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In Honor of
DONALD PADY
AND
ROBERT BEASECKER

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PREFACE

MidAmerica begins its second decade with a remarkable collection of essays that, together, provide further insight into the unfolding Midwestern myth. At the same time the essays individually define different dimensions of the Midwestern reality as it is transmuted into fiction or verse by writers who have given much of the substance and direction to American literature in our time.

Both myth and reality, the essays make clear, grow out of a region and a tradition forever in transition and—in spite of the pessimistic pronouncements of Dan Rather, Mike Wallace, the Editors of *Time*, and other media myopiacs—forever new. In the essays, as in the works they explore, the Midwest appears in all its wondrous diversity: the cities, the towns, the countryside, the cornfields, the smokestacks, the people, as varied as any under the sun, the three generations of transition from wilderness to heartland and the century of political, social, and cultural domination that sees increasing numbers of Midwesterners in The White House and the Great Hall of the Swedish Academy.

The second decade of *MidAmerica* and of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature will see further explorations of the Midwest, its myth, its reality, its culture, in the literature of a tradition at once firmly established and continuing to grow. Thus it is fitting that *MidAmerica* XI be inscribed to two members of the Society whose work provides the record of the continuing Midwestern literary tradition: Donald Pady and Robert Beasecker, distinguished bibliographers and recipients of the Mid-America Award for 1984.

DAVID D. ANDERSON

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BEYOND BRUTALITY: FORGING MIDWESTERN URBAN-INDUSTRIAL MYTHOLOGY

PHILIP A. GREASLEY

Early Midwestern literature speaks with many voices. Reports of visionary social experiments, romantic adventure stories and exploration narratives all appear. With time and settlement, however, one Midwestern theme becomes dominant—the brutality of everyday agrarian life. The literary protagonists of this period are no longer explorers. They are farmers, herdsmen, and storekeepers. No longer are privations acceptable, short-lived inconveniences in service of imminent reward and fulfillment in the new American Eden.

Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* is characteristic of the period, with its thesis that the Midwestern road of life consists mainly of "toil and deprivation" and "silent [unavailing] heroism."¹ Grant McLane, a Garland character, endites the narrow, brutal, life-denying toil on the land, saying, "A man like me . . . is helpless . . . Just like a fly in a pan of molasses. There ain't ainy escape for him. The more he tears around, the more liable he is to rip his legs off."² With views of rural life such as these, the mercantile cities are dreamed of from afar as havens from the unremitting brutality of life on the land.

Within ten to fifteen years after Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* present equally stark views of industrial, not mercantile, city life, and they assert brutality as the cornerstone of turn-of-the-century urban Midwestern life and literature.

Brutality reigns in early twentieth century Midwestern cities for many reasons, some obvious, others more elusive. The changes

occurring in Midwestern life at this time go beyond the obvious transition from rural to urban, agrarian to industrial life. The changes are so profound and pervasive as to cut across society and to seriously threaten individual perception of identity, purpose, and relation to society. Massive social and economical shifts enter, producing a generation of middle Americans more cut off from themselves, their culture, and their God than any earlier Midwestern generation. This prevalence of confusion and alienation amid brutally destructive surroundings makes essential the emergence of a radically new vision of humanity and a new strategy for successful existence.

The poetry of Carl Sandburg and Sherwood Anderson is a conscious effort to fill this need. These authors weigh the meanings and purposes of Midwestern life and seek to replace no longer functional myths or perceptual frameworks. They try to comprehensively redefine the meaning and value of existence for Midwestern industrial life.

Nineteenth century life orientations—adherence to Christianity and Christian concepts of justice, fatalistic acceptance of events, social structures which enhance collective modes of action and identification, a sense of stasis as the norm in life, relatively low social stratification, and ideals of craftsmanship and fair price—function in rural Mid-America near the turn of the century. Together they control action and desire, allocate resources, and protect individuals in ways which go far beyond any strictly religious context. Together, too, they constitute the mythos, or pattern, for Midwestern life.

Imagine then the shock that Midwestern farmers imbued with these values feel upon becoming caught up in the alien urban-industrial milieu of Chicago in the early twentieth century. Sherwood Anderson's "Godliness,"³ is an excellent exemplar of the psychological and social dislocations which occur in this context. Christian life models provide no insights for coping with the new life. Aggressive, selfseeking scoundrels act openly and regularly defeat individuals tethered to moral scruples. Collective identity and loyalty, too, are undercut in the vast, anonymous cities, where *individual* identity is demanded for economic, not moral, reasons. Change is the norm. Progress, not heaven, is called upon as the

last hope of the defeated. The human form, which had loomed so large in the plowed field, now appears insignificant among mushrooming skyscrapers of steel and stone.

With this massive diminution in relative human scale, traditional identity, values, and goals are seriously threatened. Many Midwestern authors assert the absence of free will, and the climate of opinion swings to allow previously tabooed actions and attitudes. Finally, in the twentieth-century industrial city, social stratification is vastly increased, and concepts of quality and fair price give way to *laissez faire*, sweat shops, and "business ethics." Only the American Dream, the myth of progress and inevitable advancement, gives solace to newcomers low on the economic ladder.

Based upon these changes in Midwestern life and thought, Mid-America needed more than an urban-industrial literature at the outset of the twentieth century. It needed a new conceptual framework, a mythos or life pattern, within which individual acts and experiences could be put into perspective: a new basis for identity, values, purpose, and, most of all, hope.

Sandburg and Anderson attempt this myth for Midwestern humanity. Their success, particularly that of Carl Sandburg, is hard to overestimate. The mid-twentieth century vision of life is profoundly colored by the mythos which his poems erect. Later in the twentieth century, however, as confidence in progress and technology wanes, Sherwood Anderson's more pessimistic, tradition-based formulation increases its appeal.

In order to entertain the thesis that Sandburg and Anderson actively attempt to build new myths for Midwestern life, we must first ask specifically what a mythic orientation implies and, consequently, what service a myth must provide to gain general acceptance.

Most essentially, a myth, or perceptual life framework, must make sense of societal experiences, creating a perception of order and purpose from the chaos of day-to-day life. To achieve acceptance, a myth must account for events better than competing life orientations.

A myth must also assert purpose. It must infold negative events and chaotic circumstances into a larger, ordered, positive

structure, giving even the least advantaged a sense that they, too, have importance and dignity, that wrongs done them will be redressed, and that they have valid bases for hope and aspiration.

A myth then must assert (or create) values strong enough to justify individual action and sacrifice. It must identify right and wrong. It must be willing and able to confront directly society's deepest, most intense horrors and to transmute brutality, suffering, and loss into integral components of a larger, redeeming order.

Myth, finally, must assert continuity within change, present itself with an authoritative voice, and embody its central tenets in sacramental symbols to which members of the society can both relate and aspire.

Both Sandburg and Anderson strive to write social poetry which meets all components of this definition. In the process, both authors consciously attempt to influence societal perceptions and values in urban-industrial twentieth century Mid-America. Both try to carry Midwestern humankind beyond brutality.

Sandburg's mythos rejects the exploitation of proletarian humanity by greed and works to counter their apparent dwarfing into insignificance by the unprecedented size and power of the emergent industrial city. Many Sandburg poems look deep into the ugliness of modern urban-industrial life. They recognize and admit the city's catastrophic effect on its laboring population.

Characteristically, however, Sandburg confronts and ultimately transmutes the horror of modern industrial life. He asserts in the process a basis for optimism even for the laboring class. His most basic argument for hope is contained in a series of worker portraits, like "Fish Crier," "Ice Handler," "Shovel Man," "Picnic Boat," "Happiness," and "Onion Days." These poems exhibit the common people's attunement to life and joy despite poverty, exploitation, and degradation. In "Happiness," for example, Sandburg tells us

I asked professors who teach the meaning of life to tell me
what is happiness.
And I went to famous executives who boss the work of
thousands of men.
They all shook their heads and gave me a smile as though
I was trying to fool with them.

And then one Sunday I wandered out along the Desplaines
river
And I saw a crowd of Hungarians under the trees with their
women and children and a keg of beer and an accordian.⁴

Pride in craftsmanship offers Sandburg's second basis for proletarian optimism. In "Fellow Citizens" Sandburg describes a guitar-maker as

a man with his jaw wrapped for a bad toothache,

.....
... a maker of accordions and guitars and not only makes
them from start to finish, but plays them after he makes
them.

And he had a guitar of mahogany with a walnut bottom he
offered for seven dollars and a half if I wanted it,
And another just like it, only smaller, for six dollars, though
he never mentioned the price till I asked him,
And he stated the price in a sorry way, as though the music
and the make of an instrument count for a million times
more than the price in money.

I thought he had a real soul and knew a lot about God.
There was light in his eyes of one who has conquered sor-
row in so far as sorrow is conquerable or worth conquering.
(23)

Most important, Sandburg reasserts the importance of proletarian humanity. In *Good Morning, America*, the title poem asks,

Who made the skyscrapers?
Man made 'em, the little two-legged joker, Man.
Out of his head.....

.....
Now the head of a man, his eyes, are facts.
He sees in his head, as in looking-glasses,
A cathedral, ship, bridge, railroad—a skyscraper—
And the plans are drawn, the blueprints fixed,
The design and the line, the shape written clear.
So fact moves from fact to fact, weaves, intersects.

.....
Then come pain and death, lifting and groaning,
And a crying out loud, between paydays.
Then . . . the job stands up, the joined stresses of facts,
The cathedral, ship, bridge, railroad—the skyscraper—
Speaks a living hello to the open sky. (320-322)

No longer then is the proletarian individual an unimportant exile. Instead, Sandburg places him or her at the center—as dreamer, architect, builder. Proper human scale is, thus, reasserted.

This mythic presentation is equally graphic in portraying the sources of evil—greed, indifference to suffering, hypocrisy, and official corruption. Sandburg admits the force of these plagues on the people. Even here, however, he repeatedly asserts a contrasting vision and a basis for hope. In "Fences," a poem about a wealthy north shore estate surrounded by fences to keep out the disadvantaged, the poet closes, saying, "Passing through the bars and over the steel points will go nothing except Death and the Rain and Tomorrow." (16) He recognizes the inevitability as well as the morality of ultimate rule by the proletariat.

A similar note is struck in "I Am The People, The Mob." The poem ends with

When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People,
use the lessons of yesterday and no longer forget who robbed
me last year, who played me for a fool—then there will be
no speaker in all the world say the name: "The People,"
with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or any far-off smile of
derision. The mob—the crowd—the mass—will arrive then.
(71)

In this time of unprecedented change and lost identity, Sandburg asserts continuity based on unchanging human nature and incessant trial and tribulation. Sandburg presents human epic credentials throughout *The People, Yes*. From the world's beginning to its end, the refrain continues unabated: "Where to now? What next?" (439) And always there is toil—and pain—and needless suffering—and common people playing off two eternities with their unchanging effort, imagination, endurance, and humor. In the guise of a "Chicago Poet," Sandburg maintains

I am credulous about the destiny of man,
and I believe more than I can ever prove
of the future of the human race . . . (464-465)

Individual aspiration and collective action are the legs upon which Sandburg's mythos stands.

In creating this myth for urban-industrial man, Sandburg assumes an orphic voice. His visions cross time and space, offering

a Genesis-like narrative of humanity from beginning to end. The poet strengthens the oracular tone by repeatedly paralleling his vision with Christian and classical myth.

Finally, Sandburg embodies the most central tenets of his world view in symbols appropriate to the age. His ultimate symbol is the skyscraper, the symbol of accomplishment and aspiration to twentieth century America, just as the Virgin and Chartres Cathedral were to thirteenth century Europe. Sandburg is careful not to allow his symbol to remain distant and inhuman. Instead, he equates the soul of the skyscraper with the dreams and lives of its builders and laborers. Later, in *Smoke and Steel*, he maintains

A bar of steel—it is only
Smoke at the heart of it, smoke and the blood of a man

And the bar of steel is a gun, a wheel, a nail, a shovel,
A rudder under the sea, a steering-gear in the sky;
And always dark in the heart and through it,
Smoke and the blood of a man. (152)

Finally, in "Prayers of Steel," human strength, endurance, and religious aspiration become one with the city. In Sandburg's prayer of modern humanity, he whispers,

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.
Let me pry loose old walls.
Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.
Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.
Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.
Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue
nights into white stars. (109-110)

Sandburg's mythic vision coincides at many points with Horatio Alger's American Dream. Nevertheless, Sandburg's vision is able to encompass horror, pain, and continuing failure in a way which other popular perceptual frameworks of the time cannot. Furthermore, Sandburg's vision humanizes the industrial city, re-

stores proper scale and primacy to the common people, and gives them a basis for pride in their strength, endurance, and creative imagination. His mythos of urban-industrial life quickly becomes dominant and constitutes much of the Midwestern mid-century urban sense of place.

Sherwood Anderson's mythos of twentieth century Mid-America is much different. In *Mid-American Chants*⁵ Anderson's writing is less effective as poetry and as a vehicle for spreading his views of modern life, largely because of the difficulty and the more private nature of his writing.

In the Foreword to *Mid-American Chants*, Anderson speaks of "expressing the hunger within," (8) the personal pain and confusion Anderson feels at the abrupt changes in Mid-American life. His writing, especially in poems like "The Beam," (46) is surreal, freed from all restraints of logic and continuity. Anderson's writing in *Mid-American Chants* greatly extends his prose technique of writing to portray the emotional tone rather than dry, lifeless facts. The *Chants* expresses the continuing dilemma which Anderson confronts throughout his mature life—resolving the conflicting claims of small Midwestern towns and large cities. Early on, he flees the constraints of the towns for the freedom and excitement of the cities. Later, he abandons the chaos, ugliness, and pressure of the cities for the personal roots, values, and identity of small town America. With *Mid-American Chants* Anderson gives an early indication of the direction in which his future sympathies will lie—with a return to the land and the values of the past.

Indeed, through the *Chants* Anderson asserts the positive values of the Midwestern past. He says,

When I was a boy in my village here in the West, I always knew all the old men. How sweet they were—quite Biblical too—makers of wagons and harness and plows—sailors and soldiers and pioneers. We got Walt and Abraham out of that lot.

Then a change came.

.....
It crushed things down and down. (4)

Anderson believes that the curse of modern life is not greed or corruption but excessive change, which destroys the social fabric. The old order offers, he feels, purpose, identity, wisdom, and fertility. On the other hand, the new industrial order means cultural chaos and the loss of continuity, identity, and even beauty. Anderson believes in a coherent cultural perspective, which he associates with song,

belongs with and has its birth in the memory of older things than we know. In the beaten paths of life, when many generations of men have walked the streets of a city or wandered at night in the hills of an old land, the singer arises. (7)

Furthermore, Anderson sees no virtue in undirected industry and technology. If these new forces are to serve society, they must be leavened by the values and virtues of the past.

Collectivity is an extremely important attribute of the past, Anderson believes. He, like Sandburg, maintains that group identity and action are essential to any regenerated industrial age.

Anderson cloaks his pattern for twentieth century life in the most mythic terms possible. He consistently refers to Christian myth, alluding to Biblical stories like the purification of Isaiah with a burning coal, the temptation of Christ coming out of the wilderness, and the fear of the apostles gathered in the upper room before pentecost. Even in asserting his Midwesternness, he reverts to Biblical phraseology, saying,

I am of the West, the long West of the sunsets. I am of the deep fields where the corn grows. The sweat of apples is in me. I am the beginning of things and the end of things. (14)

The ultimate import of these Christian parallels is that the mythic singer, the carrier of the new gospel, must be tested and purified prior to proclaiming the redemptive message. And even then, Anderson asserts, "I do not believe that we people of midwestern America, immersed as we are in affairs, hurried and harried through life by the terrible engine—industrialism—have come to the time of song." (7) To achieve such a redemptive order, we must effectively integrate the wisdom and values of the

past with the technologies of the future. Until then, "We but mutter and feel our way toward the promise of song." (8)

Anderson adds to the mythic tone with allusions to classical mythology. A sphinx-like presence, for example, points the way toward social redemption through reintegration with the land. We hear,

Back of your grim city . . . the long flat fields.
Corn that stands up in orderly rows, full of purpose.
.....
I see new beauties in the standing corn,
And dreams of singers yet to come (31)

Repeated allusions to the Eleusian grain mysteries and to the miracle of seed—life coming out of death—reinforce Anderson's commitment to the fertility of the land and the values of the past.

Finally, Anderson echoes Eliot's wasteland images, expressing industrial society's spiritual dessication. Only when America awakens to the values of its past will cultural redemption be possible.

Mid-American Chants, like Sandburg's mythic vision, embodies its most central truths in symbols. For Anderson, these symbols include the long, straight rows of corn and the bridges. The corn clearly refers to traditional land-based values of nineteenth century America and the cultural fertility they offer. The long, straight rows express order amid the cultural anarchy of early twentieth century urban-industrial life. Anderson's bridges suggest modern technology turned to human purposes.

Anderson's last symbol in *Mid-American Chants* is a vision of industrial Chicago nestled among farmland, offering us the possibility of redeeming synthesis if we will but grasp it.

Back of Chicago the open fields—were you ever there?
Trains going from you into the West—
Clouds of dust on the long grey plains.
Long trains go West, too—in the silence
Always the song—
Waiting to sing. (61)

Anderson implies that when connection is made between the agrarian past and the urban-industrial present, our individual and

cultural identity, values, and purpose will be clear and positive. Until then, sterility and brutality will prevail.

Sherwood Anderson's sense of place is clearly different from Carl Sandburg's. Anderson's myth rejects technology as an end in itself. He calls for a return to the values of the past, to cultural continuity and solidarity. Sandburg offers a life orientation based on strength, solidarity, and pride in creation. Both poets react against the prevalence of brutality in society. They write in the hope of transforming their myth into our improved reality. Their visions constitute new, major twentieth century Midwestern value systems.

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NOTES

1. Hamlin Garland, *Main-Travelled Roads* (New York: Harper, 1899), dedication.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
3. In Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1919), pp. 55-109.
4. Carl Sandburg, *Complete Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 10. Subsequent references to poems in this collection will be identified by page numbers in the text of the study.
5. Sherwood Anderson, *Mid-American Chants* (New York: the John Lane Company, 1918). Subsequent references to poems in this work will be identified by page numbers in the text of the study.

WILLA CATHER'S *ONE OF OURS*: A NOVEL OF THE GREAT PLAINS AND THE GREAT WAR

RAYMOND J. WILSON III

In *One of Ours* Willa Cather demonstrates the dangers that result from a people's successful adaptation to a pioneer region, but Cather did not write *One of Ours* as a pioneer novel. In such a novel, environment presents the essential challenge to the characters; as in Cather's *Oh, Pioneers!* and Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth*, a pioneer novel plays itself out against the backdrop of an overwhelming question: "Can the settlers successfully adapt to the new land?" In contrast, *One of Ours* depicts the era immediately after the pioneers have successfully adapted to the Great Plains environment—have done so, with the help of machines, by channeling enormous energy into the practical matter of turning the prairie into farmland. Naturally, the pioneers' first descendants greatly value machines and the trait of adherence to the practical: the tools required for their parents' very survival. This does not mean that all members of the plains society would share the dominant values, but that those who did not would be likely to feel inadequate and to face frustrations. Nor does it mean that all abstract concepts would be in disrepute; patriotism, for example, could lead these people to endorse the ultimate in wastefulness—war.

Cather had no theory that human behavior reduces to a mere function of the social situation in *One of Ours*; the non-mechanical, impractical Erlich family thrives in Lincoln; Gladys Farmer, a woman of similar tastes, manages to live out an uneventful existence in Frankfort, her life being neither tragic nor fulfilled. Even more, we know from *My Antonia*, a novel set partially in the post-pioneer era, that Cather could see positive values in this society.

However, Claude Wheeler, the novel's central character, fails to solve the problem faced by the imaginative individual in a society that in general denies value to imagination. His defeat is made more poignant by contrast with the relative success of the Erlichs and Gladys Farmer in meeting such a challenge. Even more sadly, Claude's failure is not the noble failure of a person who remains true to art and beauty and to impractical friendships, suffering for these values and ultimately dying as an indirect result of resistance against the prevailing psychology. Cather would later evoke such a pattern in *Lucy Gayheart*, but in *One of Ours* Claude fails by compromising those values. He gives up his wish to transfer from a small-minded church college to the more stimulating intellectual community of the State University; he relinquishes his cultured friends in Lincoln to take over practical management of a farm, marries a woman profoundly unsympathetic to his life's aspirations, and finally hurls his entire energy and imagination into war, which Cather pictures as the ultimate smasher of all that is fine and beautiful and sensitive. Claude Wheeler "is terribly afraid of being fooled," says Cather early in *One of Ours*¹ and Claude's tragedy, more subtle than Lucy Gayheart's, is that he was fooled into trying to adopt the overriding values of post-pioneer society—values that favored practicality and machinery. One would not claim that these values are exclusive to the plains region, merely that Cather emphasizes them in *One of Ours*.

Many passages reveal the high value placed on "practicality." For example, when Claude explains that his Lincoln friend Julius Erlich plans to study in Europe to become a professor, Claude's brother Bayliss replies, "What's the matter with him? Does he have poor health?" (79) Such an attitude of casual contempt for anything less immediately functional than farming or running a store helps explain Gladys Farmer's feelings against Bayliss. Gladys believed that all the non-practical things "which might make the world beautiful—love and kindness, leisure and art—were shut up in prison, and that successful men like Bayliss Wheeler held the keys. (134) Gladys, herself, was afraid to go to Omaha for three performances of the Chicago Opera Company because such an "extravagance" would have "aroused a corrective spirit in all her friends, and in the schoolboard as well; they would probably have decided not to give her the little increase

in salary she counted upon having next year." (134-35) Similarly, Claude feared to ask his friend Ernest to have a pleasant lunch with him in the hotel dining room "because he had been so brought up that it would be difficult for him to do this simple thing." (11) Cather stresses that "it was considered extravagant to go to a hotel for dinner," even though, in the Wheeler family, "a new thrasher or a new automobile was ordered without a question." (11)

Although such machinery is presumably "practical," Cather makes clear that the high value placed on it was due more to mindless obsession than to any rationally considered policy:

The farmer raised and took to market things with an intrinsic value; wheat and corn as good as could be grown anywhere in the world, hogs and cattle that were the best of their kind. In return he got manufactured articles of poor quality; showy furniture that went to pieces, carpets and draperies that faded, clothes that made a handsome man look like a clown. Most of his money was paid out for machinery, —and that, too, went to pieces. A steam thrasher didn't last long; a horse outlived three automobiles. (88)

There were also curious exceptions to the rule. That an impartial observer might, for example, consider a patriotic war or a missionary trip to China impractical only stresses the mindlessness of this obsession, for most people in Frankfort did not object to these things. Such inconsistencies actually increased the difficulties for a thinking person who was trying to adapt to this society.

Because Claude did not share the irrationally high valuation placed upon machinery and "the practical," he felt inadequate. "Claude knew, and everybody else knew, seemingly, that there was something wrong with him. He had been unable to conceal his discontent" says the narrator, and repeatedly Claude himself tries to think his problem through. (90) Setting Claude on the steps of the Colorado State House in Denver, Cather's omniscient narrator reveals the youth's discouraged attitude. "What *was* the matter with him, he asked himself entreatingly. He must answer that question before he went home again." (104) He does not succeed, for later at home Claude says, "I've never yet done anything that gave me any satisfaction." (124) "Claude was aware,"

says the narrator, "that his energy, instead of accomplishing something, was spent in resisting unalterable conditions, and in unavailing efforts to subdue his own nature." (90)

Efforts to subdue his own nature constitute Claude's main line of conduct and precipitate his unhappiness. Instead of asserting himself against the idea that a university education is impractical and that farming is the best life in the world, Claude accepted his society's standard of measurement. Claude may not have had much practical choice in taking over the work, but his emotions show that he went beyond a grudging agreement to do the labor: "sometimes in the morning he awoke in a state of panic because he wasn't getting ahead faster" in successfully managing the farm. (69) Claude knew that the people who had land "were slaves to it, and the people who didn't have it were slaves to them." (71) but still: "Day after day he flung himself upon the land and planted it with what was fermenting in him, glad to be so tired at night that he could not think." (69)

Inevitably unsuccessful in his effort to be happy as a farmer, Claude tried again "to subdue his own nature" in his marriage to Enid Royce. Gladys knew Claude was making a mistake. "If he married Enid," thought Gladys, "that would be the end. He would go about strong and heavy, like Mr. Royce; a big machine with the springs broken inside." (135) But Claude insists on the marriage because he believes that marriage to someone his mother referred to as "a good, Christian girl" (149) would finally make him adequate in his own eyes and those of his parents. When he was with Enid "he thought how she was to be the one who would put him right with the world and make him fit into the life about him. He had troubled his mother and disappointed his father. His marriage would be the first natural, dutiful, expected thing he had ever done." (127) After the wedding, when insight comes to Claude, and he inevitably recognizes that marriage has only made him more "a prisoner" (178) than ever, Claude decides "it was better not to think about such things," attempting the same evasion he had tried in the farming episode, and with equal lack of success: "When he could he avoided thinking." (179)

After Enid's departure makes Claude's failure in marriage a permanent fact, and what is worse, a public fact, he makes one

more effort to accommodate himself to his surroundings. This time he acquires his mother's naive attitude toward the war, a course which requires a major change in outlook from his original skepticism. When the Germans moved toward Paris Mrs. Wheeler had been impressed by newspaper accounts of "how the churches are full all day of women praying." She leaned forward and smiled at him indulgently. 'And you believe those prayers will accomplish nothing, son?' (146) Claude's answer shows none of his later naiveté: "Well, you see, I can't forget that the Germans are praying, too. And I guess they are just naturally more pious than the French." (146) Later Claude "smiled to himself" at his mother's simplicity:

His mother, he knew, had always thought of Paris as the wickedest of cities, the capital of a frivolous, wine-drinking, Catholic people, who were responsible for the massacre of St. Bartholomew and for the grinning atheist, Voltaire. . . . he had noticed with amusement her growing solicitude for Paris. (148)

On another occasion when Claude argues how senseless it would be for the United States to enter the war, his mother replies with great intensity: "But we must stand somewhere, morally." Saying "I believe the Bible," Mrs. Wheeler passionately concludes, "If our only alternative is to be at the bottom of the sea, we had better be there!" (197)

Claude's attitude eventually changed, and influencing him were his sense of inadequacy, his desire to fit into society, and the basic situation on the post-pioneer plains. While Mrs. Wheeler's feelings may well have influenced her son, the potential for Claude's shift of attitude lay in his fundamental sense of inadequacy, of being a "farmer boy" with the manners of a "clod." Thinking of the French Army on the Marne, "Claude felt that even he could clear the bar of French 'politeness'—so much more terrifying than German bullets—and slip unnoticed into that outnumbered army. One's manners wouldn't matter on the Marne tonight, the night of the eighth of September, 1914." (148-49) War, in a large sense, is "impractical" as Bayliss' pacifism testifies, but it is one impracticality that most of Claude's society endorsed. By joining the Army and taking up Mrs. Wheeler's naive attitude

toward the war, Claude could please his mother, do something that his father could not ridicule and something at which the neighbors could not laugh; at the same time he could fulfill his feelings that even he could have "to do with the fate of nations, and with the incomprehensible things that were happening in the world." (197) Thus Claude's imaginative yearnings, stifled in everyday life, find room to operate on the fields of France. The prairie pioneers had had dangers to face and a large task to absorb their energies. But successful adaptation had brought security to the next generation, especially in families that owned land, and Claude felt that to "be assured, at his age, of three meals a day and plenty of sleep, was like being assured of a decent burial. Safety, security; if you followed that reasoning out, then the unborn, those who would never be born, were the safest of all; nothing could happen to them." (89) These currents flow together, carry Claude along and, despite his early skepticism, ultimately fool him into believing he can find satisfaction by throwing his energies into the war.²

Because Claude's commitment to the war grows directly from his frustration in Great Plains society, *One of Ours* needs the war episodes to be a fully realized novel.³ Cather based the episodes on a personal tour of the ground she wrote about, as well as on countless interviews with veterans, and on their diaries and letters, including of course those of Cather's young cousin, on whom she based the character of Claude. After the novel's publication, many veterans wrote to tell her how perfectly she had recreated the atmosphere of the war.⁴ The novel appeared not at the height of war frenzy and patriotic fervor for "Making the World Safe for Democracy," but in 1922 during Harding's presidency when "Back to Normalcy" was the prevailing slogan, retroactive taxes had been passed to penalize the "merchants of death," and the United States had refused to enter the League of Nations. The novel's winning the Pulitzer Prize and capturing for Cather her first popular success suggests that the contemporary reader did not view *One of Ours* the way later critics did, as an exercise in blind patriotism.⁵

In fact, Cather was free of Claude's limited vision, and she continually counterpoints her hero's naiveté.⁶ An example occurs when Claude travels to Europe on a ship that is plagued by an outbreak of deadly flu. In the midst of horror, Claude has a won-

derful sense of well-being and virtual immortality, but when the ship arrives in a French harbor, Claude awakens with a thought that in fact reveal his subconscious concern: "He sprang up with a dazed fear that some one had died." (271) Such subtle irony relies on Cather's prior establishment of Claude's unrealistic attitude toward death, for early in the novel Cather stated:

When he thought of the millions of lonely creatures rotting away under ground life seemed nothing but a trap that caught people for one horrible end. There had never been a man so strong or so good that he had escaped. And yet he sometimes felt sure that he, Claude Wheeler, would escape; that he would actually invent some clever shift to save himself from dissolution. (45)

This fits well with the theme of Claude's being "fooled" into trying to adapt to societal and familial expectations, tends to connect the war episodes with those on the Plains, and helps explain Claude's faulty sense of invulnerability.

Further counterpoints occur. Claude's Nebraska friend Ernest provides another example: "Ernest shrugged his shoulders. 'You Americans brag like little boys; you would and you wouldn't! I tell you, nobody's will has anything to do with this [the war]. It is the harvest of all that has been planted.'" (142) And Claude himself thinks, "The invasion of Belgium was contradictory to the German character as he knew it in his friends and neighbours." (143)⁷ Furthermore, while some characters see the war as a noble struggle of the good guys (Americans and French) against the "Huns," the narrator stresses that the people did not see the machines of war in the same light as those of peace:

Even to these quiet wheat-growing people, the siege guns before Liège were a menace; not to their safety or their goods, but to their comfortable, established way of thinking. They introduced the greater-than-man force which afterward repeatedly brought into this war the effect of unforeseeable natural disaster, like tidal waves, earthquakes, or the eruption of volcanoes. (143-44)

This may indicate that they did not see the war as being a result of human decisions about which they should apply their standard maxims of "practical choice." In Claude's case, the narrator juxtaposes Claude's attitude with a distancing comment:

He was still burning with the first ardour of the enlisted man. He believed that he was going abroad with an expeditionary force that would make war without rage, with uncompromising generosity and chivalry. (213)

Cather's key words "still," "first," "believed," subtly indicate that she may not agree with her character. "Most of his friends at camp shared his Quixotic ideas" (213) says the narrator, making clear that Cather feels Claude's ideas are idealistic but in conflict with reality.⁸ Claude's ideas obviously do not fit with his earlier notion of both sides praying and the Germans the more pious. Cather further counterpoints the notion of the crusading American soldier by depicting an average enlisted man who does not share Claude's view:

On the train, coming down, he had talked to the boys about the bad reputation Americans had acquired for slouching all over the place and butting in on things, and had urged them to tread lightly. "But Lieutenant," the kid from Pleasantville had piped up, "isn't this whole Expedition a butt-in? After all, it ain't our war." (292)

Further, when the troops depart from New York harbor and Cather includes some rhetoric about the "ageless" scene of departing youths "making vows to a bronze image in the sea," she also gives us the de-romanticizing counterpoint: "That howling swarm of brown arms and hats and faces looked like nothing but a crowd of American boys going to a football game somewhere" (235).

Claude's friend, Lieutenant Gerhardt, who had been a violinist before the war, provides the strongest counterpoint to Claude's naive, untenable attitudes. When Claude comments that it "seemed too bad" that "fellows with special talent" should be taken, Gerhardt replies:

"Oh, this affair is too big for exceptions; it's universal. If you happened to be born twenty-six years ago, you couldn't escape. If this war didn't kill you in one way, it would in another." (301)

David Gerhardt did not just mean that the war could kill a person by machine-gun bullet, artillery shell, or gas attack; he meant that if it did not kill a person's body it could still kill his artistic sensitivity, destroy his sense of values, or sap his emotional vitality.

Claude admired the French farmers' display of aesthetic simplicity, but, under the influence of David, even Claude began to have doubts about his attitude toward this war:

It was the Wheeler way to dread false happiness, to feel cowardly about being fooled. Since he had come back, Claude had more than once wondered whether he took too much for granted and felt more at home here [in the war zone] than he had any right to feel. (344)

David—and consequently Cather—exists on a level of awareness far above Claude's. Commenting on the abundant rations to be expected at a certain city, David quips, "Headquarters must have something particularly nasty in mind; the infantry is always fed up before a slaughter." (345) In trying to explain to Claude why he, David, will never return to his musical career, David tells the story of how his Stradivarius was "smashed into a thousand pieces" when he was holding the instrument in his knees while riding in a military car that collided with a taxi. (347) David compares the accident to the war which has smashed whatever was beautiful within him that had once enabled him to make lovely music: "I didn't know what it meant then; but since, I've seen so many beautiful old things smashed . . . I've become a fatalist." (347, Cather's elipsis) When later Claude again insists that David will return to his musical career after the war, Gerhardt replies, "Not I," and "he put up his hand; far away the regular pulsation of the big guns sounded through the still night. 'That's all that matters now. It has killed everything else.'" (365) And Claude's question, "You don't believe we are going to get out of this war what we went in for, do you?" brings David's answer: "Absolutely not." Cather further reveals her level of awareness when Gerhardt expands his answer: "The war was put up to our generation. I don't know what for; the sins of our fathers, probably. Certainly not to make the world safe for Democracy, or any rhetoric of that sort." (348)⁹

For his part, Claude admits that he finds the war satisfying; not only is he physically removed from the Great Plains, but the war gives him a chance to suffer hardships and overcome obstacles toward a great end, something permitted the pioneers but until now denied his generation. Here lies the irony of Claude's fate:

he does not suffer exclusively out of loyalty to the gentle values of art, beauty and sensitivity to the non-practical; instead, fooled into whole-heartedly embracing the war, Claude has, to a degree, betrayed those values. *One of Ours* expresses a sense of loss and sorrow at undeveloped potential that characterizes the post-pioneer plains region and perhaps even our whole country, though the novel, of course, comments directly only on its own setting. In either case, Gerhardt's reply hints strongly at Cather's position on the war: "'You'll admit it's a costly way of providing adventure for the young' said David drily." (356)

Claude and David die shortly after this conversation occurs.¹⁰ And immediately after Claude's death, Cather switches the scene to Lovely Creek, Nebraska, where Claude's mother contemplates the situation:

As she read the newspapers, she used to think about the passage of the Red Sea, in the Bible; it seemed as if the flood of meanness and greed had been held back just long enough for the boys to go over, and then swept down and engulfed everything that was left at home. (389)

Cather thus brackets the episode of Claude's death with strong expressions of doubt. Mrs. Wheeler, an unworldly person, realizes that Claude had been fooled by his blind faith in military patriotism.¹¹ Just as he had not found fulfillment in Lincoln, in farming, or in marriage, Claude, had he survived, would have been destined to be disappointed in the war. As in the other attempts, he had convinced himself for a while, but Cather ends the novel with a forceful assertion, in the thoughts of Claude's mother, that disillusionment, "awakening," would have been very likely for Claude. Claude's letters reassure his mother that he died with illusions intact:

She knows what to read into those short flashes of enthusiasm; how fully he must have found his life before he could let himself go so far—he, who was so afraid of being fooled! He died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be . . . She would have dreaded the awakening,—she sometimes even doubts whether he could have borne at all that last, desolating disappointment. (390)

In the literary sense, perhaps Claude's deluded death was inevitable.¹² Even so, Cather stresses its poignancy by a lengthy list of the methods of suicide of the returning war heroes:

When Claude's mother hears of these things, she shudders and presses her hands tight over her breast, as if she had him there. She feels as if God had saved him from some horrible suffering, some horrible end. For as she reads, she thinks those slayers of themselves were all so like him; they were the ones who had hoped extravagantly,—who in order to do what they did had to hope extravagantly, and to believe passionately. And they found they had hoped and believed too much. But one she knew, who could ill bear disillusion . . . safe, safe. (390, Cather's elipsis.)

