

**SOCIETY
FOR
THE
STUDY
OF**



MIDWESTERN LITERATURE

Newsletter
Volume Six
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Society for the Study of

Midwestern Literature

Volume VI, No. 3

Fall, 1976

The Seventh Annual Conference

The Society's Seventh Annual Conference will be held at the Kellogg Center, Michigan State University, on May 14, 1977, and future conferences will be held in the Spring. The theme of the program is "The Study of Midwestern Literature: Past, Present, and Future." Presentations will focus on new dimensions in the study of Midwestern literature, work in progress, and work that remains to be done.

Those who would like to participate by presenting 15 minute papers or chairing the two panels should contact Dave Anderson by March 15, 1977.

The Sixth Annual Conference, the observance of the Sherwood Anderson Centenary, was held at Michigan State University on September 9, 10, and 11 at the Kellogg Center and at Clyde, Ohio, on September 12 and 13. A good many members of the Society participated, and the observance at Clyde was featured on the "Today Show" on September 13.

Observances were also held at Camden, Ohio, and in Marion, Virginia, on September 17, 18, and 19.

A full program, containing previously unpublished photos, is still available for \$2.00, in a limited number. The program is not only useful, but it will serve as a historical record. Two copies, including one for your library, may be ordered for \$3.00.

MidAmerica IV (1977) is in press, and it should be available in February. It contains nine essays by members of the Society and the annual bibliography for 1975.

MidAmerica V (1978) will go to press in October, 1977.

Annual Dues and Election of Officers

Included with this issue of the Newsletter are the annual dues notice and the ballot for election of officers for 1977. Please return the former promptly and the latter by March 1, 1977. If you haven't paid 1976 dues, please do so now.

Midwestern Miscellany IV

Also included with this issue is Midwestern Miscellany IV. Contributions of brief-10-page-essays are needed for the next Miscellany, to be published in 1977.

Fall Programs

The Society sponsored special programs at the annual meetings of the Midwest MLA in St. Louis on November 5, 1976, and at MLA on December 28, 1976.

The St. Louis program featured five contemporary Missouri poets reading from and commenting on their works. The poets were Charles Guenther, Robert C. Jones, John Knoepfle, Tom Mc Afee, and Ronald W. Mc Reynolds. Robert L. Kindrick and David D. Anderson moderated the session.

The MLA program, "Two Hundred Years of Midwestern Literature: Part II, 1876-1976," included

Professor Nancy Pogel, Michigan State University, on "The Clock Runs Down: Time and the Midwestern Writer"

Professor Ronald Primeau, Central Michigan University, on "Awakened and Harmonized: Masters and Emerson"

Professor James Stronks University of Illinois, Chicago Circle, on "Lucy Monroe's 'Chicago Letter' in the Critic, 1893-1896"

Professor David D. Anderson, Michigan State University, on "Dispersion and Direction: Sherwood Anderson, The Chicago Renaissance and the American Mainstream"

and featured

Professor Douglas Rogers, University of Chicago, in "Sherwood Anderson: A Dramatic Monologue"

Professor Linda Wagner, Michigan State University, President of the Society, presided.

Part 1, 1776-1876, was held in San Francisco on December 26, 1975. Three of the papers presented in 1975 appear in MidAmerica IV (1977).

Future Programs

During the coming year the Society will sponsor programs at the Popular Culture Association, Midwest MLA, and MLA. Potential participants should contact Dave Anderson.

Announcements

Missouri Philological Association

The first meeting of the Missouri Philological Association having demonstrated an interest in such an organization, the second meeting will be held February 18-19, 1977, on the campus of Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg.

Reading sessions will again be scheduled for Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. Professor Hamlin Hill is scheduled to be the keynote speaker at the dinner Friday evening. Registration fee for those attending will be \$5.00; the Friday dinner and a Saturday luncheon will require additional charges (not as yet determined).

A special session entitled "Portraits of the Adolescent Female in Literature" is being organized for the December, 1977, convention of the Modern Language Association of America.

If you are interested in participating, please send your title and a summary of the proposed paper to:

Professors Mary Jean DeMarr and
Jane S. Bakerman
Department of English and Journalism
Indiana State University
Terre Haute, Indiana 47809

Because of the MLA's early program copy deadline, we urge you to send the information at once.

American Studies Association of Michigan

Annual Conference

April 2, 1977

Proposals for papers, panels and other professional contributions are invited for the American Studies Association of Michigan's Annual Spring Conference to be held at Kellogg Center for Continuing Education, Michigan State University, on Saturday, April 2, 1977.

Resumes of papers or outlines of presentations indicating thesis, method and significance, should reach the Secretary of the Association no later than January 3, 1977.

The overall conference theme will be "Current Directions in America Studies." It is hoped that a Current Methodology session will address such practical questions of scholarship as how to research a period, how to research a movement, how to study the culture of a small town. It is envisaged that an On-Site Research session will examine historic preservation, local history activities, archeological digs and site preservation efforts, among others. A third session, devoted to Institutional Directions, will survey current emphases among museums, history divisions. ASA chapter activities, etc..

ASAM invites further suggestions for areas and topics to be treated. The program is still quite flexible.

The conference will begin at 9 am and finish at 3:30 pm. There will be a keynote luncheon speaker and an off-campus reception following the formal program.

Accommodations are available at Kellogg Center for those who wish to arrive on Friday, April 1.

