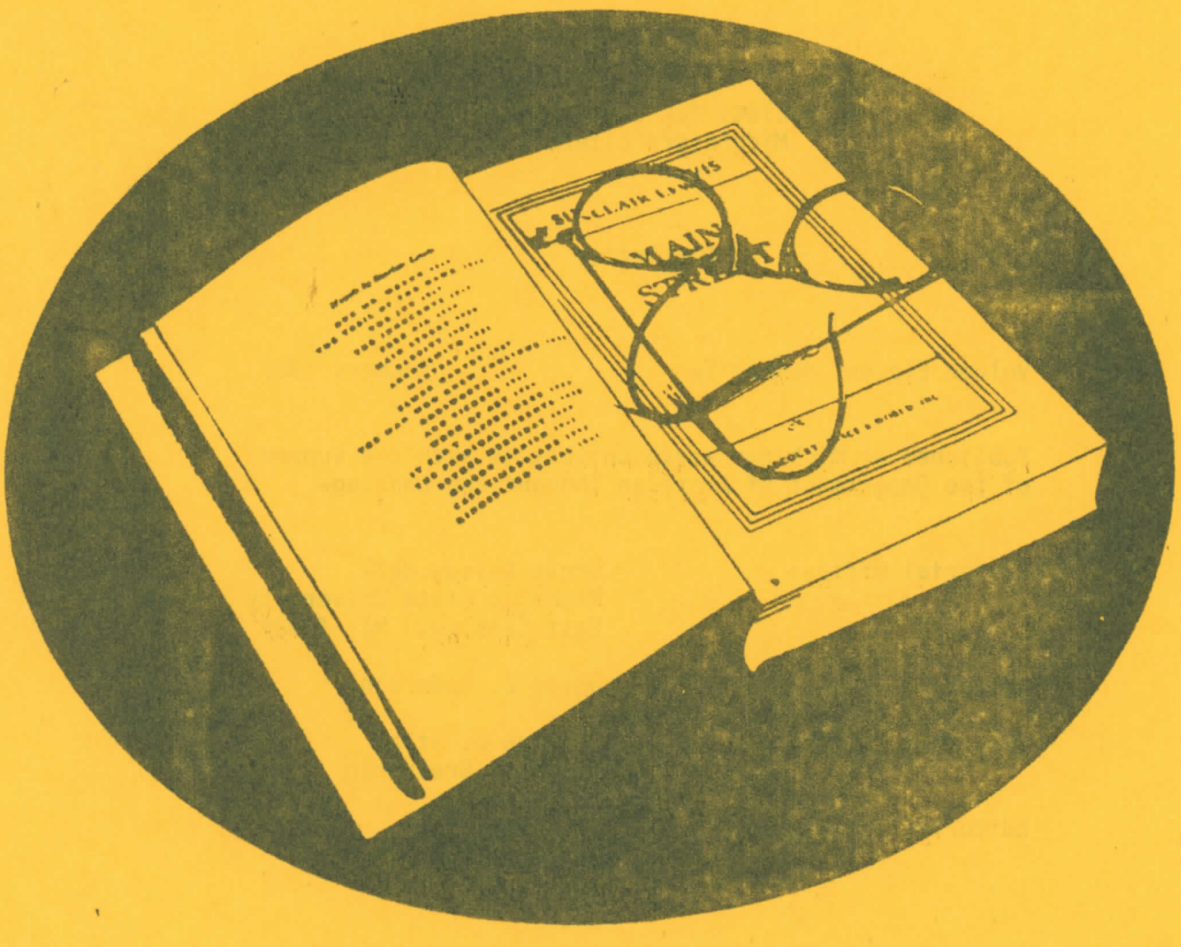
SML Newsletter



The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

The Center for the Study of
Midwestern Literature and Culture

Founded 1971

VOLUME ELEVEN
Number Two
Summer, 1981

Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

Newsletter

Volume Eleven, Number Two Summer, 1981

Published at Michigan State University with the support
of the Department of American Thought and Language

Editorial Office: Ernst Bessey Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824

Published in Spring, Summer, Fall

The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Officers, 1981-82

President: Sister Martha Curry
Barat College

Vice President: Arthur W. Shumaker
De Pauw University

Executive Secretary/Treasurer: David D. Anderson
Michigan State University

Executive Council

Expires 1984: Marilyn J. Atlas
Ohio University

Roger Bresnahan
Michigan State University

Expires 1983: Ronald Primeau
Central Michigan University

Alma J. Payne
Bowling Green State University

Expires 1982: Nancy Pogel
Michigan State University

Bernard Engel
Michigan State University

Bibliographers: Donald Pady
Iowa State University

Robert Beasecker
Grand Valley State College

Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

Newsletter

Volume Eleven, Number Two Summer, 1981

Contents

Daylight on the Shores of Gitchee Gumee
Bernard F. Engel 1

Midwestern Influences in F. Scott Fitzgeralds's
The Great Gatsby
Tim Sherer 9

Sherwood Anderson and *Dark Laughter*:
Discovery and Rebellion
David M. Lockwood 23

The New Regionalism and the Study of
American Popular Culture
David D. Anderson 33

Lansing's Forgotten Novelist of the
Lost Generation
William McCann 43

Daylight on the Shores of Gitchee Gumee

Bernard Engel

The best known of the dozen or more long "Indian poems" of the nineteenth century's middle decades is Henry Wadsworth Longefellow's The Song of Hiawatha (1855). Questions of literary value aside, the poem appears to the modern reader as a paradigm of the nineteenth century history of the Midwest and of America, the story of an optimistic dream of progress being checked, ultimately defeated, by human cussedness and the inability to escape from the certainty of death. It is, of course, far from a masterpiece even though Longfellow gave it the grand aim of presenting what he called a "Promethean" cultural hero. Critics rightly see that it is flawed by persistent genteel sentimentalism, structural inadequacy arising from failure to resolve conflicting views on the fate of the Indians and their culture, and use of tom-tom metre that wearies the tolerant and incites the mischievous to parody. Yet Hiawatha deserves comparison not only with other "Indian poems" but also with the attempts at epic of Romantic poets in England and Europe. As in many of them, the essential failure is caused by the split between subject and object, between self and other, that has troubled even the greatest of Romantics.

The poem of course presents the white man's Indian: Hiawatha himself is out of Edgar Rice Burroughs, with the Ojibwa in the role of the apes; Minnehaha is out of Godey's Ladies Book as impregnated by Anthony Comstock; Old Nokomis, the Tricksters, and other extras are Coppertoned layabouts from Central Casting; and the villains are wryly misshapen scalawags devised by Walt Disney. Indeed, though anthropological

knowledge has become more sophisticated, the moral and intellectual significance of Indian myth and lore still escapes our probing.

In the 1850's, white opinion on Indian culture went to two extremes. The nay sayers held that the Indian is a wild man of little more worth than a beast. Contempt for the Indian appeared not only among such barbaric frontier whites as the Indian hater in Melville's The Confidence Man (1857), but also in the views of such supposedly sophisticated New Englanders as Francis Parkman, who wrote that "It is obvious that the Indian mind has never seriously occupied itself with any of the higher themes of thought," and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who in a letter thanking Longfellow for a copy of the poem,wrote that though it is "sweet and wholesome as maize," Longefellow had taken undue risks: "The dangers of the Indians are, that they are really savage, have poor, small, sterile heads,--not thoughts" and that Longfellow had let himself be dominated by "tenderness" in "accepting a legend or a song, when they had so little to give."

The yea-sayers no doubt would have conceded that few redmen bought the work of the Boston literati. But they spoke for the Indian as a fellow human being who though admittedly "savage" had a culture worthy of respect. Among these was the indefatigable ethnologist and amateur poet whose collections were the chief source for Longfellow's poem, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. Such modern students as the flamboyant Elemire Zolla and the more sober Roy Harvey Pearce find Schoolcraft's view to be ultimately racist. But their readings take a twentieth century perspective. Certainly Schoolcraft thought of himself as a defender of the redman. As Pearce and Zolla see, Schoolcraft, like Lewis Henry Morgan and other professional students of the time, was a cultural evolutionist who identified complexity and technological advance with

supposedly higher, therefore better, stages in human development. It follows that Indian culture is "primitive," not as advanced as white and therefore without equal standing. The unspoken moral is that the Indian should adopt white ways, or accept the fate that awaits most of those recalcitrants who do not agree that might makes ten tenths of the law. Schoolcraft's own hope, expressed repeatedly in Notes on the Iroquois, was that some tribes, at least, would survive by adopting the white man's technology, by becoming what one might now see as a white man in redface.

