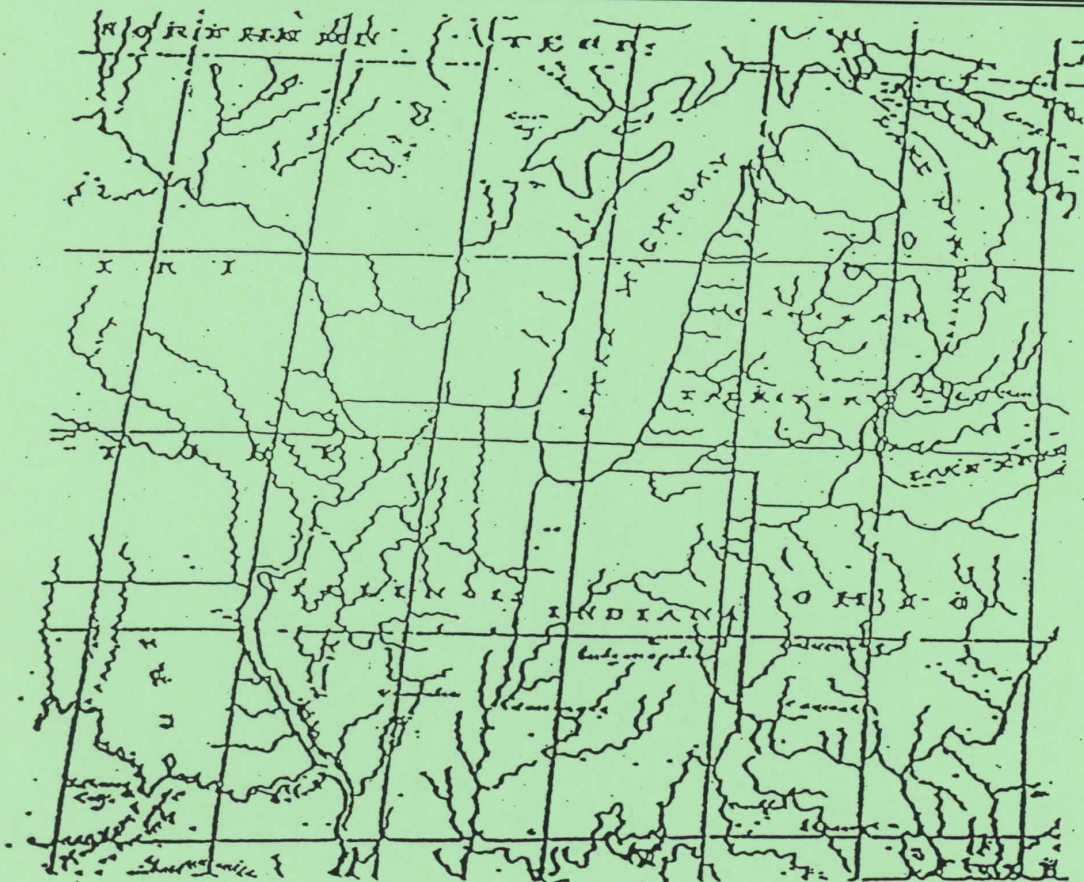


SSML NEWSLETTER



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Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Newsletter

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CONTENTS

Members Notes.....	1
New Notes	
The Annual Conference.....	2
William H. Gass Honored.....	4
Louis Bromfield in Video.....	5
Eighty Gifts for Gwendolyn Brooks.....	6
Country School Days.....	7
William Thomas	
Can Ohio and the Midwest Claim Ambrose Bierce?.....	12
David D. Anderson	
Billboard.....	16

Members Notes

Arthur and Julis Shumaker celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in Greencastle, Indiana, on June 22, 1997. They were honored at a reception in Julia's sorority house at DePauw University.

Dorys Crow Grover, Texas A & M at Commerce Emerita, has published The Valley of the Tutuilla, and other Lines, a collection of poems.

Marcia Noe, University of Tennessee/Chattanooga, appeared on Jeopardy! on January 15. She will be one of 400 contestants in the coming season.