Please address correspondence to one of the following officers of ASAM:

John Ferres, President, ASAM Dept. of American Thought and Language, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI. 48824

Jeremy Mattson, Secretary-Treasurer, ASAM, Department of American Thought and Language, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI. 48824

Great Lakes History Conference

The Great Lakes History Conference, held at Grand Rapids, April 28-30, is soliciting papers for a session, "Popular Culture and History," to be held on Friday, April 29th; if sufficient papers are received, there may be two sessions. Some papers may be published later in the association's Journal. If you have a paper which fits into this topic, send for a membership application form and a precis form from

Dr. Russell Horton
Department of History
Grand Valley State College
Allendale, Michigan 49401

(Membership fee is \$5.00--required of those who give papers.)

This date conflicts with the National Popular Culture Association meeting in Baltimore, but may provide a good opportunity for someone who does not intend to go to Baltimore, and who has a paper which has to do with history (broadly interpreted). If you have any questions about whether or not your paper would be acceptable, write to Professor Horton.

Announcing a new journal of commentary and analysis--

The Popular Culture Scholar

Winter, 1977: Mystery and suspense fiction in all media.

Spring, 1977: Women in popular culture in all media.

Fall, 1977: Mass media.

The editorial policy of this journal will be to further the search for a philosophical and aesthetic structure for the study and analysis of popular culture. Articles submitted should explore the connections, influences, and relationships among elements of such cultures as popular, elite, and academic in literature, history, communications arts, and sciences.

Send manuscripts with self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

Dr. Pearl Aldrich
Department of English
Frostburg State College
Frostburg, Maryland 21532

The Society for the Study of Southern Literature

Since it was founded in 1968, the Society for the Study of Southern Literature has become increasingly active and has made significant contributions to the scholarly study of an important branch of American and English literature. For several years the Secretary of the Society has asked members for the names of those who might be interested in joining; however, no invitations have until now been extended.

The general purpose of the Society is to encourage the study of Southern Literature. This purpose is accomplished through a variety of means:

At meetings of regional Modern Language Associations and at the National MLA meeting, special sessions are held at which papers are presented.

The Society has sponsored the publication of A Bibliographical Guide to the Study of Southern Literature edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr.

The bibliography committee of the Society prepares an annual checklist which is published in the Spring issue of the Mississippi Quarterly.

The Society sponsors five-and ten-year confluations of these checklists.

News and information of interest to scholars are published twice yearly in the Society's Newsletter: the Newsletter includes announcements of events and recent publications, invitations for papers, news about members, and bibliographical information.

At present the Society is preparing A Biographical Guide to Southern Literature under the editorship of Robert Bain and Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and a compilation of theses and dissertations under the editorship of Marion C. Michael and O. B. Emerson.

The current members of the Executive Council are:

Walter Sullivan, Vanderbilt University
Eugene Current-Garcia, Auburn University
Blyden Jackson, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Mary Ann Wimsatt, Greensboro College
Louis J. Budd, Duke University
O. B. Emerson, University of Alabama
Robert D. Jacobs, Georgia State University
Thomas Daniel Young, Vanderbilt University
James M. Cox, Dartmouth College
Charles T. Davis, Yale University
Rayburn Moore, University of Georgia
Lewis P. Simpson, Louisiana State University

Louis D. Rubin, Jr., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is President and Robert L. Phillips, Jr., Mississippi State University, is Secretary-Treasurer.

The annual membership fee is two dollars. Checks should be made payable to SSSL.

Oral Archives

The Oklahoma Writers Oral Archives for tapes, video recordings, and similar materials involving literary interviews and readings by writers who are natives or residents of Oklahoma have been set up at Oklahoma State University.

If you are a writer with Oklahoma ties or if you know of such writers who should have his/her interview in this archive, please write Patrick D. Hundley, Acting Director, OSU Oral Archives, Department of English, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74074. You should also communicate with the OSU Oral Archive if you are interested in securing copies of any tapes or transcripts.

Midwest Modern Language Association

American Literature II:
(Literature After 1870)

November 1977, Chicago

Topic: Re-Evaluating Regionalism

Papers on any aspect of regionalism will be welcome.

Possible topics: the poetics of regionalism (what are the essential features of regionalist writing?); the uses of a label (has the term been applied in a somewhat pejorative sense to certain writers, especially women writers, in order to limit the significance of their work?); any particular writer as a regionalist; all writers as regionalists; or any other approach that might elucidate the concept and/or practice of regional writing.

Prospective papers should be single-spaced, no more than 8 pages in length (including documentation), and must be submitted by April 15, 1977 to the chairperson:

Cathy N. Davidson
Department of English
201 Morrill Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824
(517) 353-5230

The American Studies Association of MSU

Now that the Spring, 1976 issue of the American Examiner has been distributed, we can get to work on the new year, 1976-77. The first order of business in this dollar-oriented society is to build up the treasury, so that we can finance the printing and distribution of this year's Examiners. Dues of \$3.00 (checks payable to the MSU-ASA) may be sent to Jenifer Banks, Department of American Thought and Language, MSU.

But, wait a moment--we have one disgruntled and anonymous member who objected strenuously to our devoting a whole issue of the Examiner to Fear of Flying. The editorial staff obviously regards the book as significant for the issues it raises, if not for its literary merit. What is your opinion? Obviously, the best way to make your opinion felt is to pay your three bucks and help shape the ASA-MSU and the Examiner to your liking.

