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The Seventh Annual Conference

The Seventh Annual Conference of the Society was held at the Kellogg Center, Michigan State University, May 14, 1977. The general theme for the meeting's three sessions was, "The Study of Midwestern Literature, Past, Present, Future." The following reports summarize the proceedings.

The Morning Session

Four speakers discussed "New Dimensions" in the field of Midwestern literature studies at the morning session of the Conference. Professor Alma Payne of Bowling Green University, former President of the Society, served as moderator.

In considering "Problems and Priorities of Midwestern Bibliography," Professor Donald Pady informed members of the progress being made with the MidAmerica Annual Bibliography, and he suggested some advantages of moving toward a computerized data system. Among the possible benefits cited by Professor Pady were economic considerations, the creation of a national demand for MidAmerica's bibliographical services, and the greater scholarly accessibility and utility of a computerized plan. Professor Pady is Society Bibliographer and Professor of American Literature and Bibliography at Iowa State University.

Professor Clarence Andrews, Adjunct Professor at the University of Iowa and author of a history of Iowa literature, described his role in the new MidAmerica University, a school which has no campus, no students, and no permanent faculty members. MidAmerica University recently produced the familiar PBS series, "Anyone for Tennyson?" Plans call for additional courses to be distributed to students via T.V. and taped as well as recorded broadcasts which will be packaged with related learning materials. Professor Andrews explained his part as producer of a Midwestern Literature course.

In the new venture, designed to bring prominent scholars and lecturers to communities which could not ordinarily afford them, Professor Andrews is joined by a number of nationally prominent educators. MidAmerica University is sponsored by a consortium of major universities and has its headquarters at the University of Iowa.

"A Different Approach," Professor Gene Dent's presentation, also described new audio-visual dimensions for Midwestern literary scholarship. Professor Dent of Lakeland College spoke of the merits and dangers of visuals as he looked back at his successful project, A Storyteller's Town, the thirty minute video production about Sherwood Anderson and his boyhood hometown of Clyde, Ohio. Professor Dent also looked forward to other midwestern visual projects which he hoped to see funded and realized shortly. Among those he thought most promising were a sequel to A Storyteller's Town, dealing with Anderson's Virginia years, a documentary dealing with Hemingway's Michigan Country near Petoskey, and an adaptation of Anderson's American County Fair to be filmed in a contemporary setting at the Geauga County Fair in Burton, Ohio.

Former Society President, Professor Bernard Engel talked about the beginnings of his new book, A History of Midwestern Poetry. In notes for the first chapter of this major study, Professor Engel wrestled with definitions of Midwestern poetry and with the problem of "Why read and study Midwestern poets?" Professor Engel's answers to both problems include his complex sense that it is important to write a history which recognizes "the poet who happens to be a Midwesterner rather than the Midwesterner who happens to be a poet." Professor Engel sees as an unfinished task the portrayal of the Midwestern poet and his poems as participants in "the movement of American poetry from its origin as a half-naturalized imitative form to its current

maturity as an art capable of dealing magnificently with the national and universal." As an example of this proposed design, Professor Engel discussed the poems of several early Midwestern poets, and he placed their work within the broad context of the development of American poetry. If [the poets of the early Midwest] were less successful than they sought to be," according to Professor Engel, "They nevertheless left us a heritage of effort that illustrates the thought and imagination and esthetic goals of their time, and is often a pleasant reading experience." Bernard Engel is Professor of American Thought and Language at Michigan State University.

The Luncheon Session

Professor John T. Flanagan received the first annual MidAmerica award at the Luncheon session of the conference. Following the award presentation by Professor David D. Anderson, and remarks by Professor Flanagan, Professor Gerald Nemanic, President of the Society, spoke to the meeting.

Under the title of "That Detestable Morass...that Intolerable River" (Dickens' response to the Midwest he saw at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers at Cairo), Professor Nemanic brought together several debunking commentaries about the Midwest from foreigners and eastern Americans. Included in his humorous references were remarks from Zerah Hawley's A Journal of a Tour (1822), a report on frontier life in the Western Reserve by a Yale educated physician from Connecticut who spoke disparagingly of frontier dwellings and manners; Ebenezer Deming's (pseud., Major Walter Wilkey), Western Emigration (1839) a satiric depiction of uncivilized conditions in "Edensburgh," Illinois as seen by "An honest Yeoman of Mooseboro, State of Main;" Caroline Kirkland's A New Home--Who'll Follow? (1839), a humorous and sophisticated commentary on frontier manners encountered by the urbane Kirklands at their home in Pinckney, Michigan; Frances Trollope's Domestic Manners of the Americans (1827), a humorous sketch on Mrs. Trollope's encounter with a Midwestern "scholar" at a party in Cincinnati, and other short quotations from Rudyard Kipling and

G. K. Chesterton on their impressions of Chicago during the first one third of the 20th Century.

The Afternoon Session

During the afternoon session three speakers reviewed their "Work in Progress." Professor Emeritus William Thomas of Ohio State University chaired the panel.

