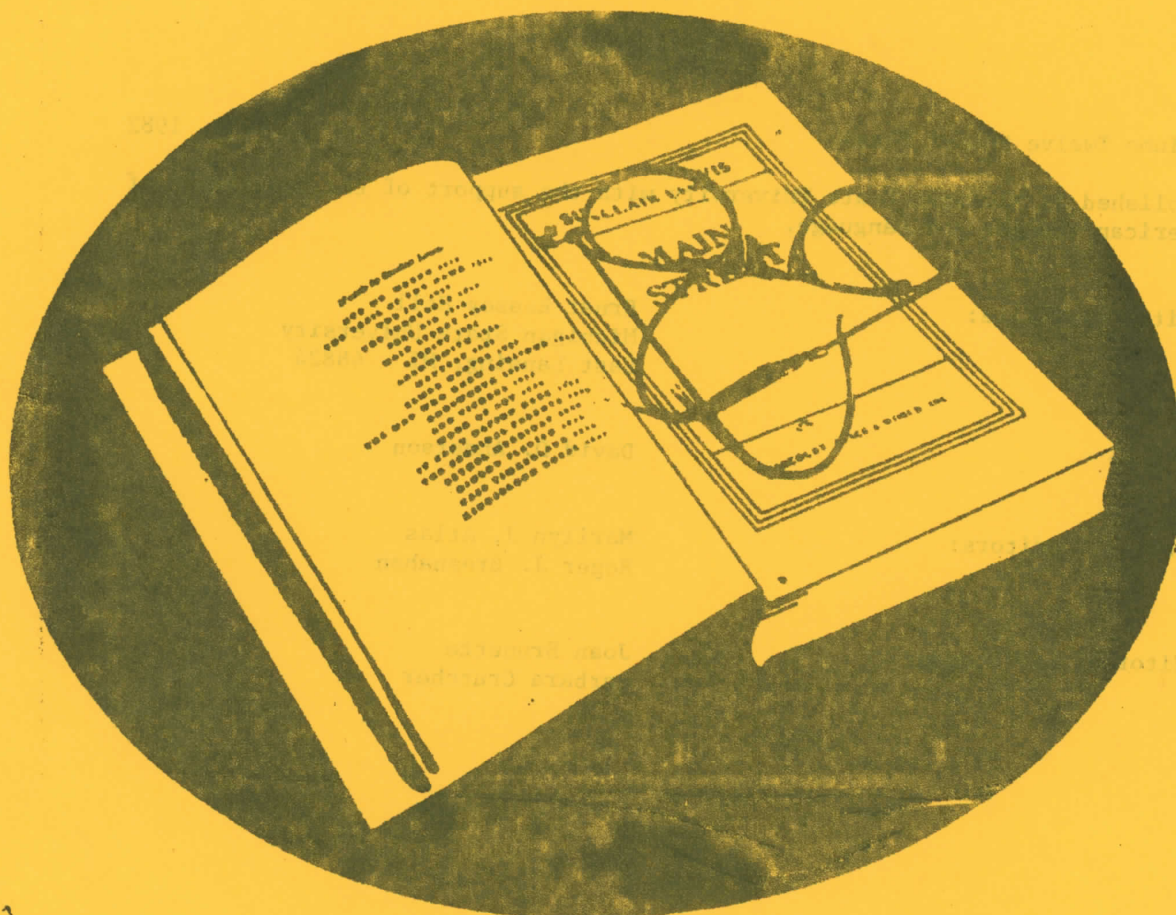


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## THE IMAGINATIVE GEOGRAPHY OF MIDWESTERN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Roger J. Bresnahan

I was born a little after midnight. . .  
in a three-room frame house on Third  
Street, the second house east of the  
Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad  
tracks, in Galesburg, Illinois.<sup>1</sup>

Thus begins Carl Sandburg's Always the Young Stranger. This autobiography shows an intense consciousness of local detail as Sandburg narrates the events of his youth. But it is at the end of this autobiography--in the "Hobo" chapter--that Sandburg displays a consciousness of Midwestern geography. That chapter relates Sandburg's nineteenth year, 1897, when Galesburg had begun to seem a dead-end. So he hoboed his way out to Kansas for the wheat harvest. The change that comes over his autobiography at this point is the change from small geographic detail to the larger continental geography. "I would take my chances on breaking away from my home town," he writes, "where I knew every street and people on every block and farmers on every edge of the town."<sup>2</sup>

Before relating his hobo tour to Kansas Sandburg describes his only previous trip of note, another trip on the "Q"--as a paying passenger then--and a three--day stay in Chicago. Like the Galesburg days, the narration of the Chicago sojourn alludes to specific buildings, streets, and scenes and thus serves to

obliterate the immenseness of the city. That this Chicago reminiscence comes just before Sandburg relates his trip out to Kansas is significant for the Chicago trip closes that part of the book which depicts events in their individual settings. Together with the hobo trip to Kansas, it forms a transition in his understanding of his past. That the Chicago trip takes place when Sandburg was eighteen and the Kansas one when he was nineteen gives this latter chapter the status of a rite of passage.

From the moment Sandburg leaps into an open boxcar of a running train there develops a sense of the openness of the Middle West and the unlimited future it may represent.

