

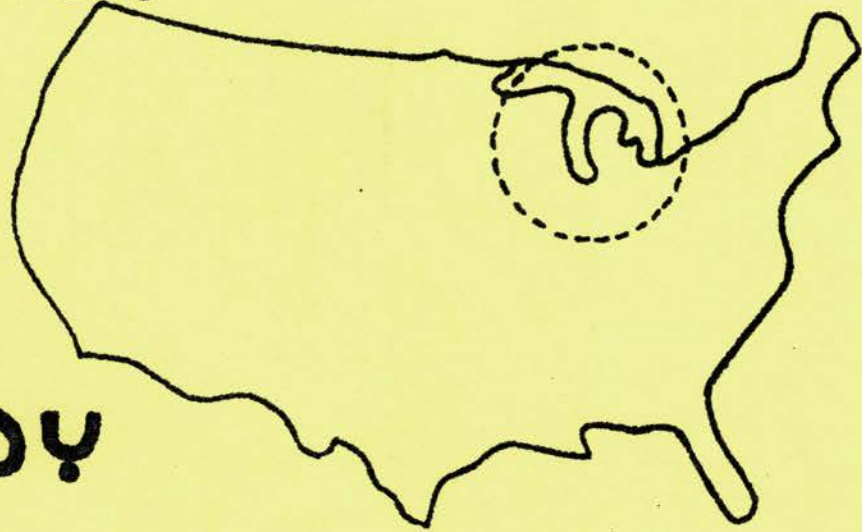
SOCIETY

FOR

THE

STUDY

OF



MIDWESTERN

LITERATURE

(MIDWESTERN MISCELLANY I)

MIDWESTERN MISCELLANY I

Being Essays on Various Topics
For Various Occasions By Members
Of the Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

Edited by David D. Anderson

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PREFACE

With this first issue of Midwestern Miscellany the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature inaugurates its third publication. Unlike the Newsletter, which is published three times a year, in Spring, Summer, and Fall, and MidAmerica, which appears annually in the Winter, the Miscellany will appear irregularly, once or twice, or perhaps three times a year, as interesting, informative, amusing essays accumulate.

This first group of brief essays had its inception in programs sponsored by the Society. Dick Thomas's "To Chiggers With Love" originated in the Society's discussion of "The Sense of Place in Midwestern Poetry" at the Newberry Library in Chicago on December 28, 1973. The other five are the result of the Society's first venture into an examination of "Midwestern Popular Literature" at the National Conference on Popular Culture in Milwaukee on May 2, 1974. Undoubtedly future programs will contribute much of the content of future Miscellanies, but we hope, too, that members will submit other Midwestern essays for inclusion.

This journal, like its companions, the Newsletter and MidAmerica, is the product of a Society growing in membership, prominence, and usefulness and of a group of hard-working people who put it together. It is dedicated to the Society's members and to those others, including Joan Brunette, Yvonne Titus, Sharon Simons, Barbara Hanna, Iola Kebler, and Raija Manning, who have made it possible.

David D. Anderson

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TO CHIGGERS WITH LOVE:
A DISCUSSION OF PLACE IN MIDWESTERN POETRY

F. Richard Thomas

LOVE

Yesterday
when I helped you
fill pails with
elderberries,
it struck me
I was a grand hulking
chigger, eating
at your heart;
and after gorging
on that fruit,
I felt
your blood in my lungs,
the two of us toppling
backwards
end over
end
through the tall
darkening stalks.

Today
I am trying
to thrive
on my own
recipes, while
you do
your wine
your self.

I am not only a young, struggling, Midwestern, middle class poet with unique personal experiences, but I am also a poet within a very close community of other Midwestern poets who have common experiences. As a result of these two sets of experiences, I think I am beginning to understand, at least partially, the ways in which some Midwestern poets have had to come to terms with their Midwest--their place. This poem of mine, "Love," seems to me to be typical of many Midwestern poems--mine and other poets'. It is obviously an expression of love; but, having been written under the influence of over 100 chigger bites, it was inspired by real mental and physical discomfort. And this is what I'm beginning to understand: I think there is a very close relationship between my hates (or discomforts) and my loves. In short, I sometimes have not been able to tolerate the Midwest, but, out of this discomfort, great love has been nurtured and, sometimes, flourished.

I'm sure many people have ambivalent love/hate emotions about these traditional Midwestern phenomena: family reunions in the country which always include both warm

hugs and snide comments, both intense boredom and inspiring moments; beautiful but nerve-chilling Minnesota winters; the awesome but frightening prairies of the west-Midwest; the wild closed-in hills of the south-Midwest, and so forth.

But I also have many personal experiences which have inspired these love/hate emotions in me. And they are not so personal that many Midwesterners might not have felt similarly. One of these very happy and frightening experiences was to be able to spend part of my youth with grandparents who made their living on a small, forty acre farm in Southern Indiana. I wrote a book of poetry about this experience, entitled Family, which deals with the family my grandmother and grandfather started on their farm. The following two poems from the beginning of the book are part of a group of poems that try to establish the feeling that I had from living on the farm. These poems, like almost all of them in the book, show that mixture of discomfort and love, of push and pull, of calmness and terror--typical of my Midwestern poems.

THE OUTHOUSE

Many times
I try to use
that cool
urine-stained board, hold
my breath till
I can't, then
breathe the
bright light that
 pushes through the door boards
 falls to the dark floor
(where the spiders whisper,
and wasps).²

THE APPLE ORCHARD

Fall evenings I hunt
gnarled fruit among
long mat grass and ruined
trees (ticks stipple
the twisted limbs).
I slide a fine blade
through the flesh
to make two stars.
 Juice shines
on my teeth, glistens
down my chin and
neck as I snap and
suck the meat from
the core. Eat
a way into the night.³

The whole book, Family, shows the destruction of a Midwestern family, a destruction which begins for me with the death of my grandfather, a man who inspired and received both great love and violent hatred. In many ways he was the cause of the destruction of the Midwestern family, as is shown in the following poem in which I

obviously hate my grandfather. I hate what he does; yet I'm also very attached to him because I see that the environment, the Midwest outside of the boundaries of his farm, is munching away at his forty acres and the kind of life that his 40 acres stood for. The changing Midwestern environment is also a destroyer.

DEATH

After his funeral

I roar the dusty roads
to the old home, arm myself
with a lungful of August, and
wagging the program of his death,
walk the deep dust path past
the wasted chicken coop to the barn.
The barnboards slip between the standstone
slabs I helped him carry from the creekbed
to keep the rats from digging in.
(One clean May day up from the plow, he
heaped a pile of the stones to hold the old
redbone, Sounder, down.

With his 12-gauge he splattered
the crying dog's head over the cowpath
for killing a couple of chickens.)

The cowpath

winds the hill to the pond's
edge. Palming away the brown fuzz-leaking
cattails, I step
onto the cracked clay bottom, yearn
towards the center.

In the small pool

slim silveredged fish swarm and slash
in tobaccojuice water. Some with panic
energy throw themselves to the clay, bake
rigid with screaming 0 mouths. Others
let the phlegm recede from them, drown
on mud and air.

Across the field

at the low end of the marsh
the Briggs & Stratton pump
that drains the pond sputters
to silence.
On the horizon
National homes armed with sump pumps
march slowly in.

Now, up at the house, Grandma angles
into the white wood lawnchair
near the line of poplars beside
the front porch.

A pink & white Ford flying a brown
squirrel's tail, and, behind it,
a gray & silver Chevy rusting
at the rocker panels, park
lean off the road's edge
into the dusty honeysuckle.

I begin
 the long climb up the path,
 away from the pond's eye,
 for the traditional postmortem meal.⁴

I am not alone in the poets of my age who have ambivalent feelings about their Midwestern heritage, their place. Several years ago, two other poets and myself edited an anthology of Midwestern poems entitled Stoney Lonesome (which is the real name of a town in Southern Indiana). At that time we tried to figure out why we wanted to limit our anthology to Midwesterners. Our reasons--none of which may even be true or justifiable--were defensive, snide, and carping. We felt that Easterners and Westerners had all the access to the media they wanted; that Easterners and Westerners and Southerners didn't have to justify their existence, whereas we did; that Lucien Stryk's anthology, Heartland, was incomplete because it didn't include us; that if we couldn't get the approval of the New York Times we'd publish our own and approve ourselves. And there were other reasons, all of which reflected the feeling we had about why we wanted to do the anthology, a feeling that was announced by at least one word of the title Stoney Lonesome. We felt lonesome, or lonely, or unacknowledged. In short our distaste for what we conceived to be our Midwestern predicament provided the inspiration and energy for the anthology, and the end result was something we could be proud of.

But there is more. This Midwestern anthology had roots in a "commune" of artists to which I belonged, and still do. It's not a commune in the sense that we live together. Now we're all married and have separate families. But many of us did live together off and on for varying lengths of time, and we're still a very close-knit group--of poets, especially, but also painters, potters, playwrights, short story writers, novelists, and so forth. We are all Midwesterners who started a community as a result of our displeasure with college rules and politics in the 1950's, and the pleasure we found in making art.

Most of us left our middle class homes several hundred miles behind when we went to college. I don't think any of us knew why we were going to college, but when we got there we found ourselves confronted with a kind of life that was foreign, exciting, and sometimes dull and stultifying beyond belief. We were supposed to study independently; but mostly we met behind locked dorm doors to smoke "cigs," chug beer, sip shots of Southern Comfort, and dream about being sex idols. We didn't know what marijuana was, except that those jazz musicians who spun for hours on our portable turntables all smoked it, and some were in prison for it. For all we knew--which was what the propaganda told us--they were probably hooked on it for life. We met each other behind these locked doors, had bull sessions, and agonized. That seemed to be our purpose--agonizing. We agonized so much that we drank too much Southern Comfort, smoked too many cigarettes and got sick. Some of the things we agonized over were significant and others were insignificant; but the fact is, all of these things were terribly serious and important to us at the time.

We did read books in college, but our interest was not with the books that were assigned in class. We sweated over Colin Wilson's Outsider, Joyce's Portrait, Miller's Tropics, Thomas's Portrait, Celine's Journey to the End of the Night, Wylie's Generation of Vipers, and a good many of the works of the exotic "Lost Generation." For painters we accepted the French Impressionists without reservation or criticism. Our music heroes were all jazz artists except for one: Coltrane, Mingus, Davis, Parker, Simone, Gillespie, Charles, MJQ, and Richard Wagner. Overtly we scorned popular music, but covertly we beat our feet to it like everyone else.

One of us, who was majoring in engineering, was reading the Outsider, drinking Falstaff, smoking unfiltered Lucky Strikes, and listening to Tristan and Isolde from the two by three inch speakers in his four by five foot dorm room, had a mystic experience, quit going to classes, and changed his major to art. Most of us had similar temperments and, therefore, similar college experiences.