In his analysis of Jim Harrison's contemporary novel, Farmer, Professor Arnold Davidson of Elmhurst College explained Harrison's use of Midwest as Metaphor. Professor Davidson observed that Harrison's protagonist, Joseph Lundgren is seen in the novel as he moves within a "nebulous, middling, Midwestern setting," which reflects his conflict with an "uncertain and unexamined middle age" and a career crisis. Professor Davidson traced the outlines of the protagonist's view of the Midwest, "as a blank between two seas," and noted the parallels between this view and Lundgren's personal dissatisfactions with his career and his romantic life. By the novel's end, however, Professor Davidson finds that Lundgren, "has begun to harmonize the formerly unresolved dichotomies in his life and to move away from a sterile, static midpoint position." Lundgren has perhaps begun to find, "music to dance to in the most ordinary things."

Professor Madonna Kolbenschlag of the University of Notre Dame described the progress of her research concerning "Female Consciousness and the City-Country Myth." Professor Kolbenschlag reported that she had discovered three sets of metaphoric structures which seemed to converge in American Literature. The way that the Midwest functions as metaphor in American literature is connected with two other symbolic clusters--that of the country/city complex of bio-polar motifs and that of a female/male set of motifs. Professor Kolbenschlag observed that the qualities associated with the city are echoed by a masculine type cluster while the country cluster is echoed by the feminine set of symbols. According to Professor Kolbenschlag, the change in American literature from male to female central consciousness after 1870 might

be the result of Americans' fear of losing the values that characterize the country in the face of increased urbanization and migration to the city. "There were both sociological and artistic reasons for the choice of the female consciousness....The writers needed a central sensibility which could properly dramatize the dialectic between innocence and experience....The Victorian ideal of women provided a metaphoric structure similar to the values that were fast receding in the popular consciousness as the figure could be seen as most threatened by the ambiguities of city life." After demonstrating the first part of her hypothesis, using heartland novels by authors such as Hamlin Garland, Professor Kolbenschlag spoke about a third metaphoric construct, the Midwest/East polarity which she believes probably converges with the other two typologies. Her research is presently concerned with further testing of the hypothesis, with investigating the interrelationships among the several motif clusters, and with examining the implications which these echoing metaphors have for an understanding of the mythical structure of American literature.

The afternoon's final speaker, Professor Nancy Bunge of Michigan State University shared her problems as a scholar of Midwestern literature and told of her attempts to "establish a convincing causal link between living in the Midwest and writing a certain kind of literature." After selecting four novelists (Anderson, Lewis, Hemingway and Bellow) for concentrated examination, Professor Bunge felt that she had more to say about theme than about form. She is presently studying the four novelists, "in terms of the solutions for modern confusion implicitly proposed by their fiction and [has] ...found that the works of each author, as well as those of all four, fall into a conceptual progression. Their protagonists try out various ways of coping, making each work an imaginative exercise in achieving an integrated life in a disrupted world."

Following the afternoon session, the conference adjourned to David and Pat Anderson's home in Dimondale, Michigan for the annual convivium.

Nancy Pogel

Society and Center Development

Planning and the search for funds for Society and Center Development continue, with promising responses. As developments occur, they will be announced in the Newsletter or in special mailings.

Don Pady, Society bibliographer, has made substantial contributions of research material to the Center.

The Eighth Annual Conference: The Cultural Heritage of the Midwest: a Symposium

The Eighth Annual Conference will be held at the Kellogg Center, Michigan State University, on May 18, 19, 20, 1978. There are still many places on the program which are reserved for members of the Society, but we do hope to put the program in final form by January 1, 1978. If you are interested in participating, please write Dave Anderson as soon as possible. We plan to publish the proceedings.

Special features of the program will be exhibits of Midwestern art, folk art, photography, and books and manuscripts; readings by Midwestern authors; and a production of "The Runner Stumbles," one of the ten best plays of 1976. By Milan Stitt of Detroit, it is set in Michigan. We hope to include group discussions of the play with the author and the Broadway producer.

Proceedings of the Sherwood Anderson Centenary Conference will be published early in the new year. MidAmerica V will go to press in October and be available in February, 1978. Contributions of essays -- 8-10 pages -- for future Miscellanies are invited.

