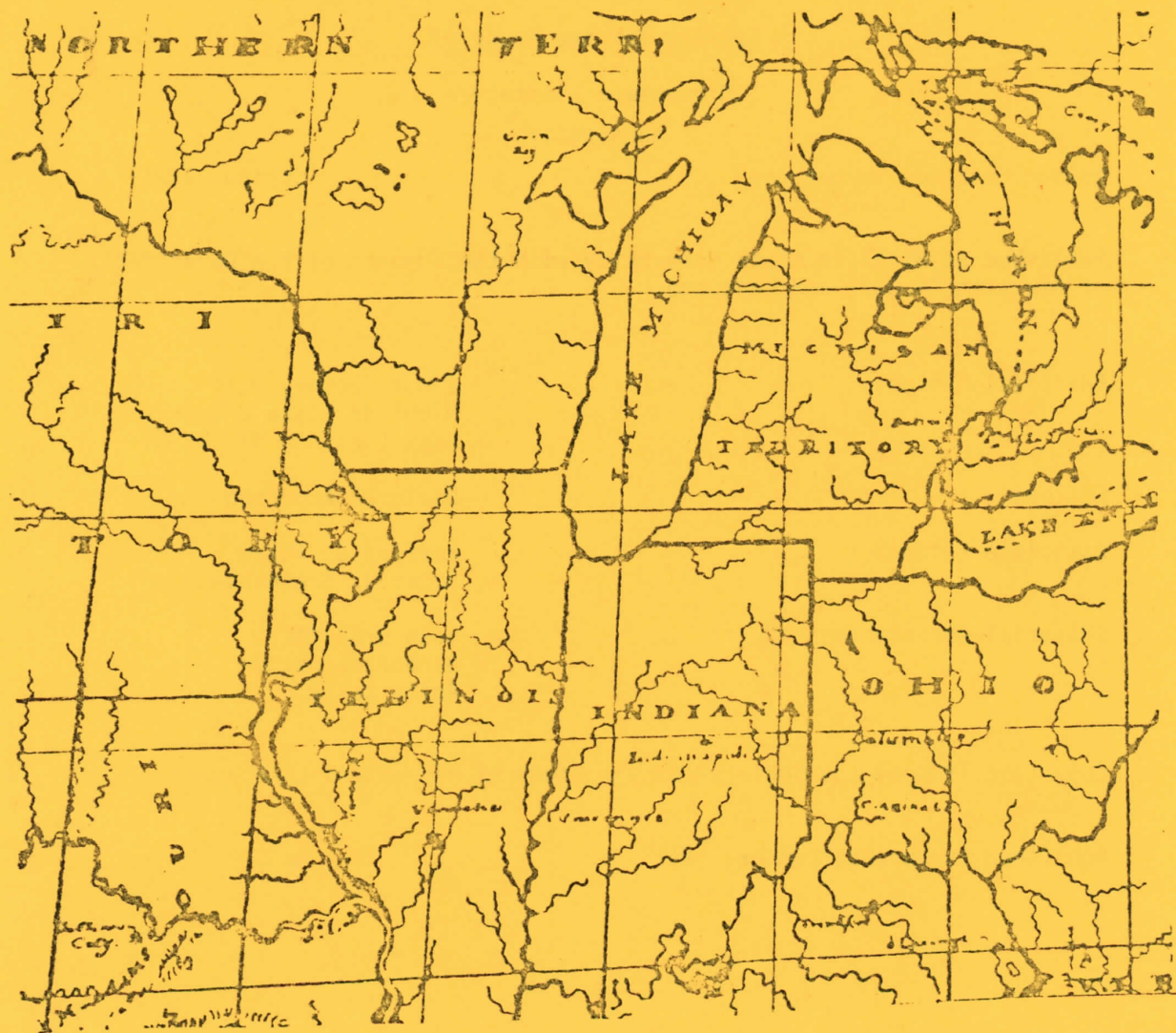


# SML Newsletter



The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

The Center for the Study of  
Midwestern Literature and Culture

Founded 1971

Volume Fourteen  
Number One  
Spring 1984

Society for the Study of  
Midwestern Literature  
Newsletter

Volume Fourteen, Number One

Spring, 1984

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

Editorial Office:

Ernst Bessey Hall  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824

Editor:

David D. Anderson

Associate Editors:

Marilyn J. Atlas  
Roger J. Bresnahan

Editorial Assistants:

Joan Brunette  
Barbara Crutcher  
Anita Kelly

Copyright 1984 by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Published in Spring, Summer, Fall

Society for the Study of  
Midwestern Literature

Officers, 1984-85

President:	Ronald Primeau Central Michigan University
Vice President:	Mary Jean De Marr Indiana State University
Executive Secretary/Treasurer:	David D. Anderson Michigan State University
Secretary:	Roger J. Bresnahan Michigan State University

Executive Council

Expires 1987:	Marilyn J. Atlas Ohio University
	Roger J. Bresnahan Michigan State University
Expires 1986:	Ellen S. Uffen Michigan State University
	Gene H. Dent Lakeland Community College
Expires 1985:	Pauline Adams Michigan State University
	Douglas Wixson University of Missouri/ROLLA
Bibliographers:	Donald Pady Iowa State University
	Robert Beasecker Grand Valley State Colleges

Society for the Study of  
Midwestern Literature  
Newsletter

Volume Fourteen, Number One

Spring, 1984

Contents

A Voice from the Thirties = III (An Interview with Gilbert Wilson)	Philip L. Gerber	1
<u>The Hoosier Schoolmaster</u> Revisited	Jerry J. West	21
Pure Poetry	Louis J. Cantoni	29
Aliens Invade the Midwest	Thomas P. Linkfield	30



A Voice From The Thirties - III  
(An Interview with Gilbert Wilson)

Philip L. Gerber

This is the third of six interviews with Gilbert Wilson, painter and writer. In previous interviews he spoke of his experiences with Art Young and Diego Rivera, and reminisced about his boyhood in Terre Haute, Indiana, his interest in adapting Melville's Moby Dick for the stage, his early experiences as a painter, and his connections with Theodore Dreiser and Rockwell Kent. The present interview begins with a continuation of Wilson's association with Kent.

Gerber: Gilbert, would you tell more about living at Rockwell Kent's place in New York State? How did they operate that establishment?

Wilson: I'd had this hand injury, and when Kent saw that I was indisposed with one hand, he invited me to come up to Ausable Forks, N.Y., where he had his home and his studio, and work for him on a mural for the big aviation building in Washington, D.C. He had already made the very careful drawing of the mural, which was about twenty feet high and twelve feet wide. It was my job to transpose his sketch by using criss-cross lines, the old conventional way of enlarging--one inch is one foot. So I caught pleurisy working in

his cold studio. He would make fun of me over making a fire in the fireplace of the studio, and it was early spring up there in the mountains of New York State; it was cold.