Dave Anderson participated in two commemorations of the centennial of William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech. On June 17, 1996, he lectured at the Miller Center, University of Virginia, on "William Jennings Bryan: the Voice and Hope of the People," and he was quoted in a news feature marking the centennial in the Washington Times on July 17, 1996.

Douglas Noverr and Joyce Ladenson, both of Michigan State, are participating in a new series of seminar for freshmen. Doug is offering "Sports and American Society" and Joyce is offering "Women and American Popular Culture." Doug was recently elected President of the national Popular Culture Association.

Jill Gidmark, University of Minnesota, is editing An Encyclopedia of American Literature of the Sea and the Great Lakes.

Ray Lewis White, Illinois State University and recipient of the MidAmerica Award for 1987 has published a major scholarly edition of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, with Ohio University Press.

Robert Beasecker, Grand Valley State University, the Society's bibliographer and recipient of the MidAmerica Award for 1984, is author of Michigan in the Novel, 1816--1926, an annotated bibliography, forthcoming from Wayne State University Press.

News items of interest to the members as well as brief essays, reviews, and memoirs dealing with Midwestern life and letters are always welcome.

News Notes

The Annual Conference

The twenty-seventh annual conference of the Society was held at the Marriott Hotel in East Lansing, Michigan, on May 15-17, 1997. New officers of the Society were announced: Guy Szburla, University of Toledo, President; Leonora Smith, Michigan State University, Vice President and President-Elect; and Tom Page, Wichita Kansas, and Marilyn Atlas, Ohio University, members of the Executive Council.

Especially honored were Paul Miller, Wittenburg University Emeritus, with the MidAmerica Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern Literature and Jon Hassler, novelist, of St. John's University, Minnesota, with the Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern Literature.

About 100 members participated in the conference by reading papers, poems, and short fictions. Dave Anderson notes that he regrets missing the conference but he appreciates the visits, cards, and calls while in the hospital. He plans to attend the 28th and all succeeding conferences.

The Annual Conference Awards

The awards for distinguished presentations at the 1997 conference have recently been announced by the respective committees. They are:

The Midwest Heritage Essay Award

The Prize Essay: "Meridel LeSuer, Engels, and the Agrarian Goddess," by Nora Roberts, Michigan State University

Honorable Mention: "Hardly Flyover Country: A Review of Recent Developments in Midwestern Studies," by Edward Watts, Michigan State University

The Midwest Poetry Prize

The Prize Poem: "Planting Asparagus," by Rod Phillips, Michigan State University

First Honorable Mention: "Body Ash" by Patricia Clark, Grand Valley State University

Second Honorable Mention: "Manifest Destiny," by Jim Goriman, Otterbein College

The Midwest Fiction Prize

The Prize Story: "Songs I'll Not Hear Again," by Jim Gorman, Otterbein College

Honorable Mention: "Road Trip," by Paul Somers, Michigan State University

William H. Gass Honored

When William H. Gass of Washington University, St. Louis, was awarded the Mark Twain Award for 1994 for distinguished contributions to Midwestern Literature, the Society not only recognized his contributions that define the Midwestern experience in such works as "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country" (collected with other stories, 1968), Omensetter's Luck (1966), Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife (1967) and most recently the magnificent The Tunnel (1995) as well as an array of criticism and comment on the art and craft of writing, but it recognized too a Midwestern writer whose future would remain both remarkable and productive.

Perhaps the Society's recognition foreshadowed the recent announcement that Gass has been awarded the Lannan Literary Award for 1997 for lifetime literary achievement, presented by the Lannan Foundation. The award, with a richly-deserved \$100,000 prize accompanying it, recognizes Gass's remarkable body of works at the same time that his recent collection of criticism, Finding a Form, has been published by Cornell University Press, which has also reissued an earlier collection, Habitations of the Work (1985). Also, Omensetter's Luck has been re-issued by Penguin.

William Gass came out of Fargo, North Dakota, to enrich the literary heritage of the Midwest even as he has contributed substantially to an ultimate definition of the region's people and their experience as well as their literature. The Society is pleased and proud that the Lannan Foundation has honored him and his work, and we offer him our sincere congratulations.