Longfellow does not argue for assimilation, nor necessarily for adoption of all white customs and mores. But he does see the Indian as victim of his own failure to merge tribal indentities into a confederation that would have been strong enough to resist the white conqueror. Though this argument would not appear to view the Indian as inherently inferior, since it sees his demise as the result of a political error, Longfellow in the poem frequently refers to the Indian as both "savage" and "childlike," clearly indicating that though he does not have the outright contempt exhibited by Parkman and Emerson he does see the Indian as a lesser breed.

The misfortune of the Indian arises from the fact that though contact with white civilization, specifically Christianity, had been touted as a step to bring him to a higher stage, Longfellow's knowledge, given in the poem first as Gitche Manito's foresight, and then as Hiawatha's foreknowledge, is that this contact will bring not betterment but destruction. The result is that in the closing sections the tone darkens. Hiawatha becomes not the ever successful figure of pleasant myth, but the man of sorrows who looks forward to nothing more on this earth. Like the closing tragedies in Longefellow's Christus (1872), and such

individual poems as "The Fire of Drift-Wood"--where the speaker himself and his friend--the awareness of the hero's dark fate suggests that Longefellow was more aware of life's complexities than he is now thought to have been, and that if he could not resolve them he at least recorded their intrusion. That the facts of Indian experience eventually prevent accomplishment of the poem's aims points to an error in literary comprehension, perhaps, but it testifies to Longfellow's recognition of reality.

The structural weakness arises from inconsistency in aim. Longfellow is seeking both to tell a story of a hero who "toiled, and suffered" in order to "advance his people," and also to create a mood of nostalgia for the past, is seeking, indeed, to associate his poem with the works of the "graveyard school." His introductory appeal is to the reader who in the course of rambling about the countryside likes to "pause by some neglected graveyard," there to read "Homely phrases" that are "Full of hope, and yet of heart-break, / Full of all the tender pathos / of the Here and the Hereafter . . ."

If Longfellow had chosen to end his story with the fifteenth section, he might have achieved what he sought, the glorification of a legendary hero who brings what is assumed to be cultural progress, the action taking place in a past far enough away to avoid the noisy and determined insistences of tragic and complex experience. Up to this point, Hiawatha is a fitting representative of the progress that such exultant optimists as Charles Sumner were proclaiming is to come to men of all races. In his season of triumphs, the hero acquires corn as the chief food of his people, devises symbols that are a step toward a written language, instructs his fellows in medical lore, vanishes the hostile Pearl-Feather, and wins the hand of Minnehaha.

But the triumphs are succeeded, rather abruptly, by a season of losses that constitutes a preparation for Hiawatha's departure from life on earth. His friends Chibiabos the musician and Kwasind the strongman are killed by envious spirits. Hiawatha knows one further victory when he overcomes the wiles of Pau-Puk-Keewis, a trickster, but the grim note returns as two ghostly visitors turn out to be messengers from the dead, delivering what one assumes Longfellow means as the proto-Christian instruction that the living should no longer lament for them, and should stop burdening their departing spirits with pots, pans, and other implements that weigh them down on their journey to the Land of the Blessed, a destination not known to the ratebooks of United Parcel or Mayflower Van. An unusually severe winter brings famine that causes the death of Minnehaha. Mourning her, Hiawatha reflects that he himself will soon die.

In the last two sections, after the arrival of white missionaries, Hiawatha does indeed die. The passage reveals Longfellow's interpretation of the white takeover as a westward march of a people "Restless, struggling, toiling, striving"--laudably industrious and ambitious, one gathers--who speak many tongues but share a unity Hiawatha describes as "one heartbeat in their bosoms." His vision includes, he says, the "darker, drearier" foresight of the Indian nations scattered, warring with each other, and consequently being swept westward as remnants "wild and woeful." The people, that is, have not heeded the warning voiced by Gitche Manito, do not have the unity that would make succesful resistance possible.

The tale concludes with Hiawatha leading the welcome to the missionaries, the "Black-Robe" reciting a summary of the Christian story, and, while his white guests nap on the hot afternoon, Hiawatha giving his people one last admonition to listen to the whites and then departing for

the Northwest wind, for the "land of the Hereafter." He indicates to his warriors that he may reappear in the distant future, but he exults at leaving the world. His exultation arises not because of the coming of the missionaries, but because in the last sections of the poem he has had a series of griefs sufficient to turn his hope for happiness away from earth. Longfellow thereby brings together the time's interest in the Indian, and its great concern with death.

The pem's repetitions and rhythm are so obvious, and it was so popular, that in an age when parody and burlesque were common it was sure to draw the attention of the frolicsome. A Midwestern example is James Warner Ward's "The Song of Higher-Water," a satire on Cincinnati politicians. The parody opens with the line "In the town where swine are slaughtered--" (a prevision of Sandburg's Hog Butcher?). It tells of the escape of a settlement of rats from an Ohio River flood. Three rat "ministers" chew a hole in the bottom of the river, enabling all to flee "To the kingdom of the good rats / To the land of Bam-ba-loo-za." Sometime later, another midland poetizer, Mark Twain, no man to resist a chance at poking fun, noted under the title of his doggerel poem "The Story of a Gallant Deed"--an incomplete burlesque of legal language--that the piece is "Roughly after the meter of Hiawatha." Returning to cinematic comparison, we can be grateful that Hollywood had not yet opened its neoned embrace to creative enterprise, or we should certainly have had Son of Hiawatha, Return of Hiawatha, and an x-rated version in which, while a simpering Linda Minnehaha is explaining to gullible whites that "We call it maize," that foxy old dog, Rock Hiawatha, is learning a few new tricks from Bo Derek in the tribal hot tub.

The poem's literary and anthropological flaws did not bother the popular audience. It struck most readers, indeed, as a revelation. Allowing for the flattery to be expected in a note of praise, the freshness

of the work for its era comes across in the testimony of the times' best-informed reader, Schoolcraft: Longfellow, he says, has shown that the redman has "mental resources of a very characteristic kind," resources which furnish "a new point from which to judge the race, and to excite intellectual sympathies." Longfellow's achievement, moreover, has "demonstrated, by this pleasing series of pictures of Indian life, sentiment, and invention" how "the theme of the native lore" can be "one of the true sources of our literary independence."

As a study of Indian thought and feeling, Song of Hiawatha is no better than a Cooper novel or the cowboy-and-Indian movies of the 1920s and 1930s. But its immense popularity indicates that it answered a desire in white readers. That desire was similar to the one more grandly, though less popularly, expressed in Leaves of Grass: to re-assert the dream of a special American mission that by the 1850s was receding before the onrush of science and technology. Whitman looked to the future, urging renewal and rededication. Longfellow looked to the past: Song of Hiawatha is a lament for what is gone, not a program for what is to come. As the champion who conquers monsters, as the teacher who brings literacy and practical arts to his people, Hiawatha is a reinvention of the American self: he is the pioneer and settler as that personage's descendants wish him to have been. His mission is to retrace the rise of American civilization, to repeat for the edification and self-congratulation of American whites the wondrous triumph of their culture.

From this perspective, the failure of Hiawatha is not a matter of literary structure, but a reflection of insistent reality. Hiawatha as the genius of progressive conquest of the continent is returned to reality by the death of Minnehaha, the prediction of his own demise, the

failure of his people to follow his counsel. He becomes the sadder, wise American of the 1850s, the heroic pioneer who in the end is deflated, is returned to the general condition of humanity because of the insuperable fact of death. In the poem "Night and Day," Longfellow happily records the way moonlight gave beauty to a scene that in the daylight was distressing. In Hiawatha, however, the moonlight (perhaps more aptly, moonshire) does not last; it is overtaken by the light of common day. In that realization Longfellow is the American of his time, the citizen living in the decade before the Civil War, the last period when the agrarian, Edenic wishes of the first generations of Americans could still engage the thoughts and feelings of the nation's people. The poem fails to bring together the two selves of Longfellow and his audience, the selves representing the moonlight and the daylight of American experience. But its failures as literary art arise from, and even strengthen, its status as a paradigm of the American cultural situation of its time.

Michigan State University

"Midwestern Influences in F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby"

Tim Sherer

Writers and critics have long contended that F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is actually an allegory of the destructive power of American materialism and the death of the "American dream." Robert Ornstein believes that Fitzgerald's theme is the "unending quest of the romantic dream" and that The Great Gatsby contrasts America's romantic Western past with her unromantic Eastern present.[1] Kenneth Eble observes that "the American dream and the American disillusion come together in The Great Gatsby."[2] While the contrast between East and West is an important theme in Fitzgerald's novel, too many writers have chosen to neglect the importance of Gatsby's Western background in favor of merely labeling him a "romantic visionary" and a dreamer living in the past. Like Fitzgerald, Gatsby is a product of his Midwestern environment, a firm believer in perseverance, individuality, and the Westerner's hope for a bright tomorrow. These qualities greatly influence his perceptions and his course of action throughout the novel. Ironically, it is Gatsby's inability or unwillingness to turn loose of his "Western" heritage that eventually leads to his downfall.

