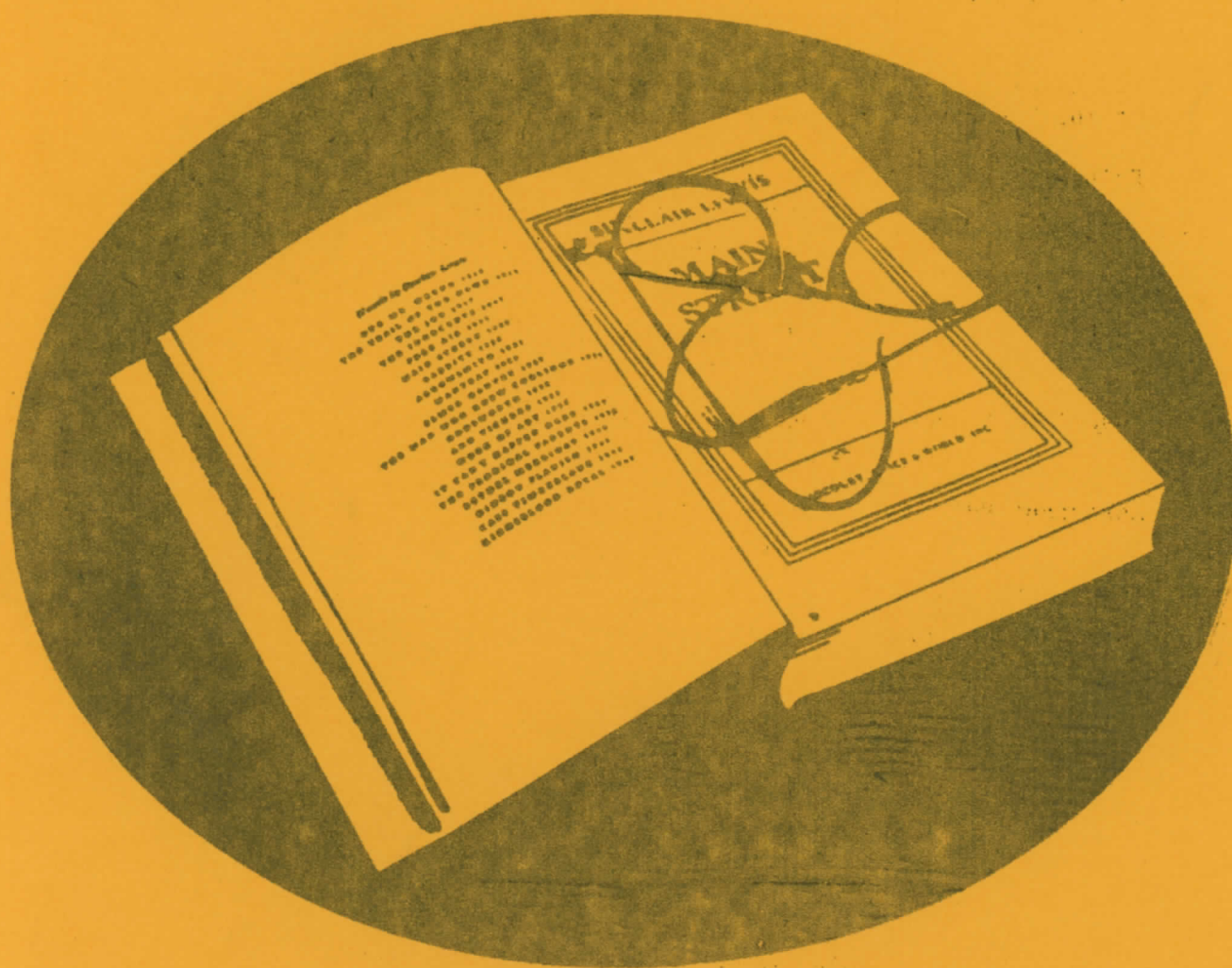


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Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

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Contents

- The Humanities at Michigan State in the Forties, II:
A Kind of Reasonableness
Frank L. Ryan 1
- Melville E. Stone, Eugene Field, and The
Beginnings of Chicago Literary Journalism
David D. Anderson 14
- The Universality of James Wright
Bernard F. Engel 26
- From Middle Border to City:
Chicago Literary Origins, a review essay
Marilyn Judith Atlas 29

The Humanities at Michigan State in the Forties II:
A Kind of Reasonableness

Frank L. Ryan

My career at Michigan State could be located between two speeches, one by President John Hannah greeting my freshman class, and the other a commencement address by Reverend J. Hugh O'Donnell, C.S.C., bidding farewell to those freshmen who had managed to graduate on time. The speeches are like bookends, providing support to the ideas and attitudes which had been generated and supported in the intervening four years, holding them upright with titles exposed, so to speak, for the inspection by an browser who might be interested in what was happening at the school in the forties.

Reverend O'Donnell, then president of the University of Notre Dame, was predictably solemn in warning us of moral pitfalls and traditionally optimistic in anticipating a world which was confused and yet ready, indeed almost begging, to be conquered by a combination of high industry and even higher Christian morality. His tones were those which invariably colored the Catholic evangelical spirit of my youth, alternately interpreting man as methodically plodding toward God's grace and sprightly running to his doom.

President Hannah's address was less Christian and more startling, though not because it was less Christian. At that time Mr. Hannah was either in his second year as president or beginning his tenure and his vigorous and sonorous articulations were prophetic of the long and truly distinguished service he was to render to the university. Aside from the articulations, his address was memorable for two things. At one point he urged each of us to turn to one of our neighbors and greet him or her cordially even if he or she is from Boston. At another point, possibly at the close by way of peroration, he quoted Kipling's poem, "If--," in its entirety. The reference to Boston

must be considered in the light of the energy and sincerity with which the poem was read. If it had been read with a suggestion of cynicism, a slight curling of the lip, I might now interpret the Boston allusion as a Menckian dig at New England. But it was delivered with those tonal qualities proper to a peroration, one which Cicero would have immediately identified as an attempt to move the listener to bright and noble goals (genus grande).

