

MIDAMERICA XVII

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

Edited by
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In honor of
Philip Gerber

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PREFACE

With the publication of *MidAmerica XVII*, the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature begins its third decade of existence. The first two decades have seen the growing recognition of the importance of the Midwest's contributions to American literature as well as a continued recognition of the accomplishments of those writers who came out of the Midwest to make their origins—their people, their places, their times—known and understood by increasing numbers of readers, students, critics, and scholars all over the world. It is no accident, for example, that the only complete set of Sherwood Anderson's works was published in Japan.

Included in this volume are the poem which won the Midwest Poetry Festival Award for 1990, "In This Night's Rain," by Alice Friman of Indianapolis and the essay which won the Midwestern Heritage Essay Award for 1990, "To Sustain the Bioregion: Michigan Poets of Place," by William Barillas of Michigan State University. Both winning works were presented at the Society's Twentieth Annual conference, which was held in East Lansing on May 10-12, 1990.

Also honored at the meeting were Jim Harrison of Lake Leelanau, Michigan, who received the Mark Twain Award for distinguished novels and poetry, and Philip Gerber of The State University of New York College at Brockport, who received the MidAmerica Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern Literature. This volume is dedicated to him.

March, 1991

DAVID D. ANDERSON

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IN THIS NIGHT'S RAIN

ALICE FRIMAN

Like the sacred text
of a mystery religion
thought lost
the trees emerge—wet as birth,
black as the coal of their ancestors.

The white birch that by day
plays with light, curves over
like a dull ghost
or pallid afterthought.
This night belongs to black.

Not bombazine, buttoned
to the chin over corsets that crack
like bark, but as your mother was,
dressed in shadow at the corner of your bed,
beating down terror by breathing—a presence
before light and beyond
that returns tonight
to stand in this deep immensity,
this black bath that was once its air.

Questions tap at my umbrella.
A white cat crosses my path.
I walk.

On a night like this, Oedipus too
walked to face the questioner
who asked the easiest
riddle in her book
because she too loved his too proud eye.

Yes, a night like this, and a tree
like this, rising in its robe of shadow—
the familiar scent beside him
in the dark—dripping from its tips
a warning: a mirror at his feet
of love's black first milk.

Indianapolis

TO SUSTAIN THE BIOREGION: MICHIGAN POETS OF PLACE

WILLIAM BARILLAS

Place is the only reality, the true core of the universal. . . . We live in only one place at a time but far from being bound to it, only through it do we realize our freedom. Place then ceases to be a restriction, we do not have to abandon our familiar and known to achieve distinction . . . if we only make ourselves sufficiently aware of it do we join with others in other places.

—William Carlos Williams¹

I imagined Michigan as some huge, bruised mitten, floating in the hostile frigid waters of the Great Lakes.

—Jim Harrison²

Is there a poetry of Michigan? Certainly there is poetry in Michigan, judging by the number of poetry periodicals, Michigan authors in books, and the growing popularity of workshops and readings around the state. But a poetry that is centrally concerned with the uniqueness of Michigan's natural and human history, a poetry by Michigan authors about Michigan experience, is yet emergent. The Michigan poetic tradition was initiated by Theodore Roethke, whose personal vision of nature was based on his experience in and attachment to the landscape surrounding and including the greenhouses his father operated in the city of Saginaw. Roethke may be accurately described as a poet of place, which by Williams' terms is one who recognizes that "the local is the only universal,"³ who makes of his knowledge of one particular place an art with insight into general truths. Roethke contributed to an understanding of Michigan as a bioregion—an ecological and cultural entity, by Kirkpatrick Sale's definition, a "life-territory, a place defined by its life forms, its topography

and biota rather than by human dictates."⁴ Without being directly tied to the political implications of bioregionalism, a contemporary ecological philosophy which calls for decentralization, local control of resources, and a redefining of boundaries and sovereignty based on natural criteria, Roethke and subsequent poets with strong attachments to Michigan's landscape—including Jim Harrison, Judith Minty, and Dan Gerber—have written of the state's land and lore in a manner which may deepen a reader's attachment to the bioregional character of Michigan.

"Place" as a central concern in American poetry found its modern champion in William Carlos Williams; in recent years, poet Gary Snyder has extended Williams' ideals by advocating literary and political bioregionalism in poems and prose statements that are an essential reference in discussing contemporary poets of nature and place. Snyder lives and works on a homestead in Northern California, more specifically "Watershed: west slope of the northern Sierra Nevada, south slope of the east-west running ridge above the south fork [of the Yuba River], at the level of Black oak mixed with Ponderosa pine."⁵ Snyder's Pulitzer prize-winning book *Turtle Island* (1974) popularized the term used for the title, which he describes as

the old/new name for the continent, based on many creation myths of the people who have been living here for millenia, and reapplied by some of them to "North America" in recent years. Also, an idea found world-wide, of the earth, or cosmos even, sustained by a great turtle or serpent-of-eternity.

A name: that we may see ourselves more accurately on this continent of watersheds and life-communities—plant zones, physiographic provinces, culture areas; following natural boundaries. The "U.S.A." and its states and counties are arbitrary and inaccurate impositions on what is really here.⁶

"The first step" in a bioregional understanding of place, according to Snyder, "is to throw out a European name and take a creative native name."⁷ The second step is to know the land for what it is, defining it not by artificial political boundaries, but by the flow of water, the distribution of flora and fauna, and other natural criteria. Snyder's "two steps" are echoed by Kirkpatrick Sale, author of *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (1985), who offers two initial endeavors which anyone seeking to rediscover place, poets included, should undertake, before con-

sidering the political implications of bioregionalism: knowing the land and learning the lore. Knowing the land, according to Sale, is to "walk the territory and see what inhabits there, become conscious of the birdsongs and waterfalls and animal droppings. . . . On a more sophisticated level, we can develop a resource inventory for the region."⁸ Snyder suggests that one "correlate the overlap between ranges of certain types of flora, between certain types of biomes, and climatological areas, and cultural areas, and then look at more or less physical maps and study the drainages. . . ."⁹ Such knowledge must be extended by personal contact with nature—Sale's "walking the territory," or as Snyder puts it, devoting "one's body, commitment, time, labor, walking."¹⁰ The task of learning the lore similarly involves bookwork and field experience: a solid knowledge of regional anthropology (Indian legends and customs) and history (the story of settlement and resource exploitation largely by people of European ancestry) provides a necessary background to interpreting the current state of society and nature in the place. Poets are particularly well equipped to entertain and instruct others by evoking a region's natural makeup and the ways people interact with the landscape.

A poet of Michigan should then approach the tasks of "knowing the land and learning the lore" with a mind to communicate what Williams called the "elemental character of the place,"¹¹ those features of nature and culture most basic to the region's uniqueness. Michigan as a political entity has a greater bioregional validity than most states because of the natural continuity of most of its border, defined by its two peninsulas' coasts on four of the five Great Lakes. Limnologically, the Lakes are actually seas—they cause massive climatological effects, including the milder summers and winters experienced in Michigan than west of lakes Michigan and Superior, as well as the state's characteristic cloud cover and precipitation. Like no other location in the world, Michigan's elemental character is based on an abundance of fresh water. The land itself is a collection of distinct watersheds, each with a particular glacial terrain, from the flat glacial till plains of Saginaw and the "Thumb" to the high moraines overlooking Lake Michigan and the ancient bedrock exposures of the western Upper Peninsula. Southern Michigan is forested with deciduous species; as one heads north, the soils become

poorer, the climate harsher, and the forest coniferous. This distinction between north and south was the basis for distribution of Indian tribes according to their means of subsistence, and the settlement by EuroAmericans according to economic activity—farming and industry as opposed to lumbering and other forms of resource extraction. For historian Bruce Catton, who grew up in Benzonia, Michigan, the state offered an excellent vantage point from which to view the changes wrought on an ancient landscape by a society based on the premise of endless natural resources: "The contrast between the old and the new," Catton observes in his memoir *Waiting for the Morning Train* (1972)

was too great. There was nothing for the mind to get hold of: [the ice age] was hardly more real than what possibly might yet be. We lived less than three hundred miles from Detroit, which seemed to be a door looking into the future, showing unimaginable things; and three hundred miles in the other direction, off into the desolate north country, lay the bleak spine of the upper peninsula of Michigan, a reef of the oldest rocks on earth . . . rocks dead since the hour of creation.¹²

Michigan poets of nature and place exemplify in their work this tension between the past and the future, the wild and the tame, the primitive and the sophisticated, in the context of the landscape and how our civilization has thought of and treated the land. They find in nature's order an alternative to the hurried, detached way of life in modern Michigan.

Theodore Roethke is the precursor to later Michigan poets for whom nature and place are central concerns; his experience of nature tamed in his father's greenhouses provided him with a detailed knowledge of natural growth and decay that he applied both to descriptions of wild landscapes and to his own psychological crises. Roethke was a poet of place and a poet of Michigan despite and because of the fact that he was more interested in expressing his personal relationship to nature than in dealing with historical themes. As his biographer Allan Seager points out,

[Roethke] ignores all the vivid racy tales of the lumber boom, tales that expressed courage, will, and cunning that might have engaged another man . . . he ignores in his poetry the events of this region's history . . . he pays no attention to the history of the valley which expresses in modes of physical action an energy like

his own. It is as if he had inherited the best part and did not need to acknowledge it.¹³

Roethke was certainly aware of how drastically the area he knew as home had been altered in the half-century preceding his birth. "The Saginaw Valley," he said in a 1953 BBC broadcast, "where I was born, had been great lumbering country in the 1880's. It is very fertile flat country in Michigan, and the principal towns, Saginaw and Flint, lie at the northern edge of what is now the central industrial area of the United States."¹⁴ In an admittedly unsuccessful poem, "Suburbia: Michigan," published in his letters, Roethke bemoaned the common lack of appreciation for regional history, correlating such ignorance with tolerance of environmental degradation: "The immediate past as remote as Carthage; / Bulldozers levelled the curving hillside / . . . Tourists stare at an absolute marvel: / A monarch pine, saved by quixotic fancy." Michigan residents are pictured as living in "a land of lubratoriums [and] super milk-shakes" within "the geography of despair" where those who would not "live by objects" are "driven from the land" to

. . . seek the comfort of water,
Crawl back to the eternal womb, the beneficent mother.
Like dazed turtles in spring, they creep to the river
To dangle bent pins at the mouth of a roaring sewer.

"Who said, 'Yes, but,' was never a hero"¹⁵ Roethke opines, counting himself among those who object to the state of divorce between culture and nature in Michigan. A summation of much of his work might be "Yes, the modern world has its good points *but* nature is our mother and we best express our love for her by living in place."

Roethke's great achievement came from his efforts to overcome his fear of death and disintegration by identifying with the regenerative power of nature as experienced in special locations found in his familiar territory: the greenhouses and their environs: notably the Tittabawassee River, adjoining woodlands, and the "far field," the spaciousness of which comes to represent eternity and hope. "It was a wonderful place for a child to grow up in and around," Roethke told his British audience over the BBC:

There were not only twenty-five acres in the town, mostly under glass and intensely cultivated, but farther out in the country the

last stand of virgin timber in the Saginaw Valley and, elsewhere, a wild area of cut-over second-growth timber, which my father and uncle made into a small game preserve. As a child . . . I had several worlds to live in, which I felt were mine.¹⁶

Roethke acknowledges that such a sensitivity to location is uncommon in modern society, that "there are those to whom place is unimportant."¹⁷ But he differs with T. S. Eliot's assertion in "Four Quartets" that "Old men ought to be explorers / Here and there does not matter"¹⁸; "Old men ought to be explorers? / I'll be an Indian."¹⁹ In the poem "The Far Field" Roethke echoes his appreciation of Williams' localism and insistence that there are "No ideas but in things"²⁰ in positing that "All finite things reveal infinitude." The poet's mind "moves in more than one place, / In a country half-land, half-water,"²¹ remembering an early encounter with death:

At the field's end, in the corner missed by the mower
Haunt of the cat-bird, nesting place of the field-mouse,
Not too far away from the ever-changing flower-dump,
Among the tin cans, tires, rusted pipes, broken machinery,—
One learned of the eternal;
And in the shrunken face of a dead rat, eaten by rain and ground-beetles
(I found it lying among the rubble of an old coal bin)
And the tom-cat, caught near the pheasant-run,
Its entrails strewn over the half-grown flowers,
Blasted to death by the night watchman.²²

Those lines typify Roethke's constant juxtaposition of what the mower had missed and the swath the mower left behind. Repeatedly in Roethke's verse we find ourselves "at the field's end," or as in "Idyll": "at the edge of a meadow"²³ or "the field's edge" of "Highway: Michigan" where "we survey / The progress of the jaded."²⁴ That edge is liminal ground, a transition zone between nature and man, where one can be immersed in the nature of the place yet be in a position to see man's effect, "the progress of the jaded," the results of human insensitivity to the bioregion's integrity.

In the poem "Moss-Gathering," Roethke remembers a task by which the economy of the greenhouses impinged upon "the natural order of things": the task was "to loosen with all ten

fingers held wide and limber / And lift up a patch, dark-green, the kind for lining cemetery baskets." The purpose of taking the moss is to make a saleable item that is used by mourners, people who have experienced a personal loss for which a form of natural beauty can provide solace. But taking the moss from its rightful place, where it is most beautiful, seems wrong to the boy performing the task:

. . . something always went out of me when I dug loose those
carpets
Of green, or plunged to my elbows in the spongy yellowish moss
of the marshes:
And afterwards I always felt mean, jogging back over the logging
road,
As if I had broken the natural order of things in that swamp-land;
Disturbed some rhythm, old and of vast importance,
By pulling off flesh from the living planet;
As if I had committed, against the whole scheme of life, a
desecration.²⁵

The fact that the boy walks home on a logging road ties his experience to the larger context of what has happened to the Michigan landscape over the course of history. The land has been used often without regard to "the whole scheme of life" in the place—a process of destruction that continues to this day. Roethke's point of social observation was from the field or the wood, looking onto the results of people living a life concerned first and foremost to obtaining wealth and moving about without much attention to natural beauty. In "Highway: Michigan," he notes the dominance of the automobile industry and its products over the landscape: "Here from the field's edge we survey / The progress of the jaded. Mile / On mile of traffic from the town / Rides by, for at the end of day / The time of workers is their own."²⁶

Often Roethke's poems express joy in being and faith in the natural order of living things; especially in his later poems, fear of death gives way to a confidence that "Great Nature has another thing to do to you and me,"²⁷ as he wrote in his famous villanelle "The Waking." But especially in the poems of his earlier period, Roethke insists on the difficulty of subsuming the human ego, with all its fears and doubts, to a greater wisdom in nature and to a communion with the place one knows as the ground of

one's being. Roethke's breakthrough sequence "The Lost Son" depicts an emotional and spiritual crisis played out in the Tittabawassee landscape, beginning at "Woodlawn," which might well be taken as a renaming of "Oakwood," the Saginaw cemetery where Roethke's father was buried when the poet was only twelve years old, and where the poet's ashes would later be interred. The speaker searches the river bank for some evidence that life is cyclical, that death is not an absolute end. The loss of his father, the man who brought life into flowering, resplendant being, underlies the pain that the lost son is trying to assuage. Roethke immediately depicts his grief as being highly disturbed: "I was lulled by the slamming of iron, / A slow drip over stones." He asks the powers of nature to assuage him: "Snail, snail, glister me forward, / Bird, soft-sigh me home, / Worm, be with me. / This is my hard time."²⁸ The speaker then runs through a pastoral scene, "Running lightly over spongy grounds, / Past the pasture of flat stones / . . . Over a rickety bridge / Toward the quick-water."²⁹ In a shorter poem, "The Premonition," Roethke contrasted the permanence of the river's flow with the transience of human life, in particular Roethke's father, who "dipped his hand in the shallow" so that "Water ran over and under / Hair on a narrow wrist bone."³⁰ In "The Lost Son," he searches the very place that his father taught him to love for some sign by which he can rise from despair:

Hunting along the river,
Down among the rubbish, the bug-riddled foliage,
By the muddy pond-edge, by the bog-holes,
By the shrunken lake, hunting, in the heat of summer.

The poem continues with nature offering no comfort from loss, as the poet explores emotional analogues to summer's process of growth and decay. It is only in remembering winter at the greenhouses that hope arises: "the roses kept breathing in the dark"³¹ because Papa Roethke had the boiler running. Human effort was keeping beauty and life alive in what might otherwise be a dead time. Looking out at the surrounding fields, "the landscape still partly brown," winter's stillness provides a solace that summer's exuberance could not: "Light traveled over the wide field; / Stayed. / The weeds stopped swinging. / The mind moved, not alone, / Through the clear air, in the silence." The

sequence ends with the promise of spring to succeed winter, of new life to follow death: "A lively understandable spirit / Once entertained you. / It will come again. / Be still. / Wait."³²

Roethke's later poems are dominated by that "lively, understandable spirit," again symbolized by the flow of water, which gives life not only to the snails, birds, and worms of "The Lost Son" but to the speaker himself: as he wrote in "Meditation at Oyster River," "Water's my will, and my way."³³ Many poems, including "Meditation," find the speaker on the banks of a river, often the river he knew first, and perhaps best:

... the Tittabawassee, in the time between winter and spring,
When the ice melts along the edge in early afternoon.
And the midchannel begin cracking and heaving from the pressure
beneath,
The ice piling high against the iron-bound spiles,
Gleaming, freezing again, creaking at midnight.
And I long for the blast of dynamite,
The sudden sucking roar as the culvert loosens its debris of
branches and sticks,
Welter of tin cans, pails, old bird nests, a child's shoe riding a log,
As the piled ice breaks away from the battered spiles,
And the whole river begins to move forward, its bridges shaking.³⁴

In "Meditation" the river has the power to cleanse itself of its pollution and to renew the human spirit. Invoking the other mortal creatures who depend on the river for life—the deer, the young snake, the hummingbird—Roethke confesses "With these I would be. / And with water: the waves coming forward, without cessation. . . ."³⁵ Another of the poems in "North American Sequence," "Journey to the Interior," recalls driving into northern Michigan to "the sand dunes and fish flies, hanging thicker than moths,"³⁶ to experience "The stand at the stretch in the face of death, / Delighting in surface change, the glitter of light on waves. . . ."³⁷ Such images typify Roethke's ideal of spiritual union with the elemental character of place, especially the element of water which held symbolic value for him wherever he found it, in the Tittabawassee River or on the Pacific Coast of Washington where he spent his last years as an instructor at the University of Washington. Though Roethke lived away from Michigan for much of his adult life, the preponderance of his natural imagery comes from his early life in Saginaw, Michigan,

in the Tittabawassee River watershed of the Saginaw valley. With that rich and detailed imagery he contributed not only to Michigan culture and land-lore, but to the fund-of world literature, thus fulfilling Williams' ideal of the local made universal.

According to reviewer Lisel Mueller of *Poetry* magazine, Jim Harrison, who was born in 1937 in Grayling, Michigan, "shares with that other Michigan poet, Theodore Roethke, not only the longing to be part of the instinctual world, but also the remarkable knowledge of plant and animal life that comes only with long familiarity and close observation."³⁸ Harrison's discovery of Roethke as a college sophomore encouraged his own early poetic efforts, and since his father was a trained agriculturalist, Harrison perceived "the direct sense that our backgrounds were similar enough that there was some hope for me as a poet, so I absorbed him rather than read him."³⁹ Like Roethke's, Harrison's Michigan is a landscape bruised by years of environmentally unsound economic activity, the natural beauty of which nonetheless offers relief from the complexities of our modern industrial society. His early poem "Northern Michigan" belongs next to Roethke's "Highway: Michigan" in any anthology of Michigan verse:

On this back road the land
has the juice taken out of it:

stump fences surround nothing
worth their tearing down

by a deserted filling station
a Veedol sign, the rusted hulk

of a Frazer, "live bait"
on battered tin.⁴⁰

Like Roethke, Harrison describes "the progress of the jaded": the "back road" lacks even the sheen of economic activity—the only cars in view are junked, and the gas station is closed. Similar to Roethke "at the field's end, in the corner missed by the mower,"⁴¹ Harrison juxtaposes a scene of human failure (his catalog of static human artifacts) with nature's exuberance, expressed in the active verbs of the poem's second half, which shows nature surviving even in a land with "the juice taken out of it":

In "Walking," Harrison mentions the 1881 fire as one important reason the land exists in its present state. But the more immediate context is of the speaker's personal associations with certain locations. As if noting significant sites on a pilgrimage, Harrison drinks at a spring he had visited ten years before, and recognizes the knoll where his father once burned a stump to keep warm. The "great hollow stump near a basswood / swale" is remembered for the time it offered hunting cover for Harrison in his youth, when he "sat within it on a November morning / watching deer browse beyond my young range of shotgun." That memory of close observation of nature (even incorporation into it—note the preposition "within") is only a brief glimpse into the walker's mind. In the poem's many subsequent lines, Harrison resumes his walk through cedar swamps, more lakes, finally to "the larger water," perhaps Lake Michigan, where a rather Roethkean submersion takes place:

... walking to an island,
small, narrow, sandy, sparsely wooded, in the middle
of the island in a clump of cedars a small spring
which I enter, sliding far down into a deep cool
dark endless weight of water.⁴⁹

While Harrison's immersion into the spring does not share the explicit connotation of death and acceptance of mortality expressed by Roethke's watery "North American Sequence," it shares Roethke's relief and expanded sense of self. The many locations of "Walking" are described with the speaker being not much more than the one who is doing the walking into, through, and over. The image at poem's end focuses us on the person in the place; who finally becomes not merely an observer but a part of the landscape itself. Harrison's "larger water" recalls the conclusion of Roethke's "The Long Waters":

I lose and find myself in the long water;
I am gathered together once more;
I embrace the world.⁵⁰

The flow of water shapes these poets' lives, as well as their Michigan landscapes: as Harrison has it in his long poem "The Theory and Practice of Rivers," which begins with a description of floating on "the rivers of [his] life":

... the current
lifts me up and out
into the dark, gathering motion,
drifting into an eddy
with a sideways swirl,
the sandbar cooler than the air:
to speak it clearly,
how the water goes
is how the earth is shaped.⁵¹

Yet like Roethke, Harrison modifies his romantic yearning to be part of the natural world by insisting on the difficulties posed by such an identification. A recurring motif in Harrison's work is the experience of "getting lost," which literally means to lose one's bearings in the back country. In his essay "Passacaglia on Getting Lost," Harrison states that "getting lost is to sense the 'animus' of nature."⁵² The landscape is recognized as a living force, a natural context outside the ordinary, indoor, social world, against which one's life falls into relief. "Perhaps getting lost temporarily destroys the acquisitive sense,"⁵³ Harrison suggests. In "The Theory and Practice of Rivers," written in the isolation of his Upper Peninsula cabin, Harrison considers the locations of his life, such as Key West, Los Angeles, and Grove Street in New York, where at age nineteen he discovered "red wine, garlic, Rimbaud, / and a red haired girl."⁵⁴ At the river, which Harrison says "is as far as I move / from the world of numbers,"⁵⁵ he seeks a sense of himself not dependent on his memories:

What is it to actually go outside the nest
we have built for ourselves, and earlier
our father's nest: to go into a forest
alone with our eyes open? It's different
when you don't know what's over the hill—
keep the river on your left, then you see
the river on your right. I have simply
forgotten left and right, even up and down,
whirl then sleep on a cloudy day to forget
direction. It is hard to learn how
to be lost after so much training.⁵⁶

Getting lost, according to Harrison, is less dangerous for the body than for the soul; as the narrator of *Wolf* observes, "the rare deaths that occur are simply a matter of the lost waiting too long

to turn around."⁵⁷ Such was the fate of two snowmobilers near Harrison's cabin one winter. "They could have piled deadfall wood around their machines," Harrison writes in "Passacaglia," "and dropped matches into the remnants of the gas in the tanks, creating an enormous pyre for the search planes."⁵⁸ These men were doomed by their attachment to machines: their acquisitive sense was too strong to let them consider the one act which would save their lives.