From then on I stood at the open side door,  
watched the running miles of the long corn  
. . . .Crossing the long bridge over the  
Mississippi River my eyes swept over it  
with a sharp hunger.<sup>3</sup>

When he gets to Fort Madison on the other side of the river he says to himself, "Now I am in Iowa, the Hawkeye State, my first time off the soil of Illinois, the Sucker State."<sup>4</sup>

Sandburg works his way to Keokuk where he spends several days learning the craft of the hobo. The Keokuk interlude culminates in an all-night ride in a boxcar well into Missouri where he stops for two weeks at Bean Lake to work on a railroad section-gang. Then he hops another freight to Kansas City where he walks all around "comparing it to Galesburg, Peoria, Keokuk, and Chicago."<sup>5</sup> Five years before William Allen White had arrived in Kansas City from the other direction. Perhaps because he had come to make his fortune, White didn't notice until years later the drabness of the failed boom town. When he looked back at this period

in retrospect in his autobiography he recognized how romantically he had perceived Kansas City:

The Kansas City of 1892, to which I came as Childe Roland to the Dark Tower, was an overgrown country town of a hundred thousand people. It was consciously citified, like a country jake in his first store clothes.<sup>6</sup>

After Kansas City Sandburg made his way to the wheat harvest. There is an intensity in this chapter that isn't present in the earlier chapters of Always the Young Stranger. It is the same intensity that one senses in much of Sherwood Anderson's writing--the intensity of an open future. But whereas Anderson rarely uses the geography of the rural Midwest as a metaphor, Sandburg freely utilizes the open spaces of Midwestern geography to suggest an open future, as he uses the closeness of the cities and towns to create a limiting effect.

Though the invitation of the open country is rarely seen in Anderson's three autobiographical works, the deadening effect of modern industrial life is certainly present. In A Story-Teller's Story we discover that for Anderson the force that limited people's opportunities was represented by the machine. The thought, for example, that people would come to prefer auto-racing to horse-racing was abhorrent:

Not for them the flashy thorough-breds or  
the sturdy trotters and pacers. Not for  
them freedom, laughter. For them machines.<sup>7</sup>

Anderson's vision of the future in an industrial society was bleak. What he feared most was that genius would submit to standardization--that "all the



young Edisons will enlist under the banner of a Ford."<sup>8</sup>

For Anderson the towns were unlikely to enlarge the human spirit, taken up as they were with the go-getter mentality. Instead, his vision received its biggest boost from an active life of the imagination which chose to invent towns only partially stored in his memory rather than dredge up the memory of actual towns. In his autobiographical novel, Tar: A Midwest Childhood, Anderson writes as a sort of minaturist--not permitting the reader any awareness of life outside the town, turning even inward from the town to the boy and negating the boy's probable experiences to focus on the imaginary life of Tar's daydreams. Indeed, Anderson makes it a point to explain to the reader that Tar never again set foot in the Ohio town of his birth after leaving at an early age. Instead, "being an imaginative child and not fond of disillusion he preferred having one place all his own, the product of his own fancy."<sup>9</sup> Anderson's midwestern towns are, if anything, only an intimate setting for human misery. In A Story-Teller's Story he describes the midwestern town as ugly and hurriedly thrown up and clearly not intended for permanent residency, a judgement that Frank Lloyd Wright would readily second even with regard to Chicago.<sup>10</sup>

There is implicit in Sherwood Anderson's writing, especially in A Story-Teller's Story and Winesburg, Ohio, a consciousness of spiritual liberation somewhere in the future. When Anderson recounts the near-traumatic point in his life when he walked out on his paint manufacturing business in Elyria, Ohio he hints at a geographical dimension to this sense of liberation:

"Suppose," I asked myself, "I could take those five, six, seven steps to the door, go along that railroad track out there, disappear into the far horizon beyond."<sup>11</sup>

Anderson explains his rejection of business for a life of the spirit as being true to the American character: "The American is still a wanderer, a migratory bird not yet ready to build a nest." He adds the cryptic comment that "All our cities are built temporarily as are the houses in which we live."<sup>12</sup>

Frank Lloyd Wright's first view of Chicago was a disappointing one. Leaving the University of Wisconsin in his senior year to seek a career in architecture, he first entered the city at night when "the horrid blue-white glare of arc lights" made it seem "cold, black, blue-white, and wet." Even in the daylight as he tramped from one architect's office to another looking for work, Chicago remained cold and distant and essentially tasteless:

Where was the architecture of the great city? The Eternal City of the West? Where was it? Hiding behind these shameless signs? . . . Chicago! Immense gridiron of dirty, noisy streets. . . .<sup>13</sup>

To the young man who would one day put his signature on the face of many of the great cities of the world, Chicago's most distinctive buildings seems travesties. The Pullman Building was "funny--as if made to excite curiosity." The Palmer House was "an ugly old, old man whose wrinkles were all in the wrong place owing to a misspent life." The Exposition Building was a "rank, much-domed yellow shed." Even the ordinary buildings seemed "savage and monotonous."<sup>14</sup>

Wright found everything in Chicago and its suburbs unimaginative and unsuited to the midwestern landscape. Just as the buildings of other American cities seemed "monstrous in their savage, outrageous attempts at variety," Chicago's new suburbs struck Wright as an "aggregation of uninspired carpenter work."<sup>15</sup> In rejecting the European tradition of Beaux-Arts architecture Wright opted for a style synonymous with the geography of the Midwest. He wished only to keep "faith with what we then called 'America' and what I now call Usonia."<sup>16</sup> Wright wanted his buildings to seem to grow out of their environment. Thus, the prairie suited his vision perfectly. A conservative populist whose "Broadacre" political philosophy found its deepest resonance in his attachment to the long stretches of prairie, he looked forward to a capitalism consistent with democracy where land would be free to all so long as it was used and developed appropriately.<sup>17</sup>

