SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF MIDWESTERN LITERATURE

Newsletter
Volume Nine
Number Three
Fall, 1979

Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

Volume IX

Number Three
Fall, 1979

The Tenth Annual Conference

The tenth annual conference of the Society, the Cultural Heritage of the Midwest, will be held at the Kellogg Center, Michigan State University, on May 15, 16, 16, 1980. A special feature of the conference will be the presentation of the MidAmerica Award to Dr. Harlan Hatcher, former Professor of English at Ohio State University, President Emeritus of the University of Michigan and author of Creating the American Novel, Buckeye Country, The Story of New Connecticut in Ohio, and many other studies and workers of fiction.

Because this is our tenth conference and the Society is reaching a milestone sceptics among us predicted would never be, we hope for wide participation among the membership. Papers on various topics are especially solicited. An announcement and form are enclosed, and members may ignore the December 1 deadline.

* * *

Forthcoming Meetings

During 1980-81 the Society will again present programs at MLA, MMLA, PCA, MPCA, and elsewhere. If you're interested in participating, please let us know.

* * *

Dateline Clyde, Ohio

For Sherwood Anderson aficionados, Thad Hurd has prepared a remarkable guide to Anderson in Clyde--photos, map, tour guide, commentary. For a free copy send a self-addressed, stamped envelope either to the Clyde Public Library, 222 West Buckeye St., Clyde, Ohio, 43410, or to Thaddeus B. Hurd, 144 West Forest St., Clyde, Ohio, 43410. Only a limited number is available.

* * *

The Vachel Lindsay Centenary Festival (Springfield, Illinois)

From November 8 through November 11, 1979, the city of Springfield and her national and international guests celebrated the 100th anniversary of the birth of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, rhymer and designer. Festival performers included poets, artists, musicians, actors, and critics, with the highlight being the appearance of Lindsay's son, Nicholas Cave Lindsay, on the night of November 9. As the Festival focused on the many talents and abilities of Vachel Lindsay--what he called his 'privilege of versatility'--people of all tastes and interests found some part of the Festival interesting and rewarding. The Festival was sponsored by the Vachel Lindsay Association, the Illinois Humanities Council, the Illinois Arts Council, and Springboard, with generous support from the Springfield Theatre Guild and Sangamon State University and the participation of several members of the Society.

November 9 .at 10:00 a.m., First Presbyterian Church: "Vachel Lindsay's 'Privilege of Versality.'" Session leader: Dennis Camp, Curator of the Vachel Lindsay Home.
.at 1:00 p.m., First Presbyterian Church: "Vachel Lindsay and Music." Featuring the Springfield-Sangamon Ragtime, Early Jazz Ensemble, directed by Jerry Torxell.
.at 2:00 p.m., First Presbyterian Church: "What It Means to Be a Poet in America." Poet-speakers were John Knoepfle, Michael Anania, and Dave Etter.
.At 8:00 p.m., Illinois Centennial Building Auditorium: "The Jungles of Heaven: An Evening of Vachel Lindsay Poetry." The speaker was Nicholas Cave Lindsay, son of Vachel Lindsay.

November 10 .at 10:00 a.m., Illinois Centennial Building Auditorium: "Vachel Lindsay and the Young." A program featuring Springfield's young people.

.at 1:00 p.m., First Presbyterian Church: "Vachel Lindsay: The Critical Heritage." The speakers are Ann Massa and Marc Chenetier, renowned Lindsay scholars.
.at 3:00 p.m., First Presbyterian Church: "Vachel Lindsay and Song." Co-ordinator: Jerry Troxell.
.at 8:00 p.m., the Theatre Guild: "Vachel Lindsay Enters into Heaven." A 'higher vaudeville' program featuring actor Jack Knight.

November 11 .from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., the Vachel Lindsay Home: Reception, with state and local dignitaries as honorary hosts.
.at 8:00 p.m., the Theatre Guild: Vachel, a biographical drama by Blair Whitney, directed by Randi Jennifer Collins Hard. The play was repeated at the Theatre Guild at 8:00 p.m. on November 16 and 17.

Addresses: First Presbyterian Church, the corner of Seventh Street and Capitol Avenue. Illinois Centennial Building Auditorium, the corner of Second and Edwards Streets. Springfield Theatre Guild, 101 E. Lawrence Avenue. Vachel Lindsay Home, 603 S. Fifth Street.

* * *

SSML Newsletter
181 Ernst Bessey Hall
MSU
East Lansing, MI 48824

Gentlepersons:

We are pleased to announce that a new literary magazine, "MAGIC CHANGES" is coming.

We herald a renaissance of the arts, and would like to establish and maintain strong communication ties with all those involved in this new age of Art. Along these lines, we will review several small magazines from across the country in each and would be willing to exchange issues of your magazine for copies of ours. We would also like to offer ad space on an exchange or reduced rate basis.

In order to further encourage the ongoing artistic explosion, we ask that you send us as complete a list as possible of all events of artistic importance which are going to occur in your area in the next few months (readings, workshops, showings, etc.). In order to encourage your quick response, we enclose an SASE.

We are now accepting manuscripts for our second issue which will be devoted to drugs and mysticism in modern America. We will include poetry, graphics, blues, rock-n-roll, folk, songs, litanies, plays and outdoor rambles. As payment we are offering 2 issues of "MAGIC CHANGES."

May we thank you for your cooperation.

Very truly yours,

John Sennett, Magician of Words

* * *

David Anderson
SSML
181 Ernst Bessey Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824

Dear Sir:

I am currently writing a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Washington under the direction of Prof. Harold Simonson. The subject is the two minor American poets, John James Piatt and his wife, Sarah Morgan (Bryan) Piatt. I am interested in information on poems by Sarah Bryan published before her marriage in 1861. Also I am looking for records of the Piatts' stay in Washington D.C. between 1861 and 1867 when J. J. Piatt was a clerk in the Treasury Department and later between 1870 and 1876 when Piatt was clerk and then librarian of the House of Representatives. During these periods he was acquainted with John Burroughs, Walt Whitman, and Eugene Field among others.

