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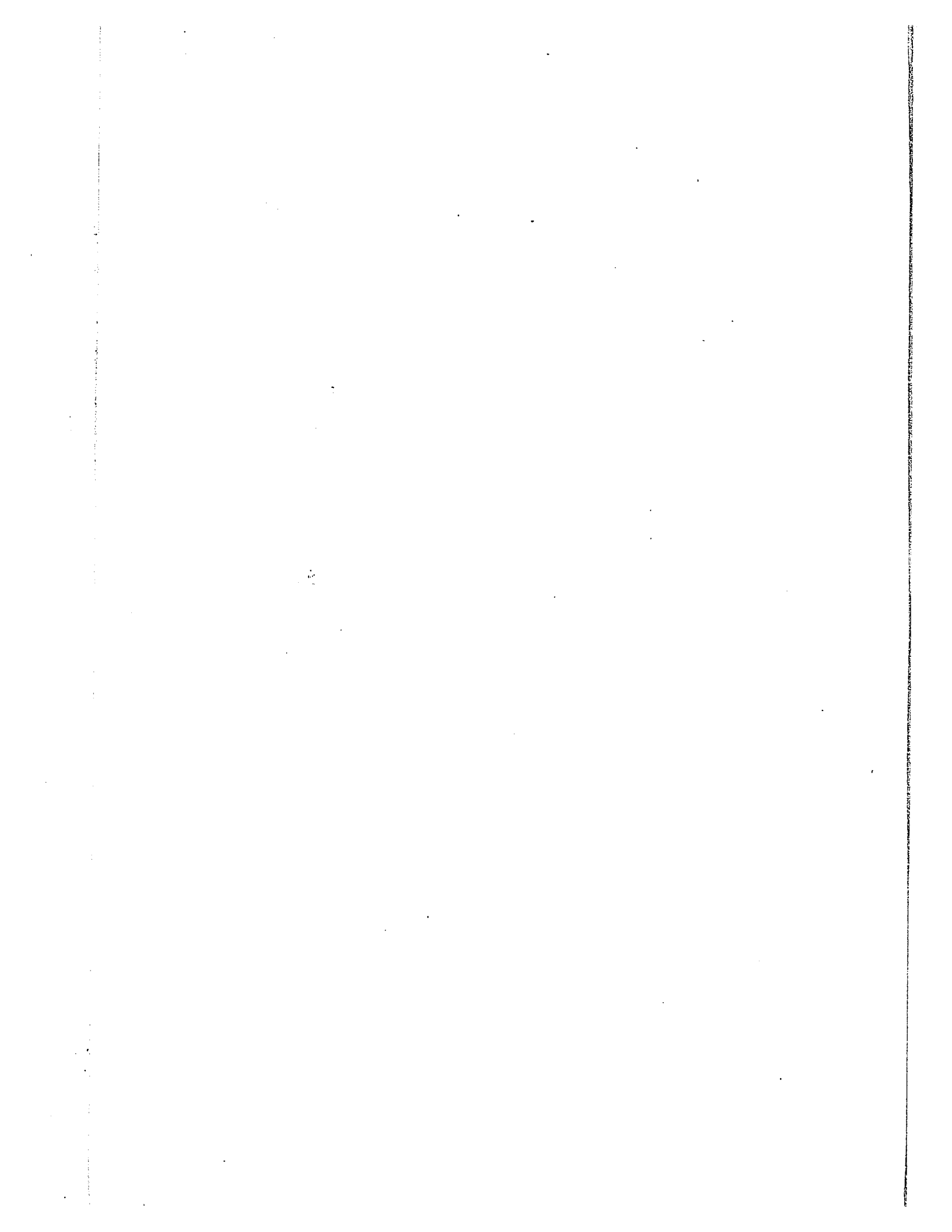
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THE INFLUENCE OF THE MIDDLE-WEST

IN

AMERICAN LITERATURE

(M.A., U. of O., June 1937.)

Ly.



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of the Graduate School of the University  
of Ottawa in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts by

John Henry Masson Yocom, B. A.

Ottawa, March 1937.

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE MIDDLE-WEST  
IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

At the risk of meeting all the dangers peculiar to a categorical treatment of literature and literary movements, the writer proposes to examine phases of one section of American writing, that which has been born in and of the Middle-West. Just where the Middle-West's boundaries lie is hard to say, for at one time the present Mid-west section was regarded by some of the people as the "West" and by others as the "South". When the country developed, a greater fixity in regard to the term was understood. What I mean by early Middle-West literature is that written by men who lived in any part of the area west of New York state and the New England states, extending south as far as the Carolinas but not into the Deep South, and north to the Canadas. As the nation moves westward geographically, economically, and socially, our term only goes as far as the corn belt. From there on and over the Rockies it's the "West", golden or otherwise. For us literary gold lies in "them thar middle states".

REGIONAL LITERATURE

The 1936-37 American trend in writing regional literature has not spent itself by any means. Gone With The Wind gives us a Kaleidoscope of the old South in Civil War and the subsequent reconstruction period.

Drums Along The Mohawk is laid in the northern New York state section of the colonies during the War of Independence. The locale of Green Margins is the deltas and mud flats at the mouth of the Mississippi about the beginning of this century. Each writer aims at putting his reader into two natures: first, as every novelist should, into the individual human natures that play against each other's ego and the circumstances of the plot; second, which is equally important with these regional authors, into the very nature of the backgrounds, the mass of detail and local colour that completely fill out the books. Regional literature is nothing new but its emphasis goes in cycles. The current literary trend in best sellers has swung, during 1936, out of the big cities with their nervous, worrying Park Avenue type of sophisticates, their apartment and tenement dwellers, their investment brokers and relief recipients, their musical comedy stage points of view, their wise-cracking artists of various rackets into the quiet, dignified South of Gone With The Wind, up to the hard-working, pioneering farmers' country in Drums Along The Mohawk, and then back into the lazy, humid "Cajin" country of Louisiana with Green Margins. Two other regional writers, both Houghton-Mifflin Co. fellowship winners for 1936, are Clelie Benton Huggins and Robert Penn Warren. The former is engaged on a novel about a Creole family in Louisiana, while the

latter plans a story based on the Kentucky tobacco war. Will a regional story be coming out of the Middle West within the next six months?

An old debate crops up here: whether the highest type of literature is that concerned with the universal aspects of human nature or that which concerns local and temporary issues. Some critics say that the best which has been said and thought in American literature bears little relation to the crude hurly-burly of contemporary American life. Remember, however, that whatever decision you as a critic reach in regard to this problem in so far as it concerns all literature must apply the same ruling to American literature. Professor Turner in The Significance Of The Frontier has opposed neglecting the local in literature, and Mr. Pattee in his History Of American Literature Since 1870 recognises that the westward movement changed the balance of power in American literature. The geographical and economic pioneering brought a corresponding literary emancipation and adventure. We used to put the emphasis on "literature", that is polish and form, but now we lay it on "American" and estimate the value of a piece of writing very largely by its spontaneity, its fidelity to the American scene, its significance as an interpretation of those states.

## VALUE OF THE FRONTIER

Professors Turner and Hazard neatly sum up the literary development in relation to the other growths in a study of the various frontiers. They explain, in separately expressed opinions, that the American frontier has had a perennial rebirth, moving geographically and chronologically from the Atlantic settlements of the 17th Century to the California mining camps of the 19th. It has moved economically from the pathfinder and the trapper to the exploiter and land-speculator. These successive frontiers have presented differences in location and occupation, yet they have had in the pioneering spirit a common factor, a mixture of determination, endurance independence, ingenuity, flexibility, individualism and optimism, that is, the American type. The same professors have pointed out that truly American literature has been given over largely to reflections of this pioneering spirit.

Upon the frontier of regional pioneering the general theme is man's attempt to control nature. In industrial pioneering it is man's attempt to control the labour of his fellowmen. On the frontier of spiritual pioneering, where they believe writers are to-day, both the underlying and surface philosophies treat man's attempt to control himself.

## A THEORY

Let us be sure of this fact, however, for it is the basis of my thesis--that the real, honest-to-goodness works of American literature, the warp and woof homespun expressions of genuine American thought as we have them in writing, have been born of the independent pioneers, the first in whatever stages of pioneering the states have passed through. It's the westering of the country, if a word may be coined here, that brings America to its Mount Parnassus.

Be the theory so, we easily can afford to pass by in this paper the study of New England literature as distinctively American. That section of the country was late to recognize the need of a definitely American type of literature. Perhaps the closest approaches are Rip Van Winkle and The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow, but even in those tales as in others by Washington Irving the atmosphere and temper are really English in quality, similar even to Addison and to the Augustans. Nathaniel Hawthorne too has a dominant European spirit, composed of a mixture of George Eliot's high seriousness and Lamb's familiarity and ease. His Scarlet Letter might well be an episode from another Adam Bede. In poetry who is the arch-priest of Victorianism? Is not Longfellow as much as Tennyson?

The situation in the West (what was to become the Middle West) was natural enough. Here was a new self-

consciously important nation sickened by the Eastern States' slavish copying of European culture and reacting with violence. On this point Mark Twain, Philistine though he was in many respects, wrote a book that was shudderingly iconoclastic, A Yankee At The Court Of King Arthur. This tale strongly suggests the usefulness of a literary Munroe doctrine.