Willa Cather so vividly depicts the naive patriotism of Claude Wheeler that it forms our dominant impression of the novel, but we cannot completely identify her position with Claude's; the person who created the cynical realism of David Gerhardt could not have had Claude's naiveté.¹³ In fact, the thoughts Cather gives to Claude's mother suggest that Cather's position on the war is closer to David's than to Claude's. David represents everything Claude had been seeking but which he had abandoned in attempting to fit into the society depicted in the novel; David had persistently tried to explain to Claude that war kills such things more surely even than the casual callousness of Claude's Frankfort neighbors. (350) Claude failed to perceive David's truth, maintaining to his death his deluded enthusiasm for the war.¹⁴ Though his death spared him the agony of the "awakening" that almost certainly would have awaited him on his return to Mid-America, it expresses most poignantly the irony of a person who above all wanted not to be fooled.

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NOTES

1. Willa Cather, *One of Ours* (New York: Knopf, 1922; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1971), p. 31. Subsequent references to *One of Ours*, cited in parentheses, are to the Vintage edition.
2. Stanley Cooperman, *World War I and the American Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), pp. 52-53, feels that the war's outbreak from the beginning meant that "the means of escape was at hand" for Claude, an

opportunity hindered only by the fact that the Germans as Claude knew them "were not the sort of people from whom it should have been necessary to save civilization." Thus, "Before the adventure of war could be justified . . . an abstract indictment had to be formulated." Cooperman's analysis differs from that presented here on peripheral matters of timing and emphasis as far as Claude's motivation is concerned; otherwise, Cooperman does not stress that for Cather to write of such a transformation, she must have been aware of both positions—before and after—and thus must have been more sophisticated than Claude; but Cooperman's analysis of Claude's motivation does not necessarily exclude the idea of an author more aware than her character.

3. Cooperman says that "as a study of erotic frustration and virility-through-violence, a violence made possible by a cosmetic surface of idealism and abstraction . . ." *One of Ours* "at least helps us to understand the environment from which the bold journey began," p. 137.
4. Edith Lewis, *Willa Cather Living: A Personal Record* (New York: Knopf, 1953), pp. 122-23. Such testimony conflicts with Ernest Hemingway's claim in *Torrents of Spring* that Cather's battle scenes came directly from the film *Birth of a Nation*, an observation first reported by Edmund Wilson in a review of *One of Ours* appearing in *Vanity Fair*, October, 1922. It may be that Hemingway's comment reveals more about Hemingway's combativeness toward rivals than about *One of Ours*. The testimony of the veterans reported by Lewis also counters Cooperman's claim that *One of Ours* "pictured the experience as something of a cross between the Alamo and Bunker Hill," p. 71. Cather does not shy away from description of gore, filth, and decay of human flesh, and if Claude's reactions to these things are not those of an anti-war novelist, this need not mean that Cather was wrong to have attempted the description of Army scenes.
5. One critic, Maxwell Geismar, *The Last of the Provincials: The American Novel, 1915-1925* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943, rpt. 1947), p. 175, has called *One of Ours* Cather's weakest novel because of the war episodes; also quoted in Marion Marsh Brown and Ruth Crone, *Willa Cather: The Woman and Her Works* (New York: Scribner's, 1970), p. 95, who echo the sentiment. Another critic goes so far as to say "Willa Cather should not have tried to write a war novel," James Woodress, *Willa Cather: Her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 192.
6. According to critics, a false theme of patriotism flaws *One of Ours*; for example, David Daiches says, "In one of its aspects the novel is a mere patriotic exercise, reflecting the one occasion when Miss Cather was deflected by the pressure of contemporary events from the pursuit of her personal vision": David Daiches, *Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1951, rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 57. Such a position implies that Willa Cather was as naive as her character, a rather doubtful proposition.
7. Such counterpoint argues against seeing *One of Ours* as an unsuccessful Cather Plains novel which becomes "structurally broken-backed" with Claude's transfer to the European war setting: Daiches, p. 54.
8. Even Sinclair Lewis, "usually a staunch Cather supporter, said he thought it doubtful the war scenes should have been brought into the book at all; that they did not seem an integral part of it": Brown and Crone, p. 95. But Lewis's comment, and similar ones by Daiches (p. 57), fail to see Claude's behavior

as part of a repeated pattern which helps unify the novel. Joining the Army is Claude's ultimate attempt to win respect from the society which nurtured him.

9. The novel's publication and popular acceptance during a period of reaction against the war suggests that certain critics are wrong when they attribute to Cather a belief in the "war to end wars." Marion Marsh Brown and Ruth Crone say, "It was a romantic story and it idealized war" (p. 94). Likewise, Daiches says that the novel "reflects attitudes of the time that now seem naive or untenable" (p. 54). Brown and Crone excuse the novel's "failure" by saying, "Its author was not alone in idealizing war at the time. 'The war to end war' and 'making the world safe for Democracy' were popular slogans of the day" (p. 94). The quoted passage of Gerhardt's words suggests, however, that both Daiches and Crone confuse the popular tone of 1917-18 (the time of the war episodes in the novel's setting) with 1920-22 (the time of the novel's completion and publication).
10. Daiches is simplistically correct when he labels Claude's death scene "a conventionally heroic episode" (p. 55); however, in view of the novel's consistent theme and the extensive counterpoint that precedes Claude's death, the episode must be seen in the light of widespread revulsion toward the war and a national feeling of having been tricked.
11. We must not sell Evangeline Weaver short: though she was initially naive in her attitude toward the war, and though she believed in her Bible, she was not without an aesthetic sense, for example in her objection to using the word "literature" to describe political pamphlets or flyers on animal disease.
12. David Stouck, *Willa Cather's Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 96, says that "the fact that we are, like Claude's mother, happy that he died at this point is surely the author's greatest indictment of all human society." Although this may be more sweeping a statement than many would accept, it would not seem excessive to speculate that the novel, while specifically reflecting Cather's lack of ease in plains society, has wider (even, perhaps, universal) implications.
13. Without a doubt, World War One was almost unimaginably horrible, but one should not assume that the day-to-day mood of the participants must have been the same revulsion that an anti-war novelist has in viewing the entire, lengthy episode in retrospect. Paul Fussell, *The Great War in Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 181-82, speaks, for example, of the almost universally cheerful tone of letters written home by "other ranks" of the British Army. Fussell then speculates at length on the reasons for this unanimous failure to tell the truth: censorship, prevailing rhetorical conventions, solicitude for those at home. "What possible good could result from telling the truth?" asks Fussell. However, is there not another possibility? Instead of holding solidly the notion that the war experience was unrelentingly depressing to the spirits of the men, and explaining how the millions universally misrepresented this feeling, and denying the term "realistic" to all other depictions, is it not possible that a variety of individuals reacted in a variety of different ways, one of which Cather accurately depicts in *One of Ours*?
14. Cummings, Dos Passos, and Hemingway depicted characters who had their awakenings during the conflict, as does Cather in the person of David Gerhardt. We can agree with Cooperman that the nature of impersonal, mechanized warfare "made 'negation' the only morally conscious reaction possible for

the intelligent or moral man" (p. 213) while still holding that timing can differ from person to person, Cather's Claude taking longer to "awaken" (to become morally conscious in Cooperman's terms) than some other characters, dying before he had had a chance to emerge from his moral unconsciousness. In arguing for the validity of Cather's depiction of Claude, this paper reinforces the closing words of Cooperman's book: "No full perspective on post-World War I literature is possible for a reader who limits himself to Frederick Henry as an antiheroic archetype" (p. 242).

GALENA IN BOOM AND DECLINE:
JANET AYER FAIRBANK'S *THE BRIGHT LAND*

MARY JEAN DEMARR

Born and reared in Chicago of a prominent family, Janet Ayer Fairbank (1878-1951) had a distinguished career as suffragist, political activist, philanthropist, and novelist. She began publishing in 1910, but it was only in 1922 with the publication of *The Cortlandts of Washington Square* that her career as a novelist began. That career continued through 1936, when her final novel, *Rich Man, Poor Man*, was issued. *The Bright Land* (1932) came late, being the penultimate of her novels. It is typical of much of her work in being centered around a strong woman and in making important use of the Midwestern scene. Its treatment of the flowering and decay of a city once important in regional history is sensitive and careful. Structurally, it is more sophisticated than some of her other work, and its symbolic paralleling of the life patterns of her central character with the place to which she comes is particularly effective.

The novel follows the life of Abby-Delight Flagg, daughter of a stern New Englander, who marries in haste, in order to escape her grim and loveless life. The first two (of seven) parts of the novel begin around 1840 and depict her girlhood. Part I, which covers her year away at school and her infatuation with a young theological student, a future missionary, stresses the centrality of church and religious faith in this society. Part II emphasizes the incongruous sexuality of her father, Samuel Flagg, and the suffering and frequent early deaths imposed upon women in his culture by repeated childbearing, as well as the grinding daily labor accepted as women's lot in this joyless world. Part III is transitional, depicting Abby-Delight's elopement with Stephen Blanchard, a

native New Englander who had left in childhood and become thoroughly acclimatized to the Midwest, specifically to Galena, Illinois, where he has become prosperous as an investor in lead mines. Part IV finally brings us to Galena and contrasts the vigorous frontier community with the repressive New England of Abby-Delight's early years. From this point on, the novel has a dual focus on Abby-Delight's personal and family life and on the development and change of Galena. Briefly, the central concerns of the sections which follow are these: IV—adjustment to Galena and to marriage; V—maturity and first strains in the marital relationship; VI—the Civil War and its effect on Abby-Delight's family and on the community; VII—decline, of both family and town, in the aftermath of the War; and, finally, a brief "Epilogue," depicting Abby-Delight as a lonely old widow and Galena as a decaying village.

The latter portions of the novel, then, are set in Illinois and they contrast with New England and the life Abby-Delight had known there. In the opening sections, Fairbank had carefully set up motifs which are useful in establishing contrasts with later sections. The arrival at Galena has been well prepared for. Abby-Delight's preconceptions, of course, influence her first impressions. As an innocent young New Englander, she had been certain that

Boston was one thing, but Galena was another. She was sure there must be Indians in Galena. It was only eight or ten years ago that the Black Hawk War had been fought right in the same State, and a State was a small place. Unquestionably there would be Indians; she only hoped they were fairly peaceable ones. Galena meant pioneering, of course, but she knew about that and did not fear it. She would, doubtless, live in a log cabin and draw water from a well, instead of from a convenient pump like the one at home.¹

She is amazed to discover that her life is actually easier in Galena than it had been in New Hampshire—among other things, she has a pump, one which will draw water up the equivalent of several stories and which is actually located inside the house! Her doting husband, proud of his city, is delighted to give her a house far greater than she could have desired and a life that was luxurious, compared to what her mother and stepmother had known. The Galena she has come to is in some ways like her Eastern imagin-

ings and in other ways very different. Her first reaction to the landscape, as she later realizes, is to a monotony that she cannot understand (a complaint many Midwesterners have heard from outsiders unable to perceive the perhaps too subtle nuances of a flat, undramatic scene):

She had formed no definite conception of what [the prairie] must be like. How could she, who had seen nothing but hills, imagine a flat, endless meadow flooded . . . with cruelly unbroken sunlight? Cornfields, vividly green and fluttering, gave the only variation to the yellow color of long grass blowing in the sun, and windmills, exotic structures to which she was becoming accustomed, furnished the only accents. Men were cultivating the corn, driving oxen which moved so slowly that it seemed they would never reach the far-off end of the row. These people looked so alone and so tiny—so pitifully unimportant out there on the vast floor of the prairie—that they gave the stranger a fiercely protective conviction that something must be done to save them. (234)

Her first view of Galena is little more reassuring. She is pleased to discover that there are hills, palisades as Stephen calls them, and impressed by the crowd of boats at the wharf. But the levee is a "scene of bewildering activity" (237)—the carts, the black dock workers, the noise all are a bit frightening. And the group of Stephen's friends there to greet her is intimidating. Her impressions the night of her arrival center on the confusion and the hills and steep steps so typical of Galena. She soon discovers that there are indeed Indians, but they are few and no longer play a significant part in the life of the area. Much more important are the blacks, some of them destined to play important parts in her life.

The main difficulties faced by Abby-Delight in her adjustment to Stephen and to marriage and Galena are psychological rather than physical. He is an expansive Westerner, and she is a tight-lipped Easterner incapable of showing her feelings. The ironies here are clear: she, who had felt unloved, is now unable to express to the husband who is her life the love she feels for him. And his need for spontaneity is stifled by her need for privacy and stability. Repeatedly, Abby-Delight is made uncomfortable by Stephen's free-spending, his ostentation, and his openness with

others. Equally often, he is frustrated by her apparent lack of emotion. In a rare moment of introspection, Stephen puzzles over his enigmatic wife and worries about their marriage:

He wondered if he would ever fathom how she felt about him, and if she herself understood her own sensations. Her reticence was something he could not cope with. It made her withdraw from spiritual intimacy as a sensitive plant shrinks from a rude touch. The intimacy of the flesh he had, but that deeper companionship of a free interchange of thought evaded him, whether purposely or not he could not have said. (289)

Indeed, it is this very difference between them that almost leads to a breach in their marriage, but ultimately each learns to temper ingrown inclinations, and Stephen learns to value Abby-Delight's stoic, calm courage as she learns to value his openness and ability to express what he feels.

Two themes almost oppressively obvious in the novel's New England sections are markedly absent from the Midwestern part. One of these is that of female death in childbirth. Here on the frontier, it is children who die. When we first meet the Fenwicks, we learn that they have recently lost three children in a cholera epidemic, and Abby-Delight, after bearing a number of children, is later to lose a much wanted baby. But no character dies in childbirth in the Midwestern portions of the novel. Women's lot is easier in this time and place, but life, especially the life of the young and vulnerable, is still fragile.

The other theme noticeable by its absence is the stress on religion, or, more precisely, on the power of an accepted religious attitude and way of life. After Abby-Delight comes to the Midwest, church and religious faith are mentioned hardly at all, although they had been controlling factors in her early life. Of course, this part of the country was settled by people of faith, and missionaries of various sects arrived early (one thinks, within Fairbank's Illinois, of the Yale Band, with their New England Congregationalism, and of Peter Cartwright, the great Methodist Circuit Rider). But in Abby-Delight's Galena such spiritual influences are apparently absent.

Other civilizing forces are, however, present. The southern impact on Galena at first seems warming and softening, and social life is uncomfortably elegant. Lily Jackson, a former New Orleans belle, and Mary Fenwick, a soft Virginia lady, seem to offer much that Abby-Delight can learn from. Through these characters, Abby-Delight is initiated into social complexity and into the value of pleasure as well as into tangled sexual undercurrents. Gradually we discover that Lily, the New Orleanian, is mentally unfaithful to her husband, having long loved Stephen. And Mary, a much more sympathetic character, suffers her own trial when the Civil War comes. She is faithful to her Virginia, although her passionately loved husband casts his lot with the Union. The breach between them is never healed in life; only after his death in battle does Mary finally become a supporter of the Union. The presence of southern sympathizers in General Grant's own home town reminds us that the state of Lincoln and Grant was far from unanimous in its support of the northern cause; the familial civil war of the Fenwicks effectively parallels the larger divisiveness.

Abby-Delight's own intellectual odyssey, moreover, is not easy. Despite her initial shock at discovering that some respectable people actually support slavery, her early New England horror of the institution is softened by her acquaintance with southerners and her acceptance of the theory that blacks were really happy in slavery, that the northern image of the institution was unjust to kindly slave owners in the South. And the reality of the "limply sprawled figures" whom she sees sleeping in the shade near the dock contrasts "amazingly from the intellectual and godly martyrs proclaimed by the Abolitionists." (251) When her sister and brother-in-law visit, she is irritated by their militant abolitionism. But when she learns that a trusted household servant is actually an escaped slave, she impulsively takes great risks—and discovers unexpected reserves of courage—as she helps him to escape up the river to Minnesota and freedom. This moment of independence and courage is her true coming of age.

Galena, then, links New England to the West (as symbolized principally by Abby-Delight's marriage to Stephen) and the North to the South (shown through the presence of southerners and by the strains of Civil War days). These linkages are always uneasy.

Lead mines had been responsible for the city's original prosperity and for Stephen Blanchard's wealth. But by the times that Fairbank portrays, the lead mines are past their prime, and the future is with the river, an appropriate symbol for Galena's function as joiner of sections at a pivotal moment in time. Thus Stephen is pleased to discover some new immigrants, "Cousin Jacks" (Cornishmen) who have special skills enabling them to recover lead from old mines thought worked out. But when the novel ends, he has had to accept the elopement of his daughter with the son of a Cornishman and their flight to the West, where there are different ore fields to be worked. His own business interests change: from an entrepreneur in mines, he becomes an investor in river boats. And even the river-based prosperity is gone by the novel's end, killed by competition from the railroads; symbolically the death of Amos, the Blanchards' deeply loved son, in a steamboat explosion, signifies the end of that era.

One of the fictional devices that Fairbank uses most effectively to dramatize the differences between New England and the Midwest as well as changes through time is that of the paralleling of characters. There are the two elopements—Abby-Delight's, from the repression of her New England home to a freer life in the Midwest, and, years later, her daughter's, from a civilized, middle-class life in Galena to the West with the son of a Cousin Jack formerly employed by her father. Stephen and Abby-Delight are at first as appalled by Lavinia's flight as Samuel Flagg had been by Abby-Delight's. But they are no more capable of controlling their daughter's life and choices or of changing the direction of history than he had been.

Another important paralleling involves Abby-Delight's loved brother Amos, who had fled New England long before her to reappear briefly, three times, much later. Toward the end of the novel, we learn that he has become a riverboat gambler, a discovery deeply shocking to Abby-Delight—for both its social and its moral implications. The brother and sister tacitly agree not to see each other again, and Amos avoids travel on boats owned by Stephen. Long before she knew that her brother was still alive, Abby-Delight had named a son for him; this Amos has his youth interrupted by service in the Union Army in the Civil War and

after the war is never able to settle down. Only the river holds any appeal for him, and he signs onto one of Stephen's boats. Ironically, his and his uncle's paths cross twice, and the uncle is innocently responsible for the nephew's being on board the boat whose explosion takes his life.

In the two Amoses, Fairbank makes use of some popular motifs: the young male New Englander who flees to the West for economic and social reasons, the riverboat gambler, and the veteran who is unable to readjust to civilian life. But she avoids triteness in her use of these potentially stereotypical characters, and the parallels between their experiences ironically point up some of the changes through time that the novel illustrates.

Clearly, change is a key theme in the novel—change in the nation's center of power, change in the relationships between the sections of the country, changes in social stratification, and changes in economic and social structures as a small city undergoes its evolution from booming youth to decay. The vibrant Galena of Abby-Delight's bridal days is even then past its first prosperity, and a new wealth is brought by the coming of the Cornish Cousin Jacks with their ability to make the old mines pay again. But that prosperity, too, is only temporary. A brutal Civil War tears the comfortable social fabric of the community, blights young lives, and destroys the easy optimism of men like Stephen. A new period of ease is created by steamboating, but the railroads destroy that. And so, in the novel's brief epilogue, we find Abby-Delight and Mary Fenwick, two widows living out their last days together. The Spanish-American War brings memories of the Civil War and rouses their embittered anger. It is, appropriately, a chill autumn day, and Abby-Delight remarks on the early darkness. All these images of ending come together in her final comment: "You never see anyone but old women in this town," she said querulously. "I can remember that when I first came here to live, I felt conspicuous on the street, because there were so many men. Now there are only old ladies like you and me left. Why, I can remember when Galena was a man's town." (524-5)

Through the lives of Abby-Delight and her family but especially through the experiences of Abby-Delight herself, Fairbank has movingly depicted a very special town during its crucial years.

That town is far from typical of its area and time, for its lead industry and its life as a river port make it special. But Fairbank has managed both to portray what was unusual about the city and its history and to make the city emblematic of the Midwest during the middle of the nineteenth century. Illinoisians from elsewhere in the state will find much that is exotic to them, but they will also find much that is familiar from their own history and folklore. A regional novel of high quality, *The Bright Land* repays study and is deserving of a wide readership.

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NOTE

1. Janet Ayer Fairbank, *The Bright Land* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932), pp. 184-5. All further citations will be made parenthetically in the text.

RED PENS FROM THE VILLAGE: *THE ANVIL* AND
THE LEFT, MIDWESTERN LITTLE MAGAZINES
OF THE EARLY 1930s

DOUGLAS WIXSON

Richard Kostelanatz argues in his book, *The End of Intelligent Writing*, that the seat of literary politics today is located in New York, that writers are made and unmade by a narrow, in-grown clique, and that publishers are unwilling to take risks on controversial or unprofitable subjects. If this is true, then the situation of literary politics in America today is scarcely different from how it was perceived by Midwestern radical writers in the Depression era. In the same book Kostelanatz writes: "the communication between intelligent writer and intelligent reader have become clogged and corrupted."¹ Five decades ago a similar feeling motivated writers and editors and publishers in small communities like Davenport, Iowa, and Moberly, Missouri, to start up their own publishing enterprises and foster new writers. In response to the fact that the commercial press seldom published little-known writers, particularly if their writing was political in content, certain Midwestern little magazines of the 1930s attempted to create an "ideological space within which a literature of 'renewal' might be located," to use the words of a Marxist critic.²

Two of the many little magazines that blossomed briefly in the early 1930s fertile Midwestern soil were *The Left* and *The Anvil*. *The Left* was published in Davenport, Iowa, from spring 1931 through fall of the same year, altogether two issues. Its counterpart, *The Anvil*, edited by Jack Conroy in Moberly, Missouri, was published by Ben Hagglund in Holt, Minnesota, Newlano Colony, Louisiana, and for a time in New York City. *The Anvil*, modelled after John T. Frederick's *The Midland*, with its

regional interest, and the old socialist press with its humanitarian concern, ran thirteen issues, from May 1933 through late fall 1935. Shortly thereafter it was assimilated by *Partisan Review*, which had begun as the organ of the New York John Reed Club. Each of these two Midwest magazines represents two contrasting kinds of "literary politics" in the 1930s. Despite their short tenure they made lasting contributions to American literature. Moreover, they provide interesting examples of the manner in which editorial aims, method of distribution, and patronage are instrumental in the life of a little magazine.

Radical literary magazines of the 1930s were, in the main, forms of cultural response to crisis. In the minds of many radical writers the economic crisis had been long in arriving; for them the political crisis had begun a decade before. The Red Scare, the near eclipse of the radical movement following World War I, the decline of organized labor's influence, indeed the paper prosperity of the 1920s, weakened literary radicalism but by no means eliminated it in the postwar period before the great stock tumble. Shortly before the war's end in 1918, Emmanuel Haldeman-Julius, the self-styled Diderot of the plains, had bought the socialist newspaper, the *Appeal to Reason*, and was soon publishing magazines in Girard, Kansas, with titles such as the *Haldeman-Julius Weekly*, the *Haldeman-Julius Quarterly*, *The Debunker*, *Know Thyself*, and others. Haldeman-Julius, a transplant from New York City by way of Los Angeles, developed successful marketing techniques for distributing his magazines and Little Blue Books. The Little Books, which the Socialist publisher of the old *Appeal*, J. A. Wayland, had made an instrument of Socialist education, became under Haldeman-Julius's guidance "the poor man's university," carrying titles ranging from Aeschylus to Zola. The new Midwestern literary radicalism was born in Haldeman-Julius's magazines during the 1920s, where young writers like J. T. Farrell, Albert Halper, George Milburn, Jack Conroy, Erskine Caldwell, H. H. Lewis, and W. D. Trowbridge were appearing in print, usually for the first time; and Upton Sinclair was assailing Hamilton Fish, an aristocratic forbear of Joseph McCarthy.

Grassroots publishing ventures such as Haldeman-Julius's publications, Wayland's socialist press, and Oscar Ameringer's *Okla-*

homa Guardian, demonstrated that cheap printing, wide distribution, social content, and popular readership all might combine in a successful publishing enterprise. These publications served to educate a generation of young writers—miners and railroad workers like Jack Conroy, and aspiring middle class authors from isolated, culturally undernourished small towns.

In contrast to little magazines like *The Dial*, *Contact*, *S4N*, *transition*, and others of the modernist movement, the Haldeman-Julius publications were populist, non-elitist, spokespieces of democratic culture and radical social commentary. At least one Haldeman-Julius writer saw it as a case of Girard, Kansas—where Haldeman-Julius ran his presses—versus Concord, Massachusetts. The Girard “group” was diffuse; there were no big names apart from Upton Sinclair. Contributors sent in their material from all over the country, united “in a common stream of cultural influence that spreads itself throughout the whole country.”³ Here was the promise of democratic culture flourishing on the plains; a literature sprung from indigenous rhizomes furnishing low cost books and magazines open to all contributors, provided that they could write well. Concord, viewed from Girard, Kansas, has not provided material for popular movements. This was not philistinism, for Emerson, Dickinson, and Wharton were genuinely admired; but despite Emerson’s faith in the common people, Concord (meaning of course literary culture east of the Hudson) represented to the Girard socialist-populists a culture of the educated few. Similarly, in the 1920s, avant garde literature in refusing to “communicate”—as a manifesto in *transition* had boldly proposed—excluded from its readership the common individual, the worker, the people. In contrast, the old Socialist culture, with its publication, *Appeal to Reason*, had preached cooperation and urged social reforms to a broad readership. In its columns Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* was first serialized. Haldeman-Julius, who had bought the old *Appeal to Reason* and its presses, maintained in his own publications the socialist impulse toward reform but his heart was in broad readership and mass distribution.

Haldeman-Julius publications picked up the Socialists’ fallen banner, but deleted most of the idealism. Not ideals, he felt, but ideas would free the individual. And so he set about educating

the commoner. The *Haldeman-Julius Quarterly* ran a “letters to the editor” section; often the letters would appear as articles. Thus two-way communication took place on its pages. Such exchanges would prove significant for the little magazines of the 1930s.

During the 1920s young writers from Ohio, Montana, Texas, Michigan, Georgia were making contact with one another through Haldeman-Julius’s letters section, committees of correspondence, such as Merlin Wand’s *Contacts Commentary* “for the intellectually marooned,” and organizations such as the Rebel Poets which would emerge near the end of the decade. Like the mutual aid societies that develop in societies undergoing revolutionary transformation, the “Girard group” of writers gave one another encouragement, recommending work to editors, offering advice and so forth—all by mail. Many of these writers would correspond for years, never actually meeting.

This period in the evolution of literary radicalism might therefore be termed the mutual aid phase. Most of the new writers on the margins of the “Jazz Age” were familiar with Zola’s *Germinal* and its description of radical transformation. What occurred during the years following World War I up until the emergence of the Popular Front in 1934 parallels Zola’s chronicle of emerging consciousness among the dispossessed.

Most literary movements receive their impulse from some signal event, literary or historical. The anarchists, Sacco and Vanzetti, were one of the *causes célèbres* catalyzing the left as the Haywood trial had previously catalyzed the Socialists. The other main inspirational event was of course the Russian Revolution and the continuing excitement generated by the Soviet Experiment. Important anthologies of radical literature appeared near the end of the 1920s, such as Marcus Graham’s *Anthology of Revolutionary Poetry*, and Ralph Cheyney and Lucia Trent’s *America Arraigned*. The latter anthology led to the organization in 1928 of the Rebel Poets, an international group of writers who, like Shelley, Yeats, and MacDiarmid before them, thought that politics was compatible with poetry.

Cheney and Trent, living in Chicago, made contact with Jack Conroy of Moberly, Missouri. Conroy became president of the

Rebel Poets, whose members included Harry Crosby, Sherwood Anderson, Langston Hughes, John Wheelwright, Kenneth Porter, Norman Macleod, and many an obscure poet. The first publication of the organization, the members of which seldom knew one another, was called the *Rebel Poet Bulletin*, hektographed by Emerson Price, a bank clerk in Columbus, Ohio. Soon Conroy and Cheney were publishing their own radical anthologies entitled *Unrest*, appearing annually from 1929 to 1931. Money was always short. A printer named Ben Hagglund, from the muskeg country of northern Minnesota, rescued Conroy's magazine publications more than once from financial defeat. Hagglund's ancient press printed a newer, improved *The Rebel Poet* magazine beginning in January 1931 through its final seventeenth issue in October 1932. For a time Hagglund and Conroy would realize the formula for successful radical publication established by the Socialist press and Haldeman-Julius: good writing, low-printing cost, and wide, if limited, distribution.

As if in emulation of Randolph Bourne's "young world," the *Rebel Poet* reached out beyond national boundaries, attracting readers and talking revolution. One with the brightest hue of red among the rebels was a young Russian emigré named Philip Rahv, a member of the New York John Reed Club and the Rebel Poets. Rahv was hungry for control of the Rebel Poets. Mustering together his followers, Rahv outvoted those loyal to Conroy. Conroy made a trip to New York in the fall of 1932 to save the little magazine but wearied quickly of the machinations he observed taking place in the Rahv-ite faction. Factionalism, the old familiar nemesis of the political left, ultimately split the group and caused Conroy to dissolve the organization and end its publication.⁴

The new literary radicalism in the Midwest was still in its "communication phase" at this stage of its evolution. During the early years of the Great Depression writers felt anger, frustration, and a need to communicate their feelings, as well as to experiment with solutions on paper.

All communication, Nietzsche wrote, begins in duress, as endangered animal-man once needed his peers and thus learned to cooperate through language. Poetry, Nietzsche went on to say, frees language from distress, delineating consciousness which is

not tied to immediate needs. It was just such a liberation of consciousness through language that, I believe, motivated a great number of young men and women, remotely isolated from one another, to share their stories and poems, usually based on experiences, in the pages of the little magazines of the early 1930s. Communication brought them closer together, broke the isolation, empowered them.⁵ Moreover, the kind of discourse characteristic of literary radicalism in the early Depression decade emancipated without seeking to gain power over others.

This, the communication "phase" in the evolution of the little magazine, embraced a kind of communicable art that we observe, for instance, in regionalist paintings such as Thomas Hart Benton's murals at the State Capitol in Jefferson City. Writers and artists in the little magazines of the 1930s explored experience—their own and others'—attempting to unveil the social and political forces they believed operated in people's lives. Some writers implied that these forces might be changed to improve the lives and destiny of the suffering toiler who found himself out of work and out of luck. Some thought they could be controlled. A few notable little magazines, like *New Masses*, plunged boldly into the revolutionary phase of radical evolution. *The Left* followed in its wake. These little magazines attempted in different ways to communicate their commitment to revolution. Eschewing formalistic experiments practiced in the folios of modernist magazines such as *transition*, the little magazines of the left wrote plainly the messages they wanted their readers to understand. The modernists ventured a revolution of the word; the radicals of the left were bent upon revolution of the world. And for this reason it was crucial to the latter to know how the reader received the message and responded to it.

One of the many magazines to survey the question, *New Quarterly*, from Rock Island, Illinois, published a questionnaire entitled "For Whom Do You Write?" So did several other little magazines. Symposia were held; a very important one was published in a magazine named *1933*. Louis Adamic, the Serbo-American novelist, discovered "What the Proletariat Reads," subtitled his results, "Conclusions Based on a Year's Study of Hundreds of Workers Throughout the United States." The article later

appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature*.⁶ Adamic concluded that "the overwhelming majority" of the working class in America reads only newspapers and pulp magazines. These surveys and symposia indicated the need to influence the masses away from pulp magazines, for example, the pernicious effect of *The Saturday Evening Post*, in order to educate an audience alert to the suffering and dislocations imposed by economic crisis under capitalism.

There were basically two schools of thought as to how this rise in consciousness among the toiling classes and disaffected intellectuals might occur. The one, represented by Conroy's new magazine, *The Anvil*, argued in effect that change would take place from the ground up; the other, reflected in the editorship of *The Left*, cultivated top-down ideological views that, the editors felt, might, given proper expression, sift down to the bottom and spread out like fine sand. In both cases, the editors were devoted to the discovery of new writers, the breakdown of the author system characteristic of the establishment press, and wide readership.

More revolutionary than the writing or ideology were the form of distribution, the conditions of literary production, and the nature of the little magazines themselves. *The Anvil* and *The Left*, and many other little magazines growing like spring weeds on Midwestern soil, challenged the old order of centralized, elite hegemony of literary expression, "the Concord group," or in the parlance of 1930s, the New York intellectual establishment. Unfortunately, many of the radical little magazines rejected one kind of literary politics for another. And here it is necessary to look at the matter of distribution and patronage, which are essentially economic considerations.

Earlier in the century J. A. Wayland had developed his "Appeal Army," volunteers who distributed the *Appeal to Reason* without pay. One issue ran to 4,000,000 circulation; at one time then a Socialist publication was the largest selling newspaper in the world! The *Rebel Poet* had its Rebel Poet network of correspondents and contributors, assuring a small but widespread distribution. The contributors themselves, feeling a participatory stake in the magazine, would undertake to sell several issues. Some contributors, like Meridel LeSueur, took a bundle of *Anvils*

to factories and sold them directly. Leonard Spier, an indefatigable contributor and supporter of *The Anvil*, and former Rebel Poet, carried issues of *The Anvil* to bookstores and kiosks in New York City, while Rahv and others of the New York *Anvil* group were content simply to sit about and polemicize. Actual subscriptions were small; distribution occurred mainly through bookstores such as Gotham's in New York City, Brentano's in Washington, D. C., and the Workers' Bookstores in St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, and elsewhere. The Workers' Bookstores were a key instrument in distribution. But before turning to them, I should add that bookstores in the 1930s were more willing to carry ephemeral publications, including radical magazines, than they are today in the era of Waldenbooks and Dalton's and drugstore racks with their inevitable *Penthouse*, *Hustler*, and muscle-building magazines.

