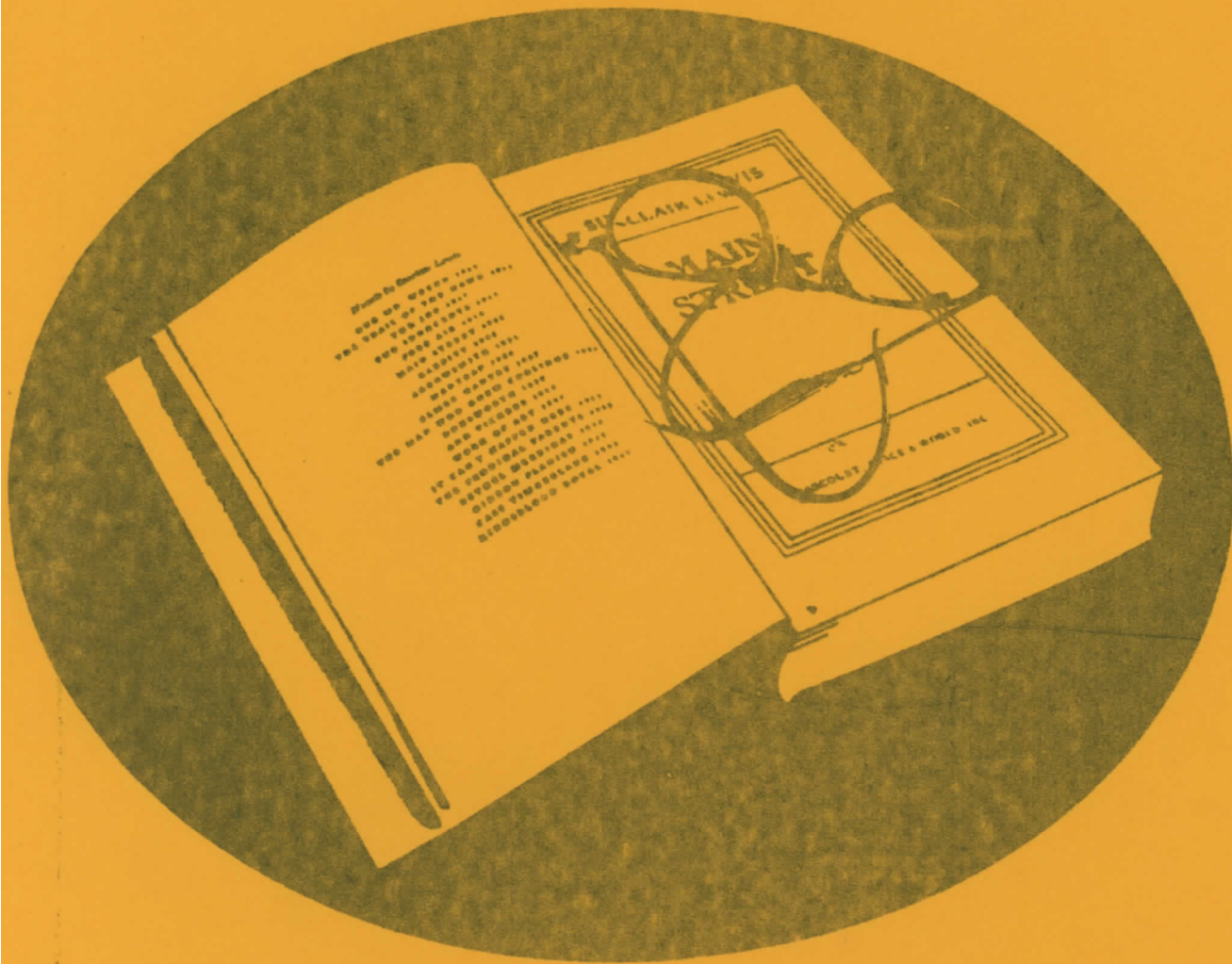


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The State of the Society:
An Editorial

Inflation and recession have eroded the strength of the Society during 1980, so much so that for the first time we had a substantial deficit of more than three thousand dollars, making necessary a dues increase for 1981. Furthermore, the reorganization of Michigan State University has deprived us of much support, particularly vital clerical assistance. Consequently, as we begin our eleventh year, we are faced with the most serious problems in our existence. The cooperation of all members is vital if the Society is to continue and to grow.

Each member can, however, contribute substantially to the Society's well-being in the future by observing some or all of the following:

Pay dues promptly in 1981.

Subscribe to MidAmerica VIII at the same time.

Solicit new members.

Recommend membership to institutional and other libraries.

Make special contributions or legacies.

Volunteer assistance.

Above all, participate:

Send essays, reviews, and announcements for our publication.

Volunteer for special programs during the year.

Give a paper or reading at the annual conference in May.

Vote.

I do appreciate all the cooperation in the past, I hope that it continues and expands, and I ask your patience during the coming year.

David D. Anderson

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Great River Review, a journal of Midwestern literature, announces the publication of Volume 2, #3. This issue includes fiction by Delores Burdick, Viane Frye, Rosemary Klein, Robert Dries, and Steven Finney, an essay on the prairie by Paul Grouchow, and poetry by John Caddy, David Allen Evans, Helen Valenta, Florence Dacey and many others. The review is published twice a year and seeks submission of fiction, poetry, essays, and articles on contemporary Midwestern writers up to 4,000 words. Subscriptions: \$8.00 for three issues. \$3.00 per copy. Address: Great River Review, P.O. Box 14805, Minneapolis, MN 55414.

* * *

The Clyde, Ohio, Heritage Association held a symposium commemorating the 104th anniversary of Sherwood Anderson's birth on September 13, 1980, in the Clyde Public Library. Coordinator was Thaddeus Hurd of Clyde, a member of the Society, and chief speaker was Gene H. Dent, Lakeland Community College and past president of the Society.

* * *

A special one-day Conference on Wisconsin Writers was held on Friday, September 12, 1980, at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin.

* * *

The University of Missouri held a week-long symposium on Missouri writers September 22-26, 1980. Coordinator was Douglas Wixson, member of the Society, and featured speaker was David D. Anderson of the Society.

* * *

The Society will sponsor special programs on November 6, 1980, in Minneapolis in conjunction with the Midwest Modern Language Association and on December 28, 1980, in Houston in conjunction with the Modern Language Association.

* * *

The Darker Side of Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon

Marilyn Judith Atlas

Song of Solomon, published in 1977, Toni Morrison's third novel, examines the distortion of black people's lives in midwestern America. Although the solution that the novel favors is surrender to the air, or spiritual transcendence,¹ it is not the only solution that it seriously explores. In a society where there is no justice for black people, Morrison, through her character Guitar Bains, and the revolutionary society he joins, the Seven Days, studies the repercussions of political violence, what it means in terms of society, and how it affects the lives of those who participate in it.

Most of the characters in the novel, Milkman, Hagar, Ruth, Corinthians, Pilate, and Macon, do nothing to change the tenor of society. Mostly they accept the distortions within their world, and if they strike out, they do so against one another instead of against their real enemies: white racists and white racist institutions. Their loyalty is either to themselves or at most familial, never extending outward to embrace the black race. Only Guitar Bains and the other members of the Seven Days attempt to focus their anger on the white power structure, and if not change it, at least assure that their people lose no more ground in it.