I had to sit on the floor and work way down low because this painting was of a huge airplane coming straight towards you. Above it was four angels going north, east, south, and west, in the conventional Rockwell Kent manner. So there was this huge Boeing aircraft, complete in very great detail, and down below it you saw the cars and the boats and the trains and bicycles and the other modes of travel on the ground. That was down in the lower part of the painting. It went clear down to the floor. I had to sit there on the cold floor working on these little tiny automobiles, which were hardly more than four inches long. I could never seem to please Kent. He just didn't like my perspective. He was a perfectionist when it comes to detailed drawing, and every day I would have to erase what I did and start over again.

I got this pleurisy in my back. I could hardly walk. They had to tape me up and put me to bed for about three days, and there I read Moby Dick, illustrated by Rockwell Kent. I just took issue somehow in my own mind with all of the conceptions of the various characters, especially his Ahab, which to me looked like the character Scrooge in Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol. So I really began to understand this story--Moby Dick--for the first time, because I had seen the Barrymore film with Dolores Costello years ago and my sister had read the story, which I brought home from

the library. She read much faster than I, and she told me the story, but when I tried to read it I bogged down in the first six chapters or so, when Melville starts talking about the blubber in the whale. I never really got into the great magnitude of the story until I read it at Rockwell Kent's. I went home from there after a rather unhappy experience with Kent, because I found him very hard to work with. Everyone who's ever worked with him has reported the same thing. He was a tyrant. He didn't want anyone's word to supersede his. So I left before the job was done, and he failed to pay me my half of the--well, he'd paid me three hundred dollars, I think, or two hundred and fifty, and I was to get two hundred and fifty more for my work on the mural. But his wife was very kind and sent me a check later on and told me not to tell Kent because she was rather unhappy with him also. Everyone who knew Kent respected him, but they were afraid of him. He had a tyrant complex which made him the lord of the manor; no one's word would go above his. After I got home to New York to my studio, I--

Gerber: Let me interrupt. His wife was younger?

Wilson: Yes, much younger than he. That was about his third wife; I'm not sure.

Gerber: A while ago you were telling a story about how the meals were conducted--

Wilson: Yes--well, Kent was a very strange blend of democracy and tyranny.



All of the help, all of the maids--there was a cook, one maid, a gardener, three men who took care of the dairy, and then there was Rockwell Kent and his wife and usually two or three or four guests. There must have been twelve or fifteen bedrooms in this huge place which he had designed by himself. Being an architect, he had laid out this grand place called Asgaard, the Garden of the Gods, something like that. He was always serving Aqua vite, which was a Scandinavian drink. It's like tequila in a way; you take a mouthful of it and you feel you've got fire in your mouth.

We would all sit around this long table on the porch in the summertime and eat. I would say that there were twenty people at the table all told. Once a week we would take this big table which had stretcher-type handles on it--a man would get at each end--and we'd load the table full of food and carry it out on a point about two or three hundred yards from the house on a great promontory. You could see the fir trees and the mountains in the background. We would eat out there and perform, do all kinds of stunts. Kent was always doing tricks, standing on his hands and on his head. I was interested in tumbling, so everything that he would do, I would do also, but just a little better. I got in his bad graces by embarrassing the "king." I was the fool, insulting his majesty.

He fell out with his wife one time over the dessert which was being served. She ran back to the house to get some more dessert so that they'd have a choice of whatever it was. I went back to the house to help carry it out. I found her in the kitchen,



crying; she was beside herself with the way he had hurt her feelings. I was trying to console her, and in comes Kent to find me there with his wife. He was angry as the dickens. At another time, at the table, the mustard came along to me, and the maid or cook beside me got up to get something, so I left the mustard there by her plate because I thought she would be coming back. Kent doesn't ask me, from his end of the table, "Please pass the mustard." No, he gets up from his place, comes over and picks up the mustard and takes it down to his place. It embarrassed the devil out of me. It seemed that everything I did got me in more and more bad graces with him. He would give me his glasses to lay down and I would lay them down glass-down. He would bawl the devil out of me, saying, "If you wore glasses, you would know better. Don't you have any sense? Are you stupid? Are you an ass?"--something like that. Everything I did seemed to do more and more harm.

Gerber: There was something about a dessert--

Wilson: He said, "When you have dessert here, you have what my wife likes, because she decides!" He would fall out with you over things like that. Later I read in one of his biographies that other people who came to work with him had the same problems that I did. Very few people stayed through the whole time. They would leave their job before it was over, quit flat, because they couldn't stand his arrogance.

I admired the fellow technically and as an artist. I liked his radical point of view. He oftentimes had the Russian embassy

staff there. He would invite people every weekend. I remember one man in particular--he was not a Russian, but he had come out with a woman to buy a painting. After the weekend was over--they didn't buy the painting--the woman left and the man stayed on. It was like the man who came to dinner. They were all against him. We were told at breakfast to ignore him. Sunday morning breakfast, you went out in the kitchen to prepare your own and sit down and eat it. If there's anyone else there, you sit down together. But we were told not to have anything to do with this man. We were supposed to try to freeze him out. But if he happened to come while I was eating, I talked to him. Kent came in the kitchen one day and found me sitting with this guest, which was supposed to be persona non grata. I got bawled out for that. Another time, the door of the kitchen swung back and forth, and I was over near the door when Kent was coming through. The door bumped me and he bumped into the door and nearly broke his nose. It was almost as if I was doing all this to him on purpose.

4 Anyway, after reading Moby Dick at Kent's the idea of it as a music drama became more and more a passion with me. Around 1947 I began making drawings of the various characters and the material that was so graphic in the story. It made wonderful paintings. I was going more and more into--not illustrating the story, but putting it into form and color, which is a non-verbal way of expressing the great idea which is the basic power of Moby Dick. The theme is man's relation to the universe, how he has to approach it with intelligence and with love rather than wild hatred and the

commercial attitude. The high purpose of whaling was to get oil to light the world's lamps. Man was approaching the whale just as a resource--he's even worse today when he approaches it with the idea of making animal food, dog and cat food. Back in those days, before petroleum had been discovered, the whale was the source of energy. We're in that crisis right now, of having bled the earth almost dry of its fuels, and we're going to have to turn to some other source. That's what whaling was, the source of energy, oil, for lighting lamps.

I saw this as a powerful statement of dramatic intensity, as Greek drama. Not sung. I couldn't see it done as an opera, but more as Beethoven's "Fidelio," part sung but also part spoken, with musical background. So there's a precedent for the idea. I saw this great drama of Moby Dick as an international cultural collaboration. I had the idea that Shostakovitch, who had done this fourteenth prelude, orchestrated by Stokowski--it's only three minutes long, but it has a powerful, dissonant raw power, and it gives you the idea that it can be the leitmotif of the whale.

Gerber: Was it your idea to get Shostakovitch to do the rest of the music for this production?