And so, though the Boston remark may have been intentionally sly it was made serious, and possibly a bit provincial, by the reading of "If--."

While Michigan in the mid-forties was somewhere west of Boston but east of Eden to New Englanders, to Michigan academicians New England was apparently Eden itself, a paradise of astute educators who had been refined and polished at Yale, Harvard, Williams, Amherst, and so forth. At times New England and its institutions were referred to in measures which suggested primitive man trying to explain the nature of the sun. We learned about some remarkably upright educators like Harvard's Bliss Perry, Louis Aggasiz, and Asa Gray if only because some of our professors could not forget them and considered it a moral duty not to let us forget them. Of course we learned that George Lyman Kittridge had become a legend in both Harvard history and Shakespearean scholarship and were alternately full of mirth and admiration before the shrine of that legend, but few rendered the same tribute to such Midwestern scholars as Elmer Edgar Stoll or Moses Coit Tyler.

On learning that I was from the Boston area, a Midwestern-born, Williams College-educated Professor of English invited me to his home to talk of New England, confident that the New England of an Irish-American Catholic, born and raised near Boston, was the New England of a Midwestern "Williams'" man.

A kind and interesting man yet, I received the impression that he had escaped from the Midwest, found happiness at Williams and in New England, developed a strong case of nostalgia for these places, and was remaining in Michigan under compulsion. At that time New England seemed unaware of the spread of higher education in the Midwest while the Midwest seemed sublimely optimistic about the pervasive influence of Boston and Cambridge. "I know somebody from Boston," a student told me in a not untypical response. "He's from Fall River." Fall River is approximately seventy miles from Boston (and Cambridge) and feels its influence about as much as Dickens' Coketown felt the influence of Oxford.

But if President Hannah's reference to Boston made me a bit wondrous about geographical isolation, the reading of "If--" started me thinking about literary irrelevance. I entered State with as little polish as any freshman but with a capacity for a unique recognition. I had left an area in which history, particularly literary history, assumed an almost aggressive stance. Pilgrimages to the shrines of Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Longfellow, Melville, Whittier, and others were almost commonplace for children from the Greater Boston area. We wandered through Emerson's house at Concord, noticing the volumes in his library, his hat hanging from the rack in the hall, the carefully preserved symbols of a domestic life which seemed alien to the Emerson of the writings. We had walked solemnly through the Longfellow mansion in Cambridge, breathing in the gentile decay which has settled within that house and dimly aware of the literary life that had been led there. We ran around Walden Pond, hoping for special pages of Thoreau's book to leap into life around us: the cry of a loon, a woodchuck crossing our path, perhaps a war being waged by the descendents of Thoreau's ants. . . Some of

us, momentarily defying the institutional stares of our teachers, had stolen a swim in the pond (drying ourselves afterward with our underwear), convinced that we were feeling the touch of history on our bodies. He stood there, we said, and bathed here and saw such and such a thing.

However, the history was more than a rather demurely monitored tour of a house or an outlawed plunge into a pond. Even if the moral edges of the messages of these writers had become rounded by time, like inscriptions in old brick, the messages themselves remained intact, inviolable in their grammatical and epigrammatical precision. "What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think." "With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do." "There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers." "What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate." Against the background of such remarks, President Hannah's reading of Kipling's poem was startling, unexpected, as though I had expectations of St. Paul and had been offered Kahlil Gibran.

Even then I had the feeling that the poem had nothing to do with me but was somehow associated with virtues which either prevailed or were declining in the British Empire. Evidently, the reading was a bugle call, a reveille, arranged to wake us to a kind of moral morning which as an American I had not yet experienced. Neither Emerson nor Thoreau, I knew, would have been interested in Kipling's advice to keep one's head while all others were losing theirs.

In fact, it seemed the contrary with Emerson and particularly with Thoreau who equated the retention of one's head with a conformity that invested in munitions, railroads, and social acceptance. And yet, the

characteristics so rhythmically phrased by Kipling and so seriously delivered by President Hannah were precisely those which I encountered in my years at State. Professor Nye once said in a class in American Literature that though their books had arrived in the Midwest, Emerson and Thoreau were still in New England. Kipling, however, had arrived in East Lansing. Just about everybody was extraordinarily level-headed. Just about everybody kept his and her head. It was a reasonable world, one which produced a kind of detachment to which Emerson and Thoreau would have been strangers.

There was little rebellion of any kind, particularly intellectual, and I cannot with assurance account for this condition. Possibly there were a number of reasons for its existence. It may have been caused in part by the freshman courses in composition which were cut off from the spirit though not the letter of classical rhetoric and therefore were outside the realm of vigorous argumentation. Perhaps it was also due to the absence of a prevailing philosophical system such as the Scholasticism which served in many Catholic colleges as a basis for cosmic checks and balances. In my classes in philosophy systems were examined without a meta-system by which to judge them. That one system emphasized the reality of materialism at the expense of spirituality or that another exaggerated the capacities of mind while another diminished them was of little consequence to us. Philosophical systems were to be studied, talked about, written about on examinations, occasionally understood, but never acted upon.

We were as far from becoming Kantian or Thomistic as we were from wearing robes in imitation of Mohandas Gandhi. We were like permanently bottled carbonated water, shaken occasionally to create a pressure but never uncapped

to discharge the effervescence. The professors themselves, may have had a hand in the matter. After Professor Williams had spoken enthusiastically and lengthily about Thomas a Kempis as a reaction to the sometimes desperate pursuit of learning in the Renaissance, he concluded soberly with the warning that one had to be careful with people like Thomas a Kempis.

When, at the suggestion of Professor Clarke, I read some essays by the "New" Humanists, Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, and responded enthusiastically, I got the impression from his comment that I had better be careful with people like Babbitt and More. Being careful was a virtue though nobody seemed to have clear ideas about the penalty for not being careful. However, one day in a class in American Language (a class occasionally visited by Professor Nye) an event took place which momentarily rocked our careful, reasonable world and served as a sign for the results of exuberance.

