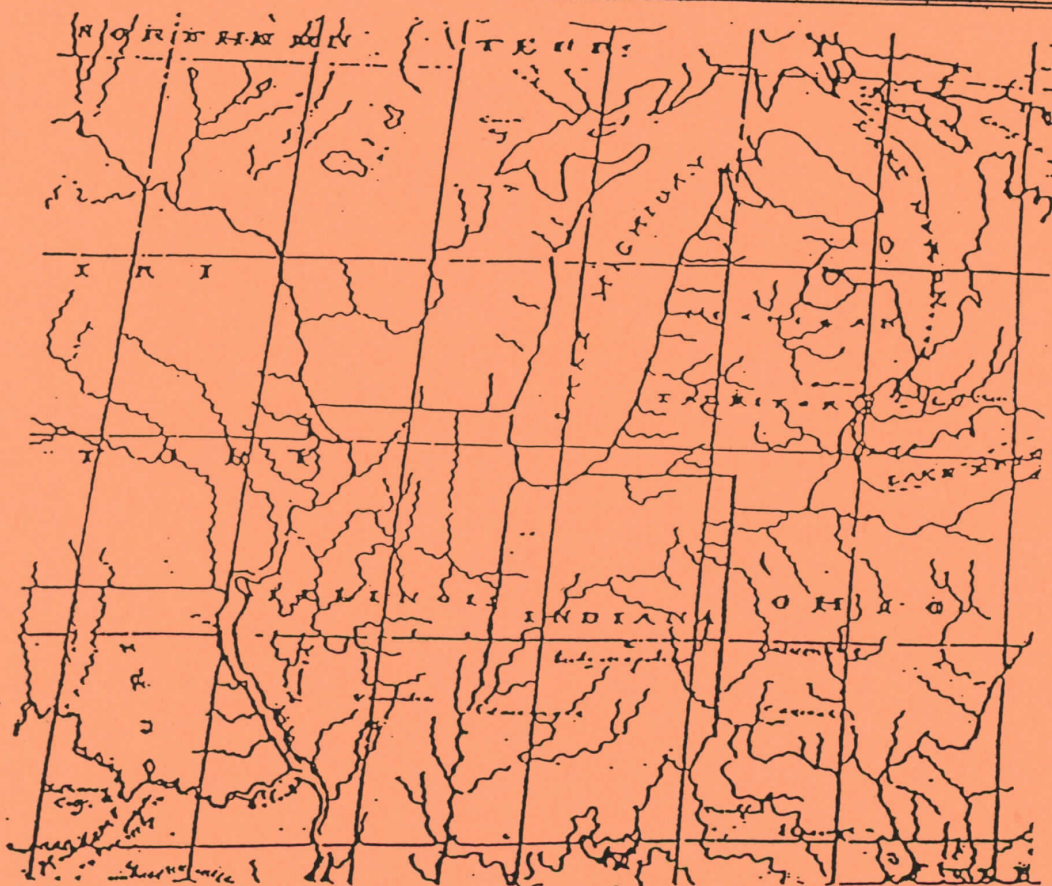


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The Center for the Study of
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Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Newsletter

Volume Twenty-Six
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The Twenty-Sixth Annual Conference

The twenty-fifth annual conference of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, the Symposium "The Cultural Heritage of the Midwest" and the Concurrent Midwest Poetry Festival, was held at the Marriot Hotel, East Lansing, Michigan, on May 23-25, 1996. About 100 members participated by presenting papers, giving readings, chairing panels, and participating in the annual business meeting and the editorial board meeting of the Dictionary of Midwestern Literature project.

Featured at the Awards Dinner on Friday evening, May 24, was the presentation of the Society's two annual awards. The MidAmerica Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern Literature was presented to Scott Donaldson, Cooley Professor of English Emeritus of the College of William and Mary and author of distinguished biographies of Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Archibald MacLeish, and others. The Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern Literature was presented to Sara Paretsky of Chicago, creator of the distinguished detective fiction series featuring V.I. Warshawski, including Tunnel Vision, Guardian Angel, Burn Marks, and others.

Candidates for the Midwest Heritage Essay Award, the Midwest Poetry Award, and the Midwest Fiction Award founded by Gwendolyn Brooks, are being reviewed by a special committee.

Officers of the Society for 1996 were announced as follows:

President: Jean Strandness, North Dakota State University

Vice President and President Elect: Guy Szuberla, University of Toledo

Executive Council: Edward Morin, Ann Arbor, and Margaret Rozga,
University of Michigan Center at Waukesha

The 1997 Conference will be held at the East Lansing Marriott on May 15-17, 1997. Jean Strandness, President, will be in charge of the program, and Roger Bresnahan and Dave Anderson will handle local arrangements.

David D. Anderson

Native Representations

Dan Campion

Every fall around the time The Chicago Tribune Magazine bore John T. McCutcheon's "Injun Summer" cover, my parents would take me to one of the inadvertently surrealistic Indian Summer Evenings at the Olson Rug Company factory at Pulaski and Diversey streets on Chicago's North Side. There, in a small park recessed between the factory walls and the busy thoroughfares, a pageant was enacted before the backdrop of a faux waterfall. One memory I retain of those early 1950s evenings is that of seeing a flaming arrow arcing toward the east--a recollection whose accuracy is sadly open to question. On several of these annual visits, however, I surely remember meeting, across a wrought iron fence, an aged, deerskinclad American Indian who wore a large, feathered headdress. I have tangible proof of this in the form of a postal card here with me now, dated by my mother 10-21-51, and signed in pencil by the American Indian, "Chief Wildhorse."

Thus, a Euro-American boy's introduction to American Indian culture, Chicago-style. I do not recall that we ever purchased an Olson rug. I would like to be able to remember the bus rides home to the West Side, but I must have slept through the dreaming streets, like a child carried home down a canyon.

McCutcheon's magazine cover, long since abandoned after the Tribune realized that actual Indians still existed, depicted in its bright top panel an old Caucasian man and boy in a harvest scene in Campion daylight; then there was a caption in which the old man described the frontier past; and below the caption, a smoky blue bottom panel showed the same scene after dark, with the ghosts of Indians rising in plumes from burning leaves. As a child I thought the cover evocative, like my mother's story that just before the turn of the century in a town north of Chicago, some Indians had strolled into her Aunt Amanda's kitchen, inspected the crockery with an appraising air, and departed, with my great-aunt's blessings, with a few dishes they admired.

