise on the Diseases of the Western Country," and, convinced that scientific knowledge could be the only sound basis of human medicine, he further refined his theories of medicine and medical education, in the process attacking and repelling counter-attacks from the wide variety of herbalists, mesmerists, toe-rappers, and others who purported to treat the diseases of the West; and he intensified his conviction that a democratic society in the area must be based upon an educated electorate. In 1827 he founded and from 1828 to 1838 edited *The Western Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences*, dedicated to the

advance of science and scientific medicine. In it, in a sarcastic review of popular "doctor books" and patent medicines, he wrote:

A new excitement now springs up. A blue light, such as the superstitions see rising from the church yard, spreads over the people, and reveals the *ecstasy* of every vacant and credulous countenance. Now is the time for dyspeptics and ashmatics and hypochondriacs. Give them but a single draught. O how delightful! Perchance a ladle full from the chaldron of Macbeth; but no matter. Administered by wizard hands it can do no harm. Down with the profession, *vive le Charlatanerie*. The world has been long enough duped by lawyers, and priests, and doctors. Let us rid ourselves of the last of them, if no more. If not the greatest imposters, they cheat us out of most money, and kill us to boot.—They bleed us to fainting, blister us to wincing, stupefy us with opium, vomit us with tartar instead of lobelia, salivate us with mercury, in place of the 'panacea,' or the 'stone mason's balsam,' and, purge off with calomel all kinds of phlegm, but that which encumbers our brain! Let no one be over nice. The end sometimes justifies the means. Suffering humanity cries aloud, and must be rescued from the keeping of science and skill and professional charity. The world has been in error four thousand years: and the path of medicine may be followed back by the carcasses of its victims. . . . Break down the *aristocracy* of learning and science: give the people their rights: let the drunken and lazy among the tailors, and carpenters, and *lawyers*, and cobblers, and *clergy*, and saddlers, and ostlers, now rise to the summit level, and go forth as ministering angels! Become their patrons, and snuff up in turn the *steams* of their incense: sustain them against the professional Doctors: lecture them into notoriety: mould them into form as the bear licks her shapeless pups into beauty: turn jackels and procurers lest they might want business: stand responsible for their success: newspaper abroad their pretended cures; and handbill away the proofs of their murders! . . .

After his return from Lexington he had visited Philadelphia and Washington to observe techniques and institutions devoted to eye care, establishing the Cincinnati Eye Infirmary as a result;

he served as professor of the theory and practice of medicine at the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia; in 1831, he organized the short-lived Medical Department of Miami University, which, after litigation with the Medical College of Ohio, was merged with that institution; and he became active in temperance agitation, founding the Hamilton County Temperance Society in early 1834. His brief re-affiliation with the Medical College of Ohio ended with his resignation amid renewed charges that he was trying to destroy the college, and a brief pamphlet war ensued. Nevertheless, he continued to publish, largely in his *Western Journal*, on disease and to speak on science and education at every opportunity. His *Practical Treatise on the History, Prevention, and Treatment of Epidemic Cholera*, published in 1832, had become a standard work, but his continued warnings that Cincinnati was threatened with an epidemic frightened many of the citizens and alienated most of the editors and physicians of the town.

Consequently, when Drake stood before the Union Literary Society of Miami University on September 23, 1834, he was not only Cincinnati's most prominent physician, but he was also its most controversial, and perhaps the controversies that surrounded him were responsible for his being second choice to the non-controversial Judge Lane. Nevertheless, at the same time it was evident that neither Judge Lane nor any other potential speaker had exhibited Drake's vision of what the West might become or his drive and dedication to make that vision real. In the course of his talk Drake attempted to communicate both his vision and his dedication to his listeners, and, perhaps more important, he attempted to articulate his reasons for both: his determination to create, to re-order, to construct a society that emulates the balance, harmony, and beauty of the natural world that was Drake's textbook.

Intrinsic to Drake's vision and his purpose is his conviction that beyond diversity lies unity and beyond apparent chaos lies order. Important, too, is his faith in the necessity of a rational awareness of the close relationship between the natural environment and those who would use it as the foundation for a new society devoid of the social and psychological ills of the old.

The West was, to Drake, the opportunity to build that new society, and not only had he accepted that mission as his own, but he attempted to share it with his listeners:

The ancient and venerable maxim, Know Thyself, has been generally addressed to individuals, but it is equally applicable to communities; who should be familiar with the natural resources of their country, and the genius and tendency of their social, literary, religious, and political institutions; or they cannot cherish the good, and successfully cast out the evil. This self-knowledge of nations, is especially necessary for one of recent origin, where everything is still green, and must be fashioned according to the skill of those who regulate its growth.

This situation, Drake asserts, provides a remarkable opportunity for the young men in his audience:

Society in these Backwoods, even in the most thickly settled parts, is but in its forming state; and we are, therefore, invited to scrutinize, with care, the principles which control its development; for otherwise its maturity may offer less of perfection, than is found in communities which sprang up at an earlier period, instead of displaying, in its own strength and beauty, the beneficial fruits of their experience and wisdom.

In an age in which regional conflicts—East and West, North and South—were becoming increasingly evident as sources of tension in the fabric of the national life, Drake, aware of the possible dangers inherent in his position and his concern, nevertheless saw his determination to enhance life and culture in the West as a necessary concern for life and culture in the nation as well. It was a concern to which Drake had directed his remarks at a literary conference in Lexington, Kentucky, the previous Fall, in which he insisted that the Union not only should not but could not be dissolved; here, rather than repeat himself, he remarks that

It may be asked, however, whether it is consistent with the peace and perpetuity of the Union, to inculcate a devotion to one of its parts? I . . . reply, that a devotion to the West, is manifestly compatible with both, and indeed the most efficient means of promoting both.

Confident that East and West were one, that the Aaron Burr incident of his youth as well as the contemporary Jacksonian energy of the region were cement for the national fabric, Drake turned to his purpose: "in the spirit of the West (1) shall wander to and fro, expiating on whatever may seem attractive, but still keeping within its ample bounds."

In ranging to and fro within the broad boundaries of the West, Drake emphasized two major points in his address to the young men of Miami. First he defined the differences between East and West in social and cultural affairs, and then he pointed out the advantages that these differences provided for young Westerners. The former consisted of those elements that comprise an orderly society, contrasted with a new society that aspires to an order it has not yet achieved; the latter becomes, for Drake, the foundations of opportunity as well as the substance of a literature.

As a scientist, therefore, Drake observes, records, and interprets the physical and social phenomena for his young audience, and then he generalizes to construct the principle that underlies his data:

Young Gentlemen: The scenery, history, and biography, of the Valley of the Mississippi, constitute the very elements of our literature, and their retrospect naturally leads us to inquire into its resources, and the character it will probably assume. When the young planter, on the banks of the Yazoo or the Illinois, clears away the forest, and prepares his lands for tillage, his tastes and judgment are displayed in the plan on which he marks out his fields and the seeds with which he sows them. It will depend on himself, whether his farm be beautiful in its arrangement and varied in its products, or irregular, unsightly, and more prolific in weeds and briars, than the useful and elegant products of agriculture. Thus it must be with the scholars of the Great Valley. They have a vast field to cultivate, but small portions of which are as yet laid off and planted, and its future beauty and abundance will be according to their skill and industry.

Having provided both a past and a present reality for the young men of the Society, Drake turned then to defining the

language, the parameters, and the substance of the literature they would produce. Foreseeing the vigor that would enter the living language with Mark Twain and his followers, he defined the sources and the course of evolution of a peculiarly Western literary language:

Many of our writers have received but little education, and are far more anxious about results, than the polish of the machinery by which they are to be effected. They write for a people whose literary attainments are limited and imperfect; whose taste is for the strong rather than the elegant. . . . Moreover, the emigration into the Valley being from every civilized country, new and strange forms of expression are continually thrown into the great reservoir of spoken language . . . gradually, the heterogeneous rudiments will conform to a common standard, and finally shoot into a compound of rich and varied elements; inferior in refinement, but superior in force, variety, and freshness to the language of the mother country.

Drake saw little classical influence or allusion among his contemporary writers and scarcely more in the future, and he foresaw no continuity with the pre-Revolutionary past; he saw a continuing emphasis upon a popular literature that would be both religious and declamatory; he deplored the lack of a musical literature and saw musical development as an interesting experimental adjunct to literary growth; he saw a continuing American patriotism and a growing American nationalism.

Of most importance to the development of a new literature in the West, Drake saw the impact of the new technology and the emergence of new themes and new heroes. Of the former, he said,

Our literature will be tinctured with the thoughts and terms of business. The mechanic arts have become locomotive, both in temper and capacity—they travel abroad, and exhibit themselves in every department of society. To a certain degree, they modify the public mind; supply new topics for the tongue and pen; generate strange words and phrases, as if by machinery; suggest novel modes of illustration, and manufacture figures of speech by steam power. They afford canal transportation to the ponderous compiles of statistics; a turnpike to the historian; a tunnel to the

metaphysician; a scale of definite proportions to the moral philosopher; a power loom and steam press to the novelist; fulminating powder to the orator; corrosive acid to the satirist; a scalpel to the reviewer; a siesta chair to the essayist; a kaleidoscope to the dramatist; a balloon to the poet; a railroad to the enthusiast; and nitrous oxide to the dunce. While we devoutly indulge the hope, that our literature will not depend for its elevation on the lever of the arts, there can be no objection to a fellowship between them; nor any reason why it should not adopt, whatever they may offer, to diversify its objects and enrich its resources.

If Drake's predicted new language grows out of that of the people and his envisioned imagery and subject matter out of the literal and metaphorical movement of the new technology, his concept of new themes and new heroes draws upon the immediate past:

The early history, biography, and scenery of the Valley of the Mississippi, will confer on our literature a variety of important benefits. They furnish new and stirring themes for the historian, the poet, the novelist, the dramatist, and the orator. They are equally rich in events and objects for the historical painter. As a great number of those who first threaded the lonely and silent labyrinths of our primitive woods were men of intelligence, the story of their perils and exploits has a dignity which does not belong to the early history of other nations. We should delight to follow their footsteps and stand upon the spot where, at night, they lighted up the fire of hickory bark to frighten off the wolf; where the rattlesnake infused his deadly poison into the foot of the rash intruders on his ancient domain; where, in the deep grass, they laid prostrate and breathless, while the enemy, in Indian file, passed unconsciously on his march. We should plant willows over the spots once fertilized with their blood; and the laurel tree where they met the unequal war of death, and remained conquerors of the little field.

Drake's conclusion is eulogistic and visionary as he exhorts the young men to take up the work that he and his generation had begun in the Valley of the Ohio in the closing years of the

eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth, the work that he was to continue for the eighteen years that remained of his life:

With this preparation in mind, and willing devotion of heart, you will labor, in harmony, till the monuments of your skill and industry shall cover the land, from Michigan to Louisiana—from the mountain rivulets of our own unrivaled Ohio, to the grassy fountains of the savage Arkansas. You will contribute to raise up a mighty people, a new world of man, in the depths of the new world of history, and the friends of liberty, literature, and religion, in all nations, will look upon it with love and admiration: composed of the descendants of emigrants from every country, its elements will be as various as the trees which now attire our hills; but its beauties as resplendent as the hues of their autumn foliage.

As he expected the young men of Miami to do, Drake went back to his work, spending much of his time in residence at the Louisville Medical Institute, but continuing to work toward the establishment of a great, permanent medical college in Cincinnati. He returned there to stay in 1852 as the Ohio College became a reality, but he died as it opened. During those years, too, he continued his observation, experimentation, and writing, publishing a prodigious array of papers and speeches on medicine, natural philosophy, the arts, and practical affairs. In 1850 he published the first volume of what he considered his life's work, a 900-page volume called *A Systematic Treatise, Historical, Etiological and Practical on the Principle Diseases of the Interior Valley of North America, as they Appear in the Caucasian, African, Indian, and Eskimoux Varieties of its Population*.

Two years after his death, the second volume, of equal weight and length, appeared, the two together comprising one of the most remarkable, complex, and detailed works by one person in the publishing—and literary—history of this country. For, as Drake exhorted the young men of Miami—and those other young men of the West, Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses Grant, too young to sit in that lecture hall, and William Dean Howells and Mark Twain, not yet born—the course of Western destiny, he knew, could be shaped only by Westerners. And as that destiny was

shaped, so was that of the nation, indeed of the world. As the Franklin of the West, Drake knew that region to be the American heartland just as his physician's insight taught him the aptness of that image.

Michigan State University

## THE POETRY OF JOHN HOWARD BRYANT

JOHN E. HALLWAS

### I

Like so many early Midwestern poets, John Howard Bryant (1807-1902) has been completely neglected by twentieth-century scholars. However, this younger brother of William Cullen Bryant deserves to be recognized as one of the few poets of the Midwest in the nineteenth century who wrote lyrics that are still worth reading. His canon is limited to a single collection, which was twice expanded and published under a different title: *Poems* (1855), *Poems Written from Youth to Old Age* (1885), and *The Life and Poems of John Howard Bryant* (1894). The last of these volumes includes an essay by E. R. Brown entitled "John Howard Bryant: A Biographical Sketch," which is the most important source of information about the poet's life. Like most poets, Bryant's best work is but a fraction of his total output, but his achievement is genuine and ought to be known by those who are interested in the development of Midwestern poetry.

Thirteen years younger than his famous brother, John Howard Bryant was born on July 22, 1807, in Cummington, Massachusetts, a lovely village in the Berkshire foothills.<sup>1</sup> He was the youngest of five sons and two daughters. Like William, he was encouraged to enjoy the natural world, to read, and to write by his father, Dr. Peter Bryant—until the latter died in 1820. After attending a "select school" and an academy in Cummington, John was a student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York from 1828 to 1829. He was subsequently a census taker and a teacher back in his home region during the next two years.

He began writing articles and poems for newspapers while still a teenager. In fact, his most well-known poem, "My Native Village," was written when he was only eighteen—the same age

at which William, whom he idolized, had written "Thanatopsis."<sup>2</sup> It appeared in the *United States Review and Literary Gazette*, which was edited by his famous brother. "My Native Village" is certainly not one of his best lyrics, but it is typical of his work in some ways. Nostalgic longing for the past and romantic delight in nature are the prominent characteristics, as the closing stanzas indicate:

Ah! happy days, too happy to return,  
Fled on the wings of youth's departed years;  
A bitter lesson has been mine to learn,  
The truth of life, its labors, pains, and fears.  
Yet does the memory of my boyhood stay,  
A twilight of the brightness passed away.

My thoughts steal back to that sweet village still;  
Its flowers and peaceful shades before me rise;  
The play-place and the prospect from the hills,  
Its summer verdure and autumnal dyes;  
The present has its storms; but while they last,  
I shelter me in the delightful past.<sup>3</sup>

The lyric reads like a mediocre imitation of William's poetry, and indeed, the latter's influence on John was enormous.

The most significant year in Bryant's career as a poet was probably 1831, when he moved to Jacksonville, Illinois, where his brother Arthur already resided, and where a third brother, Cyrus, would soon move also. It was at this time that he began to write lyrics about Western subject matter. He contributed poems to a local newspaper, *The Illinois Patriot*, from 1831 to 1833—sometimes under the pseudonym "Prairie Bard"—and he also had poems published in James Hall's *Illinois Monthly Magazine* (located in Vandalia) during the same period.<sup>4</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that in 1832 William came to Jacksonville for a visit, and he and John rode together for a few days over the wild landscape, stopping at such villages as Springfield and Peoria. As a result of this excursion, William wrote a few poems, including "The Prairies," which may have encouraged John to write lyrics about his own experiences in the West.

In any case, John remained in Jacksonville for only a year and a half. In the fall of 1832 he and Cyrus moved to Princeton,

Illinois, where they were soon joined by Arthur. During the next year, John married Harriet Wiswall, whom he had met in Jacksonville, and they settled on a 320-acre tract of land. In 1835 his mother and eldest brother, Austin, came west to live in Princeton too. Of the five Bryant brothers, only William remained in the East—although he seriously considered moving to Illinois during the 1830's.

John remained in Princeton until his death seventy years later. During this time he occasionally wrote poems, but his total output was meager. He evidently became too busy with other concerns. Aside from being a pioneer farmer, he was extensively involved in government and politics, was a newspaper editor for a time, and was active in a variety of community and state affairs. He was, for example, the first recorder of deeds for Bureau County and the first chairman of the Bureau County Board of Supervisors—to which he was reelected for several terms. More importantly, he was elected to the state legislature in 1842 and again in 1858. Partly as a result of these years of work in Springfield he came to know Lincoln well. From 1847 to 1850 he was editor of the *Bureau Advocate*, and he used that position to espouse the principles of the Free Soil Party. In 1854 he ran for Congress as the nominee of that party, and upon his defeat, organized the Bureau County branch of the newly formed Republican Party. He was also prominent in the Illinois State Agricultural Society and active in the movement to establish industrial colleges in the west.

Furthermore, Bryant was a staunch abolitionist and, hence, was an ally of the famous preacher and politician in Princeton, Owen Lovejoy (the younger brother of Elijah, who was murdered in 1837). Both men were very active in the Underground Railroad. In an 1845 lyric called "Hymn"—one of several poems by that title in his canon—Bryant refers to the use of Lovejoy's church (the Princeton Congregational Church) for this purpose:

Here hath the fleeing bondman found  
A shield from Hell's pursuing hound;  
And hence have Freedom's truths gone forth  
To shake and light and bless the Earth.<sup>5</sup>

During the final decades of his long life, Bryant continued to take an interest in agriculture, government, and education—and

he continued to write poetry. However, a long series of deaths darkened those post-Civil War years. His four brothers and two sisters all preceded him in death; his wife died in 1888, and his son Elijah died in 1892. (His only other son, Henry, died in 1854.) It is, then, not surprising that his final lyric in *The Life and Poems of John Howard Bryant*, entitled "At Eighty Seven," finds him counting his losses:

Alone, Alone! why wait I here,  
When all most loved have passed away;  
Parents and wife and children dear,  
Brothers and sisters, where are they.

Gone to the boundless silent past. . . . (p. 229)

He was also, during this period, the most well-known old pioneer of the Princeton area, and he was often called upon to write poems for local celebrations. He finally died in 1902, at the age of ninety-five.

## II

Bryant wrote a number of poems that were based on the Illinois landscape around Princeton, but there is little sense of a unique locale in them. Rather, he chose to focus on his own emotional and religious response to the natural world. In fact, two of the most common elements in Bryant's poems are romantic landscape description and religious sentiment. These are often combined to express the conventional theme that nature bespeaks the presence of God—as in the two closely associated lyrics, "A Night Scene" and "Hymn." (Taken together, they are similar to his brother William's famous poem, "A Forest Hymn.") In the first of these, a midnight walk through the unspoiled landscape near his Princeton home allows the poet to experience God's influence, and become worshipful:

Standing here,  
And looking on this varied scenery, spread  
So beautiful around, I feel a power,  
As of the Great Omnipotent upon me,  
That calls my heart to worship: I will kneel  
Here by the side of this o'erhanging wood,

And like the patriarchs of ancient time,  
Who worshipped on the mountains, offer up  
Beneath heaven's mighty arch, my humble hymn  
To the Great Keeper of the sleeping world. (p. 56)

The following lyric contains the text of the poet's "hymn." Although addressed to God, it is really a meditation on the darkened landscape, as the following lines indicate:

Nothing is so minute, but speaks Thy power;  
Each spring flower proclaims infinity,  
And every stirring leaf, a God. This earth,  
This mighty globe upon its centre turns,  
And gives a glimpse of Thine eternal works, —  
A narrow glimpse that shows superior worlds  
As specks, and distant suns as points. How vast,  
How beautiful, are thy works, O God! (p. 57)

Another poem that depicts a benevolent, God-wrought natural world is "The Maples," into which Bryant also works his favorite theme, transience. (This is also the most common theme in the poetry of his brother William.) The opening stanzas find him musing on the years that have gone by since he first settled in Bureau County:

In the shadow of the maples  
That cluster round my home,  
I watch the silent changes  
That with the seasons come.

'Tis six and forty summers,  
Since the naked prairie land,  
With the slender forest saplings,  
Was planted by my hand.

Then so slender, now so sturdy,  
Their round tops towering high,  
While beneath them on the greensward  
The broad, dark shadows lie.

And still in youthful vigor,  
The struggling branches climb;  
While my life's powers are ebbing  
With the passing years of time.



Beneath these spreading branches,  
Cool as the sky o'ercast,  
I dream of the boundless future,  
And muse on the mighty past. (p. 115)

Evident here is the remarkable smoothness of style that characterizes his best lyrics. The "boundless future" is a reference to eternity, for Bryant soon wonders whether the delights of the natural world will be experienced in heaven. And meditation on the "mighty past" brings to mind his loved ones who have died, the saddest aspect of his recollections. Then he goes on to admit that his theme is conventional—but he offers an unusual, comic employment of the Methuselah story to make his point:

'Tis a trite and hackneyed subject,  
This rapid flight of time;  
It is one that men have grieved about  
In every age and clime—

And I doubt not old Methuselah  
Felt that nature did him wrong,  
As he marked how fast the centuries  
Were hurrying him along.

And there is a tradition  
That at last he died of grief,  
O'er his lack of opportunity  
In a life so very brief. (p. 117)

Yet in spite of the fact that transience lies at the heart of nature and often makes life difficult to bear, Bryant closes by affirming the essential goodness of the world:

'Tis true its paths are toilsome,  
At times exceeding rough;  
But save its crimes and sorrows,  
This world is good enough.

And He whose hand hath formed it,  
Plain, mountain, sky and flood,  
When the great work was finished  
Pronounced his labor good. (p. 118)

All things considered, "The Maples" is Bryant's best lyric on the conventional notion that man's life is a fleeting enterprise.

It is in relationship to such works as "A Night Scene," "Hymn," and "The Maples" that a more unusual lyric called "Drought" should be read. The poem is dated "June, 1871," and so it was evidently written in response to a period of unusual dryness in Illinois at that time. In this lyric, natural conditions certainly do not indicate the presence of God, as the opening stanza demonstrates:

Not a cloud in the sky, but a brassy haze,  
Through which the sun glares hot and red,  
Day after day, these long June days,  
'Till the grass is withered and the flowers are dead.  
(p. 160)

Indeed, the entire landscape is depicted as suffering from a lack of moisture:

From the bosom of earth goes up a sigh,  
From every living thing a plaint;  
The leaves on the shrubs are crisp and dry,  
And the mighty woods look sick and faint. (p. 161)

Moreover, the world is suffering from spiritual drought as well, for there is no one with enough faith to assert a ready end to the parched conditions through the Lord's help:

O! for the faith and prayer of Him,  
Who bowed upon Carmel's mount of yore;  
When rose on the far horizon's rim,  
The little cloud with its priceless store.

"But those times of undoubting faith are past,"  
Men say, "And the age of law has come,  
Trust in the Lord is waning fast,  
And his prophets of power are dead or dumb." (p. 161)

In short, the poet does not depict himself here as kneeling in prayer "like the patriarchs of ancient time"—as in "A Night Scene"—for he himself lacks the faith to ask for, and expect, God to remedy the situation. "Drought" may have been influenced

by William's portrayal of dryness in "Summer Wind," but the latter is not as fine a poem.

From the 1860's on, Bryant occasionally wrote poems for local celebrations, and while they are not among his best lyrics, they display another aspect of his role as Illinois poet. For example, "Then and Now," which is sub-titled, "Lines Read at the Old Settlers' Meeting, 1864," includes a brief description of Bureau County as it was when he first arrived:

. . . here and there beside the wood,  
The squatter's rude, rough cabin stood;  
While all around, fair nature smiled,  
Untamed and beautiful and wild. (p. 146)

Likewise, after the Civil War ended, he wrote "Welcome to the Returned Soldiers, 1865," which closes with the following stanza:

Union and Liberty are ours,  
The fruit of your endeavor,  
God help us keep the heritage  
Forever and forever. (p. 178)

Before closing the discussion of Bryant's longer lyrics, one more poem deserves attention. "Temperance" was "Read before the Princeton (Ill.) Washingtonian Society" in December of 1840. It is his only poem on this subject, but it is one of his finest achievements. As in "The Maples," Bryant deals with the past and the future in order to assess the present, but in this case, his frame of reference is entirely Christian. At the beginning of the poem, he describes Eden as a place of joyfulness. Water was the only drink, and so man was in tune with nature. The scourge of alcohol had yet to appear:

No alchymist, as yet, had found,  
In his dark cave beneath the ground,  
The liquid fire, that friend of strife  
Which eats the silken threads of life. (p. 125)

In contrast to Eden, he depicts the world after the Flood (i.e., after the first biblical age, from Adam to Noah) as a period of degeneration because of liquor:

When from the ark our sires went forth,  
And spread abroad upon the earth

And planted there the clinging vine  
And pressed its purple fruit for wine,  
How soon the years of man had run  
From nine long centuries down to one;  
How thick were sown along his path,  
Sorrow and crime, disease and death. (p. 126)

With this passage, he makes liquor responsible for the diminishing of man's biblical longevity, and for the woes of life. In short, alcohol is associated with all the evils of a fallen world. On the other hand, he declares that in the Christian heaven of the future, the saved will find the "Water of life" gushing from the throne of God: "That radiant, bright and blessed river, / Whose crystal wave flows on forever." Hence, water is presented as a symbol of eternal life. Having in this way very effectively associated alcohol with temporality and sorrow, and water with eternity and joy, he concludes that temperance will help to undo the effects of the Fall:

Then let us all our steps retrace,  
Regenerate our wasted race;  
Temperance shall lengthen out the span  
Allotted here on earth to man.  
Bring in the coming years to view,  
The reverent age the patriarchs knew;  
Give to the glad Millenium birth,  
And make a paradise on earth. (p. 126)

Although not a brilliant poem, "Temperance" is a good one—perhaps the finest lyric on this exceedingly common topic in early Midwestern poetry.

### III

Bryant's sonnets are also an important part of his achievement. Of course, he sometimes used the sonnet form to express his favorite theme, transience, and the nostalgia that often accompanied it in his mind—as in the following sestet:

Could I bring back one day of that far time,  
With the dear friends that gathered round our hearth,  
Childhood and youth, and manhood's noble prime,  
I've dreamed I could resign all else on earth.

But all those years of life have once been mine;  
I've had my time, and why should I repine? (p. 164)

As one might expect, his least effective sonnets are constructed around such conventional themes.

A better poem is "Sonnet—October," which first appeared in *The Illinois Patriot* on November 16, 1833. Most of the lyric is devoted to a conventional romantic description of the autumn landscape, to which the poet feels more responsive as he grows older—as the opening quatrain indicates:

I love the time of Autumn's fading groves,  
For with the sere and yellow leaf appears  
A dreamy sadness, that my spirit loves,  
And loves the more with my departing years. (p. 137)

However, the closing lines present a reversal of the common notion that fall is associated with death, for late summer was a time of "fell disease" for the pioneers—while in October "the hand of death is stayed, / And pallid cheeks with healthful bloom are spread."

Much more significant is a poem simply entitled "Sonnet," which describes a frontier preacher at work. Bryant's gift for creating effective rhythms is especially evident in this lyric:

I saw a preacher in the house of God;  
With frantic gestures and in accents loud  
And words profane he spread his hands abroad  
And poured anathemas upon the crowd!  
His speech was set with many a phrase uncouth,  
And frivolous remark and common jest;  
A mixture strange of folly and of truth,  
With fierce denunciations for the rest.  
Is this, I thought while listening to his strains,  
A follower of the meek and lowly one?  
Are these the accents heard on Bethleh'm's plains  
When angels hailed the birth of Mary's Son?  
Is this the Gospel sent us from above  
Whose words are peace and charity and love? (p. 189)

Many of the sermon techniques that he mentions ("jests," "anathemas," "denunciations") were the stock-in-trade of Peter Cartwright, who was for a few years presiding elder of the

Methodist Church district in which Bryant lived. And it would indeed have been difficult to see Cartwright—whose love of confrontation was legendary—as "A follower of the meek and lowly one." But whether or not the preacher described here was Cartwright, the poem is a thought-provoking criticism of the hellfire-and-histrionics style of preaching that he (and others) practiced. Undoubtedly, Bryant reacted negatively to the preacher because he himself was a member of the Congregational Church, whose ministers did not indulge in the emotionalism that was so characteristic of the Methodists and certain other frontier sects.

Another sonnet about an unnamed individual is also well written to praise and encourage someone who had set an enormous task for himself, as the opening quatrain indicates:

Bold champion of the poor, a thorny road  
Before thee lies: for thou hast bared thy breast  
And nerved thine arm to lift the heavy load,  
And break the chains from limbs too long oppressed. (p. 70)

The fourth line suggests that the "champion" was Owen Lovejoy, Bryant's close friend and political associate, who was the leading abolitionist in Illinois after the murder of his brother Elijah at Alton in 1837. The occasion for this sonnet may have been Lovejoy's election to Congress in 1856, for the conclusion of the poem refers to the making of laws to avert the shedding of blood:

Lo! the day dawns along our eastern shore;  
Soon shall the night of prejudice be o'er,  
And a bright morning give thee freer scope  
To rouse thy countrymen to deeds of good,  
And just and equal laws shall save the land from blood.

It is also possible, of course, that the sonnet refers to Lincoln, whom the author knew "intimately" from about 1854 "until the time of his assassination."<sup>6</sup> However, the unnamed man's boldness of purpose in regard to freeing the oppressed more closely fits the character of Lovejoy.

In any case, Bryant did write a sonnet about Lincoln in 1865 which is thematically related to "Sonnet to —," for it emphasizes the President's role as emancipator of the slaves. One of a great many Lincoln lyrics written after the assassination, it is simply entitled "Death of Lincoln." Several years earlier, the poet had

written another poem called "Hymn" which powerfully conveyed his desire for the freedom of the slaves:

Upon the nation's heart,  
A mighty burden lies;  
Two hundred years of crime and tears,  
Of anguish, groans and sighs.

How long, O Lord! how long!  
Crushed, trampled, peeled and dumb,  
Shall thy bound children suffer wrong,  
And no deliverer come? (p. 153)

Of course, prior to 1860 Bryant probably did not suspect that the deliverer might be Lincoln, his friend from the Illinois legislature. But when the emancipation finally took place, and the assassination closely followed, the poet could not help but view his fellow Illinoian as a martyr for freedom. This is his perspective in "Death of Lincoln":

"Make way for liberty," cried Winkelried,  
And gathered to his breast the Austrian spears.  
Fired with fresh valor at the glorious deed,  
O'er the dead hero rushed those mountaineers  
To victory and freedom. Even so  
Our dear, good Lincoln fell in freedom's cause.  
And while our hearts are pierced with keenest woe,  
Lo, the black night of slavery withdraws,  
And liberty's bright dawn breaks o'er the land.  
Four million bondmen, held in helpless thrall,  
Loosed by his word, in nature's manhood stand,  
And the sweet sun of peace shines over all.  
The blood that stained the martyr's simple robe  
Woke the deep sympathies of half the globe. (p. 160)

Through the comparison to Winkelried, the Swiss hero of the fourteenth century, Bryant conveys the notion that Lincoln is just as much a martyr as one who died in battle. But unlike Winkelried's sacrifice, which had a comparatively limited effect, Lincoln's death "Woke the deep sympathies of half the globe." Moreover, this reference to awakening in the final line is prepared for by the dawn imagery that conveys the impact of the emancipation in lines eight and nine. In other words, Bryant

sees the emancipation and the assassination as part of the same historical event, bringing the dawn of a new era of liberty in the world. "Death of Lincoln" is not only one of Bryant's finest achievements, it is comparable in quality to the much more well-known poem by William, "The Death of Abraham Lincoln."

Thus, John Howard Bryant may have a small canon of lyrics to show for eight decades of work as a publishing poet, but some of his poems are among the finest achievements in early Midwestern literature. His romantic landscape pieces, like "A Night Scene" and "Hymn," are readable—if unremarkable—examples of the kind of poetry that his brother William was noted for. Although these lyrics were based on the Illinois landscape, the language is so conventional that they could just as easily have been written in Massachusetts. Likewise, even "Drought," "Temperance," "Hymn" (on slavery), and the best sonnets show that Bryant never escaped from the eastern literary influence—nor could he be expected to, as the admiring younger brother of William. However, the latter poems also demonstrate that, when he avoided conventional themes like the presence of God in nature and reverence for the past, he could write distinctive, and even powerful, lyrics. For this reason, he is one of the few Midwestern poets of the nineteenth century who still deserves to be read.

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#### NOTES

1. The Summary of Bryant's life is chiefly indebted to E. R. Brown's "John Howard Bryant: A Biographical Sketch," in *The Life and Poems of John Howard Bryant* (Elmwood, Illinois: [no publisher], 1894), pp. 5-42.
2. A. F. Bridges makes this point in his article, "The Bryant Brothers," *Potter's American Monthly*, 12 (1879), 133.
3. *Poems* (New York: D. Appleton, 1855), p. 8. This lyric is altered slightly and re-titled "My Native Vale" in *The Life and Poems of John Howard Bryant*, pp. 45-46.
4. Some information about Bryant during this period is given in Frank J. Hein's "The Bryants at Jacksonville," *The Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 18 (1925), 218-27. The article includes two of Bryant's early poems, "To H.—1831" and "John Smith's Epistle to Kate."
5. "Hymn," in *The Life and Poems of John Howard Bryant*, p. 98. All subsequent quotations from Bryant's poems will be taken from this edition, and page references will be included in parentheses in the text.
6. From the headnote to "At the Tomb of Lincoln," in *The Life and Poems of John Howard Bryant*, p. 190.

## VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE'S FEMINISM: A STUDY OF HER THEORY AND CHARACTERIZATION

MARILYN JUDITH ATLAS

In this study of Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912), I have attempted to understand the personal code of an anarchist-feminist from Leslie, Michigan, one who gave public lectures encouraging and accepting life-giving compromises, yet one who created female characters in her fiction who blindly lived a moral code which was self-destructive, or who were so torn by contradictory values that they grew too weak to have any choices at all. de Cleyre was intelligently sensitive to the human difficulty of finding one's own balance between self-suppression and self-restraint. Oppressive outside messages could only increase the difficulty of finding such a balance. She blamed her isolation on the fact that she was living in a politically repressive environment and on the fact that she was a woman. In her essay, "Sex Slavery," she expresses her outrage at the way women are treated and asks for individuals to compromise their rigid values in order to help one another. She establishes the plight of women by stressing their isolation:

When America passed the fugitive slave law compelling men to catch their fellows more brutally than runaway dogs, Canada, aristocratic, unrepugnant Canada, still stretched her arms to those who might reach her. But there is no refuge upon earth for the enslaved sex. Right where we are, there we must dig our trenches, and win or die.<sup>1</sup>

The central thrust of this essay is to urge anarchists to sign a petition, even though signing a petition means acknowledging the government, for signatures might help release Moses Harman, a defender of women's rights, from prison. Harman has committed

no larger a crime than using language considered obscene by the government when speaking against male sexual violence in marriage. de Cleyre appeals not to the necessity of direct action but rather to the moral necessity of helping one another. She uses the rhetorical device of immediacy, switching from third to second person in an attempt to make her request as personally urgent as possible:

To those extreme Anarchists who cannot bend their dignity to ask pardon for an offense not committed, and of an authority they cannot recognize, let me say: Moses Harman's back is bent, low bent, by the brute force of the Law, and though I would never ask anyone to bow for himself, I can ask it, and easily ask it, for him who fights the slave's battle. Your dignity is criminal; every hour behind the bars is a seal to your partnership with Comstock. No one can hate petitions worse than I; no one has less faith in them than I. But for *my* champion I am willing to try any means that invades no other's right, even though I have little hope in it.<sup>2</sup>

de Cleyre is embracing practicality when others are concerned. She does not believe in government, but she acknowledges its existence and uses its strengths if she feels it may help her aid innocent people. On May 1897 she wrote a letter to the Honorable William E. Chandler, Senator from New Hampshire, in which she begs him to use his influence in the Senate in order to protest the Spanish government's torturous treatment of prisoners.<sup>3</sup> She is sensitized to the need of compromise, but she is afraid of being self-serving. In her sketches she explores what happens when individuals will not compromise for themselves. Her female protagonists in both "The Heart of Angiolillo" and "The Sorrows of the Body" suffer irreparable damage because of their inflexible natures.

Although still relatively unknown, Voltairine de Cleyre is receiving increased attention by modern scholars. Paul Avrich of Queens College recently wrote a biography entitled, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre*, in which he informatively establishes her position as an American radical and feminist, but he does not discuss the psychological tensions portrayed in her political and artistic works.<sup>4</sup> Margaret S. March

of Stockton State College uses the career of Voltairine de Cleyre to expand upon her discussion of anarchist-feminism in her essay "The Anarchist-Feminist Response to the 'Woman Question' in Late Nineteenth-Century America."<sup>5</sup> While she notes de Cleyre's political isolation, she neither fits into the individual anarchist nor communist-anarchist mold, March does not note the personal isolation which comes from de Cleyre's variable stance concerning self-serving action. Contrary to March's understanding, de Cleyre is not personally convinced that women must themselves take the initiative through individual rebellion against prevailing attitudes and behavior.<sup>6</sup> Her inconsistent attitude toward self-effacement becomes clear when one studies the relationship between her essays and sketches.

There is no question as to whether de Cleyre is a feminist, but certainly it is obvious that she is a confused one. Part of her confusion comes from her strong male identification. For instance she ends her essay, "Anarchism and American Traditions," with the following lines:

And when Modern Revolution has thus been carried to the heart of the whole world—if it ever shall be, as I hope it will,—then may we hope to see a resurrection of that proud spirit of our fathers which put the simple dignity of Man above the gauds of wealth and class, and held that to be an American was greater than to be a king.