David D. Anderson

Louis Bromfield in Video

A century after Louis Bromfield's birth on December 27, 1896, and forty years after his death on March 18, 1956, his life and his two careers as a successful novelist and as a practical farmer-ecologist are the subject of two video films currently under production by Ohio State University Television, WOSU-TV.

The first, a video biography produced and directed by Brent Greene of WOSU-TV, is concentrating on Bromfield's life, literary career, and personal, literary, and agricultural philosophies, and on the remarkable philosophical unity beyond the apparent diversity of his complex life. Photographed largely at Bromfield's Malabar Farm, now an Ohio State Park, a working farm, and a memorial to Bromfield, it includes interviews with those who knew Bromfield, including his daughters Ellen Bromfield Geld, author of The Heritage, and Hope Bromfield; his former farm manager and others who worked with him, and David D. Anderson, Bromfield biographer. It will be televised by Channel 34, WOSU, in February, and it will be televised nationally on PBS at a later date.

The second film, tentatively titled "The View From Malabar," is being produced by Robert W. Greene, Professor Emeritus of cinema and photography at OSU and Geoffrey Holland of Cognizant Films Ltds. of California, will focus upon Bromfield's accomplishments as a conservationist, tying in with farmland preservation movements in Ohio and elsewhere. It will be finished early next year.

David D. Anderson

Eighty Gifts for Gwendolyn Brooks

Gwendolyn Brooks, recipient of the Society's Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature in 1985, and of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1950, Poet Laureate of Illinois, Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, founder of the Society's annual awards for the best poem, essay, and story read at the annual conference, was honored by the City of Chicago and the active Chicago arts scene on her eightieth birthday, June 7, 1997.

The observance, "Eighty Gifts: A Celebration of the 80th Birthday of Gwendolyn Brooks," was held at the Harold Washington Library Center. More than eighty poets and performers gave presentations, as did the Alyo Children's Dance Theatre, the Chocolate Chips Theatre Company, Street Sounds, and many more. The celebration was sponsored by the City of Chicago, the Department of Cultural Affairs, and the Chicago Public Library.

David D. Anderson

COUNTRY SCHOOL DAYS

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 andy over or one old 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 sling shot—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 could 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 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 no job for an amateur. As we were all amateurs, we never really made anything. Sling shots, 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 happened 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 pond, 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 was 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 shot; 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 than 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 sweater, knee pants, cotton stockings, and cotton undershirts and drawers, was conventional rather than 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 to the girl he liked 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 all knew what was coming. It was a spelling-bee. 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", "ecstasy", "resuscitate", "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 young 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' generations); 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 weeds. But in 1917 most teachers went on teaching.

It was that 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, circulated a petition to maintain its existing status and obtained enough signatures to overrule 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.

Late Ohio State University/Marion

CAN OHIO AND THE MIDWEST CLAIM AMBROSE BIERCE?*

David D. Anderson

So controversial was Ambrose Bierce in his own lifetime and after—that is, unless in some obscure spot in rural northern Mexico he still lives—that a good many of his critics would suggest that the above question should be phrased, "Why should Ohio claim Ambrose Bierce?" or perhaps "Why should the Midwest?" or "Why, indeed, should anyone claim him?"

Following four years of combat service in the Civil War, Bierce's literary career began in San Francisco. It was contemporary with those of Joaquin Miller, Bret Harte, and Mark Twain and extended to that of Jack London more than a generation later. That period, the last third of the nineteenth century, has rightly if tritely been called the "Golden Age" of California literature, and for his part in it, particularly for his *Devil's Dictionary*, Bierce has most commonly been called "Bitter Bierce." He has also been called "God Almighty" Bierce, "The Wickedest Man in San Francisco," and other terms more abusive and less printable, even in the San Francisco of his day.

Like a good many others of his time and background, Bierce had come to San Francisco as a result of a combination of post-Civil War restlessness and the national search for destiny and fortune in the West. The San Francisco in which he accidentally found himself at loose ends in 1867 was a wealthy city that had lost many but not all of the rough edges of the Gold Rush and had begun a search for a culture and a tradition. Still it had not yet suffered the tempering influences of earthquake and fire, or of the United States Army's clean-up campaign during World War I.

