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CONTENTS

Page Number

In Memoriam: Eleanor Copenhaver Anderson David D. Anderson

A Midwest Diary: Edna Victoria Davis (Haskin)

Pauline Adams and Marilyn Culpepper

Poems for a Time of Short Views Bernard F. Engel

A Worker of our World Charles H. Miller

Sherwood Anderson, Letter Writer: II David D. Anderson

In Memoriam

Eleanor Copenhaver Anderson

1896 - 1985

Nearly forty-five years after Sherwood Anderson's death on March 8, 1941, Eleanor Copenhaver Anderson, his wife of nearly eight years that were productive and contented for both of them, has joined him on the hill overlooking Marion, Virginia, where Anderson's monument proclaims confidently for both of them that "Life Not Death is the Great Adventure."

Eleanor was proud that she was, as she liked to say, a mountain Virginian, an Elizabethan, but she was much more. She was born in Marion, Virginia, on June 15, 1896, to distinguished parents, Bascom E. Copenhaver, Superintendent of Schools in Smyth County, and Laura Schere Copenhaver, author, English teacher, and founder of an organization for marketing the handicrafts of mountain women. She graduated from the University of Richmond in 1917, received a certificate in social work from Bryn Mawr in 1920, and an M.A. from Columbia in 1933.

As part of the work for a course at Columbia, Eleanor had, while at home in Marion, interviewed Sherwood Anderson in late 1931. The interview focused on Anderson's Poor White, his novel dealing with the industrialization of an Ohio town. The topic was of particular interest to Eleanor; she had, since 1920, worked for the National Board of the YWCA, with much of her time spent in social work among young women in mill towns in the South.

Anderson had, since his move to Virginia in 1925 and his purchase of Marion's two weekly papers in 1927, become friendly with Eleanor's parents, particularly her mother; the attraction between Anderson in his fifties and Eleanor, twenty years younger, continued to grow. They were married on

July 6, 1933.

The marriage was fulfilling for both, and their careers were mutually enriching; Anderson discovered the mill girls with whom Eleanor worked and who were to provide the magnificent portraits in Perhaps Women, Beyond Desire, and Kit Brandon; Anderson often traveled with her and, Eleanor recalled, sometimes wrote her reports for her.

From 1937 to 1947 Eleanor was head of the Industrial Program of the YWCA, culminating her long service to the causes that promised social and economic reform, and in her years of what were, for her, retirement she recalled her role in the causes of the past; marching in support of Sacco and Vanzetti, speaking on New York street corners for FDR in 1932, supporting, with Sherwood, the causes of the 1930s. She retired from the YWCA in 1961.

Eleanor's second career had been that of maintaining the literary legacy of her late husband. Since his death in 1941, she not only collected and cared for the thousands of letters, manuscripts, and other materials that she graciously presented to the Newberry Library in 1947, but she welcomed dozens of Anderson scholars and aficionados, giving generously of her time, encouragement, and support. She was a member of the Society since its beginning in 1971. Those of us who were fortunate to know her will miss her greatly. Eleanor was a gracious lady and a great woman. Like Sherwood, we are richer for having known her. She died on September 12, 1985, in Marion.

David D. Anderson

A Midwestern Diary: Edna Victoria Davis (Haskin)

in 1894 and 1895

Pauline Adams and Marilyn Culpepper

There are those diarists who use their daily notations as therapy, a safe way to vent their frustrations and to voice their joys; others use their diaries to graph their moral or social or professional progress; still others seek to preserve the transitory moment. For many, their diaries become their most trustworthy and precious companions. Regardless of purpose, the diary, any diary, is a validation of one's life; it is also a validation of a way of life.

Investigators of grass roots America can learn much from the reading of diaries: ordinary people's notice of national events; their daily diversions; their aspirations; their work; their attitudes; their state of health; their income and expenditures; and so on and on. In a society which prides itself on being concerned with the welfare of individuals, how they are faring becomes important as an end in and of itself. When those diaries illustrate the generalizations of evaluators of the American scene, so much to the good; when they contradict the accepted wisdom, so much more provocative.

This study is an attempt to add to the accumulating knowledge of America and Americans by analyzing the diaries of a typical, young, Midwestern woman, Edna Victoria Davis, for the years 1894 and 1895, the only years for which her diaries exist. This is what is known about her. Edna V. Davis was born in 1868 perhaps in Saline, Michigan from where her family moved to Lansing, Michigan at the time of her birth. In any case, her whole life up to the time of the diaries was spent in Lansing where she worked in the family business, a combined restaurant,

bakery, and catering establishment. The Davis family also ran a boarding house and, early in the 20th century, an ice cream factory.

In 1895, Edna married Ralph Haskin of Imlay City and moved there. At that time, Ralph worked in his father's tailoring business. By 1899, the young couple had moved back to Lansing where their three children were born. They remained in Lansing, working first in the Davis family enterprises and then in Ralph's own tailor shop, until Edna's death in 1928 at the age of 60. Ralph returned to Imlay City, a widower, where he died in 1940 at the age of 68.

