

SOME NOVELISTS BETWEEN TWO WARS

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The 1920's in America--a time of exhilaration and wild exuberance, of bravado and fast living to make up the wasted war years. A time of jazz, short skirts, new shiny automobiles; a time of lavish spending and "get-rich-quick" schemes. And yet, there were other things in these "roaring, mad" years too. Heartbreak for some who found their dreams of permanent peace and prosperity smashed; mounting hysteria and fear for others who knew that the gaiety and rejoicing could not last. And finally for all the insecurity and bewilderment of the sudden, if not unexpected, depression. The 1930's found a new group of Americans--older, wiser, often bitter, and decidedly more realistic. The era of youthful carelessness had passed; there were some who questioned whether it had ever really existed.

Just as the war brought new pride in the strength of America, and the post-war period a return to isolationism for the country as a whole, individual groups of Americans asserted their independence. Scientists, musicians, artists, writers: all searched for new outlooks, new modes of expression which were peculiar to themselves. The imitation of British orthodoxy<sup>1</sup> and European culture belonged to the past. In its place had risen an insistence that emphasis should be placed upon the fundamentals of life, fundamentals which were often unpleasant, but which applied especially to American life.<sup>2</sup>

1/ Ernest Boyd, Introduction to Winesburg, Ohio by Sherwood Anderson, New York, B.W. Huebsch, 1919, x.

2/ Maxwell Geismar, The Last of the Provincials, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947, p. 223.

In literature, this struggle for independence took form in a revolt against the sentimentality of the pre-war period, the provincialism and childish evasion of harsh facts. The new fiction had its "roots in the soil,"<sup>3</sup> and in going "beyond naturalism,"<sup>4</sup> became more and more subjective, titling itself "Realism".

Until nearly 1920, there was only one writer who could be seriously considered an original figure in modern American fiction, and that was Theodore Dreiser.<sup>5</sup> By the mid-twenties, a dozen protagonists of the New Realism had followed him with some success.

With new material--for writers no longer hesitated to draw from any source--new methods of expression were both desirable and necessary. Elaborate vocabularies and literary diction gave way to brief sentences, monosyllabic dialogue, and startling and sometimes confusing punctuation. Plots became more complicated, or were apparently lacking altogether; stories were told from the viewpoint of children and idiots, and often probed into sub-conscious minds. The writers, as their characters usually were, were searching for something stable, but something new and different. A few have been called successful by the literary world; others have been condemned. All contributed something.

In this paper, at least one work of ten leading novelists of the 1920's and 1930's will be analyzed in regard to plot structure and narrative style. There also will be some mention of the philosophies of these authors as reflected in their writings, since, as will be shown later, the majority of the writers have social as well as purely literary

3/ Boyd, loc. cit.

4/ Fred B. Millett, Contemporary American Authors, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1940, p. 32.

5/ Boyd, loc. cit.

purposes. Few of the novels of this period were written simply for the story involved. Most of them have some historical or sociological significance as criticisms of some phase of American life. Perhaps, however, they seem more critical than they were meant to be because they discuss subjects--and thus awaken readers to facts--never described before.

The ten novelists chosen are not necessarily the ten best of their period; some, in fact, may be among the ten worst. Neither are the novels which represent them necessarily their best works. The writers are, however, typical of their period, and the novels typical of the writers. The innovations of some of these men and women have been widely imitated; others have appeared sensational because few have been able to copy them well. A few authors do not seem radical at all.

With regret such men as Sinclair Lewis, James Branch Cabell and James Farrell have been omitted. Through the work of Sherwood Anderson, Ellen Glasgow, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, John Steinbeck, Erskine Caldwell, Pearl S. Buck and John P. Marquand, will be drawn a partial picture of a little more than twenty years of American fiction.

...THE BEGINNING...

Tagged a "figurehead" in the "Life of Realization,"<sup>1</sup> SHERWOOD ANDERSON stands as a leader in the modern literary movement both because of his influence upon younger writers such as Hemingway,<sup>2</sup> and because he was one of the first to base his characterizations and plots upon instinct and daily observation rather than lofty idealism. He is considered by many critics to be the most constructive of twentieth-century novelists; for although his form has many imperfections, his mission--self-admittedly--is to "give persuasive expression to the inarticulate."<sup>3</sup> He has devoted himself primarily to the emotions of the common people, and although he may over-emphasize their sexual lives, does so without resorting to obscene details and with sympathy.

Anderson was born in 1876 in Clyde, Ohio, which is probably the "Winesburg" of his most publicized book. His father, often a character in his novels, was a drifter who moved his family from town to town, where young Sherwood did odd jobs and "picked up his knowledge in barrooms, streets and stores."<sup>4</sup> He spent half of his life as a wanderer, gaining the experience of which he later wrote, before he finished his first book. His work as a mechanic, as manager of a small factory, Spanish-American War soldier, and publicist for moving pictures is reflected in his writing.

1/ Geismar, Last of the Provincials, p. 223.

2/ Ibid.

3/ Millett, Contemporary American Authors, p. 32.

4/ Ibid., p. 221.

Fadiman called Anderson a "re-emergent adolescent with the bewilderment of a mature man who has suddenly been forced to think."<sup>5</sup> William Allen White attached to him the titles, "the Dostoievsky of Winesburg, Ohio," and the "mid-American Chekhov."<sup>6</sup> Actually, however, he had little in common with either except for "preoccupation with interior mental processes and an absence of sharply defined plot."<sup>7</sup> Even more characteristic of his individual style is his never-tiring search for an escape from the world he finds so monotonous and hypocritical; and the confusion in his subjective, Freudian story telling manner. Said one critic, "Will his wisdom ever catch up with his passion and his observation?"<sup>8</sup> However, this very passion which prevents tranquillity in Anderson is probably most responsible for his effective realism.

Windy McPherson's Son, Marching Men, and Poor White, written between 1915 and 1920, were Anderson's first novels. By the end of the second, he had formulated the basic plot which he used in most of his later books: that of a young man struggling to leave home, or leaving home, to win success and finding only dissatisfaction. All of Anderson's heroes, as we also see later in Wolfe, seem to be "variations on his own introverted personality."<sup>9</sup> His later volume, Winesburg, Ohio, although not a true novel, will be used here for analysis because it contains all of the characteristics, good and bad, of the author's style.

5/ Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, New York, H. W. Wilson Company, 1942, p. 25.

6/ Ibid.

7/ Ibid.

8/ Carl Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists, 1900-1920, New York, The MacMillan Company, 1926, p. 157.

9/ Millett, op. cit., p. 32.

Perhaps inspired by Edgar Lee Master's Spoon River Anthology,<sup>10</sup> Winesburg, Ohio is a collection of short prose sketches of individuals, a "wheel of many colors".<sup>11</sup> In the introduction, Anderson explains that he intends to draw grotesques, and his resulting characters are lonely, sex-starved villagers who live abnormal and futile lives in what appears to be a typical small town. The life stories of these characters are the plot, and therefore if not told well doom the book. One of Anderson's severest critics, Arthur Quinn, has compared the author to a small boy who relieves his mind with a piece of chalk on a back fence.<sup>12</sup> Quinn finds no realism in what he considers monsters of lust and perversion; and he calls the Winesburg characters "pale incarnations of the idle thoughts which, if they come to normal human beings, are rarely translated into action."<sup>13</sup>

Quinn's admission that such "idle thoughts" might exist is probably Anderson's strongest defense. Idle thoughts alone cannot produce a story; but these thoughts together with a writer's imagination and intuition may break through surface dullness and reveal the passion beneath. Unlike his later contemporaries such as Dos Passos, Caldwell and Faulkner, Anderson does not write of sex just as "sex" to create humor or sensationalism. Instead, he reveals character. The woman who sleeps hungrily with a pillow, the man who imagines himself Christ, the minister who peeks through a stained glass window

10/ Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction, New York, D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936, p. 657.

11/ Boyd, op. cit., ix

12/ Quinn, op. cit., p. 658

13/ Ibid.

at a nude woman; all are real human beings. Where is obscenity in this description of George Willard's mother?:

At eighteen life had so gripped her that she was no longer a virgin but, although she had a half dozen lovers before she married Tom Willard, she had never entered upon an adventure prompted by desire alone. Like all the women in the world, she wanted a real lover. Always there was something she sought blindly, passionately, some hidden wonder in life. The tall, beautiful girl with the swinging stride who had walked under the trees with men was forever putting out her hand into the darkness and trying to get hold of some other hand.

Anderson presents his characters through direct description, through their actions, and through well chosen dialogue. The brevity of his sentences, his frequent use of the word "and", and his simple vocabulary give his prose as a whole an exceptional naturalness. He is a master of American colloquial language, and yet one is hardly conscious of the colloquial because of his "fine sense of rhythm, sensitive repetitions and poetic use of the most familiar words and phrases."<sup>14</sup>

The trees along the residence streets of the town were all newly clothed in soft green leaves...

He said that Helen White was a flame dancing in the air and that he was a little tree without leaves standing out sharply against the sky...

It soon becomes obvious to the reader that Anderson likes his characters in spite of his emphasis upon their perversions. He is ever sympathetic, and his insight into men's hidden emotions is extraordinary. Typical of his tenderness is his brief comment:

In his grief Tom Willard's face looked like the face of a little dog that has been out a long time in bitter weather...

<sup>14</sup>/ Millett, op. cit., p. 32.



When describing the reaction of young George Willard to the same death, he writes:

George Willard became possessed of a madness to lift the sheet from the body of his mother and look at her face...he became convinced that not his mother but someone else lay in the bed before him...again and again he put out his hand. Once he touched and half lifted the white sheet that covered her, but his courage failed...

Occasionally, Anderson reaches great heights in characterization through seemingly insignificant action. George Willard's behavior in a pool room tells us much about him:

...He said that women should look out for themselves, that the fellow who went out with a girl was not responsible for what happened. As he talked he looked about, eager for attention...Out of doors under the black sky filled with stars he forgot his companions of the pool room. Because it was dark and he was alone he began to talk aloud. In a spirit of play he reeled along the street imitating a drunken man and then imagined himself a soldier clad in shining boots that reached to the knees and wearing a sword that jingled as he walked...

"There is a law for armies and for men too," he muttered, lost in reflection. "The law begins with little things and spreads out until it covers everything. In every little thing there must be order, the place where men work, in their clothes, in their thoughts. I myself must be orderly. I must learn that law. I must get myself in touch with something orderly and big that swings through the night like a star. In my little way I must begin to learn something, to give and swing and work with life, with the law. ...He was amazed and delighted with his own mind.

There is indeed something of the philosopher in Anderson which is later found in Wolfe.

Symbolism is one of Anderson's most effective tools and he makes frequent use of similes. The first sketch in Winesburg, Ohio, called "Paper Pills", is almost one long simile. The author describes the twisted, gnarled apples which are left on the ground

of Winesburg orchards after the beautiful round ones are sent to the cities. He tells of their hidden sweetness, and adds that the story of old Dr. Reefy and his lovely young wife "was delicious, like the twisted little apples." After describing the heartbreak brought to the girl by young men (supposedly like round apples), he comments meaningfully, "only the few know the sweetness of the twisted apples." Anderson does not hesitate to write a moral into the sketches which on the surface may seem plotless and without purpose.

Hands seem to have a peculiar fascination for Anderson, and some of his best descriptions are based on them:

The knuckles of the doctor's hand were extraordinarily large. When the hands were closed they looked like clusters of unpainted wooden balls as large as walnuts fastened together by steel rods...

Again:

That flaming kind of birthmark that sometimes paints with red the faces of men and women had touched with red Tom Willy's fingers and the backs of his hands. As he stood by the bar...he rubbed the hands together. As he grew more and more excited the red of his fingers deepened. It was as though the hands had been dipped in blood that had dried and faded...

Once more:

Not everything about Walsh was unclean. He took care of his hands. His fingers were fat, but there was something sensitive and shapely in the hand that lay on the table by the instrument in the telegraph office...

In spite of Anderson's vividness of detail, he has undeniable weaknesses, both in characterization and in plot structure. The criticism that his secondary characters are too often treated casually and seem to play no integral part in the pattern of his books is certainly justified, as is one critic's comment that his

frequent digressions and essays on American ideals tend to "blur the outlines of his creative forms."<sup>15</sup> Anderson starts one story, mentions another, goes back and forth, and finally finds himself again. He also seems to find great difficulty in describing adequately more than one or two characters in a scene; and his scattered use of citizens' names for atmosphere is not effective. His sentences sometimes become overburdened and confusing:

George Willard went one evening to walk with Belle Carpenter, a trimmer of women's hats who worked in a millinery shop kept by Mrs. Kate McHugh. The young man was not in love with the woman, who, in fact, had a suitor who worked as bartender in Ed Griffith's saloon, but as they walked about under the trees they occasionally embraced.

Neither Mrs. McHugh nor Mr. Griffith is ever mentioned again.

By bestowing some of his finest thoughts upon characters who have not been sufficiently described, Anderson loses many opportunities for good sketches. Then again, he will describe another character with great feeling--as Tom Foster in "Drink"--and suddenly let his story drift off into thin air with no direction, climax or real significance.

The sketches of Winesburg, Ohio are held together by their common locale, the repeated appearances of a few characters through the book, and the psychological factor based upon Anderson's statement, "People live and die alone even in Winesburg." The hero, or main character of the book, is George Willard (undoubtedly Anderson himself), a young reporter without any obvious abnormality. He is seldom particularly interesting, but serves as an observer and a victim of the influence of the other characters.

<sup>15/</sup> Millett, op. cit., p. 32

The book really becomes young Willard's toward the end, and in shifting the center of interest from the rest of the villagers, Anderson becomes overly sentimental. Where he might have shown a great psychological impression upon George, he instead changes the boy's struggle to leave his despised environment into the normal desire of any healthy young male to seek new fields. The last paragraphs, although "pretty" and idealistic, are disappointing:

The young man's mind was carried away by his growing passion for dreams. One looking at him would not have thought him particularly sharp. With the recollection of little things occupying his mind he closed his eyes and leaned back in the car seat. He stayed that way for a long time and when he roused himself again and again looked out of the car window the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood.

It might appear that there is irony in this paragraph, if it had not been preceded by a chapter of George's happy frolic in the woods with a squealing girl.

