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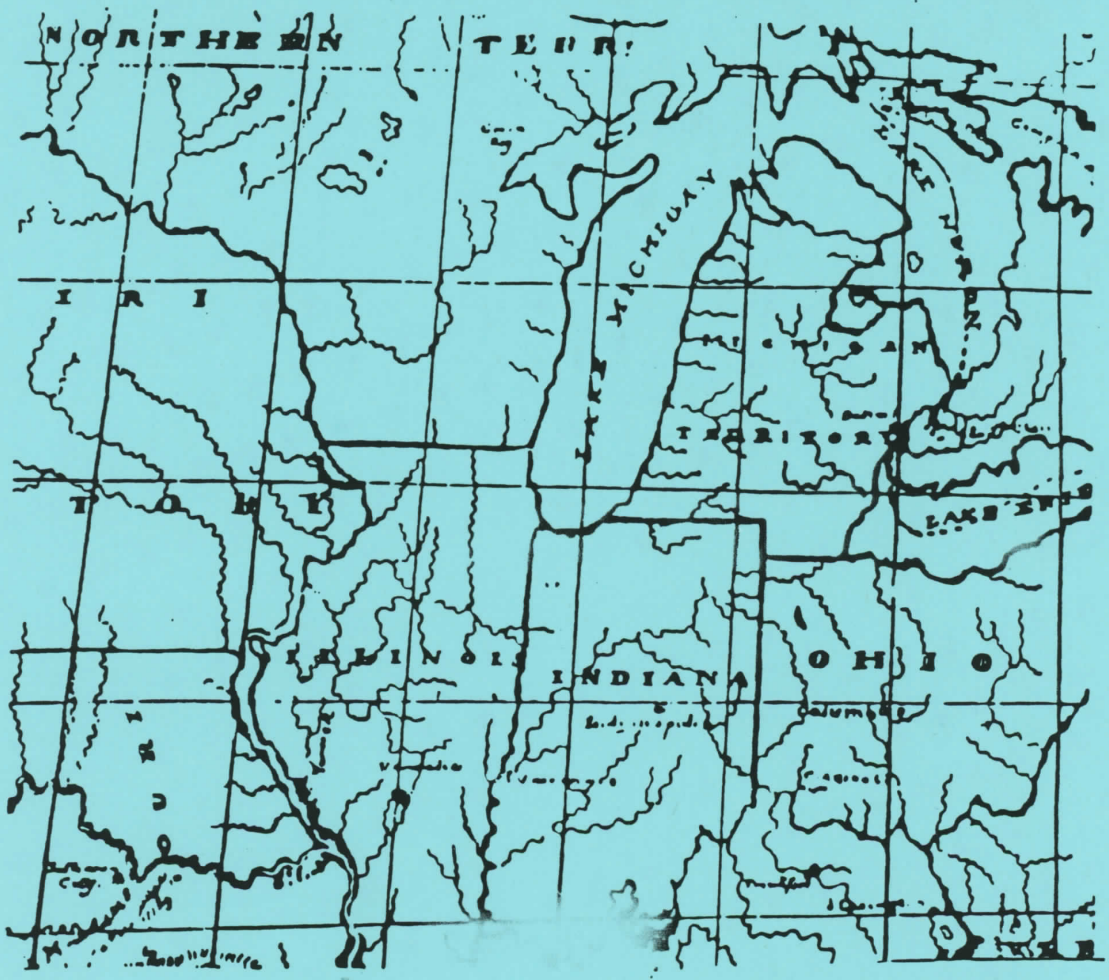

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Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Newsletter

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In Memoriam: Frederick Manfred

Frederick Manfred, distinguished novelist, pioneer member of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, and recipient of the Mark Twain Award in 1981 died at his home in Lucerne, Minnesota, of a brain tumor on Wednesday, September 7, 1994. Born in Doon, in the northwest corner of Iowa, on January 6, 1912, he was baptized Frederick Fiekema, a name compounded of the American heritage that had begun with his grandfather, who became Frank Fiekema instead of his native Friian Feike Feikes Feikema V, at Ellis Island, and the Frislan name that had been the family's for generations in the Netherlands. Fred graduated from Western Academy in Hull, Iowa, near Doon in 1928 and spent two years on the family farm before enrolling in Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1930. Although he nearly flunked Freshman English — his term paper was described as having 'no literary worth at all"—he graduated in 1934, in the middle of the Depression. For three years he wandered the upper Midwest and the Plains, working at a variety of jobs, until he became a reporter for the Minneapolis Journal. But in 1940 he contracted tuberculosis and spent two years in a sanitarium near Minneapolis, where he determined that if he recovered he would become a writer.

The result, beginning with The Golden Bowl, published in 1944, is literary history of a very high order. In the thirty-one books that followed regularly, as well as in the not yet published "The Wrath of Love" and the unfinished "Black Earth," Fred has created one of the great mythical places of American literary history, a place that ranks with Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Country, Mississippi, Thoreau's Walden Point, and Willa Cather's Nebraska as one of the epic places in the American literary imagination and in our collective national memory. Fred's place was called Siouxland, the place where the states of Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota now meet, where the Rock River and the Big Sioux flow to the Missouri, where Fred was born and grew up in Doon and where he lived and died in Lucerne.

But Fred's Siouxland is not merely that of his own life on that of his family's; compounded of reality and mythology and transmitted by memory, talent, imagination, and meticulous research, into a story that, though thirty novels, ranges from pre-history to the middle of the twentieth century, through the successive occupation of that place by aboriginal Sioux to adventurer-explorters to the transplanted Europeans who

became American farmers, and finally to their restive offspring. In substantial microcosm, it is the North American story.