In that day there shall be neither kings nor Americans,—only Men; over the whole earth, MEN.<sup>7</sup>

In a letter she wrote to her mother, Harriet Elizabeth Billings de Claire, she discusses her response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Although de Cleyre confesses that much of the book has disappeared from her memory she remembers feeling sorry for Rochester. She believes it is a grave injustice for him to be tied to a mad wife—she never questions his role in his wife's becoming mad.<sup>8</sup>

Most of de Cleyre's mentors were male, among them Dyer D. Lum, poet and anarchist, and Francisco Ferrer, innovative educator. It also seems that she recoiled from her fellow woman anarchist, Emma Goldman, for unconsciously sexist reasons: she wrote in a letter to her mother, "I have never liked Emma Gold-

man or her speeches; I don't like fishwifery or billingsgate," characteristics that she accepted more readily, or at least didn't write home about, in men.<sup>9</sup>

But even though her writing is at times laced with the sexist prejudice of nineteenth century America, even though she cannot fully reject the glorification of self-sacrifice and quiet personalities in women, she is one of the more liberated women of her era and she is often aware of her own conflicted nature. She can be, as March notes, assertive, demanding and approving of individuals making personal demands, but she is afraid of her own personal needs. In a letter she wrote to her best friend, Mary Hansen, she reveals a recurrent desire to withdraw:

"Do you know, Mary, I often and often long desperately for the quiet and order of convent life. I suppose it would be intolerable if I got it, but for the last three or four years it has been a continually recurring feeling: 'Oh, if only I could be in a place of *order* and well-regulated peace, and silent tongues.'"<sup>10</sup>

Emma Goldman noted her conflicted nature, but she did not understand its cause. In her pamphlet on de Cleyre she wrote:

With all her devotion to her social ideals, she had another god—the god of Beauty. Her life was a ceaseless struggle between the two, the ascetic determinedly yearning for it, worshipping it in utter abandonment, only to be dragged back by the ascetic to the other deity, her social ideal, her devotion to humanity.<sup>11</sup>

de Cleyre's conflict was deeper than the tension between the aesthetic and the ascetic: it was a conflict between freedom and the self-hatred and guilt that came with self-expression whenever these expressions were not productive or for the good of others. A few years before she died, de Cleyre wrote a letter to her mother in which she shows discomfort with her emotions. In it she states that joy is no longer appealing to her. She can no longer seek it because she can no longer believe in people. Each individual she has trusted has proven to be different than she suspected. She trusts no one and this lack of trust is poisoning her ability to relate. de Cleyre is angry at herself for feeling protective: she wants to be free to experience her feelings but they anger her for she finds

them unproductive and ungenerous. She can neither trust nor forgive herself for feeling negative.<sup>12</sup>

Intellectually, de Cleyre knows that she is not to blame for her disappointment with people, particularly in her relationships with men. Her lover, Samuel Gordon, for instance, once a fellow anarchist, disappointed her by becoming too conservative to either cope with anarchism or with her independence. She tutored him in English and financed him through medical school only to find that the depth of his spirit was less than she has suspected: Gordon wanted money more than human liberation; he wanted ownership more than the fluid cotillion of love. de Cleyre wrote to her sister, Adelaide Thayer, revealing her attempt to accept the new "Samuel Gordon":

I'm just the same friends with Gordon I always was, but he isn't satisfied with me because I won't agree to the regular program of married life (I don't mean the ceremony but the rest of it—exclusive possession, home, children, all that) so we don't see each other very often. I'm sorry, but I'll have to stand it. I've done the worst of my worrying over it, and have settled down to facts.<sup>13</sup>

But de Cleyre had not settled down to "facts." During the summer of 1906 Alexander Berkman was released from prison after serving a fourteen year sentence. He had attempted to assassinate Henry Clay Frick, manager of the Carnegie Steel Company, in order to prevent any more cold-blooded murders of Homestead Steel workers. de Cleyre tried to help Berkman regain the strength to survive his personal confusion and depression by writing him a letter in which she praised sensitivity and breadth of experience, and identified herself with him: "I like you as a spirit akin . . . I like you because you are strong, and because you are troubled with weakness; and because you are not cock sure; because you have lost the power to be narrow—as I have."<sup>14</sup>

de Cleyre knew that her personal problems with relationships were reinforced by a government which kept women in a powerless position. Hippolyte Havel, a fellow anarchist, noted that de Cleyre's pain was caused by her knowledge of "universal pain,"<sup>15</sup> but he did not connect her sadness with the fact that

she was a woman trying to remain whole while living in a sexist society which demanded that she view herself as an object. While she would readily admit that capitalism and a swelling interest in materialism were crippling America, while she fought the evils of imperialism and racial prejudice, it was the way that she was exploited as a woman that embittered her personal life. She saw sexual exploitation as a horror which cut across every form of human oppression. In her 1895 essay, "The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League," she explicitly states this:

The sex question is more intensely important to us than any other, because of the interdict which generally rests upon it, because of its immediate bearing upon our daily life, because of the stupendous mystery of it and the consequences of ignorance of it.<sup>16</sup>

In 1895 the law in most American states treated a wife as the property of her husband, allowing him to use violence against her, denying her the disposal of her property, and refusing to recognize her as an equal parent. de Cleyre opposed marriage because it placed the woman in a position of dependence in the fact of the law and encouraged her to fall into the role of housekeeper. She expressed her anger at women who had decent "masters" and who therefore were blind to the outrages practiced on their sisters. Those women who told their abused sisters to simply leave were reprimanded in her essay, "Sex Slavery":

Will you tell me where they will go and what they shall do? When the State, the legislators, has given to itself, the politicians, the utter and absolute control of the opportunity to live; when, through this precious monopoly, already the market of labor is so overstocked that workmen and workwomen are cutting each others' throats [sic] for the dear privilege of serving their lords; when girls are shipped from Boston to the south and north, shipped in carloads, like cattle to fill the dives of New Orleans or the lumber-camp hells of my own state (Michigan) when seeing and hearing these things reported every day, the proper prudes exclaim, 'Why don't the women leave,' they simply beggar the language of contempt.<sup>17</sup>

de Cleyre is angry because she realizes that economically dependent women have few choices. In this particular essay she

refers to marriage as a prison. Women are captured in a repressive enclosure and like Moses Harman, individuals who fight for freedom are denied exactly that for which they fight. de Cleyre stresses that Harman is placed in prison because he threatens existing social order. The government is attempting to stop him from saying: "Let the mothers of the race go free! Let the little children be pure love children, born of the mutual desire for parentage. Let the manacles be broken from the shackled slave, that no more slaves be born, no more tyrants converted."<sup>18</sup>

De Cleyre is outraged and bitter. What society calls virtue becomes, in her perception, disease, stupidity and criminality; the obscenities that get punished by our society are righteous attempts to reach back toward a more life-giving legitimacy.

In this same essay, she quotes August Bebel as saying that the fathers of the Church allowed women their souls in the sixth century. Now she and others are demanding their bodies. Because she believes that women have no way of actualizing these demands, given their present state of dependence, she asks men to preserve what they love and to help stop women's slavery. The standards that she finds placed on women, standards of false purity and repression, are driving them mad. She addresses men:

. . . take the statistics of an insane asylum, and you will find that out of the different classes, unmarried women furnish the largest one. To preserve your cruel, vicious, indecent standard of purity (?) [sic] you drive your daughters insane, while your wives are killed with excess. Such is marriage.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the message of "Sex Slavery" is for people to fight for each other's freedom, even when compromise is necessary. Men must fight for women, anarchists must bend their dignity and ask the government's forgiveness for a crime not committed. Individuals, however, must not bend their standards for themselves.

de Cleyre's personal code is reluctant in allowing people to save themselves. She is herself frightened of personal compromise. Action is more comfortable if it serves another. de Cleyre is fighting for freedom in order to have the right to find her own balance, but she is more comfortable trying to free others than finding the forgiveness to simply be self-serving.

While "The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League," was published five years after "Sex Slavery," de Cleyre's tendency toward passivity when she is directly fighting for herself is still evident. Her article on the Ladies' Liberal League explains the history of the organization and its refusal to be a "Ladies Aid." These women wanted control over their own funds and thus separated from the men. de Cleyre confesses that when these women were without funds and the more radical among them suggested the formation of a Lecture Society, she felt that the lectures would fail to support the league: de Cleyre could not imagine women financially supporting themselves by their own intellectual pursuits. When they attempted the lecture series and the entrance fees proved sufficient to support the organization, de Cleyre is delighted and relieved.

The ideal of the group is to allow for free speech. The group members encourage reactionary speeches. de Cleyre summarizes two of these speeches, obviously annoyed at their content, yet clear that reactionary individuals must be heard and must be encouraged to listen if changes are to occur within society. One man, Professor Cope, verbalizes that women are unable to do anything as well as men for they are "hopelessly, unredeemably, everlastingly mediocre."<sup>20</sup> Another conservative speaker attempts to define his ideal woman. A good wife will serve him and his children, approve of him, entertain him, agree with him and never mix in public matters. de Cleyre responds by stating that this man, Mr. Raleigh, "longs for the good old days, and the ease and restful quiet of the woman who didn't know anything and didn't want anything."<sup>21</sup> She poignantly concludes that this blessed woman got precisely what she wanted.

de Cleyre intellectually comprehends that women who want nothing get nothing, and she does want women to begin wanting things for themselves. She is moving toward liberation, commending women for separating from men if they are being oppressive, commending them for financial independence, but she is not a separatist, nor is she fully comfortable with believing in herself. de Cleyre is trying to free men as well as women; she is trying to believe in change and in personal, self-serving, and self-actualizing strength.



In summary, the persona in de Cleyre's feminist essays is attempting to be realistic, quick to perceive the need for action, but this persona is also afraid of selfishness, even though she knows that too much self-sacrifice will kill the organism.

When one analyzes de Cleyre's sketches another persona appears. The female characters she creates are self-destructive: through them, de Cleyre is studying her own hesitancy to be self-assertive and self-forgiving. On a political level she is working toward more assertive men and women, but in her fiction she explores the victims of self-effacement.

In her sketch, "The Sorrows of the Body," the narrator is unable to allow herself earthly happiness, although she feels earthly happiness is all she ever wanted. The narrator tells her own story:

I have never wanted anything more than the wild creatures have,—a broad waft of clean air, a day to lie on the grass . . . leave for a month to float and float along the salt crests and among the foam, or roll with my naked skin over a clean long stretch of sunshiny sand . . . this is what I wanted,—this, and free contact with my fellows; not to love, and lie and be ashamed, but to love and say I love, and be glad of it. . . .<sup>22</sup>

The narrator has not received these natural things, for her soul, indifferent to her body, has driven her to breathe city air and learn in man-made temples. The soul repents its hardness only after the body falls sick from overwork: by then the narrator is beyond the pleasures of the body, beyond the ability to experience desire. The narrator states: "only the memory of my denial throbs on, with its never dying pain."<sup>23</sup> The sketch ends in bitter self-destruction and painful irony:

If my days are to pass in perpetual idleness I may as well be annihilated. I will make the wretch do me one more service.—You have clamored to be naked in the water. Go now, and lie in it forever.

Yes: that is what It is saying, and I—the sea stretches down there—<sup>24</sup>

The soul is allowed to keep power and the body gets what it has wanted. The bitter tone and a dash going nowhere end the story.

In another sketch, "The Heart of Angiolillo," the female protagonist is equally self-destructive, if not equally self-aware. de Cleyre begins this sketch by presenting a four-year old who through no fault of her own has been born with marvelous grace and charisma. The narrator informs us that the central story will involve another woman whose fate is to love the wrong man and thus to allow herself to be destroyed. Again the tone is bitter. The narrator takes a stance of detachment:

Some inadvertent little angel in the destiny shop took down her name when the heroine of a romance was called for, and put her where she shouldn't have been, and then ran off to play no doubt, not stopping to look twice. For even the most insouciant angel that looked twice would have seen that Effie was no woman to play the game of hearts, and there's only one thing more undiscerning than an angel, and that is a social reformer. Effie ran up against both.<sup>25</sup>

Effie, the story's main character, is a poor, colorless, overworked woman who has given birth to a love-child. She is not beautiful except for her strong profile which implies that once something enters her heart it will remain and that she keeps her pain within and will never cry out even though forsaken by all. David, her lover, cares only for his own needs and she encourages him to think of himself as wonderful. Effie is glad to serve him, and even after he proves himself an unworthy lover (he is willing to pawn the only dress his baby possesses in order to entertain some friends), she is faithful to him.

During the evening of the party, Effie walks the streets with her infant, returning only when she is too exhausted to walk. One man is still at her home, an Italian social reformer, who becomes immediately attracted to her. He is sensitive to her exhaustion and leaves soon after her arrival, but returns after a few days and makes every effort to become a true friend.

As the relationship between Effie and the social reformer develops, the sketch becomes increasingly political: the Spanish Civil war serves as the center of action. She, her effete lover, and the Italian reformer begin to frequent political halls where translated letters are read revealing the torture of Spanish political prisoners. At one such meeting Effie is overcome with horror.

The reformer takes her home where he confesses his love and desire to serve her and save her from the early death toward which she seems to be moving. She will hear nothing of his love and asks him how he dare broach such a subject when innocent people are being tortured. The social reformer then asks permission to assassinate one of the victimizers and without thinking she reinforces his plan. He requests one kiss, which she refuses, having no tender feelings toward him.

The Italian man goes to Spain, assassinates a high official, and is soon garrotted. Only then, does Effie respond to him as a fully human being. She is overcome with the possibility of her own responsibility and imagines the torture chamber and his dying word, "Germinal." This word, meaning spring, awakens her own desire for life and she finally feels an urge to kiss him and perhaps to live. But she remains with her lover and although he begins to take some responsibility for her and the child and she is able to eat better, her health has been broken and she, as the Italian social reformer prophesied, dies.

Through Effie, de Cleyre explores displaced will. If Effie is a victim of "fate" as the narrator implies, she is also, most certainly, a victim of self-destructive loyalty and poorly placed affection.

The issues of compromise and self-sacrifice never crystallize for de Cleyre: she is uncomfortable with self-involvement but also realizes that self-effacement leads to meaningless death. Voltairine de Cleyre is a feminist model because she explores, because she remains fluidly uncertain and because she creates beautiful essays and sensitive sketches in spite of her troubled spirit, in spite of the troubled world.

#### NOTES

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2. Voltairine de Cleyre, p. 357.
3. Voltairine de Cleyre to William E. Chandler, Senator, May 29, 1897, Labadie Collection.
4. Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 18-232.
5. Margaret S. March, "The Anarchist-Feminist Response to the 'Woman Question' in Late Nineteenth Century America," *American Quarterly*, XXX (Fall, 1978), pp. 539-540.

6. Margaret S. March, p. 541.
7. Voltairine de Cleyre, p. 135.
8. Voltairine de Cleyre to her mother, Harriet de Claire, January 22, 1893, Labadie Collection.
9. Voltairine de Cleyre to her mother, Harriet de Claire, September 14, 1901, Ishill Collection as quoted by Paul Avrich, p. 135.
10. Voltairine de Cleyre to Mary Hansen, June 3, 1911, Ishill Collection as quoted by Paul Avrich, p. 225.
11. Emma Goldman, "Essay on de Cleyre," Labadie Collection, p. 29.
12. Voltairine de Cleyre to her mother, Harriet de Claire, February 11, 1909, Labadie Collection.
13. Voltairine de Cleyre to her sister, Adelaide Thayer, September 14, 1901, Ishill Collection as quoted by Paul Avrich, pp. 130-1.
14. Voltairine de Cleyre to Alexander Berkman, August 24, 1906, Navro Manuscript, Ishill Collection, Berkman Archive as quoted by Paul Avrich, p. 198.
15. Voltairine de Cleyre, introduction by Hyppolite Havel, p. 14.
16. Voltairine de Cleyre, "The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League," *The Rebel*, I, iv (1896), p. 43.
17. Voltairine de Cleyre, p. 351.
18. Voltairine de Cleyre, p. 344.
19. Voltairine de Cleyre, p. 355.
20. Voltairine de Cleyre, "The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League," *The Rebel*, I, iii (1896), p. 31.
21. Voltairine de Cleyre, "The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League," p. 43.
22. Voltairine de Cleyre, "The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League," p. 43.
23. Voltairine de Cleyre, p. 451.
24. Voltairine de Cleyre, p. 453.
25. Voltairine de Cleyre, pp. 421-2.

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## SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

ROBERT NARVESON

The years just before the first world war are relatively barren ones for American literature. Among novelists, Crane and Norris were dead, Howells and Mark Twain were past their prime, Dreiser was silenced for most of a decade by the quasi-suppression of *Sister Carrie*; both James and Wharton were living out of the country, and the strongest voices on the domestic scene were rebels and reformers such as Jack London and Upton Sinclair, whose talents for literature were less strong than their commitment to the social causes of the Progressive era. As for the poets, Frost, Eliot, and Pound were learning their craft in obscurity, while Robinson's finest work was appearing under adverse conditions and finding little response. In 1912, however, the founding of *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse* in Chicago, presaged a growing spirit of expectation and an increasing receptiveness to novelty. John Butler Yeats stated in that year: "The fiddles are tuning as it were all over America." It was toward the end of such a literary drought, amid the stirrings of a new awakening, that Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River poems made their sensational appearance.

Masters was a liberal lawyer in Chicago, a literary unknown, when he began sending his epitaphs in verse to William Marion Reedy's weekly *Mirror* in the spring of 1914. The series of weekly installments started with the issue of May 29 and continued with few lapses—apparently as quickly as they came from the author's pen—until by January 15 of the following year some 213 poems had appeared. Masters gathered them into a book which was published by Macmillan in May, 1915. In the fall of the next year came a second edition, expanded by the insertion here and there throughout the volume of thirty two additional epitaphs and an epilogue.

From its beginnings in *Reedy's Mirror* and on through the expanded, definitive edition of 1916, *The Spoon River Anthology* was an immediate and outstanding success with both critics and public. People were shocked, scandalized, indignant, delighted. The muckrakers had been busily exposing the shame of the cities, President Roosevelt and others had denounced malefactors of great wealth, but the small town was still the official haven of innocence and virtue. Now came Masters' ghosts, avowing the presence of vice, corruption, greed, and pettiness in the American Arcadia.<sup>1</sup> Their sexual behavior was scandalous; their frank candor violated strong taboos; their conventional religious views were masks for meanness; their genuine religious feelings were heterodox; and the language and the verse form in which they couched their sentiments were appropriately unconventional.

On the other hand, the portraits were strongly ironic, pathetic, heroic, comic; the quest for the good life and the good society, the god-seeking, the love of nature were on a level of high seriousness; a fundamental affection for traditional agrarian values informed the whole volume. Along with the notoriety due to scandal, came a fame based on the book's solid virtues. Ever since its first public prominence it has continued to lure new readers. Often reprinted, translated, and adapted, it has had the vitality to survive the times that gave it birth; and is by now an established American classic.

Judged by its setting and characters, the *Anthology* may be seen to illustrate the realist's dictum that one writes best about what one knows at first hand. Masters knew the life of central Illinois in the last third of the 19th century. In several earlier books he had made no direct literary use of the experiences of his childhood in Petersburg and Lewistown, but the editor of the *St. Louis Mirror*, his friend William Marion Reedy, was refusing to print more of his conventional poetry and demanding instead something more contemporary in spirit. Masters obliged. With the example and encouragement of his friend Theodore Dreiser he began in 1913 writing short prose sketches of the life he had known.<sup>2</sup> He wrote Dreiser in the spring of 1914:

Glad some of these things [poems] please you. I am trying to find a theme for a play that interprets a bit the spirit of the times. As yet all is nebula, whirling about, emitting

sparks and smoke. Those central Illinois stories and episodes would make playlets. Oh for time!<sup>3</sup>

A short time later he sent Reedy the first of the Spoon River poems. He did it half-jokingly, but he knew, and Reedy knew, that he had finally found his subject and method.<sup>4</sup>

The subject was complex, and not to be separated from the poet's attitude toward it. *The Spoon River Anthology*, as he later wrote, was born out of long meditation upon the life of two Illinois small towns in which his immediate ancestors had lived since the early days of the state and in which he had spent most of his first twenty-two years.<sup>5</sup> An equal number of years in Chicago had not effected his youthful experiences, nor had the years taken the edge off his memories. However much his perspective had been broadened, he still found that his early years had provided him with a point of view for interpreting all human existence.

The towns of Petersburg and Lewistown lie on opposite sides of the Illinois River in the central part of the state. Petersburg lies two miles north of New Salem, remembered as Lincoln's home in the 1830's. Squire Davis Masters and his wife Lucinda pioneered land in this area, building up a farm which prospered with the region. One of their sons, Hardin Masters, had taken his bride to Garnett, Kansas, where their son Edgar Lee was born August 23, 1868.<sup>6</sup> Less than a year later, the family returned to Petersburg where Hardin took up the practice of law. There Edgar Lee grew up amid legends of Lincoln and the pioneer days. He enjoyed long visits to the Masters farm, where the domestic atmosphere was more tranquil than in the home of his temperamentally mismatched parents. In 1880 the family moved fifty miles northward to Lewistown. The transplanting was not easy. The father's struggle for an adequate practice cast an unpleasant shadow over the first few difficult years. Eventually he did succeed; he became a leading citizen of Lewistown, was several times elected its mayor, and often served as a delegate to state and national Democratic caucuses.

In later years Masters remembered Petersburg with affection, but he wasted no love on Lewistown. Powerful elements in Lewistown opposed his father in political, religious, and economic principles, and the son remembered the life there as one of more

or less constant strife. Then, too, the discord within the family was increasingly galling as he grew older. Eventually his father's opposition to his literary ambitions, among other things, led to the young man's departure. He went in the classic American manner to the big city—in this case Chicago—to make his own way as best he could. There he settled to the practice of law, hoping to gain the leisure to write.

This was in 1892. During the next two decades Masters married and established a family, became a prominent lawyer (Clarence Darrow was a partner for eight years) and an influential Democratic politician, and at the same time pursued an underground career in poetry, drama and the essay, publishing generally at his own expense and under a pseudonym. His absorbing ambition was to gain recognition as a poet, and his consistent failure to progress toward this goal lent a tinge of bitterness to his outlook. His practice was productive enough, but generally pitted him against the financial powers of the city. These were also the years when his Democratic party consistently lost state and national elections. His struggles in Chicago seemed to him a mere continuation of his family's struggles in Lewistown.<sup>7</sup> He soon concluded, he said, that the great world of the city and the smaller world of the rural town were essentially alike.<sup>8</sup> This idea was to become his guiding theme in the *Anthology*.

He began, he said, with "casual experiments in related themes" and ended by creating "an epic rendition of modern life."<sup>9</sup> His first few poems were free imitations of ancient lyrics from the *Greek Anthology*. As the influence of his American setting gained ground over that of his classical model, he began more and more insistently to write into the epitaphs the familial and community interrelationships that give most of the dramatic force to his creation. What happened to the significance of "Spoon River" serves to illustrate this development. Through the first few "Garlands" in the *Mirror*, "Spoon River" seems to have meant no single incorporated community, but rather the whole territory from which he was drawing his raw materials. Not until "Dow Kritt," the sixty-eighth epitaph to appear (August 7, 1914), was there an unequivocal reference to a town of Spoon River. Until then the name had been applied either to a river or to what Josephine Craven Chandler has called the "Spoon River country."

Until one fourth of the way through the series, the author seems to have resisted naming forthrightly the village on which his imaginary community centered. Though he employed other place-names drawn from his native region—Chandlersville, Thompson's Lake, Clary's Grove, Proctor's Grove all turn up in the early epitaphs—nowhere did he mention either town in which he had lived as a boy. Characters based on memories of each community spoke instead of "the village." His problem seems plain. His fictional community had to represent *both* Lewistown and Petersburg. Eventually "the village" became "Spoon River," and in it the differing tendencies that Masters associated with the two historical towns were settled in disharmony. It was a simple solution to a problem that has never existed for his readers but for personal reasons was very real to Masters.

Masters appreciated the advantages of his solution. From the point of its introduction, the specific application of "Spoon River" to the village occurs in epitaph after epitaph. In rearranging the epitaphs for the first edition he saw to it that the town of Spoon River was mentioned in the early pages. The epitaph of Benjamin Pantier, for example, which had come in one of the middle Garlands (September 25), was moved ahead to page 14 in the book. There are many such examples. Even the extensive rearrangement in the first edition did not reflect strongly enough Masters' interest in the town as a corporate entity, and in the first fourteen pages of the second edition he added three epitaphs, "Constance Hately," "Harry Carey Goodhue," and "Kinsey Keene," each of which mentions the town of Spoon River, the last two in great particularity. Harry Carey Goodhue lists specifically a number of the issues that divide the town: prohibition, taxes, public utilities. Kinsey Keene names the men who personify the institutions dominating the town:

"... Thomas Rhodes, president of the bank;  
Coolbaugh Whedon, editor of the Argus;  
Rev. Peet, pastor of the leading church;  
A. D. Blood, several times Mayor of Spoon River;  
And finally all of you, members of the Social Purity Club—"

With the advantages of such epitaphs, today's reader need not repeat the error, made even by Masters' close friend Reedy, of

overstressing the individual portraiture, important as that is, at the expense of the dramatic battle over the form that community life should take. So striking is the portraiture that even the recent Broadway adaptation of *Spoon River* emphasized the nostalgic mood of recollection with which Masters began ("Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom, and Charlie—"). But it was Masters' satirical critique of contemporary America that soon became his central theme. In such epitaphs as Kinsey Keene's the acrimonious feuds of Lewistown between the liberals and "the party of law and order," as Masters satirically has people call it, are fought out once more. Not until later epitaphs does he emphasize the mellower spirit that he associated with Petersburg and the older pioneer generation.

Though the battle in Spoon River has many petty manifestations, the basic issue is momentous. Masters is writing of that transitional period in our history when a predominantly rural society adhering in principle to Jeffersonian-agrarian ideals was in the throes of change into the urban-dominated society we know today. He portrays society as an arena in which conflicting ideals battle to become institutionalized. The issue is joined; society is in flux, the outcome uncertain. The central question is whether social institutions shall favor the many or the few, whether the forms of life shall permit each person the largest possible freedom to work out his own destiny or whether those forms shall limit individual options. For him to do this required that he make his village society mirror the issues of the nation at large; this led him to portray village life in a way that was for his times little short of heretical.

Americans had—and still have—their own version of the pastoral. It asserted that God made the country and the devil made the city; and that the United States was a God-favored refuge from the corrupt city-dominated civilization of Europe. This pastoral myth was buttressed by the historical fact that most Americans of that generation were of rural origin and had made in vast numbers the epic migration from farm to city; the road to grandmother's fabulous house did often lie over the river and through the woods. If they felt that the national character was decaying, they blamed the life of the city, which in its cruel competitive individualism contrasted unhappily with the nostal-

gically remembered cooperative life of the family farm. Though later writers have attacked this myth of rural bliss, it was nearly inviolate in 1914, and Masters' simple assertion of common nature and motives in city and country people was not only shocking but liberating, helping to give his poems a scandalous reputation.

The perspective of years has made it plain that Masters' love for his rural society led him to excoriate its evils the more bitterly. Petit the Poet sings of

"Life all around me here in the village  
Tragedy, comedy, valor and truth,  
Courage, constancy, heroism, failure. . . ."

In this he speaks for Masters himself. The individual portraits portray the gamut of human emotions, desires, compulsions; and petty viciousness in one character is balanced by grandeur of soul in another. Far from repudiating the American pastoral myth, Masters made it central in his thought; but he was aware that the agrarian ideal differed from the actual condition of life in his times. Both sides of a dichotomy in American thought were present even in the rural community. Basically this dichotomy was between the urge to freedom, which he associated with Jefferson, and the urge to repression, which he identified with Hamilton. He did not limit his polarity to economics and politics; he saw it influencing attitudes toward religion and morality as well. One can see the polarity in the epitaph of Kinsey Keene, already quoted. It is present just as explicitly in "Jefferson Howard," who speaks of "my father's beliefs from old Virginia: / Hating slavery, but no less war," and lists his opponents "here in Spoon River, with its dominant forces drawn from New England, / Republicans, Calvinists, merchants, bankers." Such a formulation of the issue extends the scope of *Spoon River Anthology* in space and time. The golden age of the Republic lies in earlier days, before the Civil War brought about the dominance of Hamiltonian impulses. The battle, though a losing one, continues.

Masters' Jeffersonianism shared the pragmatic spirit of the Progressive era. For him, freedom was quintessential to human life. Truth required continual testing in action and a man had

to be free to seek his own truth because no received truth could be trusted to point the way. The inadequacy of convention in sexual mores and economic affairs was for him proved by its manifest failures to achieve order and justice. The libertarian position receives support by inference whenever the rules for life laid down by "preachers and judges" fail. The lives of people in the *Anthology* contradict conventional wisdom at every turn. Hod Putt, highwayman and inadvertent murderer, asserts his kinship to the rich man who used law to achieve ends that the law should rightly oppose. Of course Hod Putt is a guilty man; he recognizes it. More significant, however, than the question of his guilt is his interest in justice. If society values justice, but does not so order itself that justice is the rule, then it is as guilty of moral failure as Hod Putt the murderer; and that is what The Circuit Judge himself asserts. Editor Hamblin makes the same point generally and figuratively in attacking perversion of justice in the Haymarket case. Justice, proverbially blind, and no respecter of persons, is now too often no respecter of guilt or innocence. Sometimes the blindness of convention may be not legal but moral, as in the case of the Charles Blisses, whose incompatible marriage was continued on the urgings of Rev. Wiley and Judge Somers ("preachers and judges"), to the irreparable harm of the children. By the pragmatic test of results, the inadequacy of conventional views of marriage is evident.

The attack on provincial dogmatism is conducted with the village's own favorite weapon—the specific example. By the equally pragmatic test of mutual fulfillment, the Matlocks demonstrate that for some at least marriage is indeed a sublime institution. Therefore, the purport of one epitaph or group of epitaphs may be contradicted by one equally as convincing. Who could unreservedly uphold dogmatic views in the light of such confusing evidence? The welter of cases supporting every sort of conclusion does not, however, lead to complete skepticism. Masters' own moral bias is clearly on the side of the greatest possible freedom for each man to seek in his own way the meaning of life; and the best social organization is that which enhances personal freedom to the fullest extent. The Village Atheist states, "Immortality is not a gift, / Immortality is an achievement; / And only those who

strive mightily / Shall possess it." The ideal form of life will least inhibit the quest.

Knowing both small town and city, and critical of both, Masters found the illustrations for his themes in the fabric of nineteenth century life. It is clear enough, from the shock of repudiation in the communities concerned, that Lewistown and Petersburg furnished a wealth of individual touches for the portraits.<sup>10</sup> It is not so easily noticed that Chicago too contributed numerous characters and incidents. The Chicago Haymarket affair enters under its own name, and Lambert Hutchens refers directly to the giveaway by the Illinois legislature of the Chicago lake front to the Illinois Central Railroad. The scandalous Yerkes streetcar franchise acts which Governor Altgeld vetoed figure in the epitaph of Adam Weirauch. Less obviously, the epitaph of Herman Altman is a disguised tribute to Governor Altgeld, who could not with plausibility be smuggled into the Spoon River graveyard under his own name. It should be compared with Vachel Lindsay's own verse tribute to the same man, "Sleep Softly, Eagle Forgotten." The case of "Butch" Weldy, victim of the "fellow servant" rule, would seem to be a fictional version of a Chicago case for which masters was counsel.<sup>11</sup> More generally, Masters' bitterness toward judges was formed not in the intimate circles of the rural courts, but in the courts of Chicago where he observed the close connections between the ruling commercial class and the likes of Judge Cary (of the Haymarket case) or the unnamed judge whose rulings harrassed Masters in his defense of a waitresses' union in 1913-14. The essays of *The New Star Chamber* (1904), especially the title essay which attacks anti-strike injunctions, are testimony to the important part that industrial Chicago had in defining the social conscience of the liberals in Spoon River. Would the attacks on the small town plutocrat Thomas Rhodes, or the prostitute journalist Coolbaugh Whedon have been so vehement if they had not been the representatives of so much that Masters hated in industrial Chicago? Chicago, Masters knew, represented the shape of things to come, the final disappearance of the heroic pioneer era. The sense of loss, of life and vitality slipping away, that often seems like a paradoxical nostalgia for the communities of his youth (and later, in his glorification of Petersburg, became just that), is far more the

expression of emotional involvement in a battle largely lost in Chicago but still raging in Spoon River.

This battle of a pre-industrial way of life now on the wane against the advancing era of the megalopolis, as Masters called it, was a rearguard action which Masters knew must result in defeat. In 1924, ten years after writing *Spoon River*, Masters returned to the subject and style in *The New Spoon River*. Much of the lesser dramatic power in the later book results from the loss of tension between rival value systems, for Chicago has won, and Spoon River is no longer the largely autonomous community it once had been: it has instead become "a ganglion for the monster brain Chicago."<sup>12</sup> Megalopolis has triumphed.

Even as the epitaphs were appearing in the *Mirror*, Reedy noted that the poems were partly an elegy "of the country's declining heroic age, of the age in which came to first acuteness the personal problem of life multiplying complications."<sup>13</sup> Since the Civil War, Reedy went on, "materialism came into rule and more and more idealists in Spoon River and elsewhere went down to dusty defeat." This may sound like an exceptional view from a liberal editor in 1914, just two years after Woodrow Wilson had led triumphant progressivism into power. But both populism and progressivism, for all their reformist tendencies, were basically holding actions, attempting to keep alive the cherished pre-industrial way of life by counteracting the forces that were destroying it. Nostalgia and a sense of loss were the other side of the energetic, hopeful progressive coin. Even as the poems were appearing, war had broken out in Europe, and soon the glorious faith in progress was to disintegrate, under the pressure of world-wide devastation, into the cynicism and selfishness of the 1920's. Therefore, even in its twilight mood the *Spoon River Anthology* is a faithful reflection of its era, recording hopes and fears, successes and failures, confidence and bewilderment, of a time which an historical cataclysm was bringing to a dismaying end.

Because Masters was what he was, the book can be this record of a particular moment in history and at the same time an intensely personal book. Not only had Masters the wealth of intimate knowledge of the life he portrayed; he had also felt in a personal way the peculiar qualities of desperation and resignation that inform the book and catch so authentically an emotional-

intellectual mood of that historical moment. The anguish of the defeated souls is Masters' own anguish; the joy of the fewer victorious souls, and the serenity of the "enlightened spirits" on their rarified level above the battle, are Masters' compensatory vision. The tone of ironic mockery, which Masters mistakenly allowed to become dominant in the weak "Spooniad" and much weaker "Epilogue," is in part the self-mockery of a man who measures the slight worth of petty daily struggles at which he expends his best energies, knowing all the while that these struggles cannot be abandoned.<sup>14</sup> Rarely is a book so truly the distilled essence of a personal experience that includes so much of the experience of its times.

It is curious that many of America's best books fit uneasily in recognizable genres. *Walden*, *Moby Dick*, *Leaves of Grass*, and the *Education of Henry Adams* are only the most illustrious examples. The *Spoon River Anthology* is another of these unique works. This uniqueness begins with the table of contents, with its alphabetical listing, like a town directory. The first poem, "The Hill," sets up an ironical relationship with traditional high culture by echoing the *ubi sunt* formula, which goes back to antiquity. The well known Rosetti translation of Villon's "Ballade of Dead Ladies," with its melancholy refrain, "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" is echoed by Petit the Poet: "The snows and roses of yesterday are faded, and what is love but a rose that fades?" But the highly conventional form of the ballads contrasts sharply with the free verse stanzas of Masters' poem, just as the highborn ladies who are the poetically suitable subject matter of the older poem contrast with the commonplace villagers of whom Masters writes. One is poetry of an elite, educated class; the other, poetry of comparatively classless democratic society. Through these contrasts Masters demands for his subjects the dignity reserved by ancient convention for more exalted figures.

The body of the work sustains this demand. The chief literary debt is to the lyrics of the classical Greek Anthology. Here again, the very name Masters chooses—*Spoon River Anthology*—raises ironic echoes of an old tradition; but does the echo imply a flattering comparison or a mocking contrast between the insignificant modern community and the great civilization of antiquity? Masters' poems purport to be epitaphs spoken by the dead sub-

jects themselves, just as the confessional epitaph is a chief mode in the older collection. The brevity and concentration of his epitaphs follows the epigrammatic convention of the Greek poems. Indeed, some of the poems, like "The Unknown" and "Alexander Throckmorton," read almost like direct translations from the older work. Even the names assigned to some of the speakers, names such as Cassius, Amanda, and Ollie, raise classical echoes, not only because of obvious Latin etymologies but because as printed in the *Mirror* a number of them stood without surnames, suggesting an older practice of naming rather than the contemporary American practice. There was also a touch of an older practice in the use of generic names, such as Griffy the Cooper, Theodore the Poet, Schroeder the Fisherman, and The Town Marshal. These are especially prominent in the early Garlands in the *Mirror*, where even people who were later given standard names have generic designations, An Able Lawyer, for example, becoming John M. Church, and A Leading Citizen becoming John Horace Burleson. The term "Garland," used for each group of poems in the *Mirror* printing, ties the Spoon River poems to the group of poems called "The Garland of Meleager," which formed the nucleus of the Greek Anthology; the Greek form of "anthology" itself translates as "a gathering of flowers," or "garland." Again the effect is ironic, since the majority of the Spoon River epitaphs seem less like flowers than like weeds, and seem picked less for aesthetic than for medicinal purposes.

During the spring of 1914 Masters experimented with free verse poems modeled on Greek epigrams. Reedy had introduced him to MacKail's *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* in 1909, possibly even earlier.<sup>15</sup> He showed renewed interest in the Greek poetry in the spring of 1914 when he asked his friend Theodore Dreiser for a copy of the Bohn library Green Anthology.<sup>16</sup> The translations in both these editions were in prose; since they did not lose their force by this fact, they helped convince Masters that the conventional rhyme and meter of his earlier and unremarkable volumes *A Book of Verses* (1898) and *Songs and Sonnets* (1910) were not the essence of poetry. He was assisted to this conclusion by the example of Carl Sandburg, whom he met in the winter of 1913-14, as well as by *Poetry* magazine, which Sandburg influenced him to read. Sandburg and



Masters discussed the new free verse then coming into vogue. Masters later professed not to have cared for it, and denied in print that Sandburg had influenced him significantly; but that was after their friendship had cooled.<sup>17</sup> It is possible that a version of "Griffy the Cooper" dates from this period before the beginning of the *Spoon River Anthology* as such.<sup>18</sup>

Though most readers are impressed by the freedom of the verse in the *Anthology*, Masters moved progressively toward the use of conventional metrics, lines, and stanzaic patterns.<sup>19</sup> Such a poem as "Petit the Poet" is in four-stress lines throughout, and if one observes the end punctuation one finds divisions into quatrains and a couplet, much as in a conventional sonnet. Similarly, "Fletcher McGee" is in traditional English ballad stanzas, and lacks only the rhymes to be conventional verse. A large number of the poems are in a fairly regular iambic tetrameter or pentameter, but the overall impression is still of free verse.