But even with the dramatic changes we did make, we still had to shuffle in our student shoes, or become non-conformists, or a bit of both. In loco parentis rules, and their by-products made us feel we had to do one or the other or both. The rules are familiar to most people in education. ROTC was required. Women couldn't attend late night bull-sessions because they were locked in their dorms at 10 p.m. Anti-administration political involvement was likely to result in expulsion from the university. Students wearing bermuda shorts in the Student Union Building were asked to leave. Only students wearing coats and ties or hose and heels were allowed to eat Wednesday night and Sunday afternoon "dress dinners." And one incredible rule stated that three or more students from the same dorm or fraternity constituted a party, and this had to be registered with the dean of students.

Many of us, as students, reacted strongly (usually inwardly, but sometimes outwardly, too) to written regulations like these, as well as to other, unwritten codes. And some of us experienced the discomfort of being "different," or being suspect because we didn't conform, because we did wear Bermuda shorts in the Union, or blue-jeans on campus; or because, if we were women, we committed the sin of wearing slacks to class in the dead of winter.

There are many ways to be young non-conformists, to rebel against codes and rules in the Midwest. If you're from Chicago, you might pick fights and drink. If you're from Indianapolis you might go to whorehouses and steal hubcaps. If you're from Hoopeston, Illinois, you might go to the local poolroom and smoke before you're sixteen. But we, as middle-class "arty," college students rebelled against the Midwest by growing beards like the Beats, making art, and gathering together to show and discuss our new creations. In order to be less threatened by the feeling that we had to conform, we banded together with those people who felt as we did. And from this community we achieved a sense of belonging to the Midwest that would have been almost impossible without the community.

Between ten and fifteen years ago when we got together we were comfortable and easy with one another; we could drop our masks in a jar by the front door and enjoy whole weekends, or more, of conviviality or freedom, without fear of condemnation or reprimand from parents, teachers, preachers, or deans. These retreats gave us the spark of energy we needed to go out into the world again, unalone and unafraid, to tackle not only our artwork, but also the values and standards which we didn't like, but which held us in their grasp.

Even today we are still perhaps somewhat lonesome--both loving and hating the Midwest. Many of us still receive confidence and security from the ongoing community. We are able to live in the Midwest because we have good friends, and we get good ideas for our work both because of and despite our environment. We are attracted to much of what repulses us. Just as I was attracted to both the good and evil which threatened

1. First published in Star-News-Paper
 2. First published in White Eagle
 3. First published in Year
 4. First published in Post-Lore

NEW DIMENSIONS IN RECENT MICHIGAN FICTION

Douglas A. Noverr

Anyone who has traveled recently in upper lower Michigan and in the Upper Peninsula cannot help recognizing the development blight which has hit the land and the people. In the area north above Houghton Lake in the lower peninsula the blight takes the form of inland lake and river developments (frontage, view, and access varieties); luxurious self contained recreational and living areas such as Michaywe, Schuss Mountain Kingdom, Lake of the North, Presque Isle; mobile homes and modular units squatting on narrow bulldozed plots along major and county roads, which represent an escape from the problems of urban areas or provide low tax retirement homes; and new private enterprise parks such as Jellystone Parks or KOA Kampgrounds which successfully compete with state parks in comforts and electrical hookups. The Upper Peninsula has seemed to fared better, although one senses that the area resists widespread commercialization only because of its remoteness and its lack of an expressway network to reduce driving time.

However, there has been encouraging news about the chances for the Upper Peninsula's survival as the varied cultural and ethnic area that it has been in the past. The Navy has apparently dropped its intended plan to build an underground communications network (called Project Sanguine) covering 3,000 square miles in the Upper Peninsula. This grid network of underground cables and transmitters would have been a part of a "fail safe" system to communicate retaliatory directions to Polaris submarines during a nuclear war by long wavelength signals. The proposed State Highway Department plan to intersect the Upper Peninsula with a new US-2 east-west freeway (a plan that would eliminate forty acres of forest for every one mile of freeway and would alter the environment extensively) called the "Chipmunk Route" has been a dead issue for about three years. There has even been the heartening news that a pack of three timber wolves have been successfully transplanted from Minnesota into the Huron Mountain area.

I mention these facts and recent developments because they form an essential background to the subject I would like to discuss this afternoon. My purpose here is to consider two novels recently written by Michigan born and raised writers: Larry Smith's The Original (published by Herder and Herder in May, 1972) and Jim Harrison's Wolf (published by Simon and Schuster in 1971). Both of these works are first novels by the authors, and both novels are now available in paperback (The Original in a Bantam edition in February, 1974, and Wolf as a Manor Book in 1973). Both novels are, to a degree, autobiographical in nature or at least based on family history as it has been played out in small Michigan rural towns. In considering these works, I would like to stress that the novels are a part of a larger movement among native Michiganders to search for and authenticate a background which was once readily there. Both writers demonstrate a profound awareness that the land and its people are changing, changing under the forces of questionable yet undeniable growth. This corrosive change has been brought on by commercialization and exploitation of the rural and wild, and by the coming of a new generation that attempts to satiate material needs on land that is often unsuited for this.

This search for an authentic experience, located in the past, has three main qualities that I would like to emphasize. First, Larry Smith and Jim Harrison see the failure of the land to support romantic dreams or hopes. Both see an end to escape

to the North Woods for large amounts of heroic raw experience or for frontier opportunities so much written about by Michigan romantic novelists in the early twentieth century. Smith documents the period from the late 1880's to the First World War, while Harrison's "false autobiographical memoir" deals with the period from 1956-1960, written from the vantage point of 1970. Second, both trace the cycle of generations on the land, with a revelation of the small and repetitious circuit of an individual's life when it is tied to the limited world of rural country life. Both recognize the deterministic forces of change, accident, fate, limited opportunities and family influence. Third, both novels offer comments on the ever shifting American dream as it was perceived and acted upon in two critical periods. The Original presents the period when much of the Michigan population shifted from work in the lumbering industry to farming with the consequent impact on family life, values attached to work, and social values. Harrison's Wolf ruminates over the period of a young man's life when what certainties he had were irrevocably changed by family members' deaths, his own inveterate wanderings and initiation into the world outside a small town, and his awareness of the deepest realities of life, often desperate and frustrated. Both The Original and Wolf represent, I believe, a maturation of fiction which uses Michigan as setting and context. By using the materials with which we are familiar and intimately as well as emotionally in touch with, these novelists authenticate the local and regional experience. Without sacrificing the uniqueness of their own personal experiences, they offer insights into our collective Midwest consciousness.

Larry Smith's The Original is the documentary saga of the Lige Garrett family, focusing on the short and ultimately tragic life of the oldest son, Jelm Garrett. With deterministic realism Smith's novel evokes the hard realities of rural farm life--the unending work, the brutal demands of the land, the absorption in work, and calloused hardness in men which inevitably resulted. The father, Lige Garrett, a former North Woods lumberjack, assumes the burden of farming 220 acres and sires a family of nine children to assist in the work. He is a demanding man who works his children, especially the oldest son, long and hard. As Jelm Garrett comes to understand his father, as he penetrates the authoritarian and dominating man, Jelm believes that his father's hardness is the result of his feeling trapped and burdened with a large family, having given up the individualistic freedom and romantic aura of his earlier work in the woods. The oldest son resents his father's heavy demands on him, but he especially recoils from the father's unrelenting will to break and tame everything (including his son, the land and nearby woods, a black colt that Jelm tries to save from castration). Smith documents the extent to which Jelm is made and shaped by the father, even though the son believes he can escape his situation in which he is no more than an unpaid farm hand. All of the son's strength and even his naive sense of the opportunities of the outside world are engendered by his father. The Original dramatizes the tensions between an ambitious and overreaching father who wants to be known for having the most spirited and best horses and a son who has what he believes are unique ideas about escape and romantic conquest which will make his life more fulfilling than his father's.

The conflict between the father and son develops into a classic love-hate syndrome, one which is intensified by narrowness of farm life with the father constantly demanding labor and then exacting it directly. The first time that Jelm works away from his father's farm he earns forty dollars building a stone silo, money that he offers to his father so that Lige will not geld the spirited colt. The horse had earlier cut itself up badly in a barbed wire fence, although surviving and healing; Jelm connected the horse to his younger brother Frank, who had been killed in an accident the day after the colt was injured. To Jelm, the horse represented a free spirit that he did not want to break or cut out. However, the father refused the money and went ahead with the castration of the colt, even forcing Jelm to help him subdue the colt. The horse turns out to be an original, since in the castrating the colt escaped

with one of his testicles by sucking it in and fighting away. After this incident, the conflict between Lige and Jelme shifts to other ground. After knocking Jelme out in a fight because of his refusal to help in the castration, Lige works his son beyond his endurance and will in a wood cutting project during the winter. The son develops an abscess in his throat, almost dying, in his attempt to match work with his father. This ultimately forces Jelme out of his father's house. He goes to live with a widow, Sary Dawkins a half mile away from his parents' farm. Having taken earlier a sexual interest in this woman, who was almost twenty years older, Jelme lives with her for a period of over two years.

This affair between Jelme and Sary Dawkins, a woman of questionable reputation and background, forces Jelme's parents to disassociate themselves totally from their son. Jelme is attracted to Mrs. Dawkins because she is sensual and attractive; she is a woman who appreciates the finer things in life which Jelme has never had (music, nice furnishings and clothes, an automobile, brandy). Jelme goes to her partly to test his masculinity, to see if he can satisfy an older and obviously experienced woman. But in reality he also has to have a place to stay, lacking, as his father recognizes, the courage and individualism to find a job in the Upper Peninsula lumber camps or in the Alaskan Yukon. During the time that he becomes determined to remain with her, Jelme is torn by his family ties, his need to have a wife who is younger and who can bear him children, and his awareness that he is trapped despite his earlier belief that his leaving was a decisive and triumphant act. But the liaison symbolizes Jelme's rebellion from the limitations and inner frustrations of his life under his father's domination. He further recognizes that Sary Dawkins needs him because of her loneliness and her need for a hard working man to transform a decrepit farm into a successful and respectable place. In putting his hard and unending work into the farm and in sexually satisfying Sary, Jelme believes that he has triumphed over his father and proved his independence.

But Larry Smith's The Original ends as a tragedy of pride and selfdeceit. Jelme begins to realize the cost of cutting himself off from his family and the price he pays for going against the community's values and moral imperatives. After hearing that his father has had the tractor that meant so much to him repossessed, Jelme faces the hard reality that his rebellion has been in vain. He has not conquered nor has he escaped, but he has too much pride to return home. In a painful twentieth birthday party scene with Sary, Jelme has to come to face the bitter and hard realities of his dilemma. He vows to remain with Sary, throwing himself into his work with a vengeance at an inhuman pace. In doing this, Jelme half hopes that he will work himself to death, which, in fact, he does, dying suddenly in the middle of his chores, at the age of twenty-one, of a ruptured aneurysm. In his last months Jelme had hardened to life much like his father, working out his inner frustrations and sense of failure by absorbing himself in his labor and withdrawing into himself.