The First MidAmerica Award
Presented to John T. Flanagan
May 14, 1977

Remarks by David D. Anderson

Nearly twenty-five years ago, on a hot summer afternoon, I ventured into the Midwest Rare Book Shop in Mansfield, Ohio, to browse and to talk books and writers with Ernie Wessen, the knowledgeable and delightful owner. After our preliminary greetings we adjourned to the back room, sat down, and began to talk. After telling me an anecdote about a conversation with Sherwood Anderson at the Press Club in New York in 1919, he picked up a book from a nearby table, handed it to me, and said, "Here's something I think you'll like." I did, Ernie made me a present of it, and I have it yet, somewhat the worse for hard usage.

The book was America is West, published by the University of Minnesota Press in 1945. It was my first and perhaps the best kind of introduction to the author, John T. Flanagan. A quarter century later Professor Flanagan is now Professor Emeritus, but the book remains the best collection of Midwestern literature, and a significant introduction to its study.

Professor Flanagan had already written his James Hall, Literary Pioneer of the Ohio Valley, and since then he has written Folklore in American Literature, and numerous other books and articles on Midwestern writers and literature. Although he has ventured abroad on numerous occasions as a Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellow in Kyoto, Brussels, Moscow, and other points East and West, at the same time his life and work have been rooted literally and metaphorically in the Midwest. A pioneer in the study of the region and literature that have given birth to this Society, he is eminently deserving of the first Mid-America Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern literature.

David D. Anderson
May 14, 1977

Response by Dr. Flanagan: "A Specialist Before His Time"

I should like to say first that I am honored and grateful to be here. And I want to thank Professor David Anderson and his colleagues for selecting me as the first recipient of the award given to those working in the field of Midwestern Literature. The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature is of course only one of many regional groups, but it has been amazingly active and its news letter, annual publications, and increasing membership prove the importance of hard work and a valid goal. I am sure we all hope that this success will continue.

Perhaps I might indicate briefly how I happened to become interested in the field. When after a year of teaching I returned to the University of Minnesota I decided to specialize in American literature even though the subject was not given high priority by the Department of English. But certain courses were offered and I was finally allowed to write a dissertation on Ralph Waldo Emerson, since Emerson was a figure of some prominence and he was safely dead. Subsequently I chose to concentrate on the writers of the Middle West, a choice which was stimulated in part by the appearance of two books in the 1920's which got wide attention: Ralph Leslie Rusk's Literature of the Middle Western Frontier and Dorothy Dondore's The Prairie and the Making of Middle America. The impressive scholarship and wide coverage of both studies were strongly influential.

But there were some personal experiences of importance too. One was my meeting with Dr. J. Christian Bay, then the librarian of the John Crerar Library in Chicago. Dr. Bay was an enthusiastic collector of western travels who was delighted to share his knowledge with anyone whose literary horizon was not limited to Great Britain. Another Chicagoan and also an avid collector of American humor and folklore was Franklin J. Meine, who generously made his library available to students of local color and of Mark Twain. Many years later I was happy to be able to persuade Meine to sell his collection, including an invaluable run of the Spirit of the Times, to the

University of Illinois at Urbana.

A third man, whose professional concern with American history often led him into literary paths, was Theodore C. Blegen, editor of Minnesota History for many years, dean of the Graduate School at the University of Minnesota for two decades, and a specialist in the study of emigration (especially Norwegian) to the United States. Blegen published many of my articles in Minnesota History and always gave me the encouragement which some of my colleagues withheld. I have tried, incidentally, to acknowledge my debt to a friend and mentor in a biography which the Norwegian-American Historical Association will publish later this year.

Another factor, I suppose, in my devotion to the study of Midwestern Literature was the celebrity of two Minnesota authors in the 1920's, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis. Fitzgerald's Summit Avenue home in St. Paul was on my route to the University of Minnesota campus, and Sinclair Lewis taught one or two classes in Folwell Hall during my tenure as a faculty member in Minneapolis. Both men served to focus my attention on the Middle West. In addition, a number of local writers were beginning or continuing their careers at this time. Grace Flandrau of St. Paul and Margaret Culkin Banning of Duluth had won some success as writers of popular fiction, Mabel Seeley had a loyal following among detective story fans. Carol Brink was widely known as a writer of children's stories, and Frederick Manfred (originally Feike Feikema) was desperately trying to establish his Siouxland on the American literary map. In the late 1930's, moreover, Max Shulman and Thomas Heggen were beginning to attract attention in the fields of humor and fiction.