While the length of his epitaphs tended to increase beyond the limits of the epigrammatic convention, many of the later ones running a full page and more, the epigrammatic nature of Masters' models may have encouraged him to employ a sort of sharply worded summation, usually made more emphatic by a falling cadence in the last line, achieved by shortening it a foot or more. Ami Green concludes:

"... the much-sought prize of eternal youth  
Is just arrested growth."

Alexander Throckmorton says:

"But my weary wings could not follow my vision—  
Genius is wisdom and youth."

An outstanding example, because it also shows Masters employing a rare degree of alliteration and assonance, is the ending of William H. Herndon":

"As the cawing crows winged their way to the wood  
Over my house-top at solemn sunsets,  
There by my window,  
Alone."

Such devices, often effective in themselves, in their recurrence create the uniformity of tone pervading the volume.

In the individual poems, little attempt is made to adapt the style of the speech to the station and character of the speaker. There is even a certain monotony of diction that makes prolonged reading in a single sitting somewhat tedious. Yet this slightly monotonous language of the plain-spoken lawyer's brief is extremely functional; blunt and unbeautiful, it carries an air of conviction that a suaver diction probably would not. The very matter-of-factness contributes to the intensity of feeling. The speech is authentically Midwestern, though not in the idiomatic vernacular fashion of Mark Twain or Ring Lardner. It is rather the language of the public record, found in newspaper and court report. The touches of an older stock poetic diction ("Behold," "lo!", "O soul," "Ye living ones") may seem intrusions in this speech, yet can be justified as remainders of the ironical relation these poems bear to the poetic tradition. They sound, not inappropriately, like the clumsy attempts at literary language of people not fully at home with it. The frequent use of sturdy home-grown metaphor and simile, earnest, intense, and groping rather than graceful, precise, or pleasing, keeps the speech concrete and vivid, and avoids the diffusion and abstraction of ordinary newspaper or official prose. Toward the end, the opposite fault of murky and imprecise symbolism is less defensible.

While the characters speak, one is hardly conscious of the manipulations of the author. Only when Masters carries certain devices too far or repeats them too often do we lose the sense of authenticity. In poetry, and even in life, names may suggest character, but how far one wishes to indulge Masters' fondness for such names is a matter of taste. Excessively obvious parallels such as "Robert Fulton Tanner" (an inventor), "Margaret Fuller Black" (a would-be writer), and "Jonathan Swift Somers" (a satirist) are fortunately fewer than names formed by recombining the names of actual people of the communities in which he grew up. The "occupation analogy" is another device that is too transparent to bear much repetition, and there are a good many of these analogies. The dentist, the laundress, the weaver, the gardener, the chicken farmer, the piano tuner, the cooper, and many others use the language of their callings to interpret the meaning of life. Despite these and a few other traces of writing to formula, the book as a whole teems with individual life.

If their language is largely undifferentiated, the characters speak out of their own personal experiences as interpreted through their own individual outlooks. They come from every station in the life of their time and place, from nearly every occupation, sect, racial background, and level of society. The actors who dramatized Spoon River portraits on the Broadway stage occasionally employed slurred endings and local accents to make "characters" out of some of them. It made effective drama, but it allowed a condescension toward certain speakers that the leveling effect of Masters' constant diction does not encourage. In the *Anthology* all the speakers share a passionate concern with life that gives them all—the wise, the foolish, the good, the vicious—a seriousness demanding respect. They step forward as before the final bar of judgment, and they speak their inmost thoughts in recognition of the awesome finality of their pleas. We feel, not that they necessarily speak truth, but that they necessarily speak what they believe to be truth. They lack the slightest trace of the duplicity that unavoidably attends speech among the living. Where the truth lies is for the reader himself to judge. If the book is regarded as a novel in verse, as some early reviewers called it, it illustrates the illusion of objectivity for which Henry James praised the dramatic point of view.<sup>20</sup>

However moving individual pieces in the *Anthology* may be, they do not show to best advantage when removed from the context of the collection. One epitaph supports and modifies another as chord modulates chord in symphonic music. The connections are various. There is first the circumstance that all the characters are or have been in some sense part of the same nineteenth century mid-American community called Spoon River, so that each contributes to the complex definition of that place and time. Beyond that, groups of characters are "interlocked by fate," as Masters said, in more intimate fashion. A group of connected epitaphs may tell a story, as in the case of the Pantiers, the Merritts, or Lambert Hutchins and his daughter. Epitaphs placed side by side may gain ironic power through contrast, as with Albert Schirding and Jonas Keene, or epitaphs refer to the same incidents, showing how events ramify and touch many lives, as in the case of the bank failure. Sometimes a series of epitaphs seem to form a colloquy, searchingly examining a topic from a

number of viewpoints, as in the case of Henry Phipps, Harry Wilmans, John Wasson, and "Many Soldiers," who discuss, directly or by implication, the nation's adventures in war. The passionate concern with finding meaning in their own lives and in life in general serves as the common denominator uniting an amazing range of material.

Not all of the characters conduct their search for meaning on the same level. Masters distinguished a three-fold division among his creations, claiming that as the portraits are arranged in the book, "the fools, the drunkards, and the failures came first, the people of one-birth minds got second place, and the heroes and enlightened spirits came last, a sort of Divine Comedy."<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, no simple three-fold arrangement is discernable in the book. This does not mean, though, that we should dismiss Masters' remark. In fact, there does seem to be a subtle progression, and by the last pages a change is obvious. Toward the end we do find a concentration of "heroes and enlightened spirits," just as he said. The overall progression could perhaps be described as moving from pettiness of vision to largeness of vision, and consequently from agitation and discord to serenity and harmony of soul. If Masters did have in mind an increasing breadth of vision, his "fools, drunkards and failures" might include those who think primarily in petty personal terms, his "people of one-birth minds" those who view human life in the context of the social world, and his "heroes and enlightened spirits" those whose vision transcends the personal and social to reach the universal. Such an interpretation is supported by the order of the epitaphs in the *Mirror*, where one may follow the course of Masters' changing conception of his work. The first few Garlands contain a majority of epitaphs concerned with individual stories; the epitaphs printed during the late summer and fall are increasingly preoccupied with the problems of communal life; and the last few Garlands showed a heavy concentration of religious and philosophical concerns. This points generally to the three levels of concern hinted at in Masters' description, but even there, and to a far greater degree in the book, the three levels are thoroughly interwoven.<sup>22</sup> In addition, any one epitaph may touch on more than one level.

One must avoid emphasis on any one of these levels at the expense of the others. Early critics concentrated on the first level, and therefore likened the book to village gossip. Masters himself seemed to be aware of the danger of this, since the epitaphs added to the second edition tend in a number of cases to strengthen the second level by emphasizing the public issues in the early pages.<sup>23</sup> The third level, on which most readers seem to find the book least impressive, is nevertheless prominently displayed in the final section of the book, and demonstrates that Masters wished to place the personal and the social in a perspective that denied them the final importance in life. An enviable calm pervading the final section contrasts sharply with the agitation that runs through the rest of the book. The "heroes and enlightened spirits" seem to have achieved a high degree of harmony with the essential nature of things.

That beyond the confused arena of human strife there lies a realm of essential harmony can be inferred also from the treatment of physical nature throughout the volume. The frequent brief descriptions of nature generally carry suggestions of repose, in contrast to the tumult of emotions associated with the larger part of humanity. The heroic old pioneers are described as having a "mystical pathos"; the "serene sorrow" in their eyes is "like a pool of water / Amid oak trees at the edge of a forest, / Where the leaves fall." William H. Herndon is pictured meditating on Lincoln's epic career in the evening of life "As the cawing crows winged their way to the wood / Over my housetop at solemn sunsets."

These examples are from the last part of the book, where the note of serenity is dominant, but instances from the earlier pages are easily found. Hare Drummer, without conscious spiritual insight, found delight in the natural setting. What he recalls of life are his boyhood walks with laughing companions "When the sun was low and the air was cool / Stopping to club the walnut tree / Standing leafless against the flaming west." He asks nostalgically:

... how many are with me, how many  
In the old orchards along the way to Siever's,  
And in the woods that overlook  
The quiet water?

In all these instances the images are of summer and fall. This is typical of the volume as a whole. Considering that the setting is Illinois, winter is surprisingly absent from the portraits. The general impression is of a nature that is on the whole benign. There are, to be sure, instances of nature's cruelty. Bert Kessler describes his death from a rattlesnake bite, Schroeder the Fisherman pictures the endless struggle for survival in which strength is everything, spirit nothing. But most of the speakers feel sublimity rather than hostility in the natural order. Dillard Sissman is typical:

... the buzzards wheel and wheel,  
Sweeping the zenith in wide circles  
Above my kite. And the hills sleep.  
.....

I am shaken as a banner!

All in all, so many of the speakers have sensed a healing power in communion with nature that the viewpoint of the "heroes and enlightened spirits" seems fittingly to receive the final place in the *Anthology* proper.

Since the *Anthology* proper does end on this comparatively elevated plane, what can be said for the "Spooniad," which concludes the first edition, and what indeed for the "Epilogue," added at the end of the second edition? The "Spooniad" does, to be sure, draw in its burlesque fashion the line dividing the community into two contending camps, and it may be, as has been claimed, a parody of Milton's war in heaven in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>24</sup> Most readers nevertheless find it heavy handed as well as unnecessary. Even worse is the "Epilogue," a relapse into the Shelleyesque conventions of Masters' earlier verse, bad as poetry and contradictory in implication to the epitaphs taken as a whole.<sup>25</sup>

Masters wrote the Spoon River poems in moments stolen from his busy law practice. He published them under the pseudonym "Webster Ford," because he feared that poetic fame would ruin him as a lawyer (it soon did). But the immediate accolades set up a pressure for the author to be revealed, and by fall Reedy had persuaded Masters to let his identity be known. Reedy then announced "The Writer of Spoon River" in a long article of appreciation on November 20, 1914, after which Masters happily

assumed a place among the poets and editors of Chicago, especially those involved with Harriet Monroe's magazine *Poetry*. The intensity of his creative effort was draining him emotionally and physically; in early winter he fell victim to pneumonia, and was critically ill when the proofs for the book arrived from Macmillan. Harriet Monroe came to his aid by reading the proofs for him; the book was ready by April, and when he recovered he found himself a celebrity, courted by interviewers, editors and publishers, the friend and equal of writers and creative artists of all kinds.<sup>26</sup> The bitter years of futile aspiration were now behind him, for all too brief a spell, and he basked in the glare of reputation.

After clarifying and amplifying the *Anthology* by adding the thirty-two epitaphs to the definitive edition, he turned energetically to other writing. Books from his pen poured forth nearly one every year. The fame of the *Anthology* won him ready publication for a time, but he could never repeat the triumph of that book. He lived on amid increasing critical and popular neglect. At his death in 1950 he had more than fifty titles to his credit, and a reputation as a one book man.

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#### NOTES

1. There was a tradition of mild dissent in rural America; "village atheists" were tolerated as amusing and harmless figures. The speeches of Ingersoll, E. W. Howe's *Story of a Country Town*, and Mark Twain's "Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" are examples of pre-Spoon River iconoclasm. Perhaps the *Anthology* carried things too far and cut too close to the bone, or perhaps a change of mood in the country caused the unusually vigorous critical stir.
2. One of the sketches survives in the Dreiser collection, University of Pennsylvania Library. One page long, it is a vernacular account of a rural festivity. Masters titled it "The Oakford Derby." Oakford is a small community north of Petersburg, Illinois.
3. Letter to Dreiser, April 13, 1914 (University of Pennsylvania Dreiser collection).
4. Masters was already thinking of book publication before the second group of poems appeared in the *Mirror*. Letter to Dreiser, June 11, 1914 (University of Pennsylvania Dreiser collection).
5. See "The Genesis of Spoon River," *American Mercury*, XXVIII (January, 1933), 38-55. This article and Masters' autobiography *Across Spoon River* (New York, 1936) are the chief sources of information about his life. His facts are unfortunately not always reliable.
6. *Across Spoon River* has 1869; however, the earlier date is recorded in the family bible in the possession of Miss Edith L. Masters, Petersburg, Illinois.

7. His own marriage was apparently at least as unsatisfactory as his parents', and eventually ended in divorce. He remarried in the 1920's.
8. See *Genesis of Spoon River*, p. 46: "The village of Lewistown had furnished me a key which unlocked the secrets of the world at large."
9. *Toward the Gulf*, p. ix.
10. For a detailed discussion of Masters' use of central Illinois material see Josephine Craven Chandler, "The Spoon River Country," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XIV (1921-22), 252-329.
11. On the more personal, less distinctly Chicago, side, "Paul McNeely" is a fictional tribute to Bertha Baum, the Chicago woman who was his nurse during his serious illness in 1915; and "Daniel McCumber" and "Georgine Sand Miner" relate a barely disguised version of Masters' love affair with Tennessee Mitchell in 1908-10.
12. *The New Spoon River*, p. 5.
13. William Marion Reedy, "The Writer of Spoon River," *Reedy's Mirror*, XXIII (November 20, 1914), 2.
14. For Casters' opinion of his legal career, see, for example, *Across Spoon River*, pp. 398-99.
15. Reedy discussed this work in "God in Stricken Italy," *Mirror*, XVIII (January 7, 1909), 1. For Masters' statement of influence see his introduction to *Toward the Gulf* (New York, 1918), p. vii.
16. Letter to Dreiser, April 20, 1914 (University of Pennsylvania Dreiser collection).
17. Harriet Monroe believed that both Sandburg and *Poetry* had influenced Masters. See "Comments and Reviews," *Poetry*, V (March, 1915), 280.
18. The April 20, 1914, letter to Dreiser mentions the crayfish image used in "Theodore the Poet"; what is apparently an earlier version of "Griffy the Cooper" is in the Harriet Monroe collection, University of Chicago library.
19. Masters claimed that he could point to exactly sixty-seven epitaphs "which are both rhythmical and metrical." *Genesis of Spoon River*, p. 49. He also stated that his book "for the first third required a practiced voice or eye to yield the semblance of verse; and for the last two thirds, or nearly so, accommodated itself to the less sensitive conception of the average reader." *Toward the Gulf*, p. ix. Actually, metrical and non-metrical epitaphs are thoroughly intermixed.
20. See, for example, William Stanley Braithwaite, "The Soul of Spoon River," *Boston Transcript*, May 1, 1915, part 3, p. 8.
21. "Genesis of Spoon River," p. 50.
22. There have been numerous attempts to classify the epitaphs; Putzel in his study of Reedy *The Man in the Mirror* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 203-5, seems closest to the mark when he distinguishes three basic themes: "the vanity of human knowledge," freedom, and "that life holds precious gifts for those who have the strength and the will to prize it." The division that I suggest, following Masters' schema, is less between epitaphs than between tendencies often found together in the same epitaph.
23. See examples on pp. 7 and 8 of this essay.
24. Putzel, p. 204: "Actually 'The Spooniad' is no true fragment but a subtle parody of the first and sixth books of *Paradise Lost* . . ."

25. Lois Hartley in *Spoon River Revisited* (Ball State Monograph No. 1, 1963), p. 5, may represent those who argue that the Epilogue's "philosophy is that of the rest of the book." The spirit of sardonic mockery there dominant is of course present in a good many epitaphs, but is, I believe, balanced against a serener, less cynical spirit, particularly in the later pages.
26. She also wrote the brief note introducing "The Spooniad."

## SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S *DEATH IN THE WOODS*: TOWARD A NEW REALISM

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Though recent critics stress the importance of Sherwood Anderson's later works and most critics admire "Death in the Woods" as one of his best short stories, if not his masterpiece, the volume *Death in the Woods and other Stories* (1933) has not been studied. Yet Anderson, always concerned with the "baffling question of form achieved or not achieved,"<sup>1</sup> took special pains with the book. When he was reading proof, he perceived unevenness in the quality of the stories and "threw out two or three"; he wrote a new story to complete the volume, "Brother Death," a story which in his opinion would "make the book"; "It is, I'm pretty sure, one of the finest stories I've ever done, and I even dare say one of the finest and most significant anyone has ever done." Anderson was especially pleased with these changes because, as he explained to Ferdinand Schevill, "I did want the book, dedicated to our friendship and my esteem for you and your mind, to have real integrity."<sup>2</sup> Anderson "sounds cocky," he admits; but as Schevill would have realized, such self-assurance with respect to a collection of short stories was a new note for Anderson. In his dedication to Dreiser of *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921) he wrote of his sense of inadequacy: "Many tales are dying in the street before the house of my mind"; and in the first selection in the volume, "The Dumb Man," the persona reiterates this despair: "I have no words. . . . I cannot tell the story." In the Foreword to the collection *Horses and Men* (1923) Anderson says that he may be deaf, blind, and unable "with these nervous and uncertain hands . . . [to] feel for the form of things. . . ." In the Introduction to a collection of sketches, *Perhaps Women* (1931), he apologizes for his failure to have

found a suitable form: "The whole thing is nothing but an impression, a sketch. I know that I have kept it by me for a year now. I have tried to give it better form but that now seems impossible to me." Anderson's cockiness about having achieved his goal of "real integrity" in *Death in the Woods* suggests that the volume may represent a new departure for him. I find in the volume a movement away from a persona seeking the meaning of life in "the preternatural or archetypal,"<sup>3</sup> a passive observer upon whom reality impinges itself, toward a persona who shares the life he observes and locates the center of reality outside himself. The change in the persona is associated in the volume with a change in attitude toward women and toward death.

The story "Death in the Woods" is the first in the volume; "Brother Death" is the last, and Anderson indicates that this arrangement was his intention.<sup>4</sup> Obviously the volume is unified by the theme of death; but it is not death alone. As he had elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> Anderson links the topics death and woman. Of the sixteen stories in the volume, five deal with the death of a woman and its effect upon a male character. In "Death in the Woods" the male narrator is a stranger to the woman whose death is an episode in his development. In three other stories—"The Return," "Another Wife," and "The Flood"—the focus is on a widower trying to find a substitute for his dead wife. The narrator of "In a Strange Town" flees his wife and home in order to recover from the depression he felt upon the death of a young woman student; he consoles himself by meditating upon the meaning of life for a widow he sees at a railroad station in a funeral party. These stories reflect the conviction which led Anderson to publish *Perhaps Women* in spite of his dissatisfaction with its form, his sense "that modern man is losing his ability to retain his manhood in the face of the modern way of utilizing the machine and that what hope there is for him lies in women."<sup>6</sup> Other stories illustrate ways in which women may save men and make explicit the faults from which men need to be saved. Their need for worldly success is the primary life-denying fault, whether it be in a mountaineer moving to the city for work, a young man seeking sophistication among expatriates, or a writer abandoning family and human values for the sake of his craft. In one powerful story, "The Flight," Anderson shows male rivalry as ruinous; in

another, he shows jealous possessiveness as absurd. Through their interaction with other characters the males in these stories either ironically reveal their illusions about themselves or gain self-knowledge. In a few stories Anderson focuses on the positive qualities of the women characters—their wisdom and their ability to deal with the realities of life—which enable them not only to survive in a hostile world but to help men. Finally, in "Brother Death," he uses a female central consciousness to show that in the midst of death one can live fully.

The stories in *Death in the Woods* were written over a period of years—some were published as early as 1925—when Anderson was also writing the avowedly autobiographical works *A Story Teller's Story* (1924) and *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* (1926). But from these and the many letters and passages in the *Memoirs* (1941) which tell about this period in Anderson's life, one cannot get a trustworthy chronology. The tantalizingly frequent parallels between his biography and his fiction cannot be made into a study of development.<sup>7</sup> But the changes I perceive in Anderson's male personae in the volume *Death in the Woods* are paralleled by changes in six versions of the title story which have survived.

Anderson considered "Death in the Woods" one of his best short stories but, he added, it "was one of the stories I wrote, threw away, and rewrote many times." Recognizable versions of the story appear in three works unpublished during Anderson's lifetime: "Paris Notebook" (1921); "Father Abraham: A Lincoln Fragment"; and the recently discovered fragment "A Death in the Forest." Three published versions exist: as part of *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* (1926); as a separate short story in *American Mercury*, (September 1926); and finally in 1933 in the volume *Death in the Woods*.<sup>8</sup> In a passage in which he compares the gestation of a story to pregnancy, "the telling of the tale . . . [to] the cutting of the natal cord," Anderson remarked that out of his private world of fancy, he would like to introduce and tell the story of, among others, "the old woman accompanied by the gigantic dogs who died alone in a wood on a winter day."<sup>9</sup> In "Death in the Woods" Anderson does tell the story of such a woman, using as narrator a grown man looking back to a memorable incident in his boyhood twenty years earlier. The narrator mentions that he did not understand the significance of the

woman's story until later in life when he "had a half-uncanny mystical adventure with dogs in an Illinois forest on a clear moon-lit Winter night." In his *Memoirs*, Anderson describes such an experience when he was living in Chicago and spending week-ends in the country nearby in order to write. The troop of dogs which accompanied him on a walk one snowy night "seemed excited"; they "ran in circles," and when Anderson stopped to doze, lying half-way up the slanting trunk of a fallen tree, they made a circular path in the snow beneath him, running head to tail; one by one they dropped out of the circle to run up the tree trunk and gaze into Anderson's face. Anderson felt "something of the mystery of the night," of the "strangeness" of the animals' reversion to a primitive state, but he thought that part of their ritual, their stopping to run to him, indicated their tie to civilization.<sup>10</sup>

Anderson ascribes a similar feeling of awe to Abraham Lincoln in "Father Abraham: A Lincoln Fragment." The narrator projects himself into the mind of Lincoln whom he imagines as the defense attorney for a woman accused of killing her employer. Like Anderson's mother a bound girl, the woman had no defense but violence when her master attacked her. Lincoln is able to imagine her feelings as well as those of the man who sees her as his rightful conquest; he knows that the man's wife tacitly condoned the rape as a way of keeping the girl bound to their service for life. With great insight Lincoln perceives the farmer as a misguided human being, not a brute; but his sympathy is for the victim. Earlier in "Father Abraham," Anderson wrote about Lincoln's passion for Ann Rutledge and his mourning for her at her grave in the snow on a winter night; Anderson presents Lincoln's love and loss as the experience which liberated him from the merely personal and allowed him to extend his sympathy and influence to strangers. In "Death in the Woods," Mrs. Grimes' early life as a bound girl parallels that of the woman on trial; the death scene bears many resemblances to that of Lincoln at Ann Rutledge's grave.<sup>11</sup>

The version of the old woman's story in "Father Abraham" is close to that of the sketch in the "Paris Notebook"; in both the emphasis is on the brutalized life of the old woman, told with compassion for all participants. In the "Notebook" the old woman, who has not attempted to murder the farmer, relives in dreams

her youthful experience. The woman whom she served, habitually "silent & sullen," "did not mean to be unkind"; the farmer is not evil but amoral, perceiving the girl as his rightful prey. The man she married, a "filled with wrath that was bottled up inside him" and which he did not understand, had in his youth expressed "a kind of love" in the only way he could, drinking and fighting. "Ma Winters' now dreams of herself as 'frightened, a young girl in a torn dress,' trying desperately to care for the animals which love her. In one of her dreams, trying to rescue herself and trapped animals from an airless barn, she cannot reach the bar which would open the door. 'The bar she could not reach was cold as death. It was death. One raised death out of its sockets on the great door and then joy and light came in.' Without raising death, she awakes. This version focuses on the meaning of death to the girl who is the central consciousness; her dream vision seems associated with Anderson's dreamlike experience in the Illinois forest.

But the bound girl's story, Lincoln-like compassion, and the dreamlike incident of the dogs were not always linked. In a recently published holograph version of the story entitled "A Death in the Forest" Anderson treats the old woman's death almost entirely as it concerns the narrator as a young boy. Anderson focuses on the boy's encounter with death and the nakedness of woman not as a rite of passage, made mysterious and "mystical" by the ritualistic circling of the dogs, but as the occasion for his finding a role model. At the death scene he meets Ben Lewis, a young man of the town who for five years has been a newspaper reporter in Chicago. His success and its importance to the narrator are symbolized by Ben's "grand overcoat . . . (all silk lined and everything)"; to the boy the most significant aspect of the death scene was Ben Lewis' giving his overcoat to him to hold:

. . . the charge lay upon me with a delicious weight. Could men, actual flesh and blood men, who had been raised in our town, wear such gorgeous garments? Did such unbelievable things happen to young fellows who left our town and become reporters on city newspapers?

The coat was of broad yellow and green plaid and to my fingers the touch of it was delicious. And it was lined with

silk. How reverently I carried it home to our house and how good and kind I thought my mother when she laughingly permitted me to have the coat hanging in my own room overnight.

I slept but little that night and often crept out of bed to touch the coat again. How deliciously soft the fabric. The death of Ma Marvin in the snow in the wood was forgotten. . . . Would I, could I, sometime, grow up, go away to a city, get a job on a newspaper and like Ben Lewis wear a coat like a king? The thought thrilled me beyond words. . . .

As to the actual story of Ma Marvin's death, I found all about it in a rather queer way nearly twenty years later. Now I will tell you of that.

The manuscript ends here, but even if it had been continued, the story would not have been that of the old woman; the narrator has already dismissed that possibility in a few short paragraphs of narrative summary beginning "It was a poor little story after all." Obviously at this stage Anderson did not perceive a significant relationship between the woman's life and her death; the narrator dismisses the death as something beyond a boy's capacity to understand and immediately shifts his attention to the death as the cause for a gathering of the townsmen and the opportunity for him to hold Ben Lewis' coat. For the narrator, following in Ben Lewis' footsteps would lead to his heart's desire: success enough to buy luxury that would be visible to the townspeople.

Even for the adults in "A Death in the Forest," the old woman's death is not deeply significant. It occurs as an interruption to the town's happy preparation for Christmas and enjoyment of winter, "crowds of boys . . . shouting and laughing" as they jump on and are thrown from bobsleds on Main Street. The first sentence of the story announces the death bluntly: "It was December and snowing when Mrs. Ike Marvin—we knew her as Ma Marvin—died in the little hollow in the center of Grimes' woods, about two miles south of our Ohio town." The next two paragraphs personify the town: the return home of a few girls rich enough to have been away at boarding school and of Ben Lewis makes the narrator feel "one's town putting its nose up in the air like a fine pointer dog" on "a day to remember." The day is

memorable because of the effect on the townsmen of the news of Mrs. Marvin's death: all activity in the town ceases, and the narrator recalls in detail what many of the townsmen were doing as "things went bang then, like putting a light out in a room." He recalls the bustle as the news is shouted by two young hunters who run down Main Street, figures remembered as "not quite human . . . more like Gods." The sudden cessation of activity is accompanied by a change in the weather as the townspeople, including "even women who had no babies to look after," went in a group to the scene. The old woman's life and the manner of her death, "just as plain as though there had been an eyewitness to her death there to tell the tale," are very briefly summarized. The narrator remembers the "white, half frozen little old figure, pitched a little forward," and the "pack of big ugly dogs"; he imagines "the stillness of death coming softly, night and the cold," but comments "My boy's mind couldn't grasp it then" and goes on to give details of Ben Lewis' participation in moving the body and handing him the coat to hold. In this version it is the boy as part of the town, indeed, the town itself which is the center of the story.<sup>12</sup>

In the three published versions of the story the old woman's death and her life become the central memory of the adult narrator and the story becomes his attempt to perceive its true significance. The final version published in 1933 intensifies the mystical and mythical nature of the experience and its effect upon the narrator as a boy. All three of these versions omit any reference to Ben Lewis and his coat. The immediate impact of the death scene on the narrator and his brother is its function as sexual initiation for them: "She did not look old, lying there in that light, frozen and still. One of the men turned her over in the snow and I saw everything. My body trembled . . . and so did my brother's. It might have been the cold. Neither of us had ever seen a woman's body before" (20).

But before this scene the story of the old woman's life as a bound girl, as brutalized wife and mother, as a person totally isolated from human contact, has been amply told; the boy's previous impressions of her during a summer when he had observed her when he was idled by sickness, make his interest in her believable; his final view of her as a "feeder of animals"



is made convincing when he presents it as arrived at "slowly, long afterward" (22).

Anderson gains credibility for the narrator in the published versions by carefully detailing his relationship to the old woman. An omniscient narrator first describes the old woman's trip to town on the fatal day as one of many such trips viewed "one summer and fall" by the boy. Her actions are presented as those habitual to "such old women" often seen by "all country and small-town people" but seldom understood by anyone. The use of the present tense to describe habitual action and of the conditional in verbs like "may own" and "might spend" is interrupted in the second paragraph by a specific statement about the boy's distaste for liver; now he becomes the central consciousness but the use of the habitual present continues. "The old farm woman got some liver. . . ." is inconspicuous in the midst of the habitual present; it prepares the reader to believe the narrator's assertion that he had often observed the old woman. Continued shifts between the habitual present and the specific preterite are reinforced by apparently casual explanations of the narrator's knowledge both of the woman's past and of the day of her death. Such observations as "she got into my thoughts," "I remembered afterwards," "I later knew all about it. It must have stuck in my mind from small town tales, heard when I loitered about where men talked," augmented by conversational tags like "You see," "Well," "Maybe," and rhetorical questions like "then what would she do?", subtly establish the tone of oral narration, of a tale being told. This tone not only achieves suspension of disbelief but imparts to the old woman's story the aura of myth. The detailed narrative of her death becomes part of a larger story; the sense of strangeness Anderson felt in the Illinois forest is communicated through dwelling on the dogs' return to their primordial origin as wolves, their memory of civilization and perhaps their fear of death expressed in their interrupting their circlings to come close to the old woman, who had stopped to rest against a tree trunk beside a clearing. Further details about the dogs' tearing into the old woman's bag of supplies and tearing off her dress "clear to the hips" prepare for the denouement when the narrator and his brother "saw everything" and perceived the body of the old woman as that of a slender young girl.

Even such a minor change from "A Death in the Forest" as omitting any women from the group of townspeople who went to the clearing, prepares for the climax as ritual: the old woman is completely alone among men who are reduced to silence by being in the presence of death and who treat her body with ritualistic reverence. Later the townspeople make her part of the community as she had never been in life, by banishing her husband and son, scapegoats for the townspeople's communal guilt for excluding her in life. The young brothers experience the scene as sexual initiation and as a story to be told; the inability of the older brother to tell the story properly increases the sense of its strange effect, which the narrator only later could understand as awe. He remembers the scene as if he had been a spectator of himself, seeing himself among "the men standing about, the naked girlish-looking figure, . . . the circle made by the running dogs, and the clear cold winter sky above," his angle of vision like that which Anderson had in the Illinois forest suspended on the tree trunk above the clearing. This distanced perspective of the adult narrator—like that of the tall Abraham Lincoln standing at Ann Rutledge's grave—along with new experience gained over time, enables him to see the woman's life and death as a cycle of feeding animal life, a cycle matching the dogs' ritualistic circle and representing a return to primordial origins. Mrs. Grimes becomes the archetype of female experience; the telling of her story brings her out of isolation into the reader's world. The substitution of the title "Death in the Woods" for "A Death in the Forest" underlines the mythical dimension.

That such a focus was deliberate is even more apparent when we examine other comparatively small but important changes among the three published versions. The version included in *Tar*; the shift to a first-person narrator, division into five parts, and many small changes in wording resulted in a story Anderson changed little for the 1933 volume. All the changes for the final version emphasize the mythical dimension. The words "lovely" and "charming" are added to the description of the body; the effect on the narrator is emphasized when "with some strange mystical feeling" is added to the sentence "his body trembled," and the words *the mind and* are inserted in the predicate of the sentence "something creepy steals over the body." Significant

changes occur in the final paragraphs of the story summarizing what the narrator had gradually come to perceive as the meaning of the story, which became to him "like music heard from far off." In the sentence "The woman who died was one destined to feed animal life," the phrase "destined to feed" has replaced "who fed"; "animal life" has replaced "animals," preparing for the subsequent addition of the idea that "She was feeding animal life before she was born," a completion of the cycle which ends with her feeding animal life at her death. Such additional statements by the narrator as "I wonder how I know all this," "I remember now," "I have just suddenly now, after all these years, remembered her," and "It all comes back to me now" distance the adult narrator; dredging up the details from his memory, telling the story, is like perceiving the archetype. The narrator's "It is a story" near the beginning and "A thing so complete has its own beauty" near the end frame Mrs. Grimes' story, which has become also the story of the artist's creation of the "thing so complete." This story is "a story teller's story," an exemplum of the process by which the artist crystallizes experience into art.<sup>13</sup>

The other stories in *Death in the Woods* continue to reveal the creative process; the narrator-persona is confident and unapologetic, increasingly involved in the life described. One story, "The Flight," shows the necessity of putting aside childish views if one is to be taken seriously; another, "The Return," shows the futility of returning to childhood scenes and conditions—of going home again—in order to find a sense of adult identity. In twelve stories first-person narrators are adult males able to understand the meaning of events as they learn about or experience them in a specific environment, whether it be New York, Paris, the Virginia mountains, or the New Orleans of "A Meeting South." The locales are neither typical nor mythical; the narrators are at home in them. They are also more rational in putting two and two together in order to find a pattern than is the adult narrator of "Death in the Woods," and they rely on others than themselves for help in the process; they are very good at listening.

Many of the first-person narrators furnish an authoritative framework for their stories. Anderson had always taken ideas for stories from what he called "feeders," people who could tell him their stories but could not see their significance or write

them.<sup>14</sup> In earlier collections "feeders" lack reinforcement as authoritative sources; they are casual acquaintances or unreliable characters: a "woman met on a train" ("War"), "a man" ("The Other Woman"), "my friend—his name is Leroy" ("Seeds"), a college professor unable to communicate with his own wife ("The Man in the Brown Coat"). "Feeders" in *Death in the Woods* are much more reliable. In the three stories about Virginia mountaineers, the narrators discourage disbelief by not demanding total belief. One has lived "for some time" among "These Mountaineers," but does not pretend to understand them when they reject his pity. Another has been told the story of "A Sentimental Journey" by a scholar who has become the friend of "a mountain man, named Joe, a man much older . . ."; the scholar tells the narrator Joe's story after first admitting to his earlier belief in "Romantic tales." In "A Jury Case" the narrator has most of his information from a mountaineer who participated in the crime and who is "something of a dramatist"; the narrator disarms disbelief by stating flatly, "His version is, to be sure, all a matter of fancy," and by not insisting on the truth of any version.<sup>15</sup> In "Like a Queen" a friend tells his story to the narrator after experience of thirty years has corroborated it; the story gains verisimilitude when Alice, who is the focus of the story, tells her own life history. In "A Meeting South" a young poet tells the narrator the "story of his ill fortune" as if he were "speaking of another"; his command of words wins the narrator's—and the reader's—belief. Being able to use language appropriate to the subject is a test for other narrators and "feeders." In "There She Is—She is Taking Her Bath," the first-person narrator calls attention to his own use of clichés, a step which increases the verisimilitude of his self-revelation; and in "That Sophistication" the hostess's repetition of the word *corked* each time she pours out a new bottle of wine for her guests reveals her absurdity. The narrator of "In a Strange Town" creates a story for us as an illustration of his techniques; because we know that the widow's life he has imagined is fiction, we tend to believe as fact the narrator's concluding story about his own experience. Unlike the persona of "The Dumb Man," this narrator has found a way to go beyond his first reaction of sitting "dumbly" upon learning of his student's death. Credibility for the narrator's perception of

hidden truths about people is gained by repetition, at the beginning and end of the story, of examples of his amazing ability to hear sounds unheard by those familiar with them.

"In a Strange Town" more directly than "Death in the Woods" epitomizes the process behind this assured narrative voice. In his *Memoirs* Anderson recorded the centrality of this story to his concept of himself as a writer.<sup>10</sup> He tells us that his habit of wandering in strange towns, immersing himself in a "bath of new impressions, of people seen," often results in mystical self-loathing which brings him to the point of suicide—"and then something happens." This "something" makes "the person called Sherwood Anderson" disappear. But he does not commit suicide; he is able by writing to get "entirely rid of self," to project the "darkness," the "corrupt mass of self." Even as a child, he had felt the "selfishness and slickness in me," the tendency to "control and use men and women," had felt the need for salvation, to which others suggested religion as an answer. Anderson says that such an answer was not possible to him because he could not make the total commitment to art that imitating God as the supreme artist would entail; such a decision is impossible for him because he is not willing to let "everything else go." The creative process described in "In a Strange Town" allows the writer to make stories without controlling lives; the narrator need not feel self-loathing but through his art may achieve a catharsis of despair and self-centeredness.

The narrator of "In a Strange Town" is a professor of philosophy, "no longer young"; he has fled the familiar in order to renew his creativity by making up stories of the lives of strangers he encounters. He demonstrates this renewal by gradually imagining the story behind a group of people in the railroad station: he sees them as "people of no importance" who in becoming mourners have "suddenly become important [as] symbols of death. Death is an important, a majestic thing, eh?" (145) says the narrator, who has already shown the townspeople's sense of awe as they make a "little path of silence" for the group. He "reconstructs" the life of the widow to illustrate his perception that all lives are similar but that "the little circumstances of no two lives anywhere in the world are just alike." From perceiving the "little odd fragmentary ends of things" he is able to perceive

the mystery of life in general which he represents in his reconstruction of the widow's life. This process of relating the particular and the general is, of course, appropriate for a professor of philosophy. Also appropriate to the mature professor is the fact that when he wanders in strange places he is an observer, not a participant in life: he no longer picks up women but tries to escape involvement. "It may be that I am a bit dirty with life and have come here, to this strange place, to bathe myself in strange life and get clean and fresh again" (150). Now, he tells us, he is refreshed. This could be the end of the story if it were meant like "Death in the Woods" to exemplify the process by which the artist goes beyond self or if the focus were on the imagined characters as symbols of death. But the narrator goes on to reveal that the immediate cause of his wandering to a strange town was the sudden death of a young woman, his student, whose attention had flattered him and whose experience had often caused him to re-experience his youth. Her death has caused him to take this trip in order to become "more aware," "more alive": as in "Death in the Woods," a woman and her death have been the inspiration for a narrator; but his learning process here is the result of active imagination, of purposefully weaving observed particulars into a pattern of meaning.