For a person in the back country whose resourcefulness would prevent such a tragedy, the more immediate danger in becoming lost is psychic: the possibility of projecting one's own psychological crises onto the surroundings:

When we are lost we lose our peripheries. Our thoughts zoom outward and infect the landscape. Years later you can revisit an area and find these thoughts still diseasing the same landscape. It requires a particular kind of behavior to heal the location.⁵⁹

By behavior Harrison implies ritual. These places have a kind of religious significance that calls for reverence in visiting them, the kind of circumspection Roethke means in declaring "I'll be an Indian."⁶⁰ In "Passacaglia" Harrison identifies with Michigan's Native Americans for their traditional expertise in the art of "getting lost," telling about a Chippewa elder he knows who "carries a folded-up garbage bag in his pocket":

He claims it is his portable home, keeping him warm and dry if he gets lost or tired. He finds coyote dens by scent, and whittles the heads of canes into renditions of his "dream birds." His favorite drink is a double martini. He asked me to check for a phone number of a "love" he had lost in 1931. He was somewhat disturbed, he told me, when it occurred to him that people didn't know that every single tree was different from every other tree.

Despite his sense of brotherhood with a man so sensitive to nature, Harrison reminds himself that he isn't literally an Indian; the old man is carving one of his "dream bird" canes for the poet, but Harrison plans to hang the cane in his cabin, "being too genetically Calvinist to have any interest in sorcery."⁶¹ As he wrote in an early poem, "Sketch for a Job Application Blank":

From my ancestors, the Swedes,
I suppose I inherit the love of rainy woods,
kegs of herring and neat whiskey. . . .

(But on the other side, from the German Mennonites,
their rag smoke prayers and porky daughters
I got intolerance, an aimless diligence.)⁶²

Harrison clearly has mixed feelings about his inheritance, but believes that the personality characteristic of his heritage can be grounded in the location as well as the Native American. Roethke expressed a similar ambivalence about his own identity, describing his beloved greenhouses as "both heaven and hell, a kind of tropics created in the savage climate of Michigan, where austere German-Americans turned their love of order and their terrifying efficiency into something truly beautiful."⁶³ Because part of any region's elemental character is its ethnic diversity, an honest historical consciousness will recognize in the past something of one's own disposition; as Snyder says to his ancestors, his "fathers / and grandfathers" who "killed [sic] off the cougar and grizzly":

Your itch
in my boots too,

your sea roving
tree hearted son.⁶⁴

This, finally, is the significance of "what it is to actually go outside . . . our father's nest: to go into a forest / alone with our eyes open."⁶⁵ Harrison's experience of "getting lost" correlates to that of Roethke's "Lost Son" in how the past, both historical and personal, necessarily colors one's first perception of the native ground. His poetry of place is in part a ritual observance, a "particular kind of behavior" that can "heal the location" for the poet, and potentially for the poet's culture—certainly an act in behalf of the bioregion.

A number of other contemporary Michigan poets share with Harrison a sense of place, and have found in Michigan's natural character the imagery to develop their themes. The sesquicentennial of Michigan's statehood in 1987 saw the publication of the *Contemporary Michigan Poetry* anthology, the preface to which noted how "the Michigan landscape ranges from Woodward Avenue [in Detroit] to the Porcupine Mountains."⁶⁶ Judith Minty, in her anthologized poem "A Sense of Place," remembers an occasion in Northern Michigan in which the migrating of butterflies provided an analogue to her own peregrinations across the continent:

Summers ago in Leland, I watched a swimmer
 walk out of Lake Michigan, her wet hair gleaming
 and her skin, with its coat of oil,
 glittering in the sun. Behind her, blue
 and stretching to the sky, the water sparkled.
 Everything shone, even crystals of sand around our blanket.
 That was the month of butterflies, thousands
 of monarchs on their way to Mexico—
 I don't know how they can make it so far.
 Once, in California, I walked
 through the eucalyptus trees at night
 and heard the whisper of their wings while they slept.⁶⁷

Minty tends to consider Michigan from the perspective of one who has sailed the Great Lakes extensively. Lake Michigan often figures in her poems as a simultaneously beneficent and destructive force whose waters define both the land and Minty's self. "This lake is cruel," she writes in beginning the poem entitled "Lake Michigan":

This lake chews at dunes,
 bites off chunks of sand,
 then ebbs back
 as firs lean and topple, their roots
 dragging deeper roots
 until cellars, kitchens, toilets collapse. . . .
 This lake has a memory. It knows
 the fingerprints of my cry.
 I strip off my clothes,
 fall into the waves. I will
 go deep, let it lick my skin,
 feel its pulse as we sink again together.⁶⁸

The "fingerprints of my cry" is one of Minty's references to the common observation that Michigan's Lower Peninsula has the shape of a mittened hand: the title of her poem "Look to the Back of the Hand" directs the reader to elements of her character as well as of the landscape:

It is a water hand, this right one,
 changed by the will and actions;
 fingers long and tapering, palm
 not thick or calloused, skin
 clear, yet slightly flushed with emotion:

the hand perhaps of an artist.
 Do not look at the back of this hand. . . .

It is an atlas surrounded by lakes,
 full of paths and roads, hills valleys plains.
 Lines intersect, fork off,
 chain—yet the signs remain.
 It erodes with years, wears
 my signature, and I cannot change it.
 "Hair on the back of the hand
 denotes extreme cruelty in a woman."⁶⁹

As the creating force, the lake becomes for Minty a mother figure, a power to be loved as well as feared, as in the poem "In the Presence of Mothers" where we find ourselves "cradled / at the shore's arm, / we fold into the sweet / breath of her hum / and dream / through flashes of light. Her fury / rocks us."⁷⁰

The irony of a gentle fury, attributed to the lake ecology that Minty considers a maternal force, is contrasted to the blind, purposeless fury of a "fisherman, or madman" in her poem "Destroying the Cormorant Eggs," which is based on an actual case in which two thousand eggs of that rare bird were discovered smashed in rookeries on Little Gull Island and Gravelly Island in Lake Michigan. The act is particularly horrible because of its calculation; the responsible party evidently had a knowledge of birds:

knowing which eggs, only lovely pale blue,
 not the gull's and tern's brown or buff, then
 to lift out, hurl against the granite,
 to punish them for fishing these waters
 to crush under boot or beat with his stick,
 2000 eggs. . . .

Minty conjectures that the culprit was driven by a kind of mad jealousy against another creature taking sustenance from the lake, "fishing these waters." The acquisitive sense, or as Minty calls it, the "old hungers" which have consumed so much of the bioregion's integrity over history, have become suicidal, when one considers acts against ecology as acts against oneself—a nightmare,

... a man's dream where he gropes
below the surface, groaning with the old hungers,
the luminescence of his skin now covered by something
so thick his arms stroke heavy with it, the water
without end, and no island, no island in sight.⁷¹

Poet Dan Gerber of Fremont, Michigan, provides a synonym for Minty's "old hungers" and Harrison's "acquisitive sense" in his poem "Speaking to Horses." Recalling a man in his town who handled horses, "pursuing a life technology / and economics had declared defunct," Gerber praises his refusal to concur with "that progress-driven / consensus in its race for prosperity and oblivion."⁷² Gerber's poetry poses sensitivity to life-cycles, such as Michigan's distinct seasonal changes and the passing of generations, as an alternative to such a displaced world-view. Jim Harrison, who was co-editor with Gerber of the now defunct *Sumac* magazine and press, has noted Gerber's "attention to animal and human life, and to the natural world, that is generally lost in the sump of ego. . . ."⁷³ Gerber's Michigan is the rural western side of the Lower Peninsula, a landscape of "huddled fields and creaking woods"⁷⁴ which he explores mostly alone, thinking of family, friends, and the inevitability that he and they will pass as do the seasons. Gerber's late father plays a central role in Gerber's poetry; like Roethke, Gerber considers the possibility of reincarnation, as in the poem "Adumbratio," which finds the speaker looking for his father in the life of the places they once shared:

In his death, my father has been wandering
through the forest. He enters a clearing
and stops to ponder the living sweep of the
sky. . . .

Sometimes he takes the form of
a bird or a pebble or the wind's high rejoinder
in the pines. When clouds build over the
afternoon, his shadow dissolves into moss,
lichen, the dry carpet of leaves. I walk
eastward along the bed of a stream where
a stream once was or will be.⁷⁵

Gerber contrasts the recurrence in nature to our "progress-driven" society's obsession with the present moment, with the dollar to

be made instead of the life of the land we know as our home. As Gerber has it in "Heartland," a Michigan poem in the vein of Roethke's "Highway: Michigan," "We found ourselves on the inland sea":

And over a million vague salesmen
high on quotas
and a million solid citizens
buying guns
and a million schemes of sad barbers,

the mountains rise and the planets move
with the grave logic of their lives.⁷⁶

Gerber, like Harrison and Minty, cannot be termed a "bio-regional poet," as one might designate Gary Snyder, who exemplifies in his work in local politics the kind of regionalism espoused by his friend, Kentucky poet Wendell Berry, which "pertains to living as much as to writing, and . . . pertains to living *before* it pertains to writing."⁷⁷ But these poets contribute to bioregionalism's ultimate aim—a spiritual regeneration based on the love for place so essential to their work. Snyder writes that

by being in place, we get the largest sense of community. We learn that community is of spiritual benefit and of health for everyone, that ongoing working relationships and shared concerns, music, poetry, and stories all evolve into the shared practice of a set of values, visions, and quests.⁷⁸

This evolution is occurring in Michigan, in schools, in the print media, even around campfires. At the Stone Circle near Elk Rapids, Michigan, poet Terry Wooten sponsors weekly events in the summer that can only be described as tribal gatherings. Tourists, children from youth camps, the young and old, gather at a bonfire inside concentric rings of boulders to hear professional poets, singers, and storytellers, and to share their own tall tales and songs. The general rule (loosely enforced) is that work must be recited, not read. Wooten himself is a bard in the oral tradition; he regales his audience with children's verse, stories about his youth in northern Michigan, and versions of Indian myth, including the classic story which explains the origin of the Sleeping Bear Dunes and the Manitou Islands, one of the areas most sacred to Michigan's native people.

The oral tradition practiced by Wooten and others is likely to become more common, as poets seek to expand their audience. Theodore Roethke knew his poetry by heart, and his readings have become the stuff of legend. Gary Snyder considers locally sponsored poetry reading, be they dramatic or subdued, "the pinnacle of poetic activity and precision"⁷⁹ because the "decentralization of 'culture' is as important to our long-range ecological and social health as the decentralization of agriculture, production, energy, and government."⁸⁰ Considering as equally great honors his invitations to read at the Library of Congress and the North San Juan Fire Hall, Snyder observes that

... if a poet keeps on living in one place, he is going to have to admit to everyone in town and on the backroads that he writes poetry. To appear locally is to put your own work to the real test—the lady who delivers the mail might be there, and the head sawyer of the local mill. What a delight to mix all levels of poems together, and to see the pleasure in the eyes of the audience when a local tree, a local river or mountain, comes swirling forth as part of protoepic or myth.⁸¹

The pleasure for the poet is in reliving the moment of creation, in seeing one's effort to know the land and learn the lore come to fruition, as generations meet to share history and personal experiences in the place. In his tenth "Chinese Poem," Dan Gerber recalls a memorable exchange that took place in Fremont:

When I read my poems to the locals
an old teacher said
"It doesn't seem like writing could be work."
"Only getting ready is work." I laughed.⁸²

That work is underway across the state of Michigan, by authors in the wild north and the rural and variously developed south. Poetry is one element among many—the water, the air, the soil—that makes Michigan what it is. Any sustainable political change must begin with a renewal of culture and a resensitizing to nature. It is up to people, poets included, to effect this transformation with an informed love of their place.

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BREATH OF LIFE: WILLIAM MAXWELL'S MIDWESTERN ADOLESCENTS

RICHARD SHEREIKIS

From the beginning, the United States has been a nation of pragmatists. Forced to eke subsistence from a grudging wilderness, the earliest settlers had little time for creative efforts, few occasions to cultivate works of the imagination. In the 1830s, de Tocqueville noted the absence in America of great writers, painters, or musicians; and a steady stream of novelists and poets—from Twain to Masters, from Edgar Howe to Sinclair Lewis and beyond—have since described America's hostility toward sensitive souls, especially males who were artistic or somehow "different" or "queer."

As the settlers moved west, of course, they brought with them their "addiction to the immediately useful and the practical" (the phrase is from Lewis Atherton's *Main Street on the Middle Border*) and their suspicion of people who didn't work at sensible jobs or know the value of money. The values shaped by necessity were reinforced by education as the country matured, and McGuffey's *Readers* spread the doctrine of utility in one hundred million volumes which were published between 1850 and 1900. As Atherton points out, the message of most McGuffey excerpts was that life was earnest, life was hard, and labor alone could insure survival. There was little place in such a world for artistic types, for boys, especially, who couldn't prove their worth through physical strength, derring-do, and courage in the face of danger. It was OK to have an imagination, but you'd better be a "real" boy, too, with a proper aversion to school and anything that smacked of civility or sissiness. You could dream and fantasize and make up stories—play at cops and robbers, say, or cowboys and Indians.—but you'd better be able to handle a fishing line, maneuver a boat, and survive in the great outdoors or in the

mean streets of bigger cities. Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn were the prototypes; Augie March was a not-too-distant cousin.

More than one observer of Midwestern life has noted how central a role this pragmatism has played in the country's heartland. In 1946, Graham Hutton, an Englishman, toured the region and recorded his impressions in *Midwest at Noon*, which remains one of the most readable and incisive accounts of our area. "The imagination of midwesterners is almost universally confined to building or doing material things," Hutton wrote, "They need to be shown something, to touch, taste, and handle it, before they can grasp it. This may explain their attitude to art and intellectual matters, which do not seem realistic. What you can perceive with your five senses is realistic, especially if it pays."

In describing the Midwest's educational system, and its tendency to standardize students and "iron out disparities" among them, Hutton emphasized the pressures for conformity which he believed were characteristic of the region. "The midwesterner always distrusted intellectually outstanding people, geniuses of the mind (though not of 'practical affairs'), non-conformists in general, and the abnormal," Hutton noted, in his discussion of "the cult of the average."

In some Midwestern literature, this distrust of the intellectual or creative is reflected in the plights of the rare artistic souls who inhabit the place. Minerva Jones, the persecuted poetess of Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*, and Erik Valborg, the aspiring actor in Sinclair Lewis's *Gopher Prairie*, are victimized by small-town hostility toward people who are "different"; and Mr. Shimerda is driven to suicide when his musical talents can find no healthy outlets in Willa Cather's rural Nebraska.

But the *absence* of artists and intellectuals in Midwestern literature is more conspicuous yet, as John T. Flanagan has pointed out in his essay on "The Reality of Midwestern Literature." Sensitive souls usually play only peripheral roles, to demonstrate their incompatibility with the prevailing values of the heartland. "The familiar characters of Midwestern literature," says Flanagan, "have been the farmer, the businessman, the promoter, the evangelist, the adventurer, the politician, in other words, the man who rises to economic and social success by a combination of diligence, industry, good fortune, and often rather careless ethics. Seldom has the artist, the intellectual, or the idealist served as

protagonist." The Minervas, Eriks, and Mr. Shimerdas are exceptions who prove a rule, in short, there to demonstrate the torment of the artistic sensibility in a land of steely pragmatists. In most Midwestern literature, such figures can serve to swell a scene or two, but they're rarely given center stage.

In the fine and quiet works of William Maxwell, however, we get a kind of corrective to this neglect in a series of portraits of delicate boys who struggle to cope in worlds they never made. Maxwell, who spent his youth in Lincoln, Chicago, and Champaign, Illinois, and who for forty years was a fiction editor at *The New Yorker* (earning the respect and gratitude of writers like John O'Hara, John Cheever, Frank O'Connor, John Updike, and Larry Woiwode), has, in his novels and stories, left us a chronicle of what it meant to be a sensitive boy in Midwestern towns and families which paid excessive homage to "the immediately useful and practical." In the six novels and numerous stories he has written since 1934 (many of them set in central Illinois), Maxwell has created a gallery of vulnerable youngsters whose stories demonstrate that there was more to Midwest youth and adolescence than the roughhouse worlds of Tom and Huck and Augie and their peers. A close look at three of those novels should reveal the nature of Maxwell's unique contribution to the literature of the region and hint at the importance of his achievement.

In *They Came Like Swallows* (1937) Maxwell first explored the traumatic experience which shaped his imagination forever. When Maxwell was ten, his mother died during the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918, just after she had given birth to Maxwell's younger brother. Over the next sixty years, the painful memory of that loss remained with Maxwell, and, as he said in a 1981 *Paris Review* interview with George Plimpton and John Seabrook, his mother's death was "a motivating force in four [of his] books."

Swallows was the first of his novels to be so motivated, as Maxwell recounted the impact of a young mother's life and death on the three surviving males in her family: her sons Peter (better known as Bunny) and Robert, and their father James. As Maxwell usually does in his fictions, he tells the story from multiple points of view, giving us first the thoughts and feelings of Bunny, a sensitive eight-year-old who is viewed by others as

a classic momma's boy. On the first page, we're introduced to Bunny's sensibility as he lies awake on a Sunday morning, contemplating the stains in his ceiling. We see his imagination at work, creating a yellow lake in the pattern, and then going even further—"The lake became a bird with a plumed head and straggling tail feathers, while Bunny was looking at it"—alerting us to Bunny's creative resources.

We learn quickly, too, that Bunny is no Huck Finn when it comes to his amusements. We learn that, although "he was eight, and somewhat past the age when boys are supposed to play with dolls," he shares his bed with Araminta Culpepper, an Indian papoose doll which he hangs on the bedpost by day, lest his older brother make fun of him. And we learn that Bunny is no adventurer. He's *glad* that it's pouring rain on this November day, because that means he'll be left alone to read the Sunday comics at his leisure. If it had been a nice, sunny day, someone would have badgered him to go outside and get some exercise, and "he would be driven out of the house to roll disconsolately in a bed of leaves or to wander through the garden where nothing bloomed."

Bunny, we learn, is most happy during quiet moments with his mother, when things seem "intimate and familiar." If his mother left the room, "nothing was real to Bunny—or alive" and even the colorful leaves that pressed against the windows "depended utterly upon his mother. Without her they had no movement and no color." Bunny and his mother would have little "parties" when he came home from school, with cakes and milk and stories read to him from *Toinette's Philip* or *The Hollow Tree and Deep Woods Book*—about Mr. Crow and Mr. Possum's Uncle Silas.

Bunny is so attached to his mother, in fact, that even she gets impatient with him. Once when he got too clingy, he "could hear her saying to herself that he was a grown man, or nearly so . . . and yet not able to depend on his own strength, but coming to her again and again to be reassured." And while Bunny promised repeatedly that he would "try and not give in to weakness," he couldn't imagine a life apart from her protection: "If his mother were not there to protect him from whatever was unpleasant—from the weather and from Robert and from his father—what would he do? Whatever would become of him in a world where there was neither warmth nor comfort nor love?"

Bunny violates the stereotype of robust, mischievous Midwestern youth in other ways, too. He plays house with his cousin Agnes, for one thing. Agnes is the mother, and Bunny is, first, the grocery man and, later, the father, who comes home to give French harps to all the children who had minded their mother during the day. A far remove, to say the least, from cops and robbers or cowboys and Indians. Worse yet, Bunny is terrorized by local bullies, afraid of his stern Republican father, and teased and intimidated by his thirteen-year-old brother Robert who, despite his artificial leg, is rough and physical, much closer to the model of active youth that dominates in most Midwestern fiction.

We get Robert's perspective in the second section of the novel, and we see his impatience with Bunny. "Bunny was always either painting or making something out of blocks," Robert complains to himself. "He didn't play baseball or marbles or anything that other kids liked to do. At recess time while they were playing games he stood off by himself, waiting for the bell to ring. And if anybody went up to him and started pestering him—instead of hitting back at them, he cried." And while Robert "would have preferred a more satisfactory kind of brother," he tries to accommodate Bunny's frailties and even plans to let Bunny play with his prized toy soldiers when the younger boy recovers from the flu that levels him at the end of the first section of the novel.

While only the first third of the novel is told from Bunny's perspective—Robert's section is followed by the father's—it is Bunny's sensibility that established the atmosphere and sets the tone for the entire story. And that sensibility—delicate, imaginative, susceptible, and sensitive—is what gives the novel its unique Maxwellian flavor. In his *Paris Review* interview, Maxwell said that "In *They Came Like Swallows*, I felt the book had to be like a stone cast into a pond. And a second stone, and a third—with the ripples moving outward from inside the first ones but never overtaking them." With his first stone, Bunny, he established the voice and perspective which not only dominates *They Came Like Swallows*, but which also permeates much of his later work: the voice and perspective of the sensitive soul, at odds with the harsh realities of practical life.

In his next novel, *The Folded Leaf* (1945), Maxwell gives us another young man—a teen-aged Bunny, perhaps—whose fragile

ego and frail physique are hardly the stuff of classic adolescent fiction. In this case, it's a boy named Lymie Peters, who has moved from a downstate Illinois town to Chicago with his widowed father, who is unable to provide the boy with the love he requires. Lymie is a flop as an athlete—an insurmountable handicap for any relay team he's on, a lead-footed, stone-fingered ballplayer who assigns himself to the comparative safety of right field when it's time for gym class softball games. He's paralyzed around girls, of course, admiring the popular ones who hang out at LeClerc's pastry shop as "wonderful tropical birds, like parrots and flamingos, like the green jungle fowl of Java, the ibis, the cockatoo, and the crested crane." Despite the colorful fantasies they inspire in Lymie, these are the girls whose "dresses were simple and right"—coming as they did from Marshall Field's or Mandel Brothers or the Boston Store or The Fair—and whose eyes, "framed in mascara, knew everything." These were girls whose "voices were harsh," whose laughter was "unkind," and who were, of course, hopelessly beyond the reach of the shy and skinny Lymie.

Lymie's discomfort with himself extends to every realm of his life. He imagines a home life with a sober father in a clean apartment and his favorite dessert served up at least once a week. He fantasizes about being recruited into a baseball game and striking out the side in the final inning with the bases loaded. Waiting for his father in the shabby restaurant where they take most of their meals, he reads history books and imagines the grand times of the past.

Mr. Peters, we're told, "wanted to be proud of his son and he was glad that Lymie had a good mind"; but he was disturbed over Lymie's dreamy absent-mindedness and his propensity "to gravitate toward whatever was artistic and impractical." Mr. Peters is full of Polonian maxims, most of them centered on the cold, hard fact that "you must learn the value of money":

"If earning a living takes all your time and energy," went Mr. Peters' litany, a compendium of practical Midwesternisms, "it is something that you must resign yourself to. There is no use pretending that life is one long Sunday school picnic. Nothing is ever gained without hard work and plenty of it. But if a person is ambitious and really wants to make something of himself; if he can keep his chin up no matter what happens to him, and

never complains, never offers excuses or alibis; and if, once he has achieved success, he can keep from resting on his laurels (also his equilibrium through it all and his feet on the ground) he will have all the more success to come and he need feel no fear of the future."