In tribute to his Frisian origins, Fred published his first seven novels as Feike Feikema, a name that should have been a literary natural, but wasn't; often, instead, it confused critics when it didn't frighten them off, so in 1854, with the publication of Lord Grizzly, he became Frederick Manfred, returning to his baptismal first name and a translation of his last. Fred's work was often nominated for the prestigious literary awards, and he was frequently nominated for the Novel Prize in Literature. He is survived by his son, Frederick Jr., and two daughters, Freya and Marya as well as his former wife, Mary Anna, three of the six Ferkema brothers, Abben, Floyd, and Henry, and two grandchildren.

The funeral services, conducted by family and friends at Doon on October 10, consisted of tributes and reminiscences, concluded with a reading of Fred's assessment of his life:

> It was all marvelous. I don't regret a minute of it. Even the pain and hunger, the almost broken head and broken heart, were sweet to have. It was life, not death. And all moments of life are very precious.

A public celebration of Fred's life was held at his home. Roundwind, near Lucerne, on October 1. His life, his work, and his presence were memorable. He will be missed as well as remembered as long as the Siouxland winds blow and rivers flow.

David D. Anderson

STILL SITS THE SCHOOLHOUSE

William Thomas

I carried my lunch to country school as a matter of course, and never thought about a hot drink. All of us, pupils and teacher, ate cold lunches--sandwiches, boiled eggs, apples or other seasonable fruit, and cake, pie, or cookies--without thinking it a hardship. Everybody had a drinking glass or cup which he filled with water from the bucket on the shelf at the back of the room, where our lunch boxes also stood. They were square ones of fiberboard or round tin ones with a flanged lid. Rarely a boy would appear with a Tiger tobacco box—a beautiful bright red rectangular tin box with a tiger stenciled on it and handles, the perfect size and shape for a lunch box—and be the envy of all the rest. But actually lunch—we called it dinner—was a matter of the least importance, the eating of it a necessity to be got through with quickly in order to have as much time as possible for blackman or andy over or one ole cat. Some of us now and then played a variety of mumble-peg in which the knife, which had to have both blades at one end, with the small blade fully open and the big blade half open, was flipped by the handle from the board. If it landed and stuck perpendicularly on the small blade, that counted one hundred; on the two blades, seventy-five; horizontally on the big blade, fifty; on the big blade and handle, twenty-five. A game was five hundred, a thousand, fifteen hundred points, or any number agreed upon. The players flipped once each alternately, and each used his own knife. A good knife was a highly desirable possession, and the object of nearly every boy was to swap, with something "to boot" if necessary, until he had a good one; but at the same time it was, like the possession of wealth, a grave responsibility because there was constant risk of losing it.

A boy habitually kept in his pockets a trading stock: knives, marbles, belt buckles, cartridge cases, metal buttons, perhaps even a compass or a slingshot—any item of which might provide bargaining power, and power well-nigh unlimited if it were unique. But the unique article, such as a steel mirror, no one would wish to part with unless he were tired of it or it were defective. And a good slingshot was something not to be let go of readily, for a new one was troublesome to make. You had to get a forked stick that was a nearly-perfect Y; and you had to have an automobile inner tube to cut strips from, and a piece of good tough leather for the sling; to put these things

together properly was not a job for an amateur. As we were all amateurs, we never really made anything. Slingshots, bows and arrows, and watch straps always came from older persons with the requisite skill.

Hardly any of us had a watch, for sixteen, the traditional age at which a boy should be presented with a good watch, was for most of us in the distant future. Moreover, he who had attained that milestone and was the recipient of such a gift would not risk danger to his Hamilton or Elgin by carrying it to school. Even if one of us youngsters chanced to possess an Ingersoll, its value was of prestige only. We depended on the bell, which depended on the school clock or the teacher's watch or that of the older boy who happened to be janitor for the term. The janitor's duty consisted in unlocking the door, sweeping, ringing the first bell at eight o'clock, and in the winter building the fire. Such cursory sweeping as he did in dry weather had to be supplemented by periodic effort of all the pupils, but in the wintertime he was obliged to do better. His tangible compensation was meager—two and a half dollars a month, I believe—but the distinction of being janitor was great. He was, in effect , no mere boy but a young man able to bear responsibility. The responsibility was not such as to weigh too heavily: when the teacher came, she took over and rang the other bells of the day. When we wished to make an expedition to the woods—it was not forbidden or discouraged—during the noon hour, we asked the teacher to ring the bell five minutes early, which she did. We were very conscientious about returning on time, a matter we attached greater importance to, I am sure, than she.

The woods was only across the field to the north, and we went there often in the fall, a troop of us, boys and girls, to frolic in the leaves. In winter we skated on the pond and when there was new snow played fox and geese in the field. The point, at the east end of the woods, was a center of activity whenever the ice was good, and we either went at noon or bargained with the teacher for early dismissal in exchange for a short lunch period and omission of recess. In the latter instance she would probably come with us; we would build a fire, and it would be a party. We boys all had skates; they were as essential to us as cap and mittens; so had many of the girls. When we were all together we just skated, singly, or in pairs, or a row of us holding hands as we went across the ice. But skating with a companion was risky and potentially embarrassing, for our skates were of the clamp kind that make permanent indentations in leather heels and might at any moment pull a not-firmly-nailed heel off the shoe or come loose from the sole. Racing skates with heel screws or real hockey skates with shoes attached we could only wish for, as they were beyond our powers of persuasion with our parents.