We had been discussing dialects and had worked around to social distinctions based on dialects and then converged on social distinctions themselves. Social distinctions were thin ice and we always recognized and respected the signs warning against the ice. We knew the faint, crackling sounds of danger as our weight advanced to issues which touched our lives secretly, deeply. Each of us respected the inevitable withdrawal of others if only because we wished to have others respect it in us. But on this day one among us, a returned veteran, seized the hour and spoke angrily of class structures, capitalistic forces, war, militarists. Nothing slowed him down; his own irrelevance, our shocked faces, the astonishment of the professor whose very mildness may have encouraged the storm. As he spoke, intensely and almost incoherently, he approached the teaching platform, mounted it, concluded his attack upon society, recited "Tommy Atkins," Kipling's embittered view of

British imperialism (had he borrowed President Hannah's copy of Kipling's poems?), stepped down from the platform, uttered a piercing cry, entered what we later learned was an epileptic fit, and dropped to the floor.

Somebody in the class knew what to do and the rest of us moved out slowly, looking uneasily at the prone figure, stiff and awkward in the grasp of the seizure. Outside, we were silently compassionate for the stricken student and embarrassed by the wild surge of emotion which had rendered him so vulnerable. Our compassion was genuine, yet we could not quite separate the uninhibited outburst from the distressing conclusion. There was no obvious association between the outburst and the seizure and none of us was so perversely moral that we made an association. Rather, we saw the outburst as a kind of violence which threatened the somewhat stoic tranquility of the classroom and the seizure as an intensification of that violence. Literary studies, or any studies, were neither a grim business nor frivolous play. They were a balance between these two points and the veteran's outburst had disturbed this balancing by adding a social dimension which we were neither temperamentally nor critically capable of handling.

There were other factors which may have produced the reasonableness, for example, the absence of a critical meta-theory, one capable of analyzing and evaluating all critical positions. The critical position which governed our responses to literature seems now to have been that recommended by Matthew Arnold, to be familiar with the best that had been thought and written. Certainly, we were exposed to the best and we accepted it without question: Swift, Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, Donne, Fielding, Dickens,

Henry James, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau, Twain, and so forth.

To a surprising degree we were also confronted with such "minor" writers as Langland, Southey, Meredith, Wycherley, Hazlitt. There was little danger of our becoming students of criticism and literary theory at the expense of the "classics." The courses in literary criticism were perfunctory side dishes to the major fare, the works themselves. We responded to literature itself and though these responses were sometimes gentile they were strong enough to produce a reasonableness which triumphed over both modernism which rendered little attention to literary history and critical studies which demanded almost complete attention if pursued seriously.

A few years later at the graduate school of a Catholic university when I was thrown in with students immersed in criticism, particularly Aristotelian criticism, State's emphasis on literary history created a problem for me but not as serious a one as that confronted by students who had paid a price for that immersion - a vague notion of literary history. The price was high, the sacrifice of the perception of origins, chronology, and comparative values. If a major function of criticism is to identify the nature of literature, then a significant part of the formation of that criticism is the recognition of what is common to all literature, a recognition achieved only by an exposure to literary history.

Eventually, the paraphrases we were asked to struggle with and the Arnold-like touchstones we were asked to admire would be condemned by the aesthetics of the "New" criticism. I add, almost as an aside, that I cannot remember either the word "aesthetics" being used at State or the

study of aesthetics, though within the scope of literary studies, had a powerful alliance with both Aristotelian literary theory and Thomistic philosophy and theology.

If there were alliances between departments at Michigan State during the forties they were well concealed. Each department apparently felt itself unique in subject matter and methodology and though literary history was being advanced by the English department it did not therefore point out similarities between literature as a history and economics, or political science, or even physics as histories. As to the cause of this I can only suggest again that the humanities had not yet come of age at the university, that in particular the humanities had not yet attained to a philosophical view of its activities.

But to return to the "New" criticism and its condemnation of admiration of parts of a text: I was to survive this criticism and look back with some gratitude to my literary studies as an undergraduate. I had accepted and shared, somewhat uncritically but yet somewhat intelligently, a paradigm of professorial views some of which I recall clearly, Prof. Williams' zest for the style of Sir Thomas Browne, Professor Clarke's judgement that The Education was not Henry Adams' best work, Professor Shirley's contention that after Marlowe no poet was so astonishing in his imagery as John Keats. No professor was reluctant to do something from which the New critics were to recoil in horror - stand back and admire segments of a text. For which attribute, my hearty thanks. "No poet," said Russel Nye in a discussion of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," ever wrote a finer image than

Whitman's

Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in the
dark-brown fields uprisen

Professor Shirley could not conceal his exuberance for a line from Marlowe's
Dr. Faustus,

See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament! And Professor
A.J.M. Smith meditated for a long time on the simplicity of the answer pro-
vided by Homer to Helen's request that her beloved brothers show themselves
in the field of battle. "But it was not as she said; already mother earth
held them fast, far away in Lacedaimon, their own native land."

Today, students have keys to every office and a seat at every table.
We, on the contrary, were at arm's length from privy councils and so were
ignorant of the forces which shaped the literary program, perhaps another
reason for our reasonableness. Much of the forming of American higher
education can be located in the years from 1870 to 1920 when a few names
were dominant: Charles Eliot of Harvard, James Angell of Michigan, Andrew
White of Cornell, Daniel Gilman of Johns Hopkins. Possibly in the forties
State was a bundle of tensions in attempts to work out the academic destinies
envisioned by these men. Possibly, there were within the English department
sharp debates between the representatives of various educational positions,
between traditionalists and modernists, utilitarianists and aesthetes,
Aristotelians and Platonists. If there were such tensions we were not aware
of them. Whatever was, was right.