In creating Guitar and the other members of the Seven Days, and in making them sympathetic characters, Morrison is forcing the reader to take the solution of violence seriously. During the 1960s and early 1970s many intellectuals, among them Jean-Paul Sartre, Leroi Jones, and Hannah Arendt, took a close look at the legitimacy of political violence and came to very much the same conclusion as Guitar Bains:

violence can be a rational way of dealing with the forces of a powerful, distorted culture.² Hannah Arendt, in On Violence, directly states what Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon implies:

Since men live in a world of appearances and, in their dealings with it, depend on manifestation, hypocrisy's conceits--as distinguished from expedient ruses, followed by disclosure in due time--cannot be met by so-called reasonable behavior. Words can be relied on only if one is sure that their function is to reveal and not to conceal....To use reason when reason is used as a trap is not 'rational'; just as to use a gun in self-defense is not 'irrational.'³

Morrison has her character, Guitar Bains, effectively argue that violence can be rational. Guitar lives in a society which is biased against black people and feels compelled to join a group, the Seven Days, which sets up its own system of justice. He explains to his best friend, Milkman, that such a group is both necessary and perfectly justifiable:

"Do we have a court? Is there one courthouse in one city in the country where a jury would convict them? There are places right now where a Negro still can't testify against a white man. Where the judge, the jury, the court, are legally bound to ignore anything a Negro has to say. What that means is that a black man is a victim of a crime only when a white man says he is. Only then. If there was anything like or near justice or courts when a cracker kills a Negro, there wouldn't have to be no Seven Days. But there ain't; so we are."⁴

While Arendt discusses the theory of political violence, Morrison explores how this theory, if accepted and acted upon, can distort and destroy individual lives. If one accepts the role of revolutionary, the burden of being responsible for racial balance, and social justice, one pays the price of one's humanity. Milkman warns Guitar of this, stating that his philosophy is dangerous and can easily lead to destruction, not simply of the enemy, but of what Guitar is trying to protect:

"Guitar, none of that shit is going to change how I live or how any other Negro lives. What you're doing is crazy. And something

else: it's a habit. If you do it enough, you can do it to anybody. You know what I mean? A torpedo is a torpedo, I don't care what his reasons. You can off anybody you don't like. You can off me." (pp. 161-2).

As Milkman predicts, Guitar does turn against members of his own race in his attempt to foster the cause of his society, and he does distort reality. His standards are too rigid and he breaks under their pressure. But Morrison never dismisses either the man or his method.

When Morrison creates the members of the Seven Days, she attempts to make them human rather than either despicable or saintly; she also makes them uncomfortable with both their society and with their solution. Morrison begins her novel eleven years after the Seven Days originates. One of its members, Robert Smith, an insurance agent, is about to fly across Lake Superior from the cupola of the town's all-white hospital. He wears wide blue silk wings and is reduced to the term "nutwagon" by Guitar's Grandmother. Two days before the event he tacks a note on the door of his house explaining his plans to fly, and confessing his love for his people. He adds a line asking for forgiveness: implicit in this apology is that he is no longer able to function as a member of the Seven Days. Thus, when we meet Robert Smith, he has already broken under the pressure of his distorted life; on the afternoon posted in his message, he jumps to his death.

Another member of the Seven Days, Henry Porter, is also introduced to the reader early in the novel. He, too, is unable to cope with the solution he has chosen for himself; he, too, needs to communicate to his people that he loves them. Our first image of Porter is of him drunkenly hanging from the window of his rented apartment holding a gun, cursing, screaming, urinating, and pleading for a woman. A crowd gathers and jeers at him and

he responds to their lack of sympathy with anger and frustration: "'Stop it. Don't act like that. Don't you see I love ya? I'd die for ya, kill for ya'" (p. 26). His chastisement of the crowd turns into a private monologue and he confesses that his love is too great a burden to bear:

"Gimme hate, Lord," he whimpered. "I'll take hate any day. But don't give me love. I can't take no more love, Lord. I can't carry it. Just like Mr. Smith. He couldn't carry it....Ain't it heavy? Jesus? Ain't love heavy? Don't you see, Lord? You own son couldn't carry it. If it killed Him, what You think it's gonna do to me? Huh? Huh?" (p. 26).

His anger with God is quickly transferred to anger with his landlord, Macon Dead, who has joined the crowd in hopes of collecting his overdue rent. Porter considers shooting Macon, decides he would rather shoot himself, but is too drunk to turn the shotgun; finally he drops it out of the window and collapses.

But unlike Smith, Porter recovers and continues his membership in the Seven Days. He learns to survive his burden of love and his commitment to the black race. When the reader meets him again he is forming a vital relationship with Macon's daughter, Corinthians; he is strong, controlled, able to give love, generally no man to be either laughed at or scorned.

In another early, and memorable, scene, the reader meets Railroad Tommy, one of the owners of the black barber shop, and another member of the Seven Days. Like Robert Smith and Henry Porter, Railroad Tommy is bitterly aware that his life is painfully distorted. The reader meets him when Guitar and Milkman, then seventeen and thirteen respectively, wander through the Blood Bank, the poor black section of Detroit. They dejectedly complain to Tommy that after cutting school and going to Feather's pool hall, Feather has refused to sell them beer because Milkman's father, Macon, is a ruthless black capitalist and Feather blames Milkman for his father's sins. After listening to their story, Railroad Tommy, at least at first, attempts to

tease them out of their disappointment:

"You think that something? Not having a beer? Well, let me ask you something. You ever stood stock still in the galley of the Baltimore and Ohio dining car in the middle of the night when the kitchen closed down and everything's neat and ready for the next day? And the engine's highballing down the track and three of your buddies is waiting for you with a brand-new deck of cards?....That's right, you never. And you never going to. That's one more thrill you not going to have, let alone a bottle of beer....You ever pull fourteen days straight and come home to a sweet woman, clean sheets, and a fifth of Wild Turkey?...." (p. 59)

Tommy's mock serious routine continues, but near its end his tone changes. Guitar, after being promised no baked Alaska, grabs his own throat feigning horror and crying that his heart is breaking; Tommy focuses on this image of a broken heart and stops teasing: he promises Guitar a broken heart and a whole lot of folly. Guitar tries to continue the light tone stating that all he and Milkman wanted was a bottle of beer, but Tommy has become serious. He simply and powerfully says, "'Yeah, well, welcome aboard.'" The impossibility of satisfaction even when what one asks for is legitimate and small is a serious problem for the characters in Song of Solomon.

Morrison has not yet introduced the Seven Days directly. Before she does that she carefully portrays the motivation that her characters have for forming such a society. They live in a violent world, and the privileges they see surrounding them are often outside of their reach. Frustrated and dissatisfied, they are desperate for change and for some control over their lives.

Although Morrison creates some very effective scenes using Robert Smith, Henry Porter, and Railroad Tommy, the member of the Seven Days she most closely examines is Guitar Bains. Of all the Seven Days, he is the most fully developed. The reader meets him during the first chapter of the novel.