#### BLAZING THE TRAIL

Going back to witness the labours of thoroughbred American literature in birth, we find that the most obvious influence of the frontier was in the exploitation of picturesque and melodramatic aspects of life, produced with some artistry by writers like Fennimore Cooper. We find optimism, self-confidence, belief in man's control over his environment. Those are the key-notes in the glad forward song of the pioneer, a song inspired by the presence of an abundance of material resources affording equal opportunity to all. Crèvecoeur's Letters From An American Farmer is a record of successes directly attributed to the abundance of free land.

From the Middle South comes three of the earliest distinct American types of writing to contribute towards the establishing of a new and national literature. First, there are the memoirs of the discredited historian

Captain John Smith, whose Travels And Works Of Captain John Smith (title on modern edition) have established him as the father of Virginia, the arch romancer and adventurer. His works originally appeared between 1608 and 1631.

"American" literature begins with John Smith's summons to a new frontier of romantic adventure: not dodging but transfiguring the stern actualities of existence, not mooning in the past, but pressing forward to the future, glorying in disappointments and hardships, unshaken by defeat, unembittered by failure. What honour Smith holds out to the magnanimous spirits that dare the enterprise for empire:

Truly there is no pleasure comparable to that of a generous spirit; as good employment in noble actions, especially among Turks, Heathens and Infidels; to see daily new Countries, people, fashions, governments, strategens; to relieve the oppressed, comfort his friends, passe miseries, subdue enemies, adventure upon any feazable danger for God and his Country. It is true it is a happy thing to be borne to strength, wealth, and honour; but that which is got by prowess and magnanimitie is the truest lustre; and those can best distinguish content that have escaped most honourable dangers.--If he have but the taste of virtue and magnanimitie what to such an inde can bee more

pleasant than planting and building a foundation for his posterie gotte from the rude earth by God's blessing and his own industrie without prejudice to any?--What so truly suits with honour and honestie as the discovering things unknowne? Erecting Townes, peopling Countries, informing the ignorant, reforming things unjust, teaching virtue, and gaine to our Native mother-countrie a kingdom to attend her. Then who would live at home idly, (or thinke it in himself any worth to live), onely to eate, drinke and sleepe and so die?

Secondly, the 18th Century southern frontier is revealed best in the journals of Colonel William Byrd, gentleman, planter, scholar. He was a representative of colonial society of tidewater Virginia at its best. The restoration of the Stuarts in England made a reflection in a Cavalier aristocracy on this side of the ocean, with large land grants and extension of slavery in the same ratio. A cleavage was thus brought about between two types of southern colonies and colonists: the aristocrat of rich and lush Virginia and the democrat of the poorer North Carolina. This cleavage is shown to us in the journals of Colonel Byrd's surveying expedition to North Carolina in 1728. Actually it was written not by a purposeful author but by a man absorbed in government projects and who had to make a report. Nevertheless, The History Of The Dividing Line shows the scorn of the

prosperous and efficient Virginia landowners for the poor white trash of North Carolina.

#### DAVY CROCKETT

But the most colorful work is that of the last in this trio of literary pioneers, Davy Crockett, the Congressman and bear-hunter. It was he who made the initial contributions of the southern mountains to the folk epic of American history. The Narrative of The Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee is a plain, homespun account, not of a group or a society for the pioneers of the Southern Piedmont, or the Southern Appalachians, did not live in that way but solitarily, but of the braggard bear-hunter and petty politician with his heroisms and swagger of the movie variety. Reading the account in the light of current fads for studied hill-billy culture, we are thankful for Davy's lack of learning. He goes to school four days a week for six months. When he's eighteen, he marries a "little Girl", sweeter than sugar, whom he "loved almost well enough to eat", rents a small house, gets disgusted paying rent and strikes out for free land. He and his family find land to their liking on the Mulberry Fork of the Elk River.

"It was here", writes Crockett, "that I began to distinguish myself as a hunter and to lay the foundation of my future greatness".

Davy's "greatness" both as a hunter and as a politician is elaborated through the rest of his autobiography. In the next election for Congress Candidate Crockett is

defeated. "Cut to the hollow" in his disappointment, he goes to Texas "to lend the Texans a helping hand in their way to freedom". (Colonel Davy Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas).

A little to the north-west in the direction of Arkansas we find early rural communities of "land-scratching people moving through the forests of free land". Even to our own day this area has been little disturbed by the subtleties of culture. For downright backwoodism you can't beat Fritz Rickaby's Ballads of the Shanty Boys, Louise Pound's edition of American Ballads and Songs, Professor Lomax's Cowboy Songs and Ballads and Songs of the Cattle Trail and Cow Camp, Percy Mackay's Tall Tales from the Kentucky Mountains, or Campbell and Sharp's Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians. Naturally most of the above have anonymous authorship and the present collections are often by editors of our day, for the originators were probably "too busy tellin' to bother writin'". Furthermore, how many of those "authors" could have written anyway?. Most of these mountaineer works have odd moral tags attached that elicit our sympathy for those pioneers. One group of interesting sketches is Lucy Furman's The Quare Woman.

It approaches a faithful and sound interpretation of the pioneer people and links them with the mountaineer of to-day.

When our forbears first rid acrost the high ridges from old Virginny or North Carolini and along these rocky creeks and tuck up land in the narrow valleys, a rude race they was; but a strong, with the blood of Old England and bonny Scotland in their veins and in their hearts the fear of naught; a rude race but a free, chasing the deer and the bar and the wild turkey and the Indian, tending their crops with a hoe in one hand and toteing a gun in t'other; a rude race but a friendly, banding together agin all foes, helping one another in all undertakings. Some of 'em like my grandsir, the old cap'n, come in to live on land that was granted 'em because they had fit under Washington, t'others jest wandered in, and tuck up what pleased 'em.

Well arter they had settled themselves in this rugged, penned-in land, then what happened to 'em? Well right then and thar was the trouble; nothing never happened. Here they was shut in for uppards of a hundred year, multiplying fast, and spreading up from the main creeks to the branches and hollows but never bettering their condition, you might say worsening hit. For before long the game was all kilt off and life became the turrible struggle hit still is jest to keep food in our mouths, raising crops on land that's nigh straight up and down like we have to.

Really this primitive cult can be explained as Davy Crockett influence.

JAMES FENNIMORE COOPER

The romantic records of western movement, so far as the hunters and trappers are concerned, begin in the stories of James Fennimore Cooper. It was in 1822 that the American west was officially opened. Jedediah Smith arrived at St. Louis to join Ashley's trappers in a series of expeditions through the trans-Missouri country to clear an inland passage to the coveted lands of Oregon and California. A little later Kit Carson rode over the trail broken by Smith. Then Joe Meek, another of Ashley's men, had the duty of escorting into the regions of the west the first Protestant missionaries en route to Oregon. After the missionaries were massacred by the Indians he carried the news to Washington and demanded American protection for American settlers. Next followed soldiers, trappers, hunters, solitary pathfinders and pioneers, and between 1823 and 1841 appeared Cooper's stories--The Pioneers, 1825; The Last of the Mohicans, 1826; The Prairie, 1827; The Pathfinder, 1840; and The Deerslayer, 1841.

Before we look at Cooper's novels we should make some mention of the minor works written under influence of this period and locale. The journals, letters, and biographies of those frontiersmen will always be the

raw stuff of any literature written on the Middle West, just as Margaret Mitchell must have spent many an hour in her home town library, old newspaper office files, and municipal records, not to speak of her own grandmother's attic, before and while she wrote Gone With The Wind. Beforehand then we might do a little prophesying by a study of the source materials as to the character of some future story written as the western pioneer contribution to the current regional literary cycle. There is in them a distinct emphasis on the external world. It is not the New England Puritan's dramatic battleground of the human soul but a geographical battleground of wild rivers, tangled woods, and precipitous mountain paths. In place of various religious and social groups, the stories tell of Crees, Blackfeet, Crows and Mexicans. In the writings of Smith, Boone, Crockett and Karson, there are more details of geographical location and fewer details of spiritual developments.

Fennimore Cooper too had such gripping stories to relate he could take time to work out fine-drawn emotional tendencies in his characters. Nature in rough settings and human nature in rough and ready personalities were what interested his readers.

Cooper looked across the water and saw that Scott, then in the midst of the Waverley novels, was achieving success with the historical romance; and he conceived the possibility of applying the same method to local

conditions. Full praise should be granted him for this feat. Beginning to write comparatively late in life, he produced upwards of thirty novels, and his work has all the faults, as well as merits, of the rapid and hasty writer. Cooper's literary habits (like those of Scott) were in contrast with the method of careful technique. Instead, in Cooper we find spontaneity, gusto, and vital effect of movement and colour. His reputation now rests firmly on two groups of stories--his sea tales and the Leatherstocking quintette.

But Cooper's immediate popularity was followed by a reaction of scornful criticism. It was even considered smart to poke fun at every aspect of his material and method. How can we excuse Mark Twain, by no means a purist in style, in his condemnations of "Cooper's literary offences", and Lowell's complaints of the "uniform insipidity of Cooper's females"? In short, everything questionable in Cooper's writings--his stock characterizations, his slipshod English and artificial dialogue, his stuffed gentlemen and tame females, his blunders in woodcraft, his idealized Indians, his pompous platitudes and impossible plots--have been severely criticized.