The changes in the narrative voice in *Death in the Woods* are paralleled by changes in the attitudes towards women revealed in the stories. All of them go beyond the suggestion in "A Lincoln Fragment" and in "A Death in the Forest" that a woman's death was more significant than her life because it freed a man from provincial limitations, though "Death in the Woods" itself comes close to this egocentric attitude. Mrs. Grimes's nobility in suffering exalts her almost to the dimensions of the mythical suffering servant who can redeem mankind, but this exaltation is essentially demeaning to the character's humanity. However much the reader is inclined to sympathize with Mrs. Grimes's stoicism, it is difficult to overlook its inadvertence. Her suffering is that of a victim; not of an autonomous human being. In other stories about women who are helpful to men because of their greater generosity and nobility, Anderson creates more nearly autonomous characters. Alice in "Like a Queen" arouses in the narrator a "great surge of love" when she obtains a gift of a thousand

dollars to support him in his work, which she tries to convince him is a source of power. As a young beauty she had given her lovers something; as an old woman she is still a nurturer, acting as go-between for rich parents and their alienated children. Aunt Sally of "A Meeting South" is like a mother; she saves their nest-eggs for men who had patronized her gambling and drinking establishments, more than re-paying them for what they had paid her for her services. Significantly, Alice and Aunt Sally, though now old and ugly like Mrs. Grimes, are perceived as beautiful by the narrator, who dissociates them from any preconception of beauty.

Anderson's exaltation of women is distilled in *Perhaps Women*, a small volume he wrote after months of wandering to observe the impact of industrialization at the beginning of the Great Depression. The woodcut Anderson commissioned for the frontispiece of the volume shows a strong woman on an impressive steed leading a small man on a nag; Anderson felt that his friend Lankes caught exactly the meaning expressed in the volume.<sup>17</sup> But the repetition of "Perhaps Women" as the title of three separate sections within the book emphasizes the *perhaps*; Anderson sees women as potentially strong leaders of men but is not sure that they will actually become saviors. In fact, he feared that women, especially as consumers, might contribute to industrial man's castration; and he recognized that women too might stand in need of salvation. In the concluding section, "A Cry in the Night," he suggests that the factory women's calls to men may become only parts of a game, greeted by "an outburst of laughter from many women, ironic laughter." In spite of such doubts, the narrator persists in suggesting that women, because of their biologically-caused tenderness, may be able to bring back to life men deadened by their roles in industrial society.

Other stories in *Death in the Woods* show men's weakness and consequent need for the saving grace of women. Males who view women primarily as sex objects are shown to be foolish, if not vicious. The absurdly jealous narrator of "There She Is—She Is Taking Her Bath" ironically reveals his foolishness while defending his suspicions that his wife is committing adultery; the reader easily perceives the innocence of the wife who is merely taking a bath—symbolically renewing herself. The nar-

rator in "The Lost Novel," shocked by the injustice of a novelist's perception of his wife as an object to be abused and used for literary purposes, perceives the novelist's self-deception. The narrator in "The Return" realizes that casual sex is no longer significant or even possible for him and that his marriage for the sake of professional advancement has been sterile. The difficulty men have in learning such lessons is wryly shown in "The Flood," in which a professor of philosophy intent upon finishing his life-work on values succumbs for the second time to marrying a frivolous woman. Although the woman in the story is not admirable, she is a tie to life more important than professional achievement. In these stories the women are more than objects; they have lives of their own and men must accept them as they are. In them Anderson moves away from exaltation of woman as a mythical creature to a realistic view of women sharing men's lives.

Two stories go further to show women as actively initiating involvements that will benefit men. "Why They Got Married" is a playful story in which a married couple tell the story of their courtship to an interested observer; both acknowledge the woman's skill in winning the man's love and his parents' approval, and credit her with their present happiness. As co-narrator as well as wife, the female character is on a part with the man; both relish the story of the wife's manipulation of her in-laws so that "marriage sure seemed like salvation to them" (268). In "Another Wife" a widowed doctor is happy to marry a woman who has, without regard to local mores, pursued him. The doctor realizes that his view of her as surrounded by admirers and therefore too good for him has been a stereotype, and he sees her as a person with her own specific life history, a unique identity. She is admirable, worthy of his love, and able to renew his self-confidence and vitality, but she is not above him on a pedestal. Through his new insight about her the doctor is able to end his own brooding introspection. In this last story the change in attitude toward women is accompanied by a significant change in the male character's view of himself.

In "Brother Death" Anderson went beyond perception of women as sharers of experience with males upon whom the stories focus; he uses a creative and wise female as the central consciousness.<sup>18</sup> No narrator intrudes between the reader and the charac-

ters. An assured but unidentified voice paints the scene and describes the characters before focusing on Mary Grey. Unlike the young boy in "Death in the Woods," Mary is already mature at fourteen. At the time the incidents of the story begin "... she was both a child and a grown woman. The woman side of her kept popping out at unexpected moments" (273), and she and her younger brother Ted understand life better than their elders. Like the narrator of "Death in the Woods," Mary does perceive the events of her childhood more completely when she grows up, but she never shares his naiveté. So sure is she of the validity of her own perceptions that she guards Ted, who has a heart ailment which they all know will soon kill him, from the over-protectiveness of the rest of the family, and stands up to her mother who spoils Ted's joy in life with her warnings. Mary and Ted both perceive that the very imminence of his death warrants his risking all for joy; embracing "Brother Death" is the only way for Ted to live. Later Mary realizes that living Ted's way, risking all for joy, is the only way to avoid "the more subtle and terrible death" in life that is the choice of their older brother who sacrifices his independence to share in the materialism and success of his parents.

In making his mature voice a female, Anderson has blended his perceptions of the artist and of woman. It is not only the male free to roam—often freed by woman's sacrifice—who has "glimpses" that can become stories; woman living her life can have and fight for creative insights. Mary's wisdom coincides with the motto Anderson ascribes to Socrates as the ultimate wisdom: "Not life but the good life" and to Anderson's choice for the inscription on his grave: "Life not death is the great adventure."<sup>19</sup> *Death in the Woods* moves from a mythic view of woman and of the artist's quest to a definition of the good life, of the kind of success Americans need to substitute for the materialism that has blighted the fulfillment of their heroic quest for meaning.

In "Brother Death" Anderson goes beyond the kind of realism in which abstractions reveal meaning,<sup>20</sup> beyond myth which evokes "a connotative style approaching the idiom of poetry."<sup>21</sup> It is significant that Professor Tony Tanner, who found Anderson not only incapable of but opposed to rational analysis, focuses on

*Winesburg, Ohio* for his examples.<sup>22</sup> Tanner epitomizes what he considers Anderson's childlike refusal to discriminate among random details in order to find the general behind the particular—his refusal to reason—by citing from *Tar* the child's concept of God as juxtaposed with his sensation of straw tickling his belly and the statement "There's a lot to think about you can never really think about." "Brother Death" opens with a statement that two oak tree stumps were to two children "objects of wonder." But their wonder is no passive awe, no mystical feeling. Soon after seeing the trees cut, the two children start "wondering" about them, attempting to understand the event, to find reasons for it, to integrate it with their previous knowledge. They suggest that perhaps the stumps had bled, as they imagined the stump of an armless man they had seen must have; they argue over this idea, the girl insisting that a woman could have had an armless stump, so that the trees' experience could be compared with that of a woman just as well as with that of a war hero. Mary's "Why not? I'd like to know why not?" sets the keynote of the entire story in which the tree stumps become a rich symbol. She would like to have verified the hypothesis by touching the tree stumps, to see if they were warm, but it is too late for that experiment, since she and her brother ran away "just as the trees fell." In the rest of the story they do not run away from experience; they escape into reality. Their escape is based upon the fact, the sure knowledge that Ted must soon die. The special bond between them because they accept the implication of their knowledge is verified by everyone who knows them; they are perceived as being "too serious" for childhood and they do not fit the romantic stereotype of the innocent, the ignorant child. It is the adults whose "recognition wasn't very definite"; Mary's sense of "something concerning her brother Ted" is not the result of an intuitive glimpse but stems from a reason, her knowledge of his condition and her rational facing up to its implications.

It is significant that Mary is not merely a passive observer of her brother's life and death; she participates in them, initiates action, though Ted too "was imaginative and could think of plenty of risky things to do." The children's actions are connected, purposive. Far from being passive, they create and re-create their own world daily; "being in their own created world, feeling

a new security there, they could suddenly look out at the outside world and see, in a new way, what was going on out there in the world that belonged also to others" (282). They do not perceive the world as isolated details; they do not intuit some mythic world behind the perceived details. They create their own reality and use it to perceive the objective reality of others. The two children are reasoning; they are Man Thinking, inducing and deducing. The narration goes on to give the facts about the cutting down of the trees, about the irrationality and tyranny of the father who has ordered them cut, the ineffectiveness of the wife in trying to get him to change his mind, about the submission of the older son Dan after a brief rebellion against his father's will. The stumps can be taken to stand for the sterile lives of the father and son who make material success their goal, a living death far worse than the real death Ted experiences. They can be perceived just as physical facts without either the anthropomorphic meaning the two children suggest or the symbolic meanings of the struggle between father and sons or between the two sons, one literally dead and one metaphorically so. The stumps are a true symbol, open-ended in their meaning; Anderson has resisted the imposition of his own view of the world or that of characters in the story. Each reader must create his own reality. In going beyond the authoritative voice of other narrators in *Death in the Woods*, Anderson anticipates the modern critical view of the need for readers to participate in the creation of a text.

Even a partial analysis of the style of "Brother Death" shows Anderson's change from the paratactic style Professor Tanner considers his hallmark. Compared with the first two hundred words of "Death in the Woods," the opening of "Brother Death" is clearly in a hypostatic style. It contains almost twice as many subordinate clauses, one-third as many simple sentences; the average number of words per sentence is 15.4 compared with 11.8 for "Death in the Woods," a significant difference when linked to the preponderance in the latter of compound predicates joined by the paratactic *and* and in the former of participial embedding. One-line paragraphs found in "Death in the Woods"—there are nine—as portentous statements of simple narrative facts are used in "Brother Death" only for dialog; just a glance at the story

establishes the paragraph length as much greater than that of any other story in *Death in the Woods*, the main reason being for continuous narrative. The style is also different in that it lacks the vagueness of "Death in the Woods" about the old woman as "one of those," "such a," one seen by all but unknown by any "Brother Death" opens with the fact "There were the two oak stumps" (Anderson added *oak* in revising an earlier version) and within four sentences begins direct discourse between the two children who exchange ideas, even argue about the stumps.

The continuity of action in the story belies Anderson's fictional view of the writer's technique as the piecing together of isolated incidents, of understanding the general through erratic glimpses into the lives of others. The narrator of "Brother Death" knows the history of the land and the people in the story; he gives us details of the cutting down of the trees and the children's death-defying activities, but neither the trees nor the death of the younger brother becomes the focus of the story. Like "Death in the Woods," the story is beautiful because of its completeness. But it is not a completeness imagined by an observer of someone else's life; it is a completeness experienced by the characters. Their concept that death is the accompaniment, the fulfiller of life has the authority of direct truth, not of myth. The narrator of this story is no naive observer of life; he has gone beyond wonder to understanding.

"Death in the Woods" is probably Anderson's greatest story in the style of his early writing, his greatest achievement in mythopoesis. In it he resolved the dichotomy between the observer and the observed by absorbing the external world into the mind of the observer. In the volume *Death in the Woods* he undercuts the authority of an observer as creator of the observed world by showing the absurdity of egocentricity, by increasing the credibility of other observers (his "feeders"), and finally, in "Brother Death," by allowing the meticulously reported details observed by the narrative voice to constitute the story, a story not about writing a story but about living a life. Perhaps this shift is the effect of Anderson's fully releasing the woman within himself. The old writer of "The Book of the Grotesque" felt that his creative force was a young woman within him, "wearing a coat of mail like a knight"—ready to go out and seek adventure.

In "Brother Death" a young woman wise beyond her years creates the meaning of her brother's life; she leads him not because of superior strength and nobility like the woman of Lankester's woodcut for *Perhaps Women* but because of sympathetic sharing of his life. In Mary Grey the voice of Sherwood Anderson expresses the wisdom learned by living; "Brother Death" is a fitting climax to *Death in the Woods*.

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#### NOTES

1. Sherwood Anderson, *The Modern Writer* (San Francisco, 1925), p. 43. For a summary of critical attitudes toward Anderson, see Walter B. Rideout in *Sixteen American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer, 2d ed (New York, 1973). Michael Geismar was one of the first critics to see the importance of *Death in the Woods*; he saw as the unifying theme of the volume a deepening of Anderson's commitment to "the realm of ordinary human relationships . . . the mysteries of the commonplace" (pp. xix, xx, Introduction to Geismar's edition *Sherwood Anderson: Short Stories* [New York, 1962]). A more recent assessment is that of David D. Anderson who considers *Death in the Woods* Anderson's "most consistently high-level collection . . . an integrated and mature examination of Anderson's belief that reality must be separated from appearance. . . ." See his "Sherwood Anderson after Twenty Years," pp. 246-56 in *The Achievement of Sherwood Anderson: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Ray Lewis White (Chapel Hill, 1966). See also his "Anderson and Myth," pp. 118-44 in *Sherwood Anderson: Dimensions of His Literary Art, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. David D. Anderson [East Lansing, Michigan], 1976. Interestingly, the imputation of form to *Winesburg, Ohio* and its designation as a "novel" instead of a collection of stories is a post-facto critical phenomenon; as John H. Ferres points out, early critics saw no form in it at all (see his Introduction to *Winesburg, Ohio: Text and Critical Edition* [New York, 1966]). William L. Phillips has shown, however, that Anderson conceived the stories of the "Book of the Grotesque" as complementary parts of a whole, unified by setting and the character George Willard; see his "How Sherwood Anderson wrote *Winesburg, Ohio*," in *The Achievement of Sherwood Anderson*, pp. 62-85.
2. Letter to Schevill, March 2, 1933, in *Letters of Sherwood Anderson*, ed. Howard Mumford Jones and Walter B. Rideout (Boston, 1953), pp. 277-78. In July, 1933, Anderson reiterated his high opinion of "Brother Death" to Paul Rosenfeld, saying that the story was "written last winter after the rest of the book was in press" (p. 292). That this was only partially true is apparent from a study of a collection of notes and six versions of the story; see Earl Hilton, "The Evolution of Sherwood Anderson's 'Brother Death,'" *Northwest Ohio Quarterly*, XXIV (Summer, 1952), 125-30.
3. Benjamin T. Spencer, "Sherwood Anderson: American Mythopoeist," *American Literature*, XLI (March, 1969), p. 3 (rpt. in *Sherwood Anderson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Walter B. Rideout [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.,

- 1947], pp. 150-65). Professor Spencer has brilliantly shown that Anderson's prevailing style up to and including "Death in the Woods" involved the process of turning into myth his observations about American life; and that his attempts, like those of Whitman, "to project the democratic beyond concept into myth," contrast with the techniques of "such contemporary naturalists or realists as Dreiser or Lewis."
4. See the letter to Paul Rosenfeld referred to above, *Letters*, p. 292.
  5. One of the main foci in *Winesburg, Ohio* is the death of George Willard's mother; in fact, David Stouck considers death "a persistent preoccupation" in Anderson's work, though he does not discuss *Death in the Woods* per se; see his "Winesburg, Ohio as a Dance of Death," *American Literature*, XLVIII (January 1977), 525-42. In the first selection in *The Triumph of the Egg*, the tale the "dumb man" could not tell was that of the relationship of a woman to four men, one of whom "may have been Death; the waiting eager woman may have been Life." The long story "Unused" from *Horses and Men* is about a young boy's first view of death; he sees the bloated distorted body of a woman who had committed suicide because she could find no man who could accept her proffered love.
  6. Introduction, *Perhaps Women* (New York, 1931; rpt. Mamaroneck, N.Y., 1970). For Anderson male impotence was not just a sexual but a total failure, essentially a failure to be an individual. To him women represented not just sex but the sense of life. For more detailed considerations of Anderson's view of women as a civilizing force, his debt to Henry Adams and rejection of Freudian formulas, see Rex Burbank, "The Artist as Prophet," pp. 107-23 of his *Sherwood Anderson* (New York, 1964), and Frederick J. Hoffman, ["Anderson and Freud"], rpt. in the Ferres edition of *Winesburg, Ohio*, pp. 309-20. In a study limited to Anderson's short stories, William V. Miller links Anderson's life experiences with women to his artistic view of them as idealized but limited to their biological roles. Miller points out as a "new note . . . the objectivity, the irony, and the narrator's [comparative objectivity]" in a story of 1936 but fails to find the evidence for this new note that I believe exists in *Death in the Woods*. See Miller's "Earth-Mothers, Succubi, and Other Ectoplasmic Spirits: The Women in Sherwood Anderson's Short Stories," *Mid-America I* (Fall, 1973), 64-81.
  7. For dates of publication of the stories, see *Sherwood Anderson: A Bibliography*, ed. Eugene P. Sheehy and Kenneth A. Lohf (Los Gatos, Cal., 1960). Of the sixteen stories in the volume, four were published for the first time in *Death in the Woods*: "Like a Queen," "That Sophistication," "The Flood," and "Brother Death." For all the stories but "Death in the Woods" and "Brother Death," Anderson seems to have used the writing habits described by Phillips for *Winesburg*: he frequently changed single words but seldom whole paragraphs or the original narrative order. The stories with previous magazine publication, except for "Death in the Woods," were almost unaltered for the volume. Anderson's shaping of the volume depended largely on the arrangement of the stories and the final writing of "Brother Death." None of the stories can be specifically linked to incidents which must have deeply influenced his ideas about women and about death, such as the death by suicide of his second wife, Tennessee Mitchell, in 1929, her body discovered in her apartment several days afterwards; and the lonely life and death (1927) of his youngest brother Earl who never found a woman



to rescue him. But Anderson does explicitly credit his fourth wife, Eleanor Copenhaver, whom he married shortly after *Death in the Woods* was published and with whom he was traveling when he put the volume together, with "awakening in me again the desire to participate in life at any cost." See his letter to Paul Rosenfeld, *Letters*, p. 292.

8. See Michael Fanning, *France and Sherwood Anderson: Paris Notebook, 1921* (Baton Rouge, La., 1976), pp. 62-65, for what Fanning thinks may be Anderson's first attempt at "Death in the Woods." "Father Abraham: A Lincoln Fragment" appeared in *The Sherwood Anderson Reader*, ed. Paul Rosenfeld (Boston, 1947), pp. 530-602; Rosenfeld thinks the piece may have been alluded to in a letter of 1925, and there is a reference to "working on Lincoln" in a letter of April [1924] to Jerome and Lucille Blum (see *Sherwood Anderson: Centennial Studies*, ed. Hilbert H. Campbell and Charles E. Modlin [Troy, N.Y., 1976], p. 9). "A Death in the Forest" was edited by William V. Miller as an appendix to *Tar: A Midwest Childhood*, ed. Ray Lewis White (Cleveland, 1969). The first and only edition of *Death in the Woods* was published by Horace Liveright in New York; the volume appeared on April 8, 1933, in the depth of the depression, and Liveright went out of business a month later. This fact may account for the scarcity of reviews elicited by the volume—there were only seven—and the scarcity of subsequent attention, though preoccupation with *Winesburg, Ohio* as Anderson's most important if not only significant work was also a cause of neglect of the volume. All quotations from the story are from the 1933 final version in *Death in the Woods* except when specific reference is made to one of the earlier versions.
9. *A Story Teller's Story* (New York, 1924), pp. 122, 121.
10. *Memoirs*, ed. Ray Lewis White (Chapel Hill, N.Y., 1969), pp. 425-26. In the first edition of the *Memoirs* (New York, 1942), the incident appears as part of Book IV, *The Literary Life*, entitled "Old Mary, the Dogs, and Theda Bara," pp. 306-12. The specificity of the title makes the incident seem biographically credible; if it occurred, it would have had to be between 1920-22, according to Professor Walter Rideout, who kindly gave me this information in a letter dated February 3, 1978.
11. Anderson had long been fascinated by Lincoln and identified himself with him. See David D. Anderson, "Sherwood Anderson's Use of the Lincoln Theme," *Lincoln Herald*, LXIV (Spring 1961), 28-32. Lincoln's mysticism Sherwood Anderson associates with his "being alone in the forest on still summer afternoons" ("A Lincoln Fragment," p. 567). The fact that Anderson added a comment about the cruelty encountered by bound children to the 1933 version of "Death in the Woods" indicates that the Lincoln story may have been in his thoughts at the time, though his own fictionalization of his mother's life as a bound girl may have been uppermost in his mind: see *A Story Teller's Story*, p. 7.
12. The town as Anderson's mythopoetic creation is discussed by Professor Spencer in part three of the article cited in n. 3 above.
13. Many critics have seen the focus on the artist as the center of the story; see Jon S. Lawry, "Death in the Woods' and the Artist's Self in Sherwood Anderson," *PMLA*, LXXIV (1959), 306-11; and Sister Mary Joslyn, "Some Artistic Dimensions of Sherwood Anderson's 'Death in the Woods,'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, IV (Spring 1967), 252-59. Professor Mary Rohrberger has

explored the story as the narrator's retrieval of myth from the subconscious, suggesting that underlying the image of Mrs. Grimes are those of the goddesses worshiped in the Eleusinian mysteries, Demeter, Proserpine, and Hecate; see her "The Man, the Boy, and the Myth: Sherwood Anderson's 'Death in the Woods,'" *Midcontinent American Studies Journal*, III (Fall 1962), 48-54.

14. See *Memoirs*, ed. White, pp. 376-81, for Anderson's account of his friend George Daugherty as a "feeder."
15. Anderson's objectivity in these stories was apparently deliberate; in a letter dated October 29, 1929, he wrote to friends that "These Mountaineers" was "just a description of some people, all my own feeling left out. I think it was good." (*Letters*, p. 196). In the Introduction to *No Swank* (c. 1934; rpt. Mamaroneck, N.Y., 1970), Anderson comments that his "glimpses" are not "a complete or even a just picture" of his friends.
16. Pp. 435-37.
17. See Welford D. Taylor, "Two Dismounted Men: Sherwood Anderson and J. J. Lankes," in *Sherwood Anderson: Centennial Studies*, pp. 224-34. See also Sherwood Anderson, "Mr. J. J. Lankes and His Woodcuts," *No Swank*, pp. 25-29.
18. In his article on "Brother Death" cited in n. 2 above, Earl Hilton points out that the use of Mary as central consciousness occurs in Anderson's notes as well as in all six versions of the story; and that one of the main effects of Anderson's changes is to give more of the story through Mary. Hilton's view that the evolving central theme is "success" as a living death is borne out by Anderson's comment in a letter written in the spring of 1933 (to Roger Sergel; quoted by William V. Miller, "In Defense of Mountaineers: Sherwood Anderson's Hill Stories," *Ball State University Forum*, XV [Spring 1974], p. 57). In the context of *Death in the Woods*, the major theme seems to be a definition of life lived fully, the life lived with "Brother Death."
19. *Memoirs*, pp. 558-560.
20. Walter B. Rideout ("The Simplicity of *Winesburg, Ohio*," rpt. in Ferres' edition, pp. 287-300) considers Anderson's realism in the early work as "a means to something else, not an end in itself" as it was for more traditional writers such as Sinclair Lewis; the result was that Anderson produced a "highly abstract kind of reality," one effect of which was to "depreciate the values of surfaces."
21. Spencer, p. 3.
22. Professor Tanner's view of Anderson as expressing in appropriately static paratactical style his passively glimpsed fragments of life is found in "Sherwood Anderson's Little Things," pp. 205-27 in *The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature* (New York, 1965).



SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S MANY MARRIAGES:  
A MODEL OF THE MOST PERILOUS JOURNEY

MIA KLEIN

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*,  
"Little Gidding"

The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you  
know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The  
exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that  
you believe in it willingly.

Wallace Stevens, *Adagia*

The most universal and the most perilous journey that the human creatures must undertake is that from childhood to adulthood. Many cultures have devised rituals to mark the arrival at adulthood, and the adult assumes rather specific burdens and responsibilities and enjoys rather specific privileges. Yet in the American culture—as seen perhaps most vividly in the fiction of our most respected writers (another essay might concern itself with our political behavior)—this journey is at least doubly problematic.

First, the protanogists in American fiction seldom seem to stop being "children." Leslie Fiedler has noted that "one of the factors that determine theme and form in our great books is this strategy of evasion, this retreat to nature and childhood which makes out literature (and life!) so charmingly and infuriatingly 'boyish.'" I am certainly struck by the persistent recurrence of searches for "fathers" and mothers," immersions in nature and fantasy, and

failure or absence of genitally organized sexuality every time I teach nineteenth- and twentieth-century American authors. Examples are readily available in the works of authors such as Poe, Hawthorne, Cooper, Hemingway, Kerouac and Barth. Our literature continually deals with the fantasies and fears of the child, but—through the disguises of art, to one degree of success or another—makes them palatable to the mature reader.

Second, the whole concept of childhood's being a separate place and of adulthood's being a separate place and of its being desirable to make the journey from the one place to the other is a tenuous concept at best. It may be that we too readily accept the notion of a clear severance between the child and the man or woman and too readily equate genitally organized sexuality with maturity. The journey may not be a horizontal, linear one—however crooked—from one place to another, but rather a vertical, circular one from a simple and wholly sensual experience of the flavor and content of childhood up or down, in or out, around and back again to the same place with a heightened appreciation or fuller sense of the same flavor and content. (See Tony Tanner's discussion of this matter in *The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature*.) When one says to a forty-year-old boy or girl, "Grow up," one means, I think, "Stop your damn suffering." Adulthood as a place to be arrived at is a fiction which too few recognize as a *fiction*, and thus they take it too seriously and refuse to arrive, or they take it too seriously, submit to arriving, and suffer. Perhaps the mature individual willingly accepts childhood-adulthood as a fiction and enjoys it—them without ever refusing to accept the responsibilities of maturity or relinquishing the spontaneity and capacity for fantasy of immaturity.

Sherwood Anderson's fourth novel, *Many Marriages* (1923), clearly illustrates the American protagonist's tendency to remain a "child," to undertake the perilous journey to "adulthood" and to end up back where he began *without growing*, without coming to "know it for the first time." Better writers than Anderson have portrayed this phenomenon, and it is no more a kind of pathology in him than in others. In *Winesburg, Ohio* Anderson succeeded in making the fantasies and fears of the child palatable to mature readers, but rarely did he succeed elsewhere. In the case of *Many*

*Marriages*, the work of art is less than the psychology it affirms. Yet Anderson's novel provides an extraordinarily lucid example of this journey pattern in American fiction. It most certainly provides a map of the journey undertaken by the protagonists in every one of Anderson's seven novels and in his own life as reflected in his three fictional autobiographies.

John Webster, the protagonist of Sherwood Anderson's *Many Marriages*, realizes one day in his thirty-seventh year that he has begun to think and act strangely. His mind has begun to produce fanciful phrases and images, and his behavior—returning from the factory at unexpected times, running bareheaded down a grassy way in the town, falling in love with a young secretary—surprises even himself. The rather quiet manufacturer of washing machines in a Wisconsin town begins a nightly ceremony. In his corner bedroom, which connects with both his wife's and his daughter's bedrooms, he nightly undresses and paces back and forth in front of a dresser which he has decorated with a little picture of the Virgin and with two candles in candlesticks with Christ on the cross on them.

Webster hears voices in his room that sound so loud to him that he is surprised they don't awaken the others in the house. On evenings when he is unable to sleep, he goes for a walk. He knows he is arousing the suspicions of the citizens:

Sometimes he met a man homeward bound and as they passed the man looked at him with surprise and something like distrust in his eyes. He walked past and then turned to look back. "What are you doing abroad? Why aren't you at home and in bed with your wife?" the man seemed to be asking.

At one point Webster asserts, "I have no doubt I am insane." We are later told that Webster's wife and daughter, when they have responded to his gesturing and come into his bedroom, think he is "completely insane."

Insane as Webster may appear, I believe his experience is more accurately seen as a revolt against the corruption of his authentic humanness. In *The Politics of Experience* R. D. Laing discusses the notion that a man can free himself from a society that is deranged by inventing a strategy of liberation, by launch-

ing himself, or being launched, on a journey into the inner space and time of consciousness to undergo a rebirth. A primary derangement of our culture, again, concerns the sharp distinction drawn between childhood and adulthood. "Rebirth" would allow the adult to rediscover his essential nature and become a responsible, open individual in the fullest, best sense.

Laing calls this journey the transcendental experience, an experience that "sometimes [the emphasis is his] break[s] through in psychosis." Laing believes the experience he describes is a version of the egoic experience of all religious and existential philosophies, and he calls on society to "set up places whose express purpose would be to help people through the stormy passages of such a voyage." Let it be noted that I share Lionel Trilling's dissatisfaction with Laing's assigning to schizophrenia "an etiology of ultimate simplicity" and with his belief in "an upward psychopathic mobility to the point of divinity." But I share, too, David Kleinbard's enthusiasm for Laing's usefulness to the reader of literature. Kleinbard writes, "In its freedom from technical jargon [Laing's] experiential language lends itself readily to the elucidation of literature." I suggest that Laing's concept of liberation through transcendental experience provides an entrance into John Webster's experience in *Many Marriages*, our model of the most perilous journey.

Early in *Many Marriages*, John Webster eats a lunch and then, for the first time in twenty or thirty years, *realizes* that he has eaten his lunch without joy, has stuffed the food into his body without really tasting it or smelling it. It had been different when he was a small boy. His senses then were joyously alive. A farm woman with strange, strong-looking hands had come driving an old grey horse and bringing fruits and vegetables to be put away in the cellar. All his senses and his boyish imagination had savored the vision and the fragrance and the mystery of the strange place from which the woman and her treasures had come. Now Webster finds he is again noticing "every little thing" about him. In Laing's terms, he is beginning again "to experience the world afresh, with innocence, truth and love;" he is rediscovering not only the content but the flavor of childhood.

Webster imagines that if people would only discard their social trappings, an infinity of new relationships would be possible and

some still-to-be-discovered senses might be revealed. Laing includes in his list of the social "things" that unite people and at the same time separate people "our different perspectives, educations, backgrounds, organizations, group loyalties, affiliations; ideologies, socioeconomic class interests, temperaments." These social "figments" are what Webster, in a metaphor reminiscent of Swift, Carlyle and Thoreau, thinks of as the clothes men wear. Therefore it becomes important to him that he perform his nightly ceremony in the nude—he wants to meet his wife and daughter in as pure and clean a condition of his humanity as possible.

I haven't been liking this room or the clothes I wear. Now I have taken the clothes off and perhaps I can in some way purify the room a bit.

. . . The clothes he habitually wore and that he had learned to dislike because they had been made not for himself, but for some impersonal being, in some clothing factory, were hung away, out of sight, in the closet.

Webster's fellows lead lives of quiet desperation. The condition, their "normalcy," is characterized by Laing as "the condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind." Webster composes a series of extended metaphors to describe his wife's normalcy. She lives, he imagines, behind a wall where the light of life is dim. She floats or sinks in an ocean of silence. She keeps a heavy iron lid on the deep well that is within her. Each of Webster's metaphors speaks of a desperate effort to achieve order in one's life, to avoid life—especially the life of the unconscious—because life can bring confusion, pain, and death.

In every human body there is a great well of silent thinking always going on. . . . There is a deposit of thoughts, of unexpressed emotions. . . .

There is a heavy iron lid clamped over the mouth of the well. When the lid is safely in place one gets on all right. . . .

Sometimes at night, in dreams, the lid trembles, but no one knows about that.

Webster's view, his healthy, anti-social insight, is that the unconscious may also be the reservoir of that in man which is authentic, physically and spiritually fulfilling, good. Forced to stay in the well, thoughts and impulses may become frustrated and diabolically threatening, yet the same thoughts and impulses, if allowed to come out into the light of day and find expression, may become beautiful.

Webster understands how fiercely society clings to its standard of normalcy. He knows that he is upsetting things by becoming "insane in a sane world or sane in an insane world," and he is fearful of being locked up in an asylum before he can complete the ceremony in his bedroom. He knows that society accepts those whose alienation resembles its own and rejects and even punishes those whose alienation is out of step. Webster explains to his daughter, Jane, "My being here in this room with the Virgin and without any clothes, the strangeness of all this will make you think me insane. Your mind will cling to that thought. It will make you want to cling to that thought."

Webster comes to understand that "If you love in a loveless world you face others with the sin of not loving." Living behind a wall and therefore, in a kind of perverse self-defense, *preferring* life behind the wall, society identifies, marks, and eliminates individuals who try, in Thoreau's terms, to "live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if [they] could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when [they] came to die, discover that [they] had not lived." Like Thoreau, Webster believes,

When one comes right down to it accomplishment is not the vital thing in life. . . . Men and women either spend their lives going in and out of the doors and houses and factories or they own houses and factories and they live their lives and find themselves at last facing death and the end of life without having lived at all.

Something in Webster insists on being allowed to live and refuses to submit to the tyranny of the social system. As a man, he feels the need of a woman; his wife will come to him only reluctantly and bought women make him feel mean and unclean. He feels the need of spiritual significance in his life, but in order

to be successful as a washing machine manufacturer he must try to crush out his dreams, for if he were really to entertain his dreams he would find it impossible to perform convincingly the "success" role as defined by society. His is precisely the "position of checkmate" which Laing describes: "He cannot make a move, or make no move, without being beset by contradictory and paradoxical pressures and demands, pushes and pulls, both internally from himself, and externally from those around him."

Facing unacceptable alternatives, Webster goes crazy. Insane as his outward behavior may appear, however, his experience is more accurately seen as an entirely appropriate rebellion against a living death. "*If the formation is itself off course,*" Laing has shown, "*then the man who is really to get 'on course' must leave the formation.*" Webster's body is now a house whose doors and windows, after twenty or more years of being locked, have been thrown open and whose interior is getting a house cleaning. Thinking of his body as a house leads him also to imagine it as a town, a city, or a world—a space into which he himself and others might enter and travel in. The metaphors reveal that Webster is inventing a strategy aimed at expanding the possibilities of self, at realizing his authentic humanness in all its dimensions.

Webster's medium of travel into inner time and space is his fancy, his imagination, his capacity for reverie. On one level his flowering fancy both frightens and shames him. Laing writes that "fantasy as encountered in many people today is split off from what the person regards as his mature, sane, rational, adult experience. We do not then see fantasy in its true function but experienced merely as an intrusive, sabotaging nuisance." Webster describes how he once adopted society's disapproval of his active, boyish fancy, and numerous times he unself-confidently recognizes the likelihood that he will be judged mad and the possibility that the entire experience is self-deceiving and dishonest or even fatal to those who are his innocent victims. At one point in the novel, Webster walks down the middle of a railroad track while he is busily fantasizing and narrowly misses being run over by a train.

At the same time, Webster is aware of his fancy's immeasurable potential for giving pleasure. Laing describes the true function of fantasy: "Fantasy . . . is always experiential and meaningful;

and, if the person is not dissociated from it, relational in a valid way." Madness, or travel into inner space and time by fancy, "need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death." Webster philosophizes that "a man's fancy, the creative thing within him, was in reality intended to be a healing thing, a supplementary and healing influence to the working of the mind." He sees infinite possibilities for transcending with the fancy the limitations of both one's socially-defined and one's divinely-prescribed humanness. "A life-giving thing has been given to me," he tells himself. If he is insane, he hopes only that he shall remain so because he is clearly getting more joy out of life and feeling more love for his own self than the so-called sane people. He is determined that his shall be a "purposeful insanity."

Laing describes the phases in the healing journey into one's self: the journey is experienced as "going further in," as going back through one's personal life, in and back and through and beyond into the experience of all mankind, of the primal man, of Adam and perhaps even further into the beings of animals, vegetables and minerals." Webster's journey is experienced primarily as "going back through one's personal life," as a chronological regression, as an effort to return to earlier, happier moments in order to attach himself to them, as an effort to return to the source of self in order to be reborn into a more satisfying life. What Webster wants is to recapture the perfect moment of total purity that he had experienced with the girl who was to become his wife and who for the moment had acted spontaneously and openly. He wants to recapture that perfect moment and, *this* time, to allow himself to be renewed by it. "'O, had we only know how to live up to that moment,'" he laments to his daughter as he is recalling it—in vivid detail—to her. He describes to her his boyhood, and life-long dream:

"It is a moment. The most unbelievable thing happens. There is a clock on the wall and it has been ticking, ticking, running out the span of your life and the lives of all the others. Outside the room, in which this remarkable scene takes place, there is a street with the activities of the street going on. . . .

"And suddenly all is stopped. It is a fact. On the wall the clock stops ticking, moving trains become dead and lifeless, people in the streets, who have started to say words to each other, stand now with their mouths open, on the seas winds no longer blow.

"For all life everywhere there is this hushed moment and, out of it all, the buried thing within you asserts itself. Out of the great stillness you step and take the woman into your arms. In a moment now all life can begin again, but after this moment all life forever will have been colored by this act of your own, by this marriage. It is for this marriage you and the woman were made."

Webster describes the transcendental journey to a zero point, a point of stopped time, a point that is the end of everything and the beginning of everything, the point at which the individual begins the return trip.

Anderson insisted in his memoirs that the relationship between Webster and his daughter during the ceremony in the father's bedroom is completely pure:

I called my book *Many Marriages*, meaning to convey the feeling of contacts among people, of the flesh and not of the flesh—something deeply of the spirit that nevertheless has the flesh in it.

The book was not understood. When it was published I was widely cursed for it. There was a scene between a father and daughter that was taken for incest.

What stupidity. It hurt me deeply when it happened.

But despite Anderson's insistence and despite Webster's belief that his purpose is "to startle her, if possible, into a realization of the fact of [the inner] life," their encounter is inescapably sexual "He came again to sit beside her and as he talked boldly put his hand on her leg." Then, "he took his hand from his daughter's leg and touched her cheeks and then her hair. He was frankly making love to her now and she had somewhat fallen under his influence. He reached down and taking one of her hands held it tightly." Jane does respond. "In a way his daughter had given herself to him as he had given himself to her. There had been a kind of marriage, that he realized. 'I have been a father as well as a lover. Perhaps the two things cannot be differentiated'."

Judging from the following dramatic moment in the bedroom ceremony, I think it is highly likely that Webster's unconscious purpose is to accomplish a physical union with his daughter:

"I'm damned. I'm crazy as a loon," he thought. He had suddenly a ridiculous desire to begin singing a silly refrain that had just come into his head.

Diddle de di do,  
Diddle de di do,  
Chinaberries grow on a  
Chinaberry tree.  
Diddle de di do.