My childhood picture books were less likely to contain reminiscences than cartoon stereotypes-- Bugs Bunny conquering all of Arizona, Yosemite Sam brandishing his pistols against all comers. Television brought Tonto, Broken Arrow, and WGN's endless reruns of Northwest Passage. The movies in the theaters featured Anthony Quinn, Leo G. Carroll, and Victor Mature in war paint and feathers.

My elementary school was attended by first- and second- generation immigrants from many places, including China, Cuba, Hungary, and even Tennessee. Although Chicago was and remains arguable the most segregated city in the United States, I was among African Americans all the time, downtown and on the Lake Street el. Yet, aside from the harvest pageants, I had never seen an American Indian.

You will say that the real antidote to popularized, meretricious falsifications of American Indian ways would have been to get to know Indians, and naturally you'd be right. Unfortunately, no opportunities for such meetings were open to a typical West Side boy in the 1950s. Confronted by the kitsch, sentimentality, and

racism of popular-cultural imagery, one was lucky to have a skeptical frame of mind and at most a chance experience or two that touched on a believable Indian ethos.

Think what you will of Scouting, the Boy Scouts taught me something about Indian culture. My Cub Scout pack was taken on the train one day in the late fifties to White Pines State Park to see a real forest and to watch older Scouts perform traditional Indian dances in their own hand-made ritual costumes modeled on Menominee and Potawatomie ceremonial attire. My recollection is that those 1950s teenagers made a considerable impression on us younger children by force of their dignity and skill. When I read about a jingle dance today, it is still those bells of forty years ago that I hear.

I also was lucky enough to go on visits, with my public-school class and with my parents, to the Field Museum of Natural History. I am not unaware of the bad reputation anthropology and ethnography have among some American Indians, and I take as legitimate the concern that cultural artifacts on display in a museum may compound the injustice of expropriation with the insult of misrepresentation. Yet, had there been no exhibits of "natural history" to inform me, at whatever remove, about the native culture that gave my home city its name, I might have been consigned to live in simple ignorance among the blatant distortions purveyed by popular culture.

And so, my classmates and I saw the tools and raiment of "Plains" and "Woodland" Indians displayed in cases built of mahogany and glass according to the manner of catafalques and reliquaries. Some displays were dioramas, with painted landscapes to provide a background for hunting or domestic scenes; there in the illusory distance soared a hawk. All was bathed in an ancient, subaqueous light that exaggerated the antiquity of the burnished arrowheads, decorated shields and spears, buckskin garments, carved and painted bowls, colored beads, lustrous pipes, and gleaming breastplates of bison bone, with the result that viewers might imagine themselves inspecting artifacts from a distant geologic era rather than common tokens of life in the previous century. Much in that long-ago museum might be said to have worked against a child's having a "natural" encounter with "history." Yet the encounter with those juxtaposed objects did, indeed, cure misimpressions bred by commercial promotions and Hollywood fantasies. The collage of facts gathered here powerfully suggested the continuity of human affairs, not their fragmentation. The lives of American Indians were simultaneously intelligible, mysterious, and subject to various interpretations-- like my life.

The immediate stimulus to this collocation of thoughts about my childhood notions of American Indians is David L. Newquist's article "Mark Twain Among the Indians" in MidAmerica XXI (1994), which traces the evolution of Twain's attitude from feelings of casual disdain, toward greater openness to Indian narratives and views. One facet of Newquist's argument is the Twain had been bitter and harsh toward Indians-- as he was toward the damn'd human race at large-- but later softened in his attitude, after he encountered the Indian in mediated fashion, through American Indian stories. Newquist may have a point, but it must be noted that none of Twain's dealings with Indians could ever have been unmediated-- all took place either in the white world of Missouri or the transition zone of the territories, and hence every transaction necessarily occurred "under western eyes." In any case, Twain's ideas about and attitudes toward Indians seem to

have been every bit as equivocal, and as complicated (e.g., did Twain need to demystify Indians, in part, simply because James Fenimore Cooper had romanticized them?), as, say, Walt Whitman's attitudes as described in Ed Folsom's Walt Whitman's Native Representations (1994). I believe it is easy to imagine Twain's reactions to the rug company's and other popular-culture exploitations of Indian images, but I am not sure how he would have responded to the Boy Scouts dressed in Indian regalia, or to the exhibits in the Field Museum.

Henry David Thoreau lived in a time and place that permitted him to look down at his path and find arrowheads there. The Indian lands may have belonged by then to the Emersons and Channings, and the Thoreau factory may have been urging the indigenous forest into pencils, but Thoreau did not need to blot much from his view to see the precolonial scene. When he traveled, he often went with Indian guides, whom he came to know as friends. When Thoreau died, well before the final Indian Wars, his planned volume on Indian history, abandoned because of illness, remained unfinished. One senses the tragedy of a historic opportunity lost. The ensuing history of Indian - white relations in the Midwest and the Great Plains was characterized by the entrepreneurship of Cody and the harshness of Sheridan. These, apart from the few but powerful positive and admiring experiences I have described, were the cultural legacies I inherited, fenced by wrought iron and paved with concrete.

The more deeply freedom is immured the greater the challenge to imagination. I heard a news report recently of a wild coyote having been sighted in a Chicago backyard near where I once lived, within walking distance of the heart of the metroplex that radiates out from the site at Michigan Avenue and the Chicago River where Fort Dearborn once stood. That coyote had imagination.

Over the years, I have talked and worked with Indians and read Indians' books. No doubt I have been guilty of misunderstandings and failures of empathy. In atonement, I have made pilgrimages, to stand where the chiefs took counsel atop the Great Mound and Cahokia; where Black Elk had visions at the summit of Harney Peak; where the calamities of the Little Bighorn and of Wounded Knee abused the rolling and all-enduring plains. These journeys I have taken are like dreams to me now, truly undertaken and earnestly made, yet fleeting, like the arc of a bright arrow at night.