Such criticisms are out of place both in an approach to a study of the period or to the literature that has come out of the period. All five of Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales are full of the fire, adventure and romance characteristic of frontier life.

As readers we live with Natty Bumppo from the time he slays his first Indian and wins for himself the name of Hawkeye to replace the title of Deerslayer, until as an old trapper on the prairies he dies among his adopted children and Pawnees and is laid in the grave with his faithful pup Hector. It is the true "American epic" and not just the "epic of the American Indian". Fennimore Cooper is careful to have Hawkeye recognise that the red man and white man are fundamentally different with the superiority decidedly in favour of the white.

Just for a moment let us consider some of the criticisms mentioned above. First, there is that concerning the mathematical impossibility of Hawkeye's shooting exploits--he could shoot the eye out of a squirrel at seventy-five yards. Whether they are true or not, we must remember that gun stories were the common form of legends current in those times. Secondly, critics have said that the heroines have too "lakadaisical a ladylikeness" for pioneer women. The Last of the Mohicans, his best book, furnishes us with one of the few examples of the fainting female. Alice faints after an Indian massacre in which her friends have been tomahawked before her eyes, and in which she and her sister have been separated from her father and lover and carried off as captives.

Here is a list of some other situation in which the "lakadaisically ladylike" women of the

frontier find themselves:

Alice and Cora, bound to trees and menaced with cruelties to their persons, refuse to buy their safety at the price of life in Indian wigwams.

Judith and Hetty think nothing of setting off alone in a canoe to reconnoiter the savage encampment and if possible to bring aid to Hawkeye.

At the opening of an Indian attack Judith saves the day by pushing the Indian intruder over the edge of the scow into the river. When Judith and Hetty return to the boat to find the mangled body of Hutter there is no time for fainting or hysterics. They get to work bandaging his scalp and wounds.

Mable Dunham in the Pathfinder not only braves the terrors of the storm but when it subsides actually asks to be taken on a pleasure trip in the canoe.

Esther and her two daughters in The Prairie in the absence of men folk defend the rock citadel against attack.

Of course, the really original character is Leatherstocking. He is not an embodiment of the Rousseau philosophy of back to nature but a distinctive individual, different from the other author's frontier characters. There does not seem much stock characterization here for Leatherstocking is the happy pro-

duct of the romantic movement in American history. As Cooper saw the frontiersman in Leatherstocking he embodied three types: a nobleman of nature, a refugee from civilization, and a conqueror of the continent. Never since have the three mingled but each has survived separately and found some sort of literary expression.

Nevertheless, to unstintedly praise Cooper as the first lieutenant on the American literary front would be silly. In construction, in the building and climax of his stories, Cooper's haste and lack of revision are often to be detected. He makes an impression of not giving to his fiction such proportionate shaping as best to serve the interests of his plot. His stories often seem to end abruptly, or with things more or less at loose ends; sometimes, strictly speaking, they hardly seem to end at all. Apparently he did not see his way through these narratives when he began them. The same criticism applies to much of the work of Scott, whose so-called "huddled endings" have often been pointed out. Once more, the style in which Cooper wrote his books, although it has marked merits of picturesqueness and power, is, to our ears today, at times pompous, heavy, even wooden. Of course he began to write at a time when English expression was somewhat more formal than it now is; and of his manner of handling the mother tongue in general it is accurate to say that, while he was not a master of style, he was a very vigorous,

fluent, and, on occasion, admirable writer, prevailingly so in description, and sometimes in dialogue.

But let us hasten to state that these faults after all were swallowed up in his very great virtues. No writer can hold readers nearly a century unless he has shining excellences, and Cooper has them in plenty. He can, for one thing, create characters that live; hardly a figure in the whole range of American fiction is better known, more clearly seen, than Leatherstocking. To create folk who thus abide in the affectionate memory of after times is one of the great triumphs of the novelist, perhaps the greatest. Cooper showed himself a large and noble man in conceiving such a type as Leatherstocking, with his reality yet poetry, his love of outdoor life, of nature, his simple reverence, and faith, his shrewdness, generosity, strength, and sweetness. His life, in the successive books, in a shifting environment which takes him through what was then the far West, carried on from early manhood to his impressive death, is the unique story of a striking phase of the American civilization now forever gone; the passing of a frontier. It has an epic quality. To-day we look for newly discovered parts of the world about which men have written. We grab up everything Admiral Byrd writes on his polar expeditions, Peter Freuchen's Artic Adventure while with the Eskimos in Greenland. Thank heaven the American frontier possessed a few writers of the calibre of

Cooper--for our own sakes!

I am positive Cooper will remain a popular literary figure. He had invention; his books are crowded full of incidents, action; there is a fine breath of adventure blowing through it all. He loved "the bright eyes of danger", as did Robert Louis Stevenson in a later generation. That is the reason he is loved of boys; older folk appreciate his character drawing or his descriptions, the young overlook them or skip them, but hang on his hairbreadth escapes, his doings by flood and field. One might imagine that, because Cooper moves so slowly (at least to modern taste), stopping not seldom for grandiloquent scene painting or for the moral comment, young people would have none of him; but they can and do jump these waits and come to action again. There is always a promise of something doing just ahead. Hence he is popular with them.

For the more mature reader, however, his descriptions are often among the best things he does, and here is to be found one of his chief merits; he appreciates and makes us appreciate the native scenery as he saw it in the American wilderness. Cooper used description in two ways: (1) to create an appropriate atmosphere for some emotion--similar to the use employed but with more psychological finesse by Thomas Hardy; (2) in a very practical relation to the plot--for examples,

a waterfall is described and so we know Eau-douce will be shooting the rapids; a forest thicket is described because the treacherous Mangua and his band are lurking in ambush.

Let us read a portion of the guantlet-running incident from the Last of the Mohicans:

There yet lingered sufficient light in the heavens to exhibit those bright openings among the tree-tops, where different paths left the clearings to enter the depths of the wilderness. Beneath one of them a line of warriors issued from the woods, and advanced slowly towards the dwellings. One in front bore a short pole, on which, as it afterward appeared, were suspended several human scalps. The startling sounds that Duncan had heard were what the whites have, not inappropriately, called "the death halloo"; and each repetition of the cry was intended to announce to the tribe the fate of an enemy. Thus far the knowledge of Heyward assisted him in the explanation; and, as he now knew that the interruption was caused by the unlooked-for return of a successful war party, every disagreeable sensation was quieted in inward congratulations for the opportune relief and insignificance it conferred on himself.

When at a distance of a few hundred feet from the lodges, the newly arrived warriors

halted. The plaintive and terrible cry, which was intended to represent equally the wailings of the dead and the triumph of the victors, had entirely ceased. One of their number now called aloud in words that were far from appalling though not more intelligible to those for whose ears they were intended than their expressive yells. It would be difficult to convey a suitable idea of the savage ecstasy with which the news thus imparted was received. The whole encampment, in a moment, became a scene of the most violent bustle and commotion. The warriors drew their knives, and, flourishing them, they arranged themselves in two lines, forming a lane that extended from the war party to the lodges. The squaws seized clubs, axes, or whatever weapon of offense first offered itself to their hands, and rushed eagerly to act their part in the cruel game that was at hand. Even the children would not be excluded; but boys, little able to wield the instruments, tore the tomahawks from the belts of their fathers and stole into the camps, apt imitators of the savage traits exhibited by their parents.

The final point I would make with regard to the positive and even splendid services of Cooper in our fiction is that his work was so truly American at a time when to make it so seemed well-nigh impossible. Nobody would have believed that a man

could have found worthy themes for romance in the unsettled wilds surrounding his home; yet, with the true instinct of the literary creator, who draws strength from Mother Earth, Cooper turned his back upon British motives and methods (after writing the dull, unsuccessful Precaution) and struck off for himself into virgin forests, across unforded rivers, over trailless plains.

As Irving found a theme in Manhattan and the Hudson River locality, so Cooper found it at Oswego Lake and thereabouts. Both are pioneers of American fiction in a deeper, better sense because they did so, and Cooper's contribution in sweep, mass, and persistence, although not in pure art, was of the two more impressive and important. The very prolificness of his power has in it something admirable. He wrote on the average more than a novel a year for many years, besides turing out an immense mass of other writings--historical, religious, and political; and this from a man who did not begin to be an author until well past his youth. Cooper is a great pioneer of American literature and unquestionably the founder of the long native romance--as is Irving of the short tale or Poe of the psychological tale of horror and mystery.

Washington Irving, fine writer though he be, will not be remembered as long as Cooper as a painter of the early American scene. His fictitious romance is laid against a state of civilization that copies largely European culture. However, Irving's The Adventures of Captain Bonneville do give some account of episodes in the western fur trade with occasional

graphic and colourful descriptions of the Indians. John G. Neihardt also sought his characters from the trans-Missouri fur trade for The Splendid Wayfaring and The Song of Three Friends.

#### THE SOUTH

Digressing from the main line of our analyzing the Middle West literature, we find that in the South romanticism met violent death in the Civil War. The South was definitely balked in its designs of empire and of industrial leadership by the North and found solace in the creation of a heroic past. Gone With The Wind is the most recent account of how deeply they felt and how nobly they met their defeat.