At present, our plan for the Autumn issue, 1976, of the Examiner is to examine the political rhetoric of the 1976 presidential campaign. The word rhetoric here is broadly defined to include TV images, magazine and newspaper propaganda, as well as the more traditional notions of the use of language. Was it a peanut farmer who defeated the ex-Wolverine football player? Or did the small-town evangelist beat the tightly-vested business man? Has political rhetoric changed since Watergate? We encourage you to respond to these or related questions in the form of a short essay (1000 to 1500 words) or a longer essay, if you're so inclined. We hope to get the issue out by March 1 (this year).

The Winter issue will be devoted to the proceedings of the 1976 annual meeting of the American Studies Association of Michigan (the state, not the university). This will be out in April. The theme of this conference was Industrialization in America.

For the Spring issue, 1977, Bob Snow and Dave Wright of Lyman Briggs College are organizing materials on technology in America. With luck, we will have this issue out in May.

As far as campus activities are concerned, we are planning an informal meeting in February, devoted to the research that our members are doing. This will be an opportunity for you to have a dry run on a paper that you are going to present later in some other forum, or simply to present your research to your colleagues and get their reactions.

In April or May, there will be a presentation of 19th-century (and early 20th-Century) American popular songs by Judith and Conrad Donakowski, with commentary by Jerry Mattson.

Please direct all comments and correspondence to Jenny Banks, Macel Ezell, or Jerry Mattson, all of the Department of American Thought and Language, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Sherwood Anderson's, First Century

Sherwood Anderson was born in Camden, Ohio, on September 13, 1876, and died in Colon, Panama Canal Zone, on March 8, 1941. During the nearly sixty-five years of his life, he had achieved substantial success in two quite diverse areas: in business, the primary concern of the first thirty-six years of his life, and in literature, the major concern of the last thirty.

The success of the earlier part of his life was last commemorated in the Elyria Chronicle-Telegram of March 9, 1941, which headed its news announcement of his death, "Sherwood Anderson, Former Elyria Manufacturer, Dies;" the second has been commemorated in one way or another almost daily since the publication of Windy McPherson's Son on September 1, 1916, and it is being particularly remembered in the academic halls of Michigan State University, the rolling countryside of Clyde and Camden, Ohio, and the blue-green hills of Marion, Virginia, in this month of September, 1976, the one-hundredth anniversary of Sherwood Anderson's birth.

The dimensions of Anderson's literary accomplishment are impressive: in statistical terms, it includes twentieth-eight book publications during his lifetime as well as more than a hundred short stories, essays, poems, and other shorter works, most of them gathered into his books during the same period. Perhaps half a dozen books have been made of the material he left behind at his death. This record, spread over a creative career of about thirty years, is substantial enough, especially when compared with the creative careers of other serious American writers.

But Anderson's real accomplishment is not statistical; it lies in the substance of the works themselves, the spiritual record of a man obsessed with the American dream and determined to make it real in accents that explore the full range of the American language. It is this accomplishment, this gift to the mainstream of American literature, that we are celebrating this month.

In the genesis of that accomplishment, however, the earlier accomplishment and the later became one. In the late fall of 1912 Anderson was a successful, apparently happy businessman and family man by the standards of Elyria, Ohio, and most of America; he had come closer than most Americans of his time to making real the American dream of success propagated by the dream makers of his time, and the story of the first thirty-eight years of his life reads like the plot of any of Horatio Alger's books for boys. Born in a small town to a poor family headed by a ne-er do well father, he learned early that he had to hustle to survive. Known as "Jobby" Anderson in Clyde, he peddled papers, ran errands, and did odd jobs in the town and surrounding countryside. Quitting school because that path was too slow, he went to the city to seek his fortune; he served his country; he became successful in the new art of advertising; he married an educated girl from a prominent family, fathered three children, and became president first of a company organized by others and then of his own. Not yet forty, he epitomized success as defined by Russell Conwell, by Andrew Carnegie and, of course, by the Alger who had told the story to that point more than a hundred times. His path upward had been marked by hard work, ability, dedication, and, he remembered, an occasional touch of sharp dealing.

But something happened. Somehow something within him determined that he must exchange material success already achieved for a less tangible, more elusive fulfillment in the future. The images of the past, particularly those of an ambitious boy, a hard-working, silent mother, and a boistrous, often ridiculous father, had become shadows he had to penetrate and to understand. And he had an uncontrollable urge, that he later described as being like a craving for a drink, to write it all down.

That turning point, the substance of what has become known as the Anderson myth, has also become the substance of the theme that runs through the canon of his work as well as the remaining thirty years of his life: the rejection of material values and the search for permanent human values. In his works as well as his life he sought them in people and in places, in his own past experience in works such as Winesburg, Ohio and Poor White that elevate his own experience and that of his time to a new American mythology, and, in the last fifteen years of his life, to a living past in the Virginia hill country that gave rise to such works as Hello Towns! Kit Brandon,

and Home Town, his last work of pure myth and pure celebration and the last work published in his lifetime.

In the course of that search, a search that he acknowledged could never end, even in several lifetimes, Anderson pointed out the direction that literary art must take in our lifetime in his search for reality, permanence, and truth in brief but revealing glimpses into the heart of another human being; in the determination with which he was convinced, in spite of all the evidence, that somehow, somewhere, one might find meaning; and in the honesty and compassion with which he sought to know and understand his people.