And years ago at his Scout's Rest Ranch in North Platte, Nebraska, I also dared to look into Buffalo Bill's own reputed vanity mirror, and beheld in its trifold surfaces my whiteness, the whiteness not even of Pahuska but rather of the people who arrived in America after the conquests were complete, a whiteness on which any lies or truths or dreams could be imprinted. It was a view, intimate yet remote, made strange by the way the antique mirror reflected and refracted the prairie light. Did Buffalo Bill glimpse my father's father, a pale immigrant from France, in Lawler's tavern on Harrison and Loomis streets, to which Cody repaired after a Wild West Show? Did Father Joliet's guides catch a chill from the distant future one morning, the lake wind raking across their shoulders as I have seen it lash Grant Park's bronze and granite equestrian statues of Indians drawing their bows? Did Black Elk, when he rode the train through Chicago bound for Paris and his meeting in London with Grandmother England, see flashing toward him a flicker of the year a half-century ahead when my father would return to Chicago from the war in Europe, when Andre Breton, according to Mark Polizzotti's

Revolution of the Mind (1995), visited the Field Museum and "admired the Indian artifacts" there -- artifacts I would be born to dream of?

Iowa City, Iowa

Henry James in Ohio--Eight Reviews of His Work

William D. Baker

Although William Dean Howells called Henry James's The Bostonians "one of the masterpieces of all fiction" and claimed that he was James's "first, warmest, truest admirer," the plain people back home in Ohio, as reflected by newspaper reviews of Henry James's fiction, failed to take to his work. What is interesting in these reviews (there were eight over a ten-year period) is their unwillingness to go along with the principles of realism, that is, a greater concern with truthfulness of character than with symmetry of plot. They were more in tune with H.G. Wells's comment that a Henry James novel "is a magnificent but painful hippopotamus resolved at any cost, even at the cost of its dignity, upon picking up a pea, which has got into the corner of its den."

The Ohio reviewers were willing to grant quality when they saw it, but they couldn't abide what one reviewer described as raindrop splitting, or, as another reviewer said, fiction that didn't "lead up to anything or down to anything particularly."

I read three newspapers published in the period from 1865 to 1886, and a review of The American showed up in a fourth, the Cincinnati Commercial for May 20, 1877. I will quote a major portion of it because it typifies the nature of the qualifications that Ohio reviewers made for James's fiction.

[P]assion and fervor Mr. James utterly lacks, and it is just this that a novelist it needs when he writes a book in which what is called sentimental takes up the entire story. It begins by the hero falling in love in the second chapter. It ends by the heroine's taking the veil in the last. Mr. James seems so much afraid of "sentimentality" that he looks askance of love too. For Mr. James sentiment, poetry, imagination are not to be dealt with earnestly He looks at humanity more as a psychological study. Of course, that is one point of view. But the result is like the difference between an anatomical drawing of a human figure and a beautiful statue--one is scientific, the other aesthetic. To look at artistic things in a bony light detracts from them and lowers them. Mr. James has tried to stimulate our flagging interest in "The American" by bringing it to heighten the unreal appearance of a . . . fearful family emersed in poisoning and murder. . . . The mystery and murder. . . awaken as little sense of reality or terror as a ghost story told by a stout genial gentleman in a room with a window open, and the midday sun streaming in. Altogether "The American" is not better than "Roderick Hudson." It has the same faults to perhaps a greater degree. Although Mr. James stories are among the best examples of American fiction, the best may still be improved upon.

The next review turned up on December 3, 1881, and is so startling an exception to the other Ohio reviews as to merit quoting on the book jacket, if there had been book jackets in those days, and if the reviewer in the Ohio State Journal had managed to get the title right. Of "The Portrait of a Young [sic] Lady" the reviewer said:

"... it is the most important and engaging novel Mr. James has yet written. It has a high degree of rare excellences of Mr. James' writings--acute observation, close study of character, subtle reflection, and a charming style; and it is quite certain to be read with admiration and delight, not only today, but by coming generations of readers."

Daisy Miller did not fare as well as Isabel Archer. In fact the reviewer in the Cincinnati Commercial for September 8, 1883, while granting that "Mr. James has a photographic skill in portraying disagreeable people and the many defects and bores of society," and granting that "Mr. James may be a writer of keen wit, and doubtless possesses literary gifts," lashes out at the play version of the novel, saying that it "is marred throughout by coarse studies of repulsive men and women." "Much of the dialogue," the reviewer continues, "is unrefined chatter. It does not strike us that Mr. Jones' [sic] reputation is growing in the right direction."

A year later (November 23, 1884) the reviewer for the same paper (perhaps the same reviewer) attacked the only piece of non-fiction noticed in Ohio, Tales of Three Cities, writing, "The fact that Mr. Henry James is a cold-blooded cosmopolitan analyst does not rob his pen of brilliancy as well of sympathy."

Two papers were critical of The Bostonians. The Cleveland Plain Dealer dismissed the novel on March 21, 1886, with these words: "... those who enjoy sensational novels would probably fall asleep over 'The Bostonians' before a fourth part of the thick volume had been waded through." But the reviewer for the Cincinnati Commercial, for May 3, 1886, created a choice and moist metaphor, worthy to set alongside H.G. Wells's hippopotamus: "Mr. James has his own peculiarities as an explorer. He never permits himself to get into the middle of a large stream if the current is strong. He paddles around in the eddies, up the tributaries, into the creeks, and is hardly willing to stop when he reaches the springs. He seems to be in search of a split raindrop that divides itself to seek respectively the Arctic Ocean and the Gulf. If he can be dull in his microscopic search after motives, he can also give a brilliant turn to a personal description. . . . [The novel] does not realize all that was expected, but it is racy of Mr. Henry James."

Two reviews of The Princess Cassimassima were equally devastating. The Plain Dealer, noted for its acid pen, said on November 21, 1886:

"... it is the same Henry James and hence there is the same lame and impotent conclusion for a long drawn out story. Mr. James has a large clientage in spite of his ineradicable defects as they have its predecessors from the same hand. We leave them to their feast."