The crucial factor in the distribution of *The Anvil* and *The Left* was an organization called the Central Distribution Agency under the command of a Party functionary named Franklin with assistance from Bill Browder, brother of a Kansan, Earl Browder, who was head of the Communist Party of America. The Workers' Bookstores were distribution outlets run by the CDA. Gradually, radical little magazines like *The Anvil* and *The Left* came to depend upon the CDA to distribute their issues. Nonetheless, Conroy's editorial policy was independent of political alliance—although in the first issue of *The Anvil* the author of *The Disinherited* did lend his support to "the literary movement revolving," as he stated, "around the *New Masses* and the John Reed Clubs." "I've never attempted to disguise my belief," he said, "that [this movement] is the only one in this country possessing any degree of vitality," and concluded by echoing what Dos Passos, Dreiser, Edmund Wilson, Waldo Frank, and many others were saying then: that "What is taking place in Russia is the most precious social event, the most precious social life, of our crucial epoch. . . ." In practice, however, Conroy tended to stay clear of ideological disputes; he was not interested, as he would often say, in determining "how many Marxian angels could dance on the point of a hammer and sickle."⁸

The CDA offered an assured sale of 3,000 issues; together with this number, subscriptions and occasional sales brought the total

circulation to about 5,000 in 1935. This was an astounding figure for a radical little magazine that published the stories and poems of mainly unknown writers. *The Anvil* exceeded in sales even *Partisan Review*; doubtlessly that is a main reason that the CP engineered the takeover of Conroy's *Anvil* and Conroy's removal.

There were other reasons. Conroy had exasperated the Communists on several occasions by publishing writers or carrying ads for books displeasing to the CP cultural bureaucrats. The dogmatists wanted to steer *The Anvil* into narrow ideological channels. Conroy might have read the warning signs at the Chicago meeting of the John Reed Clubs in 1934 when Alexander Trachtenberg, the CP's cultural commissar, and members of what Conroy calls "the Eastern Mafia," Philip Rahv and Wallace Phelps (later William Phillips), attempted to dazzle the Midwestern contingents with their Marxist rhetoric, finely tuned from countless disputations. At the time, Conroy was occupied with finishing his second novel; when he won the Guggenheim Fellowship in early 1935, he turned over the main business of *The Anvil* almost entirely to Walter Snow, its tireless publicist in New York City. Snow had ambitious plans for *The Anvil* which required an expensive printer to produce a magazine on eggshell paper, larger circulation, and closer ties with the CP. The combination of Trachtenberg, Rahv, and Phillips, editors of *Partisan Review*, and Snow, proved overpowering for the plucky literary magazine from Moberly, Missouri, that had taken risks on new writers like Richard Wright, Nelson Algren, and Joseph Vogel—not because they were known (they were not), or toed an ideological line, but because they wrote well. *The Anvil* was assimilated into the *Partisan Review* in 1935. In ads the new title was *The Anvil and the Partisan Review*; apparently the new editors, Rahv and Phillips, preferred the reverse order, however, and that is how it appeared. After a few issues "The Anvil" disappeared from the title altogether. Conroy was asked to contribute only a single book review; he had no further part in the Rahv-Phillips magazine. A new "Concord" was born in the East.

The guillotine phase just described had followed the burst in circulation of *The Anvil*, shored up of course by Party patronage through its distribution agency. Conroy had counseled against

larger distribution; others on *The Anvil* staff like Walter Snow were hungry for numbers, a literary magazine that would draw the attention of Eastern publishers, as it had already begun to do, towards its young writers. But tying in with the CDA carried the risk of relinquishing one's control of what had started as a grass-roots endeavor in the tradition of John T. Frederick's *The Midland* and Charles J. Finger's *All's Well*. Fresh, and perhaps naive in their literary faith, editor, printer, and contributors fell victim to the machinery on which they had become dependent for patronage.

The CP's Popular Front delivered the death sentence to little magazines of aims similar to Conroy's. After 1934 Earl Browder was reciting "Communism is 20th century Americanism"—which led one wag to write: "From Moscow Earl Browder is getting divorscht./He now likes clam chowder better than borscht." In a shift of literary politics the CP now courted literary respectability, meaning of course name-authors. Struck from the list of favorites were the low-born proletarians, the farmers and laborers and literary regionalists who had found warm reception in the pages of *The Anvil*, the *Dubuque Dial*, *New Quarterly*, the *Cedar Rapids Hub*, *Manuscript* of Athens, Ohio, and other radical little magazines of the Middle West. With da Vinci, Conroy might have said: "The Medici made me, the Medici destroyed me." The CP had wanted to use Conroy as an example of an indigenous American radical, an authentic WASP worker, the "real article." They might just as well have used Meridel Le Sueur, for instance, but she was a woman. It was not the end of Conroy's career as writer or editor by any means. But it did prove to him, a Middlewesterner, an independent radical, a "philosophical anarchist," not to mess with the Medici, and to stay close to the grassroots. It was an instructive lesson for Conroy, but it cost American letters one of its brightest literary forums for new writers in the Midwest.

The fortunes of *The Left* were quite different from those of *The Anvil*, although the outcome was roughly similar. Inspired by Mike Gold's appeal in *New Masses* (January 1929), entitled "Go Left, Young Writers!" a group of young writers in Davenport, Iowa—Jay Du Von, George Redfield, Marvin Klein (a.k.a. Mark Marvin), Robert C. Lorenz, and Willis K. Jordan—all from middle

class homes and educated at universities, brought out "a quarterly review of radical and experimental art . . . born of [the] revolutionary movement," to quote from their statement of purpose printed in the first issue.¹⁰ The editors of *The Left* declared that "The more intellectually honest are becoming convinced that the capitalist system must be replaced by a collective state, dictated by the proletariat. . . ." They called for new writers to participate in the overthrow of capitalism, after which, they presumed, there would be "New ground for talent, new strength in affirmation, new ideology, new courage." The first heads to roll we may assume would have been the Concord group, followed soon after by the Girard group, the first as representatives of the status quo, the second for representing outworn, ineffectual homegrown ideals.

The Left came under the scrutiny of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers in Moscow, as did most leftist little magazines and writers of the era. Despite its rejection of capitalism and acceptance of the revolutionary movement, the IURW found *The Left* wanting on several counts. A simple declaration of faith to the Cause is insufficient, a reviewer wrote in *Literature of the World Revolution*, organ of the IURW; one must prove one's convictions on the firing line of daily revolutionary tasks.¹¹ The editors of *The Left* had committed several serious "errors" in their first issue, printing, for instance, an essay by the heretic, V. F. Calverton, editor of *Modern Quarterly*, who among other deviances held that "Revolutionary art has to be good art first before it can have deep meaning."¹²

In a remorseful letter to the IURW, *Left* editors Du Von and Redfield apologized for their blunders and promised to make the necessary corrections in the next issue, including removing Calverton's name as associate editor from the masthead. The organization phase I mentioned earlier in the evolution of radical little magazines devolved into an authoritarian phase; the moribund phase was close-by. In a follow-up critique a year later, another IURW reviewer praised Redfield and Du Von's "healthy self-criticism," publishing their letter along with lengthy analyses of theoretical errors in the second issue of *The Left*. "We must be prepared," the reviewer concluded, "to do everything possible to

help them cope with these difficulties . . . to safeguard them in advance from repeating the same mistakes that have already been overcome in the process of the Soviet proletarian literary organization . . ."¹³

The Left published many of the same writers in its two issues who appeared in *The Anvil* and other experimental magazines of the political left. Conroy appeared in the second issue—presumably he passed muster—and so did John Cheever, the same Cheever we know from his novels of upperclass life in exurban New York. Sherry Mangan, Louis Zukofsky, Horace Gregory, Norman Macleod, Albert Halper, all appeared in *The Left*. It was a promising start for a little magazine from the hometown of Floyd Dell, George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, and Arthur Davison Ficke. The faith of *The Left* editors in the revolutionary movement was strong; so was Edmund Wilson's for a time. But the editors' faith in the Soviet cultural bureaucracy was even greater.

Conroy had attempted to build a magazine from the ground up—and a radical literary movement among Midwestern writers. *The Anvil* depended for more than half its circulation on the Party's Central Distribution Agency; nonetheless, given its large circulation and reputation there is a strong probability that *The Anvil* might have survived and continued to provide an outlet for the new writer of talent but no connections, an alternative to what Ronald Sukenick calls, rather unfairly, for my own tastes, in a recent issue of *New Literary History*, "the elitist, hermetic, and politically reactionary Modern movement."

But inattention on Conroy's part did *The Anvil* in, together with an over-zealous business manager, a manipulative Party cultural apparatus, and two lean and hungry editors who would commandeer Conroy's subscription list and lead the *Partisan Review* in a splendid march across modern letters than continues into our own day—a new Concord, but an old hierarchy. *The Left* became *Left Front*, the organ of the Chicago John Reed Club, running three issues, and carrying news of strikes and labor pageants rather than literary contributions. *The New Anvil* appeared, under Conroy and Nelson Algren in 1939, this time in Chicago. William Carlos Williams, Algren, Margaret Walker, Jesse Stuart, published in its pages, and the magazine saw at least one new writer into

print for the first time, Frank G. Yerby, and turned down another, J. D. Salinger. Burdened with expenses, shored up by benefit readings and productions of a melodrama called "A Drunkard's Warning" (in which Conroy played the tavern-keeper, James T. Barrelhouse, and Algren his wife), *The New Anvil* collapsed after six issues.

In the summer of 1940, the world was making ready for another war. Employed in the Federal Writers' Project were many a rebel poet alumnus. Conroy and Arna Bontemps were writing their study of the black diaspora, to be called *They Seek a City*. The Russians were our friends and the cry was not revolt but defeat of the fascists. *Hinterland*, *Hub*, *New Quarterly*, *The Midland*, *Dubuque Dial*, *Direction*, and other Midwestern little magazines providing space for new, unknown writers had folded. Magazines like *Illinois Quarterly*, the revived *North American Review*, *Kenyon Review*, all university journals, had taken their place; but somehow the spirit was different. What Conroy refers to as the "crude vigor" was gone. Social commentary was an awkward guest at cocktail parties. Where could one scout up another Ben Hagglund? Who could replace the tireless Jack Conroy? Where, in sum, had the mighty fallen?

Through defeat comes new understanding and new opportunities. After examining the Labadie Collection of radical literature at the University of Michigan, Conroy commented:

I realized then that good poets need good printers and that rebellious poets (and publishers) need self-sacrificing printers who will print for whatever sums you can rustle up for them. If *The Anvil*, in its period of greatest circulation, had been conducted on that principle. . . .

Rebel writers of the future should weigh this reflection wisely. Perhaps another *Anvil* will yet spring from Midwest soil. The rhizomes are there. But who will be the self-sacrificing printer and the selfless editor to nourish what Frank Luther Mott, editor of the *The Midland*, called a "literature with roots" and watch it grow?

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NOTES

1. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1974, p. xi.
2. Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (NY: Methuen, 1979), pp. 90-1.
3. John W. Gunn, *Life and Letters*, 2 (Jan. 1924), pp. 9-10.
4. See Conroy's introduction to *Writers in Revolt: The Anvil Anthology*, Jack Conroy and Curt Johnson, eds. (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1973). Also, Michel Fabre's "Jack Conroy as Editor," *New Letters*, 39 (winter 1972), pp. 115-137.
5. Eric Fromm discusses the need to free oneself of isolation as a responsibility of democracy. See *Escape From Freedom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), Chap. 7.
6. (December 1, 1934), pp. 321-2.
7. *The Anvil*, 1 (May 1933), pp. 3-4.
8. For Conroy's retrospective commentary see "The Literary Underworld of the Thirties," *New Letters*, 40 (March 1974), pp. 51-72.
9. Michael Gold in his "Change the World!" columns in the *New Masses* promoted Conroy as the genuine article, a real worker-writer.
10. *The Left*, 1 (spring 1931), p. 3.
11. 3 (1931), p. 139.
12. *The Left*, 1 (spring 1931), p. 9.
13. *International Literature*, pp. 2-3 (1932), 152.
14. *NLH*, 10 (spring 1979), p. 477.
15. "On *Anvil*," *Tri-Quarterly*, 43 (fall 1978), pp. 115-117.

SHERWOOD ANDERSON, CHICAGO, AND THE MIDWESTERN MYTH

DAVID D. ANDERSON

In the fall of 1896, just after his twentieth birthday and following the death of his mother the year before and the disintegration of his family, Sherwood Anderson left Clyde, Ohio, for Chicago. Clyde, the town that had been his home for twelve years, had, in 1890, a population of just under 3,000 people; Chicago had in the same year more than a million. It was the second city in the nation, and during the following decade it gave the nation a magnificent show and began to build a university.

Anderson's departure was unrecorded in the Clyde *Enterprise*, just as his arrival in Chicago to live with his older brother Karl, an art student, was unnoticed by the Chicago *Tribune*, the *Daily News*, or the *Times*. Anderson's was only one of the arrivals of thousands of other young people from the towns and villages of the Midwest and more than a dozen European countries. Anderson, however, has recorded both arrival and departure.

In the last lines of *Winesburg, Ohio*, in a passage that elevates into myth the movement of those countless young people from the towns and farms of Mid-America to Chicago, Anderson describes George Willard's departure from the town of Winesburg:

The young man, going out of his town to meet the adventure of life, began to think but he did not think of anything very big or dramatic. Things like his mother's death, his departure from Winesburg, the uncertainty of his future life in the city, the serious and larger aspects of his life did not come into his mind.

He thought of little things — Turk Smollet wheeling boards through the main street of his town in the morning,

a tall woman, beautifully gowned, who had once stayed over night at his father's hotel, Butch Wheeler the lamp lighter of Winesburg hurrying through the streets on a summer evening and holding a torch in his hand, Helen White standing by a window in the Winesburg post office and putting a stamp on an envelope.

The young man's mind was carried away by his growing passion for dreams. One looking at him would not have thought him particularly sharp. With the recollection of little things occupying his mind he closed his eyes and leaned back in the car seat. He stayed that way for a long time and when he aroused himself and again looked out of the car window the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood.¹

As the book ends, young George Willard goes West toward the setting sun, in the old American path of destiny and the search for fulfillment, yet simultaneously he goes to Chicago, following the new path toward a newer, more immediate, more material future.

But the Chicago of 1896 provided neither canvas nor paint nor dreams for the young man from the Midwestern town; it provided instead the values and the myths of a new age. Anderson recorded another young man's arrival, that of Sam McPherson, the protagonist of *Windy McPherson's Son*, as he looks at the city in which he will make his fortune:

It was a wonderful place, that South Water Street in Chicago where Sam came to make his business start in the city, and it was proof of the dry unresponsiveness in him that he did not sense more fully its meaning and its message. All day the food stuff of a vast city flowed through the narrow streets. Blue-shirted broad shouldered teamsters from the tops of high-piled wagons, bawled at scurrying pedestrians. Upon the sidewalks in boxes, bags, and barrels, lay oranges from Florida and California, figs from Arabia, bananas from Jamaica, nuts from the hills of Spain and the plains of Africa, cabbages from Ohio, beans from Michigan, corn and potatoes from Iowa. In December, fur-coated men hurried through the forests of northern Michigan gathering Christmas trees that found their way to warm firesides through the

street. And summer and winter a million hens laid the eggs that were gathered there, and the cattle on a thousand hills sent their yellow butter fat packed in tubs and piled upon trucks to add to the confusion.

Into this street Sam walked, thinking little of the wonder of these things and thinking haltingly, getting his sense of the bigness of it in dollars and cents. Standing in the doorway of the commission house for which he was to work, strong, well clad, able and efficient, he looked through the streets, seeing and hearing the hurry and the roar and the shouting of voices, and then with a smile upon his lips went inside. In his brain was an unexpressed thought. As the old Norse marauders looked at the cities sitting in their splendor on the Mediterranean, so looked he. "What loot!" a voice within him said, and his brain began devising methods by which he should get his share of it.²

However, Anderson's own journey to Chicago in search of the fulfillment that had become the Midwestern American's birthright was not one but three: that first, in 1896, a second, in 1900, as an advertising writer, and a third, early in 1913, in flight from the success he had sought. The first stay lasted nearly three years, during which the *Clyde Enterprise* reported he had a "lucrative position" in the city. In reality, he worked in a cold-storage warehouse wheeling barrels of apples and he went to night school. From this labor he was rescued, as he regarded it, by the Spanish-American War, in which he served in Cuba with Clyde's Company "I," Sixth Ohio Regiment of Volunteer Infantry.

His second journey to Chicago in the fall of 1900 was, rather than the first, his journey into the new age, with a clear promise of success almost within his reach. After his discharge in 1899, and a hero's welcome during a few weeks in Clyde, he attended the Wittenburg Academy in Springfield, Ohio, for a year, finishing high school in preparation for college. But in Springfield he met Harry Simmons, advertising manager of Crowell Publishing Company, then based in Springfield. Simmons offered him a job as an advertising salesman in Crowell's Chicago office. After a few months there he moved to the Frank B. White Company as a copywriter and then to the Long-Critchfield Agency, where he began almost immediately to reveal himself as a young man to watch.

In keeping with the promise of the age Anderson rose rapidly. He wrote and sold successful advertisements, and he wrote articles for *Agricultural Advertising* that established him as a spokesman for industry and the new profession that had become its voice. In 1904 he married Cornelia Lane of Toledo, the daughter of the prosperous president of R. H. Lane & Co., shoe wholesalers. Two years later he became president of the United Factories Company, a mail-order house in Cleveland, and then, a year later, president of the Anderson Manufacturing Company in Elyria, purveyors of a miraculous compound called Roof-Fix. At thirty-one Anderson had arrived: happily married, a member of the Elyria Country Club, the Elks, and the Fortnightly, a literary discussion group, father of three children, he was, to all appearances, already a success, and the promise of Chicago had been fulfilled.

But somewhere in the Elyria years something went wrong. He began to write, first secretly and then openly, to drink more than his contemporaries, and to dream. In late November 1912, he suffered a breakdown, an event that gave rise to his myth of himself. In the next two months he handed over his affairs in Elyria to stockholders, the Anderson Manufacturing Company disappearing forever in the process, and on February 9, 1913, a well-known if eccentric Elyrian, he left again for Chicago, a journey noted in the *Elyria Telegram*: "Mr. Sherwood Anderson left Sunday evening for Chicago to take up his work with the Taylor-Critchfield Co." But with him he took a bundle of manuscripts.

If Anderson's other journeys to Chicago were those of the young man escaping the past in his search for the promised future, this trip was an escape from success, from the dream turned nightmare. The Chicago he sought had become instead a refuge in which he would write advertising to support himself while he wrote fiction and pondered the failure of success. But the Chicago he found in 1913 was a new Chicago, that of the Renaissance, and a new promise, the promise of liberation, of art, of a new vision, of the opportunity to write, to remember how it had been, to attempt to define what had gone wrong, and ultimately to dream of what might again become real. The results for Anderson were literary success: the publication of *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916), *Marching Men* (1917), *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), *Poor*

White (1921), a collection of verse, *Mid-American Chants* (1918), and some memorable stories drawn out of his memory and his search for meaning.

The towns of Winesburg and Clyde were, as George Willard and Anderson remembered them, places fixed in time and space in the Midwestern American past, products of the movement across the mountains to make real the American destiny foreseen by Thomas Jefferson in his first inaugural address at the century's beginning. Jefferson had predicted "A rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land, . . . advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye . . . ;" he saw, too, a land characterized by an open and orderly society in which free people might, under free government, work out, simultaneously, the national destiny and their own.

For those who came West over the mountains in the early nineteenth century, that dream—for them the dream of the open society and cheap land—promised to become a reality through their own efforts, and the movement to make it so became perhaps one of the greatest, certainly the most significant migration in American history. In 1800 fewer than one-twentieth of the American people lived west of the Appalachians. By the third decade of the century—the decade in which both Clyde, Ohio, and Chicago were founded—more than one-third lived in the new lands west of the mountains, north and west of the Ohio River, the Old Northwest. It was in 1833 an area in rapid transformation from wilderness to order, to the Midwestern heartland that it was to become by mid-century.

Both Clyde and Chicago were founded on transportation routes to that heartland, Clyde originating as Hamers Corners, a stop on the federal government-built Maumee and Western Reserve Turnpike, and Chicago at the foot of Lake Michigan. The first railroad came to Chicago in 1848 and to Clyde in 1852, when it was named. By the end of the decade Clyde had become what it was to remain for the rest of the century, indeed substantially as it remained for the rest of the century, and Chicago had become Chicago.

Both Clyde and Chicago and the countless farms, villages, and towns that dotted the vast landscape of what Sherwood Anderson

was later to call Mid-America were the product of that migration of people that saw, in less than half a century, the wilderness of the Old Northwest become the Midwest. Together with people, statehood, and empire, American destiny had moved West of the mountains, and a stable agricultural society had come into being. Cheap land had disappeared, but the open society, as Lincoln graphically demonstrated in November 1860, had become the Midwestern reality rather than its dream in the towns and countryside. With orderly transition, easy transportation, and opportunity for Jefferson's natural aristocrats to rise, the eighteenth century promise seemed within the reach of the farm boys become craftsmen, become lawyers, become tinkers, become bookkeepers.

But two developments in the decade of the 1850s—perhaps the most dynamic and fateful of the nation's history—altered the Midwestern landscape beyond Jefferson's imagination and made of his dream of orderly progress a mockery he could not have comprehended. Lincoln had gone from his prairie legal circuit to the White House, demonstrating for all time the social mobility and natural leadership that Jefferson had envisioned in a land unencumbered by the old values of colonies become states. It was the new states west of the mountains that enshrined in American myth the log cabin and railsplitter and the inevitable rewards of hard work, talent, ambition, and virtue. But the railroads, three by 1860, in the perceptive words of Clyde's historian "changed life and created Clyde."³ And the railroads, four by 1856, together with the lakes and the canal, made of Chicago a boom town, destined, in Carter H. Harrison's words in mid-decade, "to be the greatest city on the continent."⁴

The other development of the decade, that which was largely responsible for Lincoln's evolution from prairie lawyer to President, was the intensified, unresolvable slavery crisis that resulted in secession and war, the first modern war, a war that accelerated change in the Midwest and the nation. Thus Jefferson's vision was, by 1876, the year of the national centennial and Sherwood Anderson's birth, transmuted into a new myth that had little to do with the immediately reality out of which it had come and the dream to which these young farmers and townsmen had begun to aspire.

For Sherwood Anderson the facts of the 1850s, 60s, and 70s, the coming of the railroads, the introduction of a new ethic that substituted money for land and material success for fulfillment, and the unforeseen intensification of those values by a war ironically fought for union and human freedom, were the central experiences of human life in the region that had promised so much to so many, and they were to provide the background out of which he wrote. Not only had his father, Irwin Anderson, come home to Camden, Ohio, from his service as an Ohio cavalryman a skilled harnessmaker, but he saw his father join the growing army of technologically displaced craftsmen who wandered the Midwestern countryside from town to town, unable to find places in the new age. In *Marching Men*, he wrote:

Once and once only in modern times the soul of America was stirred. The Civil War swept like a purifying fire through the land. Men marched together and knew the feel of shoulder to shoulder action. Brown stout bearded figures returned after the war to the villages. The beginning of a literature of strength and virility arose.

And then the time of sorrow and of stirring effort passed and prosperity returned.⁵

For Anderson, in the towns if not in Chicago, the end of the War had brought a moment of respite, of introspection, perhaps even of choice, before the new values became dominant. In *Poor White*, in which Anderson describes the great Midwestern dream and its failure in human terms, he defined that moment:

In all the towns of mid-western America it was a time of waiting. The country having been cleared and the Indians driven away into a vast distant place spoken of vaguely as the West, the Civil War having been fought and won, and there being no great national problems that touched closely their lives, the minds of men were turned in upon themselves. . . .

In all the great Mississippi Valley each town came to have a character of its own, and the people who lived in the towns were to each other like members of a great family. The individual idiosyncrasies of each member of the great family stood forth. A kind of invisible roof beneath which every one lived spread itself over each town. Beneath the

roofs boys and girls were born, grew up, quarrelled, fought, and formed friendships with their fellows, were introduced into the mysteries of love, married, and became the fathers and mothers of children, grew old, sickened, and died.

Within the invisible circle and under the great roof every one knew his neighbor and was known to him. Strangers did not come and go swiftly and mysteriously and there was no constant and confusing roar of machinery and of new projects afoot. For the moment mankind seemed about to take time to understand itself.⁶

This was the way it was in Clyde in the 1880s as Anderson remembered it and in Winesburg as George Willard experienced it. In the towns, the people, each of them a grotesque, the result of ideas become truths become falsehoods, reached out, seeking an understanding that Anderson and his alter ego determined to find. And this was the time and place that Anderson and George and the other young men left behind as they went west with the setting sun, from the town to Chicago, to find their fulfillment.

This was the time and place, too, in which change had already begun to be felt, as echoes of the new values began to be heard on the streets, in the homes, the churches and schools, even in the barber shops and saloons of the towns:

The air of Bidwell began to stir with talk of new times. The evil things said of the new life coming were soon forgotten. The youth and optimistic spirit of the country led it to take hold of the hand of the giant, industrialism, and lead him laughing into the land. The cry, "get on in the world," that ran all over America at that period and that still echoes in the pages of American newspapers and magazines, rang in the streets of Bidwell.⁷

While George Willard had taken with him the old values, Sam McPherson, son of Windy, a failure in his son's eyes if not those of the town, took with him the values of the new, those that taught him that loot rather than love, money rather than understanding, held the promise of success in the new age. In *Marching Men* Anderson examines the result of these values in the city that is both the symbol and the reality of what the Midwestern promise had become:

Chicago is a vast city and millions of people live within the limits of its influence. It stands at the heart of America

almost within sound of the creaking green leaves of the corn in the vast corn fields of the Mississippi Valley. It is inhabited by hordes of men of all nations who have come across the seas or out of western corn-shipping towns to make their fortunes. On all sides men are busy making fortunes.

In little Polish villages the word has been whispered about, "in America one gets much money," and adventurous souls have set forth only to land at last, a little perplexed and disconcerted, in narrow ill-smelling rooms in Halstead Street in Chicago.

In American villages the tale has been told. Here it has not been whispered but shouted. . . . The word regarding the making of money runs over the land like a wind among the corn. The young men listen and run away to Chicago. They have vigour and youth but in them has been builded no dream, no tradition of devotion to anything but gain.

Chicago is one vast gulf of disorder. Here is the passion for gain, the very spirit of the bourgeoisie gone drunk with desire. The result is something terrible. Chicago is leaderless, purposeless, slovenly, down at the heels.⁸

The young men from the Midwestern countryside had gone off to the city imbued not only with ambition and determination, but, whether searching for fulfillment or wealth, with the dream of success that had brought an earlier generation over the mountains to make a rich and orderly life in the wilderness. Now, Anderson recognized, the dream had become perverted, the values distorted, the Jeffersonian vision shattered. In both *Marching Men* and the verses in *Mid-American Chants* he attempted to define what had happened. In the former, in terms that were symbolic rather than literal but reminiscent of his view of the town, he wrote of the gulf that had emerged between Chicago and the rich rural countryside that had given it life and wealth:

And back of Chicago lie the long corn fields that are not disorderly. There is hope in the corn. Spring comes and the corn is green. It shoots up out of the black land and stands up in orderly rows. The corn grows and thinks of nothing but growth. Fruition comes to the corn and it is cut down and disappears. Barns are full to bursting with the yellow fruit of the corn.

And Chicago has forgotten the lesson of the corn. All men have forgotten. It has never been told to the young men who come out of the corn fields to live in the city.⁹

In "Mid-American Prayer" he attempts to fuse the symbol of the corn with another perception, a conviction that he was to develop at greater length in *Poor White* and that was to become an article of faith for other later Midwestern writers: the corrupting influence of New England values on a Jeffersonian paradise. In the process he defines the origin of the corruption of the young man, the age, and the city:

I sang there—I dreamed there—I was suckled face downward in the black earth of my western cornland.

I remember as though it were yesterday how I first began to stand up.

All about me the corn—in the night the fields mysterious and vast—voices of Indians—names remembered—murmurings of winds—the secret mutterings of my own young boyhood and manhood.

The men and women among whom I lived destroyed my ability to pray. The sons of New Englanders, who brought books and smart sayings into our Mid-America, destroyed the faith in me that came out of the ground.¹⁰

For Anderson it was clear that although the Midwestern countryside, exemplified by the orderly rows of corn flourishing in the deep soil, represented the realization of the ideal that had brought the Midwest into being in the first half of the nineteenth century, the values and the cities that emerged in the last half had turned essentially spiritual and human values into those of the bookkeeper and the counting house. Yet, he knew, too, as he had learned and the young men in his fictions—Sam McPherson, Beaut McGregor of *Marching Men*, George Willard—were to learn, those values, like the cities they created, were shoddy and meaningless, that the fulfillment they promised was empty, that life is, for the many, hopeless. In the short story "Broken," the product of his last days in Chicago, (published in the *Century*, March 1923, and in *Horses and Men* as "A Chicago Hamlet" in the same year) he sums up the fate of the brave young men in the city:

"we are set down here in this continual noise, dirt and ugliness. . . . Millions of us live on the vast Chicago West Side,

where all streets are equally ugly and where the streets go on forever, out of nowhere into nothing. We are tired, tired! What is it all about?"¹¹

While the narrator concludes that the young man who had told his story "had gone down the same road I and all the men about me were no doubt going, the road of surrender to ugliness and to dreary meaningless living,"¹² the young man comments, "It is horrible stuff, this whiskey, eh, but after all this is a horrible town."¹³

By the time "A Chicago Hamlet" was published, however, Anderson had put Chicago, which had failed him three times, behind him and had begun to search out another dream, to wander "up and down the great valley here seeing the towns and the people and writing of them as I do not believe they have been written of."¹⁴ In *Dark Laughter*, published in 1925, he wrote of his rejection of the Chicago Renaissance that had promised success, liberation, and fulfillment, and he wrote, too, of the beginning of another search that was to take him down the river of American destiny and ultimately into the meaningful past of the Virginia hills. During the last sixteen years of his life he alternately celebrated a time, place, and people uncorrupted by the world beyond them and warned of the new slavery of power, money, and machines. And there, near the end of his life, in an essay published only months before his death he attempted to define what he had learned about the town, the city, and the search that for him had come nearly full circle, that reflected, too, a universal as well as a regional and national reality:

What a long road to be traveled.

Years ago I wrote some stories of life in an American middle western town. They were, as best I could make them, studies of little lives, everyday small people in a small town, their lives, their reactions to one another, and for years afterward I got letters, from England, Germany, Turkey, Japan, from South American republics, from France, from many other countries, all saying the same thing.

The stories, they all said, might have been written about people in their own South American, European, Asiatic towns.

So there is this common thing we have, our lives, so essentially alike, deep down, the same dreams, aspirations, hungers.

And then the power hunger, hunger to command other men's lives, that has now changed, perverted this thing we have made. The machine. The machine that can be so beautiful, that can do such wonders for us.

Must the power hunger, also in man, defeat us all, pervert, make horrible all our lives?

It is a dance.

Man never intended it to be the dance of death.

He dreamed of making it a great new dance of life.

Life to be longer, richer, sweeter.

The test of man and the thing he calls "civilization" is on. There is this inanimate monster loose in the world. It can make life infinitely richer. It can destroy all we have built up. Is it all to end in a dance of death or in a dance of new rich life?

The dance is on.¹⁵

If the search that had taken him from the town of Clyde to the city, Chicago, through industry and advertising and writing success and back again to the town, had failed to make good its promise to him and his generation, neither, he concluded, had it yet failed, that perhaps the search itself had no end. Near the end of his life, he wrote,

When I die I would like this inscription put on my grave:
Life not death is the great Adventure¹⁶

The Midwestern search for success, for fulfillment had, in Anderson's life and work, become an eloquent statement of the myth that had created his Mid-America and destroyed it.

NOTES

1. Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1919), pp. 302-303.
2. Sherwood Anderson, *Windy McPherson's Son* (London and New York: the John Lane Co., 1916), pp. 133-134.
3. "These Things Stay By You" (N. P., N. D., published by Whirlpool Corp. for the Clyde Public Library), p. 15.

4. Quoted in Lloyd Lewis and Henry Justin Smith, *Chicago: the History of Its Reputation* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1929), p. 74.
5. Sherwood Anderson, *Marching Men* (New York: the John Lane Co., 1917), p. 156.
6. Sherwood Anderson, *Poor White* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1920), p. 46.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
8. *Marching Men*, pp. 155-156.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
10. Sherwood Anderson, *Mid-American Chants* (New York: the John Lane Co., 1918), p. 69.
11. Sherwood Anderson, *Horses and Men* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1923), pp. 139-140.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
14. Sherwood Anderson, *Letters*, edited by Howard Mumford Jones with Walter B. Rideout (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1953), p. 45.
15. Sherwood Anderson, *Memoirs*, edited by Ray Lewis White (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 553.
16. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 560. The statement appears on Anderson's gravestone in the cemetery overlooking Marion, Virginia.

HARLAN HATCHER'S MIDWESTERN NOVELS

ROGER J. BRESNAHAN

Harlan Hatcher's three novels, all published in the 1930s, are practically unknown today. They deserved better. To be sure, Hatcher has neither the artistry nor the scope of classic mainstream American writers like James and Melville. Nor would his three novels stack up against the mature work of regional writers like Steinbeck, Faulkner, Wharton, or Sherwood Anderson. *Tunnel Hill* (1931) focuses on working class folk on the southern bank of the Ohio River. *Patterns of Wolfpen* (1934) is a dynastic novel concentrated in the space of a single year and confined to a narrow valley in the Kentucky hills, near where the Big Sandy empties into the Ohio. *Central Standard Time* (1937) explores the extremes of rich and poor in an industrial town in Ohio. In these works Hatcher has authentically recreated people and places of the lower Midwest from the era of settlement to the years of the Great Depression. The three novels exemplify many of the characteristics thought common to Midwestern writing as they explore the region as frontier, heartland, and mainstream, covering the full range of society from laborers to managers.