All this, coming from a man who "As a rule . . . quit before he was fired" from a series of jobs, is "too materialistic" for Lymie, who finds solace in his reading and in his friendship with Spud Latham, a tough and combative new kid in the school, who takes Lymie under his protective wing. With Spud's help, Lymie is invited to join a high school fraternity; he's made to feel at home in the Lathams' apartment; and he even embarks with Spud in a college career when this odd couple enroll in a downstate university. Both the joy and the pain of their relationship, including its strongly homoerotic elements, are laid out clearly and poignantly in Maxwell's simple and elegant style, and the story explores the problems young men encounter when they grope toward adulthood in a culture that isn't always tolerant of their ways and feelings.

Maxwell switches points of view at a dizzying rate, putting us inside the minds of half a dozen characters, but Lymie's views and his sensitive assessments dominate, giving us a view of late adolescence that may be unique in American fiction. Edmund Wilson praised *The Folded Leaf* for the "careful, unobtrusive art" which Maxwell employed to make "us feel all the coldness and hardness and darkness of Chicago, the prosaic surface of existence which seems to stretch about one like asphalt or ice." In Lymie Peters' responses to this "prosaic surface," however, we get a sense of how the poetic spirit copes in a hostile society, and we can appreciate Maxwell's strength as a chronicler of these sensitive souls.

Perhaps because "the whole of [his] youth is in it," Maxwell has said (in the *Paris Review* interview) that *The Folded Leaf* is his personal favorite among his novels. But Maxwell's ability to use the personal to achieve the universal is also apparent in his most recent novel, *So Long, See You Tomorrow*, which in 1980 won the William Dean Howells Medal, given every five years by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters to the most distinguished work of American fiction. At one level, *So Long* is the story of a murder/suicide in a small Midwestern

community—of the relationships between two tenant farmer families and the adultery which triggered the ultimate violence. The novel explores the tensions which led to the killings, and it also examines the relationship between the narrator, a boy of twelve or thirteen, and Cletus, the son of Clarence Smith, who killed his neighbor, Lloyd Wilson, and then took his own life in despair over his wife's affair with Wilson.

But in a real sense, the story also belongs to the unnamed narrator, another shy and sensitive boy like Bunny and Lymie who, while befriending Cletus, is also coping with the recent death of his own mother, his father's remarriage, and his awakening sexuality. Like his young predecessors in Maxwell's fiction, the narrator is a quiet boy who prefers solitary play. "All up and down Ninth Street there were children I could play with, and sometimes I did," he says, "but I preferred to play by myself. On the most beautiful spring day of the year I stayed in the house, reading *Tik-Tok of Oz*." When his peers might have been collecting baseball cards, memorizing the statistics of their sporting heroes, the narrator is fascinated by the lives of musical composers, doled out to him by his piano teacher. Alone on his street, no doubt, he forms attachments to Bach and Handel and Mozart instead of to Evers and Tinker and Chance.

When he looks back on his youth, the narrator feels it is "clear enough that I brought my difficulties on myself." He was "thin as a stick," he recalls, and "In any kind of competitive game, my mind froze and I became half paralyzed." He couldn't catch a baseball and so, of course, nobody wanted him on their teams. Compounding his problems was his intelligence and his diligence as a student. "I was a character," he says. "I also had the unfortunate habit, when called on in class, of coming up with the right answer," a clear violation of the Midwestern code of proper boyhood behavior. And while his answers might gain him a smile from his teachers and a place on the Honor Roll, they also incurred the wrath of "two coal miner's sons who were in the same room with me but only because they could not escape from the truant officer." They chased him home, tormented him in the classroom, and pushed him around on the schoolyard, "trying to get me to fight back so they could clean up on me." They dropped out of school at fourteen, probably to enter the coal mines, says the narrator, which leads to one of the rare

hostile thoughts to emerge from a Maxwell novel. "If somebody told me they had contracted black lung," says the aged narrator, "I don't know that I could manage to be sorry."

The narrator's unfitness for the rough and tumble of "normal" boyhood leads here, too, to conflict with his father, a practical man. When the boy was five or six and, Bunny-like, looking for love, his father declared that he was now too old to be asking for kisses at bedtime. The father worried when his son spent too much time with books or his toy theater, wondering "if I continued to be interested in such things, how on earth would I support myself when I grew up? There was nothing comical or odd in his thinking this. We are what we are, and he was a businessman, and in his mind there was no better thing that one could be." Needless to say, the narrator "knew I was not the apple of my father's eye," although he tries to put his problem into perspective:

We were both creatures of the period. I doubt if the heavy-businessman-father-and-the-oversensitive-artistic-son syndrome exists any more. Fathers have become sympathetic and kiss their grown sons when they feel like it, and who knows what oversensitive is, considering all there is to be sensitive to.

None of which is to suggest that the narrator lacked a rebellious streak, in the face of his discomfort in the world. He did feel frustrated and angry at times, but even his disobedience was subdued, softened by his unwillingness to make things unpleasant for others. "Where a hardier boy could have run away from home or got in trouble with the police," he explains, "I sat with my nose in a book so I wouldn't have to think about things I didn't like and couldn't prevent happening." And when he balked at learning to play popular songs on the piano—as his father wished, so he'd be a more "regular guy," apparently—his rebellion took on a characteristic form. Impatient with the classical music the boy's teacher was making him play (and which the boy, of course, liked), the father made the boy take lessons from a family friend, who assigned him "Alice Blue Gown." The father had gone too far this time, and the boy was pushed to (for him) drastic action. He simply refused to improve! "I liked [the teacher]," he recalls, "but I came to have a deep dislike for that inane song as, week after week, I played it and nothing else. I also made no progress. I had found a small

plot of ground on which I could oppose my father without being actively disobedient."

But his is truly civil disobedience, a quiet rebellion by a quiet boy who, like the protagonists of most of Maxwell's novels, will make his way quietly in a hostile world. Problems with practical fathers, with bullying peers, with girls who won't pay attention, are the stuff of life for these sensitive souls, who marched to more muffled drums than the ones that Tom and Huck and Augie March heard in the hurly-burly worlds they lived in.

Maxwell's sympathetic treatments of these quiet protagonists, conveyed in his clear and unpretentious style, give his work its unique feel and flavor. And his own sensitivities to the feelings and frustrations, the joys and sorrows, of others lie at the heart of his fiction. In the case of his most recent novel, in fact, his acute sensibility, triggered by a twinge of guilt, was the cause for his taking up the story at the start. In the novel, the narrator explains that what caused him to tell Cletus's story was the shame that he, the narrator, felt, because he'd seen Cletus a few years later in the hallway of a large Chicago high school, and he hadn't acknowledged him. The novel, says the narrator, "is a roundabout, futile way of making amends."

In his *Paris Review* interview, Maxwell reveals that this was pretty much the way it worked in reality. He was asked how he knew when it was time to write, whether it was "some sort of instinctual act, like the impulse that impels birds to migrate?" Maxwell answered:

I expect to live forever, and therefore I never get worried about what I ought to be writing, or about anything undone. In the case of *So Long*, *See You Tomorrow*, I was sitting at my desk, and something made me think of that boy I had failed to speak to, and thinking of him I winced. I saw myself wincing and I thought "That's very odd indeed that after all these years you have a response so acute; maybe that's worth investigating." And so that's what I set out to do.

Luckily, in the heartland and elsewhere, some sensitive boys survive to become sensitive men. The passage of time has only deepened William Maxwell's memory and enriched his insights with the wisdom that comes of keen observation. His quiet, unobtrusive art still has the power, as Joyce Carol Oates has put it, "to deeply move us, and even to wound us, to surprise us into sympathies we could not have anticipated."

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LINCOLN AND CIVIL RELIGION

JAMES SEATON

I wish to argue for the continuing importance of our "civil religion," though at a time when E. D. Hirsch's proposal on behalf of "cultural literacy" is attacked as an attempt to suppress diversity, a defense of "civil religion" risks being dismissed out of hand. Hirsch himself emphasizes the minimal nature of his call for cultural literacy by contrasting the stronger claims of the "civil religion." American public culture, he argues, may be thought of as a spectrum, on which

At one end is our civil religion, which is laden with definitive value traditions. Here we have absolute commitments to freedom, patriotism, equality, self-government, and so on. At the other end of the spectrum is the *vocabulary* of our national discourse, by no means empty of content but nonetheless value-neutral in the sense that it is used to support all the conflicting values that arise in public discourse (102).

Hirsch emphasizes that this "vocabulary," acquaintance with which defines his notion of cultural literacy, is not a tool of domination but rather "an instrument of communication among diverse cultures" (104). Despite such protestations, Hirsch has generally been lumped with William Bennett and Allan Bloom as a right-wing authoritarian.

But E. D. Hirsch is not a right-winger nor an authoritarian, nor is Robert Bellah, the originator of the notion of "civil religion" as a factor in American culture, a mere fundamentalist with tenure. Himself a proponent of "some sort of decentralized democratic socialism" (*Covenant*, 136), Bellah nevertheless argues in his seminal article for the continuing importance of the civil religion, with its affirmation that "the rights of man are more

basic than any political structure" (4), its "awareness that our nation stands under higher judgment" (17), and its prophetic tradition extending from Thoreau through the civil rights movement and beyond. Acknowledging that the "civil religion has not always been evoked in favor of worthy causes" (14), Bellah argues that it is all the more important that "critical Americans . . . not leave the tradition of American idealism entirely to the chauvinists" (*Covenant*, 162). But Bellah himself raises an obstacle to the future of the civil religion when he notes that its affirmation does require reference to a "God," however vaguely defined ("Religion," 15). The generation of the founders included many non-Christians, many Deists, perhaps including Thomas Jefferson. But if God is dead, how can the "civil religion" be anything more than a vehicle for manipulation?

Perhaps it cannot. But before we expunge "civil religion" from our culture, we should consider the stakes. The "American bible," as Hirsch approvingly notes, ". . . is constantly being brought up to date through new additions . . ." (101) and he specifies Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech as the most recent addition. If in rejecting the civil religion one also ends the possibility of such "additions," then we should, at the least, consider all the possibilities before cutting ourselves off from such a tradition.

The writings of Abraham Lincoln may provide a clue, not so much in their ideas as in the way the ideas are affirmed. Lincoln has been called the greatest theologian of the civil religion, but his "theology" is only incidentally my concern. Nor will I consider Lincoln's actions, his life and his death, though all these are central to the civil religion. Instead, I will look at a recurrent motif that appears throughout Lincoln's writings and achieves its greatest significance in the Second Inaugural. Lincoln is fond of reserving judgment, of considering "what if . . . ?" without committing himself to the hypotheses under consideration. Over and over again he states alternative, opposing possibilities without committing himself to either. The "faith" which he first affirms explicitly in his "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act" at Peoria, Illinois in October, 1854, does not give him certainties—it is, finally, itself an hypothesis which must be tested.

Sometimes Lincoln suspends judgment about individuals, as in an early speech in the Illinois legislature arguing against the

legislators appointing a committee to examine the state bank. Noting the examiners would be politicians

... a set of men who have interests aside from the interests of the people, and who, to say the most of them, are, taken as a mass, at least one long step removed from honest men . . . (Fehrenbacher, 13)

he explains

I was not saying that the gentleman from Coles [County] could not be bribed, nor, on the other hand, will I say he could. (15)

In some of his most eloquent passages Lincoln reserves judgment about the course of events, carefully articulating opposing possibilities, often without specifying his own preference. In Chicago on July 10, 1858, he noted that his "House Divided" speech had been misinterpreted as an expression of preference rather than as a prediction:

Now, it is singular enough, if you will carefully read that passage over, that I did not say that I was in favor of anything in it. I only said what I expected would take place. I made a prediction only—it may have been a foolish one perhaps. I did not even say that I desired that slavery should be put in course of ultimate extinction. (Fehrenbacher, 446)

A few days later, in a speech at Springfield, Lincoln drove the point home after quoting the controversial passage:

Now you all see, from that quotation, I did not express my *wish* on anything. In that passage I indicated no wish or purpose of my own; I simply expressed my *expectation*. Cannot the Judge perceive the distinction between a *purpose* and an *expectation*. I have often expressed an expectation to die, but I have never expressed a *wish* to die. (Fehrenbacher, 470)

Even here Lincoln understates his own care in refusing to commit himself. Even the "expectation" he offered was not a straightforward prediction of a particular outcome but rather the presentation of contrary, opposed possibilities, either one of which, Lincoln seems to suggest, has as good a chance of coming true as the other:

"A house divided against itself cannot stand."
I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*.

I do not expect the Union to be *dissolved*—I do not expect the house to *fall*—but I *do* expect it will cease to be divided.

It will become *all* one thing, or *all* the other.

Either the *opponents* of slavery, will arrest the further spread of it . . . or its *advocates* will push it forward . . . (Fehrenbacher, 426)

As President, Lincoln refrains from assuring the nation of the certainty of victory, even in messages to Congress. In the Annual Message for 1862, Lincoln speaks of a "fiery trial . . . which . . . will light us down, in honor or in dishonor, to the latest generation" (Williams, 198). "We shall," he tells the Congress, ". . . nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope of earth . . . (Williams, 199). In December 1864, more than a year after Gettysburg, he was still presenting the Congress with the same opposed possibilities:

If we yield, we are beaten; if the Southern people fail him, he is beaten. Either way it would be the victory and defeat following war. (Williams, 254)

Lincoln suspends judgment not simply on matters of fact or on future events but on the key issue of the moral and intellectual equality of black people to white. Stephen Douglas, while arguing that "popular sovereignty" demands that each state and territory make up its own mind about slavery, affirms the inferiority of "negroes" in emphatic terms.

I hold that this government was made on the white basis, by white men, for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever, and should be administered by white men and none others. I do not believe that the Almighty made the negro capable of self-government. (Fehrenbacher, 598)

Lincoln reserves judgment. He is certain that the "negro" is the white man's inferior "in color" (Fehrenbacher, 478) but about other differences he is unsure. There is clearly a "physical difference" between the two races, but he is not so sure about moral or intellectual differences. The case is not proven. If it is unlikely that blacks and whites can live together on the basis of "perfect equality" (Fehrenbacher, 512), the apparent cause is not any innate differences in moral or mental endowment, but rather the existence of a "universal feeling" which "cannot be safely disregarded" even though it is not clear whether it is "well or ill-founded" (Fehrenbacher, 316). On the other hand, Lincoln is

quite clear that the "negro" is indeed the white man's equal in the respects claimed by the Declaration of Independence, a claim that does not depend on facts but on the acceptance of moral principles.

Lincoln is willing to leave the factual question undecided so long as the moral issue is clearly joined. Nor does he offer any arguments on behalf of the statements of the Declaration of Independence; instead, he simply affirms them as part of his political "faith." In the speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria, Illinois, which inaugurated the second phase of Lincoln's political career, he repeatedly insists that his political opinions are based on a particular faith, the faith which Bellah was later to call the "civil religion":

If the negro is a *man*, why then my ancient faith teaches me that "all men are created equal;" and that there can be no moral right in connection with one man's making a slave of another . . . according to our ancient faith, the just powers of government are derived from the consent of the governed. (Fehrenbacher, 328)

In referring to his political views as a "faith," Lincoln is not implying any special knowledge of God's will. He is saying that those who reject the Declaration of Independence outright (like John Calhoun) or pervert its meaning (like Stephen Douglas) have no right to link themselves to the founders or to claim to be carrying out the vision of America affirmed by the founders. That vision is not an empirical reality, and acceptance of its principles is not the sign of any special grace. In the United States, however, those who exile themselves from this community of faith thereby effectively withdraw from national politics. The "faith" itself may be misplaced; repeatedly Lincoln emphasizes that a government based on equality is an experiment; Jefferson's assertion that "all men are created equal" is no longer a "self-evident truth" but a "proposition" which must be tested in war.

As for the Will of God itself, Lincoln, though leading the nation in what many were ready to call a "holy war" while singing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," emphasizes his lack of knowledge. He questions the certainty of those who claim to know God's will, whichever side of the slavery question they take. Thoreau eulogized John Brown and Emerson applauded, but to Lincoln Brown's career was that of a typical fanatic:

An enthusiast broods over the oppression of a people till he fancies himself commissioned by Heaven to liberate them. He ventures the attempt, which ends in little else than his own execution. (Williams, 99)

On the other hand, and much more frequently, blatant self-interest encourages slaveholders to affirm that slavery is surely the Will of God. What influences, for example, the Rev. Dr. Ross in deciding the question of whether God wishes him to free his slave Sambo?

The Almighty gives no audible [sic] answer to the question, and his revelation—the Bible—gives none—or, at most, none but such as admits of a squabble, as to its meaning . . . while he [Dr. Ross] considers it, he sits in the shade, with gloves on his hands, and subsists on the bread that Sambo is earning in the burning sun. If he decides that God Wills Sambo to continue a slave, he thereby retains his own comfortable position; but if he decides that God will's [sic] Sambo to be free, he thereby has to walk out of the shade, throw off his gloves, and delve for his own bread. Will Dr. Ross be actuated by that perfect impartiality, which has ever been considered most favorable to correct decision? (Fehrenbacher, 685-686)

Lincoln himself is not certain as to God's will even about slavery; he is content to base his opposition to it on the grounds of his "ancient faith" in the Declaration of Independence and the words and deeds of the founding fathers generally. The very Second Inaugural which suggests that slavery is an "offense" in the eyes of God also intimates the possibility that God himself caused slavery to come about:

The Almighty has his own purposes. "Woe onto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." (Williams, 261)

The great speech marks the culmination of the motif of the hypothesis in Lincoln's rhetoric. He does not assert that he knows God's will for slavery or for the United States. Instead he suggests an hypothesis: "If we shall suppose . . ." that the entire war is the work of God ". . . shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to him? Lincoln raises a further possibility: God may very well will the war to continue

... until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword . . . (Williams, 261)

Lincoln does not claim to know whether that will happen or not, and in fact prays "fervently" that it will not; but if it should come to pass, then, he asserts, one would still have to say

"The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."
(Williams, 261)

Lincoln's own moral judgments are clear, but his suppositions about the Will of God are clearly, explicitly, only suppositions.

Must the civil religion which produced the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln's Second Inaugural and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" be abandoned? Not necessarily. Like Lincoln in the Second Inaugural, we can still entertain the hypothesis of a God who judges nations, if not to guide our metaphysical speculations at least to judge ourselves by standards beyond those of *realpolitik*. We might be wise, that is, to adopt the civil religion as a working hypothesis—at least until we find a substitute for what still provides the broadest bridge linking, in Robert Bellah's words

... the profoundest commitments of the Western religious and philosophical tradition and the common beliefs of ordinary Americans. ("Religion," 15-16)

If preservation of what Lincoln called "my ancient faith" in Peoria in 1854 and what Bellah today calls "civil religion" is considered upon the basis Lincoln proposed in his Cooper Union speech, then, I think, even those most suspicious of religion as an instrument of hegemony, even those most critical of our nation's failure to live up to its ideals, will come to support the continuing affirmation of those ideals in the civil religion:

I do not mean to say we are bound to follow implicitly in whatever our fathers did . . . What I do say is that if we would supplant the opinions and policy of our fathers in any case, we should do so upon evidence so conclusive, and argument so clear, that even their great authority, fairly considered and weighed, cannot stand . . . (Williams, 92)

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AN AESTHETIC OF MORALISM

BERNARD F. ENGEL

[Americans] cram everything under the head of morality. Morality is the cant and crack word of the place. If you go to our fashionable churches you will hear the fashionable clergyman preach 'morality'; if you visit a private gentleman's house, he is sure to entertain you with 'morality'; if you attend a public meeting, the 'moral' speaker will address his 'moral' fellow-citizens on the subject of 'public morals'; if you listen to the partisan harangues of our professional politicians, they will conjure the people 'in the name of morality' . . ."

An unnamed New Yorker, quoted in Francis J. Grund, *Aristocracy in America* (1839)

As both writers and readers of nineteenth century Midwestern poetry saw it, verse was meant to inculcate moral principle, an aim thought to be virtually identical with aesthetics. One might bemoan fate, celebrate the glories of the nation, urge on the soldiery, scorn the evil, present pathos or tragedy or glory, but there was always the underlying purpose of furthering belief in "high ideals," in work and duty, in heroic strenuousness, and in moral responsibility. Morality, indeed, at times appeared to be superior even to the religion with which it was supposedly associated. Immanuel Kant, in *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), had stated the case: "morality requires the belief in the existence of God, freedom, and immortality, because without their existence there can be no morality." Such British philosophers as Hume, in *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), and Adam Smith, in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) associated sentiment or feeling, what we would call sentimentality, and morality. At the height of the Victorian era, Dickens—a writer more popular

in the U.S. than any of his American contemporaries—wrote in the conviction that, as Fred Kaplan put it,

... there was an instinctive, irrepressible need for human beings to affirm . . . that they possessed moral sentiments, that these sentiments were innate, that they best expressed themselves through spontaneous feelings, and that sentimentality in life and in art had a moral basis (3).

Dickens and other Victorians believed that everybody except a few victims of perverse conditioning instinctively felt moral pleasure when the good triumphed and the bad were defeated. Sentimentality was seen as a desirable way of feeling and of expressing oneself morally. The satisfied were supported by W. E. H. Lecky, who in his classic *History of European Morals* (1869) saw a Comtean progress resulting from the rise of Christianity, from later increases in the powers of observation and abstraction, and from the rise of physical science with its rejection of notions that actions are subjected to arbitrary interference from on high.

American statesmen too saw morality as necessary to society. Washington in his farewell address (1796) declared "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports"; these attributes, he said are "great pillars of human happiness. Thomas Jefferson frequently used the popular concept of a "moral sense," an inherent feeling that enables all but the ethically misshapen to tell right from wrong. Late in the nineteenth century when realists and other critics began to attack such optimistic idealism, Twain unerringly targeted for ridicule this belief in a "moral sense."

Yet the acid of realism could not destroy the link between morality and art; a link that, though now seen as subtle rather than as obvious to all, remains a postulate even in the mid-twentieth century. Thus Lionel Trilling in 1940 observed that his "interests" led him to

see literary situations as cultural situations, and cultural situations as great elaborate fights about moral issues, and moral issues as having something to do with gratuitously chosen images of personal being, and images of personal being as having something to do with literary style. (3).

Trilling presumably would hold that morality, together with politics and the arts, contributes to what Washington called "the researches of the human mind after social happiness." Gertrude Himmelfarb, writing in 1985, saw a link between the middle class ethic and the social and political revolutions of the nineteenth century: "If the agricultural and industrial revolutions created the opportunities for social mobility, the ethical revolution made it easier to take advantage of these opportunities (278). And Christopher Clausen, writing in 1986, argued that though history and anthropology have "largely discredited" the absolute norms of the Anglo-American past, this liberation ought to make people "more conscious and reflective about moral questions and to make the ethical content of literature (and of criticism) more valued, if less doctrinaire" (xi).

On the everyday level, Americans of the nineteenth century often drew no distinction between morality and manners. Caroline Kirkland, for example, the author of classic depictions of Midwestern frontier life, in *The Evening Book* (1852) gave chapters to hospitality, "the Mystery of Visiting," the significance of dress, conversation, the question "What Shall We Be," fastidiousness, standards, and other topics meant to instruct members of the ascending middle class who were hungry for advice on both ethical problems and household behavior. As Twain illustrated, not only in his spoofing of the ways of townspeople along the Mississippi but most importantly in having Huck Finn defy the moral and legal codes that required a white to turn in a runaway slave, morality could insist on behavior conflicting with what the thoughtful might find honorable or humane. But most readers and writers clearly felt responsibility toward the moral code we now identify as Victorian.