The Cincinnati Commercial on December 4, 1886, was equally negative, saying, "... it is decidedly a rambling tale, microscopic in sentiment and description, cultivated and keen, but not leading up to anything or down to anything particularly."

The final phrase of the review, worrying about novels leading someplace, summarizes as well as anything else, the typical Ohio reviewer's opinion of Henry James. Both James and Howells were fighting against the critics and the public at the same time, and to the extent that the Ohio reviewers reflected the Ohio public, James at least lost the battle. While Howells, as I have noted elsewhere, took some of the same negative criticism, he was more kindly reviewed as a native Buckeye than his expatriate friend, Henry James.

Worth noting in the reviews is their forthrightness, their refusal to be intimidated by the establishment, and their concern not for the principles of a new and seldom popular literary trend but for the taste of a reader of some experience and refinement. They saw the brilliant descriptions but they just couldn't wade upstream in search of the split raindrops.

Wright State University Emeritus

Pumping Ethyl--and Regular Too--at Shorty's

David D. Anderson

Back in the days when the neighborhood gas station was nearly as ubiquitous as the neighborhood grocery store—in the decade before World War II—and long before the postwar super-stations that were the automotive counterparts of supermarkets, my grandfather, my father, and my uncles were all customers of Shorty's--Shorty's Good Gulf, that is, at the strategic corner of 17th Street and Reid Avenue, in the depression-ridden steelmaking town "Where Coal and Iron Meet," where the Black River flows reluctantly into Lake Erie.

The town, Lorain, Ohio, then little more than a century old, had existed under various names--The Mouth of Black River, Black River, Charleston, and finally, after pressure from the Post Office Department, it was named after the county in which it was located, which was named after the French province for some reason and appropriately anglicized into its present, often misspelled form.

Although Shorty's Good Gulf had existed for no more than a decade of that hundred years, when I came to know it, it seemed almost as old, and when I last saw its shell, some years ago, it seemed infinitely older and undoubtedly haunted by the ghost of the little entrepreneur whose name I still associate with the place.

My intimate acquaintanceship with Shorty's Good Gulf, Shorty, and the two pumps—one Ethyl, one regular—that stood in front of the little building, occurred over a period of about three months in the Spring and early Summer of 1940. On the right side the building housed what was called "the office" and a men's room that we would probably call unisex today, although to my knowledge no woman in her right mind—or man either—would use it; on the left there were two stalls for cars, one with a grease rack that operated hydraulically, the most modern device in the station, and the other for general repairs, at which Shorty excelled and which I became most familiar with one day when Shorty inadvertently dropped a transmission on my chest while I was flat on my back on a creeper beneath it.

Shorty's mechanical ability was widely admired, but he was even more widely admired for his appearance and manners; invariably he cheerfully greeted customers impeccably arrayed in a khaki military-style jacket, khaki jodhpurs, high laced boots, and a jaunty peaked cap, all of which reminded me of a movie director from the twenties or of the dress of Lyle Talbot, the movie actor in early talkies whose most memorable roles were as barn-storming pilots who flew World War One vintage Jenny biplanes from pasture to pasture.

Not only was Shorty admired for his dashing appearance and manners, but he was also admired for his courtesy, his friendliness, and his willingness to perform a variety of little acts beyond those called for in the Good Gulf Courtesy Manual, which Shorty kept displayed, greasy but unread, on the equally greasy candy and cigar counter next to the pop cooler that held Coca Cola, RC Cola, Nehi Orange, and 7-Up submerged in luke-warm water that was never iced or changed in my tenure at Shorty's.

That tenure began on a Saturday morning in late March of 1940. I was unemployed; my temporary job delivering the Cleveland Shopping News had run out; I had been turned down for a permanent job bagging groceries and stocking shelves for twenty cents an hour—but on that Saturday, when my uncle stopped over and announced that Shorty was looking for a part-time helper, I was, euphemistically, at liberty.

I would have much rather remained in my unemployed state than work at Shorty's or for Shorty—I had seen a different Shorty about two years before, of which I had never told anybody—but the announcement was made in front of my father, like Shorty a veteran of World War One and a member of American Legion Post 30, and my mother, who like every other woman in town, was charmed by Shorty, and the response were predictable:

My father: "Shorty's a fine man and a good mechanic.
You'd learn something there."

My mother: "And he's a gentleman, too."

My father: "I'll run you over."

My father, like virtually every man of his generation, loved automobiles and gas stations, especially the latter, which functioned in those depression days as men's clubs where two or three guys were always around for a chat or to exchange comments or a bit of political or economic wisdom. Years later, during the Carter Presidency, when photos appeared of Brother Billy's gas station in Plains, Georgia, I'm sure that all the men of my father's generation still alive felt a note of nostalgia. The likes of Billy and his place of business had vanished from much of America decades before.

Anyway, my brief acquaintanceship with and my peculiar insight into Shorty remained unrevealed—as they have until now—and my dad got into the car and I got in beside him, and on the way to Shorty's, while my dad talked about him—"Always good-natured, never a harsh word, he'll make a great boss"—I remembered what had happened several years before.

I didn't have to go past Shorty's on my way home from school, but I often did when I was alone because I had discovered a peculiar thrill that I kept to myself. Shorty's, like most gas stations, had a rubber-coated, pressure-activated wire between the pumps and the building, and, when a car pulled in, it rang a bell inside the station, calling the attendant—usually Shorty, although a long series of young men worked there over the years—out from under a car or a hood or the grease rack, and he came out smiling, wiping his hands on a rag.

I discovered that I could jump on the wire, causing the same effect, and be away before Shorty emerged. Later I learned that, as I passed the air dispenser that stood on the edge of the drive, I could give the hose a sharp pull, press in the valve, produce a hiss and a ring, and also be gone before Shorty came out, although occasionally from the door he would shout in unintelligible frustration.

And so I went, my obnoxiously twelve-year-old self, until one day, as I went through the routine and thought I was away, a giant of a man stepped out from behind some bushes next door and grabbed me by the arm. It hurt, and without a word he marched me back to and in the station, where Shorty sat, impressive in

word he marched me back to and in the station, where Shorty sat, impressive in his dashing jacket and cap, and remarkable stern. He looked at me for a long moment, while I stood there scared to death. Then:

"What's your name?"