Wilson: Not necessarily. I'd heard that Shostakovitch was interested in electronic music, and I'd hoped that he would do something along that line to separate the realism of the story from the delirium. When Ahab goes mad it goes into almost electronic, raw sound that is not orchestrated but is almost like abstract painting and abstract music. Shostakovitch was in this country twice, and my agent talked



to him. We had to have an interpreter, because he never did learn English. The agreement was that if this project ever got to a high level of production, then he could consider taking part in it. But I, being an unknown person and having no credits of any kind, no real name, and no support for the thing, I failed utterly in getting the thing to any stage where this great composer would become interested in it. Even though a few times it almost got to the Metropolitan.

Rudolph Bing was interested by the drawings and said I painted a lot like Blake, and I felt greatly encouraged but I never was able to get any financial support for commissioning the score. All I could do was to make the libretto--or the scenario, as it's called--and a set of scenic designs, and then try to interest some theatrical group in doing this thing as Greek drama with musical background.

Gerber: Was it about this time you came up with the idea of using Walter Huston and Lauritz Melchior to do the speaking and singing?

Wilson: I had gone to the American Theatre Guild about it. I used to walk around New York with these two big portfolios of drawings. I felt like the man in "Death of a Salesman," because they each weighed about twenty-five pounds. No one had ever approached these theatrical people with a bunch of drawings. You came in with a scenario, usually a good commercial idea, and they would take it from there. But being an artist, and impelled also to write, thanks to Theodore Dreiser, who said I ought to write as well as paint, I made this effort to put the story not only into



a scenario but into graphic form.

I've even graphed the music and the electronic parts as I can hear them, just as though you'd see a sound track. You remember when "Fantasia" came out? They would hit a drum or a cymbal and you'd see this chart showing the way the music or sound creates a graph. I had even made a twenty-foot-long thing which graphed the music. There was black for the percussions, red for the brasses, yellow for the stringed instruments, and blue for the wind instruments. There were thick lines for the wild music, and when it got into the lyrical parts it was a very thin line. I showed this to Richard Rodgers once and he agreed that this could be very helpful in conceiving a score, because you could tell where the light parts of the music are, and the heavy parts. I understand Villa Lobos down in South America once took the mountains of the horizon beyond his home and put it on graph paper. Then he set it to music. By drawing lines across the graph paper he could actually put that creative line into a melody. One time I found someone had graphed the music of Bach by using a design. Every time this design came along, you had a certain melody, and when it was over that same melody was repeated. So it is possible to graph music.

Gerber: What is the next step? You have this marvelous collection of Moby Dick paintings. They're connected somehow with the movie and this tour you went on. When did that phase begin? When did you go from the scenic designs to these paintings?

Wilson: They were coming along at the same time, the first hundred paintings. A friend of mine was an agent, from my home state, from Indianapolis. He was in New York, with a place at Steinway Hall. For about \$700 we could rent a gallery on 57th Street for one week. These hundred drawings were put in this gallery on 57th Street--these were Moby Dick drawings. The Theatre Guild had become somewhat interested in looking at my designs, and someone had suggested Walter Huston as being a good Ahab. I had two Ahabs in my conception, because in the middle of the second act the man's alter ego steps out from behind the mast. The good Ahab and the bad Ahab, the split personality; you don't know which is dominant, which is in control. I conceived of Walter Huston playing the body of Ahab and Lauritz Melchior--who was about the same height, although he was heavier--playing the soul, the spirit. It was a battle between them; one would speak and the other would sing, perhaps. The one was trying to get back to his wife and child; they kept coming into his memory, and in his imagination he would try to reach them. The other half of him kept telling him, "Look, you can't go back home again to your wife and child because"--he's inferring that Ahab was emasculated. These images come on scenic projection on the sails. It is said in the novel that when Ahab is laid out, they would find this scar running from the top of his head clear down the side of his body to the sole of his foot. He had taken this lightning stroke. He was like a great tree that had been struck. All of this intrigued the people who would look at my drawings, but the story is so heavy and powerful that it's almost frightening.

I thought about the problem of the leg; you can't bend back a leg and walk comfortably on stage. Walter Huston told me about this. He had been in Knickerbocker Holiday and had worn a peg leg. But he wore a long coat and a sword which held the coat back so that he could put his leg back and strap it up to his belt and still walk around, rather awkwardly. He said, "You'll never get someone like Melchior to do that, because he believes in comfort. He'll wear his old sneakers even when he's playing "Tristan and Isolde." Then Huston said, "Why not make a plastic boot which can just fit over this leg? It'll be comfortable and impressive; it's made out of the whale's jawbone. It's a formidable thing. It would solve the problem of the leg." The problem of the whale could be solved by using light, which makes it a very symbolic thing. This brilliant, blinding light which approaches the ship is really what takes care of the whale. All of these things seemed to strike home to the people who would see this. They would get excited about it. Walter Huston was very close to Kurt Weill. Weill took my drawings out to his home one time and showed them to Maxwell Anderson, who was very much excited by the fact that Ahab was castrated by the whale's biting off his leg. Also, when he fell that time in Nantucket, a splinter pierced his groin, which implies that he had a castration. This gave motivation for Ahab's madness. It seems as if everyone who took hold of this thing eventually, I'm sorry to say, they just died. Walter Huston died. Kurt Weill died. Melchior died, and before that he got kicked out of the Met because he wouldn't rehearse. Of all the ironies, after I approached him on this music drama of Moby Dick and showed him the script, the



very next year he came riding into Jones Beach on the back of a big whale, almost as if he got that idea from me. He was almost making fun of the fact that he was going to play Ahab. He was a great prankster. One of the big violinists came to his place and Melchior put this violin down behind the chair and he came over there and stepped on the violin, squashed it in its case. They used an old, cheap violin. This guy--Michael Stern or something like that--nearly had a heart attack. He thought it was his Stradivarius.

Gerber: Could that be Isaac Stern?

Wilson: Could have been, yes.

Gerber: What became of the drawings, that first hundred?

Wilson: These are the big ones I have here in the studio. Behind there, I have about 150 or 200 smaller ones, about one by two feet. These big paintings hadn't been done yet. I keep adding to them. I've been working on this for thirty years.

Gerber: But the New York exhibition--are those the drawings over there, in the box?

Wilson: Yes.

Gerber: Then these drawings we're looking at now came later? They were done in connection with the movie?

Wilson: I'd done them before the movie, but I used them in touring for it.



Gerber: Tell me about getting connected with the motion picture of Moby Dick.

Wilson: I've spoken of this exhibition I'd had on 57th Street, which cost \$700. The people kept coming in to see this and looking around, but the critics just don't seem to like what they call "theme" shows. I was exhibiting them with the idea of getting someone interested in the music drama. Pearl Buck was one of my sponsors. Walter Huston was another.