In spite of his sometimes disturbing lack of form and his inconsistencies in style, Anderson deserves his position in modern American literature. It must be remembered that he was a pioneer, and that even if he accomplished nothing else, he helped inaugurate the revolt against puritan taboos<sup>16</sup> and prepared the reading public for the writers who followed him.

16/ Geismar, op. cit., p. 235.

...A NEW PICTURE OF THE SOUTH...

Standing with Sherwood Anderson as one of the first "modern" writers, but with more conservative tendencies, is ELLEN GLASGOW. Although classified in the school of realism, Miss Glasgow may be contrasted with many of her contemporaries as one twentieth century novelist who has not been swayed by the radical movement in technique. She has instead depended upon freshness and variety in presentation to gain her position as an early leader.

Ellen Glasgow was born and raised in Virginia, and obeying the most elementary principle of good technique, has written about the scenes she knows best. She herself admits that the scope of her material is limited by the impressions and recollections of her early childhood,<sup>1</sup> and yet, it is this adherence to what she knows is fact that gives her work the sense of deep understanding of life. Her style has been called "Zolaesque" because of its epic sweep<sup>2\*</sup>; but even so, one soon discovers that she is not free from romantic influence. Her first novels especially are reminiscent of the orthodox historical romances.<sup>3</sup>

Miss Glasgow has been called by one critic an "ironic idealist," by another an "ironic tragedian."<sup>4</sup> She is probably both, although the extent of her idealism frequently tends to lessen the effect of her pathos. Although she manages to create

1/ Quinn, American Fiction, p. 670.

2/ Frederic Taber Cooper, Some American Story Tellers, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1911, p. 91.

3/ Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists, p. 132.

4/ Twentieth Century Authors, p. 541

\* The epic novel like the epic poem must have a two-fold theme: a specific human story and a big general problem.

an atmosphere of universality while telling a specific story, she has difficulty in maintaining a consistent tone. This inconsistency is more understandable when one considers that she was one of the first realists.

Barren Ground, written in 1925 and once chosen by Miss Glasgow as her favorite work,<sup>5</sup> is typical of both the epic quality of her style and the high degree of romanticism in her early novels. In the larger sense, it tells the story of the degeneration of the Southern middle class; more specifically, it is the tragic romance of one girl, Dorinda Oakley. It was the first novel to come out of the South which did not have as its theme the joys and sorrows of old plantation life.

Ellen Glasgow freely admitted that she wrote to please herself rather than any group of readers, and that her aim was perfection.<sup>6</sup> A careful stylist, she wrote the chapters of Barren Ground one by one, working over each until it satisfied her.<sup>7</sup> This preciseness has enabled her to produce some of the most beautiful description in modern fiction, but at the same time, unfortunately, has taken from her prose much of the naturalness and smooth transition which she sought. Each sentence, each phrase, each word seems too carefully planned; each paragraph must not only tell a story but must have a lasting meaning.

Barren Ground is divided into three parts, symbolically titled "Broomsedge", "Pine," and "Life-Everlasting". The first is gluttoned

5/ Ellen Glasgow, Barren Ground, New York, Modern Library (Random House, Inc.), 1925, Preface, vii.

6/ Robert van Gelder, Writers and Writing, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946, p. 321

7/ Ibid.

with adjective-filled description of the Virginia countryside and the people who inhabit the farms there. Woven in among the description is the frantic love of twenty-year-old Dorinda Oakley for a young doctor, Jason Greylock, who professes love for her, but in his weakness jilts her for another. "Broomsedge" concludes with Dorinda's heart-broken escape to the anonymity of New York.

In "Pine", Dorinda, brooding over the tragedy of her life, is hit by a taxicab and then befriended by a kindly surgeon who saves her life. After two years of work in his office, the details of which are given in brief retrospect, she returns to the family homestead just before her father's death. She spends the next fifteen years laboring to make the farm prosper, loses her mother, and finally marries a widower, Nathan Pedlar, who had been married to her best friend. Her desire for revenge on Jason is partially satisfied by her purchase of the old Greylock farm, Five Oaks, after the suicide death of Jason's neurotic wife.

"Life-Everlasting" brings final tragedy to Dorinda through the death of Nathan in a train wreck. She then takes Jason, who has followed his father's drunken example, into her home and nurses him until his death. She is left at middle age, implies Miss Glasgow, with one life behind her and the vision of a new and better one lying ahead.

Were it not for the beauty of the prose, Barren Ground would be more "soap opera" than anything else. The plot is sentimental, melodramatic, almost Elsie Dinsmorean. Everything and everyone is either very, very good, or very, very bad. To Miss Glasgow, not only is everything God made worth telling about, but is so important

that the significance of its existence must also be described. A horse cannot shake its head without its ears twitching dejectedly and philosophically; Dorinda cannot look at a building or planted field or sunrise without reflecting on all that has ever happened to her. Miss Glasgow obviously has observed much, and she has a great deal to say. She attempts to say it all in one novel.

Probably most responsible for the impression of over-elaboration in Barren Ground is the discrepancy between Miss Glasgow's subject matter and her technique. She writes of simple people who belong in the social class between gentility and "poor white trash." Physically, she does not glamorize them, and therefore she falls into the class of realists. However, her own gentle breeding and feminine inhibitions prevent her from really getting "down to earth" and analyzing them honestly, especially in regard to depth of character. The result is an almost startling mixture of realism and idealistic coloring.

The novel begins slowly, the first chapter consisting of an historical résumé of several family trees and of the general degeneration of the South. The second and following chapters start the story, but move equally slowly because they are glutted with description. Nothing is left to the reader's imagination; nothing is left to reveal through dialogue. When one has struggled through paragraphs of Miss Glasgow's acute observation, one knows everything. There is an almost Homeric touch in the description of Dorinda's father:

"I ain't had my coffee yet," replied Joshua, raising his head from his plate. He was a big, humble, slow-



witted man, who ate and drank like a horse, with loud munching noises. As his hair was seldom cut and he never shaved, he still kept his resemblance to the pictures of John the Baptist in the family Bible. In place of his youthful comeliness, however, he wore now an air of having just emerged from the wilderness. His shoulders were bent and slightly crooked from lifting heavy burdens, and his face, the little that one could see of it, was weather beaten and wrinkled in deep furrows, like the fissures in a red clay road after rain. From beneath his shaggy hair his large brown eyes were bright and wistful with the melancholy that lurks in the eyes of cripples or of suffering animals. He was a dumb plodding creature who had as little share in the family life as had the horses, Dan and Beersheba; but, like the horses, he was always patient and willing to do whatever was required of him. There were times when Dorinda asked herself if indeed he had any personal life apart from the seasons and the crops. Though he was not yet sixty-five, his features, browned and reddened and seamed by sun and wind, appeared as old as a rock embedded in earth. All his life he had been a slave to the land, harnessed to the elemental forces, struggling inarticulately against the blight of poverty and the barrenness of the soil. Yet Dorinda had never heard him rebel. His resignation was the earth's passive acceptance of sun or rain. When his crop failed, or his tobacco was destroyed by frost, he would drive his plough into the field and begin all over again. "That tobacco wanted another touch of sun," he would say quietly, or "I'll make out to cut it a day earlier next year." The earth clung to him; to his clothes, to the anxious creases in his face, to his finger-nails, and to his heavy boots, which were caked with manure from the stables. The first time Dorinda remembered his taking her on his knee, the strong smell of his blue jeans overalls had frightened her to tears, and she had struggled and screamed. "I reckon my hands are too rough," he had said timidly, and after that he had never tried to lift her again. But whenever she thought of him now, his hands, gnarled, twisted, and earth stained like the vigorous roots of a tree, and that penetrating briny smell, were the first things she remembered. His image was embalmed in that stale odour of the farm as in a preserving fluid.

This is Glasgow realism at its best; but this characterization would be far more effective if broken up into smaller paragraphs and scattered through the book to enrich the narrative.

Miss Glasgow's "pictures" of the countryside are fresh and lovely. Here one again may see her well-rounded vocabulary and fastidious treatment:

Bleak, raw, wind-swept, the morning had begun with a wintry chill. The snow of yesterday was gone; only an iridescent vapour, as delicate as a cobweb, was spun over the ground. Already...the light was changing, and more slowly, as if a veil fluttered before it was lifted, the expression of the country changed with it. In the east, an arrow of sunshine, too pallid to be called golden, shot through the clouds and flashed over the big pine on the hill at the back of the house. The landscape, which had worn a discouraged aspect, appeared suddenly to glow under the surface. Veins of green and gold, like tiny rivulets of spring, glistened in the winter woods and in the mauve and brown of the fields. The world was familiar, and yet, in some indescribable way, it was different, shot through with romance as with the glimmer of phosphorence. Life, which had drooped, flared up again, burning clear and strong in Dorinda's heart. It had come back, that luminous expectancy, that golden mist of sensation...

In the few scenes of real sorrow or grief, there are shades of Edgar Allan Poe:

It isn't true. It isn't true. The pendulum was swinging more slowly; and suddenly the ticking stopped, and then went on in jerks like a clock that is running down. It isn't true. It isn't true--true--true.

...Though she had not lost the faculty of recollection, she was outside time and space, suspended in ultimate darkness. There was an abyss around her, and through this abyss wind was blowing, black wind, which made no sound because it was sweeping through nothingness. She lay flat in this vacancy, yet she did not fall through it because she also was nothing...

Occasionally, in order to speed up her narrative without omitting her descriptions, Miss Glasgow lapses into retrospect, cutting out months or years of action important to the plot. At the end of one chapter Dorinda hopes that Jason will someday love her. At the beginning of the next they are engaged. A brief summary of what

has happened is given through Dorinda's sighs of rapture, but it is not satisfactory. Perhaps the author left out a chapter when writing them one by one!

Even in some of her best description, Miss Glasgow is too frequently guilty of labeling. She will produce a perfect sentence, and then weaken its effect by over-elaborating:

Mrs. Oakley shook her head, while she dragged her body like an empty garment back to the stove.

The next sentence:

From the way she moved she seemed to have neither bone nor muscle...

Barren Ground belongs to Dorinda. She is the strongest character. Since Miss Glasgow has written her own reactions to life into the girl's every thought and gesture, a vivid portrayal of Dorinda is to be expected. However, Jason, who should certainly be second in importance considering the influence of his behavior, is the most poorly drawn. We are told again and again that he has red hair, "just the color of the clay in the road", a small mustache and a charming smile; he speaks a few times; and his lack of courage is bewailed by Dorinda. But he never really lives, and is the most romantic figure in the novel.

Mrs. Oakley, whose pious expressions are sprinkled through Dorinda's speech, is characterized through widely distributed bits of description, and therefore remains with the reader longer than her husband Joshua does. Miss Glasgow generally has little difficulty in characterizing members of her own sex:

...The girl had sometimes felt that the greatest cross in her life was her mother's morbid unselfishness.

Even her nagging--and she nagged at them continually-- was easier to bear...

She writes of another farm woman:

As the mother of children so numerous that their father could not be trusted to remember their names, she still welcomed the yearly addition to her family with the moral serenity of a rabbit...

Miss Glasgow's dialogue is her weakest point. It is usually affected and self-conscious; and many of the speeches are too long and involved. Again the author must make every comment entirely clear, and often the characters speak to the reader rather than to each other. Dorinda says to her mother:

"If it's a good day tomorrow I think I'll walk down to Whistling Springs in the evening and see Aunt Mehitable Green. Her daughter Jemima works over at Five Oaks, and she may had heard something."

Mrs. Oakley knows Aunt Mehitable's last name; she knows Jemima is her daughter; and she knows where Jemima works. Actually, the reader knows too, for Aunt Mehitable and her family have already been introduced.

Miss Glasgow's genteel English seems to handicap her, for she mixes her own vocabulary with the colloquialisms of her characters. The resulting dialogue is inconsistent, and the use of such forms as "yestiddy", "thar", "anywhar", and "ain't" does not seem justified when a character has perfect mastery of participles and uncontracted verbs in other speeches.

Note the difference in two of Jason's statements:

"I'd just got down to open the gate when I looked up the road and saw you coming..."

"I am dependent upon some human associations...I hoped I could distract myself by doing some good

while I was here...but last night taught me the folly of that..."

Miss Glasgow's style most obviously does not relate to her subjects when she puts pretentious words into the mouths of unpretentious people.

The inflections written into the negro dialogue are noticeably poor when the following is read aloud:

"Naw'm, Micajah brung me over wid de load er pine in de oxcyart. I ain' seen you en you' Ma fur a mont' er Sundays, honey."

Evidence of over-dramatization may be seen in Jason's speech:

"Dorinda!...So you know. But you can't know all. Not what I've been through. Not what I've suffered. Nobody could. It is hell. I tell you I've been through hell since I left you. I never wanted to do it. You are the only one I care for..."

There is irony in this speech, just as in many of the conversations of the ignorant Southerners, but it is obscured because the reader has not been prepared for it through adequate characterization. Later in the novel, Miss Glasgow either runs out of adjectives or becomes exhausted, and her prose becomes more simple and thus more powerful. The best ironic humor lies in the villagers' praise of Nathan after his death. Dorinda, because of her idealistic dreaming, might be even a superb satirical figure if Miss Glasgow did not so obviously sympathize with her.

In all fairness, Ellen Glasgow, in spite of the weaknesses of Barren Ground, must be praised for her spirit. As one of the first Southerners who dared to speak honestly about her part of the country, she did surprisingly well. It must also be remembered that she was writing long before her contemporaries of the 1920's

and 1930's were even through school; and she was therefore more directly influenced by romanticism. Her later works are more sophisticated and less sentimental; and in 1942 she received a Pulitzer Prize for her novel, In This Our Life.

...FAREWELL TO SENTIMENTALISM...