Unknown on his arrival, with no suggestion in his background of any ambition for a literary career or even of literary talent, Bierce found a job as watchman at the United States Mint. During the next several months he apparently read *The Californian*, *The Golden Era*, and *The News-Letter and California Advertiser*—all culturally conscious journals that sought and found the talents of Joaquin Miller, Mark Twain, and others. While there is some evidence to suggest that Bierce applied unsuccessfully for an editorial job on *The Golden Era*, his literary career began on September 21, 1867, in *The Californian* with the publication of a solid if unspectacular poem in the romantic tradition of Keats and Coleridge. This poem, called "Basilica," was followed on November 18 by another called "A Mystery," a near-Gothic portrayal of life in terms of struggle and frustration.

* Because this essay raises questions about literary and regional identity it is reprinted from *Ohioana* 14 (Summer, 1973), 84-88.

From this modest beginning he rose rapidly, publishing essays in *The Californian* and *The Golden Era*, and joining the staff of the *News-Letter*, probably in the summer of 1868. By that time he was firmly established in the burgeoning cultural life of San Francisco, and a short time later he became editor of the *News-Letter*. This journal had been rather ponderous but under Bierce's editorship quickly became a barbed organ for social criticism. From that point, with the exception of three years between 1872 and 1875, during which he spent much of the time in England, he remained for the rest of his active literary life closely associated with San Francisco and the Bay Area. By the early 1890s, he had distinguished himself in the *Examiner* and the *Argonaut*; his books were receiving national attention, and he was as firmly established as the literary arbiter of the West Coast as William Dean Howells was in the Eastern literary establishment.

Why then, if Bierce's relationship to California literature was so clear, should the question of Bierce's literary origins or identity be raised at such a belated time? Perhaps the most obvious answer lies in his subject matter, his attitudes, and his early years in rural Meigs County, Ohio, and Kosciusko County, Indiana, a harsh frontier continuum in the 1840s, the decade of his birth.

As his gothic poetic beginnings suggest, Bierce's subject matter was bizarre, with savagely satirical attacks on such profoundly American institutions as the church and the family. (He once described his family as "unwashed savages," perhaps less humorous but no less descriptive than Lincoln's cousin, Dennis Hanks, who in describing his and Lincoln's youth, said "We lived the same as the Indians, ceptin we took an interest in politics and religion".) Particularly telling in his attacks on institutions was his role in the attack on the new capitalists: "We {have} an unweakened conviction of the rascality of the Railroad Gang, the Water Company the Chronicle newspaper, and the whole saints' —calendar of disreputables, detestables, insupportables, and moral canaille . . ."; on the church: "On Monday, at the Church of St. Iniquity. . ."; on Leland Stanford, "a Political Violet"; on feminists, "Them Loud"; on ignorance, "Hooople County, Indiana." Ultimately, in "When I am Dictator," he proclaimed that his new society would consist of subjects battered into submission. Like Mark Twain, his vision of the human race was something less than ideal: "I love the dead, and their companionship is infinitely agreeable," he wrote.

This was the substance that gave rise to "Bitter" Bierce and "Almighty God" Bierce, a man respected, even loved, but also hated on the West Coast. His reputation was reinforced even while it expanded nationally through the horror and savagery of his short stories. In the best known of them, "An Occurance at Owl Creek Bridge" Bierce snatches reality — sudden, horrible death — from the fantasy of escape, survival, and rich, meaningful love.

Bierce's bitterness and his vision of horror were so sustained during the 30 years of his creative career that his fate — he vanished into Mexico in 1913, while seeking the story of the revolution from its source — was considered poetically inevitable as well as appropriate. But the caustic quality of his vision was so

unchanged, so intense throughout the course of his career that it is evident that its origins can be found in the two most important experiences of his life: his Midwestern origins and his Civil War service.

