MIDWESTERN MISCELLANY XIII

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edited by

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in honor of
Gwendolyn Brooks

PREFACE

Midwestern Miscellany XIII is again truly a miscellany, a collection of essays that range from literary introductions and reintroductions to bits of Midwestern biography and autobiography memorializing Midwesterners celebrated and unknown and to accounts of personal and literary discovery. The writers and works that this miscellany addresses provide, too, insight into the breadth and richness of Midwestern geography as setting and subject matter. As the essays treat works that range in time and space from nineteenth-century North-Country exploitation to twentieth-century Second-City self-discovery, they provide, too, an indication of the importance of place in the Midwestern literary memory and imagination.

Thus, it is particularly appropriate that this volume is inscribed to Gwendolyn Brooks, poet, Chicagoan, and Midwesterner. Recipient of the Society's Mark Twain Award for 1985 for distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature, she shows in her works the fusion of memory, talent, and imagination with a clear sense of place and identity that mark them as truly Midwestern, truly American.

DAVID D. ANDERSON

September, 1985

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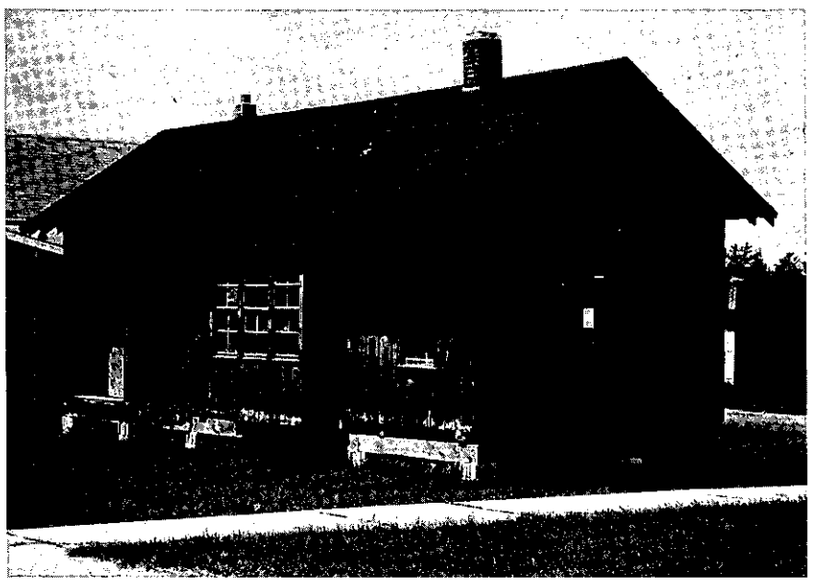
T. Kilgore Splake



OLD TRAIN STATION
Seney, Michigan

The film was fresh, camera settings correct
and still my print contained unexplained
dark shadows,
hiding the apparition
of an earlier visitor returned too late
to stalk the twin-hearted trout again, his
grasshopper bait in a glass bottle hanging
around his neck?

Last summer, after stopping at the post office of Seney, Michigan, I drove down a side street to continue my journey toward Grand Marais. At an intersection I was stunned to see an old train sitting on blocks. Almost immediately the Nick Adams stories of Ernest Hemingway came to mind. This overlooked train station in Seney was the same station where young Ernest Hemingway, later Nick Adams in the stories, stopped when he fished in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan streams. The abandoned building is a monument to the youth of Hemingway.

Research on this early chapter of Hemingway's life shows some uncertainty whether the date of his "Big Two-Hearted River" experience was 1919 or 1921. Biographer Carlos Baker described the Hemingway arrival in Seney with these words of the brakeman that shocked the young war veteran:

"Hold her up," the brakeman said. "There's a cripple and he needs time to get his stuff down."[1]

Baker identified the purpose of young Ernest's visit as a "lone hiking and fishing expedition to allow him to recuperate from the effects of his wounding in the First World War."[2] Critic Malcolm Cowley reflected that this journey appeared to be "an escape from a nightmare or from the realities that have become a nightmare."[3] If Hemingway did arrive "still badly hurt in body, mind, spirit, and morals," Baker believed that after this encounter with the brakeman he "stopped being a cripple in his mind."[4]

When Hemingway wrote about his camping and fishing experiences in the Upper Peninsula, he changed the name of the present Fox River in Seney to the Big Two-Hearted River, a river which actually flows farther northeast. The change, as Baker explained, came "not from ignorance or carelessness but because Big Two-Hearted River is poetry."

Re-reading the short stories, "Big Two-Hearted River, Part I and Part II," brings enjoyment again of the Nick Adams sojourn in northern Michigan. In Part I, after watching the trout from a wooden railroad bridge in Seney, Hemingway as Nick hiked across burned-over forest lands populated by surviving black grasshoppers. Eventually he chose a streamside campsite nestled among the "sweet fern" and "clumps of jackpine." Hemingway described evening time, when a "dark mist" rose across the river, and the glow of his campfire when the "night wind blew on it."[6]

In Part II, Hemingway narrated his trout fishing forays. He stalked his noble adversary with an apple butter sandwich in his shirt pocket, the grasshopper bait in a glass bottle hanging around his neck, and a flour sack attached to his shoulder.

"Big Two-Hearted River, Part I, and II," confirms how much strong poetry lives in the imagery of the young Ernest Hemingway. A visitor to the ancient Seney train station feels almost tempted to look for his ghost in the evening shadows.

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NOTES

1. Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway A Life Story* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 127.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
3. Malcolm Cowley, intro., *The Portable Hemingway* (New York: The Viking Press, 1944, p. XIX), cited in Constance Cappel Montgomery, *Hemingway In Michigan* (New York: Fleet Publishing Co., 1966), p. 143.
4. Baker, p. 127.
5. Baker, p. 128.
6. Ernest Hemingway, *The Nick Adams Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), p. 187.

EUGENE THWING'S RED-KEG: TAMING THE COMPETITIVE SPIRIT

JEAN A. LAMING

In *The Red-Keggers* (1903) and *The Man from Red-Keg* (1905), two Michigan novels with regional, perhaps even national implications, Eugene Thwing (1866-1936) portrays the changes that took place during the transition from logging to farming in the Saginaw Valley region of Michigan during the 1870s. In the novels, however, Thwing, who was "probably the first to use the Michigan lumberwoods as a locale,"[1] insists that the transition is progressive, as he presents an often idealistic view of farming and small town life, in which a resourceful, generous, and forgiving community ultimately molds competitive and selfish individuals into contributing members of a stable new society.

Although in both novels Thwing admires the contributions of the logging industry and other developing businesses in the mid-Michigan region, as he portrays the positive, productive, adventurous, and capable men who settled the area, he also makes clear his concern that business schemes and attitudes threaten important social values, resulting in difficult conflicts within the community. Nevertheless, in each of the novels, Thwing concludes with hope for future stability in the emerging small towns of northern Michigan and those scattered throughout the Midwestern countryside.

Both of Thwing's Michigan novels are set in the Averill and Midland, Michigan, area. His first, *The Red-Keggers,* received reserved reviews. The critic for the *Independent* admired the novel's "raw material" and "lifelike" sketches of rural Michigan, but he was less impressed with the author's verbose and "unrefined" style and his "commonplace dialog."[2] The *New York Times* reviewer was also attracted to the authentic descriptions of logging, farming, and country life but discouraged by the unrealistic characters, didactic prose, and "proper" dialog; yet despite these problems the critic considered the novel "a serious attempt to put the life of Red-Keg in epic form."[3]

Reviews of Thwing's second novel, *The Man From Red-Keg,* continued to question the author's style, dialog, and characterizations.[4] Nevertheless, reviewers were still impressed with his historic realism "touching national subjects" and his refreshing "sense of humor."[5] Interestingly, the *Literary Digest,* a publication which Thwing would later join in 1918 and write for until his death in 1936, gave the second novel a rave review, printed the author's picture, and praised the novel as "clean, wholesome, and upbuilding" because "strenuous religion is here made more palatable to the average man by interesting fiction."[6] The *Literary Digest* quoted similar reactions from *Leslie's Weekly,* the Brooklyn *Eagle,* the Columbus *Post,* and the New York *Globe,* all of which apparently felt that the novel is "as hearty and pleasing as a Thanksgiving dinner."[7]

Except for brief mention in a variety of historical and literary studies of early Michigan authors, both novels received little attention after these initial reviews. Eugene Thwing was not a native of Michigan, and in his preface to *The Red-Keggers* he thanks John Rhines, a Michigan pioneer, for his personal accounts of the 1870s in mid-Michigan. Thwing also expresses his indebtedness to Edwin Burton, who made available the reminiscences of his brother, Frank Burton. Frank Burton's journal-like memoirs were published in 1886 in a lengthy volume, *Green Fields and Whispering Woods.*[8] This collection contains recollections, sketches, poetry, letters, descriptions, stories, and reactions to pioneer life that influenced the plot, characters, and setting of the Red-Keg novels. Some of Thwing's later publications include a biography of Theodore Roosevelt, a compilation of detective stories, entries into the *Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia,* and contributions to "more than 500 magazines and newspapers."[9]

The action of *The Red-Keggers,* the earlier in time, takes place in the spring of 1870, and it ends with the Great Michigan fire of October, 1871. The spring signals a "transition period between

lumbering and farming" for Red-Keg, and Thwing contrasts the pastoral beauty of the planting season with the frantic and dangerous end of the logging season a month earlier when a "rollway" or logjam could have taken the life of "some of the bravest in this region. . . ."[10] In the novel, Thwing develops the mystery-romance plot around three central characters: Sam Hawkins, the college educated son of a respected and established farmer; Barney O'Boyle, an immigrant logger-farmer; and Jim Gyde, the son of a struggling and unsupportive father.

Just as the novel begins with signs of renewal in nature, so too does the rebellious spirit of the students at District No. 1 Schoolhouse signal a renewal in the community. Fortunately, Joseph Walters, the schoolmaster, establishes firm control over his older students, who are matured physically by years of logging but are immature and undirected in their intellectual development. Walters respects the potential of this new, younger generaiton of loggers, but recognizes their need to be encouraged to develop the "gold" within them.[11] Another character, Parson Allen, the local clergyman, also shares this faith in the youth of Red-Keg. A key focus in this novel is the unconditional love and firm commitment the older generation extends to the young people. Yet the college-bred Sam Hawkins, who is one of the town's most educated members, refuses to contribute, and he poses a potential threat to the community's welfare.

In contrast, the women in *The Red-Keggers*—Lettie Green, who has secretly married Sam Hawkins; Axcy Marthy, who is loved by both Jim Gyde and Joseph Walters; and Norine Maloney, who will marry Barney O'Boyle—are all involved in community sharing and celebrating. These women represent a civilizing force not only because they respect education and the future welfare of Red-Keg, but also because they can nurture the strengths and control the excesses of the men who love them. Thwing's women characters are idealized; they are warm, generous, forgiving, and stable. Unfortunately they are also stock, predictable characters, and even though they have a pioneer strength and vitality, their main role is clearly to nurture, teach, and make homes.