When the girls were not along we played a kind of hockey called "shinny", which could also be played on frozen ground. It was much better, however, on ice, with skates, though a shinny club is more like a golf club than a hockey stick. In truth, I doubt that many of us would have recognized a hockey stick for what it is. The puck (we knew no such name and would have felt it too near obscenity to utter freely) was a stone or a small piece of wood. We called it simply "the ball". To get a good shinny club was like getting a good sling-shots; you had first to find a straight branch of the right size growing off a larger branch at the correct angle, which is a little greater than that of a golf iron. It was a real misfortune when a good one got broken, and that happened frequently, for a boy's shin is luckily stronger that a stick. We wore no guards of any sort, and I suppose our shins were bruised all winter; but there is little time in the year when a country boy is not healing somewhere or other.

Winter was a good time, a happy time, and nobody complained about being cold, indoors or out. We were fairly well dressed for it—our parents made sure of that—although our clothing, wool mackinaws, buckle overshoes, knit caps and sweaters, knee pants, cotton stockings, and cotton undershirts and drawers, was conventional rather that designed for protection. The girls were comparable garbed, and I am sure they wore long underwear, though feminine garments were then as mysterious to me as mine were familiar. On the coldest day the fire could be poked up until the stove, in the middle of the schoolroom, was red-hot; if you were still cold you might exchange seats with somebody who had absorbed enough heat for the while. Sometimes a pupil came wearing (not of his own volition) a bag of asafetida tied around his neck, to ward off illness; he well knew why he became suddenly a pariah, and usually managed after a day or so to discard it. We all had mild or severe respiratory ailments during much of the winter, but accepted them as inevitable.

A tingling cold day was ideal, we thought, for visiting another school. A visit had to be arranged beforehand, but it was always when there was snow. A farmer of the neighborhood would put a wagonbox on a sled, cover the bottom with straw, gather all his horse blankets, and appear about ten o'clock. We would pile in, with our lunch boxes, every boy trying to get next the girl he like best, and every girl trying to keep a place for the boy she favored. Unsuccessful ones bore their disappointment and were consoled with others; we were under the blankets and off for a ride of twelve or fourteen miles, and who was afraid of getting cold with a lapful of girl?

At the other school they would be expecting us, and the boys would congregate at the back of the room, girls would join the girls up front, and teacher would talk to teacher. The driver would blanket his horses. Everybody was shy at first, but shyness

soon vanished. It was probably lunch time now, and whether it was or not we ate lunch anyway. When it was time for the afternoon session to begin, we were not sorry; we knew what was coming. It was a spelling match. Each teacher nominated her most proficient pupil, who chose a team of seven or eight from his or her own group. Then the contest began, one of the teachers pronouncing from a prepared list to a member of each group alternately. The first few words would be fairly easy, but soon there would be long or tricky words like "plenipotentiary", "supersede", "irascible", "dilettante", "desiccate", "ecstasy", "judgment". If you missed a word when it was your turn, you were out, and if you were out quickly it was not only a personal defeat but a discredit to your school. If one whole team was defeated while two or more pupils were left in the other, the pronouncing of words continued until one only was left, the champion. I was pretty good at spelling, and nearly always either won the contest or was one of the last to go down. I still have a leather-bound Palgrave's Golden Treasury which Lulu Eaton gave me as a prize for spelling. Later in the year, or perhaps the next year, the host school might repay the visit.

The schoolhouse was a focal point of community life, and in the fall there would be box socials in it and two or three times a year an "entertainment". In the spring there might be a last-day-of-school picnic. For a box social the girls (not schoolgirls only but the young women generally of the neighborhood) would every one prepare a box of food for two, and the boxes would be auctioned, the successful bidder for each having the privilege of eating with the lady who had prepared it. A girl was prohibited from telling a young man which box was hers, but some were not above devising ways of letting it be known; and some men were unwilling to leave all to chance. There was often rivalry among the swains and a conspicuous lack of grace. These affairs were, generally speaking, for the unmarried, but there was no law about that; it simply happened that in our community unmarried and married people were respectively youth and age. The entertainments were for everybody, and everybody went, for nearly every family had a child in school, and every pupil had a place on the program. There were always recitations, songs, and a short play. The recitations were pathetic and sentimental, like "The Bridge of Sighs", or stern and religious, like "The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers", or patriotic and vigorous, like "Marco Bozzaris". Humor did not disqualify a composition, and "The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay" was sometimes given; but few of our recitations were humorous, because humor does not readily combine with didacticism to give the elevated tone it was felt they should have. Once I recited Holmes' "The Boys" with ten embarrassed lads seated behind me, pointing to them one after another. "The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers" was a favorite, and I gave it a

number of times. If it were a Christmas entertainment, 'A Visit from St. Nicholas' was almost certain to be included.

We would prepare for an entertainment weeks in advance and practice both during and after school hours. We always decorated the schoolhouse for the occasion, in the fall with pumpkins, stalks of corn, bittersweet, and perhaps sumac and oak leaves, in the spring with dogwood or flowering quince,. And always our drawings were hung between the windows and at the top of the blackboard. We all worked hard at it, but we pupils never thought of our activity as work. I do not know how the teacher felt. Some of these doings, as well as much of the routine instruction, must have been dull to her, but if they were she never let us know it.