Tunnel Hill is Hatcher's *bildungsroman* about Karl Kahne and his adolescent passage, "released at last into the world of men."¹ Hatcher effectively recreates adolescent boyhood on the banks of the Ohio River at an indeterminate time which he calls "the good old days when boys were as ripe at twenty as at forty, when men still had wives who worked at home, when children were economically profitable and inexpensively foaled by volunteer midwives and a country doctor whose fee was ten dollars." (49) Doubtless the time evoked in this novel is that of Hatcher's own boyhood along the Ohio, to which he alludes in his book on *The Buckeye Country*: "I was born on its banks in a house from whose

upper rooms you could look out upon its willow fringed banks all day long. It was always the same and yet always changing. . . . designed on a rare scale. . . . It is just the right size to make good neighbors of Ohio and Kentucky." (104)

The narrative of Karl Kahne's passage from the unfettered freedom of adolescence to the responsibilities of manhood and marriage, as well as Hatcher's portrayal of the lives of common people along the river, is blunted by an intrusive sense of irony which pervades all three of his novels. In this first novel it is demonstrated in numerous authorial asides which, though clever by themselves, flail in all directions without larger meaning or clear intent. In the subsequent novels, *Patterns of Wolfpen* and *Central Standard Time*, Hatcher would display more control, but the irony would always be present, and sometimes rather too obvious.

Tunnel Hill is a novel rich in detail—the technology of brick-making, the ritualistic pageantry of the cock-fight, the squalid lives of the fisher-folk and squatters of the river, the block houses of Cement Row above the brickworks, where the prostitutes live and work. It is also rich in its description of the misdirected efforts of religious and social reformers to save the common folk. The well-meaning but simple-minded Brother Preston who undertakes to preach to the brickmakers at work is no more effective than the cynical revenue agent, John O'Keefe, who suppresses the trade in bootleg alcohol in order to corner the market for himself.

The detail with which Hatcher so richly develops each scene reveals a society which is corrupt and mean-spirited. His ironic portrayal of SOAR—Saviors of the American Republic—a reactionary movement "to combat the great menaces to orderly and peaceful living" which "assumed concrete reality in the persons of all Jews, Catholics and Negroes," shows the unsavory bigotry of small-town life which less pessimistic writers have glossed over. The novel brings together the contrapuntal themes of sin and religion, each reduced by Hatcher's overriding irony. Religion is tempered by all sorts of falsehood and fakery, and most notably by SOAR, whose members gather to learn "proper respect for Old Glory and the proper disrespect for all foreigners" and to decry "the number of millions the Jews were spending among the Nig-

gers to help the Pope get control of this country. . . ." (268) Sin is also reduced by irony, as Hatcher's entertaining soliloquy of Saturday nights shows, though the length of this passage shows that this tour-de-force operates more for its own sake than for its function in the novel, which is to demonstrate that the pleasures of the poor are neither greater nor lesser than low-life at other places and times:

One is permitted to surmise that ever since Father Judah journeyed up to the great sheep-shearing at Timnah and cast the incontinent eye of a released widower upon the first harlot who ogled him from behind her veils and wrappings in the gate of Enaim, Saturday night has had for the unimaginative a monotonous sameness. Cain, Noah, Judah, Potiphar's wife, Samson, David, Amnon, the whole gallery of Jewish frailty, not to mention its counterpart in Roman, Persian, English, French, Spanish, any nationality,—what is it that unnumbered generations have been unwilling to forget about these immortals? Wine, fornication, death. How diverting to recall the great ones of the earth about whom we know nothing more: Paris and the wife of Menelaus, Sir Lancelot and the wife of Arthur, Sir Tristram and the wife of King Mark, his uncle, Sir Lamerock and the wife of King Lote, his aunt . . . The years of dead level existence float away like a morning cloud and are no more remembered; the Saturday nights are preserved for all posterity: wine, fornication, death. (173-4)

The locale of Hatcher's second novel, *Patterns of Wolfpen*, is the valley of the Big Sandy River, "guarded on the south by the Cumberland Ridge, protected on the north" by the Ohio's "level bottoms, fenced in on the west and on the east by row upon row of rugged hills."² It is a valley, Hatcher tells us in a preface which he terms a "prelude" (as if the novel were to be a symphony or perhaps a Wagnerian opera), that "preserved its isolation until the encircling territory was conquered and cleared" (viii) as westward moving pioneers either passed to the south into the Clinch River valley so as to avoid the Cumberlands or floated down the Ohio rather than push against the stream up the Big Sandy. Though the time spanned in this novel is only one year in the life of the latest generation of the Pattern family, the reader is made acutely conscious of previous generations. Saul Pattern, the Vir-

ginia pioneer who explored the valley in 1785 when it was still a Shawnee stronghold, discovered Wolfpen Hollow. Though "not given to emotion," he felt a "glow of pride and an eagerness to possess it." (x) Indeed, Hatcher relates that Saul Pattern, "with some four thousand square miles of wilderness to choose from . . . selected these bottoms at the mouth of Wolfpen, crying aloud to the deer and the wild turkey: 'God Almighty, what a place for a man to LIVE in!'" (x-xi)

Saul and his son Barton settled the 6,000 acres in 1790, even before the final defeat of the Shawnee in 1795, but not before Barton's throat was slit in an Indian raid. He survived as his father "pulled the wound together and bound it with guncotton." (xi) Thus the valley of the Big Sandy was settled by "hardy industrious settlers from Virginia." Hatcher contrasts these "strong men and fertile women" with the white settlers to the north: "riffraff squatters washed in near the mouth of the river . . . inhospitable, lazy people who allowed cockleburs to overrun the patches of corn and entangle and destroy the fleece of their few sheep." (ix-xii)

The themes which Hatcher thus introduces in the prelude—the immensity of nature, the contrasting types of settlers, and the Edenic opportunity presented by nature to mankind—do work themselves out in the manner of a Wagnerian opera, except that the ending belies the promise of the beginning. The novel opens in the spring of 1885 and ends the following spring. In Cynthia, the youngest child of the fifth generation of Patterns living in Wolfpen, is evident the heroic past and uncertain future of the family and its manse. Previous generations have built Wolfpen from a crude hut to an efficiently managed estate. Or rather the men have built, improved, and managed the estate. To Cynthia, who is the central intelligence of the novel, only the male forebearers are heroic figures. The first Pattern woman to impinge on the reader's consciousness is Julia, Cynthia's mother. An illiterate woman whose skill lay in her management of domestic tasks—tending a garden, weaving cloth, making clothes, and caring for the family—Julia battles her husband, Sparrell, to get Cynthia a year of advanced schooling at the Institute in Pikesville. Though Sparrell finally relents, he cannot see any practical good in educating a girl. Neither can Cynthia's closest brother Jesse, who will

himself go to Pikesville to study law. His more speculative mind finds justification for his own education in Blackstone, but not for his sister's. Jesse quotes Blackstone: "The last duty of parents to their children is giving them an *education* suitable to their station in life. . . ." (202) Nevertheless, even in this self-serving maxim is the justification for the education of women, for Blackstone observes that the purpose of education is that the child not "grow up like a mere beast, to lead a life useless to others and shameful to himself." (202)

In Sparrell Pattern is culminated the work of building the Wolfpen estate. As the novel opens, Cynthia perches herself upon a ledge to overlook the conversion of the water-powered grist mill built by Tivis Pattern in 1825, on the site of the horse mill built by Barton Pattern in 1810, to a steam-powered mill capable of grinding corn and sawing lumber:

A century of life, of making things in these bottoms of the Kentucky mountains, separated Cynthia from her Great-Great-Grandfather Saul who first strode through the wilderness on his long legs spying out the land. During that century, wave after wave of change and reform, sweeping over the Republic and bearing it on into the Westland, had broken against the mountain walls, leaving the valleys within almost untouched. The way of life which Cynthia Pattern from the brown Pinnacle saw in the valley below her was the indigenous fruit of an unbroken tradition of family life developed without benefit of the world beyond the wide horizon of the Big Sandy hills. If there were surviving anywhere in America in 1885 anything resembling a native culture, it was represented now in the life of the Patterns now in their fifth generation on their six thousand acres of hills and valleys surrounding Wolfpen Bottoms. But a new steam-mill would not be indigenous. (15)

Shortly, Sparrell Pattern sells for timber 4,000 acres at five dollars an acre, an act which ultimately brings the low-life population of the river mouth up into the valley and leads to the ruin of the estate and the family. Thus, the progress brought about by the practical Sparrell Pattern results in the permanent scari-fication of the land, the degradation of values which successive generations of the family had represented, and the ultimate dis-

solution of the family. Julia is killed by overwork as she takes on the job of feeding and housing the surveying crews. Cynthia's brother, Abrael, smitten by a desire to see Pittsburgh, leaves Wolfpen to become a boatman on the Big Sandy and the Ohio. Brother Jesse becomes a lawyer in Pikesville. Sparrell is knocked from his horse and killed by stones thrown by the ruffian loggers he has brought to the valley. Cynthia leaves with the surveyor who had made all this progress possible. Only Brother Jasper remains at Wolfpen to work the land.

The novel ends on a sprightly note as all go their separate ways, but the reader remains conscious that the challenge to develop the land has been only imperfectly met. Sparrell Pattern never received more than a fraction of the money owed him for his timber. As Cynthia must shoulder her mother's burdens, her dream of an education is never realized. When she marries the surveyor she leaves full of hope for the future but oblivious to the fact that she has exchanged Wolfpen for a small house and orchard in Catlettsburg at the mouth of the river. Cynthia and her new husband ride up out of the hollow and down to their new home. The differences between Wolfpen Hollow and the flat land at Catlettsburg seem to be less, anyway, as the surveyor has laid his plats on ground considered theoretically level. Sparrell Pattern had argued with him about this, but the young man's knowledge overpowered the old man's last grasp of tradition. The prelude had declared that what lay before Saul Pattern and the generations to come was "a moment unique in the history of man: a clean slate before them, a virgin district at their feet. . . ." (xii) To their unspoken aspirations—"What would they not make of this new land!"—comes the surveyor's echo five generations later. A leveling has occurred. The heroic stature of the forefathers is no more.

Hatcher's third and last published novel, *Central Standard Time*, contrasts the top and bottom strata of industrial civilization in central Ohio at the time of the Great Depression. It is, in part, the story of J. Alfred Penniston, self-made millionaire and absolute monarch over all who work at Penniston Products, Inc. What is produced at Penniston Products is never revealed to the reader for what is important in this novel is the struggle for power in industry. On one side it is J. Alfred's struggle to remain in control

even as he withdraws the benefits of the paternalistic society he had created. On the other hand, it is a struggle for power on the part of his employees. As the Depression deepens, J. Alfred reduces the hours of his employees and then the hourly rates. His salesmen are forced to forgo their fixed guarantee as they are put on straight commission and as the commission itself is reduced while the territory is enlarged. Meanwhile, J. Alfred Penniston and his son Mark live in the baronial style they have always maintained. Mark's wife, Grace, is even featured in the society pages "with a smart spring garden costume, a trowel in hand . . . the gardener on hands and knees blurred out of focus behind her."⁸

At the bottom of this society are the workers, epitomized in Henry Ferrell, father of ten hungry children with another on the way. Though Hatcher's use of dialogue is quite good, he has elected to present the aspirations of each of the characters as interior monologues. Henry Ferrell's speaks for labor in tones that were still revolutionary in 1937:

They want what everybody wants. They want what Industry does not and cannot provide. They want a sense of satisfaction that constitutes living. They want the activity by which they get a living to provide them also with living. They want to avoid the feeling of being exploited, of being prisoners of Industry. They don't want to have their lives taken away, bit by bit, hour by hour, through the days, through the years, with nothing being offered in exchange. They want . . . they don't know what they want. But they want something. . . . There is plenty to want! (218)

Henry Ferrell's wife, Clara, has a clearer idea of what she wants. She wants to share equally with the management class:

Old Penniston doesn't share the work and share the pay—not his work and pay. . . . Thirty-three dollars and sixty cents last month. Our share! Share it over a big family, Mr. Penniston. How much a share! Share the work—share the pay—how about sharing the babies? Yes. Let's share the babies, Mr. Penniston. I'll share. Share this one with Grace Lamb Penniston. Let it spoil her trim figure that she's so proud of she won't eat potatoes and won't use cream (cream! my God, when did we last see any cream?)

Or, if it might be a real inconvenience to her, I might be hired to mind it for her. . . . How about sharing the house?

What do they do with a whole hotel up there, just the two of them? Or share the grounds! My kids out in the street, like as not to be run over by a truck. Share the work—share the pay! Share the house, share the grounds. Share the factory, why don't you? . . . Share the work. Be a good neighbor. Have faith in your country, in Penniston Products, Inc., in the Labor Union, in everything have faith by sharing the work—and the pay. We share the work all right, but we poor devils do the sharing, all among ourselves. (138-139)

Grace Lamb Penniston's interior monologue shows how completely unaware she is of the aspirations of such people as Clara Ferrell, even more so than her mother-in-law who muses "If you didn't know they existed, you'd ask, are there really such people?" (101) Yet Grace's aspirations are not so different from Clara's for both want to live a life of quality. Grace's articulation of that desire, however, is a tour-de-force of consumption without meaning, of culture without understanding:

It is all about love, and money, and freedom, and cocktails. It is all about barn studios, and barn restaurants, and candlesticks from the Flea Market, and crooked paintings from the attics of Montparnasse. It is all about T. S. Eliot and James Joyce and Gertrude Stein. It is all about Ziegfeld and Earl Carroll and George Gershwin. It is all about Matisse, and Picasso, and Modigliani. It is all about the Yacht Club, the Riding Club, the Gun Club, the Hunt Club, the Garden Club, the Bath Club, the Theatre Art Club, the Art League, the Junior League, the Literary Guild, the Hospital Twig, the Friends-of-the-Children Twig. It is all about diet and beauty treatments and skin ointments and golf and reducing exercises, about love and bridge parties and contraceptives. It is all about the restlessness of unfulfillment, the atrophy of correspondence, and the good new life getting mislaid somewhere on the way up and out. It is about Mark and Grace, Penniston Products, about her music phase, her painting phase, her clay-modeling phase, her ceramic-art phase, her poetry phase, her music phase, her painting phase. (44-45)

The narrator's sardonic response to Grace's credo: "What will you have, quoth the gods. Take it and use our modern pay-as-you-enjoy budget plan. This is our new permanent high level . . .

from Plymouth Rock to Packard Twin Six to Penniston Products, Inc." (45)

The notion of time as a regulator of human action is interwoven throughout this novel. The novel's headnote cites Ohio's General Code establishing a uniform time standard throughout the state. There are frequent references to clocks not as recorders of real time but imposers of order. We are told that "time, like other commodities, is manufactured, ticked off by brass wheels, carried in men's pockets, on girls' wrists, or hung up on a wall over a lamp bulb to measure off the life of Penniston and his hired hands." (4) There are also numerous references to traffic lights "ordering the confusion" and directing movement. (13) This "automatic solution of all modern problems" will ultimately wrest absolute power from Penniston as he is forced to recognize the labor union's right to bargain.

One suspects that this ultimate triumph of law in an ordered universe pleases Hatcher. Yet there is still a note of irony. At the novel's close, Mark Penniston has just settled with the union, his father having slit his veins rather than relent. Mark speculates on the course of history: ". . . after the purge by water, Noah got drunk and cursed his sons; after the purification by fire, Lot got drunk and debauched his daughters." (310) The younger Penniston has spent much of this novel trying to recover the idealism he lost fighting in the Great War. He speculates on the purgation of the world by the four elements of which it is composed. Noah and Lot account for water and fire, and the Great War was earth. Penniston thinks the world will finally be destroyed by air, perhaps by poison gas. How ironic that the winds of another great war were already blowing when this novel was published in 1937, and that destruction by air not of the whole world but of any possibility for a well-ordered universe would occur in less than ten years.

The critical reception of Hatcher's novels was mixed. Reviewers generally found something to praise, but frequently enough Hatcher suffered the ignominy reserved by Eastern critics for regional writers even before H. L. Mencken made his famous pronouncement. *The Saturday Review* commended Hatcher's "admirable clarity" in description and point of view in *Tunnel Hill*,

yet questioned whether brickmakers, prostitutes, moonshiners, and other lower class ruffians were "of sufficient interest in themselves to sustain the interest of a long book."⁴ By the time that the *Saturday Review* examined Hatcher's second novel, however, regionalism no longer had to prove its merit: "His writing has learned much from Elizabeth Madox Roberts and has learned it well; his book gives us a beautiful, a little known, a truly native pattern of life."⁵ The *Springfield* (Mass.) *Republican* was equally impressed, commending Cynthia Pattern to its readers as "natural, human and attractive."⁶ But the *New York Times*, which had justly taken Hatcher to task for his intrusive asides in *Tunnel Hill*, faulted *Patterns of Wolfpen* for exactly those characteristics which other reviewers had begun to find pleasing. The *Times* reviewer found the characters in *Patterns of Wolfpen* "neither striking enough nor real enough to carry one past any inconsistencies in the logic." Professing to find Hatcher's writing "charming," that reviewer concluded nonetheless that the "total effect he achieves is one of triteness and mediocrity."⁷

Hatcher's probing of economic issues in *Central Standard Time* also drew mixed reviews. Richard Droughton's signed review in the *Boston Evening Transcript* praised the theme: "As a commentary on American life in a small Middle-West town in the very recent times of economic and social transition, Professor Hatcher's writing is mature and thoughtful."⁸ But the *Times* was still unrelenting. E. H. Walton's review acknowledged it as "a well intentioned and fairly clever novel" and even found "some nice touches of satire." But Walton remained unconvinced of Hatcher's originality: "it is too glib and stereotyped to cut very deeply and it adds very little to what one could deduce from the front page news."⁹

Perhaps the *Times* reviewers cut Hatcher too deeply. He did not publish another novel and soon turned to popular histories of the Midwest. In such works as *The Buckeye Country* (1940), *The Great Lakes* (1944), *Lake Erie* (1945), *The Western Reserve* (1949), and *Century of Iron and Men* (1950) Hatcher continued to display his ability to bring a mass of detail to bear on the total picture. As his novels had focused on the common folk, so too his histories favor ordinary figures in the historical panorama. Per-

haps, indeed, popular histories were Hatcher's best genre, for in them he was forced to keep in check the powerful sense of irony which always threatened to fracture the narrative in his novels. In addition, Hatcher brought out numerous anthologies which for a long time were the staple of college drama courses. And his critical study of American fiction, *Creating the Modern American Novel* (1965), remains relevant today—not least because in dating American modernity with Sinclair Lewis, he focuses critical attention on the heartland. In the entire scope of Hatcher's life, from his birth near the banks of the Ohio River in 1898 to the present, his three novels probably may not be said to constitute his most important achievements. When he was given the MidAmerica Award by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature in 1980, it was for his contributions to our understanding of the Midwest, but chiefly in his popular histories rather than his novels. Nevertheless, the three novels, sweeping as they do over the history of a small part of America and focusing squarely on the common folk, constitute a resource for the study of American life. Particularly in *Patterns of Wolfpen* and *Tunnel Hill* do we see the culture of a borderland which blurs even so definite a boundary as the Ohio River. In that respect, Hatcher's perspective shares much not only with Elizabeth Madox Roberts, as the *Saturday Review* noted in 1934, but with Zora Neale Hurston, Flannery O'Connor, Oliver LaFarge, Willa Cather, and all who have delineated the region in the character of its common folk. Though Hatcher's three novels are relatively early work in his canon, together with his popular histories, they constitute a body of work which falls within John T. Frederick's celebrated definition of regionalism: "A good regional writer is a good writer who uses regional materials. His regionalism is an incident and condition, not a purpose or motive. It means simply that he uses the literary substance which he knows best, the life of his own neighborhood, of his own city or state. . . ."¹⁰

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NOTES

1. Harlan Hatcher, *Tunnel Hill* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1931), p. 49. Subsequent references to this work will be identified by page number in the text of the study.

2. Harlan Hatcher, *Patterns of Wolfpen* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1934), p. viii. Subsequent references to this work will be identified by page number in the text of the study.
3. Harlan Hatcher, *Central Standard Time* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937), pp. 41-42. Subsequent references to this work will be identified by page numbers in the text of the study.
4. *Saturday Review*, May 30, 1931, p. 867.
5. *Saturday Review*, Dec. 29, 1934, p. 401.
6. *Springfield (Mass.) Republican*, Nov. 25, 1934, p. 7E.
7. *New York Times*, Nov. 18, 1924, p. 20; April 6, 1931, p. 6.
8. *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 30, 1937, p. 4.
9. *New York Times*, March 14, 1937, p. 7.
10. John T. Frederick, ed., *Out of the Midwest: A Collection of Present-Day Writing* (New York: Whittlesey House, McGraw-Hill, 1944), p. xv.

VERA CASPARY'S CHICAGO, SYMBOL AND SETTING

JANE S. BAKERMAN

In some ironic ways, perhaps it is unfortunate that Vera Caspary's novel *Laura* (1943) and the film which was subsequently based upon it (1945) were such smashing successes, for *Laura* is almost the only title for which Caspary is known today. Currently, when the critical establishment remembers her at all, they think only of a good screenwriter or of one excellent mystery. Actually, *Laura* is only one of several good crime novels Caspary produced, and while her work as a scriptwriter is important, these categories exclude major portions of her fiction. This narrowness of vision is a serious loss for current readers and students of literature because Caspary's portraits of young working women trapped amid the expectations of society, their own romantic dreams, the seemingly vast opportunities of the marketplace, and the enticing new freedoms purportedly available to them remain fresh and surprisingly—perhaps sadly—contemporary. One important complication in the books is the tension generated by the young women's wish to or need to find and hold jobs, and the phrase "the working girl" is almost a refrain in Caspary's studies of young females in pursuit of the American Dream.

In several of her novels, Vera Caspary uses Chicago, her birthplace, as both an effectively rendered setting and as a major symbol. Her portrait of Chicago develops almost entirely in relationship to the women whose stories she recounts; for example:

shortly before the hands of the Wrigley clock indicate eighty-three, the streets awaken as suddenly as if a giant hand had released a spring imprisoning the crowds in the street cars and the motor buses and the Elevated stations. . . . people start pouring out of the cars and down the narrow staircases . . . filling the streets with shifting color. . . .

The crowd is young and colorful because there are so many girls. Year after year the girls come, year after year miraculously youthful as they emerge for a few crowded minutes of freedom on the streets.¹

Because they focus on the girls' perceptions, these novels resemble Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, but unlike Carrie, Caspary's protagonists are capable of leading examined lives, and most of them do so. Their habit of self-evaluation and self-examination gives rise to much of the symbolic value the metropolis assumes.

Symbolically, the city functions in two antithetic ways: on the one hand, it represents the opportunity to find the perfect mate, to fulfill those romantic dreams. Where better to seek ultimate happiness than in a young city filled with young people? The girls believe that any good thing is possible in Chicago:

To the south and the west the tall structures, the pointed towers, made an angular pattern against the sky. Their shadows were purple and blue and strong and beautiful in the early morning. A few yellow lights were glittering sequins, glowing their defiance against the coming brightness.

'Did you ever see anything like it? It's not Chicago, it's a city in a dream'. . .

Mae liked that phrase. . . . She was enchanted by the resemblance of this reality to the towns in pictures, towns that were strong and resolute and self-sufficient and exciting. (63)

On the other hand, Chicago's urban hustle—busy streets; slick mobsters; developing businesses; and masses of young people on the trail of success, security, and happiness—is also a symbol of the confusion stemming from the central characters' lack of preparation for life in a highly competitive, often cold, usually exploitative, society. Though some of the young women are confident of their ability to compete in the marketplace, all, in Caspary's view, are under some degree of threat:

There are girls with avid, searching eyes and girls dull with the discontent of long office days ahead, girls rebellious because they have only impersonal business hours to contemplate, and girls eager because an office with its men and its activities is a livelier place than a kitchen. There are girls . . . worrying because the . . . clock races too swiftly toward the

moment of nine; girls loitering because they are assured a few moments' tardiness will not endanger their jobs; girls self-confident and impressed with a sense of their importance to the day; and timid girls wondering if they shall have to suffer this morning for yesterday's errors. (151-152)

Three novels, *Music in the Street* (1930), *Thicker than Water* (1932),² and *Evvie* (1960),³ offer particularly successful portraits of very youthful women in pursuit of the American Dream. For them, the Dream encompasses two important elements; they want to find the perfect mate, and they spend almost endless hours fantasizing about him, endless hours seeking him. Equally important, however, is their desire to find self-realization in work; they wish to support themselves (indeed some *must* support themselves), at least until they can marry and realize their socio-sexual fantasies. Much of their frustration arises from the duality of their concept of the American Dream, for while struggling to establish identities for themselves as wage earners, they believe, simultaneously, that they will have no identity at all unless they are indispensably desirable to *the* man. The duality of their aspiration is, of course, reflected in the dual role played by the Chicago symbolism: dream and nightmare.

Caspary's portrait of Chicago is enhanced by its breadth. These young female protagonists' backgrounds cut across various socio-economic levels and patterns of city life. Chronologically, the novels cover the years between 1885 and 1931, the time period of *Thicker than Water*, a family saga spanning several generations. Both *Music in the Street* and *Evvie* are set during Prohibition, and the contradictory signals about correct and incorrect behavior under the drinking laws is echoed in the conflicting signals given the girls about their personal lives. Further, the City of the Big Shoulders emerges as a city of immigrants in these three novels, for in their various ways, the young protagonists are all immigrants; they are all outsiders.

In *Music in the Street*, Caspary introduces an image which represents all the young women in these three novels; it is a painting of "a girl, blindfolded, kneeling on the crest of the world." (178) To Caspary's protagonists, Chicago is the "crest of the world," but because they are aliens whom no one guides through

the strange land, they remain blind, floundering in their search for happiness and success. Again, the resemblance to Dreiser's Carrie is unmistakable; like her, these girls are largely defined by *wanting*—and what they want is what Carrie wants: affection, comfort, security; in other words, male protection and/or jobs; also like Carrie, they don't know exactly how to achieve these ends, and there is no one to instruct them. As Patricia Meyer Spacks has pointed out in her comments upon Jane Austen's protagonists, however, the absence of useful mentors for young female heroes is all too common throughout English-language fiction.⁴

Lacking tutors, largely ignorant of the roles demanded by modern urban life, Caspary's central characters often act on instinct or impulse, just as Carrie does. Here, however, they differ from Carrie in that their instincts for survival are not always viable; also because they, unlike Carrie, are capable of introspection, they are well aware of what they are missing. They are missing the "city in a dream," and they fully realize that they must settle for Chicago, the reality. For them, reality is often a bittersweet compromise; frequently, it is a severe disappointment.

Rosalia Piera, the protagonist of *Thicker than Water*, is a member of a family who are immigrants in the usual sense of the term. The Pieras, Portuguese Jews, have, in a series of moves, over a series of centuries, established themselves in Chicago where they intend to make their fortunes. Rosalia's pursuit of the American Dream is complicated by the fact that she is not conventionally pretty and by the arrogance and snobbishness of her family who consider *only* Spanish or Portuguese Jews sufficiently worthy of acceptance into their clan. Further, Rosalia is intelligent and ambitious; she would enjoy working and is, indeed, far better suited to the marketplace than her brother, the family breadwinner, but the social and familial standards of the Pieras forbid her to take a job, because "working girls came from the poorest, from the commonest families." (127)

Thus, Rosalia is left with only her intensely romantic dreams which are undergirded by a grim, pragmatic, even ugly reality; the obvious contradiction troubles her, but she cannot resolve it:

The legend was that the engagement of a girl and a fellow was highly romantic. As soon as the girl's parents could send

an announcement to the *Tribune* and the girl display a diamond, she became a heroine, a Juliet whose Romeo was doing nicely in leather goods or men's tailoring. The girls did not consider marriage the beginning of a useful adult life but the end of all striving. They knew that marriage involved the sacrifice of chastity and the compliance with the horrid physical desires of a man, which compliance was payment for board and fashionable clothes and a luxurious home. They also knew that the rite of compliance would result in their having dear little babies, a process which would further entitle them to rich and idle days. (233)

Accordingly, Rosalia, barred from useful employment which would fulfill her, continues her search for a mate. When she does marry, she marries a German Jew, makes a decided compromise, and though the marriage survives many tests and trials, it is merely workable, not particularly happy. Perforce, she invests her ambition, intelligence, and drive in curbing frustration, in mere survival.

Until Rosalia's marriage, almost no scene of the novel is set in any public place in Chicago; for Rosalia's generation, the city represents exile from the East (where the Portuguese-Jewish community is larger, mate-hunting better), and Caspary uses this device to underscore the insularity of the lives the Pieras live. Thus, Chicago limits Rosalia's pursuit of her romantic dream, promotes the nightmare. This pattern changes progressively, however, as Rosalia's daughter, Beatrice, and her granddaughter, "Little Rosie," come to share center stage with the protagonist.

Thicker than Water actually portrays a number of Chicago girls, and Beatrice and Little Rosie are of great importance. They also compromise the dreams they share with Rosalia, and both marry outside the Portuguese-Jewish community. They do, however, live in broader worlds. Rebelling against her failed marriage, Beatrice earns (and, in the Crash, loses) a fortune in the stock market, becoming the first Piera woman to be at all self-supporting. In order to earn a living, Beatrice leaves Chicago for New York until the Depression forces her to return to the diminished life Chicago and her parents' home offer her. But Little Rosie marries for love and hopes to share the burden of supporting her new family. Both these young women frequent the speakeasies,

restaurants, shops, and public buildings of the larger Chicago, and in this way, Caspary indicates that the insular life of the original Piera immigrants is over, destroyed by changing times and by social assimilation.

Rosalia's recognition of the changing times is symbolized by her gift to Little Rosie of the one remaining family heirloom, a beautifully engraved silver bowl, and in this way, readers are allowed some hope that Rosie, though mentorless like her mother and grandmother before her, will, nevertheless, profit by their negative examples, make a good marriage and a viable life for herself. In any case, Rosie will be a full citizen of Chicago, perhaps a citizen of the world, rather than simply a prisoner of custom unsuited to the new, strange land in which the Piera immigrants originally found themselves.

Whereas Rosalia Piera would relish employment in order to be a happy, fully realized human being, Mae Thorpe, hero of *Music in the Street*, holds jobs because she must. For Mae, it's work or starve. Also a newcomer, Mae migrates to Chicago hoping that the anonymity of the big city will obviate the undeserved "bad reputation" foisted upon her by a home-town man. As Rosalia Piera represents the multitudes of Chicagoans who are second-generation Americans, Mae represents the millions of urbanites who migrate from their small Midwestern towns to seek fortune and security in the city.

Mae brings with her almost no skills, but she does bring romantic dreams and her inability to distinguish between honorable and dishonorable men. Even though she knows that her dreams have "no power to protect her" (10), Mae Thorpe continues her search for a young man who projects "a radiance that no other mortal possessed" (11), and that search leads her into a series of dead-end jobs, an extended love affair, an attempted abortion, and a pragmatic marriage.

This marriage also represents assimilation and compromise, for Mr. Moses is Jewish as Mae is not, and he is far from the glamorous, romantic hero of her dreams. Unlike Mae's handsome lover, however, Moses is a very decent, loving man, and Mae, more than any other protagonist in these novels, matures by learning to value what life does offer her. Among the many household

goods the couple acquires is a lamp which Mae finds particularly beautiful; during a period of serious marital tension, the lamp is smashed. When Mr. Moses replaces it, Mae begins to realize that though he may not *project* radiance, as does her dream suitor, he *provides* radiance by loving her devotedly.

Impoverished Mae Thorpe's Chicago is very different from that of the upper middle-class Pieras, and from the first, Mae moves about the city refusing to see its grim reality. She lives where it is held that

the morals of self-supporting young women were more important than their nourishment. Thus Rolfe House had always been known . . . as the institution where the girls had to be in at twelve, and its cuisine had never improved. (31)

The cheapest of nightclubs where a friend's fiancé plays in the band substitutes for glamor, and for several months, the shabby efficiency apartment her lover rents passes as a romantic love nest.

Settling down to life as wife, mother, and member of the extended Moses family, Mae will be tangentially a part of the Chicago scene through her husband and his flourishing business. Chiefly, however, her life will center on friends and family, and she will be a full participant only within a narrow social circle. Mae settles for a small life, her identity defined solely by her relationship to her husband and her coming child, the purple and blue shadows of her Chicago dawn replaced by the glimmer of the green porcelain lamp.

In sharp contrast to Mae Thorpe and to Evvie Ashton, her roommate, Louise Goodman, narrator of *Evvie*, has skills and makes her way in the job market fairly successfully. Louise is a copywriter for an advertising agency, and despite the constant pressure of sex discrimination, does excellent work and moves freely among the professionals and quasi-professionals who frequent the "best" Chicago restaurants, clubs, bars, and speakeasies. Unchaperoned, she shares an apartment with Evvie, the title character. Though free and sexually liberated in word if not in deed, Louise is far from contented, devoting innumerable hours to fantasies about an ideal lover, marking her working days by the hands of the Wrigley clock exactly as Mae, unskilled and drifting, does. Determined not to marry, Louise nevertheless devalues herself

because the man she desires does not desire her. She remains blind.

In a very special way, Louise Goodman, a Chicago native, is nevertheless an immigrant, for she is among the first generation of young American women to claim sexual freedom and to seek economic equality. Louise is well aware of her new status, and, true to her introspective nature, comments upon its contradictions:

this was the age of The Girl. We had come out of the back parlor, out of the kitchen and nursery, we turned our backs upon the blackboards, shed aprons and paper cuffs. A war had freed us and given women a new kind of self-respect. . . . it was even superior to be a *career* girl. . . . We held jobs, we voted, we asserted equal independence with men, equal privilege. Best and most decisive in the reshaping of our lives was the money in our pocketbooks. . . . [But still] Popularity [was] the golden apple of the 1920 Atalanta. . . . the prince no longer rides into the life of the passive Cinderella; she must go out and win him. (25)

Competent, intelligent, and bold, Louise is nevertheless dependent upon some phantom prince for validation of her identity. She may be willing to "go out and win" the prince, but she does not know how to capture him; there are no road maps, no mentors for this first-generation New Woman, and her free, bohemian life is merely a "front," "like the steaks in speakeasies were a front." (67) For Louise, recounting her youth in retrospect, Chicago also is merely a front, a dream imposed over the frenzied activity which substitutes for joy; she describes

a club on the top floor of a new Michigan Avenue skyscraper. Its walls were all window, its fresco was Chicago. . . . the whole glittering panorama . . . the lake with its dark water bounded by a crescent of lights, backed by a city of gold and purple. Tall structures guarded the boulevard, spired towers pierced the sky, glowing windows compounded the pattern. . . . Dusk and distance concealed the ugliness back of the boulevard . . . rejected the existence of poverty and labor. This was a carnival staged for our pleasure, prelude to an evening of insane and fruitless happiness. (44-45)

The carnival halts abruptly when Evvie Ashton is murdered and Louise must face not only the loss of her closest friend but

also the fact that their friendship had crumpled behind the facade, for the man of Louise's dreams was also the man of Evvie's dreams, and, until her death, he was also Evvie's secret lover. Louise eventually seeks escape, substituting the view from an apartment on Washington Square for the Michigan Avenue panorama. She retains, however, one of Evvie's paintings which summarizes the experiences of all of Vera Caspary's Chicago girls; it is

a study [of] a flight in unison, man and woman in space. . . . The man is hideously muscled, the female clings below him, knobbed hands clutching his exaggerated thigh. The woman's eyes are closed against the male's maleness. Close by, its beak threatening the woman's blind eyes, hovers a hooded bird. (53)

As she recounts the story of her girlhood, long after the events of the story itself, Louise still does not know

what Evvie intended by this picture, whether it was to suggest the woman's clinging, sycophantic need or her willful doom. (53)

For Louise Goodman as for Rosalia Piera and Mae Thorpe, Chicago proves to be a hard testing ground. These protagonists have knelt blindfolded on the precipice of the world, and they have fallen. Diminished, wounded, they have, nevertheless, survived, and they have compromised: married or run away. Forced to abandon Chicago, the dream city, they evade the Chicago of the nightmare, never learning quite enough to transform dream into reality.