I might conclude by saying that I have taught courses in Midwestern Literature at four different universities: Southern Methodist, Indiana, Illinois, and Minnesota. I have conducted a number of doctoral dissertations on such individual writers as Masters, Lindsay, Anderson, Hemingway, Rølvaag, and Suckow. And I have published three studies of Midwestern literary figures, an anthology of Midwestern literature, and some two hundred articles and reviews, most of which have

a basic relevance to the field. But other subjects now preempt the attention of scholars and new names appear. Certainly writers like Nelson Algren, Willard Motley, Gwendolyn Brooks, James Farrell, William Maxwell, Louis Bromfield, James Jones, and of course our newest laureate Saul Bellow demand attention. Perhaps we should take to heart Sherlock Holmes's favorite admonition to Dr. Watson: "The game's afoot!"

John T. Flanagan
May 14, 1977

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MidAmerica IV is available. Please recommend that your library order it at six dollars.

MidAmerica V will go to press in October. If you have items for consideration, please send them soon.

The Newsletter needs items of interest to the membership.

Taps for Sergeant Jones

The 27th Infantry came back to Hawaii from the far Pacific -- Back to Eternity, as a Life feature put it -- long ago; the dust and deaths of unpopular combat in Korea and Viet Nam have forestalled romanticizing the G.I.'s war; and now James Jones, the Old Army soldier who wrote From Here to Eternity (1951) is dead of a heart attack at 55.

Literary types prefer Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead (1948), a book about a different Army, the civilians reluctantly in uniform as combat soldiers who hate the service and its regulars almost as much as the official enemy. Tolerating life in the army only because "there's a war on," they have been overseas, literally and figuratively, so long they are afraid even to speculate on coming home ("The Golden Gate in '48" was, the G.I. feared, too optimistic). Like others from the upper middle class, Mailer, who had graduated from Harvard with honors, saw life in the Army as serfdom. He brought off what most of his class peers swore to do: the important novel exposing the army as an American representative of that Fascism we were said to be fighting. His thoughtful though talky book, with its ludicrous touches of 1940s pop psychology -- every time a G.I. drops his pants to defecate, he has Great Thoughts -- will always be preferred by the literary establishment.

As it should be, I concede. But let's give a toot or two on the bugle for From Here to Eternity. Jones, the high school graduate from Illinois, like thousands of his peers in the Depression, found the gilded inequities of service life preferable to the demeaning round of soup kitchens, Hoovervilles, and make-work "projects" that were the options for the unskilled. Eternity is a World War II book not because it ends with the Pearl Harbor attack and the first floundering response to it, not because it shows the Army of the enlisted man, but because it expresses faith in the institution of the Army itself. To the Depression-era soldier, the Army offered a glorious three squares a day, sturdy and plentiful if ungainly clothing, guaranteed if indifferent and contemptuous medical care, and lifetime security

for all but the worst of foul ups.

Eternity reminds us of, though it does not deal directly with, questions of class affiliation and political organization that lie quiescent until, perhaps, another Depression hits.

The Old Army of the 1930s was an easy life. As a teenager in Portland I met occasional privates and corporals from Vancouver Barracks who drew their Army pay while they picked strawberries and raspberries and hops and traded shifts with us in canneries, and as late as 1940 worked in shipyards. Their military obligation was to stand reveille a couple of times a week and to pass Saturday morning inspection (a buddy could be found to yell "Heah!" or "Yow!" at roll call, and to lay out the gear on the shelter half). The peacetime Army knew that its men wanted more than its \$21 a month, and in return for the understanding that they would be available in an emergency did not press them to be on hand for military training--i.e. plucking vagrant blades of grass and emptying slops. Such vital chores were taken care of by the large number of men wearing blue fatigues with a white P (for "prisoner") painted on the back, heinous knaves who had failed to salute an object in riding boots or had put the razor on the wrong side of the footlocker.

Jones's Private Robert E. Lee Prewitt has a vision of the Army as it could be, the vision of an orderly and just society of mutually respecting professionals. The Army is not like that. But neither is it wholly the Fascist society perceived by Mailer's intellectuals. It's a human institution, populated in peacetime by -- as a recent Sixty Minutes feature on the Pentagon was astute enough to see--some of the least aggressive of our citizens, time servers who want lifetime security and good pensions. Its members have achieved what campus politicians want faculty careers to be. . . but I digress.

These minimally competent types hold the organization together in the lean years of peace when few of the imaginative and ambitious would care to yawn their way from post to post, from stripe to stripes or from gold bars to silvered eagles and stars. That we'd never win a war if we had to fight it with only the regular Army is a truism (and I don't suppose the

regular Navy and Marines and Air Force to be much different). But the regulars provide the cadres which, fleshed out with thousands of more active men, become the divisions and groups and forces that do the fighting.