I've tried to give some sense of the conflicts and tensions in The Original as well as the toughness and determination of its vision. Its tone is essentially tragic, yet it documents the psychological realities of Midwest rural farm life. But in many ways the novel also comments on the diminishing qualities of the American Dream as it was perceived by rural farm folk. Lige Garrett leaves the romantic freedom of the North Woods lumberman out of necessity when the timber has been cut over and exhausted. Despite the limitations and frustrations of his life as a farmer, he believes that his reputation and situation can be enhanced by other ventures. Lige Garrett believes in opportunism and risks, in attacking life in a heroic way. His luck is such that the dream is always only temporarily realized and then his fortunes backslide. But the effort is all; the struggle is a way of dominating life and covering up deeper inner disappointments. Jelme Garrett also believes that he can dominate life by hard work,

but his desire to vindicate himself to his father brings about alienation, loneliness, and bitterness. His desire to test and prove his individualism ends in disillusionment when he recognizes that his deeper needs are with his family and that his father has made him what he is, not Jelm's own dreams or sense of his uniqueness. He accepts his commonness, but tries to beat his fate with work.

At the end of the novel there is a sense that the American dream of unlimited opportunity and self-realization has imposed a false sense of priorities or created a negative effort. As Larry Smith presents it, the dream, however perceived, too often pits men against things or against each other, destroying or denying the expression of human needs. The work and the symbols of the work lock men into the limitations of self-justification and pride. The Original has been called a "rural American tragedy," which is, I believe, an appropriate description. Larry Smith has examined the rural life of Midwest America and revealed that underneath the surface of respectable and stable farm life there was often an underlying desperation, the frustration of the deepest human needs for love and acceptance, and human conflict resulting from the imposition of wills. The much admired toughness of the rural family often covers up the quiet desperation of their lives. The Original ends with an awareness that the ongoing cycle of time negates the evidence of the will dominating and transforming nature. The novel documents what is lost and sacrificed in human terms when the land demands adjustments in individuals.

If The Original can be read as a "rural American tragedy," Jim Harrison's Wolf offers an anti-heroic narrator who tells a bittersweet saga of his Kerouacian on the road wanderings to the ends of the American continent, East and West. Swanson, the thirty-three-year-old inveterate wanderer and traveller, has a huge appetite for experience and "lowlife instincts." In this novel he has returned to his home state of Michigan and made a camping and fishing trip into the "comparatively vast, the peopleless Huron Mountains." (p. 18) His purpose in going there is ostensibly to see if he can stay away from liquor, drugs, and women for a full week while living off the land and supplementing his meager food supplies with fish. One, of course, immediately senses a parody of Hemingway's story of Nick Adams' quest for self-control, healing reunion with nature by involving himself in a ritualistic pastime and revival of survival instincts which are harmonious with nature in the "Big Two-Hearted River" story from In Our Time.

Swanson's camping trip, however, is a combination of qualified success, misery, and tribulation. He recognizes that his survival instincts are minimal.

I simply didn't have the functional intelligence of the explorer, the voyager, and had only met a few people who were unilaterally stable in the wilderness. You have to know a great deal about food and shelter and the stalking of game and many of the aspects of this knowledge come only through astute, almost instinctive openness to your surroundings. In Montana I nearly walked off a cliff dreaming of the peculiar flat shape of a whore's ass. Too much muscle like a ballerina . . . I imagined myself crawling around in hunger and in a snarling rage attacking a sick old opossum and losing the fight. Paws and face badly bitten by it. (p. 173)

Swanson's real reasons for going to the wilderness in the Huron Mountains are to experience a brief period with a clear mind. He desperately wants to live the instinctive life in nature and to stand in awe of wild nature. He hopes to see a wolf, the one sign that will reassure him that wild, untamed instinct still survives and can excite fear and admiration in him. However, he misses his one chance to sight a wolf, and his attempt to observe an osprey only brings about the sighting of an eagle. This

thought of experiencing the wild produces some honest sizing up of his reasons for being in the Michigan north woods:

If I found wolf tracks tomorrow or even spotted a wolf or found the impossible den that would scarcely change the fact that my first love had betrayed me. My real griefs were over the dead and the prospects of a disastrous future; my affection for the presentness of the woods was easily accounted for. Trees offer no problems and even if all wilderness is despoiled I'll settle for a hundred acres and hide within it and defend it with howls perfected by operatic training. I'll handroll Bugler tobacco and become a hermit. They'll parachute starlets into my outpost to be reseeded--the poor girls will wander about aimlessly for a few hours wondering what the hell it's all about and I'll follow them like a male Rima the birdman sizing up the cut of their haunches. (p. 139)

Many of Swanson's imagined instincts are a parody of the cult of primitivism, animalism, and atavism. In considering his need for instinctive behavior, Swanson admits that Nature will not heal him of his self admitted "piggishness" for creature comforts and satisfaction of his voracious sexual appetite.

Nature doesn't heal, it diverts and because we are animals too all this silence is a small harmony. If I stayed I would go beserk and shrink into a wooden knot. I once thought there were only two natural courses for a man, savior or poet; now at its vulgarest level either voting or not bothering to. I don't care about anyone's problem only the occasional luminescence we offer to each other. (p. 192)

In this context of self imposed isolation Swanson attempts to order a confused and dissipated period of time from 1956-1960, a period when his "exploratory trips" set the pattern of circular wanderings.

The real center of Swanson's woods experience is his coming to terms with himself and with the dislocations which have produced rage and bitterness in himself. In sorting things out, he recognizes that he does not know what he wants but that he is easily satiated, even in his sexual needs, and bored. He is aware that his problems with women are caused by his ambivalent attitudes about monogamy and his deeper needs for a sustaining relationship. Swanson realizes that in many ways he is an anachronism in his times, a man who desires to act heroically against the stupidity and self-defeating behavior of the world. His vision is a deeply comic and absurdist one as he consciously tries to resolve the problems of his life, some of which are imposed by the world he can't accept and some of which he creates himself.

Needless to say there is no resolution for Swanson in Wolf. There are, however, certain realizations that he can accept squarely and painfully. His father and sister have died in a grinding head-on collision seven years earlier, ending family life and continuity. The land where Swanson spent his childhood and early adult life has changed, the family home now deserted and falling apart as he revisits it after leaving the woods. The previous ethnic "crazy gaiety" of life in the area is now only a haunting memory, and a fondly remembered, eccentric grandfather is dead. Swanson's eighty-three years old grandmother holds on to life with a silent grip, separated from him by age, by the dead men who connected her to her grandson, and by an inured acceptance of death and change.

Wolf ends on a sad and lonely note, but the anguish and pains of Swanson's mind have been explored and fathomed. In the end, Swanson recognizes that life cannot be ordered through art, that life turns in on itself in endless circles. Nothing endures.

He recognizes that the American dream--which is for him going first-class and having all the booze and women he wants--is in the past. And the past is dead, or he is disconnected from it. The only realities of which he can be sure are continued circular wandering, a struggle to protect his wanting to "be nothing" and his "own particular, harmless sort of freedom," and an awareness of the decay of life. In a sense, though, the Michigan North Woods and the rural countryside provide Swanson with a center, however lacking in connections and continued roots. The circle always leads back home, for what was now lost was in fact once held and experienced. One's identity always emanates from a center, and the heart can never deny those attachments and emotions connected to family and place. In its inexorable way the land changes and the people change with deaths of family and with aging. Swanson realizes how centrally alone we are and how deeply central change is regardless of our readiness for it. In creating his psychic and physical wanderer who is uneasy about life, Jim Harrison has created a truly modern existential Midwestern hero who survives by his humor, his capacity for honesty, and his poetic lust for things natural and instinctive.

Both Larry Smith's The Original and Jim Harrison's Wolf reflect the desire to touch authentic experience as well as the need to discover the psychic realities that direct men's lives. They show the profound ways that the Michigan landscape, both rural farm land and the woods, has affected and shaped the lives of the people. Their vision is a hard and honest one, a clear view of the cycles of experience and change that have brought us to where we are today. They have both articulated realities, fears, and awareness that we all share, anyone who has been touched by this land and who has responded to it. Our Midwest regional literature is richer and finally deeper because of these two novels. We finally have a larger sense of our shared existence on these changing but much loved peninsulas.

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IMAGES OF THE MIDWEST IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Patricia A. Anderson

Images of the Midwest in children's books can be as diverse as these two statements: The first, "They're real mean kinds on account of living in such a desolate land as Michigan," is from Miriam E. Mason's Caroline and the Seven Little Words (1967), a short novel set in the late 1800's in Michigan. The second statement, "It's like a golden plain where meadow larks sing in the morning" is a statement used to describe Wisconsin to a group of Norwegians in Walter and Marion Havighurst's Song of the Pines (1949).

Much as one might like to agree with the first statement, especially on cold and snowy Michigan mornings in January, it is no more common an image in children's books than the second very idealistic one. Both are found to some extent in all the children's books I examined for this paper.

In selecting books for this study I concentrated on fiction written for children between the approximate ages of eight and twelve. Reluctantly I omitted picture books for younger children, but only because these so seldom have definite settings. Those of you with children will realize that books like The Cat in the Hat or Curious George have important characters, not settings. In choosing the fiction I tried to pick books by well-known authors, books that have been popular with children or adults working with children. Each state has its own regional writers who weave local history into fiction which is generally popular only with the people of that particular state. I have tried to avoid this type of book whenever possible and concentrate instead on those with broader appeal.

Using subject bibliographies to locate these books with midwestern settings was usually frustrating. One new bibliography, The Best in Children's Books, listed twenty-seven titles with a New York City setting but one for Ohio and South Dakota and none for any of the other Midwestern states. Seymour Metzner's American History in Juvenile Books (1966) was my most helpful guide, however. These sources and my own reading interests lead me to the books I shall discuss in this paper.

Of all the images of the Midwest in children books, the strongest image appears to be that of the Midwest of the 19th century, or perhaps, more properly, the "Old West." Laura Ingalls Wilder is this era's most important writer for children. Her series of books beginning with Little House in the Big Woods, which is set in Wisconsin, are probably the best known and loved books of several generations of American children. The Little House in the Big Woods alone has sold more than 349,000 copies. Eight of her books are fictionalized accounts of her life from childhood through her first years of marriage. The First Four Years, published in 1971, fourteen years after her death, concludes the series of books which are set from roughly 1860 to 1880.