He is then six years old, standing with his grandmother and waiting for Robert Smith to jump off the hospital's cupola. Even at six, Guitar is bright enough to notice that the nurse who asks him to run and get the hospital guard has spelled admissions incorrectly, she has left out an "s", and he is secure enough in the accuracy of his perceptions to verbalize this to his grandmother. Pilate is also present in this scene and her singing of an ancestral song about flying attracts him as much as Robert Smith's take off. Although, as he grown older, Guitar will have the social consciousness of Robert Smith, his attraction to spiritual transcendence will never fully dissipate: it remains part of what he respects, and as the reader will find out in the last scene, part of what he is capable.

Morrison purposefully makes Guitar fascinating. She does not want his solution of violence to be easily dismissed. Physically he is attractive: his yellow catlike eyes add intensity to his face, and reinforce his aura of independence and strength; spiritually he is interesting: as a young child he cried desperately for a guitar which he never gets; thus, he has the sensibility, if not the instrument of an artist. Morrison also makes him uncannily brave. Guitar explains how even as a child he was a natural hunter:

"I used to hunt a lot. From the time I could walk almost and I was good at it. Everybody said I was a natural. I could hear anything, smell anything, and see like a cat. You know what I mean? A natural. And I was never scared--not of the dark or shadows or funny sounds, and I was never afraid to kill. Anything." (p. 85)

Guitar may not have been afraid to kill anything, but there were animals which he did not want to harm: when he accidentally kills a doe instead of a deer he is upset because he has broken his self-imposed standards.

In creating Guitar, Morrison forms a vital, brave, and sensitive

individual who sets standards for himself; she also creates a loyal, protective friend. When Milkman is teased by his fellow school mates, Guitar willingly comes to his aid, enjoying the fight. After it, without any self-consciousness, he removes his own baseball cap, tells Milkman to wipe the blood from his nose, and simply replaces it on his head (p. 267).

Because he senses what Milkman needs, and because he is brave enough to act, Guitar becomes the main liberating force in Milkman's life. It is he who introduces Milkman to his aunt Pilate, and thus provides him with his first experience of complete happiness (p. 47).

Morrison does not simply give Guitar positive, vital characteristics: she tempers his personality with a traumatic youth. As a young child he learns that people do not get what they earn, that there is often no connection between service and benefits, and that human kindness is frequently an empty gesture. His early experience with injustice centers around his father's grotesque death, colors his attitude toward justice and activism, and helps explain why such a group as the Seven Days is attractive to him. The narrator tells the reader what is too painful for Guitar to verbalize even to his best friend, Milkman:

...his mother smiled when the white man handed her the four ten-dollar bills. More than gratitude was showing in her eyes. More than that. Not love, but a willingness to love. Her husband was sliced in half and boxed backward. He'd heard the mill men tell how the two halves, not even fitted together, were placed cut side down, skin side up, in the coffin. Facing each other....

Even so, his mother had smiled and shown that willingness to love the man who was responsible for dividing his father up throughout eternity. It wasn't the divinity from the foreman's wife that made him sick. That came later. It was the fact that instead of life insurance, the sawmill owner gave his mother forty dollars "to tide you and the kids over," and she took it happily and bought each of them a big peppermint stick on the very day of the funeral. Guitar's two sisters and

baby brother sucked away at the bone-white and blood-red stick, but Guitar couldn't. He held it in his hand until it stuck there. All day he held it. At the graveside, at the funeral supper, all the sleepless night. The others made fun of what they believed was his miserliness, but he could not eat it or throw it away, until finally, in the outhouse, he let it fall into the earth's stinking hole. (pp. 226-7)

The situation affects him deeply and he never can eat sweets or look at an individual smiling in the face of injustice without feeling ill. The experience not only marks him in ways he understands, he hates candy and injustice, but it also marks him in ways he doesn't understand, he hates black individuals who can eat candy even in the face of adversity. His advice to Milkman, that Milkman should try to forgive his family their distortions, is advice that Guitar himself cannot internalize:

"Listen, baby, people do funny things. Specially us. The cards are stacked against us and just trying to stay in the game, stay alive and in the game, makes us do funny things. Things we can't help. Things that make us hurt one another. We don't even know why." (p. 88)

Guitar has problems accepting his race for what they are. He is disgusted by black people who do not share his outrage at white society. Honore Island, the black resort area where Milkman's father owns summer homes, represents a world of false luxury that Guitar both fears and hates. The island helps divide rich from poor blacks, allowing those that are wealthy to simply pretend that the world is kind and just. Guitar and Milkman quarrel about Honore, but Milkman cannot think in terms other than jealousy over material wealth: he extends an invitation to Guitar to visit the island, in case he for some reason feels he is no longer welcome there. Guitar responds to the invitation with hostility: "'Fuck Honore! You hear me? The only way I'll go to that nigger heaven is with a case of dynamite and a book of matches'" (p. 104). Guitar is angry because Milkman will not see the evil

of luxury in the midst of social injustice, and because Milkman suggests that Guitar once enjoyed the island. In his attempt to be different from the Honore crowd, he feels compelled to cut out even the memory of sensual pleasure. He has stopped drinking, going to parties, and smoking. He is concerned only with justice for the black race. In concentrating on the group he stops associating with individuals cutting out his own less determined self. He has thrown away the peppermint stick and refuses to be tempted by it any longer.

As Guitar's desire for justice becomes stronger, so does his ability to distort reality. He begins to divide the world into categories which are too clear to be true, and he moves toward idealizing and despising people rather than exploring and enjoying their complexity. When he decides to share the fact of his membership in the Seven Days with Milkman, he makes their mission perfectly selfless and controlled:

"They don't initiate anything; they don't even choose. They are as indifferent as rain. But when a Negro child, Negro woman, or Negro man is killed by whites and nothing is done about it by their law and their courts, this society selects a similar victim at random...." (p. 155)

The Seven Days neither searches for glory nor tries to expand. In Guitar's estimation the group is perfectly reasonable, neither perverse nor angry, but simply and calmly trying to keep the numbers static.

Neither Guitar nor the other members of the Seven Days are as indifferent as rain and their reasoning is sometimes illogical. For instance, Guitar explains to Milkman why all white individuals deserve killing:

"It doesn't matter who did it. Each and every one of them could do it. So you just get any one of them. There are no innocent white people, because every one of them is a potential nigger-killer, if not an actual one. You think Hitler surprised them? You think just because they went to war they thought he was a freak? Hitler's the most natural white man in the world. He killed Jews and Gypsies

because he didn't have us. Can you see those Klansmen shocked by him? No, you can't." (p. 156)

But even if the Klansman are not shocked by Hitler, Guitar has not proven that the sensibility of a Klansman is representative of the entire white race. When Milkman tries to argue that some white people made real sacrifices for Negroes, Guitar simply dismisses those individuals as aberrations. White people who do not stop killing, deserve killing. While he tries, though granted he is not very successful, to forgive the passivity of black people, he is quite comfortable imposing a double standard and condemning white people for their ability to turn away from injustice. He sums up his argument with a statement about white chromosomes: they simply make white people depraved. Since white people do not use scientific evidence when killing blacks, he feels justified in not proving his statements about the genes of white people.