Private Prewitt expresses some of the idealism most of us who were drawn into the World War II services felt for the first few weeks of our time in the military, an idealism not felt by those called into later, perhaps less justifiable wars. Because he is idealistic, Prewitt is offended by the injustices of military life, those injustices which, as Jefferson said of slavery, are bound to occur when some men have absolute authority over others. In being thus offended, Prewitt represents all who went into the service willingly, ready to contribute, but found that neither initiative nor drive were wanted. What Prewitt cannot see, because Jones himself cannot, is that the military system is one which guarantees individual injustices. Only if all men were innately as good as the handbooks mistakenly say Rousseau held them to be could the system avoid producing wasteful and inequitable treatment of anyone a step lower in rank than the man giving the orders.

Jones sentimentalizes this Army's possibilities. Like thousands of others in 1942, I tried to do this. After all, my father brought me up proud of his World War I service, during which he was hit by shrapnel twice and gassed twice. The second gas attack was bad enough to bring him home in a hospital ship and send him through the rest of his life on one lung. Only after joining up myself did I realize that he had talked of Ft. Lewis and the Argonne, of ships and shells and his dislike for "On the Banks of the Wabash." (His engineer company spent a night in a trench next to an Indiana National Guard outfit some of whose men sang that song until at 5 a.m. they were sent out on one of those insane World War I rushes at the entrenched enemy. The engineers were assigned to bury them). But he never, I came to realize, talked about the Army itself.

Eternity is a book about the Army as the loyal regular sees it, an institution sometimes tolerating a Captain Dana Holmes

and a Staff Sergeant Fatso Judson, but fundamentally one made up of decent men like Lieutenant Ross, and dedicated professionals like First Sergeant Warden. Part of the book's popularity came because it shows soldiers spending spare time and all their cash in brothels, a portrayal shocking to the women's clubs who had been conned into supporting the proposal for Universal Military training by the argument that it would make men of "character" out of their sons. (Remembered question, as out of date now as virginity in bobby sox: "How they gonna make a movie out of that?"). In being largely responsible for the death of UMT, Eternity joins Uncle Tom's Cabin and The Jungle as one of the few novels to have had direct social impact.

The Army ought to reform. There is little excuse today for uniforms and an order-taking hierarchy. Even in the Infantry, the system is outmoded. In our rifle company as our original officers and platoon sergeants disappeared, we took our objectives without paying more than minimal attention to the fussings of the occasional brass the replacement depots passed on to us from outfits whose colonels were cagy enough to get rid of them. (When will we on college faculties develop replacement depots for trading our incompetents around? There's the MLA convention, but it's too squeamish).

The Prewitts and the Joneses will never reform the service. But they see some of what an outfit, like any community, could have. It's easier for me to believe in Captain Holmes and S/Sgt. Judson than in Pvt. Prewitt and 1st Sgt. Warden. But Prewitt and Warden are both of them no doubt aspects of Jones as he saw himself. For the idealism of 1941 and early 1942 that had to go when combat began in earnest in Guadalcanal and North Africa; for the idealism that is to be honored in every generation even when misdirected; for Jones himself, not as the overpaid pop novelist making the scene in Paris in the 1960s and 1970s but as he must have been when young -- for all, a sentimental wish: that one more time Pvt. Prewitt of the 27th Infantry would stand on the second story balcony of Schofield barracks to send a silvery taps into the soft Hawaiian night.

But, grown up, we cannot stop with

sentimentality. We all learn that a blackened bayonet may surprise the throat on the softest of nights. The future we come into brings diverse fates, answers seldom announced with a bugle call. Jones cannot speak for men and women who have passed the age when there is a medal for every chest and two glories wait in every pot. But if not a Mailer, Jones is at least a voice for the long-thoughted youth that we recognize because we once could see that youth in the mirror. Taps for Sergeant Jones is taps for all of us as we were at 20.

Bernard F. Engel
Michigan State University

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More Dimensions of Sherwood Anderson

As part of the Sherwood Anderson Centenary, Twentieth Century Literature and American Notes and Queries have each devoted issues to Anderson scholarship. These journals pay Anderson authentic homage by showing that thirty-six years after his death we are still learning to understand him and his work.