Not surprisingly, then, the men in the novel are the competitive and productive members of the community, and their excesses create the conflicts that the community of Red-Keg must even-

tually arbitrate and control. When Sam Hawkins forms a "gang" to live on a secluded island, make moonshine, and eventually make a "fortune," he disrupts the equilibrium of Red-Keg. The community chooses to ignore the youth's activities in the hope that he will eventually be drawn back into everyday life. But Sam is a daring entrepreneur whose dealings eventually involve federal authorities. To complicate these problems, Sam harbors an obsessive hatred of Barney O'Boyle, and Sam's ultimate scheme to kidnap Norine and marry her for her fortune leads to criminal charges.

The pretrial at Red-Keg unravels the mystery and cements all the romances of the novel. Sam Hawkins eventually realizes the errors of his ways because Red-Keg forgives him and gives him still another chance. Despite the unfair and even brutal treatment she has received, Lettie Green is Sam's staunchest defender. At the novel's end, Sam Hawkins saves Ros Whitmore's child from the burning forest. Thus, the tragic fire of 1871, which left 18,000 people homeless in Michigan, brings about the ultimate salvation of Sam Hawkins, who would be treated leniently at his subsequent trial in Midland and later begin a new life with Lettie on his father's farm.[12]

In the sequel, *The Man from Red-Keg,* Sam Hawkins is designed to be a main character, but he never evolves to a central focus. He is still happily married to Lettie and trying to establish his farm, but he remains most sensitive and vulnerable because of his past. He becomes a likely target for the villain, William Bartley, who operates a Midland scandal sheet, *Chips.* The paper has alienated so many area residents that when there is a fire at the office people hope that *Chips* will shut down. Yet Bartley, who is a master at bribery and underhandedness, pressures the honest and moderate editor of *The Pioneer,* Jesse Brinton, to print the jeopardized edition. Brinton succeeds in censoring some of Bartley's more questionable articles, and a *Chips* employee, Nell Tompkins, can also stop some scurrilous copy; however, on the whole, Bartley remains free to print gossip, exaggerations, and outright lies. Thwing does develop Bartley as a nimble, spirited, and energetic soul, yet the editor undermines and divides the community, and he must be controlled.

Thwing's plot again evolves around an unraveling mystery that uncomplicates a romance, this time between Ned Jewel and Bessie Carrol. They are sensitive young people who have found city life complicated and disquieting. When Ned visits Brinton's farm, he meets Bessie, who shares his gentle, simple outlook and deep love of nature and farming. Unfortunately, Ned has been married in Detroit, but his wife has abandoned him. He believes she is still alive and is apparently bribing him periodically for support. As the plot evolves, it becomes clear that Bartley is involved in schemes against Ned Jewel, Sam Hawkins, and other residents. Eventually Bartley's problems reach a climax when a mob, bent on revenge, forms outside his newspaper office. Ultimately, Bartley escapes with the help of Hawkins, Jewel, and Brinton. Despite Hawkin's efforts, Bartley does not reach a stage of repentance or salvation, but he does reveal that Jewel's wife is dead. This revelation allows the novel to end with the happy union of Ned and Bessie and the moral vindication of Sam Hawkins, who can forgive just as he was forgiven.

It is evident in both of these novels that Thwing is most attracted to the simpler life of the farm where generation after generation works the land and where the insulated small town shares communal concerns. Yet he is also realistic, and he fully recognizes that speculation and productivity are necessary to the region's development and vitality. Even the farmers must cut their forests, not only to clear the land for crops but also to raise cash to survive. Indeed, the farmers would not even be settling the mid-Michigan region if it were not for lumbering.

Thwing admires the strength, courage, and productivity of the logging industry which boomed between the 1860s and 1880s in mid-Michigan and spurred growth and development in the region.[13] The Saginaw Valley was "the focal center of Eastern Michigan" for logging operations, and growing towns owed their very existence to the "crash of the noble pine."[14] And yet the industry, having little concern for conservation or future generation, cut over virtually all of Michigan's virgin pine in an accelerated period leaving the State with vast acreage strewn with "raw stumps, tangled and broken branches, and ghost towns."[15] Even though booster brochures and land reports invited settlers to the Saginaw Valley, promising that it was "most excellent farm

land, and the timber taken off in clearing will pay a large portion of the purchase price," the reality was that farming in the area was back-breaking and not always profitable work.[16]

The cutover lands, termed by one historian as "the land nobody wanted," involved substantial financial outlay to clear.[17] In addition, Saginaw Valley land was often too sandy, and there was a considerable drainage problem to solve before the region could become what it is today: "one of the richest agricultural areas in Michigan."[18] Thwing is most realistic about the realities of farming and logging in early Michigan, and in one scene Josiah Hawkins discusses a fair solution to a business dealing with Ros Whitmore who has cleared some stumps but lost money because the project was more difficult than he had expected.[19] This concern for fairness stands in sharp contrast to the dealings of lumber barons who often took substantial profit at the expense of lumberjacks who labored twelve to fourteen hour days, six days a week, lived on a diet of beans and more beans, and faced disease and dangers daily.[20]

Indeed, Thwing's Red-Keg novels strike a new note of realism about the realities and dangers, the expenses and frustrations of pioneer life in the Saginaw Valley. One of the greatest concerns was the devastation and senseless waste caused by so many forest fires; sadly "almost every town and city in the northern part of lower Michigan dates itself from the day it burned."[21] A great deal of the blame for this destruction falls on the lumbering industry, which had little concern for fire prevention and left the branches, bark, and unprofitable timber drying on the forest floor "where after a dry summer any spark could ignite them."[22]

The catastrophic fire in the conclusion of *The Red-Keggers* was caused in just such a fashion, and the citizens feared it "must be the end o' the world's coming" when they received word that all communication was cut off and that Michigan, Chicago, and Wisconsin were ablaze.[23] Pioneer farmers sustained great financial losses because of these fires; yet many communities survived and rebuilt. Fortunately, the "dangerous conditions in the former logging districts inspired, in a large part, the first attempts to conserve Michigan's natural resources."[24]

Yet, as Norman Schmaltz points out in his study of conservation efforts in Michigan, "few could have foreseen the remarkable

record of timber cutting, particularly of white pine, which would be set in the state."[25] By the time any definite steps toward a state conservation policy were taken in 1899, most of the region's timber land had been "ravaged."[26] During the boom years, the state's location, its cheap and plentiful water transportation, and the increasing demand for lumber from the western settlements brought an aura of optimism and growth to the lumbering centers.[27] Yet, even after the boom, Michigan's early conservation effort was "by no means a perfect one," and even as late as 1939 the Michigan forests were shrinking and abandoned land increasing.[28]

Despite these negative aspects of lumbering and the industry's lack of concern for the future, the literature that surrounds the timber era often exalts the schemes, the speculation, and ingenuity, the quest to cut better and faster. The lumberjack himself has become a source for tall tales and legends of phenomenal strength and endurance; a hero immune to danger; a larger than life figure clearing the land for the humble farmer who would follow in his memorable footsteps. In contrast, Thwing has taken a more realistic and detailed view of these times, and in the process he focuses on the excesses of the lumbering era. He insists that Red-Keg needs to direct and control the spirit of competition and progress, and Thwing is hopeful that emerging farmers will redirect the values and decisions of the region.

Even though Thwing gives detailed accounts of the logging work still in progress in the area, he focuses on positive, down-to-earth concerns for safety, fair pay, good working conditions, and the future of the land. He gives detailed and authentic accounts of logging practices, and his descriptions of logging competitions do not present exaggerated heroes with monumental strength, but real men who win because they paced themselves, worked hard, and had better luck with their equipment. When he deals with some of the dangers and excitement of the rollways or logjams, he concentrates on the cooperative effort, the trust, the fears, the losses and the near losses that are all a part of the logging effort.

The Red-Keg novels show that the wild and unrestrained ways of the lumbermen are yielding to the moderation and restraint of established residents. Nevertheless, despite this emerging and

conservative life style, Red-Keg still has its fair share of saloon battles. While Thwing does not condone the excesses of drinking and brawling, and he creates a mediator, Barney O'Boyle, who can stop the fiascoes before any serious injury occurs, the author indeed finds the "lumberjack battle" an exciting and integral part of his tale. Thematically, Thwing believes in forgiveness and non-aggression, yet his plot moves along punctuated by necessary altercations that serve to pick up the action.

It is difficult to document the historical accuracy of the brawls of the era, but mid-Michigan papers in the 1870s abound with detailed accounts of saloon fights. One interesting hour-long contest was said to have taken place at Thwing's Red-Keg between Silver Jack, a perennial favorite, and Joe Fournier.[29] Some historians have documented the violent and callous aspects of these assaults, and others feel that the fights were competitive contests involving "little animosity."[30] Thwing leaves no doubt that the days of saloon entertainment and brawling were not so ideal. He contrasts such "entertainment" with the community social functions and foresees a new time in Michigan. The destruction of the pine will be followed by a productive and cooperative period of agriculture. Red-Keg is forming an attachment to family life; it is making a commitment to the welfare of the community and its future; it is nurturing a deeper respect for the land and the individual. These values will help the small towns throughout the cutover lands face the hard work of building a solid agricultural economy and tame the excesses of the competitive spirit.

In many ways both of Thwing's Michigan novels caution middle America against the dangerous lure of wealth, the environmental hazards of productivity, and the risks involved in business schemes. Thwing emphasizes the need to control speculation, to employ fair business tactics, to be moderate and moral about decisions that involve a region's future. Ideally, Thwing believes that the emerging farmer can offer a needed moral perspective to developing communities. In an agricultural economy the residents must be cooperative because neighbors work together: to help during a crisis; to raise a barn; to barter and trade for survival; to fund and support education; and to demand fair treatment for everyone.

The Red-Keg novels set out to record this transition to communal concerns as loggers became farmers in the Saginaw Valley. Yet, ironically, Thwing also includes the beginnings of the next great transition in the area—the discovery of salt deposits. Speculation and drilling are just beginning in the 1870s for these deposits, and Sam Hawkins is saved from substantial losses when Bartley schemes to buy land that Sam has optioned. The salt, if there, is too deep, and happily the scoundrel Bartley pays the consequences. Thwing is probably one of the only Michigan authors of the period to include a look at salt mining. Kathleen Gillard, in her pioneering study of Michigan literature, is surprised that so few authors have developed this aspect of the times especially since "the alkali industry at Wyandotte and the Dow Chemcial Company of Midland have developed as a result of the discovery of large deposits of salt."[31] Yet, as Gillard points out, "the industry seems not to have called forth stories, tales, myths, or poetry as did the timber industry."[32]

Despite his emphasis on farming, Thwing seems to sense the importance of these new salt discoveries. He is somewhat disappointed that young people like Sam Hawkins will make a living in business rather than agriculture; however, he admits that not everyone can be happy farming, and the region needs to grow and change with the times. Yet, the Red-Keg novels advise communities to temper their productivity with concern for the future, the people, and the land. Such advice is still relevant to the Saginaw Valley area today, where farming and the chemical industry continue to be major economic and social concerns in regional decisions.