What has been explored here--rather briefly and with only a few representative texts--is a thematic which bears further study. The texts are, of course, separate works with no integral connection. Their only affinity, though predictable, is an accidental one occurring through similar geographic contexts. The midwestern landscape is bound to be powerful in its immensity and thus affect those living within it. This is especially so for anyone engaged in the self-reflection necessary to compose an autobiography. It may even be possible to classify the uses of geography in all types of midwestern writing; and while that would be a legitimate activity for the critic, it would imply a stasis which might only obscure the dynamic of the literature. It would



seem more useful to explore geographic consciousness in midwestern writing as a collective discourse. Walter Prescott Webb regarded the settling of and human adaptation to the Great Plains as "a gigantic human experience with the environment."<sup>18</sup> For Webb this enterprise required "new institutions, or a radical modification of the old ones" and inevitably led to "a different outlook on life. . . ."<sup>19</sup> It is, therefore, this study of signs in the writing of and about the Midwest which should emerge as a discourse on the meaning of the physical fact of the Midwest itself. It is a discourse that, if thoroughly and thoughtfully pursued, will prove a rich resource as we view our history against our landscape.

## Notes

1. Carl Sandburg, Always the Young Stranger p. 16.
2. Ibid., p. 379.
3. Ibid., p. 381.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 385.
6. William Allen White, Autobiography (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 205.
7. Sherwood Anderson, A Story-Teller's Story, ed., Ray Lewis White (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Univ. Press, 1968), p. 141.
8. Ibid., p. 147.
9. Sherwood Anderson, Tar: A Midwest Childhood, ed., Ray Lewis White (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Univ. Press, 1969), p. 14.
10. Anderson, A Story-Teller's Story, p. 60 and Frank Lloyd Wright, Autobiography (New York: Horizon Press, rev. ed., 1977), pp. 85-103.
11. Anderson, A Story-Teller's Story, p. 224.
12. Ibid.
13. Wright, pp. 85, 87.
14. Ibid., pp. 88-89.
15. Ibid., pp. 89, 102.
16. Ibid., p. 151.
17. Ibid., pp. 596-597, 612.
18. Walter Prescott Webb, The Great Plains (New York: Ginn and Co., 1931), p. 141.
19. Ibid., p. 453.

Sherwood Anderson's Technologically

Displaced Persons

David D. Anderson

The central image and the primary motivating force in Sherwood Anderson's Windy McPherson's Son, Anderson's first novel, published in 1916, is a tall figure astride a white horse at dawn on a Fourth of July in the late 1880s. The figure is Windy McPherson, his days of glory as a sergeant of infantry in a volunteer regiment who had served his country and the cause of freedom in the dust and mud and blood of rural Virginia twenty years behind him. Now a small-town housepainter, sign painter, unemployed harnessmaker, and spinner of war tales, he is heroic in the eyes of his twelve-year-old son Sam and the center of local attention at that dramatic moment when he is to wake the town to its day-long celebration by playing reveille on a bugle:

In Main Street the people were packed on the sidewalk, and massed on the curb and in the doorways of the stores. Heads appeared at windows, flags waved from roofs or hung from ropes stretched across the street, and a great murmur of voices broke the silence of the dawn.

Sam's heart beat so fast that he was hard put to keep back the tears from his eyes. . . . .

A cheer broke from the crowd massed along the street. Into the street rode a tall figure seated upon a white horse. The horse was from Culvert's livery, and the boys there had woven ribbons into its mane and tail. Windy McPherson, sitting very straight in the saddle and looking wonderfully striking in the new blue uniform and the broad-brimmed campaign hat, had the air of a con-



queror come to receive the homage of the town. He wore a gold band across his chest and against his hip rested the shiny bugle. With stern eyes he looked down upon the people.

The lump in the throat of the boy hurt more and more. A great wave of pride ran over him, submerging him . . . . .

Slowly and with stately stride the horse walked up the street between the rows of silent waiting people. In front of the town hall the tall military figure, rising in the saddle, took one haughty look at the multitude, and then, putting the bugle to his lips, blew.

Out of the bugle came only a thin piercing shriek followed by a squawk. Again Windy put the bugle to his lips and again the same dismal squawk was his only reward. On his face was a look of helpless astonishment.

And in a moment the people knew. It was only another of Windy's pretensions. He couldn't blow a bugle at all.

A great shout of laughter rolled down the street. Men and women sat on the curbstones and laughed until they were tired. Then, looking at the figure upon the motionless horse, they laughed again.

Windy looked about him with troubled eyes. . . he was filled with astonishment that the reveille did not roll forth. He had heard the thing a thousand times and had it clearly in his mind; with all his heart he wanted it to roll forth, and could picture the street ringing with it and the applause of the people . . . He was amazed at the dismal end of his great moment--he was always amazed and helpless before facts.

Windy's astonishment and amazement at his sudden confrontation with a reality that had consistently eluded him in the town is exceeded not only by the laughter of the townspeople but by the humiliation of his son Sam. The incident is only one of many that haunted Sam as he later left the town behind him to pursue success in the greater world of Chicago. With the image of Windy driving him, Sam was to achieve that success and ultimately to find it empty.