I think we really learned a great deal from one teacher in a one-room country school. There were no serious disciplinary problems. Generally our teachers were competent and conscientious. I recall one substitute who, asking me for a sentence including an adverb and being given "The dog runs fast", acknowledged with reluctance that perhaps one might say "The dog runs fastly". But she was a girl learning to teach, and her assumption that all adverbs end in ly should not be held against her. It was natural enough, and I am sure she must have learned better. None of my regular teachers would have been guilty of such a mistake. They knew grammar, and would have been chagrined if they had not been able to answer any question a pupil might ask with a definite and precise statement as to "right" and "wrong" or "correct" and "incorrect". Not only did they work hard but they were put to much inconvenience. A teacher must either live with a family in the neighborhood (not an agreeable prospect when no farmhouse had a bathroom) or come from Marion to Newmans on an early trolley car and arrange for daily transportation from there. Most of them found the latter preferable, and their days were long and arduous. Their remuneration was never more than seventy-five dollars a month (to be sure, that was twice as much as went to country teachers of their mothers' generation); expenses must have taken nearly all that. It was a bit of poetic justice when, in 1942 and after, so many female teachers went to work in factories to earn three or four times their previous salaries and left penurious school boards dreeing their weirds. But in 1917 most teachers went on teaching.

It was the year when legislation sponsored by Governor Cox and enacted as the Rural School Codes Act of 1914 caused great controversy in Marion County. The new law empowered county boards to redefine school districts according to population and without regard to township lines. Henry Jacobs, a parent indignant at the threatened violability of Canouse Number 7, exercised his legal right of remonstrance

and obtained enough signatures to forestall the projected decree of the county board. My father would not sign it. He told Henry: "You are standing in the way of a trend that is inevitable. You may stop it now, but it will not be for long." He was right. Canouse Number 7 was secure for only three more years. As I was already in high school, it did not matter to me.

Ohio State University Emeritus

Afternoons at the Ritz

David D. Anderson

Properly speaking, its name was the Elvira Theatre (please note the French spelling, origin and etymology of the name unknown), but more frequently during its heyday in the 1930s, it was known familiarly as "The Ritz" when it wasn't called "The Rat Palace" or worse. Housed in a white, brick-fronted three-story building, the upper floors of which were occupied by the notorious Thomas Hotel (of which more later), the Ritz was, at best, a third or fourth (or fifth or sixth)—run movie theatre in the years from about 1936 to 1938, when I knew it best, and when prestige theatres were billed as "first-run."

The Ritz proudly proclaimed that it showed talking exclusively, a statement that should have been outmoded by 1936 but that sometimes wasn't true. I saw my first—and last—silent film there, perhaps as late as 1934—and when it was true, the best that could be said for its sound system was that it just barely was, and often, especially in the middle of the competition from devotees of the Saturday 5¢ matinee, it wasn't.

For much of that two-year period between 1936 and 1938 I was often one of those Saturday afternoon matinee attendees--usually under protest; I'd much rather have stayed home and read or re-read a Joseph A. Altsheler novel from the library or a Doc Savage or The Shadow or Dime Western or Dime Detective pulp newly obtained for two cents and a trade-in from the hole-in-the-wall purveyor of stamps, bubble gum, pulps, and penny candy that called itself the Hobby Shop, four blocks north of the Ritz on my Midwestern milltown Broadway. Sometimes, however, the features at the Ritz echoed the action and the characters of the pulps, although they could never, in my estimation, equal Altsheler in his various series novels—The Young Trailers Series, The Texas Revolution Series, the Civil War Series, and the Great War Series—each consisting of three to twelve novels featuring the same characters, setting, and historical background. Anyway, my weekly protests were futile; my parents prized that three or four hours alone on Saturdays too much to give in to my anti-social behavior, and I went to the Ritz .

But, as attractive as the Alsheler novels remain in my memory, those afternoons at the Ritz are, (for a variety of reasons) each in its own way, valuable memories of an age as innocent of political correctness as the Ritz was of air conditioning. The programs

invariably included a feature film, often a Western starring Tom Mix, Buck Jones, or Ken Maynard, none of whom was, I thank God in retrospect, a singing cowboy, although Gene Autry managed to sneak in on one or two later occasions. Sometimes the feature was a Tarzan—Johnny Weismuller—or a cops and robbers film; only rarely was it a flying film, my favorite. Always included were a chapter of a series in the image if not the spirit of "The Perils of Pauline," a comedy short featuring the Three Stooges, the Ritz Brothers, the Marx Brothers, Laurel and Hardy, Our Gang, or other more easily forgotten comics; rarely a newsreel; but always "Previews of Coming Attraction," which, we perversely liked to insist, was the best part and our only reason for going.

"We", the pronoun I use to describe those with whom I spent those afternoons at the Ritz, included a group that often varied in size and identity; perhaps its most important consideration was the fact that attendance at the Ritz was always a social occasion; for a variety of reasons, one never went there alone, and often the audience was more entertaining than the film. In a passionate, intimate moment marked by forced heavy breathing in the audience as well as on the screen, a sudden shriek might interrupt, followed by "I see a rat!" or worse, "I smell a rat!", and the passionate moment was lost forever in the tumult that followed, until the usher or the manager, usually the same person, armed with a flashlight and the power to eject, marched down the aisle.