In all these books Wilder portrays the Midwestern frontier as vast, rich, empty land, waiting for the sturdy, life-loving people who would come and make their lives there. In Little House on the Prairie Wilder describes Kansas:

There was only the enormous, empty prairie, with grasses blowing in waves of light and shadow across it, and the great blue sky above it, and birds flying up from it and singing with joy because the sun was rising. And on the whole enormous prairie there was no sign that any other human being had ever been there. In all that space of land and sky stood the lonely, small, covered wagon. And close to it sat Pa and Ma and Laura and Mary and Baby Carrie, eating their breakfasts.

Later in the book after they've built a cabin the father says, "We're going to do well here. This is great country. This is a country I'll be contented to stay in the rest of my life." The mother asks, "Even when it's settled up?" and the father replies, "Even when it's settled up. No matter how thick and close the neighbors get, this country'll never feel crowded. Look at that sky."

But the Wilders don't stay. In a later book, By the Shores of Silver Lake, the Wilders are in the Dakota territory looking for a homestead. Here again the prairies are described:

This is different country. I can't tell you how, exactly, but this prairie is different. It feels different . . . It was an enormous stillness that made you feel still. And when you were still, you could feel great stillness coming closer.

As in many of Wilder's books the father sings little songs to entertain his family. Here he sings:

Oh come to this country
And don't you feel alarm,
For Uncle Sam is rich enough
To give us all a farm.

Later when they've found a homestead, Mrs. Wilder suggests that they plant some trees. She says, "I would like to see some trees again . . . They would rest my eyes from all this prairie with not a tree."

There may not be trees but there are Indians, many of them in Wilder's books. Usually the Indians are threatening as in The First Four Years when two approach the newly-married Laura's house. She had seen Indians often, without fear, but "she felt a quick jump of her heart as they came up to the house and without knocking tried to open the front door. Still later she thinks, "Likely they only wanted something to eat, but still one never could tell."

In Little House on the Prairie two Indians come to the Wilders' house when Mr. Wilder is away. They are described as ". . . tall, thin, fierce-looking men. Their heads seemed to go up to a peak . . . Their eyes were black and still and glittering like snakes' eyes. The children and their mother are afraid, but the men only take some food and then go. Laura wrinkles her nose and says, "They smell awful," and the mother replies that they were wearing skunk skins.

Life in the Dakota Territories is also the theme of Cornelia Meigs' book, The Willow Whistle (1931). Meigs also describes the prairie land. Here a storm is approaching and she says:

The air grew more and more chilly and a little wind sprang up. . .
 Something like a dense white cloud had gathered on the western
 skyline and was spreading wider and wider as it swept toward
 them, blotting out all view of the broad prairie.

The snow storm which Meigs goes on to describe is a cruel one to both man and animals.

Meigs bases this book upon the relationship between the settlers and their Indian neighbors. Set prior to the Civil War, the settlers' attitudes toward the Indians can be seen in the opening lines of the story. The mother says, "I'm afraid of the Indians" while the father answers, "Indians are nothing to be afraid of. They are as peaceable as any neighbors we have." In most of the books I read, this attitude carries through with the women fearing the Indians the most, the men ready to get along with them as neighbors, and the children, a little fearful, but more curious, and the first to make friends.

Miriam E. Mason is another author who has written extensively about the Midwest of the 19th century. In an early novel Smiling Hill farm she tells the story of the Wayne family's travels from Virginia to Indiana by ox wagon in the 1830's. She writes of the Indiana woods:

It was always damp and shady in the great woods, because the sun could not shine through the tangled treetops...Millions of beautiful birds and wild animals made their homes in the great dark woods. There were pigeons in flocks so large that when they settled for the night they filled many trees...Wildcats and panthers walked among the shadows of the great woods.

Like Wilder and Meigs, Mason also writes of the relationship between Indian and settler. She describes still another type of relationship in a later book, Caroline and the Seven Little Words, set in Michigan in the late 1800's. This was the relationship between states, primarily a rivalry between Ohio and Michigan which had nothing to do with football. One family in the book is giving up on settling in Michigan. "We're going back to Ohio. We hate Michigan...Michigan is nothing but a great big woods full of snakes and spooks and wolves and wildcats and horse thieves." One of the children adds that back in Ohio they wore "silk dresses and ate with silver spoons...that they rode fine horses in Ohio."

Carol R. Brink also wrote of the 19th century Midwest in her popular books Caddie Woodlawn and Magical Melons, both with a Wisconsin setting. She, too, described attitudes toward the Midwest. At one point in Caddie Woodlawn a relative arrives from Boston, and after an hour or so of Boston gossip the children tire of the talk and one of them remarks, "Well, I guess Boston's a pretty good place all right, but how about Dunnville?" The Boston cousin laughs and says that Boston is one of the world's great cities and the only one she'd care to live in, while Dunnville was quaint and rustic and not even on maps. Condescendingly, she adds that she wants to see everything in their savage country.

These are only a few of the books written about the Midwest of the 19th century. In all these books the closeness of the family unit is the important factor in making life possible in new isolated areas. The weather is shown to be often harsh. Wilder's The Long Winter details a particularly bad winter in the Dakota Territory, but the settlers have great faith in the future. Rather than moaning about conditions, they sing. Wilder's, Mason's and Brink's books are filled with little songs like this one in Caddie Woodlawn:

When I can shoot my rifle clear
 At pigeons in the sky
 I'll bid farewell to pork and beans
 And live on pigeon pie.

They were singing, of course, of the passenger pigeons.

William Anderson and Patrick Groff in their New Look at Children's Literature (1972) suggest that the singing in Wilder's books always occurred at moments of stress or when life seemed to be coming apart. There were many such moments in these stories of the 19th century Midwest.

Schools and learning played an important part in all of these stories. The teacher was often the person who helped the children to form dreams about the rest of the world. The teacher in Caroline and the Seven Little Words loved to speak of the future with his students to the point where he upset the blacksmith when he talked of the railroads of the future and the time when horses would be too slow.

Laura Ingalls Wilder became a teacher herself in These Happy Golden Years, and the process of education is described in detail in this novel, including Wilder's relief when her students go home on that first day of class and she is left with only the floor to sweep. Education was hard for both teachers and students in the 19th century Midwest.

Another interesting feature in many of these stories is the use made of Abraham Lincoln. In Caddie Woodlawn men talk of the Civil War but it seems remote to the Wisconsin children although their father had paid a man to fight in his place. Caddie remembers that she had once seen President Lincoln. "There had been a torchlight procession. She had never forgotten the deep-lined face of the great man."

In still another novel, More than Halfway There (1970), by Janet Ervin, the author uses a boy's acquaintance with young Abe as the central feature of her book. Lincoln teaches the boy how to write his name and from then on the boy knows that he really wants to go to school even though his father is against the idea. A character remarks that it always gave a person a hankering to go to school when he listened to Abe Lincoln.

Lincoln also figures in Enid Meadowcroft's By Secret Railway. Lincoln leaves a small pocket dictionary at a Chicago shop while buying candy. Finally after Lincoln is President-elect the boy of the family is able to return it to him. Lincoln is described as having one of the kindest, saddest, most friendly faces that the boy had ever seen. Lincoln thanks the boy but says, "Why don't you just hang on to this... to help you with your lessons... Our country's going to be in sore need of men who've had good educations. If you should decide you'd like to grow up to be one of them, maybe this book will help you the way it helped me."

Going on now to fiction set in the 20th century Midwest one finds many of the same characteristics: a basic optimism of the family group, idealistic descriptions of the land, and stress on the seasons and weather. In fact, this latter quality showed itself in the structure of many of the books I examined with the plots built around the changing seasons. Betsy-Tacy by Maud Lovelace, with a setting in a small Minnesota town in the early 1900's, is a good example of the structure of which I am speaking. Copper Toed Boots by Marguerite de Angeli also relies on the seasons for much of the structure of her book. Why, thinks one of the boys, "each day it grew warmer and warmer. Ma had let Shad and Will take off their long flannels, so it must be summer... why soon it would be berrying time and circus time."

In the 1940's and 1950's Lois Lenski, who was born in Ohio, wrote what she called regional books. Two of these, Prairie School and Corn-farm Boy, are set in the Midwest. Prairie School, set in the late 1940's, centers upon a terrible blizzard in South Dakota. Lenski, too, describes the prairie:

The prairie stretched so endlessly off in the distance. It was not "flat as a pancake" as people so often described it. It was rolling... There were no trees at all--how homesick a person could get for a tree. And yet there was a grandeur and a majesty about the barren landscape.

Although Lenski's characters are basically optimistic they are not so idealistically characterized as in Wilder's novels. For example, when the mother complains that their car is broken down and there is no way to take their sick baby into the town, she says:

Oh, yes, the old car, it's broke down...and the truck and the tractor, they are gone...What for? What is all this machinery for? Always more and more machinery to get out of order, to break down when we need it most. The men are not farmers any more. They are mechanics and poor ones at that.

One point about Lenski's books for those of you who collect nostalgia from the 1940's: she is an artist and the black and white illustrations in this book and in Corn-farm Boy are delightful. In the latter book her description of a Saturday night in a small Iowa town will evoke memories in anyone who ever experienced one. She writes:

The town was crowded...the curbs were lined with parked cars. Town and country people were enjoying a social evening visiting with each other. They walked up and down the sidewalks of the two blocks where the stores were. Some sat on benches, while others leaned against the fenders of parked cars. They went in the stores and came out with big bundles in their arms.

Although the majority of the books set in the Midwest have small town or rural settings, a few are set in Chicago. Enid Meadowcroft's By Secret Railway makes Chicago seem to be an exciting, good place to be in 1860. The story explores the friendship between a recently-freed black boy and a white Chicago boy and the city is described here through the recently arrived black boy's eyes:

...the boys walked through a little park and up Michigan Avenue with its fine homes...Never before had the young had seen such a busy, noisy place. Men in high silk hats and women in wide hoop skirts...Omnibuses, filled with passengers, rattled over the wood-paved street.

There have been several children's books about the great Chicago fire of 1871. The Fire Dragon by Fredrika Smith (1956) uses a recently arrived Irish boy and a boy from an old aristocratic Chicago family as the main characters of this story of the fire. The Irish Boy's neighborhood is described as "near the gasworks where the houses were for the most part unpainted cottages, some little more than shacks with here and there an ill-smelling stable or pigsty. The street had no paving blocks and was pitted with deep ruts."

Of course, the fire is vividly described, especially after the main characters have waded into the lake for safety. Looking at the city they see "the ruins of proud buildings and beautiful houses" standing gaunt and broken, "smoke still curling upward

from their discolored walls."

The Great Wheel by Robert Lawson (1957) tells the story of another Irish immigrant boy who comes to America and then on to Chicago to help build the huge ferris wheel at the Columbian Exposition of 1893. The boy's impression of Chicago is not a favorable one. He finds it crude and garish when compared with New York. "And the ever-present aroma of the stockyards and slaughterhouses were far from pleasant."