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NOTES

1. Vera, Caspary, *Music in the Street* (New York: Sears Publishing, Inc., 1930), p. 151. All further references cite this edition and are indicated in the text.
2. Vera Caspary, *Thicker than Water* (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1932). All further references cite this edition and are indicated in the text.
3. Vera Caspary, *Evvie* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960). All further references cite this edition and are indicated in the text.
4. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Avon Books, 1976), p. 150.

"A VISIONED END":
EDGAR LEE MASTERS AND WILLIAM STAFFORD

LELAND KRAUTH

Comet-like, Edgar Lee Masters emerged with the publication of *Spoon River Anthology* in 1915 from dark obscurity to shimmering prominence, only to disappear again into ethereal night. Pound's expatriot enthusiasm—"AT LAST," he announced, "At last America has discovered a poet"—quickly gave way to reiterated complaints against Masters's dejected vision.¹ Amy Lowell struck the reverberating note when she pronounced the book as depressing as the Newgate Calendar.² For more recent critics, however, the criminals are not the citizens of Spoon River, Masters's grim self-elegists, but his critical judges. In *Beyond Spoon River*, one of his most sympathetic readers, Ronald Primeau, has noted that even Masters's "admirers" don't know the whole of his work.³ This neglect, together with the insistently negative view of the tenor of his poems, has isolated Masters, stranded him on an all but forgotten shoal far upstream from the rapids of contemporary poetry.

But Masters is closer to us than we realize. Consider these three recent descriptions of contemporary American poetry—the first, a definition of subject matter; the second, a description of postmodern poetic form; the third, an assessment of current practice in prosody:

- 1) a poetry of immersion . . . an embrace not only of the raw and chaotic energies of contemporary life, but also of the interior life of individual subjects.
- 2) Postmodern American poetic form . . . is *analogical* . . . [employing] non-literary analogues such as conversation, confession, dream and other kinds of discourse . . .

- 3) Free verse is clearly the *Lingua Franca* of our time. . . . What we hear in it is the music of the land, and the words we say it with.⁴

What is striking here is how well these summaries fit the Masters of *Spoon River*. Like our contemporary poets, he embraces the raw and chaotic energies of life by driving into the interiors of individual lives; like our contemporary poets, he employs an analogical form by writing verse epigraphs; and like our contemporary poets, he exploits free verse to voice the music of the land. Such unexpected congruencies suggest anew the lasting power of Masters's finest poetry. They also suggest, I think, that we might usefully reexamine Masters's work by comparing his *Spoon River* poems to those of an eminent contemporary poet, William Stafford. For the distance from Masters to Stafford is not as far as it appears on most maps of postmodern poetry.

Stafford himself feels a kinship with Masters. Although he has never discussed Masters publicly in his essays or interviews, Stafford knows his poetry well and considers it one of the seminal influences on his own career. Explaining not only his knowledge of Masters but also his debt to him, he writes:

Specifically, about Masters—yes, oh yes. My parents early introduced us to the Spoon River world, and I know those poems as old friends. My mother could quote some, and I can too . . .

You make me realize that encountering Masters' direct, sceptical and ironic, but caring, bits of insight printed in an arching collection of poems—this kind of reading was a steady encouragement to me:—something called poems could be right out of the lives around me.⁵

Stafford's silence in public about Masters is, he explains, like not "saying much about my brother or anything else so near that I forgot it was an influence."⁶ Beyond encouragement and even direct influence, there is between the two poets, I believe, a fundamental congruence of feeling and vision.

Four things specially mark the connections between Masters and Stafford: a common reliance on memory as the generative source of poetry; a common feel for the remembered world of their Midwestern pasts; a common concern over the creative life of the

artist in a materialistic society; and a common belief that the darkness of life can be transcended by acts of spirit—by visionary seeing. In more encompassing terms, both poets have a bifocal vision, looking at experience through what Masters called “realistic” and “mystical” eyes.⁷ In Masters the realistic view seems to predominate, while in Stafford one is more aware of mystical glimmerings. But whatever the emphasis, both see beyond the empirical world into a sphere of haunting otherness; both write toward “a visioned end.”⁸

For Masters and Stafford alike importance lies, in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s memorable phrasing, “somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic” roll on “under the night.” Both poets are “borne back,” if not “ceaselessly,” at least recurrently, “into the past.” Memory opens the space for many of their finest poems. Stafford insists that his writing is “a reckless encounter with whatever comes along,” a process of “accepting sequential signals and adjustments toward an always-arriving present,” but paradoxically the content of that “always-arriving present” is often the past made available through memory.⁹ He is inspired by recollections “stretching back through daily life, into early experiences.”¹⁰ Masters was similarly enthralled by his past. He acknowledged, in a sentimental way not often associated with the infamous poet of ascerbic bitterness, that “his heart” lay always in the river valleys of his youth, clenched by “a thousand memories.”¹¹ He insisted that “the story” of his “ancestors” was “woven into . . . [the] fabric” of *Spoon River*, and he was, by his own account at least, devoted not only to his relatives but to all the villagers of his past.¹² “I loved the people there then,” he averred, “and I love their memory.”¹³

Memory for Stafford arises within the “cave of yourself where you know / and are lifted by important events”; it is “what holds the days together.”¹⁴ Knitting his present to his past, memory often functions as both well-spring and matrix of his poems. It leads him back to indelible events—to the class picnic at Garden City, for instance, or to catching catfish in the deep channel—and back to unforgettable people—to his father and mother, of course, to his Aunt Mabel, his Uncle George, to Ella, Bess, Ruth, Althea, Ellen, and the preacher at the corner who “talked like an

old gun killing buffalo.”¹⁵ Two of his earlier books, *The Rescued Year* (1966) and *Allegiances* (1970), in particular, exploit memory. To a notable degree, both are, like Master’s *Spoon River Anthology*, gatherings of remembered people. But once memory has opened for Stafford the world of his poem, imagination holds sway. Some of his seemingly real people are, as he has admitted, invented figures.¹⁶ For Stafford, memory is less literal recall than a vista revealing the unexpected, multiplying possibilities. Commenting in effect on how his poems come into being, Stafford says in “The Rescued Year,” “I rubbed / the wonderful old lamp of our dull town” (N&CP, 117)—and then, of course, anything can happen: genies or genius can appear.

Masters has a similar sense of the power of memory. “Memory,” he insists, “is a kind of reading glass under which spots of earth long beloved take on the aspect of something magical.”¹⁷ *Spoon River Anthology* itself came into being when Masters, spending time with his mother “recalling . . . old days,” found that he remembered “the whole past” of his village years.¹⁸ In the book memory is in fact doubled, for Masters brings his characters into existence by remembering—and like Stafford, freely inventing—the people of his past, and the characters in turn define themselves by recalling their lives in elegy. Memory for Masters is thus not only an engendering power, as it is for Stafford, but also a primary technique. For both poets, however, memory is more than a recollection of things past; it is the very ontology of the individual present.

What both poets most often remember is place—and the ways of living that take shape from it. Both have an abiding feel for the particularities of their regional past; both know what Stafford says he learned from Masters: that poems can come right out of the world around them. Each poet has testified to the power of the first homeplace. In *The Sangamon* Masters muses in passionate wonder over the hold everyday things exert on the poet:

I’d like to know what it is that catches the imagination like a strange touch on the very heart, the very spiritual being of prenatal memories, that persist with reference to earth-places, like little streams bordered by willows, like fields of yellow wheat, like hills with the summoning sky above them

against which may stand an old corncrib? Why should such common things stir down where there is no explanation in the heart?¹⁹

And Stafford, having selected a poem out of his Midwestern past, "The Farm on the Great Plains," as his favorite for Paul Engle and Joseph Langland's anthology, *Poet's Choice*, glosses it with an amaze equal to Masters's by remarking that "the things" in the poem—"plains, farm, home, winter"—command his "allegiance" in a way that is, he insists, beyond his "power to analyze" for they "possess" him.²⁰ Both poets are spell-bound by the magic of place.

Most often Masters recreates place in the *Spoon River Anthology* by describing lives played out within the confines of regional life. The details of so simple a declaration as Indignation Jones's, for instance, reverberate with the felt import of lived space:

No more you hear my footsteps in the morning,
Resounding on the hollow sidewalk,
Going to the grocery store for a little corn meal
And a nickel's worth of bacon.²¹

Such lines evoke a past, a place, a whole ethos and its special ways of living. So strong is the grip of locale on Masters that his most natural affirmations are little more than itemizations of remembered regional pastimes:

Do the boys and girls still go to Siever's?
For cider, after school, in late September?
Or gather hazel nuts among the thickets
On Aaron Hatfield's farm when the frosts begin?
For many times with the laughing girls and boys
Played I along the road and over the hills
When the sun was low and the air was cool,
Stopping to club the walnut tree
Standing leafless against a flaming west.
Now, the smell of the autumn smoke,
And the dropping acorns,
And the echoes about the vales
Bring dreams of life. They hover over me. (SR, 52)

Dreams of his past life on the Midwestern plains also hover over Stafford. Throughout his career he has repeatedly made poems out of his familial past. "A Family Turn" is a representative

portrait, one that "links" for Stafford himself "to a quality in Masters."²²

All her Kamikaze friends admired my aunt,
their leader, charmed in vinegar,
a woman who could blaze with such white blasts
as Lawrence's that lit Arabia.
Her mean opinions bent her hatpins.

.....
We swept headlines from under rugs, names
all over town, which I learned her way, by heart,
and blazed with love that burns because it's real.
With a turn that's our family's own,
she'd say, "Our town is not the same" —

Pause—"And it's never been." (N&CP, 114)

While the affectionate humor is distinctly Stafford's, the honest acknowledgement of his aunt's meanness, the slight shock that comes with the revelation that she busybodies and gossips all over town, and, more complexly, the sense that her critical prying breeds genuine love, all these recall Masters's visioning of experience. Stafford's feel for his regional past takes in the landscape, as well as the people who inhabit it, and he often allows place to bespeak its own meanings, to voice the music of the land:

The well rising without sound,
the spring on a hillside,
the plowshare brimming through deep ground
everywhere in the field— (N&CP, 51)

Sometimes, however, Stafford attaches general reflections to the specifics that prompt them:

Mine was a Midwest home—you can keep your world.
Plain black hats rode the thoughts that made our code.
We sang hymns in the house; the roof was near God.

The light bulb that hung in the pantry made a wan light,
but we could read by it the names of preserves—
outside, the buffalo grass, and the wind in the night.

.....
The sun was over our town; it was like a blade.
Kicking cottonwood leaves we ran toward storms.
Wherever we looked the land would hold us up.

(N&CP, 29-30)

Here, as in Masters, place becomes compelling presence, real in itself, redolent of past delight, and emblematic of something larger still, of something that might be called existential sufficiency. In both poets this sense of adequacy—"the land would hold us up," Stafford tells us—is associated with the deeply felt particularities of the Midwestern world.

While finding stability as well as beauty in the world of their past, Masters and Stafford alike look askance at much of the present. They have in common a strong didactic impulse, an urge to instruct their age, one which is in fact out of sync with the two eras they bridge, being at odds not only with the tenets of modernism but also with the tenor of postmodern poetry. Yet Masters and Stafford are poet-critics of their society. Both view with alarm the increasing commercialism of America; both fear the stifling of liberal ideology; and both object to the madness of war.

Much of their discontent with America is in the familiar vein of Midwestern protest. From Howells and Twain on through Garland to Anderson, Dreiser, and Lewis, Midwestern writers have inveighed against the drift of American life. More specifically the Midwestern writer has characteristically complained of a cultural impoverishment. Garland strikes this recurrent note with poignant humor in his diaries:

I've been rereading Hawthorne's *Mosses [from] an Old Manse* and contrasting his life with mine. How little I have to work with as compared to his Concord. . . . The only moss I have is on the woodshed.²³

The Midwestern writer has typically attributed the vacancy in his field of vision, to borrow James's famous phrase, not only to the crude newness of his region but also to the steady drive toward materialism in American life in general. Anderson made the contrast between artistic endeavor and practical business the very center of his personally liberating self-mythologizing. "My own nature," he exclaimed, again and again, "was in revolt against moneymaking as an end in life."²⁴ The classic formulation of the case, however, is Dreiser's polemic, "Life, Art and America":

Here in America, by reason of an idealistic Constitution which is largely a work of art and not a workable system, you see a nation dedicated to so-called intellectual and spiritual

freedom, but actually devoted with an almost bee-like industry to the gathering and storing and articulation and organization and use of purely material things. In spite of all our base-drum announcement of our servitude to the intellectual ideals of the world (copied mostly, by the way, from England) no nation has ever contributed less, philosophically or artistically or spiritually, to the actual development of the intellect and the spirit.²⁵

The same strain can be heard in the pronouncements, as well as the poems, of Masters and Stafford. Masters centers his autobiography, *Across Spoon River*, on his struggle to free himself from a business environment inimical to art. "And here was I," he writes at one summarizing moment, "in this apartment badly deviled to make a living, and doing that in a business which destroyed every imaginative impulse."²⁶ Having freed himself from such entanglement sooner in his career than Masters, Stafford still feels his estrangement, even from those who profess respect for his art:

Oh, the people around me voice regard for art, writing, and so on. But I confess: they like poetry and poets in terms which seem to me not valid. I do not have the qualities, motives, purposes, hopes that they seem to think poets have. In short, I do—as a poet, that is—feel alien.²⁷

From their "alien's" point of view, both Masters and Stafford assail the misdirection of American life.

For Masters in *Spoon River* the chief destroyer of humanity is money—the love of it, the striving for it, the power it entails. Masters sees in someone like Anthony Findley, an archetypal figure of success in the Horatio Alger mold, a basic perversion of values: "I say of a man," Findley says, "'tis worse to lose / Money than friends"; and, "'Tis better to be feared than loved." (SR, 152) Masters's principal embodiment of the corruption of American life and character, however, is of course Thomas Rhodes—the financial, political, and ecclesiastical kingpin of Spoon River. Masters makes Rhodes not only grasping, self-serving, and morally depraved, but also actively hostile toward the creative artists of Spoon River. Pointedly he has Rhodes dismiss Petit, the Poet, Margaret Fuller Slack, the would-be novelist, and Percival Sharp,

the ironic reader of icons often taken to be one of Masters's self-portraits. He thus dramatizes what he feels as the antagonism of money-men toward all imaginative endeavor, thereby endorsing the Midwestern notion that there is an irreconcilable antithesis between materialism and the creative life itself. The fall of Rhodes, incomplete as it is, is Masters's rebuke to the human arrogance born of wealth and power. It is also, perhaps, a sign of his hope, fragile though it is, for the life of the mind.

Like Masters, although in softer tones, Stafford often objects in general to much of American life:

Counting the secretaries coming out of a building
there were more people than purposes. (N&CP, 51)

And the great national events danced
their grotesque, fake importance. (N&CP, 152)

Stafford is far less the social critic than Masters, but there is no mistaking his feeling that a money-mad culture is perverting the human. In the fifth section of the long poem, "The Move to California," he is for once almost savagely ironic in condemning America's debilitating obsessions:

Those who wear green glasses through Nevada
travel a ghastly road in unbelievable cars
and lose pale dollars
under violet hoods when they park at gambling houses.

I saw those martyrs—all sure of their cars in the open
and always believers in any handle they pulled—
wracked on an invisible cross
and staring at a green table. (N&CP, 47)

Stafford marks the loss of the human in these representative Americans by making them exotic. His ironic evocation of the traditionally religious—"martyrs," "wracked on an invisible cross"—anticipates the antidote to their illness which he dramatizes in the next stanza:

While the stars were watching
I crossed the Sierras in my old Dodge
letting the speedometer measure God's kindness,
and slept in the wilderness on the hard ground. (N&CP, 47)

For Stafford, nature often seems to offer a norm for human action. More explicitly than Masters, Stafford calls for a return to the elemental: "We must go back and find a trail on the ground," yet like Masters, he challenges all present-day hubris: "we must travel on our knees." (N&CP, 44) Nature in Stafford's poetry is never static (even his rocks move and intend) but always becoming. He dismisses those "Deaf to process, alive only to ends," "the logical ones." (N&CP, 55) The epiphanies in his poetry are sudden illuminations of mystery that defy rationality as well as materiality. They occur by chance or by an imaginative knowing at one with nature's beckoning essences. For as Jonathan Holden has observed, a major theme of Stafford's work is "the imagination—its resilience, its stubborn and playful instinct for deriving meaning and awe from the world."²⁸ Apprehending the natural world aright is for Stafford a necessary act of imagination, the crucial exercise of the very creativity Masters feels is jeopardized by the likes of Thomas Rhodes. With an urgency equal to Masters's, Stafford envisions as disaster any loss of imaginative power (see in particular "The Animal That Drank Up Sound"). While Masters characteristically condemns those who thwart the creative life, Stafford typically exhorts his readers to release their imperiled potentialities. Here, for instance, he enjoins humanity to remain human through imaginative responsiveness to the portents of earth:

The earth says have a place, be what that place
requires; hear the sound the birds imply
and see as deep as ridges go behind
each other. (N&CP, 75)

Of course for both Masters and Stafford one must not only imagine what the world suggests but also face what it presents. Perhaps the most notorious aspect of Masters's poetry is its bleakness, its insistent sense of catastrophe, befallen or impending. This mood, too, has its counterpart in Stafford's poems. Both poets envision humankind in large perspective, as, in Masters's terms, "a part of the scheme of things," "a part of the question / Of what the drama means." (SR, 262) Both see human life played out against a dark cosmic backdrop; both are haunted by a sense of apocalyptic peril, a fear of ominous endings near at hand. Here, from one of Masters's poems, is their common atmosphere:

Then the sun went down between great drifts
Of distant storms. For a rising wind
Swept clean the sky and blew the flames
of the unprotected stars . . . (SR, 211)

Or again, even more terribly and explicitly from Stafford:

Now we hear the stars torn upward
out of the sky; the alarm
shadows us as we run away
from this fact of a life, our home. (N&CP, 127)

The similarity of mood is arresting. This dark vision is by no means exclusive to Masters and Stafford (one could in fact argue that it is common to most twentieth-century poets). But it is one they share, and it is one of the things Stafford has singled out as central to his own appreciation of Masters. "I had an appetite," he writes, "for that bitter but sustaining way of seeing."²⁹

In neither poet, finally, is the bitter way of seeing life at large confirmed. Despite the prevailing critical view to the contrary, Masters's poetry resists its own darkness. And Stafford's not only counters its darkness but transfigures it, not into light but into a signifying obscurity worthy of human embrace. In both, to use Stafford's phrase, the "bitter . . . way of seeing" is also "sustaining."

The other side of the bleakness of *Spoon River* is, as careful readers know, a celebration of human nature, an affirmation of lived life, and an assertion of at least the possibility of metaphysical meaning. The point is worth emphasizing because the negative view of Masters persists. As recently as 1982 one critic, sensitively rediscovering the regional literature of Illinois, rediscovered only the misanthropic Masters.³⁰ Yet Masters invested the world of *Spoon River* with glimmerings of hope, joy, and faith. We need to re-see his poems, both one by one (for they are often technically more interesting than criticism has acknowledged) and as an anthology. His gathering, it seems to me, might best be reviewed as a dialectic. Positions—social, political, moral, psychological, intellectual, sexual, philosophical, and accidental—are balanced by their opposites. The striking, discontinuous utterance of Dippold the Optician, who shifts the lens of vision from color to families to knights of old to women to fields of grain to goblets to space to nothing to trees to lakes to sky to depths of air, should teach us

how to see Masters's book. (see SR, 201-202) The energy of *Spoon River* arises from the constant interplay of conflicting perspectives. It is an exchange without final resolution but with a clear inclination.

The inclination is a desire to uphold, to affirm and believe. Masters himself suggested as much when he spoke of the joy in the book, of its celebrations, and especially of its design. He understood his structure as one that would move his reader from confusion, failure, and limitation to heroism and truth, or as he defined the final sequence, to "heroes and the enlightened spirits."³¹

His celebration of human nature careens between love and self-sacrifice, on the one side, and courage and endurance, on the other. His pioneers loom as heroes of accomplishment:

We went by oxen to Tennessee,
Thence after years to Illinois,
At last to Spoon River.
We cut the buffalo grass,
We felled the forests,
We built the school houses, built the bridges,
Leveled the roads and tilled the fields
Where the leaves fall,

and as mystical spirits whose essence is as unfathomable as it is riveting

What was it in their eyes?—

.....
It was like a pool of water,
Amid oak trees at the edge of a forest,
Where the leaves fall,
As you hear the crow of a cock
From a far-off house . . . (SR, 237)

His affirmation of life lived fully, whatever the result, pervades the volume, providing the sounding board against which all the elegiac cries—of joy or pain or triumph or despair or frustration or fullment—are to be heard. This note, enjoining all to embrace life, is struck most fully by that fictive version of Masters's grandmother, Lucinda Matlock, who voices it through a denunciation of succeeding generations (thereby allowing later critics to hear only its bitter strain):

But Stafford's attitude toward the painful, bleak, uncertain aspect of life is accepting. Although he is sharply aware of "how cold, / unmanageable the real world" is (N&CP, 119), he welcomes it. His acquiescence is so pronounced that Robert Creely has declared it a clear and present "danger" that "things will become cozy" in Stafford's poems.³⁴ Whether dangerous or not, Stafford embraces life in all its darkness. His affirmations equal, even exceed, Masters's. Matching Masters's "It takes life to love Life," Stafford proclaims,

we ordinary beings can cling to the earth and love
where we are, sturdy for common things. (N&CP, 193)

And echoing both Masters's cries of life's tangled darkness *and* his insistence upon stoic engagement, Stafford grimly announces:

Better to stand in the dark of things and crash,
hark yourself, blink in the day, eat bitter bush
and look out over the world. (N&CP, 126)

Stafford's stance of acceptance is anchored, I believe, by his abiding sense of what he has variously termed "a certain directional feeling we have," "reverberating patterns," or "impressions of holiness."³⁵

As in Masters's poetry, this underlying or overarching significance is apprehended by heroic questers, ordinary wanderers, and visionary seers. Like Masters, Stafford celebrates "the star-striding men / who crossed the continent." (N&CP, 104) He creates a series of legendary figures—some historical, like Daniel Boone, most imaginary, like Deerslayer, Logue, Sublette, and the Wanderer—who confront, as Logue does, the "world of the farthest." (N&CP, 167) They are Stafford's counterparts to Master's pioneers and visionaries. And again like Masters, who endows his grandparents with heroic vision, Stafford makes his own father into one of these far-seeing guides. He mythologizes his father as someone who teaches him to listen out "into places" where "the walls of the world flared, widened" (N&CP, 33), as someone who teaches him to believe in the "sight of angels or anything unusual" (N&CP, 63), as someone who teaches him to know that he is the world's "slow guest, / one of the common things / that move in the sun and have / close, reliable friends / in the earth, in the air, in the rock." (N&CP, 157) Above all, his mythic father gives him

his life's occupation: "'Your job is to find what the world is trying to be.'" (N&CP, 107)

Heeding this father's advice, Stafford is the chief visionary in his own poetry. It is Stafford himself who propounds the visions of metaphysical meaning which correspond to those set forth by Masters beyond the mundane world of Spoon River. These seings are some of Stafford's most famous poems. "Bi-Focal" encapsulates his visionary faith:

Sometimes up out of this land
a legend begins to move.
It it a coming near
of something under love?

Love is of the earth only,
the surface, a map of roads
leading wherever go miles
or little bushes nod.

Not so the legend under,
fixed, inexorable,
deep as the darkest mine
the thick rocks won't tell.

As fire burns the leaf
and out of the green appears
the vein in the center line
and the legend veins under there,

So, the world happens twice—
once what we see it as;
second it legends itself
deep, the way it is. (N&CP, 48)

To any skeptical reader, the certitude of the last stanza is in question, and the way the world "legends itself" may be indistinguishable from, only an instance of, "what we see it as." But as with Masters's seers, so with the visionary Stafford himself, what matters most is just the capacity to discover meanings—meanings which may or may not actually inhere in the universe. To the extent that Stafford and Masters believe in the legends that write life into the universe they participate in what has been defined as

the central postmodern poetic concern: "to uncover the ways man and nature are unified, so that value can be seen as the result of immanent processes in which man is as much object as he is agent of creativity."³⁸ To see Stafford in this light is to see him as a poet of his age, our moment; to see Masters's similarity is to see, in yet another way, that he too is our contemporary. Placing the two together reveals a basic continuity in Midwestern writing. Both poets present "a visioned end," and find in such discovering, as Stafford suggests, the essential human activity:

And all, slung here in our cynical constellation,
whistle the wild world, live by imagination. (N&CP, 64)

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NOTES

1. Ezra Pound, "Webster Ford," *Egoist*, 2 (June 1, 1915), pp. 11-12.
2. See Amy Lowell, *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917), pp. 174-75.
3. Ronald Primeau, *Beyond "Spoon River": The Legacy of Edgar Lee Masters* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), p. x.
4. Charles Molesworth, *The Fierce Embrace: A Study of Contemporary American Poetry* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1979), p. ix; Jonathan Holden, "Postmodern Poetic Form: A Theory," *New England Review*, 6, No. 1 (Autumn 1983), 3; Wayne Dodd, "And The Look Of The Bay Mare Shames Silliness Out Of Me," *The Ohio Review*, No. 28 (1982), p. 36.
5. William Stafford to Leland Krauth, 26 March 1984.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Edgar Lee Masters, *Across Spoon River: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), p. 318.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 402.
9. William Stafford, *Writing the Australian Crawl: Views on the Writer's Vocation* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1978), pp. 66-67.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
11. Edgar Lee Masters, "The Genesis of Spoon River," *American Mercury*, 27 Jan. 1933), p. 40.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Edgar Lee Masters, *The Sangamon* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942), p. 116. The enthusiasm for his townsmen expressed here by Masters should be compared to his contempt for them registered in his autobiography (see *Across Spoon River*, p. 410).
14. William Stafford, *Roving Across Fields* (Daleville, Ind.: The Barwood Press Cooperative, 1983), p. 49.
15. William Stafford, *Stories That Could Be True: New and Collected Poems* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 163; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text as N&CP.

16. See Jonathan Holden, *The Mark to Turn: A Reading of William Stafford's Poetry* (Lawrence: The Univ. Press of Kansas, 1976), pp. 3-6. This is the best extended critical study of Stafford.
17. Masters, *The Sangamon*, p. 23.
18. Masters, *Across Spoon River*, pp. 338-39.
19. Masters, *The Sangamon*, pp. 87-88.
20. William Stafford, in *Poet's Choice*, ed. Paul Engle and Joseph Langland (New York: The Dial Press, 1962), p. 143.
21. Edgar Lee Masters, *Spoon River Anthology* (1915; rpt. New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., 1962), p. 45; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text as SR. Whenever I use one of Masters's Spoon River speakers as the voice of his own attitudes, I do so believing that the normally suspect identification between author and created character can be established in the specific instance by Masters's other personal writings. I imagine that for Masters generally what Stafford once said of himself was also true: "Successive poems are . . . like multiplying self." (Stafford, *Roving Across Fields*, p. 20)
22. Stafford to Krauth, 26 March 1984.
23. *Hamlin Garland's Diaries*, ed. Donald Pizer (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1968), p. 53.
24. *Letters of Sherwood Anderson*, ed. Howard Mumford Jones and Walter B. Rideout (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1953), p. 82.
25. Theodore Dreiser, "Life, Art and America," *Hey Rub-A-Dub-Dub: A Book Of The Mystery And Wonder And Terror Of Life* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), p. 258.
26. Masters, *Across Spoon River*, p. 209.
27. "Reciprocity vs. Suicide: Interview with William Stafford," *Trace*, 46 (Summer 1962), 224.
28. Holden, *The Mark to Turn*, p. 6.
29. Stafford to Krauth, 26 March 1984.
30. See Robert C. Bray, *Rediscoveries: Literature and Place in Illinois* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 152-56. An extensive review of critical response to Masters is provided in John T. Flanagan, *Edgar Lee Masters: The Spoon River Poet and His Critics* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1974). For somewhat more recent commentaries and bibliography, see *The Vision of This Land: Studies of Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, and Carl Sandburg*, ed. John E. Hallwas and Dennis J. Reader (Macomb: Western Illinois Univ. Press, 1976).
31. Masters, "Genesis of Spoon River," p. 50.
32. Cesare Pavese, "The Spoon River Anthology," *American Literature, Essays and Opinions*, trans. Edwin Fussell (Berkeley: Univ. of Cal. Press, 1970), p. 43.
33. Masters, *The Sangamon*, p. 25. For an excellent discussion of Masters's mysticism, see Primeau, *Beyond Spoon River*, pp. 168-205.
34. Robert Creeley, "Think What's Got Away . . .," *Poetry*, 102 (April 1963), p. 44.
35. Stafford, in "Discussions During the Spring Poetry Festival, Martin, April 16-17, 1971," *Tennessee Poetry Journal*, 4, No. 3 (Spring 1971), p. 18; "Keeping the Lines Wet: A Conversation With William Stafford," ed. Philip L. Gerber and Robert J. Gemmett, *Prairie Schooner*, 44 (Summer 1970), p. 126; "Reciprocity vs. Suicide," p. 223.
36. Charles Altieri, "From Symbolist Thought To Immanence: The Ground of Postmodern Poetics," *Boundary 2*, 1, No. 3 (Spring 1973), p. 608.

JAMES PURDY'S EARLY YEARS IN OHIO AND HIS EARLY SHORT STORIES

PAUL W. MILLER

The English novelist Pamela Hansford Johnson has written: "No novelist should attempt to write his full autobiography—he has written himself and his life into his novels, no matter how much both are disguised."¹ James Purdy, the contemporary American short story writer and novelist, clearly must have shared Miss Johnson's opinion, when he wrote in response to an editor's request for autobiographical information. "I prefer not to give a biography since my biography is in my work, and I do not wish to communicate with anybody but individuals, for whom my work was written in the first place."² Because of Purdy's theoretical objection to supplying his readers with autobiographical information beyond what may be gleaned from his fiction, or because of extreme reticence about the facts of his life and a desire for privacy, the little that has been published about his life has been fragmentary, vague and often inaccurate.

Yet, however exaggerated Purdy's insistence on the high autobiographical content of his work may appear, or how difficult it sometimes is to differentiate between history and imagination in his fiction, research into his formative years in Ohio towns indicates that his first American trade collection of short stories *Color of Darkness*³ is in several important respects autobiographical. Most importantly, this volume reflects the disintegration of Purdy family life that William, his wife Vera, James, and his two brothers⁴ suffered between 1908, the year the boys' parents were married, and the dissolution of the Purdy marriage through divorce twenty-two years later. Evidence that this marriage was already in trouble in 1914, the year James was born, is provided by a sur-

viving friend of his mother. By way of explaining the deep-seated fear of his father that James developed as a child, Vera reportedly said that when she was pregnant with him, her husband was so cruel to her that she often had to hide from him. Thus she speculated that her fear of her husband was transferred to James while he was still in the womb, when the father's early apparent success as a banker was already threatened by heavy indebtedness leading eventually to financial failure. Other evidence suggests that the family relationships deteriorated irregularly over the years, culminating in the messy, contested divorce suit alluded to in Purdy's novel *Jeremy's Version*.⁵

No doubt it would be impossible even if it were desirable to document all the steps leading to the collapse of the Purdy's shared dream of family harmony, affluence and security based on the traditional American values of talent, ambition and speculative risk-taking. Yet a comparison of the early stories with such events of Purdy family life as I have been able to document reveals a recurrent, almost obsessive concern with failing or failed relationships of wives and husbands or parents and children in the stories, presumably reflecting Purdy's obsession with the deteriorating relationships in his own family as he grew up.

Indeed all but three of the eleven short stories in *Color of Darkness*—and clearly the best of them—deal with one of the following stages of conjugal or family disintegration that must also have afflicted the Purdy family: 1) an early stage of declining expectations from marriage, focused on the loss of love's mutuality and of young romance ("Man and Wife," "A Good Woman"); 2) a later stage of alienation of husband and wife, separated by the death of love, symbolically portrayed, by ferocious hatred for one another, or by the literal, welcome death of one partner in marriage ("Sound of Talking," "Don't Call Me by My Right Name," "You Reach for Your Hat"); and 3) a still later stage of family disintegration, when the alienation of husband and wife is reenacted in the next generation through the alienation of child from parent and parent from child ("Why Can't They Tell You Why?," "Color of Darkness," and "Cutting Edge"). Thus the cycle of alienation of husband and wife, parent and child promises to repeat itself from generation to generation, recalling

the Old Testament admonition that the sins of the parents shall be visited on the children unto the third and fourth generation.

In order to trace the process of family disintegration in Purdy's early short stories, and by reasonable inference in the Purdy family itself, I shall examine the two stories illustrating the first stage of disintegration mentioned above ("Man and Wife," "A Good Woman"), followed by examination of the two best illustrating the second stage ("Don't Call Me by My Right Name," "You Reach for Your Hat"), and the two best illustrating the final stage ("Color of Darkness," "Cutting Edge").

The first of Purdy's stories dealing with declining expectations in marriage is "Man and Wife," set in a small Midwestern town on a hot summer's day. This story concerns a latent homosexual and pedophile named Lafe who has been unceremoniously fired from his factory job for "looking at boys." He returns home to his wife, Peaches Maud, to gain whatever support and consolation he can from their fragile relationship, already threatened by her long repressed but persistent suspicion of his sexual preferences. Following his pained and painful account of his dismissal, he confesses to her his fear of sexual inadequacy or abnormality and pleads for her understanding and love. But alas, she is unable to assure him of his ability to "satisfy her" that he so desperately needs; moreover, far from arousing her compassion, his confession reinforces her deep-seated fears of his recurrent "mental talk," of his surfacing homosexuality, and indeed of "anything that ain't human," to use her own pithy phrase. Ironically, at the very moment he needs her most, she fails him; simultaneously, when it is most needed, their noisy refrigerator clatters to a stop and its "little light" goes out, leaving them sweltering on one of the hottest days of the summer without the balm of either refrigeration or reciprocated love. Nevertheless, in spite of the bleakness of his situation, Lafe resolutely asserts at the end of the story, "I will always stand by you anyhow, Peaches Maud." Though his love has been rejected, he will dedicate himself to the overwhelming, near hopeless task of proving that his is not the kind of love "which alters when it alteration finds,/Or bends with the remover to remove."