Nevertheless, neither Sam McPherson nor Sherwood Anderson understood at the time the forces that had led Windy to that ludicrous moment in Caxton, and Sam, seeking an ambiguous personal fulfillment at the end of the novel, was unlike Anderson, never to understand more than what he remembered: a fool with

a bugle on the back of a livery-stable nag.

Nor did Anderson himself understand that image as he published Marching Men in 1917 or as he wrote the stories that were to become Winesburg, Ohio, defining for all time the nature of the American Midwestern grotesque. Windy, clearly drawn in the image of Anderson's own father, Irwin Anderson, Civil War cavalryman, failed harnessmaker, house and sign painter, and teller of tales, was himself a grotesque, the first and in many ways the most enduring that Anderson was to describe.

The grotesque, as Anderson defined him in the introductory sketch in Winesburg, Ohio, was a victim, a victim of ideas became truth became lies, and Windy, astride his charger, making foolish noises instead of blowing clear notes, was not merely a fool any more than Wing Biddlebaum, hiding his eloquent hands, was a fool. Windy, like many of his post-Civil War generation--and the post-World Wars and Korean and Viet Nam generations--was a victim of the inevitable winless clash between American idealism and its reality. Windy's idealism was that of pre-Civil War America and the idealistic crusade that resulted in a wilderness tamed and made orderly and a people freed from slavery by young Americans who had known the heady excitement of marching down Pennsylvania Avenue as part of a conquering army. Then Windy and the other young men had come home to the farm and villages and towns to take their places in the orderly world they and their fathers had made. Windy, Irwin Anderson's alter ego, had come home, had learned a trade, had married and begun a family that he took to half a dozen Ohio towns in search of a place to

practice a dying craft. And in so doing, in his seizing an idea and making it his truth and attempting to live by it, the truth had become a falsehood and Windy--Irwin--had become a grotesque, a figure of fun, a long-winded, idle teller of tales, and a haunting, humiliating figure of failure to his son--and to Sherwood.

In Windy McPherson's Son Anderson recognized the central role of the Civil War in the American experience and in Windy McPherson's life. "Windy McPherson, the father of the Caxton newsboy, Sam McPherson, had," Anderson wrote, "been war touched," and in his failure to find a place in postwar Caxton, the war had become his only reality, his refuge from the failure of his harness shop, his business, and his inability to find a place more meaningful and valuable than that of an itinerant laborer, a dreamer, a teller of tales about a war ever greater and larger than life, in a reality--a village, an America--he could no longer understand.

Windy McPherson's post-Civil War America, even in the villages, was not the orderly place of the American ideal, a place in which he and his generation had been promised fulfillment. While Sam learned the gospel of the new postwar America--"Make money! Cheat! Lie! Be one of the big men of the world! Get your name up for a modern, high-class American"--Windy, his craft useless in an age of machine-made harnesses, his money lost in a financial world he does not understand, his truth become falsehood, becomes a figure of fun in the town and a repulsive horror to his son.



Windy's grotesquery, the grotesquery of a man lost in a world he neither made nor understood, a world vastly different from that he had known and helped to reshape, is not the that of the people of Winesburg; it is not the result of the horror that brought Wing Biddlebaum into being, the frustration that drove Elizabeth Willard to the secret arms of Dr. Reefy and to her grave, the torment that led Dr. Parcival to declare that "We are all Christ and we are all crucified;" Windy's grotesquery remained unrecognized by his son Sam and by Anderson, its origin perhaps sensed but neither understood nor defined either by Sam, seeking and rejecting the success he had learned to value in the town, or by Anderson as he returned to his origins and the origins of his time in the village of Winesburg. A man deprived of his craft, his identity, and his dream, Windy was left behind, to stumble blindly in a reality he could neither see nor understand.

Although Anderson defines the nature and origin of the American Midwestern grotesque in Winesburg, Ohio, in it he neither saw nor understood the grotesque he had left behind him in his fictional Caxton, Iowa, or in the real Clyde, Ohio. There is no figure in Winesburg, Ohio, that approximates the character or the role of Windy McPherson, teller of lies and figure of fun, nor does George Willard's father ever emerge from the shadows of his time, his place, his role. George, in his search for vicarious experience never finds the secret of that dim, undefined figure standing behind the desk of the New Willard House or giving inane advice at George's departure. Whereas Sam had seen and understood his father only as the town had seen him, George neither saw his father nor understood him.

In Winesburg, Ohio, Anderson's grotesques are, with the exception of George's mother, Elizabeth Willard, whom George does not come to know until she lies before him in death, people of the town, many of whom he does come to know and understand in brief, intuitive moments, but many others whom he never knows, whom he never sees as what they are because of the pressures of biology and of misguided morality. But in each portrayal, whether understood by George, or not, the origins of grotesquery are clear: they are the forces that brought Winesburg and the society it represents into being even while they distorted and denied the humanness of its people.

Neither George Willard nor Anderson saw at that time that other forces, new forces, were at work in the world beyond the village. These were the forces that, unleashed by the war that had ironically been fought for human freedom, had brought about a new slavery as they directed the Sam McPhersons and the George Willards of the towns and villages toward success in the city. They were the same forces that left the human debris of the Windy McPhersons, attempting to live in a world that no longer existed, bewildered in their wake, "amazed and helpless before facts."

