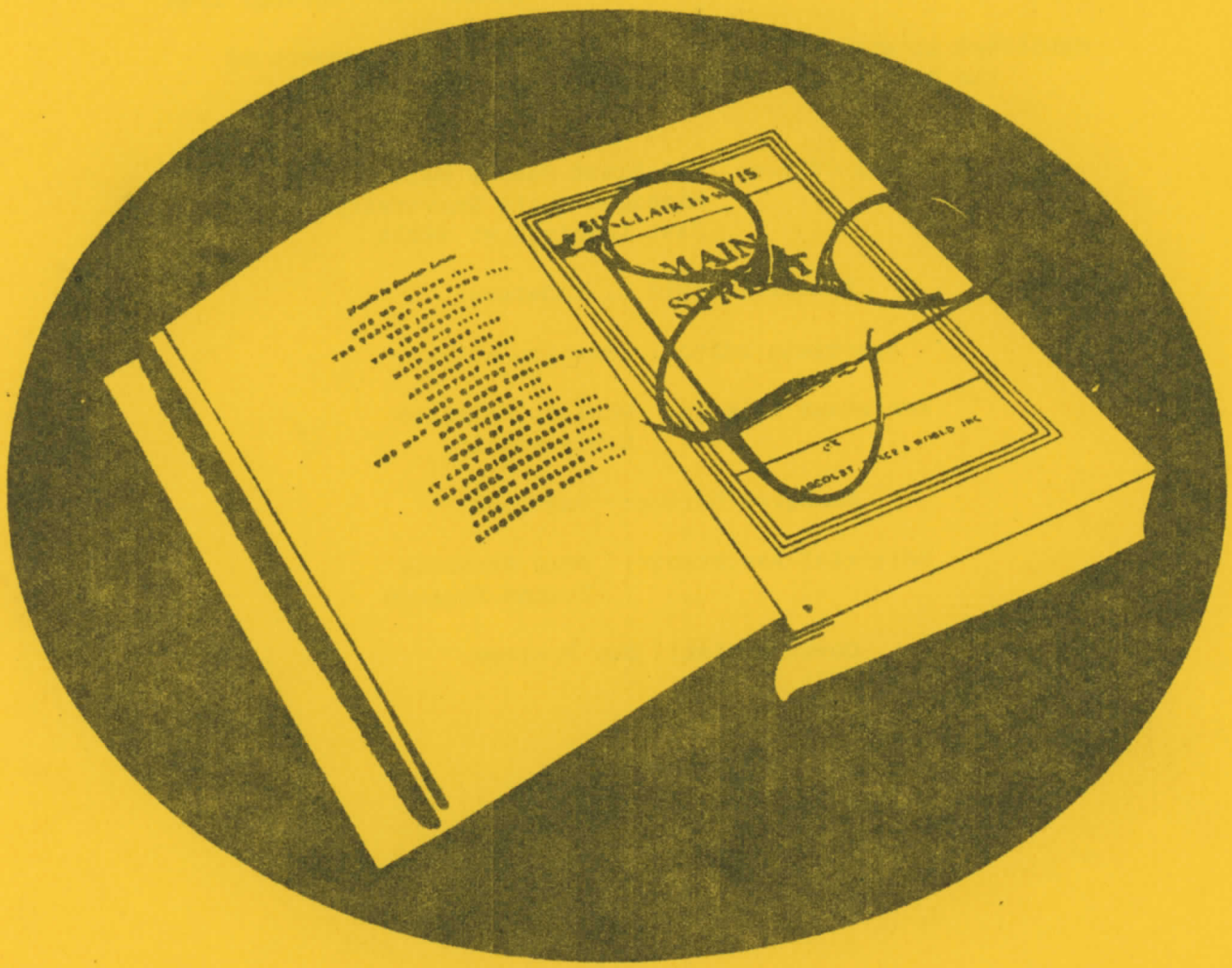
SML Newsletter



The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

The Center for the Study of
Midwestern Literature and Culture

Founded 1971

Volume Ten
Number One

Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Newsletter

Volume Ten Number One, Spring, 1980

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

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

Published in Spring, Summer, and Fall.

Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

Newsletter

Volume Ten, Number One Spring, 1980

Contents

Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Officers 1980-81

President: Paul J. Ferlazzo
Michigan State University

Vice President: Sister Martha Curry
Barat College

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

Executive Council

Expires 1983: Ronald Primeau
Central Michigan University

Alma J. Payne
Bowling Green State University

Expires 1982: Nancy Pogel
Michigan State University

Bernard Engel
Michigan State University

Expires 1981: John Flanagan
University of Illinois

Jane Bakerman
Indiana State University

Bibliographers: Donald Pady
Iowa State University

Robert Beasecker
Grand Valley State College

"Sherwood Anderson's 'Adventure': an Appreciation"

Keith Carabine

Perhaps the most curious feature of criticism on Sherwood Anderson is that though he is invariably acknowledged to be a much finer short story writer than he is a novelist, the canon of acknowledged masterpieces in the shorter form remains a small one. Several reasons for this strange situation can be identified. 1) A generation ago Irving Howe recognized "I Want to Know Why," "I'm a Fool," "The Man Who Became a Woman," and "The Egg" to be "a superior coherent group" because they "are similar in having as their structural base in oral narration, as their tone in a slightly bewildered tenderness and as their subject matter elemental crises in the lives of simple townspeople."[1] 2) Because the scores of commentaries on Anderson's finest book, Winesburg, Ohio, tend to concentrate on such general features as shape, point of view, mood, the "grotesque", epiphanies, the absence of direct speech, on George Willard's development and its protonovelistic structure, rather than on individual stories, only "Hands" and "The Untold Lie" have been definitively established as masterpieces.[2] 3) Recent critics, especially, have been anxious to establish, in D. D. Anderson's words, that "Anderson is not a one-magnificent-book writer" and they have thus tried to show that Anderson's journalism, autobiographies and novels are "perceptive documents that are, in style and structure as well as in insight, worthy successors to Winesburg, Ohio."[3] I am not convinced that D. D. Anderson or the volume he has edited demonstrates his case, but one result of his and his peers' worthy concerns in that Winesburg, Ohio has been taken for granted as a masterpiece and no single story has been subjected to "the most penetrating critical analysis," which D. D. Anderson claims to discern in commentaries on Anderson's "work" in general.[4]

I want in this essay to try and capture the peculiar power

of Anderson's voice and vision in one story from Winesburg, Ohio, namely "Adventure", which has received virtually no critical attention. I hope to persuade readers that "Adventure" merits inclusion in the small canon of Anderson's best work.

The title itself--"Adventure"--is pure Anderson and in it can be detected a note of defiance against stories of "cowboys or daring wild game hunters." He was proud of the fact that "none of the people in the tales got lost in burning deserts or went seeking the North Pole." His concern was rather "the simple little . . . happenings . . . among my own people . . . in my own street . . . common everyday American lives."[5] Such happenings he insists are "adventures". The story begins:[6]

> Alice Hindman, a woman of twenty-seven when George Willard was a mere boy, had lived in Winesburg all her life. She clerked in Winney's Dry Goods Store and lived with her mother, who had married a second husband. (112)

This is a stock note of Winesburg, Ohio--a flat relation of those public facts which the chronicler draws from the common fund of knowledge he shares with Winesburg. But from these prosaic details a sense of a life pattern is suggested. Alice is a spinster, whereas her mother has been married twice, and her clerking job in a Dry Goods Store, in a town where "she had lived all her life," sounds an ominous note of withering tedium.

The description of her physical features which follows deepens the opening notes with the lurking suggestion that the story of her life in Winesburg has already been told:

> At twenty-seven Alice was tall and somewhat slight. Her head was large and overshadowed her body. Her shoulders were a little stooped and her hair and eyes brown. She was very quiet...

At this point Anderson pivots, "but beneath a placed exterior a continual ferment went on." Henceforward the chronicler is moving

towards a fund of knowledge he shares with no one, namely those details of the buried self which are ever his subject. Alice once, we learn:

> before she began to work in the store, . . . had an affair with a young man . . . named Ned Currie, [who] was older than Alice . . . and for a long time he went to see Alice almost every evening. Together the two walked under the trees through the streets in town and talked of what they would do with their lives. Alice was then a very pretty girl and Ned Currie took her into his arms and kissed her. He became excited and said things he did not intend to say and Alice, betrayed by her desire to have something beautiful come into her rather narrow life, also grew excited. She also talked. The outer crust of her life, all of her natural diffidence and reserve, was torn away and she gave herself over to the emotions of love. (112-113)

All readers have a sense that Winesburg, Ohio, for all its faults, has a strange power. I think it lies in the voice--simple, obstinately matter-of-fact, repetitive, which creates through the measured yet tense sentences a claustrophic atmosphere, as if the young couple are moving in a padded cave. They are said to walk but we do not hear them. They are said to talk but they do not speak. There is no explanation for the course they take beyond the most basic generalization. Alice is sixteen, Ned older; Ned gets excited: "Ned said things he did not intend to say and Alice, betrayed by her desire to have something beautiful come into her life, also grew excited": . . . "and" . . . "also" . . . . The sequence is inevitable and we feel there is no escape, no alternative.

She offers to go with him to Cleveland and live with him. He is "deeply touched" by her abandon and decides not to make her his mistress. "He wanted to protect and care for her."

On the evening before he left Winesburg to take up

his new life in the city, Ned Currie went to call on Alice. They . . . went for a drive in the country. The moon came up and they found themselves unable to talk. In his sadness the young man forgot the resolutions he had made regarding his conduct with the girl.