Any help you or your readers have will reach me here at Seattle Pacific. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jean Allen Hanawalt
Associate Professor of English
Seattle Pacific University
Seattle, WA 98119

Members and Friends of the
Society are invited to a
symposium:

A Half Century Ago
Michigan in the Great Depression

January 19, 1980
Kellogg Center

Sponsored by the Archives and Historical Collections

and

The Program in American Studies of Michigan State University

'Hard Times'...'The Lean Years'...'The Great Depression'...or simply, 'The Thirties.' What other decade in recent history generates so much folklore, so many recollections, so much community of thought? The stock market crash is a half-century behind us, yet the experiences of those long years that followed are a vivid part of the public and private histories of many citizens of this state. Perhaps this catastrophe cannot be celebrated but it should be remembered, appraised, its 'lessons,' for better or for worse, absorbed.

This symposium has been organized with the hope that the talks and discussion that take place will encourage individuals and groups of citizens, civic, business, educational, religious, to pursue their own inquiries into the past and to discover the meaning of those years in our time.

Sponsors:

The Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections is responsible for collecting, preserving and making available historical and documentary materials that form an invaluable and irreplaceable heritage. Included in the archives are business and institutional records, diaries, memoirs, photographs, maps, films, sound records, all of which are available to scholars, students, the public at large.

The program in American Studies is administered by the Department of English at Michigan State University and includes in its functions the coordination of undergraduate and graduate studies of the United States and the development or participation in University and community activities such as this symposium.

"A Half Century Ago"

Was made possible by a grant from the Michigan Council for the Humanities which is in turn supported by The National Endowment for the Humanities.

The participants:

Sister Marie Heyda, Acquinas College: The Auto Industry
Sandy Bryson, MSU: The Cooperative Extension Service
Jess Gilbert and Craig Harris, MSU: Primary Production in the Upper Peninsula
Sarah Howard-Filler, Michigan Historical Commission: The Administration of the Federal Arts Project
Dennis Barry, Archives of American Art: The Achievement of the Federal Arts Project
David Anderson, MSU: Proletarian Literature
Paul Sporn: Government and the Arts
David Halkola, Michigan Tech: Political Parties in the Upper Peninsula

For further details, write:

Marc Van Wormer
Continuing Education Service
Kellogg Center
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824

* * *

Carl Sandburg Remembered by William A. Sutton. The Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, N.J. and London, 1979.

This book consists of a vast and varied collection of biographical bits and pieces about Carl Sandburg. There are diary entries and letters written by people who knew him well, newspaper and magazine articles by anonymous authors, and summaries of phone conversations and interviews done by the author with people from every walk of life who had some contact with the great poet. The longest section of the book contains

relevant sections from the diary of Mrs. Lilla Perry of Los Angeles who met Sandburg in 1919 and remained his friend until the poet's death in 1967.

Although fragmented and occasionally unfocused, the overall effect of the book is impressive. We are given a comprehensive view of his character and behavior as it appeared "off the record," in his casual and unguarded moments. Mostly he remains true to his image as the great-hearted populist embracing all mankind and human experience. But occasionally we catch a glimpse of him in a less favorable light--manipulative and selfish for attention, moody and egotistical.

It is a useful book for the Sandburg biographer who can transform the data here gathered by Sutton into an interesting narrative of the poet's life.

* * *

Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature Newsletter

Volume nine, Number three
Fall, 1979

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

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

Edited by David D. Anderson

Assistant Editors: Marilyn Atlas
Paul J. Ferlazzo
Nancy Pogel

Managing Editor: Sue Cook

Editorial Assistants: Joan Brunette
Yvonne Preston

Cover Artist: Dan Preston

American Literature in Poland

The Fall-Winter, 1979 issue of The American Examiner: A Forum of Ideas features five articles by Polish scholars in American literature. Four of the articles discuss the reception of American writers in Poland with special attention given to the complex conditions and factors that influence the reception of a particular writer's work and that shape a popular reputation and readership. The articles offer case studies of the reception in Poland of Ezra Pound, William Faulkner, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and American prose writings of the 1960's and 1970's with a consideration of Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Joseph Heller, and others. One article describes and analyzes a growing body of Polish literature that relates the experience of Poles who have lived and travelled in America and who have written probing accounts of their search for America's meaning within the context of a European and Polish outlook.

The articles show that an American writer's reputation in Poland can be influenced by many factors and considerations: changing political conditions, quality of the translations and size of the printings, the prevailing climate of Catholic theology and traditional Catholic beliefs, the impact of World War Two and the Polish outlook on history, the influence of prominent Polish literary journals and literary critics, the Polish tradition of cosmopolitanism and an awareness of experimentation in literature and the arts, and the widespread awareness of America prompted by American films and the publication America, distributed in Poland under a mutual arrangement. Poles are aware of America and American culture, and the Polish reception of American literature is a remarkably complex phenomenon. This issue reveals the climate of literary opinion in Poland of major American writers, and the articles indicate the tremendous expansion of Polish interest in American literature in the book trade, the university, and the marketplace of literary ideas and judgments.

(continued on page 15)

James T. Farrell: A Memoir

The announcement of James T. Farrell's death, which I read in the Montreal Gazette on August 23, was shocking but not surprising. For years Farrell had suffered from a variety of ailments--ulcers, diabetes, heart disease--and for as many years he had largely ignored them, just as he had largely ignored the perennial irritation produced by critics who insisted that his creative career had begun and ended with the Studs Lonigan trilogy.

Farrell's death was particularly shocking to me, I think, largely because without consciously thinking about him very frequently, I felt that he was always there, surrounded by the debris chewed and digested by a mind constantly in search of the facts that for him made up reality.