As this barebones account of Edna's life indicates, she is typical of her time and place. Hers is an American story no different from the thousands of young women. And her diaries reflect her ordinariness even while they establish her individuality.

The potpourri of news headlines for the year 1894 offers the following: The Lexow Committee is appointed to once again investigate corruption in New York City government, particularly in the police department; the Chinese Exclusion Treaty between U.S. and China whereby China consents to the exclusion of Chinese laborers is signed; Coxey's army of the unemployed marches from Massillon, Ohio to Washington demanding an addition of \$50,000,000 in paper money and public works for the unemployed; the Pullman Strike is called in Chicago; a strike that widens into a general railroad strike on western roads, a strike that leads to the invasion of Chicago by U.S. troops as well as by Illinois state troopers, a strike that does not end until nearly three months later with the power of railroad strikers broken; the Democratic Convention in Omaha, Nebraska, under the leadership of William Jennings Bryan, calls for the free coinage of silver on the basis of "16 [silver] to 1 [gold]" in order to lift the nation

from economic depression; the first Monday in September is declared a legal holiday, Labor Day; the Republic of Hawaii is proclaimed and quickly recognized by President Cleveland; Congress creates the Bureau of Immigration; the U.S. signs a commercial treaty with Japan; hydro-electric power is first developed on a large scale at Niagara Falls.

How does the diary of this fairly typical, young, Midwestern woman, Edna Victoria Davis, reflect--reflect on these events? Hardly at all. The only national item that made her diary was the railroad strikes and they merited three separate entries. On July 2, 1894: "They are having great strikes in the railroads all over the country. I wonder how it will end." On July 3, 1894: "The military co. here was ordered to meet at the Armory today to be ready to go to Battle Creek if needed. We had 26 of them here [The David family restaurant] to dinner and supper." On July 6, 1894: "The strike is very bad in Chicago today." (July 6 was the day the state troopers were sent into Chicago, 3 days after U.S. troops had already entered.)

Today's reader of this personal diary is left without a clue as to Edna's personal reaction except that she is curious about the outcome of the strike. Yet, the day the strike is finally broken, she takes no note of the ending or the outcome. When Edna applied the adjective "great" did she mean "big" or "extensive" or "significant" or "noble"? When she asserted that the strike was "very bad", did she mean the strikers' actions were wrong or that the situation, in general, was getting out of hand? The reader has no way of knowing.

Though the strike was the only national event to be recorded, Edna did note other happenings. "Wilber elected mayor." (April 2). "Brown (who shot Hendershot) was sentenced. Five year in Jackson today." (March 31). "The first

car (electric) ran to the college [Michigan Agricultural College now known as Michigan State University] today." (June 14) "Mr. Edgerley died last night at 1:00 o'clock. [A later entry tells of his having shot himself]." (September 21).

"There was a fire at 11 o'clock and I locked up, and we all went to it."

(July 17) Note that there is no information as to where the fire was; what it consumed; who fought it; how she felt or thought about it.

If the previous is the sum of recorded events beyond here immediate

personal interplay with life, what did Edna write down? Much yet little.

The weather of the day was always noted: "cold," "rainy," "lovely." Once she dared to be intimate. "This has been a lovely day and I left off my underclothes." Weather insistingly demands attention, no matter who the diarist may be. Another constant in diary entries, and Edna is no exception, is the registration of births and deaths.

Along with the weather and the notice of individuals coming into and passing out of this world, there daily appeared unelaborated enumerations of activities. Her work duties, which were most likely concentrated in the morning hours and were clearly performed in connection with the family business, are occasionally referred to. There are eight entries during the year about washing and ironing napkins, mere statements of accomplishments, no revealing modifying words to indicate her attitude or emotions about that chore. There were other entries as well. On August 19, she wrote without complaint, "I have been doing my work alone today as we have no girls in the dining room." The "girls" are never mentioned again. They remain mysterious anonymities. The August 8 entry reveals a hint of disappointment. "Barnum and Bailey's circus is in town today but not such a very big crowd. We had about 40 extra to dinner." On August 22 she

observed, "We were quite busy." Labor day, and remember that 1894 was the year when Labor Day was first declared a legal holiday, must have been quite a day since it merited an unusually long entry and the adverb "awfully" to boot.

"Labor day and oh such a day. We were awfully busy. Served dinner from 9:30 until 3:00 and supper from 4:00 to 8:00. There were 1600 people from Jackson alone." (September 3) That day's word did Edna in for the following day she wrote, "I am just about sick today, stayed at home all day." A week later, she took note of another unusually busy time. "We have been decorating and getting ready for the Maccabees today. There are a good many of them in town tonight." (September 10) "This is the big day of the Maccabee's meeting. We had a good day but not as many as expected." (September 11) November 28 carried a last extended entry on work for the year. "I have done my work as usual and I washed and ironed napkins in the afternoon....I wrote up my bills of fare for tomorrow."