They got out of the buggy at a place where a long meadow ran down to the bank of Wine creek and there in the dim light became lovers. When at midnight they returned to town they were both glad. It did not seem then that anything that could happen in the future could blot out the wonder and the beauty of the thing that had happened. (113)

Ned goes to Chicago:

For a time he was lonely and wrote to Alice almost every day. Then he was caught up by the life of the city; . . . he boarded at a house where there were several women. One of them attracted his attention and he forgot Alice in Winesburg. (114)

There is no moral judgement and a disdain for the investigation of motive that one associates with a ballad or with a story from the Old Testament. I am reminded of Amnon who yearns for his half-sister Tamar, and finally forces her to sleep with him: but "then Amnon said unto her, 'Arise be gone'."[7] In the simple declarative statement lies a complex psychological explanation, yet we do not need it. Similarly "for a time he was lonely and wrote to Alice almost every day. Then he was caught up in the life of the city. . . there were several women . . . and he forgot Alice in Winesburg." No more seems to be needed. Ned is "caught up in the life of the city," Alice "is alone in Winesburg," where as we know from the first sentence she has spent "all her life." Only Anderson could write "In his sadness the young man <u>forgot</u> his resolution" with no "edge" to it at all. The moon is full. It is his last evening in Winesburg. Alice is in love with him. He forgot

his resolutions. Nothing else.

Our moral judgements are pre-empted because Alice and Ned, like almost all the figures in Winesburg, cannot express themselves and never think about what they are doing or have any sense of consequences. None of them know what is happening to them; so they cannot be held responsible for their actions. They feel strongly and incoherently, but they do not understand their actions. I think it is because Alice's efforts to avoid her loneliness do not essentially involve a conflict of values which would involve an incorporation into the prose of another language--whether institutional or moral or social--that the beat of the prose is so steady, even and eerie. Thought when it occurs expresses, rather than directs Alice's feeling, and provides a stifled resistance, which may thicken but does not cut across the basic beat of the prose.

Ned Currie may have forgotten Alice in Winesburg, but the chronicler proceeds throughout the last two-thirds of this 3000 word story to chart the life pattern of "the girl who had been loved" and "grew to be a woman." (114)

> Alice worked in the dry goods store from eight in the morning until six at night and on three evenings a week went back to the store to stay from seven until nine. As time passed and she became more and more lonely she began to practice the devices common to lonely people. (115)

Once again the deliberate literalness, the dry factuality of both sentences is very disturbing. The depiction of "the devices common to lonely people" is the subject Anderson is <u>always</u> truest on, whether it is Hugh McVey in <u>Poor White</u> weaving baskets alone in the telegraph office; or Wing picking up the crumbs of his bread and honey sandwich off the floor; or as here Alice talking to her long-lost love in her prayers, or going to the woods which lovers use, and sitting down alone:

> Fear of age and ineffectuality took possession of her. She could not sit still, and arose. As she stood

looking out over the land something, perhaps the thought of never ceasing life as it expresses itself in the flow of the seasons, fixed her mind on the passing years. With a shiver of dread, she realized that for her the beauty and freshness of youth had passed. For the first time she felt that she had been cheated. She did not blame Ned Currie and did not know what to blame. Sadness swept over her. Dropping to her knees, she tried to pray, but instead of prayers words of protest came to her lips. "It is not going to come to me. I will neve find happiness. Why do I tell myself lies?" she cried . . . (116-117)

"Something, perhaps" is the one phrase I would certainly use if like his literary successors, Hemingway and Faulkner, I wanted to write a parody of Anderson exposing his vagueness: yet here there is a tentativeness, an aloofness, an awkwardness that is indicative of the tender bafflement of the chronicler before the mystery of human loneliness, which is deepened rather that clarified by the simple, measured statements I noted above, because between the tread of the sentences--as between the verses of the Old Testament stories--a series of muffled notes resound, which remind us that their lives are darker and deeper that they seem. "She did not blame Ned Currie and did not know what to blame."

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of his "voice" is that although the chronicler allows us (seemingly) only an outside view of the "buried life"--there is no interior analysis in Winesburg, Ohio--there is though a curious "innerness" in the powerful sympathy that informs this outside view, which affords such a seeming banality as "Sadness swept over her"--a phrase Anderson used till the end of his days--a vibrancy and a charge of "truth"; we feel sadness is more to do with the character's own perplexity in discovering herself alone in the woods at night, and more to do with the chronicler's involvement, than it is with her love for Ned. Sadness sweeps over author, character, and reader.

Again curiously the matter-of-fact narration of the following paragraph does not break this mood. Only Anderson could state flatly that Alice joined the Winesburg Methodist Church "and went resolutely about the business of becoming acquainted with people" and, rather than invite our derision at the result of this decision, fill us with admiration for the effort that lies behind this temporary robustness of spirit in an irresolute lonely spinster.

But "Will Hurley, a middle-aged man who clerked in a drug store, and who also belonged to the church" (what implications Anderson's literal repetitions have!) does not replace Ned Currie in her affections, and indeed Ned Currie himself has begun to fade, when one rainy evening she returns to find the house empty:

> Alice went upstairs to her room and undressed in the darkness. For a moment she stood by the window hearing the rain beat against the glass and then a strange desire took posession of her. Without stopping to think of what she intended to do, she ran downstairs through the dark house and out into the rain . . . a mad desire to run naked through the streets took possession of her.
>
> She thought that the rain would have some creative and wonderful effect on her body. Not for years had she felt so full of youth and courage. She wanted to leap and run, to cry out, to find some other lonely human and embrace him. On the brick sidewalk before the house a man stumbled homeward. Alice started to run. A wild, desperate mood took possession of her. "What do I care who it is. He is alone, and I will go to him." she thought; and then without stopping to consider the possible result of her madness, called softly. "Wait!" she cried. "Don't go away. Whoever you are, you must wait."
>
> The man on the sidewalk stopped and stood listening. . . she did not dare to get to her feet, but crawled on hands and knees through the grass to the house. When she got

> to her own room she bolted the door and drew her dressing table across the doorway. . . . When she got into bed she buried her face in the pillow and wept brokenheartedly. "What is the matter with me? I will do something dreadful if I am not careful," she thought, and turning her face to the wall, began trying to force herself to face bravely the fact that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg. (119-120)

The darkness is the natural milieu of the grotesques, and we only need to know of life and movement outside her room--"the rain beat against the glass"--to feel her claustrophobia. Alice thinks but her thoughts have the illogicality of the entranced, and rather than control her feelings they direct them, rather than feed into them, express them: "She thought the rain would have some creative . . . effect on her body."

Alice's plight reminds us yet again of the huge discrepancy between intention and achievement so typical of the grotesques, for whom action--the antithesis of their lonely dreams--is always abortive. Such a discrepancy is depicted in "The Book of the Grotesque" where people turn into grotesques, snatching up a truth and left clutching a falsehood: a view that would seem inherently ironic. Indeed Dale Kramer has surmised that "The Book of the Grotesque" demanded a gift of irony beyond Anderson's capability.[8] Waldo Frank in contrast thinks that in Winesburg, Ohio, only the author's irony is "hard-edged" pointing "to his spiritual transcendence over his subject."[9] Both judgements I think are misguided and irrelevant in relation to "Adventure".

The remarkable feature of the close of this story is that the mood or focus is not altered; Anderson has not worked for an ironic response. In deference to Waldo Frank I cannot think--and this is one measure of Anderson's achievement--of any writer I have ever read who could resist adopting, at such key moments in his story, an ironic tone either to deflate or achieve "transcendence over his subjects." The ending of "Adventure" is worthy of Chekhov, but

we are not asked to admire the ironic balance Chekhov maintains as he explores the gulf between his characters' thoughts and their actions. Consider for example Mrs. Lubyantsev at the close of "Misfortune" going to meet the waiting admirer she has erstwhile so strongly resisted:[10]

> "You slut!" she murmured mechanically. "You vile creature!" She was gasping for breath, she was burning with shame, she did not feel her feet under her, but the thing which pushed her forward was stronger than her shame, her reason, her fear . . .

Nor do we feel the ending of "Adventure" to be a coup de grace as in a Maupassant story, or the final twist as in an O. Henry. We do not say as Thomas Hardy might have us react--"one of life's little ironies--grim--but little." "What else would you expect?" Anderson seems to ask. From the opening words when we learn she is a spinster of twenty-seven who has lived all her life in Winesburg till the last words of the story--"the fact that many people live and die alone in Winesburg"--the end has been in sight.

Anderson does not work for an ironic response to Alice because he so utterly reverences her dilemma. Alice is aware she has escaped "something dreadful" and Anderson as chronicler shares the fear and loneliness of a woman too self-involved to be aware of incipient ironies, as he himself is too involved to work neat patterns around her fate. Indeed it is no exaggeration to claim that he does not so much <u>resist</u> the temptation to treat his materials ironically (even when they seem ironic!), as that, he is so passionately simple and serious in his treatment of the grotesques, that irony is impossible. To be ironic is in some measure to be detached and conscious, and is the polar opposite of his stance of suffering with his characters, and would call into question the very nature of his relationship to them. Irony would be blasphemous, and would betray Anderson's role as priestly celebrant of "the sweetness of the twisted apples" ("Paper Pills") which the Winesburg pickers, to their cost, ignore.[11]

The ending is not ironic. Something like this had to happen. Winesburg like the old man is deaf to human suffering. The only words we see Alice addressing to another human being (apart from thinking aloud to herself) after Ned has left, are addressed to the old deaf man at the close of the story. People talk only to themselves, not to each other in Winesburg. Nothing it seems is allowed into the story to sound a different pitch.[12]

As Anderson describes "the devices common to lonely people" his stories remind one of the matter-of-fact terribleness of the agony column letters, or of those letters to newspapers advising fellow readers who feel lonely to keep budgerigars in the cage to have something to talk to. The problem in rendering these lives, as Nathanael West was to discover, is that the pain, so simply recorded, renders the agony strangely surreal. We have to laugh for release, to distance ourselves from the pain. It is a measure of Anderson's achievement in his best work that the moments of intense loneliness in his characters' experience--as here when Alice runs naked into the rain and tries to accost the deaf old man--are felt to be unextraordinary, the predictable manifestations which reaffirm their humanity at the very instance they reveal their "grotesqueness." Furthermore, Anderson at his best, skirts the danger of patronizing his characters because sympathy has watered down into sentimentality, which is Steinbeck's main weakness. Anderson does not want us to laugh and weep at the problems of simpler, less complicated, freer because less civilized people, of a Tortilla Flats. Anderson records Alice's life of quiet desperation with great tact. He never betrays her by suggesting there is a more viable lifestyle open to her. And because he suffers with her without becoming maudlin, sentimental or melodramatic, he ensures that the unforced, haunting and melancholic prose liberates and encompasses the reader's compassion.