In direct contrast to the elaborate description of Ellen Glasgow is the bareness of presentation of ERNEST HEMINGWAY, who has been called the laureate of the "lost generation", and the articulate voice of its subconscious death wish.<sup>1</sup> He has been compared to Byron in writing himself into the character of his heroes; he has frequently been hailed as the leading American author of the last twenty years. His individual style has become the model for a horde of imitators; and whether or not his contribution may be considered valuable, its impression has affected modern literature to the extent that publishers have hopefully titled one young writer after another the "second Ernest Hemingway."<sup>2</sup>

Hemingway's reputation rests mainly upon three novels, A Farewell to Arms, The Sun Also Rises, and For Whom the Bell Tolls, plus a host of short stories which include "The Killers", "The Undefeated", and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro". Through all of these runs a basic theme or philosophy which has set him apart as an individual with a style which is both new and peculiar to himself. This set pattern has made his work easily recognizable, but because it is so specialized, has also limited his scope of characters and situations. If it is true that the secret of good writing lies in the relation of subject to style, Hemingway has been successful, for he always creates characters who naturally speak and act the way he writes. However, because he is so consistent in

1/ Louis Untermeyer, "My Own Five-Foot Shelf", Esquire, XXVIII, August, 1947, p. 120.

2/ Bennet A. Cerf, Editor, Great Modern Short Stories, New York, Modern Library (Random House, Inc.), 1942, P. 475.

his portrayal, he loses the variety which is found in the characterizations of authors with less exacting technique.

The most obvious and outstanding characteristics of Hemingway's writing are his emphasis on the physical, his brief and seemingly realistic dialogue, and his lively, stacatto phrasing. Said Clifton Fadiman: "Hemingway cultivates primal emotions almost to the degree of fetishness...he worships his reflexes...he is primitive and brutal...bare of sentiment." He dwells upon sports in almost all of his stories: boxing, bull-fighting, racing, hunting; his reactions are entirely masculine, unsentimental, animal.

Ernest Hemingway was born in 1898, the son of an Illinois doctor. Before America's entry into the first World War, he went to France as an ambulance driver; and after the Armistice he became a foreign correspondent in Paris. Just as his war experiences gave him subject matter, the world-wide breakdown of beliefs in the post-war period influenced him as it did Dos Passos. At a time when people were seeking escape from reality and looking for something tangible to cling to, the searching in Hemingway's books made him instantly popular. Unhappy, disillusioned Americans found themselves (or thought they did) in A Farewell to Arms and The Sun Also Rises. They were grateful for the flat, undecorated statements which replaced the fancy trimmings of the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras.

Reminiscent of Anderson, many of Hemingway's sketches and stories are almost plotless, without climax or proper development of action. Their energy and vividness together with the writer's



power of weighted understatement alone save them. His characters are revealed through dialogue--dialogue which seems extremely realistic when read aloud, but which perhaps really is not realistic since it is always so typically "Hemingway". The people he portrays have a bare language, make no profound statements, and have little use for subtleties. And yet they live because they say and do what readers believe they would say and do.

Typical of Hemingway's style is A Farewell to Arms, a novel which in reality has a dual subject: the influence of war on a young American volunteer in Italy, and the relationship between this man and a British nurse. The story is written in first person with Frederick Henry, the American, as narrator. The book is well organized, divided into five sections, each with a different setting. Hemingway's power of organization is one of his greatest assets. Each part of A Farewell to Arms is almost complete in itself, and when all are put together make a unified whole. No one could deny that Hemingway is an expert craftsman. Not only this organization but his careful revisious, shown by his original copy, and the natural rhythms even in his short sentences testify to this.

The first section introduces the characters: Rinaldi, Henry's colorful Italian surgeon friend; the young and humble deeply-religious priest; other Italian officers; and Catherine Barkley and her brusque, good-hearted friend, Miss Ferguson. It ends with Henry's injury through a shell explosion when he is off-duty in the village.

In the second section, Henry is joined in the American hospital at Milan by Catherine. He realizes his love for her, and after living with her during his convalescence, returns to duty leaving her pregnant.

The third section, possibly the most dramatic, tells of Henry's readjustment in his outfit, his flight from the German army, and escape from Italian insurgents when captured on the road leading to Milan.

In the last two sections, Henry, a deserter, and Catherine travel by boat to Switzerland, establish themselves in a hotel and await the birth of the child. Catherine's death leaves Henry alone, his future undecided.

The most important factor in analyzing A Farewell to Arms is the success or failure of the characterization--and thus, the success or failure of the dialogue. Although it may be true that men and women speak in monosyllables and leave much unsaid, it is also true that too much of such conversation can fail by seeming too insignificant and unimportant. It seems unfortunate that in order to achieve realism an author must waste some of his best opportunities to reveal character. While Hemingway may have a point in showing that people say little, he apparently forgets that they also think. There is a vast difference between being subtle and being so obscure that a reason can not be found for an action or conversation.

Added to the brevity in dialogue is an almost total lack of character description. This may be partly due to the narrative

having been written in the first person (a man can not well describe himself), but more probably, Hemingway did not feel that description was necessary. (He is certainly not incapable of adequate characterization, as is evidenced in For Whom the Bell Tolls.)

Neither of the two leading characters really seems to live, partly because it is impossible to picture them adequately. Henry has no real personality. He tells his story objectively, seldom showing any feeling or emotion, and frequently reviews his experiences instead of living them.

Catherine is less cold, but only with enough warmth to give her femininity. Of course the story is not told from her point of view, but Henry might be more expressive:

Miss Barkley was quite tall. She wore what seemed to me to be a nurse's uniform, was blond and had a tawny skin and gray eyes.

He never elaborates further.

The result is that because the reader does not really know the characters, the story is less poignant than it might have been. The final death scene, for example, has pathos and intensity, but loses much of its irony and heart-rending power because preceding action has not prepared the reader for such emotion or grief. More drama here is not necessary or justified, but greater feeling in earlier chapters might give this scene added effectiveness.

In spite of its weaknesses, there is much merit in A Farewell to Arms. The story increases in intensity as it moves along, a welcome contrast to many books which lose impact after the first one hundred pages. There is tenderness in some of the hospital

love scenes:

"Hello, darling," she said. She looked fresh and young and very beautiful. I thought I had never seen anyone so beautiful.

"Hello," I said. When I saw her I was in love with her. Everything turned over inside of me.

Henry's kindness to the two lost teen-aged girls in the flight chapter, and the death of the driver Amyo are beautifully expressed. In the latter scene, Hemingway's lack of surface emotion is especially effective:

He looked very dead. It was raining. I had liked him as well as anyone I ever knew.

The war scenes show Hemingway's fullest understanding of men and battle--the bravery, the cowardice, the grim humor and bitterness of injury and death. His struggles as he floats down the river away from insurgents tell us more about Henry than does any of his dialogue.

Each of the two parts of this book--war and love--although dependent upon each other as the story is now written, with fuller development could stand alone. Either might be more powerful if separated from the other and made into a short story, since neither seems complete. We would like to know more about the priest and Rinaldi, more about Nurse Ferguson. All three seem more alive and worth telling about than either Frederick Henry or Catherine Barkley--possibly because their dialogue is more involved.

The book as a whole makes a better play and movie than a novel. Facial expressions and voice inflections give the briefest dialogue more meaning; and the incomplete characterizations are strengthened by the physical presence of Henry and Catherine.

That Hemingway is capable of more vivid characterization through his dialogue and descriptions, is evidenced in his later novel, For Whom the Bell Tolls. Thought by many critics to be his best work, this book also tells of the reactions of a young American to danger and love, but with more imagery, feeling and vigor. Said Henry Seidel Canby, "...Hemingway, who has been celebrated for his toughness and brutality, has written in the sudden love story of Robert Jordan and his 'rabbit' one of the most touching and perfect love stories in modern literature...war is the scene of this novel; but it is a magnificent romance of human nature quite apart from and above its environment of civil war."<sup>3</sup>

Nearly twice as long as A Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls is obviously the product of a more mature and experienced writer. As Hemingway himself said, "...they say when you're in your forties you ought to know enough and have enough stuff to do a good one. I think this is it."<sup>4</sup>

Even with years between them, however, there is much similarity in the two books. Both have a war setting; both have a love story which enters accidentally and then dominates; both have their heroines influenced by a past tragedy (rape and confinement for Maria, loss of a lover for Catherine); and both have their ending in death. Here all similarity ends. The action in A Farewell to Arms covers months, and yet one still knows nothing tangible about the characters. During the four days of For Whom the Bell Tolls, one lives, feels and thinks with Jordan and Maria.

<sup>3/</sup> Book of the Month Club News.

<sup>4/</sup> van Gelder, Writers and Writing, p. 95.

It might be argued that the greater length of For Whom the Bell Tolls gives it an advantage in that there is more opportunity to become well acquainted with the characters. However, development rather than length is the secret of the effectiveness of this novel. In fact, one of the few weaknesses of the book is that it loses some of its impact through being almost too long. Hemingway's masculine passion for physical violence will not allow his love stories to predominate; and here he adds episode after episode of action which, although interesting barely misses causing the story to drag.

One knows much of the character of Robert Jordan after the first chapter of For Whom the Bell Tolls; one does not know Frederick Henry after the whole of A Farewell to Arms. From the beginning, when Jordan is introduced as an American professor enlisted in the Republican struggle in Spain, one feels that he and his friends are individuals, not a group of words printed on a page. Hemingway accomplishes this by three means: by direct description, by more detailed dialogue, and by paragraphs of the characters' thoughts and subtle planning before they act.

In this book, the characters think as well as speak; and although the Spaniards may not be true to Spanish type, they live, which is perhaps more important. The loud and vulgar but wise Pilar, the shrewd but cowardly Pablo, the brave Fernando, good Anselmo and rascally Gypsy are intimately portrayed and self-expressive. No character is merely a name:

Golz with his strange white face that never tanned, his hawk eyes, the big nose and thin lips

and shaven head crossed with wrinkles and with scars.

The description of Maria, as Robert Jordan first saw her, is especially typical of the vast difference in approach of the two novels:

The girl stooped as she came out of the cave mouth carrying the big iron cooking platter and Robert Jordan saw her face turned at an angle and at the same time saw the strange thing about her. She smiled and said, "Hola, Comrade," and Robert Jordan said "Salud", and was careful not to stare and not to look away. She set down the flat iron platter in front of him and he noticed her handsome brown hands. Now she looked him full in the face and smiled. Her teeth were white in her brown face and her skin and her eyes were the same golden tawny brown. She had high cheekbones, merry eyes and a straight mouth with full lips. Her hair was the golden brown of a grain field that has been burned dark in the sun but it was cut short all over her head so that it was but little longer than the fur on a beaver pelt. She smiled in Robert Jordan's face and put her brown hand up and ran it over her head, flattening the hair which rose again as her hand passed...

There is warmth and tenderness here, as there is later in descriptions of love scenes. Maria does not know how to kiss, and she says, "Where do the noses go? I always wondered where the noses would go." And Robert Jordan's feeling:

Now as they lay...where there had been roughness of fabric all was smooth with a smoothness and firm rounded pressing and a long warm coolness...now all warmly smooth with a hollowing, chest aching, tight-held loneliness that was such that Robert Jordan felt he could not stand it...

The dialogue is also more involved with longer sentences and longer individual conversations. Some speeches even last a paragraph! The few long speeches in A Farewell to Arms unfortunately belong to Rinaldi, who is not supposed to be one

of the most important characters. Hemingway does not completely forsake brevity in For Whom the Bell Tolls, but this brevity seems more effective when mingled with detail and, occasionally, the results of a conversation:

"Slit the trouser, will thee?" he (Jordan) said to Pilar. Maria crouched by him and did not speak. The sun was on her hair and her face was twisted as a child contorts before it cries. But she was not crying.

In only one quality does A Farewell to Arms seem to be superior to For Whom the Bell Tolls, and that is in organization. It is difficult to determine, in such a long book as the latter, where one day ends and another begins. The significance of the lifetime of love and courage in four days might have been intensified had the book been divided into four sections. As it is, a reader might easily believe that the action covered weeks or months, rather than only a few, drama-filled days. Nevertheless, Hemingway has shown definite growth in his characterization and dialogue if not in his plot structure in For Whom the Bell Tolls. Unfortunately, many of his imitators have not shown the same growth.



...THE VOICE OF AMERICA...

Of these ten authors, the one who has introduced the most obvious and daring innovations in technique is JOHN DOS PASSOS. His work is also of special interest because more than any of his contemporaries he reflects the chaotic frenzy and hopelessness of America as a whole. Through a series of novels, each independent of the others, but fitting together like chapters in a fictionalized history, Dos Passos has presented a running chronicle of everyday U. S. life. His reputation as a leading novelist and social commentator has been most strengthened by his trilogy, U.S.A., and by such novels as Manhattan Transfer and Numero One.

Dos Passos was born in 1896 in Chicago, the son of a "self-made literate"<sup>1</sup> lawyer father and Southern mother. His travels as a child, his scattered schooling, and his experiences during the first World War greatly influenced his writing. His early novels, including One Man's Initiation and Three Soldiers, clearly are products of his student and Ambulance Service days in Spain and in France; Streets of Night, his first book with an American setting, gives an indication of the new techniques and experiments which are more fully developed in Manhattan Transfer, and reach their peak of success in U.S.A.

U.S.A. is composed of three novels, 42nd Parallel, Nineteen Nineteen and The Big Money, which cover the period from 1900 to 1929 and have settings ranging from pre-war Harvard and boom struck Miami to Hollywood, Greenwich Village and Washington, D. C.

1/ "Books" (John Dos Passos), Time, XXVIII, August 10, 1936.

The three books together contain thirteen major characters, most of whom travel from one book to another, and many of whom meet violent ends. These characters are introduced in straight prose chapters which are labeled with their names and are mixed with skeletonized biographies of famous Americans, poetic interludes of an autobiographical nature called the "Camera Eye", and a montage<sup>2</sup> of newspaper headlines and trivia titled "Newsreels".

Dos Passos' narrative--that is, his undecorated story standing alone--consists of sketches of people whose lives are eventually intermingled. This method gives unity to the individual books; and the overlapping of characters from one book to another gives the entire trilogy a smoothly jointed wholeness. Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether the intermingling is not overworked. Since each sketch holds independent action of its own--almost to the extent of short story form--in the first novel one is pleasantly surprised to find the characters meeting. However, in the succeeding novels, suspense and effect lessen when one knows what to expect. Even so, Dos Passos may be defended by his obvious lack of interest in the O'Henry type of twist ending; most of Dos Passos' sketches end with a fatalistic hopelessness which has been apparent from the beginning. It is also true that the intermingling of lives might seem more original in U.S.A. if it had not been used in his earlier novels (i.e., Manhattan Transfer).