In contrast to "Man and Wife," which deals with the loss of mutuality in love, is "A Good Woman," a story of fading romance.

Its heroine, Maud, the "good woman" in question, is an overweight, not very attractive, childless woman in her middle years, who married her husband Obie years ago when he was a flashy, dashing, apparently affluent leader of a traveling jazz band that occasionally played one-night stands in Martinsville, Purdy's fictional name for Findlay, Ohio. Now, with the passage of years and the change of his occupation from glamorous orchestra leader to unsuccessful insurance salesman, too old to be on the road, Obie's appearance and material fortunes have declined. Now he is content to come home at night to the domestic pleasures of "fried pork chops and French fried potatoes with a beet and lettuce salad and some coffee with canned milk and homemade preserves and cake." Meanwhile, Maud becomes increasingly discontented with her world of memories—memories of her husband's former glamorous profession, of the days when she could buy luxuries no longer affordable, and memories of boys asking her to dance before she became stout. To escape from the tyranny of memories painful by virtue of their contrast with present reality, she relies increasingly on her afternoon trips to the movies with her friend Mamie, a housewife even more discontented than Maud. On their way home from the movies, the two of them stop at Mr. Hannah's drugstore for strawberry milkshakes, Maud buying hers on long-term credit. One day after the movie, when her six-months' bill for milkshakes has reached the astronomical sum of \$35.00, the lecherous old Mr. Hannah takes Maud into his back room, calls her a beauty, and none too subtly offers to cancel her bill in exchange for unspecified sexual favors. Though she allows the old goat to kiss and fondle her a bit, on the grounds that what he does is not so bad and he is so old anyhow, Maud finally pushes him away, assuring him as she marches out of his store that her husband Obie will soon get a check, whereupon she will pay her bill. Unlike the unfaithful woman she has seen in the movie that afternoon, Maud maintains her loyalty to her husband; she also keeps active her claim to be the "good woman" of the story's title. Indeed the only chinks in her breastplate of righteousness, chinks probably not yet widened to dangerous proportions, are her delight in being called a beauty once again, her momentary lapse of propriety in Mr. Hannah's arms, and her intense satisfaction in looking at a suddenly youthful reflection of herself in the hall

mirror when she arrives home, a vision recalling if not momentarily restoring the lost romance of her youth.

In the two stories referred to above, representing the first stage of family disintegration, some elements of love and loyalty remain in one or both parties to the marriage contract. In the two stories illustrative of the next phase of decay, love has almost completely given way to hatred, to the point where one or the other partner does life-threatening violence to his mate or reveals satisfaction rather than grief in the death of a spouse.

In the first of these two stories, the couple in "Don't Call Me by My Right Name" actually seek to destroy one another, so great has their hatred become. At a drunken party they attend after six months of marriage, Mr. Klein is so outraged by his wife's sudden refusal to continue taking his surname as her own that after the party is over, on the street outside, he beats her unmercifully, till she lies barely conscious on the pavement. Mrs. Klein, far from yielding to this violent persuasion, has so keen a sense of marriage's violation of her proper identity and personhood that she risks further violence rather than agree to take back his name. Slightly rallying from her drunken, battered stupor, she once more denies that she's Mrs. Klein, beats her husband over the head with her handbag as he crouches down beside her, and demands that the "cheap son of a bitch"—her husband, that is—call a cab. "Can't you see I'm bleeding?" she asks by way of explanation. Thus the story ends, giving the reader reasonable confidence that the battle between the Kleins will continue till divorce or murder mercifully separates the one from the other.

Instead of the ferocious ongoing marital conflict of "Don't Call Me by My Right Name," "You Reach for Your Hat" focuses on the aftermath of a loveless marriage ended by the death of the husband. The main character in this story is Jennie Esmond, wife of Lafe Esmond, killed in the war. Instead of staying home and weeping over his picture, as the town's widows are supposed to do, Jennie goes downtown on evening promenades and drinks beer into the wee hours at the Mecca, a workingman's tavern "where no ladies went," but where Lafe had always gone, leaving Jennie home alone. Worst of all, in the eyes of the townspeople, she indecently removes the gold star from her window no more than

six months after being notified of her husband's death. Her friend Mamie Jordan, a widow herself, enters the story as a guardian of the townspeople's conventional, falsely idyllic notions of marriage, notions further distorted, in Mamie's case, by frequent trips to sad, romantic movies. Braving a visit to the Mecca one night after a double feature at the movies, Mamie is determined to extract from her friend a personal expression of the meaning of Lafe's death that Jennie had refused to supply on Mamie's first visit of sympathy to Jennie at home, where she sat coolly eating chocolates. In the Mecca, as Mamie joins in a couple of beers, she is horrified to be told that her friend never loved Lafe, that she married him only to get away from the cigar factory where she worked, and that she found him sexually unattractive from the beginning. Jennie's sense of desolation, though profound, is not the personal grief for the loss of a loved one that Mamie had expected. Indeed, Lafe's death is unimportant to Jennie except as a sudden, shocking reminder of how impoverished her life has been, before as well as after his death, and of how far short of her childhood dreams the reality of her life has fallen. In response, Mamie takes refuge in a beery but purgative flood of tears, the tears of "an old woman who wanted something that was fine, something that didn't exist." At the end, the tables are turned; Mamie, who had entered the Mecca to give Jennie consolation, leaves the tavern supported and consoled by Jennie. Through sharing Mamie's long-delayed expression of sorrow over life's hollowness that both have experienced, Jennie gains the objectivity and strength to help her friend leave the tavern as though they were to leave the sad, shared, dark movie of their past lives behind, to wait for the lights of their future to come on, and in words recalling the story's title, to reach for their hats. Thus, this sombre story of alienation and loss ends with a faint hope for the future based on sisterhood.

The first of Purdy's two stories showing the third and final stage of family breakdown, the alienation of parent from child and child from parent, "Color of Darkness" is written from the point of view of a reluctant father obliged to rear his young son Baxter with the aid of a kindly but dull housekeeper named Mrs. Zilke, the boy's mother having run off. Given the child's tender age, the mother cannot have been gone many years, yet the father, never dignified in the story by a name, can no longer remember

her. Specifically, he can no longer remember the color of her eyes; even more disturbing, he finds that a few minutes after looking at his son's eyes, he forgets their color as well. Alienated from people in general, and from his son in particular, he absorbs himself in frequent business trips to Washington, in his brandy, and in his pipe, whose clouds of smoke, even when he is at home with young Baxter and Mrs. Zilke, make him seem "as far away as if he had gone to the capital again." Though compromised somewhat by her financial dependence on him, his relationship with Mrs. Zilke, with whom he engages in desultory conversation while at home, is now the only human connection that still seems important to him—though he can't remember the color of her eyes either. As for his son, the father thinks of him merely as a gift increasing in "value and liability" with the passage of time, or as "an 'infant' brother he did not know too well." The special bond supposed to exist between father and son is here not in evidence. Though the father is incapable of feeling love for his son, he is still sufficiently human to show embarrassment, or, in the child's words, to "look funny" when Baxter on a sudden impulse kisses him. The father is also capable of being shocked when he learns that the boy's favorite nighttime pet is a toy crocodile; as a substitute, Mrs. Zilke recommends a live dog: "After all, he's got to have something." Agreeing, the father gets his son a puppy, which the son promptly rejects, saying he doesn't want anything. The story ends in a scene of rage and violence foreshadowing the boy's total alienation from the father, a state reflecting and reciprocating the father's dismal attitude toward his son, doubtless influenced in its turn by the mother's running off several years earlier. Sucking on his father's wedding ring that he had taken from a table, the boy lies about what's in his mouth, insisting first that it's gum and later that it's a "golden toy." Fearful of being deprived of this now violated, hollow, but still oddly comforting symbol of love's perfection, the boy curses his father before being forced to spit out the ring, then, as it lies before them on the carpet, kicks his father in the groin and escapes up the stairs. The son's vicious attack on the father who conceived him but who has no place in his heart or his life for him once he is born, stands as a powerful indictment of the fragmented modern family in general, and of casual, loveless, irresponsible fatherhood in particular.

Purdy's last story of the alienation of parent and child is entitled "Cutting Edge." Unlike "Color of Darkness," this story focuses on the alienation of the young adult—not the child—from both parents; as in "Color of Darkness," though, special attention is paid to the alienation of father and son. Here the young man's alienation, far from being a curse to both father and son, represents the painful but necessary liberation of the offspring from the mother's tyranny over the father, a curse which unchallenged and unchecked, would engulf the son along with the doomed father.

Thus in "Cutting Edge" Bobby Zeller, a young artist from New York, comes home to visit his parents in the town where he grew up. His mother is horrified to find him wearing a beard, which he refuses to cut off. Adding fuel to the flames of this rebellion is his insistence on sunning himself stark naked in the garden. Initially, and somewhat surprisingly, Bobby's rebellion is also supported by his father. For although the father has long been indifferent to the son and blindly submissive to Mrs. Zeller, he is now drawn to the son's assertive masculinity (symbolized by his beard and his flaunted nakedness). The father and son are also drawn to one another by their dim, shared memory of Ellen Whitelaw, a former family servant still loathed by Mrs. Zeller because of her brief affair with Mr. Zeller, some twenty years previously. Though Mr. Zeller's ancient spark of rebellion in the Whitelaw affair was soon extinguished by his indomitable spouse, it has now been briefly rekindled by the son's insurgency. Soon, however, having yielded as in the past to "the army of unalterable law," Mr. Zeller finds himself pleading with his son to shave off his beard and wear clothes in the garden. Why? Because the older man cannot endure the long months of stony silence his wife will inflict on him if he fails to achieve her sovereign purpose, expressed in his pleading to the son. Caught between contempt and pity for his uxorious father, Bobby comes down to breakfast crudely shaven on the morning of his departure. He has cut off his beard, he explains, not because of his parents but because he can't stand the thought of their sitting there after he leaves, not speaking to one another for months on end. Like the youth in Mrs. Zeller's wallpaper pattern who seems to be sacrificing "some sort of animal," Bobby has sacrificed his beard to assuage the cruelty of the goddess-mother to her puny husband, but the cost of this

sacrifice to all three parties involved is very high—total alienation of child from parent and parent from child, just at the moment when it seemed that the gulf between father and son might finally be bridged. One can infer from the ending that Bobby will not soon be returning home from New York for a visit, with or without his beard.

In conclusion and in retrospect, we see in these early Purdy stories occasional references to a town very much like the small Ohio towns in which Purdy grew up, or to couples with declining fortunes, like Purdy's parents. More important, these stories show an almost obsessive concern with three main stages of deteriorating family relationship from which Purdy himself may be assumed to have suffered acutely as he grew up, and which derive their general significance from their powerful delineation of the decline of the twentieth century American nuclear family.

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NOTES

1. Quoted by Edmund Fuller, in review of *Important to Me*, by Pamela Hansford Johnson, *Wall Street Journal*, 3 April 1975, p. 12.
2. Quoted by James Vinson, ed., *Contemporary Novelists* (London and New York: St. James Press, St. Martin's Press, 1972), p. 1030.
3. *Color of Darkness* (New York: New Directions, 1957).
4. James's elder brother Richard (1909-67) became a professional actor; the youngest brother, Robert (1921-), served as a coach and athletic director in Ohio schools up to the time of his recent retirement.
5. *Jeremy's Version* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1970), p. 244-52.

OHIO'S REACTION TO WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

WILLIAM D. BAKER

If it's yesterday's newspaper, it's useless, but if the newspaper is more than one hundred years old, it is an invaluable research tool. Perspective makes the difference.

Fortunately, a good number of nineteenth-century newspapers are available to researchers who have access to a microfilm reader and interlibrary loan. The catch is that it takes several years to read every page of sixty years of daily newspapers, and it takes self-discipline to limit the search to selected literary items while ignoring the juicy tidbits that make the nineteenth century come alive.

I must confess to not having the will power to keep the literary research blinders on, and so I wallowed sinfully away from my search for items on Howells, Twain, and James into the nominations and elections of Hayes and Garfield (astonishing events which are hardly hinted at in today's history books), the daily news over twelve months of the confusions, gossip, scandal, jury trial in the affair between Henry Ward Beecher and Theodore Tilton's wife, and in the six-month daily scandal over the publishing of Harriet Beecher Stowe's charge of incest against Lord Byron. When I alibi that my sinful straying led to a better understanding of the nineteenth century, I wonder how much I am rationalizing.

What can a survey of daily newspapers lead literary researchers to? The chances are that it will not lead to the instant riches of hitherto uncollected or unreported stories, sketches, or poems by major authors. Miracles do happen, of course, but it is best not to count on them. For a few weeks my pulse beat more rapidly when I thought I had found two uncollected Twain sketches, but

one had been reprinted in the *Twainian* in 1942 and the other was not Twain's hand. The survey can lead to news and comments on authors' lives, items which serve to corroborate impressions from biographies and, more significantly, in their cumulative effect to suggest an author's contemporary and regional reputation. But the chief research nuggets will be book reviews, important because they reveal something of a regional response, and they correct or modify impressions of the relatively few previously reported reviews largely from Eastern periodicals.

It would be valuable to have a life of an author, especially Howells, written from a regional point of view, supplementing standard sources (letters, autobiographies, works) with all the regional material that can be dug up. I should think it would be a refreshing change from the current surfeit of interpretive and analytical studies, and it would have the virtue, at least, of using primary materials.

What was Ohio's reaction to Howells's career up to 1886? The record as indicated by hitherto unrecorded newspaper book reviews was, as one might expect, positive. In addition to the reviews, I found three dozen mentions of the native Ohioan, a third of which were in connection with *The Atlantic Monthly*, and the rest I classified as "native son makes good." Two items were hitherto unreported interviews.¹

As one might anticipate the *Ohio State Journal* (Columbus) printed over twice as many items on Howells as the Cincinnati *Commercial* and the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* combined. Why? James M. Comly, editor of the *Journal*, was Howells's best friend in Ohio. Since the Comly-Howells friendship has not been fully explored, I will first discuss its outlines and implications, then reveal the extent to which Comly's paper furthered Howells's reputation, and then consider the record of Howells's reviews in Ohio.

James M. Comly (1832-1887) was born in New Lexington, Ohio, and when he was ten his family moved further west, leaving him with friends in Columbus. He attended public schools, apprenticed to a printer at first as a messenger and then in the composing room of the Baptist *Cross and Journal*, and by the time he finished high school he was a journeyman printer for the *Ohio State Journal*. While working as a printer he also studied law, and

even before he was admitted to the bar in 1859 he was working on the editorial staff of the paper. (It is possible that he met Howells when Howells worked as a printer for the *Journal* in the winter of 1951-52, but Howells speaks of their friendship beginning in 1858.) In June 1861 Comly joined the Union Army, serving with considerable distinction under Lieutenant Colonel Rutherford B. Hayes of the Twenty-third Ohio Volunteers, was brevetted a brigadier general after the hostilities, and was thereafter called General Comly. In 1863 he married Elizabeth M. Smith, the daughter of Ohio's surgeon general. With his father-in-law's financial help he bought the *Ohio State Journal* in 1865, making it the central organ of the Republican Party, and being credited by many as the power behind the nomination of Hayes in 1876. Hayes appointed him Minister to Hawaii in 1877, and in 1882 he returned to Ohio to be editor and proprietor of the Toledo *Commercial* for the last five years of his life.²

When Howells moved into the boarding house at the Starling Medical College in the fall of 1858, Comly was already a boarder there. In April 1859 Howells wrote to his sister, Victoria, "Comly, you know, is my present Jim Williams [referring to a very close friend from Jefferson]. . . . He and I used to do our walking together—after breakfast, a long saunter, just before supper, short walk; at midnight, extended and romantic ramble. . . ." In May, evidently playing Cupid, he wrote to her, "I invited Comly to pay you a visit at the time I do in June. He promised to do so, conditionally, and I think you may expect him." And on May 24 he wrote to his mother,

Last night I took a walk with Comly, and told him how I knew you were sitting upon our little front porch, and counting up the days until I should be with you. . . . I have asked Comly to go home with me, and he has conditionally promised to do so. He is a nice fellow, and my "dearest friend." You know you told me to invite him. I think it will be pleasant for you all to know him.³

A change in ownership on the *Ohio State Journal* in March 1860 sent them both looking for other jobs—Howells as a professional reader for Follett, Foster and Company and Comly to a law office on the same street as the *Journal*. When Howells re-

turned from his trip East in the fall of 1860, he left the boarding house to share a room with Samuel Price, and Comly boarded at the American Hotel until he joined the army in April 1861. But they often ate at Ambos Restaurant together and perhaps most important of all, they began to court the attractive niece and the Vermont cousin of Hayes in the same social whirl. They went frequently to, as Howells put it, "the dear house of the [Samuel M.] Smith family, which made itself a home any hour of the day up to midnight for such youth as has once been adopted its sons." The daughter of the family was a niece of Hayes. In addition they were often at the Broad Street mansion of William Platt and his daughter, Laura, another a niece of Hayes. It was at the Platt mansion that Howells met another relative of Hayes; his cousin, Elinor Mead, and courted her during the winter of 1860-61.

Elizabeth married Comly in May 1863, Laura married Comly's fellow law student and army comrade, James G. Mitchell, in October 1862, and Elinor married Howells in December 1862. The point is that during the winter of 1860, "Of all the winters . . . the gayest," Comly and Howells were together a good deal and formed a lasting friendship.

In *Years of My Youth* Howells wrote:

Only two or three of the friends who had formed our College group went to the war; of these my friend, Comly, had been one of the earliest, and when I found him officer of the day at the first camp of the volunteers, he gave me what time he could, but he was helplessly preoccupied, and the whole world I had known was estranged.⁴

In thanking Comly for his good offices during his Columbus visit in September, 1873, Howells wrote, "The most important event of my Columbus visit [was being with you] and it shows that we had not lost each other."

It is possible that the two friends met once again, in June 1877, when Comly accompanied the party of President Hayes in New England, and Howells joined the party for dinners in Boston and in Newport, Rhode Island.

Howells sent Comly thirty-two letters, and while many of them refer to Comly's letters, only two of the letters have ap-

peared, a stirring battlefield report in 1863, and a report on materials for the Hayes biography in 1876. A dozen of Howells's letters to Comly are printed in the first two volumes of the admirable *Selected Letters*, perhaps the most notable of which contains Howells's comment, "You are the oldest friend I have, and I couldn't bear to think you didn't care for me as much as I did for you." (28 June 1868)

Comly, as an Ohioan of ideals, was a representative model for all that Howells thought was true and right in a decent, self-made hard-working, socially concerned, middle-class Midwesterner. Thus he shared the positive qualities of Silas in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and of Judge Rufus Kenton in *The Kentons* (1902).

The dozen parallels between the Comlys and Kentons are striking: army rank, middle-class status, location in the Middle West, vacations on the upper lakes, mansion in the middle of town, husband older than wife, five children, eldest son married and now in father's business, passionate devotion to state and region, devotion to old regiment, called by his brevetted title, advised to go abroad for health. The descriptions of the Kenton family and the town from the first four paragraphs of the novel could be applied almost directly to Comly and Columbus. The mansion where the Smiths lived (later occupied by the Comly family) still exists in downtown Columbus, and it may be the home of the Kentons.

But the details of Comly's life as a model for fictional characters, intriguing as they may be, are perhaps less significant than the presence of the man himself, his truthfulness, rightness, modesty, and manliness.

Excerpts from his nineteenth-century obituaries help reveal the man:⁵

Toledo Bee. Comly was one of the brightest journalists of the country and he was withal everywhere admitted to be one of the most kindly and worthy of gentleman.

Ohio State Journal. A true type of the American citizen, he was indeed a statesman fully comprehending questions of the day and fearlessly expressing his convictions thereon.

Toledo Commercial. While he possessed the highest type of manly courage, his heart was tender, sympathetic, and confiding as that of a child. His greatest pleasure was derived in doing good to others. His heart was overflowing with kindness and none could know him but to love him. . . .

Eugene Kleinpell, who worked over the Comly Papers in 1936 and researched Comly's life thoroughly, wrote, "To the end Comly remained a genial opportunist and apologist for his day, casting about it an idealism that was heroic." Of his style Kleinpell wrote:

It was forcefull and frequently picturesque, but seldom heavy. Intellectual cowardice he did not know, and he was respected both for his earnestness and for his directness. He had a certain genius for coining pungent phrases that were readily adopted by other writers. He never lost his sense of humor, though, like many writers of his generation, he went on moralistic crusades. . . . One of [the opposition press] said, "Comly's pen is one of the most caustic in Ohio: as an editor, he is wise and witty; and as a gentleman, he is without reproach."

In his memorial tribute to Comly (a letter in the Comly Papers addressed to Comly's wife), Howells wrote:

I need not praise him to you, who knew how good and true he was. But his memory will always be dear to me as his friendship was. Years and the world have drifted us apart, but I never heard or saw his name without a thrill of the old affection.

George C. Carrington in his introduction to *The Kentons* makes a plausible case for linking Judge Kenton to Simon Kenton, to William Cooper Howells, and to Howells himself. He also links the site of the novel, Tuskingham, to Jefferson, the home of the Howells family from the early 1860s. But the linkages to Comly and Columbus are, it seems to me, even stronger: and cannot be ignored even though, as Carrington points out, Howells is creating a symbolic representation of men and places.

During Comly's twelve-year tenure as editor, Howells was treated in the columns of the *Ohio State Journal* as not only a native son but as a favorite son and good friend. A brief selection of over forty items on Howells will reveal the positive and local nature of his "free" publicity.

31 January 1871 Howells did some good writing on the *Ohio State Journal* as he has done ever since.

14 August 1871 Howells goes on with his altogether charming wedding journey [Sept. *Atlantic*] . . . You read on till, if you are a man, you wish you had an Isabel, if you are a woman, you wonder Basil could not have been made for you—these wishes being the inevitable conclusion of every fresh installment of the "Wedding Journey."

21 November 1871 Howells is in the front rank of American men of letters.

14 July 1873 One of the leading booksellers here informs us that there have been over a hundred *complete sets* of Howells's works sold here. The writer of this paragraph has three copies of the "Venetian Life," different editions, and they have all been "read to pieces." The latest of Howells's works, "A Chance Acquaintance," has never been at home since the week of its receipt. Three editions of it were out before the sheets of the first were dry, and it could not be furnished fast enough to meet the demand. . . .

Three items printed after Comly's tenure will serve to illustrate the positive way the *Ohio State Journal* continued to nourish Howells's reputation. (In fact, this paper never had a negative word to say about Howells or his works.) On 8 March 1880, an interview with Howells, ascribed to the *New York Times* (but not discoverable there), appeared in the *Journal*. Since the interview appeared six years before the first-listed interview in Ulrich Haffmann's *Interviews with William Dean Howells*, I will quote it extensively. "Howells," says the "newspaper scribe," is "very accessible."

He never assumes a lofty demeanor or treats young writers either with superciliousness or patronage. He is, on the contrary, very simple, straightforward and cordial in manner, but still shrewd and careful in all business matters. In person he is small, rather stout, stooping a little; his complexion is dark, his eye bright, his smile kindly, his brown hair parted in the middle, his mustache heavy and just tinged with gray. He has something of an Italian look, though he would be known for an American anywhere. He has three children, a boy and two girls, the elder of these, fourteen or fifteen, having already made her debut in verse in a juvenile maga-

zine. They usually run in and out of his study while he is at work, and are as fond of him as he is of them. His conversation is as facile, bright, and graceful as his style, and, like that, abounds in delicate humor and gentle cynicism. He avoids serious subjects, and can not be betrayed into argument, but illustrates whatever he touches with picturesque lightness. He is accounted charming in company, but unlike what might be expected of a describer of contemporaneous life and manners, he goes little into society. His wife, very amiable and pleasant, a sister of Larkin G. Meade, the sculptor, he first met in Italy. Howells is a native of Martin's Ferry, Ohio, his father being Welsh and his mother a Pennsylvania German. Originally a printer, he became a journalist—he edited the *Ohio State Journal* once—and then a pure literateur. He is a master of style, and is in his forty-third year.

Another story, "Howells's Ohio Career" (4 January 1883) also appeared after Comly left the *Journal*, and it makes capital of Howells's Columbus associations. The author, O. B. Chapman of the Ross County *Register*, was especially fulsome in his praise, but he did not hesitate to tell the famous story of the "Owl" poem of Howells:

Probably the most accomplished and elegant writer that ever held the position of local editor on an American newspaper was William D. Howells, at present the leading novelist in this country if not in the world. And yet he could hardly be called a success in that capacity, for the reason that he was in no way adapted to the work he had to do. He had none of the "rough and ready" ways of men of his calling, and usually wrote entirely above the capacity of the average reader. It was while employed thus on the *Ohio State Journal* that he first obtained recognition as a literary writer, by the publication of a poem of his in the *Atlantic Monthly*; and it is said that the recognition at once lifted him almost to the third heaven of enjoyment. He was at the time a linguist of no mean order, and the public gave him credit for trying in every way he could to make the fact notorious. Indeed, hardly a week would pass that the *State Journal* would not contain numerous extracts from German, French and Italian journals, always prefaced with the words; "We translate as follows." About that time a poem from Howells appeared

in the *Atlantic Monthly*, complaining of a want of proper appreciation on the part of the general public for poetry and poets in particular; comparing the latter to song birds, and the former, if our memory is not at fault, to a herd of cattle, who were more intent upon filling their bellies with nutritious grasses than they were with listening to the sweet strains of song birds. Now there resided in Columbus at that time a printer by the name of Laurens, who excelled as a writer of satirical poetry, and it so happened that he did not like Howells. These well known facts at least led the public to attribute to him a poem that appeared in a succeeding number of the *Ohio Statesman*, written in close imitation of Howells's style; but in place of the latter's song birds, warbling their delightful notes from fence and tree-tip, he had an owl, perched upon the top of a hay-stack, "hooting a dismal tune" for the supposed entertainment of a herd of cattle that were browsing about its sides, giving no heed to any thing that was going on above. At this the owl was represented as becoming very indignant, and as reproaching the cattle for their utter want of appreciation of his fine music; when one of the bovine tribe was made to reply something after this order: "Your song, dear sir, may be very good, but it is in a heathenish tongue, *and why the devil don't you translate it!*" Of course all Columbus laughed at the joke, with the single exception, perhaps, of Howells; but the latter even showed his appreciation of its point by ever afterward refraining from any attempt to air his linguistic lore in that community.

Still another publicity item for Howells appeared on 5 September 1885. Revealing a caricature drawing of Howells standing at his desk with a gigantic pen, the anonymous author combined many of Howells's titles to write:

It is "A Foregone Conclusion" that "The Man o' Airlie" (not merely "A Counterfeit Presentment" of "A Modern Instance,") met "A Chance Acquaintance" in "Venetian Life" on "An Italian Journey," who was interested in "The Rise of Silas Lapham," and that it developed into "A Wedding Journey" during "An Indian Summer." Mr. Howells, it is thus seen, is a gentleman of many titles. There is a breeziness and freshness about his works, due doubtless to the fact that they are well salted with wit. He is a robust author, taking

a dip into the *Atlantic Monthly*—whether it be January or July.

Howells's friends in Columbus, as reflected in the items in the *Ohio State Journal*, played an important role in keeping Howells's name before the public. They were generous in their praise of their companion, and over a twenty-year period they never wavered in their admiration for his accomplishments. It would be interesting to know if any other major American author could say the same.

To what extent was Howells aware of critical reviews? There is some evidence that he knew of selected Ohio reviews, and we assume he was aware of the family paper, the *Ashtabula Sentinel*, although in point of fact the *Sentinel* reprinted but did not review Howells's books, reprinting all of *Their Wedding Journey*, for example. He mentions the *Ohio State Journal* in his letters to Comly, writing to him on April 26, 1868:

I feel it almost a personal compliment when the man who opens the *Atlantic* exchanges said the *Columbus Journal* had the best book notices in the West.

Furthermore the notes to the *Selected Letters* reveal he was aware of an occasional review in the Cincinnati and Cleveland papers.

Why was he concerned about the Ohio reviews? Howells's efforts to make the *Atlantic* reflect a national scene would pique his interest in reactions from publications spread across the country, especially from the three major cities of his native state, cities where he had earlier established connections. And, as he developed his theory of realism and attempted to portray an accurate picture of American life as he knew it, he naturally remembered that life (as shown by his letters, his "Ohio" novels, and his flood of memoirs) in Ohio. Thus he was no doubt interested in Ohio's reaction. If Ohio praised the accuracy of his pictures and the bone-true delineation of his characters, it would justify his work and offer solace in the midst of battle.

Expectations were high when Howells published a novel. As the *Ohio State Journal* said in 1879, "Anything from the pen of Mr. Howells is pronounced a success by the public on its announcement even." The evidence suggests that the much-praised

writing style of the early travel books and their positive reception nourished those expectations. And although Howells did not always meet those expectations in his novels, he satisfied reviewers in Ohio more often than not.

A brief listing of the highlights of the reviews reveal the glowing nature of his Ohio reputation to 1886: "an accurate record," "freshness of originality to his sketches . . . almost as artistic and finished as Hawthorne's" "intelligent observation, . . . a style remarkable for limpid purity and easy grace . . ." an artist of real poetic beauty, passion and power," "the best work of its class," "one of Mr. Howells's happiest productions," "a happier hit than usual. . . . Many think it is his best novel," "much refined beauty of workmanship," "the fidelity to actual life is . . . merciless. The author's process amounts almost to vivisection," "great power in realistic character delineation," "one of his most successful stories . . . rare ability in rendering the commonplace amusing," "unquestionably the best and strongest of [his] novels," "one of the most pleasing and original productions of genius," "[when the] studies of life are reflected upon . . . their merit will be acknowledged," "touches indicate he has characters and material to his mind to make a story of Ohio life . . . [and] there are many who would like to see the experiment made."

Most of the Ohio reviews were probably written by everyday journalists, not professional reviewers. On the other hand, Ohio journalists were no longer "backwoods" editors. The Civil War, the railroad, and industrialism (with its need for mass markets) lowered if it did not destroy sectional barriers (except, ironically, for the South), so that the reviewers, especially in noting the works of a native son, were neither defensive nor folksy. Many commenting on Howells's style, his freshness and originality, his quaintness, humor, natural dialog, insight into character, photographic depiction, use of commonplace characters, and his uncharacteristic endings, provided insights and judgments as useful in today's study of Howells as those of reviewers elsewhere. If they lack the sophistication of Henry James or of some of the English reviewers, they represent the reaction of Howells's native territory, they were not hesitant to express their opinions, and they wrote with considerable intelligence and occasional grace.

The evidence shows that Howells's early work was highly regarded in his native state, that his close friend, James M. Comly of the *Ohio State Journal* was a strong and enthusiastic supporter, and that the reviews elsewhere in the state were generally thoughtful and good. Studies of Howells's reputation in newspapers of other Midwestern states would be useful to compare to the Ohio experience. It would also be useful to study the reputation of Howells from 1887 to 1920, when his early friends and supporters had departed, when younger writers began to crowd the field, and when the impact of his early stylistic triumphs had faded.

It is interesting to speculate on Howells's career had he returned to Ohio from Venice and made use of his native materials as the Toledo *Commercial* review of *The Minister's Charge* suggests. In *Years of My Youth*, Howells said:

I cannot make out why, having the friends and incentives I had in Columbus, I should have wished to go away, but more and more I did wish that. There was no reason for it except my belief that my work would be less acceptable if I remained in the West; that I should get on faster if I wrote in New York than if I wrote in Columbus. Somehow I fancied there would be more intellectual atmosphere for me in the great city, but I do not believe this now, and I cannot see how I could anywhere have had more intelligent sympathy. When I came home from Venice in 1865, and was looking about for some means of livelihood, I found that Lowell had a fancy for my returning to the West, and living my literary life in my own air if not on my own ground. He apparently thought the experiment would be interesting; and if I were again twenty-eight I should like to try it.

Excerpts from the twenty-one reviews, presented below, cover all of Howells's productions to 1886 except for *The Undiscovered Country*, *Dr. Breen's Practice*, and *Three Villages*. Descriptions of the works are omitted from the reviews, but the judgments are presented in full. The reviews are followed by an interview with Howells printed in the Cincinnati *Commercial Gazette* for 13 March, 1886.⁶

Venetian Life (Cincinnati *Commercial*, March 13, 1867)

... the author has not attempted to speculate upon the change

in the fortunes of the city which have occurred since the work was written, preferring to leave it, as it was originally, an accurate record of what he saw and knew of Venice.

Italian Journeys (Cincinnati *Commercial*, December 16, 1867)
... by his quaint way of looking at these old cities and the people thereof, [Howells] gives the freshness of originality to his sketches, and gives us a book as readable as though written about a hitherto unknown country. His style of writing is almost as artistic and finished as Hawthorne's.

Italian Journeys (Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, December 17, 1867)
[The new edition] is even more carefully studied, more graceful and delicate; its humor has had just that slight pressing which it needed, and the greater range of subjects permits the author to take on at times a more thoughtful and deliberate tone. It is a pleasant book, but it is also an instructive one, and the multitudinous touches by which the author has delineated Italian character and Italian scenery, though each seem slight, produce a full and decided impression upon the reader's mind.

Venetian Life, Second Edition (Dayton *Journal*, April 9, 1868)
[Howells's] style is pure, and while he sketches vigorously, he is yet chaste and delicate—presenting to the mind's eye, some of the most finished pictures in the English language. Aside from its literary merits, it is full of instruction.

Suburban Sketches (Ohio *State Journal*, March 24, 1871)
Hurd & Houghton have put Howells's *Suburban Sketches* (for sale by Gleason) into a beautiful and fitting dress. The Sketches are reprints from the Atlantic, too well known to most of our readers to need comment. There are such tender juicy flavorings in Howells's humor,—such delicious drolleries of verbal expression,—such delicate and dainty manipulation, as remind one constantly of the best of Charles Lamb, without any of Lamb's childlike audacity of invention as the roast pig essay with the droll gravity of an imaginative child at that lying stage which comes once to all children. Howells has little of that species of humor which amuses by absurd suggestions of mendacity or cruelty—a quality which so shocks pious Gradgrinds with Bret Harte. For example, Bret Harte satirizes with exquisite irony a half-savage society which delights in riot and bloodshed, in the phrases, "All night long was

heard the soothing sound of the pistol and the cheerful squeak of the victim, as the ball passed through his gullet." The Christian Union and a correspondent in this morning's State Journal gravely deprecate such a style of writing as demoralizing in its tendency, by familiarizing the minds of unthinking youth with scenes of blood! We do not discover any symptoms of trifling in our correspondent's solemn letter, or we should be inclined to set it down as a capital burlesque. The prime quality of Howells's humor is that it is introvertive—subjective. If it goes out of him after an object, it creeps back again with its capture, and fondles it in the bosom of his mental affections. Hawthorne had the same species of humor, modified by temperament into something as near ghostliness (if not ghastliness) as humor can approximate. It is the habit of this introvertive cast of mind to feed its offspring with its own blood, and to suffer pangs of mental nerve-torture and sleeplessness in consequence.