When Walter came in to see the work, he said, "I've got to get John in here to see it, because he wants to do Moby Dick as a motion picture." Finally, John sent one of his partners in, a man named Kohner, and he was very much excited by the thing. I was going to design the picture for John even though the Met was interested in a music drama. John even was considering filming an opera or music drama. I have letters from him which said, "Certainly I'm interested in this. I don't know how we would do it," he said; "I don't like the idea of filming a play or a stage production, but maybe I can make a documentary."

Along came Orson Welles, who did what was called a "Moby Dick Rehearsal." His characters were all sitting around; they just finished King Lear and are talking about their next play. So they just go through the motions. The ropes hang down from the rigging. The whole stage is empty and there's big ladders, there's big ropes hanging down, and they move the ropes back and forth. It gives the feeling of a ship.

Gerber: Where was this?

Wilson: This was in England. He did a beautiful thing. Some of the Melville Society scholars saw it and they said it was one of the finest things. I've always felt that Orson Welles could do a grand job of Ahab. I see Ahab as a big, stout, heavy set, Wagnerian hero. In fact, John Huston used Welles in his film, but he played Father Mapple. He was just too fat for Ahab. And Walter Huston was to play Ahab in the film, but they had to use Gregory Peck, and he was just wooden in the thing. He didn't feel right in the role. He admitted it was his worst performance. I kept saying this on the tour. I was getting all kinds of press notice because I wasn't going out and beating the drum for the picture. I was being critical of it.

Gerber: How did the tour start?

Wilson: It was five years getting off the ground. Huston started this picture around 1950 or '51, which was the 100th anniversary of Moby Dick. It didn't come out until 1956. He had trouble with the unions in Hollywood doing a film of a purely American story and he was going to do it over in his Elstree Studios in England. That cut me out, because he couldn't use any American help. Peck being, fortunately, a Britisher--now he's an American citizen, I guess--made him all right. John had to use all British labor on his film over there. He had two million dollars in his budget and before he knew it all of that money was gone. He'd built this huge whale which floated away and they finally had to blow it up because it became a hazard in the Channel. He found this little village in Wales that looked just like New Bedford. He had a very interesting

thing of using a black-print negative and a color print super-imposed, and that gave the color a very dark and ominous quality. That's the first time it was used, in Moby Dick. He invented a great many ideas, and the picture when he first made it was three hours long. They cut that down to an hour and fifty minutes. I'm ashamed of my own little film of Moby Dick, in a way, because it's only thirty minutes long--or twenty-eight--it seems like putting the Gettysburg Address onto the head of a pin. You can't put Melville into a condensed form!

Gerber: Who sponsored your tour?

Wilson: It was Warner Brothers.

Gerber: They wanted to publicize the Moby Dick film?

Wilson: My idea was to go out and talk about the story of Moby Dick and show slides of my paintings. I had these paintings in a portfolio, and I would show them to the people I was talking to. They had me speaking to Rotary Clubs, and women's clubs, and fifteen high schools, and colleges. I had three lectures. One was fifteen minutes long, one was a half-hour long, and one was a whole hour.

Gerber: You can't do much in fifteen minutes, can you?

Wilson: When you go to a Rotary Club, they horse around a lot, and then they're all getting up to sneak out, so you just give them the small works. I remember one time, it was in an old people's home--they were really putting me into almost anyplace. After almost five months of this road work, I came back along the southern route and they were putting me into children's shows and Captain Kangaroo and



just anywhere they could. These old people, they took them away from their games and their crocheting and their handcrafting and said, "Here's a lecture this man's going to give you on Moby Dick." One old fellow said, "How long does this thing last?" So I thought I better give them the short form. They were cranky about it. I had an audience of six people one time in Indianapolis, in one of the museums there. Since it was an art lecture, they thought they'd put it into there. Six people came to the thing. This was at the John Herron Art Institute.

Gerber: A tour like that is unpredictable, I suppose.

Wilson: They would have me on television and radio. They cut all of the pages out of the newspapers that the story is in, and they put them all in a pile, just the single page of the newspaper that's got the article on it, and that's the way they measure it. They say, "This has got more publicity than any film we've ever shown." I was on the front page of papers way up in the northern part of the states. I told a story about the power of the atom; can you imagine the art news or the movie news getting on the front page? It was really an interesting thing. I made money for the first time in my life, and then the income tax took most of it away. Two years after the tour, the capital-gains tax came in and I could have gotten all that money back. My friend Naecker, who is on the H & R Block thing, says, "You really should have filed over again." After three years, you can refile, you know. But I was never able to get it back.



Gerber: When we ended a previous tape, we were talking about a dancer--

Wilson: His name was Allen Wayne. He was a premier dancer at the Metropolitan.

Gerber: You were speaking of the way he walked, how he glided his feet.

Wilson: He walked like Nijinsky. He was a great admirer of Nijinsky. An Indian walks that way too. It's flat-footed, but they slide their foot along the ground almost. It looks very powerful, like a panther. There's something about it that's very beautiful. People will stand and look when they see someone walk along the street that way.

Gerber: He was with the Ted Shawn company?

Wilson: He had a great career in dancing. But I never knew such a homely person. He must have had smallpox--he had pock marks all over his face. His hair looked like a wild man, and he usually had wide-open eyes. He just didn't seem to fit into little old Terre Haute, somehow. But he was a dance teacher in the latter part of his life. He took one of my drawings of a hand--Ahab's hand--and nailed it up in his dance studio, and I was never able to get it back again. He was that kind of an aggressive person. He wanted to do the choreographing of the music drama, the way the crew act when they're frightened by the whale as it's approaching the ship. He had marvelous ideas as to how the men would move. He was a great advocate of Martha Graham. He had style, and he had talent, but he was a kind of a wild man. I suppose all creative people, including dancers,

have something like that about them. I remember that Melville is spoken of by Hawthorne; he was describing a savage who is swinging a club, fighting. And after Melville went home that evening, they all said, "Where is that club that he was using?" Their imagination was so powerful that they felt he had used an actual war club. My friend, the Melville scholar, Dr. Murray, who is a psychiatrist, said, "Really, your grandfather must have been hit over the head with a harpoon, because Moby Dick has possessed you. It's amazing. No one has spent thirty years of his life on this book."

Gerber: You thought of that as your masterwork?

Wilson: After you get past fifty, you begin to feel that you've got to do something that will really solidify your talent, something to be remembered. I've appreciated the fact that you've gone from Dreiser to Melville in approaching my own interests, because I'm sure Dreiser appreciated Melville and probably was familiar with him, but Melville is my first love, in that sense, and Moby Dick is my Bible. I feel it's got as great an impact, as a message.

Gerber: I was going to ask what it is about Moby Dick that appeals to you so much.

Wilson: I can't explain it. I see the book as a work of art that has true greatness in it. When Somerset Maugham included Melville's Moby Dick as one of the ten great literary works of the world, I really

felt good about this. It confirmed my belief that it is, for our time, the greatest piece of writing that's come along.