Probably the most applaudable characteristics of Dos Passos'

2/ Untermeyer, "Five-Foot Shelf", p. 120.

prose are his passionate accuracy of detail, his extraordinary vividness, and his realistic sensory impressions. These, coupled with an objective detachment, give life to his characters and create atmosphere. Each person is introduced by a description of his home and family, himself, and his general attitude. We learn of Fainy:

When the wind set from the silver factories across the river the air of the gray fourfamily frame house where Fainy McCreary was born was choking all day with the smell of whaleoil soap. Other days it smelt of cabbage and babies and Mrs. McCreary's washboilers. Fainy could never play at home because Pop, a lame cavechested man with a wispy blondgray mustashe, was nightwatchman at the Chadwick Mills and slept all day...

...It was a day of premature spring...The girls looked terribly pretty and their skirts blew in the wind and Fainy felt the spring blood pumping hot in him, he wanted to kiss and to roll on the ground and to run out across the icecakes and to make speeches from the tops of telegraph poles and to vault over trolleycars; but instead he distributed handbills and worried about his pants being frayed and wished he had a swell looking suit and a swell looking girl to walk with...

In spite of the changes of scene in U.S.A. and the differences in background of the characters, there is a great deal of similarity in the unfolding of their lives. Dos Passos' emphasis on sex--both normal and perverted--seems mainly responsible for this. The women, for the most part first pictured as pure, sexless little girls and adolescents, all eventually become tainted, ending their careers as seriously maladjusted wives, frustrated spinsters or near-prostitutes. Their early environment makes little difference. The men have an equal lack of decency and

even less respect for fellow human beings. In fact, although Dos Passos is supposedly condemning the American lack of morals, his most satiric thrusts are directed at the few characters who at one time or another attempt a semblance of normal behavior.

This was a bad year for Johnny Moorehouse. He was twenty and didn't smoke and was keeping himself clean for the lovely girl he was going to marry, a girl in pink organdy with golden curls and a sunshade.

The author then proceeds to make a fool of Moorehouse, while treating with sympathy other of his male characters who spend most of their time in houses of prostitution.

Generally speaking, few of Dos Passos's characters have any intellectual awareness or purpose in life. They become individuals only through detailed descriptions, usually physical, which, although certainly realistic, are increasingly intimate. The characters think, yes, but usually in a vein of this type:

Big cloudheads were piling up in the north. It wasn't fun anymore for Janey. She was afraid it was going to rain. Inside she felt sick and drained out. She was afraid her period was coming on. She'd only had the curse a few times yet and the thought of it scared her and took all the strength out of her, made her want to crawl away out of sight like an old sick mangy cat. She didn't want Joe and Alec to notice how she felt...

Later, Dos Passos finds it necessary to use toilets for atmosphere. Perhaps consistent emphasis on such subjects might be condoned when used occasionally in characterizations of certain groups of people, but seems unnecessary when Dos Passos has such a wealth of material for use in U.S.A. He too often gets one idea, typified by the paragraph below, and then repeats

it with slight variation a dozen times:

As he walked to the ferry station where he was going to meet her at nine the clank of the presses was still in his head, and the sour smell of ink and paper bruised under the presses, and on top of that the smell of the hall of the house he'd been in with a couple of the fellows, the smell of moldy rooms and sloppails and the smell of armpits and the dressingtable of the frizzyhaired girl he'd had on the clammy bed and the taste of the stale beer they'd drunk and the cooing mechanical voice, "Goodnight, dearie, come round soon."

The most unfortunate result is a lack of variety. It is very difficult when searching for bits of expressive prose to find any in which the emphasis is not on sex. Such emphasis may make Dos Passos' novels popular, but does not enhance their creative style. One critic has said, "The fevered dreams of adolescence were the dreams of Dos Passos."<sup>3</sup> It does not seem advisable to advocate the reading of these "fevered dreams" by adolescents.

Technically, Dos Passos' prose is characterized by a lack of punctuation, especially the comma, and a swift rhythm which is deep and almost monotonous rather than melodious:

Russet hills, patches of woods, farmhouses, cows,  
a red colt kicking up its heels...rail fences, streaks  
of marsh...

They went to the Auditorium Annex and sat in the lounge and ordered tea and cinnamon toast and then Evile told her that she'd broken off her engagement with Dirk McArthur and that she'd decided not to kill herself but to go to work...

The writer also makes use of repetition of sounds:

...fourfamily frame house...

3/ Charles C. Baldwin, The Men Who Make Our Novels, New York, Dodd Mead & Company, 1925, p. 139.

His vocabulary, although expressive and suitable for his subject matter, contains few polysyllabic or poetic words. Instead he attaches his adjectives and nouns to one another for emphasis:

...roadmender...cartrack...frizzyhaired...  
whitewashed...dusty rutted wagonroad...  
fillingstations...

More effective are combinations which have become synonymous in spoken conversation:

...niggerpink...sonofabitch...stickinthemud...

There is danger here, however, of coining new words which are more pleasing in their original forms. "Donkeyengine" and "fruittrees" seem poor choices.

Dos Passos is very successful in changing the length of his sentences to suit a specific character's mood, and in using colloquialisms in his narrative which a character would use in speaking. "Honestly," he will write after describing a sales girl, "it was kinder funny to see that happen."

There is swiftness of movement in U.S.A. and maintenance of interest. Although one may criticize Dos Passos' attitude toward life, one never doubts his sincerity, and must admire his ability to arouse emotion in the reader. In his passion he does not dawdle, but moves rapidly from one scene to another, leaving each one complete. In spite of his detailed description, there is never a trace of the over-elaboration which hampers Ellen Glasgow.

Dos Passos' most extreme departure from convention is found in his newsreels, biographies and Camera Eye. The newsreels

contain headlines, fragments of news articles, and bits of songs popular at a specific time. Each about a page long, their purpose is not only to set time but to suggest the general moral and intellectual condition of the United States during the period of one sketch. Emphasizing the sensational, they give a bare but thought-provoking cross-section of American life; and are arranged to take full advantage of all possibilities for irony:

Goodbye Piccadilly, farewell, Leicester Square  
It's a long long way to Tipperary

WOMAN TRAPS HUSBAND WITH GIRL IN  
HOTEL

to such a task we can dedicate our lives  
and our fortunes, everything that we are  
and everything that we have, with the pride of those  
who know.....

The fragments are well chosen and well mixed, giving an excellent surface portrait. Second readings reveal more subtleties, even greater irony.

The Camera Eye is made up of fifty-one poetic interludes, supposedly autobiographical, which show Dos Passos' own attitude toward the events in which his characters are involved.<sup>4</sup> Abstract and absolutely without punctuation, these interludes are fragments of thoughts and impressions, and when taken together have been called Dos Passos' "stream of consciousness". Shifting from one idea to another, they are confusing and often do not seem to apply to the prose sections which they precede. Many of them, however, when analyzed as individual creations, have true poetic

4/ Time, August 10, 1936, loc. cit.

qualities and psychological significance. The first interlude in 42nd Parallel begins:

when you walk along the street you have to step  
carefully always on the cobbles so as not to step  
on the bright anxious grassblades easier if you  
hold Mother's hand and hang on it that way you can  
kick up your toes but walking fast you have to  
tread on too many grassblades the poor hurt green  
tongues shrink under your feet maybe that's why  
those people are so angry and follow us shaking  
their fists they're throwing stones grownup people  
throwing stones...

Here Dos Passos is a child; later as a college student he reflects:

Those spring nights the streetcarwheels screech  
grinding in a rattle of loose trucks round the curved  
tracks of Harvard square dust hangs in the powdery  
arlight glare all night til dawn can't sleep  
haven't got the nerve to break out of the bellglass  
four years under the ethercone breathe deep gently  
now that's the way be a good boy one two three four  
five six get A's in some courses but don't be a grind  
be interested in literature but remain a gentleman  
don't be seen with Jews and socialists  
and all the pleasant contacts will be useful in Later  
Life say hello pleasantly to everybody crossing the  
yard  
sit looking out into the twilight of the pleasantest  
four years of your life  
grow cold with culture like a cup of tea  
forgotton between an incenseburner and a volume of Oscar Wilde...

Also written with little punctuation, but with more complete sentences and a fairly consistent outline form, are the twenty-seven biographies of famous personages. Scattered through the three books of U.S.A., they vary in length from one to a dozen pages. They are satiric, often bitter histories of men whose lives were dominated by the same hopeless bewilderment which invaded the experiences of the fictional characters.<sup>5</sup> Here

5/ Time, August 10, 1936, loc. cit.



Dos Passos reaches his highest peak in irony, pathos, and occasional humor.

The narrative style varies with the subject. The author writes of Woodrow Wilson in the correct diction of the ex-professor himself, and of Rudolph Valentino with the melodramatic, detail-filled language of the theater. As in the newsreels and Camera Eye, Dos Passos is no longer objective; his criticism, although subtle, is harsh and biting.

The lyrical quality missing in the straight prose sections may be found in the biographies. La Follette is described:

a stumpy man with a lined face, one leg stuck out  
in the aisle and his arms folded and a chewed cigar  
in the corner of his mouth  
and an undelivered speech on his desk,  
a wilful man expressing no opinion but his own.

By breaking sentences in the middle and letting phrases or words stand alone on a line, added emphasis and meaning are gained. Wilson's biography begins:

The year that Buchanan was elected president  
Thomas Woodrow Wilson  
was born to a presbyterian minister's daughter  
in the manse at Staunton in the valley of Virginia;  
it was the old Scotch-Irish stock; the father was a  
presbyterian minister too and a teacher of rhetoric in  
theological seminaries; the Wilsons lived in a universe  
of words linked into an incontrovertible firmament by  
two centuries of calvinist divines,  
God was the Word  
and the Word was God.  
Dr. Wilson was a man of standing who loved  
his home and his children and good books and his wife  
and correct syntax and talked to God every day at  
family prayers...

In final analysis of Dos Passos' style in U.S.A., one must judge whether the fusion of four such different methods of

expression is successful. When the purpose of the volume is considered--that is, to give a composite picture of America as a whole--such a plan has merit. From a literary standpoint, however, the fusion fails because the four styles mixed together frequently obscure the plot by preventing smooth transition from one chapter to another. Only the straight prose sections have sufficient explanatory detail to be easily understood. The Camera Eye and the Newsreels are puzzling since they create time and setting in a manner which is clear only to those who are familiar with the period which they symbolize. The biographies, although admittedly masterpieces of irony, are so abstract and full of hidden meaning that the real significance of the subjects' lives may not be recognized by readers two generations hence. In writing U.S.A., Dos Passos undertook a gigantic task, and his approach is certainly original and powerful. It seems unfortunate that such a work, although popular now, may become "dated" because of this originality in technique. I believe that Dos Passos' earlier novel, Manhattan Transfer, has greater unity and freshness because it does not attempt to be a history text as well as a work of fiction.<sup>6</sup>

6/ Manhattan Transfer is similar to U.S.A. in both narrative style and characterization. There is so little difference in the prose that comparison is unnecessary. The characters are typical of the Dos Passos "race": they include a young man who seeks escape in the big city but finds only destruction; a young girl who becomes a hardened, bitter woman; a dissipated business failure; a refugee; a group of actors with various perversions; and a young hero who wins a partial victory over his environment. However, there is only one of

6 cont'd/ each set type, and the author thus avoids the repetition which was a weakness in U. S. A. The shorter length of the novel and the centralizing of action in New York City gives added unity. Specific settings within the city are given at the beginning of each chapter in italicized paragraphs which do not detract as much from the main story as do the newsreels and Camera Eye. The chapters are grouped in three large sections and do not belong to specific characters. Dos Passos also gives a feeling of wholeness to the novel by blending the past, present and future through his clever manipulation of the time element. He blocks off pseudo-chapters within chapters, and then turns from one to the other, presenting the life stories of his characters in pieces. He eventually draws these pieces together by having the characters meet and influence one another.

...THE INNER SANCTUM...

In the writings of Hemingway and Dos Passos we have seen an attempt to break away from the set patterns of American creative style; in Wolfe and Steinbeck we will find new vigor mixed with partial acceptance of these same patterns.<sup>1</sup> Between these two movements many critics have placed WILLIAM FAULKNER, through whom subjective naturalism reaches its greatest depth.<sup>2</sup> Using sensual emotionalism, round-about-narration and an unequalled emphasis on perversion and mental abnormalities, Faulkner presents sardonic pictures of decayed Southern gentility which are suggestive of the diabolism of Baudelaire and the decadent nineteenth century romanticists.<sup>3</sup>

William Faulkner, called by one critic our "lone unreconstructed rebel",<sup>4</sup> was born in 1897 in Mississippi, the son of a livery stable owner whose wealthy family had been reduced to poverty by the Civil War. Young Faulkner's schooling stopped after the fifth grade, although he later took special courses at the University of Oxford. His only early literary attempts consisted of bad verse imitative of Swinburne and Omar Khayyam,<sup>5</sup> and he did little serious writing until after the first World War when he became friendly with Sherwood Anderson.<sup>6</sup>

1/ Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942, p. 143.

2/ Millett, op. cit., p. 34.

3/ Ibid.

4/ Geismar, Writers in Crisis, p. 183.

5/ 20th Century Authors, p. 438.

6/ 20th Century Authors, loc. cit.

The year 1929 was the turning point in Faulkner's career. With the completion of two novels, the Sound and the Fury--probably his best work--and Sanctuary--considered by some critics his worst--he established himself as a master of the world of horror.

Faulkner's basic style is not new, for he uses the Joycean interior monologue,<sup>7</sup> employing intricate cross narrative with shifting sequences of time. To add to the confusion, he then tells his story from the viewpoint of an idiot or emotionally unbalanced mind. As Granville Hicks said, "Faulkner's characters are twisted shapes in the chaotic wreckage of a mad world."<sup>8</sup> These characters, assembled with brilliant planning and startling symbolism, are a vital part in the success of the writer's imaginative approach.

The Sound and the Fury, over-shadowed by the sensationalism of Sanctuary, is written in a stream of consciousness style reminiscent of Dos Passos' Camera Eye. It is the first American novel to invade successfully the infantile or idiot mind, and in conveying the psychological influence of environment to the reading public is surpassed by no other contemporary work.<sup>9</sup>

Divided into four parts, each telling the story from a different viewpoint, the Sound and the Fury relates the history of the Compson family--a family degenerated by the moral deficiencies of its members and by the after effects of the Civil War.