Uniform Edition of Travels Books (Cleveland *Herald*, May 25, 1872)

[*Their Wedding Journey, Venetian Life, Italian Journeys, and Suburban Sketches.*] Intelligent observation, quick eye for picturesque effect, quiet humor, and a style remarkable for limpid purity and easy grace characterize all the writings of Mr. Howells. It is to be hoped he will soon enlarge and collect the papers on "Modern Italian poets," . . .

The Poems of William D. Howells (Cincinnati *Commercial*, October 20, 1873)

This seems to us a very precious little book wherein Mr. Howells may be said to present us with the body of his old love, to which it can hardly be said he has returned in doing so. For of the forty-odd poems contained in this volume, upwards of thirty (including all of the longer pieces except "Louis Labbeau's Conversion," "The Royal Portraits," and "The Faithful of the Gonzaga,") were written in Ohio before Mr. Howells went to occupy the consulate at Venice in 1861. Ten or twelve of the briefer poems, including "The Movers"—a beautiful, tender, and pathetic sketch in hexameters—were printed early in 1860, in a first volume, which Mr. Howells published at that time, entitled "Poems of True Friends." We give these facts, which have no particular

bearing on the value of the present book, for those people (if any such there now be) who, having a pride in and wish to cherish literary home production, will therefore make the most of them. And in this instance they will not easily exaggerate.

[A thousand-word analysis of the hexameter poems follows, focussing on "The Pilot's Story, concluding as follows:] Byron once said, we believe, that he would rather have written the "Burial of Sir John Moore" than all his own works; and Walter Scott, if we mistake not, once proclaimed Burns' song of "Ae More Kiss and then We Sever" of more value than all his own novels. Let us convey our impression of "The Pilot's Story" by saying that we should, we fear, sacrifice all of Mr. Howells' prose works, however fair and sweet, rather than lose this fine poem. It has, we believe, greater intrinsic value than all of them and the workmanship, aside from tyrannical hexametrical defects, is also noble. He is here an artist of real poetic beauty, passion and power.

[Another thousand-word analysis of the remaining poems follows, concluding with a final paragraph:] The book, as a whole, is not a cheerful one—we regret to find so prevailing a tone of sadness in those pieces wherein the poet may be presumed to express his own self. But we do not complain of this—few contemporary poets say many things to cheer us. Browning confuses and annoys us; Tennyson charms us into languid wretchedness; Rossetti and those other people sicken us and weary us; Longfellow is nearly the only one who comes to our firesides as a comforter and friend, whose words uplift and strengthen us. But although not among the cheerful poets' books, this of Mr. Howells is yet, as we have said, a very precious one. Let us copy the last thing in the volume, and thank our stars that we have not the unhappiness of being one of Mr. Howells' friends (or did he refer to friendly-noticing American newspaper reviewers in general?)

The Poet's Friends

The robin sings in the elm

The cattle stand beneath.

Sedate and grace, with great brown eyes

And fragrant meadow-breath

They listen to the flattered bird,
 The wise-looking, stupid things;
 And they never understand a word
 Of all the robin sings .

A Foregone Conclusion (Cincinnati *Commercial*, December 11, 1874)

The greatest charm . . . is the carefully painted bits of Venetian scenery and life one gets in reading it. To be sure Howells's character pictures . . . are conscientiously drawn, with delicate strokes of color here and there, that bring out their peculiarities firmly, but it is not in these that most readers will find most delight, nor the plot, which is simple enough, but in the descriptive parts and passages. Howells's life in Venice [is called up] with wonderful vividness. [The novel] is the best romance of American origin that the year has produced, and those who have not read it in serial form should get the book edition. . . .

Life of Hayes (Ohio *State Journal*, September 22, 1876)

. . . the very best work of its class. It has literary excellences which place it among the best of biographical literature, and give it a character of permanency. . . . It shows a wonderful insight [into] character. . . . We have not seen anywhere so faithful and accurate a summing up of the elements. . . . It is like a formula in chemistry, established by the tests of the crucible. . . . The development of character [is done with] the intuitions of a skilled and practiced method.

The truth is, this work has sufficient literary excellence to make it worthy to be classed with entertaining and instructive biography. . . . Mr. Howells seems to have caught the very spirit of the camp and the field, as it breathed like life itself from those diaries. We cannot but feel that such a biography as this is destined for a better life in literature. . . . It is worthy a permanent place.

A Counterfeit Presentment (Cincinnati *Commercial*, October 11, 1877)

. . . one of Mr. Howells's happiest productions. Unlike most of his earlier works of fiction, it is almost all story, almost all drama. The descriptive element is very slight; it opens with a passage to lo-

calize the story, in which one of those exquisite glimpses of autumn Mr. Howells is so fond of giving shows itself. . . . but the descriptive writing is almost entirely in the nature of stage-direction. . . . The dialogues, though perhaps here and there too refined and subtle for direct popular apprehension, are generally bright and quick with life, and seldom without relevance to the progress of the story. The story itself is sufficiently novel. . . .

Mr. Howells is the only writer of any real literary eminence whose first distinct dramatic effort has been first put upon the stage in Cincinnati. He comes home, one may say, for this new trial, for though a long resident in New England he is a native of Ohio, and may be said to have begun his career as a writer in this city. It will doubtless be a pleasure to him, as well as a matter of pride [several words indistinct] to one who has had so many agreeable successes in literary directions of an order certainly not less high, if his first drama in which other judges of the drama besides Mr. Bartlett have recognized fine points—should be successful in Cincinnati.

[John J. Piatt]

The Lady of Aroostook (Ohio *State Journal*, April 2, 1879)

Anything from the pen of Mr. Howells is pronounced a success by the public on its announcement even. But his hosts of admirers will realize that in this story Mr. Howells perhaps makes a happier hit than usual, and more than meets the public's great expectations. It is a charming story, . . . and instructs while it pleases. . . . The incidents . . . are portrayed with that exquisite grace and beauty of felicitation, so marked in Mr. Howells's writings, that it is a source of pleasure to the reader from beginning to end. Many think it is his best novel.

A Fearful Responsibility (Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, September 19, 1881)

. . . There is much refined beauty of workmanship in this book, yet as a story it seems to us lacking. There is certainly a delight in reading the book—the dialog is so natural, unaffected and bright, and the figures of the tale are so far removed from lay figures: are, indeed, so true to the life, that one gets deeply absorbed in their fortunes and wonders how they will all “come out.” And then, all at once the author seems to be at a loss how to get these charac-

ters off the stage—the result being that the reader has no idea of an ending, after the story is ended; but stumbles into the concluding sketches, put in apparently to pad out the volume, and only begins to suspect the truth when he appreciates the muddle he is so innocently making. Mr. Howells can tell a story beautifully after it is under way; but he cannot end it.

A Counterfeit Presentment (Cleveland *Leader*, October 23, 1877)
Mr. Howells' Comedy

When, some months ago, Mr. W. D. Howells' charming little "Ride in a Parlor Car" appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the patient public which had waited so long and hopefully for the coming of the real, unmistakable American dramatist, expressed a hope that the young editor of the *Atlantic* might be induced to try his hand at something for the stage. The Parlor car affair was but a cabinet pleasure,—the only characters being a young lady, a young man and the porter of the car—but it had the true dramatic fibre, since it was impossible to read it without seeing with the mind's eye the action of the trio and feeling the pulse quickened with a pleasant suspense which was sustained until the last line of the piece. The hopes awakened by this comedy of the car have been met during this year by a second and more mature effort, which, under the title of "A Counterfeit Presentment," has become familiar to the reading public through publication in the *Atlantic*. The piece was written for the stage, and for the accomplished actor who will this week present it to a Cleveland audience. And since it is Mr. Howells who chiefly represents Ohio in the field of elegant literature, and inasmuch as his first assay in dramatic writing is sent for its christening to his native state, the occasion is surely one which appeals to the warmest interest and most enlightened judgment of this community. The play will be listened to, we may be sure, by an audience largely made up of readers of Mr. Howells' writings. As such, they will not need to be told that the question to be solved by this performance is whether the delicious subtlety of the author, innate grace of thought and expression which makes his written words seem literally to flow—*can be acted* so as to become intelligible to the average audience. If Mr. Howells' characters can act as they read, the question will be solved, and his success in this new and more difficult field assured. He begins upon solid, legitimate ground, and if he attains

success it will be fairly and substantially won. The play deals with American people as they are—gentlemen and ladies, who speak the English tongue without slang or provincialisms, and have the instincts and manners that prevail in cultivated society.

A beautiful young girl, or a purely and distinctively American type, the daughter of a General of the Union army, has been jilted in Paris by an adventurer who had won her in the absence of her father. The latter, finding him to be a villain and a coward, forces him to play the jilt, but keeps his daughter in ignorance of the whole truth. Heart-broken, she returns with her father and mother to a New England summer hotel, where they arrive after the season when all the guests are gone but Bartlett, an artist, and Arthur Cummings, a clergyman, who plays *Pythias* to the *Damen* of his artist friend, who is waiting to catch the autumnal tints on the New England hills. Bartlett happens to be in form and feature a living image of the villain in Paris, and when he accidentally meets the jilted heroine in the parlor of the hotel, the play begins. The plot is simple but of exquisite flavor, rich in opportunities for the subtle and delicate acting which forms the highest element of pure comedy. It is in three acts, the titles of which: "An Extraordinary Resemblance," "Distinctions and Differences," and "Not at all Alike," sufficiently suggest the progress of the action. Bartlett, vowing to see nothing but a weak-minded invalid in the pale-faced girl whose wan eyes follow him round the room like the eyes of a painted portrait, inevitably falls in love with her, proposes and is rejected, the girl declaring an unalterable affection for her former lover. Her interest in the artist has been due entirely to his resemblance to her faithless hero. Enter then the father, who exposes the real baseness of the villain in Paris, when with a suddenness which every woman will say is monstrous and impossible, the heart of the heroine turns to Bartlett, and a suggestive glimpse of the young reverend in the background closes the scene and the play. To build a successful comedy upon a framework like this would require consummate workmanship, and such we are assured Mr. Howells has bestowed upon it. If the piece fulfills upon the stage its promise on paper, the cause of a pure dramatic literature will be honored in its success. [Frank Mason]

A Modern Instance (Cincinnati *Commercial*, October 21, 1882)

No critical reader . . . will deny that it has certain original features.

In the first place, it is remorselessly true to life. No photograph was ever more pitilessly a picture in black and white. Mr. Howells has certainly painted his characters from nature, giving them due credit for their talents and virtues, but not hiding their imperfections in the least. . . . Bartley and Marcia [are] . . . described and analyzed with a pen that tears away the usual film of romance. The explosive, absurd type of feminine jealousy, brought into contact with a keen but lightweight manhood, form a new combination for the pages of a novel, and their treatment here is also new. Mr. Howells may justly claim that he gets "A Modern Instance" out of his own head, or, what is the same thing, out of his observation.

.....

Mr. Howells began life in a printing office, and he has evidently kept track of journalistic types, their merits and deformities. We will not follow Bartley further; for it is necessary to read the book to get the range and flavor of the characterization.

Mr. Howells is happy in his descriptions of men and women of maturer years. As they are settled and distinct in outlines, he draws strikingly faithful portraits of them, and catches subtle matters of detail with charming insight.

[The book] has phases of social life in Boston that are full of interest. The novel arouses thought and piques the intelligence. It is not very sympathetic, still less romantic. The fidelity to actual life, as we have said, is merciless. The author's process amounts almost to vivisection.

A Woman's Reason (Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, October 30, 1884)

. . . Helen Harkness is a noble woman, and in painting her Mr. Howells gives further evidence of his great power in realistic character delineation.

Indian Summer (Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, August 18, 1885)

. . . The "Indian Summer" of Mr. Howells is unsatisfactory. . . . The hero of the story is realistic enough; in fact, there lies the trouble, as in the case of nearly all the heroes of Mr. Howells's novels. Colville, like Silas Lapham and Bartley Hubbard of the two preceding novels, has all the unflattering characteristics of a photographic likeness before being "touched up," instead of the more pleasing appearance of an artistic portrait in which the like-

ness is preserved but the harsh lines softened. There is nothing whatever heroic about him. He is not the man of whom heroic conduct is to be expected. He drifts more than acts with determined purpose. . . . A prominent feature of Colville is his indolent cynicism. . . . In that the creature is something like his creator, for it is very evident that Mr. Howells does not thoroughly believe in his characters. He draws the retired Indiana editor and the American women, into whose company chance has thrown him in Florence, with a practiced hand, but with a smile of good humored contempt curling his lip at times. Now the average reader tires of this after a while. He or she is apt to resent the scarcely concealed disdain of the author for the characters in which that author expects his readers to become interested. And no wonder.

The Rise of Silas Lapham (Cincinnati *Commercial-Gazette*, September 5, 1885)

Mr. Howells' latest completed novel, "The Rise of Silas Lapham," is generally regarded as one of his most successful stories. It is a serio-humorous-ironical study of certain phases of American character and commonplace people, not a symphony in rich colors by any means, but a skillfully-finished piece of work in plain black and white. The novel illustrates several facts, one being that no possible use of newly-acquired riches can confer the real patrician air and atmosphere. The Laphams are worthy people, but struggle in vain to place themselves in harmony with the Coreys of blue Boston blood. Colonel Lapham is a sturdy man of business with some unpleasant forms of self-assertion, yet sensitively honorable and sound at heart. His wife also, with peculiarities of manner and temper, is sternly upright when principles are put to the test. The Coreys are accepted as genuine specimens of aristocratic Bostonians. In fact, the novel has pleased Boston, which is an indication that the truth is in it under favorable lights and mellowing tints.

The misadventures of Colonel Lapham as a diner-out constitute a delightful farce, for the writing of which Mr. Howells has repeatedly shown talent. It would appear from certain passages in the book that Mr. Howells holds that "the novelist who could interpret the common feelings of commonplace people would have the answer to the riddle of the painful earth on his tongue." This

is extremely doubtful, since people generally are occupied with material affairs according to infinitely varied circumstances, the pressure of necessity having more to do with their feelings than predilection. He also seeks to illustrate the proposition that "our manner and customs go for more in life than our qualities." But this could not be said, for instance, of Abraham Lincoln. The fact is, some of the novelists of the period who write in English confuse the commonplace with the man, just as certain French romancers put forward the licentious and the disgusting as the real.

No one can deny that Mr. Howells has rare ability in rendering the commonplace amusing. Take young and lovely Miss Lapham, who is visiting the unfinished mansion her father is building, in company with young Mr. Corey, with whom she is in the first steps of flirtation. "She found another shaving within reach of her parasol, and began poking that with it and trying to follow it through its folds. Corey watched her awhile. 'You seem to have a great passion for playing with shavings,' he said. 'Is it a new one?' 'New what?' 'Passion.' 'I don't know,' she said, dropping her eyelids and keeping on with her effort. She looked shyly aslant at him. 'Perhaps you don't approve of playing with shavings.' 'Oh, yes, I do. I admire it very much. But it seems rather difficult. I've a great ambition to put my foot on the shaving's tail and hold it for you.' 'Well,' said the girl. 'Thank you,' said the young man. He did so, and now she ran her parasol point easily through it. They looked at each other and laughed. 'That was wonderful. Would you like to try another?' he asked. 'No, I thank you,' she replied. 'I think one will do.' They both laughed again, for whatever reason or no reason, and then the young girl became sober. To a girl everything a young man does is of significance; and if he holds a shaving down with his foot while she pokes through it with her parasol, she must ask herself what he means by it." Now this contains the pure essence of fun, yet the reader is not sure that it is radically intended to be funny. The young man presents the shaving to the maiden; she carries it home in her belt, and makes of it a keepsake. Anon she finds the young man engaged to her sister, and the shaving takes on quite a tragic significance as it is thrown into the lap of the fiancée.

The novel was greatly enjoyed as a serial, and will be popular in book form. It is entertaining, yet it is not Scott nor Thackeray

nor Dickens, and most assuredly it is not the music of the future. Mr. Howells apparently, has yet to learn that the ideal side of human life is far more wonderful and far more worthy of study than narrow social mannerism; and yet his surface sketches are very acceptable if too much is not claimed for them.

The Rise of Silas Lapham (Cleveland Plain Dealer, September 27, 1885)

Now that [the novel] has been published complete in a volume there is an opportunity to revise the opinions formed of the story during its serial publication, there is little to be changed. It is unquestionably the best and strongest of all the novels of Mr. Howells, but we doubt if any reader will lay it down feeling quite satisfied. The characters are drawn with a remarkable skill and careful attention to details. Silas Lapham and his wife are as thoroughly finished studies as can be found in the whole wide field of modern fiction and Irene and Penelope are within certain limitations, almost as good.

Bromfield Corey is a dainty water color sketch and Tom Corey is a necessity to the conduct of the story but as a study of character is the less interesting of the leading figures: and one of the imperfections of the work is suggested by the question the reader is likely to put to himself at times, what there was in Tom Corey that two such girls as Irene and Penelope Lapham should become infatuated with him. The end of the study as was remarked here at the conclusion of the serial publication is unsatisfactory. It gives the impression that Mr. Howells did not exactly see how he was going to wind it up properly and so just cut it short.

The Garroters (Cincinnati Commercial-Gazette, December 5, 1885)

Is Howells a Plagiarist?

The discussion of plagiarism and cognate topics in an article on "Literary Integrity," published in the *Commercial Gazette* of November 21, has led a reader to prefer a charge of flagrant dishonesty against one of the most deservedly popular of living American authors. He says:

Howells' latest, 'The Garroters,' in this month's Harpers [the December number] is stolen from an old farce of Amos Madison Morton. I think it is called the 'Two Barleycorns.'

At any rate, we played it once in some sort of theatrical club of which I was a member. I should think W.D.H. would be above stealing.

And so should we. Yet an accusation so categorically made seems to deserve investigation. [There follows a recital of the plot of "The Two Barleycorns," produced in London in 1851.]

There is, however, still more decisive evidence of Mr. Howells' innocence of even pardonable appropriation. A few months ago a local item appeared in the Boston papers describing just such a robbery as is portrayed in "The Garroters," and locating it in the Common. The story certainly sounds fishy and marvelously like a reportorial adaption of Morton. Still, it is believed by Bostonians generally, and the parties concerned are well known citizens. Our author had then a local event, or, if one chooses to be skeptical, a local myth, ready at hand. He certainly had no need of help from a source whose use would at once be detected. We have no evidence that he has ever seen Morton's piece, and are sure that if it were his authority he has transgressed no literary law. He has at worst taken raw material and wrought it into a charming fabric. The man who clears a forest and converts it into a park may leave a few trees standing which old residents will recognize as part of the original growth, but the grading, the walks, the shrubbery, the flowers and the fountains will be all his own. If the park be constructed from a barren and treeless waste, taste and skill will have still further triumphed. Taking either of these achievements as an analogy, "The Garroters" will hold its place as one of the most pleasing and original productions of genius in its lighter and sportive moods.

(Signed by J.T.P.)

The Minister's Charge (Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 19, 1886)

Mr. Howells' Latest Novel.

Of the thousands of persons who began reading "The Minister's Charge," as it appeared monthly in the Century Magazine, a very large number became dissatisfied with it as it progressed. They found fault with its style, with its language, with its characters, with its dragging plot or half apology for a plot, and were provoked beyond everything by its conclusion, which was no con-

clusion at all but left everything as much at loose ends as at the beginning or in the middle or anywhere between the first page and the last. They vowed as they read each installment that they would not read the next or anything else that Mr. Howells might write, but they continued to read and to be provoked. They did the same thing with "The Rise of Silas Lapham" and "A Modern Instance," and they will probably do the same with the novel that must inevitably follow the apprenticeship of Lemuel Barker, as that followed the story of Silas Lapham, which in turn was rendered necessary by the history of Bartley Hubbard. Resent as we may the method of Mr. Howells in his later novels it must be admitted that he is a master in his way. Whether his stories are high art or not depends on the standard by which high art is to be judged. That they are judged merely as stories, each complete in itself and which therefore should have a regular plot culminating in the last chapter. A little reflection will show this to be a mistaken idea. Mr. Howells has evidently adopted the plan originated by Balzac in his "Comedy of Human Nature" and followed by other French novelists, in which a series of novels form one great novel, the whole being a study of human life and character under many phases. Bartley Hubbard is the central figure in one story, Silas Lapham in another, Lemuel Barker in the latest, and each is minutely studied, but several of the accessory characters are common to all three. In fact the principal in each figures slightly in one of the other novels. Bartley Hubbard reappears at the opening of the "Rise of Silas Lapham," interviewing the rising paint manufacturer. In the second story casual reference is made to a young country lad with a crushed poet air coming away from Parson Sewell's door, and in the next novel the lad turns out to be Lemuel Barker, who divides interest as the hero of the book with Parson Sewell. When this fact is recognized that the novels are not mere stories for the diversion of a leisure hour, but studies of life to be reflected upon, and the questions they raise to be grappled with and answered to the reader's self, if an answer can be found, their merit will be acknowledged.

One other cause of dissatisfaction probably lies in the remarkable contrast between the style and the language of the present novels and of the earlier and slighter sketches and airy trifles of Mr. Howells. These had an inimitable and indescribable charm

which lay more in the manner than in the matter. The artistic finish was perfect. Each word was the exact one for the place, each sentence a polished gem. In the series of Boston novels of which "The Minister's Charge" forms part, the style is wholly changed. Extraordinary words are picked up, from where nobody knows. The talk is frequently uncouth. The sentences are sometimes so constructed as to send cold chills down the spine of the reader fastidious in phraseology. But all that is evidently done with a set purpose and there is as much genuine art in the apparent uncouthness as there was in the smooth finish.

Now that "The Minister's Charge" has been completed and published in a volume by Ticknor & Co. a fairer judgment can be made of it by readers who dislike serial publication. It is a novel that will pay to read carefully and when the provoking "no conclusion" is reached it will not be time altogether lost to turn back and read over some of the pages still more carefully and thoughtfully. Parson Sewell's perplexities over his human problem may then be sympathized with more completely by the reader.—Received by the Burrows Bros. company.

The Minister's Charge (Toledo Commercial [from J. M. Comly's Scrapbook, 1886 or 87])

The Minister's Charge, Mr. Howells's last book, which has been running in The Century and is completed in the December number of that magazine, has been published in book form by Ticknor & Co.

Lemuel Barker has no counterpart in any of the other characters Mr. Howells has yet given us. He has given us numerous phases of what one of his greatest admirers calls the "patrician Bostonian" character; well-bred gentlefolks, whose fathers and grandfathers have been genteel and well-bred before them. Notable among these are the Coreys. And he has given us, in contrast to these pleasant, refined, cultivated people (a class which is not confined to Boston, nor to New England, nor to any locality of this country, as Mr. Howells very well knows) the vulgar man of puffed-up pride in newly acquired riches (Silas Lapham) honest and upright but with no sort of refinement or sensibility beyond a sort of jealous vanity; and still further, the man of veneer polish and knavish heart, thinly crusted over during his unpros-

perous years, who hovers upon the outskirts of Mr. Howells's own favorite, select circle of Boston "family" and "culture" but is too palpably unsound to be admitted. Such a one is Bartley Hubbard. But here we have a character, evolved from such circumstances as a humble village home on a dairy farm, an experience limited, to the care of the cows, a few books and a self supposed taste for writing, a mother who wears bloomers, himself a raw boned, awkward, uncouth sort of a person, and yet containing a refined soul within the rough shell; who assimilates with an insatiable capacity, the lessons of the various experiences which come to him; adapting himself anew with an intuitive perception to the altered conditions of the successive changes in his life thoughtfully observed with a rustic taciturnity and shyness and recognized by the "patricians" (with a sort of cultural superciliousness [sic] it is true) as possessing a capacity for fine distinctions of conscientiousness equal to their own and capable, too of learning an appreciation of those finer distinctions in all things, which some people are wont to consider their own peculiar province; proving all this more than anything by the resolute firmness with which he refuses to repudiate obligations formed before he had come to his advanced state of appreciation of good and true qualities and with which he resolves to give up the woman of refinement to whom all his sympathies turn because he considers himself bound in honor to a factory girl; an obligation holding over from his state of lesser development.

There is a rugged, rustic (perhaps rustic; certainly not urban) honesty and truth about Lemuel which carries our sympathy with him wherever he goes. There are not wanting notable examples of this type of character among those famous in the history of the Republic. It is a peculiarly American character. Boston perhaps offers as good opportunities for the development of such a character as anywhere, but the development of a person having such a character might be effected in one of our western cities to better advantage than in "the modern Athens."

Several of the female characters in this book show a departure from the usual lines of Mr. Howells's women. Mrs. Barker of the bloomers and awful firmness and determination; Manda Brier of the snub-nosed and staccato dialect and with positive convictions

and candor in expressing them and Statira, the pretty consumptive factory girl who reads novels from the circulating library and fits her demeanor to genteel occasions. Statira has what her author calls a "genteel elongation of her final syllables" in conversations upon those occasions as, to the minister's wife, referring to Lemuel's mother. "I guess I shall get along with her. She's kind of queer when you first get acquainted, but she's *real* good heart e e-d." This may be the manner of speech of a Boston factory girl but it sounds very much like the daughter of an Ohio farmer come to town to "work out."

Friends and neighbors of Mr. Howells, in his earlier years, recognize continual touches from his experience of that time; touches which indicate that he has characters and material to his mind to make a story of Ohio life if he should wish. Perhaps he would not please us if he were to depict us; but there are many who would like to see the experiment made.

A Talk with Howells (Cincinnati Commercial Gazette, March 13, 1886)

Washington, March 3.—W. D. Howells, the novelist, is in the city. He has come here, he says, for rest and recreation. He will probably remain a month. I met him this morning and talked with him for over an hour. Mr. Howells is rather short in stature, but so well proportioned that he looks taller than he really is. He has grown very gray within the last ten years, but his face is as fair and rosy as many men scarcely half his age. He talks well, but shows a modest disinclination to speak too freely of himself or his works. I asked him how he liked New York. He replied that he had not gone there, nor did he intend to. He thinks Boston is the most delightful residence city in America. It was expected when he formed his present engagement with Harper's Magazine that he would make New York his home, but he finds he can discharge the duties of his position quite as well in Boston, and for that reason he will continue to reside there. I asked him what he thought of Miss Murfree, whose sketches over the *non de plume* of Charles Egbert Craddock, have attracted such widespread attention of late years. He replied that the girl was a genius, and her future a very promising one.

"I remember," said he, "her first contribution to the Atlantic. The manuscript was sent to me for examination. I read it with

great pleasure. I am greatly mistaken I said to myself, if here is not a new star in the literary firmament. I glanced at the signature. M. N. Murfee. The chirography was bold and masculine. Some clever young barrister, I again soliloquized, trying to eke out a scanty income by devoting his leisure hours to magazine work. Whereupon I wrote M. N. Murfee, telling him it was an injustice to himself to print a production of so high an order anonymously, and that while Charles Egbert Craddock, as a pseudonym, was very pretty and all that, it would be better to make known his identity from the start. The answer, which came a few days later, said there were family reasons why it was not advisable to disclose the author's identity then, but that this would probably be done at some future time.

[There follows a 300-word description of his first meeting with M. N. Murfree]

"Then it appears, Mr. Howells," said I, "that Miss Murfree's first essay in the literary field did not share the usual fate of articles contributed by unknown persons, for the general impression is that no matter how clever these may be they are usually tossed into the wastebasket without undergoing the formality of a reading."

"I know that impression exists," said Mr. Howells, "but it is not a correct one. The sub-editors, as they are called, of all our leading magazines, are on the lookout constantly for new talent. What so unreasonable then, as to suppose that skilled men can not recognize such talent unless accompanied by the name of some writer of prominence. Of course every magazine has a great mass of rubbish sent to it, but it is all carefully examined in the hope that something of merit may be found among it."

"Then there is no truth in the stories one occasionally hears that you or Bret Harte, or T. B. Aldrich, or some other distinguished man of letters has written something anonymously and sent it to one of the magazines, only to have it rejected on account of its alleged inferiority?"

"There is absolutely no truth in it whatever. I believe Baynard Taylor did it once, but it is the only authenticated case I know of."

"Are magazine writers well paid for their work?"

"As a rule, yes. A few years ago \$5 a page was considered a fair remuneration, it has gradually increased, until now \$15, and quite frequently \$20 a page is paid."

"Do our magazines meet with as much favor from the English as they did a couple of years ago?"

"More. The sale of all our first-rate magazines is constantly on the increase in England. In traveling about the country you will see great heaps of American magazines at the book stalls in the railway stations, while, lying alongside, obscure and almost neglected, may be found half a dozen copies of Cornhill or some other British periodical."

"How does it happen that our American product crowds the English so closely to the wall?"

"They don't crowd them to the wall. There is practically no call for the English article, while, as I have said, the demand for the American product is constantly on the increase. Seventy thousand copies of the January Harpers were sold in England a few weeks ago. I merely mention this to show you the favor in which our magazines are held by the English reading public."

"Every literary man who has written a number of books," I said, "is supposed to regard each particular one with more affection than the others. Dickens, for example, speaks of *David Copperfield*, as the one of his novels he liked the best. Have you any preference among those you have written?"

"I can't say that I'm in love with any of my books, but on the whole I like "A Foregone Conclusion" best, and after that, "An Undiscovered Country."

"Does your work ever become tiresome to you, or, I might ask, do you ever work when you know you are not doing yourself justice?"

"No, my work never tires me. I enjoy it thoroughly. How good it may be I leave to others to judge. But whether good or bad it is always my best effort. I don't know how to do otherwise. In that respect I am like a friend of mine who once held a responsible custom-house position. When a man came to him with a bribe he would say, 'You don't know how to do this.' This simple remark and the invariable effect of making the would-be briber feel that

he had committed a terrible *faux pas*, which usually resulted in his beating a hasty retreat without asking for an explanation. In this way my friend saved his honor and avoided making an enemy. It is so with me. 'I don't know how' to slur my work."

(Signed by Jules Guthridge)

Wright State University

NOTES

1. The files searched were those of *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Ohio State Journal*, and the *Cincinnati Commercial*, chosen because they represent a fair geographical distribution in the state and because they were the only papers from those cities available on microfilm for the entire period. The first interview, from the *Ohio State Journal* (8 March 1880) which attributed it to the *New York Times*, is not noted in Ulrich Halfmann's *Interviews With William Dean Howells* (Arlington, Texas: *American Literary Realism*, 1973). The second, from the *Cincinnati Commercial-Gazette* (13 March 1866) and signed Jules Guthridge, is probably the one Halfmann saw in the April 1886 issue of *Literary News*, which attributed it to the *Chicago News* (no date). Both interviews are presented here.

To my knowledge the reaction of Ohio papers to Howells up to 1886 has not been used in biographical/critical studies, including the introductions to the volumes of the Howells Editions, and in fact the existence of Ohio reviews has not been noted in bibliographies. The notes to the *Selected Letters of W. D. Howells* (Boston: Twayne, 1979) indicate there were book reviews Howells knew of in the *Ohio State Journal*, and reviews of his plays in the *Cincinnati Commercial*, and the *Cleveland Leader*.

2. For biographical information on Comly see: Eugene H. Kleinpell, "James M. Comly, Journalist-Politician," Ph.D. dissertation (Ohio State 1936); and The James M. Comly papers, Ohio Historical Society (microfilm edition). The scattered files of the *Toledo Commercial* for 1882-86 yielded no significant biographical information. Howells's life-long pride in his early work as a printer is echoed in Comly's obituary in the *Commercial*:

[When Comly entered the printing office as a lad, it was] regarded one of the best schools the country afforded, and many of the most distinguished men of the country were graduates from printing offices. They were found filling public positions of every character and honored all of the professions, while few men were thought competent to conduct a public journal who were not practical printers.

3. *SL I*, pp. 30, 37, 38.
4. W. D. Howells, *Years of My Youth*, ed. David J. Nordloh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), pp. 201-02. The biographical details above are also from this source, and from Ginette de B. Merrill, "The Meeting of Elinor Gertrude Mead and Will Howells and Their Courtship," *The Old Northwest*, VIII, 1 (Spring 1982), 23-49. The relationship of Hayes to Elizabeth Smith Comly is uncertain. She was either a niece or a cousin, an interesting problem for genealogists.

5. The obituaries appear in the undated scrapbooks of the Comly Papers. He died on 26 July 1887.
6. The appearance of a review does not guarantee it was written for that paper. When a review is attributed to another paper, it is recorded here, but there were occasional exchanges with other papers that were not acknowledged; thus, it is possible that some reviews were copied from other Ohio or Eastern papers. The Toledo *Commercial* review of *The Minister's Charge* appeared in Comly's scrapbook (undated), and since Guy Comly, his son, took over the more active part of the editorial work during the last six months of his father's life, it seems more likely that he wrote it than his father.

Complete texts of the reviews have been deposited with the Howells Center at Indiana University.

RAINTREE COUNTY AND THE CRITICS OF '48

RAY LEWIS WHITE

Several years ago, when I was lecturing on American literature in Munich, I unexpectedly suffered a mild case of *Heimweh*—a longing for my adopted American Midwest. Rather than rush home to visit our American heartland, I located a copy of a challenging Midwestern American novel that I had not yet read—*Raintree County*, by Ross Lockridge, Jr. Everytime I had driven through the green hills of Indiana, I had thought of the beauty of this novel's title and determined to read the work; only the vast bulk of the fiction had put me off. But, with much time on my hands in Munich and the feeling that a full dose of *Raintree County* would heal my homesickness, I plunged into Lockridge's almost eleven hundred pages of Indiana chronicle and national myth to emerge at least a week later, with my appetite for long fiction temporarily sated but with my curiosity awakened to know more of this seemingly tireless Ross Lockridge who had put together what I considered an interesting synthetic prose epic—a sprawling, romantic, totally derivative and yet sometimes moving amalgam of a very personal Indiana.

To learn more of Ross Lockridge, Jr., I soon read *Ross and Tom* by John Leggett (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), wherein I learned, not to my surprise, that Lockridge was a college teacher who, after an Indiana youth, determined to create a best-selling epic novel compounded of Plato, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Balzac, Freud, Lewis, Joyce, Proust, Wolfe, Mann, and Benét—all projected through D.W. Griffith's film innovations. What did surprise me in reading the life of Lockridge was the writer's suicide on March 6, 1948, in the midst of the enormous financial success of *Raintree County*, for the work had won the lucrative

(\$150,000) M.G.M. prize for a movie-worthy novel, it had become a prime selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, and it was rising to the top of the national best-seller lists just after publication on January 5, 1948. I could understand the suicide of Lockridge only as Leggett explained the action—as the inability of a Midwestern prig and monomaniac to live richly and peacefully after successful if perhaps subconscious revenge on the Christian Science mother and the amateur-historian father.