The manager, whose English was of a rough, sub-literature, functional sort, was known to us in our ethnic innocence as "the Greek," although to the best of my memory he was a member of the extended Lebanese family who owned and staffed the Ritz and its more avowedly dignified sister-theatre, the Dreamland. In retrospect, he was not only the Saturday afternoon arbiter of order at the Ritz, but he was a dedicated enemy of those of us who had handed our nickels to the ticket-seller (usually a female member of the same family) and those of us (and there were always a few) who had not. It was the latter , whoever they might or might not be, whom the Greek was determined to exterminate, usually by grasping whomever he caught by the ear, dragging him protesting up the aisle and out into the sunlight and then aiming (and invariably missing) a kick at the portion of the recalcitrant's anatomy designed for such purposes, and then screaming at him to go.

Most of the Greek's enemies—and I'm sure he saw himself as a latter-day reincarnation of the original Nemesis if he was aware of her existence in the ancestral panthenon we ascribed to him—had sneaked in, and not all of them were male, although I don't remember his apprehension of the few girls who had come in sub-screen if not sub-rosa, for some had come in courtesy of the fire laws of the time and place. Because both sides of the Ritz abutted side walls of two other businesses, a dry-cleaner and tailor's shop and a poolroom, fire exits were necessarily in the front of the theatre, that is, behind the

screen, accessible through what was euphemistically called the orchestra pit—it housed an archaic, tuneless piano devoid of most of its keys—and opening into the alley behind the block of buildings of which the Ritz was a part.

At critical moments, usually during Previews of Coming Attractions, when the Greek was at his busiest, screaming for quiet, grasping at ears, and muttering incomprehensibly as he dashed from one crisis point to another, one or more of the nickel-paying righteous would scream at the alleged appearance or odor of a rat, others would join in, and, as the Greek sought out the source of fraudulent aspersions cast at his theatre, another of the righteous would slip down beside the pit and behind the screen to open the fire-door. Light faded the screen and momentarily blinded the Greek, and whoever might be waiting patiently in the alley was inside, home free, even as he or she or all of them tried to act decorously to fool the Greek while he sought out the miscreants who tormented him so loudly and maligned his theatre so unjustly.

But neither I nor my contemporaries were the mindless vandals that our behavior at the Ritz would seem to suggest. Some of my most vivid recollection of the time and place—Lorain, Ohio, in the depression—have become remarkable memories only in perspective—that from another America more than half a century later. Not only were graffiti unknown in Lorain in the 1930s—and for all I know, in the rest of the Western World, if one refuses to count the occasional initials in the wet cement of the sidewalks the W.P.A. and the N.Y.A. were laying here and there around the town—but the random vandalism and mindless violence of a later America were also unknown. In an age when hundreds of thousands of young Americans, dispossessed and, in Jack Conroy's term, disinherited, were on the road and stopping at the back doors of inhabited dwellings for handouts, never were Americans safer in their homes and on the streets, and vacant houses—those on each side of ours stood empty for years—came through the depression with all their windows intact.

But what passed for vandalism and incipient but never actual violence to the Greek was undoubtedly to him symbolic of the worst of all possible early adolescent behavior. I remember one such incident in detail. During one intense moment in a forgettable film I was sitting next to a friend who was known as Skinny because, in our innocence we had discovered irony, and not only did he weigh what to us was an astronomical amount, but he was known to his family as Junior. He was seated on the aisle. As the moment intensified on the screen. Skinny put both feet up on the tack of the seat ahead of him and peered at the screen from between them.

Suddenly, punctuating the intensity of the moment on the screen came a double—or quadruple—barrelled scream: "Feets! Feets!" The Greek had caught Skinny in one of the most serious offenses possible in the Ritz on a Saturday afternoon in the mid-1930s.

Skinny dropped his feet to the floor, but the Greek was far from mollified, and what happened was one of a number of occasions that suggested that either the Greek harbored dramatic ambitions or he had seen too many movies of the kind habitually shown at the Ritz. He posed dramatically in the aisle, his flashlight, held like the torch of liberty, lighting the scene with a glow refracted from the tin ceiling. Then came the voice in what would have been sonorous tones if they had not been so high-pitched: "For shame! For shame!"

After an equally dramatic pause, the voice continued in tones that, had it not been for the pitch, might have been considered confidential (and I won't attempt either the pitch or the diction):

"For shame," he intoned again. Then, savoring the moment, he went on. "You bad, bad boy, for shame. How you like it if some little girl come into your house, climb up on the table and wash her feet in the soup? Oy!" The flashlight went out, and if we had been more sophisticated we surely would have burst into applause as the Greek vanished into the dark where he had stood.

The films from which the Greek—and, alas, many of us—derived a sense of the dramatic in prose and diction, were, as I knew intuitively then, as uniformly bad as my more cultivated taste tells me that movies are today. But in that infinitely more honest age, movies did not purport to be true in a literal sense, however conscious movie makers, critics, and audience were aware of their moral significance. Reality was relegated to the newsreels, and films made no pretense of being "docudramas" that conveyed the perverted political and moral sense of their creators in the guise of truth. But their quality—in writing, in acting, in dramatic structure —was designated clearly for the prospective audience as A B, or C. To the best of my knowledge the Ritz never showed an A, at least not on Saturday afternoons, but the management was much more aware of another rating, that of the Legion of Decency, and to the best of my knowledge no film condemned by that organization ever graced the screen of the Ritz.

At that time there was a third category of film judgement, that of the State of Ohio, and each feature film at the Ritz and every other theatre was preceeded by a screen-filling outline map of the State of Ohio in white on a black background, with appropriate next explaining that particular film had been passed by the Board of Censors of the State of Ohio. That, too, like the Legion of Decency and the attempt to convey a sense of critical worth, have long vanished in a world I've helped to create, for better or worse.