The mere facts of his background and early years suggest a relationship that is more than casual: He was born on June 24, 1842, the tenth child of an old New England Calvinist family that had joined the early nineteenth century New England migration from Old Connecticut to the Western Reserve in Ohio. His father, Marcus Aurelius Bierce, a proud descendant of William Bradford of Plymouth (Bierce later described genealogy as "An account of one's descent from an ancestor who did not particularly care to trace his own"), settled first in Portage County in the Reserve where he married, fathered nine children, and managed to survive, but little more. When Portage County began to lose its frontier appearance and New England began to be reproduced in fact as well as in spirit, he moved to Meigs County, a generation away from stability and hence full of the frontier opportunity that had eluded him in the Western Reserve. Here four more children, including Ambrose, were born. Marcus Aurelius's younger brother Lucius remained in Portage County, to become wealthy, respected, and a six-times mayor of Akron.

But success eluded Marcus Aurelius Bierce in the six years he spent in Meigs County, just as it was to elude him in Indiana for the rest of his life. Although he was, as Ambrose later wrote, "a man of considerable scholarship" — perhaps the origin of his son's later literary ability — he was destined for the hardships of a frontier farm, and apparently his sons were also. In Ohio and Indiana young Ambrose grew to young manhood in that path, and although the family fortunes improved somewhat in the late 1850s, the evidence suggests that young Ambrose welcomed the Civil War for reasons other than patriotic or altruistic.

During the years between 1842 and 1861 heredity and environment combined to make inevitable Ambrose Bierce's unlikely literary career; and those years and his Civil War service gave it its substance and peculiar vision. Heredity provided him with the temperament and scholarly inclination of his father, certainly out of place on a frontier farm in the woods of Ohio and Indiana, but a major asset in a new community determined to develop a cultural life and atmosphere of its own. Upon this foundation the nature of those formative years and particularly the nature of the Bierce family erected the environmental superstructure. Throughout their odyssey, the Bierce family preserved undiminished the Calvinistic grimness of their New England Congregationalism. Like his contemporary Robert Ingersoll, Ambrose couldn't stand it, particularly when that deterministic faith insisted upon acceptance of the hard work and humiliation of a life of failure. His formal education was virtually non-existent, but his reading, writing, and psychological education were not neglected at home. In later years, when Ambrose Bierce emerged as "Almighty God" Bierce, his alter ego was a curiously pronounced perversion of the God of John Calvin.

By April, 1861, when Ambrose enlisted in the Ninth Regiment of Indiana Volunteers, a 90-day regiment raised in response to Lincoln's first call for

volunteers, the course of his literary career had already been determined. The later three-year regiment that succeeded the 90-day regiment provided Bierce with a military education, friendships, and the promise of a military career that fortunately did not materialize. When mustered out as a lieutenant—later raised by brevet to a major—he found peace intolerable, the path to the West attractive, demanding, and adventurous, and his arrival in San Francisco fortuitous. In his short career at the San Francisco Mint, his fellows remembered him as controversial, argumentative, and irreverent—an iconoclast whose targets were legion. The meeting with a literary market was as inevitable as the movement westward, which had begun for him in Ohio, but the forces that made him had their origins in Puritan New England and even before that in the low-church Puritanism across the Atlantic.

Does Ambrose Bierce's brief sojourn in Ohio and Indiana make him a Buckeye or a Hoosier, a part of the literary as well as the social history of the Midwest? Or must he be surrendered to California literary history because he found his voice there? In temperament, in philosophy, in subject matter, he is most assuredly more closely related to the rural iconoclasm, the small-town freethinking tradition that gave a multitude of Midwesterners, ranging from Robert Ingersoll to John Peter Altgeld, from Clarence Darrow to Mark Twain, from Theodore Dreiser to Sinclair Lewis, to the world. Like them, the place of success for him was less important than the forces that made it inevitable. And for all of them the harshness and the dynamism of the Midwest in the nineteenth century were the sources of those forces. Like the others, Ambrose Bierce remained a Midwesterner psychologically long after he ceased to be one in fact; the place of his origin can claim him more legitimately than any place else.