Central Michigan University

NOTES

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4. "Red Keg Again," rev. of Eugene Thwing, *The Man From Red-Keg, New York Times Review of Books*, 4 Nov. 1905, p. 746.

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7. "New Michigan Novel," p. 798.
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10. Eugene Thwing, *The Red-Keggers* (New York: Book Lovers Press, 1903), p. 1 and p. 15.
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THE "CHELSEA CHAPTER" IN AN EDGAR LEE MASTERS BIOGRAPHY

EVELYN SCHROTH

It was after Edgar Lee Masters had won a divorce in 1923, had left the Chicago scene with property gone and finances depleted, and was living in New York that he wrote his autobiographical *Across Spoon River*, published in 1936. By that time he had remarried and had a small son, Hilary. It is in this autobiography, according to Hilary Masters, that the many facets of Masters' life are brought together, here where his father "tries to relate the different figures [and] give them motives. The successful lawyer. The secret poet. . . . The family man. The early pal of Sandburg. The womanizer. The political dilettante. The partner of Darrow. The man of property. . . . The corporation lawyer. The *paterfamilias* of a society household."[1] But Edgar Lee Masters' account stops with his leaving the Chicago scene, and makes no mention of the woman he first met in Chicago who became his second wife, Ellen Coyne. He says merely, "All the years after 1971 . . . remain to be told,"[2] and of this period—the Chelsea period[3]—"The thirteen years that I have lived in New York City have been the most peaceful of my life, and the most productive."[4]

In 1978 Hardin Masters, the son from Masters' first marriage, published a "biographical sketchbook"[5] about his father, a book of "candid camera shots" in print that gives us some insight into the person of Edgar Lee Masters but provides little information pertinent to the Chelsea period.

In 1982 Masters' son from his second marriage, Hilary Masters, published *Last Stand* in which he chronicles, in reminiscence form, his own life and gives us for the first time in print a study

of his mother, Ellen Coyne Masters, and a picture of this second marriage, as well as a glimpse of his father's final years. The book emerges as a tribute to a woman who chose a role, and responsibly carried it through.

We have from the two sons' biographical accounts an explanation for the absence to date of any adequate biography of Masters. Hardin Masters regrets the failure of his two sisters to make available materials which had been held by the first family as indemnity against alimony payments, their disposal of some letters in the interest of discretion, and their indifferent stewardship of papers which, he says, needed to be sorted out and preserved for some future biographer.[6]

Hilary Masters explains that his mother has a policy of never correcting an error when something about her husband appears in print but notes that she never permits the use of letters and papers which would supply information that might restrict such errors, so, he says, "We must piece the life together as well as we can."[7]

Different views emerge from the two books about the role of Ellen Coyne in the marriage breakup. Hardin Masters says, "The new wife . . . was a person who set her cap for my father in no uncertain campaign."[8] And in another place, "I have often felt that Ellen was more mature than my father in promoting this alliance. She knew exactly what she was doing, under the guise of being carried away by an older man's attention. . . . America's famous poet of the moment was compelling to Ellen. . . ."[9]

Hilary Masters' book gives us more information about this alliance of his mother and father. Ellen Coyne, a twenty-year-old student at the University of Chicago, met Masters at some campus function where he had been invited as the Spoon River poet. Says Hilary, "He probably propositioned her, as he seemed to with every woman, almost as a matter of form. . . ."[10] However, she would have nothing to do with him in Chicago because he was still a married man. Four years after his divorce, she married him.

Hilary says that it was probably inevitable that Ellen Coyne would be blamed for the first marriage's failure, but claims that there is evidence to suggest that the union had become bankrupt long before. "Too many separations, too many family councils to force reconciliations, too many letters. . . . too many reports.

. . . to cast Ellen Coyne with any believability as the 'flapper home-breaker'."[11]

And later he speaks of his father's having been constrained in Chicago in the "decorous straitjacket of law business and the first marriage"[12] and says that had the *Spoon River Anthology* not been successful, his father would have gone on being "one more bourgeois husband enduring a marriage that had become stale and boring."[13]

Edgar Lee Masters' own autobiography depicts the first marriage as one from which he tried to escape but then succumbed to in response to his fiancee's pleading and to his father's admonition that one couldn't court a girl for a year and then just leave her and his cynical counsel that one had to marry someone and that "The girl is as good as anyone."[34]

Masters speaks of this marriage as a prison sentence and wonders enroute, "Was there nothing else until I should arrive at sixty . . . and then die after sacrificing all my powers to a marriage that did not satisfy my heart?"[15]

Hardin Masters terms the second marriage "an alliance of convenience: He gave her a son, and she gave him a sense of security and freedom."[16]

Hilary Masters' memoirs provide us with an expanded picture of this marriage which netted Edgar Lee Masters the security and freedom he needed, while also providing him with a son he loved and admired, and a wife who could not only fend for herself but could also allow her husband the freedom he needed to realize his "terrible urgency"[17] to rush into print to compensate for the earlier wasted years, a wife who could treat his "sexual casualities" on the level of "itches to be scratched,"[18] who could maintain a domestic setting with a minimum of funds and space and hot plates, pressure cookers and extension cords, who could meet him on his own intellectual level, amuse and entertain him, support him with her youth and energy as well as provide the needed medical care he needed for his failing health, and still let him occupy stage-center and feel that he was in charge.

As Hilary Masters notes, the birth of a small son (he refers to himself) to Edgar Lee Masters at the age of sixty was an event which threatened the quiet Masters needed for writing, and

Ellen's determination to enroll at Columbia for a master's degree to obtain a teaching position. The difficulty was resolved by having Hilary raised by his grandparents, the Tom Coynes, in Kansas City and spending the summer with his parents in New York. But the two rooms and bath quarters at the Hotel Chelsea, where the couple had moved in 1930, were small, so prior to 1935 the family would get together for the summer in rented farm houses in the New England area.

By 1936 the parents lived apart. Ellen left the Chelsea, unable to concentrate on her studies there and unwilling to put up with her husband's hostile opposition[19] to them—this opposition a seeming carry-over from the insecurity Masters felt at being forced by his mother's decision to leave college (Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois) after one year. Ellen offered her husband a divorce, but he refused it. He was offered a stable position as secretary to the governor of the Virgin Islands, a comfortable berth where he could have lived and worked during his final years. His wife advised him to accept, but when he found that she and Hilary would not go with him, he turned it down.

So the couple lived apart, but close enough for Ellen to be available whenever her husband needed her. They would get together for a drink or for dinner, to discuss plans and ideas for their son and for books and articles.

In 1943 Masters had a physical collapse; a friend found him bedridden and feverish, with two packets of prescription medicine unopened in his pockets, and he was rushed to Belleville Hospital. Headlines blared that Edgar Lee Masters had been found starving in his hotel rooms and was near death. After assuming responsibility for his overdue hotel bill and for other debts, Ellen established him in a convalescent home, and upon his recovery kept him with her when she went as camp director for the summer in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania and then to teaching positions in Charlotte, North Carolina, and in a junior college near Philadelphia. They lived in small apartments provided by the schools, and Ellen cooked meals in make-shift kitchens for her husband and her mother, who was now living with them after Ellen rescued her from the charity institution in which her husband had placed her, and for her son, who was now in school nearby, when he visited.

With Ellen in charge, Edgar Lee Masters "felt secure in the firm ground [his wife] once again provided him and her on-stage presence."[20] He had surrendered to circumstances, his wife having broken down his self-sufficient illusions, and he sat in his chair, peacefully smoking his pipe and reading, or sat at the table writing, with Ellen providing him, as Hilary notes, with good food, good company, and when he needed it, good medical care.

Edgar Lee Masters was bedridden for the last one and one-half years of his life, tied to a catheter, and he died March 6, 1950, in a nursing home in Melrose Park, Pennsylvania, located near the school where his wife was teaching.

Ellen Masters refused to display her husband's corpse in New York as the Poetry Society requested or to allow a *Life* photographer to take coffin pictures, insisting upon a small "family" funeral. She refused, too, to observe her stepson Hardin's request that a religious service be provided. Instead, she honored her husband's pre-planned funeral plans. He wanted no ceremony, no services or prayers, only a program of his favorite music and two of his poems—one to be read in the funeral home in Petersburg, Illinois, where he had asked to be taken, and one at the Oakhill Cemetery in Petersburg, where, by his request, he was buried next to his grandparents. Edgar Lee Masters, then, went to his grave "in charge" because his wishes were carefully observed by his widow, Ellen Coyne Masters. And a final chapter in the much-needed Edgar Lee Masters' biography begins to emerge with the publication of Hilary Masters' notes from memory.

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NOTES

1. Hilary Masters, *Last Stands* (Thorndike, Maine: Thorndike Press, 1982), 152.
2. Edgar Lee Masters, *Across Spoon River* (New York: Little and Ives, 1932), 396.
3. Hardin Masters in his book (listed below) calls his father's New York years "The Chelsea Period" because of the many years he lived and wrote at the Chelsea Hotel.
4. Edgar Lee Masters, 397.
5. Hardin Wallace Masters, *Edgar Lee Masters* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1978).

6. Hardin Masters, 151.
7. Hilary Masters, 168.
8. Hardin Masters, 82.
9. Ibid., 117.
10. Hilary Masters, 156.
11. Ibid., 158.
12. Ibid., 164.
13. Ibid., 159.
14. Edgar Lee Masters, 244.
15. Ibid., 293.
16. Hardin Masters, 82.
17. Hilary Masters, 164.
18. Ibid., 230.
19. Ibid., 227.
20. Ibid., 274.

FRANK VLCHEK'S *STORY OF MY LIFE:* A TRANSLATION AND AN EDITION

ROBERT D. NARVESON

As my uncle Joe Krbechek Kerby tells in his preface, his interest in Frank Vlchek's story began when a mysterious large wooden box arrived at his parents' farm. In the box was a complete set of beautifully polished tools with the name "Vlchek" stamped on the handles. I myself remember seeing a few remaining pieces, mostly wrenches, when I worked on the farm, years afterwards, in my teens. These tools represented, Joe states, not only a much appreciated practical gift, but more impressively, a remarkable achievement. Starting in Cleveland in the late 1880s with little else besides talent and vision, in the course of thirty years a Czech immigrant had built a modern industrial factory that supplied 85 percent of certain tools bought by American car manufacturers. This achievement was described in the book, Vlchek's autobiography, that arrived shortly after the box of tools.