Whether the Ritz had any connection other than geographic with the other tenants of that white-brick-fronted building at fourteenth and Broadway, I have not idea, although in retrospect I seriously doubt it. The tailor shop on the north side was nondescript enough, with heavy drapes hanging in the windows, although we attempted to veil it in an aura of mystery by calling it "The Carpet Factory" and peopling it with mysterious never-seen beings who practiced arts infinitely more esoteric than cutting, measuring, and sewing in the dimness behind those dusty drapes.

The poolroom was equally nondescript although considerably livelier than the tailor shop. If not terra incognita, for us it certainly was terra prohibita, forbidden by unspoken rules, whether emanating from home, school, church, state, or the poolroom itself. There were certain things, places, and acts that we knew intuitively were taboo, even while we stretched our limits to try to include them.

But the Thomas Hotel, whether it shared ownership, interest, or management with the Ritz, certainly shared its legend, as it does even yet. From a perspective of half a century, I'm sure that the Thomas Hotel was no more than a seedy rooming house for those who were down on their luck, but to those of us who spent Saturday afternoons at the Ritz, it was the subject of more rumor, myth, gossip, folklore, imagination, and innuendo than our innocently erotic imaginations could articulate. Although nothing, to my knowledge, ever happened there to call its attention to parents, police, or moral arbiters, it never-the-less loomed large in our imaginations as what we euphemistically called a "cat house." Just who the cats were, we had no idea, nor did we speculate on their relationship with the tired looking men whom we saw occasionally going in and out, up the long flight of stairs beside the Ritz and to or from whatever exotic—a word we didn't know, just as we were innocent of the meaning of erotic—activities went on beyond the stairs.

Nevertheless, the Thomas Hotel occupied a central placed in our pantheon of forbidden places and legendary places. Every port on the south shore of Lake Erie had, we knew, an establishment like the Thomas Hotel, and, for some incomprehensible reason, most of them were known as "Rosie's." South Lorain had a place known as "1632 1/2," derived from its address, as was "210" in Sandusky. But more mythically attractive were some of the names reportedly attached to creatures whom we could not even imaging: "Box Car Annie," Shipyard Gert," and a legendary creature known as "Rose," who, in her front page obituary in the local paper some time in the late thirties was described euphemistically as "Rose of the Underworld."

To my knowledge that Rose is perhaps the only one of those persons and places whose existence can be documented from the morgue of the Lorain Journal, although I have no reason to question the existence if not the function of the most of the others. But in

the spring of 1940, well after I began to spend Saturday afternoons in pursuits other than those possible at the Ritz, I had the opportunity to know the Thomas Hotel at close range. It was the period known in some places as that of "the phoney war;" I had become a newspaper and war afficionado, going down to the Journal each afternoon to talk with the staff and read the war news just off the wire and the press. Then, miraculously, a paper route become vacant. In my experience, they were family property, handed from brother to brother to nephew in those depression years, but the managing editor gave it to me temporarily—I lived too far, perhaps ten blocks from the route, to expect it permanently. And when I went through the ring of cards, I noticed as a subscriber, the Thomas Hotel. When I went over the route to learn it, my instructions from the drab man behind the spotted glass counter at the top of the stairs were simple. Each afternoon I was to place the rolled paper on the glass, and each Saturday the eighteen cents for the week would be waiting there for me. And in the three months or so I carried those papers up the seedy stairs, laid one on the counter, and came down again, I never saw either cat or client, but only the few tired, faceless men from those afternoons at the Ritz.

The Ritz, the Thomas Hotel, and the white-brick-fronted building that housed them are long gone, replaced by the approach to a railroad underpass, but in many ways their existence and the memory that remains still reflect the city and the time of which they once were a part. Lorain was a town that had neither a history nor a myth, although it produced a commander-in-chief of the American fleet during World War II and a future Nobel Prize winner in literature who was in the first or second grade in the public schools while I spend my afternoons at the Ritz. But it has a past, part of which I share, that of the 1930s, compounded of the ebb and flow of a vaster world made tangible by the smoke—or lack of it—that came from the steel mills to make much of the East Side uninhabitable, or, conversely, the smoke that wasn't, which made inevitable the empty houses, the young men on the road, the sad old man climbing stairs to the Thomas Hotel, the priceless nickels for Saturday afternoons at the Ritz, a place that perhaps never was, that perhaps ended its brief existence unnoticed and unlamented. Yet it continues to live and it will as long as memory and imagination create, however briefly, a past, a history, and a myth whose existence is as real as the red smoke—now you see it, now you don't—that dominated the landscape and the lakescape and ordered the youthful lives of those who, like me, were fortunate enough to enjoy Saturday afternoons at the Ritz.

Michigan State University

A Moment in Time: The Queen City at the End of Its Second Century

David D. Anderson

John Clubbe, Cincinnati Observed (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992). 531 pp. Preface Foreword, Introduction, Bibliography, Index, maps, and illustrations.

Since Thomas Jefferson's warnings in the late eighteenth century about the potential destruction of the American ideals of equality and liberty by the rise of great European-style cities in a newly-independent and potentially democratic United States, Americans have had and continue to have a curiously ambivalent attitude toward their cities, particularly since the domination of the American economic and political structure by industrialism and urbanism in the years since the Civil War. On one hand, we have, since the beginning of the mass immigration of Irish and Germans in the 1840s, and continuing to the present, a perception of what is euphemistically called the "inner city" today. In it, the city is seen as a magnet that makes inevitable one ghetto after another, each with its concomitant violence and crime, punctuated by riots induced by perceived grievances ranging from draft injustices in the Civil War to racial oppression, the latter riots occurring with predictable regularity in the twentieth century. The city, from this perspective, is an urban jungle, to be avoided after dark, a place one escapes permanently as soon as one can afford to do so.