Michigan State University

THE BILLBOARD

September 22, 1997

Dear Colleagues,

I enclose information about the next conference of the Michigan College English Association in September of 1998. I hope that you will consider joining this group and/or giving a paper at the conference. The conference themes are broad enough to fit many of your essays and projects.

If I can answer any questions that you have, please drop me a note or phone me (work 616 749-7694 or home 616 323-2014).

Best wishes!

Janet Heller
Adjunct at Olivet College

SHERWOOD ANDERSON AND OTHER FAMOUS CREOLES



WILLIAM SPRATLING AND WILLIAM FAULKNER

September 1997

MCEA Proposals

**College
English:
Changing
Conditions,
Contexts and
Canons**

**September
25-26, 1998
St. Clair
County
Community
College**



**Featuring
Trip to Stratford**

Theme

Lester Faigley, near the end of his 1996 address to the CCCC's concludes: "The overriding question facing us as a professional organization is: What do you do when the tide seems to be against you? I don't think there is any big answer but there are some little ones. You have to look outward. You have to be smarter and more aware. You have to look for opportunities to inform people about what you do. You have to practice what you preach and engage in public discourse. You have to form alliances. You have to be more tolerant of your friends and look for common ground. You have to organize." Despite constraining budgets and diminishing time, MCEA continues—as a conference, yes, but

most importantly, as a stalwart group of talented faculty and professionals who genuinely care about one another. What keeps us interested and engaged with what we do in the face of current conditions and challenges? What tenets are we willing to fight for? What values have clouded in recent times? Where do we go from here?

Participants are encouraged to reflect on how their teaching, research, and other responsibilities have been informed by changes in the discipline and how they have sought to influence change or reinforce traditions they find valuable to the academy.

Proposals for sessions may address and are not limited to:

literature and composition
electronic media
cultural studies
gender studies
ESL
Popular culture
diversity issues
global studies
technical writing
children's literature
creative writing
basic writing
departmental politics and practices
service learning
film studies
assessment
learning communities and collaboration

Please direct proposals to:

Suzanne Moore, English Department

DEADLINE APRIL 15, 1998

323 Erie St. Port Huron, MI 48060-5015

Proposal Form
1998 MCEA Conference
College English: Changing Conditions, Contexts and Canons

Please respond to the following questions and attach a brief summary or abstract for your proposed session to this sheet. Mail to:

*Suzanne Moore, MCEA Program
English Department
St. Clair County Community College
323 Erie St.
Port Huron, MI 48060-5015 (810) 989-5590 office (810) 984-4730 fax
smoore@stclair.cc.mi.us*

Name and Address:

Equipment needed (AV etc.)

Proposed title of session:

Are you interested in a twenty minute presentation/paper, or would you like a full session?

Please list how you would like your name, title and institution to appear in the program:

Please list any other concerns such as scheduling.

Can you list someone else who might like to receive information about the conference?

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTORS

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE SEA AND THE GREAT LAKES

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*For a list of entries, contributor guidelines, sample entries,
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**The Center for Western European Studies at
Kalamazoo College**

**Will be presenting a
Conference on**

Friday and Saturday, May 1 and 2, 1998

entitled

**"FROZEN IN TIME? AMERICAN COMMUNITIES
AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICAN
IMAGES OF EUROPE"**

The keynote speaker will be Professor Kathleen Conzen from the Department of History, University of Chicago. This conference will begin on Friday afternoon and continue until 1 PM on Saturday.

For more information, please contact Janet Riley, Outreach Coordinator, at the Center for Western European Studies, Kalamazoo College.

Phone: 616 337 7329

Fax: 616 337 7251

e-mail: cfwes@kzoo.edu

All-Points Bulletin

SEEKING SHERLOCK'S SISTERS

Issues in Feminist History-Mystery

Query as soon as possible
for collection of essays on strategies
for writing women into history
through detective fiction.

* * * *

For 1998 MLA conference in San Francisco:

please submit papers or developed proposals
featuring contemporary constructions of female sleuths
in historical settings by March 10th, 1998,
including e-mail address and telephone.