At times we passed beyond reasonableness to a gentility which, in turn,
made us at times look like innocents. When Will Durant in a campus address
referred to Franklin Roosevelt as "that cripple," the audience literally

gaped at the harshness of the term. We had no literary "heroes," like Kurt Vonnegut Jr., who shook the temples of education and rattled the supposedly dry bones of tradition. We read Aldous Huxley and Evelyn Waugh but they were not threats to our reasonableness. The return of the World War II veterans brought about an emphasis on a no-nonsense education, one which would ensure the secure life which the thirties had denied the previous generation. There was little time for cynicism. Cynicism was a luxury permitted those who could afford it and the price was a sacrifice of earnestness and sense of purpose, virtues essential to what has become known as "goals." In a course in the European novel, the favorite writers were not the satirists but those who expressed directly, sombrely, the disintegration of old values or who seriously envisioned the emergence of a new order: Ignazio Silone, Arthur Koestler, Andre Gide, Leon Bloy, Thomas Mann, Sigrid undset. We turned to this literature and the literature, in turn, served the taste which made the choices.

Our innocence was a by-product of our earnestness in pursuing the best in literature and the best in literature was that which offered the deepest insights into human behavior. Literature was moral and though not in the possession of systematic moral critical theory we expected the human behavior to either be of the highest order or subject to punishment for significant moral lapses.

A few years ago I visited an experimental college in western Massachusetts and discovered that the bookstore had carefully isolated a space for the sale and leisurely scanning of pornographic art. Our innocence suffered no such trials. That once admired possession seems now to have been invincible

and even quaintly charming. A visit of the Bacchantes to the men's dormitories could not have caused more excitement than Merle Oberon's exhibition of cleavage in a college sponsored film, "The Scarlet Pimpernel." "Jonathan Swift is a filthy writer," a coed remarked in class when we encountered the Lilliputians' admiration of Gulliver's private parts of which they had a particularly advantageous view. A discussion of Hemingway's A Farewell To Arms convinced just about everyone that Catherine was indeed the "whore" she felt herself to be and that Rinaldi was a thorough profligate.

That the majority of students in literature courses were women may have had something to do with these responses, though I recognize the perils inherent in that statement. Nevertheless, the women at State impressed me as remarkably conservative, not at all like the Midwestern woman created by Thomas Wolfe and Edmund Wilson: lusty, wide-hipped, rose-cheeked earth goddesses seeking a tumble in the hay or, aware of their destiny created by American's heartland, an opportunity to procreate.

But then, perhaps I did not go west far enough. Perhaps in Kansas or Nebraska or Iowa I would have found the prototype of the creature which sometimes haunted Wolfe's dreams. At Michigan State I found that women were extraordinarily conservative, reading Milton with a taciturn intensity which I have not seen duplicated since. Therefore, it was not surprising that Reverend O'Donnell's commencement address was fitting. We had begun as freshmen with a set of virtues from Kipling which, though they did not establish new values did not annihilate old ones, and had concluded with a prosaic Christian message which was not designed to trouble our winter's sleep.

In between the messages, we read literature which was often ponderous in its length and solemnity and an instruction that for the most part complemented these qualities. But it was also a literature which never apologized for its length and solemnity and an instruction which rather valiantly assumed that the best interests of the student could be served by the exploration of this literature. The exploration had many fine moments the best of which were those in which I sensed, though could not have adequately described, the privilege of being part of a reading tradition that was hundreds of years old.

I often followed that tradition in temporarily empty rooms, mellowed with age and use, in the botany and forestry buildings which, I hope, have survived the improvements at the university. That I occasionally dozed over Milton, stared blankly for long periods of time at a page in a Henry James novel, and often wondered what John Donne was all about is not surprising. It was the price I paid for membership in a reasonable environment.

Stonehill College

Melville M. Stone, Eugene Field, and
the Beginnings of Chicago Literary Journalism

David D. Anderson

On September 10, 1871, the Chicago Tribune described the city as made of "everlasting pine, shingles, shams, veneers, stucco, and putty," holding "miles of fire-traps, pleasing to the eye, looking substantial, but all sham and shingles. Walls have been run up a hundred feet high and but a single brick in thickness." It was a city that forty years before had been one of hundreds of villages, including Lincoln's New Salem, strewn about the Illinois landscape, each of which had a future that was declared by its founders to be singularly bright.

Whereas New Salem had disappeared in a relatively few years until its resurrection as a shrine, the future predicted for Chicago had, by the end of the Civil War, become a reality as it supplanted Cincinnati, the Queen City of the West earlier in the century, as the transportation and commercial capitol of the country West of the mountains. But Cincinnati remained the literary capitol; as the Tribune article pointed out, Chicago was, in the Fall of 1871, a city without substance. And on October 10, 1871, after the Fire, one of the great events of the nineteenth century--Chicago, one of its boosters later proclaimed, never did anything less than spectacularly--the city was in ruins. Nevertheless, on October 10, the Tribune, in a make-shift edition, proclaimed:

CHEER UP

In the midst of a calamity without parallel in the world's history, looking upon the ashes of thirty years' accumulations, the people of this once beautiful city have resolved that Chicago Shall Rise Again.

The Fire had destroyed nearly \$200,000,000 worth of property, it had taken more than 250 lives, and it had left 100,000 people homeless and destitute. Among its casualties was the Lake Shore Iron Works on the north side near the lake front, and its owner, twenty-three year old Melville E. Stone, "Maker and Factor of Hardware," was one of those who had dreamed of becoming millionaires and were now destitute.

Melville E. Stone, the second of six sons of the Reverend Elijah Stone, a circuit-riding Methodist Episcopal minister in rural Illinois, and Sophia Louisa Creighton Stone, was born in Hudson, McLean County, Illinois, on August 22, 1848, and his youth had been spent in a series of small central and northern Illinois towns. In 1860 the family moved--for the second time--to Chicago, and Stone attended the Chicago High School on Monroe Street near Halstead. During the summer of 1864 he worked on the Chicago Tribune, in the commercial department and as a reporter. But he had no journalistic ambitions; his tastes were for the law, in spite of his mother's assertion that he could not be both a good lawyer and a good man.

The next year, however, not yet seventeen, he joined Charles A. Dana's Chicago Republican as a reporter. Later he moved to the Chicago Times, for which he covered the Democratic National Convention in New York in 1868, and then, after an altercation with the Times editor, Wilbur F. Storey, he left journalism forever, determined to ride the Chicago boom to success as a manufacturer.