Anderson had intuitively recognized and attempted to resolve the impact of these forces in Windy Mc Pherson's Son and in Marching Men, published in 1917, leading to the weakness of the ending of the first novel, when Sam seeks a humane and human fulfillment with his wife and adopted children, and to the massive but futile dream in the latter, when Beaut McGregor visualizes thousands of men march-

ing together to destroy the economic forces that enslave them. His attempt to define those forces without understanding them led to the magnificent failure of Winesburg, Ohio, in which its tortured people remain behind, no more than the background on which George was to "paint the dreams of his manhood," as he goes West with the setting sun. He follows the old American path of fulfillment but ironically, also the path of the new, to the city, to Chicago, which Sam had already found wanting.

In Poor White, Anderson's third and best novel, published in 1921, he wrote neither of the forces that directed and nearly destroyed Sam McPherson nor the reality of the manhood that George was to experience rather than dream; he wrote instead of the America that had followed Lincoln's new birth of freedom, of the America that had left Windy McPherson a mock-heroic buffoon, Irwin Anderson a semi-employed ex-harnessmaker, Sam McPherson an unhappy executive in the armaments industry, George Willard an inevitably frustrated dreamer, Tom Willard a shadow figure at the end of the platform.

Poor White tells two stories. The first is that of the tinkerer-inventor-entrepreneur Hugh McVey, who like Lincoln unwittingly unleashes the forces of capitalism and industrialism that transform a sleepy Ohio town into an industrial city and its people into captives of a system that promises much at the expenses of their humanness. For Hugh there is ultimately the promise of fulfillment beyond material success in marriage with the remarkable Clara Butterworth, thus finding the same intimate fulfillment that Sam McPherson presumably found in the artistically disastrous end of Windy McPherson's Son.



Here, however, the factory whistles echo mockingly, to suggest that the promise will ultimately remain unfulfilled.

The other story told in Poor White is that of the underside of success and fulfillment, whether human or material, the story not only of those whom the new system enslaves and exploits but also of those for whom the new system has no place. These are the technologically displaced persons of America's maturity, those who, like Windy McPherson, found themselves replaced by machines, their skills obsolete, their demands for recognition unheard, their continued existence a joke or a tragedy.

The underside of Poor White takes place not in the new factories that have sprung up to exploit McVey's inventive genius, nor on the assembly lines where farm boys turned foremen and farm boys turned factory hands presage a new social stratification, but along Main Street, where the town had found its identity and its purpose in the two generations since its founding. There we find the misfits: Ezra French, who insists that the new agricultural machinery contradicts both biblical and natural law; Smoky Pete, the blacksmith, the town's Jeremiah, calling down judgement on those corrupted by the new values; Sandy Ferris, the house painter, taken to drink.

There, too, is the harness shop, where Joe Wainsworth had practiced his craft for a generation, secure in the skill of his hands and the knowledge of his usefulness and unafraid of competition that he knows is shoddy and cheap:

During the afternoon, after he had heard of the four factory-made harnesses brought into what he had always thought of as a trade that belonged to him by the rights of a first-class workman, Joe remained silent for two or three hours. He thought of . . . the constant talk of the new times coming. Turning suddenly to his apprentice . . . he broke into words. He was defiant and expressed his defiance ". . . I know my trade and do not have to bow to any man" he declared . . . "Learn your trade. Don't listen to talk," he said earnestly." "The man who knows his trade is a man. He can tell everyone to go to the devil."

But Joe Wainsworth's tirade, the outspoken faith of the craftsman in his hands and his trade, is as futile and feeble as was the bugle call of Windy McPherson, former harnessmaker turned housepainter and braggart. As the factories rise in the cornfields, there is more bustle on Main Street and along country roads, and increasing numbers of horses wear new machine-made harnesses. The insulting requests to repair the shoddy goods infuriate Wainsworth, yet his trade diminishes, his apprentices become factory hands, and his savings are lost in a failed attempt to prosper by investing in the new age that had promised so much to him as well as the others.

While union organizers come to town to promise a new kind of fulfillment to the farm hands turned factory hands, and the town moves inexorably toward the "long, silent war between classes" predicted by a wise old man when the town was a village, Wainsworth broods and buries himself in his work, making harnesses that began to hang in the shop unsold except to those few old farmers who know and value his work. Increasingly Wainsworth turns over the business operations of the shop to Jim Gibson, his journeyman harnessmaker, a "spiritual bully," as Anderson describes him. Gibson is determined to rise in the new age, not by

skill and hard work or by practicing a craft rapidly becoming obsolete, but by buying and selling the products of the new age at a profit:

. . . A week before, a traveling man had come to the shop to sell machine-made harness. Joe ordered the man out and Jim had called him back. He had placed an order for eighteen sets of the harness and had made Joe sign the order. The harness had arrived that afternoon and was now hung in the shop.

Jim's triumph was complete: "'It's hanging in the shop now,'" he shouted to workmen idling in the street, "'Go see for yourself,'" he told them while Joe huddled over his harness-maker's horse in humiliation. But Joe is not Windy McPherson, and his refuge is not in a past made ludicrous in his dreams but in an anger that leads him to strike a blow for his craft:

. . . In his hands he held his harness-maker's knife, shaped like a half moon and with an extraordinarily sharp edge . . . he sometimes spent hours sharpening the moon-shaped knife on a piece of leather; and on the day after the incident of the placing of the order for the factory-made harness he had gone into a hardware store and brought a cheap revolver. He had been sharpening the knife as Jim talked to the workmen outside. When Jim began to tell the story of his humiliation he had stopped sewing on the broken harness in his vice and, getting up, had taken the knife to give its edge a few last caressing strokes.