Chicago is also the setting for The Mimosa Tree by Vera and Bill Cleaver (1970). In this story, a poor southern white family moved to Chicago where a relative lives. The father is blind and he asks his daughter to describe their new surroundings. Looking out the window the daughter sees:

...a gray, grim wall, only four or five feet removed from her. She looked down into the alley between the buildings and saw the refuge littered there: overflowing garbage can, an old stained mattress, a wicker chair without a seat. Broken glass...

When her father says, "Tell me, what's outside the window...Look and tell me what's out there?" the daughter lies and tells him there is a mimosa tree, a huge one, the biggest one she'd ever seen. Here, as in some of the other novels, the family unit is extremely important, but Chicago is far from the idealistic place portrayed in the stories of rural and small-town life. This family is almost beaten down by the city before it decides to move back to the South.

To move back...to move. Perhaps ultimately this is the most last lasting image of the Midwest in children books--the Midwest as a place to move to, a place to move from, and an area peopled by men, women and children who are always willing to move on since they know from their relentlessly changing seasons that change is the most unchanging thing in their world.

Although the majority of the books set in the Midwest have small town or rural settings, a few are set in Chicago. Fred Henderson's By Secret Railway makes Chicago seem to be an exciting good place to be in 1860. The story explores the friendship between a recently-arrived black boy and a white Chicago boy and the city is described here through the recently arrived black boy's eyes:

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There have been several children's books about the great Chicago fire of 1871. The Fire Dragon by Franklin Smith (1952) uses a recently arrived Irish boy and a boy from an old aristocratic Chicago family as the main characters of this story of the fire. The Irish boy's neighborhood is described as "near the gasworks where the houses were for the most part unpainted cottages, some little more than shacks with here and there an ill-smelling stable or pigsty. The street had no paving blocks and was pitted with deep ruts."

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On Nailing the Octopus; or, On
Midwestern Popular Poetry

Bernard F. Engel

Preparing a paper for a Seminar on Midwestern literature at the 1974 meeting of the Popular Culture Association, I considered that one might sensibly define a Midwestern poet as one who writes in, possibly of, the area between the East and the West. But we all know that defining the Midwest is like driving a nail into an octopus: the body of the target slithers away from you while its ramifications tug you in eight different directions. The planners of the seminar gave me an equally cephalopodian problem by including in my assignment the term "popular poetry." I can think of only one man in present day America who writes poems that can reasonably be called popular. He is Rod McKuen, an artificer of verses much bemurked with squid ink.

The assigned topic being unfindable, I will talk about some of the poetry made by two writers born in the Midwest, William Stafford and James Wright. Stafford, raised in Kansas, has taught at Lewis and Clark College in Portland since 1947, long enough to be considered a Northwesterner, but he still often writes of his Midwest recollections and sometimes directly contrasts the scenes of his present with those of his youth. Wright, raised in Ohio, has lived on both coasts and also has continued to use his native territory as one major source for poetry. Both men, that is, have Midwestern roots but are typical modern Americans in having moved about the country.

As poets, both belong to the post-Modernist generation. They do not make a metaphysical problem of the image, and they do not suppose themselves to be limiting their concern to "the thing itself" (a slogan that misled critics and imitators almost as much as the proclamations of the Imagists). Both use colloquial language, avoiding in diction and in idea the apocalyptic and the abstruse. Both also avoid rage, "confession," and the sensational.

Both usually write in the first person. But they differ in their view of the self. This difference gives rise to--or, at least, is associated with--differences in theme and technique. The self who appears in Stafford's poems is an observer, an interpreter of something sensed in the world which is to some degree separate from its perceiver. His concern is man's ultimate destiny, the kingdom to come; his interests are philosophical, sometimes semi-religious. Though Stafford was a conscientious objector in World War II, as a poet he seldom touches on social issues. He writes often of the past: it is important to him because meditation upon what happened within it, and to it, may suggest the nature of the future.

Wright, in contrast, typically is concerned about the daily bread, the effect of an event or experience upon the self, rather than about what it may mean for mankind: his interest is in the particular. Though he stops short of that fascination with the self which makes one a "confessional" poet, he shares with poets of that persuasion a strong interest in social problems. If the self is cherished, if what happens to it today is all important, then the nature of the immediate environment is of more moment than the destiny of mankind in eternity. Yet Wright's self clings to a dream of possibility. It rejects no avenue which might give insight into means of achievement.

Even reason, that power often held to be unesthetic, sometimes gives Wright the structure of a poem (which is to say that it is part of the informing idea of the poem). One sees that Wright's self is continually feeling out the structure of earthly experience.

The reader cannot know whether differences in views of the self rise from temperament or from philosophy. What matters to him is how these differences influence each poet's work. It happens that both men have written well on the theme of death, a problem that, though it is not in any sense "popular," and of course is not Midwestern, is assuredly of continuing human interest. Comparison of poems on the response of a self to observation of death can illustrate some of the characteristics

of Stafford and Wright both as contemporary poets and as individual artists.

Stafford works for what he describes as "a level delivery of non-rhetorical poems"; he says that he "would not like to assert," that he wants his poems to "climb toward the reader without my proclaiming anything." He wants, he says, to use language that is "much like talk, with some enhancement." The reader will indeed find his work quiet in tone, without insistent assertion of the self or of ideas. But he will also find Stafford's poetry deeply subjective, much concerned with irrational components of experience that he believes are universal. His plainness of surface therefore often works as a realistic counterpoint to distortion, even fantasy, that convey feelings more urgent than his diction and syntax would seem to suggest.

Though not alienated, the Stafford self typically is alone; it is as an individual in but only partly of a society that it confronts major doubts and questions. And though not depressed Stafford is certainly aware that we are not in control of our existence. He is not always sure that existence is to be struggled for. In the poem "Travelling Through the Dark" he writes of his emotional decision upon finding a newly-dead, pregnant deer beside the roadside. Noting that the fawn may possibly still be alive in the doe's belly, the speaker

. . . thought hard for us all--my only swerving--
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

This speaker senses that other occupants in the car, even the car itself, are watching him, and he thinks of "us all"; but his decision is an individual act, not a social one. The reader may note also the contrast with Richard Eberhart's "The Groundhog," the poem which made verse on the discovery of a dead animal an obligatory production for all poets of the 1950's. Eberhart as discoverer was led to fervid, semi-visionary recollection of China and Greece, of Montaigne and Alexander and St. Therese "in her wild lament." In a parallel situation, Stafford hesitates only a moment, then acts decisively. He thinks of significances, of the fact that death comes to all living creatures, but he can face this knowledge without despair or rage, without assurance of ease or redemption, without grand philosophical consolations. In the face of death he is disciplined, taut, filled with strong feeling but not driven to

merely emotional response. He would feel it foolish of man to think of himself as either accepting or rejecting death--the one would be presumptuous, the other impossible. His spokesmen see that there is nothing to be done but to go forward in awareness.

Such discipline in his philosophical stance enables Stafford to use distortion without becoming surrealistic; his poem must communicate, not merely express. One describing his matter of fact style would not write the cliché "deceptive plainness," for his artistry makes the fantastic as natural as the mundane. This accomplishment is evident in "The Farm on the Great Plains," a poem of seven stanzas which opens with lines remarking on the speaker's habit of making an annual telephone call to a farm where "no one is home." But one year, the speaker says, he will call on the "right" night. Then:

I will see the tenant who waits--
the last one left at the place;
through the dark my braille eye
will lovingly touch his face.

The speaker will ask for his parents, but will be told that "no one-- no one is here." The realization will dawn that "both ends" of the phone line will "be home"; there will be "no space, no birds, no farm." The speaker foresees the awareness that will come:

My self will be the plain,
wise as winter is gray,
pure as cold posts go
pacing toward what I know.

The conversation about Mother and Father is saved from sentimentality by the realization of what has happened and by the poet's spare attitude, his recognition that at the coming of death he will be "pacing toward what I know." The fantastic elements-- for example, an eye "tapered for braille" that can see over a telephone line that extends to a long vanished farm -- succeed because of the universality of the emotional longing they suggest.

But though his theme is universal, Stafford's position is his own. The "tenant" who waits on the farm of the poet's boyhood is not Emily Dickinson's coachman who kindly stopped; the poet does not embrace death as "lovely and soothing" in the manner of Whitman; he does not dwell upon his fate in the mode of a Dylan Thomas (e.g., in "The Force that Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower"). And he does not rage after the

fashion of perhaps the most famous of his American contemporaries, Theodore Roethke. One may see Roethke as always dancing on the edge of the cliff, in danger of falling over into despair and madness, giving a chancy though wonderful performance. Stafford sees the cliff edge, but he walks a sensible five paces inland. Roethke learns, as he says (in the poem "The Waking"), "by going where I have to go." Stafford apparently was born learned in the ways of destiny; he simply paces "toward what I know." If he is, to make a pun, less edgy, he is also more sure and direct.

Wright spends much more of his time in the world of men. He, too, knows that in the end we go off the edge of the world. But, preferring to let the future take care of itself, he looks toward the cliff only when some immediate event there temporarily compels his attention. Wright's chief concern is a dream of beauty---personal, moral, and social as well as esthetic. But the sunlit meadows of dream are likely in this world to be miasmic bogs: the dreamer is going to be disappointed, if not worse. Wright can at times sound despairing, as in the poem "Stages on a Journey Westward," which asserts that America--meaning the dream of special human achievement--is "over and done with." But it is in disappointment rather than in despair that he sets down most of his verses. Sometimes he writes specifically of disappointment at the failure of American life to bring fulfillment, as in the poem "Miners," where the picture of policemen grappling for drowned children leads to thought of a man who would go down into the grave and of a woman who dreams of impossible palaces. Sometimes he lets himself lapse into conventional social moralizing, as in the easy sarcasm of the poem "Eisenhower's Visit to Franco, 1959." But in more imaginative moods Wright can turn out so charming a poem as "A Blessing," in which his speaker instead of placing blame for human limitation on the social environment realizes that what holds him back is his humanity, sees "That if I stepped out of my body I would break / Into blossom." The capacity to appreciate beauty enables Wright to turn out poems almost as richly sensuous as a Marvell ode, (e.g., "Morning Hymn to a Dark Girl").

He seldom approaches the fantastic either in thought or technique. When he writes of death, his modes sometimes are merely conventional. Thus in the poem "I Was Afraid of Dying" his speaker hints that seeing the use insects make of the remains of other living creatures can reconcile one to the idea of his own body's dissolution; and in the poem

"A Dream of Burial" he makes use of the traditional situation of a poet who imagines himself dead and having a dream within this "dream."