He pointed out that direction too in the skill and surety with which he practiced the form of the short story and the integrated collection of stories and in the durable style that he constructed out of the easy rhythms of the Midwestern heartland and gave to the mainstream of modern American literature. Most of all, he gave vitality and farth to the literature of his time and ours, a contribution that will prove to be as enduring as it is valuable.

As we begin Sherwood Anderson's second century, as we recognize the richness of his contribution to the literature of his time and ours, we recognize at the same time a contribution and a reputation as secure and as durable as the language, experience, and countryside out of which they came.

David D. Anderson
September, 1976

The Vision of This Land: Studies of Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, and Carl Sandburg. Ed. John E. Hallwas and Dennis J. Reader. Western Illinois University, 1976.

Starting with the premise that Lindsay, Masters, and Sandburg are better understood as The Prairie Poets than as members of the Chicago Renaissance, the editors of this book have commissioned and gathered here a group of nine interesting and useful essays about this trio of poets with the purpose of "examining the motives and methods behind their achievement."

The three poets share in common not only a group of important influences as a result of their being raised up on the Illinois prairie at the end of the pioneer period, but they also share, according to the editors, artistic values which place them outside the mainstream of modern poetry. Unlike the highly personal, richly intellectual and ironic poets bred in the mold of an Eliot or a Pound, The Prairie Poets are essentially public poets, with a populist's faith in America, and a pastoral vision of the land.

The opening essay, "The Garden of Illinois," by Blair Whitney, places the poets squarely on their native prairie and establishes how their response to the beauty of the natural environment accounts for much in their point of view about what is good and great in American life.

Dennis Q. McInerny's "Vachel Lindsay: A Reappraisal" follows with a sound and sensitive judgment of the poet's career. After surveying the negative and sometimes conflicting opinions of Lindsay's poetry, McInerny convincingly details the forces within the poet himself which limited the fullest flowering of his art. Marc Chenetier's "Vachel Lindsay's American Mythocracy and Some Unpublished Sources" is chiefly interesting for his use of materials drawn from the rich collections of unpublished Lindsay manuscripts that exist across the nation, especially at the University of Virginia.

The two essays on Edgar Lee Masters explore aspects of his life to which little attention has been paid by scholarship. Charles E. Burgess's "Edgar Lee Masters: The Lawyer as Writer" establishes with great detail the fundamental influence of his legal career upon his writing. Not only as a source of material, but also for the inquiring turn of mind and self-discipline it fostered in the poet, Masters' law practice is probably second only to the prairie as a factor in his life and career. Herb Russell's "After Spoon River: Masters' Poetic Development 1916-1919" focuses on the four books published during this period which have received little critical praise. Although the poetry represented here is not especially good, Russell's essay intelligently analyzes Masters' basic esthetic problems, and confronts the personal difficulties, frustrated ambitions, and failed ideals which prevented the poet from ever writing another book equal to Spoon River.

The first of the three Sandburg essays, Charles Mayer's "The People, Yes: Sandburg's Dreambook for Today," vividly describes the themes of tension in Sandburg's poetry between "affirmation and denial, life and death, growth and decay, dreams and the reality of broken dreams," which find resolution in his mystical faith in "the people." Using quite a different approach, Richard Crowder in "Sandburg's Chromatic Vision in Honey and Salt" makes some keen psychological and esthetic evaluations of Sandburg's mind and art through a detailed analysis of the poet's use of color, especially in his late poetry. After surveying the use of color in the poetry of Sandburg's contemporaries (Robinson, Pound, Eliot, Williams, Moore, Cummings, and Frost), Crowder's conclusions emphasize Sandburg's continued vigor, optimism, and feel for the common touch throughout his later life. The last essay on Sandburg by Victor Hicken, "Sandburg and the Lincoln Biography: A Personal View," is an historian's account of the writing, publication, and occasional uproar caused by the legendary biography of a legendary president.

The volume closes appropriately with a thoroughly useful bibliography of criticism by William White on Lindsay, Masters, and Sandburg covering the years 1950 through 1975.

Paul J. Ferlazzo

Heartland II

In Heartland II, Poets of the Midwest (Northern Illinois University Press), Lucien Stryk, the editor, gives selections from the work of 79 poets. None of them were among the 29 represented in the first Heartland. The two anthologies show an astonishing fecundity on the part of our poets, and put one in awe of Stryk's wide-ranging search as well as of his obviously excellent taste.

Clearly, the discovery of 79 additional poets whose work is worth printing testifies that the art of poetry is alive, and is kicking out in all directions. Why didn't someone get such anthologies together before? Nearly all the 79 poets are college teachers, many of them giving courses in "creative" writing.

It may be true that public support for poetry seems minimal; but taxpayers have not revolted at the provision of support for so many versifiers (though I concede that they are commonly thought of as "English" teachers).

Stryk in his introduction discusses several major themes and attitudes -- both tough and sympathetic humor, a sense of wonder about the distant sea, loneliness, and others. I should add that a large number of poems deal with the threat of our bleak, never-ending winters. And one oddity: many poems have passages dealing with, or at least mentioning, ducks. What the quacking devil is up: Does the duck speak for the conard that the Midwest psyche is depressed, repressed, suppressed? Is there a hint that the surging cornbelt proletariat is to march on webbed feet? Should the Big Ten abandon the gopher, the wolverine, the Spartan, and all those other feral emblazonments in favor of this tractable "swimming bird of the family Anatidae"?