Among the writers who exploit the empire building past of the South none are more interesting than those who comprise the "Cult of the Colonel", that group of southern writers who feature the typical military figure. Men like Thomas Nelson Page, James Lane Allen, Owen Wister, Irvin Cobb, O. Henry and F. Hopkinson Smith dwell lovingly on the gentle and pathetic figure of the Civil War colonel, the fragrance and loveliness of the Old Dominion, "befo' de wah, sah", the gallant losing and the mournful yet dignified acquiescence in a new regime. The Civil War colonel influence in popular writings must be credited by important mention among those things in the literature that are genuinely American. We can list a few of the stories' main elements here:

The colonel with his faded dignity, his quixotic honour, his pathetic impracticability, living amid "wisteria, live oaks, and soft voices, and faithful old man<sup>r</sup>ies, and courteous squires, and benign old neighbouring colonels, and mint juleps, and charming bell<sup>e</sup>s, and white col<sup>u</sup>mned plantation houses".

In our own time when reaction against such American institutions set in, as we shall see later, realists like Sherwood Anderson were to write shockingly of the South.

"The literature of the South is far removed from the soil. The stench is gone out of it. New Orleans, for example, is a city of smells. It reeks with smells from the earth, the sea, the rivers, the houses, the markets, the swamps. In the moist heavy air the smells hang all day and all night, but in southern stories nothing is mentioned but magnolia."

#### PIONEERS, O PIONEERS

Again we remind the reader that the strongest frontier virtue was optimism. The frontiersman's one chance for success lay in believing that nothing but success was possible. The sense of co-partnership with God gave a religious sanction to the manifest destiny of the westering American. To become philosophical, we can call this frontier point of view transcendentalism, since it was constituted largely of optimism and individualism.

Both Walt Whitman and Thoreau sing the glad forward  
song of the Pioneers.

Whitman:

Have the elder races halted?

Do they droop and end their lesson,

Wearied over there beyond the seas?

We take up the task eternal, and the burden,  
and the lesson,

Pioneers, O pioneers!

Thoreau:

It is a noble country where we dwell,

Fit for a stalwart race to summer in,

From Madawaska to Red River Raft,

From Florida keys to the Missouri forks,

See the red face with sullen step retreat.

Whitman has been regarded as fresh, original, daring,  
the incarnate spirit of the New World. Contempt for  
the old and European as compared with the new and Ameri-  
can, pride in "progress" as measured by mechanistic de-  
vices; deification of the prosperous citizen whose bank  
account is unquestionably accepted as an index to his  
character--these were objects of idealism to the reading  
public of the eighteen-forties. Poems by Whitman, such  
as pioneers, O Pioneers, The Song of the Broad Axe, and  
Song of Occupation, emphasize those themes. It has been  
reserved for our own day to see in them the objects of  
satire.

## THE NEGRO

So far we have neglected mentioning anything of the negro in the United States literary picture. It is the Civil War that creates two social problems-- that problem of the poor white, and that of the poor black. Already some mention has been made of the "poor white trash" of North Carolina as opposed to the aristocratic and rich Virginians. As for the negroes, their greatest body of literature, the spirituals, underwent a profound change after the emancipation. Freed slaves percolated north and westward and upon the disintegration of negro communities soon arrived a changed negro faculty for creative song. The group factor of the spirituals was lessened and the solo element became more pronounced. Now into the American song bag was tossed the "Blues" and other workaday negro songs.

The negro insistence on rhythm continued because it still served the practical ends which melody, the preference of Westerners, does not. Rhythm, having originated with a ritual purpose, gave the American darkies the spiritual value of a drug of consolation to their longings. There has been a definite value in syn-copation also that is different from the blues. It has furnished a form of rhythm universal among native people set to exhausting work.

We can trace the negro influence upon American consciousness through to our own times in the popularity of jazz and interest in primitive culture generally, noticed first to any extent after the Great War. In twentieth

century literature the negro has appeared both as a psychological factor in the novels and plays of white authors and as an author himself. A few are mentioned here: Jim Tully's Circus Parade, Dubose Heyward's Porgy (the libretto George Gershwin used for his opera hit Porgy and Bess last year), Mark Connelly's Green Pastures, Paul Green's In Abraham's Bosom, Edna Ferber's Show Boat, etc.

#### CALIFORNIA, HERE THEY COME

Continuing our tracing of the westward movement, we find the next stage to be the "Forty-niners'" brilliant debut in California. It is not proposed to describe the West ~~not~~ <sup>but</sup> Middle West. However, the former, although separated geographically, had profound influence upon the latter. Bret Harte has pictured California for the most part in a well-rounded and essentially accurate way. Red Gulch, Luck of Roaring Camp, Poker Flat, etc. are melodramatic but catch the vivid and vigorous life of the gold miners. Both in characters and plots he likes to give violent contrasts. And why shouldn't he with Spanish, Chinese, Russians, Indians, and Americans, all in little communities but going out ever so often and digging for wealth?

In one story there is a baby born and reared among miners. In another it is a beautiful daughter of joy devoting her life to the care of a helpless paralytic.

Still another has a simple-hearted man in all innocence offering his pile as a bribe to the jury to release his friend. In The Idyll of Red Gulch, "the young girl reached out her arms and caught the sinful woman to her own pure breast for one brief moment". Perhaps this emphasis upon sentiment and emotional play are influences of Charles Dickens.

In the heart of the whole western setting, rough and ready at all times, a man's a man, goodness is easily acquired, sentiment is easily touched, the right things happen to the right people at the right times. The transforming power of the west is a favourite story basis. For example, Canfield's Diary of A Forty-niner tells how Yankees become Californians. So also does Bret Harte use this reorientation of the easterner as a pivot for his stories (Snowbound At Eagle's). "In the sunburnt west, the bad get better and the good get livelier". Sherwood Anderson has satirically commented on this device in western fiction in A Story Teller's Story:

"A man went into the redwood forests or into the deserts and took upland. He had been rather a mean, second-rate chap in civilization, but in the new place a great change comes over him. Well, the writer had got him out where there was no one looking and could do as he pleased with the fellow.

Never mind what he had been. The forests or the deserts had changed him completely. The writer could make a regular angel of him, have him rescue downtrodden women, catch horse thieves, exhibit any kind of bravery required to keep the reader excited and happy."

With the fading of the last frontier went the last opportunity for the moral holiday. But in the westering process to the coast American literature reaped a full harvest in picturesque variations that the sectionalism, produced by frontier isolation, permitted. When the United States commenced to take her place among industrial nations in the seventies by developing her own newly found resources, regional pioneering was over with. Then it was industrial pioneering, and all classes, including writers, clergy and statesmen, aimed at "business efficiency".

#### CARNEGIE'S GILDED AGE

There was a tradition that every industrious workman could rise to be a capitalist and this was to retard the organization of labour. Perhaps it is a wrong assumption to suggest that Andrew Carnegie, the Horatio Alger of Algiers, had any ulterior motive in regard to a possible organized labour when he wrote in his Triumphant Democracy, 1886, "It is possible

for everyone to become rich if they're smart". No one seemed to think that for every millionaire there would be a correspondingly large group of people poorer because the "big shot" had "hitched his wagon to a star". Ambition counted most and the business men were paying the bills for our libraries, universities, symphony orchestras and opera companies. American literature secured new story elements from "Big Business". The new settings were the secret chambers of the money masters. The new plots were tracings of individuals' rises from poverty to wealth and then recounting the everlasting pulling-off of "deals". The new philosophy was the glorification of success.

#### TINKLINGS OF THE KNELL

Paradoxically enough, the first reaction and literary sneers towards this growing Gilded Age idealism came from a man who rose from squalid surroundings on the south-western Tennessee frontier, became involved in mining, stock-markets and industry, and throughout his life in scores of speculative schemes. Also he was a friend and admirer of Carnegie. It was Mark Twain.

#### MARK TWAIN

His life and work on the Mississippi gave Mark a knowledge of humanity, mostly of robust types, and his half-baked democracy endowed him with a valuable flair for what the public wanted. His two masterpieces,

Tom Sawyer, and Huckleberry Finn suggest portraits of Mark Twain.

Both Tom and Huck are rebels, but to Mark Twain they are more than just the normal boyish variety. These lads have an inborn impatience with conventional uses.

When Tom goes unwillingly to church, Mark Twain says:

The choir always tittered and <sup>h</sup>wispered all through the service. There was once a church choir that was not ill-bred, but I have forgotten where it was now. It was a great many years ago and I can scarcely remember anything about it, but I think it was some foreign country.

At the public examination of pupils in Tom's school, Mark Twain comments on the current educational system with ardent contempt:

"to squeeze some stereotyped moral phraseology into every subject".

Did Mark Twain find, as Huck Finn found, that "whithersoever he turned, the bars and shackles of civilization shut him in and bound him hand and foot"?

Unlike Carnegie, Mark Twain sympathized with labour unions, and his compassion for failure prevented him from paying unreserved homage to success. The novel he wrote in collaboration with Charles Dudley Warner, The Gilded Age, concerns the family tragedy of the Tennessee land acts and includes the major scandals of the seventies--the "Boss" Tweed ring, the Salary Grab Act, the lobbying and bribery at Washington, etc. It is historical to a great extent. The accounts of

the gambling spirit in America's early financial days and of the spectacular reversals of fortune, and the credos of the devotees of quick turnovers and profits are valuable material that may be omitted by squeamish historians for a few years yet. This story is crystallized into two characters, Colonel Seller and Senator Dillworthy. To-day we are shocked to see the disrespect of communism for religion. How should we feel when we read in The Gilded Age that religious fervor is mixed in with industrial pioneering, as if God were boosting business?