There is no sense of oppression or dissatisfaction in these entries yet on June 1 she wrote, "I went to answer an advertisement for a lady at the Singer Sewing Machine office. Am to go again tomorrow." But the next day's entry has nothing further to say about that Singer Sewing Machine job nor does any indication of job restlessness appear again anywhere else in 1894. (On August 9, 1895 she recorded answering an ad for office work, but as with the previous foray into the job market, there is no follow-up in later entries.)

It is not surprising, however, that the Singer Sewing Machine office advertisement caught her eye because one of the activities she frequently records is sewing: making over her green dress, or finishing her green shirt, or fixing her red dress, or trimming her red hat, or making mama an apron, or working on her waist, and so on day after day.

Nevertheless, to think of her life as being made up of only work and sewing would be an error. Her days and nights were filled with visits of all sorts of people, sometime for tea, sometime for a chat, but most often for cards, particularly pedro. Some evenings, music, singing, and piano playing competed with card games. One evening, May 22, Chas. Smith was in and sang a new song, "Velvet and Rags," but that is the only time a specific musical selection is named.

In the summer months, going to North Lansing and elsewhere to hear the band seemed to replace her passion for cards. Starting June 1, when she recorded the first band concert she heard, and up through September 15, when she recorded the last band concert she heard, Edna had eighteen entries on these concerts. But that was all. No mention of the music played, the instrumental composition of the band, the audience. However, she did add an occasional specific. "Meach's band played on our street tonight and Prince's played on Washington Avenue." (July 6) "Meach's band played on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Grand Street in the evening." (July 11)

Edna enjoyed drama as well. Six times in the entries for the first six months of 1894, she referred to going to Rink's Opera house--this at a cost of 25 cents per show as revealed by the financial list at the back of the diary. Most of the entries merely note, "to the Rink with Johnnie" or whomever. Only rarely is she more specific. "In the evening we went to see Julia Marlow. She played A Love Chase." (March 15) "Mrs. Allen and I went to the play, The Gold King." (April 9)

Theatrical entertainment also included an evening of "Magic Lantern views" (April 2); an evening when mama and she "went to an entertainment at the Presbyterian church. It was a lady whistler, a pianist, and Miss. May (elecutionist)" (April 27); a matinee at the fairground, "but we gathered wild

flowers most of the time" (May 4); a visit to Sell's Bros. Circus (May 29).

Then, starting June 1 and until early fall, there were several carriage rides with several men, rides to hear the band play, or to the college (M.A.C.), or to the cemetery, or to Leadley's (an amusement park opened to the public in 1892--once she took a "steamer" there). Nice weather brought other diversions as well: visiting the fairgrounds; sipping a soda at Grave's or Bennett & Brake's; attending the races, "They were splended. Saw [name illegible] pace 1/2 mile in 1:00 1/2." (August 24) "Ralph [at this point Ralph Haskin of Imlay City is another male friend, but by Thanksgiving of 1895 he would be her husband] and I took the train for Grand Ledge and spent a very pleasant day. We got a boat and went for a ride and up on the Island. Got home at 8:30. Visited until bedtime peaches-peaches. This is Ralph's birthday." (August 26)

Winter was not devoid of its amusements other than sewing and visiting and card playing and theatre going. There were, also, having her pictures taken; going "to a Spiritualist Social at Mrs. Marritt's" (January 2); reading. "I stayed at home all day. Read 'On her Wedding Morn' by Clay. It is good and so is 'Her only Sin.'" She also enjoyed reading "An Old Folk's Wooing," "Chords and Dischords," "Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter."

Throughout the year, she spent much time on correspondence, carefully recording each letter she received and sent. In fact, Edna's New Year's Resolution on January 1, 1895 reads: "To be more prompt in my correspondence this year than I was last."

Edna's daily excursions are punctuated by two longer trips. One was for twelve days (September 24 to October 6) when she visited relatives in Vernon, near Owosso. The other was for ten days (December 26 to January 5) in Imlay City where she visited Neva Haskin, Ralph's sister. Most likely Neva was an

acceptable pretext by which she could visit with Ralph.

Church did not play an important role in her life that year. Church is mentioned only in six entries for the entire year. Two of those referred to attending an entertainment at the Presbyterian Church, and it is worthy to note in reference to Edna's church attendance that her Easter Sunday entry merely read, "Easter Sunday. I stayed at home all day." (March 25) When she does go to church, she displays freedom of choice as to which she chooses: Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Congregational, Spiritualist. "Mama and I went over to the Baptist Church to hear Mr. Sayles but we were late and didn't hear much." (April 30) "I went to church went to the M.D. but it was crowded so we went to the Cong." (December 9)

Edna was a healthy, energetic, optimistic yet practical young woman. Her health is attested to by the fact that only twice, on April 10 and on September 4, did she mention not being well. And on September 18 she did note, "I have had a hard headache today so have stayed at home." On August 11 she wrote of going "to the dentist's with Allie [her sister-in-law] but there is no indication on whose behalf the visit was made. Finally, on September 17, there is the following entry, "Went over to Morgan's and got a pair of glasses to try but am afraid they don't fit me."