The other perspective, seen regularly by succeeding generations of young people ranging from Horatio Alger Jr's., bootblacks and newsboys, Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie, Sherwood Anderson's Sam McPherson, F. Scott Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway, and hundreds of others in fact and fiction and see the city as a bright and shining place where all things are possible, where all dreams become real, where disillusionment is inevitable.

John Clubbe's Cincinnati is not only not seen from either of the traditional extremes, but it enjoys a perspective uniquely its own, uniquely Clubbe's. In form, Clubbe's Cincinnati Observed is what the title implies, an examination of the form, structure, and history of the city, using as a basis a series of eleven walking tours of the historical city as well as a tour of the Cincinnati Art Museum and a driving tour of its

environs and cemeteries. But to refer to it even loosely as a guidebook to the city is to treat it with gross injustice. It is at once a perspective on the city, a tribute to it, and an exercise in perception, in understanding what we see. Thus, not only does Clubbe show us the cityscape of Cincinnati, and each element of which it is made, but he shows us each in its cultural and historical contexts as well.

In his introduction Clubbe defines Cincinnati Observed as a seizure of the city in a particular moment in history, that of about 1990, and consequently, because the city is in a constant state of flux, already at least slightly out of date. But, because Clubbe recognizes, in each tour, the transience of each site as well as its momentary apparent permanence, no trace of the absolute makes itself felt in the book. Buildings, streets, statues may appear or disappear in the course of time, and Clubbe, in making clear what once was, makes equally clear what may be. As he concludes his introduction, he makes evident the complexity as well as the inevitability of flux in one's perception of the city as well as in the organic nature of the city itself:

> Every time I take an extended walk in the city I anticipate a visual feast: vistas, facades, windows, doorways, shop fronts. No less do I appreciate the reassuring and familiar church, park, or palazzo. But only the unexpected will turn an ordinary walk into an unforgettable experience. Every time I stalk the city I also anticipate the unexpected—a Victorian house newly painted, a hitherto unnoticed cast-iron storefront by a firm I had not heard of, a cat perched atop a brick wall, a friend not seen for a year and a half. I am never disappointed.

Perception, for John Clubbe, is as organic and as timely as the thing seen, and that seen in one moment, one walk, one context is not that in the next, if one has learned to see. Each of Clubbe's descriptions captures an appropriate moment, but each is seen, too, in the context from which it has come even as it suggests that which may succeed it.

Examples abound of the clarity and completeness of Clubbe's perception of the city. One of my favorites is that of Pratt Park in downtown Cincinnati. Clubbe places it first geographically, describes its origins and name changes, and then the buildings that mark its perimeter, thus creating what Clubbe calls "one of the great urban set pieces of the midwest." But then he digresses to define it in its social setting as well as what it may become:

> The park long served the city's street people as a watering hole, though water was not what was drunk here. In some ways such a use is a good thing. Many of those who have quit the race for this world's honors have an integrity all their own. Further, as Ian Nairn, the English architectural critic has argued, a public area "without bums has something very wrong, with it, because the bums know instinctively what we have to learn so laboriously and with so much effort—that is, whether a place feels right." Pratt Park obviously feels, or felt, right to Cincinnati's down and out. But not everyone finds undesirables (as town planners call them) a good thing. What to do?

Clubbe defines the city's attempt to discourage the transients and to make the park more attractive to its tax-paying citizens with new residential buildings, new landscaping, and proposed changes. But, he concludes, although the park has the potential to become "one of the city's most livable urban spaces," few people find the time or perhaps the courage to sit on its benches.

Cincinnati Observed is, as Zane Miller and Henry Shapiro comment in the Foreward, a book on "the urban experience" rather than on the city's history, its sociology, or even its value to the touristic adventurer. It is both love letter and testament to its subject, and it will rank high in the literature of American cities. John Clubbe, native New Yorker, Professor of English at the University of Kentucky, has written a work that no lover of cities, no Midwesterner, no Americanist can afford to overlook.

Michigan State University

The Return to Raintree County
David D. Anderson

The most anticipated and celebrated literary event in the years following World War II was the official publication, on January 5, 1948, of Raintree County, a one-thousand-and-sixty-six-page first novel by thirty-three-year-old Ross Lockridge, Jr., a native of Bloomington, Indiana, where he had spent much of his life. The novel had already sold 50,000 pre-publication copies, and, although some criticism was directed at its length, its sexual content, daring for its day, and from some its pretentiousness, the overwhelming critical reception ranged from enthusiastic to eulogistic. By March 1948, it led the best-seller lists, it was a Book-of- the Month Club selection, and it had won the world's most lucrative literary prize, the MGM Award of $150,000 for the screen rights to the novel, even as its young author was hailed as the writer destined to revitalize American fiction in the second half of the twentieth century.

Yet on March 6, 1949, the young novelist was dead, a suicide by carbon monoxide in the garage behind his home in Bloomington, leaving his widow and four young children. After a season of psychological analysis, informed and otherwise, the novel and its young writer faded into obscurity, punctuated only the delayed filming in 1957 of a badly expurgated, re-ordered, and re-written Raintree County starring Elizabeth Taylor, Montgomery Clift, and Eva Marie Saint and the simultaneous publication of an abridged paperback version of the novel in 1957.