The selections cover most details of regional experience -- nursing homes, the end of summer, front porches, highways, lakes, job hunting, cities, the prairie, Indians, what have you. The 25th century ethnographer could get a fair picture of all but one aspect of our experience from browsing through the collection. What is ill represented is of course the workplace, where most men and women spend much of their lives. But this deficiency is common in American poetry and fiction, for most of our writers are middle class academics whose experience outside the schoolroom has been limited to a few summer vacation jobs. The one work poem in the collection, James B. Allen's "Night Shift . . .," is a typical product--sensitive college boy finds he is disliked by hardbitten worker, etc. (It's a fine poem; this sociological observation is irrelevant to its quality as art).

One senses narrowness in vision. But this may be owing to the nature of the inclusions, typically two to four short poems from each poet. Emphasis must be on the brief notation or comment, rather than on whatever more extended work the poet may have undertaken. Several of these writers have turned out sequences or long poems that cannot be represented in this anthology.

But the theory of what poetry is and does also contributes to the impression of smallness. So many poets so determined to write of the ordinary: One wonders if anyone dares to escape the commonplace, to try for a realization more profound than that possible with a technique that restricts focus to such details as are available to the senses. Many of these poets are slaves to the slogan that the thing itself is all sufficient. The typical poem in this collection is a set of notations of observed detail, shaped to give a slightly wry observation or, often, assembled in the assumption that the irony inevitable in human circumstance will be enough in itself to give profundity. Stanley Plumly's poem "Porches," for instance, is a well written nine lines picturing the dying, and deadening, small town. Felix Pollak's humorous but perceptive "Nofretete," another poem of nine lines, shows the similarity in looks of a girl in a drugstore to the Egyptian queen, and the vast dissimilarity in grandeur. Both poems are good, but one gets the impression that their authors and many other apparently talented writers are spending their abilities on the cameo. Not mute, not exactly inglorious, but surely far from Milton.

And the almost universal resort to "open" forms wearies. What results is commonly a set of conventional sentence rhythms, easily classified by those possessing more Greek terminology than I, rather than the strikingly individualized language that the writer thinks he is achieving (One is reminded of the hundreds of juveniles at a dance, each in his own view being "creative" though to the adult eye all are moving up and down in the same stylized jerks). One of the best at achieving the colloquial manner many strive for, Jim Barnes' poem "Year's End," is also one of the few which uses conventional form (a four-stress line, end rhyme). Barnes knows how to work with the discipline, instead of rejecting it.

Seventy-nine more poets: all this fervid activity surely is a background that major talents -- including, probably, some of those here briefly shown -- can grow in. Fortunately, however, poetry is not an art of backgrounds but of individual talent. One can enjoy most of these poems.

He can rejoice at the occasional memorable passage, as in Jenne Andrews' "Autumn Horses" where lovers

. . . release the disarray
of both lives meeting
to the wild color behind the eyes.

A little less confinement to domestic hues, a little more of that "wild color behind the eyes" would take us out of the merely recognizable into the new experience, that disarray of the usual that we come to poetry for.

Bernard F. Engel

Introducing Poems

If the post-modern understanding is to mean that all textbooks for the study of literature will be as sensible as Introducing Poems (Harper & Row, 1976), then let us hope that the post-modern quickly becomes the norm. The editors, C. David Mead and Linda W. Wagner, have the courage to address their work to the student rather than to fellow professors (poets "often manage to record our true and sometimes unrecognized feelings," Berryman's "Dream Song 14" shows "private anxiety and disillusionment"). They bring to their chore an omnivorous taste that serves up Brautigan as well as Yeats, and the originality to compare a William Carlos Williams poem to a sonnet by Shakespeare without taking for granted that this is comparing the serviceable to the divine (Williams "trusts his reader," Shakespeare "explains").

That the comparison is apt shows the ability of the editors to look at the poem, rather than only at the reputation of its writer. Their introductory essay observes that a poem may get its impact from economy in expression, and from the fact that it "forces the reader to participate in it." Halleluia! The fact of participation, as distinct from passive absorption, ought to be emphasized by everyone teaching in the arts before the idolaters of the flicks and the tube free us from our demode servility to abecedarianism. Perhaps we must genuflect to Baal; it's no crime, after all, to watch Cronkite and to enjoy in our too numerous idle moments Kojak, Police Story, and the local popcorn dispensatorium.

But let us keep in mind that, as Mead and Wagner say, poetry contains "insights, wisdom, and alternative values that can advance both private growth and public good." It is in advancing values, the editors say, that poetry has its social purpose. They thereby dispose of the cacophonous quarrels of the last decade about the relevance of art to society.