Nothing of Windy McPherson or Irwin Anderson appears in what follows. Possessed by a mad joy as Jim returns to work, Joe swings the knife, and Jim is nearly decapitated. Joe runs off into the street, revolver in his pocket, the cries of the idlers echoing behind him: "Hey . . . do you believe in factory-made harness now-days, Joe Wainsworth? Hey, what do you say? Do you sell factory-made harness?" and he rushes out to destroy those who had destroyed him.



Joe's tragedy was no less inevitable, however, than Windy's humiliation and his ultimate defeat was as certain in the woods in which he takes refuge as Windy's was astride the rented horse with his bugle to his lips. Joe's mindless rebellion, against men rather than forces, is as futile as Windy's mindless acceptance of a world in which skill and dedication to craft are redundant.

With his portrayal of Joe Wainsworth, a craftsman displaced by time and circumstance, the image of Windy McPherson disappears from Anderson's work, replaced by two new images. The first is of the craftsman at work, his skilled hands, whether of harness-maker or stone mason or writer, the essence of and reason for his being; the second is of the fumbling, improvident but delightful father no less displaced by time and circumstance but with a difference: unable to succeed, unable to comprehend a factual world, he tells stories to his sons and to anyone who will listen. But Anderson never brought the two together in his work.

In his last years Anderson delighted in telling two stories that sum up what he had learned about the craftsman and his father. The first concerned an incident that took place when he was erecting the large stone and log house at his farm in Virginia in 1926. None of the local builders could do what Anderson wanted, so he scoured the hills, eventually finding a seventy-year-old man named Ball who couldn't read blueprints but who knew stone. When the house was completed, including a stone arch in a first-floor bed-sitting room, Anderson was pleased. But then he noticed Ball's initials carved on the arch, and was furious.

"Let's see, you write books, don't you?" old man Ball asked him.

"Yes."

"Well, you sign the books, don't you?"

Anderson couldn't think of a reply.

The second story repeats one told by his father:

"You know," my father said, "about General Grant's book, his memoirs. You've read of how he said he had a headache and how, when he got word that Lee was ready to call it quits, he was suddenly and miraculously cured."

"Huh," said Father. "He was in the woods with me."

"I was in there with my back against a tree. I was pretty well cornered. I had got hold of a bottle of pretty good stuff."

"They were looking for Grant. He had got off his horse and come into the woods. He found me. He was covered with mud."

"I had the bottle in my hand. What'd I cared? The war was over. I knew we had them licked."

My father said he was the one who told Grant about Lee. An orderly riding by had told him because the orderly knew how thick he was with Grant. Grant was embarrassed.

"But Irve, look at me. I'm all covered with mud." he said to Father.

And then, my father said he and Grant decided to have a drink together. They took a couple of shots and then, because he didn't want Grant to show up potted before the immaculate Lee, he smashed the bottle against the tree.

"Sam Grant's dead now and I wouldn't want it to get out on him," my father said.

Anderson remembered, too, his momentary glimpses of sadness in his father's face in odd moments at home, but he insisted that his father, displaced harness-maker, had found two new places in the town: as "Major" Irwin Anderson, storyteller, and as "Irve" Anderson, house painter and self-styled sign artist, foreshadowing the crafts that Karl and Sherwood, his two older sons, were to practice in the world beyond Clyde.

## On Space and Spaciousness

Bernard F. Engel

It is often assumed that the Middle West has an ethos of space, that the existence of land extending for a thousand miles unperturbed by mountain or sea must inspire spaciousness of mind and spirit. One sees indications of such an ethos even on the Atlantic coast, as in Cotton Mather's proud declaration that the vine of Godliness has "sent its Boughs unto the Atlantic Sea Eastward, and its Branches unto the Connecticut River Westward." By the time of the Revolution, Paine and Franklin were taunting the British with impertinent questions about how the rulers of a mere island could expect to control the populace of a continent.

Speculations on the importance of space were fortified by early nineteenth century theories that climate and topography shape individuals and their culture--mountain people are tall and ebullient, flatlanders squat and torpid, those of us reared in Oregon especially sexy (well--there has to be some accounting of my magnetism).

The underlying notion that grandeur lies in the geographical extent of America appears throughout nineteenth century literature dealing with the Middle West. In Henry Hirst's poem "The Coming of the Mammoth" the great beast, defying the Indians' god, smashes through the forest, leaps the Mississippi, tops the summit of the Rockies, and disappears in the Pacific, the marvel of his bulldozing progress over so varied a topography implying unbounded possibility. In Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's "Rise of the West," the Mississippi Valley's extent is in itself a guarantee that great cities and civilization will come. In Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha," the hero traverses leagues of forest, prairie, and mountain to seek out his errant father.



Most famously, Whitman constantly declares marvelling confidence in the material and spiritual resources of the West: "All the pulses of the world . . . with this Western movement beat" ("Pioneers! O Pioneers!"). And Sandburg's "Chicago" is an early twentieth century declaration that the power and vitality--though not the sublimity--of earlier expectation have indeed been achieved.

No doubt the faith that geographical space leads to large-scale human development was fortified by the steamboat and the railroad, inventions appearing just as pioneers were filling up the Midwest. The sudden increase in man's ability to move through and occupy great stretches of territory must have appeared to the emigrants to be evidence of Divine will.