7/ Geismar, op. cit., p. 154.

8/ 20th Century Authors, p. 440.

9/ Geismar, op. cit., p. 159.

The first section, dated April 7, 1928, consists of the idiotic babbling of Benjy, the subnormal Compson offspring; the second, dated June 10, 1910, eighteen years earlier, contains the pre-suicide raving of Benjy's brother Quentin; and the third, dated April 6, 1928, is "written" by Jason, the oldest brother. The fourth is straight third person narrative centering around the negro servant, Dilsey, and is dated April 8, 1928.

The beginning of the novel, completely confusing for at least a hundred pages, finds Benjy on the morning of his thirty-third birthday lost in a reverie of grief and anguish. He is once again five years old, and through his eyes the reader is introduced to his adored sister Caddy, who obviously is no longer on the scene. Caddy, as well as other characters--Mother, Quentin, Jason, Versh, Dilsey, and Luster--appear and disappear as Benjy gains age, then loses it again. By the end of the section, one feels fairly safe in concluding that the idiot is mourning for his sister.

The second section, called Faulkner's "most sympathetic piece of writing,"<sup>10</sup> clarifies the story slightly and describes Quentin's almost incestuous love for Caddy, who breaks his heart by her moral looseness. Since Quentin is half insane with grief (expressed through unpunctuated, childish rambling), most of the slowly increasing clarity comes not by direct explanation, but by means of comparison with the first section. Quentin and Benjy frequently describe the same incident, but with different details.

10/ Geismar, op. cit., p. 155.

Jason's simply told story, a brilliant satire on an ignorant and jealous egotist, clears up much of the mystery in revealing that Caddy has married for money, and that there is a second Quentin. This Quentin, Caddy's daughter, is busily engaged in following her mother's example.

The last section gives physical descriptions of the characters and paints a reasonably clear picture of the present situation in which the few remaining Compsons find themselves.

In spite of the high degree of confusion which would ordinarily discourage readers, interest is maintained throughout the Sound and the Fury by Faulkner's amazing flair for creating suspense. One is first intrigued by his handling of an idiot's emotions, and then is carried on through the rest of the narrative by the clever plotting which fits each new revelation into its proper place.

Faulkner reveals character both through his "stream of consciousness" and his dialogue, the styles of which vary with the speakers. Benjy can only howl and expresses himself by remembering what others have said; Jason is ungrammatical, sprinkling his conversations generously with "I says". Quentin is incoherent, running his thoughts together; and the negroes' dialogue is filled with the colloquialisms of the black South.

Italics are used by Faulkner to shift from one time or mind to another, but do not aid clarity since there is no consistency in having the italicized paragraphs apply to any specific person.

Variety in style and shift in viewpoint may be shown by these excerpts:

(Benjy) "I is done it. Hush now," Luster said. "Ain't I told you you can't go up there. They'll knock your head clean off with one of them balls. Come on, here." He pulled me back. "Sit down." I sat down and he took off my shoes and rolled up my trousers.

"Now get in that water and play and see can you stop that slobbering and moaning." I hushed and got in the water and Roskus came and said to come to supper and Caddy said,  
It's not supper time yet. I'm not going.

The first few lines belong to the present; the last few go back eighteen years.

(Quentin) Caddy  
I stopped at the steps I couldn't  
hear her feet  
Caddy  
I heard her feet then my hand touched her not warm  
not cool just still her clothes a little damp still  
do you love him now  
not breathing except slow like far  
away breathing  
Caddy do you love him now  
I don't know...

This is a childhood reminiscence repeated several times in Quentin's section.

(Jason) "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say. I says you're lucky if her playing out of school is all that worries you. I says she ought to be down there in the kitchen right now, instead of up in her room, gobbing paint on her face and waiting for six niggers that can't even stand up out of a chair unless they've got a pan full of bread and meat to balance them, to fix breakfast for her.

He is discussing Caddy's daughter Quentin with his mother.

The last section concludes:

(Faulkner, third person) Ben's voice roared and roared. Queenie moved again, her feet began



to clop-clop steadily again, and at once Ben hushed. Luster looked quickly back over his shoulder, then he drove on. The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place.

Like Dos Passos, Faulkner has attempted to fuse four styles; and he seems more successful because he has chosen means of expression which are less dissimilar. Also, where Dos Passos has presented different facts or ideas in the Camera Eye, Newsreels and biographies, Faulkner has given only one idea, but from several different viewpoints. Each section of the Sound and the Fury reveals something new about one subject, and thus all four fit together smoothly to create a unified and complete picture.

Faulkner's other 1929 novel, Sanctuary, was written on an upturned wheelbarrow while the author was working nights as superintendent in a power plant.<sup>11</sup> It is a vicious horror story, published as Faulkner himself admits, purely for commercial reasons.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, it reveals his hatred and sadistic discontent too well, and because of the disgust it invokes in the average reader, has offended many who might otherwise have thought him a truly gifted novelist.

It seems almost impossible that the man who wrote the compassionate story of the Compsons could, in the same year, have produced a book so completely lacking in sympathy and love of humanity. A spirit of the grotesque and some emphasis on sex

11/ 20th Century Authors, p. 439.

12/ Geismar, op. cit., p. 161.

and perversions are certainly present in the Sound and the Fury, but they aid in revealing character and developing the plot without unnecessary detail. There is no metrical quality, no beauty in the Sanctuary, no freshness in presentation. Instead, there is a degree of sensationalism and degeneration which seems inexcusable.

The plot of Sanctuary is centered around the rape of a flapper college girl named Temple Drake by a sexually impotent bootlegger called Popeye. Temple's subsequent removal to a house of prostitution, and the conviction of the innocent bootlegger leader for the murder of another henchman who tried to protect Temple, form the basic framework. Onto this framework Faulkner hangs his "pornographic scenes of blood and brutality."<sup>13</sup>

As in the Sound and the Fury, Faulkner reveals the full meaning of his story slowly, never giving full explanations. The prose is generally bare, seldom enhanced by detail, confusing in its lack of descriptive words or phrases when description is needed for clarity. The dialogue is realistic, but adds to the bewilderment of the reader since frequent shifts in time omit action which is necessary for understanding of what is said. Faulkner intimates, teases, adds new ideas word by word, and then jumps to entirely different thoughts or scenes. The lawyer who acts as defense attorney in the murder trial plans a trip. We next see him at his destination; then we move back to his arrival. Even later we learn why he made the trip.

13/ Geismar, op. cit., p. 159.

By means of repetition of scenes through the eyes of different characters, seemingly insignificant events acquire added meaning. For example, a bedroom episode in the mountain cabin is repeated five times, and there is added effect with each retelling. Faulkner, as a craftsman, evokes little criticism. He is painstakingly careful, and after a second reading of Sanctuary one is even more conscious of the compactness and unity of the whole novel. His style is different from that of any other author, but so is his subject matter. It is doubtful that his type of subjective naturalism could have been presented in any other manner.

Throughout Sanctuary there is a curious mingling of plain, rough talk, occasional beauty of description, and an almost humane philosophy. Faulkner's vocabulary is surprisingly free of obscene words, and he makes frequent use of similes:

Motionless, her head bent and her hands still in her lap, she had that spent immobility of a chimney rising above the ruin of a house in the aftermath of a cyclone.

He followed them...as though in the aftermath of a sudden and violent destruction, with dropped heads, open-mouthed, their throats turned profoundly upward as though awaiting the stroke of knives...

Physical descriptions, generally lacking in the Sound and the Fury, give definite individuality to the characters of Sanctuary:

The whole man...emanated somehow the idea that he had been dry-cleaned rather than washed...

She drank beer, breathing thickly into the tankard, the other hand, ringed with yellow diamonds as large as gravel, lost amongst the lush billows of her breast.

Popeye...his suit was black, with a tight, high-waisted coat. His trousers were rolled once and

caked with mud above mud-caked shoes. His face had a queer, bloodless color, as though seen by electric light; against the sunny silence, in his slanted straw hat and his slightly akimbo arms, he had that depthless quality of stamped tin.

Several times, however, Faulkner over-reaches even himself. The expressions, "high fat clouds like gobs of whipped cream", and "out of their odorous and omnipotent sanctity", do not seem quite appropriate to the earthy theme of Sanctuary. The words of the lawyer, Horace, although not incongruous with his personality, also do not seem to belong in a book characterized by its general lack of intelligent, coherent thought:

"Time's not such a bad thing after all. Use it right, and you can stretch anything out, like a rubber band, until it busts somewhere. And there you are, with all tragedy and despair in two little knots between thumb and finger of each hand," he said.

Faulkner uses satire sparingly, but well, in achieving a semblance of comic relief. His anecdote of two boys living innocently in a brothel and complaining of a lack of women, is one of the few light touches in the novel. Unfortunately, however, Faulkner seems far less interested in creating either comedy or tragedy than in expressing his own bitter frustration. It is his willingness to reveal this frustration by an overemphasis on unpleasantness which has threatened to lessen his popularity as a leading novelist.

...AUTOBIOGRAPHY...

"I'd rather be a poet than anything else in the world. God, what I wouldn't give to be one!"<sup>1</sup> This cry came from the lips of THOMAS WOLFE, the third modern novelist to emerge with success from the South. Hailed the Whitman of prose,<sup>2</sup> Wolfe was more a poet than he knew, for in his writings are found an unsurpassed vitality and lyrical quality. Passionate, undisciplined, and unhappy, he has driven his own intense feeling into the very fiber of his four autobiographical novels, Look Homeward, Angel, Of Time and the River, The Web and the Rock, and You Can't Go Home Again.

Thomas Wolfe was born in 1900 in Asheville, North Carolina, the son of a Pennsylvania stone-cutter father and North Carolina mother. He was the youngest child in a large family, and his boyhood was dominated by his blustering, shiftless father until, at fifteen, he left Asheville for the University at Chapel Hill. After four years of astounding other students by his enormous appetites and violent outbursts of pent-up emotion,<sup>3</sup> he spent three more years at Harvard in graduate study. He then began his first novel, Look Homeward, Angel, and became acquainted with the editor, Maxwell Perkins, who helped him co-ordinate his reams of material. Wolfe was a teacher, a world traveler and a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship award.<sup>4</sup>

1/ 20th Century Authors, p. 1544.

2/ Untermeyer, "Five-Foot Shelf", p. 120.

3/ van Gelder, Writers and Writing, p. 115.

4/ 20th Century Authors, p. 1154.

Like himself, Wolfe's themes are gargantuan. His books are a series of episodes and events, just as his life was a series of experiences without pattern or purpose. He was never able to achieve the detached view of other writers of his period, and yet he has included in his thousands of pages of words the whole web of life. While Anderson, Hemingway, Steinbeck and Marquand set forth a theme on specific types and subjects, Wolfe was diverse, thrashing along the plane of the grand and grandiose.<sup>5</sup> Only Ellen Glasgow, of the nine other writers discussed here, has even approached his power of description and strong sense of the epic.

Wolfe's narrative style is constant: sprawling, rhythmical, strongly cadenced,<sup>6</sup> verbose. He makes use of nearly every creative narrative device: re-experiencing, childhood recollection, sensory impressions, direct description and dialogue. He feels and experiences every action, every thought and word of his characters. Probing into the intermost recesses of men's souls, he soars to heights of joy, sinks to depths of depression. And in doing so, he touches the lives of all men with understanding and sympathy, hatred and revulsion.

One critic justifiably has said of Wolfe, "It would be inappropriate if his errors, like all the rest of him, were not gigantic."<sup>7</sup> In spite of the nobility of his prose, Wolfe lacks one of the prime prerequisites of a writer: he is not a finished

5/ Millett, Contemporary American Authors, p. 34.

6/ Geismar, op. cit., p. 190.

7/ Geismar, op. cit., p. 190.

craftsman. He has no idea of plot structure, little feeling for organization, no direction in his work. His novels are powerful from beginning to end and do not build to a climax, do not have a turning point. Without the help of his editors the reading public would never have heard of him. And yet, he is never dull, never prosaic; for the richness and stirring sincerity of his prose makes one forget the great length of his books.

Man's search for a father--or rather, for a strength superior to his own which gives him security--is the basic theme of all of Wolfe's novels. Each individual novel is a family chronicle, and tells of the rise of a boy from a common environment and his struggle against the world which tries to envelop him.

Look Homeward, Angel, in which Wolfe calls himself Eugene Gant, begins with the entrance of his father, Oliver Gant, into the Southland, traces the birth and boyhood of Eugene, and ends with the boy's departure to the new world of the North.

The second novel, Of Time and the River, includes Eugene's return to "Altamont" before his father's death, his unsuccessful attempts at playwriting, his trip through Europe, and his first serious love affair.

Gant is replaced in the last two novels by George Weber in an attempt to hide the autobiographical significance. The Web and the Rock and You Can't Go Home Again review the boy's early childhood and college days and then continue the story of Of Time and the River. The hero's first novel is published

and received with indignation by the South, and the boy concludes that the "real home of everyone is in the future".<sup>8</sup> One never learns what eventually happens to George Weber, for Wolfe died at 38 before the last of the series was published.

Look Homeward, Angel, completed in 1929, will be used for analysis because, from a literary point of view, Wolfe showed no growth in his later novels, reaching his height of power in his first work.

Characterization is of major importance in this novel of living experience, and Wolfe is a master. Oliver Gant, his miserly wife Eliza, and their seven children are not set types in spite of their common heredity and environment. Each has characteristics peculiar to himself, as do the dozens of other people in Look Homeward, Angel. Each individual--the town butcher, the milkman, a professor--comes alive through vivid description and dialogue which, although elaborate, is always expressive. Wolfe writes of Oliver Gant:

The strange figure...cast its famous shadow through the town. Men heard at night and morning the great formula of his curse to Eliza. They saw him plunge to house and shop, they saw him bent above his marbles, they saw him mould in his great hands--with curse, and howl, with passionate devotion--the rich texture of his home. They laughed at his wild excess of speech, of feeling, and of gesture. They were silent before the maniac fury of his sprees, which occurred almost punctually every two months and lasted two or three days. They picked him foul and witless from the cobbles and brought him home....And always they handled him with tender

8/ 20th Century Authors, p. 1542.



care, feeling something strange and proud and glorious lost in that drunken ruin of BabeI. He was a stranger to them; no one--not even Eliza--ever called him by his first name. He was--and remained thereafter--"Mister" Gant.