The book is not the usual assemblage of the well worn. Though it includes such standard pieces as "Ozymandias," "The Passionate Shepherd" (with the replies of not only Raleigh but also Ogden Nash), and "To His Coy Mistress," its emphasis is on the modern and contemporary. It brings in enough foreign poets to remind the student that poetry is written in languages other than English. The range in quality is wide, from Yeats' "The Second Coming" to Nikki Giovanni's "Nikki-Rosa." The editors group their selections under six headings, moving from poems on the self and on human relationships to poems that focus on the community ("poets . . . are products of times and places"), on the "spiritual," and on nature, to the final section on poetry itself. This last grouping does not attempt to argue its assertion that art gives "order to reality" and brings "beauty and meaning to life." Instead, it prints nine poems intended to support the point, among them Moore's "poetry," Thomas' "In My Craft or Sullen Art," and MacLeish's "Ars Poetica." The section ends with Jim Harrison's "Word Drunk" and Levertov's "The Jacob's Ladder," two examples of poets exulting in the difficulty of their victories.

A concluding essay illustrates ways of reading by means of explications of poems by Robert Hayden and Galway Kinnell. The book's ending matter prints a section "Notes on the Poets" that gives a short paragraph of biographical information about each poet, usually including some general description or interpretation of the editors' selection (Auden's "The Unknown Citizen" illustrates the poet's "lively wit and concern for dubious values in society"). The ending matter also includes a glossary of terms. Its explanations are as clear and commonsensical as the editors' section introductions -- see, for example, the entry under "metaphor," which recognizes that this term's meaning is more extended than the usual handbook definition. A teacher's manual is available.

As a textbook, this is a model of explanation, ideal for lower division and non-major classes, useful also in any class where most of the students do not have considerable background in poetry. Neither avoiding the poem in the manner of the historical critic, nor dissecting it into its constituent atoms, nor demanding that it preach a sociopolitical message, the book represents that post-modern sensibility that has learned from a variety of critical approaches without being overwhelmed by any of them.

Bernard F. Engel

From a Midwest Notebook:

Sylvester Sterling

In the presence of Mr. Forsythe, Mrs. Forsythe was about as talkative as the Sphinx. She'd long given up trying to get anything said to somebody else when he was about, but she wasn't anybody's fool, and she had some tales of her own. One day I went to their house for some reason that I've forgotten and doesn't matter, and Mr. Forsythe was working in the field. She and I got to talking about people, and one thing reminded her of another, and she told me about Lillian Parry and Sylvester Sterling. I was in a material-gathering phase of my literary life, on the lookout for "stories" and "plots" and "ideas," so I asked her to write their story out for me, and she did. What I had in mind was to dwell on its complications, maybe to introduce some new ones, perhaps to give it a sophisticated setting, to embellish it, to turn it into a genuine drama of thwarted love and frustration, with overtones of poetic justice.

Somehow I was never able to do that, and later decided there was no way to improve on her version, which is this:

Back in the eighties near the village of Sussex there lived two sturdy old farmers named Francis Parry and Lorenzo Sterling. They were owners of vast farms and respected by everyone in their community because they were helpful to the poor and generous and kind to all.

Mr. Parry had three daughters, Elsie, Louise, and Lillian. Elsie was a talented musician but very haughty and proud. She married a man well educated though very poor whose family had once been quite wealthy but had met with misfortune. By her husband's ingenuity and Mr. Parry's help they became quite well-to-do. Louise was her parents' favorite. She cared nothing for books or music but devoted herself to her parents. Alas, she ran away with a man they were much opposed to and married him, which almost broke their hearts although they tried to make the best of it. He deserted her and she led a miserable life.

Their third daughter, Lillian, who is the heroine of this tale, was a sweet and lovable girl. She loved books and her greatest desire was a thorough education. She attended school in Sussex and later in the Sterling district, and there she became acquainted with Sylvester Sterling, who fell madly in love with her and came to be a frequent visitor at the Parry home. Mr. and Mrs. Sterling liked Lillian very much and were pleased that she received the attention of their son. But Lillian being a beauty was always surrounded by friends and admirers and was much sought after even though she was modest, and this made Sylvester very jealous.

About a year after they became acquainted Lillian's desire for higher education caused Mr. and Mrs. Parry to move to Maysville so that Lillian could attend college. Sylvester did not get to see her so often, but she made many new friends, among whom was Ray Marlow, who fell madly in love with her at first sight and was always at her side when possible. One day Sylvester came to call on Lillian, but she had not yet returned from school, so he sat down to wait for her. When she came he was very surprised, for Ray Marlow was walking with her carrying her books and acting very much the lover.

Sylvester watched through the window and saw them stop at the gate, and upon leaving her Ray Marlow took Lillian's hand, raised it to his lips, and kissed it. Sylvester was indignant and when Lillian came in he demanded to know who was her friend. She laughingly told him it was one of her school chums, a very nice young man.

That made Sylvester more indignant and he wanted to know what right he had to kiss her hand, to which Lillian replied he could kiss her hand if he wanted to and Sylvester was not her guardian. At this Sylvester became very indignant and left the house at once.

Not knowing or caring where he went, Sylvester roamed the streets for an hour or more till he met an old schoolmate, Mattie Woodruff. Mattie had always liked Sylvester and was pleased to see him and invited him home to supper, which Sylvester eagerly accepted thinking to spite Lillian. After this Sylvester called on Mattie several times and when they walked out together made it a point to go past the Parry house so that Lillian might see them.

But if Lillian cared no one knew it, because she went on giving her time to her studies and attending social affairs where Ray Marlow was always by her side. Sylvester not caring for Mattie left his father's home and went to St. Louis to work for his brother-in-law in the real estate business. When school closed in the spring Lillian hastened to visit her old home and her sister Elsie, who lived on the farm. Her friends welcomed her with a party, and there she met an old friend, Charles Willis, who had always loved her but had been too bashful to ask to call on her. He mustered up courage enough to ask to take her home, and Lillian gracefully accepted his company.