Curiously, my thoughts of Farrell are not of Farrell the writer in spite of the fact that for a time in my mid-teens the Modern Library Giant edition of the Lonigan trilogy was one of my most valued possessions, and I have had a curious love-hate attitude toward him as a writer since. My memories are of Farrell the man, a fact that I know would please him, and of Farrell the symbol, which I know would not.

Alfred Kazin once described Farrell's work as "passionately honest and passionately narrow," and I think the first part of the phrase is an apt description of Farrell the man. A curious combination of shyness and bitterness in his last years, when I came to know him, he had never lost his passion for truth in his work and in his life, and he demanded no less of his fellow writers and his critics.

Particularly upsetting to Farrell during his last years was what he considered bad treatment by academic critics. Not only did he write in 1970 in an essay called "On Ignorance" that ". . . I am called bitter when I say that many of the professors, critics, and reviewers are fakers and frauds. When ignorant and lazy men make careers out of the minds and talents of others, what are they?" but on one occasion--the first time he was to speak to the organization--he was prepared to denounce the entire Modern Language Association for having misunderstood him for so long.

On that occasion--my first personal meeting with Farrell--the MLA, meeting in Chicago in December, 1971, had scheduled a forum called "Chicago and the Arts." Chaired by Bernard Duffey of Duke University, author of The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters, it included myself speaking on "Chicago as Metaphor"; Farrell on "When Chicago Was America's Literary Capital"; and Daryl Hine, then editor of Poetry, on "Poetry--Chicago, the Magazine, and the City."

Before the program, Duffey, Farrell, and I met in Duffey's room in the Palmer House for a few drinks and a talk. I had just read Farrell's Judith, the latest in his "A Universe of Time" cycle, as I had read each of Farrell's works of fiction as it appeared, increasingly with a sense of duty and loyalty rather than pleasure, and I was determined not to discuss it unless he brought it up. He didn't but instead we talked about a number of things: about Chicago, which was still his city in spite of his long residence in New York: about the 1930's and the significance--and in Farrell's view the permanence--of proletarian literature; about Sherwood Anderson; about his last visit to the Palmer House, when, as a young writer, he sat in the lobby and wrote "A Jazz-Age Clerk" in his mind; about my own aborted career as a writer of fiction; about the Cubs and the Yankees. At first his shyness matched my own, but his obvious pleasure in reminiscing, my fascination with the clarity and completeness of his memory, and the uncut bourbon warmed both of us. It was evident that he was not interested in talking about Studs Lonigan but about Danny O'Neill, about Ellen Rogers, and about his work in progress and projected. We had both, I think, largely forgotten the occasion of our meeting, but in a shadowed corner, his friend and companion, whom he did not introduce, sat quietly and, I thought, possessively and increasingly aprehensively. Farrell laughed as he mentioned his diabetes and poured another drink.

Finally Bernard Duffey mentioned the

program. Darryl Hine had not yet arrived and had not called--we later learned that he had been caught in traffic coming in from Evanston--and Duffey mentioned that he would speak on Henry Blake Fuller if Hine didn't turn up. Farrell preferred to speak last, without notes, using as his point of departure earlier comments.

Then the conversation turned to my paper, and as I described it briefly, Farrell became visibly upset. First he corrected a minor error of fact, which occurred in the telling rather than the paper itself, then he objected to my limiting my discussion of his work to the Lonigan trilogy and objected further to my comparison of Lonigan, Nelson Algren's Frankie Machine, and Saul Bellow's Augie March and to my linking discussion of his work with theirs. Finally he boomed, "Chicago is not a metaphor! Chicago is reality!"

Not only was it evident that I had become, in Farrell's eyes, a faker and fraud or worse, but as he proceeded to announce that his purpose was to denounce the assembled body of the Modern Language Association for the fraud and fakery it had collectively perpetrated over the years, it appeared that the program would be something other than the program committee had planned. But Farrell's friend said quietly but firmly that he couldn't, Duffey pointed out that the program was designed to pay tribute to him and his city, and I mumbled something about my good intentions. Somehow or other, with Farrell muttering, we got into the elevator and down to the combined Grand and State Ballrooms.

Daryl was waiting for us, the room was full, Farrell was greeted with applause, and the program began well. Although Bernard and I later agreed that we had no idea what was going to happen, it continued to go well. My paper seemed well received, although Farrell announced in the background that "Chicago is not a metaphor! Chicago is reality!" Daryl spoke on the history of Poetry, a factual paper which pleased Farrell and provided his point of departure for a rambling, fact-filled but gracious discourse; discussion and questions were lively, and the evening ended in good feeling as Farrell's sister and her family, old friends and admirers, and others came up for greetings and conversation.

After that I met Farrell a number of times--at dinner, at meetings, in hallways. The incident was apparently closed, although I'm sure that he never forgot it just as he never forgot anything else, and we became friends, our talk ranging as widely as when we first met. Shy, invariably courteous, eager to speak, but as eager to listen, he provided me with the facts and insights I think he felt that I needed.

I learned a great deal, most of it about Farrell himself, a man of strong convictions, of dedication, of courage, a man with a profound understanding of the art and craft of writing and of his own role as a writer. And I learned the meaning of his own words: "There is only one kind of writer, he who will fight. The artist who does less betrays himself. Happiness, comfort, even love cannot always be his. But he can attain victory."

For me and for many of my generation Farrell symbolized the honest, uncompromising fighter-artist that we could not be. I respected him as a man and valued him as a friend. Now he is gone, and I miss him.

David D. Anderson

* * *

The Wind Blows Free, A Reminiscence by Frederick Manfred.

The Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, S.D., 1979. $9.95

Frederick Manfred has written several novels that are to a significant degree autobiographical. One thinks especially of his Thurs Wraldson trilogy, World's Wanderer, the last books Manfred published under the name Feike Feikema and which he later revised under the name Frederick Manfred as Wanderlust (1962). Manfred's most recent novel, Green Earth (1977), was based on the marriage of Manfred's parents, and the character of their son Free is based on Manfred.