Jo Ellyn Clarey
326 Norwood SE
Grand Rapids MI 49506-1717
(% francior@gvsu.edu)

POPULAR JAMES

Submissions are invited for a Fall 1998 *Henry James Review* Forum on "Popular James." Henry James was a writer who read widely in popular literature, and who tried (and failed) to be a best-selling author. James, who appeared often in the popular press during his lifetime, now seems pervasive as an influence on late twentieth-century writing, a source for film and television screenplays, and even as a character in postmodern fiction. Contributions to "Popular James" may address any aspect of the topic, including: James's presence in popular culture, popular depictions of James, marketing of James's work, movie and television adaptations of James's fiction, popular influences on James's life and writing, James's influence on popular fiction, reading and reception of James's work, shifts in the James canon, appearances of Henry James and his family in postmodern literature and film, James's attempts to write for a popular audience, history of James's popularity (and unpopularity).

HJR forums provide a flexible space for critical conversation about a specific topic and allow for shorter, less formal contributions. One-page proposals or short papers (10-12 pp.) should be sent by March 1, 1998 to Susan M. Griffin, Editor, *The Henry James Review*, Department of English, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 40292. E-mail: HJAMESR@ULKYVM.LOUISVILLE.EDU

MIDWEST MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL CONVENTION
November 5-7, 1998
St. Louis, Missouri

CALL FOR PAPERS

Resituating Regionalism

SECTION: American Literature II: Literature After 1870

This session engages the current moves in literary theory which reconsider space as an analytic category and rekindle debates on the politics of location.

Questions to consider include the following:

How does reconceptualizing narration by way of topology rather than chronology change the way we read and interpret literary works? What complicities exist between plot, space, and characters? How does a focus on regionalism (in both literary works and theory) answer postmodernist critiques of rootedness? In what ways does Bioregionalism challenge the usefulness of larger regional &/or national identifications?

1-2 page abstracts due by March 15, 1997

Please send to: Lisa Fry
English Department
Loyola University of Chicago
6525 North Sheridan Road
Chicago, IL 60626
e-mail: lfry@orion.it.luc.edu

Announcement and Call for Papers and Creative Submissions

Midwest Christianity and Literature Conference

April 17-18, 1998

Taylor University
Upland, Indiana 46989-1001

In the Beginning Was the Word...

Manuscripts (20 minute reading time) should develop various interpretations of this theme. Possible applications include

*Authors' attitudes towards and engagement with language

*Experimentation with language

*Textual variations among races, ethnicities, classes, and genders

*Incarnational views of literature

We especially welcome submissions with interdisciplinary applications (communication arts, religion) or those which focus on a particular Christian author.

We will also sponsor a poetry competition. Denise Levertov will identify the top three selections and winners will read their entries at the conference.

An entry fee of \$2 per poem should accompany submissions.

Keynote Speaker: Denise Levertov

Abstracts or completed papers should be sent by December 10 to

English Department, Taylor University
500 W. Reade Ave., Upland, IN 46989-1001
(765) 998-5141 (English Dept.)

Papers to Colleen Warren: (765) 998-5250 (clwarren@tayloru.edu)
Creative submissions to Rick Hill: (765) 9998-4971 (rchill@tayloru.edu)

Call for Papers

M/MLA 1998 St. Louis

Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment

Topic: *Spoken Hungers: Exploring Erotics of Place in
Environmental Literature*

This session will explore and critique recent theories of desire that celebrate an "erotics of place." Examining environmental texts, the session will ponder the following questions: How does one define an erotics of place? How does gender enrich or complicate such an erotics? Is eroticizing nature a form of anthropocentrism? How are loss, death, and destruction figured in such an erotics? Send queries and/or two page abstracts to: Dr. Susan Naramore Maher, Dept. of English, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE 68182-0175 (maher@cwis.unomaha.edu)

Position Announcement

Assistant Professor of English/Tenure-Track Faculty Position at Raymond Walters College of the University of Cincinnati. We are seeking a candidate to teach composition and introductory literature courses beginning Fall quarter, 1998. Preference may be given to candidates who possess experience in teaching developmental writing or ESL students. Ph.D. preferred; ABD considered. Application should include a cover letter, evidence of prior teaching experience, vita, and three letters of recommendation. Review of applications will begin Feb. 15, 1998 and continue until the position is filled. Raymond Walters College is a two-year, open access branch campus of the University of Cincinnati. Send application materials to:

Philip Luther

Professor of English

Chair, Department of English

Raymond Walters College

University of Cincinnati

9555 Plainfield Road

Cincinnati, Ohio 45236

The University of Cincinnati is an equal opportunity affirmative action employer.