Her energy is attested to by the multifarious activities that are briefly but tellingly inked on the pages of her diary. Perhaps that basic good health, perhaps that reservoir of energy, perhaps some uncharted atom of nature or nurture, separately or together, contributed to her basic optimism. The days and the events Edna recorded were described as "good," sometimes "real good," often "lovely." Anyone acquainted with the depression inducing quality of Lansing, Michigan weather can only admire the absence of curses hurled against

the pervasive grayness. Moodiness is not her companion, though on two rare occasions, there is the confession of loneliness. On January 1, she writes, "How lonely it is without Harry today," but by August 30 Ralph Haskin has replaced Harry. The former had visited her for a few days and had returned to Imlay City on August 29. The following day she penned the following: "This has been a lonesome day. I have missed Ralph so much." The one other cloud in her otherwise sunny lifescape was on May 14, when "We had to give our poor old kittie chloroform this morning." But all this affirmation does not necessarily add up to an agreeable non-entity. A bit of her assertiveness comes out when on December 24 she wrote, "Ralph came today on the 8:20 train. He had whiskers and I made him go to have them cut but he couldn't get a barbershop."

Her practical grasp of reality is attested to by her careful accounts. The back of her diary records each penny she spends (rarely do her expenditures top the dollar mark) plus the money "due me." The purchases are usually for the necessities of 19th century female life: ribbons, thread, pins, hairpins, crochet thread, corset stays, stamps, side combs, Ladies' Journal. She does indulge with frequent 5 cent purchases of candy and infrequent purchases of clothing items such as stockings, a belt, a hat. Her reading and show going betray a romantic streak to which she occasionally succumbs but which is never allowed to wreck her budget. During the year she is able to maintain a bank account of \$25--heady wealth for one with such a limited flow of money (about \$30 per month) and such a measured outflow.

The diary of 1895 reveals very little change in Edna's life or outlook except for a major change in status: marriage. National events still touch her lightly.

News headlines for the year reveal much concern about Latin America. Insurrection against Spanish rule breaks out in Cuba, and President Cleveland calls for the observance of American neutrality in that conflict; the U.S. demands the right to arbitrate Great Britain's boundary dispute with Venezuela, a demand that is rejected by Great Britain; President Cleveland does get a chance, however, to arbitrate the boundary dispute between Brazil and Argentina (in favor of Brazil). All these conflicts rush forth from a press that had adopted the shock tactics labelled "Yellow Journalism." The cutthroat competition between newspaper giants for readership centers on these foreign issues but there is much domestic news, primarily economic, as well. The cry for free silver, for increased currency in circulation, continues throughout the land, particularly in the West and South. An income tax provision tacked on to the Wilson-Gorman Tardiff Act is declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court but the Court declares constitutional Federal injunctions to prevent strikers from interference with interstate commerce. The Supreme Court also declares the Sherman Antitrust Act to apply to monopoly in interstate trade but not in manufacture. There is non-economic news as well. The Anti Saloon League of America is organized in Washington, D.C.; both the Boston and New York Public Libraries are founded. And so on.

Not one of these national events makes Edna Davis' diary during the year though she is not completely oblivious to politics. She records on January 30 that she went to the Capitol where there was a large delegation from Detroit both for and against "this Board of Health bill--500 in all." Again, on March 7, she went to the Capitol because the pure food bill was up. But, as in the previous year, there is no follow up, no hint as to her own interests in this

legislation (the family's restaurant business?) She notes other items of local interest. On a visit to Imlay City on May 6, she records that electric lights are lit for the first time (Ralph Haskin's father owns the electric company responsible for this illumination) and back in Lansing, on August 16, she notes, "The street cars run across the new bridge for the first time at 10:30 tonight." And that is the sum total of diary entries beyond the personal. They reveal no awareness, for example, of the impact of the national depression on Lansing.

This 1895 diary, the only other volume of her diaries extant, reflects the same, average, young woman--optimistic, friendly, hard-working, healthy, even tempered--as the 1894 one. Her work in the family restaurant is still uncomplainingly recorded as "I did my work as usual" or "washed and ironed napkins this forenoon." As in the previous year, her days are certainly not without their littler pleasures: daily walks to visit others or to do some "trading" uptown or to merely go uptown to see or be seen. In addition to these forays, afternoons at home are usually spent reading, or sewing--constructing waists, skirts, dresses for herself, or fashioning shawls, aprons, pin cushions, wrappers, neckties for family and friends--or tying up comfortables and crocheting and learning "to make tatting."