Mark Twain pierces the flimsy structure of "prosperity" and shows the rotten foundation on which it rests, the cheap pretense of its success, the squalid misery of its failures, the waste of energy and talents in the pursuit of its glittering delusions. Mark Twain's conception of man as the victim of his temperament and environment was a new one--the first ominous sign of the disintegration in the "American spirit" morale. The previously conquering heroes of other writers are treated cynically by him. His frontier towns are not democratic communities of fraternity and equality but crude, squalid villages. His frontier characters are desperadoes. Here is a quotation from his Life on The Mississippi:

How solemn and beautiful is the thought that the earliest pioneer of civilization, the vanleader of civilization, is never the steamboat, never the railroad, never the newspapers,

never the Sabbath School, never the missionary-- but always whiskey! Such is the case. Look history over; you will see. The missionary comes after the whiskey--I mean, he arrives after the whiskey has arrived; next comes the poor immigrant with axe and hoe and rifle; next the trader; next the miscellaneous rush; next the gambler, the desperado, the highwayman, and all their kindred in sin of both sexes; and next, the smart chap who has bought up an old grant that covers all the land; this brings in the lawyer tribe; the vigilance committee brings the undertaker. All these interests bring the newspaper; the newspaper starts up politics and a railroad; all hands turn to and build a church and a jail--and behold, civilization is established forever in the land.

Although Mark Twain was too intelligent to join in the blind adulation of the successful, he was too tenderhearted to join in the superior scorn of the unsuccessful. Too deeply involved in the hazards and triumphs of the Gilded Age to extricate himself from it and launch such unqualified invectives as were poured forth a generation later by the muck-rakers, he takes refuge in a philosophy of fatalism. This transfers the responsibility from the individual to the universal. Not blind enough to be the

idolater of the Gilded Age, not brave enough to be its iconoclast, Mark Twain makes the ingenious compromise of portraying the Gilded Age as a spectacle for scornful laughter. He reveals the pettiness of its heroes and the pitifulness of its victims.

#### THE NESTER

Before we look at the famous trio, stronger than Mark Twain in their reactions towards one form or another of American smuggering--Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, and Sherwood Anderson--there is another and later form of pioneer whose effect has been felt upon the literature. It is the Nester--that settler who, sometimes at the urging of the government, sometimes in defiance of the government, goes into the Middle West to farm, settles the untamed land and becomes of political and economic importance. Two opposite attitudes to farm life gradually take form in their thinking. Some believe it to be the finest way of life, while others say, "This is the upshot of our dream. The great free west! Free, yes, free t' starve in. Just as a desert is free".

#### WILLA CATHER

Willa Cather's love of the land is the ruling passion in her work. Her Antonia (in My Antonia) and Alexandra (in O Pioneers) are strong nesters of the peasant type--large, slow, enduring, intense,

apparently unimaginative. Alexandra falls heir to her father's unsolved problem of taming the land, that "was like a wild thing that had its ugly moods". By indomitable force of will she holds her ineffectual mother and her commonplace brothers to the executing of her purposes. She horrifies her brothers by insisting on taking out another mortgage to buy more land because she "just knows that land is going to go up". A pioneer, says Miss Cather, should have this mystic intuition to "feel the future stirring", where others see only the bleak exterior. Other qualities will be sacrificed, perhaps, for this pioneer feeling. For instance, we find little romantic love in the career of farmerette Alexandra. Of her marriage with Carl Linstrum she says simply, "When friends marry, they are safe".

Now disillusionment has come to Miss Cather in her championing of farm life. She began her work by writing of the open plains and the waving wheat, of the indefatigable efforts and triumphant reward of the heroic age of pioneering. Now she is writing of the stagnating stupidities of small towns, of their vicious gossip and timid pieties, their futile aspirations and fermenting repressions.

In A Son of the Middle Border Hamlin Garland relates a frontier boyhood of driving toil, of constant moves, of squalid dinginess, of futile endeavour. He tells us of his break with the chronic pioneer his father,

and of his striking out for himself, not like the earlier pioneers to go farther west, but to take the "back trail" to the east, to make a place for himself, not on some frontier homestead, but in the world of letters. Filled with the enthusiasm of his new environment, he goes on a visit west. As he rides across the plains of his country and looks out upon the ugly cabin homes of his people, he finds his theme:

All that day I had studied the land, musing upon its distinctive qualities, and while I acknowledged the natural beauty of it, I revolted from the gracelessness of its human habitations. The lonely box-like farmhouses on the ridges suddenly appeared to me like the dens of wild animals. The lack of colour, of charm in the lives of the people anguished me. I wondered why I had never perceived before the futility of woman's life of the farm.

I asked myself, "Why have there stern facts never been put into our literature as they have been used in Russia and in England? Why has this land no storytellers like those who have made Massachusetts and New Hampshire illustrious?"

"The first actual farmer in American fiction," Hamlin Garland undertook to tell the truth about Western farm life as he had known it. His repre-

sentation of this life was so marked a departure from the conventional rustic idyl as to call forth a storm of protest at his indictment of farm conditions. This indictment fell under two classes: first, those criticisms of farm life which arose from Garland's own distaste for farming; second, those criticisms of farm life which arose from his sense of the social injustice under which the farmer laboured.

Let Whittier sing of the cheery content of the snowbound family telling stories before the blazing hearth, making a jolly adventure of the daily excursion through the drifts to care for the cattle--

Boys, a path!

Well pleased, (for when did farmer boy  
Count such a summons less than joy).

Here is Garland's version of Snowbound:

One such storm which leaped upon us at the close of a warm and beautiful day in February lasted for two days and three nights, making life on the open prairie impossible even to the strongest man. The thermometer fell to thirty degrees below zero and the snow-laden air moving at the rate eighty miles an hour pressed upon the walls of our house with giant power. The sky of noon was darkened, so that we moved in a pallid half-light, and windows thick with frost, shut us in as if with gray

clouds.

Hour after hour those winds and snows in furious battle, howled and roared and whistled around our frail shelter, slashing at the windows and piping on the chimney till it seemed as if the Lord Sun had been wholly blotted out and that the world would never again be warm. Twice each day my father made a desperate sally toward the stable to feed the imprisoned cows and horses or to replenish our fuel-- for the remainder of the long pallid day he sat beside the fire with gloomy face. Even his indomitable spirit was awed by the fury of the storm.

From Garland's convictions and resentments sprang the grim group of stories collect under the title Main Travelled Roads and dedicated: "To my father and mother whose half century of pilgrimage on the man travelled road of life has brought them only pain and weariness". The stories in Main Travelled Roads are all variations of the same theme: the ugliness, the monotony, the bestiality, the hopelessness of life on the farm. An analysis of one will give the spirit of all.

Class war between the farmers and financiers have furnished Middle West themes for stories by Bellamy (The Duke of Stockbridge), by Hamlin Garland, and by Frank Norris (Octopus). We read of the fights

of both small farm owners and large ranch proprietors against railroad executives and "big Business", and the defeat of the farmers.

#### CHICAGO

Very frequently Chicago has been termed the capital city of the Middle West. Such a title can be justified in a commercial sense by the presence of the wheat and live stock markets, the many large factories, and the railroad terminuses, philosophically by the number of writers born in and around the city during the Gilded Age who were destined to cry down "Big Business", and socially because of the number of retired farmers, as well as city men like implement manufacturers who have become rich because of the farm, that have come there--in the days when retirement was a possibility for the farmer. Every one knows of the phenomenal growth of such industrial cities as Chicago. Despite the munificence of the Carnegies and Rockefellers mass production meant that purposeless lives of non-creative workers would become ever more purposeless as the business grew more prosperous and the machines of business became more efficient.

## THEODORE DREISER

Theodore Dreiser's first attacks in The Titan and The Financier were aimed directly at the notorious career of Charles Yerkes, the Chicago railroad king. In all his book old Dreiser is haunted and pained by the realization of the complexity of life, but try as he may, he never is able to reduce it to a simple formula. His autobiography A Book About Myself tells his impressions as an unsuccessful spectator of life. He contrasts with the maddened rush of industrialism, the peaceful, domestic idealism of the agricultural period. Dreiser had seen the Carnegie plant at Pittsburg and could never reconcile or accept the tragic contrasts of the industrial regime. He could never forget the "forgotten man". "It was the underdog who interested me more than the upper one", he writes, "his needs, his woes, his simplicities". The Financier of his story is a Frank Cowperwood, a Big Businessman. But Dreiser sees Cowperwood and Cowperwood's victims alike as puppets directed by invisible wires, a certain fatalism shrouding life.

Sex grotesqueries are found in all three of the Mid-west hyper-critics, Dreiser, Lewis and Anderson, but the sex motive is dominant only in Dreiser (e. g. Dawn, An American Tragedy, Jennie Gerhardt). Perhaps the barrenness of industrialism as a normal way of life would be Dreiser's excuse for the nasty emphasis. His writing is heavy in

style, has a sameness of theme, a deficiency of humour and frequent passages of dull sentimentality, yet it does not generally bore. His books may be literary monsters but they are living monsters.