Joe's mother—my maternal grandmother—read Vlchek's story aloud to the family, all of whom understood and spoke Czech, though only the parents could read it. "After that first hour or so's installment," Joe recalls, "I for one could hardly wait 'till she began the next episode. And so it went for me (and for the rest, too), chapter after chapter, to the very end. Never anything but absorbingly captivating. So different from a dull book report I then was slogging through in school! Even now, properly discounting the fact that the reader was dear Mother, I still feel it's the most fascinating book I've ever been privileged to encounter. And that covers decades" (ii).

I quote this passage to give you the flavor of my uncle's prose. His formal education ended with eighth grade. The English that

he learned in a one-room country school was for him a second language, and like nearly everyone else living around him, he all his life spoke it with a slightly exotic flavor. His brief schooling was sufficient to develop in him a taste for reading, and throughout his subsequent life he read voraciously, especially in history and exploration. His knowledge of geography and geology also impressed me. He had a ready memory and loved to embellish conversation with curious facts. He was a man of curious, slightly eccentric opinions, a self-made intellectual who chafed, occasionally, at the fate that had made him a farmer in an isolated rural corner of Minnesota.

Joe Krbechek was born in 1910; he heard his mother read Frank Vlchek's book in the late 1920s. Not until the 1950s, after modern machinery had reduced the exhausting toil of farming, did he find the leisure to look again at Vlchek's story. He determined to enlist his mother's aid in making a translation. Translate the book they did, but Joe was not satisfied. "Unfortunately, I felt, it did not come across as being enough like the original" (iv).

Nearly twenty more years passed, during which his mother died and he himself pursued other interests. Then, upon his retirement from active farming, with help from his nephew, Paul Narveson, my brother, he reworked the translation. Paul knew no Czech, but could assist in refining the English. The result, according to Joe, was "indeed a further translation redone by me virtually from scratch" (iv). They completed this work in 1978. Joe's health failed soon after. Before he died in 1981, he and Paul asked me to undertake to edit their work and see to its publication. I had other projects to complete first, but am now attempting to carry out their request.

The typescript as given to me by my uncle and brother testifies that my uncle was not greatly exaggerating the attractions of the story. Vlchek proves to be a lively story teller, vigorous in narration, particular and detailed in description, fond of dramatic dialogue, given to quoting poems in moments of high emotion, and aphorisms when shrewed judgment was called for. The story is intrinsically worth telling. In it, Vlchek emerges as a man of resourcefulness, energy, and sturdy character.

Frank Vlchek was born, he tells us, in Budyne in southern Bohemia in 1871, the youngest child among fourteen. He says

almost nothing of his ancestry, only mentioning briefly one grandmother, but he remembers his parents with filial affection. With only a small farm they gave their children a start in life, which, while materially marginal, was nevertheless rich in love and care. Each grown child, male and female, received a patrimony or dowry. One daughter was even sent away to be educated, and thereby ruined forever for village life; she went to Cleveland and there throve.

Vlchek learned a love of books from a schoolmaster. He says little about his reading but his ready knowledge of the Czech poetry that he frequently quotes suggests that he formed and retained a reading habit, and in one poignant passage he laments having to set aside his Czech literary books to devote himself to technical studies.

After a few early years of schooling, Vlchek was apprenticed at age twelve to a blacksmith, and was thereafter employed in that trade in several Czech and Austrian villages and cities before joining two sisters in Cleveland in 1888. There, after a few years of working for different smiths, he found himself without a job during a depression period. If no one would employ him, he would employ himself. He borrowed money from his in-laws and started a shop of his own. The year was 1895.

Several Czechs operated blacksmith shops in Cleveland, but only Vlchek used his as a stepping stone to development and ownership of a modern highly efficient tool factory. The future belonged, he early concluded, to those who devised ways to increase the productivity of labor. Looking one day at a pocket knife that he had bought for thirty-nine cents, he asked himself how long he would have had to work to produce one like it by hand. He thought of the tools he made. Could they not be produced, like that pocket knife, by machine? The long hours of study and toil that led to his introduction of mechanization into his shop make an absorbing and inspiring part of his tale, that he tells with excitement and justifiable pride. Twice his progress was interrupted by disastrous fires that destroyed his buildings and equipment. Though his first love was to dirty his hands in working with his machinery, inventing ways to produce more and better products at lower costs, he had also to master marketing and

management, and to fend off threats by competitors and financial predators.

Along the way to creating his successful enterprise, he found that he had to educate himself in draftsmanship, engineering, and English correspondence. He accomplished all that was necessary. By 1903 he owned a small factory, which he ran with the aid of several employees, and in 1908 he added an office and a sales force. His accomplishments began to attract investors, and expansion became rapid. By 1919 he was a wealthy man, living in a new, luxurious home in Shaker Heights. He had arrived.

During these busy years, he had married, raised three children, traveled, and been active in the cultural life in Cleveland, particularly in the American Czech community. In 1920 he returned to visit his now independent native country and rejoiced in reunion with relatives and friends. He valued both his old country and his new one, but found that he had become an American; his outlook was no longer that of the old country Czechs. He freely—rather too freely—advised the Czechs to learn from the new world how to create a more abundant life for themselves and free themselves from the burden of incessant toil. He implies that the newly independent nation could emulate his personal success.

His behavior on this occasion may strike one as slightly tactless, even though well intentioned. The explanation for it lies, I believe, in his attempt to account for his own success. That success, as he sees it, derived from his having profited from the good qualities of each culture. Each country, he had concluded, had much to contribute to the other.

Published by the Vlchek Tool Company, Cleveland, Ohio, the book was printed entirely in Czech, illustrated with many photographs. It was never copyrighted, but bears an author's foreword dated 1928. I do not know how many copies were printed and I suspect that, however many there were, all were given as gifts to relatives and friends in this country and abroad. My family's copy is personally inscribed to my grandfather Jan Krbechek, dated 1929. I have personally seen two other copies, one in the home of my uncle's cousin in Czechoslavakia and another in the library at the University of Nebraska, a gift from a Czech family in the state.

The book has three sections of 80, 165, and 200 pages respectively. It is written, I am informed, in literate but not literary Czech, much the language in which friends would converse informally. Whether a person of Vlchek's limited formal education could have produced it without the help of an editor seems doubtful, though no help is acknowledged.

His Impressionistic Method. At no time in the book is it the author's intention merely to chronicle events. He wants to bring important memories to life, and uses an array of literary means to do so. Among these are dialogue, direct representation (in present tense) of unspoken thoughts, use of lively metaphors and images, and the quoting of poetry and aphorisms.

His Sense of Continuity. Though his own life was filled with rapid change, his cultural heritage had provided him with a sense of cultural continuity. He implicitly assumed, one discovers, a basic fixity in human nature that guided him through perplexing moments. From his quotations of poetry and aphorisms I infer his belief that his cultural tradition helped guide him in life.

The Solidarity of the Community. In Vlchek's memory, village life was sociable and peaceable. "With such people," he reports, "even family squabbles were unheard of" (3). They worked hard, but they talked as they worked, they sang, they played pranks. Life was full of ceremony, much of it centered in the church. One could know what to expect and how to get along. Even when Vlchek went on his apprentice wanderings through Austria, he seems to have enjoyed a feeling of relative security. He could count on finding food and a place to sleep, simply by asking, though they were not always forthcoming on first request. Walking through a strange country, sleeping in strange places, at the mercy of strangers, he seems rarely to have feared for his safety. Thievery was a problem, but not violence. In Cleveland, on the other hand, there were districts through which he hesitated to walk alone.

Nationalism in Conflict with Religion. Like other deeply patriotic Czech immigrants, Vlchek was distressed by divisions in the Czech community in the United States, chiefly along religious lines. Though himself a loyal Catholic, he placed Czech unity ahead of Catholic partisanship, and tried to maintain a degree of solidarity with the many groups of freethinkers that represented

more than half of the Czech immigrant population. In religious matters Vlchek adopted his new country's tradition of toleration, and prided himself on never having attempted to impose his religious beliefs on another.

He was American, too, in his belief in the equality of all peoples. He deplored racial and national prejudices, and while he tried to further the fortunes of other Czechs by seeking them out as workers and investors, at the same time he employed good people of any background and showed them equal loyalty and affection. He could of course not be blind to the power of group cohesiveness, and reports frankly what he saw as a conspiracy of an Irish group among his office staff to wrest control of his business from him. In business life he associated on good terms with business people of all stripes, gladly participating in the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary International. In church and social affairs, however, he was thoroughly Czech. He does not speak of how he raised his children, but it says something that all three of them married second-generation Czech spouses.

Work and Thought. Though obviously financially succesful, Vlchek insists—and one must believe him—that making money was never his uppermost motive. What he wanted was to make human life easier by reducing physical toil. In his business life, his commitment to the dream of technological progress was total. His every refinement of machinery and organization delighted him, satisfied him, and inspired him to further effort. Work alone, he says more than once, is not sufficient. Work and thought together are the controlable components of success. The rest is up to God and one's fellow men.

The modern age may be less confident of this formula's adequacy, but Vlchek, and thousands, perhaps millions, like him, believed that it would enable them to realize the dreams that brought them across the ocean to a new and strange way of life, in which they grafted the culture they brought with them onto the cultural shoots they found where they landed. Their gratitude to both cultures seems entirely appropriate and does them credit. We look back with wonder at what they accomplished. Now, nearly sixty years after Vlchek wrote, we possess few detailed accounts of these years written by people who were a part of this

process. So far as I have been able to discover, there is no other book in Czech-American literature comparable to Frank Vlchek's.

This translation, made by a largely self-educated farmer and edited by his nephews whose ignorance of the Czech language is total, will no doubt have its defects. Nevertheless, it has the merit of filling a need that has until now gone unsatisfied. In this era when we are more curious than our parents were about our diverse roots, it is high time that Vlchek's narrative be available in English.

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REMEMBERING FLOYD DELL

R. Craig Sautter

"Who is Floyd Dell?" That's the question I heard so often when I first searched for old volumes of Dell's 26 books of plays, essays, short stories, and novels. It seems that doing literary research, even for a period as recent as the first third of the 20th century, is a kind of archeology into a disappearing civilization. Most of the primary witnesses and participants are dead. And because important books have been sold, stolen, purged, or never purchased by many libraries, a researcher haunts old bookstores in Chicago or New York and even attends auctions in the small towns in between sifting for clues. And though I found some key volumes with the help of a few rare book sellers who knew their field, I was astonished just how few people had ever heard of Dell, much less read anything he had written.