Keynes College
University of Kent
Canterbury

Notes

[1]Sherwood Anderson, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1951, p. 147.

[2]Incidentally "The Untold Lie" when it was first published in Seven Arts I (January 1917), pp. 15-21, was told in the first person, and would thus fit into Howe's category.

[3]Sherwood Anderson: Dimensions of His Literary Art, ed. D. D. Anderson, Michigan State University Press, 1976, pp. xii, xiii.

[4]Ibid., p. xi.

[5]Letters of Sherwood Anderson, ed. Howard Mumford Jones in association with Walter P. Rideout, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1953, p. 403.

[6]All page references are to Malcolm Cowley's readily available edition of Winesburg, Ohio, New York: The Viking Press, 1960.

[7]II Samuel 13, v. 15 A.V. Given Anderson's attachment to what he called "these marvellous stories of the Older Testaments" (A Story Teller's Story, Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1968, p. 240) such a comparison is inevitable. Biblical rhythms and vocabulary abound in Anderson's prose: as for example in "Adventure", "Fear of age and ineffectuality took possession of her. She could not sit still, and arose."

[8]Chicago Renaissance, New York: Appleton-Century, 1966, p. 294.

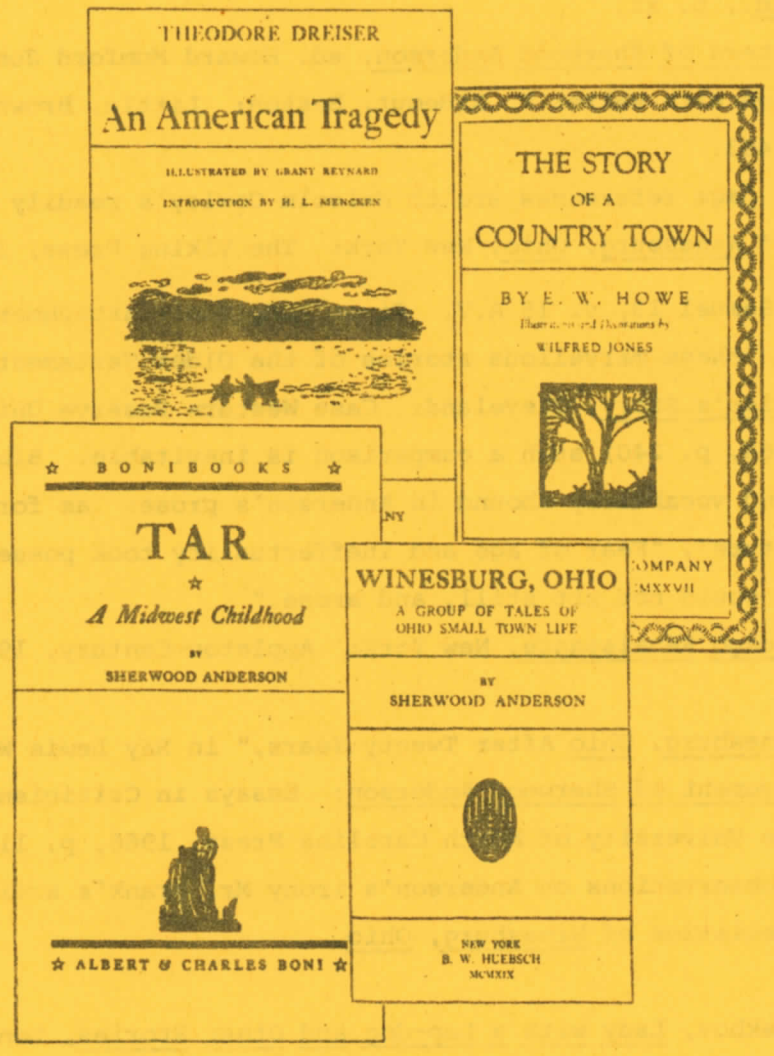
[9]"Winesburg, Ohio After Twenty Years," in Ray Lewis White, ed., The Achievement of Sherwood Anderson: Essays in Criticism, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966, p. 119. Apart from his observations on Anderson's irony Mr. Frank's article is a fine appreciation of Winesburg, Ohio.

[10]Chekhov, Lady with a Lap-dog and Other Stories, London: Penguin Books, 1964, p. 45.

Notes, cont.

[11]Incidentally, I am not arguing that all the stories of Winesburg, Ohio lack irony. The stories which concentrate mainly on George Willard such as "An Awakening" and "Sophistication" are ironic at his expense.

[12]This is the main point of John J. Mahoney's fine article, "An Analysis of Winesburg, Ohio," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 15 (December 1956), pp. 245-252.



Lo, the Lowly Indian

Bernard F. Engel

Being unwilling--even unable--to perceive limits on achievement, the Midwestern poet of the nineteenth century rejected the past as part of a hated otherness, a sphere identified with monarchy and absolutism in government, priestcraft and idolatry in religion, and suggestions that ethics and morality might be given thought by the empire builder that he identified as the true American. (Not Huck Finn, who lit out, but Tom Sawyer, who stayed "home"--that is, in society where he might grow up to wheel, deal, and genteelly steal--was the model).

A part of the otherness was the Indian. Lacking the economic worth of the slave, and the domestic, romantic, and sexual worth of the female, the Indian was an outcast. His diverse tribal cultures broken down, his fellows "removed" beyond the Mississippi if not killed by disease or indifference or sportive musketry, the observable Indian of the Great Lakes area was by 1820 a wretched survivor, the remnant of a "savage" species doomed to extinction by the God-destined advance of "Anglo-Saxon" civilization.

He was neither significant enough to be scorned nor deserving enough to be pitied. That his avidity for trinkets and technology contributed to his downfall was little recognized, perhaps because to perceive it would require granting him a tatter or two of humanity.

The Indian therefore became only an emblem of the outworn, a stock figure with little more human worth than the owl and the yew tree that accompanied graveyard verse. Few poets saw the Indian as a representative of a separate culture; few saw him as a human being in his own right; none saw him as a participant in the American destiny that was manifestly to come.

Though the past was accorded neither philosophical nor workaday importance, it could of course in one's idle hours be exploited to arouse feelings of nostalgia and pathos. Midwestern poets wrote lyrics, meditations, sonnets, and even would be epics about "the Indian." But always they identified him with the disappearing past. His fate could be recognized, but no one saw it as a cause for remorse. One of the discards in the game where only winning counts, the Indian was ignored or, if noticed, was more to be censured than pitied.

Poems dealing with the mounds that still lie thick in stretches of Midwestern countryside represented this view. The poets accepted the prevalent theory that the mounds had been built not by the ancestors of the Indians but by members of an earlier, superior race that had disappeared, perhaps having been driven out or killed off by "savage" redmen.

Hypotheses about the identity of the builders stirred creativity not surpassed by our own era's authorities on diet, UFOs, and the administration of academic departments. The builders were one of the Ten Lost Tribes, or Aztecs in training for their later efforts in Tenochtitlan, or errant Greeks, or Persians, or Romans, Danes, or Hindus--anyone but the sorry ancestors of these even sorrier shanty-dwelling, rum-besotted, nickel-begging rejectors of Sunday School and the fourteen hour day, the visible Midwestern Indian.

These notions may have had their origin in the observation that contemporary Indians did not build mounds. But this fact often enough reinforced the idea that the Indian was not capable of sophisticated cultural enterprise. (Only in the twentieth century would the majority of anthropologists come to the view that mounds were erected not by a mysterious race of unknown origin but by the ancestors of those Indians who inhabited the Midwest when the whites arrived).

The old belief shows in Bryant's "The Prairies." Asking if the prairies had a human past, the speaker says that "the mighty

mounds" give the reply: "A race, that long has passed away" had built them; a "disciplined and populous race" that "Heaped, with long toil, the earth" at the time that the Greeks were still laboring on the Parthenon.

"Here," Bryant continues--giving the mound builders an as yet unrivalled expertise in animal husbandry--"by their stalls the bison lowed." Here lovers walked and forgotten musical instruments "Gave the soft winds a voice." But into this idyllic scene "The red-man came." With the appearance of his "roaming hunter-tribes, warlike and fierce," the mound builders vanished.

William D. Gallagher, an Ohio poet, similarly observes in his poem "Miami Woods" that "the builders of the tumuli . . . disappeared, and to the conquering hordes / Left these, the dim traditions of their race." For Gallagher, knowledge of the mound builders is "shrouded in the gloom / Of dark, impenetrable shades."

Another Ohio writer, Charles A. Jones, in "The Old Mound" indulges in pleasantly sad speculations on the structure (levelled in 1841) that gave its name to Mound Street in Cincinnati. Assuming that the mound was built as a tomb (some were: others seem to have been foundations for temples, or parts of fortifications), Jones' speaker remarks of its "tenants" that "Their names are forgot, their memories unrenown'd."

A man of sentiment, the speaker, reflects on the bustle of the city ("Temples and mansions," he calls it, in the grandiose way of the time) that surrounds the mound. Conventionally, he recognizes that "the labor that the coffer fills" will mar the "bloom" of nature, and, milking the situation for further pathos, observes: "And, sole memorial of a nation's doom, / Amid the works of art rises this lonely tomb."