But in his more reasonable moments, Guitar realizes that he needs the Seven Days for the organization allows him to take himself seriously, to justify his life, and to actively attempt to create a fairer society. He hopes that his retaliatory murders some day make white people think before they lynch (p. 174).

As Guitar's involvement with the Seven Days increases so does his distrust of Milkman. The final rift occurs between the two men when Milkman offers Guitar the possibility of getting gold if he will help him steal the green sack that hangs in Pilate's cottage. Macon has convinced Milkman that the bag contains gold which Pilate has no more right to own than he does. Guitar is delighted at the prospect. Recently four colored girls had been blown up in a Sunday School, and he needs explosives in order to kill his white victims in a parallel fashion; explosives are expensive and the gold will allow their purchase.

Milkman is uncomfortable being generous. When Guitar shows enthusiasm for the project something in Milkman's own excitement becomes blunted: "Something perverse made him not want to hold the whole score to his friend on a platter" (p. 175). Guitar senses Milkman's reluctance, and the distrust between them grows. After the robbery they discover that the bag contains only dry bones. Since Macon is still convinced that the gold can be found, that it must simply be in the cave to which he and his sister ran before they forever separated, he convinces his son to return to Danville, Pennsylvania. Milkman decides to go alone so that he can privately discover his heritage, but he promises Guitar that if the gold is found that he will still give him the promised share. When the men separate, they do so without their usual warmth. Guitar secretly follows him and thinks he discovers that his friend is keeping the gold hidden from him and more importantly, from the Seven Days. Guitar decides that Milkman must die, but because Milkman is his friend and because Guitar still has rigid standards of friendship he warns him of his murderous intentions.

As Milkman realizes, the problem between Guitar and him runs deeper than gold. He tries to convince himself that because he has not betrayed his friend, because he has hoarded no gold for himself, that the battle between him and Guitar will never occur. But even as he thinks about Guitar's anger cooling, he realizes that a confrontation between them is inevitable:

Even as he phrased the thought in his mind, /that the anger Guitar felt toward him would subside /, Milkman knew it was not so. Either Guitar's disappointment with the gold that was not there was so deep it had deranged him, or his "work" had done it. Or maybe he simply allowed himself to feel about Milkman what he had always felt about Macon Dead and the Honore crowd. In any case, he had snatched the first straw, limp and wet as it was, to prove to himself the need to kill Milkman. The Sunday-school girls deserved better than to be avenged by this hawk-headed raven-skinned Sunday man who included in his blood sweep four innocent white girls and one innocent black man. (p. 334)

Milkman is innocent of stealing the gold, but he is not innocent of having little social conscience, and it is partially for that reason that Guitar needs to kill him. As Guitar grows increasingly obsessed with controlling himself, he also becomes increasingly obsessed with controlling Milkman. Guitar would save his life, and Guitar, having found an excuse that he can accept, Milkman's betrayal, is comfortable taking it. Self and other merge. By killing Milkman, Guitar can symbolically kill that part of himself that will not simply focus on racial justice.

In her development of Guitar, Morrison avoids judging him. She is not interested in defining him as either good or evil, but in exploring his personality and how his choices affect it. In an interview that Robert B. Stepto had with her when she was in the process of writing Song of Solomon she stated that good and evil evade definition: "Sometimes good looks like evil; sometimes evil looks like good--you never really know what it is. It depends on what uses you put it to. Evil is as useful as good is, although good is generally more interesting; it's more complicated."⁵

Toni Morrison, makes Guitar Bains and the other members of the Seven Days distorted characters, but she does not make them evil. In the final confrontation between Milkman and Guitar, Morrison implies that Guitar has as much a possibility of spiritual transcendence as does Milkman. If both surrender to the air, both may ride it. Thus, while Morrison clearly shows that Guitar's perceptions have gone awry she does not condemn him. Such solutions as that of the Seven Days, such characters as Guitar Bains, cannot simply be dismissed as either irrational or evil, and in Song of Solomon Toni Morrison pays them her respect by seriously exploring them and by subtly transferring responsibility for a more just society where groups like the

Seven Days would not consider themselves necessary, where such responsibility belongs: on each reader who must come to terms with Guitar Bains and the other members of the Seven Days.

Ohio University

NOTES

¹Marilyn Atlas, "A Woman Both Shiny and Brown: Feminine Strength in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature Newsletter IX, No. 3, (Fall, 1979). In this essay I argue that Pilate's solution, surrender to the air, is not only a possible one, but the only viable one the novel offers.

²John Fraser, Violence in the Arts (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 40-50.

³Hannah Arendt, On Violence (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), pp. 65-6.

⁴Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon (New York: New American Library, 1977), p. 161. All subsequent references to this edition are internally noted within the text of this essay.

⁵Robert B. Stepto, "'Intimate Things in Place' A Conversation with Toni Morrison," Massachusetts Review XVIII, p. 476. The interview took place in Toni Morrison's office at Random House Publishers in New York City, May 19, 1976.

Return to Innocence?: The Value of Nick Carraway's
Midwestern Perspective in F. Scott Fitzgerald's
The Great Gatsby

Erik S. Lunde

I might say as a way of introduction that when I initially proposed this topic to Professor David Anderson, he embraced it rather eagerly. I puzzled over this for a time, until I remembered how ambitious a man the normally benign, kind Dave really is about the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature and how he never misses an opportunity to promote the Society. And then I remembered from the novel The Great Gatsby that when the narrator Nick Carraway first asks Jay Gatsby, the main character, what part of the Midwest he came from, Gatsby responds rather humorously, "San Francisco," and later, Nick declares that the main characters in the drama, Jordan Baker, Nick's girl, his cousin, Daisy and Tom Buchanan, Nick himself and Gatsby, all coming from portions of Mid-America from Louisville to Chicago to Minnesota to North Dakota respectively, were really Westerners and that this has been a story of the West, I thought, "that's it!" Dave is always looking to push out the boundaries of the Midwest; in Gatsby, the Midwest takes over the whole West and then moves East to West Egg, where Nick declares himself a modern pathfinder, to take over the East as well. Hence in Gatsby, the Midwest becomes the nation, and Dave has long argued that a study of Midwestern literature is really a study of American literature! And, of course, my point is that a study of the Midwestern perspective in The Great Gatsby is a study of the American perspective.

Countless numbers of critics have discussed the theme of regionalism in The Great Gatsby, emphasizing the cultural conflict between the Western origins of the main characters and the Eastern setting in which their summer

activities take place. Many have stressed the clash between the apparent innocence of the narrator, the modern pilgrim Nick Carraway's provincial heritage, and the corruption of his New York City life. Of course, Fitzgerald encouraged such treatment with symbols like the villages of West Egg and East Egg in Long Island and with several direct references, like Nick's statement, "this has been a story of the West, after all... we were all Westerners." Yet the Eastern/Western motif is complex, because crucial to the story's development is the point that Nick's perspective, his vision, is not just Western but more specifically Midwestern; his point of view emanates, just as Fitzgerald's did, from his presumably Minnesota heritage, hence his own Middle West. Fitzgerald makes direct references to the Middle Western cultivated landscape and middle class background as well when discussing the origins of his characters and with several of Nick's statements. In the beginning of the book, Nick says that he went East because instead of "being the warm center of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe," and at the end of the novel, in a reversal, Nick now talks of "my Middle West...[with] the thrilling returning trains of my youth."