Fitzgerald grew up in the Midwest in St. Paul, Minnesota. While his grandfather left the family a large sum of money, Fitzgerald's father was an ineffectual businessman unable to support the family. Consequently, they were forced to live on the interest from the principal, which often meant exercising economy. "I enclose $1.00," his father wrote to Scott

in July of 1909. "Spend it liberally, generously, carefully, judiciously, sensibly."[3] While Scott enjoyed the prestige of his grandfather's fortune and rarely lacked for funds, his father remained an important influence in shaping his character. Arthur Mizener notes that "breeding--right instincts, good manners, the need for 'honor, courtesy, courage'--a respect for which was a powerful motive throughout Fitzgerald's life, he got from his father."[4] These same qualities would later appear in Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway in The Great Gatsby.

It is simplistic to consider Fitzgerald primarily an "Eastern" socialite, horribly fascinated by the power and wealth of the upper class. Fitzgerald never escaped his Western heritage, and remained distrustful of the wealthy, resenting their power and control over others less fortunate. "That was always my experience," he wrote later in his career, "a poor boy in a rich town; a poor boy in a rich boy's school; a poor boy in a rich man's club at Princeton. . . I have never been able to forgive the rich for being rich, and it has colored my entire life and works."[5] Sheilah Graham once wrote concerning Fitzgerald that "one must be clear that it was never the possession of money in and of itself that he admired."[6] When Ernest Hemingway ridiculed Fitzgerald in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" for bowing to the rich, Fitzgerald wrote back that "Riches have never fascinated me unless combined with the greatest charm or distinction."[7]

In both his fiction and his personal life, Fitzgerald exhibits an ambivalence regarding power, wealth, and status in society. This is due in part to the clash between his Midwestern past and his involvement in "Eastern" society. Malcolm Cowley contends that his difference produces a "double vision" that pervades Fitzgerald's writing. "It was as if all his novels described a big dance to which he had taken. . . the prettiest girl," Cowley writes, "and as if at the same time he stood

outside the ballroom, a little Midwestern boy with his nose to the glass, wondering how much the tickets cost and who paid for the music."[8] Both Fitzgerald and Gatsby recognized the power of wealth and status in society and utilized them to accomplish their goals. If Gatsby sought Daisy's love, Fitzgerald wished to become the consummate American novelist. Neither man envisioned wealth as an end in itself.

The clash between East and West in Fitzgerald's personal life is evident in his quest of Zelda Sayre, a beautiful southern girl from a prominent family. A struggling young writer, Fitzgerald very nearly missed out on claiming his bride. Only the publication of his first novel made the union possible. Their relationship was later to sour, however, as Zelda's mental health continually deteriorated and he was finally forced to institutionalize her. Fitzgerald's correspondence also suggests that they were from two "different worlds" and that this disparity occasionally contributed to their marital difficulties. He reveals his bittersweet relationship with Zelda in a letter to his daughter, Scottie, in 1938:

> When I was your age I lived with a great dream. The dream grew and I learned how to speak of it and make people listen. Then the dream divided one day when I decided to marry your mother after all, even though I knew she was spoiled and meant no good to me. . . . But I was a man divided--she wanted me to work too much for her and not enough for my dream. She realized too late that work was dignity, and the only dignity, and tried to atone for it by working herself, but it was too late and she broke and is broken forever.[9]

The letter is somewhat unfair in that Fitzgerald had experienced a number of personal and literary failures when he wrote it and was obviously dejected. At the same time it reveals that he had never been blinded by the brightness of the upper class or the allure of the "top girl" to the point of abandoning his own convictions and literary ambitions. Even at the height of his social prominence and wealth, Fitzgerald never lost his

commitment to becoming a great writer, a dream fostered and nurtured on the quiet streets of St. Paul. If he lived the life of an Eastern socialite, he never escaped the bounds of his Midwestern heritage. Jay Gatsby would also experience a similar duality in his quest of Daisy Fay.

A prominent Midwestern attribute Gatsby possesses is individuality. From the beginning Fitzgerald presents Gatsby as a man apart, living among the affluent "Easterners," surrounded by their lavish trappings, but distinctly separate from them. Gatsby buys a magnificent mansion across the bay from Daisy to be near her, not for his own self-aggrandizement. He rarely graces his own parties, and when he does appear, he is unobtrusive. Consequently a romantic aura surrounds him. Table gossip reports that he "once killed a man" or that he was a "German spy." Nick meets Gatsby in a most casual manner and later observes him standing alone. "I could see nothing sinister about him," Nick admits. "I wondered if the fact that he was not drinking helped to set him off from his guests, for it seemed to me that he grew more correct as the fraternal hilarity increased."[10] When the frivolity of the party increases and young girls begin to drape themselves over the nearest man, Nick observes that "no one swooned backward on Gatsby, and no French bob touched Gatsby's shoulder, and no singing quartets were formed with Gatsby's head for one link."[11] Gatsby has no interest in impressing his attractive and pretentious guests. His contrived extravaganzas are merely gaudy backdrops for his real purpose--to meet Daisy again after five years.

Gatsby's Western sensibilities are clearly affronted by the tasteless gossip and insensitivity of the "Easterners" who surround him. Once he renews his acquaintance with Daisy, the parties and the gay life abruptly stop. Gatsby tells Nick that he fired his servants because he wanted "somebody who wouldn't gossip" about Daisy. Gatsby focuses much of his disdain for the idle rich on Tom Buchanan, whom he considers

unworthy of Daisy's love. In a New York hotel room he tells Tom, "You're not going to take care of her any more."[12] After Daisy accidentally kills Myrtle Wilson, Gatsby fears Tom might harm Daisy. "I'm just going to wait here and see if he tries to bother her about that unpleasantness this afternoon," Gatsby tells Nick in the shadows beneath Daisy's house.[13] Gatsby clearly does not belong in an Eastern, elitist society. He has entered its ranks and clothed himself in its vestments to regain Daisy's love. If he had lived, it is doubtful that he could have continued the charade indefinitely, even for Daisy, in a role so alien to his background and beliefs.

Both Fitzgerald and Gatsby exhibited stubbornness and perseverence, characteristics long associated with the "Westerner" who struggled to succeed in an alien and hostile environment. Fitzgerald's "alien environment" was the heady atmosphere of the upper class. While he gained a measure of success and wealth as a novelist, the long bouts with drinking, the social revelry, and his inability to handle money often made life difficult. Fitzgerald refused to give up and fought against his continuing alcoholism and Zelda's growing schizophrenia. When an old friend urged them to join in the old revelry they had abandoned by 1933, Fitzgerald replied, "you insist on a world which we will willingly let die, in which Zelda can't live, which damned near ruined us both. . ."[14] Fitzgerald was equally pointed in his advice to his daughter. "When I do not feel you are 'going somewhere,'" he wrote to Scottie in 1938, "your company tends to depress me for the silly waste and triviality involved. On the other hand, when occasionally I see signs of life and intention in you, there is no company in the world I prefer."[15] Fitzgerald continued to lead a life of intense highs and depressing lows. When he was involved in his writing, however, his concentration was often intense and he would

continue to revise and correct his material even on the final galleys of his stories and novels.

Gatsby's determination to succeed is evident in his swift acquisition of a personal fortune. His mentor is Dan Cody, a Westerner whose transactions in Montana copper made him a millionaire. From a picture in Gatsby's house Nick describes Cody as "a gray, florid man with a hard, empty face--the pioneer debauchee, who during one phase of American life brought back to the Eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon."[16] Cody is the literary counterpart of James J. Hill, the often ruthless founder of the Great Northern Railroad and a prominent member of St. Paul society at the turn of the century. Tom Buchanan may complain of Gatsby's questionable methods of achieving wealth and his association with "gangsters" like Meyer Wolfsheim, but there is an inherent logic in Gatsby's choice of partners consistent with his Midwestern background. As Robert Ornstein observes, Wolfsheim is "merely the post-war successor to Dan Cody and to the ruthlessness and greed that once exploited a virgin West. He is the fabulous manipulator of bootleg gin rather than of copper, the modern man of legendary accomplishment 'who fixed the World's Series back in 1919.'"[17] If Westerners were often courageous and determined in their conquest of the frontier, they also displayed a certain ruthlessness in accomplishing their goals. Gatsby is merely following the dictates of American society in achieving success. Indeed, he feels a certain disdain for the "idle rich" who exert little personal effort in the acquisition of their fortunes.