The pathos is equally strong in "The Mississippi," a poem by Sarah T. Bolton, an Indiana poet more profluent but no more profound. Her speaker suggests that the river could tell "of the race that found thee," of "Those who build their mounded cities" but left only "mysterious foot-prints." "Alas!," the speaker

cries; the mound builders left "no trace nor token / Of their feelings, thoughts nor language," nor of "the human forms they wore."

In such poems, the notion that the builders were long gone, never to be known, combined with the Romantic desire to give America a past more tangible than the merely geological and an ancestry at least somewhat comparable to that of Europe. In the mounds, that is, America had ruins: those much contemplated and sentimentalized remnants, incomplete and therefore suggestive of unending possibility, that were a desideratum for neoclassic and Romantic Europeans.

With the discovery of ruins came, of course, echoes of the theme of mutability. After a passage on the horrors of the European conquest of the Indians, Bryant turns not to moral condemnation but to identification of this fate as God's intention: "Thus change the forms of being. Thus arise / Races of living things . . . and perish, as the quickening breath of God / Fills them, or is withdrawn." This thought enables him to take calmly the lot of the disappearing Indian: "The red-man, too, / Has left the blooming wilds . . ."

Most poets of the time saw the demise of Indian cultures as an inexorable result of "Anglo-Saxon" superiority. The concept of mutability reinforced this notion that destiny, rather than white misdoings, was the source of the Indian's doom.

It is no wonder, then, that in the best known of all poems on Midwestern Indians, "The Song of Hiawatha," Longfellow could present without tears or protest or even pathos his hero's swift and willing disappearance once the Blackrobe appeared. God intended the superior race to replace the inferior. To protest would be useless, even sacrilegious.

Not quite all poets blandly accepted doom as the fate of the Indian. Frederick William Thomas, of Ohio, in "The Indian" not only granted the redman dignity but also carried on the literary European tradition that he could teach civilization's products a lesson ("To tell the simple truth, and do the promised deed.").

And Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, of Michigan, in "The Rise of the West" at least envisioned the Indian as having a happiness suited to his simple mind in a home on the farthest prairies, remote from the glorious empire that "Anglo-Saxons" were to develop in the Mississippi valley.

Nearly all poets preferred to work the Indian's situation for pathos, demonstrating that sentimentality indeed obscures rather than clarifies the events that it ideals with. Their notions were pleasant indulgences of nostalgic feeling, not urgings to reconsider the status and role of the Indian.

The Indian was an outsider whose ultimate disappearance was necessary and proper in the land where then has no connection with now, where a later spokesman would declare that history is bunk. The Indian would do to ornament a museum case, provided it was at the far end of the dustiest corridor. His fate could be exploited to raise the fond tear of sentimentalism. But he was understood to have no role in the ongoing life of the region.

Michigan State University

Sherwood Anderson and The Seven Arts

David D. Anderson

While the nation marched inexorably through preparedness toward war in the spring and summer of 1916 three young men spent their waking hours in a flat in Washington Square in New York's Greenwich Village plotting revolution and a new order. The three young men--James Oppenheim, published novelist, the oldest at thirty-five, Waldo Frank, Yale B.A., M.A., and Phi Beta Kappa, twenty-seven, and Paul Rosenfeld, Yale B.A. and Phi Beta Kappa, twenty-six--had, as Oppenheim later recalled, begun their plotting and planning as a reaction to what they felt was the temper of the times:

> We were in a deploring mood, as who shouldn't be in 1916? Europe was cutting her own throat with new mechanical devices, and this land was fat with loot and down with fatty degeneracy of the heart and a sleazy spirit. All of us had lived through the cigar-store Indian period, wooden and dead, when nice people went in for "social work," when Howells was dean of American letters, and when stiff white collars held your chin up.

While Oppenheim and his cohorts were plotting revolution in New York a somewhat older man sat at an advertising copy desk in Chicago plotting escape, an escape into the kind of life already--from his point of view--enjoyed by the New York revolutionaries: a life of letters, of culture, of intellectual excitement, of the stimulation that he had once thought possible in Chicago as the result of his first attempted escape from business three years earlier. That earlier escape had already become somewhat legendary in the Chicago artistic group, rapidly becoming old hat, to which he belonged, and he knew again that his own artistic survival and integrity demanded flight.

That older man was Sherwood Anderson, almost forty, one-time factory worker, Spanish-American War corporal, advertising man, and

president-owner of a paint factory, a former devoted husband and father of three then newly-married to a liberated young musician-dancer-sculptor. But Anderson's credentials included more than a drive for culture and the literary life: he was a promising author, with a short story published in Harpers, another in the Masses, seven essays and stories in Margaret Anderson's Little Review, and a novel scheduled for fall publication, by a major English-American publishing house. But he was still, he wrote later, "spending his days writing advertisements for somebody's canned tomatoes."

While Anderson plotted escape, the planning of the three revolutionists began to take on a form that was perhaps predictable: their revolution and new order would be artistic:

> Well, Waldo, Paul and I were wild enough to believe that the artists and critics could dominate America. But how? I shyly dragged out my dream of the magazine. Ecstasy! All we needed was money--something like $50,000. Since the three of us were unburdened, and since Croesus, and mad Ludwig of Bavaria were dead, it looked as if we had drawn a blank.

Although Anderson would have settled for considerably less than $50,000--in fact, there is some doubt about that figure as the total of his lifetime literary earnings--Oppenheim had little trouble: Mrs. Annette K. Rankin, a neurotic collector of James Whistler's paintings then undergoing psychiatric treatment, was persuaded to sell her collection and provide the necessary money. With a secure financial basis for the project, the plotters sent out an initial circular sounding the call to arms:

> It is our faith and the faith of many that we are living in the first days of a renascent period, a time which means for America the coming of that national self-consciousness which is the beginning of greatness. In all such epochs the arts cease to be private matters; they become not only the expression of the national life

but a means to its enhancement.

Our arts show signs of this change. It is the aim of the Seven Arts to become a channel for the flow of these new tendencies: an expression of our American arts that shall be fundamentally an expression of our American life.

We have no tradition to continue; we have no school of style to build up. What we ask of the writer is simply self-expression without regard to current magazine standards. We should prefer that portion of his work which is done through a joyous necessity of the writer himself.

The Seven Arts will publish stories, short plays, poems, essays, and brief editorials. Such arts as cannot be directly set forth in a magazine will receive expression through critical writing, which, it is hoped, will be no less creative than the fiction and poetry.

In short, the Seven Arts is not a magazine for artists, but an expression of artists for the community.

The time seemed appropriate for such a journal. Its only competitor among intellectuals and artists was the Masses, the magazine that, speaking from Greenwich Village, served as the conscience as well as the voice of the American radical intellectual community. The Masses, edited by Max Eastman, was dedicated to social change, but The Seven Arts was to demand an artistic revolution; while the Masses championed political and economical upheaval, The Seven Arts would seek a new lyrical voice for the nation. The Seven Arts, its editors determined, would provide artistic expression for the new order that their colleagues on the Masses proclaimed from their masthead. Thus, they envisioned a two-dimensional assault on the critical and aesthetic conscience of the nation: socio-economic through the Masses and aesthetic through The Seven Arts.

Consequently, to match the manifesto-broadside-circular in impressiveness, Oppenheim recruited a seven-person Advisory Board which never sat but which occupied a prominent position on the

masthead, together with Oppenheim's designation as editor, Waldo as associate editor, and Rosenfeld as music editor. The board included VanWyck Brooks (soon to become an associated editor, providing, Oppenheim later commented, Anglo-Saxon distinction to the masthead), Louis Untermeyer, who became poetry editor, Kahlil Gilbran, Robert Frost, Edna Kenton, David Manners, and Robert Edmond Jones. In the spring of 1917 the staff was joined by Randolph Bourne, who for all practical purposes was to become war editor for the duration of the war and the magazine's existence.

The initial result of the announcement, Oppenheim recalled, was "a shower of manuscripts that stunned us." Among them was a sheaf of copy paper from a Chicago advertising man who sent it in response to a query from Frank, who had heard about a Chicago businessman-writer whose first novel was to appear shortly. The sheaf of copy was the manuscript of "The Untold Lie," the first of many that Anderson was to send off to the Seven Arts. It was followed quickly by "Queer," by poems, by other stories, more often than not accompanied by letters to Frank.

More immediately important to Anderson, however, was the review of Windy McPherson's Son which Frank wrote for the first issue of the journal in November 1916. Its title was "Emerging Greatness." Largely the tribute of one man whose first novel was to appear shortly to another new novelist--Frank's The Unwelcome Man was to be published in January, 1917--the review defined the new literature as Anderson and Frank were writing it and as the Seven Arts sought to become its voice:

> This much is sure, however--and true particularly of the novel--that our artists have been of two extremes: those who have gained an almost unbelievable purity of expression by the very violence of their self-isolation, and those who, plunging into the American maelstrom, were submerged in it, lost their vision altogether, and gave forth a gross chronicle and a blind cult of the American fact. The significance of

> Sherwood Anderson, whose first novel, Windy McPherson's Son, has recently appeared, is simply that he has escaped those two extremes, that he suggests at last a presentation of life shot through with the searching color of truth, which is a signal for a native culture.

Although Frank compared Anderson favorably with Dreiser, with Mark Twain, and with Dostoevsky, he pointed to the novel's flawed ending, an ending that Anderson was later to revise, with no greater success, in the 1922 edition. Aware of that problem, which was to continue to plague him in every novel he was to write in the future and that critics still delight in pointing out, Anderson responded gratefully to the review. It was one of the few that, as Anderson saw it, defined what he was trying to do as well as the only one that promised entry to a greater world beyond the copy desk and the Chicago literary world. His subdued response to Frank's review was humbly grateful:

> Dear Mr. Frank:
>
> I cannot resist the desire to write to you at once and thank you for your intelligent discussion of my book in the initial issue of the Seven Arts.
>
> I like particularly your slap at my ending of the novel. What you say is no doubt true. In secret I do not mind telling you that I never knew how to end a novel and am afraid I never will. Always feel as though I were just at the beginning when the thing has to be wound up and put aside....
>
> Come to see me, Mr. Frank, if any wind blows you toward Chicago.