I propose that it is this Midwest perspective, with its critical, moralistic, agrarian overtones, which gives Nick the detachment necessary to make judgements on the activities of Eastern compatriots. In a way, Gatsby resembles works like James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men and Henry David Thoreau's Walden in that it is essentially a story of a journey of the main character (as Lee Marx states) who enters rather casually into a new environment after leaving home and then finds

that he must face his home to reassess the immediate past. Hence the physical journey is simply a metaphor for the psychic journey. The pattern is cyclical: the push from home, the experience, the retreat to home as a new man or woman. The visitor not only makes comments about the society he visits, whether Agee's rural Alabama, brute life at the pond in Walden or Nick's New York City, but he also has the perspective to make revealing remarks about the environment from which he has come and to which he shall return. Carraway not only critiques the Eastern culture but the Midwestern heritage, and by extension, the national heritage. His return to Minnesota after his journey in modern Hades, where in Thoreauvian terms, he tastes "the tonic of the wild", is not just a retreat, but it also is an affirmation of an America which still offers possibilities. It resembles a cleansing process, a ritual of renewal and purification. After all, like Ishmael in Moby Dick, Nick survives to tell the tale, and there is justification, I think, in the view that Nick achieves a redemption at the end which some critics may have overlooked.

We should remind ourselves that the crucial character in the novel is really Nick himself rather than just Gatsby or anyone else, and it is his final assessment of Gatsby and the moral of the tale which give the novel its chief energy. What is crucial is not what only Gatsby, with his criminal ways, really was, but what Nick thinks he was, not whether his cousins the ultra rich Buchanans were really "careless and confused" but that Nick thinks they were, not whether Gatsby really had an uncorrupted dream of the capacities of human beings to love one another and to achieve a better life but that Nick thinks he did. The crucial point is the impact of the

tragic story of Myrtle Wilson's death, of her husband, George's suicide, of Gatsby's death on Nick's consciousness. And in this regard, we should recall that Nick himself is self-critical. He knows about Tom's and Myrtle's love affair and does not tell Daisy; likewise, he does not tell Tom about the Daisy/Gatsby rendezvous. He well knows that as a keeper of secrets and as a go-between, he has been a partial cause of the tragic events leading to the confrontation in the Plaza Hotel which in turn leads to Daisy's accidental killing of Myrtle in an automobile. Of course, as a so-called honest man, "the most honest man I know", Nick still does not offer essential information at the inquest which might have implicated Tom and Daisy. In this sense, he obstructs justice. The innocent bystander becomes the corrupt broker of disaster, however unwillingly.

After all, The Great Gatsby is the story of one man's "remembrance of things past", his attempt to reshape his reminiscences of his summer of 1922 in New York City, to find a pattern out of chaotic events, to recreate an experience in an act of at least a psychic writing. Nick's book of the "mind" begins not in New York, but back in his native Minnesota where he "came from the East last autumn" and "felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever." It is a book of winter about the sun, and it takes him two years to complete his work of art, as he notes in the last chapter. Here his Midwestern perspective is crucial: it gives him not only the physical distance from the East, but in a metaphorical sense, an internal detachment.

One can easily catalogue Midwestern references which Nick makes about his New York summer. He constantly reminds his reading audience that he

is a man of the provinces; whether he is referring to his "provincial" inexperience or to his role as "pathfinder." Nick further reveals his provincial squeamishness when he says to Daisy, "You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy, I confessed...Can't you talk about crops or something." His descriptions remind one of the Midwest: he declares that he took his bungalow in Long Island rather than live in the city because he "had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees;" he describes the shops in the Valley of Ashes as "sort of compact Main Street," he mentions that when he, Tom and Myrtle "drove over to Fifth Avenue," it was "so warm and soft, almost pastoral, on the summer Sunday afternoon that I wouldn't have been surprised to see a great flock of white sheep turn the corner;" he is the man of the garden as he describes Gatsby's gaudy machine, his automobile, which "was terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns. Sitting down behind many layers of glass in a sort of green leather conservatory, we started to town." Of the many colors in Gatsby, Nick is particularly responsive to green, whether the green light at the end of Daisy's dock or the green grass on his lawn which Gatsby wanted cut to prepare his rendezvous with Daisy and which Nick symbolically notes after Gatsby's death the end was now as long as his. In this sense, Nick remains the man of an earlier pastoral America confronting the modern and grotesque, just as Gatsby has done, but he has a better sense of balance. In one of the most famous statements from the novel, Nick states, "I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life."

It is vital to stress that Nick, like Gatsby, is also a dreamer, a quester after a more exciting and meaningful life force. But, as with Gatsby, the dream is not nurtured in the East, but in the Midwest. Nick can so deeply identify himself with Gatsby's dream at the end because he understands its origins, whether it comes from a poor farm in North Dakota, a stable of horses in Lake Forest as with Tom, a Louisville home as with Daisy: "For Daisy was young and her artificial world was redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful snobbery and orchestras which set the rhythm of the year, summing up the sadness and suggestiveness of life in new tunes." As Professor Douglas Noverr has pointed out, Nick's imaginings about Dutch sailors on a Long Island Sound in a kind of cinematic dissolve, is directly connected to Jimmy Gatz's wonder at the sight of Dan Cody's glamorous yacht on the shores of Lake Superior:

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes-- a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desire, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

The American dream clearly has its heart in the Middle West.

This is what Nick understands at the end of his journey into time past. His earlier descriptions of New York, with its promise of life beginning anew, found their source not in the East but in the Midwestern perspective which he brought with him. "I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men

and women and machines gives to the restless eye." And both the corruption and the purity of the dream came from his roots: "The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world." The love affairs of Tom, Gatsby's business connections, class conflict, materialism, violence, misplaced expectations (Gatsby with Daisy) all had origins in the Midwest. But most importantly, Nick learns that the most important condition of any dreamer is to come to terms with one's origins, not to reject them, to return to one's parentage in this novel of middle age children without parents, to unite one's past with the promise of an ecstatic future. Ultimately, I would say that Nick's Midwestern perspective, with its sense of balance, saves him. Unlike Charles Samuels, who says about the end, "The past is our future. We have come to the end of possibility," I would argue that Nick keeps the dream because he understands its potential corruption. I do not now despair over the end of Gatsby with others: I do not find solely an elegy of doom. Rather, I find redemption and hope in Nick's last testament that the problem with Gatsby's perspective was that he "did not know that [the dream] was already behind him, somewhere back in the vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night." Hence Nick's Midwestern perspective allows him to realize that while the human condition may dictate that we are all "boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past," we are always dreamers, and we have the power to dream what we might be, essentially better creatures, if we always confront the reality that we are continually subject to the "wings and arrows of outrageous fortune." The quest is rich as long as the source is not forgotten.