If The Wind Blows Free were a novel, its hero would be called Free, for the book follows closely upon Green Earth in logical progression and in chronological time, omitting those years when Thurs was at Christian College in "Zion," Michigan, and Manfred was at Calvin College in Grand Rapids. But Manfred invites no one to see The Wind Blows Free as a novel. He labels it "A Reminiscence"; while it seems to read like a novel, Manfred's protagonist is not Free Engleking, but Fred Feikema. The book is a narrative with real names and real places; it recounts Manfred's hitchhiking adventures from his father's farm in Doon, Iowa, to Bozeman, Montana, in 1934, just after Manfred's graduation from Calvin.

It is poetically just that Manfred's publisher for this new book be The Center for Western Studies, for the journey he recalls was Manfred's first into the West and indicated the preferred angle of vision Manfred would eventually take from his Siouxland lookout, where West and Midwest impinge upon one another. In 1943 Manfred was exploring country that would later be the setting for his Western novels. In his preface to the reminiscence Manfred evaluated the trip as one that "released his soul."

But readers who have responded to Manfred's farm novels and works set in twentieth-century Siouxland will also find special significance in the tale of Manfred's 1934 trip; Manfred retells several incidents that he had fictionalized in his first novel, The Golden Bowl, and in the Thurs volumes. For such readers, part of the pleasure is contrasting the original experience with its transformation in the fiction.

The reminiscence is charmingly authentic in its recreation of Manfred's winning innocence and boyish enthusiasm--and those qualities have survived as refreshing elements of the Manfred touch. Young Fred in the reminiscence warms to people, and they to him, and Fred becomes deeply moved by the drama of the land he is viewing for the first time. He senses that there is much to do and to see and to feel--and the experience he seeks will provide the basis for what he most wants to do, write. Like Thurs, Fred travels with a copy of Whitman's Leaves of Grass. Both Thurs and Fred have a big, expansive self. The Wind Blows Free is a genial book, even as Fred is a genial, tolerant traveling companion. Representative of the book's essential humor is the fact that during the trip Fred becomes the chauffeur of a middle-aged spinster who only slowly is able to allay her fears that the giant Fred Feikema (6'9") is out to rape her. A traveler with a less tolerant sense of humor would have abandoned Miss Minerva's "hospitality" much sooner that Fred does.

The joyousness of Manfred's narrative is accented by a series of illustrations by Elsie Thorson. To emphasize the quality of reminiscence in the narrative, the publisher provides interesting prefatory material. There is a photograph of Manfred at age eighteen on the Doon, Iowa, farm and a copy of Manfred's Calvin graduation photograph four years later and a photo of Manfred in 1978. The book is also prefaced with Manfred's 1934 sonnet to "Special Face," the college love he lost at Calvin. "Special Face" is more soothingly named Hero in the Thurs volumes. Manfred's trip West was partly to help him overcome his heartbreak over that college romance. The early poem comes before Manfred's own preface in which he recounts the excitement of another kink of first love, his first successful story-telling efforts. The Center for Western Studies has made a handsome book of Manfred's aptly named reminiscence, a title which carries a pun as well since Free may also be read as noun.

While The Wind Blows Free is not major Manfred as Lord Grizzly or Green Earth is, it is a valuable addition to the canon and will be especially welcomed by those who want to view the experience of the writer before it was reshaped in the fiction.

Joseph M. Flora
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

* * *

THE MINNESOTA EXPERIENCE, AN ANTHOLOGY. Edited by Jean Ervin. Minneapolis: The Adams Press, 1979. Pp 455. $7.95. Paper bound.

Any anthologist who attempts to reduce the interpretive literature of a single state to one volume faces a difficult task. Problems of space, scope, and merit often defy solution. Some subjects that should have been treated by writers have not always attracted attention. Permission to reprint is sometimes not forthcoming. The result is almost invariably a certain unevenness and the inclusion of pieces that a sharper critical judgment might have omitted.

Jean Ervin has included 37 prose selections by 37 different authors. Only two pieces date from the period before 1900, an Indian legend by Schoolcraft recounting the trickery of Manabozho, and four pages from an 1873 novel by Edward Eggleston entitled The Mystery of Metropolisville. Although a few essays and fragments of autobiography appear, the majority of the selections are fiction, thirteen from novels, the remainder short stories. The editor has arranged her selections according to their main subjects: The Land, the Town and the City, Childhood and the Family, and Old Age. The book begins with Emilio DeGrazia's fifteen-page story about an old farmer who resents a radar tower and eventually commits suicide, reprinted from the Red Cedar Review, and ends with J. F. Powers's account of an aging Catholic bishop which was originally published in Look How the Fish Live.

The average reader of fiction will find only a few familiar names in the anthology. F. Scott Fitzgerald is represented by an unusual short story entitled "Absolution" and Sinclair Lewis by four pages from Cass Timberlane (a rather scrappy selection). There are eight pages from an early novel by O. E. Rolvaag, The Boat of Longing, and short stories by Margaret Culkin Banning, Charles Macomb Flandrau, and Ann Chidester. Other pieces are the work of Frederick Manfred, Herbert Krause, and Martha Ostenso. Too many of the selections focus on the drudgery of farming or dreary domestic life. Much of the material was provided by little magazines. A good example is the thirty-page tale of Carol Bly called "Gunnar's Sword," dull and rather pointless.

The editor has contributed brief biographical sketches of the authors, a helpful list of further selected readings, and an introduction in which she assesses some Minnesota writing from which no excerpts were made.