As important as was this initial recognition in the first issue of the magazine to Anderson's career, it was more important to him as an artist. He had read the first issue carefully, recognizing Romain Rolland's advice to American writers as expressing what he tried to do in his work. In "America and the Arts," Romain had written that

> This is your first task--diverse personalities that compose your states must dare to express themselves, freely, sincerely, entirely, in art. They must avoid the false quest of originality. They must be careless of form. They must be fearless of opinion.

To Anderson, who believed like Emerson without having read him, that form was subservient to truth, and that the local was the only universal, the fact of the magazine's existence and its philosophy was as exciting as its recognition of his work. The editors and contributors spoke directly to him in a new, personal, exciting voice. But to the editors the first issue was simply a smashing success, and the revolution of the arts seemed at hand. Rolland sounded the call to the nation's artists in his essay; Oppenheim attacked "Lazy Verse" and Peter Minuit sought an American architecture. Floyd Dell examined "Shaw and Religion;" Louis Untermeyer, American dance, and Paul Rosenfeld "The American Composer." Stories by Josephine Baker and Berry Benefield; verse by Robert Frost, Jean Starr Untermeyer, Kahlil Gibran, and Amy Lowell; Louise Driscoll's one-act play, "The Child of God;" and review-articles by Frank, Van Wyck Brooks, and Allen Upward completed the 95 handsomely printed pages.

Brook spoke for the editors and for Anderson when he wrote that "Our ancestral faith in the individual and what he is able to accomplish (or, in modern parlance, to 'put over') as the measure of all things has despoiled us of that instinctive human reverence for those divine reservoirs of collective experience, religion, science, art, philosophy, the self-subordinating service to which is almost the measure of the highest happiness," but he spoke to and for a generation of artists struggling to be born and to give birth to a new artistic era. The Seven Arts was the success that its revolutionary editors anticipated. In retrospect, Oppenheim recounted the experience:

> All I can say is that for a year our different national strains in the world of art and criticism somehow coalesced,

came to a focal glow in the Seven Arts, though wise Van Wyck shook his head from the start and said it couldn't last.... At any rate, Van Wyck soon had us all shadowing America, not only to see what she was up to, but to find out if she came of noble lineage. I am referring to his attempt to find a "usable past," so that we might have a real tradition on which to nurture our new talent. Well, we had Walt Whitman, loud as a locomotive to overly sensitive ears; we couldn't string along much on Poe; Emerson was watery; Waldo found that Dreiser belonged to our pre-cultural period, hence making him a part of our usable past; but much farther we didn't get, though "Moby-Dick" was in the offing.

I should say roughly that between editors and contributors we had practically all the forces which were let loose on what the Humanists jeeringly call the 'twenties. There was the just-emerging Sherwood Anderson, there were Dreiser, Amy Lowell, Lee Simonson, Bourne, Bodenheim, Padraic Colum, Dos Passos, Jack Reed, Van Loon, DeCasseres, Dewey, Eugene O'Neill, Carl Van Vechten, and stacks of others, to say nothing of all the poets from Frost to Sandburg. Aye, and Professor Spingarn was with us too, stirring up a hornet's nest.

Of course it couldn't last, but neither the editors nor Sherwood Anderson, the magazine's most frequent contributor and correspondent to Frank and Rosenfeld, allowed themselves to believe that it could not. During the year of its life Anderson published in six of the twelve issues: "Queer" in December, 1916, "The Untold Lie" in January, 1916, "Mother" in March, and "The Thinker" in September, all stories later published in Winesburg, Ohio in 1919, and his verses included "From Chicago," later published in Mid-American Chants in 1918 and "Mid-American Prayer" in June.

By the fall of 1917 both Anderson and The Seven Arts were

known and respected in the circles that mattered to them. Anderson's second novel, Marching Men, appeared in 1917, and the journal published articles by John Dewey, H. L. Mencken, Bertrand Russell, Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, a poetic play by Dreiser, and the first short story of a young playwright named O'Neill. During its year of life The Seven Arts published twenty-eight short stories, of which twenty-seven were declared distinctive by Edmund O'Brien in the 1916 and 1917 versions of his Best Short Stories.

For Anderson in Chicago the years of The Seven Arts very nearly meant the escape that he sought into an artistic world that transcended Chicago, into an acceptance and understanding of his work as literary art, and into a success that would permit him to live by his art. But the illusion of escape was to remain just that as the world of commercial success remained aloof and the nation went to war. The Seven Arts did not "make" Anderson, as Oppenheim later insisted--Winesburg, Ohio did that--, and it brought his dream of escape no nearer, but it provided glimpse of the world beyond the copy desk and Chicago, and it introduced that world to his work.

Early in 1917 Anderson went to New York, combining a business trip with a visit to the editorial office of The Seven Arts, perhaps, as Oppenheim later insisted, to ask for more money for his stories, but in reality to touch the world that he knew only from the pages of the magazine. On his return he wrote Frank:

> ...Your clean, wholesome outlook, your generosity in praise, and your willingness to listen to my provincial, Western point of view warmed my heart....
>
> ...It was all good. It rested and gave me new courage. I came home from New York with an odd feeling of reverence and humbleness. Perhaps it would do me no good to talk to you fellows too often. I should talk too much, but this was good for me....
>
> Nevertheless, in spite of humility that borders on obesequi-

ousness and Western imagery that is deliberately rustic--perhaps Anderson was telling these New Yorkers what he thought they wanted to hear and indulging in a bit of image-making at the same time--he was also Anderson the businessman. Although he wrote Frank with the appropriate humility in February, 1917, that

> This occurs to me. I have written a series of ten or twelve papers about writing. Could you not publish them without using my name? Say simply, "By a Western novelist," and let it go at that?
>
> My notion is that I do not want to embarrass you by having you use my name too often, and I want you to publish stories by me,

nevertheless, a few weeks later, he wrote,

> About signing these things--my attitude is this. If there is no story [by me] appearing in the issue in which the article appears, I see no reason why it should not be signed. For the sake of book sales I want to build up my name as fast as I can.

Again, he was willing to argue price:

> I'm damned, Frank, if I am going to let you pull and haul among my stories, taking the cream at $40 per. It isn't fair, and you know it. I will send you the stories one at a time, and you accept or reject. Forget the notion that there is no other market for these things. I've got offers on my desk for them now. I believe in Seven Arts and want to swim with you, but there is no reason why I should give you this unseemly privilege. You may consider this an overt act, but I'm going to stand on it. Now, damn it, man, behave.

Nor was he above promoting the verse that he was writing in prodigious quantities for what was to become Mid-American Chants:

> The songs sing to me. They have carried me far. I am only sorry that Seven Arts does not want them, because it is

the only place I at this time know for them.

The series of articles did not materialize, although there was tentative discussion of using them in planning volume two, 1917-1918. But that volume was never to see print. Nevertheless, Anderson was gratified that two of his songs, "From Chicago" and "Mid-American Prayer," appeared in June.

Of most importance, however, during these same months of debate and self-promotion, Anderson began a friendship with the shy, gentle, and perceptive Paul Rosenfeld that was to last to the end of his life and beyond, a friendship that was to provide for each of them the ear that he needed when none other was available, and that gave both of them a sense of human durability in the face of change. Anderson became close to Frank and to Brooks for a time, but his friendship with Paul Rosenfeld was to last, ultimately providing him with the impetus and support for his break with advertising and with Chicago.

But that was in the future. The nation went to war in April, and The Seven Arts was destined to become an artistic casualty. As war neared, Oppenheim's monthly editorials became more strident; rifts appeared among the editors as Brooks insisted that a literary magazine should avoid politics, especially "the politics of war." Waldo Frank later remembered that "a prophet might have discerned in us, already, the trend of the arts toward politics, a natural course when the society is menaced for causes exterior or internal."

The journal might have survived editorial stridency and staff disagreement, but as America went to war, Randolph Bourne--brilliant, crippled, fearful, and yet courageous--joined the staff. In June, in an essay called "The War and the Intellectuals" he provided the magazine's declaration of war against war and against those intellectuals--betrayers of the revolution--who supported it. In the four succeeding issues he expanded his fight against the war. "Below the Bottle," "A War Diary," "Collapse of American Strategy," and "Twilight of Idols," together with John Reed's "This Unpopular War," made The Seven Arts, in the words of the

New York Tribune, "an enemy within," and in those of friends of its backer, "pro-German." Finally, the magazine defended the Masses against the changes of sedition brought against its editors by the Department of Justice. Almost immediately Oppenheim received a letter from Mrs. Rankin:

> ...I do not agree with the war policy of the magazine, and I do not approve of the war articles which have appeared in the last few issues.
>
> I wish to state further that I am desirous of withdrawing my support, and severing my connection with the company as soon as possible.