"S.S. .Steve." Where that lucky answer came from, I have no idea.

"Steve," Shorty said, almost kindly. "You're causing me a lot of trouble."

I said nothing.

"Not to mention money."

For a moment I felt almost good, and then he frowned.

"I want you to cut it out."

I nodded eagerly.

"If you don't I call the police."

I nodded again.

"Or," and here Shorty rose and in military fashion marched around the desk and stood looking me in the eye. We were almost the same height. "Or," he said again, and paused dramatically, "Or I'll just have to beat the shit out of you. Now get out." He about-faced, and I dodged the silent giant and was out the door.

"Shorty's a prince," my dad was saying as we pulled in front of the pumps, and I hoped desperately that he wouldn't remember me and that the job was filled. But he didn't and it wasn't and in a short time I was an employee of Shorty's Good Gulf, where I spend the afternoon learning to smile, to wipe windshields, pump gas, check oil, use that same air pump to check tires, tour the inside, learn about the drain rack, an invention of Shorty's, and become familiar with the intricacies of Shorty's bookkeeping system: a pad of lined paper, with the date at the top, and a list of names, each followed by a notation, such as "5 reg," "2 Qo," "G.J." or something of the sort.

Occasionally someone would come in to pay his bill, and Shorty would check through a sheaf of such sheets, make notations on another, add them up, and pronounce a figure, whereupon the customer would pay. Occasionally Shorty would announce, in an inimitably kindly way, "Of course there's the tax." There always was tax on motor oil, I learned, "But," he magnanimously added, "I'll assume the tax myself." And another customer went away impressed with Shorty's kindly nature. And, for Saturday afternoon and part of Sunday, I was myself. But I soon learned that the creative nature of Shorty's bookkeeping more than made up for the tax.

In perspective it's odd that neither hours nor wages were mentioned in the brief interview, but they weren't in those pre-war days when young people trusted the wisdom and fairness of adults, and adults were all confident that they and their cohorts were arbiters and dispensers of justice. In fact, I worked with Shorty until 7:00 p.m. and was told to come in at noon on Sunday, and then after I got home and washed, I commented to my mother that I wondered how much I would make. She replied that I could be sure that Shorty was fair, perhaps even generous.

I learned the routine, the hours, and the requisite skills very quickly: I worked all day Saturday, from eight a.m. to 7:00 p.m. eating sandwiches when I could; Sunday from noon to six when I closed up I was alone, while Shorty took his wife for a Sunday ride, and then each day during the week after school from 3:30 to 7:00, while Shorty went to supper, I worked alone, except on Mondays when I worked alone until nine and closed the station, while Shorty went to Legion meetings.

The first Monday afternoon, Shorty, wearing a smile and a new badge, produced a similar badge and pinned it on my jacket with all the aplomb of one conferring the Congressional Medal of Honor. It was headed by a large Gulf orange disc with my name in black inside a plastic shield. Then hanging below was a plastic ribbon, emblazoned with "Ask About Our Spring Service Special." Of course, I never learned what the Spring Service Special was, and nobody every asked, but I still have the badge somewhere, my only souvenir of Shorty's, except, for many years, until the rise of self-service stations, the confidence that I had a second profession to fall back on.

The routine of the station—tending pumps, especially—was my responsibility, as well as occasionally greasing and changing oil. The repairs—and every gas station was also a repair shop then—were Shorty's responsibility, although occasionally, as when he dumped the transmission on my chest, he called to lend him a hand.

As my father had predicted, I did learn a lot from Shorty and at Shorty's, but not all of it was useful or at least not useful in polite or mixed company. Virtually no man and a few women would pull into the station without coming in, ostensibly to pay or to charge, but really to talk, to bask in Shorty's smile and gracious words, occasionally to buy a pop, a candy bar, or a pack of certain items kept in a cigar box in the candy counter, items that we euphemistically called rubbers. The money for these items went into a saucer in the case, from which Shorty often took a handful, I suspect to play the slot machines at the Legion.

We—and I—were rarely alone in the station, not only because of the club-like atmosphere of the place, but because, on Monday evenings and Sunday afternoons my friends took to dropping in, to drink a pop, eat a candy bar, or on one spectacular Sunday afternoon indulge in an equally spectacular battle with oil guns that left us, the station, and an inadvertent male customer dripping with oil. I cleaned it up the best I could after they left, but I fully expected to be fired. But when I came in the next day Shorty complimented me on my initiative. The place hadn't been so clean in years, he told me, and he later told my dad. It

was a surprise to my father; for years he had been convinced that I was hopelessly lazy.

The station was never dull; often Shorty treated me to a burst of his profane eloquence concerning a customer's character after he left; when a group of customers or drop-ins gathered in what we called the office the stories were loud, the bragging intense, the smoke pervasive, Shorty's smile presiding over all. On one memorable occasion the topic under debate was typically male, typically gas station, typically steeltown in the 1930s: who could—euphemistically—urinate the farthest. One gray little man, silent until then, announced that he could piss over a boxcar. After expressions of disbelief, a few bets were made, and the group adjourned across Broadway to the B & O yards, leaving me in charge of the station. I never did learn what actually happened, but when Shorty returned alone, he shook his head and muttered, "Well, I'll be a son of a bitch."

My work week from the beginning added up to at least 36 hours, and the first week, including two Saturdays, was considerably more. As Saturday came I anticipated my first payday; I hoped for at least ten dollars. Consequently, at seven that night when Shorty called me aside, told me he had something for me, and reached into his pocket I was almost excited. He pulled out his hand and handed me some currency. I thanked him, but I was afraid to look. I turned away and stole a glance: two one-dollar bills. I was stunned all the way home. My mother consoled me, telling me that undoubtedly I would get more when I learned the business. I refrained from replying that the only things left to learn were things she'd rather not have me know. But each Saturday at seven he handed me two greasy one-dollar bills until the day I quit going in and didn't bother with the last two dollars or what fraction thereof I had earned.