Gerber: You've spoken to me of someone who called it one of the twelve worst.

Wilson: Some dumb cluck students who hate to read stuff brought out a book some years ago and classified all of the novels that were the worst ten books in the world, and Moby Dick was at the head of the list. They were being smart alecks.

Gerber. What was second worst, David Copperfield?

Wilson: That or Les Miserables. Maybe War and Peace. They parodied the story in a chapter of their book. It came out from Princeton or Harvard. I feel the same about Whitman's Leaves of Grass as I do about Moby Dick. I wanted to do a mural on Whitman's poetry. In fact, I've done one, which you know about--you have the postcard of the "Vigil Strange" which I did in the community theater in Terre Haute. I have made the scenario of the story of Walt Whitman and his Leaves of Grass. But I haven't carried it nearly as far or illustrated it like I have Moby Dick.

Gerber: Do you see in Moby Dick what so many critics do, an elemental story of the human species and its predicament?

Wilson: There are many interpretations of the thing.

Gerber: Some people say it goes to the heart of everything which makes us the human predicament.



Wilson: There's an outstanding book called Melville's Quarrel With God. And Dr. Murray, the Melville scholar at Harvard, has written a marvelous essay called, "In Nomine Diaboli," which is a quote from the book: "In the name of the devil." He sees this white whale as the great religious conscience of mankind. Melville is trying to overcome it.

The Hoosier Schoolmaster Revisited

Jerry West

When George Bernard Shaw wrote, "He who can, does; he who cannot, teaches," there is no doubt that he was being contemptuous specifically of those of us who stand or pace or sit in classrooms while talking of literature and the art of composition but lack the talent to practice what we teach (we may write and be published but even our favorite maiden aunt seems insincere when she announces that we have created literature).

As one of the legion who could not but taught anyway I find that one of the few rewards for surviving to age sixty is that Shaw's barb no longer has any sting--more important is how I managed to stand and pace and sit through thirty-six years of classrooms without becoming alcoholic, homicidal, suicidal, unemployed, or even notoriously neurotic.

Bemusement at survival is certainly a hobby of old age as one goes to funerals or hears horror stories of what happened to colleagues from long ago. Such musing led me to Edward Eggleston's The Hoosier Schoolmaster, first published in 1871, a novel which I had read last at possibly age fifteen, and not considered consciously since in spite of Vernon Loggins' claim that it is a "literary landmark" and should stand with Little Women and Tom Sawyer (not to mention Mrs. Gaskell's Cranford and Daudet's Lettres de mon Moulin).<sup>1</sup>

Having read, with surprised pleasure, the one battered copy available in the local library, I knew why I had searched it out after forty-five years. The little novel contained the key, not only to Ralph Hartsook's survival in that one-room school in Flat Creek, Indiana in 1850, but to my own survival as a college professor.

Edward Eggleston, of course, has some fame for his eight novels, stories, and other works written mostly between 1871 and 1891, but there is a tendency to dismiss him as a writer whose works about frontier religion were flawed by his own religiosity. (Anthology excerpts from novels such as The Circuit Rider feature the crude rather than the heroic elements of early Methodism.) Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn could survive the Naturalistic criticism of the early twentieth century because Twain makes them immune to any serious religious influence; Eggleston has Ralph Hartsook mouth religious platitudes but--whether Eggleston intended it or not--Ralph's survival depends on visceral rather than spiritual sources though he also resorts to the cunning of a Tom Sawyer and the practicality of a Huck Finn.

"Want to be a school-master, do you? You? Well, what would you do in Flat Crick deestrick, I'd like to know? Why, the boys have driv off the last two, and licked the one afore them like blazes. You might teach a summer school, when nothin' but children come. But I 'low it takes a right smart man to be school-master in Flat Creek in the winter. They'd pitch you out of doors, sonny, neck and heels, afore Christmas."

That's how young Ralph Hartsook is greeted by "old Jack Means," the trustee who will hire him because "I pay the most taxes, t'others jist let me run the thing."



Ralph has walked ten miles to get the school in this district, thinking he will be judged by his education rather than his muscle. He is cold, tired, threatened by Jack Means' ugly bulldog, measured contemptuously by huge, brawny Bud Means who will be one of his students, and giggled at by Mirandy Means who thinks it hilarious that the new teacher may be eaten by the bulldog or beaten by her brother. (Mirandy, a silly, homely girl, soon compounds his problems by falling in love with him.)

In desperation, Ralph accepts the position, beginning his "boarding around" at the Means'--a process that involves eating salt pork swimming in lard, sleeping in a cold attic room in a small bed already crowded by a teenage boy, and being lectured by such as Mrs. Means, who smokes a pipe and feuds with a neighbor who criticized her "bekase I tuck a sheet off the bed to splice out the table-cloth, which was rather short. And the sheet was mos' clean, too. Had-n ben slep on more'n wunst or twicet."

Ralph's first day of teaching is not very successful. "There were symptoms of insubordination through the whole school" which contained students from age six to eighteen, some of them outweighing the slender teacher by fifty pounds. Lying awake that night, Ralph has a vision which comforts him, which inspires him to go on in spite of the odds against his success.

He had gone on a raccoon hunt at night with Bud and Bill Means, hoping to make friends with these two large students. He had helped dislodge a raccoon from a tree so that the Means' bulldog could kill it. At the time, Ralph had felt sorry for the raccoon:

He remembered that quiet and annihilating bite which Bull

gave. He remembered Bud's certificate, that "If Bull once takes a holt, heaven and yarth can't make him let go." He thought that what Flat Creek needed was a bull-dog, quiet but invincible. He would take hold in such a way that nothing should make him let go. And then he went to sleep.

And the next morning Ralph begins to take on the personality of the bulldog, moving as he thinks Bull would move, eating with deliberation, continually comparing himself with Bull. Thenceforth, as a teacher, he preserves a cool and dogged manner.

In 1948, at the age of twenty-four and with a fresh master's degree and no teaching experience, I accepted--on a week's notice--a position as instructor of English and speech at a small State College in West Virginia. I had never wanted to be a teacher--never even had a nightmare about being a college instructor--but debts, a wife and new baby, and no other job offers launched me into the classroom. The incredible influx of veterans on the World War Two G. I. Bill created that desperate need for me and other novice teachers.

So there I was, a would-be novelist, actor, radio announcer, anything but teacher, holding forth on the parts of speech in Freshman Composition, posture and enunciation in Beginning Public Speaking, and the Puritan contribution in American Lit Survey. The first weeks were as bad as the Normandy Invasion, with the students as German soldiers intent on throwing me back into the ocean.

In one class of thirty there were twenty-nine male veterans and one eighteen year old coed who couldn't make up her mind whether to die of fright or happiness. I had reached the exalted rank of corporal after three years in the United States Army and



made the mistake of letting this be known. In my classes there was one former major, two captains, a naval commander (or whatever he was), and an assortment of ex-sergeants. I was addressed variously as "Mr. Corporal," "General West," and "Hey, soldier."