But though he has neither the live for excess that is characteristic of Roethke, nor the taut discipline of Stafford, Wright can make poetry as strong in feeling as that of either of these poets. His appreciation of physical beauty, his use of realism and irony, his close emphasis on events and attitudes in this world, and his profound disappointment at the failure of life to live up to expectation, combine to make the poem "At the Slackening of the Tide" a fine achievement. The poem expresses the anguish of its speaker at his realization of his inability to do anything about the drowning of a child, his recognition of the universe's indifference to man--knowledges which show that Wright's interest in the social has not limited his vision. Beginning the first of its seven stanzas with the sight of a woman cursing the sea that has taken her child, the poem moves to the resulting emotional impression of "cold simplicity"; to a dog whose howls, though in fact expressing only hunger, remind the poet of epic despairs; and to a declaration that the speaker in his grief would "Go down, almost." One may note that in these first four stanzas the poet has achieved range by citing realistic detail, strong emotion, and classic legend.

The last three stanzas contrast the expectations of pleasure and beauty that had brought the poet to the beach early in the morning with the tragic feeling that held him after the drowning. Posing ironic questions about the "mellow" sea that has taken a human life, he sets down in his ending lines the effect of the experience:

Abstract with terror of the shell, I stared
Over the waters where
God brooded for the living all one day,
Lonely for weeping, starved for a sound of mourning,
I bowed my head, and heard the sea far off
Washing its hands.

Just as Wright can be shocked by the indifference of society to its members-- whom he sometimes sees as its victims-- like Dylan Thomas, he can be shocked by the indifference of the universe to man. He is "Lonely for weeping," he resents the sea's washing its hands of us. Stafford, in contrast, is quite aware that the universe is indifferent, expects nothing of it, and goes forward "wise," "pure," and "cold."

The self in the poems of Stafford and Wright is the thinking and feeling individual. Its trim representations may not achieve as broad an appeal as the self of a McKuen, which waxes fat in our sugar-loving culture. But the lean are said to live longer.

...is recovered, and it is not to turn it over like a coin, with ex-
cessive antipathy. It is one of the "early signs of late adolescence." We must
be aware of excessive antipathy. It is the first of the signs that produced what seems
to be an extraordinary number of journalistic writers, satirists, and humorists. Actually,
of course, it is possible to claim that nearly all American literary journalists, regardless
of region, -- from Jane Smiley, who published her first Jack Bowling letter in the
Portland (OR) Courier in 1932, to Robert Benchley, Frank Sullivan, and J. J. Foxworth --
wrote for the newspapers, to begin with, and this includes, as we know, Mark Twain, whose
earliest pieces appeared in his brother Orion's newspaper at Leitchfield. But a long time
the Midwest may claim one Thomas A. Cahoon (Ohio), James Thurber (Iowa), Ring Lardner, Kin
Hudson (about whom I'll have more to say later), Peter (Floyd) Dunne, George W. Pace
of Ohio's bad boys, David Ross (Ohio), (John G. Patterson, J. D. Salinger, and Carlene F. O'Connell
(father known perhaps, as Arthur, until, this by no means exhausts the list, and
there are some who were born in the Midwest, like Jackson Lears (in Ohio), Don Marlowe
in Maine, Ed.) and Will O'Quinn (in Texas), and who wrote their early pieces and
achieved distinction in the newspapers of other regions. For example, in Don Marlowe's
case: Atlanta, Georgia and New York.

During the middle decades of the 19th century, the early growth of comic magazines
the Boston Courier had the mark James F. Y. Spicer of the Times, who had a distaste
tion of 10,000, published a lot of humor, of the Illustrated variety and the Illustrated
magazine most notably the writings of George Washington Harris and his partner, "Doc"
Loring. Much later on, magazines like Putty, Judge, Life (not Henry Lucraft), and
Lolita (which became the former's humorous counterpart). But between 1870 and 1920, for
whatever reason, these magazines began to fade and die. The historical decline of the
urban daily, usually the province of our writers, began the year 1897, when the Illustrated

MIDWESTERN HUMOROUS JOURNALISM

William C. McCann

Students of regional humor were warned of a "lurking pitfall" years ago by Constance Rourke; In her excellent book on American humor, Constance Rourke said that "When an old comic specimen is discovered, one is apt to turn it over like a worn carving, with excessive antiquarian pride if one can name it 'early Maine or late Arkansas.'" We must beware of excessive antiquarian pride in finding that the Midwest has produced what seems to be an extraordinary number of journalistic wits, satirists, and humorists. Actually, of course, it is possible to claim that nearly all American literary humorists, regardless of region, --- from Seba Smith, who published his first Jack Downing letter in the Portland (Me.) Courier in 1830, to Robert Benchley, Frank Sullivan, and S.J. Perelman-- wrote for the newspapers, to begin with. And this includes, as we know, Mark Twain, whose earliest pieces appeared in his brother Orion's newspaper at Hannibal. But among those the Midwest may claim are George Ade, Eugene Field, James Thurber, Ring Lardner, Kin Hubbard (about whom I'll have more to say later), Peter Finley Dunne, George W. Peck (of Peck's Bad Boy), David Ross Locke (that is, Petroleum V. Nasby), and Charles F. Browne (better known, perhaps, as Artemus Ward). This by no means exhausts the list. And there were some who were born in the Midwest, like Ambrose Bierce (in Ohio), Don Marquis (in Walnut, Ill.) and Will Cuppy (in Auburn, Ind.) who wrote their early pieces and achieved distinction in the newspapers of other regions, for example, in Don Marquis's case, Atlanta, Georgia and New York.

During the middle decades of the 19th century, two early popular comic magazines-- the Boston Carpet Bag and the more famous N.Y. Spirit of the Times, which had a circulation of 40,000, published a lot of humor of the Mississippi Valley and the frontier, perhaps most notably the writings of George Washington Harris and his character, "Sut Lovingood." Much later on, magazines like Puck, Judge, Life (not Henry Luce's), and College Humor became the foremost humorous periodicals. But between 1920 and 1930, for whatever reason, these magazines began to fade and fail. The humorous column of the urban daily, usually the province of one writer, became the most important single medium of American humor.

Many of these columnists were what have been variously called "crackerbarrel philosophers" or "wise fools" or "rustic oracles." Usually they assumed the name and supposedly the characteristics of another person. This was done not so much to create a fictional character but merely to use the name as a mask to express irreverent or sardonic views about social problems, politics, and human nature in general. Good examples of these masqueraders were Dunne's "Mr. Dooley" and Kin Hubbard's "Abe Martin."

There were others humoristic of course, who were more urbane and citified. Bert Leston Taylor, was one, in his column, "A Line-o' Type or Two" in the Chicago Tribune. And Franklin P. Adams, a disciple of Taylor's, began his long career in 1903 on the Chicago Journal. And there was columnist Keith Preston, a University of Chicago Ph.D. in classical literature, who wrote witty paragraphs and verse, including translations of Horace, for the Chicago Daily News. These men were shifting from the popular pioneer and rustic humor toward urbane irony. They were skilled writers who sometimes justified Frank Moore Colby's observation in 1910 that, "Distinguishable English sometimes may be found in an American newspaper; it is almost never found in an American literary magazine. In some corner of a newspaper you may find a man writing with freedom and a sort of natural tact, choosing words he really heeds without regard to what is vulgar or what is polite."

Chicago was especially blessed with good columnists. Eugene Field, Finley Peter Dunne, George Ade, and Ring Lardner were the most outstanding. Field, until his death in 1895, set a good early pace with his "Sharps and Flats" column in the Daily News. Here is a sample of Field's, a short, fictitious news dispatch from "Clue Cut, Tenn.-- May 2, 1885 -- The second section of the train bearing the Illinois state Legislature to New Orleans was stopped near this station by bandits last Night. After relieving the bandits of their watches and money, the excursionists proceeded on their journey with increased enthusiasm." Field sometimes used dialect and sometimes "correct" prose, but he always reflected a suspicion of big-city life and of book learning, though he himself read omnivorously.

George Ade, who came along about the time Field died, wrote his "Stories of the Streets and Towns" as well as the memorable Fables in Slang for the Chicago Record.

Dunne introduced "Mr. Dooley" in his Evening Post column. Later on, Ring Lardner took over the sports column of the Tribune, "In the Wake of the News," and brightened it with his special brand of humor, which usually revolved around the antics of baseball players.

Lardner, unlike Ade and Dunne, eventually moved East and participated to some extent in what Walter Blair has called the "urbanization" of American humor by such writers as Robert Benchley, Thurber, E.B. White, Frank Sullivan, and S.J. Perelman. "Our chief humorists until the 1920's," Blair wrote, "were all rustic or western. Since the 1920's, by contrast they have been urban." There was a decided difference in their approach. The rustics tended, as Bernard DeVoto observed, to present themselves as "Perfect Fools, whereas the urban humorists presented themselves as Perfect Neurotics." They both exaggerated, but whereas the rustics and westerners exaggerated the difficulties they had to overcome, the urban humorists, like Benchley and Thurber, exaggerated "the Smallness of their difficulties and their inability to cope with them." "King Lear loses a throne, Benchley a filling."

But during the first twenty years or so of this century, the urbane wit and humor of cultivated easterners, like John Kendrick Bangs, Frank Colby, and Harry Thurston Peck, were definitely less popular than the satire in dialect and slang by Ade, Dunne, and Kin Hubbard. One fastidious easterner, E.C. Stedman, shuddered at what he called "the zealous idiocies and the foolish misspellings" of the western humorists. However, the country oracles continued to be widely syndicated, particularly in smaller cities throughout the country well into the 1930's. Even big city papers used their columns, evidently in response to the nostalgic yearnings of readers not long removed from rural and small town surroundings.

Will Rogers, in his enormously popular column, was a rustic observer, an adviser in high places, a century after Major Jack Downing. ("Congressional investigations," Rogers wrote "are for the benefit of photographers.") and ("I never lack for material for my humor column when Congress is in session.")

In more recent years, radio and T.V. comedians adopted some of the formats and stances of the earlier journalistic humorists; Fred Allen's "Senator Claghorn," for instance, ("Ah take a firm neutral stand on all controversial issues,") . And Archie Gardner used Dunne's "Mr. Dooley" format for "Duffy's Tavern."

I think it likely that Art Buchwald and the New York Times 'Russell Baker, perhaps the only two widely known newspaper humorists today, would acknowledge indebtedness to the work of Ade, Dunne & other early practitioners in their field.

Having set forth a sketchy and inadequate survey of midwestern journalistic humor, I think it may be worthwhile to single out and recite in some detail the career of Kin Hubbard. Hubbard was born in the Midwest and spent all his working life there, though he became nationally known through the syndication of his work.