A sense of Anderson's sympathetic humanity permeates many of the essays in the Twentieth Century Literature volume (February 1977). Gilbert Wilson's Centenary portrait of a melancholy Anderson appears on the cover, and Anderson's light-hearted description of the trials he suffered as a literary lion opens the collection. Since Anderson particularly regrets the distance established between Writers and Common People, he takes special pleasure in those not impressed with him. Nor should they be. Many people tell wonderful stories, but have too little writing experience to record them effectively. Practice alone distinguishes the author from ordinary people. The generosity implicit in this stance receives external confirmation in Kichinosuki Ohashi's account of Anderson's correspondence with three Japanese admirers to whom Anderson gave freely of his energy and support.

David Anderson's collection of representative photographs graphically portrays Anderson's outer life while hinting at

the inner life Mia Klein focuses on. She explores Anderson's relationship with his father, concluding that his struggle to accept his father reflects his difficulty in accepting himself as an artist. Jon Lawry examines the relationship between the man and his artistry, while Mary Sue Scriber Hypothesizes that the personal orientation of Anderson's work explains the greater interest of the French in American writers like Sinclair Lewis whose works have a heavier sociological orientation.

But this fascination with the man rests on his writings. Appropriately, the remaining articles provide new insight into the works. The man's confusion sometimes flaws his writings, as John Ditsky's discussion of Marching Men illustrates. Too often critics allow these weaknesses to obscure strengths. Paul Somers notes sophisticated experimentation with point of view in some lesser known short stories. "Godliness," although less innovative than other Winesburg stories, brings together and exemplifies the work's central themes, as John O'Neill shows. J. R. Scafidel argues that the discerning treatment of sexuality in Windy McPherson's Son deserves acknowledgment despite the novel's aesthetic shortcomings.

The American Notes and Queries volume (September 1976) shows that there is still more work to be done by both reconfirming earlier conclusions and providing clues for further research. The contradictions Hilbert Campbell encountered in his search for Anderson's middle name can be reconciled by recalling Anderson's admitted tendency to imaginatively reshape the truth, a trait Ray White also thinks led to Anderson's misrepresenting The American Spectator Conference. William Phillips suggests that Anderson criticism needs re-evaluation in two areas. He believes that Anderson's later rejection of Emerson has caused critics to underestimate Emerson's influence and that interpreters dismiss Dr. Reefy's positive qualities too easily. William Sutton calls attention to an unpublished, unfinished, anti-fascist play by Anderson. David Anderson's entry helps explain why so much remains to be said and understood about Anderson. He

documents Anderson's underestimation by the Editors of Time who insult Anderson even while praising him. In one of their more generous comments, they describe the Memoirs as "not within miles of faultlessness," but "as placidly worked as a cow works her cud." Yet their misunderstanding makes sense; few writers tell complex truths in the simple, honest manner they deserve. As we overcome our own limitations, we see further into Anderson.

Nancy Bunge
Michigan State University

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Richard Eberhart, Collected Poems 1930-1976
(Oxford University Press, New York: 1976).

Does the center hold? The compelling authority of W.B. Yeats told us that it does not. But Yeats spoke for a generation still in shock from revelations of science and revulsion at war. Some poets half a generation younger than Yeates started out accepting the picture of a fragmented world but have come to conclude that there is underneath the seemingly multifarious seas but one ocean.

Perhaps the best known of these writers who belong to a transitional era--born a little late to be modernists, a little early to be post-modern--is the Midwest's Theodore Roethke. But the overdue bestowal of the National Book Award on Richard Eberhart (1904-) for his Collected Poems (1976) brings to attention another who eventually found, as one of his occasional Latinate titles puts it, ". . .Unity in Multeity."

A Minnesotan who has spent most of his adult life in the East, Eberhart has earned his resolution of the esthetic difficulties that faced the imaginative and thoughtful of his generation. His central problem has always been the significance of death in our experience, a problem he has faced directly more often than most. His best known--though surely not his best--poem is "The Groundhog," an account of his feelings as in several visits over a period of some months he observed the dissolution of the animal's body. The shudder that these observations aroused (in the midst of teeming life, this?) could not be

stilled: the poet could only recall others who have wept at the realization of death. (It is not Eberhart's fault that the poem became one of the most imitated works of the 1950s and 1960s, probably because contemplation of a creature which though animal was non-human enabled one to deal with physical dissolution without slipping into the pathetic. Perhaps surfeited by the piles of mammalian, reptilian, and ornithological cadavers that bestrew his poem's wake, Eberhart now says he thinks a parody of "The Groundhog" is better than the original poem).