By the end of the first week I was already a reasonably competent gas station attendant, grease rack operator, and general handyman around the station, and I had already begun to learn some of the things I knew my mother would rather not have me know. One such thing was Shorty's special service for attractive women, particularly for the two daughters, both in their early twenties, of the Lutheran minister across the street and with both of whom I was madly if secretly in love. When one such pulled into the station Shorty always snatched up a whisk broom and smilingly beat me out the door. Then, after his greeting, while he motioned to me to pump the gas, he opened the front door for his special service: brushing out the front floor under her feet with his whisk broom. Invariably he smiled in self-satisfaction as she pulled away. Once he offered to let me try it and see what I could see, but I guess I was lacking in curiosity or nerve.

Shorty had once vice that he practiced almost incessantly: several times a day he helped himself to two aspirin tablets and a bottle of RC Cola. Because popular adolescent folklore insisted that this was a sure way to a cheap jag, I watched carefully and even tried it one night when I was alone in the station. However, as far as I would see, there was no appreciable difference in his behavior or mine, but none of my friends would accept objective observation and experimentation over superstition. Perhaps somewhere the myth still endures.

Shorty never missed an opportunity either for such prurient research with his whisk boom or for making a buck. He special oil rack was a case in point. Motor oil, whether in cans or bottles, is thick, and it doesn't flow quickly into engine blocks but has a tendency to stick to the sides of containers. With a little quick sleight of hand, considerably more than normal will still be in the container when it is removed, ostensibly empty. Shorty's rack, out of sight in the back of the station, was a device for draining the cans, which, if properly handled in Shorty's terms, produced a good deal of drainage, which Shorty then sold as bulk oil by the quart. Somehow no matter how often Shorty showed me, I could never match his deftness.

I leaned, too, about creative bookkeeping and the method behind Shorty's apparent casual and courteous carelessness. Each sheet of charges was never complete until the lights in front were off and the pumps read. Invariably when he added up the amount of gas sold by charge and the amount in the till there was a discrepancy, either real or imagined, and on the charge sheet Shorty apportioned the difference to those who had been in or sometimes those who hadn't. And then, with a smile, perhaps with an assumption of imaginary taxes, Shorty would present the amount, and no one, at least in my hearing, ever questioned or protested.

The evening I knew that I would work at Shorty's no more, two friends stopped in, and I confided the fact that I was through. Both responded typically. One helped himself to a bottle of pop and a candy bar without even the suggestion of payment; the other reached in the cigar box in the candy counter, pulled out a packet of rubbers and used the pin of my Spring Service Special badge to poke a hole in the end of each before carefully replacing them. Two months later, when pumping Ethyl was fading from my memory, I heard that a young man customer who drove a much-envied Model A. Roadster had unexpectedly announced his recent elopement.

In an enterprise like Shorty's, in the late Depression in a town full of unemployed young men, either resident or passing through and the railroad and a hobo jungle a few blocks away— in 1954 Saul Bellow was to have Augie March pass through Lorain on a freight train in the mid 1930s and spend the night in the same jungle—holdups were perennial threats, and from the beginning Shorty gave me strict instructions. Although he had no insurance, I—or he— was to hand over anything the robber wanted at once. There was no place, he made clear, for heroics, and, although I knew that I was by nature a hero, I agreed.

And then there was the night that it came. It was a rainy Monday night, and business was non-existent. I worked at a Plain Dealer crossword puzzle that was beyond me, and suddenly a strange man about thirty, needing a shave, came in. I knew this was it, but he said almost nothing. I tried to make conversation about my current hero, Bob Feller, but he didn't respond. I knew he was working up his nerve, and I wondered what it would be—a gun, a knife, or a blackjack—and I toyed with the idea of offering him the till before he could ask. Frankly, I was scared to death, and he wouldn't look directly at me.

And then the door opened again, and a big black man, a regular customer, came in. He lived over on Elyria Avenue, near where Toni Morrison, then Chloe Wofford, was growing up, although neither of us was aware of her. Immediately he sized up the situation, walked over, and glared at the stranger. Almost immediately the stranger blurted out "Well, I gotta go." It was the once in my life when I felt total relief and profound gratitude.

Shorty was a sad little man in a sad time, perpetually at war, although they didn't suspect it, with the customers whom he hated, although they didn't suspect that either. He wore his nickname proudly, seeing it as a mark of affection. But it was a sad time in a sad town, with much of the productive capacity of the steel mill, the shipyard, the stove works, and the shovel company unused, and even with war on the horizon there was little hope that things would improve. Shorty's only pleasures were Monday nights at the Legion—he was in his element telling war stories—and those moments when he used the whisk broom and stole peeks at what was forever denied him.

But Shorty was also a con man, and as I began to share my experience with my father, my grandfather, my uncles, at first they disbelieved and then they noticed things. After I simply quit going in, gradually they began to trade elsewhere; now the station, long abandoned, stands empty in a declining neighborhood, perhaps haunted by Shorty, his whisk broom, and his ghost.

One footnote remains; the symbolism of my title, based on the bawdy adolescent humor which I found distasteful as a boy, and am not quite comfortable with even yet. Ethel was a not-uncommon girl's or woman's name in the thirties—witness Ethel Barrymore, Ethel Merman, and others. And the adolescent male who worked in a gas station was consequently pumping Ethyl, and regular, too. I knew no Ethels; today Ethyl has disappeared from the pumps, Ethel is no longer a popular name, and adolescent boys no longer work in gas stations, either in Plains, Georgia, or Lorain, Ohio. I suspect that the adolescent attempt at ribald humor is as far from the popular consciousness today as all three of the phenomena from which it was derived; of the three, I regret only the passing of the last.

Michigan State University

WALT WHITMAN, SECULAR MYSTIC

Louis J. Cantoni

Behind the physical and the materialistic in Leaves of Grass is a unique expression of mysticism. Walt Whitman's Leaves is not so much a chant of America's growth in wealth and power as it is the cry of a mystic who delved into the significance of our relationships with others rather than the mystery of the university Godhead. Whitman saw with prophetic vision that technological advances alone would not satisfy the people of America. He knew a century and a half ago that the nation's great challenge was the complete realization by all Americans of the inherent dignity of the human person.