Wolfe's mingling of the sentimental and satiric is one of the most outstanding characteristics of his style. In one paragraph he almost weeps with sentiment; in the next he laughs at the same character he has just treated tenderly. The result is that an amazingly sharp and clear picture is created of the whole personality of each character. Through the quotation above, one can see the tragic side of the elder Gant. Below, Wolfe gives a more humorous view through dialogue and comment:

"Little did I reckon," he began, getting at once into the swing of preposterous rhetoric which he used half furiously, half comically, "little did I reckon the day I first saw her eighteen bitter years ago, when she came wriggling around the corner at me like a snake on her belly--(a stock epithet which from repetition was now heart-balm to him)--little did I reckon that--that--that it would come to this," he finished lamely. He waited quietly, in the heavy silence, for some answer...

"Are you there? I say, are you there, woman?" he howled, barking his big knuckles in a furious bombardment.

There was nothing but the white living silence.

"Ah me! Ah me! he sighed with strong self-pity, then burst into forced snuffling sobs, which furnished a running accompaniment to his denunciation. "Merciful God!" he wept, "It's fearful, it's awful, it's croo-el. What have I ever done that God should punish me like this in my old age?"

...And he continued, weeping in heaving snuffling burlesque: "O-boo-hoo-hoo! Come down and save me, I beg of you, I entreat you, I implore you, or I perish."

In describing the brothers, Wolfe uses words which are sometimes rythmical, sometimes harsh, depending upon the character

of his subject. The sentences are constructed to give the most poetic effect possible:

...a gentle peering face, a soft caressing voice, unlike any of the others in kind and quality, a tender olive skin, black hair, sloe-black eyes, exquisite, rather sad, kindliness. He nuzzled his soft face next to Eugene's, fondled and embraced him. On his brown neck he was birth-marked with a raspberry..This was Grover--the gentlest and saddest of the boys.

...Steve...he was like Gant in all his weakness, with none of his cleanliness, his lean fibre, his remorse...

His description of Ben, with its allusions to angels and other symbols, expresses the mysterious depth of the boy whom no one quite understood:

Ben..had aqueous gray eyes, and a sallow bumpy skin. His head was shapely, the forehead high and bony. His hair was crisp, maple-brown. Below his perpetual scowl, his face was small, converging to a point: his extraordinarily sensitive mouth smiled briefly, flickeringly, inwardly--like a flash of light along a blade. And he always gave a cuff instead of a caress: he was full of pride and tenderness...Perhaps, as Ben loped through the streets or prowled softly and restlessly about the home, his dark angel wept, but no one else saw, and no one knew. He was a stranger...he was always aprowl to find some entrance into life, some secret, undiscovered door--a stone, a leaf--that might admit him into light and fellowship.

Through all of his narrative Wolfe weaves his own philosophy. Frequently using the figures of speech which are found in real poetry, he dramatizes the experiences of his characters and thus shows their significance; for everything has significance for Wolfe. He writes again of his father, occasionally using short

sentences for emphasis of an idea:

He never found it. He never learned to carve an angel's head. The dove, the lamb, the smooth jointed marble hands of death, and letters fair and fine--but not the angel. And of all the years of waste and loss...these are blind steps and gropings of his exile, the painting of our hunger as, remembering speechlessly, we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane--end into heaven, a stone, a leaf, a door. Where? When?

Later he writes of death with understanding and sympathy, using words which by themselves create an impression of sadness (grieved, ghost, lost, loneliness, beatitude):

...like one who has been mad, and suddenly recovers reason he remembered that forgotten face he had not seen in weeks, that strange bright loneliness that would not return. O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again...

...Eliza...was weeping, her face contorted by the comical and ugly grimace that is far more terrible than any quiet beatitude of sorrow...

With so much tragedy and drama, Wolfe's prose might easily become ponderous and heavy. It does not because of short interludes of humor which are sometimes satiric, sometimes comic. He writes with tender amusement of the impression books make upon young Eugene:

Ah, me! Ah, me! Eugene's heart was filled with joy and sadness--with sorrow because the book was done. He pulled his clotted handkerchief from his pocket and blew the contents of his loaded heart into it in one mighty, triumphant and ecstatic blast of glory and sentiment. Ah, me! Good old Bruce-Eugene.

For his straight satire, Wolfe rephrases quotations from other writers, often intermingling the classical and common.

More so than with any other twentieth-century author, a reader must have a wide literary background to fully appreciate Wolfe.

He writes of prohibition:

...the "wets"...so, they came down with vine leaves in their hair, and a good fog of rye upon their breaths...

His burlesque of the town milliner is rich in quotations-- and fiendish devilment:

Mrs. Thelma Jarvis...drew, in one swizzling guzzle, the last beaded chain of linked sweetness long drawn out from the bottom of her glass. Drink to me only with thine eyes. She rose slowly...then fluescent, her ripe limbs moulded in a dress of silk henna, she writhed carefully among the crowded tables, with a low, rich murmur of contrition. Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low--an excellent thing in woman. The high light chatter of the tables dropped as she went by...she walked slowly up the aisle past perfume, stationery, rubber goods, and toilet preparations, pausing at the cigar counter to pay her check. Her round melon-heavy breasts nodded their heads in slow but sprightly dance. A poet could not but be gay, in such a jocund company.

Wolfe's blank verse, his acute perception, his use of sensory impressions and his colorful vocabulary all may be observed in this part of one of his most quoted descriptions:

...He knew the inchoate sharp excitement of hot dandelions in young Spring grass at noon; the smell of cellars, cobwebs, and built on secret earth; in July, of watermelons bedded in sweet hay, inside a farmer's covered wagon; of cantaloupe and crated peaches; and the scent of orange rind, bittersweet, before a fire of coals...

Yes, and the exciting smell of chalk and varnished desks; the smell of heavy bread-sandwiches of cold fried meat and butter; the smell of new leather in a saddler's shop, of a warm leather chair; of honey and of unground coffee...of hot cracklin, and of young roast pork; of butter and cinnamon melting on hot candied yams...

One may relive his own childhood experiences through Wolfe's thoughts of Spring ("when odorous tar comes spongy in the streets, and boys roll balls of it upon their tongues"); the struggles of Eugene in school; the vulgarity of the small boys who are his friends; and his pain when his first sweetheart forsakes him.

After Faulkner, there is a refreshing lack of vulgarity in Wolfe. He writes of sex, yes, but it neither detracts from, nor makes, the story. There is love as well as lust in Look Homeward, Angel, tenderness as well as passion. Immorality is never praised, and one does not feel that Wolfe is striving for the sensationalism that comes with obscenity.

In his violence, Thomas Wolfe succeeded in his portrayal of life as he found it; but his body was not as strong as were his emotions. On his tombstone are these words from The Web and the Rock:

Death bent to touch his chosen son with mercy,  
love and pity, and put the seal of honor on him  
when he died. 9

Had he been more disciplined, and his gigantic energy trained in the right direction, we believe that Wolfe might have produced the greatest fiction of the twentieth-century.

...A NEW VINTAGE...

Mixing tenderness and affection with brutality, idealism with irony, and comic humor with tragedy, JOHN STEINBECK has become the spokesman for the poverty stricken migratory people of the west coast of America. His biggest, if not his best novel, Grapes of Wrath, has been called Homeric and heartbreaking, has been compared to Uncle Tom's Cabin, Leaves of Grass, and Moby Dick.<sup>1</sup> It also has been called filthy and profane. It is certainly earthy and shocking; but it is also full of life as some have to live it, and its moral message creates a desire for reform. To writer Steinbeck, Wolfe's famous stone "is a stone, a leaf a leaf, and the door is sure to be found."<sup>2</sup>

John Steinbeck is descended from an old Massachusettes family, but was born and grew up in California where he was a special science student at Stanford University. Before he began writing, he worked as a chemist, caretaker, painter, hod-carrier and fruitpicker. For a brief time he was a reporter on a New York newspaper, but was fired because he colored news stories with his own reflections.<sup>3</sup> When he finally published his first novel, Cups of Gold, in 1929, he had already destroyed three earlier attempts. In the next ten years he wrote seven other books which included Tortilla Flat, Of Mice and Men, and the widely discussed Grapes of Wrath.

1/ Geismar, Writers in Crisis, p. 240.

2/ Ibid., p. 260.

3/ 20th Century Novelists, p. 1338.

As a creative artist, Steinbeck has been accused of self consciousness in style, a "silky mellifluous manner",<sup>4</sup> and an over use of cliches.<sup>5</sup> However, he may be praised for his keen observation, his successful blend of realism and anger, and an undeniable sincerity.

Grapes of Wrath, one of the least violent Steinbeck novels, gives the sentimentalized story of a family of tenant farmers, the Joads, who migrate to California when driven off their Oklahoma land. Their struggle for survival when jobs are scarce and money low, the death of two of their members, and their final realization that their situation is hopeless, are related with a mixture of humor, pathos and passion. The narrative is simple, enhanced with descriptions of scenery which are beautiful and occasionally poetic.

The characters, even if "obviously reflections of Steinbeck's earlier interests",<sup>6</sup> are vividly portrayed, and to new readers of Steinbeck, would seem very human and real. The description of "Grampa" tells us:

...His was a lean excitable face with little bright eyes as evil as a frantic child's eyes. A cantankerous, complaining, mischievous, laughing face. He fought and argued, told dirty stories. He was as lecherous as always. Vicious and cruel and impatient, like a frantic child, and the whole structure overlaid with amusement. He drank too much when he could get it, ate too much when it was there, talked too much all the time...

4/ 20th Century Authors, loc. cit.

5/ Geismar, op. cit., p. 268.

6/ Ibid., p. 263.

The author writes of another farmer:

It was a long head, bony, tight of skin, and set on a neck as stringy and muscular as a celery stalk. His eyeballs were heavy and protruding; the lids stretched to cover them, and the lids were raw and red. His cheeks were brown and shiny and hairless and his mouth full--humorous or sensual...

Steinbeck's most successful character is "Ma" Joad; for although she is not described with original phrases she may be clearly seen, and she has been given both warmth and strength. When her son Tom returns from prison he finds her in the kitchen:

...Tom heard his mother's voice, the remembered cool, calm drawl, friendly and humble. "Let 'em come," she said. "We got a' plenty. Tell 'em they got to wash their han's. The bread is done. I'm jus' takin' up the side-meat now..."

...She looked out into the sunshine. Her full face was not soft; it was controlled, kindly. Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering like steps into a high calm and a superhuman understanding. She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of her family, the strong place that could not be taken...she had taken dignity and a clean calm beauty...she seemed to know that if she swayed the family shook, and if she ever really deeply wavered or despaired the family would fall, the family will to function would be gone...

The most outstanding characteristic of Steinbeck's narrative style is his versatility, which is especially apparent in the chapters of general description separating the chapters of Joad family action. Steinbeck paragraphs carefully, mixing well punctuated, complex sentences with short sentences, fragments of sentences, and words standing alone. Each type



creates a different mood:

(Cotton picking)

Sack's full now. Take her to the scales.  
Argue. Scale man says you got rocks to make  
weight. How 'bout him? His scales is fixed.  
Sometimes he's right. You got rocks in the  
sack. Sometimes you're right, the scales is  
crooked. Sometimes both, rocks an' crooked  
scales...

(Diner on the road)

Minnie or Susy or Mae, middle-aging behind  
the counter, hair curled and rouge and powder  
on a sweating face. Taking orders in a soft  
low voice, calling them to the cook with a  
screech like a peacock...the cook is Joe or  
Carl or Al, hot in a white coat and apron,  
beady sweat on white forehead, below the white  
cook's cap; moody, rarely speaking...

Steinbeck also uses "and" sentences to give flow and natural  
rhythm:

And after a while the man with the guitar  
stood up and yawned. Good night, folks, he said.  
And they murmured, Good night to you.  
And each wished he could pick a guitar,  
because it is a gracious thing.

These chapters of general description actually serve as  
introductions to the other chapters, just as Dos Passos' "News-  
reels" and "Camera Eye" have a similar function in U.S.A.  
Steinbeck's less radical method seems more effective than that  
of Dos Passos:

The people come with nets to fish for potatoes  
in the river, and the guards hold them back; they  
come in rattling cars to get the dumped oranges,  
but the kerosene is sprayed. And they stand still  
and watch the potatoes float by, listen to the  
screaming pigs being killed in a ditch and covered  
with quicklime, watch the mountains of oranges

slop down to a putrefying ooze;...and in the eyes of the hungry there is a gnawing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.

Steinbeck occasionally approaches "sweetness" in his prose, but there is symbolism even in this description:

The sun lay on the grass and warmed it, and in the shade under the grass the insects moved, ants and ant lions to set traps for them, grasshoppers to jump into the air and flick their yellow wings for a second, sow bugs like little armadillos, plodding restlessly on many tender feet...

The dialogue of Grapes of Wrath is brief, and the dialect seems realistic. One of the longest speeches, made by a dying woman, holds pathos:

..."When I was a little girl I use'ta sing. Folks roun' about use'ta say I sung as nice as Jenny Lind. Folks use'ta come an' listen when I sung. An'--when they stood--an' me a-singin', why, me an' them was together more'n you could ever know. I was thankful. There ain't so many folks can feel so full up, so close, an' them folks standing there an' me a'singin'. Thought maybe I'd sing in theaters, but ' never done it. An' I'm glad. They wasn't nothin' got in between me an' them. An'--that's why I wanted you to pray. I wanted to feel that clostness oncet more. It's the same thing, singin' an' prayin', jus' the same thing. I wisht you could a-heerd me sing."

Grapes of Wrath has its humor, too, even if an "off-color" humor:

A committee of dogs had met in the road in honor of a bitch. Five males, shepherd mongrels, collie mongrels, dogs whose breeds had been blurred by a freedom of social life, were engaged in complimenting the bitch...