Highlights in her patterned existence include band concerts, Salvation Army street concerts, visits to the glass blowers (where she "drew a ship" and her friend a pipe), trips to the rink (to see Eddie Smith, a champion skater, or to skate with Ralph), baseball games, and even boat rides. Once she goes to the corner to hear Evangelist Willis and another time she hears Robert Ingersoll at the Opera House. No comment, no elaboration, no reaction, no information on these last two events. Merely a notation of her attendance. She spends more time on fires: "Joe Beck's store caught fire at 2 a.m." (March 13, 1895) On

March 24th there were four alarms in less than two hours. One of these alarms was for a fire in a barn in the alley between her house and the Chapman house. "The hotel came near going." July had its share of fires as well. Did these fires generate excitement, fear, increased activity on her part, community confusion or tragedy? She does not disclose though her jottings on the fires are fuller than on the lectures she mentions having attended.

There are still other diversions. The Richmond (jewelry store?) auction creates a flurry of excitement for Edna and her friends necessitating two or three trips daily for over two weeks. Donseraux's (department store?) sales are worth an almost daily trip uptown. All this heightened interest in sales and shops and even the increased sewing activities reflect the forthcoming high point of Edna's year: her marriage to Ralph Haskin.

A visit from her soon-to-be sister and brother-in-law spark several visits to the Star Theatre where they see, on successive nights, "The Police Patrol," "The White Squadron," and "The Midnight Alarm." Were these plays dull? Well acted? Amusing? Did they reflect life at the time? Did they contain a prescription for life? Edna does not describe them or the experience, let alone evaluate them.

Correspondence remains Edna's vital line of communication and each letter sent or received she scrupulously records.

More information can be found in the entries concerning her marriage though scarcely enough to satisfy the curious observer. The entries offer few real clues as to "the proposal" or the setting of the wedding date, but the frequency of Ralph's letters, the young couple's "staying home to visit" on his trips to Lansing, Edna's waiting up with Ralph who prolonged his visit by taking the 4 a.m. milk train back to Imlay City, and her anguished "Oh how I hated to have him go" entry testify to the growing seriousness of their relationship.

In the weeks prior to their Thanksgiving day nuptials, there were more than the usual trips uptown with mama to the Donseraux sales (already mentioned) where she "got some stuff for comfortables and sheats [sic] and aprons," and to Simon's where she purchased her lace curtains. On the Sunday preceding her wedding, following several afternoons of cleaning her trunk and packing boxes, Edna noted that she "directed and sealed my cards" (her wedding announcements). And added, "I expect this is the last Sunday I will be home in some time."

Three days later Ralph arrived and together they went to the greenhouse to select the flowers for the next day's ceremony. That evening they "went up and practiced the march a few minutes."

The details of the wedding itself are scanty. Edna, in her usual terse style, wrote of the all important occasion: "Ralph Haskin and I were married at 3:00 p.m. today by Rev. Hickey and left on 6:10 train for Imlay City- arrived here [Imlay City] at 8:45 and stayed in our home." One can surmise that the wedding is small (she records only 23 guests present) and that it might have been held on Thanksgiving Day because of the restaurant holiday, (The popularity of eating Thanksgiving dinner out was not to become a "tradition" until some decades later.)

The young Haskins' honeymoon trip apparently consisted of the two and one half hour train ride from Lansing to Imlay City for the next days' entries chronicle the young bride's attempts to put their house in order: cleaning the pantry, shelving books, unpacking, and celebrating their first meal in their own home at supper two weeks after their wedding. They may well have been taking their meals during the interim with the senior Haskins as she mentioned "went over and had breakfast" the morning after their marriage. At other times, she

recorded going over to "the other house" to hear the Haskins Home orchestra practice.

Four days following their wedding, Edna, her mother-in-law and Ralph go downtown in Imlay City to pick out carpet and dishes. That evening Ralph sews the carpet, lays it, and puts up the stove in the sitting room. On December 24th Edna's mama arrives to spend Christmas with her daughter and new son-in-law.

During December the entries are sporadic and after the last two entries on December 28 and 29 noting Ralph's having worked on the boiler all night and the next day, the diary ends. Whether Edna did not, as she had for 1894 and 1895, receive a diary as a gift for 1896, whether it was lost (possibly to a fire), or whether the activities of married life superceded diary writing is not known. In one of her final entries she records having gone to help Ralph on some pants in the afternoon and again in the evening; it is known from photographs that she continued to devote at least some of her sewing talents to helping Ralph's tailoring business in the years to follow.