Eberhart's original "bent," the vein in which some of his best work appears, is for the ardently romantic. "This Fevers Me," one early poem said of nature, "Go to the Shine That's on a Tree," he advises the questioning. His unrestrained cry for revelation by means of radiance was consistent with the poems of the same period in which he told prettily though perhaps not daintily of reflections upon his own body's death and decay, and of his lamentations at the grave of his mother. In this early period he could not reconcile the terms of the "dualism" which caused him to see death and its circumstances as in contradiction to, even denying, the sheer wonder of the natural world. Because it led to 1001 varieties of question and mood and efforts at belief, his situation was not so much that of a man torn between only two positions as it was that of one caught in a world of chaotic diversity.

Like Wordsworth, a poet he admired early and, apparently, still admires late, Eberhart finds one possibility of resolution to the paradoxes of existence in intimations of immortality. Rarely, his realizations have a Christian cast, more often they are, as in the poem "Light from Above," assurances gained by "pure visual belief," by seeing a natural object or setting that is bathed in a significant radiance.

Caught sometimes at the high tide of enthusiasm, at others by the ebbings of doubt, Eberhart naturally enough also finds possible resolution at moments when the pulling of opposite currents appears to be in balance. In the poem "Moment of Equilibrium Among the Islands," he

compares the pleasure of finding still water among granite boulders with the experience of riding on the sea which eyes show to be playful and sprightly but imagination knows to be profound.

Such resolution is also exemplified in the poem "May Evening," in which the poet has a "harmonious moment of apprehension" that shows the oneness of mankind, the unity that lies beneath the shifting of time and circumstance. He may, too, as in "Seals, Terms, Time," find not resolution of opposites but only confirmation of their equal attraction as he sees himself to be "in compulsion hid and thwarted" because he is "Pulled back in the mammal water, / Enticed to the release of the sky."

But throughout his career Eberhart has sensed that man and mankind, man and nature, man and whatever he believes to lie beyond this world---that these are not a set of discontinuous entities but a continuity, a shared though unrecognized existence. From early assertion that only moments of mystical experience could bring this realization Eberhart has moved to the more mundane but perhaps more convincing belief that oneness is always present.

The fine poem "The Place," unaccountably omitted from this latest collection, recognizes that sensory experience is the realm in which the poet works, that "There is no environment patent for the poetic," that instead of seeking a noumenal origin for art the artist must realize that "... my flesh is / Poetry's environment." This lesson does not lead him to abandon the moment of mystical experience, of course. But it does lead him to recognize the importance of the day-to-day, to know that, as he says in the poem "The Hard Structure of the World," the world

Is made up of reservoirs,
Birds flying South, mailmen
Snow falling or rain falling,
Railmen, Howard Johnsons and airmen

In becoming willing to recognize the importance of the ordinary, Eberhart is adding to, not trimming, his arsenal of resources. He can still hope for, and occasionally find, mystical experience.

One of the 43 new poems in Collected Poems of 1976, "Undercliff Evening," tells of such an experience as a butterfly he neither asked for nor summoned crosses his path as a "messenger of supernal power," a "moment of perfection in the dream of time." And because he can now see importance in the ordinary, Eberhart can write appreciatively of domestic experience, the workaday world, and the human love which arises from and proves our inter-involvement.

Never as well known as some of his contemporaries, yet a poet of many skills and delights, a serious poet who recognizes significance in the witty and the playful, a man who has written always with major purposes, Eberhart is too good a poet to exist in our minds only as the author of "The Groundhog," "The Horse Chestnut Tree," "The Fury of Aerial Bombardment," and a few other anthology favorites.

Though in development he often parallels Roethke, he is always his own man, one of the least imitative of poets. His style is sometimes the despair of his friends because of his occasional setting down of mouthfuls of multi-syllabic abstraction. Accustomed to rejecting such mouthfuls unless we can take them to be contributing to wit or irony, we fail to see that Eberhart's strategy is to force our thought to follow his.

The rather small number of pieces in that style, and the much larger number which are readily accessible, deserve attention they have not received, an attention earned by esthetic accomplishment. For Eberhart the center holds because under the hurricaned sand and edged stone of our pathway there is a universal bedrock. He is a celebrant of this world who always has one eye open to revelation.

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* * * *

Philip L. Gerber, Plots and Characters in the Fiction of Theodore Dreiser. Hamden, Conn., Archon Books, 1977. 153 pp., chronology.

All too frequently books that purport to introduce, summarize, guide, or otherwise provide information about an author and his work for scholars, teachers, or students are simply dull, resulting in the worst sort of injustice to exciting literary works and, in effect, discouraging the neophyte from reading the works themselves. There is no possibility of such a result from Philip Gerber's Plots and Characters in the Fiction of Theodore Dreiser for three reasons: Gerber understands Dreiser, he appreciates Dreiser, and he writes well. The result is a first-rate reference work for the teacher, scholar, or student.