If Gatsby is persistent in his quest for wealth, he is even more determined in his desire to regain Daisy's love. Nick observes that Gatsby "wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: 'I never loved you.' After she had obliterated four years with

that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken."[18] "Practical" is the crucial word here, for Gatsby is no foolish, wide-eyed dreamer. A man capable of utilizing the talents of a Meyer Wolfsheim is no visionary. Many writers conclude that Gatsby is deluded or incurable romantic because of his contention to Nick that one can "repeat the past." "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," he tells Nick. "She'll see."[19]

The temptation is to take Gatsby too literally at this point. Rather than turning back the clock five years and starting anew with Daisy, Gatsby is merely holding on to a belief he has always held. Daisy has "always" loved him and only married Tom Buchanan because of the pressures exerted by her family and society. "Both of us loved each other all that time, old sport," he tells Tom in a final confrontation in a New York hotel, "and you didn't know. I used to laugh sometimes. . . to think that you didn't know."[20] Gatsby is no deluded, incurable romantic, refusing to live in the real world. He is merely a poor judge of character. For five years he has patiently amassed a fortune to make himself worthy in her eyes. He is the historical descendant of the frontiersman who suffered for years through danger and deprivation on the Great Plains to build a ranch or start a farm so he could send "East" for his intended. Gatsby has paid the price and now stands ready to collect his reward. He may even picture himself as an heroic figure in the best Western tradition, arriving to rescue the heroine from a situation she cannot control and does not enjoy. Gatsby does not fail because he is living in the past He fails because Daisy has never been worthy of his devotion.

Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy's love is Fitzgerald's quest for Zelda's hand. As a young lieutenant in Camp Sheridan, Alabama, Fitzgerald competed with other hopeful suitors for her affection. Zelda was both

beautiful and uncoventional. She expected the men in her life to be gallant and to promise her a bright and glittering future. Discharged from the army, Fitzgerald became engaged to Zelda and hurried off to New York to make enough money to prove he was worthy of her love. For months he struggled alone writing advertising copy by day and short stories at night. When he sold only one short story for thirty dollars, Zelda broke the engagement. Dejected, he returned to St. Paul to finish a novel he had begun in the service. When This Side of Paradise was accepted for publication, Fitzgerald triumphantly returned to claim Zelda's hand. In The Crack-up he recounted how close he had come to losing her:

> It was one of those tragic loves doomed for lack of money, and one day the girl closed it out on the basis of common sense. During a long summer of despair I wrote a novel instead of letters, so it came out all right, but it came out all right for a different person. The man with the jingle of money in his pocket who married the girl a year later would always cherish an abiding distrust, an animosity, toward the leisure class--not the conviction of a revolutionist but the smoulding hatred of a peasant.[21]

Fitzgerald once told a friend that "the whole idea of Gatsby is the unfairness of a poor young man not being able to marry a girl with money. This theme comes up again and again because I lived it."[22] Through sheer determination Fitzgerald finally claimed Zelda's love. That he succeeded is due in part to Zelda's ability to recognize and to accept his sincerity. Daisy has no such perception. Even before she marries Tom, she cannot see past the crassness and materialism of her class. "Rich girls don't marry poor boys," she tells Gatsby. Gatsby may be more fortunate than Fitzgerald in that he never won Daisy. Both men came from Midwestern pasts and were dazzled by the beauty and glitter of the "top girl." Gatsby never lived to discover Daisy's falseness, while Fitzgerald was finally forced to institutionalize Zelda. "The mistake I made was in marrying her," he wrote to his daughter in 1938.

"We belonged to different worlds--she might have been happy with a kind simple man in a southern garden."[23]

In contrast to the falseness and insincerity of the Eastern Buchanans, Gatsby is loyal and steadfast, traditional characteristics of the Westerner. It is this loyalty that eventually spells his doom. Gatsby is impressed by Nick's genuine concern and friendship, and unsuccessfully tries to involve him in several "business deals" that will bring him immediate wealth. Gatsby's loyalty is most evident, however, in his devotion to Daisy. When Daisy runs down and kills Myrtle Wilson, he is quick to take the blame. "Was Daisy driving?" Nick asks. "Yes," Gatsby replies, "but of course I'll say I was."[24] When Nick urges Gatsby to return home with him, he refuses. "So I walked away and left him standing there in the moonlight," Nick laments, "--watching over nothing."[25] Nick's words are prophetic. She is nothing. Daisy refuses to assume responsibility for her actions and never tells her husband, Tom, the truth. Consequently, Tom mistakenly tells George, Myrtle's husband, that Gatsby killed her. When George subsequently kills Gatsby, Daisy is partly responsible for Gatsby's death.

Fitzgerald also utilized Nick to contrast the East and West in The Great Gatsby. Initially Nick considers the Midwest the "ragged edge of the universe" and travels East to learn the bond business. Soon his visions of an "Eastern paradise" begin to fade when he discovers that people like the Buchanans are "careless people" who "smash up things and creatures" and then simply retreat into their "money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess they had made. . . ."[26] Nick and Gatsby's father are the only ones to attend Gatsby's funeral. Afterwards Nick contemplates the home he has so recently rejected:

> That's my Middle West--not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. I am part of that, a little solemn with the féel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name. I see now that this has been a story of the West after all--Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life.[27]

If it is a common deficiency, Fitzgerald's characters do not hold it in equal measures. Jordan Baker, Daisy's friend, sees nothing unethical about cheating to win a golf match. Tom finds nothing wrong with having a mistress and sending an innocent man to his death. Daisy casually toys with Gatsby's emotions and easily forgets him after death. All of this is too much for Nick. "After Gatsby's death the East was haunted for me," he confesses, ". . . distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction."[28] Disappointed, but wiser, he decides to return to his home in the West. Charles Shain concludes that "Nick guides us safely through all the moral confusions of the wealthy East and leads us in the end back to the provinces where the fundamental decencies depend upon a social order of families who have lived in the same house for three generations."[29]

Even George Wilson reveals the heartlessness of "Easterners" like the Buchanans. Tom toys with Wilson by promising to sell him a car, while making Wilson's wife his mistress. Eventually Wilson discovers that things are not right with his wife and prepares to take her away. "I want to get away," he tells Tom. "My wife and I want to go West."[30] When Daisy kills Myrtle, Wilson is consumed with grief. He becomes as relentless in his desire for revenge as Gatsby is in his pursuit of Daisy's love. Unfortunately, both men are deceived. Both die tragically.

They are Fitzgerald's "innocents," armed only with simple trust and devout but misguided affection. In a glittering world of careless and unfeeling people it is not enough.

Fitzgerald put much of himself into the character of Jay Gatsby. In 1925 he wrote to his friend, John Peale Bishop, that "you are right about Gatsby being blurred and patchy. I never at any one time saw him clear myself--for he started as one man I knew and then changed into myself--the amalgam was never complete in my mind."[31] Fitzgerald's lifelong passion was not the pursuit of love, however, but the attainment of excellence in his craft. "I want to be the greatest writer that ever lived. . . ." he told his friend, Edmund Wilson.[32] In 1925, when he had nearly completed The Great Gatsby, he wrote to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, that "The book [Gatsby] is wonderful--I honestly think that when it's published I shall be the best American novelist . . . ."[32] Both Gatsby and Fitzgerald aspired to greatness, and both ended their lives tragically. Fitzgerald could not shake the effects of tuberculosis and his own excessive drinking, and his health continued to deteriorate until his death in 1940. Neither man could escape the influence of his Midwestern heritage. Neither attained the dream that seemed so close that he could "hardly fail to grasp it."

Kenneth Eble once wrote that "The Great Gatsby succeeds in being more than it seems at first reading partly because of the effectiveness of the larger contrast between the American West and East."[33] Fitzgerald viewed the Midwest as place of strong family ties, simple virtues, and continuing traditions. He reflected these beliefs in the characters of Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby. While Fitzgerald spent much of his life among wealthy and prominent members of society, he was not always comfortable with them and was not able to escape the influences of his

Midwestern background. Arthur Mizener once wrote concerning Fitzgerald that "in a characteristic American--perhaps even Middle Western--way he was ambitious, passionately confident that he could do anything he wanted to if he only tried hard enough, and sure that he could take risks and live as dangerously as he chose because he was immune to moral destruction."[34] Neither Gatsby nor Fitzgerald proved immune to "moral destruction." While we may lament their personal failures, we can applaud the brightness and the magnitude of their dreams.