SINCLAIR LEWIS

America's coming of age was marked not by the receiving but by the dissipating of America's material inheritance. Such a condition was bound to call forth critics in arms against the "average American" and the various philistinian elements of his life--Paul Elmer More, George Edward Woodberry, Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Browne, Waldo Frank, and Sinclair Lewis.

Lewis's three most important novels--Main Street Babbitt and Arrowsmith have the common theme of the individual struggling against his standardized world. The individual is just a little less rude, just a little more skeptical than the yokels, the realtors, the Rotarians and church-goers around him. In each case the struggle ends in defeat. Lewis tells the stories with gaiety and spontaneity, not as Dreiser in the heavy voice of a rough undertaker. Arrowsmith is the record of many failures but here for the first time Sinclair Lewis ascribes to his protagonist a rejective power over his environment.

In Arrowsmith we find a progression through the three phases of American pioneering. The book opens with an apparently irrelevant account--after the much ridiculed manner of old-fashioned novelists--of Arrowsmith's forefathers:

The driver of the wagon swaying through forest and swamp of the Ohio wilderness was a ragged girl of fourteen. Her mother they had buried near the Monongehela--the girl herself had heaped with torn sods the grave beside the river of the beautiful name. Her father lay shrinking with fever on the floor of the wagon box, and about him played her brothers and sisters, dirty brats, tattered brats, hilarious brats.--She halted at the fork in the grassy road, and the sick man quavered, 'Emmy, ye better turn down towards Cincinatti. If <sup>we</sup> could find your uncle Ed, I guess he'd take us in'.

'Nobody ain't goin' to take us in', she said, 'We're goin' on jest as long as we can. Goin' West! They's a whole lot of new things I aim to be seein'!'

She cooked the supper, she put the children to bed, and sat by the fire alone.

That was the great-grandmother of Martin Arrowsmith.

However, even to-day (Dodsworth) Lewis's hatred for sham, his contempt for the jocular hail-fellow show of solidarity, for the trumped-up hurrah stuff, for the speeded up manufacture of shoddy results still animated his picture of

commercialized America.

As works of literature Lewis's writings are not measurable by ordinary standards. At first they were considered slapstick satire but that opinion now is reversed. He has been fitly titled "an aggressive early member of the American Debunking Brigade". As the works of a social moralist Sinclair Lewis's novels will go the way of all such. They will become museums of the interesting archaisms of Zenith City and Gopher Prairie; but as the works of a novelist who learnt his job at a good school they will endure. People in the books are sufficiently strange to be continuously interesting and sufficiently familiar to be recognizable as under their skin, brothers and sisters to ourselves. Arrowsmith has less freakish wit and more body than Babbitt but I doubt if it will stay as long. A study of that other eternal triangle Love, Ambition, work--is not quite satisfactory.

From the many clever comments in his books on American institutions we quote that upon the pathetic faith in the efficacy of education:

The University of Winnemac is the property of the people of the state, and what they want-- or what they are told they want--is a mill to turn out men and women who will lead moral lives, play bridge, drive good cars, be enterprising in business, and occasionally mention books though they are not expected to have time to read them. It is a Ford Motor Factory, and if its products rattle a little, they are beautifully

standardized, with perfectly interchangeable parts.

A natural mimic, Sinclair Lewis takes off a hundred absurd characters, reproducing their looks, gestures, speech, with amazing accuracy. He seems to have overheard all the average citizens of the republic, and to have made notes of their average conduct. He knows just how they will respond to a given situation, just how they will behave when any topic comes up for discussion. He does not, indeed, leave them quite on their average level of speech, for he is a satirist, and he tends by little touches of exaggeration at every turn to lift the language of his characters up so that it may be noticed, if only for its imminence of dullness. What the men and women say in his books is what they would say if they had the knack of expressing themselves a little better than such persons actually have. As Lewis has observed human beings, so has he observed <sup>the</sup> background of their lives, their costumes, houses, schools, churches, clubs, amusements, politics, with a swift, remembering eye. He has reproduced the outward life of the Middle West as no other novelist of the century has done. Its inner life he reproduces less exactly, because as a satirist he is concerned with making certain points, not with setting forth the eternal drama of birth, love, hope, death, which is the basis of imaginative literature. Many readers who sympathize with him in his dislike of conventional ways of thought and action, still find themselves unable to keep up with him in his delight in exposing such conventions. His proofs of an indisputable

thesis seem too numerous. Nevertheless, he rarely loses himself in his materials. He has that first of qualities in a novelist, narrative energy. His stories move rapidly and consecutively. With all his cleverness, he take great pains with his plots, building them up with that scrupulous conscience which is, rather unexpectedly, no less characteristic of him than his satiric wit.

#### SHERWOOD ANDERSON

Begin your study of Sherwood Anderson by reading A Story Teller's Story, an original form of autobiography. He is not boastful, not full of intellectual arrogance, but in the realization of his own limitations he gives an honest humility to the account of his life. In apparently disconnected notes Anderson tells "the tale of an American Writer's journey through his own imaginative world and through the world of facts".

He decides when young to be "an empire builder", but later in his life he begins to wonder if there is "a power greater than obvious power". Before walking out of the managership of a paint factory, Anderson had been a "true American", thinking in terms of size--bigger plant, bigger business, etc--schemes that fitted perfectly into the Carnegie gospel of wealth.

Anderson's characters repeat his own experiences. John Webster, a washing-machine manufacturer in a Wisconsin town, revamps his life so that it will have grace and meaning, after he realizes that "accomplishment is not the vital thing in life". The stalwart McGregor succeeds over his inferiors only to discover success has a certain emptiness. He sees the irony of "how men coming out of Europe and given millions of square miles of black, fertile land, mines and forests, have

failed in the challenge given them by fate and have produced out of the stately order of nature only the sordid disorder of man".

In the story Poor White Anderson indicates the effect of success upon character. Hugh McVey grows up in the poor-white region of Missouri on the western shore of the Mississippi. As a boy with natural indolence and animal contentment to sleep in the sun, not caring for the business of getting on, he is interesting. There is a fascinating chapter in the history of "the little hopeless community of beaten men and yellow defeated women", whose children were made stupid and dull by poverty. As Hugh develops and becomes ambitious, blossoming at length into a fertile inventor of machines, the book grows correspondingly less interesting and Hugh himself less real.

"On his first wandering visit to Chicago, Hugh shivered with the nameless fear of multitudes as the people swarmed in and out of the city like driven cattle under the smoke-blackened sky".

Towards the end of Poor White we are shown here and there previews of the new America with its "long rows of houses, long streets of houses, houses in brick, stone and wood"--"its countless millions of rubber hoops, filled each with its portion of God's air compressed and imprisoned at last like the farm-hands who have gone to the cities". Hugh's wife is revolted by the mechanical impulse which has taken hold of her generation.

She even grows to hate, for a while, Hugh himself, who with his machines is helping to destroy the memory of the dead past when men and beauty were not crushed by the machine. According to Anderson, America's real tragedy is conquest by the machine.

Throughout Anderson's writings there is implied or stated the existence of a dumb confusion in America. Such a condition has been arrived at after decades. Americans have inherited the mistakes their fathers unconsciously made. People are caught up in the meshes of American civilization that are growing stronger and stronger. They bind them down socially and morally. The country gropes for a way out of the entanglement. There is a way out, which Anderson indicates but in an indirect manner rather than by straightforward advice. He himself walked out of a factory office to be free.

In the early novels, Windy McPherson's Son and Marching Men, Anderson saw social orders as the most dominant. Later in Freudian fashion he emphasizes the tragedy of moral failure. The autobiographical element plays a large part in his books. The pitiful scenes he paints he has seen first hand. Yet among such disheartening surroundings Anderson walks tenderly. He broods over his creatures with affection, though he makes no luxury of illusions. When he paints the soft beauty of the

Middle West landscape, the strange criminal violences of life in a small western town, the comic fears, the shabbiness, the endless miseries, his truthfulness stands out at once, cruel and tender; but it is quite different from Sinclair Lewis's malicious tinge.

The best collection of intimate sketches by Sherwood Anderson is the series found in Winesburg, Ohio. Here are histories of everyday people, beneath the surface of whose lives the author hungers to see. Each little story is a tragedy of moral failure. The drama is not acted out in the open but deep down in the souls of the people, down in "the well". That is the reason the stories of Winesburg, Ohio, have an appeal that is broadly human and universal. Although most of the characters are eccentrics, day dreamers, and the half-insane, they have representative qualities that we all might possess under similar circumstances. They all have dual personalities for themselves and for others. They are inhibited characters, hypocrites, or whatever you wish to call them.

The story called Paper Pills in the Winesburg series concerns the old town doctor who spends his time filling his pockets with scraps of paper on which he had written his thoughts. These have become little hard round balls in his pockets. When forty-five he marries a tall dark girl who had come to him in the fall because she was going to have a child. She has had two suitors, very different in character from each other.

In the spring she dies, but during her last few weeks, the doctor reads to her all the odds and ends of thoughts he had scribbled on the bits of paper.

Another poignant study is that of the mother of George Willard, a young reporter. She hates her husband because she wants his son to be ambitious. Awkwardly she tries to make the boy understand her. When she hears the father trying to implant seeds of ambition in George's mind, she nearly decides to kill him with her sewing scissors. At that moment the boy rushes in to tell her enthusiastically that he cannot expect her to understand, but he wants just to go away and look at people and think. "I think you had better go out among the boys. You are too much indoors", is all the mother can say.