He was born in 1868 in Bellefontaine, Ohio, where his father published a weekly newspaper. He quit school in the 7th grade and showed an early talent for drawing and cartooning, but preferred to be a showman, hanging around the visiting tent shows and theatrical companies. His easy-going, affectionate parents allowed him to take off for trips with the shows, for which he worked at menial jobs, but he usually returned after a few weeks to resume work on his father's newspaper. After a brief hitch as a cartoonist on a paper at Mansfield, Ohio, he was persuaded by a friend to take a modest job on the Indianapolis News. During the Roosevelt-Parker presidential campaign in 1904, he did political cartooning. After the election, he began to look around for other subjects and formats and eventually came up with his character, "Abe Martin," who was pictured as an amiable but shrewd and sardonic loafer living in Brown County, a beautiful, hilly, wooded area some 40 miles south of Indianapolis. It was an area, incidentally, that Hubbard didn't visit until long after he had made the county and "Abe Martin" famous. He pictured Abe as an indolent village know-it-all, clad in baggy pants, over-sized boots, a shapeless black coat with huge hands which protruded from ragged sleeves.

Hubbard began to turn out a daily "box" of two or three sharp, satiric sentences, usually unrelated, attributed to "Abe Martin", or, occasionally as his column developed, to other Brown County characters. The sentences usually referred to characters and

situations recalled from Hubbard's boyhood days in Bellefontaine, a town, he once wrote, "that could be identified by the two sparrows on the south end of the water tank near the Big Four station....The town was so lonely, "he said, "that owls sometimes flew 900 miles out of their way to spend a few days there." And there ^{was} always a drawing of "Abe Martin" (Hubbard did a new one each time, with little variation in the product -- early 9,000 of them during his lifetime).

Here is a typical daily column:

"Mrs. Tipton Bud's niece writes that they're gittin on fine in Kansas, an' that her husband will soon have money enough to git a divorce from.....The first thing to turn green in the spring is Christmas jewelry."

After Hubbard had worked a while for the Indianapolis News, George Ade, whose name by then had become well known, wrote a highly laudatory essay about him in a national magazine, comparing him with Josh Billings and Artemus Ward. Fred C. Kelly, Hubbard's biographer, believes that Ade's article was the deciding factor in getting the feature syndicates interested in his work. They came to Hubbard and signed him on and he became immediate success. But all his life he resisted the blandishments of New York journalism and stayed at the Indianapolis News. He seems to have been temperamentally unambitious and unimpressed with the trappings of worldly success.

Hubbard's satire was usually gentle, as was George Ade's, and not overly-heated with indignation. However, I think you'll agree, on the basis of the following quotation, that Hubbard was capable of turning out very sharply edged stuff:

"Tell Binkley jumped into his new \$3,000 tourin' car and hurried as fast as he could to the poor farm but arrived too late to see his mother before she died."

It was perhaps this sentence that caused Franklin P. Adams to observe that, "There is more healthy hate in Kin Hubbard's paragraphs than in anything written these days." Actually, Hubbard could puncture the myths of rural and small-town felicity as deftly as could E.W. Howe, Sinclair Lewis, Hamlin Garland, or Edgar Lee Masters.

I think the reason Hubbard's humor still holds up, is still readable, much of it. is that he essentially dealt with human frailties, the human predicament, at times with considerable penetration and shrewdness but with compassion and sympathy. For a number of years after his death in 1930, the "Abe Martin" column was continued, using old columns in numerous papers throughout the country. At the peak in the 1920's it was syndicated in more than 400 dailies. Each year, Hubbard brought out a hard-cover collection of what he considered his better stuff, a book that sold for \$1. and sold enormously well. From one of these collections -- "Back Country Folks"--I've chosen a sampling:

I'll lead off with one of my own favorites:

"When Lem Moon was acquitted for the murder of his wife and Judge Pusey asked if he had anything to say, Lem replied: "I never would have shot her if I'd knowed "I'd have to go thru so much red tape."

"When a fella says it ain't the money but the principle of the thing, it's the money."

"Stew Nugent has decided to go to work until he kin find somethin' better."

"Uncle Mort Hickman, nearly 98, after cuttin' and splittin' 4 cords of wood yister-day afternoon, was found frozen stiff in the lane leadin' to the house, by his 4 sons, who had been attendin' a billiard tournament."

"Cause there ain't no place like home, is why so many girls work in stores and offices."

"Tell Binkley says the Tornado Insurance Agents will hold an important business meeting here next month if they can git an oriental dancer."

"A husband will often say things in a burst of hunger that he fully regrets after he has bought his breakfast downtown."

"The hardest thing is to disguise your feelin's when you put a lot of relatives on the train for home."

"This mornin' after Mrs. Lafe BUD had recalled th' events leadin' up to her weddin' there wasn't a dry lawyer in the court room."

"Hush money often makes more noise than any other kind"

"th' many friends of Cy Peters' ||| be glad to learn that his wife has run away."

"The only time some fellows are ever seen with their wives is after they've been indicted."

"Fawn Biddle treated her hired girl like one of the family - so she quit!"

"We're all pretty much alike when we get out of town"

"I don't look for much to come of government ownership as long as we have Democrats & Republicans."

"There isn't much to be seen in a little town, but what you hear makes up for it."

"Ike Moon, who will be operated on tomorrow, will leave a wife and 3 children."

"While goin' after fishin' worms in the field where his wife was plowin', Tipton Bud found an Indian dart."

And, finally,

"One good thing about a feller that speaks from somethin' he wrote down; "Abe Martin said," he knows when to stop."

Lets hope this is true. But I can't stop until I've given you the only quip Kin Hubbard ever turned out that the editors of his day refused to print, claiming it was in bad taste. Actually, it was only a bit ahead of its time, a line that any discerning humorist today would be proud of.

"Nothing annoys a vulture, "Abe said, "like biting into a glass eye."

The Boy's World of Booth Tarkington

David D. Anderson

Only a handful of American writers have been so completely identified with their literary creations that identity of writers and creations have become fused. Among them are David Ross Locke--Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby--, Finley Peter Dunne--Mr. Dooley--, Frank McKinney Hubbard--Abe Martin--, and Booth Tarkington--the Gentleman from Indiana. All of them, perhaps more than coincidentally, were Midwesterners, all of them popular, all of them recreators of a world that flourished briefly in the years between America's mission to save its little brown brothers and its attempt to make the world safe for democracy.

Of them, Tarkington was the best known, the most successful, and the ablest writer. Twice winner of the Pulitzer Prize--for The Magnificent Ambersons(1918) in 1919 and Alice Adams(1921) in 1922--Tarkington was born in Indianapolis in 1869; he lived there most of his life, writing and setting his most successful works there; he died there in 1946; and he is buried there. His first successful novel, The Gentleman from Indiana(1899) was responsible for the persona which obscured and ultimately, to the detriment of his literary reputation, replaced his own identity not only as one of America's most prolific writers of novels, plays, and short stories, but as one who plays a central role in the emergence of a unique Midwestern literature.

Curiously and more than coincidentally, as that literature began to assume its own peculiar identity apart from literature predominantly national, "Eastern," or "Western," the writers who brought it into existence--among them Mark Twain, Sherwood Anderson, and Booth Tarkington--and those who carried it into maturity later in the twentieth century--especially James T. Farrell, Nelson Algren, and Saul Bellow--devoted a great deal of creative effort and attention to novels of boyhood and youth, and the literature of the Midwest is replete with the names of famous, if fictional, boys and young men: Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, Tar, Penrod, Sam, Studs Lonigan, Frankie Machine, Augie March. In that list of famous names not only does one hear echoes of the history of Midwestern literature but overtones, too, of the history of American literature from the end of the Civil War

to our own time: the archetypical innocence of a frontier past long lost except in its mythic remnants; the brutal innocence of encounter and discovery in the small towns and along the river-highway of the heartland; the sudden savagery of an urban ethnic crisis of maturity; the picaresque search for identity retold in a new idiom for a new age.

In this boy-youth-man collective fictioal re-creation of the history of the Midwest and of America, Booth Tarkington's novels of boyhood and youth occupy a unique place as they describe a unique time. Penrod was published in 1914, Penrod and Sam in 1916, Seventeen in 1916, Penrod Jashber in 1929, Penrod: His Complete Story in 1931, and Little Orvie in 1934--an order, however, that does not trace chronologically a boy's development and growth physically and psychologically (Little Orvie, the Penrod books, and Seventeen is a better order of discussion). They share a common setting in time and space and a common attitude toward the process of growing up, of a boy's moving from late infancy to early maturity, from innocence to knowledge of the ways of men--and women--and the nature of the world.

The time in which the books are set is identified with social and historical precision as the time when America paused on the threshold of its maturity, unaware as yet of the price of urbanism and technology. It was, as Tarkington describes it, the time, two years after the death of the Schofield family's horse, when the stable remained, as yet unconverted into a garage or urban apartment, "an interregnum in transportation", Tarkington says, "during which Penrod's father was 'thinking' (he explained sometimes) of an automobile" but had not yet succumbed to the need for more rapid--but less certain--transportation to the office or to family visits than trolley car, horse cab, jitney, or shank's mare might provide. It was, in other words, that time, just before Woodrow Wilson's call for America's acceptance of moral responsibility for the safety, the well-being, and the natural rights of the rest of the world, when, for a brief period in time, it appeared that the eighteenth century dream, compounded of Jeffersonian idealism and Hamiltonian practicality, might become reality.

The novels are anonymously set in Indianapolis of that time, already the largest and most prosperous of state capitals, the home of Benjamin Harrison and James Whitcomb

Riley, but not yet of the Speedway, heavy industry, or complex social problems, only the shadows of which--normally in the personae of small boys--ever enter the prosperous middle class neighborhood of the city's north side.

It was a time, a place, and a neighborhood for which Eastern ghettos, Southern share-cropping, or Northern industrial slums did not exist, nor did the twelve-hour day, the Ku Klux Klan, the civilizing of Phillipinos. by the Krag-Jorgensen method, city corruption, child labor, or contaminated food. It never snows in Booth Tarkington's boys' books, nor does Injun Joe ever scratch futilely for escape from the cave of treasure and horror. No Injun Joes, Muff Potters, or Pap Finns mar the pages of the Penrod books or the dreams of their hero, nor does the depression, the Fifty-eighth Street alky squad, the monkey on the back, or the New Year's Eve parties become riots of later times, later writers, and other cities; Tarkington's reality and the metaphor that emerges from it is rooted in faith rather than frustration, in a confidence in human progress rather than acceptance of deterministic degeneration. Tarkington's boys, manifestations of that faith, grow up both physically and metaphorically, to become eventually men who, like their fathers, are builders of an American civilization.

In a chronological sequence beginning with the youngest boy, Little Orvie is seven, Penrod is eleven, and William, the central character of Seventeen, is that age. In each book Tarkington attempts to depict, with realism tempered by compassion and humor, the process of education and experience by which a boy at each of those ages naturally moves out of the innate savagery of boyhood and ever closer to the state of the civilized human being, largely through the abrasive influence of parents and other adults, older brothers and sisters, and, increasingly, those appealing but incomprehensible bits of humanity called girls.