Representative regional verse of the midcentury, when the moral-sentimental was its height, appears in *Poems* (1853) by Thomas Buchanan Read of Ohio, a skillful writer who would later gain fame for his Civil War poem "Sheridan's Ride." Like most of his British and American peers, Read wrote on the virtue of maidens, the wisdom of the elderly, the poverty and misery of city life and the delights of the rural. He exploited American nostalgia for the European settings of castles and crags and fair ladies wooed by armored knights; and for stories of aristocrats in disguise, beggars who wed princesses, and other trappings of the

Gothic and Romantic. All this led, of course, to the triumph of the nation. He also wrote about the wind, weather, the seasons, and about a blind girl, delights of Rhine wine, consolation by nature, the glories of Christianity, and the pathos of the deserted farm (heightened by the beauty of the forest and meadows that replaced the plowed fields). In this outpouring he employed an elevated diction and traditional rhyme, meters, and stanza forms. The conviction that all is right with the world led Read frequently to anticipate a glorious future. In "The Bards," for example, his speaker recalls inspiration from Homer, Virgil and Shakespeare, and a vaguely beautiful spirit of poetry:

Nor these alone—for through the growing present,
Westward the starry path of Poesy lies—
Her glorious spirit, like the evening crescent,
Comes rounding up the skies.

The same optimism caused Read to assure the laborer that though his toil today may be hard, it will bring a great future. In "The Brickmaker" his speaker declares that though bricks made today may go to mundane prisons or palaces, these structures are but a step toward eventual construction of "a stately building, / Airy dome and columned walls," to be decorated with "Mottoes writ in richest gilding . . ." Such visions were not so much predictions of a glorious Midwest to come as appeals to readers' aesthetic sense, presentations of beauty as a ideal without attachment to specific places on earth.

Aestheticism reached a height when Read in "The Miners" recognized the hard conditions of the men who dug for a living, but conveyed this recognition in imagery drawn from popular stories of royalty and palaces—"Vassals in the train of Night, / Build the chambers for your Queen"—and assured workers that "Labour is not mean or low! / Ye achieve, with every blow, / Something higher than ye know!" Read's governing belief appeared in the long poem *The Wagoner of the Alleghanies* (1863), which declared "A moral winged with verse may reach / A soul no weightier words will teach."

Henry Nash Smith observed that the nineteenth century found it difficult to make heroes out of farmers and frontiersmen, that the heroic was reserved for the West of cowboys and buffalo hunters (246). But Smith wrote as an admirer of realism. Read

and his peers sought not to document the lives and labors of everyday people, but to ennoble, to show readers as they wished to be. He and other poets knew that they were not giving literal descriptions. In their view, such "weightier words" would not effectively teach the morality they sought to further.

But though the settler generations preferred that their poetry express not the raw present but the idyllic future, the weightier would dominate the post-Civil War imagination. Religio-patriotic assurance led too many moralists to take a defensive stand against the coming of new ways in thought and behavior. Responses were diverse, with idealism, cynicism, aestheticism, and rejection of the literary in favor of the historical or sociological prominent among them.

Yet the vast output—probably amounting to 1500 or more volumes—of poetry produced by writers associated with the Midwest in the last third of the century continued to express the views of those who thought of themselves as "interpreters of nature, sentiment, patriotism, religion, conviction" (Stedman xix; by "conviction" Stedman meant strong faith in approved values). They emphasized acceptance of the traditional, and rejected questioning as in poor taste and even as ungodly. They spoke for what the average citizen of Hadleyburg, Winesburg, and soon, Zenith no doubt considered true and even original thoughts and feelings. But both subject matters and forms were in fact hand-me-downs from sermons, schoolbooks, parents, and popular fiction. There is much direct moralizing in the work even of good writers of the era—Howells, Dreiser, Norris, to name three—but they explored their themes instead of preaching them.

At the end of the century, some—not all—moralists sought to defend the inherited by arguing for military assertion of U.S. virtue. One confident spokesman for strenuous moralism was Meredith Nicholson (1846-1947) of Indiana, a professional diplomat known for his several novels. He was also the author of *The Hoosiers* (1900), a study of Indiana authors; and *The Poet* (1914), a fictional biography supposedly portraying Riley. Nicholson illustrated in his own poetry traits of that religio-moralistic tradition scorned by Santayana as genteel. Nicholson's *Poems* (1904) open with a 54-line dedication to Riley, patriotically praising him for turning away from Apollo and the Muses to weave the human (meaning the American) with "the divine," and moralistic-

ally lauding him for not seeking out the grain that has fallen, the "trampled husks" (that is, one assumes, for not taking the path of realism that Nicholson saw as leading to the vulgar and sordid). Riley sought instead, the poem says, "life's golden yield"—the morally inspiring, one deduces. The 59 poems that follow, most of them only a page or so long, show belief that Americans live in an orderly community under a beneficent God, surrounded by a nature that they may soon succeed in taking dominion over. There are problems in this community, but all may be solved—if not on this earth, at least in the hereafter.

The drive for power criticized by Santayana as romantic willfulness—what many in the age idealized as strenuousness—was as strong for Nicholson and his peers as it had been for poets almost a century earlier. Among Nicholson's poems on nature, "Where Four Winds Meet" envisions the winds coming, at the summons of the pines, to a "trysting-place" where they discuss such "mysteries" as why flowers bloom, secrets that man may learn if he follows his "guided feet." This directed journey will enable him to discover "plot and plan" by which the world is ruled; thereafter, he will be in control of all the created world. It is a notion that foresees a day when man, having achieved dominion, will stand before God alone, without need for nature (the epitome, it would appear, of the isolated individual Tocqueville saw as the logical product of a democratic society).

Many of Nicholson's poems on nature are specifically Christian, frequently using as themes quotations from the Bible. Yet even at his best, as in "In the Great Pastures," Nicholson showed pride in man's growing mastery. Taking as his theme Exodus X 26 ("Our cattle shall go with us"), the speaker sees man's treatment of cattle to be cruel but nevertheless takes the Bible verse to mean there will be no change in the relationship between man and beast. Reflecting on the centuries of life and pain that cattle have shared with man "since Abram's herds of old / Darkened the Asian plain," the poem celebrates the grandeur of the destiny that the author believes impels both man and animal (one assumes that Nicholson did not ask a cow's opinion of this ennoblement). In "The Earth," the speaker recognizes that even when people have come to know all geological secrets, they will still have to pause before the power of earth's "moods of

night," its tides and volcanoes. In these nature poems, the Christian and the strenuous fortify each other.

Poems on the seasons, the appeal of young women, the glory and pathos of an old man's Civil War memories, the pleasures of books, and the apparent indifference of the world to the individual (represented, in "Watching the World Go By," by a passing train) reflect, pleasantly enough, on topics and themes at a remove from intrusions of the realites presented by close observation or sensory experience.

The mood becomes militantly strenuous in poems on political themes. "God Save the State" is reminiscent of Kipling's "Recessional" in its stance as the declaration of one solemnly reflecting on the supposed ethical obligations of what seems to him a position of absolute strength. Nicholson's speaker is prompted by thoughts of the presidential election of 1904 (which pitted Theodore Roosevelt against the Democrat Alton Parker), an event that he says the state will survive no matter who wins because the state is superior to the individual. Even more militant are poems pressing for zeal in the Spanish-American War. "Cuba," dated January 1898 (the *Maine* would be blown up in February), urges the U.S. not to let "vulture Spain" hold on to "the fair pearl of the southern seas." "Bless Thou the Guns," dated April 1898, uses iambic trimeter, given solemnity by use of a half-stress on the opening syllables of many lines, to virtually identify Force and the U.S. democracy with God. Moralists were not all militarists. Nicholson represented, however, the rather large number for whom the war, which in the eyes of Howells and Twain confirmed U.S. errancy, was a confirmation of U.S. virtue.

Argument over morality in literature continues, whether in the guise of political, sociological, or psychological concerns or in more general terms. It must, of course, given that words are not musical sounds or daubs of paint, that they will continue to have meaning. What has changed is not the presence of moral content, but the comprehension which this content embodies. For the 19th century reader and writer, both typically members of the upwardly striving middle class represented by Read and Nicholson, the concern was how to behave as individual, as citizen, and as creation of a variously loving or fearsome God. In the Midwest there was until near the end of the century no sharp split between the moral notions of the general public and

those of the literary artist. But by the last two decades the works of such Midwestern writers as Howells and Twain—both of them versifiers as well as prose writers—were showing increasing restlessness with received ideas. Nicholson, writing almost two generations after Read, was angrily defensive because he knew that the values he shared were under attack. As Francis Grund's unnamed observer might have put it, both the parties in the ongoing dialogue would "conjure the people in the name of morality."

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SARAH T. BARRETT BOLTON:
NINETEENTH-CENTURY HOOSIER POET

MARY JEAN DEMARR

Today the name of Sarah Tittle Barrett Bolton is almost completely forgotten in the state which once was so proud of her. A tourist wandering through the capitol building in Indianapolis might be startled to discover there a plaque honoring her. The bronze plaque includes a head of the poet sculpted by Emma Sangernebo, a brief quotation from one of the most beloved poems by the plaque's subject, and several dedicatory lines. The quotation, quite appropriate in its boosterism for such a use, will give a preliminary sense of the quality of the poet's work; the lines are from "Indiana":

THE WINDS OF HEAVEN NEVER FANNED
THE CIRCLING SUNLIGHT NEVER SPANNED
THE BORDERS OF A BETTER LAND
THAN OUR OWN INDIANA.

The inscription reads:

—IN HONOR OF SARAH TITTLE BOLTON THIS PLAQUE
IS PLACED TO COMMEMORATE THE CREATIVE WORK
OF INDIANA'S PIONEER WRITER — BY THE INDIANA
BRANCH NATIONAL LEAGUE OF AMERICAN PEN WOMEN.
OCTOBER, 1941

Our imaginary tourist might be inspired to attempt to seek out information about the plaque's subject. If so, she might be further puzzled to discover that several weighty tomes of verses by the poet had been published in the nineteenth century but that the latest—and only separate—biographical and critical study was no more recent than 1941. Following the custom of the

times, Bolton's verse was originally published in newspapers and popular magazines, but an extensive collection, running to 300 pages was issued in New York in 1865, indicating something of the national reputation she achieved. Most impressive of her publication within her own lifetime was the typically nineteenth-century *Life and Poems of Sarah T. Bolton*, published in 1880 in Indianapolis. *Songs of a Life-Time*, a selection of poems published in 1893, thus within a year or so of her death, almost canonizes her through testimonials from two of the most respected literary Hoosiers of the century, Lew Wallace and James Whitcomb Riley. Two poems, "Indiana" and "Paddle Your Own Canoe," were widely known and loved, and another, "Left on the Battlefield," was selected by no less an authority than William Cullen Bryant for inclusion in his collection of *Fifty of the Greatest War Poems of All Times*.

That this poet of wide fame in the nineteenth century should be almost completely forgotten today gives dramatic evidence of the change in taste between her time and our own. Today her verse seems florid though fluent, sentimental though high-minded. It lacks the originality, the restraint, the toughness, so valued in our day and illustrates the ready feelings, the smooth versification, the easy accessibility considered virtues in the poet's time. Our imaginary tourist's examination of Bolton's experience and impact on her world and of some of her most characteristic and, formerly, most valued work would shed light on the startling changes in taste and in expectations of what the poet should do and be that have occurred in the last hundred years. Indeed, even the examination of the few secondary sources available to the student of Bolton's work is illuminating, for both the standard life, anonymously included in the *Life and Poems* of 1880, and the single work that can be considered a "critical" piece, Downing's commemorative study of 1941, are so effusive and indiscriminating in their praise as to prejudice a late twentieth-century reader against their subject. Ironically, the later work is in some respects less useful, for it is so badly written that its very meanings in some cases are difficult to ascertain.

In her 79 years of life, Sarah T. Barrett Bolton lived through changes nearly as great as those which separate her death from today. The two major biographical sources, the anonymous *Life* of 1880 and Downing's 1941 book, agree on the major facts,

though of course the earlier life does not carry its subject through to the end of her career. Their subject was born on December 18, 1814, in Newport, Kentucky, the daughter of Jonathan Belcher Barrett and Esther Pendleton Barrett; she was connected to prominent figures of the day through her parents, her mother being a first cousin of President James Madison. Sarah was their first child, and while she was still very small the family migrated northward to Indiana in search of a new home. The poet later remembered the journey in terms that make plain the nature of the wilderness that was southern Indiana in the second decade of the nineteenth century:

As there was no road for wheels, . . . we were obliged to travel on horse-back. Our little caravan consisted of three packhorses, laden with bedding, bacon, coffee and flour. Upon one of these horses my mother rode with the baby in her arms, and I on the pack, behind her or my father, who led the third horse. After picking our way for several days, along the trace which was little better than an Indian trail, we came to the Muscatatuck, and found it swollen to a broad, angry looking river. What was to be done? There was no ferry no [sic] apparent ford, and nobody in reach to tell us of its depth, or of the danger of an attempt to cross it. After consulting with my mother, my father, on the tallest horse, tied me behind him, took the baby in his arms, and ventured in. The water rose to the horse's back, but did not lift him from his feet; and steadily he climbed the opposite bank, waded through the flooded valley, and brought us at last safely to dry land. There my father laid the baby down, left me to watch it, and went back for my mother; not knowing but that the bears might carry us both off before his return. It chanced however, [sic] that we all got safely over the river and arrived at Vernon, that night. (*Life* XVIII-XIX)

Just a few more words will suffice to characterize the frontier hardships which this gently-bred family was to undergo. The poet commented particularly feelingly on the situation faced by her mother, a refined young woman with a small child and an infant to care for:

Our new home . . . was a little cabin, built of round logs, with a puncheon floor, a clapboard roof, and a door hung on wooden hinges, and fastened with a wooden latch, and standing in a dense forest, full of wild beasts and "tame Indians," as we called

the few stagglers [sic] that remained after their tribes had been removed. It was a dreary outlook to my mother, a young and sensitive woman, brought up in cultivated society, and I saw the tears dropping from her dark eyes that first night as she spread our supper upon the rude table. (*Life* XIX)

During the family's time north east of Vernon, the father transformed his portion of wilderness into a productive farm. And while there, little Sarah roamed the hills and woods, learning a romantic love of nature which she always claimed as a crucial influence on her development as a woman and as a poet.

But Vernon offered few advantages of the sort required by the parents of a cultivated and rapidly growing family, so in 1823, when Sarah was less than ten years old, the father sold the farm (at a loss, we are told) and moved his family to Madison, according to the anonymous *Life*, "then, the chief center of trade and commerce, of education and social refinement in the State" (XXIV). His primary purpose was to make possible the education of his children.

In Madison, young Sarah was educated broadly: the anonymous *Life* lists among texts she devoured "Kirkham's English Grammar . . . Adam's Geography . . . Blair's Rhetoric and Comstock's Natural Philosophy," in addition to studies in chemistry (a particular favorite), logic, Greek mythology, and Latin (XXIV-XXV). In the latter, she progressed "about the middle of Virgil," but was persuaded to drop that as an unsuitable study for a woman. A future feminist, she later observed, "Women's rights . . . had found no place in the world's heart then" (XXV). By this time, incidentally, she had already begun to write and publish her verses.

On October 15, 1831, when not quite seventeen years old, Sarah Tittle Barrett married Nathaniel Bolton, a man eleven years her senior and the founder and publisher of a newspaper in Madison. Earlier, with his stepfather, George Smith, he had established the Indianapolis *Gazette*, the first newspaper published in the capital. After his marriage, he and his bride moved to Indianapolis, "their bridal tour, accordingly, consist[ing] of a journey on horseback from Madison to Indianapolis" (*Life* XXVII).

The next few years, while active and important to the young couple, may be passed over quickly here. Nathaniel rose in local

publishing and political worlds, and Sarah bore her two children: Sarah Ada on March 4, 1836, and James on July 25, 1838 (*Life* XXVIII). For about nine years, the Boltons were forced to become proprietors of a country inn on their farm near the National Road, in order to pay some debts Nathaniel had incurred for friends. These were hard times for Sarah; the anonymous *Life* paraphrases her as having claimed the duties of "house-keeper, chamber-maid, besides superintending a dairy of ten cows, caring for the milk, and making large quantities of butter and cheese for the market" (XXVII). Ultimately the farm had to be sold, and it later became the site of the state mental hospital.

These difficult years passed, however, and the Boltons entered happier times. Sarah resumed the writing of poetry which had largely ceased during the hard seasons of inn-keeping, and Nathaniel was elected state librarian, a post he occupied from 1847 to 1853 (*Life* XLII). This position was followed by appointment as clerk to a United States Senate committee and, finally, to cap his career, by President Pierce's appointment of him as Consul at Geneva, Switzerland, in 1855 (*Life* XLII).

Thus began the traveling that was to be another crucial influence upon Sarah's life and writing. She accompanied her husband to Geneva and then spent many months exploring Europe and writing letters and verses about her discoveries. Her husband's serious illness beginning in 1857 and his death in 1858 cut short his career and led to his widow's settling down in Indianapolis, where she spent the rest of her life—except for two additional extended trips to Europe which she undertook for the purpose of broadening the education of her grandson. What a gulf between the father who moved his family to Madison, Indiana, in 1823, so that his children might have some schooling and the prominent matriarch who traveled to Europe later in the century to enhance the quality of education of her grandson!

The last years of the poet's life, until her death on August 5, 1893, were spent in her Indianapolis home, honored, even revered as a leading poet of Indiana. Her name came to be listed, as among equals, with writers like Lew Wallace and James Whitcomb Riley. Among her circle of friends were leading thinkers and activists of her day like Robert Dale Owen, with whom she discussed women's issues. And without exception, these men paid tribute to this woman who had been nurtured in the frontier

wilderness, had been presented to kings and queens in Europe, and who always retained her close connection to her native state. Robert Dale Owen spoke particularly of her feminine daintiness, her "finely formed head, and ample intellectual forehead[;] her countenance, without boasting regularity of feature, is of a highly pleasing expression, especially when lighted, as in conversation it usually is, by the bright and cheerful spirit within" (*Life* LXXIII).

In his "Introduction" to her *Songs of a Lifetime*, Lew Wallace stressed the changes in literary attitudes which had occurred during her nearly eighty years, so that American writers were no longer held in contempt across the Atlantic. Invoking the names of James Whitcomb Riley, Maurice Thompson, Meredith Nicholson, and (today also unknown!) Evaleen Stein, in characteristically flowery prose, he claims primacy among Hoosier writers for Sarah T. Barrett Bolton:

Now, . . . if Indiana does become the Pirenean State, the new Provence of minstrelsy, center of song, home of the later lyrist, we may be sure there will be enquiry and much delving to know who was the first singer of clear note, mother of the glory. And it is to lay disputation, and give the chaplet to its rightful owner, that this book is published. (xii)

That same volume is also prefaced by a sonnet by James Whitcomb Riley which begins with the phrase giving the collection its title and praises her "glory," her verse which "hath wed / Melodious Beauty to the strong of mien / And kingly Speech" and predicts "FAME DIVINE" for her work.

The uncritical praise of her verse characteristic of these appreciations is echoed by the final summation of her single twentieth-century biographer and critic:

Sarah Tittle Bolton lilted poetic symphonies throughout her existence—as a child she played in the wilderness of a new world; as a girl in her teens she sought knowledge in books, libraries, schools and the great outdoors; as a young matron she met the elite of the land; she later toured here and there over the vast universe, meeting kings and queens, visiting the tombs of the great men of all ages, the noble by great deeds[.] She walked up the Reu la [sic] Paix at Paris, saw Rome in all its glory and London with its "wilderness of steeples" and witnessed the wonders of Florence, Versailles, the Louvre and Tuileries. What an

opportunity for anyone, and the strings of Mrs. Bolton's poetic lyre were especially inspired because she possessed the power of discerning the best. No sky canopy, no evening twilight, nor "white swans of cities" missed her keen glance. (Downing 150)

But what of the poetry itself? Continuing her investigation into the life and works of Bolton, our imagined tourist would begin drawing some conclusions as she glanced through the tables of contents of any of the collections of Bolton's poems. The prominence of several themes would immediately be apparent, themes that might be labeled European places, literary heroes, Indiana, and social concerns. Given what our tourist had already learned of the life and experience of the poet, stress on European and Indiana themes would not be unexpected, but the other two might occasion some surprise.

Even our tourist's cursory examination of the contents of Bolton's books of poetry indicates the importance of themes of European travel, especially of romantic and storied places upon the continent, a theme not surprising for a period in which major American writers habitually paid homage to the European scene and European history. This compelling interest and inspiration is revealed by such titles, taken from Bolton's largest though not final collection, as "A Day at Ouchy, on Lake Lemán," "Alp Land," "A Scene in Ireland," "A Tale of Chamouni," "Diodati [Byron's residence in 1816]," "Germany," "Lake Lemán," "Leaving Switzerland," "Le Chateau De Pregney," "Legend of Chateau Chene," "Legend of the Castle Monnetier," "Mont Blanc," "Poems Written in Geneva in 1855 [and] in 1875," "The Last Supper of the Girondists," "To Geneva," even by "To My Traveling Shoes"! To these might be added, from *Songs of a Lifetime*, the later selection, "Castle of Wartbury," "Switzerland," and "To the Arve." Though some of these poems relate legends and some are devoted to historical or literary incidents, most consist largely of romantic and flowery appreciations of scene. They are written in a variety of moods, from joy in present beauty to nostalgia, from personal response to political indignation or admiration. And it is perhaps this very variety as well as the multiplicity of influences upon her revealed by the versification that most strikes a new reader of her work.

Bolton was quite aware of her literary predecessors and she had better taste in her selection of models than might be expected.

Byron was an important influence, and several of her European poems pay homage to him, but one of her more interesting—and perhaps surprising—literary affinities was with Edgar Allan Poe. A number of her poems seem to echo his metrics, and the poem entitled "Edgar A. Poe," written November 1, 1847, and thus three weeks after the death of its subject, is an enthusiastic defense of Poe written in his "Raven" stanza and employing many of his most characteristic stylistic tricks and devices as well as allusions to his poetry and troubled life. In her eleven stanzas, however, she had the wit and originality to resist the temptation to follow Poe's restriction of his refrain to the single word, "nevermore," achieving variety by altering the significance of that single word. Instead, Bolton varies the word and thus avoids monotony and slavish imitation even while retaining the effect of repetition. Her "refrain" variously consists of "forevermore" and "evermore" as well as her model's "nevermore." Her opening and penultimate stanzas will illustrate:

They have laid thee down to slumber, where the sorrows that
encumber
Such a wild and wayward heart as thine, can never reach thee
more;
From the weariness and sadness, from the fever and the madness,
Of a life that knew no gladness, to a bright and blessed shore—
To the wondrous joy and beauty of the distant Aidenn shore,
Thou are gone forevermore. . . .

Never more wilt thou undaunted wander through "the Palace
haunted,"
Or the "cypress vales Titanic" which thy spirit did explore;
Never hear the "Ghoul" king dwelling in the ancient steeple
telling,
With a slow and solemn knelling, losses human hearts deplore—
Telling "in a sort of Rhunic rhyme" the losses we deplore: Tolling,
tolling evermore.

(*Life and Poems* 213-17)

The uses of alliteration and of repetition of words and of grammatical forms as well as the echoes of Poe's own work are obvious here. Bolton has, in fact, achieved the difficult feat of imitating Poe's most famous and idiosyncratic poem without parodying it!