The mystic endeavor may be defined as the attempt of the human individual to arrive at an ultimate reality which is regarded as ineffable, and which can be known only through the ecstasy of actual communion with the Highest or the Real. Whitman believes that nature and people's lives find their unity in friendship, in love. While Thomas à Kempis desired personal absorption into God through meditation upon the mystery of the Holy Trinity, Whitman desired spiritual union with others through an intuitive knowledge of the workings of nature and of our hearts and minds. This yearning for unity among all objects in creation by means of human love constitutes Whitman's secular mysticism.

Mysticism has its special language and mechanisms, and they pervade the Leaves. Again and again Whitman, speaking in symbolic terms, explains how we come to understand nature. And in example after example he demonstrates his ability to achieve spiritual oneness with other individuals. In "There Was a Child Went Forth" Whitman suffers the agonies of a human martyr-slave much as the traditional Christian mystic experienced the woes of a divine Savior-Christ.

Whitman's poetry is an attempt to grasp a life and a universe which, for him, were loaded with philosophic implications. In his poem, "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances," Whitman begins by questioning human hopes and desires, and he wonders whether we can distinguish between apparition and reality. The thought of love and friendship finally puts his mind at rest, and he feels that he has arrived at something real, "the impalpable the sense that words and reason hold not."

It is Whitman's unshakable conviction that this life can be heaven on earth. To the extent that individuals recognize each other as kindred spirits, they take on attributes of the divine. A rare sensitivity enables like-minded souls to feel that mutual attraction which, conceivably, might distinguish all human encounters. "Among the Multitude" is a statement of the revelatory nature of human meetings and associations.

Whitman maintains that we discover and actualize our greatest values—knowledge, happiness—through other persons. But it is a mistake to postpone the satisfaction of human needs and longings to an indeterminate, and, supposedly, more propitious future. Rather, such satisfaction ought to be searched for and found in the immediacy and vividness of day-to-day experience. He expresses his point of view on the matter in "A Song for Occupations."

Like his poetry, Whitman's prose reveals a mystic whose gaze is turned toward the mounting demands of a scientific age. Thus, in Democratic Vistas, Whitman foresaw what is tantamount to the inheritance of the earth and all that is in it by people living in an industrial society. He foresaw, too, that an abundance of conveniences would not satisfy the human spirit.

American democracy has wrought the miraculous in gaining widespread economic well-being. Since World War II, however, the nation has become poignantly aware that material wealth is not enough. Today many attempts are being made to impart a sense of genuine dignity to the human individual. Poets, statesmen, philosophers, ministers, educators, and others propose various ways of establishing worthwhile human relationships. Yet in spite of these efforts, it appears that the generality of Americans continue to be more adept at manipulating money and machines than at inspiring mutual confidence and happiness. An all-engrossing concern for tangible goods forestalls the awakening of dormant souls. The fruits of such a concern are wars and rumors of wars, pollution of the environment, labor-management difficulties, stress-ridden lives, crime, juvenile delinquency, broken homes.

Throughout his adult life Whitman wrestled with the problem of encouraging richer and more rewarding human associations. In "The Base of All Metaphysics" he reviews the proposals of impressive philosophic systems, and then, contemplating the lives of Socrates and of Christ, he states his own answer to the problem of a much-needed natural and practicable ethic: caring friends, fulfilling marriages, beloved children, cooperative cities and lands. The clarity and directness of his answer carries that sense of conviction about the Real which has characterized the mystic in all times and in all locales.

Occasionally there arise seers whose mission is one of arousing people's souls to full and various awakening. An appreciation of the fact and the meaning of a Whitman is a revelation of the fact and the power of the natural spiritual in our lives. A quickening to the mystic influences which are present in day-to-day living and which spring out of routine human interactions can help everyone to see what Whitman saw so clearly during the infancy of the nation's technological development. Of real consequence is not what we fashion with our hands, nor what some of us in our ingenuity accomplish through the ingenuity of others. Of real consequence is the dignity that comes from our individuality and from the quality of our relationships with other human beings. It is precisely this insight, stunning in its simplicity and its magnificence, which gives Whitman his great stature and which lends such abiding fragrance to the Leaves of Grass.

Wayne State University Emeritus

EX CATHEDRA, PART III

William Thomas

lxxii

It is never easy to achieve the desired state. That is why one must persist. Even when persistence seems most useless, it may be most gainful.

lxxiii

I believe there is a principle of compensation that governs, though it cannot control, human actions. I believe that in order to attain the most desirable condition an individual must work in harmony with what has been called the moral law (though I fear use of that term invites a more specific interpretation than I choose to give it). I believe one cannot insistently counter this principle and escape consequences inimical to his well-being even though they may not be spectacular. On the other hand, I do not think more adherence to a golden rule of conduct guarantees any reward whatever. Retribution may be either swift and sure or delayed and indirect; good or bad fortune may fall capriciously where it is unexpected or cannot be endured. The individual is forced back to the eternal as if; to act as if his purposes might be achieved by his effort. To do so is no assurance of success; to refrain from doing so is certainly to fail.

lxxiv

Two courses are open to youth, the first certain of modicum of success, the second most likely to come to nothing. A young man may do the best he can where he is with what he has; or he may put all his effort toward reaching an invisible and indefinable goal. Anyone can do the first; few are capable of the sacrifices required by the second.

He who chooses the first course should begin to plan his life as soon as he conceives the possibility of acting according to a plan. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." He should go to college at college age, have the doctorate no later than age forty, preferably much earlier, and somehow by then have got something substantial published. He should get his whoring done in youth (too chaste an adolescence, says Gide Journals, III 39, makes for a dissolute old age), find a congenial mate, and achieve emotional stability in his thirties. I say these things with conviction, having made none but the first step, that unplanned and primarily as flight.

lxxv

To a young man who aspires to be a writer: Choice of the first course will get you everything but what you want most. It will divert you from the truly important things in your life, and you will have to be an extraordinary man possessed of extraordinary powers of concentration and efficiency if you save yourself from being diverted. Choice of the second course dooms you to the perpetual giving-up of satisfactions other people value and whose worth is undeniable. This without the slightest assurance (or even probability) that the course you have chosen will eventually secure you those satisfactions. You will never have enough ready money to free yourself from petty annoyances of living. You will have to cadge off people, you will have to submit to many indignities. The likelihood that you will find a woman willing to share the life you have made is so small that you must renounce marriage before opportunity presents itself. Being a writer, you are naturally, like Faustus, "wanton and lascivious", and cannot live without a women (or, at best, can endure celibacy only with extreme perturbation). You will, therefore, fritter away time and energy—"waste uncounted priceless hours"—that in ideal circumstances would be applied to the main chance "chasing what ought to have been brought to the back door with the milk". (The words of Aleister Crowley, quoted by Daniel P. Mannix in "The Great Beast", True, October 1956.)