Michigan State University

Notes

[1]Robert Ornstein, "Scott Fitzgerald's Fable of East and West" in Ernest Lockridge, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968), 54.

[2]Kenneth Eble, F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963), 97.

[3]Ibid., 19.

[4]Arthur Mizener, Scott Fitzgerald and His World (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1972), 6.

[5]Andrew Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 150.

[6]Sheilah Graham, The Real F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., 1976), 38.

[7]Fitzgerald to Ernest Hemingway, August, 1936, in Andrew Turnbull, ed., The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 311.

[8]Malcolm Cowley, The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), xiv.

[9]Fitzgerald to Frances Scott Fitzgerald, July, 7, 1938, in Turnbull, Letters, 32.

[10]F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), 51-52.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., 136.

[13]Ibid., 147.

[14]Mizener, Scott Fitzgerald, 90.

[15]Fitzgerald to Francis Scott Fitzgerald, June 7, 1938, in Turnbull, Letters, 32-34.

[16]Fitzgerald, Gatsby, 102-103.

[17]Ornstein, 58.

[18]Fitzgerald, Gatsby, 112.

[19]Ibid., 113.

[20]Ibid., 134.

[21]Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 103.

[22]Fitzgerald to John Peale Bishop, August 9, 1925 in Turnbull, Letters, 358.

[23]Fitzgerald to Frances Scott Fitzgerald, July 7, 1938, Ibid., 32.

[24]Fitzgerald, Gatsby, 147.

[25]Ibid., 149.

[26]Ibid., 184.

[27]Ibid., 180-181.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Charles Shain, F. Scott Fitzgerald (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), 34.

[30]Fitzgerald, Gatsby, 126.

[31]Fitzgerald to John Peale Bishop, August 9, 1925, in Turnbull, Letters, 358.

Sherwood Anderson and Dark Laughter: Discovery and Rebellion

David M. Lockwood

Sherwood Anderson, identifying and being concerned with his Middle American subjects, was constantly seeking to capture both the mood and meaning of the relationships between the races and sexes. Although he was most frequently successful in this endeavor when working with the short story form, Anderson was able, with the aid of his experimental semi-stream of consciousness style, to make Dark Laughter a quietly outstanding piece of literature. He has created a delicate and insightful balance between both man's relationship with nature and his quest for individual freedom.

Each chapter of the novel, released honestly and with an innocence that implies only partial understanding by the featured character, offers a view of the river of human relationships that represent Mid-American life. The hypnotizing thoughts of the characters flow relentlessly through the reader's mind but, if one chooses to presevere, it is rewarding to watch the dots that appear on the horizon grow and become realizations. The characters find that, as in real life, each realization can be held and treasured for but a moment before it is gathered and swept in time across the other horizon by the endless river of life.

An important part of Bruce Dudley's search for sexual and intellectual freedom deals with his understanding of his past and present relationship with black culture along the river. He remembers and experiences again

bright colors, rich, singing voices, gracefully swaying bodies, and easy laughter. But he does not understand immediately why it is important, "Thinking of niggers! What sort of business is that?" (p.79)[1] His thoughts continue to ramble and slowly a feeling grows that is not quite an understanding:

> Unconscious love of inanimate things lost to the white-skies, the river, a moving boat-black mysticism-never expressed except in song or in the movements of bodies. The bodies of the black workers belonged to each other as the sky belonged to the river. (p. 106)

That was what Bruce was looking for. How can one be free from sexual and intellectual constraints if one is not a part of everything that is around him? It is the same feeling that Fred witnessed in the Jew during the war: "It was as though he wanted to tear the stars out of the sky, to eat them, or throw them away in disgust." (p. 279). Having been denied the opportunity to become an integral part of the material world, Bruce and the Jew turn to the natural world to find their niche in life. Bruce felt that his answer lay somewhere along the rivers, somewhere within the people that live along them.

Bruce was not conscious of it, but he began to feel the importance of the unrestrained sensuality and open sexuality that he saw in the black people. He was, in fact, probably never aware of the value of the awakening that was going on within him. It was powerful enough, however, to dictate his actions throughout the rest of the story. Stated much more fully in Anderson's short story, "The Man Who Became a Woman", the rapidly growing feeling was asking:

> . . . do you suppose it could be that something we whites have got, and think such a lot of, and are so proud about, isn't much of any good after all?
> It's something in us that wants to be big and grand and important and won't let us just be. . . (p. 492)[2]

The white man was too proud, and Anderson believed that the black man had reached a realization that the white man hadn't, and couldn't, given the situation. Whites were too busy dominating, too busy trying to stay on top of the blacks to realize that life is all around us. It does not reside in money or social standing: it is in the trees-sky-song-dance-rivers around and within us. It is the essence of the line Bruce remembered that had been written by a Negro, "Would white poet ever know why my people walk so softly and laugh at sunrise?" (p. 79) Anderson realized that the futility of escape from life is a joke too cruel to explain to those that cannot see it.

If Anderson had a grand idea in mind when he wrote Dark Laughter, it lies in the symbolic meaning of the rivers flowing through Mid-America. When Bruce admits that he somehow confused his notion of his mother with his feeling about the river and quickly rejects any significance in the fact, we are told:

> Still there might be something in it-something Mark Twain had almost got and didn't dare try to quite get-the beginning of a kind of a big continental poetry, eh? Warm, big rich rivers flowing down-Mother Ohio, Mother Mississippi. (p. 100)

For Anderson, the rivers, washing over and through all of middle America, carried and became the spirit of the people that lived near them. He believed that they bred life that spread quietly and innocently beyond their reaches, across the continent.

The fact that Anderson wanted to create something as vast and everlasting as the big rivers were for him is only emphasized by his immediate denial of any such consideration, "When you begin to get smart you got to look out for that kind of bunk." (p. 100). This Twain-like sarcasm is an important dimension of Anderson's work, and it serves a similar purpose to Twain's, mocking those that allow others to tell them what is

good and bad, possible and impossible, swept with an undercurrent of derision for his own self-doubt and human inadequacies.

But his words are straightforward and lucid when he speaks of the subject of his "big continental poetry":

> The great river, lonely and empty now, was, in some way, like a lost river. It had come to represent the lost youth of Middle America perhaps. (p. 17)

Anderson felt that the pull of the train and rush of the automobile had drained the youth of the river and replaced it with a rushing maturity. He felt also the need to capture the aura of the light over the river, the light that shone on the fading innocence of the Mid-American existence that he treasured.

It was Sherwood Anderson's thoughts prior to writing Dark Laughter, and efforts during, that prompted David D. Anderson to say:

> For Anderson, for the first time, it was evident that rejection and rebellion were symptoms of a vision, a vision as subject to corruption as any other human endeavor . . . (p. 131)[3]

Anderson's desire to be true to a vision that he had had, and to avoid corruption, made rejection and rebellion a vital element of his ideological survival. His greatest fear, in fact, was of not rebelling. His vision was that the advance of industrialization and the oncome of the new "liberated art" was stifling to man's search for freedom as well as destructive to man's creativity. The symptoms of this vision sparked in him a need to discover, and offer to others, a personal solution. Rejection and rebellion thus became one of the two major themes in Dark Laughter.

The forms of rejection and rebellion that Anderson engaged as a solution were both the effort to speak plainly and honestly about the truth and the refusal to accept easy fulfillment. In order to speak

plainly and honestly, Anderson realized that he need only let the beauty of his subjects present itself. He portrayed the simple but profound happiness of Sponge Martin and his wife, the cunning opportunism of Joe and Esther Walker, and the narrow, almost pitiable world that Fred Grey built to protect himself from the real world. The beauty in this honest exhibition of humanity is distinctly lacking in the painting Bernice had had done of herself:

> One ear had been made twice the size of the other. That was for distortion's sake. Distortion often got you effects you couldn't get at all by straight painting. (p. 47)

Anderson also knew a great deal about the distortion of truth and the effects it got. He spent much of his career "painting" people that were distorted and disfigured by the collapse of the false truths that they had built their lives upon. He might have argued, however, without irony but with a touch of sarcasm that he was speaking plainly and honestly about his "grotesques"; that the characters he created were a perfect likeness of many people he had met.

The second form of revolt, the refusal to accept easy fulfillment, is much like the first form except that it involves speaking honestly with one's self. Just as deliberately distorting a picture or story avoids the difficult task of capturing the truth for others, defining happiness to fit one's situation in life avoids admitting to one's self the painful truth.