All of Tarkington's boys have limited vocabularies and minor gifts of articulation, all of them have extensive, daring daydreams, and all of them crave but rarely achieve--and then only for reasons less than ideal--the attention of the adult world and the approval of the juvenile feminine world, both of which they earnestly but usually unsuccessfully attempt to understand, at least upon occasion. They have a uniformly high rate of failure at the dinner table, family gatherings, and public performances. At

seven they are anti-social rebels and only slightly less so at eleven, but at seventeen they mean well--with limited but promising success.

The plot of Little Orvie, such as it is (the book had its origin in a series of stories written for Tarkington's great nephews and nieces and published in the Saturday Evening Post), centers around Orvie's first encounter with the great world outside the immediate family, a world personified for him in Little Cousin Marie from Kansas City, a precocious, talented, hateful, beautiful child, whose singing for Grandpa, Grandma, and the Governor upon his grandparents' wedding anniversary, elicits Orvie's most eloquent "Haw poot". Yay, yay, yay, ya! Yi, yi, yi, yi! and an occasional "Baw! Baw! Yi, yi," and another "How! poot," and a pathetic, near-tragic, ironically funny plea for the sort of adulation that adults, to his bewilderment, delighted in bestowing upon the hateful, fatally-attractive Marie. Even while Tarkington describes his dilemma as little Marie sang, Orvie climbed unnoticed to the verandah roof;

The upper surface of the rail of the balcony was flat and about three inches wide. Carried beyond himself by hatred and unbearably stinging ambition little Orvie climbed upon this rail and somewhat tottering stood erect. No one observed him immediately; even in the minds of his parents he had again become so inconsequent a factor in the pleasures of the day that his presence on the roof of the verandah had been forgotten. Almost straight below him, Grandma was filling the first goblet of harmless garnet punch for the Governor, and undoubtedly the large glass punch bowl suggested something or became a symbol in the imagination of little Orvie.

Neither he nor anyone else understood this matter afterward; but, at the moment when he contrived to poise himself erect upon the rail, the punch bowl seemed to him rather like a tank of liquid far, far beneath a glittering figure upon a tiny platform high in the air.

"Look at me, Mamma!" little Orvie bawled startingly, standing upon the rail. "Look, Mamma! Look at me, everybody! Hay, everybody! Look, Grandpa and Grandma! Look at me, everybody! Yi-i-i-i-i! Hurrah for me!"

With that, and with all upturned eyes indeed looking at him, but no opened mouth yet able to become vocal, he squatted himself somewhat, to enhance his spring, and jumped forth from the rail magnificently into the airy void.

A falling body descends a fraction over sixteen feet in the first second of its fall; consequently, a person has no time for reflection during a drop of something less than sixteen feet, and of course the circumstances prevent a reconsideration of the project--nevertheless, there is a period of poignant emotion, however brief. Little Orvie's feeling was not regret precisely but an intensified sensation of the kind an impulsive person sometimes has when he feels that he has perhaps overstepped or gone a shade too far.

The conclusion of his descent was complex. The impact was first, in a partially sitting position, upon the punch bowl. He caromed, upsetting the bowl, the table, and his grandmother, but not the Governor, whose clothes, however, became mainly garnet. Little Orvie's grandmother sustained a bent rib, a thorough wetness, discoloration, and an unsettling nervous shock. Little Orvie himself suffered no injury whatever, except the ruin of his clothes and being locked up in his grandfather's bathroom, unclad, for about two hours before being taken home, put to bed, and exhorted tragically and tediously.

In fact, he became so bored with the passionate question, "What if you'd killed your dear Grandma dead?" that he finally went to sleep while it was being put to him.

But parental displeasure fades, Little Maries must return to Kansas City, and Little Orvies expand their self awareness, consolidate their identities, and strengthen their self esteem as they grow from seven to eleven. It is at eleven that we first meet Penrod Schofield, but his kinship with Little Orvie is evident at once:

Penrod sat morosely upon the back fence and gazed with envy at Duke, his wistful dog.

A bitter soul dominated the various curved and angular surfaces known by a careless world as the face of Penrod Schofield. Except in solitude, that face was almost always cryptic and emotionless; for Penrod had come into his twelfth year wearing an expression carefully trained to be inscrutable. Since the world was sure to misunderstand everything, mere instinct prompted him to give it as little as possible to lay hold upon. Nothing is more impenetrable than the face of a boy who has learned this...

Penrod's inscrutability is reserved for the adult world, that in which mothers, older sisters, ladies of limited literary talent, school teachers, and preachers conspire in groups large and small to direct his activities toward the wholesome, the noble, the poetic, and the good.

The three volumes devoted to Penrod emphasize that peculiar anti-social, anti-intellectual, anti-respectability, anti-adulthood (particularly anti-that of the gender charged in America with civilizing small boys) period of a boy's life in which he is too old to be considered cute, old enough to have a mind of his own, too young to be permitted to use it, and not yet a discoverer of the wonderfully civilizing influences of those girls of his own age, particularly those who, like one Marjorie Jones, find his antics publically reprehensible and privately enchanting.

Like Little Orvie, the three Penrod books are episodic in structure, carrying Penrod successively through various adventures, including a momentary victory over the

triumvirate of his mother, his older sister, and Mrs. Lora Rewbush, whose pen had concocted "The Children's Pageant of the Table Round" in verse and put Penrod in costume (designed by his innocent but enthusiastic mother and sister) as the Child Sir Lancelot. Momentarily confounding his feminine enemies by an on-stage appearance in the janitor's overalls, his short-lived victory was reduced to a form of incarceration and punishment well known to small boys in the innocent years before Dr. Spock's rise to authoritative prominence:

At home the late Child Sir Lancelot was consigned to a locked clothes-closet pending the arrival of his father. Mr. Schofield came and, shortly after, there was put into practice an old patriarchal custom. It is a custom of inconceivable antiquity: probably primordial, certainly prehistoric, but still in vogue in some remaining citadels of the ancient simplicities of the Republic.

Penrod visits forbidden movies, where a vivid imagination, a horrible case-history of alcoholism, and an innocent but forbidden day-dream in school contribute to family crisis and disgrace; he ventures into show biz with his friends Sam, Herman and Verman, the black brothers from the alley, and an assortment of trained Michigan rats, tom cats turned into leopards, and, wonderfully, the scion of a socially prominent family who shares the name Magsworth with a notorious murderess. He encounters Rupe Collins, a bully from the wrong side of the tracks and, out of fear and admiration, emulates him until justice in the form of outraged small black boys teaches him the lack of valor inherent in any number of bullies. Unlike Tom Sawyer, his bucket of whitewash is a barrel of tar, his willingness to share it the result of outraged pride rather than a youthful confidence game, his revenge as sweet to him as, to the families of six contemporaries as well as to a well-meaning minister, it was unmistakably pointed and sticky.

Penrod's victories are those of the individualist who resists reshaping himself to the demands of a civilization that prides itself upon correctness, upon decorum, upon the graceful arts; as in the case of any primitive who stands in the way of an onrushing civilization, refusing to acknowledge its existence or accede to its wishes, those victories are as brief as they are puzzling to those who have his best interest at heart. Thus Tarkington includes such gems of conversation as :

"I tell you he's a lunatic! Mr. Schofield would have said the same thing of a Frenchman infuriated by the epithet "camel." The philosophy of insult needs expounding.

"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield. "It does seem a kind of frenzy."

Or in a more philosophic vein:

Mrs. Schofield looked thoughtful. "Aunt Sarah," she ventured, "don't you really think that we improve as we get older?"

"Meaning," said the old lady, "that Penrod hasn't much chance to escape the penitentiary if he doesn't? Well, we do learn to restrain ourselves in some things, and there are some people who really want someone else to take the last cookie, though they aren't very common. But it's all right, the world seems to be getting on... Of course, when you watch a boy and think about him, it doesn't seem to be getting on very fast... I suppose Penrod is regarded as the neighborhood curse?"

"Oh, no," cried Mrs. Schofield. "He---"

"I dare say the neighbors are right," continued the old lady placidly. "He's had to repeat the history of the race and go through all the stages from the primordial to barbarism. You don't expect boys to be civilized, do you?"

Penrod turns twelve, on the threshold of adolescence and, in the strictest sense, no longer a boy and yet, in his great Aunt Sarah's terms, the product of "over nineteen hundred years of Christianity and some hundreds of thousands of years of other things"

"It'll be your turn to struggle and muss things up for the betterment of posterity soon enough" / she tells Penrod / "Drink your lemonade!"

Leaving Penrod on the verge of adolescence, Tarkington introduces William Sylvanus Baxter, on the threshold of manhood in Seventeen. One whose sense of the proprieties, especially in the presence of girls and women, is only exceeded by his appetite, particularly at a soda fountain, William has passed from the barbarism perceived in Penrod by Aunt Sarah, but has not yet reached a state of decorum.

William's adventures are not those of clashing swords, even if only of lath, nor are they the dramatic and dangerous flourishes that transmute moments of solemnity and high art into near-tragic buffoonery, for William is no longer a boy. In his case, the world, in Aunt Sarah's terminology, had indeed gotten on, and William had acquired, together with a deepened voice and a few wispy facial hairs, what he fondly considered to be dignity.

Nevertheless, just as Little Orvie and Penrod had, in effect, served much of their apprenticeship for manhood as they had retraced in embryo the history of the race, William, too, has an apprenticeship to serve, but not that of the life of action. William must learn to live as an adult human being in close proximity to other human beings in the adult world that is no longer filled with a boy's natural enemies, but with attractions for a man.

With this transition to manhood -- in the last pages William meets, with suitable adult dignity, the younger girl who will one day become his wife--Tarkington's saga of Midwestern boyhood comes to an end, together with the era of which it was a part. Tarkington's recreation of boyhood, the time out of which it came, and the world of which it was a part are episodes out of an America long gone, perhaps one that never existed except for those who, like myself, discovered Penrod at the age of ten in a grandmother's bookcase on a rainy holiday afternoon, his writing career as the author of "Harold Ramirez the Road Agent" becoming mine as the author of a similar work long and thankfully forgotten.

But at the same time, Tarkington, like Mark Twain, like William Allen White, like Sherwood Anderson, like others of that time, was not writing for children, however bored or precocious, nor was he pandering to sentiment, sentimentality, or nostalgia; he was writing for adults, particularly for those adults who, in their search for order or their proselytizing of a particular adult morality, had forgotten their own animalistic origins, their own rebellions, however innocent, against a system that trained them up in the way they should go. With simplicity, with compassion, with a great deal of humorous overstatement, and with even more insight into the ambiguous nature of man's most immediate ancestor, Tarkington has recreated the boy's world, that is, the world of those who ultimately, for better or for worse, will be entrusted with the preservation of a world they not only never made but tried their best to escape.