Both the film and the abridged novel are failures, the former because the novel was simply too complex for the film medium or the film maker, and the latter because both its scope and its vision are narrower than the original. In the years after 1957, the novel and its author have become legends, ocassionally referred to and rarely read except by a handful of admirers, and the novels worth rarely attested to except by the rare appearances of scholarly and critical essays that continue to explore its merits.

Now, in 1994, the novel has been reissued, by Viking Press, together with Shade of the Raintree, the Life and Death of Ross Lockridge, Jr. a biography of its author by Larry Lockridge, the author's second son. The event of the double publication threatened to become a literary event parallel to that forty-six years earlier, and a number of reviewers proclaimed that it was, as indeed it deserved to be. But somehow, perhaps inevitably, in an age that proclaims the universality and worth of

The Bridges of Madison County, today only surpassed only by I Want to Tell You by O.J. Simpson, it fell short.

Nevertheless the republication of Raintree County and the publication of Shade of the Raintree are indeed the most important literary publications of 1994, the former because we can see, once again, through the eyes of John Wickliff Shawnessy, on that remarkable July 4, 1892, the vision and promise of America and its people, and in the latter, through the eyes and mind of his son, the vision and the torment of Shawnessy's creator. In these two publications, a remarkable, perhaps even a great literary work will continue to live in spite of the vagaries of literary fashion, popular taste, or literary celebrity.

If Raintree County is not the fabled Great American Novel, it will do until that unlikely work appears. In it, in the space of about twelve hours on July 4, 1892, Ross Lockridge, Jr. recreates 48 of the most tumultuous and changing years of the nineteenth century, those that took America from its romantic and idealistic adolescence through the great crisis and purging of the Civil War into a new materialistic and cynical maturity as the nation approaches into its second century.

Those year are not only the nation's, but they're those of its people, of those who maintain the dream and propagate the myth of a fulfilling America, most notably, the years of Johnny Shawnessy as he remembers them on that eventful July 4, 1892, the day on which he still maintains its validity. They are the brief years, too, of the dark, married Southern beauty that was Susanna Drake and the bright, pristine beauty that was Nell Gaithor; the years of those who had gone from Raintree County to the heights of material glory: Senator Garwood B. Jones, financier Cassius P. Carney, and General Jacob J. Jackson, all of whom have traded faith for fortune; they are the years, too, of Professor Jerusalem Webster Stiles, Johnny's alter ego and the cynical interpreter of an American reality,. They are the years too, of the rise and fall of the National Road and the Jeffersonian dream of an open society and cheap land that it was designed to implement, and the emergence of the railroad that destroyed it in its directed search for power and profit.

Evident at once in re-reading the novel is not only the durability of the characters and the myth that Ross Lockridge created, but the elements that make the novel even more timely in 1994 than it was in 1948. Then the pollution of the land and the dream that had been so clearly foreshadowed in the book was not yet evident to most Americans, particularly those flushed by victory in a "good war" they had not yet calculated the cost of. Today the continued pollution of both is unmistakable to all but

the most insensitive, and Lockridge celebrates even more eloquently than nearly half a century ago the vision of what might have been and of what may yet be.

To turn from a major work of fiction to a major biographical study demands in this case less dexterity on the part of the reviewer than is normally the case. Just as the two authors are father and son, the relationship between the works is substantially as close. In a study that is at once compassionate, compelling, and forthright, the biography gives us insights into the talent, drive, and torment of the young writer that we can find in no other way. The study is clear, complete, and courageous as Larry Lockridge, who had, as he has commented, grown up with a novel instead of his father, seeks, for his own understanding as well as ours, the truth of the novel and its creator as well as the man who was his father.

Shade of the Raintree demonstrates clearly what a literary biography, the biography of a writer, should be and so seldom is: a study of the man and the work at that difficult to define place where life and art converge, often to the exclusion of everything else, where the writer's artistic vision and his psychic reality overlap, even threatening to become one. But Larry Lockridge deftly extricates each from the other, and in his pages Ross Lockridge, Jr., son, lover, father, Indianian, and literary artist, emerges as clearly as the myth that emerges from recreated reality in Raintree County. In the Shade of the Raintree Larry Lockridge discovers the father he had never known and he discovers too the magic with which his father had endowed his major work. The result is not only a significant literary event, but it is a convergence of two important works, either of which is major in itself.

Two interesting footnotes remain, one a bibliographic triumph of art over puritanism that has passed entirely unnoticed, and the other a touching tie between father and son that has also passed unnoticed. In the former, a phrase that had appeared in the first printing but was expurgated from subsequent printings is restored in the new Viking edition. In the original on page 152, as Professor Stiles pontificates on nature and nature's law, he states,

> . . .Besides, Nature puts no premium on clarity. My God, where would the human race be if it weren't for the bastards? Wasn't Jesus God's? Pass the perfectos, John.
>
> Completely stunned, Johnny passed the cigars.

Perhaps in an effort to placate some of the clerical criticism directed at the book, the phrase "Wasn't Jesus God's? was deleted from further printings, leaving the readers

to wonder at Johnny's simplistic response to an otherwise inoffensive phrase. Now the phrase is restored, the text is pure, and Johnny's response is in character.

The other footnote is both personal and touching. Larry Lockridge has been Professor Laurence Lockridge for many years. In the course of his research, however, he learned that his father insisted that he was name was not Laurence but Larry. It is Larry Lockridge whose name appears on the title page of Shade of the Raintree. I can think of no more suitable tribute by the son to the father as well as the writer and the man defined so compellingly in these pages.