In essence, my problem was identical to Ralph Hartsook's. I had to find a persona which would enable me to survive. Though I was much larger and by nature more aggressive than Ralph, intimidating those veterans was as hopeless a proposition as Ralph fighting back if Bud Means decided to clobber him. There was one ex-paratrooper who never smiled, still wore his boots with a knife stuck in one of them, and who seemed to be back in the Battle of the Bulge rather than in my classroom. When I asked him a question one day he actually said, "Nuts! My answer is nuts!"

Humor didn't work; being friendly didn't work; reminding them that I held the power of the grade didn't work; since my war stories couldn't compare with what was going on in that paratrooper's mind, I abandoned them early on. Like Ralph, I could quit, flee, or await total chaos and disgrace. (Since that time I have heard professors older than I proclaim that G. I. period after the War as a golden era for teachers because the vets were so mature and serious and cooperative and so forth. That may well have held true for older, white-haired gents or ladies, I may have had more than my share of Charley Company types, vets were particularly impatient with the basic, required courses I taught, there was reason to feel short-changed by the young, inexperienced teachers being thrown into the classrooms at that time, and my--unwisely announced--service in the Combat



Engineers soon resulted in "Did you know our Professor was in the Comic Engineers?" Personally, I was glad to see the last of the World War Two vets and have my classes filled with eighteen year olds who didn't carry knives in their boots, laughed nervously at my jokes, were impressed by my war stories, and called me Doctor long before I achieved that eminence.)

So, whether or not I consciously remembered Ralph's solution to the problem, I followed the same route. I changed personality and became like Bull, inexorably going through all the motions no matter what happened. Regardless of what those vets did or said, I was going to get a grip on them and nothing would make me let go. Either they would make a fair attempt to learn whatever I was teaching or they would flunk; nothing short of death or firing would make me change my attitude or system. The only emotional display I permitted myself was an occasional deep growl or snarl.

It worked for me as it worked for Ralph. Since life is rarely as strange as fiction, I was never accused of robbery in conjunction with my job, put on trial, and found innocent after a dramatic series of events. I did pass a trial by water, as Ralph did, but without his cleverness. In the novel, Ralph learns that Henry Banta, a typical "low-browed, smirky, and crafty" student has plotted revenge for a beech switching from the schoolmaster. Henry has loosened a broad board behind the schoolmaster's desk so that Ralph will fall into a pond which lies beneath the school. Ralph disappoints the students by avoiding the loose

board--apparently by accident--and, when Henry has forgotten his plot, Ralph has the boy come to the desk, fall through the hole, and get a ducking in the cold pond water.

In my case, the trial by water occurred in that speech class which had twenty-nine veterans and one half-delirious coed. It was an old army barrack's trick: I should have been warned by the quietness in the classroom. I pushed open the partly-closed door and a bucket full of water fell on my head. I stood there, drenched, amidst a roar of laughter. Even the coed was tittering hysterically. I remembered I was Bull. I kicked the bucket aside, walked to the lectern, began and ended the class as if nothing had happened. I did, however, announce a special test, at the next class meeting, which would include an extra hundred pages of reading which I then proceeded to assign. It was at about that point in time that I ceased to have any real problems with students, though I did, henceforth, kick open partly-closed doors before entering classrooms.

And so I find the inspiration for my survival as a classroom teacher for thirty-six years (counting down to forty) in a little novel written over one hundred years ago and read first when I was possibly fifteen. But whether or not you find that point interesting, I recommend a reading or re-reading of The Hoosier Schoolmaster. It is a delightful little book, filled with characters as grotesquely comic as any Twain ever created, including "strong-minded and weak-minded" women. The Southern Indiana dialect of the time and place seems authentic. Eggleston writes in the novel, "We are all children in reading stories." Perhaps. Certainly

some of us become young again when we read this kind of novel.

Note

<sup>1</sup>Vernon Loggins, "Introduction," in Edward Eggleston, The Hoosier School-Master (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), p. v. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

Michigan State University



## PURE POETRY

Louis J. Cantoni

His destination, when he set out, was pure poetry, although he did not recognise it. He traveled the byways talking gladly with all he met, but not seeking out anyone. He was given many years and a good measure of pain to work out the complexities of his life. In the end he cherished the same gifts as in the beginning--the sun, the rain, the flight of a hummingbird, the song of a flute, a good friendly talk, a brightening smile, a walk in the woods, a simple meal.

He April'd all his days with his own good companionship. His marriage was as natural as a drink of fresh water. His wife radiated the clear beauty of mature women. His children, albeit curcuitiously, took on his values. He espoused no overriding personal causes, thus obviating many battles and skirmishes. His vocation was to converse with others, to discover with them the essence of the human way.

In his youth he forgot God for some years, but God did not forget him. He often felt the presence of God, or of God's special messenger. In his middle years sleep came fitfully sometimes, but he resolved certain perplexities to his own satisfaction. Now, in his later years, he delights in each day. He feels near to man and God and views death as another beginning. He has reached his destination many times and welcomes sunset as well as sunrise, conflict as well as calm. He knows now that much of his life has been pure poetry.

Wayne State University

## Aliens Invade the Midwest

Thomas P. Linkfield

Writers have used the Midwest as the setting in their fiction for many different purposes. Ray Bradbury has utilized the Midwest in much of his fiction that emphasizes personal nostalgia for his boyhood in Waukegan, Illinois. Within the last two years, two writers - Tom Reamy and Clifford D. Simak - have published novels set in America's heartland, although each writer used the Midwest for different purposes. Tom Reamy, who wrote Blind Voices (1978), used rural Kansas as the setting for a plot involving a struggle between the forces of good and evil. Clifford D. Simak, author of The Visitors (1980), used rural Minnesota to demonstrate the far-reaching effects of an alien invasion upon both an isolated community and the entire nation. Although one novel is heroic fantasy while the other is science fiction, both novels present problems and issues that transcend the dull, lazy Midwestern towns in which they are set.<sup>1</sup>

Reamy's Blind Voices is set in the small agricultural community of Hawley, Kansas, during the administration of Herbert Hoover. In Hawley, where everyone knows every other living soul, the chief business is growing wheat and corn. The three principal amusements are sitting in the town's drugstore, gossiping about other folks, and attending the one movie house in town. Local farmers worry about the weather and their ripening crops, which from a distance appear as undulating seas of grain. Although several of the area's farmers have been prosperous, concern exists over the state of the nation's economy, and one of the novel's characters has to cancel her plans for college in the fall because of steadily worsening agricultural conditions. Hawley,

Kansas, is dusty, dull, and isolated from the rest of the United States and even the world.