Hence Nick's sense of balance is crucial to Fitzgerald's vision in The Great Gatsby. Of all the major characters, Nick emerges as the only one who seems to adjust to transition in America. He is not only the conduit, the go-between of individual rendezvous and romantic relationships, but he, as the chronicler and historian, is the go-between of time sequences, of past and future, of old and new, of regions, Midwest and East, despite its haunting quality and its resistance to Nick's attempts to adapt to it. Unlike Gatsby, his father Henry Gatz, the Wilsons, Daisy, Tom, Nick is not caught in the past trying to recapture some "irrecoverable" dream of a dramatic football game or condemned to repeating the past. Ultimately he is not careless in his driving or inconsiderate and insensitive to the feelings of others. He is the man of the present tense, as he reveals in the first chapter and in the final chapter when he notes, "that's my Middle West--not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. I am part of that, a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name." He keeps the pastoral dream of an Edenic America while confronting, in 1924, a new America of machines--power and iron--"a new world--material without being real." Gatsby may have failed; his house is dark; he is dead. But Nick survives as his protector the keeper of his dream, as symbolized by his erasure of the obscenity in front of the house in the moonlight.

Nick recognizes the inadequacy of earlier sustaining myths in America, the myth of success, and the myth of the frontier, for dealing with contemporary problems. These two myths are beautifully combined, of course, in the old edition of Hopalong Cassidy, where Gatsby kept his schedule for success, like Benjamin Franklin, in a work of celebration of the West and of the individual, self-sufficient hero--"rise from bed--6:00 a.m.....Study needed inventions 7-9 p.m." After all, Gatsby had been introduced to the concept of expansion by Dan Cody, himself a product of the last frontier in the Yukon gold rush, and he sailed around the world three times, to little avail. Gatsby had certainly been socially mobile, only to find crassness and rejection in the upper set, partially deserved, of course.

If frontiers were gone and if social mobility were sterile, what was left? What was left was the internal frontier, the exploration of the mind, the journey of the artist, a fabulous culture which Nick captures in a poetic and enduring fashion, a triumph of the mind, a new self-awareness, and centering. Nick may be growing old, like the other characters as he recognizes when he suddenly realizes he is thirty: "Thirty--the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning briefcase of enthusiasm, thinning hair." But he is able to adjust to that fact the knowledge of his own finitude, and he realizes that enduring American values so central to the American dream, experimentation, individualism, a thirst for freedom and beauty, remain immortal, if one can only keep perspective, in his case a distinctly Midwestern perspective. The Great Gatsby is not simply a lament for lost youth or a lost America. I would submit that a focus on the Midwestern perspective in this exquisite novel,

one which I lived with pleasure for many years and one which I am increasingly convinced is one of the masterworks of the Twentieth Century, adds a most significant dimension. For, by focussing on this perspective, we can realize that it is a triumph of intellectual retrospection, a promise of rebirth.

Michigan State University

Note: Direct quotations from the novel come from the Charles Scribner's edition (1925, 1953).

* * *

NEW POETRY COLLECTION

Gradually The Dreams Change, a new book of poems by Louis J. Cantoni,

has just been published by South and West, Inc. Dr. Cantoni is a professor at Wayne State University in Detroit, where he directs the master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling. His poems have appeared in national and international quarterlies and in anthologies. He is the author or editor of several books and monographs and has published numerous articles and reviews in counseling, rehabilitation, education, psychology, and other journals. His biographical listings include American Men and Women of Science, International Who's Who in Poetry, and Who's Who in America.

The book costs \$5.00 and may be purchased from South and West, Inc.,

P. O. Box 446, Fort Smith, Arkansas 72901.

Joyce R. Ladenson

Androgynous child whose hair curls into flowers,
naked you ride a horse without saddle or bridle
easy between your thighs from the walled garden outward.
Coarse sunflowers of desire whose seeds birds crack open
nod upon your journey, child of the morning whose sun
can only be born from us who strain bleeding to give birth.
Grow into your horse, let there be no more riders or ridden.¹

In the past decade or so, women writers of fiction have mainly concerned themselves with a variety of patterns of female alienation, primarily conceived out of a dazed, disgruntled, isolated middle class perspective: marriage, the family and the suburban cocoon simply have not worked. Nor, for that matter, have the traditional psycho-therapeutic palliatives which have lined the pockets of psychiatrists but done little to correct or even relieve female malaise.² By contrast, Marge Piercy's guiding vision is distinguished largely by its broad, radical social and political concerns, which give her art energy and usually provide hopeful guideposts for a better life while signalling warnings of a decaying social structure. Piercy's feminism must be regarded in light of her socialist, humanist leanings, for her women characters struggle not only with personal feelings--relationships of profound psychological dimension--but with socio-political ideas: indeed, she has been called America's Doris Lessing in part for her ability to dramatize the complex political environment in which her female characters play out their circumscribed yet rebellious destinies.

Piercy's didacticism, especially pronounced in the volume of poetry, To Be of Use, 1973, also propels and energizes her vision, imagery and recording of events; but her passionate commitment to social change should not be confused with propaganda since she strives consciously and successfully,

I think, to fuse craft with idealogical and social issues, and does not sacrifice art for the sake of wrenching a message. What one notices through at least three of her novels is a progressive movement from incipient, awakening feminism as it actually emerged in the radical political and counter-culture movements of the sixties, toward a fuller expression of women's lives until recently, to a preoccupation with full-fledged revolutionary feminism cast in the dual form of science fiction and a quasi social realism.

Piercy's second novel, Dance the Eagle to Sleep, 1970, illustrates both her sympathy with and involvement in the 1960's political movements, and her depiction of both the men who lead them and the women who are their servants and functionaries. Piercy reduces the mean age for those involved to the late teens in order both to exaggerate youth's intensity and passion as well as its vulnerability and shortsightedness: the young men who lead the political and cultural underground are ultimately divided between scientist-warriors who advocate violent resistance against increasing militarism and repression, and those who foster utopian dreams away from society in a more separatist commune. The separatist wait, more pragmatically, for the right moment to assume power, if, indeed, that assumption would ever be appropriate in their lifetime. Youthful naivete and self-absorption notwithstanding, Piercy's sympathy for the radicals is clear. For instance, she writes approvingly of their efforts to build a new society or at least a model of one; of their anger with and moral repulsion from the Vietnam War; of the commercialized culture whose caricatured values the war throws into horrific relief; and of the lopsided, capitalist priorities which create impoverished populations and breed racism and class divisiveness.

What is a little less clear is the role women characters play in all of this. Ostensibly, they are in full support of a new society built on

socialist lines; and they choose to participate in an Anglo imitation of Native American culture especially for its avowed communitarian ethos. But the two women who assume important roles in the lives of "their" men, and who are among the leaders of the commune, remain more tentative in their commitment to feminism than socialism, and mouth only mechanically feminist rhetoric. Although they are painfully conscious of the gender inequalities within the commune, they appear powerless to alter them. For instance, Joanna, a high school groupie dropout, comes to recognize her Native American lover Corey's subtle, gentle dominance in all areas of their relationship, yet ultimately retreats into an escapist ploy by becoming his best friend's lover. This, in turn, drives Corey to petty revenge as he pursues another woman, though never able to relinquish his love for Joanna. Though momentarily conscious of her oppression, Joanna is more acted upon than acting. Finally captured by the police, and sent to a mental hospital, she succumbs to psychiatric torture, perceiving her rebellion as an immature, "personal" resistance to authority, stemming from "penis envy" and the lack of "good female models."³ Piercy's satire implies condemnation of pernicious, manipulative government politics, but the novel implies as well that, as yet, women are not strong enough to resist sexist pressures from the right or left.