Bruce displays the greatest desire to find a more satisfying existence by constantly probing his mind for clues to what allows an inner peace. Also, Aline decides later that she has been living in a peaceful void that breeds not peace but emptiness. So, Bruce and Aline search for the soft, rich, easy laughter of the blacks while Fred, the whitest of the whites, is left sitting rigidly alone in his bed, pondering the empty

shell of truth to which he had clung:

> A lady is a lady. That's one advantage of marrying a lady. You don't have to be always asking yourself questions. (p. 238)

Had Fred been always asking himself questions he might not have become a subject of dark laughter. Similarly, as Anderson knew only too well, had Bruce accepted an easy fulfillment he might have become hopelessly ensnared in an empty life in Chicago writing to please an employer and wondering if there wasn't something more in life.

How much more there may be in one's life is the second major theme in the novel. This particular facet of Dark Laughter shows that it is a story of discovery - and the inhibitions that impede discovery. Anderson's characters live, love, hate, and die according to the reality they accept and the reality they deny.

The black people in the story represent acceptance of reality. The easy-going, light-hearted freedom that the black people exhibit arises from the discovery that no matter who or what you are you cannot escape yourself. Anderson believed that this freedom excluded the material and social luxuries that were the most treasured dimensions of the white people. The dilemma that haunts the major characters is the desire for freedom of self, and it forces them to ask, with varying degrees of sincerity, "Am I happy? Can I be happy if I ignore society's expectations?" The potential for freedom, Anderson maintained, lies in the ability to ignore all but one's own impulses.

Bruce was able to seize the opportunity created by an impulse and forfeit his worldly luxuries for a chance to search for inner peace and artistic inspiration. His actions grew from his inability to embrace Bernice's "liberated" life-style and face his seeming artistic weaknesses. Expanding an earlier observation, as Bruce follows the Mississippi River

into the heart of America, he begins to feel the spirit of the life that hovers just beyond verbal delineation. We watch the feeling take shape as it grows in his mind:

> Soft voices laughing, laughing. (p. 73)
> Song-dance-a slow dance. (p. 82)
> Brown blood flowing, white blood flowing,
> deep river flowing. (p.79)

As Bruce passes the days in Old Harbor with Sponge Martin, he begins to understand the feeling taking shape within him. The understanding, and a step toward freedom, became real for Anderson when Bruce realized that Sponge could be an expert craftsman confined to near slavery - and happy.

Bruce's problems, however, are not solved. He cannot use Sponge's example to break the barriers in his mind that are inhibiting his search for personal and artistic freedom. When Bruce and Aline finally get together we see that the psychological constraints that prevent Bruce from reaching his goal are paralleled by Aline's societal constraints. Aline has been raised and married according to society's dictates without her ever having made a conscious decision concerning her future or desires. But their running off together does not signal a "happily ever-after" ending. Anderson's intention here, one of his favorites, is to show that basic sexual desires can supercede both a noble search for truth and a profound rejection of social mores. It is true that Aline slaps back at society for never having allowed her the freedom to choose and that Bruce has found, ". . . a woman he could really marry. . .", but as the sentence concludes, ". . . that was only half of it." (p. 310). Anderson would like us to remember that nothing has been solved except that the most immediate yearnings of both Bruce and Aline have been satisfied. Whether or not they have taken a step toward fulfillment or emptiness is not important to Anderson. What is important is that each has fulfilled a strong desire and is free to search for more answers; each is free to

get on with life.

The inhibitions to which one can succumb, and the fear of discovery, can be seen in Fred Grey. He approaches one of Anderson's "grotesque" characters in that he spent his life doing, or pretending to do, what he thought other people expected of him. After all:

> It isn't what you do that counts. You do what you can. What counts is what you seem to do, what others think you do. . . (p. 293)

For this reason, Fred could not identify with black culture. In his eyes, they didn't care what anyone said or did, even a man of respectability, "Negroes are such people! "They have no moral sense."" (p. 313).

Still, Anderson seems to concede over his personal distaste that Fred's character cannot be considered hopelessly grotesque. Even with all of his obvious faults and purist beliefs about women, blacks, and society in general, he had always tried to do what he thought was right. In fact, he had a conscious purpose in life, as Aline admitted to herself, "He wanted consciousness of quality, sought consciousness of quality." (p. 258). The statement implies that he was constantly aware of what his ancestors had bequeathed to him - money, prestige, and the opportunity for personal achievement - and that it was his duty to uphold and extend that legacy.

This is what Anderson despised. The obsession with one's personal legacy, especially at the expense of a simple, peaceful middle America, was hopelessly grotesque. Just as trying to do right while shrinking from reality is no virtue, seeking "consciousness of quality" is simply a way to avoid striving for quality in one's actions.

While Aline was with Fred, neither of them sought to communicate their inner fears or desires to the other. They floated along the river of life as though it and its problems were detached from them. Con-

sequently, it could be said that Fred and Aline were living according to the reality they denied. As husband and wife, there was no more for them in life because they would not open their minds to change or discovery. Finally, Aline awakened to this fact, at least partially, and dared for the first time to follow an impulse of her own desires.

Aline's commitment to reach out and embrace what she believed might be her only chance for the happiness she had never experienced is the common bond between the major themes of discovery and rebellion. Anderson would have agreed that the most dynamic and potentially enlightening examples of rebellion and the discoveries to which it may lead take place in one's mind and are borne of one's impulses.

Anderson's purpose was to compel us to consider, and actively search for, those impulses which may lead to greater personal fulfillment. That will in turn allow us to seek a closer relationship with the great river of humanity that is everywhere around us. Anderson's belief was that we must look closely at ourselves and dare to discover the truth; we must dare to rebel because our freedom depends upon it.

Michigan State University

Notes

[1]Sherwood Anderson, Dark Laughter, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1970).
Unless otherwise denoted all direct quotations and page numbers are from this publication.

[2]Horace Gregory, Editor, The Portable Sherwood Anderson, (New York: The Viking Press, 1967)

[3]David D. Anderson, "Anderson and Myth". In Sherwood Anderson: Dimensions of His Literary Art: A Collection of Critical Essays. Editor, David D. Anderson. (Michigan State University Press, 1976).

The New Regionalism and the Study of American Popular Culture

David D. Anderson

More than a century ago Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that the local, the particular is the only universal, a statement that was daring in an age in which regional disagreements East and West, North and South, were providing increased tension that strained the fabric of the nation's life. In little more than a decade the American Civil War began to test the supremacy of the local, the state, the regional over the national in the affairs of a nation not yet four score and seven years old.

It was an era that was dominated by competing regional cultures: between North and South, the former demanding that its role as intellectual, economic, and moral arbiter of the nation's affairs be recognized, and the latter, insisting that as heirs and guardians of the Jeffersonian tradition its role as political mentor dominate. Both sections were proud of heritages, fully developed and quite dissimilar, that antedated the birth of the nation.

Less significant and never to move out of the political arena and the halls of Congress was the debate between East and West, between the intrinsically European culture of the East and the uniquely American of the West, an important difference succintly defined by Emerson. "Europe," he wrote, "extends to the Alleghanies, while America lies beyond." That debate, too, was a conflict of cultures--between the stability, order, and economic power of the East and the dynamic democracy of what had become by the mid-nineteenth century the archetypical open society envisioned by Jefferson, intensified and compounded by Jackson's deification of the common people..

The Civil War, the extension of the conflict between North and South, between prideful Puritan and self-styled cavalier, resulted in federal--in national--ascendency, so much so that Lyndon Johnson, the first Southern President in more than a century, proclaimed a decade ago that he was "a free man, an American, a Texan and a Democrat, in that order." Political, economic, and social alliances, holy and unholy, cemented the rents in the national fabric, New England turned to writing the nation's history while the South chaired Congressional committees, the East managed the nation's money, the West--the old that had become the Midwest and the new that made the nation continental--ran its farms, mines, ranches, and increasingly, as a new generation of tinkerer-inventors emerged, its factories. The nation at the end of the nineteenth century was presumably one in spite of the disenfranchisement of the nation's women, its blacks, now free in law if not in fact, and its earliest arrivals, the Indians. However, sectional tensions echoed from the rhetoric that rang in the halls of Congress and filled the editorial columns of the local and regional--America has never had a national--press.

Also, during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, sectionalism, that of New England, the South, and the New West, took refuge in myth that echoed the rhetoric of the time: the South with its faulty memory of Paradise lost, a myth later exploited by Margaret Mitchell in Gone With the Wind; New England's dream of intellectual and spiritual, and, according to Bostonians, linguistic purity. The myth of the New West--that of the frontier and the cowboy, forged by Ned Buntline, William F. (Buffalo Bill) Cody, Walter Prescott Webb, and Republic Pictures--has become in many ways the American myth: "West is a country in the Mind, and so eternal," declared Archibald MacLeish. Alone among the regions, the Midwest was deprived of a mythical past, but it has sent twelve Presidents to Washington since the national identity was established

through Federal power six generations ago.