And then his fingers, fumbling about in his pockets, came upon the thing he had unconsciously been looking for. He clutched it, half convulsively, and went toward his daughter, holding it between his thumb and forefinger.

Though he talks about wishing to recapture that perfect wedding moment with his wife, what Webster is actually doing is courting and trying to achieve a wedding moment with his daughter who is, after all, more responsive. This father-daughter "incest" fantasy is Webster's first effort to find an acceptable real-life substitute for the son-mother "incest" that makes possible a rebirth to a more fulfilling life. In *Symbols of the Mother and of Rebirth*, Carl Jung writes:

The basis of the "incestuous" desire is not cohabitation, but, as every sun myth shows, the strange idea of becoming a child again, of returning to the parental shelter, and of entering into the mother in order to be reborn through her. But the way to this goal lies through incest, i.e., the necessity of finding some way into the mother's body.

Webster's strategy to escape his checkmated position is, in Laing's terms, to return to "the womb of all things (prebirth)" so that he may subsequently travel back from eternity to new mortal time and life. To avoid the crime of incest, a substitute mother must be found. Thus Webster's daughter is finally not a satisfactory mate, nor is the Websters' housekeeper, who, although she indi-

cates willingness, is likewise too much a part of the family. Webster must look elsewhere.

Mother figures and forces, to be sure, dominate Webster's experience. He relates intimately to the gardens and to the life in the countryside—that is, to Mothers Earth and Nature. The sudden flowering of his fancy and his feeling that he is a budding artist and his continual creating of metaphors to express for himself his own experience reflect his involvement with the Mother Unconscious who is the seat of fantasy, imagination, impulse. Most central, however, in his effort to return to his point of origin—and here we cannot separate the physical and psychic aspects of his travel—is the Holy Mother. It is the Virgin who watches over the ceremony and to whom Webster's thoughts continually return.

Natalie, the woman to whom Webster pledges his love, is linked in his mind to the Virgin. This is the crucial aspect of their relationship. When Webster buys the image of the Virgin for his ceremonial altar, he thinks, "To tell the truth the figure of the Virgin looked not unlike Natalie. There was a kind of quiet strength in her." During the ceremony, "[the Virgin] looked steadily at him as Natalie might have looked and he kept smiling at her." Further, one day early in their relationship, Natalie herself presents a Virgin image to Webster. He is standing in their factory office in such a position that her head is framed by a window. The lumber in the yard outside is "so piled that, in the soft evening light, the yellow boards made a kind of background for Natalie's figure. The sun was shining on the lumber pile, the last soft rays of the sun. Above the lumber pile was a space of clear light and into this Natalie's head was thrust." The halo about the head of the Madonna. Webster's falling in love with *this* woman was clearly more a matter of unconscious selection—the selection of an appropriate woman to be his "mother"—than of chance.

Quite apart from whatever sexual compatability they might have, then, there is also a level on which Webster's and Natalie's relationship is that of a son and his mother. Natalie's maternal qualities—in Webster's vision of her—include the fact that she is pure and clean and has a way of keeping things clear. At their first embrace, he puts his head in her lap and feels "her broad

strong hand in his hair and on his cheek." After they become lovers, Webster and Natalie take long walks through the streets or into the country nearly every evening. He thinks of her as having a naturally poetic nature: "She is a strange one. When she does not understand she believes. There is something in her that accepts life as these trees do."

What Webster really achieves in his escape with Natalie from his family and factory and town is a reunion with a mother who might give him new life. It was all a part of his plan—the meaning of his madness—a plan fired by his unconscious, by his creative, healing fancy. His behavior has the appearance of insanity only in its deviation from the socially accepted normalcy.

The fact remains that Webster's psychic trip has required more than anything else that Natalie be his *mother*, and his own thoughts and doubts reflect the extent to which he has failed to consider how their relationship might succeed once they have begun to live together and once his role for Natalie and *her* vision of her role in their relationship meet. At the end of the novel, as they walk to catch the train, John is in a dangerously impersonal mood, considering the drastic move he is making with his and Natalie's lives. "There's no use thinking too much about what I've done. What's done is done," he says. His attitude is alternately flippant and philosophical, and it seems to me that Anderson's self-conscious defense of or confusion over his own one-way psychic journey (some ten years earlier) is audible in Webster's question, "Where did a man come out in all this? What, in the end, did he think of himself?" Anderson asks us to believe in Webster's answer, "I am myself. I am trying to be myself." We sense that this individual who has undertaken the most perilous journey is returning to the starting place without having learned anything.

Bergen Community College

LEO MARKUN:  
MRS. GRUNDY'S BAD BOY

WILLIAM F. RYAN

Any discussion of Leo Markun's brief career today has an unavoidable ring of morbidity. The commentator has only the mounting impression that his short unhappy life was an absurdly sad one as well. I have more than once stared over the tall paper columns formed by the stacks of his many Little Blue Books—a 1920s larder for trunks and attics—and pictured his closing the file folder on his own life with a shrug.

Leo Markun foretold his own obscurity in a poem he wrote late in life, and left unpublished. He titled those lines, "I Live to Plague Unborn Schoolboys," and jotted in rhyme his bitterness over the cruel price exacted by generations passing his own grave. None would know him. He would be "A name to them, a mental dot" . . .

I was able to read that poem, and several others which survive only in manuscript, through the courtesy of Leo Markun's niece, Mrs. Evelyn Rosenberg, of Boston. Those facts of the author's life, recounted here for the first time, were told to me by Mrs. Rosenberg and by Mrs. Louis R. Markun of Indianapolis, widow of Leo's cousin. Much of the Markun lore came in a rush on June 30, 1979, when those women obliged my curiosity in separate telephone conversations. That afternoon, the mysterious thicket surrounding Markun's hidden existence was parted at last.

Leo Markun was born on March 11, 1901, in New York City, and grew up on the East Side. He was the youngest of four children. His parents, Jacob and Dora Markun, were well-to-do owners of a factory where coats and suits were manufactured. Eventually the family moved to 801 Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn, where they remained for several years. The father, Jacob, was a

Russian Jewish immigrant. The influence of this ethnic heritage on the mind of Leo Markun is not entirely known.

Louis Markun was Leo's first cousin. The two were very close from their big city childhood. Louis would come to fetch Leo from his room for a ball game. He would find the bookish Leo reading and writing. He was not easily persuaded from his introvert's pursuits to the lures of outdoors. Even when he did go outside, the boy carried a note book.

In 1918, he began undergraduate study at Columbia University. Later he transferred to Harvard College, where he graduated cum laude in 1922. His degree was in Literature—an S.B., roughly equivalent to the current Bachelor of Science. In the 1920s it was a Harvard practice to accord the S.B. to those Humanities candidates who did not complete a Latin-speaking requirement.<sup>1</sup> Markun's facility with languages other than German dialects is yet another of the troublesome unknowns.

After graduation, Leo Markun immersed himself in the deep channel of his craft. He is remembered as quiet, aloof, lonely. That he would ever have emerged from the buried life he seems to have chosen is unlikely. Mrs. Louis R. Markun portrayed him from memory: "Leo Markun had dark hair and wore rather thick glasses. He was tall, of average weight, not very good looking. He was not a happy person. Probably he never went out with girls. His parents never understood him. I don't think he was particularly religious—I always considered him an agnostic. He questioned many things, including the government. And he could read a book in nothing flat!"

Only his literary ambitions are without question. In a very short time his name surfaced as a prodigious and ingenious author. In 1923 and 1925, his book reviews peppered the pages of *The Nation* and some of the New York papers. Outstanding among them is Markun's review of D. H. Lawrence's *The Captain's Doll*, in *The Literary Digest International Book Review*.<sup>2</sup> "Psycho-analysis in the fiction of D. H. Lawrence is a civilized thing," he wrote. "It serves to explain, not to confuse."

He passed into a kind of hiatus in 1924. Since the close of World War I, the Markun clothing business had suffered a steady decline. The factory was shut down. Toward the end of March,

Leo and his parents moved to 2832 Park Avenue, Indianapolis. They lived in this house in the capital city for three years.

Another branch of the Markun family had preceded them to Indianapolis years before, and had established themselves in the motion picture theater trade. Jacob Markun took this profession as well.

Leo Markun always styled himself a freelance writer, when approached by Harvard for the anniversary reports of his class. The literary occupation afforded him all of its material disfavor. It compelled him to live in the home of his parents. When he was not in his father's employ at the theater, he was enshrined with his books.

There was time for writing poems. He typed out reams of them, and many remain unpublished and unread today. Probably his mind, if not his shoes, lapped the miles back to New York City over and over again. Certainly his heart had never left there.

*The Literary Digest International Book Review* continued to welcome his work. The August, 1925 issue carried his review of Frances Sim's critical biography, *Robert Browning: The Poet and the Man* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1925). Therein, Markun faulted Miss Sim for her infatuation with the period of Browning's boyish love affairs to the neglect of an insight into the basis of his couch-side courtship of Elizabeth Barrett—leaving it an open question whether Robert was bound to Elizabeth the woman, or her poems.<sup>3</sup> This incisive probe into literary history was a prefiguration for Leo Markun.

The following month brought his essay on Havelock Ellis, spinning itself easily around an appreciation of Ellis' *The Dance of Life*, published two years before by Houghton Mifflin. This article, perhaps more than any other in the spare literary remains of Leo Markun, serves as a profile of Markun the scholar and thinker. In Ellis he found a model of the psychological artist who "goes beyond perfunctory definitions, and therefore deals of necessity with theories which may be partly or entirely false."<sup>4</sup>

The greater portion of the Leo Markun canon was written for E. Haldeman-Julius' "University in Print." A finer author on such a diverse range of subjects would have been fearfully hard to find. By H-J's own telling, Markun came as a great boon, almost magically. He responded to H-J's call for a Voltaire in the Twen-

tieth Century, to be recruited among a roundly positivist and forward-seeking generation of youthful intellects in the 1920s. Markun was not the optimist that Haldeman-Julius proved himself to be. He was a free thinker but that appellation with the capital "F," so covetously guarded by the atheist and anticlerical ideologues, was a category he might well have shunned. But in a handful of years, the young scholar Leo Markun became, in his Indiana hermitage, the Haldeman-Julius standing authority on the *Sturm und Drang* of the human heart and its cyclone swath through recorded history. His astonishing output of Little Blue Books with such consistent high quality—and salability, of course—caused Haldeman-Julius to look back on the record and declare about Leo Markun, "He was a minor McCabe."<sup>5</sup>

In his autobiography, Haldeman-Julius said that he never saw Leo Markun and knew not a single fact about him. Memory did not serve H-J as well as it usually did. He claimed that he first heard from Markun in 1926; actually, that happened one year previous.

"He sent me a few suggested titles and 12 or 15 words describing what he wanted each title to cover," Haldeman-Julius wrote. "That's all I was told, but the titles were so attractive that I asked him to submit Mss., which he did, and each was accepted immediately. During a period of five year (sic) he submitted 62 editorial suggestions, all of which I endorsed. He wrote them, submitted them, and I accepted them without exception. Usually his check went out the day after his Ms. was received. . . . It worked just like that. I know it sounds like something out of this world, but it happened just that way. . . . Remember, the man's a stranger to me."

Haldeman-Julius proceeded, in his autobiography, to list 62 Little Blue Books by Leo Markun. There were, in fact, 12 more than that—74 in all. The dozen Little Blue Books, somehow omitted by H-J from the long litany of histories, psychologies, statistical handbooks, legal-economic treatises, sociological exposes (with sales figures for all), included the very first works by Markun in 1925, and a significant index to the vast cityscape of his interests:

820 *Max Stirner and the Philosophy of the Individual.*  
1925.



- 840 *Conventional Lies of Our Civilization*. Max Nordau.  
Edited by . . . 1925.
- 845 *An Introduction to Chaucer*. 1925.<sup>6</sup>
- 1439 *Your Intelligence and How to Test It*. 1929.
- 1442 *What You Should Know About Graphology*. 1929.
- 1448 *Character Reading From the Face*. 1929.<sup>7</sup>
- 1449 *The Love Affairs of John Wesley*. 1929.
- 1456 *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences*. 1929.<sup>8</sup>

Haldeman-Julius neglected, as well, to mention the Markun translation of Leasing's *Nathan der Weise*, issued as one of the very early Big Blue Books.<sup>9</sup> This work was probably Markun's only published book of poetry, and a rare distinction that Haldeman-Julius might at least have claimed in his own behalf.

It seems likely that Leo Markun sought out H-J when his best ideas and arcane literary taste were brushed aside elsewhere by academic journals and highbrow reviews. His learning, his essentially poetic sensibility and the fine strokes and loops of his writing style, made of him a truly unique craftsman in the H-J series. His mastery of Freudian psychology made his revisionist historical tracts stand out as pioneer efforts in the United States, especially as they were marketed for the mass H-J audience. His symphonic examinations of depression and psychoneurosis burned a strange incense to Schopenhauer and foretold his own doom.

He was, regally, an author of Little Blue Books, and permitted himself time for scarcely anything else. Haldeman-Julius went into much detail about the astonishing record of his sales of Markun titles.<sup>10</sup> They proved to be harbor lights of popular learning and radical expression through the tough economic decade of the 1930s. Markun's articles in H-J's magazines were mere précis, and often just window dressing, for a handful of his pamphlet texts.

To the second issue of the *Haldeman-Julius Monthly* he contributed "A Note on Chaucer."<sup>11</sup> He was one of the bright stars of the *Haldeman-Julius Quarterly*, his piquant psychological essays spinning off Little Blue Books in very short order.<sup>12</sup> To *The Debunker* and *The American Parade* he penned the bristly expose that became Little Blue Book No. 1709 *The White Slave Traffic*, in 1931.<sup>13</sup>

The first two Markun productions for the Little Blue Books series were *Max Stirner and the Philosophy of the Individual* and an abridgement of Max Nordau's much-cursed *Conventional Lies of Our Civilization*. Markun's *explications de texte* were to set the tone for all his future essays in history and psychology. In the archetypal misanthrope and narcissist philosopher who signed with the pseudonym Max Stirner, he discovered what he took to be ultimate truth—that appearance so masks what really is, that the sham is frequently bitter and absurd; that most philosophies and ethical systems are so duplicitous in just that fashion, that human welfare and freedom are stifled by them; that laws and governments are chiefly to be banished or discarded because humankind cannot proceed through planetary existence with a durable and reliable moral framework. From Stirner he derived—probably in Harvard days, reading him in German—the notion that man is indeed an island after all, and could well sustain an unmuddled head by avoiding all other human "islands" as much and as coolly as possible. Such was the engine of Leo Markun the thinker and Leo Markun the man.

For Little Blue Book No. 840, Markun adapted the translation of Nordau's seventh edition of *Conventional Lies of Our Civilization*, as published by Louis Shick, Chicago, 1884. Again the reader is confronted with appearance and reality in modern society, the shabby facades of religion, government and conventional morality, all adorned with the idols and icons so prone to fall over and crush the brains of unthinking, unquestioning persons. And there is little doubt that Max Nordau (yet another pseudonym) was an idol of the young Leo Markun's. The Nordau iconoclasm and scalpel edge to the world's spreading cancer was surely the prime role model for Leo Markun the free thinker and debunker—young, precocious, aloof, learned, combative of all convention. A paragraph from his brief "Introductory" was practically a syllabus for the course of study he would present to Haldeman-Julius and the Blue Book devotees:

Of Nordau's other books, "Degeneration" (1893) is no doubt the most important. This deals chiefly with the abnormalities of the human mind and their relations to one another. The connection of genius, especially the genius of the "decadent" writer and artist, with insanity and

criminality is fully discussed. About the time this book was published, these same matters were being studied by another Hebrew, Lombroso, in Italy.<sup>14</sup>

What followed was a splendid array of revisionist histories under the hot light of Freud, and psychologies made tender with much the same history and literary allusion. Many of Markun's subjects were seemingly from the same secret cabinet as Clement Wood's, only executed with a surgery quite alien to Wood. For the Clement Wood pageantry, Markun substituted a relentless earnestness, a set of discourses with figures often hundreds of years out of the past.

His overview of history was most clear when he set out to prove that wars were the inevitable upshoot of financial and economic turmoil and human greed; that laws were designed to be broken and governments to topple; that the history of morals is little more than a ceaseless war of sex-endowed men and women against conventionality. He was less the foe of religions than he was of laws.

He has been regarded as a front-guard author of the psycho-analytic approach to history and literature, but Markun would have eschewed any identification with this growing school of criticism in the 1920s. In his treatise on the human memory he wrote: "There is much in the teaching of Freud and the other psychoanalysts with which I find myself unable to agree. The dogma of the will to forget, however, seems to me entirely reasonable, provided that it be not carried to extremes."<sup>15</sup> In his later booklet on character building he furthered his argument with visible pique:

While I consider the psycho-analytical system of great importance, it seems to me that it has developed in part along mystical rather than scientific lines. And the psychoanalysts themselves, as every student soon discovers, do not agree as to methods and results. In short, the subject has been popularized somewhat prematurely. The uncritical have tended to make a fetish of psycho-analysis and thus to throw it into undeserved disrepute among persons who have been scientifically trained. Psycho-analysis stands now approximately where organic evolution stood shortly after the publication of *The Origin of Species*. Just as evolution

came into use for the explanation of all sorts of ethical and sociological matters, psycho-analysis has recently been dragged into many fields where it is not altogether appropriate, at least in the present state of knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

Probably no one really knew Leo Markun. His mind had a weave like the streets of a Medieval town in old Europe—non-linear spokes and fans and blind turns, seemingly without direction, the purpose and meaning deliberated and obscured by a cunning, private deception worthy of the Borgias. It reflected in the deep stream of his writing style. But the terrors and tortures of his reclusive existence are a secret list still hidden from the daylight world of people who still read books.

Leo Markun would not be photographed. I have seen only one camera reproduction of his face. Haldeman-Julius certainly never published one, as he was bound to do with his best authors—either a photo portrait or a drawing. At Harvard his face was not relegated to school remembrance volumes of any sort. The Harvard University Archives told me by telephone (June 19, 1979) that all of Leo Markun's possible yearbooks and anniversary volumes list him among those "Not Pictured." This is in keeping with what those who have watched and tracked Leo Markun have come to understand about his troubled personality and what surely must have been a brittle, wounded character. Did he have any friends? Were any of them close intimates? Perhaps not. I have obtained reliable information, for instance, that both Haldeman-Julius and Freudian scholar Albert Mordell considered Leo Markun a genius, a most learned American free thinker. They sought his friendship but Markun doggedly refused to communicate.<sup>17</sup> All three were urban Jewish writers of east coast origin and shared a bounty of concerns and delightful obsessions. Markun certainly knew of Mordell, as well as he knew of H-J. His constraints and his silence will not be understood. Perhaps it was home life with his family on the quiet end of Indianapolis.

It appears that Leo Markun returned to New York City for some weeks in 1927, likely with the best intentions of remaining there as a freelance writer.<sup>18</sup> Other than his Little Blue Books written that year, I have only located two other national appearances of his during 1927. To the fifth issue of Samuel Roth's slick, vivacious monthly, *Beau* magazine, he sold his sardonic poem,

"Advice from a Russian Proverb."<sup>19</sup> It closes with the chuckling admonition to "Praise God all day, but don't neglect the Devil." His stanzas could be taken in merriment except for the line he drops as if for a distress call: "Neglect not this and not the other world." For a poet to reveal some third eye on the much-whispered parallel world has never been remarkable; but Markun was not truly a poet. "The beasts can hear, perhaps the very table," he penned in iambs, "So let no usless (sic) vodka-oaths be hurled."

His expeditions on the veldt of that other world were undoubtedly less understood by himself than anyone else. His scholarship can be seen now, not only as an attempt to examine his own capacity for those beasts at his table, but as an escape from their slaving jaws as well. The theme recurs that same year—1927—in the first of his pair of poems carried in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine. "Two Realities" was written in five quatrains, given here in full—not because they are immortal, but as an indicator of the sad pathology of Leo Markun:

What I have lived in reverie  
Is true beyond the bounds of truth.  
The dreams which subtly come to me  
Are sweet to gaze on—aye, and sooth.

Reality I see in twain,  
Reality of dream and flesh;  
But both we falsify in vain  
While still the memory holds them fresh.

And yet the twain are not as one:  
If dreams are healthy, flesh is mad.  
But I have cried, The sun! The sun!—  
While yet a child, with Galahad.

In older age, I heard the spheres  
As they went dancing—Lackaday!  
And thus I missed the playful years,  
The boon of licensed disarray.

I know not, master, which is true;  
I know not if I dream or live;

And doubt has whispered, Nor do you—  
A doubt not easy to forgive.<sup>20</sup>

There is no clue to who the master was, whom Markun was addressing with a tremble.

Not long afterward, Haldeman-Julius published *Little Blue Book No. 377 The Psychology of Joy and Sorrow* (1928). I have found this the most precise instrument for measuring that mind of Leo Markun. On page 11 is the turnkey to the lines above, and to his wrestling match with the appearance-reality enigma:

The advantages of looking for happiness in attainable things are obvious. Perhaps a word may be said in favor of the land of faery, the world of poetic dream. . . . But if we reject the ordinary criteria of success, if we make satisfaction—purely a subjective thing—the only test, we may come to realize that there are individuals who can best attain happiness in an imaginary world of their own. The walling up of a man's experience, the isolation of his dream country from the field which he shares with other human beings, if it is carried out fully, makes him insane. Are lunatics unhappy? Some are, apparently, some are not, and many change quickly from a gloomy state to an excessively cheerful one. But I think it is true, in general, that people are happier after they go crazy than just before. It is to escape from harsh realities that they protect themselves with neuroses and psychoses. The patients who recover and are discharged from asylums are, of course, ashamed of having been insane. In their case, it is hardly true that the insanity adds to the total pleasure of their lives.

The laws of this country at the present time serve to obviate any option of tracking whether or not Leo Markun was speaking from personal experience in that rambling paragraph. What is clear is his return to clean, well-lighted comforts of his parents' house in Indianapolis in the early weeks of 1928. The Markun family moved to 2139 North Pennsylvania Street, a detached home some miles apart from the capital city's industrial area. However disenchanting this residence might have been, he remained there in a kind of somber seclusion much of his remaining years, a young man with the stature and bearing of an elder.

The albino tramp writer Fred Bair, who was the "roving correspondent" of the *Haldeman-Julius Monthly*, caught a hobo ride on a mail train and traveled to Indianapolis in the winter of 1928. He dropped in on Leo Markun at home, and wrote what is surely the only interview with the young scholar to ever see print. It is also the only face-to-face glimpse of Leo Markun ever afforded to the world.

At the time, Markun was turning 27 years old, but Bair apprehended a physical and mental specimen closer to 40, an overweight bachelor who wore shell-rimmed glasses and displayed the mannerisms, presumably the stoops and lopes, of a seasoned scholar. When he was not working for his father, who operated a movie theater in the city, Leo was sequestered in the tiny study relinquished to him by his parents, a lair of books, manuscripts and envelopes packed tight with notes.

According to what Markun told Bair, he was making real earnings from this authorship in some forty magazines (But what were those?). He displayed to Bair a patent vocalization of his disdain for American poets, his emulation of James Joyce as the greatest novelist then alive, his bouts with discouraging editors' rejection slips, and his long dawn watch with "well-founded hope that he will some day make a big hit."<sup>21</sup>

He had told Fred Bair that he found it easiest to sell verses "confected merely for the market." The roundel that inched its way into *Poetry* magazine in 1929 was certainly one of that quality. Entitled "My Song,"<sup>22</sup> it was his second appearance in Harriet Monroe's magazine for the supposed versificators of the future. The poem is only significant because it indicates a woman in Leo Markun's life, a lover who must have found herself in the ranks of other persons who knew Markun well enough to try to figure him out. The refrain, "She is my song and my son's recompense," gives an impression that his love for whomever she was, was requited—at least for a time. But the same tension and confusion about himself is still present. He speaks of being "sweetly mad," wearing his dreams like a mantle. The verses are more about himself than anyone outside. He remains the Max Stirner persona whose uncanny attraction in history had taken such a choke hold on his overworked intellect—the narcissist dreamer of shades in the great books, all star-crossed lovers from

the fallen courts of Europe. For all his ink on paper about the lush and dangerous sweets of the dream world, he left readers of books with no idea of what his personal dreams were really like. Decades later there would only be that question, whether the Roderick Usher of Indianapolis could file away his voyeurism of history's illustrious mistresses and profligate rogues, long enough to feel love and passion for someone among the living.

Meanwhile, he had a major project in mind. The idea had obviously occurred to him as early as 1926. In his Little Blue Book on *Insanity and Other Mental Disorders* he wrote an apology for his inability to submit for publication any useful discussion of sexual aberrations. The reason: ". . . what we may call the Mrs. Grundy complex, unfortunately active in the great majority of Americans just now, is quick to seize upon supposed indecencies."<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Grundy is the perennial archetype of prudery and censorship through all recorded history. He would cast in a giant book a history of human morals and havoc that moralizers and arbiters of right conduct have unleashed on the planet.

Leo Markun's magnum opus appeared in book stores and was mailed to reviewers in the early part of 1930. The work is *Mrs. Grundy: A History of Four Centuries of Morals Intended to Illuminate Present Problems in Great Britain and the United States* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1930). Its 649 pages of text (There is a fairly good index as well) are profusely illustrated with highly curious prints from most periods of art history. The work is a feast of historical anecdotes, ideosyncracies, eccentricities, pruderies, outrages, horrors, sinister purposes, well-intentioned bad ideas, hypocrisies, miscarriages of justice and general scholarly mayhem. Never had there been, on the popular market, such a heavy catalogue of the world's prurience and obscurantism. Markun embodied in the image of Mrs. Grundy the most lethal aspects of what Haldeman-Julius had been calling *bunk* about society's morals, customs and bad taste.

For his major work, Markun had incorporated the better servings from several of his Little Blue Books, notably his series on the history of prostitution<sup>24</sup> and samplers of amorous adventures among the aristocrats of Europe over centuries. Had this magenta-covered tome been censored or banned, it would likely

have remained perennially in print. As it is, Mrs. Grundy is still highly thought of by scholars and has been a favorite for reprint.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike several authors whose trade books were spin-offs from their earlier Blue Books, Markun was quick to give credit to Haldeman-Julius. In the Preface to Mrs. Grundy he said: "I am grateful to Mr. E. Haldeman-Julius for his courteous promptitude in granting me permission to make free use here of the material contained in such of my earlier publications under his imprint as cover, though on a lesser scale, parts of the present ground. Hardly any of the phraseology of Mrs. Grundy, however, has been carried over from these."<sup>26</sup> Later in his book, Markun cites Mr. and Mrs. E. Haldeman-Julius in connection with the companionate marriage brouhaha.<sup>27</sup> And near the close of Mrs. Grundy is this paean of praise: "E. Haldeman-Julius has displayed less pedantry [in muckraking], and has shown more willingness to make himself understood by people of little formal education. He has more respect for democracy than some of the other 'debunkers'. Like Mr. Mencken, he believes in free speech and personal liberty. In religion, while Mencken calls himself an agnostic, Haldeman-Julius prefers to be known as an atheist. Both are anti-Christian, both agree that this is not the best of all possible worlds, and the United States not the best of all possible countries."<sup>28</sup>

Mrs. Grundy was widely reviewed, and although opinions were mixed, none of the commentators would deny its significance. *Outlook and Independent's* Walter R. Brooks was nearly ready to fault Markun for a lack of "general interpretation" but then concluded: "Perhaps it is not fair to quarrel with a book because it does not take up considerations which are outside its scope."<sup>29</sup>

Arthur Krock defended Markun on this very argument, in *The New York Times*: "No, the story of Mrs. Grundy is too entangled for any of us to draw confident conclusions. Like Mr. Markun, who compiles it, we had best refrain from being positive about the rights and wrongs. Emerging from his curious list of regulatory facts he could not well be otherwise."<sup>30</sup>

Preserved Smith, writing in *The Saturday Review of Literature*,<sup>31</sup> faulted Markun for what was touted as a scientific approach

to history, in order to mount a case for his conclusion that all moral systems are historically futile. This prompted a rejoinder from Leo Markun in a letter to the editor. Defending his book, he said: "Whether it needs to deal more than a history of literature or of the fine arts with such matters as economic and religious development is, after all, somewhat disputable. So is the question whether any truly scientific history has been, or now can be, written. I myself think that history as a science is impossible until the study of human behavior can be considered complete and accurate."<sup>32</sup>

In a brief review, *Current History* quipped: "In an extensive account, obviously written for popular consumption, Leo Markun traces the rise and fall of moral standards among Americans and their British forebears. . . . One gathers the impression from reading this volume that generally our men have been men, and our women have been women; after all that is something."<sup>33</sup>

Alan Burton Clarke wrote a surly chastisement of Markun and his work for *The Bookman*, including in its opening remarks a patrician swipe at the author's having introduced his subject matters in the publications of Haldeman-Julius. He taunted Markun for a style that he felt bordered on the monotonous.

"As one of the debunkers," Clarke continued, "Mr. Markun takes pride in the completeness of that list of 'morals' which hopelessly contradicts itself and which to him is mere grist for his mill and the butt of his indirect laughter.

"But there is little explanatory material in *Mrs. Grundy*. There are no wit, no style of consequence, no observations drawn to indicate what the reader is to make of the mammoth study. The book plods, plods wearily in its recital of local and impermanent customs, and in many places is more a simple history than a study in 'morals'.

"Without being told as much we gather from the general tone of the book that Mr. Markun believes he is writing actually about morals—morals of the British and the Americans. And the book leaves one with the impression that morality is a matter of geography, the calendar and popular whim. Perhaps the author, if asked, would say as much."<sup>34</sup>

My own aside to Clarke's elocution is that I feel quite sure—had Markun been confronted with that question—he would have answered, "Yes."

Favorable thumbnail commentaries appeared in *The Booklist*<sup>35</sup> and in *The American Journal of Sociology*.<sup>36</sup> But the most offensive and infuriating review, by far, was William Seagle's in *The Nation*, late in the year. Seagle parroted back many of the same criticisms of *Mrs. Grundy* and found Markun's thesis—that moral systems are relative and destructible—an objectionable idea out of righteous, priggish indignation.

"Such a view," Seagle commented, "implies no moral standards and may be sophisticated. It is undoubtedly true that to recognize as an article of one's philosophy of life that the *mores* do change is a sign of civilized urbanity. But a constant preoccupation with the idea argues the possession of a mind that is basically naive. It is at least plausible to hold that morality would be idiotic if it were everywhere and at all times the same. To take a perpetual delight in the fact that our ancestors were foolish in different ways from ourselves betrays a certain form of immaturity."<sup>37</sup>

Leo Markun had done a splendid job. *Mrs. Grundy* was a considerable success in its time. The stir it caused in the intellectual and literary communities must surely have been what the young author had desired. Whether he felt victory, whether his life was altered at all during the next two years, is not known. As usual, very little is known about him.

All that is definite is the ongoing pattern of his work. He continued to write Little Blue Books. But Haldeman-Julius had restricted all new titles in the series to 32 pages. Markun's last books were inconsequential to his personal learning and obsessive scholarly pursuits—handbooks of statistical matter, legal and financial guides, trivia on pseudo-science to which he tried to apply his best critical faculties.

In 1929, Haldeman-Julius designed a correspondence course for fledgling authors. His promotional copy was printed and sold as No. 1366 in his series and titled, *How to Become a Writer of Little Blue Books*. On page 28 of the booklet was this endorsement:

## Blue Book Standards Are High

BY LEO MARKUN

(Author of 64 Little Blue Books)

I have written Little Blue Books in which I had full scope for the development of my own thoughts. I have also compiled statistical matter for other Little Blue Books. Never have I felt that I was doing mere hack-work. This, after all, depends rather on the worker than on the task. If you can show that you have the right to be original, you will be encouraged to be so, I am sure—something which is not true of all editorial rooms. I think it is likely to prove permanently harmful to a writer if he or she constantly works with tongue in cheek, or at a low level, and I haven't been made to do so while writing Little Blue Books.

A year after that statement, *Mrs. Grundy* was the resonant controversy in a trans-Atlantic intellectual wrangle, a paper-throwing bout in magazines, which readers could afford less every day to buy or to read. The Great Depression had hammerlocked the U.S. and much of the world. Leo's finest hour was rung in a bleak season. His material survival as a writer was still on a cat walk.

One September 27, 1930, Haldeman-Julius wrote to Markun approving a list of 18 books, and setting up terms of 7,500 words each and payment of \$50 per book. All were suggested by Leo Markun, and all but a couple were ultimately published as Little Blue Books over the next two years, as follows:

- 1575 *History of Venereal Diseases*
- 1576 *Facts You Should Know About Masturbation*
- 1592 *A History of Gambling*
- 1602 *Principles of International Law*
- 1639 *The Story of British Imperialism*
- 1682 *The Story of American Imperialism*
- 1685 *The History and First Principles of Insurance*
- 1687 *The History and First Principles of Banking*
- 1709 *The White Slave Traffic*
- 1710 *The Magic of Numbers*
- 1711 *The Economics of Taxation*
- 1712 *Great Dates in History*

- 1722 *Fortune Telling From Dreams*
- 1724 *The Next World War: How It Is Being Prepared*
- 1725 *The Story of Tammany Hall*
- 1726 *How to Think Creatively*

Two other Markun suggestions, "Facts About the Moving Picture Stars" and "The Inferiority Complex and Adler's Psychology," never came to be. Haldeman-Julius said that he could only afford to receive one manuscript a month from Markun. "Our receipts during September are down to our 1921 level," H-J wrote, "and that's pretty bad, even though our Hoovercrats tell us everything is only psychological."

Leo Markun accepted this letter as a kind of contract, and proceeded with his list of what most other authors would have considered hack work. He seems not to have regarded it so—even his late works for H-J were of thoroughgoing excellence—and he dutifully mailed one complete book per month.

But his business-like relations with H-J became strained when Markun's ambitions turned irksome to both of them. Leo Markun was apparently soliciting a collection of his writings from past Little Blue Books as a new work entitled *All Mysteries Unveiled*. In a perfunctory letter dated December 17, 1930, Haldeman-Julius refused permission to Markun for the use of any such material without payment from the publishers who planned to pick up the writings. Markun apparently threatened to discontinue his list arrangement with H-J. On January 6, 1931, Haldeman-Julius sent him a letter of rebuke:

Of course, I wouldn't want to urge you to write any more Little Blue Books if you do not feel our conditions to be acceptable. I'd prefer to have you finish your schedule, despite the fact that the publishing business is suffering from a depression that may not improve before next Fall. I gave you the work to do because I admire your workmanship, and this was done at a time when it is difficult to raise money for ordinary expenses let alone the "luxury" of increasing one's list of titles.

If a threat it was, Markun retracted it and agreed to complete his list of books. Haldeman-Julius acknowledged this on January 12, 1931.

In the meanwhile, Leo Markun attempted to entrench his more serious ruminations of history and philosophy in loftier places. *The Open Court*, a literary and theological monthly out of Chicago, entertained his "Pleasant Pains" triad of essays in 1930 and 1931. In the first, "The Pleasant Pains of Martyrdom," he set out to dissect the nature of algohedonia—the ability to derive pleasure from pain—and produced a short history of the great religious persecutions. He argued that the martyrs have always shared a self-cruelty which can quite naturally and perversely turn to merciless bloodlust upon others in another time. No religion or nation or race could escape the pointing finger of Leo Markun. He trashed the supposed high-thinking motives of the persecutors and the persecuted as well, relegating them to the midden pits of human greed and sexual aberration. He had done the same job in his Little Blue Books. Somehow he found abrupt rescue for himself and those he quietly admired by telling the reader to expect abuse and death for skepticism and innovation. "Men of original genius must have a strong capacity for self-cruelty if they are to be successful," he declared. "They must delight in the very attacks made upon them. Else they are liable to die heartbroken."<sup>38</sup>

In the second, "The Pleasant Pains of Asceticism," he continued his bleak lecture on self-cruelty, exactly paralleling self-cruelty with self-denial, probing for the exuberant joy of the celibate, the flagellant, the faster and the cloistered monk. For a long time he branded the ascetics of ancient and modern history as the mad destroyers of human happiness. He would find no true ascetics beyond fanatics and perverts who need no religion or reliance on the supernatural to joist up their mysticism, their quest, through renunciation, for a communion with a far-off consciousness. But then! At a juncture of his sermon, Leo Markun seems to have found something like himself.

"In our own time, when scholars and philosophers and scientists are chiefly to be found outside monastic walls, many of these men and women show a certain tendency toward asceticism," Markun concluded. "Choosing to devote himself to pleasures which are not such at all in the eyes of the unsympathetic, they renounce others. Knowing in many cases that they are not to enjoy the material rewards which come to persons of intel-

lectual ability inferior to their own, they nevertheless choose to serve humanity or to follow the inward gleam."<sup>39</sup>

In the third and last, "The Pleasant Pains of War," he sought to apply algohedonia to the time-worn penchant for human warfare.<sup>40</sup> The essay fails, perhaps because of its brevity, perhaps because Markun could not see himself in the problem. The fine sentences wax into clusters of fascination for men's revelry with the martial life through recorded history. What is missing is a denouncement for the indictment Leo Markun was building up in the previous two essays—a bill of ugly and pathological particulars against something that none of his readers would see. Only he could see the horror, in his own mirror. Himself.

Something there was in Leo Markun that wanted to commit violent, wanton acts. He refused to face it, blanched from it. The final installment of "Pleasant Pains" would either assume the proper disguise—a discourse on war—or fumble philosophically. He chose the latter. The fact of its appearance in print was a clue he never would have suspected, for the outrageous wind-up to come.

Evelyn Rosenberg prepared for me some handwritten notes on her uncle Leo Markun, July 22, 1979. Therein she stated that Markun was solicited by letter, dated February 13, 1931, from Henry Harrison, publisher of *Poetry World* magazine, New York City. Harrison was putting together an Indiana Anthology, and had accepted for it five Markun poems: "Mother Eve," "Arouse No Gods," "Under the Red Robe," "My Song" and "The Triumph of Caliban." They were published together in three pages.<sup>41</sup> More than a year later, on October 9, 1932, Leo wrote to his cousin's husband, the author Max Licht, that he had written no new verse in two or three years. Perhaps, he said, he would give up poetry forever.