Steinbeck's laughter, although usually based on incongruous situations--for example, the Joads' ignorance of modern bathroom

equipment--nevertheless is seldom like that of Caldwell, who delights in the "dirty joke", and whose anecdotes seem to be written merely to produce snickers and guffaws. The humor in the Grapes of Wrath is derived from the mistakes of the Joads, but what obscenity there is seems excusable when the social significance of the novel is considered. In contrast, Caldwell's characters seem to have nothing of interest to them except sex, and do not strive to lift themselves from poverty.

The plot structure of the internal story of Grapes of Wrath is weak. In order to maintain rapid movement, Steinbeck solves problems with impossible contrivances; and several times shifts too suddenly from one scene to another. There is not adequate transition between episodes in the peach-picking camp, in the cotton fields, and in the box car.

There is a definite letdown in the last chapters, with loss of detail and effective dialogue. The more abstract, discouraged tone of the prose is fitting, but the reader is not prepared for the earthy realism of the final scene. The humiliation of Rose of Sharron might not seem so tawdry if Steinbeck had not hastened when he should have proceeded carefully. The impression given is more characteristic of Caldwell than of Steinbeck.

...DIRT LIES IN EVERY ACRE...

Although we would be inclined to agree with the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice that God's Little Acre should have been banned, there is nevertheless some literary merit in the work of ERSKINE CALDWELL. As one of the first objective naturalists,<sup>1</sup> Caldwell displays a fairly skilled handling of colloquial language, an objective detachment in his description, and a raucous humor which has hitherto been almost completely unknown to the American reader. His subject matter is consistently coarse and earthy, and his emphasis is always on sex; and yet, he seldom seems deliberately profane or sacrilegious. His characters are so ignorant, in fact, that they almost appear innocent.

Caldwell's major innovation is his creation of comedy in a setting of extreme naturalism.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, this success in repressing the reader's normal reactions to details of man's lowest moral degeneration is the greatest tragedy of his career. "I don't write things that are supposed to be funny," he laments.<sup>3</sup> Instead, he wishes to show the truths of social irresponsibility, to be a "Hogarth of Prose".<sup>4</sup> Thus far, he has fallen far short of his goal.

Caldwell's narrative is simple and straightforward, his vocabulary limited except for obscene terms and swear words.

1/ Millett, op. cit., p. 36.

2/ Ibid.

3/ van Gelder, op. cit., p. 34.

4/ James Gray, New York Times Book Review, December 7, 1947.

His plots, with perhaps the exception of Tobacco Road, do not lead anywhere; nor do they have any very obvious moral purpose. The action instead is based upon extremely incongruous situations which certainly do not indicate the hidden meaning that might be slowly revealed through pure realism.

The characters of God's Little Acre and Tragic Ground, a later novel, have no dignity, no aim in life. Their degeneration is so complete, in fact, that it does not seem possible that Caldwell could be hinting for social reform. Therefore, the only thing left for the reader to do is laugh, or rather, titter or sneer.

God's Little Acre is the story of Ty Ty Walden, a dirt farmer who dedicates a portion of his land to God, and then shifts its position whenever he suspects there might be gold on it. His struggle to find the long-awaited wealth, together with detailed descriptions of the sex orgies of his three sons, two daughters and daughter-in-law, form the basic framework for the plot. Two other characters--Pluto, a rejected suitor of the most beautiful daughter, Darling Jill; and Will, a son-in-law strike leader--complete the picture and save the book from being labelled a work of pornography.

Pluto, fat and as refreshingly wholesome as a huge puppy, is running for sheriff, and his antics give Caldwell an excellent opportunity for real satire. Through Will, when he is not lusting after one of Ty Ty's daughters, Caldwell has

injected into the story a sense of the social consciousness which he himself feels. He writes:

A darkness enveloped everything. For a while the whole memory of his life passed across his eyes. He squeezed the lids over his eyeballs, straining to forget the memory. But he could not forget. He could see, dimly at first, the mills in the Valley...He could see, since the first time he could remember, the faces of the wild-eyed girls like morning glories in the mill windows. They stood there looking out at him, their bodies firm and their breasts erect, year after year since he could remember being alive. And out in the streets in front of the mills stood bloody-lipped men, his friends and brothers, spitting their lungs into the yellow dust of Carolina...

Later, Will's murder when he attempts to open the mills after a strike shows Caldwell at his dramatic best. The few scenes of this type, however, are over-balanced by the repeated episodes of lust (which will not be quoted here).

Unfortunately, contrary to the praise of some critics, Caldwell's dialogue is not sufficiently realistic to create mood. Ty Ty's daughters make few grammatical errors although they have had little or no education; and Ty Ty himself switches from double negatives in one sentence to correct English in another:

...there wouldn't be no sense...  
...we can't get anything out of this...

The dialogue does have partial success, however, in that, like Hemingway's, it gives an impression of realism through its brevity. This same brevity prevents effective use of the conversations to reveal character.

Tragic Ground, also a short novel, has as its setting a settlement of shacks surrounding a closed powder plant. In one of these shacks live the Douthits, Spense, his wife Maud, and their two promiscuous daughters. Spense is well described by Caldwell as a dully cheerful man to whom the words "ethics" and "morals" have no meaning. Maud, wearing her one nightgown which is forever lost because of its broken straps, lies in bed drinking tonic in order to soothe her stomach trouble and raise her morale. All of the characterizations in this novel are superior to those in God's Little Acre; and the dialogue is more consistently ungrammatical.

In spite of the obscenity, there is real hilarity in Tragic Ground. When Spense visits a brothel while searching for his youngest daughter, his bewilderment at the behavior of others almost causes one to forget the vulgarity of the situation. His naive mistakes in other scenes are equally amusing; and the result is that only the title of the book indicates that humor, if the author speaks truthfully, is not intended.

Erskine Caldwell was born in 1903, and spent his childhood traveling with his presbyterian minister father.<sup>5</sup> He obviously did not show interest in the ministry, and after a few years spent at sea and in various colleges, worked as a cub reporter, cotton picker, lumber-mill hand, hack driver, soda jerker, and stagehand in a burlesque theater.<sup>6</sup> He therefore has gained

5/ 20th Century Authors, p. 237.

6/ Ibid., p. 238.

close personal knowledge of the people about whom he writes. Even so, he does not compare favorably with the other three Southern writers of his period, Miss Glasgow, Faulkner and Wolfe. Perhaps added study and self-discipline will someday make his work more acceptable.



...A RICHER EARTH...

Also writing of a people of the soil, but choosing as her subjects the humble peasants of China, Pearl S. Buck has presented in her trilogy, House of Earth, a permanent symbol of Oriental culture. As one of the few modern American writers who refused to be swayed by the radical movement in technique, Mrs. Buck has fashioned novels of dignity and strength out of the chaos of the 1920's and 1930's. Ironically, she has had to go to China to do it.

The Good Earth, her earliest publication and the first book of the trilogy, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1932, and has become a literary classic. Mrs. Buck calls it a "pot-boiler",<sup>1</sup> and claims that it was written for purely mercenary reasons at a time when she needed money. Nevertheless, none of her novels written when she was better established financially have equaled it.

Mrs. Buck's childhood spent in China and her resulting intimate knowledge of Chinese life have given her inestimable advantages in her attempts to make this ancient civilization comprehensible to American readers.<sup>2</sup> Her devoted study of the Chinese classics and her experiences in North China during days of famine and of bandit terrorism<sup>3</sup> have added to her knowledge of the Chinese people.

1/ van Gelder, Writers and Writing, p. 26.

2/ Millett, Contemporary American Authors, p. 70.

3/ Ibid., p. 266.

She was born in 1892 in West Virginia, but at an early age moved to China with her missionary parents. She later returned to the United States to attend Randolph Macon College where she was a leader, but felt herself a misfit.<sup>4</sup> As a child she read Dickens and acquired a love for England and English literature which probably has had great influence upon her style.

The Good Earth, translated into nearly twenty languages, is the story of Wang Lung, his faithful wife O-lan, and their three sons. A family chronicle, it traces the life of Wang Lung from his marriage with a slave girl from the rich House of Hwang to his death in the earthen house of his birth. The novel is a tragedy: the tragedy of a peasant who in his desire for wealth and prosperity is blinded into forsaking direct contact with his land for a life of artificiality. His lack of appreciation for his loyal, hard-working wife is the most deeply moving part of the story.

The people of The Good Earth are tied to their land in order to sustain life, and they worship the earth as a second god. They leave it only once--when drought threatens starvation--and their days and years are filled with toil upon it. To Wang Lung, the symbol of prosperity is ownership; and he battles the weather, the rich of his community, and the avarice of his uncle until he is able to buy one piece of land after another. Not until he has become one of the men of property

<sup>4</sup>/ Millett, op. cit., p. 266.

he despised as a peasant, does he realize that in giving his sons absolute security he has deprived them of the privilege of doing honest work. His only desire as he lies dying is that his plots of "good earth" never be sold.

Mrs. Buck plots her story in orthodox fashion, without the trickery of sudden shifts in time, confusing abstractions, or any of the other innovations of many of her contemporaries. The characters are moved from one situation to another logically, and the action rises and falls with the power and intensity of her narrative. She writes realistically and objectively, but with deep feeling, and creates irony and pathos without resorting to the use of crude implications and obscure hidden meanings. She never exaggerates a situation for impression, and the heartache and disaster which befall her characters are revealed through direct narration rather than "stream of consciousness" reverie.

And the old man let his scanty tears dry upon his cheeks and they made salty stains there. And he stooped and took up a handful of the soil and he held it and he muttered,

"If you sell the land, it is the end."

And his two sons held him, one on either side, each holding his arm, and he held tight in his hand the warm loose earth. And they soothed him and they said over and over, the eldest son and the second son,

"Rest assured, our father, rest assured. The land is not to be sold."

But over the old man's head they looked at each other and smiled.

Mrs. Buck's prose has the imaginative vitality<sup>5</sup> of biblical poetry, and a melodious rhythm which aids smooth transition from

5/ Millett, op. cit., p. 70.

one sentence to another. The dialogue and descriptions are brief; and each word is carefully chosen and precisely phrased, reflecting the innate reserve and dignity of the Chinese people. In capturing and maintaining this spirit of quiet strength and wisdom throughout The Good Earth, the author proves that she is both a polished artist and keen observer of human nature.

Not only character but an indication of the relationship between husbands and wives of old China is revealed in this scene following the birth of the second child to O-lan:

...Later before the sun set she was back beside him, her body flattened, spent, but her face silent and undaunted. His impulse was to say,

"For this day you have had enough. Go and lie upon your bed." But the aching of his own exhausted body made him cruel, and he said to himself that he had suffered as much with his labor that day as she with her childbirth, and so he only asked between the strokes of his scythe,

"Is it male or female?"

She answered calmly,

"It is another male."

They said nothing more to each other, but he was pleased, and the incessant bending and stooping seemed less arduous, and working on until the moon rose above a bank of purple clouds, they finished the field and went home.

Mrs. Buck uses few adjectives, and there is very little description of scenery in The Good Earth. Instead, pictures are drawn of conditions and situations to give atmosphere.

We see Wang Lung's household as O-lan is dying:

It seemed now that none knew how to light the grass and keep it burning in the oven, and none knew how to turn a fish in the cauldron without breaking it or turning one side black before the

other side was cooked, and none knew whether sesame oil or bean were right for frying this vegetable or that. The filth of the crumbs and dropped food lay under the table and no one swept it unless Wang Lung grew impatient with the smell of it and called in a dog from the court to lick it up or shouted at the younger girl to scrape it up and throw it out.

And the youngest lad did this and that to fill his mother's place with the old man his grandfather, who was helpless as a little child now, and Wang Lung could not make the old man understand what had happened that O-lan no longer came to bring him tea and hot water and to help him lie down and stand up, and he was peevish because he called her and she did not come, and he threw his bowl of tea on the ground like a wilful child. At last Wang Lung led him into O-lan's room and showed him the bed where she lay, and the old man stared out of his filmed and half blind eyes, and he mumbled and wept because he saw dimly that something was wrong...

There are also few paragraphs of straight physical description of the people of The Good Earth, and these below reveal much more than surface characteristics:

...She had a square, honest face, a short, broad nose with large black nostrils, and her mouth was wide as a gash in her face. Her eyes were small and of a dull black in color, and were filled with some sadness that was not clearly expressed. It was a face that was habitually silent and unspeaking as though it could not speak if it would. She bore patiently Wang Lung's look, without embarrassment or response, simply waiting until he had seen her...

...She plodded along steadily on her big feet as though she had walked there all her life, her wide face expressionless...She clutched them (some peaches Wang Lung gave her) greedily as a child might and held them in her hand without speech. When next he looked at her as they walked along the margin of the wheat fields she was nibbling cautiously, but when she saw him looking at her she covered it again with her hand and kept her jaws motionless...

As for Lotus, she grew lovelier as her fullness of years came on, for if before she had had a fault, it was her birdlike thinness that made too sharp the lines of her little pointed face and

hollowed too much her temples. But now...she became soft and rounded in body, and her face grew full and smooth at the temples, and with her wide eyes and small mouth she looked more than ever like a plump little cat...If she was no longer the lotus bud, neither was she more than the full-blown flower, and if she was not young, neither did she look old, and youth and age were equally far from her.

Their faces in repose were twisted as though in anger, only it was not anger. It was the years of straining at loads too heavy for them which had lifted their upper lips to bare their teeth in a snarl, and this labor had set deep wrinkled flesh about their eyes and mouths. They themselves had no idea of what matter of men they were. One of them once, seeing himself in a mirror that passed on a van of household goods, had cried out, "There is an ugly fellow!" And when others laughed at him loudly he smiled painfully, never knowing at what they laughed, and looking about hastily to see if he had offended someone.

The basic story of Wang Lung and his family is enriched with scenes which disclose customs of Chinese civilization which are of interest to American readers. Worship of household gods, attitudes toward birth and death, class distinctions, methods of travel, birthday parties and wedding celebrations are interwoven with the action of the plot.

The little humor which exists in The Good Earth is subtle, controlled, simple, and therefore delightful. But one can never laugh wholeheartedly, for the theme of the novel is essentially serious. The small vanities and occasional pompousness of Wang Lung make one smile, and the slyness of other characters is equally amusing in contrast with their surface appearance of righteousness. When the unsophisticated

Wang Lung seeks a concubine, his middle-aged unfaithfulness is foolish, but it is also pathetic. Mrs. Buck mocks her characters gently, never with malice, and therefore her humor is light and refreshing.