Midwest Modern Language Association
40th Annual Convention
November 5-7, 1998
St. Louis, Missouri

CALL FOR PAPERS

Section: Women in Literature

Artists or Ideologues?

Interested Women Writers and the Aesthetics of Literary Propaganda

This session will explore how aesthetic practice informs literary works with a manifest political agenda. Given the cultural and political dislocation of women writers throughout history, what critical use can we make of the dialectic between art and ideology in the study of women's writing? Is "feminist literature" essentially different from "women's literature"? What effect does narrative method have on political intent? And how have interested women writers negotiated their way through mainstream debates about the value of the "classic"?

Paper topics may address but are not limited to the following:

utopian literature * Alice Walker * avant garde feminist literature * Marge Piercy
"New Woman" fiction * Jane Martin * Gloria Anzaldúa * feminist aesthetics
Caryl Churchill * gender, politics, and the literary marketplace * Frances Power Cobbe
Rebecca West * Margaret Atwood * suffragette drama and fiction * Bessie Head
socialist fiction * Caroline Norton * the "womanist" tradition in African-American women's writing
Charlotte Perkins Gilman * Olive Schreiner * feminist melodrama as propaganda
canon revision * Elizabeth Robins * literary style in feminist journalism * Ursula Le Guin
Florence Nightingale * women's slave narratives * Mary Astell

1-2 page abstracts due by March 15, 1998

Please send to:

Sherri C. Smith
Department of English
Ballantine 442
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405
e-mail: shcsmith@indiana.edu

Creative Writing Section of M/MLA for 1998 Call for Papers

Spinning Webs or Parlor Tricks: New technologies and creative writing.

The world wide web, the internet, and other new technologies (such as multi-media computers and CD ROMs) have the potential to shape new forms of creative "writing," such as hypertext, that merge with other media, such as illustration, film, music, or theater. Essays for this session should address themes and problems with these "new" technologies as they impact creative writing (or as creative writing impacts them). The organizers hope for a range of responses from fountain-pen purists through technology evangelists. Below are some possible jumping-off points for discussion:

Do these new technological forms represent something truly "new," an epochal change or emerging genre related to, yet separate from, the traditional areas of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction? Or are they more closely related to publishing and printing, the generation of final product? Where do we find useful distinctions between "creative writing" and "technology programming"? What is the shape of this new technological and creative landscape? What are the ecological effects and ethics of embracing or rejecting these technological changes? Are these "new" media simply sleight of hand parlor tricks that distract us from more pressing concerns about the emergence of technology? Concerns about how the landscape of these new technologies effects and mediates our relationship with "natural" landscapes (is the concept of landscape itself a "technology"?); about the ecological destruction that accompanies our historically recent cultural changes; about control of information, sensory perception, expression; about the historical selection and repression inherent in editorial control. What are the ways in which "creative writing," within or outside of technologies, can explore, subvert, reinforce, or otherwise impact these concerns? Will technology forever change "creative writing"? How does "creative writing" figure in the embedded duality in these questions, such as "nature" and "technology," "human" and "nature," even "new" and "traditional"? What becomes of poetry and prose in a world of flashing color and sound effects, animated gifs and internet audio-video effects?

Abstracts or completed essays that explore these themes—or similar themes related to these questions—in the context of creative writing, should be submitted to Michael Dickel, c/o The English Department, The University of Minnesota, 207 Lind Hall, 207 Church St. S.E., Minneapolis, MN, 55455, or via email: <dicke001@tc.umn.edu>.