Lillian spent the summer with her sister Elsie, which gave Charles Willis a chance to see her often, and he overcame his bashfulness and told her he loved her, and in the fall they were engaged to be married. A short time later Lorenzo Sterling Sylvester's father, died suddenly and Sylvester was called home. Not knowing Lillian was in the neighborhood, one Sunday evening Sylvester became lonesome and decided to attend church, and to his surprise there he saw Lillian. After services he sought her out and asked to take her home, but Lillian refused him and said he might call on her the next evening at her sister's.

Sylvester thought Lillian had forgotten the episode of the year before and still cared for him, and when Lillian opened the door to admit him he attempted to embrace her, but much to his surprise she repulsed him and bade him be seated.

Although Lillian loved Sylvester she could never forget the way he had acted and she decided she would not break her engagement to Charles Willis. She seated herself on a sofa and let her eyes rest on the floor. Sylvester went over and sat beside her and asked what the trouble was but she gave him no answer. He put his arm around her and said Lillian, I have come back to ask you to be my wife. At this Lillian burst into tears and shook her head saying I can't.

Why not? demanded Sylvester. You know God meant us for each other. Lillian still sobbing said I can't marry you. Lillian, said Sylvester, I worship you and the ground you walk on, and I know you love me. Why can't you be my wife? She did not answer, and he went on, saying Lillian please forgive me, I admit I was too hasty. Have I waited too long to ask forgiveness, are you plighted to another?

Yes! sobbed Lillian. Sylvester taking her hands in his and dropping to his knees begged her to change her mind but to no avail. Sylvester groaned My God what have I done to deserve this? and tears streamed down his face. Lillian, he said, will you grant me one favor? Yes, if possible, she answered. Kiss me just once, he said, and he took her in his arms and their lips met in one long parting kiss and then he quickly left the house.

At home he hurriedly packed his grip and left for St. Louis the next day. After staying there a short time he had to come home again to settle his father's estate, which called him to Maysville. There he met an old friend, a Mr. Brown, who greeted him warmly and said he was the very fellow he was looking for and offered him a position in his office. After Sylvester finished settling the estate he accepted the position offered him by Mr. Brown in the courthouse at Maysville. Among the employees in Mr. Brown's office was a young lady named Dale Moore, whose fiancé had died. She was always sad and paid no attention to people and was absorbed in her work. She and Sylvester each thinking of another approached each other only in a businesslike way and worked that way side by side nearly a year.

One day Sylvester asked Dale why she always seemed so sad, and she told him how the man she loved had died only a short time before the date of their wedding,

and Sylvester told her about Lillian and how he had lost her through his own foolish jealousy. They at once became fast friends and Dale invited Sylvester to her home. Mr. Moore, Dale's father, thought Sylvester was a fine match for her and just what she needed to bring her out of her sorrow and he encouraged them to be together, himself often inviting Sylvester to the house. But matters did not proceed as fast as Mr. Moore thought they should, and one day he asked Sylvester why he and Dale didn't forget about the past and get married.

Sylvester was somewhat taken by surprise, but he asked Dale to marry him and she readily accepted. They had a grand wedding attended by hundreds of people and settled down on Sylvester's farm adjoining Mr. Parry's. About a year before that Lillian and Charles Willis were married and settled on the Parry farm which had been occupied by Elsie and her husband, who had bought themselves a farm of their own. Lillian and Dale now being neighbors soon became good friends, which pleased Sylvester but on the contrary with Charles Willis. Several months later Lillian was taken seriously ill and both Dale and Sylvester were greatly concerned. Sylvester thought the doctor Charles Willis got for Lillian was not doing the right thing for her and he proposed getting another doctor.

This made Charles Willis very angry and he told Sylvester she was his wife and he should keep his nose out of his affairs. He forbade Sylvester to enter the house, though Dale stayed with Lillian day and night and nursed her, and Sylvester did not pay any attention to Charles Willis but came to see Lillian every day. In spite of all they could do Lillian gradually grew worse and after about a month she died.

Sylvester was very broken up and ceased to care about anything, and though Dale had grown to love him she now had no influence over him. They left the farm and moved to Maysville, where Sylvester took to drinking and gambling and spent his money like water and became very abusive to Dale. She stood for this as long as she could and then left him and through the courts freed herself from him. After a while Sylvester married again but was so abusive to his wife that she died of a broken heart, and Sylvester being free once more ran through the rest of his fortune gambling and drinking.

A poor miserable old man depending on charity in the village of Sussex, he took his own life at last and was buried in a pauper's grave.

William B. Thomas

Midwestern Writers and Visions of the Land:

An Editorial Perspective

Central to the American literary tradition from its beginning, wherever in the sixteenth century one prefers to date it, is a preoccupation with the relationship between man and his natural environment, that is, between man and the land in which he found himself. This preoccupation continue as we enter our third century of national existence and our fifth as inhabitants of this continent.

A tradition established in those years in which American literature-literature primarily in English about American subject matter by writers concerned with life in America-began, concern with the land-the natural environment-is consistently central to that development. In the course of development, that concern has gone beyond literature to become firmly established in the national faith and the national philosophy. The earliest American writers-Thomas Hariot, John Smith, William Bartram, Thomas Jefferson, and others-saw an abundant America with the potential for providing a good life for all, if, in terms of another American tradition, each man was willing to work for it.