In sum, Edna seemed happy enough with her family/neighbor/work oriented life--and almost estastic about her forthcoming marriage to Ralph. Her pre-marital world revolved around the restaurant business, her mother, her sister-in-law Alice, her young nieces, ner many friends. She quickly fitted into Ralph's family. There seemed to be a genuine fondness for his sisters (at least Nina and Neva) who came to Lansing for extended visits and they in turn appeared to welcome her enthusiastically into the family. The family and in-law relationships appear strong and close, a far cry from many of today's splintered families. Edna harbored little jealousy, revealed almost no evidence of pettiness, no record of ego centricism. She appeared well adjusted; unpressured,

though very busy; easy going, yet efficient; calm; adaptable; congenial.

Was this study worthwhile or merely a form of academic voyeurism? Did this study do any more than introduce the reader to a person whose life could be vicariously shared, to a person whose brief aseptic recordings could stimulate the imagination? Certainly this study revealed that for one young woman, more typical than atypical, in Lansing, Michigan in the 1890's life was not only possible, but "peaches" at times, without telephones, automobiles, televisions, radio, stereophonic sound, and motion pictures, even for an energetic, life affirming, hardworking young woman. Quite as clearly, life would have been impossible without the daily comings and goings of other people, without the commanding presence of daily obligations. Furthermore, these diaries, like so many other non-literary diaries, reveal a preoccupation with weather, with precise facts and events of daily life, a preoccupation devoid of much revealing elaboration. When these diaries, again typically, document the fact that decisive and major actions can be undertaken by a government or fail to be undertaken by a government where needed, actions or inactions that lead to long lasting reactions, and the ordinary and hardworking citizen neither notes nor appears to even be aware of what is happening, it is worth taking notice.

Michigan State University

Poems for a Time of Short Views

Bernard F. Engel

Contemporary verse offers too much accomplished diversity to give the pigeon-holer an easy time. It is hard to come to comprehensive statements even if one chooses to focus on the work of individuals rather than hunt for the general tendency the critic feels obligated to sniff out.

Nevertheless, to start sniffing: probably the most admired contemporary is John Ashbery, a writer who often serves up both long and short poems that are as impenetrable as those of Hart Crane but without the brilliance of imagery. Yet sometimes, as in "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" and an occasional lyric, Ashbery is so profound and original that the difficulty of much of his work doesn't matter.

Ashbery tends to deal with the large subject--matters of public knowledge and concern, or, conversely, careful, probing examination of the self. At another of the numerous poles is the personal lyric, concentrating on the writer's self in its daily experience at home with spouse and children, in the market or the service station or the hospital, or, rarely at work (almost always the school-room).

The practitioners in this mode are likely to be enthralled by one or another of the slogans of recent decades--"projective verse," "the deep image," the "sensible surreal." Like the verse of Charles Olson, their work seldom is sufficiently accomplished to support the weight of the theorizing they and their fans engage in. But there are such contrarities in the work of any age.

An example of the contemporary who, taking limited risks, sometimes writes interestingly, even movingly, and sometimes fails is Roger Pfingston, author of

The Circus of Unreasonable Acts, a set of 26 brief poems (Years Press, East Lansing, Mich.). Pfingston, a teacher of English and photography in Bloomington, writes affectingly in such pieces as "The Soft Spot," an expression of wonderment at change and growth that is brought home to him when his four-year-old butts him in the belly—an act showing that the boy has indeed outgrown the "soft spot" of early childhood.

Pfingston is equally affecting in "Neruda's Bee," a reflection on the paradoxes suggested by the Chilean poet's boyhood discovery of momentary satisfactions obtained by snatching up other creatures in a manner that appears as arbitrary as the decisions, if any, that affect our own lives and deaths. The poem works because it meets the demand of the modern Romantic for specifics of experience.

But the use of particulars has its dangers. In "Poem After an NBC News Feature," it contributes to the too easy irony in the contrast between a man seen walking through a sewer and the equally "muffled" world above the pavement.

Sometimes Pfingston shows a sense of humor that saves a poem seemingly headed toward giving only an accurate description of nothing much (to the Romantic, everything of course amounts to much). Thus in "Instead of TV I Watch YOU and the Rain" he opens with two stanzas of description that, though precise in detail, seem to lack any large purpose.

But in the last two stanzas he imagines himself as the cloth in the garment enveloping a woman's legs, a conceit that, if hardly profound or surprising, is at least amusing. And in the "This Otherpoet" he sets down a lively impression of a woman who not only burns inside him but defiantly declares she will leave him to "damn well zip" to infinity on his own.

Pfingston's book is engaging reading. Twenty years ago, one would have

concluded with a wish that he would take on larger aims, meaning the aesthetic-philosophical statement we were trained to expect in the work of Eliot and Stevens. Perhaps today we have learned to be reasonably satisfied with short views. Enough of them may add up to long views after all.