Of greater interest, however, are Bolton's Indiana poems. Like the European poems, they are quite various, including emotional outpourings, nature poems, dialect poems, sentimental stories and legends, and occasional poems inspired by individuals or events. If only because it was so intimately associated with its author's reputation, the poem called "Indiana" must be examined. Written at Beech Bank, Bolton's Indianapolis home, in August of 1879, the poem consists of nine stanzas celebrating the state's landscape, its history, and its people, in much the mood—though without the restraint—of Emma Lazarus' contemporaneous "The New Colossus," the famous sonnet inscribed on the Statue of Liberty. Several stanzas will illustrate:

Though many laud Italia's clime,
And call Helvetia's land sublime,
Tell Gallia's praise in prose and rhyme,
 And worship old Hispania;
The winds of Heaven never fanned,
The circling sunlight never spanned
The borders of a better land
 Than our own Indiana. . . .

Where late the birchen wigwam stood,
Or Indian braves their game pursued,
And Indian maids were won and wooed,
 By light of soft Diana,
Fair cities as by magic rise,
With church towers pointing to the skies,
And schools that charm the world's wide eyes
 To fair young Indiana. . . .

She gives the hungry stranger bread:
Her helpless poor are clothed and fed
As freely as the Father spread
 The feast of mystic manna.
The sick in body, wrecked in mind,
The orphaned child, the dumb, the blind,
A free and safe asylum find
 In generous Indiana.

Her gentle mothers, pure and good,
In stately homes or cabins rude,

Are types of noble womanhood;
 Her girls are sweet and cannie;
Her sons, among the bravest, brave—
Call no man master, no man slave—
Holding the heritage God gave
 In fee to Indiana. . . . (*Life and Poems* (380-3))

While "Indiana" was certainly her most admired poem, appealing to the sentimental and boosterish tastes of the late nineteenth century and to the complacency of those who delight in calling themselves "Hoosiers," it is perhaps not her most characteristic work. It might be argued, in fact, that her most interesting poems are those in which her concern for the poor, the down-trodden, the politically and socially outcast of the earth is expressed, but even here she generally tends toward the acceptance of received ideas of her day. Though promising in theme, many of these poems are ultimately disappointing in their basic conventionality. Among such poems is "The Last Supper of the Girondists," which in inflated rhetoric eulogizes some victims of the 1793 Terror in France (*Life and Poems* 153-5). By contrast, "The Doomed Anarchist," undated but apparently inspired by the death sentences given to the men accused of instigating the Haymarket riot in Chicago on May 4, 1886, with two actually being executed in 1887, makes explicit the association of the condemned with Christ which was implied by the title of "The Last Supper of the Girondists," though she does not argue for the innocence of the Haymarket rioters. Indeed, in part she argues that hanging is too good for these men. In "The Doomed Anarchists," she asks,

Have we forgot that the Crucified,
 Nailed to the cross by a murderous crew,
Prayed, "Father, forgive them," as he died—
 "Forgive them, they know not what they do?"

How, then, can we in this latter day,
 Professing to teach what he taught then,
Presume in His sight to take away
 The life He gave to these wretched men?

She goes on, passionately, to urge a different punishment:

Hide them away from the sun and stars,
 To count the sum of their loss and gain—
 Never to pass from their prison-bars
 Till their latest hours of life shall wane. . . .

There, face to face with their deadly sin,
 Haunted by horrors asleep and awake,
 Leave them to gather the harvest in
 Their hands have sown, for the dear Lord's sake.

(Songs 91-2)

Although these overtly political poems are basically conventional in upholding commonly accepted attitudes of their day in the United States, the poet's arguments for life imprisonment rather than the imposition of the death penalty seem quite modern.

A poem sympathetic to the labor movement and thus in stark contrast to her condemnation of the Haymarket rioters is "Ye Sons of Toil." Here we have an almost martial rallying song for the cause of the worker which touches on a number of important problems, including women's issues and child labor, and connects the cause to farmers, miners, and even artists. In fifteen passionate stanzas, she ringingly evoked the cause and predicts a triumphant future:

Men, rally to the cause of right!
 The morning breaks and golden light
 Dispers the brooding gloom of night
 On Freedom's towers;
 The goal we seek is just in sight—
 The day is ours. . . .

Come, ye who till the rich man's land
 With patient toil and hard, brown hand,
 Whose lives are written on the sand,
 Souls bought and sold,
 Like chattels at your Lord's command,
 For yellow gold.

Come, swart-browed toilers of the mines,
 Whose labor buys the rich, red wines,
 The silver plate on which he dines,
 Who never toils,
 The silken couch where he reclines,
 Who wins the spoils. . . .

Come, workers, in the realm of art,
 From sea and land, from mine to mart;
 No man can do another's part,
 In word and deed;
 Each traveler, on the wide world's chart
 Must sow some seed.

Come all, but not with sword and shield,
 Ours is no blood-stained battle field;
 Truth is the only brand we wield—
 And truth is strong—
 But come, resolving ne'er to yield
 To hoary wrong. . . .

The glorious day of Jubilee
 Is dawning now o'er land and sea,
 In which the soil shall be as free
 As sun and air,
 And title deeds fee-simple be
 Old relics rare. . . .

(Songs 9-12)

Bolton also conveyed her sympathies for the less fortunate of the earth through narrative and dramatic poetry, often using dialogue and directly depicting individual characters struggling in hostile environments. In "The Tenement House," for example, a narrator visits a "den— / Such as some wealthy, prosperous men / Build and rent to the homeless poor." Here are discovered children suffering hunger and grieving over their dying mother (*Life and Poems* 81-4). The children's baby talk and the sentimentality of the narrator's description are cloying, but the humane impulses of the poet cannot be doubted.

Using a different technique but marred with the same mawkish sentimentality is "The Miner's Story." Here another nameless narrator introduces and describes the protagonist, a "big, strong man in a miner's guise," met in a railroad station. Then the miner tells his story—of having left home to find work and now of returning home too late, for his loved but neglected mother is dead. Aside from the obligatory idealization of the mother and canonization of her in heaven, the most markedly characteristic feature of this poem is its use of dialect. In describing his reasons for leaving home, for example, the miner says,

"I lagged, you see, at the hardest work
 With the older boys; I wasn't as strong,
 But they called me a lazy, idle shirk—
 And harped on the same old string so long

"That it riz my grit—I slammed the door
 And made a rumpus, for I was mad,
 And left my mother a-crying sore—
 Don't judge me hard, I was only a lad—. . .

"I always intended to write, but then'
 I'd hed no schoolin' and sca'ce knowed how
 With my horny fingers, to guide a pen;
 I never will—it's no use now. . . ."

(Songs 13-15)

While the sentimentality of the tale may be particularly objectionable to the late twentieth-century reader, Bolton's sympathy for her grieving protagonist and her concern to depict truthfully and believably the deprivations that led him to the lapses for which he feels such guilt should also be observed. Bolton's younger Indiana contemporary, James Whitcomb Riley, was to mine more fully this same vein of social concern joined with sentimentality and expressed through dialect.

Our tourist who began by puzzling over the memorial to Bolton in the Indiana capitol building now may be puzzled again—no longer over the identity of the unknown poet but over how to evaluate her work. To our tourist's taste, much of the poetry, including that most admired in the poet's lifetime, seems to exhibit some of the worst excesses of romantic sentimentality even while maintaining admirable sympathies and understanding. Little originality is evidence by the poetry, but great variety of subject matter and versatility of manner are obvious. Perhaps we can do no better than to leave our tourist with her mixed feelings of admiration and bemusement and allow the poet, in words taken from the poem which, along with "Indiana," is her best known, to speak to us of the independence and courage which carried her from the wilderness of frontier Indiana, to the courts of Europe, through a long widowhood and, during almost all of her adult years, through a career as a widely respected and loved poet. The poem, written in Washington, D.C., in 1853, admonishes the reader to "Paddle Your Own Canoe":

Voyager upon Life's sea,
 To yourself be true,
 And where'r your lot may be,
 Paddle your own canoe.
 Never, though the winds may rave,
 Falter nor look back;
 But upon the darkest wave
 Leave a shining track. . . .

Would you wrest the wreath of fame
 From the hand of fate?
 Would you write a deathless name
 With the good and great?
 Would you bless your fellow-men?
 Heart and soul imbue
 With the holy task, and then
 Paddle your own canoe. . . .

*Nothing great is lightly won;
 Nothing won is lost;
 Every good deed, nobly done,
 Will repay the cost.
 Leave to Heaven, in humble trust,
 All you will to do;
 But if you succeed, you must
 Paddle your own canoe.*

(*Life and Poems* 227-9)

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GENE STRATTON-PORTER: WOMEN'S ADVOCATE

MARY DEJONG OBUCHOWSKI

Gene Stratton-Porter's writing is, among many other things, unabashedly didactic. She said, for example, about her fiction involving the outdoors, "The nature stories are the slenderest possible threads of romance on which I have strung every gem from nature their strength will bear" ("My Work . . ." 150). In other words, she used the plots of her books to teach her readers about nature and thus entice them into loving and respecting it.

The same principle undoubtedly applied on a more general level to her depiction of human nature. She said,

I elect to write only of moral men and women who work for the betterment of the world. My characters portray life as it is lived in homes of refinement and culture, where each man and woman does his level best, they represent life as it is lived in many homes all of us know, and as it might be lived in all homes, if men and women would live up to the "mark of high calling"; do their best instead of their worst. ("My Work . . ." 150)

Porter assured her readers that she knew the less pleasant aspects of life well—from ignorance and error to viciousness and cruelty—and indeed she presented many of them in her writing. But she clearly preferred the figures who triumph over adversity, who resist temptation, and above all who serve as models of courage and integrity to her readers ("My Work . . ." 150-54). Many of the male characters in her books come to mind immediately: Freckles (*Freckles*); David Langston, in *The Harvester*; the title character of *Laddie*, and his father, Mr. Stanton; and in fact she stated that each of them was based on one or more people whom she knew ("My Work . . ." 180 and elsewhere). But Porter's women have a special place in her fiction because she

seemed to feel that she had a particular calling in addressing them through women's magazines as well as through her books. She published dozens of articles in addition to some poems and serialized versions of her novels in such periodicals as *Good Housekeeping*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, and *McCall's*.

Indeed, hers is a double role: she is an advocate of women and an advocate for them. This is not to say that she intended to have or thought she had an exclusively female audience; often she was remarkably evenhanded in creating models of both men and women and in purveying advice to both. Yet in her magazine columns, she picked up themes from the fiction and directed them particularly to women: hence the emphasis here on her portrayal of women—and even girls—as influential role models for her readers, and on her advocacy of certain women's rights.

Many of the women in her books lived out their fictional lives as conventional housewives and mothers, but the exceptions are the ones who provide one of the outstanding feminist themes in Porter's books, and they embody qualities which reemerge in Porter's nonfiction. They are the career women.

Primary among them is Gene Stratton-Porter, who portrays herself as the Bird Woman. Although she appears only as a minor character in *Freckles* and *A Girl of the Limberlost*, her presence in those stories moves the action ahead dramatically. As a student and photographer of wildlife, moreover, the Bird Woman in these books has achieved local and even national fame. Like Porter, she has a home and a family in a town bordering on the Limberlost swamp. In a lesser known work, however, her status differs considerably. In "The Real Babes in the Woods," an early short story, the Bird Woman is single. When another character, young Reginald Moreton, Jr., dissolves into tears and hysterics over a maid's rendering of "The Babes in the Woods," a friend of his mother sends him to the Bird Woman, who comforts him with lore of how bird mothers care for their chicks, "the real babes in the woods." When Reginald's father comes after him, we learn that Mr. Moreton, Sr., had courted the Bird Woman years earlier, but she had chosen her career over a marriage. Now he approves of her choice because she has helped his son, but she has come to regret her lack of husband and children. Clearly, the evolution of the Bird Woman from lonely old maid in the short story to married woman and mother in the later

works allows her the luxury of both family and career. On the other hand, her attitude toward turning children over to hired help does not change. The implied disapproval in this story later becomes explicit in *Michael O'Halloran*, in which a nursemaid, not paying attention to her charges, is indirectly responsible for the death of one of them. Porter places greater blame on the mother for gadding about and neglecting her children.

Few of Porter's women have easy lives, even when they have only home or only career. Elnora Comstock, the Girl of the Limberlost, educates herself to become a teacher in spite of her mother's refusal to help her purchase books or clothes for school. Ruth Jameson, in *The Harvester*, attempts to cultivate herbs and to do some drawing for embroidery and other patterns while she is caring for a sick aunt, but her brutal uncle overworks her and accuses her of stealing his money. In *Michael O'Halloran*, the irresponsible mother, Nellie Minturn, undergoes some radical changes and not only becomes loving and caring but also develops her musical talents, and one assumes that she will use them professionally. Katherine Bates, in *A Daughter of the Land*, starts out as a teacher, then marries and finds herself confined to home with twin babies. She develops a potential business for herself and her husband, but he destroys their livelihood and dies in the process. She lapses into an almost catatonic state. Eventually her mother brings her home to run the family farm, a successful enterprise which she enhances. She finally marries a prosperous physician, but we are led to believe that even with such an advantageous marriage she will continue her career as manager of the farm. Linda Strong, the heroine of *Her Father's Daughter*, orphaned as a teenager, competes for scholastic honors at school, studies nature on weekends, and makes a little money on the side by publishing recipes and drawings anonymously, but not without frustrations and handicaps in the form of her vain and greedy stepsister, Eileen. In the same book, Linda's friend Marion Thorne becomes an architect, though she suffers a temporary setback when a design she has submitted to a prestigious competition is stolen. Molly Cameron, the mysterious Storm Girl in *The Keeper of the Bees*, teaches an international class of small children about the language and customs of the United States. This sampling suggests that Porter intended to set these figures, among her most attractive and admirable, before

her readers as examples of what women can become, despite the challenges of various negative forces.

Most of these same women, as well as others less endowed with marketable talents, serve as examples to their sons and daughters. In *Laddie*, Porter implied that her own mother had educated herself by learning her children's lessons along with them (435), and elsewhere stated that Mrs. Stratton maintained an exemplary household and set a standard of excellence in her charity, fortitude, grace, and compassion (*Rainbow* 4-5). The Harvester, David Langston, repeatedly invokes the image of his mother when others tempt him to leave his chosen path. Even the orphaned Michael O'Halloran depends on the memory of his mother to sustain him through difficult times. Freckles feels he can marry the girl called the Angel only after he learns his parentage and can assert that his mother was not a woman who mutilated and deserted her child, but a person of tenderness and respectable birth who was destroyed by circumstances.

In her magazine columns, Porter stated that she taught by example. In one aptly titled "Why I Always Wear My Rose-Colored Glasses," she said that one of her goals was "to uphold clean living" (118). She expanded on this thesis in another column, in which she acknowledged that the "simple, kindly, moral folk" that appeared in her stories were not the only inhabitants of the world and that she had read and been moved by "books of realism." However she says of them,

I know their strength and truth to life. What I do not know is whether they accomplish any great work for the betterment of the world; while in their second-rate and third-rate forms of immediate discourse of lust, fraud, and snobbishness, I do know that they are a horrible source of corruption and evil. ("My Life . . ." 80)

Consequently, she felt, "the history of a strong man is better to put into the hands of a boy than the detailed self-indulgence of a weak man" ("My Life . . ." 80). Certainly the same theory which she applied to boys and men she extended to women and girls, since most of these columns appeared in women's magazines. In one entitled, "Putting Something Over on Mother," she ended with this advice: "The structure we build is the kind our children will build and live in. Always let us keep our children in mind in

our every act" (32). Clearly, she saw women as examples to their children and the women in her books as examples to her readers.

Just as she was an advocate of women to her readers, Porter was also a champion of certain rights and privileges for them, both legal and otherwise. She perceived women as confined by clothing, custom, and architecture, and proposed that they be freed or free themselves.

In an early article, Porter described the agonizing process she had endured to prepare for an elegant occasion. After spending two months in the field, she found herself having her hair crimped, frizzed, and bound, her body imprisoned in a corset, and her feet squeezed into party shoes. She exclaimed, "There are no words to describe how I felt. Between the burning of my feet, the fiery points digging into my scalp and the cable that cut off my normal quantity of air I was nearly dead" ("In the Camps of Coresus" 22). Though she exaggerated in the interest of humor, and though she apparently did love pretty clothing and accessories (Richards 120), she resented and regarded as unhealthy anything that cramped or distorted the body, and she especially recommended comfortable walking shoes for girls. In *Her Father's Daughter*, Linda Strong's oxfords are objects of ridicule by an attractive senior boy, but she soon converts him to her point of view. Porter also implied that women who wear sensible clothing won't waste time and energy on frivolous pursuits. She exemplified this by means of contrasts between Linda Strong and her stepsister, Eileen (who even went so far as to smoke cigarettes), and between Elnora Comstock and her rich and conceited rival, Edith Carr, in *A Girl of the Limberlost*.

By custom, male descendants in a family inherited most of the property, as in some cultures they still do. In *A Daughter of the Land*, Porter took strong issue with that practice. She insisted that women should have rights of inheritance equal to those of men. In the book, Katherine Bates' father deeds his land only to his sons, assuming that his daughters' husbands will look after their women. He keeps the documentation in his own name, however, and makes the young men pay the taxes on the acreage. Mrs. Bates, silently acceding to her husband's harshness during his lifetime, burns the titles to the property at his death, bringing about a redistribution of the land among his offspring. Though

a great deal more happens in the book, that issue remains a major theme.

A second right generally considered exclusively the province of men was a chaste spouse, and Porter indicates that women deserve the same privilege. One example of male chastity is Jamie MacFarlane in *The Keeper of the Bees*. Believing that he will die soon of a war injury, he contemplates his past, noting gratefully that he has committed few major sins, and, specifically, he has "not soiled and disgraced any innocent woman" (96). Fortunately, Jamie survives and reaps a number of rewards for his virtues. The romance of David Langston, the Harvester, is complicated by the fact that he believes his wife, Ruth, loves a Chicago physician named Frank Harmon. Apparently Harmon cared for Ruth's mother during her final illness. Unable to pay him, Ruth offered herself to the doctor in return for his services. He refused, and, she says, "I would have fulfilled my offer, . . . but he spared me. . . . I think I worship him" (384). Actually, that worship was totally platonic, a matter of gratitude, and Porter breaks up the imagined triangle by pairing Harmon with a pretty nurse, leaving Langston and Ruth to each other. Since Porter, in her fiction, conveyed these situations more by hint than by actual description, we must turn to her nonfiction to see her state her case overtly: "I believe in one moral standard—a man has no right to take liberties which he denies his mother, his sister, or his wife" ("A Message . . ." 2).

There is a good deal in Porter's writing, both fiction and nonfiction, that proposes comfort and convenience in the home, for servants as well as for housewives. Undoubtedly she had her farm upbringing and work in rural Indiana in mind when she wrote in an article in *McCall's*: "I have learned the reason why, as a class, there are more farmers' wives in the insane asylum than from any other walk of life" ("Conveniences . . ." 2). She felt that the dreary confinement and the acute discomfort housewives faced added simply and needlessly to the heavy work they encountered in their kitchens. She continued,

Ten years ago there was scarcely a kitchen door I entered that did not present to my view a woman who was cooked three times a day with the food she prepared for her family. On wash day, she was parboiled; on ironing day she was baked; and on baking day she was practically roasted. It is a question as to

whether she suffered most from a huge iron stove in which a wood or coal fire literally roared, or whether her greatest tribulation lay in a pump so far from this same stove, that water had to be pumped by the bucketful, carried some distance, usually up three or four steps, across a back porch and into the house. ("Conveniences . . ." 2)

In this article and elsewhere (e.g. Meehan 187-89), she described the kitchen she had designed for herself at Limberlost North (her home in northern Indiana) and added that, in general,

I have known no greater joy than I have had in able to roust out some of those same old iron cook stoves, and installing neat, light gas or oil stoves in their places, for summer use; in bringing in pump; in cutting windows through dingy walls. . . . I have nothing better that I have accomplished during a lifetime of work, than the building of an ice house on a farm so situated that it was possible to have a refrigerator in a kitchen or on an adjoining porch; than relegating to the garret the old milk crocks, . . . No one thing has done more to eliminate drudgery from the life of a housewife in the country than being relieved of the work of handling of cream and churning. ("Conveniences . . ." 2)

These straightforward and detailed accounts show Porter's advocacy at its strongest. The presentation in her fiction is slightly more subtle but no less dramatic. In *Michael O'Halloran*, Mickey visits the Harding farm and helps Nancy Harding with her chores. He observes, "It's men's work to eat, and I don't know who made a law that it was any more 'woman's work' to cook for men than it is their own [that is, men's work]. If there is a law of that kind, I bet a liberty-bird the *men* made it" (286). He mentions to Nancy's husband, Peter, that the cramped, dark kitchen had no window for air or for a refreshing view of the outdoors. Once he has Peter's attention, he goes on to say, "Cotton up to that cook stove and imagine standing over it while it is roaring, to get three meals a day, and all the baking, fruit canning, boiling clothes, and such" (289-90). He continues, "You know Peter, if there was money for a hay rake, and a manure spreader, and a wheel plow, and a disk, and a reaper, and a cornplanter, . . . —you know Peter, there *should* have been enough for that window, and the pump inside, and a kitchen sink, . . ." (290). So Peter gives his wife the money to remodel, and Nancy Harding not

only gains control of some finances but also makes drastic changes in the rest of the house. Mickey explains,

There'll be a bathroom on the second floor and a lavatory on the first. There'll be a furnace in one room of the basement, and a coal bin big enough for a winter's supply. We can hitch on to the trolley line for electric lights all over the house . . . and [for a] fireless cooker, iron, and vacuum cleaner, and a whole bunch of conveniences . . . including a washing machine and stationary tubs in the basement. (364-65)

When other families in the neighborhood see what the Hardings have done, a small revolution begins, and other farmers improve their homes for their wives. This illustrates yet again Porter's belief that models are effective in teaching.

Similar changes occur in *A Daughter of the Land*, in which Kate renovates her mother's home, partly for status and comfort, and partly for efficiency. The floor plan of the house which the harvester builds for Ruth matches, almost detail for detail, and especially the kitchen, that of Porter's own Limberlost North. Porter designed the house for comfort and efficiency not just for herself, but also for those who worked for her. She said,

In the southwest corner, over the kitchen, with its share of sleeping porch outside, I should build a room especially for my cook. It would have deep windows looking into the woods, sunshiny walls, comfortable rugs and rocking chairs, and an excellent bed, so that she might feel that I truly appreciated the brand of service she saw fit to render me. ("My Ideal Home" 43).

If these examples do not fit our contemporary image of a woman actively supporting equal rights, we need to remember that Porter's times are not our times. Her real and fictional daughters did not become physicians or lawyers, nor did they lobby for wages and opportunities comparable to those of men. Such activities characterize more recent decades. For Porter it was daring enough to propose—and carry on—a career that was compatible with marriage and family. Such a career could be the more possible with sensible and comfortable clothing, with a healthy and convenient environment at home, with a woman's right to her own money and property—and the skill and determination to manage them—and with the self-respect engendered by a uniform (rather than a double) standard of morality.

Porter built her own life by making use of or creating those advantages for herself. Thus, what she advocated for the women in her audience was no less than what she achieved for herself and demonstrated through her heroines.

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SELECTED MIDWESTERN WRITERS AND THE POPULIST MOVEMENT

DORYS CROW GROVER

Midwestern writers and the populist movement is a subject that needs a more thorough investigation than can be accomplished in this short study. Several important questions need to be answered at the onset: what was the populist movement, who were the more important Midwestern writers, and what was being written at the time?

American populism, in historical summary, had as predecessors the National Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, the Greenback-Labor Party, and several Agrarian Alliances. The populist movement began in 1891 with the organization of the People's Party. Known as the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, the Party was composed of farmers and laborers who hoped to change some of the inequities they felt existed in the lives of people in the Middle West and Western regions of the nation (Hicks 227). Some of their grievances included falling crop prices, high credit, land speculation, monopolistic control of shipping rates by the railroads and unscrupulous grain dealers. Farmers believed Eastern money interests profited at their expense and they sought to correct these conditions. The political expression for the movement was Populism, but it has been referred to as the Agrarian Revolt of the 1890s.