Although its focus is limited to Dreiser's fiction, Gerber's study is in the tradition of the great literary concordances of the last century: not only does it provide in detail factual information otherwise available only with difficulty, but its thoroughness is itself a major work of scholarship. The result is that Gerber's reader can see in detail and in provocative juxtaposition the broad range of work of a writer who was not only a "born novelist," as Gerber describes him, but whose work provides one of the broadest literary canvases of America in this century. As Gerber points out in his introduction, perhaps the most immediate revelation from a review of Dreiser's characters is the fact that here, for the first time, is a broad array of non-Anglo-Saxon Americans, the forerunners of the varied and rich scope of American fiction in the last half of this century. Gerber suggests, too, and the juxtaposition of characters and plot support his conclusion, that for Dreiser's people there are no epiphanies, no sudden bursts of insight or illumination, but a relentless, continuous relationship between human life and environmental and biological circumstances.

Not only is Gerber's book the useful, provocative work that such a study should be, but, as these conclusions suggest, for the imaginative reader, scholar or graduate student, there are, in this volume, the germs of a good many ideas and insights. I predict that not only will a fair number of scholarly articles have their

inception in this book, but I see the germ of a dissertation or two that I suspect will materialize. I hope their authors give Professor Gerber the credit that he deserves.

David D. Anderson

* * * *

The Harmony of Deeper Music; Posthumous Poems of Edgar Lee Masters

Edited by Frank K. Robinsin
Austin, The University of Texas, 1976
72 pages

This collection of thirty-four poems written by Edgar Lee Masters between 1927 and 1942 is not likely to change the Spoon River poet's literary reputation as a "one-book" author, but it does offer several new perspectives on his art.

Edited by a long-time Masters scholar, The Harmony of Deeper Music is the first of Masters' posthumous volumes and swells his bibliography to a remarkable fifty-four books. Unlike any of his other collections of verse, however, this one shows the dates on which the individual poems were completed, thus providing some necessary information for charting his later poetic development.

Overall, the poems reveal an unexpected consistency to Masters' art, for even among these pieces that he chose not to publish, the best tend to be, like those in Spoon River, elegiac cameos about very average people. But of course Masters was consistent in his unevenness too, and that he decided not to make public some of the best verses highlights that chronically flawed esthetic judgement which caused so many of his volumes to fail.

No less important, these poems remind us that during the 1930's, as Masters approached and passed his seventieth year, he enjoyed a period of unusual poetic eloquence and wrote some of his finest post-Spoon River verse. One of these poems, "I Have So Loved This Earth" (1939), may be one of his "ten-best"; another (from 1937), the

judiciously selected opening poem enjoys a like sensitivity;

The leaves whisper finalities,
The grass gestures, asking what is
loss?

The mountains look afar, over the
Atlantic deep.
They say a poet is asleep.

Herbert Russell

* * * *

UNEQUIVOCAL AMERICANISM: Right-Wing
Novels in the Cold War Era
by Macel D. Ezell 160 pages 1977

Unequivocal Americanism is the first book to bring together most of the right-wing (conservative, patriotic, anticommunist, nationalistic) novels of the post-World War II era. It provides a biographical and bibliographical survey of novels published by conservative presses such as Western Islands Press and Conservative Book Club or highly endorsed by reviewers in right-of-center periodicals. Since the books have largely been ignored in mainstream literary media, they are generally not well known. Some of the books have sold well in the popular market (for example, those of Allen Drury, Taylor Caldwell, and Ayn Rand), but most of them have not.

Although the book deals briefly with background materials, its primary purpose is to provide bibliographical information and to isolate some of the major themes in right-wing novels. To determine what rightists expect of imaginative literature, the study first identifies some of the writers and summarizes novels which have been well received by right-wing spokesmen. Then it covers some of the writers and novels to which right-wingers have objected. Finally, it treats basic themes which rightists would have novelists emphasize. Besides the fiction itself, the author has relied primarily upon book reviews in periodicals which identify themselves as right-wing. Information is also included from a few books of literary criticism endorsed by right-wing spokesmen. An annotated bibliography is included.

The book should appeal to persons (both advocates and scholars) who are interested in right-wing ideologies, whether their fields be politics, American studies, American literature or American history.

Macel Ezell is a member of the Society and an associate professor in the Department of American Thought and Language, Michigan State University. He holds a B.A. from Furman University and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Texas Christian University. His major field is American history, twentieth century, with American literature as a supporting field, and his research interests concern the ideologies of conservative/right-wing movements since World War II.

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