I particularly remember one occasion in Chicago. I climbed the steep and narrow steps of an old used bookstore and adjoining coffee house across the street from a major university. The coffee house is, of course, a gathering place for intellectuals and social critics, students and professors, dissidents and debators, the 1980s equivelent of an early 20th century bohemian tea room, a place where they still drink coffee and talk endlessly into the night, just like the characters of so many of Dell's novels. When I asked the book clerk if they had any works by Dell, he belligerently bellowed "Who's Floyd Dell?" The irony of the situation startled and saddened me. For here in the city where Dell had worked tirelessly to usher in a new age of American literature, and where he had been so influential in introducing bohemian ideas and lifestyles, he had become almost virtually unknown.

Yet Chicago is not provincial in this respect. For I heard the same question repeatedly in old Greenwich Village bookstores. But was it not Dell, the advocate of rebellion and freedom, who was once celebrated as the Village's first citizen in the years surrounding the First World War? And was it not Dell who mythologized the area's history in his volume of short stories *Love in Greenwich Village*? And is it not still the shadow of Dell frolicking hand in hand with Edna St. Vincent Millay and other ghosts on moon lit nights in Washington Square?

Who is Floyd Dell and why are we afflicted with this literary amnesia? Why is Dell unknown to America's intelligent reading public and why has he all but vanished from our literary history? Why can't we find his writings in anthologies of that exciting time of literary discovery and invention? Why is his name absent from the important surveys of the period or from encyclopedias?

Certainly we can assume that as a committed socialist writer associated with radical journals like *The Masses* and *The Liberator,* and as a defendeant charged with espionage and conspiracy for advocating conscientious objection during the Great War For Democracy, Dell found little praise from conservative quarters of the society. For instance, some of Dell's *Liberator* articles are cited as evidence in a 1920 report of The Joint Legislative Committee of the State of New York Investigating Seditious Activities entitled "Revolutionary Radicalism, Its History, Purpose And Tactics, With An Exposition And Discussion Of The Steps Being Taken And Required To Curb It." Presumably, one such step was to see that dangerous writers did not appear on many public library shelves or in the classrooms of state supported schools and colleges. Indeed, Dell's third novel, *Janet March,* was suppressed in New York and Massachusetts in 1923, though less for political reasons than because of the objections of censors who cringed at its moral and sexual content.

Yet, ultimately, in the late 20's and early 30's, Dell's critics also came from the revolutionary left. Because Dell always demanded and exercised his individual artistic freedom as a critic, poet, and novelist, he seemed to lose influence and popularity with the militant left who suspected him of deviating from ideological rigidity. But that is not because Dell or his socialism had radically changed, though he subjected it to criticism. As Egbert

and Persons note in *Socialism and American Life,* "The left of 1918 was completely unlike the left of 1912 . . . The latter had been a motley collection, loosely organized, of populists, untutored synicalists, rebels, etc. The new left (after the war) was led by tough minded young men, many out of metropolitan colleges, who found in the Bolshevik Revolution what a left wing had long lacked, a program around which to organize."

But I do not wish to conclude that Dell has failed to receive adequate recognition simply because of his political positions. Dreiser, Sandburg, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Farrell, and others all had their associations with socialism and the left without it destroying their literary legacies, though certainly their involvement was less pronounced or important than Dell's. In one sense it is simply true that Dell has been overshadowed by the incredible production of creative talent of this exciting period. But the situation is even more complex than this, and is, I believe, linked to our rather one dimensional definition of modernism in literature. For it is ironic that Dell, who seemed to himself and many others of that period to be at the forefront of the literary struggle to create a new kind of literature freed from conventional restrictions and superficialities, is now dismissed as simply a transitional figure of little merit.

To this subject of modernism we will return. But let us first try to briefly answer the question "Who is Floyd Dell?"

Dell was born in western Illinois in 1887, two years after Ezra Pound. His family was poor and semi-nomadic, forced to the neighboring small towns by the changing industrial economy. Later, they moved to Davenport, Iowa, where he ventured into lifelong friendships with George Cram Cook and Pulitzer-Prize winning dramatist Susan Glaspell, who eventually made their reputations with Eugene O'Neill and the Provincetown Players.

The discovery of his poetic soul came early, and though he dropped out of high school to support himself, he had already devoured library shelves of literature. In his 1933 autiobiography, *Homecoming,* Dell recounts just how passionate a disciple of poetry he had already become. "I was reading English and some other poetry at a rate of one great poet a week. I read and knew vastly by heart Wordsworth, Shelley, Walt Whitman, Kipling, Wilde, the Rossettis, Tennyson, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, Herrick,

Milton, Heine, Swinburne, Donne, Marvel, Drayton, Shakespeare's sonnets; some Persian and Chinese poetry of which I made up my own rhymed versions. Among living Americans I was enthusiastic about Bliss Carmen and William Vaughn Moody." He adds, "of all the poets whom I read, the one who meant the most to me was Heine. Far from the greatest, and not even among the most admired, he was my poet in a very deep sense—because he was not a poet only. I enjoyed his prose too, and responded to every quality of its style, the purpose of which I understood fully. He was my poet because he was also a critic, of art and of the political scene, and above all life—and he criticized it from the point of view from which I wanted it criticized. He was mine because he wished, as one who had been a soldier in the Liberation War of Humanity, to have laid on his tomb not a wreath but a sword, and because at the same time he was a gay and light hearted lover." Indeed Heine was a model to whom Dell the poet, the critic, the dramatist, the political activist, the novelist, the bohemian, could by the end of his career, favorably compare himself.

But the reality of economic survival created a dismal contrast to this realm of poetic marvels. He learned the brutal lessons of economic value in a candy factory where he often burnt flesh off his arms and hands. The conflict led to an early poetic and spiritual crisis. "I, as a useful worker in a civilization which set a proper value on carmels, had been making more money in that factory than most of the world's great poets had made with their poetry, than any poet was likely to make with his poetry. Certainly I did far better by carmel cutting than Wordsworth ever did by poetry making—he didn't even make enough to pay for his shoe strings, he said, while I paid for my summer's keep. . . . It is a rash thing for a girl or boy to write poetry, for sooner or later the question must arise 'is this a gift of so much value to youths still unborn . . . that I must cherish and cultivate it in despite of the kicks and jeers which will be the only likely payment now from a world which prefers carmels?' A terrible question for a boy or girl to answer."

Dell decided that he could not be a poet only, that the promise of his own freedom meant even more to him. He wanted to discover a literature, not of alientation from the world, but of social

and self liberation. Still, Dell wrote poetry all his life. His first published work came at age 16 in *Century Magazine*, while many others were to appear in the various journals Dell edited, sometimes anonymously. But in 1912, when a Chicago publisher asked for permission to issue a volume of his verse, Dell declined and suggested instead that the publisher produce a volume of his feminist essays, and in 1913 his first book, *Woman As World Builder*, was released to high praise.

His reluctance to publish his poetry probably had something to do with his realization of the coming revolution in poetry. After all, it was Dell who first took a batch of Carl Sandburg's unshaped efforts to Harriet Monroe's new *Poetry Magazine*. They were duly noted and rejected, and it was the next set that Sandburg delivered that launched his fame. But Dell must have sensed that the musicality of verse that so appealed to him was falling out of style. And so Dell preferred to keep his verse to himself, though poetry always remained sacred to him. Yet there can be little doubt that these works had a rare and beautiful quality to them. And at least one contemporary poet found them so. Vachel Lindsay wrote to Dell thanking him for a set of hand copied verse he had sent, making hearts and double hearts next to the titles he liked best. Lindsay ended his letter this way, "I consider meeting you one of the fine adventures of my life, especially meeting you in rhyme."

The young Dell was not only a poet but, as I've mentioned, a feminist as well. He hated "the contemptuous degradation of girls in men's minds to a single physical function." He despised their "implicit attitude of lords of the earth towards a slave class, or sometimes of a hungry tramp toward an apple tree loaded with fruit. If they did not feel this way about girls why should they talk this way about them? 'That was a good apple' they said with an air of one who has just tossed the core away. Girls were things. And this was an old role for girls, church and state joining in denying them their rights as individuals, and employers keeping them in roles of helplessness by cheap wages."

When the first comprehensive history of feminist literature is written, that is, of literature that treats women as human beings of deep character and dignity, Floyd Dell will surely rank among the first and finest authors in this respect. Both *Janet March*

(1923) and Diana Stair (1932) must be considered important and influential novels that created a new real life and literary image for American women. Nor could there be in our own current society themes more modern than those of the definition and consequences of freedom in the matters of love and sex and self understanding, questions that Dell approached from both critical and fictional perspectives.

Dell's discovery of bohemia is also revealing about his character and the development of his work, and it is intimately connected with another spiritual crisis that seemed to reappear throughout his writings: the freedom of the artist committed to social change and political action. "My socialism was too much a part of me," he wrote in *Homecoming*, "it was too invigorating to me as a student, too stimulating to my social energies, for me to dream of giving it up; as a person with mere belief in Art, I should have been only an unhappy shadow of myself. I had to hold onto my socialist philosophy, and yet somehow get from it the freedom to be an artist. In order to do this, I had to go back to my earlier Nihilism, which set revolutionary value on the Truth. In my present world there were no Nihilists. But there was Bohemia, and it had a certain kinship to the Nihilist realm . . . (So) I became imaginatively a Bohemian . . . My contribution to the revolution would be such truth-telling as I could manage to do. And so I regained my self respect as an artist."

But Dell's imaginative bohemianism ultimately became lifestyle and in real life and in his fiction his bohemia became a beacon to a generation who fled to Chicago and Greenwich Village to find themselves through self-expression. And Dell's truth-telling, particularly in his brilliant and enchanting criticism, set a new standard for modern American aesthetic judgment that was revolutionary indeed.

Dell's critical career began at age 21 when he arrived in Chicago with not many dollars in his pocket and a few years experience as a local Davenport reporter. His success was immediate. From 1908-13 he helped create a renaissance that transformed American letters. As has been noted by Duffy, Kramer, and Hart, three authors who have written on Dell, *The Friday Literary Review* of which Dell eventually became chief spokesman and editor, was one of the most lively and influential literary journals of its

time and at the forefront of the modernist struggle. It was not just luck that put him there. As he recalled "doubtless the fact that I could 'review' briefly thirty to a hundred books a week, and still have time to read one book and criticize it, had something to do with my having the job."

Dell reviewed everything from Walt Whitman to the 1913 Post Impressionist Show at the Art Institute. When that show came to town, Dell was sternly warned by his superiors that he was not the political editor, the drama editor, the music editor of the *Evening Journal*, but the literary editor. He still reviewed the show on the *Review*'s front page. He knew the existence of a book, and though there were no copies of it in Chicago, it was all he needed to write about the critical event. "The Post Impressionist show exploded like a bombshell within the minds of everyone who could be said to have minds," he later explained. "For Americans it could not be merely an aesthetic experience, it was an emotional experience which led to a philosophical and moral revaluation of life." Harriet Monroe subsequently wrote him that his piece was the best thing written in America on the historic show.