Only in the past decade has regionalism been recaptured from the mythmakers, the politicians, and the mass media as the new regionalism--the study of those elements--geographic, historical, cultural, literary, social, and mythic--that define American regions as they relate to the national whole has gained acceptance, and it is now growing rapidly in every region of the country in spite of the disbelief, doubts, and downright hostility of the same traditionalists who denied two generations ago the legitimacy of the study of American literature. In the Society for the Study of Southern Literature, the Society and Center for the Study of Midwestern Literature, the Western Literature Association, the Southwestern Literature Association, and various New England Studies centers, the new regionalism is alive, well, and thriving, although, strangely, the Southerners still seem to chair the standing committees of the Modern Language Association.

Concurrently, in the past decade the study of popular culture, especially American popular culture, has also emerged to challenge the traditionalists, to thrive, and to determine what we are through the examination of the culture we have created as a people and in which we are collectively and individually reflected. The impressive growth of the Popular Culture Association and its regional adjuncts, together with the decline of the Modern Language Association and the American Historical Association are facts worthy of our consideration and contemplation now that, even in the universities, the traditional strongholds of sanctification and sanctimony, our popular culture is increasingly considered worthy of study.

The new regionalism and the study of popular culture are not only natural allies in challenging intellectual and academic tradition, but they are natural allies, mutually reinforcing, in the study of their

respective cultural areas and artifacts. Much of what makes the regions of a country what they are, much of what defines them, can be found in the popular cultures of their peoples; at the same time, differences and similarities in popular culture can often be seen most clearly and defined most succinctly through the study of regions.

Nowhere is that relationship more evident than in the Midwest, the home of both the Popular Culture Association and the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature. In our study of the Midwest and of American popular culture we can learn much from the pious frauds perpetrated by MGM, CBS, and NBC--in Hollywood's spectacular perversion of William Inge's "Picnic," in the distorted video vision from Sixth Avenue that has given us "Apple's Way," "Fernwood, Ohio," and "One Day at a Time." But we can learn much more about the region, its people, and its self-identity from the cultural reality that its people have created and with which they live and identify themselves. And, while Midwestern culture has much that is national, it has as much if not more that is uniquely regional.

Especially worthy of study are three collective expressions of Midwestern popular culture that reflect the nature of the region and the quality of its life and that have become more fully developed, more richly expressed celebrations of self-identity, of natural abundance, of life itself in the Midwest than anywhere else in the nation. These are the fairs, town, country, or state; the country and town auctions, not yet captured by antique dealers, as in the East; and the ethnic festivals in towns and neighborhoods that have maintained clear if hyphenated identities since their nineteenth century settlements. Together they provide clear insight into the dynamic variety that makes up the Midwest today.

The fairs are the most spectacular in their acceptance of the machine age, but at the same time they are tied most closely to the geographical

and natural reality of the country out of which they come. The Midwestern fair is compounded of fun and work, of beauty and vulgarity, of entertainment and achievement, of competition and cooperation, of people, animals, and machines, of carnival in the people's denial of reality and celebration in their acceptance of it, but its substance is the earth, the countryside, and the animals and produce that make it live. As William Butler Yeats said, "The history of a people is not in parliaments and battlefields but in what people say to each other on fair days and high days and in how they farm and quarrel and go on pilgrimage."

The great state fairs of Iowa and Illinois are the classics of the Midwestern genre, replete with big-name entertainment, the finest harness racing in the world, the longest midways, the fattest hogs, the richest corn. But here, too, are the closest relationships between people and animals, relationships that antedate the glitter and the thrill. And here, too, are the personal relationships celebrated by Phil Stong in his novel State Fair in 1932.

But the real fairs are the town and county fairs, those that provided the background for "Sophistication" in Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio and that he celebrated a decade later in The American County Fair. Compounded of Anderson's memory of the Clyde Fair of his youth, his aesthetic and sensual perception of smooth-flowing horse flesh and the intricacies of human beings, of his love of the towns themselves, Anderson's The American County Fair recreates the seeming simplicity and the underlying complexity of the countless counterparts that recur across the Midwestern countryside from Ohio to the Dakotas today.

The fairs, spectacular or simple, tell us much about the region, its people, and their popular culture. Perhaps secular successors to the frontier revival camp meetings that dotted the region a century ago and

that served much the same function as the fairs when the circuit-riding preacher wasn't looking, Midwestern fairs have escaped domination by gospel singers, trotters, and temperence agencies as in the South, and they avoid the rodeo spirit of the West; they remain today a remarkable opportunity for a study of the tradition, continuity, and change that characterizes the rural Midwest today.

Like the fair, the auction, whether on the homesite or in a frame building in town, whether of household goods, farm implements, antiques (with a straight face and no quotation marks), or livestock, they are compounded of commodity and practicality, of personal misfortune or tragedy and the luck of the buy, of the mundane and the miraculous--in a minor way. They are compounded, too, of purpose and color, of people socializing, of minor battles and no less minor victories. The auctioneer is a folk figure, sometimes a folk hero, in his own right (I say his because country auctioneering remains a masculine profession), deserving more attention in face and in fiction than he has received. But more important are the people, who come out of need for socialization or merchandise, the regulars and the casuals, and increasingly, pointing the way toward ultimate commercialization of Midwestern auctions, those who buy and sell real, alleged, or imaginary antiques.

Of particular interest to the Midwestern regionalist or popular culturist are the artifacts. The Midwest has never been comfortable in the throwaway economy, and the small towns and rural areas still discard almost nothing, saving items of all kinds for eventual use or perhaps sale. The artifacts at the auction, whether in town or on the farm, often provide a cross section of the domestic history that marked the course of Midwestern living, change and movement for a century and

a half; there are classic items that came over the mountains by wagon, down the Ohio by flatboat, or over the lakes by schooner or steamer, all of them, however, increasingly rare; primitive items made out of necessity or for pleasure of convenience on the farm or in the home; Sears-Roebuck and Montgomery Ward items that mark the earliest years of parcel post and rural free delivery; Grand Rapids modern and mission oak furniture that were purchased during rural World War I prosperity, all of it side by side with the ubiquitous glass and plastic goods of later years.

The implements, too, mark the course of Midwestern farm history: the primitive hand tools, also rapidly disappearing; the forged iron horse-drawn tools, now unfortunately often cannibalized for the seats that for some curious reason have become stylishly decorative; the magnificent self-powered multi-purpose machines; the air-conditioned, AM-FM-TV equipped tractors, the forelorn hoe. We have yet to explore the cultural dimensions of the country auction.

Still another important means of understanding the varied dimensions of the Midwest and the culture of its people are through the ethnic festivals that mark the course of nineteenth century Midwestern settlement: the Germans and Dutch of mid-century, the Scandinavians, the Slavs, and the smaller groups that came in the eighties, the nineties, and later. Like the fairs and the auctions the ethnic festivals have a surface similarity: the beer tent (rarely are the ethnics Midwestern Puritans where beer is concerned), the rides, the games, the parades, the queens, beards on the men, sun bonnets and long dresses on the women, often Indians, real or synthetic, uniformly wearing Commanche war bonnets, the antique cars, the unavoidable square dances. Invariably the ethnics have joined the mainstream of Midwestern culture, making it their own.

But, again like the fairs and auctions, each is unique in costume and in flavor: Bucyrus, Ohio, settled by Germans in the 1840's, a Democratic anti-war stronghold and scene of draft riots in the 1860's, is now the "Bratwurst Capitol of the World," annually celebrating the finest sausage this side of the Rhine. There are the sedate tulip festival of Holland, Michigan, settled in 1847 by those Dutch who, unlike others, avoided tragedy on a stormy Lake Michigan; the smorgasbord of the Icelandic festival at Washington Island, Wisconsin; the Belgian festival of Brussels, Wisconsin, founded by Belgians in 1853; the Czech festival in Wilbur, Nebraska, in Willa Cather country; and Oktoberfests everywhere, real or imaginary. But lack of hyphenation is no deterent to Midwesterners in celebrating their origins as is demonstrated by the maple sugar festivals in Chardon, Ohio, settled by New Englanders before 1810 and in Vermontville, Michigan, ditto, circa 1837. We can learn much about our Midwestern and our popular culture from the festivals that brighten the Midwestern countryside in summer. We can learn much, too, about people, about ethnic cultures often somewhat less than pure but no less clear, and about the celebration of identities--American, Midwestern, and whatever, proclaimed with pride and enthusiams. (And I do recommend the bratwurst).