It is interesting to compare another anthology with The Minnesota Experience since the two books are somewhat complementary. In 1949 Theodore C. Blegen and Philip D. Jordan combined to edit With Various Voices, which they subtitled Recordings of North Star Life. The anthology begins with the arrival of adventurers and fur traders and ends with 1900; it includes no fiction but succeeds in being what the editors hoped it would be, accurate and colorful. Most of the selections come from the men and women who helped to prepare Minnesota for statehood or who guided it thereafter: missionaries, teachers, politicians, editors, businessmen.

With Various Voices would be a richer volume if it included some of the better twentieth century fiction which deals with Minnesota. It depends too heavily on factual chronicles and slights the imaginative and the interpretive. On the other hand, The Minnesota Experience settles too easily into the commonplace situations and admits too many prolix tales. Louis Hennepin, Henry Sibley, and Ignatius Donnelly certainly deserve a place in any volume which purports to tell the story of the thirty-second state.

John T. Flanagan
University of Illinois, Urbana

* * *

A Woman Both Shiny and Brown: Feminine Strength in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon

Toni Morrison is one of the best black novelists writing today. Her story-telling ability is superb: her characters are exciting, her rhythm powerful, and her imagery unique. Song of Solomon is her third novel. It combines the

warmth and closeness of her first novel, The Bluest Eye, a first person narrative in which a young woman searches for her identity in a white society, and the grotesque characterization of her second novel, Sula, a third person narrative that portrays the dreams and actions of displaced people. Song of Solomon, warm, vaguely ironic, and spiritually transcendent, is both her longest and most complicated work. The eccentricity of the characters mixed with the sympathetic tone of the narrator successfully bring the need of humane values home to the reader. Song of Solomon explores the relationship between ownership and spiritual freedom using the power of myth to give its most spiritual character, Pilate, the necessary power to make her solution, surrender to the air, seem not only a possible solution, but the only viable one.

While other women writers like Marge Piercy, in Woman On the Edge of Time, are exploring utopian solutions to traditional male value systems, Toni Morrison is concentrating on showing how western materialistic values are distorting the quality of American life, specifically black people's lives. Morrison creates a male character, Milkman, and shows how he is caught between the power-oriented vision of his father, Macon, and the spiritual acceptance of his aunt, Pilate. His father tries to give him the values of upwardly mobile black America: "'Only own things. And let the things you own own things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too.'" His aunt also tries to educate him. She shows Milkman how to perfectly cook a soft-boiled egg: "'Now, the water and the egg have to meet each other on a kind of equal standing. One can't get the upper hand over the other. So the temperature has to be the same for both'" (p. 39). Milkman must choose between ownership and relationship, between land-locked values and transcendence.

Song of Solomon begins with a balance of earthly and nonearthly power. Through the force of Pilate's personality, it leans, even in its first chapter, toward spirituality. In this chapter, Milkman, the main character of the novel, is about to be born. The year is 1931, midday, midweek, midwinter. An insurance agent, Robert Smith, has discarded his reasonable lifestyle and decided to fly from the cupola of the town's all-white hospital across Lake Superior on blue silk wings. The hospital, Mercy, or No Mercy, as the black people who are not allowed to use it have named it, is located on Not Doctor Street, again a name upon which the black community and the government officials cannot agree. The black community feels that this street, once called Mains Avenue, should be renamed in honor of the first black man, a medical doctor, who purchased a house upon it. The post office will not recognize the new name, except when sending out draft notices. This information sets a mood of irony, conflict, and circling. The reader is also told that four years earlier Lindbergh had made a similar attempt to fly: somehow not enough has been achieved. The same tests are still being tried, the same issues contested. The novel also begins on the water's shore, and it is easy to accept that the traditional symbol of spirituality, water, is still evading and being evaded by, the characters.

Although Robert Smith, the insurance agent, does not succeed in flying, he does succeed in causing Ruth Dead, the daughter of the man No Doctor Street was named after, the soon to be mother of the main character, Milkman, to go into an early labor. She and her dried daughters have been walking to the town's department store to sell the red-velvet rose petals they have laboriously stitched, but she, on seeing Robert Smith wrapped in blue wings, dropped her basket, spewing petals in the snow. Besides these two centers, the winged man, and the pregnant woman, another person appears making the scene triangular. She is Pilate Dead, Ruth's sister-in-law. In contrast to Ruth's stylish brown coat Pilate is wrapped in an old quilt, and in contrast to gathering red-velvet petals, she is singing a mysterious song of actualized flight and return: "'O Sugarman done fly away/ Sugarman done gone/ Sugarman cut across the sky/ Sugarman gone home...'" (p. 5). The surrounding people watch this three-way balance, wondering whether they are viewing a

racial uplift organization or some new form of worship. The narrator cannot help but make fun of them for they are not content to experience this odd scene but feel compelled to shout and move about, adding to the confusion.

The tone of the chapter gains seriousness as Pilate stops her singing and simply moves closer to Ruth, whispering that her child will be born, as it is meant to be, early the following morning. She then continues her ancestrial song of unaborted flight as Robert Smith hangs from the hospital's cupola and the all-white staff begins to make plans to get Ruth admitted to the hospital. Pilate's prophesy, that the child will be born in the morning, proves correct. Ruth's last child, her only son, Macon, later named Milkman because his mother breast-feeds him until he is almost six, is the first black child delivered in the city's hospital. At four years old, the narrator tells us, he will grow disheartened when he learns that people do not fly, but through the influence of his aunt, Pilate, he will grow to believe that spiritual flight is indeed possible if one surrenders to the air, and he will learn the full meaning of his aunt's child-like ancestrial song.