Either being deprived of sexual gratification or engaging in the hectic pursuit of cunt will keep you from doing your best as a writer. Assuming your persistence is great enough to enlist the law of averages in your favor, your success will still depend on luck. If you succeed, it is likely you will be too old for success to do you any real good. If not embittered, you will be heartsick from hope deferred and will no longer care much what happens.

Either way, you can't win.

lxxvi

Zen Buddhism. It appears to be alone among cults in repudiating the essence of cultism, which is the seeking an infallible guide to conduct, a perfect rationale of action. But none demonstrates futility more than another, when man's plight is ever greater, since what has been thought of as immutable law seems in abeyance, and the nuclear physicists shudder with fright at finding themselves in a Dèli-esque world of fantasy and paradox.

lxxvii

The book before me was written by a man who experienced a severe heart attack and was laid low for a year. It is a reaffirmation of the eternal platitudes, in a style as distinguished as that of the Sunday newspaper. Its author has written successful fiction, and implies that he has recovered the good life on his Kentucky

farm, enforced leisure having given it savor. But there seems something foolish about all this, because of what he has omitted to say. The good life—and, correlatively, good writing—is not to be achieved by a course of action (or inaction) that ignores man's moral dilemma. One might assert that there is no way of achieving it open to 20th-century man. He must make do with such individual amenities as he can manage in a life necessarily directed by expediency, in a world where principles, so far as they obtain, are expedient.

Ixxviii

Man's moral dilemma, as I conceive it, is how to arrive at principles that function as bases for action when he is confronted by forces of evil that are literally denials of humanity and by the possibility of extinction—extinction of countless individual lives and of the fruits of man's endeavors over centuries of time. In comparison, the dilemmas of previous ages seem as childish as the debates of medieval schoolmen.

Ixxix

Notes for a conversation: The foremost necessity is to determine (a) what one wants; (b) whether attainment of it is possible; (c) how it can be attained. It is unlikely that (a) can properly be regarded as a primary objective. The primary objective almost certainly must be (c), the condition under which (a), assuming an affirmative answer to (b), can be made reality.

(a) may be love (to love and be loved). It may be success in a good sense (recognition by one's peers of his achievement, and corresponding monetary rewards to accrue). These two ends take precedence over all others, and in comparison others are negligible.

Love, however rewarding it may be, cannot be considered by itself. It does not come into existence by an act of volition, and is not to be striven for. It has its own essence and must be allowed to create its own existence, and it flourishes only when accompanied by success. Reciprocally, the optimum condition for success to thrive in is one where love is present.

Only success, then, can be identified as (a). Success must now be redefined as recognition of achievement in doing what one wishes to do. Achievement can nohow come out of activity that partakes of task work, or is opposed to the promptings of one's nature. The condition necessary to attaining success is leisure (Gide's "an unpreoccupied mind" *Journals*, III 307).

Leisure—or, literally, freedom from a job—is demonstrated to be the primary objective. It is not to be assumed, however, that realization of (c) naturally leads to (a), or is ipso facto likely to do so. An affirmative answer to (b) is at most a statement of fact, containing within itself another set of conditions that one may or may not be able to fulfill. Without strong evidence of capacity of some events to indicate likelihood of fulfillment, it is questionable whether he may wisely put

himself into (c) even at a high level in order to renew and sustain the effort toward (a).

To arrive at a decision requires statement of the negative aspects of the problem: (1) The condition of (c), which I have called leisure, does not entail release from physical exertion but contrariwise imposes greater demands of this sort. (2) When one is past the point of no return, a change of direction obviates the possibility of reconsideration.

To offset much negative aspects are these facts: (1) The physical exactions can be controlled as well in one situation as in another and therefore have no bearing (2) No other direction gives true satisfaction, and one's output of writing during his years of pain employment is negligible in comparison to the quantity producible when there are no major demands on his time.

Next in order are certain positive aspects: (1) External circumstances inimical to earlier efforts no longer exist. (2) Love is potentially a greater reality than ever before, and the sharing of interests is potentially unlimited.

Counter to these positive aspects are: (1) One's financial resources, relatively greater, are in an absolute sense diminished. The great practical problem of securing sufficient income still exists, and no solution to it can be discerned. (2) One who has been unstable in marriage cannot trust himself to be stable.

The only answer to be arrived at to (1) immediately preceding is that for the sake of income a man must continue to hold a job, despite the unproductiveness it enforces, possibly to retirement age. An answer to (2) is not forthcoming.

Late Ohio State University/Marion
Emeritus

Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature
News Item

Dorys Crow Grover, Professor Emerita, Texas A&M U-Commerce, published a poem, "Meadowlark Over Tututilla," in E. P. Spofford: An Anthology in Memoriam (1835-1921). ed. M. Myers. Bristol, IN: Bristol Banner Books, 1996: 63.

Dr. Grover presented a paper titled "Satanta, or White Bear," in Session A: The American Peoples—Old Timers and Newcomers, at the American Studies Association of Texas at the annual meeting at East Texas Baptist U, Marshall, TX. She also chaired Session III, a panel discussion "Defining Moments in the History of ASAT," which Professor Richard Tuerk, Texas A&M U-Commerce, organized as a councilor of ASAT, and member of the Standing Committee on Regional Chapters of the National American Studies Association.

In October she chaired Session 2B: The Turn of the Century Western at the Western Literature Association meeting in Lincoln, NE.

Dr. Grover writes a column for her hometown newspaper The Pendleton Record, Pendleton, Oregon, titled "Literary Notes," and recent columns have appeared on Texas writers Ben Capps, John Graves, and Elmer Kelton.