Toward the end of the summer, an outside force invades Hawley to upset its tranquility and dull routine. Without warning, Haverstock's Traveling Curiosus and Wondershow (a circus of freaks) arrives to provide some much needed entertainment for the town's citizens. This freak show includes such marvels as a Minotaur, Electro, the Lightning Man, the Snake Goddess, and a twelve-inch midget named Tiny Tim. The star attraction is a mute albino named Angel, and the show's owner is a dark, brooding character named Haverstock. The town literally buzzes with excitement and anticipation as people gawk at the circus wagons passing through town. Twelve-year old Finney Bower expresses the reaction of many residents when he exclaims, "Sumbitch! Something's finally happening!"<sup>2</sup> The long hot summer may not be a waste after all. Haverstock's Wondershow may provide Hawley, Kansas, with a few good thrills and better-than-average entertainment. It does that, but it also provides Hawley with a lesson in evil the town will not soon forget.

The Wondershow is actually a front for an evil genius who possesses an unusual power and the vaunted ambition to use it in unnatural ways. For many years Haverstock has been developing his telekinetic powers. But Haverstock's mastery of telekinesis far exceeds the ability to move objects through space. He can actually manipulate natural laws and control energy and matter. The amazing special effects in his freak show, like the flashes of color and lightening, are not mere illusions, but are displays of his awesome power. He can create fire and light and also produce minor earthquakes. Haverstock has developed his telekinetic power to the extent where he can mend diseased or broken parts of the human body. He dreams of immortality, and for years Haverstock has been regenerating himself with his mental power. His most sinister use of telekinesis, however, is his manipulation of human embryonic develop-



ment. Through sheer will power, he has created the freaks in his Wondershow; they are his unholy and unnatural children. Behind the guise of a traveling freak show, Haverstock has been perfecting his telekinetic powers to the point where he can seriously consider achieving immortality and ruling the world.

Haverstock's great power with its potential for evil is counterbalanced by the same telekinesis which is present in another character - Angel, the show's strange Albino. Angel is not one of Haverstock's bizarre creations, but simply a runaway mute whom he adopted. Although Angel possesses great telekinetic potential, Haverstock has blocked his development and use of that power by hypnotic suggestion. Enslaved by Haverstock's mental power, Angel must perform as the main attraction in the Wondershop.

Angel's attempted escape in Hawley from his evil master begins a chain of events culminating in a spectacular duel between these two possessors of telekinesis. When Angel escapes from the Wondershow, a local girl, Evelyn Bradley, assists him and takes him to Hawley's only doctor. She falls in love with Angel and later conceals him in a barn on her family's farm. Haverstock, after destroying his own freak show, pursues Angel and Evelyn, finally cornering them in an abandoned, dilapidated mansion outside town. Haverstock imprisons both of them with his mental power, and the situation seems hopeless for the heroic couple. Angel, however, discovers the secret of breaking Haverstock's hypnotic spell, thus releasing his confined telekinetic potential. With Evelyn Bradley a helpless observer, Angel and Haverstock battle with their telekinetic powers in an earth-shaking struggle which only one can survive. The fate of the world is at stake as Angel and Haverstock hurl bolts of energy and fire at each other at night in a

field outside Hawley, Kansas. Summoning his last reserves of faith and power, Angel reduces the evil Haverstock to a smoldering, roasted pulp. Good has triumphed over evil; Hawley, Kansas, which slept through the entire episode, is safe.

Tom Reamy's novel emphasizes both the continuity and change that accompany the Wondershow's brief visit to Hawley, Kansas. The town's residents will not soon forget the show's freaks and its demise in a spectacular fire. But their attention returns to more pressing matters - their crops, the weather, and the condition of the economy. Young boys like Finney Bowen look forward to next summer and any new adventures it might hold for them. Dr. Latham will never forget the brutal rape and murder of his daughter Francine by the Minotaur, one of Haverstock's evil creations. Angel experiences a dual awakening in Hawley: the ability to use his telekinetic potential and his sexual desire for Evelyn Bradley, the local girl who aides him against Haverstock. But despite these and other changes, life will continue in Hawley much as it did before the arrival of Haverstock's Traveling Curiosus and Wondershow.

In The Visitors Clifford D. Simak describes an invasion of a much different sort and its effects on a small Midwestern community and the nation. The novel's setting is Lone Pine in northern Minnesota, a sleepy tourist community on the edge of a primitive wilderness area. Lone Pine is a great place for trout fishing or communing with nature. The water is pure and unspoiled, the air clear and brisk, but the pace of life is slow and dull. Residents spend a lot of their time just sitting and talking to each other. Lone Pine seems far removed from the hustle of the urban ratrace, isolated from domestic and foreign issues that plague the President in Washington.

As the novel begins, George, the town's barber, is pontificating on forestry management and Indians - two issues he knows nothing about.

Without warning, something invades Lone Pine during autumn, a creature so totally alien that it is extremely difficult even to recognize as a living being. The invader, or visitor since it is not discernably evil or warlike, is a huge black box measuring 50' by 200'. Tests eventually determine that the visitor's inner core is composed of cellulose, while its outer shell is a silicon-oxygen polymer. It has other startling characteristics in addition to these. It can absorb energy from any available source. It can convert kinetic energy into potential energy and change energy into any form of matter it desires. It can also manipulate gravity to propel itself effortlessly. But the characteristic that most bewilders and mystifies people is its insatiable appetite for trees of all kinds. After the first visitor has reconnoitered Lone Pine, Minnesota, the rest of the race follows. The invasion of the United States commences as thousands of these stranger visitors settle down to graze in state and national forests.

Even though these uninvited visitors are not overtly hostile like H. G. Wells' Martians, their "invasion" does produce some startling results. The tranquility and isolation of Lone Pine are violated as media people, state troopers, the national guard, and even the FBI invade the small town to guard and investigate the aliens. In urban ghettos blacks riot, loot stores, and listen to street preachers who claim the invasion signals their deliverance from white domination. Several Americans claim the visitors have singled them out for special messages and futuristic visions. Millions of citizens turn to organized religion for answers and guidance, since these aliens are totally



beyond human understanding. But churches fail to provide easy answers, and one character in the novel describes the incredible surge in church attendance as a "mystic retreat into unreality." One offbeat religious cult called "The Lovers" claims that pure, simple love will produce comprehension of the aliens' intentions. The aliens, who become a first-class nuisance, do not respond to pure love, but instead regard Americans with curious detachment. The initial novelty and excitement over the visitors change to irritation as Americans grope for explanations and comforting answers. Lone Pine, Minnesota, at first the center of national attention, sinks back into obscurity once again as the focus shifts to Minneapolis, Washington, and other localities.

Concern develops among some Americans as they better comprehend the visitors' nature and intentions. The visitors have apparently been wandering across the vastness of inter-galactic space for a considerable time searching for a new home. Although they can survive the harsh conditions of outer space, they need a planet with proper food in order to reproduce their species. They locate ideal conditions in the United States, the first geographic area on Earth they investigate. As they devour national forests, they begin to reproduce smaller versions of themselves. The cellulose in trees is essential for their survival, and with the survival of their race now guaranteed, they settle down for a long, comfortable stay. Americans become increasingly more uneasy as they realize these huge black boxes appear to have made America their permanent home, even though they remain relatively benign and non-hostile.