Ginny, a more maternal, gentle figure than Joanna, and the person to whom Corey turns, ultimately becomes the final symbolic vehicle for a new society. As she gives birth to Corey's baby, and is assisted by a former lover and a black male ally, both of whom take on midwifery roles, the three form a kind of androgynous trimuvirate, energized and blessed by their participation in the life-giving ritual. And as fugitives from a society which has literally declared war on them, they figuratively give birth to a child

of a new age--the only hope in the novel that all may not be lost. The hope remains symbolic, however, as the ranks of the youthful counterculture and any resisting groups are destroyed by the government war machine. Furthermore, Ginny and Joanna are both rudimentary feminists and shadowy figures; Piercy has only sketched her subject which takes fuller shape in her third novel.

The shift in focus in Small Changes, 1973, indicates Piercy's interest in fictionalizing the actual historic shift in women's lives during the early seventies away from politics where men lead toward an assertion of a woman's culture. Her two main characters are women who occupy nearly all of Piercy's attention. Like the familiar middle class women's novels of the early seventies, the plot involves a youngish, questing heroine whose involvements with men are painfully drawn and morbidly ended: Miriam, with beauty on her side, lives with two men alternately, and finally embittered by their respective forms of instability and capriciousness, is propelled into a marriage from which she emerges after a few years, two children and an unfaithful husband, a broken woman who may yet transform her beleaguered energies into productive activity. Although she is in good part defined by her work as a computer scientist with humanist values and as a sympathizer with Leftist and environmental causes, her reliance on intimate heterosexual marriage dooms her, as does her need for men in general, Piercy seems to suggest. By contrast, Piercy introduces Beth, whose early, disastrous marriage leads her ultimately to relationships with other women and to building a lesbian feminist dance collective. Though Piercy's imaginative abilities are better demonstrated by Miriam's very vivid psychological and social life, and though the reader may be more convinced by Miriam's more complex fictional persona, Beth is Piercy's trump card, her

symbolic alternative to hopelessness and stagnation. Beth's discovery of her own ability to love, to lead an enriching artistic and communal life, and ultimately to go underground in order to resist the CIA, are evidence that Piercy's women have grown stronger out of their identification with each other. And, though Miriam lacks Beth's strength and determination, her complex, very dynamic and full characterization are testimony to Piercy's own shift away from leading male characters.

By far her most radical novel, Woman on the Edge of Time, 1976, is an ideological fruition of her earlier feminism. The novel presents as well a philosophical alternative to those destructive internal and external forces working against the communal youth culture in Dance the Eagle to Sleep. The half realistic tone and atmosphere of the earlier novel with its awkward endeavors to form a communal society where men and women share in work and in the products of their labor, and where sexuality is ceremonialized in an attempt at freeing people (heterosexism prevents such freedom, however) is finally perfected in the imagined utopia of Woman on the Edge of Time.

Piercy's utopian vision of a future, nonsexist, socialist society is inspired by what she and other feminists of the seventies have both dreamed of and in small part experienced: an androgynous sexuality prevails where one's gender is of little if no importance to one's identity (thus language is beautifully and gracefully transformed into revolutionary non-sexist diction and usage); communal homes are patterned after early Native American villages and utilize materials which are recycled leftovers from our century; ecological balances are scrupulously maintained; parenting is truly androgynous as men who wish to "mother" their children have evolved nurturant breasts; women and men are free to love either sex (though heterosexuality seems more the norm);

rituals celebrating birth, coupling, death, etc., are rich in their shared community atmosphere, something only fumbled with in the teenage experience of Dance the Eagle to Sleep; and political decisions are familiarly long, often boring sessions that are relieved, nevertheless, by rotating, egalitarian structures. In addition, technology serves human needs: practiced by and taught to many at very young ages, herbal and technological medicine is available to all who need healing; television projects varieties of ritualistic, poetic, realistic and historical drama, not escapist pap; and mass transit is free for everyone. In short, a visionary form of primitive communism prevails, where class divisions, greed, private property, sexism and racism are eliminated while the individual is not lost in a 1984 Big Brother mass hypnosis. The present, on the other hand, is much less than ideal and contains the seeds necessary for growth into utopia less prominently than the tendency toward managerial fascism, complete with behavior control, rigid class, race and sex divisions, and careless, profligate misuse of the natural environment. Both the present and the future are viewed through the eyes of Consuela Ramos, a poor New York Latino woman, at first committed to Bellevue on the trumped up excuse that she displays unprovoked violent behavior, when, in fact, Piercy gives another impression through dramatic scenes where Connie defends herself and her niece against the brutal mistreatment by her niece's pimp.

Connie's final incarceration in a New York State Mental Institution from which she makes her psychic escape, comprises the drama of the novel: the attempts to neutralize her socially caused anger by implementing a kind of remote control reactor in her brain are ultimately defeated by her as she, on the one hand, wages literal war against the inhumane doctors who administer

brain experiments against intractable patients and, on the other, by exercising her ability to communicate psychically with the androgynous woman, Luciente, of the future utopia. Luciente's just and humane visions instruct Connie in the ways of a better life and vividly point out the injustices of her own; they arm her with a reason for resistance in a way which makes her appear justified and powerful to the reader.

Mattapoissett, the visionary world, cast as science fiction, could be interpreted as the delusions of a schizophrenic; but Piercy has endowed her utopia with credible dignity, authority and even historic authenticity, thereby ingratiating her readers.⁴ The acid test which provides proof that Connie is justified in her saint-like, single-handed war against the psychiatric-technocrats, is her ability, near the end of the novel, to make contact with another future society which clearly cultivates opposing values and social structures to Mattapoissett's: that other society, "New York" of the next century, is a slick, drugged, plastic, consumer-mad world run by a male executive elite who employs legions of mass-manipulated soldiers and male workers to drain the earth of its last remaining resources. And the women are silicone-stuffed, mechanical prostitutes forced to serve the sexual pleasures of the elite. This, Piercy suggests, is the other possibility--a decadent fascism with entrenched class, race and sex hierarchies, glamorized and disguised through mindless celluloid sensationalism. Piercy's Swiftian satire of media escapism dramatically undermines the appeal of pornography, romance and sadomasochistic entertainments, such as one finds today, Connie muses, in Times Square. Crucially, in future time, the fascist "New Yorkers" wage war against the gentle though cautious and legitimately defensive people of Mattapoissett. Once conscious of such a horrifying alternative,

Connie becomes a resolute rebel, resisting, by force, her psychiatric persecutors; and the reader is engaged, through Piercy's artistry and compassionate insights, to cast his/her own lot. By the novel's conclusion we have all become women and men on the edge of time.

The evolution of Marge Piercy's feminism then, on the basis of three novels, reflects an emerging, increasing affirmation of women's lives and the potential power of women to radically alter society. Further, Piercy's feminism, so much the guiding spirit for her novels and poems, is generally part of her vision of social justice; and her commitment to that vision is the yardstick against which the whole psychological and social fabric of the novels is measured. In an era of economic and social retrenchment, Marge Piercy's works are cautiously optimistic, offering stringent social criticism beside corrective visionary utopias.