Before the ashes cooled, Stone was at work assisting in arrangements for caring for the needy. During the winter of 1871-72 he was in charge of the barracks for the homeless erected on West Madison Street, and in the

spring, broke, he returned to journalism, as managing editor and later city editor of the Chicago Inter-Ocean, which Jonathan Young Scammon, a Chicago banker, had resurrected out of the ashes and ruins of the Republican.

During the summer and fall of 1872, Stone wrote most of the Inter-Ocean's editorials, particularly those supporting President Grant's re-election, which the paper enthusiastically espoused, but he pursued, too, other causes that Scammon had less enthusiasm for: he secured and published without official sanction the report of the Chicago fire chief upon the factors that contributed to the extent of the Fire; he published a secret report of a church trial for heresy; he demonstrated a keen nose for scandal and skulduggery in high places. That winter, Scammon gave him an extended leave of absence, ostensibly for health reasons. He spent the ensuing five months touring the reconstruction South, returning to Chicago to resign from the Inter-Ocean. He then worked briefly as editor of the Chicago Evening Mail, which was almost immediately consolidated with the Evening Post, and he then went to Washington as correspondent for the Post and Mail, and the New York Herald.

During his two years in Washington, Stone began to plan a one-cent evening paper in Chicago. He backed the short-lived one-center, the Chicago Herald, edited by William Daugherty, and when that failed, he returned to Chicago to start his own. On Christmas Day, 1875, the Chicago Daily News, "the original one-cent paper of the West," published its first issue.

The paper's rivals and other sceptics asserted that its first issue would also be its last, that no penny paper could survive in a city experiencing perennial penny shortages, but Stone immediately took steps to prove them wrong. With an initial circulation of 4,000 copies a day, Stone imported supplies of pennies from the mint, advertising the availability of change at

the News office, and he persuaded merchants to advertise goods for odd amounts--29¢, 39¢, 49¢--thus increasing the demand for, and hence the availability of, pennies in the city.

Stone made clear the independence of the News from the beginning. Of the Indian victory on the Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876, reported as a massacre by his competitors, Stone commented editorially that "the killing of Custer and his men by Sitting Bull was a perfectly justifiable act on the part of the latter, considering all the circumstances," and, when a News reporter interviewing William H. Vanderbilt elicited the statement, "Oh, the public be damned," Stone delighted in printing it.

Cash crises continued, and at one point, when the paper's demise seemed imminent, Stone purchased William E. Daugherty's share for \$55.00, and then gave Victor F. Lawson business control as publisher. Lawson authorized the reporters to report news and advertisers to order space by telephone, the first paper in the country to do so. It was also the first to sell full-page advertisements, the first to use Mergenthaler linotypes, the first to publish daily installments of continued stories, the first to provide social services for its newsboys, the first to print its daily circulation figures, which rapidly climbed.

Stone, free to direct the editorial policy of the paper, was equally innovative, in the process contributing one of the classic stories of Chicago newspaper folklore. The first edition of the News hit the streets at noon, and the variety and effectiveness of Stone's news gathering staff was soon paid the ultimate if undesirable compliment: the Post and Mail, owned by the Macmullan Brothers, began to pirate its stories, often without changing a word. Finally Stone set a trap: the first edition of the News

carried an alleged cabled report from London that a dispatch from Belgrade reported famine among the Serbs. The report concluded with a quotation in Serbian from the mayor of Belgrade, "Er us siht la Etall iws nel lum cmeht," which is translated as "The municipality cannot aid."

The Post and Mail sprung the trap by reprinting the story completely, with the Serbian quote and translation included, whereupon Stone spread the story to other papers. The alleged quote was simply, "The Macmullens will steal this story," spelled backwards. The Post and Mail could not survive ridicule, and its remnants were bought by Stone shortly thereafter.

During the great railroad strike of 1877 Stone mounted his reporters on horseback so that they might move freely between centers of strike activity in the West and South Sides, scooping his rivals regularly. Meanwhile, by supporting the strikers editorially in spite of visits from outraged businessmen, he gained the support of workmen throughout the city, and circulation increased dramatically, from 27,129 a day to 68,823 by the end of the year.

Nevertheless, in spite of his reputation as a friend of the workman, Stone's aggressive journalism became a weapon of reaction after the explosion in the Haymarket on Randolph Street between Desplaines and Halsted on May 4, 1886. Much of the public indignation and the police hysteria that followed was fueled by Stone's editorial insistence that the perpetrators be captured and justice served. But Stone always insisted that his editorial judgment was sound, that it was based upon the presence of Paul Hull, his reporter on the scene, and that his report, graphically describing the word "Charge" shouted from the crowd and gunfire "like the falling of corn on a tin pan or the roll of a drum," was to be trusted.

But the success of the Veys was the result of more than aggressive innovative journalism: it was the result of three rules defined by Stone at the beginning and repeated by him fifty years later:

The first rule was that the newspaper should be run distinctly in the interest of the public....It was recognized a newspaper has in its editorial department three offices to perform: first, to print the news; second, to strive to guide public opinion in a proper direction; and third, to furnish entertainment....

Another rule was that the paper should make every effort to see that its news was truthful and impartial, and if at any time we were led into a misstatement, nothing gave me greater pleasure than to make a fair, frank, and open acknowledgement and apology....

The third rule divorced the business and editorial departments absolutely. No line of paid reading matter ever appeared in the columns of the paper....

To carry out the first rule Stone gathered the best staff that he could find, a staff he later described as "one of the most remarkable for brilliancy and efficiency that I have ever known." A major innovation in editorial staffing was the use of specialists: Professor W.G.B. Matthews to write on music; Colonel Gilbert A. Price, later Senator from North Dakota, on politics; William Morton Payne, later critic for the Dial, on books; Professor James Lawrence Laughlin of the University of Chicago on economics; and Professor Richard T. Ely of the University of Wisconsin on sociology.