The people of Winesburg are types that one can find in almost any small town, yet they are intensely individual. Joe Willing is the volcanic little man who always "has an idea" to solve any problem. Edward King, the barber, has worn through the sleeve of his coat because he always scratches his left elbow with his right hand when he laughed. Alice Hurdman, a clerk in Winney's Dry Goods Store, waits through the years for her lover to return from Chicago and marry her. But at the moment when she feels most desperate, she suddenly realises the fact that many people must live and die, alone and unmarried, even in Winesburg. Wash Williams, the ugly and dirty-appearing telegraph operator, is really a man of courage. He hates all

women and he tells young George Willard the reason:

There is something rotten about them. My wife was a thing sent to make life unbearable to me. I would like to see men a little begin to understand women. They are sent to prevent men making the world worthwhile.

He had been married in his youth and after two years had elapsed, he discovered his wife had three other lovers. He merely sent her back to her mother and said nothing. But the vulgar attempt of the mother to reinstate her daughter with him was too much for poor Wash. It has shattered his belief in all women.

The Strength of God is a queer story of a Presbyterian minister who is tortured by the temptations of a school teacher. Every night in his church study he can peep into her bedroom next door as she undresses for bed. He can see her through a loose pane in a stained glass window of the Christ. Then, one night he sees her kneel naked by her bed and pray fervently. He finally realizes that what he took for a trial of his soul was only a preparation for a deeper religious experience.

In I Want to Know Why the boy cannot understand why a man who shares his own passion for the beauty of horses can bear to go from them to consort with ugly, mean-looking women in a brothel.

In The Egg there is the father who along with his wife becomes bitten by the "American passion for getting up in the world" and who came to failure via a chicken farm and a restaurant through absurd adventures with an egg. Another story tells of Winnifred Walker who "understood that when a man is put behind iron bars he is in prison. Marriage was prison to her". Perhaps perverts, introverts and exhibitionists all appear too frequently in Anderson's stories, yet they only serve to make stronger his condemnation of the Mid-west small-town social set-up.

In style this teller of tales to come out of the Middle West is an expressionistic writer. Vitality is the dominant quality. His work is chaotic, full of electrifying suggestion rather than definition and reasoned argument. Instead of a self-possessed craftsman deliberately constructing from without according to a firmly held idea, the expressionistic writer seems to be on the watch for the emergence of he does not know quite what. His story seems to come from some deep and hidden place, a creation he cannot account for. Anderson's penetration into character may be deep but his expression of what he finds is not so particular nor incisive. I find this essential point in him: he does not seek average or commonplace or typical occasions that give cross-sections of life. He seems to seize the mood or moment in life when a person's guard of consciousness breaks and allows a glimpse of the suppressed but essential self, that is almost as much a stranger and a mystery to its owner as to an outside observer.

In his reflections on literary art, Sherwood Anderson has justified his own writing thus:

There was a notion that ran through all story-telling in America that stories must be built about a plot, and that absurd Anglo-Saxon notion that they must point a moral, uplift, make better citizens, etc. The magazines were flooded with these plot stories. The plot stories did seem to me to poison all writing. Would the common words of our daily speech in shops and offices do the trick? Surely the Americans among whom one sat talking had felt everything that the English felt. Deaths came to them; the tricks of fate assailed their lives. I was certain none of them lived, felt or talked as the average American novel made them live, feel and talk; and as for the plot short stories of the magazines--de Maupassant, Poe and O. Henry--it was certain there were no plot stories ever lived in any life I had ever known about. Sherwood Anderson as a realist is an inevitable part of the American Literary movement, and as a critic destined to strike out at the smuggerly and cant of industrial America. Yet, in general he has unpretentious understanding of little people. His work is not as desperately depressed as Dreiser's nor as significant of the new-bounding and pushing American as Sinclair Lewis's.

## SPIRIT AND BEAUTY

Vachel Lindsay in his revolt against the machine age finds Kansas the state which most completely realizes the frontier idealism, Kansas the heart of the west, Kansas the ideal American community. His private agrarian crusade raises voluntary poverty to be the only means of belonging to the truly leisure class. He longs for a return to St. Francis. His Gospel of Beauty and Golden Book of Springfield with their idealization of agriculture and glad acceptance of poverty prophesy an American renaissance.

The emphasis on the spiritual development rather than on the material can be found in almost all American writers from this point on. Take Eugene O'Neill's plays, for instance. In them we find this disturbing sensitiveness to life and the subsequent insatiable desire to find reality and beauty in human relationships. But even more suggestive than the objects of O'Neill's love are the objects of his hate. A paraphrase of the Luther hymn to serve as the American industrial creed would be "Ein feste bourgeois ist unser Gott". This God of American adoration is the Great God Brown whom O'Neill delights to dethrone, madden, and destroy.

The Mid-west can lay just claim, I believe, to being the real instigator and establisher of the reaction to "Americanism" that later was seized by

critical writers in all parts of the country.

EDGAR LEE MASTERS

Before Sinclair Lewis dissected *Zenith* and *Gopher Prairie* in his novels and Sherwood Anderson his *Winesburg, Ohio*, Edgar Lee Masters had made a survey of *Spoon River* in his free verse poems. Masters follows closely the free verse tradition that Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell established, but it is not through his unusual ability in that medium which gives him a place in modern American poetry. He was the first to encompass the Mid-western community in his Spoon River Anthology. Although the poetic claims of the work are rather questionable, it is certainly a piece of unquestioned originality. It was the forerunner of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, and Sinclair Lewis's Main Street and Babbitt. Masters might claim a paradoxical greatness for it in that he contributed little to American poetry but a great deal to American prose.

Masters was born in Garnet, Kansas, worked for times in law, politics and writing in Chicago. He conceived the idea of social reforming the Middle West by way of poetry in free verse, and for a whole year contributed to each issue of William Reedy's "Mirror" in St. Louis. Each contribution was an epitaph and all together they formed a lengthy poem after the fashion of the Greek anthology. They proved popular and Masters

collected them into a volume entitled The Spoon River Anthology, published in April, 1915. Its wide reception was due not so much to its poetry as to the story quality of the portraits. The poems were supposed to be epitaphs in the cemetery of this Mid-west town. It was as if its two hundred and fourteen dead citizens arose, and each speaking the truth revealed his own life as it had been and the real cause of his death. It is remarkable that Masters accomplished such a colossal study of character in one year. Free verse had given him the medium for which he had been searching.

I am not going to give a lengthy criticism of Master's use of free verse for The Spoon River Anthology rarely achieves the synthesis of absolute poetry. The lines are divided and look like poetry but the speech is human and prosaic. Anyone can read it and thousands have--read it as "divided prose." But the Spoon River's virtue was stripping Americans of their self-delusion at a time when they needed it. At last they saw themselves not as a community of helpful democrats devoted to the loftiest ideals, but as a heterogeneous clash of weaklings, fakers, egoists, lovers, haters, hypocrites, little men and women. Masters is no Balzac and Spoon River Anthology is no Comédie Humaine, but it is as effective as a novel or play in miniature.

Each poem is a character study and as the characters multiply the whole town gradually is built up before us. Unlike most books, no set of primary characters is given more prominence than the set of secondary characters. All together they make the town. The Chinese laundry man is as important to himself as the State's Attorney is to himself. Masters with all his sociological tendencies does not even deify the working man as Sandburg and many other sociological poets do.

Yet in Masters' entire picture there is a brutal quality that seems to us revolting. One wonders if life in the little Western towns of America is as bad as this. Crime follows crime and most of them of an extreme violence and sordidness. This procession of crimes of ambition, of sex, of insanity, of hate is the great blot upon Masters' work. In seeking to give us realism he has made the mistake of showing us too often life in the raw. He has forgotten that idealism, a perception of beauty and an aspiration after fineness and nobleness are also real. To make all such aspirations end in disillusion and death is to have a twisted point of view, needlessly sensual and cruel. This is the general impression of The Spoon River Anthology.

If this panorama of Mid-western American life errs on the side of over-sordidness, over-bitterness and over-sensuality, taken as individuals, we have a true picture. It is only in the aggregate that the balance

is lost by too great a preponderance of one sort of person. See how Masters shows up hypocrisy as in the epitaph on

Nicholas Bindle

Were you not ashamed, fellow citizens,  
When my estate was probated and everyone knew  
How small a fortune I left?--  
You who hounded me in life,  
To give, give, give to the churches, to the poor,  
To the village!--me who had already given much.  
And think you not I did not know  
That the pipe-organ, which I gave to the church,  
Played its christening songs when Deacon Rhodes,  
Who broke the bank and all but ruined me,  
Worshipped for the first time after his acquittal?

Often Masters becomes subtle and more penetrating. In a philosophical suggestion, little is said and all is implied, as in

Sam Hookey

I ran away from home with the circus,  
Having fallen in love with Mademoiselle Estralda,  
The lion tamer.  
One time, having starved the lions  
For more than a day,  
I entered the cage and began to beat Brutus,  
And Leo and Gypsy.

Whereupon Brutus sprang upon me,

And killed me.

On entering these regions

I met a shadow who cursed me,

And said it served me right.....

It was Robespierre!

In Cooney Potter's epitaph, Masters gives us the essence of a novel. A character is doomed by the inevitable approach of Fate.