There can be no doubt about Dell's critical skills. Ezra Pound wrote him in 1909, "I feel almost as if I should apologize for my naive surprise at finding a critic who has considered both the functions of criticism and the nature of the book before him." Dreiser was more direct. "He said I was the best critic in America, but I had said he was a great novelist, so it was only natural of him to think well of my critical powers," Dell recalled. It is more than likely that both were correct in their mutual admiration. Whether in the *Friday Literary Review*, the *Masses*, or *The Liberator*, (a journal incidently with a subscription of 50,000) Dell's critical work created a new framework for understanding literature. His work in this respect comes prior to Pound or Eliot's critical writings. And though Dell offers a critical approach that differs substantially from both, it is certainly as erudite and compelling.

We do not unfortunately have time to treat Dell as a novelist, dramatist, or short story writer. But briefly, he was importantly connected to the Provincetown Players, and one of the first books from that group was a collection of Dell, Glaspell, and the not

yet famous Eugene O'Neill. He wrote a play for Edna St. Vincent Millay that brought her to the attention of many. One of his plays moved up to Broadway. A novel became a movie. Dell's versatility is rather extraordinary. He is in his novels, a realist, an idealist, and a proletarian writer. But he consciously retreats from the angry economic indictments of the first generation of American socialist writers like London, Norris, and Sinclair. He refuses to allow his art to become propagandistic and instead explores new secrets about the psychological implications of rebellion, and the quest for freedom. Dell thinks out the implications of Marx and Freud long before Marcuse, as his brilliant study *Love in the Machine Age* (1930) confirms. Yet it is always the artist and not the activist who is in control in Dell's fiction, and his soft, full, lyrical language would not allow it otherwise. He is a poet who puts the finely drawn themes and characters of a novelist into their dramatic order. He works in the traditions of Tolstoy and Robert Herrick, the Chicago realist, and at the same time he introduces the French notion of the "novel of ideas." Henry Miller in an interview in the movie *Reds* puts it simply and accurately, "Floyd Dell wrote beautiful novels."

In conclusion, let us return to the subject of Dell's fall from grace. As I suggested, our understanding of modernism plays a role in this unfortunate situation. Instead of acknowledging many diverse and conflicting kinds of modernism, we have simplified the paradigm into the "new versus the old." We have tended to insist there is but a single doctrine. That doctrine is almost exclusively associated with experimentation of form and disintegration of spirit. Thus most clearly the charmingly convoluted prose of Gertrude Stein, the inward stream of lyric confession of James Joyce, the plotless tales of Sherwood Anderson, the broken rhythm of common speech of Sandburg, the shatter syntax of Cummings, the erudite reconstructions and sparse imagism of Pound, the desolate resignation of Eliot, the naked lines and wasted lives of Hemingway, or the jarring newsreel juxtapositions of Dos Passos, constitute in our minds the essence and meaning of modernism. And we are ready to exclude all others who do not fit our tightly elaborated tenets.

Examination of Dell's work proves modernism as it historically unfolded was not so simple, and that there were competing creeds

working to shape the new literature of America. Dell was not an advocate of despair or alienation of literature from life, and in this form of modernism he observed a kind of "intellectual shell-shock." In his valuable little volume, *Intellectual Vagabondage*, published in 1926 by Doran, he traces the psychological movements that ended in "a celebration of ugliness and chaos of life" which he deemed the "esoteric mystery of the elect." The French Revolution disappoints the Utopian hopes of the intelligenstia and led in "literature to the Byronic mood of cynicism," and retreat into the just recently escaped Middle Ages. Next Darwinism strikes at the moral core of culture and "the horrors of the machine age" and a "vague expectation of some gigantic collapse of the existing order in world war and the emergence of some new order out of the ruins" forces literature "to deal seriously and hopefully with important human problems." It is this side of the modernist movement, perhaps best called ethical realism, with which Dell aligns himself.

But "the 'Peace'" Dell writes with horrifying clarity, "has been, indeed, even more than the war, a disillusionment." And all are appauled by the prospect of "more destructive and futile wars to come." Dell sees around him an intelligenstia that rather than fight back simply confesses "its hopelessness by the very nature of its new esthetic interests" which are mere idle "guessing games." "That is nothing very new after all," he argues, "There is the same preoccupation with 'form,' even though the most approved form has now become an ostentatious formlessness." This is a bankrupt position of a bankrupt world that does not dare act to save itself from destruction, and Dell wanted no part of this modern alternative.

So Dell tried to write and encourage a modern literature which helped to reassert man against the chaos of machine and society. And he urges a literature that will help the world "to love generously, to work honestly, to think clearly, to fight bravely, to live nobly." He concludes, "These may seem queer words for one of this vagabond generation to use without a smile. But let them stand." It is as we all know, still the 20th century and we are still at our wars of possible self destruction, and little came of Floyd Dell's vision, which is also Emerson's vision, and Whitman's vision. But that is perhaps why we have consigned him to literary

oblivion. Such a vision is too difficult for us to execute and it seems to make us uncomfortable. Yet his themes of freedom, love, self discovery, are themes that will always be at the core of great American literature.

DePaul University

CHICAGO CITYSCAPES BY THEODORE DREISER, SHERWOOD ANDERSON, AND SAUL BELLOW

David D. Anderson

In August, 1889, a girl on the verge of womanhood, newly-arrived from Columbia City, Wisconsin, walks curiously but uncomprehendingly east along Van Buren Street in Chicago in search of a dream; early in the new century a young man from Caxton, Iowa, goes eagerly into South Water Street, seeing in it his future and the meaning of America in his time; two generations later, in December, 1942, a young man no longer a civilian, not yet a soldier, presses his drawn face against a window, looking out over the desolation of the Northwest side in search of himself.

The first vignette appears early in *Sister Carrie*, Theodore Dreiser's first novel, published by Doubleday in 1900; the second, early in Book II of Sherwood Anderson's first novel, *Windy McPherson's Son*, published by John Lane in 1916; and the third, early in *Dangling Man*, Saul Bellow's first novel, published by Vanguard in 1944. In each of the novels a young person confronts the city at a critical point in his or her life: in the first, Carrie Meeber, at eighteen, with, as Dreiser comments, "vague conjections of what Chicago might be," yet "dreaming wild dreams of some vague, far-off supremacy," her only motivation a mild self-interest; in the second, Sam McPherson, in his early twenties, simultaneously a refugee from his father whose values threaten to destroy him, from a town too small to contain his ambitions, from a recently-dead mother and a woman who would become his mother, carrying with him a keen instinct for trading, and in his mind, Anderson writes, a vision of Chicago "as the old Norse marauders looked at the cities sitting in their splendour on the

Mediterranean," and his mind occupied with one thought: to get his share; in the third, Joseph, without a last name, at twenty-seven dangling between two realities, simultaneously free of responsibilities and demoralized by his condition, for eighteen years a resident of the city, hoping that in an understanding of the city, as of the room in which he lives, the war that he faces, and ultimately of himself, he can find, Bellow tells us, "clear signs" of a "common humanity," of, Joseph thinks, the truth behind the fact that "The worlds we sought were never those we saw; the worlds we bargained for were never the worlds we got."

For each of these young people Chicago marks both an ending and a beginning, and in the structure of each novel Chicago is both urban reality and metaphor for an age. For Carrie, it marks the end of family closeness, of small-town boredom, and of her girlhood and the beginning of a life in which, her vague dreams told her, "She would have a better time than she ever had before—she would be happy." For Sam, it marks the end of degradation, of embarrasment, of lies, and the beginning of opportunity to live by the values of a new century and a business age: "With almost his first day on the street he began seeing on all sides of him opportunity for gain. . . ." For Joseph, the city that he looks out upon marks not only the end of civilian life and the beginning of military service but the end of one self-image as a scholar, as one who "is keenly intent on knowing what is happening to him," and the search for another, in books, in conversation, in himself, all in a city reduced to the dimensions of a boarding-house room.

In each of the novels, the city is setting and background, and it is drawn with a sure sense of place. To Dreiser, in digression, it is

> . . . a city of over 500,000, with the ambition, the daring, the activity of a metropolis of a million. Its streets and houses were already scattered over an area of seventy-five square miles . . . . The sound of the hammer engaged upon the erection of new structures was everywhere heard . . . . huge railroad corporations . . . . Street car lines . . . . streets and sewers . . . . long, blinking lines of gas lamps . . . . an imposing appearance to most of the wholesale houses . . . . large plates of window glass . . . . Polished brass or nickel signs at the square stone entrances . . . . a high and mighty air . . . . the gulf between poverty and success . . . .

Against this background, Carrie in her innocence, briefly employed in two of the great enterprises, suddenly finds herself with a dashing young salesman, ensconced in a fashionable, if small, apartment on the West Side, loved by Hurstwood, at least momentarily a theatrical success, and Chicago is suddenly hers: "The whole earth was brimming sunshine . . . she tripped along, the clear sky pouring liquid blue into her soul," as destiny smiled on her.

To Anderson, conversely, the city manifests not the massiveness of the monuments men build to themselves and their enterprise, but a manifestation of "The hugeness of life," a perception of which his protagonist is only dimly aware:

> All of the faces going past him, the women in their furs, the young men with cigars in their mouths going to the theatres, the bald old men with watery eyes, the boys with bundles of newspapers under their arms . . . . the slim prostitutes lurking in the hallways . . . . men looking at the sidewalk . . . . the faces of women pressed against the little squares of glass . . . . old men . . . men in shabby coats whose feet scuffled as they hurried along . . . . young boys with the pink of virtue in their faces . . . . the lake lashed by the wind . . . .

But Sam, imbued with the spirit of the age that had created the city and filled it with life, sees the people around him, not as human beings, but "as so many individuals that might some day test their ability against his own . . . . exercising his mind by imagining this or that one arrayed against him in deals, and planning the method by which he would win in the imaginary struggle."

Bellow's Chicago, seen by Joseph from his third-floor perspective, is that of the Northwest Side, "a dreary hour's ride on the El" from his Southside room:

> The sun had been covered up; snow was beginning to fall. It was sprinkled over the black pores of the gravel and was lying in thin slips on the slanting roofs . . . . Not far off there were chimneys, their smoke a lighter gray than the gray of the sky; and . . . ranges of poor dwellings, warehouses, billboards, culverts, electric signs blankly burning, parked cars and moving cars, and the occasional bare plan

of a tree . . . . human lives organized around these ways and houses . . . . taverns, movies, assaults, divorces, murders . . . .