Most of the farmers living in the Middle West believed that America's farm-labor-debtor-banking problems came not from foreign threats, but from political conspirators within the nation. Where once the virgin land had promised so much, the angry protests of the populists "brought a wholly different conception of the agricultural West before the public" (Smith 213). The Midwest was the center of populist social reform because it was

almost entirely a farming region, and included the great central area of the nation: Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. This does not exclude populist reform movements that took place in other parts of the nation; in particular, the protests were strong in Georgia and Texas.

The writers of the Middle West turned to a realistic literary mode in the 1880s and 1890s because of their disillusionment over the gloomy national social outlook. They knew of the failure of the high hopes of the first waves of settlement, of the movement of many farm people to metropolitan centers, and they wrote grim reports of farm and small town life. The populist literature is mostly nonfiction by writers thought of as middle-brow writers: journalists, essayists and politicians, and a number of writers known as muckrakers. Two of the better newspaper writers were Lincoln Steffens (1866-1936), who became a leader in exposing the sins of politicians and business leaders, and William Allen White (1868-1944), editor and owner of the *Kansas Emporia Gazette*.

Serious fiction about farm life was delayed mainly due to the change from predominantly rural to predominantly urban living. Not a great amount of scholarly criticism has been written on the subject of farm fiction in the early period before 1900. Roy W. Meyer's *The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century* (1965) provides some information on the farm novel of the earlier period, but a majority of the fiction after 1900 tended to be less concerned with the farmer and his problems than with the workers and the state.

An early fictional attack on capitalism was *The Gilded Age* (1873), co-authored by Samuel Langhorne Clemens and Charles Dudley Warner. The work was influential in giving a name to an era in American history, but did little to put an end to the abuses of capitalism. Considered by some to be a farcical melodrama, the work should not be lightly dismissed for it attacks land speculation and money scandals of the eighteen-seventies (Hazard 225+).

The year the Populist Party was formed in 1891, and to 1962 [a period of seventy years], more than one-hundred and forty novels were published dealing with farm life in the Midwest, and the majority of them appeared after the First World War.

Many of these novels took as their theme the pioneer or immigrant's experience. Others centered on the farm as a desirable place to live, but very few were concerned with the reform of social and economic conditions on the farm (Meyer 3). Disenchanted with the epic dreams of the first settlers, many of the writers concentrated on the changing American scene, evident in their protests against the industrial order and by a knowledge of the poverty and suffering of displaced people in the cities.

One writer of fiction dealt strictly with the realities of farm life, and included the ideas of populism in his work, mainly in his fiction written before the turn of the twentieth century. He was Hamlin Garland (1860-1940), a son of the middle border. Born in Wisconsin he moved with his family to Iowa and Dakota before he left the drudgery of farm life for the city. Garland's memories of farm life came to light in his early stories, many of which contained the ideas of Henry George (1839-1897), whose single tax theory was a protest against the monopolies of land ownership. George proposed a central solution in his *Progress and Poverty* (1879): that of taxing the unearned increment of land. Such a tax would relieve industry and labor from all other taxes. He objected to land speculation, ownership by absentee landlords and monopoly of the earth by the wealthy (Whitman 343-47). Garland's writings relating to agrarian reform and to George's single tax have received the most attention from historians and literary critics. Donald Pizer's explanation of the influence of Henry George upon the early Garland is well done, although there is some question with Pizer's estimate of the extent to which Garland remains committed to George's doctrines in his later writings. The Middle Border novels and the early stories: "Under the Lion's Paw," "Up the Coulee," and others in *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891), concentrate on agrarian problems. Garland is a passionate recorder of the failed dirt-farmers of the Middle Border, and for the first time real farm life is presented in a work of fiction (Andrews 53+). The autobiographical border narratives of farm life form an epic of migration, and depict the struggle and discouragement of the prairie farmers, including Garland's *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917), *A Daughter of the Middle Border* (1921), *Trail-Makers of the Middle Border* (1926), and *Back-Trailers of the Middle Border* (1928).

There were other Midwesterners who wrote farm novels, but Caroline B. Sherman says, "Only three novels published before 1900 are now [1938] considered to be genuine studies of rural life" (67). The three she designates are Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871), Edgar Watson Howe's *The Story of a Country Town* (1883), and Garland's collection of stories in *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891). Eggleston's work is set in backwoods Indiana, and Howe's Midwestern prairie town of Twin Mounds pictures the pioneer as depressed and defeated by the conditions of his environment.

Aside from William Dean Howells, Garland credited Joseph Kirkland (1830-1894), Alice French [Octave Thanet] (1850-1934), and Maurice Thompson (1844-1901) as having an influence upon his work (Hanson 458+). Kirkland was known for his frank and powerful studies of life in the Middle West of his time. Born in New York, he grew up in Michigan, and his work is based largely on his own frontier farm experiences. French expressed an interest in labor problems in Arkansas and Iowa, and Indiana native Thompson wrote romantic regional novels. All of the writers produced a mixture of realism and romanticism, but they lacked the serious approach that Garland took in his early work.

Unlike Kirkland and the others, Ohio-born novelist, critic and editor, William Dean Howells (1837-1920), went east and wrote classic studies about characters who moved from the farm to the city and became urban dwellers rather than struggling American farmers. In *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894), Howells's characters discuss America's social and economic problems and reveal his concern for a truly democratic, humanitarian commonwealth. Howells's social novels foreshadow the populist writing of later authors, including Garland and Frank Norris (1870-1902).

In his early collection, *A Deal in Wheat and Other Stories* (1903), Norris gives a stark portrayal of the failed wheat farmer. His "wheat trilogy" novels argue against economic exploitation in the production and distribution of wheat and the second volume of the trilogy, *The Pit* (1903), centers on the Chicago grain exchange. The final unfinished volume titled *The Wolf* was to concern the marketing of wheat abroad.

Other Midwestern fiction writers who explored economic reform include David Graham Phillips (1867-1911) of Indiana;

Robert Herrick (1868-1945) of Indiana; Winston Churchill (1871-1947) of Missouri, and in the nineteen twenties, Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951) of Minnesota; Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941) and Louis Bromfield (1896-1956) both of Ohio; James T. Farrell (1904-1979) of Illinois, and Nelson Algren (1909-1981), of Michigan. The earliest well-known example of a proletarian novel is Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), although it was more socialist than Marxist in sympathy.

Another early labor novel was Stewart Edward White's *The Blazed Trail* (1902), which dealt with the rigors of his native Michigan and its lumber camps. The novel does not comment on the Industrial Workers of the World or other labor movements as political causes. Most of the work of the above Midwesterners concerned wage earners in the cities . . . the factory laborers and the industrial-urban economic abuses in the Midwest, but all of them were writing some distance in time from the populist movement, as its main thrust had ended by 1896. That year Sherwood Anderson moved to Chicago and worked in an apple warehouse, and it would be twenty years before his first novel, *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916) appeared. The work sets a theme Anderson continues in many later writings for it expresses his dismay at the plight of the working man. Anderson was not a proletarian writer, but he did include some of the ideas of progressivism as they pertained to the factory workers, in particular in *Kit Brandon* (1936), *Puzzled America* (1935), *Mid-American Chants* (1918), *Poor White* (1920), and *Nearer the Grass Roots* (1929). *Poor White* comes nearest to being a populist work; however, *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* (1926) is an account of Anderson's early years. That he saw the chaos of materialism is vividly portrayed in many of his writings.

Within the limits of this article, treatment of so large a subject cannot be thorough; thus it may be best to conclude by mentioning a few prose writers who were immersed in the populist movement. The Midwestern populist leader, Ignatius Donnelly (1831-1901), was born in Philadelphia but moved to Minnesota and became a newspaperman. Called "The Great Apostle of Protest," Donnelly helped form the National People's Party, and denounced "the oppression of farmers by a devilish conspiracy of . . . Easterners" to the *Chicago Tribune*, claiming the eastern bankers and industrialists betrayed true Americanism and served

Communitistic radicals and Wall Street (Herzberg 269). Donnelly wrote the preamble to the 1892 labor platform which met in St. Louis.

Another Easterner, New Yorker Henry Demarest Lloyd (1847-1903) was an economist, lawyer and reformer who moved to Chicago where his articles for the Chicago *Tribune* pointed out the dangers of monopoly, the abuse of grain speculators and the machinations of the railroads and of the Standard Oil Company. In his best-known book, *Wealth Against Commonwealth* (1894), he argued that the natural wealth was in the hands of the few, rather than controlled by the nation. Committed to government ownership as the means of establishing a different economic and social order, he joined the People's Party in an effort to unite under its banner the workers and agrarians, and to lead the populists to a gradual acceptance of socialism (Caro 241-43).

Illinois-born William Jennings Bryan ran for President on the Populist platform, and his "Cross of Gold" speech in 1896 before the Democratic National Convention in Chicago could not win him the election. He advocated unlimited free coinage of silver, but backward-looking, he had little influence, although in early life, as John Dos Passos says, he was "the boy orator of the Platte." Most Nebraskans do not like to be reminded of him today.

A Wisconsin-born economist and social philosopher, Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) was reared in Minnesota among Norwegian immigrants and shared deeply in the agrarian unrest of the 1870s and 1880s in which pre-Marxian utopian socialist ingredients and real grievances combined to produce the later populist outburst against the railroads and Eastern capitalism (Whitman 824-27). His first book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), often misunderstood as literary satire, was actually an ironic evolutionary analysis of the pecuniary values of the middle and business classes. He was the predecessor of William James and James's theory of pragmatism, in that Veblen distinguished sharply between business and industry—the latter was the endlessly fecund process of making goods to answer actual needs; the former a predatory scheme of making profits by interfering in the direct consumption of goods for use.

Donnelly, Lloyd, Bryan and Veblen are but four of the many populist writers who spoke for the American farmer and laborer, and they were the predecessors of the proletarian novelists. By

the turn of the twentieth century the farm novelist as social critic had become the farm novelist as historian. Garland himself experimented with an historical Dakota prairie novelette titled *Moccasin Ranch* (1909), based on his personal experience of "proving up a claim" (Meyer 36). Some of the better artists who recorded the pioneer and immigrant experience were Willa Cather in *O Pioneers!* (1913), and *My Antonia* (1918), both set in Nebraska; Herbert Quick's *Vandemark's Folly* (1922), set in Iowa; Ole Edvart Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth* (1927), and Rose Wilder Lane's *Let the Hurricane Roar* (1933), both set in Dakota territory, and Frederick Manfred's *This is the Year* (1947), about a Frisian-born farmer in Northern Iowa.

In addition to the prose writers, poets too expressed their views of farm life, including Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931) of Illinois, who wanted to revive agrarian civilization; Edgar Lee Masters (1868-1950), of Illinois, whose poems give psychological insight into his people; Carl Sandburg (1878-1967) who wrote of steel workers and corn huskers, and perhaps Walt Whitman (1819-1892), who says he is all of the people.

In perspective one might ask whether or not the farm novel exists today in literature. Fiction has taken unusual turns in recent years, with long tales of drug companies, hotels, airplane crashes, motor company intrigues, earthquakes, automobiles that search and seek, and other sensational events. The pastoral fiction of one-hundred years ago appears to have become a fragment in the literary history of America.

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON REMEMBERED

DAVID D. ANDERSON

In the twenty-seven volumes of novels, short stories, poems, essays, and journalism that Sherwood Anderson published in his lifetime and the dozen or so other volumes of letters, journals, and stories published since his death, as well as literally hundreds of reprinted and translated editions, literary scholars, critics, historians, and the general reading public of three continents have at their command a body of work that is at once a remarkable record of an America in transition to modernity and of an American life shaped by that transition. At the same time both the transition and the life are transmuted in these works into enduring parallel myths that explain the life of the republic and its people in what is, in Northrop Frye's words, "the only possible language of concern," that which, again, in Frye's words, has "more to do with vision and with an imaginative response than with the kind of belief that is based on evidence and sense experience."

At the same time, Sherwood Anderson had, in his works, in his life, and in the myths that we perceive in both, pointed out the direction that modern American literature has taken for much of this century and he had rewritten the language of literature for our time and the foreseeable future. He had, in fact, taken the most enduring central nineteenth-century American image, that of the white boy and the black man, both simultaneously, literally and metaphorically, free and enslaved, afloat on a raft in the middle of the great American river, and transmuted it into the equally enduring twentieth-century American image of the young man on the train that will take him at the same time to the West of the setting sun and to the City of business and industry, as the older America and the new become one.

But Anderson left behind more than the record of his life, the body of his works, and the American myth that he created; he left at the same time enduring memories of himself in the works of those whose lives had touched his. Sherwood Anderson remembered by the younger writers—Anderson was already thirty-six when in 1913 he became part of the Chicago literary movement that he was to shape even as it shaped him—is, with the recent publication of his letters to his final and most enduring love, Eleanor Copenhaver Anderson, the last of the touching revealing dimensions of his life to be examined.

Sherwood Anderson has been remembered by friends and associates from his boyhood in Clyde, Ohio, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, including his close friend Herman Hurd, to those who knew him in Virginia in the last decades of his life, and those memories, recounted over the years to Anderson's biographers, have become part of the public Anderson record, reinforcing what we know of the reality of his life. But the young writers who came to know him and whose lives and work he had often influenced provide a record that is often spontaneous and frequently contemporary but that has all too often been overlooked or ignored as the Anderson of literary legends and gossip has proved in later years to be more durable, more interesting, or more scandalous than the Anderson of memory.

The most important of these encounters, those which proved to have the most significant and lasting results and to leave the most durable impressions on young writers if not on Anderson himself were those that took place in Chicago between 1913 and 1921, when Anderson found himself as a writer, and later, in New Orleans in 1925 and 1926, when, established and respected, he was seeking a place where he might live and work.

Memories of Anderson during those thirteen years were recorded between 1920 and 1961; they were written by writers ranging from the most prominent—William Faulkner and Edmund Wilson, both of whom met Anderson in the early twenties—to those, like Harry Hansen and Burton Rascoe of his Chicago years, who remain peripheral to the literary history of their time, and to others, like Ben Hecht and Floyd Dell and Margaret Anderson, none of whose promise was ever realized, who met Anderson after his return to Chicago in 1913. The

memories themselves range from brief to exhaustive, but each not only reveals much of Anderson as he seemed to a newer, younger writer, but it reveals, too, something of what he gave of himself to each of them. The more immediate remain the more vivid if often the briefer; the more remote in time, if often the most exhaustive, are often too the more appreciative and the more understanding.

Chronologically the earliest recorded encounter with Anderson by a young writer is that described by Margaret Anderson, founding editor of *The Little Review* in her memoir *My Thirty Years War*, written in France just after the magazine had died and more than sixteen years after she met Anderson in Chicago in 1913. Sherwood was then thirty-six; Margaret, who had come to Chicago from Columbus, Indiana, was twenty-three; for two years she had reviewed books for Floyd Dell, the twenty-six-year-old editor of the *Chicago Evening Post's Friday Literary Review*, who had himself come to Chicago from Davenport, Iowa, only a few years before. Margaret had insisted that the Chicago Renaissance dated from 1911, when, as a twenty-one-year-old apprentice book reviewer, she received from Dell a book about China with his editorial instructions: "Here is a book about China. Now don't send me an article about China but about yourself" (36-37). The spirit of enlightened self-indulgence the incident suggests certainly marked the course of the Chicago Renaissance, as it does *My Thirty Years War*; at twenty-three, as a member of a literary group that surrounded Dell and his wife Margery Currey, Margaret Anderson, when she met Sherwood Anderson, was planning the journal of the Renaissance, *The Little Review*, which was to appear in 1914. In her memoir, she remembers, from the perspective of those years and her enlightened self-indulgence, an Anderson only months from the paint factory in Elyria, Ohio, from his nervous breakdown, and from his momentous decision to return to Chicago to find himself as a writer, having brought with him a trunkful of manuscripts nobody seemed to want to publish. She remembered that

Floyd and I talked of Pater and of living like the hardgem-like flame. Sherwood Anderson used to listen to us in a certain amazement (resembling fear) and indicating clearly that nothing would induce him into such fancy realms. But I liked Sherwood—because he, too, was a talker and of a highly specialized type. He

didn't talk ideas—he told stories. (It sounds bad but the stories were good. So was the telling.) He said to everybody: You don't mind if I use that story you've just told, do you? No one minded. Sherwood's story never bore any relation to the original. He read us the manuscript of "Windy McPherson's Son." Floyd was passionate about it—I, a little less so. It was a new prose, but I knew by Sherwood's look that he would do something even better. I asked him to give me an article for the first number of the *Little Review* (38-39).

Sherwood Anderson, oral story-teller, is a perception of Anderson shared by many others over his lifetime; it even provided the substance of Anderson as Dawson Fairchild in Faulkner's novel *Mosquitoes*, published in 1927. Floyd Dell, who recorded essentially the same encounters as Margaret Anderson more than thirty years after *My Thirty Years War*, and nearly half a century after they occurred, as well as nineteen years after the first posthumous publication of Anderson's *Memoirs*, was to remember them somewhat differently. But Margaret saw Sherwood's literary judgment as new and sound; his essay "The New Note," in the first issue of the review, is quoted in *My Thirty Years War* as an assertion of the movement's independence and affirmation of what had happened in Chicago:

In the trade of writing the so called new-note is as old as the world. Simply stated, it is a cry for the reinjection of truth and honesty into the craft. . . . In all the world there is no such thing as an old sunrise, an old wind upon the cheeks, or an old kiss from the lips of your beloved; and in the craft of writing there can be no such thing as age in the souls of the young poets and novelists who demand for themselves the right to stand up and be counted among the soldiers of the new. . . . it is the promise of a perpetual sweet new birth of the world; it is as a strong wind come out of the virgin west (50).

The essay appeared in March, 1914 and it established Sherwood Anderson as the philosopher of the Renaissance; in July Anderson's first published story, "The Rabbit-Pen," appeared in *Harpers*, and his literary career had begun. But Floyd Dell, like Margaret Anderson, remembered the early days and months of their acquaintance, in a memoir called, "On being Sherwood Anderson's Literary Father," published in 1961, two decades after Anderson's death.

It was forty-eight years ago, in the year 1913, that I first knew Sherwood Anderson in Chicago. He was the author of an unpublished novel, *Windy McPherson's Son*, which I had read in typescript and greatly admired. I was young, but I was a literary editor and very much a literary pundit, so that my critical judgment was valued highly by Sherwood, who had just had his novel rejected by a publisher. A rejection hurts any author's feelings very badly, but Sherwood's feelings were more raw and sensitive than I could possibly realize; for he had a deceptively robust air, which, as I knew later, masked an inward state of doubt and gloom and anxiety. . . . at all events I was taken in by appearance and had no idea that he was a sick soul. . . .

Sherwood was thirty-seven years old at the time, an extremely handsome and attractive figure, tall and broad-shouldered, with dark eyes and a mass of black hair; he had a gentle and friendly manner. I found him very likeable and companionable, and in that summer of 1913, before I went to seek my fortune in New York I saw a great deal of him. We loafed and talked together. . . .

I knew Sherwood well; yet evidently I never knew him at all. For instance: there were parties in Margery Currey's studio around the corner, frequented by Chicago's young and rebellious intelligentsia, and Sherwood was there, gay and genial, very much admired and appearing to enjoy himself heartily. Years afterward I read his autobiographical account of how he would start to go to one of those studio parties, but would stop outside the door, listening to the din of talk and laughter and saying to himself that these brilliant and sophisticated intellectuals regarded him as a mere advertising man and despised him; so he would slink away and wander forlorn and lonely through the spaces of Jackson Park (315-316).

Dell further notes that "There were variants of this pathetic tale, in which, standing at the door, he *heard* those people inside saying: 'Sherwood Anderson is a mere advertising man. He will never be a writer'" (316). But, he adds, shrewdly, an observation that every Anderson scholar must be aware of: "What Sherwood imagined was real to him. He confused fact and fancy."

Noting that Anderson had referred to him in his *Memoirs* as his "literary father," Dell recounts the nature of that paternity; not only had he praised Sherwood, but when he went to New York later in 1913, he took with him the typescript of "Windy McPherson's Son," which he eventually succeeded in placing with John Lane, the London publisher, whose American branch pub-

lished it in 1916. He recounts, too, the nature of their friendship in Dell's early New York years when he, editor of *Masses* (1914-1917) and later *Liberation* (1918-1924), enjoyed Sherwood's visits, their respective self-images, and the projection of those images in the clothes that they wore. The first is amusing, while the second is revealing. The first describes a visit Sherwood made to New York and its aftermath in another visit. Dell had an apartment mate in the Village; Sherwood stayed with them, sleeping on the couch. Dell takes up the story:

... He had come in a suit such as a well-dressed Chicagoan should wear; but he brought no pajamas or nightshirt and he slept in his underclothes. One night, after we had all gone to bed, some Greenwich Village nighthawk pounded on our door; we let him in and we all got up and had a drink; and Sherwood, prancing around in his underclothes, told one of his Mama Geiger stories, giggling. I didn't think the story was funny. What I thought was funny was Sherwood's drawers. They were the most disreputable drawers I have ever seen in my life. They were long drawers, ancient and patched, preposterously patched, and the seat was baggy and hung down. I could not imagine why any man should wear such drawers, unless he were sunk in the most abject poverty. (I, myself, in the matter of underwear, was elegantly attired; I wore silk BVDs; but I did not sleep in them, I had pajamas.) Really, the spectacle that Sherwood presented was fantastic (318).

But Dell said nothing to Anderson; instead, reacting as a writer should, he wrote a story "in which a Western author stalked about a Greenwich Village apartment in patched and baggy drawers" (318); it was circulated in the Village and repeated, with Anderson's name attached to it. When Anderson returned to New York he heard about the story and demanded to read it, but to him it wasn't funny; reproachingly, Anderson told him, "Floyd, if you had been thinking about my soul, you never would have noticed those drawers." But Dell was not convinced; "Soul or no soul, how could anyone help noticing those drawers" (319).

Anderson further explained then that the underwear was a mark of his liberation. As a boy his mother had repeatedly warned him to wear good, clean underwear when he was away so that he would appear respectable in case of a train wreck or

other calamity. So Anderson as an adult reserved his oldest, most patched underwear for his journeys, he explained in mumbling terms to Dell. It is easy to share Dell's skepticism.

Dell's other anecdote also concerns dress, but it is more pointed, suggesting the source of the later estrangement between the two. In Chicago, Dell, as aesthete, wore a high collar and black stock like a clergyman's, together with a walking stick and gloves; in New York, at work at the *Masses* he wore an expensive but proletarian-looking blue flannel shirt (presumable over the silk BVDs). When Sherwood came to New York he was attired as the aesthete; he was surprised that Dell was not. Dell concludes his description of the incident with what is his point of the essay:

... I had given up the role of aesthete and he had taken it on. He was now holding high the banner of the ideal. . . . Moreover, it was proper that a literary infant should don the togs of his literary papa, preparatory to throwing the old gentleman downstairs. I did not wait to be thrown downstairs; I could see it coming and I got out, leaving Sherwood in undisputed occupancy of the Ivory tower (320).

But the break was not merely that of a hasty and judicious retreat; it was, as Dell saw it, a new relationship for Anderson that replaced the old:

By this time he was being published in the *Seven Arts* magazine and was an honored member of the *Seven Arts* circle, who were aesthetes of high calibre. Compared to them, I as an aesthete had been only a piker. . . . I didn't have to worry about Sherwood's literary career, nor give him advice, nor read every line he wrote, nor minister with the balm of praise to his suffering soul, so easily hurt by a harsh word. Someone else was looking after Sherwood. And, oh, how glad I was to be free (320).