Stone took seriously the charge in his first rule to entertain his readers, and the result was not only one of his most lasting innovations but America's most important contribution to journalism: entertainment that became literature and writers whose names and works became household words as the authors of regular columns. The first of these was a balding young man named Eugene Field, a native of St. Louis, whom Stone hired away from

the Denver Tribune in 1883; and the second was Finley Peter Dunne of the West Side in 1884. These two were the beginning of a tradition that later brought George Ade, John T. McCutcheon, Slason Thompson, and others to the News under the aegis of Victor Lawson after Stone left the paper in 1883. But Field, under Stone's editorship, marked out the path that literary journalism in Chicago was to take.

With the hiring of Field as a columnist for the Morning News, which had been established as an early edition of the Evening News in 1881, Stone began a tradition that continues to the present in Chicago journalism and Field began a column and found a place in the developing Chicago literary scene that was to last until his death of a heart attack on November 4, 1895. Field, born in St. Louis on September 2, 1850, and educated at a private school in Massachusetts and at Williams College and the University of Missouri, had turned to journalism after spending a small inheritance on a European tour in 1872 and an abortive attempt at acting. He worked on the St. Joseph (Mo.) Gazette in 1875-76, the St. Louis Journal and Times-Journal from 1876 to 1880--Stone met Field in St. Louis at the time and remembered him as "a lank and cadaverous figure, smooth of face and bald of pate," telling hilarious stories one after the other--and then Field went on to the Kansas City Times in 1880-81 and the Denver Tribune from 1881 to 1883, from which Stone hired him for the News. Offered the chance to write a regular column for the News, Field replied:

I will contract with you for three or four years, to do the work you specify, for \$50 per week the first year, and \$50.50 the second year....The reason I tack on the 50 cents for the second year is to gratify a desire I have to be able to say I am earning a little more money each year....

Stone commented that "after mature deliberation I yield to this exorbitant demand, and Field came." Neither the News editorial office, the Chicago Press Club and its successor, the Whitechapel Club, McClurg's Bookstore, nor Chicago journalism was ever to be the same. Shortly after his arrival, learning that Stone customarily gave a turkey to each member of the staff for Thanksgiving, Field commented that if it was all the same to Stone, he would rather have a suit of clothes. Stone complied by sending to his friend Major R.W. McClaghry, warden of Joliet Prison for a suit of convict stripes. Field delighted in wearing it to the office. On another occasion, Field paraded a dozen street urchins before Lawson, insisting that he could not feed and clothe his "chillum" on his salary. And for years a verse, surreptitiously placed by Field, hung on a bookshelf in McClurg's.

It read:

Swete friend for Jesus sake forbear
To buy ye boke thou findest here
For when I do get ye pelx
I mean to buy ye boke myself.

But Field's contributions were not merely office highjinks. For the next twelve years he wrote the column "Sharps and Flats" which appeared daily in the News under the colophon of a wreath of linked sausages. In it appeared such sentimental ballads as "Little Boy Blue" and "The Lyttel Boy" because, he commented, he liked to see women cry. As the "Chicago Dante," as he called himself, he was "...bard/of pork and lard." But his principle targets were Chicago prentensian and sophistication and Eastern writers, and he delighted in naming names. Of Charles Dudley Warner's visit to Chicago, he wrote on March 4, 1887,

Local literary circles were thrown into a condition of feverish excitement yesterday by the rumor that Mr. Charles Dudley Warner, a well-known Eastern litterateur, had arrived in the city and was the honored guest of Colonel Wirt Dexter, the popular South Side Boniface. When the rumor first gained circulation it was discredited by very many, including that cautious and exacting body known as the Chicago Literary Club. Mr. T. Arthur Whiffen, the talented son of the wealthy fig. dealer and a member of the club in high standing, refused to believe that Mr. Warner was really in the city.

'As soon as I heard it,' he said, 'I stepped around to Dale's drug store and asked the proprietor if he had received any confirmation of the rumor and he replied in the negative. Mr. Dale is the general Western agent for Mr. Warner's works, and, as he very pertinently observed, he would have been likely to know if Mr. Warner was in the vicinity.'

Later in the day, however, it was learned that Mr. Warner was indeed in the midst of us: in fact, along about three o'clock in the afternoon he was seen bowling down Drexel Boulevard in Mr. Dexter's elegant dog-cart, behind Mr. Dexter's famous bay gelding Grover Cleveland. It was stated that Mr. Warner had come to Chicago for the purpose of delivering an address before the Clan-na-Gael on St. Patrick's Day...and had chosen as the theme for the address 'The Theory that Ben Johnson did not write "Rasselas."' Subsequently, however, it was ascertained that this statement was unfounded. In a conversation with Professor Benjamin F. Lawkins, president of the Emerson Literary Society, author of the scholarly brochure entitled, 'The Relations between Fifteen-Ball Poole and the Librarian of our Public Library,' it was developed that Mr. Warner had produced the following works: 'A Liver Safe Cure,' 'Some Golden Remedies,' 'Comets and Their Relations to Purgative Pellets,' and 'What I Know About Farming.'

When it was announced that E.C. Stedman was to be the guest of the

Twentieth Century Club, Field commented on the occasion on April 29, 1891:

Chicago literary circles are all agog over the prospective visit of Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman, the poet-critic. At the regular monthly conclave of the Robert Browning Benevolent and Patriotic Association of Cook County, night before last, it was resolved to invite Mr. Stedman to a grand complimentary banquet at Kinslay's on Wednesday evening, the 29th. Professor William Morton Payne, grand marshal of the parade which is to conduct the famous guest from the railway station the morning he arrives, tells us that the process will be in this order:

Twenty police officers afoot.

The grand marshal, horseback, accompanied by ten male members of The Twentieth Century Club, also horseback.

Mr. Stedman in a landau drawn by four horses, two black and two white.

The Twentieth Century Club in carriages.

A brass band, afoot.

The Robert Browning Club in Frank Parmalee's busses.

The Homer Club afoot, preceded by a fife and drum corps and a real Greek philosopher attired in a tunic.

Another brass band.

A beautiful young woman playing the guitar, symbolizing Apollo and his lute in a car drawn by nine milk white stallions impersonating the muses.