After the initial shock and an ensuing visit from Mrs. Rankin's lawyer, The Seven Arts floundered briefly, amid staff quarrels and recriminations, resulting in controversy that echoes yet, and then expired. It remained for Sherwood Anderson, avowedly non-political until his people in the towns were threatened in the depression more than a decade in the future, to write its epitaph in a letter to Brooks a month later:

> Dear Brother: I have come to think of the muddle of life as a necessary thing and all direct effort at corrective measures as rather absurd. Perhaps the muddle is a fertilizing thing like the stable manure thrown on the fields.
>
> What happens to so many of us is this. We see the muddle so clearly that we come to think of ourselves as not a part of it. Forgetting our own muddle, we begin to bark and scold at the world.
>
> Do you remember how that element finally crept into the Seven Arts? We were all impatient with the New Republic because of its blatant preaching at the world.
>
> Then in the Seven Arts the same thing began. It was as though we had said: "Now you see here, the New Republic is not wrong in scolding. It does not scold well enough. Let my voice be heard."
>
> Anyway in the beginning when Seven Arts was a project,

J. O. wrote to me. "Please be good," I wrote back. "Don't start another magazine to scold at us...."

The world might burn in hell for all of me. I love a few people. Time is long. Innumerable wars have been fought and will be fought. You are my brother. I care most to have great moments come to you. Luck for 1918.

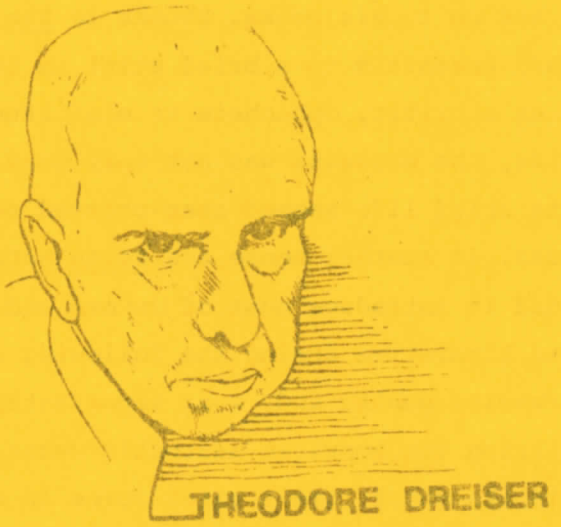
But regardless of causes and later recriminations the Seven Arts was indeed dead. Post-mortems were and perhaps are yet futile, and the fact of its death was just that, with its goals, the revolution of the arts in America and the defeat of the war spirit, still unachieved, indeed not yet in sight more than seventy years later. Perhaps its epitaph might also be found in Brooks's advice to his colleagues that "The time has come for us to write books." The staff disbanded as quickly as it had come together, ending, perhaps, as presumably the war had done, an era of American innocence. As Bourne went to his early grave, Frank to conscientious objection and on to his books, Brooks to The Ordeal of Mark Twain and beyond, Rosenfeld to a brief stint in the army and modest success as a critic, Oppenheim to misfortune and death, Mrs. Rankin to suicide, the magazine was not only dead, but those who made it live its brief life seemed star-crossed as well.

Nevertheless, in another sense the Seven Arts is still with us. Not only did it introduce most of the men and women who were to make American literature during the following decade and beyond to a literate reading public and, most importantly, to sympathetic publishers, stirring the American aesthetic sense in the process, but it became in its short life a vital force in American literature, and it passed its ideal on to the rejuvenation Dial and through that journal to the generation of young men who fought in as well as against the war. The result of that ideal is literary history.

For Anderson, making tentative attempts to break with Chicago and advertising, the brief life of The Seven Arts would never end. When it ceased publication he was known and appreciated in the

greater world of the East, and the break that he sought, the flight into the life of the mind and of art that he dreamed of, was, largely through the influence of Paul Rosenfeld, not far off, however short-lived it was to be. But for the rest of his life The Seven Arts, its people, and its dream remained part of his own usable past.

Michigan State University



Place and the Poem

Bernard F. Engel

Ours is not an era of emphasis on regional studies. Critics accept the notion of national literatures, and of time periods in literature. But a reviewer in, for example, American Literature, will challenge a book on regional literature or intellectual developments on the ground that the author has failed to establish that the South or New England or the West exists as an entity apart from the U.S. as a whole.

Speculations on the importance of place seem, indeed, to belong in the same cornerless file as musings on the origins of language or the possibility that this year's pay raise will equal the rate of inflation. It having proved impossible to point to verifiable evidence of the impact of place, this positivistic age rejects the concept that such influence exists.

And the critics have a point. Even such a poem of apparent fond patriotism as Stephen Vincent Benet's "American Names" could with a change in only one or two lines have been written by a visiting Englishman. If no information on the author is given, can the reader tell whether a poem was written by a Midwesterner or other American, by an Englishmen, Canadian, Australian, or South African? By a man or a woman? It's often fairly obvious that a piece originated in a particular century. But the community of English users has enough mutuality in theme and in manner of expression to make other distinctions difficult unless one comes to the poem with "outside" information.

This fact does not, however, destroy the idea that place has importance. Such poets as William Carlos Williams have argued that the writer must begin with particulars of his own experience. A contemporary poet who insists on place to the point of making a

mystique of it is Thomas McGrath of North Dakota, whose long Letter to an Imaginary Friend resembles Williams' major work in style though not in argument. McGrath begins with the spot of earth that gave him his own origins. He is certain that by doing so he will discover that "North Dakota is everywhere" (compare Whitman, who, though less narrowly focussed, hoped to express through American circumstances the "thoughts of all men in all ages and lands").

But if North Dakota is everywhere, then one might conclude--with an apology to the logician--that everywhere perhaps is North Dakota. If every place is the same, how can a particular place matter?

The reader may recall that Hawthorne and James catalogued America's shortfalls, but Thoreau insisted that everything needful is right here. Archibald MacLeish, a native of Illinois, in "American Letter" seems to accept something of both positions: "America," he writes, "is neither a land nor a people, / A word's shape it is . . ." America offers only a little, it appears, but that little is what the writer must work with.

The strongest argument against the idea of place asserts that a poem is verbal invention, a structure of words that itself makes the place the writer perceives. In his poem "Description Without Place," Wallace Stevens says that language creates the world, including the speaker himself and his place. Evidence for this, Stevens holds, is that "everything we say / Of the past is description without place . . ."

The future too, he says, must arrive by what the reader takes to be esthetic parthenogenesis: it must seem to be "like rubies reddened by rubies reddening." In the context, this gemological simile appears to mean that the future will take its own unique shape, not one given to it by a particular geographical origin. It is typical of Stevens that he holds back, suggesting that creation by the word may only seem to be the fact. But his refraining from absolute commitment does not belie the fact that he thinks it most likely that place is essentially a verbal act of the

mind. Such Stevens poems as "Farewell to Florida" and "The Idea of Order at Key West" may incorporate details of observation and experience, but, one gathers, they are parents, perhaps, of a place rather than offspring of it.

Does place then have only whatever importance one chooses to give it? What about unconscious shaping by the language and culture of a place? Someone remarks on the difference in attitude of householders hearing that a goat covered with paint is in the backyard. In most of North America and Europe, the surprise would be at the presence of the animal. In much of the rest of the world, it would be at the fact that the creature was painted.

Marianne Moore, a native of St. Louis, writes in "New York" that the attraction of the metropolis for the poet is not "the savage's romance" of its business dealings nor its "dime-novel exterior" nor its "atmosphere of ingenuity." What the city offers is "accessibility to experience." The experience she has in mind is the city's enormous variety of observation and feeling, rather that its specifics as a local place.

Walter Havighurst sums it up as well as anyone (Newsletter, Summer 1979). "The imagination," he writes, "rests on place but not in it. In the particular it sees the universal." Yet, he adds, "locality is important to the writer." It provides "the air he breathes, the currents of life he feels, the traditions he discovers." What is important for most writers is "the place they belong to, the background they best understand." Havighurst goes on to cite advantages of the Midwest, at least for those whose roots are here. But the writer must still invent. The people of fiction, Havighurst observes, "never lived except in the imagination, and they never died. They become the heartbeat of our cultural heritage."

The matter comes back, that is, to one of making. It is not where the writer finds whatever he uses that is important, but rather what he does with it. For most writers, the resources of one's own native territory will be most plentiful and best under-

stood. But the writer's job is to imagine, to give the material the living force, "the procreant urge" that Whitman, meaning much more than sex, spoke of. Without that urge, he or she who writes of a place will produce only a geography book. With it, the writer may devise the pacemaker that will keep the heartbeat pulsing.

Michigan State University

Folk Ethics and the Village Tale: Winesburg, Ohio and Berdichevsky's Jewish Ukraine

Albert Waldinger

In Berlin near the turn of the century, Mikha Yosef Berdichevsky (1865-1921), a realist whose lyrical style placed him beyond schools, called upon naturalist and sentimentally Zionest Hebrew fiction to make a "transvaluation" in the Neitzchean sense. His demand meant a rejection of frigid ideological preconceptions as well as overheated communal idealism in favor of a hard look at life and a concentration on the individual. This analysis dictated his view of the small town in which he, like Sherwood Anderson, was formed, and in spite of his privileged status as the son of a rabbi, he could see, also like Anderson, that the demagoguery of village values was extinguishing human freedom. For this reason, he combined an escape to "Outside the Pale" (the title of one of his short story collections) in Switzerland and Germany with an unsparing look back at the Ukrainian village of his birth in such collections as "Of My Village" (1900) and "From Two Worlds" (1902). However, his attempt to understand home was, like that of Anderson, misunderstood, a flare of need in the dark. This misunderstanding becomes even more disturbing when one realizes that both writers never really abandoned their past but used its assumptions as critical narrative reflections of village reality.[1]

Thus, a single internalized folk morality, deriving from this past, supplies the core of characterization to Anderson's America and to Berdichevsky's turn of the century Russia.[2] The identification of perversions of this code creates the dynamics of a narrative in which the warped and "grotesque" is exiled from the society of the American small town and the "world" of the Jewish

village. However, critics have concentrated on stasis and illustration. In Anderson's case, they have chiefly been interested in describing sources--George Borrow, Turgenev, and Twain[3]-- and themes: "American estrangement and loss of love"[4] expressed through a "deliberately distorted paradigm of an extreme situation,"[5] "noncommunity,"[6] and the "dance of death" embodied by the unlived life.[7] In the case of Berdichevsky, a modern classic of Hebrew prose, they have focused on the subservience of realistic detail to mythical meaning[8] and on the sketchiness of characterization as a sign of the greater importance of fatal action.[9]

However, systematic ethics was an active part of the lives Berdichevsky described and his treatment of them. The daily prayer book used by the average Jew of the Ukrainian small town contained a tractate of the Talmud, "Fathers,"[10] to be studied on every Sabbath from the Passover to the New Year.[11] The principle behind this practice was the belief in an assemblage of socially useful truths strengthened by the repeated injunction not to "keep aloof from the community,"[12] often phrased as the "world." When a person dared to depart from this framework, the result was disaster. Berdichevsky's work is motivated by the constant regret that the individual was often violated by communal morality in the process of ruin enveloping both. Nevertheless, he was a careful realist and showed how the form of a fictional life had to follow the form assigned it by the community.