Sex is important in The Good Earth, but there is never a trace of the subjective naturalism of Faulkner, the obscenity of Caldwell, or the Freudian over-emphasis of Dos Passos. Since Mrs. Buck is attempting to give a complete picture of Chinese life, she treats passion realistically, but without unnecessary detail:

Now Wang Lung became sick with the sickness which is greater than any man can have. He had suffered under labor in the sun... ..and he had suffered from the despair of laboring without hopes upon the streets of a southern city. But under none of these did he suffer as he now did under this slight girl's hand...

...Each night he went in and each night again he was the country fellow who knew nothing, trembling at the door, sitting stiffly beside her, waiting for her signal of laughter, and then fevered, filled with a sickened hunger, he followed slavishly, bit by bit, her unfolding, until the moment of crisis, when, like a flower that is ripe for plucking, she was willing that he should grasp her wholly...

...When O-lan had come to his house it was health to his flesh and he lusted for her robustly as a beast for its mate and he took her and was satisfied and he forgot her and did his work content. But there was no such content now in his love for this girl...

The birth scenes of O-lan are painful and heart-rending rather than disgusting; and Wang Lung's love for his various mistresses is never really beautiful, is often ludicrous, and dies because it is not honorable.

The other two novels of House of Earth, Sons and A House Divided, do not possess the sweeping strength of The Good Earth. They continue the story of the Wang Lung family through succeeding generations; and their theme becomes the clash between oriental and occidental ways in a more modern China.

Mrs. Buck adjusts her narrative style to her subject matter, her prose slowly losing its biblical tone and taking on a modern idiom. The characters, although realistically portrayed, are more numerous and do not have the individuality of Wang Lung, O-lan and the others of The Good Earth. The trilogy as a whole, however, presents a comprehensive picture of the China of yesterday and today.

A House Divided concludes:

...She said, "Not all foreign things are bad!" and suddenly she would not look at him. She hung her head down and looked at the ground, and now she was as shy as any old-fashioned maid could ever be. He saw her eyelids flutter once or twice upon her cheeks and for a moment she seemed wavering and about to turn away and leave him alone again.

Then she would not. She held herself bravely and she straightened her shoulders square and sure, and she lifted up her head and looked back to him steadfastly, smiling, waiting, and Yuan saw her so.

His heart began to mount and mount until his body was full of all his beating heart. He laughed into the night. What was it he had feared a little while ago?

"We two," he said--"we two--we need not be afraid of anything."



...THE BOSTON BRAVE...

Like Pearl Buck, a Pulitzer Prize winner and expert craftsman, JOHN MARQUAND has produced some of the most sparkling satire of the twentieth century. Seemingly untouched by the radicalism of many of his contemporaries, Marquand has used a subtle and conservative approach in picturing a New England gone to seed. He has chosen for his subjects the "Boston Brahmin," or a comparable New York group, and has characterized them with an affectionate, if sometimes malicious, irony.

Marquand was born in 1893 in Delaware to parents of "blue-stocking" heritage.<sup>1</sup> He lived in New York until he was fourteen, spending his summer vacations at the family farm in Newburyport, Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> By the time of his graduation from Harvard in 1915, he was well equipped to write vividly and realistically about the social class in which he found himself. He worked as a reporter on the Boston Transcript, served in the first World War, and published his earliest novel, The Unspeakable Gentleman, in 1922. Many of his first stories, centered on love and romance, were printed in the Ladies Home Journal and other popular women's magazines. In 1937 he completed The Late George Apley, considered by many critics his most brilliant satire on narrow-minded Bostonians.

1/ 20th Century Authors, p. 912.

2/ Ibid.

H. M. Pulham, Esquire, written several years later, is a more mellow continuation of the same theme.

In writing The Late George Apley, Marquand has used a technique which, although not new, has been used by no other modern American novelist of reknown. His method of presentation of material is through letters written by the characters and drawn together by the running comments of the supposed editor of the volume. These letters, generally assembled in the order in which they were written, tell the life story of George Apley. Most of them are notes composed by Apley himself; others are products of his family and friends. All reveal character, and when viewed as a whole form the plot of the novel.

The Late George Apley begins with a description of the Apley family tree, and then moves from the birth of George through his boyhood, school days, and marriage to his death. It is written in the first person. The narrator and editor of the letters is a character named Horatio Willing, who has been asked by Apley's son John to write a "human" biography of his father. Especially in the first few chapters of the book, much of the information about the family is given through flashbacks in the adult George Apley's letters to his children. As soon as the setting and background are established, however, the epistles are placed in logical sequence.

As commentator upon the significance of the letters in drawing a sympathetic picture of the friend he worshipped,

Horatio Willing is an important figure in the novel. Marquand has characterized him well. Willing's over-elaborate vocabulary, his carefully constructed sentences and general emphasis on correct grammar, and his concern with trivial matters reveal that he is a pompous man with no sense of humor. He is undertaking what is to him a serious memorial to the late George, and he sees nothing amusing about Apley's life. Since Marquand's aim is to satirize the snobbish complacency of the Bostonians--typified by Apley--, his success lies in his ability to blind Horatio while opening the eyes of the reader. Much of the hilarity of the novel comes from the lack of agreement between the editor and his readers.

George Apley, a member of an old Boston family, supposedly lived from 1867 to 1933. He is typical of the self-satisfied snobs of his social class; and yet, through Marquand's clever characterization, he emerges as an individual. The letters which he writes to his family and friends, and the answers which he receives, not only trace his life story but reveal his Puritan conscience, his aristocratic attitude, and his belief in his own importance. Other characters are also described through George's observations. His father's Bostonian temperament may be seen here:

"Thunderation," Father said, "there's a man in his shirt sleeves on those steps!" The next day he sold his house for what he had paid for it and we moved to Beacon street...

...I had eaten very heavily of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, and was not feeling well, when

Father said: "George, stand up and give Burke's speech." I started out mechanically, but when I got to the part about the savages I stopped and my stomach seemed to turn about. Father rose quietly and took my hand. "George," he said, "come with me." As I went upstairs I told him I felt sick. Father's reply was the right one. "You must learn to do a great many things that you don't want," he said. "Now let us go over this so that you may get the end correctly."

Marquand is extremely successful in his letter writing in giving each character a style peculiar to himself. This was a difficult task, since all of his Bostonians are well educated and do not use the wide variety of colloquialisms which have aided other authors in revealing character through dialogue. Marquand has been forced to create personality traits through the different ways in which individuals express their ideas. George's mother's letters, for example, are filled with sentiment, possessiveness, and pride in her ability to judge better than anyone else what is right and what is wrong. Her favorite word seems to be "dear". When George as a child comments in a letter, "...I like Aunt Mabel...she is fat...", his mother replies at length:

...It is not right to make remarks on the appearance of other people, particularly your dear relatives. Your Aunt Mabel would be very sorry if she were to think that you had written of her stoutness...

The phrase, "particularly of your dear relatives", is typical of Marquand's sly thrusts at snobbish family pride.

Years later, George's mother writes to his prospective bride:

...My own dear sweet George himself told his first love, his mother, his tender news this

very morning...He came up to me at the front window, as I was holding a bit of burning tobacco leaf in a dustpan to kill the aphids that have attacked my dear geraniums, and he said: "Mother, I think you will be glad to know that Catherine Bosworth has consented to be my wife."...I had only to say to myself that I was not losing a son but was gaining a dear, sweet daughter...I know that you will let Georgie and me have as many friendly, playful chats as we ever had before. I know that you will realize that George is a dear, sensitive boy...

George's wife Catherine is well-characterized through this brief but meaningful note:

Dearest George:---I wish you would let me know definitely when you are coming back, as you have put off coming for two days already. Well, Amelia has caught Newcomb. It took her a long time--but now she really has him. I wish your family were not quite so openly pleased as they are. You might think Newcomb was a crown prince. I could have married Newcomb myself, as you know, but we won't mention that...

Marquand makes John Apley, who probably understands his father better than anyone else in the book, one of the most appealing characters. Mr. Willing sees only a lack of form in John's letters, and feels that he does not appreciate his father's importance. However, anyone else can see the son's feeling in his comment:

He was always doing a hundred things, not one of them amounting to much, and it was like him never to let anything go when he might have dropped the whole lot of them without any trouble. I never blamed him when he was hard on me...

The strife between the two generations is most clearly shown through Apley's worried letters when the boy returns

a "changed person" from war. One always feels, however, that John will return to the fold even though he is not as conservative as his father.

Marquand's characterization reaches its highest peak in Apley's last letters to John. As the older man advises his son to take membership in Boston clubs seriously, and gives detailed directions for his own funeral, his concern for appearances, and his pompous self-satisfaction are very obvious.

However, the letters alone do not give The Late George Apley its satiric brilliance. Horatio Willing's verbose explanations of the excerpts, and his almost complete lack of understanding are great sources of humor. His over-dramatization is shown when he writes:

...the theater of his life was already broadening and with it the field of his human contacts. One gains a sense of this and an impression of a boy's naive enthusiasm in a letter which he wrote to his mother...

"Dear Mamma:---I am very well. I hope you are well. I have brushed my teeth every night and said my prayers. I play all day with my cousins. I like the sea. Uncle horatio has a sailboat. He has a dog too, and a goat that pulls a cart. We press flowers in the dictionary. Can father send me ten cents? With love...(George)

Marquand has so successfully blinded Horatio to Apley's faults that he does not even realize that his proof of his hero's lack of snobbishness is either contradictory or incongruous. "He had always prided himself upon maintaining democratic tolerance," he writes, adding triumphantly, "Anyone who has seen Apley at a single reunion of his college class

can be sure that this is true." Horatio also is completely unaware of the weighted under-statement in many of his biographical remarks. He intends no sarcasm when he says, "This one sounds a slightly different note", in comparing two letters whose viewpoints could not be more conflicting.

Horatio occasionally tells jokes to illustrate a point, but they are amusing only because they show his complete lack of ability to be humorous on purpose. One never laughs with him; one can only laugh at him. His comments on his own wit are especially effective:

Some students...(constructed)...an insect for a naturalist...thorax of one species, the wings of another, the legs of a third, and the antennae of a fourth. When the professor was confronted with the final result...he smiled,

"I think," he said, "that it is called the humbug."

Mr. Willing adds: "...One must not forget that life in those days had its own modicum of robust gayety."

In spite of Marquand's satire, he never seems deliberately cruel. In fact, it is difficult for a reader to become convinced that he really dislikes his Bostonians. At times he seems to admire their established customs and conservative tastes; and what he really satirizes is their complacency and narrow viewpoint, their belief that Boston is the center of the universe. His irony is delicate rather than harsh or bitter; and there are few critics who would deny that his deep understanding of human nature makes him sympathetic. If there is

any failing in The Late George Apley, it is that readers who do not know Boston may not be able to appreciate the novel fully.

Marquand again shows his flair for believable characterization in H. M. Pulham, Esquire. This book, however, in contrast to The Late George Apley, is tragic rather than hilarious. Where one is willing to see the era of the Apleys pass, one is saddened by the realization that there are Harry Pulhams everywhere, not just in Boston.

H. M. Pulham, Esquire is the story of a man who twenty-five years after his Harvard graduation sits down to write his autobiography. What he finally sends to the anniversary committee covers only a few pages, and is as boring and as conservative as his whole social class. What has actually happened to him is shown through a series of flashbacks as he thinks about all of the people and places which have influenced him. Marquand injects less acridity and more pity into this story of a man who belongs to the generation of George Apley's son. He does not, however, lose his wry humor; and his detail and well-handled dialogue aid him in drawing a clear picture of Pulham.

The narrative, written in the first person, at first seems dull and ponderous, but so are Harry Pulham and his environment. Marquand is especially efficient at suiting his style to his subject. The characterizations are also again excellent; Harry, his frustrated wife Kay, his old sweetheart



Marvin Myles, and his college friends Bill and Bo-Jo are all individuals with sharply defined personalities.

Marquand's short sentence dialogue has great effect in showing Harry's dullness, his wife's shrewish nagging, and his children's lack of respect for him. His slow comprehension is revealed through his passive acceptance of the insults sent in his direction, and his repetition of one statement over and over when he is trying to understand something--or make himself understood.

One feels closer to Pulham personally than to Apley because Marquand has given his later character a universality in that a reader may find in him his own weaknesses. Apley, however, seems so real that he almost appears to be a historical figure. Both men are excellent satirical creations of a clever and observant artist.

POSTSCRIPT

These are our ten authors and their representative works as we have seen them. In this analysis of their contributions to the world of American fiction, one characteristic common to them all has become increasingly apparent. American writers have not "found themselves" in regard to acceptance of any definite pattern of narrative style or plot structure. They are still groping in a period of experimentation; they are floundering together in an abyss, all reaching upward in the same direction, but, with few exceptions, are unable to climb to stability.

It is interesting, and perhaps significant, to note that in the midst of a radical movement in technique, the three writers--Glasgow, Buck, and Marquand--who have used the fewest innovations have been the only recipients of Pulitzer Prizes, and have been given the highest praise in literary circles. Even the reading public, which admittedly has received with enthusiasm the works of other authors, has chosen for its permanent libraries the more classical novels.

Too many of our modern creative artists have indicated by their unrest and carelessness in presentation of material that they are writing to satisfy the flesh rather than the soul. In an era of conflicting emotionalism and materialism, it is not difficult to understand why fortune and fame should seem more desirable than the satisfaction which comes from truly good

writing. However, since the literature of a period may affect the attitudes of a people just as the attitudes affect the creators of the literature, a more progressive movement is both fitting and necessary.

Too few of the novels of the 1920's and 1930's appear to have any possibilities for lasting distinction or position as important works of fiction. Too many lack universality, and have become mere flashes of over-bright light in a literary darkness. And unfortunately, the effect of their weaknesses has been greater than that of their merits.

The novels of the 1940's have been almost without exception poor imitations of their predecessors; and what is even more deplorable, future writers of America too often are taught in their schools and universities to follow the examples set by the authors of least ability. Undeniably there are hopeful signs of growth in many of the later products of the Age of Realism; but this growth thus far has been painful, and too few novelists have reached maturity.

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