Michigan State University

A Worker of our World

Charles H. Miller

THE WEED KING and Other Stories by Jack Conroy. Intro. by Douglas Wixon
Lawrence Hill & Co. 17.95 hc, 9.95 pb

Who made our nation what it is today? Capital and labor did the job; the rich man put capital on the line, the poor man put his life on the line. Capital's heroes are notoriously well known--the Goulds, Vanderbilts and Carnegies--but labor's heroes, except perhaps for Joe Hill and John L. Lewis, are nameless and faceless. Now Jack Conroy turns a strong clear light on our unknown workers.

Like Jack London, Gorky and Dreiser, Conroy is himself a worker who made it as a writer. He went to work at age 14 after the death of his father, but his mother was determined to keep her healthy big son out of the Midwest mines that had killed his father, a brother, and many relatives. So young Jack became a migrant worker in railroad yards, factories, mills, construction and on farms. He did what Kerouac hoped to do: live like a worker and tell us exactly what it is like in the shape-up, on the job, in breadlines and among the casualties. Conroy roved many states and cities in search of rare Depression jobs, but the best pay he got was a wealth of people.

Conroy's workers are as fascinating as they are various. When the drifter 'Weed King' becomes a small landowner, he fails. The good-hearted Syrian of the 'Siren' story becomes a successful businessman until he fails in the strike-torn mining district. But both these lonely individuals are memorable. Others simply suffer, hunger and survive (or not) as remnant Americans, even those rural miners who were 'never far from the green fields and fishing streams'

of home. Among whole people we meet in these stories and sketches is Conroy's mother; in her 'Fields of Golden Glow' she is a heroine of parental endeavor who succeeds in raising her surviving children to a better life.

Conroy's early novel, The Disinherited is unique among classics of workers, but this collection of stories has a wild range from vulgar folklore to tall tales to confessional sketches. In a brutal construction camp, off-limits to Negroes, Conroy befriends a young Negro and '...shared his hut and his hot food when the frost was thick and the mornings cold,' and brings the black to life in his prose, long after he has been stoned and driven off the job.

Happily, the bottom line is entertainment. These workers show us how hunger can sharpen wits, how deprivation cannot always crush the spirit. They walk (or limp) through these stories as real as Conroy knew them. Recently Studs Terkel read some of these stories by Conroy on his weekly broadcast, so there's a chance that this mulligan of stories may reach the wide audience it deserves.

Heath, Mass.

Sherwood Anderson, Letter-Writer: II

David D. Anderson

A few months ago I used the opportunity of the publication of Charles E. Madlin's excellently edited Sherwood Anderson: Selected Letters to record some of my thoughts about the extensive correspondence Sherwood Anderson maintained with many people over many years. Now, with the publication of another important collection, I find another such opportunity to make some additional comments.

The new collection, composed of 305 letters Anderson wrote to a single friend over a period of about seventeen years, two others by Anderson, and two from the recipient of the 305, is Letters to Bob: Sherwood Anderson to Marietha D. Finley, 1916-33 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), edited by William A. Sutton, the Anderson scholar to whom so many of us have owe so much for so many years.

As interesting as was Anderson's relationship to Marietta Finley -- whether she was Anderson's mistress, as the jacket proclaims or whether they were the close friends described by Sutton is a matter of debate -- and as fascinating and revealing as are the letters, even more fascinating is the literary detective story that led Sutton to their ultimate publication forty-four years after Anderson's death, sixteen after Marietta Finley's (She became Mrs. E. Vernon Hahn in 1928), and fifty-two years after the last letters apparently passed between them.

In an earlier essay, published in 1976, Sutton describes his initial discovery of Mrs. Hahn and her relationship to Sherwood:

In 1962 I became aware of Mrs. Hahn through the Newberry's Development

File, the list of people from whom the library hoped to make acquisitions. At the time I was working on The Road to Winesburg (published in 1972) Because Mrs. Hahn's home in Indianapolis was only sixty miles from mine in Muncie, it seemed necessary that I should become acquainted with a prime Anderson source so close to home.

The library had an old address for Mrs. Hahn. After one letter was returned, I made an appeal to medical friends who approached the matter through Dr. Hahn's address in a medical directory. Dr. Hahn had died, but my friends did produce an address for Mrs. Hahn, who was living in a cooperative housing unit, The Propylaeum, in Indianapolis. She was then seventy-three years of age and recuperating from a very serious illness.

After receiving permission to visit Mrs. Hahn and making an appropriate appointment, I was greeted, upon entering Mrs. Hahn's one-room apartment with these words: "Why did Sherwood Anderson marry Tennessee Mitchell?"²

Gradually, after admitting that he didn't know but otherwise proving his credentials as an Anderson scholar, Sutton extracted the story of the Finley-Anderson relationship and the existence of a treasure trove of previously unrecorded letters from Anderson. Finley and Anderson had met in the fall of 1914 at a play production by the Chicago Little Theatre in the Fine Arts Building - Finley was twenty-four; Anderson, at thirty-eight, was married to his first wife, Cornelia, and the father of three young children. After his sudden departure from a successful business career in Elyria, Ohio, nearly two years before, he was writing advertising copy by day and trying to be a writer at night; the first of his short stories, "the Rabbit-Pen," had been published in Harpers the previous July.