Joseph ponders the scene, its drabness matching his mood: "Where was there a particle of what, elsewhere, or in the past, had spoken in man's favor?" he asks himself, unwilling or unable to admit that there is none, that there must be a doubt, that "There must be a difference between things and persons and even acts and persons," but he can only conclude, knowing what neither Carrie nor Sam could, in their innocence, see beyond the promising facade: "This would probably be a condemned age." Yet, uncertainly, he hesitates: "But . . . it might be a mistake to think of it in that way."

As each of the three young people reflects on the Chicago cityscape he or she chooses to see, each sees, too, a glimpse of the Chicago beyond the reality: for Carrie, a glimpse of what her innocence insists can be and will be; for Sam, an image of the great American game of business that promises him success. Both of them are convinced of their individual importance and the bright promise of their destiny. For Joseph, conversely, older, but no less innocent, in an older age that denies individual destiny and hope, there is, first of all, the mass of the city and the mass poverty of flesh and the spirit and in it echo the destruction and deprivation of the war that lies beyond. The city before him becomes representative of his state, "the backdrop upon which I can be seen swinging," the city that is a prelude and an echo of war.

For Carrie, as she sees her future beyond the reality of the city, both of which are tied intrinsically together in her limited imagination, the direction of her life is taken over and directed by the city itself, and as its values are superimposed on the innocent *tabula rosa* she had brought with her, Chicago becomes, as Dreiser intended, the metaphor for his vision of the universe; of the uncontrollable forces that direct human life, and that ultimately mock those who seek to direct their destiny.

Although the choice that Chicago apparently presents Carrie, to become an exploited drudge, whether in a drab flat like that of her sister's or in the shops and factories she briefly experiences, or to become, as she does, the kept mistress of first Druett and then Hurstwood, is no choice at all; Carrie ultimately finds her

success on the stage. But the choice has been made for her through chance, circumstance, deception. Her innocence, like that of the farm boys lured by painted women in Carl Sandburg's Chicago, her attractiveness, like that of the clothes she has learned so quickly to admire, her pliancy, like that of the river made to reverse its flow, and the inexorable greed of the men who serve Chicago well and receive its reward combine to make the course of her life inevitable. And chance, circumstance, deception, and ultimately, in another city, a moment of determination when the values of both cities become her own and Hurstwood is sent to his fate, combine with a minor talent and still-innocent attractiveness to insure both her success and her failure, as Dreiser makes clear in the final scene.

As Carrie, professionally known as Carrie Madenda, sits in her rocking chair by the window—the peculiar American invention that provides the illusion rather than the reality of movement—another city and yet the same city before her, and a slow, black boat carries Hurstwood's nameless remains to Potter's Field, Dreiser cries out in elegy and eulogy and regret in his love. But Carrie rocks on, dreaming yet of the happiness that still eludes her, unaware of an urban reality that denies it.

While Carrie dreams of happiness, Sam McPherson seeks dollars, the only measure of worth that the city, its men of affairs, and a new business civilization understand, and he finds them in the buying and selling, the manipulations and deals that have given Chicago its pulse, its identity, and a veneer of culture that means nothing to Sam or his associates. By thirty, he, too, is a man of affairs, as buyer, as treasurer, as director, in classic American fashion, of the great Rainey Arms Company, and dollars have in his dreams become power: "I have in my hands a great tool," he thought; "with it I will pay my way into the place I mean to occupy among the big men of this city and this nation." And, in further emulating the Horatio Alger myth, he marries Sue Rainey, daughter of the company's owner.

At that point Horatio Alger's tale would have stopped, but Sam's monomania drives him to greater power; at the same time his personal relations deteriorate, his marriage crumbles, and, finally, a power on the Chicago stock exchange, controller of the firearms trust and the Chicago and Northern Lake Railroad, he

is alone, bloated, restless, often morose and ugly to other members of what has become known as the Chicago McPherson crowd.

At that point Dreiser might have ended the novel, leaving McPherson looking out at the city of his triumph and failure, but neither is Anderson Dreiser nor is Sam McPherson Carrie, and, wisely and practically turning his holdings into cash, Sam leaves Chicago behind, determined to find not the happiness that continued to elude Carrie, but an equally amorphous Truth. Like, Carrie, however, Sam leaves Chicago behind as he seeks across the countryside beyond Chicago what had eluded him. He becomes a laborer, a strike leader, a town's anonymous benefactor, until finally he realizes that truth—or fulfillment—or happiness—can only come in closeness with others. In a conclusion that remains unsatisfactory in spite of Anderson's revision of it for the second edition, published in 1922, McPherson returns to his wife, bringing with him the children of an abandoned woman, the children that would give meaning to an empty marriage and a newly-fulfilled life.

Although Carrie had put Chicago behind her through Hurstwood's trickery or fraud, the result of her innocence or stupidity, both Sam McPherson and Saul Bellow's Joseph, of a later, more introspective generation, do so deliberately, each of them ultimately recognizing that whatever answers exist, if any indeed do, cannot be found in the city. But Joseph's choice, unlike Sam's, is ultimately made for him as the result of a simple request.

Joseph's search is neither for happiness nor money nor truth, but for insight into himself, a truth but not the truth that he seeks in the city, in casual encounters, in relations with others, especially his wife, Iva, in the grotesques of the rooming house, reminiscent of the people of Winesburg, but always he returns to himself, alone in the room. Against the background of Chicago in winter—fake Santas with soiled beards, snow that quickly becomes dirty slush, fake musical sentiments, insincere holiday festivities, and increasing alienation from family, friends, temporary mistress, fellow roomers, even wife—he ponders the nature and experience of himself. Waiting for a call that does not come, Joseph wrestles with himself and his state; he struggles with a freedom that is illusion; he debates "the Spirit of Alternatives," his alter ego. Finally, he can struggle no longer, but determines to surrender to

the elements that threaten him in the only way that he can: as winter becomes spring, he requests immediate induction.

Like Dreiser's and Anderson's portraits of Chicago, Bellow's too, becomes an extended metaphor for the human condition in America in an industrial, mass society: the city itself, complex, massive, and beyond individual control, takes on the role of a nearly human, apparently malevolent antagonist; like Hardy's heath country, it becomes a character in the drama of the individual. But Bellow's Chicago, that of the Southside neighborhood in which Joseph wanders, although no less impersonal than that of Dreiser's cabarets, theatres, and Gold coast and Anderson's Loop and financial district, is both smaller in scale and yet more complex than either of the others; it becomes not a metaphor for time and circumstance, but a metaphor within a metaphor as the room, the city ,and ultimately the war, unseen but ever-present, combine to define the complexity of a time and an experience beyond our comprehension. Carrie can escape into her dreams, and Sam can return to his wife. But for Joseph, however, there is only the irony of intensifed, perhaps fatal, regimentation as the city is reduced to the dimensions of a room and the room is expanded to those of the war.

As reality, as metaphor, as literary city and city in literature, as promise and denial of fulfillment, Chicago and its cityscapes, whether in H. L. Mencken's terms, "the gargantuan and inordinate abatoir by Lake Michigan" or the bright, shining place of the late nineteenth-century innocents, loom large in the landscape of the literary imagination of our time. For Dreiser, for Anderson, for Bellow, each a new novelist deeply imbued with his Chicago experience, Chicago's beauty and its horror ultimately merge in the lives of human beings—the people who give life to Chicago as reality and metaphor in these remarkable first novels.

Michigan State University

PAUL OSBORN AND HIS GALS IN KALAMAZOO

CHRISTINE BIRDWELL

The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn,
Morning's at seven,
. . . . . .
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!

Often included in popular anthologies of inspirational poetry, this song from Robert Browning's poem, *Pippa Passes,* inspired Michigan playwright Paul Osborn to use one of its lines—"Morning's at seven"—as the ironic title for his 1939 play about a small-town, backyard world. In the little world of *Morning's at Seven* everything isn't all right, but at least the elderly Gibbs sisters and their menfolk abide in time-tested balance if not in perfect peace. Ida, her husband Carl Bolton, and their son Homer live right next door to Cora and her husband Theodore (or Thor) Swanson. Unmarried sister Aaronetta (or Arry) lives with the Swansons. Several blocks away live Esther (or Esty) and her husband David Crampton. The Gibbs sisters can be summed up in this bit of family doggerel:

Esty's smartest,
Arry's wildest,
Ida's slowest,
Cora's mildest.

However, all the backyard balances are disturbed, all the carefully concealed tensions spring to the surface when, for the first time, forty-year-old Homer brings home his thirty-nine-year-old

girlfriend Myrtle. (He has gone with her for twelve years and been engaged for seven.) With the arrival of Myrtle, the Gibbs-Bolton-Swanson-Crampton hopes, passions, and anxieties fill the stage:

1. David, angered that Esty keeps slipping out to visit her "moronic" family, announces that she will occupy the second floor of their house, their "Crystal Fortress," and that he will occupy the first.
2. Esty, enjoying her sisters regardless of "how ignorant they are," begins to discover that life without critical David can be fun and freedom—giggles, songs, and games played by "lots of people on both sides."
3. Carl, plagued for years by "spells" during which he fears that he has lost his true self, decides to move in with intellectual David, who will then help Carl find out who and where he is in life.
4. Ida, urging son Homer to marry so that he won't become like the sad and suicidal old bachelor she saw in a movie, finds that she needs her son to stay with her when Carl leaves to live with David.
5. Homer, ambiguous about marriage (he has been very comfortable in his little room at his parents' house), decides to stay with his mother and take care of her. He won't be able to marry Myrtle after all.
6. Myrtle, liking her job but getting very lonely in the evenings, is faced with giving up her dream of marriage and a home of her own.
7. Cora, discovering that Homer and Myrtle won't be needing the new house Carl has built for them, schemes to rent it for herself and Thor because she is sick of sharing her home and husband with irritating Arry.
8. Arry, fearing Cora's plan to deprive her of the only home and husband-surrogate she has ever had, threatens anew to reveal the dark secret about herself and Thor.
9. And Thor tries frantically to keep everything from breaking apart and spoiling his pleasure in retirement.

In *Morning's at Seven* all the characters ask, like Carl, "Where am I?" in life and find answers of varying satisfaction. Because the play is a comedy, most of this agonizing is not only amusing

but often extremely funny. And, as in all comedies, the proper order of life is restored in the final scenes.

The play is based on experiences from its author's life. Born in 1901 in Evansville, Indiana, the son of a Baptist minister, Paul Osborn spent his childhood in Kalamazoo, Michigan. According to a 1980 *New York Times article,* he created *Morning's at Seven* from "the gossip and squabbling . . . overheard as a child in the backyards of his relatives' homes." (Stories that may be apocryphal tell how Osborn refused performance permission within a one hundred or two hundred or three hundred mile radius—the mileage varies with the story teller—of Kalamazoo because he feared that someone in the audience might know the originals of the stage characters.) Osborn received an M.A. in English from the University of Michigan and taught there from 1925 to 1927, but he felt unfulfilled. As he told the *New York Times* interviewer, "A lot of my old friends . . . were working in hardware stores or banks, and that just wasn't for me." At first not "gripped" by a love of theatre for its own sake, Osborn saw playwriting as a way out of Michigan. He went East—attending George Pierce Baker's Dramatic Workshop in 1927, teaching English at Yale in 1928, and working on the Long Island Railroad while he wrote.