Yet I suspected more—namely that in the critical reception of *Raintree County* there might be another clue to the suicide of Ross Lockridge, for Leggett had demonstrated clearly this author's near-psychotic obsession with his writing and his loathing of negative commentary on that work. Still intrigued, I managed, after my return from Germany, to collect almost a hundred of the contemporary reviews of *Raintree County*, reviews published early in 1948 in almost every major newspaper and magazine of the United States. After studying these reviews I have decided that the ambiguous critical reception of *Raintree County* might indeed help to explain the pathetic end of Ross Lockridge, Jr., this arrogant and too-sensitive college professor turned would-be epic-maker of the Midwest.

So that others may study the evidence available, I provide here a digest of my ninety-four collected reviews of *Raintree County* from the time of its initial publication. To aid further in such study of Ross Lockridge, Jr., and his synthetic Midwestern epic novel, I have given my entire collection of periodical commentary to the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.

1. *Book-of-the-Month Club News* (December 1947)—Canby, Henry Seidel.

Here is a vital novel, rich in characters, close to the soil and American history, puzzling sometimes, too verbose for my taste, but what I would cut some other reader would insist upon keeping.

Take your time about reading—that is essential—and you can be guaranteed an experience.

2. *Retail Bookseller* (January 1948).

It's a sprawling sort of book, not very well organized, and apt to be irritating in its sudden change from here to there and

back again. Its great appeal is its zest; the author's evident delight in his own words not only explains his frequent self-indulgence but excuses it. The author's pleasure in story-telling makes for reader pleasure.

3. *Booklist* (1 January 1948).

4. Moultrie (GA) *Observer* (1 January 1948)—Rogers, W. G.

It escapes being cheap, and that has not been true of other M.G.M. selections. Indeed, it has one or two passages, like the wedding night scene, which achieve a certain intensity.

But that isn't enough to justify the prodigious length, especially since the rest of it doesn't escape being trite. . . .

5. Buffalo *Evening News* (3 January 1948)—Bonner, Willard Hallam.

This novel obviously has melled long and lovingly in the mind. In it are stored the cornucopia ripeness of a land and the spirit of many, from plain citizens to artist and philosopher, who have made that land. It is a solid, good novel.

6. Hartford *Times* (3 January 1948)—Gross, John.

Raintree County demands its own reading pace, but once started we wager it will absorb the reader to the very end. It should not be passed by.

7. Indianapolis *Times* (3 January 1948)—Butler, Henry.

The term "epic," which Hollywood has applied even to horse-operas, is shopworn. But in its classical sense of a long and elaborate treatment of a great theme, the term aptly describes *Raintree County*.

8. *Saturday Review of Literature* (3 January 1948)—Jones, Howard Mumford.

Latest candidate for that mythical honor, the Great American Novel, *Raintree County* displays unflagging industry, a jerky and sometimes magnificent vitality, a queer amalgam of pattern and formlessness, and an ingenuity of structure that is at once admirable and maddening. The engineering of this huge volume arouses one's admiration, although the problem of organic form is by no means solved.

9. Atlanta *Constitution* (4 January 1948)—North, Sterling.

Like all such Niagaras of words, whether from a Tom Wolfe or a Walt Whitman, this rushing river of verbiage

would have turned more wheels and done more useful work had it been disciplined with a few dams and directed through turbines.

10. *Atlanta Journal* (4 January 1948)—Tyre, Nedra.
11. *Bridgeport Post* (4 January 1948).
 . . . *Raintree County* is neither an historical fiction nor philosophical fiction. Its primary appeal is to its swift, exciting narrative, its salty humor, its human warmth.
12. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (4 January 1948)—Whitford, R. C.
 Unquestionably this novel will live when simpler narratives, and more direct, have passed into limbo, for research scholars in the Twenty-first Century will have a field day with it. They will have a delightful time tracing influences, Whitman here, James Joyce there, Laurence Sterne and Marcel Proust passim. They will gleefully discover allegorical subtleties laid on like curly maple veneer.
13. *Buffalo Courier Express* (4 January 1948).
 It must be stated clearly . . . that the book is needlessly verbose and (despite a strained attempt at the classic unities of time, place and action) needlessly formless. It is a book which men will enjoy more than women; poets more than Philistines; pagans more than fundamentalists. And yet in many respects this novel is timeless and universal.
14. *Chicago Tribune Magazine of Books* (4 January 1948)—Guilfoil, Kelsey.
 Make no mistake about it, *Raintree County* is unique. If I have compared it to the work of Thomas Wolfe, that was not said in derogation. In many ways it is better than Wolfe. It certainly comes closer to the heart of America, and is less distorted in its view of life than Wolfe often is. Ross Lockridge is not Wolfe's successor, but in the exuberant vitality of his story-telling, in the sweep and scope of his work, he belongs in the same class.
15. *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (4 January 1948)—Gulzeth, Irene.
Raintree County, regrettably, is a book of contradictions. It has moments of keen suspense and high drama, but it also has long rambling passages of meditative philosophizing which break the story's thread without perceptibly adding to

its interest. But to the writing of this, his first book, the 32-year-old novelist hailing from Bloomington, Ind., has brought a knowledge of American history and an able pen: it is unfortunate that he felt compelled to demonstrate all of his ideas within one volume.

16. *Dallas Times-Herald* (4 January 1948)—Allen, Stewart.
 The people who read most easily those novels which have a straight story line, an obvious theme, a clearly defined climax, and a tidy ending will find this one heavy going. The author has built a plot structure in which there are many stories and wings, cellars and attics, secret stairways and compartments, rather than one with regularly spaced rooms all opening onto a well-lit hallway which runs from front to back.
17. *Denver Post* (4 January 1948)—Mechau, Vaughn.
 Instead of sketches of a happy community replete with people playing croquet, children skipping rope and rolling hoops, the artist filled his drawings of local scenes with much more interesting insight of the town.
18. *Houston Post* (4 January 1948)—Copeland, Bart.
 Many are bound to agree, on reading this wise and infinitely appealing story, that not since Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* has an American's first book been so important. . . . Wolfe, genius of cosmic dimension, was no more accountable to pattern than are the sea and sky. Lockridge—though spiritually sensitive—likewise is discerning, disciplined in craftsmanship.
19. *Indianapolis Star* (4 January 1948)—Patrick, Corbin.
 If Mr. Lockridge were a musician rather than an epic poet, he might rival Bach himself as a master of contrapuntal weaving. He juggles his scenes superbly, and only the reader who peeks is relieved of suspense. His writing is lush and vivid, his creative imagination warm and vigorous. His one apparent weakness seems to be that he doesn't yet know his own strength—the book is rather overwhelming in its massiveness. But its power and sincerity are manifest. It is a first novel of inestimable promise.
20. *Miami Herald* (4 January 1948)—D., M. S.
 His feeling for the Indiana country and its people, his tre-

mendous grasp of Civil war issues, his brilliance in handling the points of view of North and of South without sentimentality, would make any novel he wrote noteworthy.

But I wish that he could have cleared out some of the underbrush of action. There are too many dream-sequences, too many reveries, too much use of the vocative and semi-poetic invocations which Thomas Wolfe did so much more superbly.

21. *Milwaukee Journal* (4 January 1948)—Matthew, Christopher. . . . it does not come under the criticism recently leveled against modern historical novels, that in their attempts to recreate history they forget to communicate ideas. The characters and ideas are always more important than the historical details in this story, though the latter are superbly done.

22. *Minneapolis Tribune* (4 January 1948)—Simak, Clifford D. Not satisfied with the experiment of scrambling his story sequence, the author has done away with quote marks and, to make the confusion utter and complete, has led off each bit of conversation with a dash. By the time the reader gets so used to this that his eyes accept it, he is ready for anything.

23. *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review* (4 January 1948)—Hilton, James.

After World War I came *Main Street*; after World War II has come *Raintree County*, by Ross Lockridge, Jr. It is possible that literary historians will some day record that both novels won wide acclaim and established enduring reputations for the reason that (apart from intrinsic merits) they offered a picture of itself to an America that towered in victory and prosperity over a shattered world.

24. *New York Sun* (4 January 1948)—Dedmon, Emmett.

The recommendation of *Raintree County* as the first work of a brilliant author . . . must be partner to a warning: Reading this novel requires application and much patience; granted you are willing to assume these obligations, the reward will be correspondingly great.

25. *New York Times* (4 January 1948)—Lee, Charles.

It would be easy to pick minor flaws in the massive structure of this fascinating novel, winner of a huge film company

award. One might quarrel with its amorous ebulliences. So-called realists will skim over Lockridge's poetic interpolations. Devotees of the spare phrase, missing his great gift for disciplined articulation, will quarrel with alleged linguistic intemperance. *Raintree County* remains an achievement of art and purpose, a cosmically brooding book full of significance and beauty.

26. *Newark News* (4 January 1948)—Herzberg, Max.

This endeavor to understand what our land means may of course be discovered in much else that has been written in novels, plays and poems that find place in American literature.

What is likely to give an enduring place in that literature to *Raintree County* is the extraordinary ingenuity with which Lockridge has contrived a new technique to fit his theme—a technique borrowed from the movies, but with elaborations which are to be found in no story hitherto written.

27. *Newark Star-Ledger* (4 January 1948)—Gray, James.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, here is a striking portent with which to get the book year launched dramatically. *Raintree County* is a literary phenomenon and by calling it that I do not mean to get myself trapped in a verbal blind alley, nor do I wish to elude the responsibility of having to describe it. The novel is an explosion of the imaginative spirit containing within its fiery structure particles of every kind of creative inspiration the author has ever admired.

28. *Omaha World-Herald* (4 January 1948)—Kunstler, William M.

Like Wolfe and Tolstoy, Mr. Lockridge could gain by restraint, but I believe that he has written a highly significant novel, one that introduces a literary personality of the first magnitude.

29. *Philadelphia Sunday Bulletin Book Review* (4 January 1948)—Neville, James M.

Impressionistically, the novel suggests a somewhat wayward bus, driven by Thomas Wolfe with Stephen Vincent Benét, Vachel Lindsay, Sinclair Lewis, Walt Whitman and Edgar Lee Masters jammed in behind him and all telling stories simultaneously while engaged in back-seat driving.

30. *Philadelphia Inquirer* (4 January 1948)—Brookhouser, Frank.

A new young literary giant has appeared, and his stature, on the basis of this performance, is an imposing one. He is, in the purest sense of the phrase, an American artist in words and ideas.

31. *Providence Journal* (4 January 1948)—Wilson, William E.

Reading *Raintree County* is a task similar to that which the New York police undertook when they explored the junk-cluttered Fifth Avenue mansion of the Collyer brothers last spring. Mr. Lockridge's novel has almost everything in it except the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

32. *Washington Star* (4 January 1948)—McGrory, Mary.

... let it be said at once that *Raintree County* is something to cheer about as an attempt, if not an accomplishment. Its weakness can be traced to the fact that its mood of gentle perplexity about the sources and meaning of life is too thin to maintain 1,060 pages of elaborate verbal embroidery, unkempt generalities and misty mysticism which comes dimly into focus. . . .

33. *Christian Science Monitor* (5 January 1948)—R., H. M.

The book has many faults, but there is also much good writing in it. Because of this and other values the book might well have had, the reader wishes Mr. Lockridge had possessed the confidence and courage to be completely himself in this novel. There is, incidentally, a functional lustiness of action and word in Mr. Lockridge which to some readers might be offensive.

34. *New York Herald-Tribune* (5 January 1948)—Gannett, Lewis.

Like rain itself, *Raintree County* spills over a lot of waste territory. But when you finish it you feel that you have been reading a book, not just a pulp. That, in these days, is something. And it should make a grand movie.

35. *New York Sun* (5 January 1948)—Cournos, John.

Not that the author fails to do a bit of pretty writing here and there. It is structurally that this novel is a monstrous mistake, being conceived, as it is, on the principle of a movie

scenario. . . . Hence this work, far from symbolizing the growth of the "American Myth" (whatever that may mean) as is claimed for it, is in fact a symbol of the disintegration of the novel as an art form. It is hard to imagine anything more confusing and unsatisfactory.

36. *New York Times* (5 January 1948)—Prescott, Orville.

It is impossible in a brief space even to suggest the richness of material in *Raintree County*, its many well-portrayed characters, its dramatic peaks and humorous exuberance. These are wonderful assets for a novel, and the man who can create them deserves attention and respect. The other elements which make *Raintree County* so pompous and tedious would ruin most novels beyond redemption. They damage and disfigure *Raintree County*, but still leave it an impressive achievement.

37. *New York World-Telegram* (5 January 1948)—Hansen, Harry.

The author took seven years to write this book, which is longer than it took to build the George Washington bridge and the Eighth Ave. subway and merely demonstrates that words can be accumulated in a huge pile by conscientious industry. It is, however, impossible not to enjoy certain lively passages in it and be grateful that one author has a refreshing attitude toward his homeland. The down-in-the-mouth school of novelists can learn a lot from him.

38. *Cleveland Press* (6 January 1948).

Lockridge employs many methods in attempting to establish the American myth: Realism, humor, mysticism and a great deal of symbolism. The work is permeated throughout with a clean eroticism which nearly always finds identity with the fertility of the good earth; it also affirms man's identity with the earth.

39. *Boston Globe* (7 January 1948)—L., E. A.

The book is about the America which is both pagan and Christian, moral and immoral, profane and sacred. Its technique is the most amazing set of flashbacks ever put between covers. It is an affirmative book, screaming its affirmation. It's full of the American beliefs, the American errors, the

American tragedies, the American humor. Despair is lacking—that is the chief merit. Even if you dislike the book it will haunt you.

40. *Boston Herald* (7 January 1948)—Bond, Alice Dixon.
It has body and significance, pace and tense interest, lyric beauty and rich symbolism, and a gargantuan vitality. It has, also, at times, a Joycean amorphism, despite the ingenious pattern which the author employs to blend past and present, and the torrential verbiage of an unpruned Thomas Wolfe, which occasionally drowns character and imagery, alike.
41. *Chicago Daily News* (7 January 1948)—Gray, James.
By turns Lockridge fancies himself as Boccaccio, Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud, and James Joyce. He has helped himself liberally to all the interest of historical narrative, realistic comedy, chatty philosophic discourse, symbolic drama, roguish double-talk about the intimacies of love, and unapologetic melodrama.
42. *Cleveland News* (7 January 1948)—Havighurst, Walter.
Like *Raintree County*, the novel has inexhaustible life. The story is told sometimes with a brooding poetic passion and more often with a comic spirit and even in a mock-heroic vein. Some things seem forced—the brief appearance of Whitman and Lincoln, the over-decoration of the narrative and its transitions.
43. *La Jolla Light* (8 January 1948)—T., T. L.
. . . *Raintree County* is neither an historical novel nor philosophical fiction. Its primary appeal is in its swift, exciting narrative, its salty humor, its human warmth. The verbal pyrotechnics and sardonic wit of "the professor" counterpoint the passages of sheer lyrical beauty such as the description of the corn growing through hot Midwestern days and nights. Lockridge has a poet's perception of the strong sensual love that binds man and woman and both to the fostering earth, and his pages convey the drive of a deep and reverent eroticism. His book attempts a synthesis of history and personal drama, of philosophical ideas and of sensual reality, that make it one of the most ambitious and impressive creative efforts of post-war American writing.

44. *New Yorker* (10 January 1948)—Basso, Hamilton.
. . . unlikely as it may seem, Mr. Lockwood [sic] does have talent. When he stops trying to write like the author of a pageant of America and just goes ahead and writes, he can be read with interest and enjoyment. Nearly all his major figures are failures, but he succeeds splendidly with a few minor characters. . . . This is Mr. Lockwood's first novel, so there is still time for him to learn that bulk is not accomplishment, that fanciness is not literature, and that Thomas Wolfe, while an excellent man in his way, had defects that look absolutely terrible second-hand.
45. *Akron Beacon-Journal* (11 January 1948)—Jackson, Margot.
Certainly oodles of good stuff is here. But the visual look of the mixture kept me frequently from seeking the meat in the hash. The infatuation for words and more words muddled my sustained interest.
Yet frequently I was proud of a writer with the individuality to write and lay out as he pleased; to get his personal feelings of America wrapped up through individuals memorable for themselves first, and as types second.
It's that infuriating contradictory kind of a sprawling gargantua.
46. *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* (11 January 1948)—G., W.
It is our solemn and considered conviction that any literate person who ever read and enjoyed just one work of fiction is doing *himself* the injustice in not buying and reading this book—not the author, publisher or book-seller.
47. *Boston Post* (11 January 1948)—S., G.
And so his book is important. It has something to say that hasn't exactly been said. Yet we feel about *Raintree*, as probably Mr. Lockridge does himself, that it isn't quite right, that it isn't typical, or perhaps, rather, that it is too typical. We sense, too, that a book this ambitious needs more sensitivity and beauty than an inexperienced writer can bring to it. In other words, America is like life itself. No book can ever fully understand or express its meaning.
48. *Dayton News* (11 January 1948)—Burick, Rae.
No short synopsis can do justice to this long, beautiful,

awe-inspiring novel. The style and the mood are the most important. You can't afford to miss the pleasurable feeling that each line gives you. The language at times is slightly bawdy, but never offensive, and it is the same with some of the scenes. The language seems imbued with a mystical meaning, yet it is human. There are many unforgettable dramatic scenes in the story. . . . Once you start reading, an indescribable force will lead you on. It may take a long time to read, but it will be an experience you will not want to miss.

49. *Des Moines Register* (11 January 1948)—Dwight, Ogden G. . . . Lockridge is prolific, even prolix in his writing. His headlong story leaps here and there. He is not above trick writing, he uses Scribean devices, and upon occasion the arm of coincidence is not only long but convenient. But there is a spirit and dash; good narration and real humor; a touching tenderness; poetic singing; and spiritual sincerity which immediately will invite comparison to the late Thomas Wolfe—among those who care to make such comparisons.
50. *Los Angeles Times* (11 January 1948)—Jordan-Smith, Paul. There will be symbolism enough, provided by Virgil and *The Golden Bough*, and there is a bigger story lying in the heart of the story you will so easily read. And all of it is apt to be obscured by the fact that it has won a big cash prize award for its author. Forget the sensational fact; lie back and read a good story, for *Raintree County* is all of that.
51. *Oklahoma City Oklahoman* (11 January 1948)—Stockwell, Robert.

A thoughtful reviewer hesitates a long time before he calls a book "great." Yet no other adjective describes this book fittingly. In the maze of human emotions, in the panoramic coverage of nineteenth century background, in the tragic motivation of Johnny Shawnessy, in the moral and esthetic problems that he encounters, and, for himself, solves—in all these it approaches the universal magnitude that has made other books great and enduring.

52. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (11 January 1948)—Sherman, Thomas B.
Whether the novel is considered as an epic concerned with

elemental forces or as a poet's vision it is still overwritten in the sense that not all of it is necessary to achieve a completeness of effect. It is possible, too, that a little more discipline and a little more creative striving would have elevated the less distinguished writing in many chapters to the high rhapsodic passages. For it is surprisingly true that the novel is most convincing when it is the most intense, most subjective and most obviously given over to lush "poetic poetry."

53. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (11 January 1948).

Monumental in imaginative concept [is] this sprawling tale, convincing in its detail of childhood and of war and rising at times to gripping dramatic power. Yet it fumbles as it seeks to translate satiric caricature into character. . . .

54. *Worcester Telegram* (11 January 1948)—Chase, Harold B.

Raintree County is a first novel of almost ominous size and monumental literary proportions. It was conceived on a heroic scale and was set down by the pen of a skilled craftsman. It erupts with imagination, fire, conviction and sincerity. Young as is the year 1948 and risky as prophecy may be, we are willing to go out on a very long limb with the prediction that *Raintree County* will prove to be one of the—if not the—most talked-of books of the year.

55. *Time* (12 January 1948).

This first book is the impressive result of a bold, if not wholly successful, effort to write the Great American Novel. It is also the latest and plainest sign that native American and recent European traditions of art and thought can flow together and that this cultural Mississippi, though full of snags and shallows, may be one of the brightest things moving in the world. *Raintree County* is a historical novel of Indiana by an Indiana boy; it is also a philosophical novel (a rare thing in U.S. fiction), and a studied work of art that is striking enough to court comparison, in method at least, with the *Ulysses* of James Joyce.

56. *Los Angeles Examiner* (14 January 1948).

If this book isn't a bold, new bid for position as the great American novel, its earmarks should be rearranged. But whereas it achieves some stature it falls short of any such goal.

The novel will confuse many, who will assert (and are loudly doing so) that it seems to back and fill too much, and that it is too philosophical and not very clear. However, the author says this backing and filling is to form a pattern and that the novel seeks to clarify, define and underscore what may be called The American Myth. This makes it fine and dandy and leaves it as fully incomprehensible, in spots, as ever.

57. *Best Sellers* (15 January 1948)—Yanitelli, Victor R.

After the first thousand pages steeped in eroticism and imbued with phallic symbols, the conclusion veers suddenly from sex by introducing into the amalgam of episodes, flashback and biography a new amalgam of philosophy composed of Darwinian evolution, Nietzschean egoism and Spinozan pantheism. Neurotically speaking, the philosophical daub lends just the right obfuscation to a theme already vague, which, together with the ponderous size of the volume, should prove to be a great drawing card with the lending library set, though it may be doubted whether an army of Hollywood rewrite men could gut the story for a scenario.

58. *Hartford Courant* (18 January 1948)—Boulton, Richard N.

He has much to learn—and more to forget—before the watered wine of Thomas Wolfe becomes American ambrosia, and the Joycean jabberwocky is reduced to intelligibility. This young author's industry must gain intensity, his knowledge mature to wisdom. And a little snipping off of the end-tags of erudition would help. Let him point himself straight down the road, forget the artfully contrived chapter bridges and the grab-bag chronology.

59. *Louisville Courier-Journal* (18 January 1948)—Beeler, A. J.

By any count *Raintree County* can stand on its own merits as a carefully planned and meticulously wrought novel involving an abundance of characters, incidents and philosophy artistically blended. No novel since Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* has impressed me more. At this early date it seems easy and logical to mention it as a strong contender for the 1948 Pulitzer Novel Award.

60. *Fort Worth Star* (18 January 1948)—Melton, Amos.

The book is unique among U.S. historical novels in that it is eternally philosophical. Problems and movements, politics and religion—all receive surprisingly deep treatment. The whole is much too wordy; the purpose might have been accomplished in half the space.

61. *Omaha World-Herald* (18 January 1948)—H., V. P.

How Mr. Lockridge stayed awake for six years writing it, I can't imagine. I couldn't stay awake for six hours reading it.

62. *Pittsburgh Press* (18 January 1948)—Hansen, Harry.

This is a salty, rambling, confused, erratic but good-humored collection of folksy episodes built around the life and regrets of an easy-going, slightly bewildered Hoosier schoolmaster, whose chief characteristic is that he hates to disappoint a lady.

It jerks back and forth among 50 years like a local freight. Its style varies between high-falutin' rhapsody and livery-stable banter, and its words fall off the ends of chapters and disappear, but it is saved by the author's flair for amusing situations and by ability to laugh with his own characters.

63. *San Francisco Chronicle* (18 January 1948)—Voiles, Jane.

There is this to be said for Mr. Lockridge's novel. It is steeped in life. He might have taken for his text the words of Blake, "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." The nucleus of the book's design is the hunt for the tree of life, the mythical raintree. Assembling the lost pages of the myth of John Shawnessy, who is Everyman, Mr. Lockridge puts them together in a meaningful pattern. A final idea emerges from this pattern, that human beings cannot escape responsibility. It is in the act of responsibility that Mr. Lockridge finds the affirmation of life.

64. *Syracuse Herald* (18 January 1948)—Turner, E. S.

A virtually impossible task to give more than a hazy idea of this book in a brief review, it must suffice to say that this reader liked it. Many will say it is too long, that it is confusing. None can deny that its author has ability far above the average and that he has produced something almost new in contemporary literature.

65. *Newsweek* (19 January 1948).

The book, for which thousands of dollars will be spent in advertising and promotion, will be one of the year's top best sellers. Whether it will enrich American literature is a question. That it will enrich the hitherto all-but-empty pockets of English teacher Lockridge, the coffers of Houghton Mifflin Co., publishers, and eventually the film company goes without saying.

66. *El Paso Herald-Post* (23 January 1948)—Meyers, Laura Scott.

It is a book chock-full of American history, yet is not an historical novel; its setting is an American small town but it is not categorically another *Main Street*; it is autobiographical in the sense that it is the product of a young man's sum of experience of life and a six-year stint of actual writing, but it is not the autobiography of Ross Lockridge.

To say that this book incites comparison with Walt Whitman and Thomas Wolfe is not to suggest that he is of their literary stature. But in the intense patriotism that permeates the book and in the rhapsodic prose-poetry there is evidence of his literary heritage.

67. *Madison Capital Times* (25 January 1948)—Derleth, August. . . . *Raintree County*, despite its flaws, is a novel of peculiarly persuasive power, and, with all its faults in mind, it is yet not too much to say of it that it is one of the most extraordinarily effective first novels to have crossed my desk in three decades.

68. *Pasadena Star-News* (25 January 1948)—G., S.

Mr. Lockridge, despite his annoying imitations of Joycean word-coining and his occasional too-opulent poetic flights, writes with many flashes of skill that are movingly effective. His uneven performance will alternately irritate and intrigue the reader. But it almost certainly will make the reader hope that, having got this out of his system, he will plant his feet on the ground and write just an orthodox novel. It could be a very fine one with his innate ability.

69. *Raleigh Observer* (25 January 1948)—Wilson, Kay.

In any novel of this length, over 1,000 pages, there are bound to be parts that will seem unnecessary to readers,

though all readers will likely vary as to these parts. This reviewer found the drawn-out dream sequences (the Freudian touch) frankly boring. Others may enjoy these pages. Perhaps some may feel that the novel would have benefited by being shortened. This novel perhaps will have greatest appeal for the more serious reader, but any one fortunate enough to read it will surely feel greatly enriched for the time spent. It is the sort of book that renews one's faith in American writers of today.

70. *Winnemucca (NV) Star* (27 January 1948).

The author's disregard of chronological order is somewhat confusing, but not too bad when you get the hang of it.

71. *Birmingham News* (31 January 1948)—Hunt, Douglas L.

To have carried on such a sustained piece of work with the skill exhibited by Mr. Lockridge is to have accomplished a minor miracle.

72. *Tomorrow* (February 1948).

It's . . . the saga of America and all its myths, indeed of human life and all its myths, unfolded with a fantastic symbolism derived from *Totem and Taboo*, *The Golden Bough*, the Greek legends, the Bible, and lord knows what else. It is, as they say, packed with action: footraces, Civil War battles, love scenes, childbirth, and sudden death—the result is a vast potpourri of anthropology-made-easy, excitement, uplift and titillation, unquestionably a *tour de force*. *Raintree County* has everything—except a glimmer of genius.

73. *Wings* (February 1948).

The weaving of the long flashbacks, the history, the poetry, anecdotes, plays, oratory, into the fabric of a single day's events represents a monumental *tour de force*. More than one critic will compare the author to Thomas Wolfe, and with justice, for he has made an important and lasting contribution to American literature.

74. *World in Books* (February 1948)—B., B. T.

If not all the characters are fully realized, it is perhaps because the author was more concerned with symbols than with individuals. In manner as well as in bulk the novel attempts greatness; but its heroics are mannerisms, and its aspiration

to poetic insight achieves only the mock-epic. This is one of the less fortunate offspring of Joyce's *Ulysses*.

75. *Detroit News* (1 February 1948)—Beck, Clyde.

For my part I found the adventures of Mr. Shawnessy not sufficiently interesting to keep me from skipping pages—many pages. It seemed to me that the author's panoramic method cut his hero up into too many bits, so that he was always swinging between the fact and fancy. He was as real to me, in other words, as the nude young lady who seems to be a part of the landscape on the dust-jacket.

76. *Memphis Commercial Appeal* (8 February 1948)—Teague, W. C.

There is far too much use of parodies, dream dramas, swollen thoughts supposed to run through the minds and memories of the main characters. Once in a while the reader is reminded of Thomas Wolfe and then again of James Joyce.

The main trouble this reviewer finds with *Raintree County*, however, lies in the fact that, just about the time the story begins to move, the author slaps on the brakes with another flashback.

77. *New Bedford Standard* (8 February 1948)—A., E. S.

This story is no more monumental than a New England stone wall, and no more great than an iron-bound well bucket. It is no more epochal nor awesome than strong hands on a plow handle or a bottle of milk on a Winter doorstep with the column of frozen cream forcing up the cap. But it has, in company with these things, a quality of simple truth; and it selects as its stepping stones to denouement emotion and incident equally basic and uncomplicated.

78. *Sacramento Union* (8 February 1948).

This reviewer itched to use an editorial blue pencil on whole sections of the book, which dragged along, something we are sure M.G.M. will do before putting the work on celluloid.

But at other times Lockridge moves deftly over interesting chapters in Shawnessy's life which stimulates you through the next extraneous portion.

79. *Boston University News* (10 February 1948)—S., A.

His novel, all 1060 pages of it, contains so much of the whole

amalgam of life, it contains too much. Lockridge tries to be poet, philosopher, playwright, newspaperman, historian, and novelist all at once. What emerges is a wild, sometimes disjointed, joyous affirmation of life.

80. *Los Angeles Herald-Express* (11 February 1948)—Rawles, Wallace X.

By abandoning set formulas, and daring to write as he pleases, always from authentic sources, a scholarly 33-year-old Indiana man, Ross Lockridge, Jr., in robust 1066-page *Raintree County*, has himself established a powerful and moving new style for American fiction.

81. *Commonweal* (13 February 1948)—Johnson, Elizabeth.

Mr. Lockridge's novel, by winning an M.G.M. award and a goodly subsidy to boot, and being exaltingly boomed as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, will bring its author wide fame and quite a pocket of cash. Right there is a good, old American tradition. Quantity, showiness and capital letters are the usual criteria for judging the worth of a novel, a political theory or a prize pig. So *Raintree County* is the "American novel of 1948!" America, never a literary nation except incidentally, and now mainly for Hollywood, has exploited its protracted adolescence long enough.

82. *Los Angeles Daily News* (14 February 1948)—Pollack, Lewette B.

One thousand and sixty pages of Indiana history overlaid with Sex are the output of six years of "literary" labor by Mr. Lockridge and his wife, who, he says, helped him write his book. The net result, alas, is a flagrant but weak imitation—dream dramas, flashback technique, eccentricities of style—of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

83. *El Paso Times* (15 February 1948)—B., M. H.

Considering the size of *Raintree County*, Lockridge could have dispensed with so many characters' dreams which tend to add confusion to a story whose sequence is not too easy to follow. Why the novel should have been awarded a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer prize for its possibilities as a future film remains a puzzle. For it is in the emotional appeal and fidelity of its character development and the richness of its literary

style that the novel gains distinction. Only in size does it bear any comparison to *Gone with the Wind*.

84. *Huntington Advertiser* (22 February 1948)—Pinckard, H. R.
... the biggest obstacle to the enjoyment of *Raintree County* is its excessive bulk. Unless you are willing to give it a week's spare time, it is an exhausting experience which could have been alleviated by more careful editing. ... The interpolation of innumerable dreams and symbol-laden Platonic dialogues helps to make the reader's task more difficult—to say nothing of the absence of any quotation marks.
85. *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (22 February 1948)—J., J. H.
The novel is greater than the sum of its parts, however outstanding and varied they are. There are annoying tricks of writing such as ending chapters with incomplete sentences, compounding adjectives too frequently, and repetition of certain words which nettle the reader, and the numerous flashbacks are rather confusing in time sequence. But viewed as a whole, one does not easily forget the book, nor can one fail to be impressed by the author's grasp of details which compose the daily lives of the people of the period and the author's craftsmanship.
86. *America* (28 February 1948)—Barrett, Alfred.
I have long doubted the discrimination of the Book-of-the-Month Club judges. *Raintree County* is the one rotten apple that ruins their whole barrel for me. From now on I choose my own books.
87. *Charlotte Observer* (29 February 1948).
The richness of Lockridge's material, the turbulent reality of his story, and a sort of Thomas Wolfe flow of words manage to surmount the awkward device of his innumerable flashbacks. He employs an ingenious but irritating trick of handling his transitions from present to past and back again by using the final words of one chapter as the first words of the next. This does perhaps achieve a flow of continuity but at the same time appears unpleasantly artificial.
88. *Catholic World* (March 1948)—Corcoran, Marguerite Page.
At times, Ross Lockridge, in this first book of his career, is a master of narration and style and, had he not decided to

include within 1,066 pages, many of them steeped in eroticism and obscenity, every possible major and minor episode, emotion and meditation of forty-eight years, he might have achieved at least two or three fine novels, instead of this one amorphous production. Much of the writing is so beautiful that we may anticipate at some future date a less morally offensive novel of normal portable proportions, not one requiring the assistance of a wheelbarrow and days of more than twenty-four hours.

89. *Christian Herald* (March 1948).
Here is a book of height and breadth and depth. Here is writing in the grand style and a story majestic in its proportion. Here is a novel that did not need to be common, indecent and vulgar, but it is all of these too. ... I know the barnyard too and have been valet to farm animals, but why shovel that into libraries?
90. *Cincinnati Guidepost* (March 1948).
The plot creaks under its load, for though the action is set in one day, extended flashbacks, a cumbersome device, give one the history as well as the developing characters and philosophies of fifty years.
91. *Sign* (March 1948).
It is its unbridled sensuality which will sell this novel, not its artistic excellence or its dramatic worth. It may well appeal to some for its energetic, but never decisive, grappling with some of the question marks of human existence. However, its obscenity and blasphemous rantings overbalance its microscopic virtues. Most of the writing is plainly offensive and extremely bad. The book is likely to be an occasion of sin for most. Pass it up.
92. *Redbook* (March 1948).
There's a lot of salty talk, a good deal of ogling, some amusing episodes of small-town life and enough wordage to make it possible to skip the dull passages and not feel cheated.
93. *Trenton Times* (23 May 1948)—W., H. A.
It is a good story and it is done in matchless prose. To evoke remembrances of the past as successfully as Lockridge has done it deserves commendation of the highest sort. To bring

back to us a part of the forgotten America, an America growing up and finding itself surging forward into the machine age, needs the hand of a master and *Raintree County* has been produced by such a master.

94. *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Summer 1948).
Where the novel is most successful is when it forgets to strive for epic grandeur and is content to give warmly felt pictures of life in the Midwest towards the turn of the century. There is more art than in Wolfe, but less real intensity. The novel, therefore, has its passing interest but is unlikely to prove at all significant among attempts to unite the epic with the prose fiction form.

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