Sherwood Anderson did the same. In addition, he developed the critique of this morality into a skeletal theory of ethnic characterization. In the introductory story to Winesburg, his central character, an old writer, believes that "the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood" (26). A truth like "love" could be perverted by "lust," its overly single-minded form; the result was an imbalance of personality that caused banishment and the withering of the truth that the person had always relied on as

essential social equipment.

Thus, tyrannical as the code was, he would have agreed with the "Sages'" analysis of typical perversions: "Jealousy, lust, and ambition put a man out of the world."[13] He made jealousy the ruling agency of "Queer," in which Elmer Cowley of "Cowley and Sons," a general store that is generally unpatronized, envies and hates George Willard of the "Winesburg Eagle," an important part of society, to the point of battering him with blows and escaping with the parting statement, "I guess I showed him I ain't so queer" (201). This impulse embraces the entire narrative: it is the result of humiliation at not realizing the truth of equal standing to which he feels entitled and it is the direct cause of violence. However, the blows do no more than stun their victim because jealousy is sterile. But it is nevertheless destructive: when it has worked itself out on Elmer's life, it makes his "queerness" stand out all the more.

Berdichevsky's "The Mourner or Worlds Apart" (Hakadish o shney rekhokim) shows the full communal ravage of jealousy. Nathan-Arie, an ultra-conventional and well respected synagogue superintendent, becomes so maddened at the religious competition of the "Hasidim" or pietists that he burns down their newly built synagogue. The result is that both his own and the homes of neighboring streets are burned down, his grandchildren die in the fire, and his family's fortune is consumed. In consequence, he is banished to a despised part of town, where he does lonely penance and dies with but one mourner, a boy considered "strange" and equally despised. The truth, which was once level-headed integrity, turns into combined destruction and isolation, changing him into a type figure of the banished: the combined agency of jealousy and fanaticism brings about a new identification. Berdichevsky has compassion for him and the boy, as he has for all outcasts. But he also understands that the atrocity of which Nathan-Arie is guilty must lead to punishment.

The domination of lust could explain the mysterious oddness

of Dr. Reefy, the main character of "Paper Pills" and a paradigmatic figure in Winesburg. It is clear, in the first place, that he had "the seeds of something fine" (35) in him before his story begins. However, this quality, perhaps love, has since turned into the curious pungency of "twisted apples" (38) with enough "sweetness" (38) to seduce an appealing woman to marry him. The new quality is one of violent and realized sensuality. Thus, as against the young woman's dreams of the lusty teeth of a talkative suitor on her body, "she became in a family way to the one who said nothing at all but who in the moment of his passion actually did bite her shoulder so that for days the marks of his teeth showed" (38). But disaster follows the wedding when she dies only two seasons later and Dr. Reefy becomes confirmed in his habit of scribbling "truths," the "something fine," on little slips of paper and cramming them into his pocket, where they become round, hard, and diminished. They suffer a convulsive reduction through disuse while the perversions that caused their stunting grow large.

In "Kelonimos and Naomi," lust has the biological force of a mania with influence over successive generations. It can produce insanity, death, and brutalization. Malka, Naomi's mother, is so desirable that the pain of desire drives her first husband insane and causes his death. When she remarries, this time to a widower with two children, the disease is passed on to the relationship between her daughter and stepson, Kelonimos. Though calm and almost ideal at its teenage outset, this turns into horror when his parents' match-making wrenches him away from Naomi to a rich girl from a neighboring village: Naomi's pining takes the form of losing her mind and humanity. She is no longer able to eat, speak, or dress herself like a human being and is given a pallet on the floor in the kitchen, removed from life.

This outcome has a dimension well defined by the perversion of "ambition." Kelonimos is ambitious for knowledge--he is always bent over a book--and this desire brings him to the ultimate

negation, apostasy, which is both the denial of God and of man, created in "His image." Naomi's condition is thus doubly appropriate. As the victim of lust, her body loses its uprightly useful loveliness; as the victim of apostasy, she loses her reason.

However, the couple's well-being oscillates according to their distance from social norms. Thus, after rejection by a shocked, prospective father-in-law, Kelonimos returns to the faith and is allowed to marry Naomi who has recovered her speech though not her beauty. But a relapse soon follows. After all, both are still under the influence of exile and the last lines of the story portray their real standing: Naomi is pictured staring at the kitchen wall as before and Kelonimos, after a hard day spent as a teacher of the poor, sits at the table with his head in his hands.

The disaster of apostasy may in fact have motivated Anderson to start Winesburg. In an unfinished story whose beginning appears on the back side of the first page of his tales in their first draft, he described a boy who rejects Christianity because it seems to him to lack both eros and mystique.[14] Moreover, when united with lust, the rejection of God as "yoke" forms the center of "The Strength of God," in which the Reverend Curtis Hartman goes up to the bell tower of his church to spy on a woman lying in bed naked. Of course, he presumably goes there to work on his sermons, but the reality is that a respected community leader is converted into a peeping Tom through lust. At the same time, a sober believer who "wanted to do the work of God quietly and earnestly" (150) is revealed as both an apostate and a crabbed and confused absolutist for whom rebellion and submission are one: "I will fly in the face of all men and if I am a creature of carnal lusts I will live then for my lusts" (154). Thus, his final act is one of metaphysical anguish and self-mutilation: he bloodies his fist in smashing the window which has allowed him to see the woman whose shoulder, like Dr. Reefy, he wants to bite. However, the statement of freedom in this act is cancelled by a fanatic submission to orthodoxy: "Now it will have to be wholly replaced. The

strength of God was in me and I broke it with my fist" (156).

In Berdichevsky's "The Red Cow," apostasy, accompanied by jealousy, sweeps through the community. This title is no mere symbol. A red cow is the reward for God-fearingness which Elijah the Prophet deals out to a husbandman in search of cattle for his farm.[15] Likewise, a sleek red Holstein and the admiration of the community are Rueven's rewards for a life spent in devoted husbandry. However, the "evil impulse," another source of departure from the code,[16] will not allow him to enjoy her. The cow is slaughtered in a group plot that resembles the ritual murder of God by unbelievers. There is no doubt here; there is only impiety, ruin, and victimization.

Berdichevsky knew that both the cow and her owner were cases of pure victimization in which the community could make its own truths suffer. The people could turn against its values. He could also not refrain from bitterness at the sight of cruelty, and a heavy-handed but angry irony set the scene of "Kelonimos and Naomi" in a village named "Tranquil" ("Shleyva").[17] Moreover, he must have felt that even Nathan-Arie was worthy of some compassion, if only because he collected to himself a pure victim, the mourning boy. As a vanguard realist, he found it imperative to react against the tyranny of folk morality over the lives of individuals, especially in the context of a Jewish community in which society was held to be everything and the individual nothing.[18] For this reason, it was especially necessary to reveal the precise consequence of traditional disobedience to traditional morality.

In like fashion, all of Anderson's figures in Winesburg, Ohio are victims. Sometimes they are victimized by social circumstances (Elmer Cowley), sometimes by misunderstanding (Reverend Hartman), and sometimes even by adherence to truth (Dr. Reefy). In each case, however, a moral perversion is instrumental. It was therefore necessary to devise a protest through ironic gesture: Elmer Cowley's escape on the roof of a train at a time when he is most bound; Dr. Reefy's crippling adherence to stuffing "truths"

in his pocket; and the Reverend Hartman's smashing of the window of his freedom.

Chapman College

Notes

[1]Meyer Waxman, A History of Jewish Literature, IV (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), pp. 113-124.

[2]The edition here used is Winesburg, Ohio: Text and Criticism, ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1966). Berdichevsky's tales are to be found in Kitvey Mikha Yosef Bin Gorion (Berdichevsky): sipurim (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1965).

[3]Irving Howe, "The Book of the Grotesque," in Winesburg, Ohio: Text and Criticism, pp. 405-408.

[4]Ibid., p. 413.

[5]Ibid., p. 411.

[6]Anthony Channel Hilfer, The Revolt from the Village: 1915-1930 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 157.

[7]David Stouck, "Winesburg, Ohio as a Dance of Death," American Literature, 48 (January 1977), 532.

[8]Yoav Elstein, "Gilgulo shel mitos: iyun basipur 'para aduma'" ("The Transformation of Myth: a Study of the Tale 'The Red Cow'") in Igulim vayosher: al hatsura hamakhzorit basipur ("Circles and Straightness: Recurrent Form in the Story"), (Tel Aviv: Alef, 1970), pp. 148-169.

[9]Gershon Shaked, "Kelonimos ve Naomi," in Al arba sipurim: prakim bisodot hasipur ("On Four Stories: Chapters in the Foundations of the Story"), (Jerusalem: Jewish Agency, 1963), pp. 66-94.

[10]Hyman Goldin, trans., Ethics of the Fathers (Pirkey avot), (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1962).

[11]Ibid., p. xiii.

[12]Ibid., pp. 22, 60.

[13]Ibid., p. 79.