Today, only a handful of the hyper-enthusiastic seems to value exploration into outer space. Perhaps Americans of the late twentieth century have given up the old dream. And, indeed, the assumption that unbounded physical space brings spaciousness of mind and spirit should be reexamined. Paine and Franklin to the contrary, insular England did come to control continents. Constricted Athens has contributed rather more to civilization than, say, Stalin's Russia or the dictator-infested pampas of southern South America. For that matter, the American South, perhaps because self-consciousness straitened its expansion, did not develop a space ethos though the Georgian and Alabaman had as much room to the west as the Ohioan and the Michiganian. And literary and social critics often have asserted that the "mind" of the Middle West itself has exhibited not freedom from limitation but the most barbed and confined of provincial immurements.

Nor has movement of people always resulted in expansion of spirit. The wanderings of my mother's grandparents from Ireland to Minnesota and Kansas, of her parents to Texas and Colorado before finally settling in California, of my father's parents to Washington Territory--his mother from Ireland, his half-Irish, half-German father from

Pennsylvania--seem to have represented no special urge to fulfillment but rather a typical restless drifting through space they did not know what to do with, a ricocheting from one mortgage to another that was hardly more volitional than the travels of a tumbleweed.

My ancestors' ambulations have left no detectable benefits or impairments in me. Much of my own wandering was at the expense of the frugal taxpayer, since the Army in the early 1940s, not knowing what to do with a grossly nearsighted G. I. who scorned "limited service"--a category seemingly filled with bellyachers and grifters--booted me about to sixteen different posts and stations in this country before happenstance placed me in the Infantry (which promptly sent me to Europe as a rifleman, since in the combat arm any body is useful that can sniff its way to the latrine and feel its way to the pro station).

One might also observe that space has failed many: ask all those prairie wives whose lives are accurately represented by Beret in Ole Rolvaag's Giants in the Earth. Perhaps the truth is that Americans have failed to understand that what space represents is neither a new garden of Eden nor "the Great American Desert" but simply an opportunity. Like that famous tree that has bedeviled generations of philosophy classes--if it falls where no ear can hear it, does it make a sound?--space may have no resonance in our minds if we bring nothing to it. Bernard Duffey finds Sandburg's poetry to show a land of "indeterminate space and time" (Centennial Review, Summer 1979). This feeling that there are no native marks and bounds is comparable to the belief shown in Frost's "The Gift Outright," the idea that we must give ourselves to this American land "vaguely realizing westward," that it is nothing as long as it is "unstoried, artless, unenhanced."

The view that the American land was simply empty, that everything it would become would be developed from or added to it, not found within it, has a long history.



As Walter Prescott Webb observes (The Great Frontier, 1952), white settlers commonly believed the Indian population to be so thin that in most areas it could be disregarded. (Recent protests by radical scholars--vide William N. Denevan--that the Indian population of America north of Mexico was nine million or more, instead of the half million estimated by Webb and most traditional scholars, may become established; at present, one may doubt their insistences, since they base their counts on assessment of food resources rather than on information on population, the testimony of explorers and early settlers clearly is that much of what are now the U. S. and Canada was indeed empty when Europeans arrived, and the radicals appear to be more interested in arguing that whites were guilty of genocide than in arriving at correct estimates of populations).

The tantalizing suggestion that something was indeed here, together with the conviction that we have failed to discover it and that our opportunity to do so may now be gone, is phrased eloquently in the ending of The Great Gatsby. "For a transitory enchanted moment," Fitzgerald writes, "man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired . . ."

Transitory, because Gatsby believes in "the orgiastic future" envisioned by such Americans as his material-minded mentor Dan Cody, the future that "eluded us" but that we still run after because, like Gatsby, we look not to what it could bring us but back, back to the old false dream of finding fulfillment through accumulation. We have taken American space to offer us not aesthetic opportunity but a cornucopia of riches that once grasped is no more lasting than those cedars and golden brocades that, when the Pharaoh's tomb is opened, crumble to dust before the covetous eye.



Pauline Adams and Emma S. Thornton (ed.), A Populist Assault: Sarah E. V. Emery on American Democracy 1862--1895. Bowling Green State University Popuoar Press. 146 pp. \$13.95, paper \$6.95

The subject of this interesting study, born in 1838 in New York's Finger Lakes region, moved to Michigan in 1866, married a fellow school teacher, and became a Populist writer, lecturer and agitator. For thirty years she focused her prodigious energy in attacks on the prevailing economic order, on what she termed "the heartless money power."

Sarah Emery found the American scene in the latter half of the nineteenth century spoiled by farm foreclosures, business failures, unemployment, crime, corruption and alcoholism, most of them causes, she contended, by the larcenous activities of the nation's banks and corporate financial interests. In 1888, she published Seven Financial Conspiracies, a stinging indictment of the "money power." The book, addressed primarily to Midwestern farmers and laborers and distributed by the Farmers' Alliance, sold 400,000 copies and made Emery nationally known in third party political circles. Senator John Sherman, a prominent "hard money" advocate and a prime target of Emery's attacks (she called him the "head devil"), was so stung by her charges that he responded at considerable length, point by point.

Emery, a persuasive speaker with a penetrating voice and an impressive manner, lectured widely throughout the Midwest. Novelist Hamlin Garland, who shared many of her views and appeared occasionally with her on lecture platforms,

described her as "an attractive woman with a daring boyish bob." She was a tall person, proportionately large.