His epistolary relationship with Haldeman-Julius was on as even a keel as Depression economics would allow. On August 25, 1931, H-J mailed his new instruction to Markun to space out his manuscripts every two months instead of one. "... I believe we have been keeping pretty well at the job of giving the public something new to read, though there (sic) mood today is to read nothing we publish, new or old," Haldeman-Julius wrote. "... For the present, the wisest thing to do is not to try to make people

buy when they either don't want to buy or are too busted to be able to buy."

In succeeding weeks, Haldeman-Julius paid for Leo Markun's books two at a time, with \$100 checks dated days or weeks ahead. On December 31, 1931, H-J sent \$100 for Markun's *Fortune Telling* and *The Next World War* tracts. The check was dated January 11, 1932. "1931 has been a disastrous year, but there are signs of improvement," H-J wrote. "I rather fancy that I'll be able to come back as strong as ever during the next six months. It's a wonderful thing just to survive!" He further added that he understood the latest submissions to clean up Markun's schedule of books; and that he planned to lay off new work for some 90 days.

Markun replied on January 3, 1932, that there were yet four more books to produce for the series. "I am glad you are finding signs of improvement in your business," Markun wrote to H-J. "Publishing in general seems to be in a bad way, so far as I am able to observe, and of course everything else is, but I know that some concerns are moving decidedly against the general trend. Bargains are going to be the great inducement this year, I think. A happy new year to you."

In the usual H-J hurry, the publisher returned Markun's letter to him with hand notations in the right margin. Haldeman-Julius encircled "Bargains are going" and scribbled the word "right."

But life was ceasing to be a seasonless cycle of pleasant pains for Leo Markun. "He had a wonderful sense of humor," Evelyn Rosenberg told me about her uncle. "He wrote me long letters on which he would draw pictures. I would see him once a year when my family would go to Indianapolis during the summer. I was six and a half years old when he died."

Only two of his four remaining titles for Haldeman-Julius were ever finished. In characteristic irony and mockery, Leo Markun's very last Little Blue Book, published late in 1932, was No. 1726 *How to Think Creatively*.

The end was swift and horrible. On the morning of November 2, 1932, Leo Markun was alone in his bedroom at his parents' house on Pennsylvania Street. He took a razor blade and slashed his own throat three times. There must have been some clamor—maybe he screamed or stumbled around in agony. His brother



Harry knocked on the bedroom door. Leo Markun opened the door for him and immediately dropped dead. Dr. John Salb, a deputy coroner, told the *Indianapolis Star* that he could get from no one any reason why the 31 year-old author of *Mrs. Grundy* would take his life.<sup>42</sup>

Evelyn Rosenberg revealed to me what she learned many years later, about her uncle's death: "He killed himself because he was going blind. He wore very thick glasses for his poor eyesight. I only learned of his suicide a few years ago. All this time I was told that Leo Markun was on his way to the library and was hit by a car. The family feared that suicide might run in the family. . . ."

In the last months of his life, Markun was working on another big book, one to match or eclipse his *Mrs. Grundy*. To Max Licht, of the Bronx, he gave the title as "A History of European Morals." Even after his suicide, Leo's devoted older sister, Sarah Markun Windheim, of Boston, continued to solicit her dear brother's manuscript in the publishing houses of New York City. Through an uncommonly rainy and chilly fall and winter in Gotham, Sarah made her relentless rounds with the next Markun book on morals. Two months after Leo's passing, she succumbed to double pneumonia and died. Her daughter is Evelyn Rosenberg, who told me that the second Markun history of morals remains unpublished.

The Leo Markun death by his own hand has been discussed over the decades since it happened that cold day in Indianapolis. Dr. Bronson Feldman, psychoanalytic author, spoke his opinion aloud to me that Leo Markun was quite obviously harboring a self-hatred and fierce longing for retribution against someone . . . or something. Someone who cuts his throat four times, Feldman adjudged, is someone who wants to commit a savage violence. At that time—the afternoon of August 4, 1979, Dr. Feldman had not seen Markun's "The Pleasant Pains of War."

At this writing, the Markun house at 2139 North Pennsylvania Street still stands in what is now the run-down inner city of Indianapolis. The parents are gone. The other children are all deceased. The secret was all but kept.

When Haldeman-Julius wrote of Leo Markun in his autobiography, in 1949, he mentioned that he had a newspaper clip<sup>43</sup>

on Markun's death—most likely the same obituary from the *Indianapolis Star* that I have consulted myself. But H-J did not mention suicide as the cause of death—that came two years later. He wrote an uncommonly morbid and grisly essay, entitled "Suicide," for *The American Freeman* in 1951. Therein he speaks of Markun's suicide and that he "cut his throat from ear to ear. I was never able to learn the reason for this act."

The impact of Markun's death was without question an enormous recoil on the spirits of Haldeman-Julius, and the shock waves repeated for nineteen years. When H-J wrote "Suicide" he was in deep trouble with the Bureau of Internal Revenue, the FBI, his arthritis, his over-taxed heart. Enthusiasm for his causes and his products was in twilight, and his depression, I am told, was staggering. The suicide of Leo Markun was back to haunt him and trip him up. The anxiety was the source of some misinformation that, as published, is so drastically unlike Haldeman-Julius that his printed blunder alone makes his own death, not long after the appearance of "Suicide," highly suspect.

"If you want to learn a lot more about this subject," wrote H-J, "read Leo Markun's excellent Little Blue Book, 'The Psychology of Suicide'."<sup>44</sup>

There is indeed a Little Blue Book of that title—it is No. 374—but the author is *not* Leo Markun. *The Psychology of Suicide* was written by Hugh Russell Fraser. Haldeman-Julius encapsulates the thinking of Fraser in this book quite well, but it is Fraser's book. I cannot stress these facts enough. Such an error pertaining to a cherished author and one of his own products was beyond his ken.

Something else could have been in among the more ghastly and chill echoes from the past. Haldeman-Julius might, indeed, have been thinking or even re-reading Leo Markun's *The Psychology of Joy and Sorrow*, which has this testament:

It is probable that there are more optimists than pessimists, among the individuals who blow out their brains or hang themselves with their suspenders. For the man who expects life to yield him a great deal is very likely indeed to be disappointed.

. . . For most of us, it is essential to turn some sorrow through whatever alchemy we know best how to use into

joys. Not always does the transmutation succeed. No philosopher's stone is perfect; no way of life passes a stream into which all disturbing thoughts, all disappointments, all unpleasantness may be flung and carried out of sight.<sup>45</sup>

Leo Markun opted for flinging himself out of sight.

Bessie White, who admired his work, mailed 23 of his poems to the illustrious scholar-critic Isaac Goldberg. Mrs. Rosenberg's handwritten notes to me, on the subject of her uncle, indicate that Goldberg replied from Boston on May 21, 1934, requesting a biographical sketch of Leo Markun. He said he would use a group of the Markun poems in one or more of the summer issues of his monthly *Panorama*.

The July, 1934 number carried a brief eulogy to Leo Markun, stating with false optimism that his companion volume to *Mrs. Grundy*, on European morals, would be published the coming fall.<sup>46</sup> A few pages later, four of his "Posthumous Poems" were displayed: "Planting a Tree," "Proverb Unlimited," "The Twain" and "Others."<sup>47</sup> The next issue, August, 1934, offered two more—"And After, Then?" and "Narcissus." Both poems are about his death. In the latter was stamped in ink a kind of epitaph:

Then I, who shall be trodden on by worms,  
Must all the more insist upon my terms:  
The body is most proud-souled when it squirms.<sup>48</sup>

Leo Markun's "terms" had obviously more to do with his own death than they would ever specify about life, the sensations of love and sensuality, or much else of concern to the poet who relishes earth's victuals more than those of the dream world. He left those terms for the unborn schoolboys to define and perhaps discard.

Arlington, Virginia

#### NOTES

1. Telephone interview with the Harvard University Archives, June 18, 1979.
2. Leo Markun, "The Captain's Doll," *The Literary Digest International Book Review*, Vol. I, No. 8, July, 1923, pp. 40-41.
3. Leo Markun, "Browning in His Courting Days," *The Literary Digest International Book Review*, Vol. III, No. 9, August, 1925, pp. 609-610.
4. Leo Markun, "Havelock Ellis Dissects the Art of Living," *The Literary Digest International Book Review*, Vol. III, No. 10, September, 1925, pp. 644-645. The quote is drawn from p. 645.

5. E. Haldeman-Julius, *My Second 25 Years*, p. 106.
6. This title was dropped from the series and replaced with Markun's *Facts You Should Know About Fortune Telling*; H-J lists as No. 845 in *Second 25 Years*.
7. Later reissued as *Character Reading From Faces*, with a cartoon cover, during the 1940s.
8. For No. 1456, H-J listed Markun's *The Psychology of the Criminal*, which is actually No. 1459.
9. B-26 *Nathan the Wise: A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts*. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Translated and Edited by Leo Markun. Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius Company, 1925. Later reissued with No. 471.
10. Haldeman-Julius, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.
11. Leo Markun, "A Note on Chaucer," *Haldeman-Julius Monthly*, Vol. I, No. 2, January, 1925, p. 94.
12. Leo Markun's articles in the *Haldeman-Julius Quarterly*: "Memory and the Man," Vol. 1, No. 2, January, 1927, pp. 128-134 (Little Blue Book No. 1097 *Memory: What It Is and How to Use It*); "Facing the Facts About the Human Will," Vol. I, No. 3, April, 1927, pp. 106-112 (Little Blue Book No. 1221 *Facts You Should Know About Will Power*); same issue, "Can Stupidity Be Conquered?", pp. 188-193 (Little Blue Book No. 759 *How to Conquer Stupidity*); "The Psychology of Leadership," Vol. II, No. 1, October-November-December, 1927, pp. 65-76 (Little Blue Book No. 858 *The Psychology of Leadership*); "Your Sense of Humor," Vol. II, No. 2, January-February-March, 1928, pp. 107-121 (Little Blue Book No. 475 *How to Develop Your Sense of Humor*); "The Psychology of Joy and Sorrow," Vol. II, No. 3, April-May-June, 1928, pp. 85-99 (Little Blue Book No. 377 *The Psychology of Joy and Sorrow*).
13. Leo Markun, "The White Slave Traffic," *The Debunker and The American Parade*, Vol. XV, No. 5, October, 1931, pp. 83-96.
14. Leo Markun, "Introductory," *Conventinal Lies of Our Civilization*. Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius Company, 1925 (Little Blue Book No. 840), p. 3.
15. Leo Markun, *Memory: What It Is and How to Use It*. Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius Company, 1926 (Little Blue Book No. 1097), p. 42.
16. Leo Markun, *The Psychology of Character Building*. Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius Company, 1927 (Little Blue Book No. 882), p. 35.
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27. Markun, *op. cit.*, p. 609.
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29. Walter R. Brooks, "Behind the Blurbs," *Outlook and Independent*, Vol. 155, No. 3, May 21, 1930, p. 106.
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31. Preserved Smith, "Chronique Scandaleuse," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, August 9, 1930, p. 34.
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37. William Seagle, "Lecky, 1930 Style," *The Nation*, Vol. 131, No. 34, November 12, 1930, pp. 530-531.
38. Leo Markun, "The Pleasant Pains of Martyrdom," *The Open Court*, Vol. XLIV, No. 6, June, 1930, pp. 359-568. The quote is drawn from p. 368.
39. Leo Markun, "The Pleasant Pains of Asceticism," *The Open Court*, Vol. XLIV, No. 9, September, 1930, pp. 564-570. The quote is drawn from p. 570.
40. Leo Markun, "The Pleasant Pains of War," *The Open Court*, Vol. XLV, No. 6, June, 1931, pp. 380-384.
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42. "Leo Markun, 31, Author, Kills Self at Home Here," *Indianapolis Star*. November 3, 1932.
43. Haldeman-Julius, *loc cit.*
44. E. Haldeman-Julius, "Suicide," *Notes and Comments* No. 8, 1951, p. 44.
45. Markun, *Psychology of Joy and Sorrow*, pp. 16-17.
46. "Panorama Notes," *Panorama*, Vol. 1, No. 10, July, 1934, p. 6.
47. Leo Markun, "Posthumous Poems," *Panorama*, Vol. 1, No. 10, July, 1934, p. 9.
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## SAXTON'S LATE-PROLETARIAN TRIPTYCH: TO CHICAGO AND WEST

FREDERICK C. STERN

It is not always true that "proletarian" fiction was written by those who had, as it were, emigrated to the proletariat. There are writers like Jack Conroy, author of *The Disinherited*,<sup>1</sup> who came to their fiction about working people from roots deeply sunk in working class life. But Daniel Aaron is surely correct when he writes: "As might be expected, most of the so-called proletarian fiction of the thirties was written by men and women of middle-class antecedents who had lost any lingering faith in the recuperative powers of capitalism and who now as the Depression deepened began to dramatize 'the coming struggle for power'. Few of them knew about the working class from first-hand experience. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

But there were those who in their personal lives did make the move from the middle class to the working class, in as much as that is possible, and then incorporated their experience as well as their ideology in felt ways into their fiction. Moreover, frequently this move in class also involved a move in locale, and often the new locale was in the Middle West, away from the putative sophistication of New York or Boston. It was to the city Sandburg celebrated that these writers often traveled, though sometimes it was to Detroit or Cleveland or other cities in the Midwestern heartland of the nation.

An example of one such writer, and a "proletarian" writer to whose fiction more attention is due than has been given is Alexander P. Saxton. He is the author of three novels, two of which are basically set in Chicago and deal with railroad workers. The third novel, set in San Francisco, reflects Saxton's personal move to the West Coast, and deals with shipyard workers. Saxton's fiction is rather belated. It is proletarian in essence, and most

clearly so in *The Great Midland*, but written and published, in the case of *Grand Crossing* at the end of the highwater mark period of proletarian fiction, and in the case of the later two books respectively nearly a decade and more than two decades after that point.

Saxton's own life, it appears, is reflected in all three novels, but most directly in the figure of Michael Reed, the protagonist of his first novel, *Grand Crossing*.<sup>3</sup> Like Reed, Saxton moved from New York and Cambridge to Chicago, from Harvard College to Hutchins' University of Chicago. In time, he moved to the west coast, where he still lives. A brief biographical sketch seems relevant here.

Alexander Plaisted Saxton was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, on July 16, 1919. His father was Eugene Francis Saxton, for many years the editor-in-chief of Harper and Brothers. Alexander spent most of his childhood in New York City, where he attended the Friends' Seminary and then Phillips Exeter Academy. He entered Harvard, where he was first on the staff of *The Advocate*, and then, in protest against what he and others considered the literary magazine's sterility, he helped to revive *The Guardian*. In his junior year he transferred to the University of Chicago, from which he received his B.A. in 1940. His brother Mark, also a writer and an editor for Farrar and Rinehart in the forties, explains Alexander's action this way: "He was becoming increasingly fascinated by the phenomenon of the Middle West, its size, its power, its culture, its identification with the realities of American life, and he wanted to know more about it and be part of it."<sup>4</sup>

Saxton returned from Chicago to work with Louis Adamic, who was then, in 1940, assistant editor of *Common Ground*. Adamic, of course, played a significant role in the development of ideas of proletarian literature in the United States, as his participation in the symposium "Where We Stand," published in the July, 1934, *International Literature*, indicates.<sup>5</sup> Saxton did not stay long with *Common Ground*, however, leaving the magazine to become a laborer. He returned to graduate school to study architecture, and in 1941 took a position as an apprentice in an architect's office. He then took several railroading jobs in Chicago, as a wiper in a roundhouse, and a switchman on the Baltimore

and Ohio and the New York Central Railroads. *Grand Crossing* was published in 1943, the same year Saxton enrolled at the United States Maritime Training School, choosing to do his war-time service in the Merchant Marine instead of the armed services, as did many other radicals of the period.

After the war, Saxton's second novel, *The Great Midland*<sup>6</sup> was published. Eventually he moved to the West Coast, where his third novel, *Bright Web in the Darkness*<sup>7</sup> is set. Like many other radical intellectuals, he did not remain a blue-collar worker. He received an M.A. in 1962 and a Ph.D. in 1967, both in history, from the University of California at Berkeley. Saxton has recently written to me about his life from the time *The Great Midland* was published until he left the ranks of blue-collar workers as follows: "Actually . . . until 1962 when I finished the M.A. and decided to go on for a doctorate, I was earning a living as a construction carpenter in the SF Bay Area and served many a year in the offices of a local of the Brotherhood of Carpenters. That makes a total of 21 years' blue collar experience—to present date, more than a third of my life. . . . I was drawn into the working class not simply by youthful romanticism, but by ambition for a career in the cultural and intellectual life of a working class based movement. I reopened negotiations with academia only after the last vestiges of such a possibility had faded out of current history." Subsequently, Saxton taught at Wayne State University for a year, and then joined the history faculty at UCLA where he has since been a professor of United States History with special interests in matters related to the labor movement.

As an historian he has published extensively, especially works which have to do with the effect of racism on the labor movement. He is the author of *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (U. of California Press, 1971), and of many articles and chapters in books. His continuing interest in the radical movement and Marxist thought is best indicated to me as I write this by the announcement in the recently founded journal *Marxist Perspectives* that it will publish an article by Saxton in a forthcoming issue\*

\*The article in question has appeared since my manuscript was completely prepared for publication. It is a review essay, "Historical Explanations of Racial Inequality," *Marxist Perspectives*, 2, No. 2 (Summer, 1979), p. 146-68.

*Grand Crossing* is rather an interesting novel, in a number of ways. Its critical reception was quite good for a first novel, but there has been little comment about it subsequently. I consider it a "pre-proletarian" novel, in that its focus is not so much on Michael Reed as worker as on Michael Reed's development away from his upper class roots towards a radical and labor orientation. Its ideology is also less clearly radical than that of Saxton's next novel. The root cause for Michael's re-education is his growing dissatisfaction with the content of his upper class life. We meet Michael when he is just finishing a summer job on a newspaper in Portland, Oregon, where he has been a kind of apprentice. The time is the summer of 1938. Michael's luggage is stolen on the bus trip home, so that he is without funds. He meets a traveling Chicagoan, a young Jew named Ben Baum who at home works in the garment industry to earn enough money to return to the University of Chicago. Together, Michael and Ben, both of whom are now broke, hitchhike and "ride the rails," working at various pursuits along the way back to the East.

Ben is certainly a romantic character. He is a young radical of sorts, who values the life of the mind, but at the same time refuses to play the college boy game. He is the catalyst who converts Michael's already nascent rebellion against New York-Harvard upper class life, and does so especially by suggesting to him that he ought to quit Harvard and come to the University of Chicago to finish his work.

Part two of the novel begins with Michael's return to the East, to New York, and provides the materials which should make us understand his desire to go West. Saxton is more effective here in portraying the shallowness, the callousness to other sections of the population, of the well-to-do Harvard students and their families. A particularly telling scene describes a party given by the staff of the literary magazine, which is characterized by the sycophancy and intellectual pretensions of the staff members, the faculty, and the lionized visiting poet. A further plot development in this section of the novel comes from an offer, made to Michael by his uncle, of a job working on a little Washington "insiders" newsletter. The end of a romance aids Michael in his decision to leave Harvard and to try the University of Chicago.

Part three of the novel begins as Michael is crossing the country on the train to Chicago. Those who have experienced it will find telling Saxton's description of the Ohio and Indiana plains unfolding under the rails. It is still not entirely clear in this portion of the novel why Michael is so attracted to the Midwest. Ben has painted an appealing picture of the University as a place "... which is full of people who actually want to read books and learn things. And they work god-damn hard for the chance."<sup>8</sup> But beyond that, what drives Michael away from the East is the lack of seriousness he feels among his fellow students, and the lack of understanding for life-styles other than those of the wealthy which he feels among his friends and family.

In the course of his travels, and in his Chicago contacts, we also see Michael's growing attraction to socialist ideas. He meets and talks with ex-Socialist Party members and Wobblies, and takes part in a workers' action, testing socialist ideas, though never, really anywhere in the novel, fully stating an acceptance of such ideas as his own.

This part of the book deals with Michael's life as a student at the University of Chicago. He leaves not only Harvard, but the clubby dormitory life associated with it. Once in Chicago, for example, he takes most of his meals in the co-op in which Ben Baum lives. There he also meets Baum's medical student friend, a Black Communist Party member who is a veteran of the Spanish Civil War's International Brigade. William Christmas is throughout the novel an exemplary figure, hard-working, dedicated, sensible and devoted, courageous in his opposition to capitalism and racism.

Baum eventually moves to an apartment in a building on Peoria and Halsted streets, a location then, in 1939, made up of empty lots and still-standing older houses (and which is close to the present site of the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle). The characters now introduced to the novel are working class people who will play a major role in Michael's life. Most important among them are Rosita, the powerful and warmly human Mexican woman who runs the grocery store downstairs from the apartment and who becomes Ben's lover, and Johnny Morelos, the young Mexican who can't find a good job and whose anger will lead him to crime. Morelos's girl-friend Maria also lives in the building, as

does her single-taxer, drunkard rag-picker father, the figure who will become the unlikely agency of destruction in the novel. Both of these are certainly "flat" characters, in E. M. Forster's sense of that term.

Before too long, Michael makes his next move. He leaves his University dormitory and moves with Ben into the Halsted-and-Peoria Street flat. The move happens concurrently with a move from East to Midwest in Michael's love life, as well. His "girl" in the East has married, so Michael is free to go out, platonically of course, with Aileen, who is the "girl" of his Harvard roommate Sherman. She is not a product of the East, but comes from Evanston, the middle class suburb of Chicago, from a stereotyped conservative family. Though true love will not have smooth sailing, Aileen will, in time, become Michael's permanent "girl." She too is in the process of breaking Eastern ties, in that she will refuse to go back to Bennington to finish her studies as an art major, and will break with the very Eastern upper-class Sherman.

On the last occasion on which Sherman, Michael and Aileen are together, we get one of the clearest descriptions of what it is that attracts Michael to Chicago. The three are driving along the lake front, on their way from the University to Aileen's Evanston home, when Sherman challenges Michael, asking him what he sees in Chicago, and insisting that there is no culture in the city. Aileen answers for Michael: "Michael sees the whole United States in Chicago," she says. The ensuing conversation is as close as we will come to a statement about the attraction Chicago has for Michael. Sherman replies to Aileen's comment:

"So do I," Sherm said. "The worst parts." Michael shook his head. "Not the parts. This is America. This is the most American city in the world—industrial city, railroad center, farmers city, boom town."

"You sound like Sandburg. But to me it's the worst parts. All slums or Rotary Club. You know, there's only one play running downtown."

Michael smiled faintly at Aileen. "This is summer season. In the fall, there's always three plays."

"Hell, Michael. America can do better than Chicago. You can't deny there's an American culture in the East."

"There's an American culture in Chicago. This is the world we live in. Take a look at it."<sup>9</sup>

It seems clear that for Michael, Chicago is that America which is not part of the East, or Harvard, of New York clubs and "influential little Washington newsletters." It is the America identified with Sandburg—working men and women, the raw, the relatively unsophisticated, and in that sense, "the good."

Saxton's novel here echoes one of the strong strains in the fiction of the left in the thirties and forties. But the strain is far more ubiquitous. It is apparent in much American fiction and American culture in general. Not only radical proletarian writers, but mid-nineteenth century New England transcendentalists expressed this impulse. Disdain of the big city, identification of the raw, the simple and the pure with the good, in fact, go back to the earliest pastoral. It is William Empson's intriguing, and at least partially sound insight that proletarian fiction is a particular form of the pastoral, and Michael Reed's view of Chicago demonstrates the point well.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to realize, however, that the source of pastoral purity has been shifted in this fiction. It is, after all, a pastoral of the big city and the industrialized world, and so, in place of shepherds and shepherdesses or Thoreauvian woodchoppers, purity is found in workers. *Grand Crossing's* Rosita is such a figure. Ben Baum, though not a worker, comes from a working-class background, and is another such pure figure, as is William Christman, the Black communist whose work ethic is as Christian and Puritan as anything can be. These working-class figures are noble, upright, and dedicated in one way or another to better lives for everyone. Rosita is not consciously a revolutionary, but she is "the salt of the earth," while Christmas, who comes from the rural South, is the essence of patience, understanding and dedication.

It is Ben Baum, however, who is the crucial character in the novel in this regard. Johnny Morelos, the young Mexican who is Ben's and Rosita's friend, had earlier in the book been sent to reform school for an attempted robbery. After the return from a country-side idyll with Aileen and Ben, when Michael comes to the apartment to get his suitcase, packed for a trip to Connecticut

to visit his ill mother, Johnny shows up, having broken out of jail and committed a murder. In a tense, detective-story scene, there is a long wait before the police arrive, when it turns out that the rag-picker whom Johnny had asked about Maria's whereabouts, has turned Johnny in. The ensuing shoot-out leads not only to Johnny's death, but also to Ben Baum's fatal wounding as he tries to help Johnny. Michael sees futility in Ben's death, a futility he compares to his own earlier action in giving a fifty-cent piece to a hopeless skid-row wino on Chicago's West Madison Street. But he also knows that Ben had to give his own fifty cents—his life—in order to remain true to himself.

Part four of *Grand Crossing* begins in the East, where Michael has gone for his visit after Ben's death. By the second chapter, however, he has decided to go back to Chicago until the beginning of 1940. He has received permission from his uncle to postpone the start of his work on the Washington newsweekly, so that he can have time to think things through. Once again we follow him as he crosses the countryside on the New York-Chicago train. Now he comes closer to the proletariat than ever, and closer also to the complete rejection of his eastern and upper-class life. He returns to the old Peoria Street apartment, and gets a job as a railroad switchman.

This is a period of emptiness for Michael, a kind of dark night of the soul, lightened only by his growing and eventually consummated love for Aileen. Though he learns his job, and even learns to like it, he plans to return to the East at the New Year, leaving Aileen, Rosita, and Peoria Street and the proletariat, to enter the world of the well-to-do once and for all. He considers such a future a betrayal of Ben Baum, but has come to feel that he is not willing to make a sacrifice, to "give his fifty cent piece," in order to continue on a political and personal path which is uncomfortable, but which he believes right. After a visit to Ben's mother, Michael explains the state of his feelings in an interior monolog. He accuses himself of selling out Ben, and in the monolog tells Mrs. Baum that she will have to "look to William Christmas, with the funny name, for Ben's future. He's the one you'll hear of. I shall take a job behind a mahogany desk and I'll wear a white linen suit in summer and stop at the club for a martini after work. Maybe you'll hear of me too—and if you do,

I'll wish you hadn't. There, he thought, you have made the accusation. He had felt it for a long time in his mind. But now suddenly the shadows at the back of the dark corridor had flashed into the whiplash of words. If you hear of me, I'll wish you hadn't."<sup>11</sup>

It will not surprise the reader that Michael does not take the newsweekly job. As a result of an accident his last night as a switchman, he is hospitalized. When he comes out of the hospital, he and Aileen go for a brief vacation to the Indiana countryside near Chicago, and the novel ends on an affirmative note, as the two young lovers play in the pastoral setting of the dunes country, prior to returning to Chicago and Michael's railroading job.

There is much about this novel to which one can object, on literary grounds, and on political ones. But as a first novel, as another novel by a young American writer which shows the young man's coming of age, and as a novel which attempts to explain the development of a young middle-class Harvard man into a radical, committed figure, it also has much to recommend it. It is a *lehroman*, reversing the usual "flight from the small town" pattern. From the point of view of its technique and style, it has all the virtues—and all the defects—of the realism which was the inevitable form of the proletarian novel. But it is most interesting now, in retrospect, as a novel which shows us the attraction of the urban, middle western "pastoralism" which, with William Empson's comment in mind, I have attributed to it. The novel's general uses of the railroad trip from east to west, New York to Chicago, is a sign of its direction.

*Grand Crossing*, then, is a novel which brings a young man to the proletariat and to radical ideas. Dave Spaas, the protagonist of *The Great Midland*, however, is born to the working class and Chicago, and even born to his radicalism, as the nephew of a Wobbly uncle. Indeed, in this novel an important secondary character, a young woman who is Dave's wife, makes the opposite journey, from the working class to the middle class via an education in science at the University of Chicago.

This novel's structure is much more complex than *Grand Crossing's* and its plot elements are more varied, though its ideological outlook is rather simpler and less ambiguous. The "present" of the novel is the years 1939 to 1941. There is, however,



a kind of prologue of several chapters entitled "The First World War," which introduces us to the background of the novel's major figures. In the chapter headed "1912," we meet Eddie Spaas and Uncle Jennison, two Wobbly railroad workers, as they arrive back in Chicago in that year. Eddie Spaas will turn out to be the uncle of the novel's protagonist, Dave Spaas, while Uncle Jennison will become the chairman of the Lodge of the Car Builders Union, around which much of the action of the novel will take place. In Eddie Spaas and Uncle Jennison two of the sides of the novel's argument are presented to us. We are also introduced to Pledger McAdams, a Black World War I veteran who is a carbuilder, and who will play a major role.

The body of the novel is divided into six parts, each of which is in turn divided into numbered chapters, though there are additional sections within each part, headed by a year. In this fashion, we follow the main thread of the various plot lines, and also are given flashbacks to earlier times, when that seems necessary.

There are essentially three related plot lines, concerning three family groupings. Each plot line can be said to have a personal as well as a political dimension. The unity of the novel is achieved in part through the personality of Dave Spaas, the young Communist who, like William Christmas, is a Spanish Civil War veteran, and in part through locale. It is Chicago's South Side and the railroads which traverse it which bring all the various family groupings into contact in the first place; it is Dave Spaas who provides much of the conflict within the groupings.

One plot line concerns Pledger McAdams. His story is essentially that of the struggle of Black railroad workers to win back positions they held on the railroad just after World War I, and which they lost approximately concurrently with Chicago's 1919 race riots. We follow Pledger as he starts a separate "Lodge" of Black railroad workers, and is betrayed again and again by the union. He wins his long struggle, with the help of Dave Spaas and other Communists whose party he has in the meantime joined, but is eventually killed. His killer is the brutal railroad detective Morgan, who moves throughout the story, rather melodramatically, as an evil force.

Another plot line concerns Dave Spaas, the ideologically committed Communist of the novel, and his struggle to create greater

militancy among the railroad workers, of whom he is a part by trade as well as by the heritage of his stolid switchman father Joe and his exciting but futile uncle Eddie. When we first meet Dave, he is returning as a seaman aboard a freighter, after having been wounded in the Spanish Civil War. At the end of the novel, Dave is at sea again, this time on a convoy in the Atlantic, between Spain and Gibraltar, at the beginning of World War II. Thus, the novel's action is bracketed by Dave's role as anti-fascist fighter.

The personal dimension of Dave Spaas' story has to do with his effort to keep together his marriage with Stephanie Koviak. Stephanie is the daughter of Roman Koviak, a Polish car-knocker who is all gentleness and self-reliance, and who will die in the course of the novel in a dramatic, well-wrought scene in which two railroad cars' coupling knuckles are joined through his body. One of the Roman's sons, Victor, has been crippled (also by the evil railroad detective) while a child, and is now a supercilious, opportunistic University of Chicago student of Old French, ready to use anyone for his advantage. Another son, Johnny, is a drunken philanderer, of not much use to anyone, though good-natured. Stephanie, who rejected her neighborhood and class even as a child, when she wandered dreaming through the Modern French collection at the Art Institute, is a student in biological science at the University of Chicago, and Dave's wife. It is in her personality that the two major class forces of the novel are most sharply in conflict. Though Stephanie is attracted to Dave and marries him, she leaves him while he is in Spain to live with a graduate student in philosophy who believes in "aristocracy." "Rather than an adherent of democracy, I prefer to call myself a believer in aristocracy," the young man says at a dinner given in his honor when he receives a faculty appointment at an eastern school. "When I use the word aristocracy, I use it in the same sense by which Plato's Republic was an aristocracy. Aristocracy denotes rule by the best. . . . The best simply are those who have the best brains."<sup>12</sup>

The basic conflict in Stephanie, which is eventually resolved in the novel, is personified in her decision whether to live with Dave Spaas and his communist ideology, or to live in a more middle-class, intellectual, university-oriented "aristocratic" fashion. Saxton seems here to have transferred the disdain which



*Grand Crossing's* Michael Reed felt for Harvard and Eastern intellectuals to all University intellectuals. "Neither one could change to suit the other," Dave thinks, as he is about to leave Chicago, in part so Stephanie can have a clear field. "And if she had been made to be a professor and a professor's wife, a learned liberal, a tennis player on the courts of universities, he could not ask her to go with him."<sup>13</sup>

But the conflict is more fundamental than Dave has fully perceived. Stephanie is certainly the most complex and in some ways the most interesting figure of the novel. She feels raging inside herself the central ideological conflict of the novel in another form. It is a conflict which extends the clear and obvious one with the opposing class represented by the railroad's bosses, the police, and the officials of the carbuilder's lodge. When Stephanie is at the point where she will decide to re-join Dave, just before he is to go off to start his hitch as a World War II merchant seaman, she comes to understand the conflict clearly. Sitting in a movie theatre after what appeared to be a final separation, remembering an earlier conversation with Dave, she thinks:

On the one hand was the despairing mood, self-consciousness, how tiny and brief these were. So she had defined life as the struggle to cram into each individual enough living to last for eternity. . . . It was as if she had asked: "What can you offer for an anti-dote to death?" And Dave, who was not a theoretician, had not grasped the meaning of her question, any more than she herself had grasped it at the time. Yet his answer suited him perfectly. Who needed an antidote to death? Life elbowed and slugged its way forward, rejoiced at being alive. . . . He could not conceive an individual pondering this matter of death. He saw a whole march of people from the beginning of history—noisy, impatient, alive. He saw them fighting cold and hunger, fighting to wipe out the few who exploited the many, fighting disease and suffering, fighting to learn the nature of the universe they lived in. He figures himself as one of them, and why shouldn't he? He saw the wonders they had already achieved—and he looked forward to more. It was very simple, and indeed she had often accused him of being simple.<sup>14</sup>

Dave's view of the universe—the march of the "people" from the beginning of history—which is essentially the view of the novel, explains, I believe, the novel's structure. Saxton presents his reader with a sufficient slice of that history so that the "march of the people" in this city and in this industry—in Chicago, in railroading—can be understood. I also take it that Saxton is here suggesting, in the person of Stephanie Koviak, an ideological struggle which many radicals saw as central to the immediate post World War II situation, that between various forms of existentialism and Marxism. It is easy to see in the concern with death, which has defeated Stephanie and vitiated her vitality, a kind of oversimplified version of Camus' and Sartre's influence on western intellectuals in that era, and in Dave's version of reality the kind of meliorist, essentially hopeful Marxism which characterized the general mood of the left in the years immediately after World War II. That Stephanie takes the initiative to reunite her life with Dave's makes clear which side of the conflict the novel supports.

There is much else in this novel, all of it related in one way or another to the two fundamental conflicts which inform it. Just to cite one more example, since it takes us back to the issue of country and city pastoral, we can look at the story of Ann Spaas, Dave's mother.

Eddie Spaas was Ann's lover in the "1912" section of the book. At nineteen, she was attracted by his guitar-playing, devil-may-care attitude to the world. When Eddie leaves Chicago, however, unwilling to tie himself down, Ann marries Eddie's brother Joe, a hard-working, phlegmatic railroad man who is mostly concerned about building up seniority on his brakeman's job, entirely lacking in rebelliousness, and who gives little of love and less of romance. Eddie returns to Chicago, having lost an arm in a railroad accident. After Joe Spaas dies, Eddie asks Ann to marry him, but she turns him down and decides instead to move to Ludington, Michigan, the small town where she was raised. There she meets and at the end of the novel is about to be married to an Italian vegetable trucker, a comic *Most Happy Fella* figure, another kind of pastoral opposite to the stolid and urban Joe, without the dangers and defeats attached to an Eddie Spaas. Life again wins out over death, the whole over the maimed, living

for the sake of life over sadness and defeat, the pastoral and romantic over the stolid.

I do not want to oversimplify the ideas in the novel, nor to vulgarize them. There is here full awareness of the possibility of disaster. Pledger McAdam's death, an innocent victim of the railroad policeman's racism, is a case in point. The grimness of the South Side of Chicago's streets in which the novel takes place—the same streets, roughly, in which Farrell's Studs Lonigan lives his life—is not in any way lightened. Over everything stands the grey, cinder-covered embankment and trackage of the Great Midland Railroad, as it winds its way through the South Side of the city, a kind of dead end against which disaster and violence are constantly played. Moreover, the conflict in Stephanie Koviak's mind is rendered in felt and believable fashion, and though the test of personal experience is always a limited one, rings true to my personal experience with people like her I have known.

The fact remains, though, that the novel's view of the world is one which is oversimplified, as pastoral is often oversimplified, and for essentially the same reasons. There is an ideal of human behavior established, an ideal the components of which are simplicity, and closeness to the reality of work (rather than sheep-herding), of honesty, of caring for one's fellows, and of struggle for a better world. The figures which incorporate that idea are Dave Spaas, Pledger McAdams and his second wife Ruby, Roman Koviak and a few others. There is an opposite to these ideal figures—a dialectical opposition, perhaps, in a simplistic way—in such figures as the railroad detective Morgan, the union vice-president, and the railroad foreman "Upstairs" Jarvis. All the other significant figures in the novel are torn between these two opposites, and attempt to reconcile their personal division in some way. Victor Koviak, Stephanie's crippled brother, moves rapidly towards the "bad" side of the opposition. The closer he comes to entering the middle class as a member of the faculty at the University, the more ruthless, exploitative and evil he becomes. He has never been much good. In fact, even as a child he is shown as rather a ruthless and nasty character, the quarterback who slugs his opponent after the game, the kid who cons his partners in the theft and sale of bull's nose-rings. But as he moves away from

his class roots, whatever redeeming qualities he had drop away. Uncle Jennison is first seen as rather a charming "boomer" who settles down with his Norwegian wife to run a working-men's forum in an old men's hotel. But as he achieves stability on his railroading job with the Great Midland and becomes lodge chairman, he moves ever more rapidly towards the side of those who keep Pledger McAdams and the other Black workers out of their rightful jobs, and is eventually defeated when the workers' wrath overtakes him.

What is true of these and other minor figures is even more true of so major a figure as Stephanie Koviak. The more she moves away from accepting Dave's set of values, which have to do with an acceptance of life and struggle, the more she becomes "subjective," "intellectual," "professorial"; the more miserable she is. It is only when she can accept her own political responsibilities, as well as Dave's value system which rationalizes those responsibilities, that she can achieve some kind of personal peace.