This was one of many such literary relations that ended badly between Sherwood Anderson and other, usually younger, writers, among them Hemingway, Faulkner, and Thomas Wolfe, each of whom Anderson had earlier befriended and influenced; most of the relationships, and the breakups, particularly those with Hemingway and Faulkner, have been simply if not simplistically explained by his biographers. But in this case, Anderson remembered things differently, more than twenty years later. In 1938 he wrote to a young writer, George Fraytag, that:

... When I wrote my Winesburg stories ... such critics as Mr. Floyd Dell ... having read them, declared they were not stories. They were merely, it seemed, sketches. They were too vague, too groping. ...

There was a time when Mr. Dell was, in a way, my literary father. He ... had been [one of] the first critics to praise some of my earlier work. He was generous and warm. He ... was instrumental in getting my first book published. When he saw the Winesburg stories, he, however, condemned them heartily. ... He advised me to throw the Winesburg stories away. They had no form. They were not stories. A story, he said, must be sharply definite. There must be a beginning and an end. I remember very clearly our conversation. "If you plan to go somewhere on a train and start for the station, but loiter along the way, so that the train comes into the station, stops to discharge and take on passengers, and then goes on its way, and you miss it, don't blame the locomotive engineer," I said. I daresay it was an arrogant saying, but arrogance is also needed (*Letters*, 404-405).

It is almost impossible to avoid observing at this point that the father-son analogy had run its course, that the son, aesthete or not, had outgrown the father, proletarian or not, however patched or silken the underwear either wore.

The third younger writer with whom Sherwood became close during his earlier Chicago years, with whom he began his only attempt at collaboration, and with whom he also ultimately broke was Ben Hecht, twenty in 1913, a recent arrival from Racine, Wisconsin. Hecht has also left the most complete record of their relationship in two works. The first was in a sympathetic but sharp portrait as Warren Lockwood, an older, reasonably successful novelist in Hecht's first, very autobiographical novel, *Erik Dorn* (1921), a portrait which has been blamed for the break between them that began at about that time. The second was a lengthy memoir in his autobiography, *A Child of the Century*, published in 1954.

The section in the novel describes a wild (for the time) night on the town as two writers, one older and established, and the younger, about to begin a stint as a foreign correspondent for a Chicago paper, an as yet unpublished novelist. The two drink at a number of bars, and finally, in a low dive, the younger goes off with a woman. Later, the older writer finds him, his clothes torn and bloody, and he tells the older writer that "I've had a look at

hell" (239). The older writer laughs, they go their separate ways, the younger writer later tells his lover that "That damned Warren Lockwood led me astray" (240).

The incident, of little importance in the novel, is of little more importance in the friendship between Dell and Anderson, and the joke, if there is one, is on Hecht rather than Anderson. They were about to go in different directions; Anderson to New York and New Orleans and ultimately to the hills of Northwest Virginia, and Dell to post-war Germany as a correspondent, and then back to Chicago to continue his varied career as novelist, journalist, playwright, and screen writer. However, the incident was likely accurately presented, and they were not to meet again until just days before Anderson's death. But the five-year friendship between the two is described at length and interpreted fairly and, I suspect, accurately, in *A Child of the Century*. The story is dramatically told, but in the telling Hecht has, I suspect, taken some literary license with dates and sequence.

"It was a spring night in 1913. I walked north in Clark Street heading for a Cass Street rooming house" (221), Hecht begins his account of his meeting with Anderson at a party hosted by an advertising man whom Dell did not know for the young people whom Anderson later called "We Little Children of the Arts" (White, 317). Maxwell Bodenheim, Marjory Currey, Harriet Monroe, and others whom he knew were there. In a candle-lit corner sat the quiet host. Hecht went on:

The candles continued to light up our host, and eventually the guests became silent and sat looking at him as if he were an actor on a stage. His rugged-looking face with its wide mouth and glowing black eyes smiled at the shadowed figures in his room. Under its wing of flat black hair, it looked like an Italian face, the kind you saw behind barber chairs. It was odd that such a face should be called Sherwood Anderson.

Our host addressed us and I became aware that this rugged-seeming man was a gentle, almost womanish fellow. He changed as he spoke from a barber into a swami. One hand reached out and waved rhythmically at us, in a gentle, patronizing fashion. His voice caressed us and I heard a fine writer speak for the first time.

"I was going to read you a book I've written called *Windy McPherson's Son*," he said, "but it's a very long manuscript and

kind of heavy to hold. So I'll read you some stories I've written about a town called Winesburg, Ohio. They're not really stories. They're just people."

We waited silently as our host moved a candle nearer his pen-written paper.

"Down the street ran George Hadley . . ." Sherwood Anderson began reading (224-225).

The opening line ascribed to Anderson may be Hecht's own creation, as certainly is the time sequence. Although Anderson had written many of the Winesburg stories by the Fall of 1916 and had by then published "Hands" in *Masses* (March 1916), "The Philosopher" (later called "Paper Pills" in *Winesburg, Ohio*) in *The Little Review* (June-July 1916), and others were to appear in the next two years, not only had Anderson not yet written any of the Winesburg stories in 1913, but there is no evidence to suggest that he conceived of such a series or, indeed, such a literary place. But the anecdote, if not literally true, is almost certainly metaphorically true, and Hecht goes on to recount his growing friendship with "My Friend Swatty," a name by which Anderson had been known in Clyde, Ohio, as a boy and which had been introduced to the Chicago group by his boyhood friend Clifton Paden, later John Emerson, the actor and founder of Actor's Equity. Again, Hecht mixes fact and fancy, the latter both Anderson's and his own:

I also learned that he had never been to any school, but that his wife, Cornelia (abandoned in Ohio) had taught him spelling and punctuation after their marriage. She had induced him to read a few books, over which they had quarreled violently because she liked them and he did not. He had left her because he considered reading a dangerous thing and books a corrupting power, and he had read no books since, nor was he ever going to (226).

Hecht's following parenthetical remark is unnecessary but revealing:

Of these and a hundred other tales Sherwood told about himself, I believed almost nothing. But whether they were lies or truths made no difference. The man who told them was full of a compelling salesmanship. I always sat fascinated.

I stopped thinking of him as a barber or swami. He became a gypsy full of larceny and guitar music. . . . (226)

Hecht recounts their growing friendship, Anderson's initial successes, and their one attempt at collaboration on a play about Benvenuto Cellini. While Anderson regretted spending his days in "the writing of advertisements for somebody's canned tomatoes" (*Letters*, 45), Hecht recounted that the first act was "a hundred and twenty pages long instead of the customary fifty, and Sherwood insisted on adding more speeches to it" (227). Finally, he "concluded that Sherwood did not want to write a play. He wanted to walk up and down his room reciting our lines, and pretending he was Cellini" (227).

Hecht comments on Anderson's work: he was "one the finest poets of our time" (231); "He was incapable of realism . . . All he wrote was invention . . ." "But behind all this fantasy that masqueraded a small-town realism and great psychological sex lore was always the strumming of Swatty's gypsy guitar . . ."; "Unlike most of his imitators or disciples, of whom Ernest Hemingway was the best, he did not hitch his poetry to ten-twenty-thirty melodrama . . . Unlike Hemingway *et al.*, he did not grandly play the poet while busily wooing the box office . . ." (232).

Hecht concludes with their falling out, with twenty years of silence, with the last casual—and touching—meeting with "my friend Swatty, unchanged from that first night in Cass Street" (231) in *Twenty-One* in New York in February, 1941. Sherwood would sail for South America in the morning, and in just over a week he would be dead.

Unlike Hecht's memories of Sherwood, recounted as Hecht himself was nearing the end of his own literary career, Harry Hansen and Burton Rascoe remember Anderson in Chicago in moments that exude immediacy, although, like Hecht, they focus, too, on Anderson the man and the story-teller rather than Anderson, the literary figure. In Harry Hansen's *Midwest Portraits* (1923), an exercise in literary and personal nostalgia for a time, a movement, and a group that had already passed into literary history, Anderson is recreated as an habitue of Schlogel's, the tavern on Wells street which had become the gathering place of the liberated. Hansen recreates the gloom of the room, out of which came voices:

Ben Hecht is speaking, speaking as he writes, always with a ready flow of words, with energy and forcefulness. Patterns. Buildings. Walls. Ben stops speaking because one must eat. . . .

"But, Ben," reiterates the low insistent voice, "have you any new scheme today for making a million dollars?" There follows a low, delighted chuckle. The speaker has launched his query for his own amusement. The spell is broken.

That is Sherwood Anderson. He leans forward and smiles across the table. His eyes are big and gentle and there is always a sort of friendly look about them. His hands are clumsy and soft but active; you get the feeling that he must hold a pen clumsily, that he must pound a typewriter mercilessly. He is the only man of whom one can say that he speaks caressingly. He rarely argues. He never expounds. He merely chuckles a bit to himself, tells a story when he has been prodded long enough, preferably an anecdote about somebody he knows. He and Ben Hecht are old friends. . . . For years Ben predicted a big writing career for Sherwood Anderson. For years Sherwood Anderson looked with kindly eyes on Ben's ripening powers. . . .

Out of the limbo come faces—faces . . . (6-7).

In later sections of the book Hansen examines in detail the people behind those faces in the tavern's gloom: Carl Sandburg, Harriet Monroe, Ben Hecht, and, of course, Anderson, whom he describes as a "dreamer, philosopher, corn-fed mystic, a man who gathered into himself all the torment of life, who suffered, to some extent voluntarily, all its pangs and ecstasies . . ." (111), incorporating in his description the term ("corn-fed mystic") that came in later years to be most frequently and sometimes, by Eastern critics, derogatorily associated with Anderson. But Hansen meant no denigration; he insisted that "Sherwood Anderson had come to grips with life . . . he feels that nothing under the arching skies is too low, too inconspicuous, too uninteresting, for him to pass it by . . ." (116-117). Hansen retraces Anderson's career to the publication of *Many Marriages* (1923), and he concludes,

Sherwood Anderson is a naive product of our soil who owes little to our deeply-rooted Anglo-Saxon culture, nor derives from "immigrant sources," or more recognized continental influences. In spite of that he more nearly approaches the homely Saxon speech than many carefully trained writers, and often invests it with a deep spiritual significance that gives new power to the plain, belabored words. He is a mystic and a dreamer, a groper after truth, deluded at times by his childlike faith in his own dreams and imaginings, and yet, like a child, a little nearer truth by reason of his dreams (178-179).

Like Hansen, Hecht, Margaret Anderson, and so many others, Burton Rascoe had left Chicago and its Renaissance behind him by the early twenties, and in *Before I Forget*, the first of his two-volume autobiography, published in 1937, he, too, looks back at the experience, the place, and the people of his literary youth and his literary editorship of the *Chicago Tribune*. In a quoted diary entry for May 20, 1917, overshadowed by the omnipresence of the European war now an American war, he recreated the events of that evening.

Last night Sherwood Anderson and Mrs. Anderson, Lewis Galantiere and Elaine Edel and Imogen Frizell were here for dinner. We ate by candlelight. Sherwood was in dinner dress—repaying, I suppose, the compliment of my first dinner at the home of Mrs. Anderson in Division Street. Sherwood and Mrs. Anderson live in separate apartments, he several blocks away in Cass Street. He comes to see her in the evenings, has dinner at her house and altogether they maintain a unique relationship. . . . He is a man with a marvelous softness in his voice, kindly, contemplative eyes, an intense emotional capacity and a calm manner.

After dinner Sherwood, Galantiere, and I soon were involved in a three-sided argument. . . .

Sherwood told me the first impression he had of me was that I was of an isolated, poetic temperament, austere and self-satisfied. . . . How he got such so absurd an impression he does not know . . . I, on the other hand, know that two things were responsible for that impression: Sherwood's vanity and my own inability to praise anyone to his face. . . .

During the argument Sherwood said I intellectualized life too much . . . , that I did not "lie fallow" enough. "My whole philosophy of life is made up," he said, "of the contention that two and two do not make four, that the mathematician's idea of life is wrong. You believe two and two make four and act upon that principle."

. . . Sherwood left an impression on me and I hope that I did on him, because that is the only value of such arguments. He has a beautiful idealism, a great depth of poetic feeling; he is more religious than I have been, even though he has never been to church. He said, in fact, that he believed he was an old-time Christian, that "Christ was righter than any man I know of." "What we need in this country is more sorrow, more prayer, more reliance upon something outside ourselves," he contended (344-345).

Rascoe's description of the evening is appended with a remark reflective of the world beyond: "Well, we shall get it in the war," is his reply to Anderson's comment.

Rascoe ends *Before I Forget* with an appendix, including some of his columns from the *Tribune* called "Unconventional Portraits." In them he talked about Chicago writers in personal as well as literary terms. Of Anderson, he wrote,

I have never known a man who was worth his salt who was not in some way vain, puffed up, proud. There are vanities and vanities, and the sagacious mind will not resent the one and be taken in by the other.

Sherwood Anderson has the most gorgeous vanity of any writer I have ever seen. It is gorgeous because on the surface he is the least vain of men. On the surface he displays a charming modesty and a sweet humility, a companionable deference and a willingness to learn.

Many are taken in by this . . . (427-428).

Again, Rascoe writes:

He has, however, another more expansive side of his nature. He is one of the finest yarn spinners I have ever heard. His story of "Mama Geighen" is an epic now famous in all the circles in which Anderson has moved . . . (433). He loves to tell these stories, and given the right sort of receptive audience, one not easily shocked or embarrassed, and he is one of the most delightful of entertainers (434).

When *Before I Forget* was published, Rascoe had been gone from Chicago for seventeen years, having taken time off to write and then followed the others—Dell in 1915, Margaret Anderson in 1916—to the East and beyond. Sherwood Anderson's ties with Chicago were increasingly loose, and he followed shortly, by 1921, East and then South, and then briefly to Europe and again to the South, in each of which he encountered other young writers who were to remember him. With the departure of Hecht in 1924 and Hansen, alone with his memories, the last to leave in 1926, the Chicago Renaissance was a literary memory, more than a footnote, less than a movement. And there, ensconced in literary history as well as etched in the memories of those who knew him, is Sherwood Anderson, chronologically middle-aged, drawn in terms that remain as young as yesterday.

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THE POLITICS OF PIETY: GAMESMANSHIP IN THE FICTION OF J. F. POWERS

MARCIA NOE

Growing up Catholic in the predominantly Protestant Illinois towns of Jacksonville, Rockford, and Quincy in the twenties and thirties was indeed a seminal experience for J. F. Powers; most of the works of fiction he has created during his forty-seven year writing career have centered on Roman Catholic clergy and religion in the Midwest. In his first novel, *Morte D'Urban*, he describes this experience:

Harvey Roche (later Father Urban) was born in that part of Illinois which more and more identifies itself with Abraham Lincoln but has its taproot in the South. If you were a Catholic boy like Harvey Roche, you felt that it was their country, handed down to them by the Pilgrims, George Washington, and others, and that they were taking a certain risk in letting you live in it (75).

The fact that Powers was educated in the Midwest and later lived and taught in Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin during much of his adult life is reflected in his choice of rural Minnesota as the setting for his two novels. In these books, Powers can be seen as a sort of Catholic Garrison Keillor, satirizing the foibles of Midwestern parish and diocesan life. The ambiance of these works is unmistakably Midwestern; it is significant that in 1968, *Morte D'Urban* won not only the National Book Award, but also the Thermod Monsen Award for the best book of the year by a Midwesterner.

From the first time I taught "The Valiant Woman" in my modern fiction class at Black Hawk College in 1971 until the moment in 1988 when I opened with great anticipatory pleasure Powers' second novel, *Wheat That Springeth Green*, I have taken

a special joy in reading and teaching his works of fiction. Part of the attraction they hold for me lies in the experiences I share with the author as a Midwesterner who was raised as a Catholic, in the memories they evoke of my Catholic education in Rock Island, Illinois, a town not very far from Quincy, where Powers was taught by the Franciscan fathers at Quincy Academy.

Given my background, it is not surprising that the fictive world of J. F. Powers is one that I enjoy visiting. It is a world where the cop on the beat stops traffic so that Monsignor, pulling away from the curb in his black Cadillac, golf clubs ensconced in the back, can travel unimpeded as he goes about his priestly business. It is a world where clergymen fall out of the pews from poker fatigue at the annual diocesan retreat, where teaching sisters struggle to piece together gas station road maps because the pastor is too miserly to buy them a new map of the United States for their classroom and where termagant housekeepers tyrannize pusillanimous pastors and dominate rectory and parish life.

There is more humor in this fictive world than in the world of Catholic life that I remember from my childhood, for Powers, through gentle satire, focuses on the discrepancy between the Church's lofty spiritual ideals and the temporal realities with which it must contend, paying special attention to the power relationships that govern his characters' interactions.

Power is a significant concept in the stories and novels of this writer, for many of them center on two individuals whose positions in the Catholic hierarchy are those of superior and subordinate. Furthermore, many of the stories' structure is that of a game, in the sense that Eric Berne uses this term in *Games People Play*. Berne's theory of transactional analysis posits three ego states active in the human personality from which come transactions, the units of our interaction with others. These three ego states are called the Child, the Adult, and the Parent. The Child ego state is that part of our personality that has survived from our own childhoods. The Adult is the healthy, reality-testing, data-evaluating aspect of our personality, and the Parent is the voice of our own parents that we still carry around with us.

Healthy transactions take place between psychological equals: Child-Child or Adult-Adult, for example. Unhealthy transactions, or games, take place when more than two ego states are involved.

Thus, a transaction between a salesman and a housewife may appear to be taking place between two Adults, when in fact, his statement to her that she should buy a particular product because she can't afford a better model appeals to her Child and makes her want to buy the more expensive model just to show that she *can* afford it.

The salesman described above is playing games with his customer, just as many of Powers' characters are playing games with each other. Berne defines a game as "an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome" (*Games People Play*, 48). Games have four main characteristics: 1. one or more of the players is unconscious that a game is being played; 2. games are dishonest and manipulative because the players' motives are concealed; 3. the game has a dramatic quality; 4. there is a payoff involved for at least one of the players.

One of the most common games, often played at parties, is Why Don't You—Yes But. Here the agent describes a problem she is trying to deal with and the other participants in the conversation offer solutions, all of which she rejects:

AGENT: My son Johnny is failing in school and I don't know what to do.

BLACK: Why don't you get him a tutor?

AGENT: Yes, but we can't afford that.

RED: Why don't you try to help him after school?

AGENT: Yes, but I don't have time.

GREEN: Why don't you enroll him in summer school?

AGENT: Yes, but then he wouldn't have time for Little League.

This game can go on indefinitely, for while the agent is ostensibly seeking a solution to her problem, what she really wants to do is reject solutions. On the surface, the conversation is one among Adults; in transactional terms, the agent's Child is responding to the participants' Parents. There could be any number of payoffs involved here. The agent's stubborn Child could be showing that she cannot be dictated to, for example. In *Games People Play* Berne includes a thesaurus of games played

in situations such as marriage (If It Weren't For You), at parties (Rapo), in consulting rooms (I'm Only Trying To Help You).

One of Powers' early stories, "The Lord's Day," is informed by the games that the two main characters are playing. The protagonist, a mother superior, is playing Kick Me. She and the other sisters count the Sunday collection each week while the parish priests take the afternoon off. By submitting to this and other indignities, she reasons, she is cooperating with the pastor and thus ensuring his future good will and cooperation. Actually, she is only setting herself up for further humiliation. Cowed by the pastor, the sisters make the best of their lot by playing a game; as they count the collection, they choose up teams, pretending to be the Cubs and the White Sox and race to see which side finishes first.

The pastor, meanwhile, is playing a game called Now I've Got You, You Son of a Bitch. The story opens with the pastor gleefully attacking three mulberry trees that provide the schoolyard's only shade on the pretext that they harbor bees. Although the mother superior pleads with him to save the trees, he cuts down the three big ones, leaving the small one to show he is a reasonable person.

When the sisters have finished counting the collection, the mother superior determines that one good turn deserves another, so she asks the pastor to look at their malfunctioning stove, hoping he will authorize her to replace it. This request gives the pastor a clear shot in his game of Now I've Got You, You Son of a Bitch. How dare Sister make a demand on the parish's meager financial resources! Fortified by this injustice, Father can now strike back. After examining the stove, he tells the mother superior that it isn't working because the small mulberry tree is blocking its draft. The tree will have to come down, he informs her, if her stove is ever to work properly. The payoff in these games comes as both protagonist and antagonist get what they want: the mother superior gets kicked once again, and the pastor gets rid of all the mulberry trees.

In Powers' most famous short story, "The Valiant Woman," games are being played once again; moreover, the story focuses on a game of honeymoon bridge played by the protagonist, Father Firman, who is anything but a "firm man" and Mrs. Stoner, his intrusive and domineering housekeeper. In this story,

Powers uses the technique of gender role reversal to achieve a comic effect. The female character, a Catholic laywoman who theoretically would reside near the bottom of the pyramid that forms the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, is the real power in the rectory while the principal male character, a Catholic priest, is meek and accommodating, seeking to rationalize Mrs. Stoner's many transgressions:

She overcharged on rosaries and prayerbooks, but that was for the sake of the poor. She censored the pamphlet rack, but that was to prevent scandal. She pried into the baptismal and matrimonial records, but there was no other way if Father was out, and in this way she had once uncovered a bastard and flushed him out of the rectory, but that was the perverted decency of the times. She held her nose over bad marriages in the presence of the victims, but that was her sorrow and came from having her husband buried in a mine (123).

Mrs. Stoner is no less reticent when it comes to Father Firman's personal life. She nags him to cut his toenails so she won't have to darn his socks, hides his books, keeps him from smoking, and chases away visiting priests with her boring conversation so that she and Father Firman can begin their nightly game of honeymoon bridge.

Mrs. Stoner's day is not complete until she skunks Father Firman at the honeymoon bridge, for she is playing the game of Surrogate Wife, and her payoff comes each time he suffers a defeat at her hands or knuckles under to her henpecking authority. Father Firman realizes that they have been playing this game at the climax of the story: "God! God save us! Had she got her wires crossed and mistaken him all these years for *that? That!* Suffering God! No. That was going too far. That was getting morbid. No. He must not think of that again, ever. No" (125).

But he does think of that again. As he recalls Father Nulty humming "Wedding Bells Are Breaking Up That Old Gang of Mine," as he remembers the mail that had come to the rectory addressed to the Reverend and Mrs. Stoner, he realizes that he has been a victim of Mrs. Stoner's Surrogate Wife game for a number of years. What is worse, he sees no way out, for Mrs. Stoner is unattractive enough to be able to function as rectory housekeeper without giving scandal.

The final indignity occurs when, as he prepares to retire for the night, he lunges for a mosquito and misses, knocking down the statue of St. Joseph. When Mrs. Stoner investigates this noise, he replies, "Mosquitoes, damn it! And only the female bites!" Mrs. Stoner, as usual, has the last word: "Shame on you, Father. She needs the blood for her eggs" (126).

In another early story, "A Losing Game," the title, the extended metaphor of the card game, and the structure of the story point up the fact that the relationship between the two main characters, a tactiturn and miserly pastor and his timid but wily assistant, consists of a power struggle that takes the form of a game.

The story focuses Father Fabre's efforts to get a typing table for his room in the rectory. The pastor, a pack rat, is reluctant to give his assistant anything from the museum-like storeroom in the basement. Father Fabre's initial request is met with a non-committal, "See what I can do" (96). Powers then employs the game metaphor for the first time: "The pastor started to close the door, which was according to the rules of their little game, but Father Fabre didn't budge, which was not according to the rules" (97).