The main focus of the novel becomes Milkman's search for his own name and for a value system that will allow him to fly. Before he can learn to fly, he must travel through a male, upwardly mobile, black, midwestern world filled with meaningless materialism and petty power, a world colored by distrust, betrayal, hatred and fear. On his journey, Pilate will serve as his spiritual role model. In his immediate family, there are no role models. The narrator sums up Milkman's home life: "Macon kept each member of his family awkward with fear. His hatred of his wife glittered and sparked in every word he spoke to her. The disappointment he felt in his daughters sifted down on them like ash, dulling their buttery complexions and choking the lilt out of what should have been girlish voices" (p. 10). Macon is the main force in his household, but even he hates the world he has created, a world ungenerous and unyielding, a world where criticism and command are his most comfortable means of communication. He has kept his house a cold place, chasing his sister Pilate from it. Macon thinks he barred Pilate from his home because she betrayed him after their father's death, but he also dissociates himself from her because she represents a world of poverty that he is trying to disown. But in Macon's deepest loneliness he moves toward her home where, against his will, he enjoys the smell of pine trees and the sensual comfort of laughter. Only in secrecy can he move toward the music, the rhythm, the movement that she represents.

As Pilate attracts her brother, Macon, even against his will, she also attracts his son, Milkman, who in the sixth grade, with the help of his older friend, Guitar, finds his way, against the command of his father, to her door. In spite of the fact that Milkman knows his father will be angry, he experiences his first moment of happiness in his aunt's feminine home. Upon seeing her, Milkman knows that he will not let her go. The narrator describes the unyielding power of his response: "As they came closer and saw the brass box dangling from her ear, Milkman knew that what with the earring, the orange, the angled black cloth, nothing--not the wisdom of his father nor the caution of the world--could keep him from her" (p. 36).

From the beginning of his relationship with Pilate, Milkman intuits that the rumors surrounding her are false. She is not a failure, a pariah, an alcoholic, but rather a strong link to his own struggle for spiritual fulfillment; she is not ugly, but fascinating, and her laughter immediately begins to heal his pain. Pilate understands her feminine strength and his father's subsequent fear of her:

> Milkman was five feet seven then but it was the first time in his life that he remembered being completely happy. He was with his friend, an older boy--wise and kind and fearless. He was sitting comfortably in the notorious wine house; he was surrounded by women who seemed to enjoy

him and who laughed out loud. And he was in love. No wonder his father was afraid of them (p. 47).

The feminine strength of Pilate and her family counteracts other powers working in Milkman, powers such as lust and the desire for gold. The book progresses through Milkman's long, involved education. He must find his own balance, his own name. During his education he betrays his love, Hagar, Pilate's granddaughter, and he betrays Pilate. His relationship with Guitar becomes destructive, finally murderous.

With pain and blood, and with his aunt as role-model, Milkman learns to embrace what is true in himself and to discard the false issues that keep him earth-bound. Slowly Milkman learns to differentiate necessity from perversion and essentials from paraphernalia. He returns South, still searching for what is spiritually true, and he finds the roots of his name and the meaning of his aunt's ancestrial song of flight. But finding spiritual reality does not imply earthly survival. The novel ends with Pilate's physical death and her symbolic resurrection. The earring she has been wearing contains her name and as she dies a bird lifts the earring into the air and disappears. Milkman watches her death and symbolic rebirth and realizes that he, too, is about to embark in what may be his last conflict: Guitar, Pilate's assasin and his spiritual brother, is about to fight him to one of their deaths. But Milkman has gone beyond interest in his earthly survival. He, like Pilate, and like the ancesters he has recently found, are willing to surrender to air in order to ride it. The novel ends with Milkman indifferent to his earthly fate, passionately embracing the spirituality his aunt represented to him.

Pilate is the major symbol of this spirituality that allows one eternal life. It is important to note that the spirituality she represents is also traditionally female. In Western mythology and in the secret writing of the Judeo-Christian religion, the powers associated with women are those of midwife, mother, mistress, warrior-protectress, and spiritual teacher.[2] In Song of Solomon, Pilate balances all these powers. She gives Ruth, Milkman's mother, the necessary potion to make her estranged husband have sexual intercourse with her. She nurtures Ruth after she has been beaten by Macon and prevents her miscarriage. Pilate's own birth is unearthly. She comes into the world dragging her cord and afterbirth: her mother had died a few minutes earlier. When Pilate's cord disintegrates it leaves no sign of a navel, thus underscoring Pilate's unearthliness and the fact that she seems to have given birth to herself. Pilate's ability to nurture also seems almost unearthly. It is her inheritance. Her father, unable to read, chose the name from the Bible because its letters looked like a tree hanging over a row of smaller trees. Her father is attracted to the princely protective aura of the configuration and writes it out, insisting on the name even though people try to dissuade him. After her father's death, when Pilate is twelve, she removes her name from her father's Bible. It is her father's only printed word and it is hers. She places it inside a brass box which she hangs from her ear. In this way she owns her name, her father's wish and her legacy as nurturer. She is a woman who can forgive betrayal. She is also one who can play "Aunt Jemima" if she feels the act will give her the power she needs. And she is a mother who will become huntress if her loved one is threatened. When a man attacks her daughter her earring flashes fire. Pilate approaches the man from the back, whips her right arm around his neck, positions the knife at the edge of his heart and clearly states her plan of action:

'Now, I'm not going to kill you, honey. Don't you worry none. Just be still a minute, the heart's right here, but I'm not going to stick it in any deeper...And if you're real still, honey, I can get it back out without no mistake. But before, I do that, I thought we'd have a little talk' (93).

Pilate is conscious of her power. Her lovers grow afraid when they find she has no navel; she knows that her ancestrial song has truths in it beyond those which she can name and she has the willingness to sing the verses, even when some of the meaning is obscure. Hers is the power of the traditional western goddesses, accepting her limits, able to use both passion and equilibrium. Pilate has the strength to receive without having her receptive powers diminish either her identity or her wholeness. Like her house, she is a woman both shiny and brown, combining spiritual wisdom with the smell of pine trees and fermenting wine, complementing, and at times overpowering, the traditional male forces of ownership and judgment.