Such a view of the world lacks complexity, even in as well-wrought a proletarian novel as *The Great Midland*, and in that lack of complexity lies its greatest flaw and perhaps the greatest flaw of the genre. Nevertheless, *The Great Midland* seems to me among the best of the proletarian novels I know. It is skillfully written, often evocative. It is excellent in particular in its rendering of the nature of work, and especially of work of a kind rarely described in fiction. Its description of the streets of Chicago in which the action takes place is a fine example of what realism and an attempt at verisimilitude at their best can do. It never falls into the most extreme dangers of naturalism, that is, into a kind of sensationalism in rendering pain and horror that is often a flaw in thirties proletarian novels. Perhaps most important, the complexity of its plot, though making for some unclarity early on in a first reading of the novel, does reflect a complexity of ideas greater than the often simple-minded good guy-bad guy quality of some proletarian fiction, and its characters, especially Stephanie Koviak, echo that complexity.

*Bright Web in the Darkness* was published a full decade after *The Great Midland*. If *Grand Crossing* is a pre-proletarian novel and *The Great Midland* a fully proletarian novel, then *Bright Web in the Darkness* is a kind of post-proletarian work. Like *The*

*Great Midland*, its major characters are working people, this time shipyard workers in San Francisco, for the most part, but also once again union leaders, a union lawyer who has sold out his liberalism because he needs money to support an alcoholic wife, and some seamen.

In this novel there is even more of an emphasis on discrimination against Black workers than in *The Great Midland*, though the essential problem is the same. The time, however, is during World War II, when labor was in short supply and some progress was made towards integration with the help of President Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, which mandated fair employment practices.

It is difficult to focus on a single protagonist in this novel. There are several important figures, whose lives interweave through their training as welders and their work in the shipyard. The title of the novel, however, is related most strongly to a young Black woman who wishes to be a pianist, though she has trained for and is now working as a welder. Joyce loses the man she loves, a merchant seaman who is killed aboard a ship. She finds her greatest solace in music. Early in the novel Joyce's boyfriend Charlie takes her to a symphony concert. As she listens to the music, Joyce thinks "... oh God to have made such a thing as this. The bright web in the darkness, the heart singing like a violin string."<sup>15</sup> After Charlie has been killed, and after Joyce and the Black workers have won a rather ambiguous victory in their struggle for full membership in the union, Joyce returns to her piano playing. She is about to participate in a student concert, and on the penultimate page of the novel she thinks that she "... was playing for them—if only she could; for the victory they had, and the defeat and the loss, for the shining bright web of hope in the darkness."<sup>16</sup> Since the political victory of the Black workers in this novel is much less clear than in *The Great Midland* and since the title of the novel comes from Joyce's comments about her music, and since it is difficult to find any other more central element in this rather diffuse novel, I take it that the focus here is no longer on a clear-cut, political ideology, but rather on the redeeming and satisfying power of art, and on a kind of liberal humanism.

I am rather tentative about this conclusion, because the novel is rather tentative. Though the marriage of the sailor, Tom O'Regan, to a woman who becomes an important figure in the effort of some white workers to support the struggle of the Black workers is rocky, the outcome seems to be that there will be reconciliation. But unlike Stephanie's and Dave's marriage, and unlike Michael Reed's and Aileen's love affair, the success of the marriage is almost entirely a personal matter. It is not embedded in a radical or communist view of human experience, but, quite simply, in Tom's need for love and interdependence.

The story of the lawyer, Walter Stone, whose disastrous marriage ends in a convenient automobile crash, suggests another sense of the book's title. When Walter visits his wife's grave, which is located in a California cemetery where there are also some graves of westering pioneers, we follow his thoughts as he leaves. He has inspected some of the older gravestones and thinks: "Oh, America . . . a paragraph in a schoolbook; a history carved on the headstones of country graveyards. And what remained of all of this? The glow of neon signs where the highway dipped down from the darkness? The hopeless lost promise, the memory of an ecstatic smile? The arrogance of Richards and Mackey, the grim fierce power of the man Garnet? Were these the purpose, the outcome of such abundance of hope and labor and death?"

We walked on towards the gate. Now this particular thread of the web had reached its end."<sup>17</sup> Richards is Stone's former law partner, whom he left because he was unwilling to take "the wrong side" in a labor case. Mackey is a rather slimy ex-state Senator, friendly to the labor bureaucrats and probably the lover of Walter's wife just before her death. Garnet is the leader of the shipyard workers union which has refused the Black workers anything other than an auxiliary lodge. These three figures are the "evil" figures of the novel, akin to Morgan, the union vice-president and Upstairs Jarvis in *The Great Midland*. But there is no opposing force in this novel with the ideological strength of Dave Spaas, and though Walter Stone is in himself an ideological battleground not unlike Stephanie Koviak, the opposing issues are a good deal more vaporous than in Stephanie's case. They are, roughly, support for working people and integrity, as opposed

to self-serving, anti-working people and anti-Black feelings. Given the metaphor of the bright web in the darkness as used by Walter and by Joyce in their musings, we have to conclude that the oppositions here are a kind of liberal support for the underdog, expressed in art, and a self-imposed selfishness and despair. Regardless of what one may feel about the political value of such positions, it is clear to me that the cleaner and more complex opposites of *The Great Midland* provide the basis for a much richer novel.

If one examines these three novels as Saxton's corpus, they form a kind of triptych. *Grand Crossing* approaches a radical proletarianism; *The Great Midland* is a solid and rather sound proletarian novel; *Bright Web in the Darkness*, while retaining its concern for working people, is a retreat from the proletarianism of *The Great Midland* to a less radical political view, which finds hope in the young artist's involvement in music and the young marrieds' love, much more than in political or philosophical solutions. The central panel of Saxton's triptych is surely *The Great Midland*, the strongest and most militant of the three novels, and in some ways the best.

It seems to me that one can also use the same triptych figure to describe the three novels' relationship to the pastoral. The first novel moves from the supersophisticated East to the Midwest, to Chicago conceived in the sense in which I have already discussed it. The second novel, set entirely in Chicago and the surrounding countryside is the most completely pastoral, in that it most clearly follows Empson's notion that "... the Worker, as used in proletarian propaganda, is a mythical cult-figure."<sup>18</sup> The third novel, moving away entirely from the Midwest, towards the ocean-bordered sophistication of San Francisco, greatly reduces the mythical quality of its working class figures—there is no Pledger McAdams in this novel, no Dave Spaas, no larger-than-life Communists at all.

The three novels rather clearly reflect the political trends of the periods of their composition. The period just before the outbreak of World War II, and especially after the Hitler-Stalin pact, and just after the U.S.S.R. entered the war was one of the most hopeful for the American Communist left, as it appeared that the nation would come out of the struggles of the thirties

united in an anti-fascism allied with the Soviet Union, as we entered World War II. 1948, the year of the publication of *The Great Midland*, was another high-point in American radical hopes. Though the force of reaction and incipient McCarthyism in the United States were already pretty clear in the aftermath of the war, there was a strong belief that a powerful counterthrust from the left was a possibility, a counterthrust which took the particular political form of the Progressive Party Presidential campaign of Henry Wallace in 1948. By 1958, most of these hopes had been smashed, McCarthyism had been fully experienced, and the emergence of a new wave of political radicalism, though already sounded in the developments in Montgomery around Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, movement, were not yet clearly perceived. What is more, the ideal of socialism, Communist party version, had been deeply tarnished by the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February of 1956, which made it impossible for even the most dedicated American radical, if he or she was at all thoughtful, to ignore the crimes of the Stalin era. Thus, it becomes very difficult to present Communists as idealized figures, to readers who would not believe it, by writers who no longer believed it themselves. Perhaps this was also true of working-class heroes of any kind. The increasing unionization of the country, the apparent prosperity of the Eisenhower fifties, made the worker as victim a much less likely figure in fiction than had been the case in 1940, even in 1948 (if one set one's fiction at the eve of World War II). It is interesting to note, in the recent film "Norma Rae" for just one example, that though the film is clearly pro-union, and though it deals quite sympathetically with the young woman who is its protagonist, and with the union organizer, there is nothing here in the seventies of the high heroics of *The Great Midland*, or for that matter, of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

There is another problem with these novels—they are too late for their social base, or at least *Bright Web in the Darkness* and *The Great Midland* are. Basing his comment on evidence garnered from other proletarian novels of the period, Chester E. Eisinger says of the genre that it "... loses its function, bowing to the fate common to all ad hoc literature."<sup>19</sup> Although there are redeeming qualities in Saxton's work, the comment does apply to the last

two panels of his triptych. Though *Grand Crossing*, the pre-proletarian novel, was published while proletarian ideology still had a significant hold on American novelists and their audiences, that was no longer the case when *The Great Midland* was published, though some of the effects of post-World War II optimism on the left were still being felt. Eisinger's comment about Marxist criticism, that it had a ". . . totally unrealistic hope . . . that young writers would soon be turning out great novels about the struggle for social and economic freedom,"<sup>20</sup> is here relevant. Saxton's work buttressed such patently false hopes. But by the time *Bright Web in the Darkness* appeared, there was no proletarian literary movement left, outside the most narrow Communist Party domains. No wonder then that Saxton's last novel is his least effective. Though *The Great Midland* can still partake of the after-shine of feeling-states which gave rise to proletarian fiction in the late thirties, there is no such after-shine left by 1958, it seems clear—neither for Saxton, nor for his audience.

Walter B. Rideout has discussed this phenomenon in interesting ways, in his last chapter, "The Long Retreat," in *The Radical Novel in America, 1900-1954*. Without concerning ourselves here with Rideout's political analysis, it does seem true that "considering the fortunes of the Left through the forties and down to the present day, [1954] the true wonder is not that so little radical fiction has been written . . . but rather that any has been written at all."<sup>21</sup> He then provides us with statistics as to the diminished flow of radical novels during the period 1940 to 1954, statistics which show that *The Great Midland* was one of four radical novels published in 1948, rather a high number for the period. Rideout considers *The Great Midland* a novel, ". . . informed in the daily lives of its proletarian characters," and comments that the ". . . portraits of Communists . . . are more life-like than the crude sketches in the proletarian novels of the thirties, but the conclusion is hardly more convincing."<sup>22</sup> More important for my purposes here than the sound specifics of Rideout's comment is the fact that he includes the novel as one of those which were part of "The Long Retreat." Had Rideout been able to extend his work a little later in time, one can only wonder if he would have thought of *Bright Web in the Darkness* as part of a rout. The lack of critical attention given to Saxton's last two novels

then is probably to some extent a consequence of the years of their publication.

If that were not the case, I believe that Saxton's work as a writer of fiction might have received more attention, an attention which I think it deserves. Despite the flaws of their genre, at least *Grand Crossing* and *The Great Midland* are interesting fictions, interesting as fictions about Chicago, interesting, especially in *The Great Midland*, as books giving us careful and meaningful descriptions of the nature of work and of the lives of working people. Though Saxton lacks Algren's uncannily accurate ear for the speech of ethnic Americans, he does give us some insight into ethnic life-styles too infrequently treated in our fiction.

The politics of *Grand Crossing* were rather prophetic, in light of developments among some middle-class and upper-class college students in the sixties, which were not very different from Michael Reed's experience. Though one can surely disagree sharply with the obvious Stalinism of *The Great Midland*, the book does remind us of the struggles of working men and women to organize their unions, struggles in which Communists often did play an important role, even if it was not exclusively their role, and was not quite so pure a role as that played by Dave Spaas. Furthermore, at whatever levels one may wish to disagree with Communist Party policy in the period of *The Great Midland's* moment, or in our own, it is worth remembering that many individual Communist Party members were and are hard-working, devoted people who believe in their cause and give much to it. Rideout suggests that *The Great Midland* is one of the novels which provide ". . . successful characterizations . . . of rank-and-file Party members or of lower-echelon 'functionaries', men and women devoted to a cause, chronically overworked in Party activity, and harassed by the protective agencies of the established social order."<sup>23</sup> Just as working people in general are too rarely a part of our fiction, so are social activists, Communist or otherwise, too rarely a part of it and it is worth our while to reconsider the role they have played in our history, an opportunity Saxton's fiction provides for us now, in retrospect.

Moreover, the conflicts adumbrated in both *Grand Crossing* and *The Great Midland* are real enough and real more recently than when the novels were published. If the allegiance of middle-

class students to their origins was not an issue in the fifties, and is hardly an issue in the later seventies again, that is, it seems to me, to be regretted, and anyone who has lived through the sixties is aware that it was an issue during that turbulent decade. Adherence to political groupings of socialist ideologies was also such an issue during the sixties, and it seems to me clear that the conflict in Stephanie Koviak's spirit between allegiance to socially relevant ideas and purely self-concerned ones is a conflict that has surfaced again and again, and will surface again, even though we may as a nation be, as I write this in early 1979, on the self-concerned side of that opposition. Union organization, we tend too easily to forget, is by no means an issue of the past—as Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers, and as the clothing workers at the J. P. Stevens Company, and many others of the unorganized remind us as we read the daily press. Saxton's novels, if nothing else, and despite their limitations, are useful ways of recovering such truths, and of making connections therefore between our past and our present. Though one must keep in mind the flaws and limitations of the works, as Chicago novels, as descriptions of working people, as novels which present ongoing ideological issues, Saxton's fictional triptych is worth more contemplation than it has received.

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#### NOTES

1. Jack Conroy, *The Disinherited*. New York: Covici-Friede, 1933. Reprinted with an introduction by Daniel Aaron, New York: Hill & Wang, 1963.
2. Daniel Aaron. Introduction to *The Disinherited* (see n. 1), p. viii.
3. Alexander Saxton, *Grand Crossing*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943.
4. "Saxton, Alexander Plaisted," *Current Biography*, 1943, p. 668.
5. Walter B. Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1956), p. 208.
6. Alexander Saxton, *The Great Midland*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948.
7. Alexander Plaisted Saxton, *Bright Web in the Darkness*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1958.
8. Saxton, *Grand Crossing*, p. 54.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-9.
10. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, n.d.), pp. 3-23.
11. Saxton, *Grand Crossing*, p. 396.

12. Saxton, *The Great Midland*, p. 253.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 337.
15. Saxton, *Bright Web in the Darkness*, p. 89.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 307.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
18. Empson, p. 14.
19. Chester E. Eisinger, *Fiction of the Forties* (Chicago & London: U. of Chicago Press, Phoenix, 1965), p. 90.
20. Eisinger, p. 89.
21. Rideout, p. 259.
22. Rideout, pp. 268-9.
23. Rideout, p. 269.

## EDWARD LUEDERS' CLAM LAKE PAPERS

JOHN STARK

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place.  
T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream  
—he awoke and found it truth.  
John Keats in a letter to Benjamin Bailey

I lived at St. Louis until 1851, and after that time in  
Sauk County, near Sauk City, tilling the soil and my  
mind.  
F. G. T. Lueders in a letter to William Canfield

When polar opposites can be brought together  
through sufficient excitation to the point of inter-  
changeability (a form of identity), the results are  
galvanic and potentially explosive.  
Edward Lueders, *Clam Lake Papers*

It certainly is not easy to write about Edward Lueders' *Clam Lake Papers*. My excitement about this winter's tale is sufficient, because it not only is set in my native Ashland County but also is as deep as the winter silence in the Chequamegon National Forest and as carefully crafted as a snowflake. A week of sub-zero weather in Madison has almost duplicated the Northern Wisconsin winter described in this book, thus making it even more pertinent, and recently the newspaper inadvertently demonstrated the pertinence of *Clam Lake Papers* by printing an it's-worse-elsewhere story about the weather in Glidden, Clam Lake's neigh-

bor. But Madison's weather is not the same as the North's. The cold here is damp, not dry, the skies often leaden, not usually blue. Winter there makes persons feel noble and shrewd because they have devised ways to survive (don't put your fingers in your glove's fingerholes: make fists inside the glove; don't hunch your shoulders against the cold: that only makes them ache) and clever because they understand the enemy (e.g., estimating the temperature by looking closely at the snow's texture). Here the cold merely makes one bitter (we, not the cold, have that quality). Similarly, an essay about *Clam Lake Papers* is only a surrogate for that book.

The greatest difficulty in writing about that book results from polar opposition. *Clam Lake Papers*, although it concedes the necessity for analytic thinking, is a hymn of praise to the metaphoric imagination, a prose-poem with every word firmly in place and bearing its burden. It both exhibits and extols the metaphorical imperative. I, a writer with an analytical bent, trained to explicate the work of others, thus confront a book that claims it is better to make a metaphor than to explain one. That book itself, however, indicates a way around this impasse. Most of *The Clam Lake Papers* purportedly is the ruminations of Lueders' alter ego, an anonymous intruder who lives in Lueders' cabin for a winter and in payment leaves behind a series of journal entries that at first seem merely to be strung together haphazardly. Lueders fades into the background, pretending that he has only edited the imaginary intruder's work and has added epigraphs, a prologue and an epilogue. If my alter ego would quicken he perhaps would create a series of comments like the following.

Both the subject matter of and the literary techniques used in *The Clam Lake Papers* are unusual, but it does have antecedents. Aldo Leopold's *Sandy County Almanac* and John Muir's *Story of My Boyhood and Youth* are finally attuned to nature, but their Southern Wisconsin settings differ strikingly from the Northern Wisconsin setting of Lueders' book, and their authors interpret nature primarily to support an environmentalist ethic, whereas Lueders' meditation on nature is more diverse and incisive. One can also usefully compare Lueders' book to Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, which also creates an alter ego (although it does not tell the story), draws philosophical

implications from a narrative and even compares analytical and imaginative ways of thinking. The book that is most helpful to keep in mind when reading *The Clam Lake Papers* is Thoreau's *Walden*. Both authors are delighted by language, explicitly tell about living in an isolated cabin while implicitly telling about the growth of their minds and skillfully use a vast array of literary genres and organic form: their content determines their form rather than vice versa, creating a subtle order amidst apparent disorder. Lueders' book is not a ramshackle building that poorly imitates Thoreau's cabin; both are expertly made of materials from their surroundings.

Because its parts resonate with one another, each making several others more clear and more meaningful, the best way to read *The Clam Lake Papers*, if it were possible, is simultaneously, absorbing and connecting all its parts at once. Lueders is not blatant about these connections; rather, he leaves them to the reader. That is, this book is about the human mind's crucial metaphor-making function, about its need and ability to connect disparate ideas and images, and this book gives its readers the material and the impetus to perform that very function as they read it. Lueders writes that viewers of op art often have two contradictory perceptions at once, thereby becoming accomplices in the art. That is, they create part of such a painting's significance by connecting the two perceptions. Readers of this book have the same kind of complicity in it when they connect its parts. To do so all at once would be optimal.

This book's final sentence is a remark by Lueders, speaking in his own voice, about meeting his alter ego: "I should not know him from Adam." True, because that alter ego in a sense is Adam, which is a valuable clue about this book's meaning. The alter ego is our forefather because his experiences are universal, although they take place in an isolated, sparsely populated region. That is, his mind's operations are universal; they are some of the functions that define us as human, particularly the function of making metaphors. Like Adam, the alter ego is also a namer who attaches words to things. Finally, they both have enormous capacities for wonder. Adam naturally was amazed at a new world, and Lueders' alter ego is amazed at a world that some would consider empty

and hostile but which he considered to be a treasure house deserving careful perception and thoughtful contemplation.

Its exuberant playing with language is one of the delights of *The Clam Lake Papers*. This playing with words is compatible with that book's prevailing attitude toward language: "much that goes unspoken has its form buried somewhere in the language, pressing for utterance. Soundless, I am full of words. Once uttered, the words are full of me." Lueders examines the history and roots of words, once, for example, considering whether to use "depend" in the original Latin sense of "hang from." He quotes dictionary definitions and proposes his own definitions, much as "style is a matter of how you *handle* things. It is movement, touch, arrangement, speed, care, and carelessness, not just how you handle words, but how you pick up a child, pet a dog, or make and throw a snowball." Again and again he defines "metaphor" and "analogy," each time revealing new significance. The narrator characteristically reports, "found a great word at the end of the S's in the dictionary: *Syzygy*—'the nearly straight-line configuration of three celestial bodies in a gravitational system'. *Syzygy*. Now how is a guy ever going to use that word?" Four pages later he describes an outdoor frolic: "we played the game for some minutes, the three of us—unidentified woodpecker, indifferent tree, and curious man—a rotating syzygy in the otherwise grave air of the woods." The effect of all these linguistic prestidigitations is to communicate, and to recommend to others, a great sensitivity to language.

Lueders' material is everything within his field of vision inside, and especially outside, the cabin; his tools to work on this material are perception and language, and his projects are to create images and insights. He works not mechanically but creatively and with reverence for his material, as his lambent images indicate. Hard at work, he disassociates himself from other kinds of images, mocking, for example, the images he occasionally allows the television screen to show: "this image is related in one aspect to the secondhand experience of gossip and in another to the idea of an unchanging sense of reality we accept in the static two-dimensional photograph." Photographic images are not only inadequate, he believes, but also pernicious: "maybe a contributing reason so many people in our age feel alien to poetry is that



they are conditioned to see and to make or accept images in the comparatively cold and objective fashion of the camera." Lueders' fashion is as warm with life as the Clam Lake winter is cold. One word is worth a thousand pictures.

Most of Lueders' images derive from nature and are effective partly because of his belief in a common ground between it and himself. The first epigraph in the book is a quotation from Jung, part of which is "contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied." Lueders sets out to demonstrate that he is an exception to this lament. His alter ego awakes one night with "commoun ground" running through his head and thinks, "*common ground*. It somehow contained all the principles of life and death and vivid thought in between." He tries to establish common ground not only between himself and nature but among other entities. For example, he conceives of memory as a linking of present and past: "the reality of the past is manifest *subjectively* in the mental process of memory." Similarly, love is a linking that depends on the existence and acceptance of opposite qualities. This book is a paper chain like those that schoolchildren make by pasting together the opposite ends of pieces of paper and then joining the links.

Lueders unites opposites in order to explain the world. He writes of such explanatory schemes: "in every age, the metaphorical imperative demands that people fasten on a scheme of reality within which their analogy-making activities can continue to function reasonably. Needless to say, the image-making reality of each succeeding era then become *the* valid one. . . . The difficulty comes in trying to recognize from inside out our own system of reality, the image-making apparatus through which we accept it and give it our sense of order and belief." The scheme Lueders examines in *The Clam Lake Papers* is based on metaphors: he explains a great number of things as variations on the themes of metaphor and its opposite, analogy, which distinguishes and separates rather than uniting. The second epigraph, quoting Nietzsche, is a clue to the explanations to come because it identifies "that impulse toward the formation of metaphors, that fundamental impulse of man, which we cannot reason away for one moment—for thereby we should reason away man himself."

All these discussions about metaphors are not idle speculation: they are a guide to a better life. *The Clam Lake Papers* is wisdom literature, as Lueders implies: "the most important thing about the doubleness, the duplicity, of our metaphorical method of dealing with reality is that from the outset it made the human being the first, the only, truly ameliorative animal. Manipulating the world through metaphor allowed a person to accept and deal with the factual level of existence—things as they are—while simultaneously envisioning and working toward another more desirable level of existence." This more desirable level, he writes elsewhere in this book, results from a spiritual experience of unity, of the common ground of all things. He believes that "we can become ecstatically aware of this [ground] when integration occurs suddenly through a selfhood that is whole by virtue of being at once inner and outer. We call such integration a mystical experience, one that cannot be parsed, that is beyond conventional analogy. It is an experience that approximates pure metaphor—wordless and timeless—in which one is both lost and found as a self."

A quotation from Jung introduces a comparison that is important throughout *The Clam Lake Papers*: "as scientific understanding has grown, so our world has become dehumanized. Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional 'unconscious identity' with natural phenomena." Lueders makes many similar complaints about science, often contrasting it to art, which he considers humanizing rather than dehumanizing, more satisfying and more meaningful. Many of the differences between science and art are caused by the needs from which these disciplines arise: "we are pleased to regard coincidence as mysterious, fortuitous, remarkable, yet we immediately begin to search for a casual relationship. In the first instance we are following the metaphorical imperative; in the second, the analytical need to explain." Science is objective, communicates by the limited methods of numbers and graphs and assumes that humans are static; art is subjective, communicates by the far more subtle methods of language and assumes that humans are dynamic. Numbers fail to communicate the things most needing communication because they are "rooted in difference," mathematics being analogical.

Language, however, being metaphorical, can express identity, the perception of which leads to the many horrible results that Lucretius mentions. Lucretius most vividly contrasts language and science by using a metaphor. Man has two basic instruments, two models or prototypes of the infernal machine. One is the clock. The other is language. The clock is the mechanism that deals with uniform and fixed duration, or time. Language deals with human circumstance. All technique, at least all mental techniques, depends on one or the other clock. Science, language, humanities. The clock and language may seem to be equally useful, equally fundamental, but is language that makes us human. Lucretius writes, "As time this human kind the human being is instinct with language. Here instinct is an adjective meaning 'filled' or 'better', because it connotes vitality, or 'charged'. The ordinary meanings of the word when it is used as a noun are also relevant. The phrase is dramatic and meaningful, the kind of phrase that only someone instinct with language can write."

Clocks seem inexorable, ticking out one's life, particularly in the dead of winter (an interesting metaphor). But the area around the cabin is full of life, even if only one of its beings is human. A fox peers through the window, a bear hibernates beneath the snow, its body heat creating a wisp of steam that reveals its location, a partridge whirs through the air. Despite these instances of life, time ominously grinds away. One can prevent its effects by dichotomizing it, conceiving of two kinds of time, one the road to death and the other a detour. One time is measured out in mundane activities. The other, more enigmatic, nearly ineffable, is without specific movement of any sort and hangs in the still air of the woods. It is the space between the trunks of the trees, the time apart from the rhythm of my own breathing. It is tacit, motionless and inert in the frozen earth to the limitless sky. To return to science for a clearer contrast, the computer, although prodigiously fast, operates sequentially. But the metaphorical imagination, by joining two things and populating simultaneity, is instantaneous. Metaphor has the ability to hold the world in abeyance, to stop the clock, to have it both ways, to authenticate paradox.

The *Clam Lake Papers* is a Viewmaster because it continually converts two images into one image that has more depth and color than the naked eye sees. It is a textbook in ecology, in human relations, in perception, in philosophy and, due to its prose, as sharp and direct as Arctic wind, in language. It is a topographical map, each detail precisely in place—beautiful despite, or perhaps because of, its precision—of Clam Lake and environs, which, like Thoreau's Walden Pond and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, turns out to be a representative sample of the world. It is better sustenance for winter night (or any night) than a cup of hot cider and a bowl of popcorn.

Only connect.  
E. M. Forster, *Howards End*

Although they do not seem to be the result of Algalvianic inter-  
action, the notes above perhaps clarify *The Clam Lake Papers*,  
and the quotations included and the form of this essay give some  
idea of that book's flavor. Reading those notes above even is not a  
substitute for reading the book. They were written to entice as  
many persons as possible to read it and thereby to learn some-  
thing about Clam Lake, about Wisconsin and about human  
existence.

Psychological fiction brought with him a new and a more serious interest in the subject. To learn whether my book reviewers had shared my enthusiasm for Cass's first two volumes, I collected sixty-six clippings from the American newspapers and magazines of 1886-1888; and I found Cass compared to not only Anderson, Stein, Joyce, and Faulkner but also Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Twain, Frost, Conrad, Lewis, Wolfe, and Mailer. Some reviewers suggested, perhaps wisely, that Cass could indeed be the link between the early prose masters and such newly respected modernists as Barthelme, Pynchon, and Barthelme.

Literature I have presented my collection to the Society. I enrich the holdings of the Society for the Study of Midwestern a chronicle and digest of my collection of book reviews; and to To encourage study of William H. Cass's fiction I present here

## THE EARLY FICTION OF WILLIAM H. GASS: A CRITICAL DOCUMENTARY

RAY LEWIS WHITE

I first became acquainted with the fiction of William H. Gass in 1972, when I finally wondered what had happened to the Midwestern short story since the days of Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway. Thus I found *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country* only five years after its publication . . . and I knew that the Midwestern short story thrived *in situ*. I further knew that William H. Gass continued Anderson's experiments with narrative language and understanding of grotesque character; Gass's own fascination with the prose of Gertrude Stein confirmed the Stein-Anderson-Gass tradition.

Moving backward to read Gass's first book, *Omensetter's Luck* (1966), I was impressed with this author's ability to write equally well in the Joyce-Lawrence-Faulkner tradition—lushly narrated psychological fiction fraught with primitivist myth.

To learn whether any book reviewers had shared my enthusiasm for Gass's first two volumes, I collected sixty-six clippings from the American newspapers and magazines of 1966-1968; and I found Gass compared to not only Anderson, Stein, Joyce, and Faulkner but also Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Twain, Proust, Conrad, Lewis, Wolfe, and Mailer. Some reviewers suggested, perhaps wisely, that Gass could indeed be the link between the early prose masters and such newly respected modernists as Barth, Pynchon, and Barthelme.

To encourage study of William H. Gass's fiction I present here a chronicle and digest of my collection of book reviews; and to enrich the holdings of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature I have presented my collection to the Society.

### *Omensetter's Luck*

1. West, Paul. "Finnegans ache." *Book Week* 20 March 1966.  
"Mr. Gass is like Joyce hymning the rivers, and one would have to be criminally tone-deaf and almost snow-blind not to register the sonic and visual brilliance of the language. It has a pregnant, swaying physicality, with an undertow of festive and smutty limericks: a delight to say aloud and a continuing sound in the mind. In short, a style. . . . The problem is the novel's density, which Mr. Gass relieves only by changes in rhythm—conclusive shudders of an epileptic having an attack in deep mud. . . . Mr. Gass' firm abundances are those of a mounting gift. Now let him cancel his indenture to Joyce."
2. Perley, Maie E. "'Omensetter's Luck' Is Intricate." *Louisville Times* 12 April 1966.  
"*Omensetter's Luck*, by William H. Gass, is as unusual a book as the title suggests, and one that makes few concessions to accepted fictional techniques. . . . Rich in symbolism, the book is intricately constructed. If the reader can weather the stream of consciousness of the Rev. Jethro Furber during his periods of lecherous fantasizing, and some vividly presented scenes, he will be lured on to a denouement that is morally and artistically rewarding. . . . In this work, which must disturb serious readers, the author is retelling a story that has been told time and again since its first enactment some 2000 years ago. Reduced to simple terms, what the author is saying is that it is not in the nature of men to accept goodness and simplicity on their own terms and the closer they move to nature, the more savagely will they try to destroy it. Fortunately for the human race, there is always the lone protagonist of morality—always the idealist whom none can destroy."
3. Fremont-Smith, Eliot. "Books of The Times." *New York Times* 13 April 1966.  
"Part dirge, part celebration, part apocalyptic apparatus, this first novel by a philosophy professor at Purdue is at the very least a gorgeous and stunning achievement of imagination. It is exhausting to read, but not wasted time."
4. Morton, Frederic. "Of Mortality And Salvation." *New York Times Book Review* 17 April 1966.  
"Mr. Gass's prose is equal to his design. Among novels I've read in recent years, only Norman Mailer's 'An American Dream' has been able to pound such wild music out of pain. Gass, like Mailer, finds the very melody of dread. But whereas Mailer uses the current counters of urban despair, Gass reaches back to the language of the Bible, of Cotton Mather and the Farmer's Almanac. He can make rich sentences from lean words; the carnalities have a primeval, and thus all the more authentic, ring; and almost natural is the mingling of scatology and eschatology. . . . Gass is himself—a new writer who has opened haunting new fields of experience to the novel."
5. "Country of the Heart." *Newsweek* 18 April 1966.  
"*Omensetter's Luck* is a dense, provoking, vastly rewarding and very beautiful first novel. In prose that rolls along the tongue even in silent reading, William H. Gass has set out to explore those thickets of the mind where the outside world impinges on the soul. Step by step, page by page, he conducts a quest into the borderland between physical even and metaphysical meaning. The price the reader pays to go along is wearing: complete attention, word by slow word; constant resistance to the pull of the story in



that you imagine the heart pumping, with hard positive thumps, building to a crescendo that eventually, abruptly must stop."

16. Gaines, Ervin J. "Mr. Gass's Novel Is No 'Gas'—But Good." *Minneapolis Tribune* 19 June 1966.  
 "The plot, which matters less than the style, scarcely holds the reader. It is the revelation of the states of mind, the clashes of personal and social values that give the novel its distinction. Told in three monologues by townsmen who knew him, Omensetter's tale unfolds, ugly, pungently and with occasional poetic magic. . . . The density of Gass's style is taxing, and toward the end, somewhat ragged. Gass does not have quite the touch of the supreme craftsman, but 'Omensetter's Luck' is a considerable work of art, worthy of the attention of any serious reader."
17. Shattuck, Roger. "Fiction à la mode." *New York Review of Books* 23 June 1966.  
 "Omensetter's Luck is a vast, vigorous, and deliberately dishevelled novel whose action falls into place only in retrospect or on second reading. The most commonplace remark to make about it is that, crammed as it is with dialogue and monologue and mixed voices, he has eliminated quotation marks from the text . . . as systematically as Apollinaire deleted all punctuation from his first collection of poetry. The result is that distinctions of character and act and attitude are at first submerged beneath the landscape of sheer style. James Joyce and Gertrude Stein practice similar obliterations of the frontier between the elements of the story, and the relation to Joyce particularly is clear also in Gass's plastic use of language. But the comparison makes one aware of the degree to which Gass reaches beyond character and beyond event to something I can only call history. Time in his novel flows massively like the Ohio that surrounds it on every side. Without ward, kings, or voyages, Omensetter's Luck takes shape as a species of historical novel."
18. Review. *Portland Telegram* [ME] 26 June 1966.  
 "As a first novel, this is a remarkable performance. Gass is a philosopher, and his writing is vivid and readable."
19. Stryker, Kathryn Ten Cate. "Of Books And Things." *Concord Free Press* 30 June 1966.  
 "In earlier works [sic] William Gass has been compared to James Joyce in his style. In this book it would seem that he resembles more the late William Faulkner. The broken sentences, the lack of punctuation, the preference for long sentences, the rambling suggestibility of his phrases are Faulknerian and almost equally powerful."
20. Cassill, R. V. "Shorter Reviews." *Kenyon Review* Fall 1966.  
 "The true subject is the act of composition. The method is at least close to the intentions of the vorticists, enunciated long ago and far away, in London before he first World War. But what Mr. Gass now spins astonishingly in his vortex is material and learning, sensibility and ideology, brought on the tide of the intervening 50 years. His success consists not so much in aiming skillfully at an established target as in making us behold a target materialize where he has aimed."
21. Menn, Thorpe. "Books of the day." *Kansas City Star* 28 May 1967.  
 "The best novel of 1966 was 'Omensetter's Luck' by William H. Gass. It is the only novel of 1966 (first or whatever) that won virtual unanimous

praise, and was called a masterpiece by some major reviewers. . . . It is one of only three novels that, in 40-some years, made me turn immediately from the last page to the first page and begin re-reading. The others were Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' and Joyce's 'Ulysses.' It has that sort of mysterious fascination. It is more Joycean than Conradian, but it is as unique as either. Reviewers make comparisons because it is difficult to describe something that is wholly new, different, unusual. Unlike reading 'Ulysses,' you know exactly what is happening and who is saying what or thinking how. Most reviewers have mentioned the style as being reminiscent also of Faulkner's 'Sound and the Fury.' So it is, but as far as the story is concerned it might be called Hawthornian."

### *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country and Other Stories*

1. Hall, Joan S. "Crystal Images." *Houston Post* 25 February 1968.  
 "In this novella, and four stories, William Gass makes it clear that his widely acclaimed first novel, 'Omensetter's Luck,' was no accident. Although somewhat Faulknerian, that book took an idiosyncratic, personal stance toward the world. Neither narrative, description, nor dialogue was conventional. And this is true of his second book as well. Gass is not easy to read, for he refuses to supply expected connections and his style is often frustratingly elliptical."
2. Roberts, Ruth L. "'Terrifying Visions.'" *Baltimore Sun* 25 February 1968.  
 "One thing is certain . . . this collection of two novellas and three short stories will do nothing to diminish Gass's stature as a writer of extraordinary brilliance and insight. Like the novel, each is less concerned with the event itself than with the emotional reaction it engenders and which resolves into an intense debate on the nature of good and evil. Analytical and often experimental in form, the stories shun neither the humorous nor the grotesque as they open up terrifying visions of the loneliness of man when confronted by these imponderables. The idea of alienation and lack of communication has suffered from overexposure lately, but it is presented here with such surprising twists of plot and out of the ordinary characters that the concept seems new and its consequences even attractive. . . . Varied and thought-provoking, the stories are written with care for the absolutely right word that suggests rather than explains, and although they demand close attention, they provide a vastly rewarding experience for the more than casual reader."
3. Hicks, Granville. "Short Stories of the Grotesque." *Saturday Review* 2 March 1968.  
 "William Gass was fortunate: his first novel, *Omensetter's Luck*, created quite a stir. Consequently, *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country*, which contains two long short stories and three of conventional length, is not going to be neglected. And that is good, for these tales demonstrate, as surely as the novel did, that Gass's talents are of a high order. . . . Gass's preoccupation with grotesques reminds the reader of Sherwood Anderson and Carson McCullers, but his style is his own, and so is his feeling for the deformation of personality. . . . Although he made a late start—he was over forty when *Omensetter's Luck* was published—he is now as firmly established on the literary scene as any writer of his generation."





transcendental American sensibility. It is writing like this that will achieve, if it is at all possible, a saving continuity with tradition as it attempts to save human feeling and individuality for art."