Anderson's relationship with Finley began almost immediately, as did the letters that passed between them, and they were to continue through Anderson's three divorces and two marriages; they finally ceased in 1933, as Anderson was about to marry Eleanor Copenhaver, his fourth wife, to begin what was to be his happiest marriage.

Nevertheless, the first letter from Anderson to Finley in the collection is dated September 26, 1916, shortly after the publication of Anderson's first novel, Windy, McPherson's Son. Earlier letters, Mrs. Hahn told Sutton, had been destroyed because Anderson had asked her to, and, "Like a fool, I did."³ Only two of Anderson's letters to Finley survive, one of which ends the collection; there are 307 of Anderson's letters including all that survive of his "letters to Bab."

During the nineteen years of their relationship, Finley befriended Anderson's three wives, and for a period of almost eight years (1921-29) she contributed \$100 a month to the support of his children. In 1921 she purchased two of his watercolors for \$300.00 each to provide him with money to spend on his first trip to Europe, with Tennessee Mitchell and his friend Paul Rosenfeld.

Nevertheless, Anderson's Letters to Bab are, like Anderson's other collected letters, less personal communications during a personal relationship than they are, like his works, part of the massive spiritual and artistic autobiography of Sherwood Anderson. Anderson's life and works document his search after the truth that continued to elude him until, in the last years of his life, he concluded that the search itself was the only truth he -- or we -- could ever know.

Early in the collection, in a letter dated November 23, 1916, Anderson suggested that "Suppose instead of just writing your letters which may concern themselves with personal things, a cold in the head, etc. I write you instead my observations on life....,"⁴ and nowhere is the closeness between Anderson's observations and his work more clearly evident than in this collection; on

October 24, 1916, his recorded observation from a train presages "the Untold Lie" of Winesburg, Ohio; the final letter, written in April, 1983, concerns the possible use of Indianapolis as setting in a projected novel; a brief free verse in a letter of 1921 becomes a poem in A New Testament, published in 1927.

Anderson's Letters to Bab are moments of insight into Anderson himself, dramatized, even mythologized, to a greater extent than in any of his other letters, suggesting a role for Finley in Anderson's literary imagination that she had never recognized, perhaps could not let herself understand, as the silent Bab becomes a catalyst to free Anderson's fancy during the critical years that made him a great artist; perhaps that role is even greater than her service in preserving these letters.

With the publication of Letters to Bab, one important collection of Anderson's letters remains to be published: those to Eleanor Copenhaver Anderson, his fourth wife, widow and manager of Anderson's literary remains until her death last September. In a 1976 interview during Anderson's centennial year, she described her role:

It's been a great satisfaction, but I regret I haven't done it better. I have seen a great many people. I've tried to take care of Sherwood's interests but not to push.... As for preserving the manuscripts, I think I've done that fairly well.⁵

Anderson, it is clear, was fortunate, as Anderson scholars are fortunate, in the women who came into his life and preserved the remarkable letters he wrote.

NOTES

- 1 Earlier collections are The Letters of Sherwood Anderson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), edited by Howard Mumford Jones with Walter B. Rideout; Sherwood Anderson: Selected Letters (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), edited by Charles E. Modlin; Sherwood Anderson/ Gertrude Steim: Correspondence and Personal Essays (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), edited by Ray Lewis White. Shorter collections include: letters to V.F. Calverton in Modern Quarterly 2 (Fall, 1924); letters to Paul Rosenfeld in Paul Rosenfeld, Voyager in the Arts (New York: Creative Age Press, 1978), edited by Jerome Mellquist and Lucie Wiess; to Robert Morss Lovett and Ferdinand Schevill in Berkeley 1 (October, 1947), to John Anderson and Theodore Dreiser in Harper's Bazaar 73 (February, 1949); to Gertrude Stein in The Flowers of Friendship (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1953), edited by Donald Gallup; to Van Wyck Brooks in Story 19 (September-October, 1941); to Syney Hook in Critical Essayr on Sherwood Anderson (Boston: G.K. Hall 1981), edited by David D. Anderson; to various people in Sherwood Anderson: Centennial Studies (Troy, NY: WHitson Publishing Co., 1976), edited by Hilbert H. Campbell and Charles E. Modlin.
- 2 In David D. Anderson, ed., Sherwood Anderson: Dimensions of his Literary Art (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1976), p. 111.
- 3 Letters to Bab (Urbana, Ill: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1985), p. xiii.
- 4 Ibid, p. 8
- 5 In Hilbert H. Campbell and Charles E. Modlin, eds., Sherwood Anderson Centennial Studies (Troy, NY: WHitson Publishing Co., 1976), p. 77.