The authors devote a part of their study to the scrutiny of Sarah Emery's "way with words," it being their contention that a major part of her "genius" lay in her rhetoric. Her writing was too often notable for its sentimentality, over-simplifications, and general windiness, qualities observable in much fiction and non-fiction of the Gilded Age. But she knew how to communicate with her audiences. Especially skillful in the use of illustrative anecdotes, she saw herself as "preaching deliverance to the toiling captives of our land." However, she lacked the gifts of terse phrasing and bitter invective possessed by another Populist agitator of the period, Mary Ellen Lease, "the Kansas Pythoness." Lease's famous cry, "Raise less corn and more hell," (an injunction that today's farmers may be pondering), could not have come from the lips of Sarah Emery, but her espousal of the farmers' cause was no less impassioned.

The agrarian radicalism of Emery and Lease was a native grassroots phenomenon little influenced by Marxist or utopian theories. The Populists, Grangers, Greenbackers, and the Farmers' Alliance were all unsympathetic toward even Edward Bellamy's socialistic thought. The free, unlimited coinage of silver, regulation of railroad rates, abolition of the national banking system, popular election of U. S. Senators, and a graduated income tax were among their high priorities. And they shared an intense dislike of bankers, corporations, creditors, monopolies, and the government's money policy.

Authors Adams and Thornton deserve praise for refurbishing the name and achievements of a dedicated feminist, suffragette, and crusader for monetary reform. They rescue her from undeserved oblivion and place her where she belongs, with Lease, "Sockless" Jerry Simpson, Ignatius Donnelly, "Coin" Harvey, Gen. Jacob Coxey, and other red-bandanna radicals who peppered the Midwestern political pot from 1865 to 1900.

Sarah Emery died at fifty-seven in 1895, a year before William Jennings Bryan, carrying many of the colors of the Populist reformers, went down to defeat by William McKinley in a crucial Presidential election.

--William McCann



A Review of Eugene L. Huddleston and Douglas A. Noverr, The Relationship of Painting and Literature: A Guide to Information Sources. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1978. Pp. xxiii, 184.

In the fourth volume of the American Studies Information Guide Series, Eugene Huddleston and Douglas Noverr have made a vital contribution to scholarship in the American heritage. Focussing on the relationship between poetry and painting, defined in the introduction of the "Sister Arts," Huddleston and Noverr have divided their work into six sections which illustrate the enduring quality of that relationship. Most fascinating is the first section, which comprises a listing of related American paintings and poems in six chronological eras. Here one can discover whether a favorite American painting was inspired by a particular poem or vice versa. Beyond what the book defines as "exact pairings," the Huddleston/Noverr approach includes two other categories which help inform the reader about such questions as to whether a particular subject inspired both a painting and a poem, like favorite symbols such as Niagara Falls and Brooklyn Bridge. Other sections of the book cover such subjects as American poetic responses to non-American paintings, American poems on all painters and painting in general, and sources on the relationship between the "Sister Arts." And there are abundant Midwestern references, from the American Regionalist painters to the many superb collections in Midwestern museums.

But there is much more here. With their listings and in a sensitive and beautifully crafted introduction, Huddleston and Noverr articulate the complexities of the interrelationship between painting and poetry. Any person who enjoys view-

ing American art knows how enriching an appreciation of a painting can be when it is connected to a poem treating a similar subject. Joseph Stella's painterly homage to Brooklyn Bridge is certainly enhanced with a few choice lines from Hart Crane's immemorial poem The Bridge, or one's observation of Thomas Eakins' superb portrait of Walt Whitman is augmented with some lyrics from the famous creator of Leaves of Grass. A reading of William Cullen Bryant's lovely "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe" provides a greater understanding for the inspiration behind Kindred Spirits, Asher B. Durand's classic visual testimonial to the affinity between the poet Bryant and the artist Cole on the sad occasion of Cole's death. Such experiences leave one with questions about the theoretical construct which binds the various art forms and which informs the interdisciplinary approach. Huddleston and Noverr, with probing insights in the introduction, address these questions and make a solid case for the reasons for the historical bond between American poets and painters, many of whom, like Cole and Bryant, have known each other and admired each other's work.

In the introduction, Huddleston and Noverr suggest that, despite the real differences between their art forms, the natural blending of artist and poet in America emerged because of the tendency of many American artists to work with the concrete, representative image, even in the Twentieth Century. Also, both artist and poet are vitally concerned with exactness of detail, whether it be in diction or visual imagery. Through the special discipline of their modes, both can express the spiritual dimension of matter. A number of American artists have written well on American themes which they were tracing in their

work: indeed, some, like Thomas Cole, have also experimented with poetry. To explore the relationship between artist and poet is to explore the source of all human creative power and why that power can maintain its hold through the ages. And to begin to discover the source of human creativity is to understand better puzzles about the origin of knowledge. In this way, Huddleston and Noverr have provided a central source for epistemological concerns.

As well, the more a sensitive observer and reader explores the material of his favorite paintings and poems and then reflects on the complex and yet indispensable relationship between the two art forms, the more he becomes aware of the value of such works not only as sources of private inspiration but as vital historical documents, as valuable for an appreciation of past lives as the more conventional prose researched so carefully by historians. Here the Huddleston/Noverr volume is also most helpful.

Any general observer, when next excited by an American painting in a fine American museum, would do well to consult this book and discover the riches of a literary equivalent to the artist's work. Any scholar, inspired by a poem celebrating the promise of an American Eden, could do no better than to find in the Huddleston/Noverr listings a visual equivalent in one of the Great American landscapes of the nineteenth century. I like this book much and recommend it to the general reader, the teacher-scholar, the artist, the poet. It is well written, brilliantly researched and judiciously edited, with three fine indices. It is one of the most unique and valuable books I have consulted in a long time.

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