Father Fabre goes on the offensive—a new tactic for him—by offering to take a look at the table himself if the pastor will give him the combination to the storeroom lock. He gains a point when the pastor, rather than give up this secret, says he'll accompany his assistant to the storeroom. The pastor evens the score, however, by returning to his room on the pretext of getting his Roman collar; once there, he simply remains in this stronghold with the door shut. When Father Fabre realizes he does not intend to come out, he concedes that hand to his superior. "Going downstairs, he told himself that though he had lost, he had extended the pastor as never before, and would get the best of him yet" (97).

Trying another strategy, Father Fabre lets the janitor think he is going to force the lock. Soon he is joined at the storeroom door by the pastor: "The pastor voiced no complaint—and why should he? He'd lost a trick, but Father Fabre had taken it honorably, according to the rules, in a manner worthy of the pastor himself" (97).

Having won Hand Two, Father Fabre precedes the pastor into the storeroom. They fight their way through decades of

accumulated junk to the table in question. To win the next hand, and the game, Father Fabre realizes he must adopt the tactic of not appearing to want the table too badly. "This might do," Father Fabre said grudgingly, careful not to betray a real desire" (101). However, even this statement is too strong, so the pastor immediately begins a game of Why Don't You—Yes But as he and his assistant meander through the storeroom, examining and rejecting inappropriate pieces of furniture.

Although the game seems to have reached an impasse, the pastor puts the contest away when he fires a .22 rifle he has found among the clutter, aiming at a rat under a pile of debris but hitting Father Fabre in the leg when the bullet ricochets off an old tire. Father Fabre, never one to forfeit the game, makes a final move before leaving for the hospital: "How about this?" he said, sounding as if he hadn't asked about the maple table before. It was a daring maneuver, but he was giving the pastor a chance to reverse himself without losing face, to redeem himself . . ." (104).

The pastor counters by offering his assistant a decrepit old easy chair, but Father Fabre considers it bad strategy to reject it outright.

"It's too good," Father Fabre said, making the most of his opportunity. If I ever sat down in a chair like that I might never get up again. No it's not for me" (104).

Father Fabre drives himself to the hospital in a defeated mood:

He was losing every trick. Earlier he had imagined the pastor driving him to the hospital, and the scene when they arrived—how it would be when the pastor's indifference to his curate's leg became apparent to the doctors and nurses, causing their hearts to harden against him. But all this the pastor had doubtless foreseen, and that was why he wasn't going along. The man was afraid of public opinion (105).

When Father Fabre returns from the hospital, he finds that once again, he has used the wrong strategy. His ploy of appealing to his pastor's obsession with self-denial by indicating that the chair was too luxurious has backfired. Chastened at last, the pastor has had the old chair brought to Father Fabre's room in an uncharacteristic penitential gesture.

Ruefully he recalled his false praise of the chair. How it had cost him! For the pastor had taken him at his word. After the shooting incident, the pastor must have been in no mood to give Father Fabre a table in which he seemed only half interested. Nothing would do then but that the wounded curate be compensated with the object of his only enthusiasm in the basement (106).

Realizing that he has misplayed his hand and, in so doing, has lost the maple table, Father Fabre's final thought is, "Oh, it was a losing game" (106).

In this story, the game played by the pastor and his assistant corresponds to the formula Berne developed in his later writings when modifying his game theory: $C + G = R > S > X > P$ (*What Do You Say After You Say Hello?* 23). A game, therefore, involves a con (C) during which the agent hooks into a weakness or gimmick (G) in the respondent (R). In "A Losing Game" the pastor, who is the agent, cons Father Fabre, the respondent, into believing there is a chance he will be able to take a typing table from the storeroom. Once actually in the storeroom, he pulls a switch (S) by refusing to allow Father Fabre to take the table he wants, offering him instead various pieces of furniture that he doesn't want. He then initiates the cross-up (X) by shooting at a rat and hitting Father Fabre in the leg instead. Both players collect their payoffs (P) when the pastor is once again able to thwart Father Fabre, and Father Fabre, losing yet again, can feel sorry for himself and ask Why Does This Always Happen to Me?

Father Urban Roche, the point-of-view character in Powers' first novel, *Morte D'Urban*, sees himself as a game player *par excellence*. A fundraiser, itinerant preacher and goodwill ambassador for the Order of St. Clement, traveling out of its Chicago headquarters, he attempts to manipulate wealthy laypeople, civic groups to whom he is invited to speak, congregations where he is the visiting preacher, and even his own peers and superiors within the Order. All of these efforts, in his view, are made for the greater good and glory of his Order, only incidentally fulfilling any personal ambitions. However, the reader can see that as Father Urban travels throughout the Midwest, preaching missions and retreats and courting prospective benefactors, he becomes a legend in his own mind.

Father Urban is brought up short when he learns he has been taken out of circulation and transferred to a former county poorhouse in rural Minnesota, which the Clementines are remodeling to use as a retreat house. Although he is unable to understand why the Provincial would send the Order's best preacher out to paint walls and sand floors in Duesterhaus, Minnesota, he is faithful to his vow of obedience. However, the game player in him soon surfaces when he is asked to fill in for a soon-to-be-vacationing pastor and his superior at the retreat house, Father Wilfrid, refuses permission.

Father Urban works a con by hooking into Father Wilfrid's weakness—an obsession with frugality. He turns up the heat in his room during the day and runs an electric heater at night. He pulls a switch to cross up Father Wilfrid by running so many appliances in his room that he blows a fuse, and then brings in an electrician who completely rewires his room. His payoff comes when Father Wilfrid changes his mind and sends him into town to substitute for the vacationing pastor.

Once back in his element, Father Urban is up to his old tricks: holding court after a successful mission before an admiring group of priests, nurturing relationships with the laity, furthering the interests of the Order wherever he goes. His crowning achievement is persuading the wealthy Billy Cosgrove to purchase an acreage adjoining the Order's property for a golf course to attract a better class of retreatants.

The new golf course provides the setting for the climax of the novel; ironically, it is a *game* of golf that Father Urban is winning that helps to change him from a game-playing winner into a spiritually regenerated man. Father Urban is knocked unconscious by the bishop's ball, and while recuperating, he is faced with three situations where he is required to either appease a lay benefactor by acquiescing in that person's immoral behavior or take a stand against that behavior and risk alienating the person.

In each situation, Father Urban makes the right moral choice and thus undergoes a spiritual rebirth. The new Father Urban is then elected Provincial of the Order, ironically on the basis of his past achievements. The death of Urban is accomplished, fulfilling the promise of the novel's title, as the slick game player becomes a wise, unworldly, almost contemplative priest, cleansed of pride and ambition. The change Father Urban experiences

calls to mind Jesus' words: "Whosoever shall seek to save his life must lose it."

In 1988 J. F. Powers' second novel, *Wheat That Springeth Green*, was published. There are several similarities between this novel and *Morte D'Urban*. As in his first novel, Powers' central character is a priest in rural Minnesota, and as with Father Urban, we follow the course of Father Joe Hackett's spiritual growth throughout the book. We see Joe as a child, an adolescent, a seminarian, an assistant pastor, a diocesan bureaucrat, and, finally, a pastor.

Powers' satiric hand is still at work, but it has become more deft over the years, now sketching amusing pictures of the changes the Church has experienced since Vatican II: newly ordained priests clad in T-shirts and jeans, guitar masses, the "country club" system of assessing parishioners one lump sum paid annually. And, like many of J. F. Powers' other works, game-playing is the energizing principle of the narrative. Games are everywhere in the novel: Joe watches the Minnesota Twins on TV, plays catch with his assistant, Bill, in the rectory back yard, and uses the thousand dollars he wins in a poker game at the diocesan retreat to place a bet that Eugene McCarthy will be nominated for President.

Joe Hackett is nowhere near as accomplished a game player as Father Urban, yet games play a significant role in his interactions with others. On the day before his first Mass, his pastor, "Dollar" Bill Stock, informs him that he will be expected to take up a special collection for the parish after the regular collection. Joe feels this is exploitative as well as demeaning and questions the practice, but the pastor is adamant. Joe then proposes that he give the parish the \$500 his parents had given him toward a new car, thus hooking into the pastor's weakness for money. Instead of showing embarrassment, the pastor replies that he will accept any offering made without qualifications.

The next day Joe hands Father Stock an envelope with \$500 in it, but finds he is still expected to take up the special collection, so he pulls a switch. At the crucial moment, he runs down the aisle with his hand over his mouth and takes refuge in the restroom. After the pastor follows him into the restroom to chastise him, Joe learns the first of many lessons in dealing with the unpleasant reality a priest must handle: this reality often

contrasts sharply with the noble visions of Holy Orders with which he left the seminary. Capitulating, he takes up the collection at the second Mass and later finds the pastor has taken his \$500.

Another humorous circumstance that Joe deals with through game playing occurs when, as a pastor, he learns he is getting an assistant. Since the chancellor did not tell him the assistant's name, and Joe does not want to admit to anyone that he doesn't have this information, he resorts to all sorts of subterfuges to get it. He calls the diocesan newspaper (which doesn't know), the seminary (where everyone is on vacation), and even questions the assistant himself when he arrives in a dialogue that is a masterpiece of indirection and circumlocution. After the assistant has been there nearly a week and Joe still doesn't know his name, he calls the license division of the highway department, which calls back in Joe's absence and gives the information to the assistant himself.

Joe Hackett and Father Urban are both motivated by pride to play games; Father Urban feeds his ego by manipulating others and Joe conceals his ignorance from people he regards as his inferiors. But just as Father Urban changes and grows during the course of Powers' first novel, so Joe Hackett undergoes a process of growth as well. We can take Joe's moral measure most effectively by reflecting on a scene early in the novel where we see him as a fleet young runner who dreams of taking first honors in a footrace at the church social.

A series of complicated incidents causes Joe to miss the hundred-yard dash he had dreamed of winning; he is entered instead in the less glamorous sack race, which he loses when he falls near the finish line after taking an early lead. Later, as a pastor, he tells his assistant that the priesthood is not a hundred-yard dash or a mile run but a sack race (238). In Joe's changed vision of the priesthood, we can see the extent of his spiritual growth. He has become less the arrogant cleric seeking sanctity and more the seasoned, empathetic pastor, ready to deal with everyday problems. At the end of the novel, Joe is transferred from his suburban parish to a slum parish downtown. Looking at the priest he has become, the reader feels certain that he will be equal to this challenge.

Critics of this essay could easily argue that analyzing game-playing in Powers' fiction is like shooting fish in a barrel, since

this phenomenon is so prevalent in Powers' work. They could also argue that games are inevitable within the Catholic Church because its hierarchical structure, almost by definition, dictates Parent-Child and Child-Parent transactions among its members. A cynic might add that games analysis is quite superfluous in an institution such as the Church, where sadists and masochists have been happily meeting each other's needs for centuries. Granting these points, I still believe that an examination of game-playing in Powers' fiction can be useful in illuminating the structure of some of his stories and in measuring the moral growth of some of his characters.

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EARLY AMERICAN LITERARY REALISM III: PATTERNS OF ANOMALY

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Early Midwestern practitioners of literary realism usually suffer by comparison to their more polished successors. In spite of the condescension usually evoked by the names of Eggleston, Howe, Kirkland, Locke, and others, though, their fiction holds its own as realism better than most literary historians seem willing to admit. A voice in the wilderness, Lars Ahnebrink, in *The Beginning of Naturalism in American Fiction*, labels Eggleston, Howe, and Kirkland as "realists" and suggests that some of their work (*The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, *The Story of A Country Town*, and *Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County*), possesses "lasting merit and significance" in spite of their deficiencies. Speaking of *The Circuit Rider*, Carl Van Doren calls Eggleston "the earliest American realist to leave behind him a settled classic, a folkbook of its neighborhood." Comparing Locke's *The Demagogue* and *A Paper City* favorably to Twain's *The Gilded Age*, Joseph Jones describes them as "hewn out with a certain rugged honesty that renders them reliable" while John M. Harrison, Locke's biographer, identifies them as "part of the literary 'revolt from the village' associated with the novels of Kirkland, Frederick, Garland, and others." Calling *Zury* "the first convincing and full-length portrait of a farmer in American literature, John T. Flannagan maintains that to his contemporaries, Kirkland's "picture of early Illinois farm life was both authentic and bold." So realistic and ahead of its time was Kirkland's use of the sexual, in fact, that he had to rewrite certain portions between the first and second editions to address critical concerns about its morality. It could even be argued, perhaps, that early Midwestern realism is not so much *lacking* in realism as it is different in *kind*.

To students of early Midwestern literature, though, it seems clear that these early realists' novels are frequently undervalued or ignored. What is not always so clear are the reasons for which this happens. What is it about their narratives, apart from obvious stylistic and rhetorical techniques, that limits the quality of their realism or that precluded its late nineteenth-century development to the level of the artistic maturity of their successors? Repeated reading of even the best dozen of the Midwest's early major realistic literary fictions suggests a number of common denominators that may help answer some of the questions concerning them all.

First, Midwest regional realism simultaneously exhibits a confident pride of place that might be called "provincial patriotism" and yet sounds a defensive note that almost demands its audience redress an unspoken grievance by acknowledging the region's literary and cultural virility. While a reader would have difficulty imagining *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in any other setting but the Mississippi River basin, somehow to the Howes, Lockes, Egglestons, and Kirklands their stories are as much stories of their regions as they are of the people in them. Though no one can claim that a *Zury* or a *Story of A Country Town* lacks a crucial dimension of psychology, their fictional settings possess a disproportionately greater significance than do later realistic narratives, which tilt the balance more toward psychology of personality. The first lines of Joseph Kirkland's opening to *Zury* illustrate this overshadowing preoccupation with region: "Great are the toils and terrible the hardships that go to the building up of a frontier farm; inconceivable to those who have not done the task or watched its doing. In the prairies, nature has stored, and preserved thus far through the ages, more life-materials than she ever before amassed in the same place." These writers, in fact, sometimes come perilously close to what Howard Odum and Harry Moore describe as "sectionalism" rather than regionalism—a treatment of their regions of the Midwest or country as though they are "isolated, segregated areal divisions with potential completeness in themselves" as opposed to organic parts of a whole. Even Howe, plunging more deeply, perhaps, into psychology than most other early Midwestern realists, confines *Zury* to a geographical circumference of two or three counties. Perhaps one sign of the provincial patriot syndrome, major characters in

many of these books never travel far from home, though their creators have and acknowledge themselves to be richer for it. Only rarely does a Locke come along who intimately unites local with national issues and events (in Ohio and Washington, D.C.) in a manner that undercuts latent or overt sectionalism.

Also a double-edged sword, while the unsophisticated, natural freshness of their narratives comprises some of the striking charm of their work, the sheer inexperience of most of these early Midwestern novelists as writers of fiction represents a second limiting factor restraining the quality of their early realism. They were generally "late-bloomers" coming to novel-writing after or during careers in teaching, preaching, journalism, and business. As strikingly good as it often is, benefitting from their years of observation and maturity, what fiction they have left still represents what might be called "first fruits" rather than seasoned and polished art. It remains true of many of these authors what James Austin said of Locke: "As in so much of his other work, Locke missed the first rank of literary excellence through a want of finish and sophistication. His most earnest efforts in fiction deserve a better fate than they have yet received, but they are nevertheless hastily done with more sensitiveness to the popular reading public than to artistic merit." Admittedly "timid" about his audience's impending response to *Story of A Country Town*, in his "Preface" Howe himself sounds the note of weary discouragement at the artistic results of his efforts. These writers' careers had called or continued to call forth their primary energies and labors; their fiction careers in some cases lacked the time to develop artistic maturity, and in other cases they lacked the dedication to develop it. Writing fiction was in some cases an extension of their careers (Locke and Howe, for example) and in others it was a transition between careers (Eggleston and Kirkland). Rarely did these writers persist in consciously developing their art in subsequent work; most of the early major Midwestern realists failed to surpass their first fruits. Often the later harvest was of demonstrably lesser quality (only Eggleston's *Circuit Rider* and perhaps one of Kirkland's later fictions merits in-depth analysis for the quality of what *is* present. Had they begun earlier in life or had they continued on to develop a more consistently realistic style, some

of them could have achieved greater artistic merit in a manner similar to the growth perceptible in Twain's work.

In addition to struggling to balance regional pride with regional paranoia and to weighing results of innovative freshness against artistic inexperience, novels from these Midwestern realists suggest both nostalgic affection for their regions and yet a need to achieve a cathartic exposé. When Van Doren suggested that "It was on the frontier . . . that realism took its earliest definite stand. Perhaps some bareness in the life of the Middle West, lacking . . . the splendid golden expectations of California, discouraged romance there and encouraged that bent toward naturalism which descends unbroken from Edward Eggleston . . ." he seems to have captured the roots of a frustration that these writers could not contain. The results are some fictional figures who are lightly and lovingly drawn—the beneficiaries of collective memories of good times, dreams, and people. Other characters, particularly the caricatures of ambitious and posturing war veterans, economic interlopers, and particular villains, usually suffer melodrama's unrealistic abuse. Events of plot illustrate the same extremes of the commonly realistic and the more fantastic. Even these writers' interest in dialect, the "reams of almost unreadable dialogue, littered with apostrophes and strange misspellings" . . . that sometimes "testify to their interest in American vernacular," can incline in either direction—toward affectionate nostalgia or toward burlesque of idiosyncrasy. Eggleston, "refusing to follow the violent and yet easy road of the dime novelists . . . confined himself to a plain tale of plain men and women, choosing for his scene a backwoods district where true Hoosiers flourished at their most typical, rather than any of the more cultivated Indiana communities. His plot exists almost solely for the sake of the manners described, the backwoods sentiments and dialects, labors and amusement." A result of a story truly told of such a region will naturally be both comedy and tragedy, both nostalgia and frustration, but somehow inflated in the hands of writers inexperienced with communicating by the literary principle of subtle "indirection."

Fourthly, related to their rather transparent incarnation of nostalgia balanced with journalistic expose is evidence that these early Midwestern literary realists tend to be realists more of reflex rather than of philosophical and artistic commitment. A

certain ambivalence concerning both their material and their goals as writers seems to betray itself to their readers. When Mrs. Kirkland pointed out early in *Forest Life* the "absence of lurid incident and melodramatic plot ('No wild adventures, — no blood-curdling hazards, — no romantic incidents, — could occur within my limited and sober sphere. No new lights have appeared above my horizon'), she was defining a kind of writing to which Joseph Kirkland would also subscribe many years later." She was revealing her awareness that, as Edwin Cady remarks in *Light of Common Day*, "One major realistic tendency was to cut down super-experience by critical irony, to undercut the romancer's yen to elevate and inflate experience—to bring it down to the plane of common humanity." While to one degree or another these early realists exhibit this artistic commitment against super-experience on the cognitive level, on the emotional plane they sometimes lose control, especially in characterization and plot. They also violate realism's demand for narrative integrity by their authorial intrusion and otherwise remind readers that the author's shadow lies over his tale. Since some of what is often taken for romantic melodrama—in fact is a sort of melodrama—in many of these early realistic novels exhibits an emotional intensity typically considered incompatible with mature realism, novelists frequently and necessarily intrude in violation of the realism's dramatic method in what Cady would call a "deliberately suicidal destruction of the illusion." Certain ingredients of their narrative style—for example, their failure to be consistently anti-omniscient in point-of-view—probably spring less from deficiency in characterization than from the early realist's less sophisticated dependence upon anti-romantic irony and satire to deflate his own romantic inclinations.

What is more important, however, in understanding these early realists is that though inexperience plays its role, their artistic inconsistency of their style and the techniques they utilize in compensating for it suggest an ambivalence toward their goals as writers—apologists for regional ideals or critics of failed vision. In an incisive chapter entitled "Paradises Lost" Jay Martin touches upon some of the same concepts. "Romantically reconstructing myth or realistically destroying it—these are the two ways of regional literature. The best of the regional writers—Sidney Lanier, George Washington Cable, Hamlin Garland, Rose

Terry Cooke, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Sarah Orne Jewett—embody, in different degrees, both tendencies." Intricately interwoven with correlative issues of realism's style, these authors live in two minds.

They are compelled to dramatize the nightmare version of the daydream; they yearn to accept. . . . Generally, then, the best regional writing is intensely ironic; the regionalists are tormented by the gulf between myth and reality. Committed by their inherited training to myth-making, they are driven by their art to critical assessments of the glittering images of hope or memory foisted upon them. The terrible pressures of this tension are suggested by the fact that most of the regionalists were forced to leave the regions they wrote about, chiefly in order to relieve the daily pressure of this irony in their lives, and so concentrate it fully in their art.

Cable, Garland, Hart, and Twain all lived in New England and/or Europe. "All looked simultaneously with irony and love upon the regions from which they had driven themselves. Inveterate wanderers, alienated men, they celebrated and analyzed the particular regions to which they could never go home again." Howe, Locke, and Kirkland never did escape their regions. Alexander Cowie's description of Twain's fiction really suggests little that is significantly different from that of lesser early Midwest realists: "In general [Twain] was too explosive, too original, too impatient of restraint to submit to any rules of writing not drawn up by himself. He founded no school of fiction. He was comparatively weak in the use of traditional elements of the novel—characterization and plot." Howe, Locke, and Kirkland never abandoned the regions where they were nurtured. Eggleston alone went outside from which to write, but he soon turned to history rather than fiction. Perhaps that is part of the difference in the degree and quality of their development. Perhaps also Twain's sense of humor helped him in a manner lacking at least to Howe and Kirkland, who returned in their fiction to the romanticism they seemed to have left behind.

Jay Martin may have diagnosed most clearly a subtle but very significant difference between the writings of these early realists and the more mature realism of the 1880's. In an analysis of western regional literature after the Civil War, he notes the

passing of the Edenic vision, the myth so popular in Europe and on the Atlantic seaboard, by the mid 1870's.

They were realists because they had lost the myth whereby to be idealists, though in everything they wrote they proved how longingly they wished to reinstate a system of romance. Ordinarily these realists are presented in literary histories as consciously seeking to reform literary fashions. On the contrary, and despite their occasional protestations, these writers who are spoken of as the fathers of realism, Eggleston, Howe, Kirkland, Garland . . . were realists only because their myths had been shattered by experience. As soon as the shock of their disillusion was dissipated, they usually either reoriented their value-schemes in accordance with new systems of myth and romance, or eliminated the personal shock of repeated recognition by resorting to the objectivity of historical research and writing. . . .

They were really "idealists yearning to celebrate the myth of their region, they were forced by the real circumstances of economic poverty, moral degradation, and mental desperation in their West to become critics of myth."

Early realists, then, were often realists by default. No matter how realistic were their content and technique, they frequently endorsed realism less by virtue of commitment and more by virtue of default of idealism, an anomalous condition at best. In contrast to the more dispassionate and controlled use of irony by major realists of the 1880's, early realists often resorted to a bleak, bitter, emotionally intense, and therefore less artistic, use of irony. These early Midwestern realists exhibit what Professor Alma Payne described recently in a discussion of William Dean Howells as "a rhythm of repulsion and attraction, of the use of the geographical area as a literary quarry from which the artist obtains materials vital to his or her work, while retreating personally from the immediate physical scene." They have difficulty hiding this bifurcated view of life, as their artistic inconsistency and dependence upon irony and its techniques would suggest. Though amateurs, however, their need to give vent to their plight and their courage to attempt incarnation, in what turned out to be rather well-received fiction, what they were and were experiencing laid the foundation upon which a soundly authentic, mature realistic vision could grow.

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