Pilate's vision is no less conservative than her brother's; it is only more spiritual: without anger or rebellion she feels comfortable requesting that her brother have a son to carry on her father's name. Song of Solomon is entrenched in the traditional western conflict between materialism and spirituality. It is through Pilate's feminine strength and ultimately Milkman's acceptance of her values that spirituality is embraced and transcendence actuallized.

NOTES

[1]Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon (New York: New American Library, 1977), p. 55. All subsequent references to this edition are internally noted within the text of this essay.

[2]Raphael Patai, The Hebrew Goddess (New York: Avon Books, 1967), p. 178.

Marilyn Judith Atlas
Michigan State University

* * *

SAY IT CLEAN

The novel Huckleberry Finn is the proof that Mark Twain developed a vernacular American prose. The principle as Twain saw it was honesty. Two steps were needed to reach this ideal.

First, Americans had to rid themselves of the past. To Twain this meant rejecting both the formal, polished prose of the eighteenth century and what he considered the swoops and posturings of the Romantics. Jane Austen and Edgar Allan Poe were two of his favorite whipping-persons. Here Twain writes to his longtime friend, and fellow son of the Midwest, William Dean Howells:

> "To me his (Poe's) prose is unreadable--like Jane Austen's. No, there is a difference. I could read his prose on salary, but not Jane's. Jane is entirely impossible. It seems a great pity to me that they allowed her to die a natural death."

(Howells, the spokesman for American realists, always defended Austen. On one occasion during their long, amicable debate Twain was sick in bed. Howells warned him that if he did not stop berating Austen he would come over to read her Pride and Prejudice aloud to to him).

Once rid of the past, Twain said, Americans had to work for honesty in presenting their subject. In fiction, for instance, the characters should be presented in action and speech, not by intrusions from the author. In dialogue, he said, the "stage directions" by the author should advance the action, or at least conform to it. He gave several examples of poor use of stage directions, among them the following:

"...replied Alfred,flipping the ash from his cigar." (This direction explains nothing, Twain said; the reader deduces that the ash-flipping has nothing to do with the story).

"...responded Richard, with a laugh." (This, Twain said, is not justified. That is, the fact that a remark is humorous, ironic, or sarcastic ought to be obvious from its content: the author should not lean on the stage direction to supply attitudes or shadings).

As good use of stage direction, Twain cited examples from a scene in Howells's novel The Undiscovered Country. Among

these were:

"...and she laid her arms with a beseeching gesture on her father's shoulder." (Twain apparently thought this direction gives a bit of physical action desirable in the scene and not easily conveyable by dialogue).

"...she said, laughing nervously." (Acceptable, apparently, if it confirms or emphasizes what the remark has to say, unlike the earlier example in which the author relied on the direction alone).

Honesty in dialogue, as in other elements of the story, would give the fact and action that the realist sought.

It remained for a later Midwestern stylist, Ernest Hemingway, to discipline the stage direction to near zero, at times a stark and staccato dinning of "he said" that tells as much about the characters and their world as the messages the dialogue gives.

Good writers in modes other than the realistic may disregard Twain's principles. They worked for him, and he admired them in Howells' writing. For the observer who wants to set down reasonably impartial presentation of people, places, and events, the prose of Twain and Howells is still a model. It would be provincial to see their practice as only an expression of Midwestern attitudes. It would be stupid to overlook the fact that rejecting the past and working for presentation true to observed fact were for a time goals of special interest to Midwestern writers.

Bernard F. Engel
Michigan State University

* * *

Sherwood Anderson: The Writer at His Craft. Edited by Jack Salzman, David D. Anderson, and Kichinosuke Ohashi. Paul P. Appel 1979

When the work of a major writer has survived the years of limbo following his death, it is inevitable that his less-known writings be sought out and assembled. Such reader interest is proper, for only by examination of his whole work can valid assessment be made, even though it is axiomatic that an author is to be judged by his best.

Sherwood Anderson: The Writer at His Craft is a mixed gathering. Nothing in it will alter the prevailing view of Anderson as a writer. The good pieces will support the attitide of his admirers; the poor will abet the contention of those who assert that, like the girl with the curl, when he was bad he was horrid.

The pieces under the heading of "Introductions and Forewords" and most of those labeled "Tributes and Appraisals" can be dismissed. Anderson wrote off the top of his head in telegraph style when he wished to escape the effort to construct paragraphs. The lack of substance in these pieces is the more conspicuous because he wrote so well when he put his mind to it.

"Living in America" and "The Time and the Towns" assemble pieces that reflect the time of their composition, a time that has passed into history. Even for one who lived it, the concerns of that time, its problems unsolved, have receded in the light of the graver and far more formidable problems of the present. The best of these pieces, "Cotton Mill", reminds one of Melville's "The Tartarus of Maids". (I am not suggesting that Anderson was inspired by Melville.)

The best of the collection appear under the head "Why I Write", and of these "Man and His Imagination" stands out. This long discussion (it should be required reading for aspiring writers) is perhaps as near as Anderson ever came to composing an organized essay that presents and develops an argument. He is inevitably repetitious in his numerous statements on the topic, but "The New Note", "New Orleans, The Double Dealer and the Modern Movement in America", and "The Situation in American Writing" are noteworthy.

Presumably the corpus of Anderson's production is now available for study. I refrain from comment on the novels, for I read them at an impressionable

age and have never been impelled to go back to them--probably for the same reason I have never wished to reread Dreiser: much of the subject matter was too real, too near to my own experience, to allow me repeated pleasure in the reading. I have gone back many times to the stories, and still can read, with a sense of joy and wonder at their perfection, "Death in the Woods", "Brother Death", "I'm a Fool", and "I Want to Know Why." On these stories, those of Winesburg, Ohio, and a few others (everybody may happily choose his favorites), I am convinced, Anderson's reputation must ultimately rest.

William B. Thomas

* * *

David D. Anderson, Woodrow Wilson. Twayne World Leaders Series. Twayne Publishers 1978.