13. Vince, Thomas L. Review. *Best Sellers* 1 April 1968.  
 "If technique is all—then these stories succeed admirably. But there is a lingering suspicion that these faceless (and sometimes nameless) characters detract from the effect of the tales. Nor are we convinced that the numerous anatomical and sexual references necessarily enhance the vigor of the writing. Finally, we wonder whether the reason these stories seem empty is because the author himself has little sympathy for the people and situations he portrays and, as a result, his characters become dehumanized. Brilliant prose? Perhaps so, but if people are still central to the unity of fiction, then these stories fail in a very large degree."
14. Glicken, Harold. "Fargo Native Is Faulkner of Midwest." *Minneapolis Tribune* 7 April 1968.  
 "This is Gass' second published book of fiction. The first, 'Omensetter's Luck,' gave the impression of being total. Had Gass written only 'Omensetter's Luck' and not written the two novellas in this collection, his contribution to American writing would have been sufficient. His chronicling of this region is becoming comparable to what Faulkner did with the South."
15. Herlihy, James Leo. "Digging deep in his story trunk." *Book World* 7 April 1968.  
 "In searching for a clue to the uniform unreadability of this volume, a reader is apt to wonder whether Mr. Gass is aware of the pitfalls of first-person storytelling. Maugham and Fitzgerald surmounted them by the simple device of having a narrator tell someone else's story, perhaps on the theory that a person fascinated by his own sensibilities was not much better company in a book than across the dinner table. Others—Salinger and Mark Twain come readily to mind—saw to it that their I-characters had plenty of charm and vitality. Mr. Gass doesn't take these precautions. A glance at the copyright page—some of the stories go back to 1959—suggests that, by digging too deeply into his trunk, the richly gifted young author of *Omensetter's Luck* may have pressed his luck a bit far."
16. Wiggins, Allen. "Psychological Exploring Is Powerful." *Cleveland Plain Dealer* 7 April 1968.  
 "It is the most intense fiction I have read in a long time. He takes men in extreme states of consciousness and portrays the world they see—obsessive, hallucinating and often frightening. It is the psychological world explored by French writers like Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pierre de Mandiargues and Michael Butor. This may perhaps frighten some people off, since these writers, for all their excellences and newnesses, often produce long dry stretches of rather abstract description. But Gass never suffers from these theoretical problems. His rhetoric is tough, often brittle and always vivid. Also, he is American, a native of North Dakota. His people are ours—an adolescent farm boy, a failing real estate salesman, a suburban housewife."
17. Spacks, Patricia. "'Heart of the Country' a terrifying place." *Boston Globe* 11 April 1968.  
 "In some ways this book, four short stories and a novella, is more compelling than Gass's much-acclaimed first novel, 'Omensetter's Luck.' Unlike many

collections of short stories, it achieves remarkable unity, unity of psychic response. Events here are less important than what they mean to participants and observers; what they mean bears little relation to ordinary judgements. . . . Only the novella, among these tales of obsession and commonplace horror, has a plot in any ordinary sense. What governs and enriches these narratives is the author's feeling for language as form and his profound, almost inarticulate psychological insight. Although his stories are difficult to comprehend, they create a brilliant and fresh evocation of the plight of twentieth-century man, cut off from community, forced to fantasy to create a sense of richness in life."

18. Creed, Dick. "The Beauty Amid Grim Intimations." *Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel* 14 April 1968.  
 "William Gass does with words what Andrew Wyeth does with paint. Gass is a master of nuance in the use of the English sentence. At their most beautiful, his sentences are nevertheless wild and portentous. They say, here is beauty, yes, but here also are intimations of grimness, of doom even. . . . 'In the Heart of the Heart of the Country' is a collection of well crafted pieces. The reading is at the same time light and challenging. It is a new avenue of experimentation and a pleasure to read."
19. Samstag, Nicholas A. "Remote flavors and exotic corners." *Providence Journal* 14 April 1968.  
 "The words of William Gass' America pop and burst in the mouth like so many cardamon seeds. For him, these United States are a land of capsicum and tarragon and all manner of remote flavors; around his countryside are corners as exotic—and frightening—as any cutthroat tribal enclave in any unexplored wilderness, imagined or real. . . . 'Omensetter's Luck' demanded concentration, and rewarded it hugely. The shorter settings of 'In the Heart of the Heart of the Country' ask somewhat less of the reader, but offer up almost as much."
20. Malin, Irving. Review. *Commonweal* 19 April 1968.  
 "William H. Gass is interested in the 'texture' of consciousness. He believes that plot is less important than insightful flashes because it is 'well ordered' and artificial—it is divorced from the way we actually experience 'the heart of the country.' Thus he writes stories which have no fixed point of reference (except the narrator's consciousness). These stories are, in effect, *imagistic essays on the mind* and when they work, they disturb our conventional responses to life and literature . . . the important American novelists from Poe to Flannery O'Connor have dealt with obsessive designs which distort reality—but I think that at his best, Mr. Gass makes us remember these writers. His stories question the relation between consciousness and reality, and they make us wonder about our tense situation in an alien (?) world. They stun us."
21. Review. *Hutchinson News-Herald* [KS] 20 April 1968.  
 "A great deal of Mr. Gass's work has a naturalistic cast and a homey or roughened Middle West atmosphere, yet beneath the close attention to the concrete detail one senses a preoccupation with phenomenological ideas."
22. Bradley, Van Allen. "Books." *Houston Chronicle* 21 April 1968.  
 "Now he has brought us a collection of shorter pieces—two novellas and three short stories—which surely must establish him in the thin front rank of today's fiction writers. Some say he derives from Joyce and Faulkner, but I say,





become luminous with the evidence of a supreme and a metaphysical order. . . . Language itself is the greater part of the action, and the likely logic of the action in Gass's fictions is, indeed, rhetorical: tropes, parodies, vertiginous verbal associations make the movement and the drama. Moreover, the fictions at the outset are provided with great freedom, because everything is grist for the obsession with which they begin—Gass is alternatively furious and fluent, cantankerous and cool: his materials are alternatively high Biblical and low pornographic, and in each instance serviceable to their end."

35. Howard, Richard. "Nothing But the Truth." *New Republic* 18 May 1968. "Nothing is overcome, nothing is effected, even, but much as realized, we are more aware that the utterance might not have been made at all than that it was what had to be: it is sufficient praise for William Gass' virtuosity that he lures across the border of existence conditions and concerns evidently dedicated to their own cancellation."
36. Tarpey, Michael P. "Purdue Professor Depicts Midwest." *Indianapolis Star* 19 May 1968. "Purdue University Prof. William H. Gass is one of the most original storytellers on the American literary front today. The traditional rules of short-story writing are thrown out the window as Gass depicts life in a 'typical' Indiana town in his recently published 'In the Heart of the Heart of the Country.' . . . 'In the Heart of the Heart of the Country' just might establish Gass in the ranks of Hemingway, Faulkner and Joyce."
37. Goolrick, Esten. "Language, Midwest Grip Him." *Roanoke Times* 26 May 1968. "It is clear from this excellent, indeed outstanding, collection of stories that its author has at least two obsessions: a burning love and respect for the English language and its uses, and a passion for the Midwest with all its raw strength and its lusty, sometimes crude, inhabitants. The writing technique could be called experimental, yet it is so firmly controlled and manipulated to the writer's will that it seems, while one is reading, to be the only possible way to say what the author wants to say. Gass seems to have no recognizable forebears. While his stories are not terse and truncated like Hemingway's, neither are they verbose like Faulkner's or blackly humorous like, say, Barthelme's. They are Gass' own, proudly themselves, and a joy to read. Anyone who missed Gass' first book, 'Omensetter's Luck,' as I did, would do well to read it and then this book, and thus get in on the start of a good thing."
38. Review. *Huntington Advertiser* [WV] 26 May 1968. "Now Gass has a new volume containing two novellas and three short stories. They serve as an excellent introduction to him for those who missed 'Omensetter's Luck' although none of them can rank with that work. . . . It's a book to digest, to think about . . . and well worth the discerning reader's time."
39. Review. *Virginia Quarterly Review* Summer 1968. "That astonishingly talented new writer who gave us so finished a first novel as 'Omensetter's Luck' provides fresh evidence of his merits in a book of short stories, each differing sharply with the other in mood and effect. Mr. Gass compels his narrative to serve his purposes as well as illustrate them; he has admirable directness and assurance; his competence is clear cut. He

is an author who can restore faith in the validity of prose fiction as an art for readers almost in despair over the evidence otherwise on display."

40. Ward, Richard. "Exercises By W. Gass." *New Haven Register* 28 July 1968. ". . . if you'll just lean over this way, sir, I'll let you in on something. The three short items and the two long ones are all over-poweringly boring. . . . These aren't really hyper-modern exercises, yet they are not short stories in the usual sense. They read to me like the type of thing that is done in creative writing classes by those with neither the imagination for fiction or the discipline for poetry."
41. Flowers, Charles. Review. *Chattanooga Times* 1 September 1968. ". . . William H. Gass, in his violent and broadening stories set in the American Midwest, can be helpfully described as a kind of Minnesota Faulkner. . . . There are those who will trip out on the flaccid rhythm of the prose here or the versatility of the author's image-manufacture, but substance wears thin throughout the book. Gass is particularly unappealing (in fact, tedious) when disguised as sensitive, middle-aged intellectual—half-Nabokovian, half-demented."
42. Gibson, Teddi. "Harsh Indictment of Midwest 'Heart'." *Cleveland Press* 20 September 1968. "His first novel, 'Omensetter's Luck,' received great acclaim and this edition is certainly a great and worthy encore to that. . . . Together, the stories cannot fail to leave the reader fascinated and unmoved [sic]."
43. Review. *Minneapolis Tribune* 1 December 1968. "In these stories the Midwest has been analyzed with enough perceptivity to make any Midwesterner wonder if he has been deaf, dumb and blind."
44. Peralion, Albert. "Reviews And Reflections." *Greenville Reflector* [NC] 8 December 1968. "His prose is impeccable, but a bit dull. His short pieces in 'Heart of the Country' [sic] are like brilliantly conceived sections of chamber music: to a musician, they are exciting; but to a layman, boring. A writer or a teacher of writing is apt to be dazzled by Gass's 'well made sentences,' but I was a bit numbed by all but the last story, a series of diary-like meanderings about some place in Indiana. . . . I can't recommend this collection of stories as one to curl up with at night for simple pleasure, even though the writing is technically excellent. As *writing* it's interesting, but not absorbing."
45. Review. *Look* 28 December 1968. "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country by William H. Gass is a collection of stories about the ways in which men fall off from humanness, succumb to madness, to obsession or despair. Each man, by the story's end, is swallowed by the world from which he had set himself apart. Gass's stories are fierce, symbolical and sternly compressed; in each, the action yields to a vision of man in the process of disintegrating."

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## MIDWEST REGIONALIST PAINTING AND THE ORIGINS OF POPULAR MIDWESTERN CULTURE

DOUGLAS A. NOVERR

The Midwestern Regionalist painters of the 1930's represent an important chapter in the shaping and articulation of an indigenous Midwestern culture during a time when this region provided a rural center to a country that had been betrayed by the industrial city. The Depression period saw a search for the real America, the America that had been transformed and standardized by the material prosperity of the 1920's but an America which now realized that even the basic necessities of life could not be taken for granted as part of the vaunted American way. This realization came slowly and grudgingly, of course, and not all regions of the country felt the impact of the loss of a standard of living in the same way or to the same degree. The 1930's were a period of self-scrutiny and national self-documentation, and Midwestern Regionalist painting was a part of this visual examination of not only the people but also their circumstances. This documentation often focused on the "forgotten man," but it is clear, even after looking at a limited number of photographs of the period, that the Farm Security Administration photographs were trying to locate the American character underneath the images of poverty, dislocation, confusion, and puzzlement. As photographers, writers, and artists examined the working classes and the common people of America, many of them found more than the material for proletarian writing and polemics. They found or rediscovered the epic story of the national experience: the epic struggle of man against nature and its forces, the frontier tradition of individualism and new beginnings forced on man by setbacks and iron necessity, the commonly shared life of specific communities and locales which had distinctive local, sectional and regional cultures.

America rediscovered its plurality and diversity, but artists found a center in the rural and agrarian Midwest. The breadbasket of the country took on significant cultural meaning when hunger and deprivation were spectres that haunted cities and the exhausted soil of the sharecropping and land tenant South and the Dust Bowl Southwest. For once the Midwest was envied for its stability and even its relative insulation from the fluctuations and uncertainties of urban life. The grainfields, cornfields, truck gardens, and dairy farms represented a certainty when other areas were devastated by floods and drought. Americans began to realize the importance of man's relationship to the land and the country's dependence upon it, especially when all the balances seemed upset and when nature seemed bent on havoc.

The Midwestern Regionalist painters (Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry) caught the spirit of this populism in their own unique ways by forging highly individual styles and modes of expression. Independent of each other, they created a popular art that spoke directly to specific sections of the Midwest, but collectively their art provided a "people's history" told in a strong narrative way. They captured scenes which gave Midwesterners a sense of the national space that they inhabited, but more importantly the artists wanted to involve their spectators directly in the art by providing what Benton called "interior images" which penetrated to the cultural roots and folk patterns of the people's lives. In his *An Artist in America* (1951), Thomas Hart Benton stated:

We [himself, Wood, and Curry] came to our conclusions separately but we ended with similar convictions that we must find our aesthetic values, not in thinking, but in penetrating to the meaning and forms of life as lived. For us this meant, as I have indicated, American life and American life as known and felt by ordinary Americans. We believed that only by our own participation in the reality of American life, and that very definitely included the folk patterns which sparked it and largely directed its assumptions, could we come to forms in which Americans would find an opportunity for genuine spectator participation. This latter, which we were, by the example of history, led to believe was a corollary, and in fact, a proof of real artistic vitality

in a civilization, gave us that public-minded orientation which so offended those who lived above, and believed that art should live above, "vulgar" contacts.<sup>1</sup>

This statement of their philosophy of popularism connects the Regionalists with the earlier New York City Ash Can School realists. Robert Henri, the leader and articulate spokesman for this loosely organized group, had written in 1910:

Art cannot be separated from life. It is the expression of the greatest need of which life is capable, and we value art not because of the skilled product, but because of its revelation of a life's experience. The artists who produce the most satisfactory art are in my mind those who are absorbed in the civilization in which they are living.<sup>2</sup>

Henri had emphasized that art should "express the spirit of the people" and the temperament of the people. Henri and the other realists expanded the subject matter of art to include all economic levels and conditions of society, finding beauty and vitality in tenement districts, in scenes on the East River and Blackwell's Island, on the roofs of tenement houses, and in places where the lower classes congregated for recreation and amusement. Henri also emphasized that it was necessary for people "to understand *what* art is, to understand *why* it is" and to see that imagination in art must affect "every phase of our daily existence." The Ashcan School painters declared their independence from conservative art academies and galleries as well as hostile art critics who condemned the "apostles of ugliness" for debasing and lowering the ideals of art. In Benton, Wood, and Curry the spirit and heritage of urban realism found root in the rural Midwest, and Benton has so forcefully and quarrelsomely noted, the Midwestern Regionalists inevitably found the same hostility from the art critics and academies who condemned them as provincial, sentimental, mawkish, and melodramatic. The Regionalists reasserted the importance of subject matter which was concrete and recognizable, and even more importantly they re-emphasized the representational and documental function (art as mimesis) of an art drawn directly from American life and which is meaningful to those living that life. This indigenous art asserted a faith in the people as the source of genuine American culture. As Benton has stated

in his "American Regionalism: A Personal History of the Movement," "Without faith of some kind there can be no background for art; without a belief in the reality of things there can certainly be no background for a realistic art."<sup>3</sup> The Regionalists were unashamed of their deep attachments to the Midwestern landscape and its culture. They were engaged in the life of their various sections or locales, and they wanted to share their insights and responses with what Benton called "socially intelligible meanings" and "effective representation of cultural ideas." They, like the earlier Ashcan School painters, sought to declare their independence from the borrowed forms and influences of Paris, the veritable explosion of experimentation styles, artistic and aesthetic philosophies which led to a disintegration of visible forms and to more private or subjective statements of artistic expression. Benton bemoaned the "unhappy effects which Armory Show of 1913 had had on American paintings." He saw art turned away from "meaningful subject matter" and "a living world of active men and women into an academic world of empty pattern." The Regionalists wanted, as Benton asserted, to emphasize intuitive insight and to place "a search for the human meaning of one's life at the center of the artistic endeavor." They wanted an art with emotional content and social signification. This is clearly within the Whitmanesque tradition of naming, cataloging, saying, celebrating, and thus revealing. Interestingly enough, this tradition also comes out of journalism, for many of the Ashcan painters had worked as illustrator-reporters for the *Philadelphia Press*. Wood, Curry, and Benton all had experience as illustrators, and of course Curry and Benton were later to use the public mural as a means of social documentation and popular history.

Wood, Curry, and Benton all had some contact with Paris, and they found reasons to reject its influences and to turn to other sources. Wood said that he rebelled against "the sleazy artifices of Impressionism" and came back home to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, because he realized "that all the really good ideas I've ever had came to me when I was milking a cow."<sup>4</sup> Benton, of course, was more deeply indebted to Parisian influences and was for a time part of the experimental vanguard. He returned to Missouri in 1935 and steadily developed an identity as a populist spokesman of the frontier past and individualism. Curry spent only a year

in Paris and upon his return lived in New York City, but he too relocated in his native Midwest, realizing that Kansas and its prairie life formed the core of his identity. Curry found the tactile, visual, and olfactory sensations of farm life to tie him to the earth. He said: "My life was made up of sensations. I used to go out in the garden and pull tomatoe vines to pieces so that I could smell them. I used to go out in the pasture to the mud-holes where the doves had gathered so that I could see them fly up against the sky. . . . I loved the smell of wet dust."<sup>5</sup> All three painters discovered the central importance of their homeland to their identities, and they turned their backs on the art centers of the East to concentrate on the known and felt experience which had shaped their outlook on life and the country.

Once the commitment was made, each artist sought to find a unique personal style to convey "the meaning and forms of life as lived" in Benton's key phrase. During the Depression, as the struggle for survival became sectional, regional, local, and familial, the time was right for folk idealism which would reassert the continuity of American history and reveal folk patterns thus providing identity. It is important to turn to a selected number of paintings by these three Midwestern regionalist painters to see how they expressed their distinctive styles and to show the continuity of their artistic aesthetics. It is important also to note their "public minded orientation" as they sought means of conveying the folk life and shared popular culture of their respective regions.

Grant Wood's "American Gothic" (1930) (Illustration 1) is the best known painting of Midwest Regionalism. The work won an award at a Chicago Art Institute show in 1930, and it was the most popular painting at the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition of 1933. Wood was thirty-eight years old when he painted it, and his career was to be ended only twelve years later when he died of cancer of the liver. The painting provides "interior images" of the lives of this Iowa farm couple by means of authentic detail and careful visual representation. Benton has noted that Wood had a quiet, sly humor, and the humor and satire of this painting are often overlooked. The title of the painting is drawn from the Gothic arched window that graces the upper story of the farmhouse, providing the only variation (except for

the lathe turned support post on the porch) of straight lines that dominate. This is a kind of limited carpenter's Gothic, and the tin roofed barn to the right provides a necessary visual contrast. The rural Gothic farmhouse, with its triangular roof line that joins the two heads, represents the idea of attempting to dress up a rather plain and drab reality. The husband and wife in the foreground, stonefaced and somber, carry out this Gothic theme even more fully. The man has a black Sunday go-to-meeting coat on over his work trousers and work shirt. The pitchfork pattern is repeated in his overalls and even in his face. The only visual fact that offers any variation is the left lapel of his coat, which is turned slightly out. The woman has on an ivory cameo broach which has on it the idealized figure of a woman with a fancy hairdo and perfect side profile. This is contrasted with the actual fact of the woman with her rather broad, elongated neck revealed and her hair pulled back with one strand hanging down to break the lines of her face and head. Her rather plain dress of circles and dots on brown over a black top is broken only by the edging along the top, and the same material is almost repeated in the curtain that can be seen in the Gothic window. The pitchfork, held firmly by the weathered fist, connects the man to his fields and barn, while the plants on the porch of the house (over the woman's shoulder) suggest the domestic life of the woman. Wood's two dimensional compositional technique eliminates the middle ground and forces the house up behind the figures, making only certain of its features visually available. We are forced to look through the figures, who themselves provide a kind of Gothic window on their world.

The painting perhaps suggests a parody of the family photographic portrait or the aristocratic family portrait done by an artist, but in this one there is no artful arrangement, pleasing variations, use of interiors or flattery. This portrait seems quickly arranged, implying that hard working farmers have little time for luxuries or frivolities. Their lives are not greatly varied or luxurious, and the cameo broach and the Gothic window and porch perhaps represent the woman's attempt to provide some degree of fashion to simple, unpretentious lives. The painting suggests their tough and flinty character, and the Gothic here is an element of genial wit and country humor. Wood admires these

people, although he can see some of the humorous contrasts in their lives. Their rigidity suggests strength and tenacity as well as certain strong opinions and cultural values. Wood's satire cuts a number of ways, and it is genial in its touch. This painting obviously speaks to the sobriety, plain living and plain religion, and lack of pretension and affection that rural country folks find characteristic of themselves and their lives.

This painting started Wood's successful career as a Regionalist painter, and he did not equal it in terms of a concise statement of the people who made the Corn Belt what it is. Wood's "Daughters of Revolution" (1932) shows perhaps a sharper satire since it narrows the focus of the picture considerably to suggest the pretensions of these three DAR ladies posed before the famous painting (notoriously inaccurate) of Emanuel Leutze—"Washington Crossing the Delaware." If the women look smugly located in the past, they also look formidable. Wood satirizes them by using a tableau pose upon the tableaux painting, and as E. P. Richardson has noted, the satire may have reflected Wood's disillusionment when the memorial window that had been commissioned from Wood for an American Legion building had been rejected because it was made in Germany.<sup>6</sup> Wood had chosen a Munich factory to fabricate the stained glass window memorial to Iowa veterans of World War I, and as Mary Ann Tighe and Elizabeth E. Lang note in their *Art America* Leutze's monumental painting had been done in Germany and was an elaborate fabrication of historical fact.<sup>7</sup> But the satire here is also inventive and genial. The controversy of the stained glass window was a local one that gave color to Des Moines life. For a local artist like Wood these women were a force to be dealt with, even to suffer a minor setback from. But the DAR was a fact of Midwestern life, and memories of the First World War and the enemy could still become a local issue even thirteen years after the war was over. For Wood, art was a means of human revelation, and although his paintings suggest conservative narrowness and certain cultural pretensions, he painted as one who loved the small town life, much as James Thurber wrote about Columbus, Ohio in *My Life and Hard Times* (1933).

John S. Curry's art has a more epic scope, and sets the farmers of Kansas clearly against the open plains and skies of Kansas. His

paintings suggest the drama of man's struggle against Nature and its particular forces which sweep across the Kansas plains. Benton has noted that Curry's realism "was technically simpler than either mine or Wood's but it was psychologically more complex."<sup>8</sup> Benton characterized Curry's realism as a faithful representation that was exact and direct to its subject and to the visual conditions in which the subject was manifested.

John Steuart Curry's "Baptism in Kansas" (Illustration 2) shows a Baptist immersion baptism taking place in a farmyard, with family of five children and their parents being baptized in the low barrel stave watering trough being used for the occasion. The family, dressed in white, looks on as the mother is about to be pushed down into the water by the minister standing inside the tank with her. She has her arms crossed over her chest and her eyes closed. Around this focal point, the members of the congregation encircle them, singing a hymn to celebrate the solemn and joyful occasion. This group includes about forty people, and around them is a circle of cars and one horse drawn buggy. Another group of three men, not directly involved, watch from a distance at the front of the barn.

Curry's depiction of this common event in the rural countryside is strong and evocative. The circumstances are common and ordinary, taking place under the open sky. But the visual imagery suggest how baptism and local church membership form the Christian bonds of the Kansas community. The minister and the woman about to be immersed form a strong triangle inside the circle, and Curry effectively shows the contrast of the force of the minister preparing to immerse the woman and her private moment of joyous anticipation and relaxed posture as she submits to the symbolic ducking. The heads of her family incline toward her, and their faces reflect a personal involvement. Above the heads of the minister and the woman the pyramidal windmill pushes into the sky, and connects visually with the two doves whirling in the sky overhead. The cloud over the sun is tinged with bright sunshine, and the sky promises warmth and brilliance. The doves, of course, can be seen as folk symbols of the Holy Spirit and the sunshine as that of grace and God's approving presence. Curry shows the simple beauty of baptism and its significance to the spiritual and social life of a local congregation.

The act of professing faith and witnessing is central to the rural Northern Baptist faith, and the simplicity and strength of this belief are conveyed. This painting is one of the most sensitive and understanding treatments of religion in American life. It suggests further the way that rural life is centered around such church occasions, as the miracle of faith takes place in common circumstances and indeed draws its inspiration from simplicity. As urban America became more secular and materialistic in the 1920's, rural America resisted the temptations of modernism and found strength in the Baptist and Methodist faith.

In "Line Storm" (a lithograph) Curry shows an approaching ominous thunderhead which arches across the sky almost covering the horizon. Inside the thunderhead two bolts of lightning zig-zag to the earth, and one has the feel of the dropping temperature and the rumbling, booming noise of the thunderhead as it encroaches and pushes down on the land. The power of the line storm is increased by the visual perception of the plains as they stretch to the horizon. In the foreground a loaded wagon of hay struggles against time and space to reach the safety of a barn, with the farmers perched on top of it. This is a rural drama, filled with tension and excitement. The scale is epic, and the efforts of the farmers who have struggled long and hard for a crop are threatened even at the moment of harvest. Wood's paintings lack this dynamic tension and scope, and here Curry shows how Midwestern cultural roots are shaped by natural forces that man confronts and against which he succeeds and fails. Curry shows us that rural farm life has its dramatic moments of testing and survival. E. P. Richardson has said that Curry saw Kansas in a melodramatic way and that he became popular because of his sincerity and love for the prairie lands.<sup>9</sup> Curry's paintings are melodramatic, but he spoke deeply for those who lived in the prairie Midwest. Curry conveyed three essential elements of the Midwestern folk experience: a. a wariness about Nature which reflects a Biblical attitude that Nature reflects God's wrath and that Nature has the upper hand of man (the Baptist and Methodist influence); b. a sense of cautiousness and even wariness about material prosperity since it can all be lost quickly; c. an acceptance that man is hardened by the struggle with Nature but in this conflict gains character and strength that no city experience could

provide. If this is provincialism, then rural Midwesterners have always seen it as a strength of character gained by exposure to natural forces and experience. Curry found a way of popularizing and dramatizing common assumptions about the Midwestern plains experience.

Thomas Hart Benton started out, after his brief career as an abstractionist, as a muralist, doing murals in the library of the New School for Social Research in New York City in 1930 and the Indiana State Building at the Chicago World's Fair of 1932. Benton has stated that he "was after a picture of America in its entirety" and that he did not confine his work to rural subjects and themes. His murals had a decidedly socialist theme and approach. Benton has stated:

I wanted to show that the peoples' behaviors, their action on the opening land, was the primary reality of American life. . . . This socialist theory treated "operations" and "processes" as more fundamental than "ideas." It also maintained the theoretical supremacy of the "people. . . ." I would go in my history from the frontiers, where the people controlled operations, to the labor lines of the machine age, where they decidedly did not.<sup>10</sup>

Benton's "Boomtown" (1928), painted after Benton visited Texas, depicts a violent town of roustabouts and prostitutes set in the middle of the open Texas land nearby oil derricks and riggings. The town has been hastily thrown together, and behind the store fronts and block buildings one can see the early shacks clustered around the derricks. We see only the men's rooming house on the corner, the movie theatre, two or three indistinguishable stores, and a hotel. There is violence in the streets, and people walk or advance in menacing ways. One feels the new violence that comes from boredom and the need for release from hard work. The town lacks settled and civilized institutions. It is a modern twenties version of a lawless Western town from the Old West with the horses replaced by jalopies which crowd the streets. Benton shows the true meaning of the frontier town experience, now mechanized, the oil fields providing the fuel for a society surging with human and mechanical energy. Benton's dynamic tension comes in part from his practice of fashioning a miniature

stage set for each painting and modeling figures made of soft clay which would be drawn out into their proportions. People push against the landscape, or the landscape surges around them showing the dynamism that Benton sees as the principle of all phenomena. Like the modernists that he rejected, Benton sought to convey the inner dynamics of experience, but he kept the recognizable, verifiable subject matter. He suggested the "turmoil of America by setting up a turmoil of rhythmic sequences."

In "Arts of the West," a mural done in 1932, Benton represented his action in several dynamic ways, emphasizing the individualism of the western experience and the competition that was a part of its games. He uses a wooden stage running from right to left and across the top to indicate indoor pursuits, and the strong pyramid organization of the groups compresses their energy or physicality. In the painting we see the essential loneliness of individuals, the energy of their self expression even at play, and the way that simple pursuits determine a folk culture. We also see a society of men, passing time with men except for the dancers, which visually present a kind of masculine assertiveness. The sexual violence of the stallion on the right carries out this theme of vitalism further. Benton juxtaposes his scenes, letting the muscular arms of the men provide the unifying symbol of hands and muscles that transform the wild land. This sinewy strength and the way that individual faces are self absorbed convey essential cultural traits. As Matthew Baigell has noted, Benton's style has the look of a rotogravure section of a newspaper, but one can also see the influence of folk music and folk legends and myths which inform the art.<sup>11</sup>

Benton showed that the central fact of the Midwestern experience was the action of the people on the land and that the frontier experience repeated itself in endless variations. For Benton, the westering experience had never passed fully West. He admired those people who still struggled with the land and found their folk identity in this struggle. The "Ozark hillbilly," as Benton referred to himself, sought to present a national vision, a picture of America in the 1930's which struggled against fate and paralysis.

Benton, Wood, and Curry all sought a "grass roots" art which spoke directly to the people. In the rural Midwest they found the

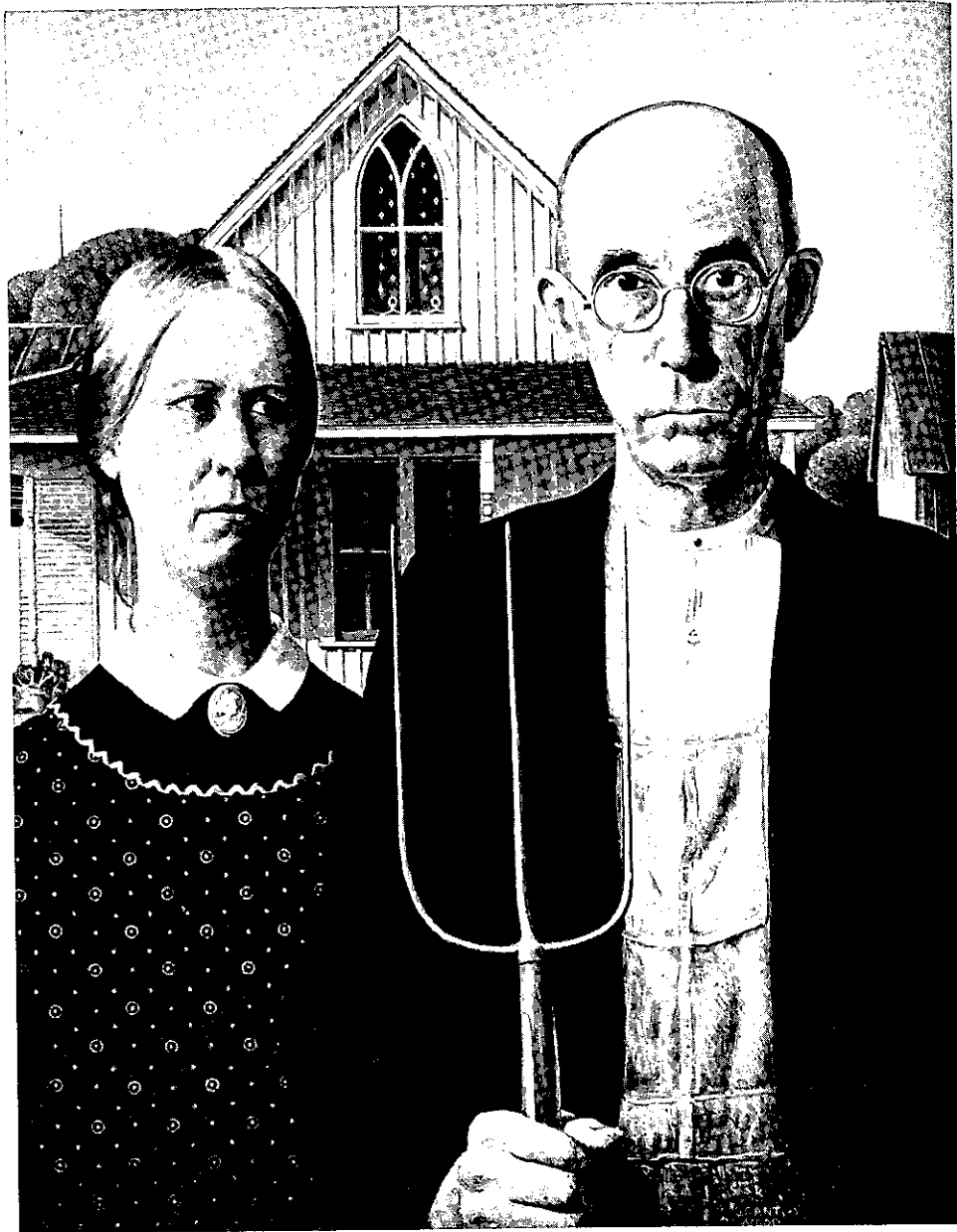
subject matter that determined the style, and they each developed unique "interior images" which found folk cultures and patterns still viable. Benton noted that their popularism was undercut by the international problems and the reversal of sentiment that now termed the Regionalists as provincials and chauvinists. He mentioned that Wood told him in 1942, when Wood was dying of cancer, that he [Wood] was going to change his identity, go where nobody knew him, and start all over again with a new style of painting. Curry confided to Benton in 1946 that he wondered about his own talent and thus he wondered if his odyssey from the Kansas farm to the University of Wisconsin had been worth it all.<sup>12</sup> Benton responded by strident defenses of his group and their aesthetics. He forcefully asserted that art must have social purpose and must be expressive of national and regional character. The vitality of their vision, its direct and immediate communication, and its attempt to "penetrate to the meaning and forms of life as lived" (in Benton's phrase) should be rescued from the often disparaging way that they have been treated by American art historians.

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#### NOTES

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3. Thomas Hart Benton, "American Regionalism: A Personal History of the Movement" in *An American Art: A Professional and Technical Autobiography* (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1969), p. 191.
4. Grant Wood, quoted in *The Vincent Price Treasury of American Art* (Waukesha, Wisconsin: Country Beautiful Corporation, 1972), p. 228.
5. John Steuart Curry, quoted in *The Vincent Price Treasury of American Art* (Waukesha, Wisconsin: Country Beautiful Corporation, 1972), p. 235.
6. E. P. Richardson, *A Short History of American Painting: The Story of 450 Years* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1963), p. 295.
7. Mary Ann Tighe and Elizabeth Ewing Lang, *Art America* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977), p. 235.
8. Thomas Hart Benton, "American Regionalism: A Personal History of the Movement" in *An American in Art*, p. 153.





Grant Wood. *American Gothic*. (1930).  
Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.



John Steuart Curry. *Baptism in Kansas*. (1928).  
Oil on canvas. 40 x 50 inches. Collection of  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



9. E. P. Richardson, *A Short History of American Painting*, p. 295.
10. Thomas Hart Benton, "American Regionalism: A Personal History of the Movement" in *An American in Art*, p. 149.
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## ANNUAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MIDWESTERN LITERATURE: 1978

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This bibliography includes primary and secondary sources of Midwestern literary genres published in 1978. Criteria for inclusion of authors are birth or residence in the Midwest; and novels are added if it is determined that the setting is a Midwestern locale.

Citations for poetry, novels, short stories, etc.—as well as critical articles about them—should be sent to this bibliography's editors: Robert Beasecker, Grand Valley State Colleges Library, Allendale, Michigan 49401, and for computerized literature searches, Donald Pady, Iowa State University Library, Ames, Iowa 50011. The editors and the bibliographic committee continually seek names and addresses of living Midwestern writers and poets, and readers are encouraged to submit names of individuals whose works could appear in future editions of this bibliography. Persons interested in becoming members of the bibliographic committee should address queries to the editors.

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New periodicals are listed here which first appeared in 1978 and in some way relate to Midwestern literature, either by content or locale. Descriptive notes follow each entry.

*El Nahuatzen*. Vol. 1—(Fall 1978- ), 2 issues per year, \$6 per year. Lowell Jaeger and Terry Neil, editors; P.O. Box 2134, Iowa City, Iowa 52244.

*A Little Magazine with "emphasis on poetry by Chicano and American Indian poets and on quality writing by anyone."*

*Ozark Review*. Vol. 1—(Spring 1978- ), 2 issues per year, \$2 per year. Steve Wiegenstein, editor; P.O. Box 384, Piedmont, Missouri 63957.

*A Little Magazine which publishes poetry and fiction; most contributors are from Missouri.*

*par rapport: a journal of the humanities*. Vol. 1—(Winter 1978- ), 2 issues per year, \$6 per year. Douglas Bolling, editor; Literature Department, Southwest State University, Marshall, Minnesota 56258.

A literary review containing essays, criticism, poetry, fiction; the journal believes that "the humanities should become more aggressive, seek to engage those who oppose their values and their existence, and reach out to all areas of their culture."

*Pikestaff Forum*. No. 1—(Spring 1978- ), Irregular, \$5 for 6 issues. James R. Scrimgeour and Robert D. Sutherland, editors; P.O. Box 127, Normal, Illinois 61761.

*Little Magazine*. Poetry, fiction, essays, reviews; "good writing communicates intense, basic human experience which is conducive of change and growth." Contributors not limited to Midwest.

*Quindaro*. No. 1—(May 1978- ), 4 issues per year, \$5 per year. Fred Whitehead, editor; Box 5224, Kansas City, Kansas 66119.

Poetry, reviews and essays make up this *Little Magazine*. Contributors not limited to Midwest.

*Sing Heavenly Muse! Women's Poetry and Prose*. Vol. 1—(April 1978- ), 2 issues per year, \$6 per year. Sue Ann Martinson, editor; P.O. Box 14027, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414.

*Little Magazine*. Poetry, fiction, essays; "a place for women writers to publish their writing and a plexus for women's ideas, feelings, and perceptions." Many contributors are from Minnesota and the Midwest.

*Tellus*. No. 1—(1978- ), 2 issues per year, \$2.50 per year. Stephen Bunch, editor; 1005 Rhode Island, Lawrence, Kansas 66044.

*Little Magazine*. Poetry and fiction; authorship and distribution almost entirely Midwestern.

*White Walls; a Magazine of Writings by Artists*. Vol. 1—(March 1978- ); 2 issues per year, \$4 per year. Buzz Spector and Reagen Upshaw, editors; Box 8204, Chicago, Illinois 60680.

*Little Magazine*. Poetry, fiction, essays; "An experiment in synthesizing word-related interests of artists and poets." Contributors not limited to Midwest.

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