Cooney Potter

I inherited forty acres from my Father.

And, by working my wife, my two sons

and two daughters,

From dawn to dusk, I acquired

A thousand acres. But not content,

Wishing to own two thousand acres,

I hustled through the years with axe and plow,

Toiling, denying myself, my wife, my sons, my

daughters.

Squire Higbee wrongs me to say

That I died from smoking Red Eagle cigars.

Eating hot mince pie and gulping coffee

During the scorching hours of harvest time

Brought me here 'ere I had reached my

sixtieth year.

In the epitaphs of Albert Schirding and Jonas Keene, Masters presents to us a frequent situation.

If there is any humour in it, it is rather brutal and sardonic.

Albert Schirding

Jonas Keene thought his lot a hard one  
Because his children were all failures.  
But I know of a fate more trying than that:  
It is to be a failure while your children are successes.  
For I raised a brood of eagles  
Who flew away at last, leaving me  
A crow on the abandoned bough.  
Then, with the ambition to prefix honourable to my name,  
And thus to win my children's admiration,  
I ran for the County Superintendent of Schools,  
Spending my accumulations to win--and lost.  
That fall my daughter received first prize in Paris  
For her picture entitled "The Old Mill"---  
(It was of the water mill before Henry Wilkin put in  
steam.)  
The feeling that I was not worthy of her finished me.

Jonas Keene

Why did Albert Schirding kill himself  
Trying to be County Superintendent of Schools,  
Blest as he was with the means of life  
And wonderful children, bringing him honour  
Ere he was sixty?  
If ever one of my boys could have run a news-stand,

Or one of my girls could have married a decent man,  
 I should not have walked in the rain  
 And jumped into bed with clothes all wet,  
 Refusing medical aid.

Although there is a preponderance of crime and  
 disease in the poems, there are occasional bursts  
 of tenderness as in the poem on

Emily Sparks

Where is my boy, my boy--  
 In what far part of the world?  
 The boy I loved best of all in the school?--  
 I, the teacher, the old maid, the virgin heart,  
 Who made them all my children.  
 Did I know my boy aright,  
 Thinking of him as spirit aflame,  
 Active, ever aspiring?  
 Oh boy, boy, for whom I prayed and prayed  
 In many a watchful hour at night,  
 Do you remember the letter I wrote you  
 Of the beautiful love of Christ?  
 And whether you ever took it or not,  
 My boy, wherever you are,  
 Work for your soul's sake,  
 That all the clay of you, all of the dross of you,  
 May yield to the fire of you,  
 Till the fire is nothing but light!.....  
 Nothing but light!

Sarah Brown, who speaks from the grave to her lover, bids him to go to her husband and

Tell him that my love for you, no less than  
my love for him

Wrought out my destiny--that through the flesh  
I won spirit, and through spirit, peace.

There is no marriage in heaven.

But there is love.

Lucinda Matlock who, after seventy years of wedlock, spinning, weaving, gardening and rambling by the river and among the hills, and mothering numerous children, concludes:

At ninety-six, I have lived enough; that is all,  
And passed to a sweet repose.

What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,  
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?

Degenerate sons and daughters,

Life is too strong for you--

It takes life to love life.

Edgar Lee Masters' own attitude toward poetry of his day is found in the epitaph on Petit, the Poet, who wrote faint iambics and verses in old French form:

Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick,

Tick, tick, tick, like mites in a quarrel--

Faint iambics that the full breeze wakens--

But the pine tree makes a symphony thereof.

Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus,

Ballades by the score with the same old thought:

The snows and the roses of yesterday are vanished;

And what is love but a rose that fades?

Life all around me here in the village:  
 Tragedy, comedy, valor, and truth,  
 Courage, constancy, heroism, failure--  
 All in the loom, and oh what patterns!  
 Woodland, meadows, streams and rivers--  
 Blind to all of it all my life long.  
 Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus,  
 Seeds in a dry pod, tick tick tick,  
 Tick, tick, tick, what little iambs,  
 While Homer and Whitman roared in the pines?

Masters tried to recapture the Spoon River idea in The Loop, a lengthy descriptive poem of Chicago, but the stretching out of his stories did not work to the poet's advantage. Unhappily for Masters, other men applied his discovered to their poetry and prose and Spoon River among the pioneer books of the era.

Just a word should be said here of the function of poetry in a reactionary period such as Masters lived in. No man is a poet unless he is bigger than the world he lives in; therefore no true poet scolds his world or moans. Pessimism has no place in poetry unless it is so completely divorced from dejection that it becomes a strong and confident faith. This keeping of its vision too closely upon present things is a fault of modern poetry. What is satisfactory for propagandist verse does not apply to poetry. There is too much escapist verse written by those who are homesick for the past or the future and never touched by the dark glory of their own day.

## CARL SANDBURG

This brings us to the last creative writer born of the Middle West whom we shall discuss in this thesis. It is Carl Sandburg, the Poet of Chicago. You meet countless difficulties when you compare a modern, free-verse poet with the great body of poets of all time in literature. Standards for each individual modern often must apply to no one else but himself. You must treat him for what he is, and then ask yourself if you like him, if he has caught the spirit of that which he writes about, if he suggests to your imagination. Carl Sandburg's poetry is not great poetry as Whitman's is great. There is no great thunderous sweep, but it is delicate and strong.

From his Poems of Chicago we quote:

Working Girls

The working girls in the morning  
 are going to work--long line of  
 them afoot amid the downtown stores  
 and factories, thousands with little  
 brick-shaped lunches wrapped in newspapers  
 under their arms.

Each morning as I move through this river  
 of young woman-life I feel a  
 wonder about where it is all going,  
 so many with a peach bloom of  
 young years on them and laughter  
 on red lips and memories in their  
 eyes of dances the night before and  
 plays and walks.

For economy of statement there are Fog and Grass.

The former has only twenty-one words; the latter, twelve lines.

Fog

The fog comes on little cat feet. It  
sits on silent haunches looking  
over harbour and city and then  
moves on.

Grass

.....I am the grass; I cover all.  
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the  
conductor  
What place is this?  
Where are we now?

I am the grass.

Let me work.

Carl Sandburg's exhilarating and continuous interest in the life of vast modern American cities is responsible for the real value in his Chicago poems. They establish him as one of the distinctive poets of the twentieth century. He is interested in all men and women, the friendlienss of simple congregated humanity.

In Happiness, a five-line poem, he asks certain prominent people to tell him what is happiness. They have no answer.

.....then one Sunday afternoon I

wandered out along the  
Desplaines River.

And I saw a crowd of Hungarians  
under the trees with their women  
and children and a keg of beer  
and an accordion.

From Fish Crier:

.....the Jewish fish-hawker, "terribly glad  
that God made fish, and customers."

From Fellow Citizens:

.....the millionaire manufacturer of butter,  
the newspaper man,  
the mayor who was happy in spite of  
the botheration of place-seekers  
and too many ceremonial dinners,  
the Americo-Italian makers of  
guitars and accordions.

Probably the best-known of all Carl Sandburg's  
poems is Skyscraper. Though he speaks of the building  
as having "a soul of dreams and thoughts and memories,"  
the poem is built of sharp images exactly fitted to  
the structure it celebrates, so that the impression  
is of a skyscraper built with words, and not merely  
a poem about a skyscraper.

Carl Sandburg's general thesis might be stated  
as, "This is our world; let us love it and extol it."

His writing is free verse yet it is musical, and even rhythmical. Along with Vachel Lindsay he has done much to re-establish the oral tradition in poetry.

#### CONCLUSION

This thesis has aimed to assert, perhaps in a too hurried fashion, the Middle West's importance in American literature. As was explained at the beginning the term has been loosely applied and for this we beg excuse. However, the point we have been making of the "Middle West" is not so much a geographical one as a philosophical one. It stands as the herald of new movements in American literature. It inspired and encouraged those first men who wrote differently from the New England copyists of European culture. It led the parade of the optimistic "glad forward song" as pioneers who went far into the west to California. Then when the Gilded Age of complacency began with its Carnegie gospel of democracy the Middle West was among the first to shout its praises. The reactionary pessimism and protest that ended this period and which fell at times into the hands of the muckrakers also was initiated in the Middle West. Finally, American writers are beginning to find some definite inspiration, some new idealism, born of all the years of literary chaos.

STATEMENT OF SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Most of the original works discussed in this thesis, and a great many of those mentioned, have been read by the writer. Much information, concerning both actual writings and that of a critical nature, was obtained from a course of lectures at the University of Toronto, 1931-1932, on American Prose and Poetry and conducted by Professors E. K. Brown and J. F. Macdonald.

(a) The general thesis, as stated first on P. 5 and also in the Conclusion on P. 66, I have always held more or less.

(b) My sympathies with pioneers and frontier creators of any sort are due, I suppose, to my own robust Canadian heritage.

(c) My admiration for men like Sinclair Lewis, Theodore Dreiser, and Sherwood Anderson, who have been bold enough to cry out against American smugery, has been with me since my childhood. After being brought up in a border town in Ontario and having seen and heard the American type summer after summer for years, I can fervently thank God for the trio named above!

(d) The vast improvement and development in American literary art over the last decade, especially in prose, have convinced me that the spiritual frontier has been reached and that the literature of the United States has arrived.

Many of the books in this bibliography I have not read but have found them referred to frequently enough to justify listing them here.

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