Osborn's first two plays appealed to neither audiences nor critics, but his 1930 comedy, *The Vinegar Tree,* and his 1938 fantasy adaptation, *On Borrowed Time,* were both successes. However, 1939's *Morning's at Seven*—in spite of actors like Dorothy Gish, direction by Joshua Logan, design by Jo Mielziner, and good reviews—lasted only forty-four performances. That commercial failure was followed by a similar short run for 1943's *The Innocent Voyage,* an adaptation of the Richard Hughes novel. In spite of these setbacks, however, Paul Osborn continued to write and, principally, to adapt. *A Bell for Adano, Point of No Return,* and *The World of Susie Wong* were all great commercial successes of the Forties and Fifties. Although Osborn liked writing original scripts, after the failure of *Morning's at Seven* he did more and more adaptations because they paid well and drew larger audiences. To his regret, adaptations became "easy." Like Carl Bolton, Osborn may have wondered how he had "branched off," "taken the wrong turn," may have wanted to "get back to the fork."

The main branching led to Hollywood. Osborn's skill as an adapter was an asset in writing screen plays such as *Madame Curie* (1943), *The Yearling* (1946), *Portrait of Jennie* and *Forever Amber* (1948), *East of Eden* (1955), *Sayonara* (1957), *South Pacific* (1958), *John Brown's Body* (1967). An attempt to "get back to the fork" of Broadway failed with the 1965 out-of-town closing of *Hot September,* a musical based on William Inge's *Picnic.*

During the 1970's Paul Osborn lost most of his eyesight. No longer able to read or write, he told the *New York Times* interviewer that he felt frustrated, in limbo. Like Arry Gibbs, who had mistakenly thought that getting old meant "that everything's more peaceful and quiet . . . like going to bed when you're nice and drowsy—and yet you know that you won't fall asleep for a little while—and you just lie there sort of comfortably—and enjoy it," Osborn found that aging wasn't "that way at all," that there was no serenity in growing old.

Paul Osborn found some late-life comfort and affirmation, however, when his 1939 failure, *Morning's at Seven,* became the hit of 1980. The original production, designed and directed in a then-contemporary style, may have been a victim of bad timing, suffering in comparison with the more nostalgic, mythic, and innovatingly staged *Our Town,* which had opened the preceding year. Certainly *Morning's at Seven* had stiff competition from other new plays—the serious dramas *Key Largo, The Time of Your Life, The Little Foxes,* and the comedies *The Male Animal, The Philadelphia Story, The Man Who Came to Dinner,* and *Life with Father.* According to critic Brooks Atkinson, 1939 audiences were not very interested in a play about old people or else did not care for the way Osborn depicted them: "rebellious, petulant, or foolishly discontented" instead of "able to organize their lives contentedly."

Although its Broadway run was short, *Morning's at Seven* became a favorite with stock companies and community theatres and was performed off-Broadway in 1955. But in 1980 it finally took the right turning in an award-winning revival. With a cast which included Nancy Marchand, Maureen O'Sullivan, Elizabeth Wilson, and Teresa Wright, it won Tonys for best revival, best director (Vivian Matalon), and best featured actor (David

Rounds as Homer). This time *Morning's at Seven* played 584 performances in New York, then went to California for another long run, and finally to regional theatres all over the United States.

Although some critics thought that several actors leaned too close to caricature, most reviewers were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the play. They made comparisons to *Our Town, Winesburg, Ohio,* and Chekov and also to Thurber, Booth Tarkington, James Whitcomb Riley, Norman Rockwell (with a bite), and *Vic 'n' Sade.*

Why did *Morning's at Seven* succeed so gloriously in the Eighties? According to critics and to Osborn

1. The production was excellent—with ensemble acting and sensitive directing. Instead of emphasizing the farcial elements as Joshua Logan apparently did in 1939, Vivian Matalon stressed the human qualities.
2. The audience had changed. An Eighties audience was more interested in character revelation; it was more accepting of the play's mixture of comedy and seriousness, sentimentality and irony. It also was more informed about and sympathetic toward the problems of aging.
3. The setting of the play had been changed. For the revival it had been moved back to the early 1920's, a production decision which, according to the *Burns Mantle Yearbook,* increased the "advantages of nostalgia in the style not only of the performances but also in the look [setting and costumes] of the show." Audiences might find it difficult to think longingly of 1939—the end of the Great Depression but the beginning of World War II. But they could view the past of the Twenties with affection. For example, the set's turn-of-the-century houses were described by the *Christian Science Monitor* as "the kind that big city people dream about"—the kind they would love to renovate if they could find one in a decent neighborhood.
4. The charm of the setting illustrates an important factor in the charm of the revival: its lure of the past. According to reviewers, *Morning's at Seven* in 1980 presented "an America lost forever" *(Women's Wear Daily),* "a place so many of us came from, . . . one which the further it recedes into the past, the more people want to reach out for it" *(Wall Street Journal).*

But the play was not just "a relic from a crowded attic of nostalgia" *(Time).* It presented themes of "our most Utopian fantasy . . . the idealization of the ordinary" *(Newsweek),* a world with "the family as the center of its gravity and the blood-tie as life's enduring nourishment" *(Time).* This is the ideal that audiences in the Eighties—the post-industrial era of an uncertain economy, of broken family ties—have a need for. In depression times— the Thirties or the Eighties—the family is seen as life's center. As the Lynds found in Depression-era "Middletown," people become concerned with "the big and little immensities of personal living by which . . . families in this culture seek to ameliorate the essential loneliness and confusion of life" (quoted in Theodore Caplow et al., *Middletown Families: Fifty Years of Change and Continuity*). As Richard Lingeman says in *Small Town America,* urban dwellers see themselves as "banished Adams and Eves . . . who have a need for belonging, for brotherhood and sisterhood."

Audiences apparently find in *Morning's at Seven* a human concern for home and family which counterbalances our society's bondage to technology and success. Is their response mere sentimentality? Douglas Watt, a critic for the New York *Daily News,* saw the play's ending as sentimental because everybody "gets their wishes": "In Osborn's America, Moscows are within reach of all sisters." Reviewer Edwin Wilson countered that the play is not sentimental because "a price has been paid to make 'all right with the world.'"

What are the Moscows and what is their price?

1. David, tacitly acknowledging his failure in personal relationships, recognizes how much he needs Esty.
2. Esty gets to live in the whole Crystal Fortress with David. (Maybe he'll stop complaining about her visits to her sisters.)
3. Carl returns home to Ida when he discovers that the Crampton's don't have three hundred dollars to pay for the new bathroom he and David will need if they are to live on the first floor.

4. Homer, angry that his mother didn't "push him out" years ago, gets Myrtle, a forthcoming child, and a home of his own.
5. Myrtle gets Homer, the house, the baby, and Homer's family. And if the "young" couple become bored or lonely, they can always visit Homer's parents in the evenings.
6. Arry gets to play two big renunciation scenes (three, if one counts her letter explaining the truth of her affair with Thor). And since she leaves the Swansons only to move in with the Boltons, she will still be right in the middle of family gossip and even see Thor "now and then."
7. Cora, no longer so mild, gets to live in her house alone with her husband at last. She also finds release from her newly articulated hatred of Arry in the realization that she will miss her sister once she has moved out.
8. Ida gets Carl back, Arry to replace Homer, a daughter-in-law, and a grandchild (though she doesn't know about that yet).
9. Thor gets some peace and quiet—and Myrtle as another woman to give avuncular protection.

At the happy ending the proper order of comedy is restored.

As an audience member still enveloped in the warm world of the play, one does not think about the price of happy endings, especially if the price is very funny. Arry's moving out means moving only as far as Ida's—an uproarious turn of events. And since Ida and Carl are the slowest and craziest family members, Arry probably can't do them any serious damage. But not all the rewards are Moscows. Some are, as Cora says hesitantly, "something . . . a lot . . . If that's all you can get." What Esty and Arry get is only "something."

Esty, in spite of brief lovely freedom from David's pomposity and her own deception, returns to David—she or Osborn conveniently forgetting the marriage problems she enumerated in Act II. When David says that they have kept their lives "clear and intelligent," she agrees even though it is clear that he certainly has not. When David tentatively explores the possibility of regrets for the years past, she denies them; the years have been worthwhile because "I've always had you, David." But what Esty has always really had that makes life worthwhile is love for and from her sisters—and her own good sense.

At least Esty ends up with a restored home and husband. The woman who doesn't isn't left with much. Arry is certainly not one of Tenessee Williams' spinsters, described by *The Glass Menagerie's* Amanda Wingfield as "barely tolerated . . . tucked way in some mouse-trap of a room—without any nest—Eating the crust of humility all of their lives." But all of her life Arry has had to settle for a fringe existence and has fought to hang on to that, changing from wild and pretty to testy and eccentric in the process. Guilty over her one sexual experience with Thor, countless times she has threatened the revelation of that expreience to keep Thor tied to her and to preserve a place in his home; yet she fears that her relationship with her sisters can be served by their belief that the affair has gone on for years. Long ago she had faced the predicament of the unmarried, unskilled "fallen" woman with no independent income: loving Thor and not knowing what to do, "she just went on living with . . . [Cora and Thor] because there wasn't any other place for her to go. . . ." Now she thinks of her past as making no sense, as years she might as well not have lived. She has no real home because only women with husbands have homes: "Marriage gives a woman dignity. . . . It gives her dignity and companionship and a place to be when she gets old." For Arry, that would be a lot. Now all she can do is cross the backyard and move in with another set of relatives—though she does so with panache.

In *Morning's at Seven* women are the saving center of the family. In the last scene of the play, Arry says that it's the woman "who makes the home and looks after things and keeps it together." ("That's just the woman's function," chimes in Myrtle.) Esty and Arry in particular subordinate their interests to those of their extended family. They live in the perpetual dilemma of women—that realization of self is difficult to achieve within the family and that the family relationship is as important as the realization of self. For them there are no Moscows; there is a price to be paid to keep the family intact.

Because of her centrality to the home, "it's the woman that ought to be the happiest" says Arry. But the Gibbs sisters are really happiest not in their housekeeping or even with their hus-

bands, but in their relationship with each other. It is not perfectly peaceful but it is strong. In the little world of Paul Osborn's *Morning's at Seven* the answer to the question "Where am I in life?" is "I'm with my family in the backyards of Kalamazoo; and if that's all I can get, that's something."

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