Two hundred Chicago poets afoot.

The Chicago Literary Club in carriages.

A splendid gilded chariot bearing Gunther's Shakespeare autograph and Mr. Ellsowrth's first printed book.

Another brass band.

Magnificent advertising car of Armour and Co., illustrating the progress of civilization.

The Fishbladder Brigade and the Blue Island Avenue Shelley Club.

The Fire Department.

Another brass band.

Citizens in carriages, afoot, and horseback.

Advertising cars and wagons.

The line of march will be an extensive one, taking in the packing houses and other notable points. At Mr. Armour's interesting professional establishment the process of slaughtering will be illustrated for the delectation of the honored guest, after which an appropriate poem will be read by Decatur Jones, President of the Lake View Elite Club. Then Mr. Armour will entertain a select few at a champaign luncheon in the scalding room.

In high literary circles it is rumored that the Rev. F.M. Bristol has got an option on all autographs Mr. Stedman may write during his stay in Chicago. Much excitement has been caused by this, and there is talk of an indignation meeting in Battery D, to be addressed by the Rev. Flavius Gunsaulus, the Rev. Frank W. Brobst, and other eminent speakers.

Stedman took the account seriously and cancelled his visit to Chicago.

Among other items that regularly appeared in Field's column were those gathered after his death in his complete primer:

This is a gun. Is the gun loaded? Really, I do not know. Put the gun on the Table, and you, Susie, Blow down one barrel, while you, Charlie, blow down the other. Bang! Yes, it was loaded. Run quick, Jenny, and pick up Suzie's head and Charlie's lower jaw before the nasty blood gets over the new carpet.

And,

Mama is beating poppa with the mop handle. The children are fighting over a piece of pie in the kitchen. Over the piano there is a beautiful motto in a gilt frame. The beautiful motto says: 'There is no place like home.'

Nor was Stone himself immune:

Here we have a valise. It does not weigh four hundred pounds. It is the valise of an Editor. In the valise are three socks and a bottle. Maybe it is arnica for the Editor's sore finger. The book is Baxter's Saints' Rest. The socks got into the valise by mistake. Perhaps the bottle will get into the Editor by mistake.

Throughout his career at the News, until his death at forty-five, Fields pursued his targets with complete freedom, sometimes with more sentiment than sharpness, and Stone, both as editor and after his departure from the paper to recuperate from an extended illness before becoming General Manager of the Associated Press, remained his defender and fan. At Field's death, with the Evening News established as the paper with the second largest circulation in the nation and the general column an established journalistic tradition in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and elsewhere, Stone commented that:

For some twelve years he contributed the prose and verse which have made him famous. Not only did he write every line that ever appeared in his column of 'Sharps and Flats,' but virtually everything that he wrote after 1883 appeared in that column. His books, which have had so wide a circulation throughout the whole world; and have given the public so much of pleasure and...pain, are chiefly selections from his work for the Chicago Daily News.

Critics have continued to insist that Field had wasted his talent, that he failed to pursue a greater literary success, that he refused to perfect

The Universality of James Wright

Bernard F. Engel

Not many writers of the 20th century would care to be known as sons or daughters of Johnson, believers in the existence and necessity of a moral order. For some in our time, order is necessary but shattered; for others, socioeconomic or psychological frameworks have replaced the moral. James Wright (1927-1980) was one of the few to recognize that Johnson speaks to today.

Of course Wright made Johnson his own, admiring what was useful to him while paying no heed to most of the neoclassic rules and decorum. But he had enough of the old Sam in him to write occasional satires, a form available only to one who believes there is an acceptable model or pattern to compare with. And he wrote, as Gay and Smollett and others of Johnson's time did, if rarely the doctor himself, of rogues and tosspots and tarts.

Belief that there exists a standard by which one can make judgments, even though he cannot name its origin nor codify its principles, caused Wright to admire the Johnsonian principle of looking for the universal in the individual, as he told William Martz, and repeated to Dave Smith in a 1979 interview. Writing to Martz, Wright quoted approvingly passages from Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare in which the doctor advocates "just representation of general nature" and voices distaste for "particular manners" and "irregular combinations of fanciful nature."

But Wright also inherited Romantic insistence on the importance

of the individual self and its problems. His practice, almost the opposite of the "confessional," was to bring the two together, to find in the individual the qualities of the general. And he distinguished clarity of imagery from the merely "fanciful": one doubts that Johnson could have approved "Over the lake / The windows of the rich waken and yawn," Wright's vivid way of condensing the observations that the rich inhabit the houses with views of the lake, that their lives are dull, and that their moral substance is as transparent as the glass of their windows.

Though Johnson was certainly humane, his belief in the necessity of social order led him to remark that he could eat a full dinner after watching an execution, horrifying the more tender-minded Boswell. Wright showed some of both the tough-minded position and the sentimental tradition. In the poem "At the Executed Murderer's Grave," his speaker accepts the fact that murderer Doty was not a man to be pitied, the he had committed sickening crimes.

But he also sees, and fears, something of his own kinship with Doty. The murderer was a man Wright's speaker cannot love, one whose death he even takes monetary advantage of ("I croon my tears at fifty cents a line"). But Doty also was part of our common humanity, and as a fellow citizen of Ohio he represents what Wright might himself have become "Had I not run away before my time." Doty, moreover, stands for each individual who has to face death--and "Order be damned, I do not want to die." The speaker fears what has happened to the murderer who is "dirt of my flesh," who sleeps underground in that earth which "is a door I cannot even face."

As a man of the twentieth century, Wright was far less willing than Johnson to respect an order merely because it is established. In "Stages on a Journey Westward" his speaker concludes that America is done for. This speaker, one who "began in Ohio," records his disillusion as he leaves the bread lines of home but meets nothing better in Minnesota, and finds only a defeated, drunken sheriff and memories of an angry past along the shore of Washington state. He judges that "America is over and done with," has been "Plunged into the dark furrows / Of the sea again," has lost all chance of becoming a new world and is in need of another Columbus to reinvent the dream of utopia.