The fairs, the auctions, the festivals are the most colorful, often the most profoundly human manifestations of a culture Midwestern regionalists and popular culturalists can explore together with mutual benefit, but there are innumerable other valuable opportunities: the culture of the waterways--the Great Lakes and the great rivers, often wildly and beautifully primitive and then suddenly canalized and industrialized, vivid studies in Midwestern contrasts; the curious similarity in spite of profound differences shown by Cleveland and Chardon in what was once

Connecticut's Western Reserve; Henry Ford's Ford River Rouge Complex, hard by his white, suburban Dearborn, his eccentric genius shown in his Greenfield Village nearby; the Midwestern pyramids, blast furnaces and grain elevators; the National Road, old U.S. 40, from the Ohio River to Vandalia, Illinois, never completed, rendered marvelously obsolete by Interstate 70, its drama preserved in milestones with on one side the mileage from its beginning in Cumberland, Maryland, and the other the miles to the next town, its culture seen in the towns like Old Washington, Ohio, memorialized in the brooding Madonnas of the Trail in Springfield, Ohio, Richmond, Indiana, and Vandalia, Illinois, preserved, too, in Conrad Richter's memorable trilogy--The Trees, The Fields, The Town.

There is much to be learned from the cities, the towns, and the villages, real or recreated: Clyde, Ohio, transmuted through Sherwood Anderson's memory, imagination, and remarkable talent into Winesburg, Ohio; Sauk Center, Minnesota, which gave Sinclair Lewis to American literature and Main Street to the national consciousness; and, of course, Chicago, indelibly Midwestern, Mayor Jane Byrnes's recent disclaimer and boast notwithstanding; the vanished, recreated New Salem, Illinois, and Zoar, Ohio; and the renaissance-flavored urban tragedy that is Detroit.

A final important area of future mutual concern lies in the sites now vanished or transposed, memorialized or forgotten, of those nineteenth-century attempts at founding Midwestern Utopias: that of George Rapp's Rappites, more properly Harmonists, who floated down the Ohio to found Harmony, Indiana, later New Harmony; that of the Community of True Inspiration, founded at Amana, Iowa, in 1854, now best known for Betty Furness's micro wave oven commercials; of the Morman drama at Kirkland, Ohio, and Nauvoo, Illinois; of the others, now remembered variously as the exclusive Shaker Heights, Ohio, and Petroleum V. Nasby's New Jerusalem at Confederate

Crossroads, Ohio. Utopia was popular but elusive in the Midwest as elsewhere in the nineteenth century and in the twentieth, and we have much to learn about the vision, the reality, the failure of the dream.

The new regionalism and the study of American popular culture have come of age in recent years, but with the constitutional reduction of statutory majority, both manifest a vigorous late adolescence, and both have much work ahead, a good deal of which can be done together. The dimensions of the Midwest alone, whether popular, regional, or a logical merging of both, provide the substance of sufficient research, search, synthesis, truth, and understanding to delay the scholarly senility of tradition for both disciplines indefinitely, and change in the regions accelerates. The areas of mutual concern I have suggested are microcosmically representative of a whole beyond the imagination, and I conclude with the admonition to you young people to get busy; the prospects are almost enough to make me wish I were thirty years younger.

Michigan State University

Lansing's Forgotten Novelist of the Lost Generation

William Mc Cann

John Herrmann, a literary expatriate of the 1920's, belonged to what Gertrude Stein called the "lost generation." His name and achievements, although not as illustrious as those of Hemingway, T.S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, or Ezra Pound, were significant nevertheless and ought not recede into oblivion.

Herrmann came from a well-established Lansing, Michigan family. When he was born in 1900, his father, Henry Herrmann, and uncle Christian Herrmann, ran a tailoring establishment on Lansing's North Washington Avenue. John attended Central high school, was on the school debating team, and worked as a part-time reporter for the Lansing State Journal. After graduation he went on to the University of Michigan, and later studied at George Washington University and the University of Munich in Germany. For a while he was a Washington newspaper correspondent, reputed to be the youngest member of the press gallery.

Herrmann went abroad early in the 1920's with high literary aspirations. In 1925 he met and married Josephine Herbst (1897-1969), who herself became an accomplished writer, with novels like Pity is Not Enough (1933) and The Watcher With the Horn (1955). Shortly after their marriage, John went to work on the staff of transition, the literary monthly founded by Elliot Paul and Eugene Jolas. His first significant writing appeared in an anthology published in Paris along with writings by James Joyce, Pound, Ford Madox Ford, and Hemingway.

Herrmann's first book, What Happened (1926), was described later by its publisher, Robert McAlmon, as a "boyish and, for the present day, a naively innocent book." However, it was refused entry at New York for its alleged indecencies and thus gained attention and readership it might not have received otherwise.

In 1932, Herrmann's short novel, Big Short Trip, shared with Thomas Wolfe's A Portrait of Bascom Hawk the $5,000 prize offered in a contest sponsored by Scribner's magazine. Herrmann's story describes the final trip made by a travelling jewelry salesman before retirement. It curiously anticipates in some ways Arthur Miller's "Death of A Salesman" (1949). The elderly salesman, ill with a heart ailment that ultimately kills him, faces the declining sales of the Depression years and worries about a radical son who decides to visit Soviet Russia instead of taking a long vacation his father has planned for them to take together.

"He's got radical ideas," the father said, "regular Bolshevik ideas. If he believes in that, everythink I've worked for seems wrong."

When he was fifteen, John Herrmann had himself gone on the road during the summer months, when school was out, peddling garden seeds, jewelry, and books. And he was later to hold "radical," Marxist ideas that his father, Henry Herrmann, doubtless viewed with little sympathy. In 1927, John and Josephine Herbst attended the meeting of the International Bureau of Revolutionary Writers at Kharkov, in the U.S.S.R., along with Michael Gold, William Gropper, and other "sympathetic" writers.

The setting of Herrmann's third novel, Summer Is Ended (1932) is partly in the Lansing-East Lansing area, which the author calls "Denton" and "East Denton." When one of the characters starts college, "she went out to East Denton to the state college." In his study The Modern American Novel (1935) Harlan Hatcher, later to be President of the University of

Michigan, classified Herrmann with James T. Farrell and W.R. Burnett as "hard-boiled realists." Of Summer Is Ended Hatcher wrote, "the narrative is stark and the expression laconic; it achieves occasional flashes of power and also stretches of the flattest monotony, . . . in a too eager effort to be ironic and hard".

Herrmann's last novel, "The Salesman" (1939), is the story of a travelling salesman, a hard-working one named Robert Crawford, who worries about his job and about balancing the family budget on his meager earnings.

Herrmann wrote little after 1940. In a letter to Corey Ford, F. Scott Fitzgerald rather uncharitably referred to him as a "one-opus genius, like William Saroyan." Herrmann returned to the U.S. and during World War II served in the Coast Guard in Greenland and elsewhere. His health declined after the war and he spent the last ten years of his life in Mexico with his second wife, Ruth, having been divorced from Josephine Herbst. By this time drinking had become a serious problem for him.

A handsome, good-humored man, Herrmann was well liked by his contemporaries. Morley Callaghan, the Canadian author, called him a "tall, laughing man." Writer Edward Dahlberg, who described him as having "a long frame and a handsome face," thought that, despite his expatriate experiences and sophistication, Herrmann actually "pined for the red barns of the old bucolic America, the Ohio and Indiana of Sherwood Anderson and Dreiser." And Dahlberg concluded that his friend somehow didn't "know how to use his life and his marvelous, erring talent."

Alfred Kazin recalls that once when Josephine Herbst and Herrmann were fishing with Hemingway off the Florida keys, Hemingway lost his temper because John wasn't getting enough ice to keep their catch fresh, and kept grousing at him. John took it good-humoredly but his wife said, finally, "Hem, if you don't stop I'll take your pistol and shoot you."

On April 9, 1959, John Herrmann died of a heart attack in Guadalajara, Mexico. He was 59. His body was sent back to Lansing for burial in Mt. Hope cemetery. An obituary was carried in his old paper, the State Journal, on April 17. It was not until May 19, when his widow, Ruth, returned to New York City with her young son, John, that Herrmann's death was reported in the N.Y. Times.

When word reached New York, Edward Dahlberg wrote movingly to Josephine Herbst: "When I heard that John died I was shaken; you had come to my apartment years ago with John, both of you such virile and handsome persons. When I met him again in New Orleans (ten years or more ago), he was broken but not sniveling, selling Venetian blinds. Bob McAlmon, too, as you know, sold trusses in El Paso. All fallen now, they and us."