Throughout the novel, Clifford Simak constructs a parallel between the impact of the aliens upon American society and the impact of white Americans on native Indian societies of the Midwest in the nineteenth century. The main issue at first in both instances is land use. One of the chief justifications

whites used to dislodge Indians from their land was that Indians never used it properly. Because Indians, especially Plains tribes, did not engage in extensive agriculture, encroaching whites never regarded Indian societies as civilized or permanent. Because of this, white Americans felt justified in moving in and simply taking over. The old white attitude regarding Indians and land use is still popular in Lone Pine, Minnesota, with people like the town's barber:

It [the land] was just lying there. They weren't using it. Once in a while, they'd harvest a little wild rice or shoot a duck or kill a beaver for its fur. But they weren't really using the land. They were letting it go to waste. They didn't know how to use it. And we did. So we came and used it.... We have the right to use any land that isn't being used.<sup>3</sup>

The barber's words, however, acquire an ironic meaning that Americans in Lone Pine and the entire nation are slow to grasp.

With their invasion the alien visitors have created unknowingly a situation similar to that which existed when White American culture confronted Indian American culture in the Midwest. When the aliens first land and begin feasting upon trees in protected national forests, they do not, in most cases, seriously disturb white Americans. They simply utilize land that Americans are not apparently using for any practical purposes. Since their survival is paramount to the visitors, they have no compunction about using forested land that the natives allow to stand idle. They at least can use the forests in a better way than Americans do; they eat the trees. Americans seem more interested in building ribbons of concrete so they can indulge in their national passion - automobile travel. The alien visitors are merely applying the old American attitude regarding Indians in a new and ironic way. While it is doubtful that they realize the implications of their actions, the visitors obviously feel that have the right to use land that other beings are not using, especially

since it means survival for their race.

Even though the aliens' actions produce considerable irritation and puzzlement among residents of Minnesota and the nation, American society and culture have not yet received any great shocks. This situation changes radically, however, when the visitors begin the mass production of automobiles and actually give two of them away. What appears to be the prelude to a wholesale giveaway of new cars to Americans creates major problems for the society. Free cars would ruin not only the American automobile industry, but hundreds of smaller suppliers as well. The petroleum industry would suffer because these cars use gravity for propulsion, not gasoline. The domino effect would not cease until millions of Americans were unemployed and the economy lay in ruins. The shocks, however, would go beyond the ruination of the economy. The implication is clear that if Americans begin accepting free consumer goods from these benign aliens, they may awake one day to find themselves the economic slaves of powerful beings who only desire a new home. What this "free dole" would do to the individual's character and subsequently to society's values is anyone's guess. The future does not look bright, since Americans seem eager to accept free cars and since the visitors begin constructing new house.

Although the reasons behind the visitors' actions remain obscure, they do inspire a lively debate among several characters in the novel. A newspaper reporter in Minneapolis believes the aliens are producing cars out of gratitude and genuine affection for Americans. They are, in effect, playing Santa Claus, and she compares them to a young man buying roses for his girlfriend. The President's science adviser maintains the aliens possess an "irrepressible business ethic." They are obsessed with making "full and honest" payment for



the trees they have eaten. Both theories would credit the visitors with emotions and values Americans would like to recognize. The most sweeping and inaccurate explanation originates with the liberal daughter of a U. S. senator. She asserts that the visitors, in their curiously impersonal way, are providing Americans with the opportunity to escape the technological syndrome that has entrapped them for over one hundred years. If these benign aliens are going to produce free goods for Americans (the actual reason is unimportant to her), Americans can re-order their society on a simpler, pre-industrial basis. She envisions the end of mad, personal competition among Americans and welcomes the demise of all corporations and the prevailing business ethic in the United States. These aliens, then, have unwittingly provided Americans with a chance to follow Henry David Thoreau's advise - to seek a more basic lifestyle.

But these explanations are simplistic and inadequate as Simak demonstrates by continuing his analogy between the present alien-American confrontation and the white American-Indian conflict of the past. By producing free cars, the visitors have discovered a way to keep native Americans relatively quiet and contented. The visitors are free to harvest trees and raise their young, their only objective since abandoning their home planet. While they do not destroy American towns or cities or intervene directly with Americans' lives, they do, in effect, confine Americans to "reservations" - all the land outside their chosen forests. They take the land they want, use it for their purposes, and leave to Americans what remains. While they do not destroy Americans the way white Americans destroyed Indians, the long-range effect of their coming is the same. America's culture - its social, economic, and political systems - will weaken and may eventually collapse because the aliens have requisitioned

portions of the land and have disrupted society's normal functioning. Indian society could not survive the onslaught of Americas in the nineteenth century, and the present American society may not survive the invasion of these strange alien visitors. It begins with something as simple as a free automobile.

Simak's novel ends with no concrete resolution in sight. The United States is on the verge of economic ruin. Several nations have offered foreign aid, since they recognize that they cannot afford to let the United States just collapse. The Secretary of State recommends that Americans sit down and analyze everything that has happened. He envisions a new politico-economic order emerging from the current crisis - a remodeling of the entire economic structure on a world-wide basis. It is clear that nothing will ever be the same again. But the alien visitors, those curiously benign and non-hostile beings, still defy complete analysis and comprehension. American society might survive the impact of this invasion and co-exist peacefully with the alien society. But that is doubtful since the aliens exist in a hive culture and seem unable or uninterested in grasping America's complex economic and political arrangements. The irony is that the visitors may not comprehend what their arrival and free gifts will do to American society. The novel ends on a terrifying note when one character discovers that the aliens may also be producing replicas of human beings, in addition to cars and houses. The crisis resulting from the aliens' invasion is far from over.

Tom Reamy's Blind Voices and Clifford D. Simak's The Visitors utilize the American Midwest for their settings, but each novel uses this region for a different purpose. Ream's novel employs the rural setting of an agricultural

community in Kansas as the background for a struggle between good and evil. The action is confined to this Midwestern community as residents react in various ways and on different levels to the invading freak show. The evil, once recognized, is destroyed in a manner reminiscent of an episode from George Lucas' "Star Wars" saga. While Simak's novel also emphasized the rural setting of a Midwestern locality, it demonstrates how an invasion by a single alien in Lone Pine, Minnesota, can escalate into a national crisis. Although the alien visitors are not overtly hostile or aggressive, their invasion does carry sinister implications which may have devastating effects on American society. The aliens' coming does not alter the rural nature of Lone Pine, but the people there and the larger society of which this isolated town is a part will never be the same. Both novels stress the willingness by Americans at times to see and comprehend only what they want to, while they ignore the truth.

Michigan State University