Michigan State University

NOTES

¹Marge Piercy. "The Total Influence or Outcome of the Matter: The Sun," in To Be of Use (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 105.

²Phyllis Chesler, Women and Madness (New York: Avon, 1972).

³Marge Piercy, Dance the Eagle to Sleep (London: W. H. Allen, 1971), p. 218.

⁴Piercy may be punning on Massachusetts in her choice of the name, Mattapoissett. The name also amplifies her emphasis on the utopia's ties with a lost Native American (and Latino) past where women once played central roles in village and family life.

A Review

Young Dreiser, by Yoshinobu Hakutani
Cranbury, N.J.: Farley Dickinson University Press, 1980, 228 pp.

Philip L. Gerber

Theodore Dreiser published three autobiographies documenting his difficult Indiana upbringing during the 1870's and 1880's. Now these books form the major basis for Yoshinobu Hakutani's Young Dreiser, a study of the writer in the making. Dreiser's own record is supplemented liberally from Hakutani's considerable knowledge of Dreiser's apprentice publications--newspaper stories, free-lance articles, and early fiction--in a handy addition to Dreiser studies.

We are prone to forget how busy the writers of that time kept their pens, particularly those peripatetic young Americans (Stephen Crane and Willa Cather also come to mind) who used journalism as an entry into literature. No academic ivory towers for them. Whether in Chicago, St. Louis, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, or New York, their posts on the great papers swept them into the mainstream. By the time they were ready to try their new wings on something less ephemeral than journalism, they had experienced widely and deeply. Their adolescent concepts of life were tested against realities met in the streets. Often enough--this was Dreiser's case, surely--they were struck by the harsh disparity between what even the most admired newspapers would consent to print and the actualities which they came to know. This knowledge was capable of impelling them onward, beyond the inhibitions of newsprint, to presses somewhat more receptive to realism, and to reputations achieved by transmitting the lessons of youth into art.

Hakutani is skillful in recounting the manner in which Dreiser managed to bridge the gulf separating reportage from art and, in the process, utilized journalistic experiences as the basis for early forays into fiction (as in "Nigger Jeff") or adapted and incorporated pieces of earlier writing into his major novels (as "Curious Shifts of the Poor" is woven into the pages of Sister Carrie). He had seen much, and all was grist for his mill.

Young Dreiser culminates where the author himself saw his youthful experiences coming to fruition, in the writing of Sister Carrie. This is entirely appropriate, and yet it might be emphasized further that his "newspaper days" were an influence until the end. The three novels of his Financier saga (1912-1947) are adapted from press materials, as is An American Tragedy (1925) and a good deal of Dreiser's final novel, The Bulwark (1946), including the automobile tragedy upon which the plot turns, was found in the daily newspaper. One regrets that more is not made of such materials as Dreiser's apprentice interviews with the likes of Philip D. Armour and Marshall Field, so important to The Titan, and of the manuscript versions of the autobiographies, generally more pungent and revealing than the printed versions. In particular it is to be regretted that Young Dreiser does not reflect the contributions made by Dr. Vera Dreiser's revisionist account of the novelist's boyhood and family life in My Uncle Theodore.

On the other hand, it is nice to be reminded that Ford Madox Ford found Dreiser a "completely readable" novelist. The same might be said of Young Dreiser, which will be much read, I am certain, by students eager to know more about the formation of this major figure but intimidated by the weight of A Book About Myself, Dawn, and A Hoosier Holiday.

The Tenth Annual Conference
Awards Citations

The MidAmerica Award

One of the great pleasures of my association with the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature is an annual prerogative that I reserve for myself: the presentation of the annual MidAmerica Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern Literature. In the past three years we have honored those scholarly pioneers who marked out the path that we members of the Society are following as we seek to discover, to define, to interpret the peculiar identity of the literature and culture of our region. The first recipient was Dr. John Flanagan of the University of Illinois; the second, Dr. Russel Nye of Michigan State; and the third, Dr. Walter Havighurst of Miami University.

The man whom we are honoring tonight is very much part of that distinguished company: Dr. Harlan Hatcher, who is perhaps best known to many for his association with a certain nearby institution. But for those of us who pursue the study of our region, and particularly for those of us who, like Harlan Hatcher, are products of the Ohio country, Harlan Hatcher's name is synonymous with the eloquent, compassionate, and comprehensive recreation of the state, the region, and the Great Lakes country. And for those of us fortunate enough to have had access to the Columbus Citizen book section during our formative years, Harlan Hatcher spoke to us in a language that led us to understand and love literature. I was never Dr. Hatcher's student in a formal sense--at one time I tried to be, but that is another story--but in other ways I have been for most of my life.

Dr. Hatcher is a prolific writer whose works have influenced our lives as scholars, teachers, students, readers, Midwesterners. His novels set in the Ohio Valley, Tunnel Hill and Patterns of Wolfpen, are well worth reading today, as is Central Standard Time. His Creating the Modern American Novel, Modern Dramas, American Dramas, and others have been classroom classics for years.

But it is for the persistence and clarity with which Dr. Hatcher recorded the growth of the Midwest that we are honoring him: The Buckeye Country (1940); The Great Lakes (1944); Lake Erie (1945); The Western Reserve (1949); A Pictorial History of the Great Lakes (1963); and many others.

I first discovered Harlan Hatcher's work in a military hospital at the end of the war at a time when I was discovering myself after three years of violent confusion. The book I found in the hospital library was The Buckeye Country. I read it twice, and together with Walter Havighurst's The Quiet Shore, I stole it upon discharge, and I have it yet. For the Buckeye Country, for the other works, above all, for pointing out the way, I am pleased and proud to present The MidAmerica Award for 1980 to Dr. Harlan Hatcher.

The Mark Twain Award

I regret very much the fact that Jack Conroy's health has prevented his being here tonight to accept the first Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature. But he continues to speak to us in his inimitable voice in the foolscap pages of The Fool Killer, and a new anthology of his works, The Jack Conroy Reader, has just appeared.

It is most fitting that Jack receive the first Mark Twain award, because from his birth in Moberly, Missouri, down the road from Hannibal, to his current role in publishing The Fool Killer, his life and works and that of his predecessor have been remarkably parallel.

Jack is known as a proletarian writer, and he wears that designation proudly. He is one of those who, like Mark Twain, came out of the people of his time and defined them for us with insight and compassion for all time. His best known novel is The Disinherited, published in 1933 and happily again in print, the story of those who sought survival and meaning in the upheaval of the great depression. As editor of The Anvil, The Rebel Poet, and The New Anvil he introduced writers as diverse as Erskine Caldwell and Frank Yerby, neames that are household words today, and he has gathered the best of those writings in the recent anthology Writers in Revolt. His other works, novels, anthologies, collections, have continued, each of them unique, insightful, penetrating, and above all, wise. Jack is "The Sage of Moberly"--in my more irrational moments I like to emulate him as "the Sage of Dimondale"--he is a great writer, a great Midwesterner, and a great human being. I'm very pleased and proud to designate him as the recipient of the first annual Mark Twain Award.

David D. Anderson