Johnson could satisfy any passing need for indications of something beyond the rational by turning to the assurances of conventional Christianity. Wright, however, had no such easily available resource. He turned instead to a mystical sense of oneness with nature, feeling, as his speaker says in the poem "A Blessing," that "if I stepped out of my body I would break / Into blossom," would be like, would even become, the willow trees that two Indian ponies discussed earlier in the poem have emerged from.

Though Johnson might have harrumphed at some of Wright's work, he had enough good taste that he would recognize its quality if he were brought forward two centuries in a time machine. Johnsonians or not, we too can recognize that Wright was outstanding in his generation, and that his work though often grounded in the region achieves some of that universality he and his eighteenth century predecessor both sought.

Michigan State University

From Middle Border
To City: Chicago Literary Origins

Marilyn Judith Atlas

Prairie Voices: A Literary History of Chicago From the Frontier to 1893.
By Kenny J. Williams. Nashville, Tennessee. Townsend Press, 1980.
487 pp. \$16.95

Kenny J. Williams, the author of In the City of Man: Another Study of Chicago, has recently authored Prairie Voices: A Literary History of Chicago From the Frontier to 1893. While In the City of Man examines Chicago's first writers, Prairie Voices explores the evolution of Chicago's literature.

The major premise of this work is that there is a close relationship between literature and culture. In this study Williams documents ways in which the city formed its literary art. She begins by examining the Middle Border in the seventeenth century, localizing Chicago's early literature in the French culture that flourished during that time. Williams concludes that this part of the region's experience, like the Fort Dearborn Massacre, the Civil War, the Fire of 1871, and the World Fair of 1893, events she also explores, had to be rejected if the Chicago writer was to successfully deal with the surging growth of the industrial city and maintain the positive image which was so large a part of this quick expansion. The fire of 1871 destroyed many of Chicago's early records, but more than the lack of concrete information, the nature of Chicago led Midwestern writers to reject these too easily romanticized events for the former reality of the steel and meat industry.

What Prairie Voices does best is to help put Chicago literary history in focus both in terms of the Chicago Renaissance and American literary history. It helps establish the fact that the Chicago Renaissance was not born full-blown from the head of a Louis Sullivan construction. The Chicago Renaissance doctrine, "art must be built from a city's own marrow," was rooted in the ideas of early writers such as Juliette Kenzie, E.P. Roe, Mary Hartwell Catherwood, and Henry Blake Fuller. The early writers may have paid more attention to the romantic elements of the chained lakes and extended prairies, to the family lines and the romance of growth, but they were also searching for a usable past and they too focused on the uncanny power of their unique city.

The evolution of the writers of the city and the reasons why nineteenth century Chicago writing was less sophisticated than writing on the east coast as well as why Chicago preceded the East as the center for the urban novel are discussed at length. The theories Robert Spiller develops in his Cycle of American Literature and the unique nature of the city itself are used by Williams in her attempt to explain Chicago's literary history.

Prairie Voices is not only theoretically rich, but it is also an excellent source book for concrete data. The appendices on nineteenth century journalism, fiction, and the publishers of fiction are invaluable to those interested in further research. Williams demonstrates how some of the earlier theories about Chicago's literary history are false. For instance, one may conclude that Chicago was a materialistic city, but one should keep in mind that there were more journals devoted primarily to literary interests in the nineteenth century than could be expected in this city and

although they may not have lasted long, individuals kept trying to make literary interests part of the city's ambiance. Chicago's relationship to literature is complicated and Williams is not afraid of exploring those complications.

Much of Prairie Voices is dedicated to examining pre-urban Chicago. Williams argues that although the Chicago of the fur traders and Indians was not that Chicago which captured the imagination of the largest group of Chicago writers, scholars interested in the history and literature of the region must recognize the city when Chicago had other than an urban reality. Williams also notes that Chicago writers were unable, even after it became urban, to integrate some of the city's most powerful events into their literature; yet through a general flavor of crisis the Arnours, Swifts, Capones, the Fort Dearborn Massacre, the Haymarket riots, the World's Fair, and the feminist movement, wended their way into the frustration and confusion of the urban novel's atmosphere.

There are other important literary histories of Chicago and Williams' work builds on them. Bernard Duffey, in his groundbreaking study, The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters, A Critical History (1954), also examines the Fort Dearborn massacre, the town that quickly burgeoned to a city, and the fire which all but destroyed it, but the major thrust of his work is to understand the Chicago whose highest value was liberty and whose greatest talent was feature writing, the Chicago of Melville E. Stone. But he is less interested than Williams in how these values and talents connect to the early culture and literature of the city. Hugh Dalziel Duncan's dissertation, The Rise of Chicago as a Literary Center from 1885-1920 (1964) also examines the Chicago writers who struggled to

control the Chicago image and attempted to find a usable Chicago past. Williams goes further than him in her attempt to understand the complexity of the struggle by examining the images and the usable past of an earlier Chicago. Dale Kramer in Chicago Renaissance: The Literary Life In the Middlewest, 1900-1930 (1966) centers his study on exploring the spirit of independence which colored the Chicago Renaissance. Williams expands upon this study by showing how the germs of this passion for individual expression can be located in the writing and culture of early Chicagoans.

Prairie Voices is an ambitious work which complements other studies of Chicago. It is both informative and fascinating, and should be read by every person interested in either Chicago or in American literary history

Ohio University

Announcements:

Dues for 1981 are now due and payable. Please use the enclosed form if you haven't already paid, and please subscribe to MidAmerica VIII (1981) if, at all possible. It will appear in the Spring.

If you paid for MidAmerica VIII and did not receive it please write David D. Anderson immediately. Some confusion has apparently deprived some members of their copies.

The annual conference will be held on May 7, 8, 9, 1981, at the Kellogg Center, Michigan State University. We welcome your attendance to a varied program.

Forms of this newsletter for individual expression can be located in the

writing and culture of early Chicagoans.

Frontier Visions is an addition to work which complements other studies of Chicago. It is both informative and fascinating, and should be read by every person interested in either Chicago or in

American literary history

Ohio University