This rapid sketch of Wilson's career takes him from his Southern unbringing to its culmination as the twenty-seventh president of our country. We see him as the earnest student, the academic man, a university president. Then we see the scholar-historian immersed, perhaps inevitably, in practical politics. The governorship of New Jersey was preparatory to his occupying the nation's highest office, and the man and the moment came together amid cataclysmic events.

Professor Anderson puts it all into a lively and engaging summary, which closes with an assessment of Wilson as writer. If I were to change anything in this succinct account, it would be to amplify the narrative of Wilson's struggle with the Congress and the aborting of his effort to make the United States a leader in a community of nations by the senators whom he called "a little group of willful men." Wilson's frustration and failure to achieve his aim was a tragedy of history. But to the electorate he was an "idealist," and with a new presidency and a new decade we were on the way back to "normalcy," complacency, and isolationism.

William B. Thomas

The Durability of Sherwood Anderson

Sherwood Anderson, by Welford Dunaway Taylor, is the latest in a line of critical monographs of Sherwood Anderson's work that began with the pro-con studies by Cleveland B. Chase and Bryllion N. Fagin in 1927 and promises to continue as long as we find new insights into the man and his work or refurbish and recast old. This continuity is further proof, if any be needed, of the durability of the work of this man who came out of the Ohio countryside to redirect the course of American fiction in our time.

Significantly, since critical evaluations of Anderson's work took on national dimensions with Waldo Frank's "Emerging Greatness," a critical review of Windy McPherson's Son in the first issue of The Seven Arts in 1916, while much of that criticism has been favorable and a fair amount has been hostile, particularly between 1929 and Anderson's death in 1941, virtually all has been sympathetic. Furthermore, many writers of fiction, ranging from William Saroyan to Saul Bellow, can say, with the late James T. Farrell, that "Sherwood Anderson influenced and inspired me perhaps more profoundly than any other American writer."

The basis of these observations lies not only in Anderson's substantial body of work but in the fact that his life and his work were so irretrievably one and that for many of us the two dimensions combine to speak more eloquently and more clearly than any other statement, life, or literary canon about the literary life in America in our time. For many of us--writers, critics, biographers, students, and readers--the implication of Anderson's life and work is clear: literature is the means by which we live most fully, speak most eloquently, and love most truly. Anderson's reverence for life, his love for it, and his celebration of it are the means by which we measure our own meaning and accomplishment.

Professor Taylor's study is a reiteration of all the above, a statement that I make not in denigration but in understanding and sympathy. Even as our

perception and understanding of Anderson grow, as they have in the past and will continue to do in the future, they will remain based upon our recognition of the depth of his perception and the breadth of his feeling. Professor Taylor makes this recognition most clear in two chapters with two significant titles: "Re-inventing the American Soul," which discusses Winesburg, Ohio, and "Expressing the Inexpressible," which deals with the best of Anderson's short fiction.

In these chapters, the bulk of the study, Professor Taylor's readings and explications are clear and succinct; in them he measures Anderson's achievement as it must be done for those of a new generation rediscovering and reinterpreting the American experience as it continues to unfold and as individual American lives continue to epitomize the whole. Taylor comments that in Winesburg, Ohio (and by implication in Anderson's other works and, one should add, in his life) "humanity and time converge." Perhaps this statement, the theme of Taylor's study, is the point at which Anderson study must begin and ultimately end.

In his readings of Anderson's works--following an excellent brief biographical introduction--Taylor rightly avoids the sweeping attempts to categorize Anderson's works in the convenient but misleading fashion that has marred so much Anderson criticism. Called a realist, a naturalist, a primitive, a modern, a Freudian, he was none of these, and as literary fashions come and go, the basis of Anderson's durability becomes increasingly clear, as it is in this study. Anderson wrote about people in all their individual complexity, variety, and profundity, and in each work he celebrates the durability of the human spirit, the worth of each individual life, and the search for understanding that gives meaning to existence. In asserting this ultimate significance of Anderson's life and work, Professor Taylor gives new meaning to Anderson's assertion and epitaph that "Life, not death, is the great adventure."

Professor Taylor's study is designed to introduce Anderson and his work to a new generation of students, and I'm sure that it will succeed admirably. But in this study, as in any other, there are shortcomings, in many cases, as in this, restrictions imposed on the work by its dimensions, its editors, or its place in a series. Unfortunately, from my point of view, the study is too brief, too much has been left unsaid, and too many works remain unexamined. Almost no mention is made of Anderson's verse which is being fruitfully examined, nor does Professor Taylor treat Many Marriages, Dark Laughter, Tar, and Beyond Desire, novels that deserve better than obscurity. A Story Teller's Story, Sherwood Anderson's Notebook, and Hello Towns are profound, often moving examinations of Anderson's experience and our own, and no student of literature and life can afford to ignore them.

Professor Taylor succeeds admirably in providing a brief introduction to Anderson and his works, but it is incomplete. Fortunately, however, he gives us glimpses of a much greater insight that lies beyond. I hope he puts it on paper.

David D. Anderson
Michigan State University

* * *

Am. Lit. in Poland, cont. from page 4

American connections with Poland have a long tradition ranging from Polish involvement in the American Revolution, to Polish immigration to America, to American concern for Polish nationhood and independence after WW I (the thirteenth of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points), to a reverse migration with Polish-Americans rediscovering their roots by visiting Poland. The articles in this issue show how the favorable reception of American literature in Poland after the 1950's reflects the steady improvement of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Those who seek an excellent discussion of the reception of Polish literature in America should consult Jerzy (George) J. Maciuszko's "Polish Letters in America" in Poles in America: Bicentennial Essays, ed. Frank Mocha (1978).

(over)

Copies of this special issue of The American Examiner can be obtained by writing to the Editor, Douglas A. Noverr, Department of American Thought and Language, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824. Cost of the issue is $2.50, which includes postage.

Douglas A. Noverr
Michigan State University