As the nation became a reality and a group of writers emerged who consciously sought to construct an identifiable American literature, the vision of abundance did not fade. Rather as Philip Freneau and Timothy Dwight began to use consciously American subject matters and idioms, the preoccupation with the land, with the vision of abundance, began perceptibly to change, to emerge in the works of Emerson, of Whitman, of the generation of those we now call romantics, as a vision of fulfillment-human fulfillment at hand or easily attainable.

At that time, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Midwestern literature had its recognizable beginnings.

Like its national counterpart it had its earlier inception in documents subliterary but concerned primarily with the land, with the relationship between man and his natural world. The earliest of those works is Louis Hennepin's Description de la Louisiane, published in French in Paris in 1683, a vision of a land so abundant that its telling resembled a later Midwestern phenomenon, the tall tale of the frontier.

As that earlier vision of abundance became a vision of fulfillment in New England and the East, what had been "the West" of Daniel Boone, Ebenezer Zane and those who founded settlements in the Ohio Valley and of Cincinnati, the "Queen City of the West" to its boosters and "Porkopolis" to those somewhat sceptical of its pretension, the vision of fulfillment in that new land becomes evident in the works of a series of new Western poets--William Gallagher, Otway Curry, the Carey Sisters, and dozens of others. Gallagher, for example, describes the harsh but rewarding life and lush natural setting of the Ohio Valley as vividly as Bryant, Longfellow, and other Eastern contemporaries, but only in the works of the other "Westerners" can one find the promise, the beauty, and the richness that Gallagher finds in "Miami Woods."

As the Old West gradually became the Midwestern Heartland and the nation engaged in its national tragedy and catharsis in the Civil War, both national and Midwestern writers began their search for a new idiom in which to express their new perception of a nation, a region, a people torn apart and a new urban industrialism. Contemporaneous with the rise of the careers of two of the greatest names associated with Midwestern and national literature, a new vision of America emerges: the vision of reality. It was largely the creation of those two Midwesterners, Mark Twain of Missouri and William Dean Howells of Ohio.

This era, from 1870 to 1910, is marked by graphic visions of the land and the institutions men built as a wilderness became the heartland, and the breadbasket of the nation, and increasing by an industrial empire--all of it at tremendous human cost, as the vision of reality made clear. E. W. Howe's Story of a Country Town and Hamlin Garland's Main Travelled

Roads foreshadow the changes then and to come. Garland writes: "The main-travelled road---is hot and dusty in the summer and desolate and drear with mud in fall and spring, and in winter the winds sweep the snow across it; but it does sometimes cross a rich meadow where the songs of the larks and bobolinks and blackbirds are tangled. Follow it far enough, it may lead past a bend in the shallow river where the water laughs eternally over its shallows."

Mainly it is long and wearyful, and has a dull town at one end and a home of toil at the other. Like the main-travelled road of life it is traversed by many classes of people, but the poor and the weary predominate."

The first of a generation of boys from the farms and the small towns to do so, Garland forsook the farms and the small towns for the city--Chicago--the metropolis of the heartland. Others who followed--Sherwood Anderson, Floyd Dell, Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, the former two to revitalize American prose, the latter three the "Prairie Poets"--gave a new vitality and a new vision to American writing as they wrote of the towns and the country side out of which they came. This newer vision continues today, a montage of hope and despair, as Midwestern writers as diverse as Saul Bellow, perhaps the finest Midwestern-and American-novelist writing today wrestles with man in the city and James Wright, his counterpart, writes of the land.

However, no more durable testament exists to document the curious love-hate relationship between twentieth century Midwestern writers and their roots in the land and the people out of which they came than that depicted in four works by two writers who came out of the Midwest to international fame but who ultimately sought to return in spirit if not in fact, to the land, the towns, and the people. The writers are Sherwood Anderson and Louis Bromfield; two of the works are Anderson's Tar: A Midwest Childhood and Bromfield's The Farm, both vivid, appreciative but not sentimental or remanticized looks at their origins; the other works came near the end of their writing careers, Anderson's Home Town (1940), and Bromfield's Pleasant Valley (1943).

Both are affirmations and celebrations of human life-their own lives and those of others-on the land, in-close communion with other lives and with the natural laws and the natural cycles that govern us all. In their works more than any others one sees the Midwestern countryside at its clearest, in the visionary but real perception of two of the ablest writers to come out of its soil and define its essence in their works.

David D. Anderson

The Newsletter continues to need news of your activities and announcements as well as brief reviews, checklists, essays, and other items.

PSA Appointment to Charles Guenther

New York, January 15 - The Governing Board of The Poetry Society of America has appointed Charles Guenther of St. Louis as the Society's Regional Vice-President for the Midwestern States, to succeed the poet John G. Neihardt who died in 1973.

Guenther, a PSA member since 1970, has published six books of poems and translations and work in more than 200 magazines and anthologies. He has received several awards for his verse including the Society's 1974 James Joyce Award and the Italian Order of Merit.

The PSA, based in New York City, was founded in 1910 to secure wider recognition for poetry and to kindle a more intelligent appreciation of poetry. Its membership has included some of America's most distinguished poets.

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