[14]Walter B. Rideout, "Talbot Whittingham and Anderson: A Passage to Winesburg, Ohio," Sherwood Anderson: Dimensions of His Literary Art, ed. David D. Anderson (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1976), p. 58.

[15]Fun unzer oytser: Eliyahu hanovi ("From Our Treasure Trove: Elijah the Prophet"), compiled by Abraham Menes (New York: Cyco, 1955), p. 173.

[16]Goldin, p. 32.

[17]Berdichevsky, Kitvey, p. 199.

[18]Gershon Shaked, Lelo motsa ("Dead End"), (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1973), pp. 15-16.

Clear Water from a Porcelain Spigot

A Review Essay of *Alive with You This Day* by F. Richard Thomas

Marilyn Judith Atlas

Alive with You This Day is F. Richard Thomas' second chapbook and it is beautiful. The Raintree Press of Bloomington, Indiana, displayed their careful craft and excellent taste by merging eighteenth century woodcuts and hand-colored ATF Versatile initials with eighteen poems, that, like the woodcuts and lettering, become richer with exploration. The number eighteen, according to Judeo-Christian mysticism, stands for life: a vital number for a vital chapbook. It was produced in a limited edition, seventy signed copies, eight dollars each, and is worth owning, worth borrowing, and worth another edition.

F. Richard Thomas, a Fulbright recipient in 1974, and a MacDowell Fellow in 1979, teaches in the department of American Thought and Language at Michigan State University and edits *Centering*, an international journal of poetry and fiction. He is the author of *Fat Grass*, a 1970 chapbook, and *Frog Praises Night*, a volume of his own poetry and commentaries which will soon be published by Southern Illinois Press. He has work in such publications as *Poetry Now*, *New York Quarterly*, and *Beloit Poetry Journal*. He has also recently edited an anthology, *The Landlocked Heart: Poems from Indiana*.

A native of Evansville, Indiana, Thomas is a poet the Midwest can claim proudly as its own, one who is able to simultaneously create on two levels: the personal, and the mythic. He successfully sets up a rhythm between images and poems, and the reader flows from vision to vision, mood to mood, ending with an aliveness that is neither city nor country, active nor receptive, organic nor spiritual, but relational, and which can be found with

equal ease in the suburbs of Michigan, or the mountains of Spain. In balance, the poems move toward the modern: their humor, their images, and their narrative stance reflect twentieth century culture; but they are ancient in their quest for a center that will hold.

Thomas' dedication, "For Sherry," begins the movement of the chapbook. It is a poem concerned with the creative process: "If I were growing poetry / for her whom I most love, / could I belie the lovely tree / that sways the leaves alive? / could I deny the willow tree / that weeps its leaves alive?" The sensual sway and nurturing tears that flow through it color the entire chapbook. The second poem, "Verge," momentarily suspends the movement set up in "For Sherry," but not its mood. In "Verge," a sunrise occurs which is so bright and sudden that it strikes to stillness even the goldfish in the bowl. The setting in this poem, like that in some later poems, is domestic, and within that domesticity lingers the fertile scent of nature: "On the orange crate / the odor of thick woods / waits in the fern's leaves. / My pencil is suspended above clean paper. / The ocean has pushed out one bright drop / that hangs from the spigot. / I will move / when the fish moves." In the next poem, "Writer," the suspension ends. The narrator feels his brain has expanded past his skull, his writing is worthy, and that he can finally release, rather than think, poems. Ironically, his belief in his flowing creativity lasts only about ten seconds.

The tone of "Nightwalk," one of Thomas' technically most balanced and emotionally most powerful poems, once again becomes serious. In this poem the world is depicted as deathlike: wet trees seem shrouded, the lighting is dangerously unnatural, and the narrator is a pilgrim who eats but is not fed: "Wet trees / against streetlights / seem wrapped in shrouds / of spiderwebs. / Strange pilgrims, / we huddle against cold bark, / nibble fire / from black leaves. / Somewhere, / somewhere lying close against morning: / bread." "Nightwalk" ends with the implication that morning may nurture, but morning is distant and its promise is

uncertain. In "Search," the narrator continues to search for sustenance: "Failing to get water from the spigot / ....I will suck cactus pulp / ....I will not drink the fluid in my compass, / nor my urine, / nor my flask of whisky. / If I am desperate, / ....I will gouge holes in the bodies / of large fish / and drink the lymph that fills them." Imagery of food and water merge. The narrator wanders, heading north, looking for something old and pure, "old saltless ice in the Arctic"; and he awaits his rescue.

In "Search," as in "Nightwalk," false nurturance is tied to unnatural objects such as the light from lamps and the liquid from compasses; in "Wonderland," nonorganic objects are again viewed as dangerous. In this poem that which is unnatural is actively destructive. The narrator innocently walks through corn and is frightened by a cast iron mechanical ape that leaps from the leaves. At the end of the cornfield some giant marigold-like flowers appear; they are ruthlessly treated by a Japanese botanist, a manipulator and destroyer of nature. The narrator relates what he observes: "...the Japanese botanist / pulls petals from one flower / to show the moving parts inside: / cupped in a clear gelatinous pool / in the hip of the flower, / a translucent web of light / in the shape of a flattened praying mantis / sways to its death." Movement, ususally positive, becomes a death dance when one's relationship to objects is unnatural. Movement is again paired with a painful death in "Goldfish," a poem about swallowing goldfish. The center of this poem is an exploration of the victim. The shrivelling cilia of the goldfish are compared to melting teeth on a plastic comb. The narrator ties the unnatural state of the fish to a technological image, and the poem ends in pain with the fish heaving and quivering to its death.

In the next poem, "Presence," heaving fish become monstrous stones that rise against the narrator, shifting ominously and becoming, in the next two poems, "The Journey: Halfway" and "The Electric Train," an internal weight. The narrator, the marigold-like flower, and the goldfish, momentarily merge as the narrator's

entrapment is explored. "The Journey: Halfway," and "Electric Train," mark the middle of the chapbook. "The Electric Train," uses sound and motion to elicit a choicelessness so profound that the reader is eased into it, and the ease elicits more powerful feelings than the strongest shove: "We stop with a shriek at Svanemøllen, / where soundless midnight boards / the empty car. / I hear my birthsong, / the rare, familiar ringing in my ears. / I lean forward: / 'What should we have said to each other tonight?' / She smiles and turns again to the thick window. / A door rumbles shut somewhere down the long train. I am eased back into my seat."

"Rodgrød med Fløde" invites the reader back to a lighter, if no less ironic, mood. It explores the chase that takes place when one tries to find oneself. The narrator states that to write a poem "is to walk around the self / while the self is walking around." All is relational and the still-point is, at best, evasive. But there is the danger of deception; the narrator admits that he himself is frequently confused and searches for himself in places where he is not. He offers an example to illustrate his point: the reader is told that an urn filled with the narrator's ashes is both him and not him, and is then asked to remember that the narrator is not the urn at all and that things are often not what they seem. The narrator changes tactics, this time offering an example, not of confusion or death, but of something light and sweet: "If you had an urn of <u>rodgrød med fløde</u>, / you'd have strawberry soup with cream." The next poem, "Country Clotted Cream," humorously continues the cream image as well as the theme that things are not always what they seem. This poem is about discarded titles, some of which stir up family arguments: "I Promise I'll Never Like Avocados"; and others which may be true but which cannot be used because they are unoriginal: "They Buried My Father in the Wrong Grave." Of course, the narrator uses these titles in this poem about discarded titles, still believing that he will never find a way to use them.

The thirteenth poem, "The Mountain," moves back to the nar-

rator's youth, to images of Spain, mountains, and motion. The narrator's transcendent vision ironically becomes his curse. In the next few poems the narrator attempts to reconcile opposing realities and be more optimistic about experience. In "Windows" the narrator concludes that if contact cannot be consistent, then perhaps the shadows of contact can be comforting: "From my west window, the grass, / the trees; / beyond the trees, the blue hills; beyond the hills, the mountain. / This year and the next and the next. / My ghost is in the windowglass, / Beside mine, / yours." In "When Leaving Friends," and "The Dream that Lasts a Lifetime," the narrator tries to make peace with reality. "When Leaving Friends," recreates the physical as well as emotional reality of departure: "The final wave / in the rearview mirror / before the end of the street." "The Dream that Lasts a Lifetime" explores the impossibility of consistently finding satisfactory solutions: "Rowing farther into the lake, / you wave goodbye. / I've got new shoes / and all my clothes on. / Mother keeps calling me: / she thinks / there isn't any popcorn left. / I don't know what to do." As we move into the last two poems of Alive with You This Day, we move toward the narrator's final reconciliation with himself as creator. In "When I Am Depressed," the narrator searches in drawers, cupboards, and everyday words for poems, and finds them; in "Alive with You This Day," the final poem of the chapbook," he opens himself up to experience. Searching for something simple and tangible, a shirt, he finds instead a rewarding spiritual experience: "This morning, while I looked through our closet / for a shirt, / your necklace / brushed against my arm. / I lifted it / from the brass wire hook / and let it fall / across my fingers;/ the silver key danced / and shone / in the soft dusky light." The reader is returned to "Rodgrød med Fløde": "things are not what they seem", and the chapbook ends with acceptance.

The poems in Alive with You This Day, flow within and between each other. They effectively maintain a double center: the artist creating and the narrator attempting to water the seeds at the

heart of his dream. Craft and emotion merge and we move through the poems as we move through our own dreams, changing moods, nibbling what light we can, and sometimes, when dawn comes, finding bread. As individual poems, "Verge," "Nightwalk," "Electric Train," "Rodgrød med Fløde," and "The Mountain," work best. But the poems all work well and merit being read in order. When read this way, what the reader experiences most clearly is what the narrator of "Search," fails to find: water from a spigot; the water is clear, and the spigot is porcelain.

Michigan State University