THE REPRESENTATION OF VILLAGE AND RURAL 
LIFE OF THE MIDDLE WEST IN THE 
AMERICAN LOCAL COLOR SHORT 
STORY 1900-1931

by

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DEDICATION

To those unsung dreamers and workers, young and old, who can see beyond the restless confusion of today, who can visualize for the future the true epic greatness of their Middle Western homeland, this study is dedicated.
PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to observe through consideration of that popular American literary form, the local color short story, the modern artistic expressions of life in the Middle Western region, to estimate the influences which bear upon the commonplace life of the Midland, and to evaluate the justice of the literary treatments in accordance with the newer spirit of sociological criticism of literature.

I have chosen the Middle West, "that common denominator of America", as my field of study, because this region having been my homeland, my knowledge of it enables me to judge fairly the literary expressions of its various aspects. Incidentally, the study of the short story is particularly valuable to me, as consideration of its technique aids my own creative work. I observe that my literary investigation has drawn my interests homeward, bringing them closer to the native soil. I find in the familiar wheat farms and Main Street towns solid and dependable foundations for expression, and my study of these many short stories convinces me that my own writing must inevitably deal with the picturesque realism of my homeland.
For valuable assistance in the preparation of this work I am indebted to Professor S. L. Whitcomb, who suggested the field of study, Miss Josephine Burnham, who has directed the writing of the thesis, and Professor J. H. Nelson and Miss Lulu Gardner, who gave valuable advice and aid. Thanks is due also the library staffs of the University of Kansas and the University of Iowa for services rendered in obtaining material.
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INTRODUCTORY

Chapter I
Il faut cultiver notre jardin.
Voltaire's Candide

The Middle West (or Midwest) region, called also the Midland, the prairie, the Great Valley and the Central Plains, will here be taken to include those states accepted wholly or in part as the Middle West by Robert L. Ramsay in his introduction to Short Stories of America.¹

These states are: the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio; or viewed sectionally the corn belt, the wheat belt, Chicago, and the Mackinac region. These states, similar in topography and climate, relatively homogeneous in racial character, and contemporary in history and tradition, are thus isolated for observational study. The rather indistinct boundary lines limiting this territory are based upon Mr. Ramsay's geographical consideration of the various states as literary fields, and upon his logically constructed map of literary America, a copy of which is included in this thesis.

¹. Ramsay's Short Stories of America, pp. 15-17
The Midland region is not the immense sweep of land treated by Miss Dondore in *The Prairie and the Making of Middle America*, the vast tract comprising all between the Alleghenies and the Rockies. That majestically broad section is too inclusive, with too many sectional differences involved in its great scope. The Western slope of the Rockies shows a development far different from that of the Mississippi Valley. The South, the East, each has a spirit of its own. We set the boundaries of this Central section to include that group of states, once the prairie of the pioneer, whose late clamor of expression has, according to H. L. Mencken, made Chicago the literary capital of America. This section Ramsay calls "a kind of microcosm of the country, a United States in miniature, the combined and evenly blended center and heart of the nation."

It is significant that the Mississippi Valley region, part of which is our Midland section, has been a

3. Ramsay, *Short Stories of America*, p. 15
rich field of literature from early times. From the earliest letters and chronicles of the explorers with their enticing descriptions of this land of plenty to the Middle Western literature of today the literary activity covers a period of almost four hundred years, if we accept as a first record Coronado's exploration in 1540. Yet it is only within the past several decades that the great central prairie can be said to have found its voice.

Through the long years of discovery and exploration, of colonization and development, the nature and resources of the country were made known through reports of alien peoples, acquisitive observers, adventurous wanderers, forming judgments for the benefit of church and state, not those who had lived upon the prairies and taken from the virgin soil a heritage of sustenance and ideals.

Travel and official literature—idyllic, romantic, or realistic, may have served to picture the new region, but it could not reveal the soul of the land. Not until shifting hordes of newcomers had crowded out the Indian and taken root in the newly formed communities as their own crops took root in the soil, could the real elemental expression of prairie life begin.
At last the great Midwest awakened with a self-conscious literary stirring, typified by Whitman in his *Leaves of Grass*. "I hear America singing", he wrote. "The varied carols I hear"—and from the Great Valley increasing numbers of voices have taken up the paean of their land; some to re-capture the lost epic greatness of the land conquest, the sagas of hunter, trapper, and Indian; some to preserve the deeds of their fathers; others to mirror the actual growing life of the region or visions of its future.

A brief survey summarizing the three chief literary periods of the United States is given by John T. Frederick, editor of the *Midland* and prominent critic of regional literature. The first, the period of settlement, produced as its achievements the picturesque records of early pioneer life: Judge James Hall's stories, Smith's *Iowa, the Promised of the Prophets*, and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Gilded Age*. The second burst of activity, during the Chicago World's Fair period, produced numerous periodicals (the Chicago *Chap Book, The Midland, Poetry* and *The Little Review*) and introduced the works of Hamlin Garland. Within the third, or twentieth century, period the spirit of the region has been voiced chiefly by
Willa Cather, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and in the latest decade, Glenway Wescott, Ruth Suckow, and Walter J. Muilenburg, to mention but a few. Perhaps the most significant feature characterizing the literary work of these contemporaries has been the skilful use of local color in revealing the poignant realities of life.

In selecting stories for this special study I have chosen only those which show through specific description or mention of place that they are definitely based upon the Midland scene. "Kaw River bridge", "those dead flat Kansas towns", "stodgy Middle West village", and similar terms have served as marks of identification. In certain instances, reliable biographical facts concerning the author's field of work have been accepted as evidence that the narrative belongs to the region specified. Zona Gale's literary field is known to be Portage, Wisconsin; Rupert Hughes', Keokuk, Iowa; and William Allen White's, Emporia, Kansas.

This investigation is confined to treatment of rural and small town life only, because the "revolt from the village" as a literary and sociological concern looms large as a present problem, and furthermore be-
cause the city is a unit too large and too heterogeneously mixed to be included in a study of the "local color of communal consciousness".  

Mr. Ramsay holds that while local color has found a place in the novel and in poetry its greatest triumph has been in the short story, "the largest factor in American literature for nearly half a century."  

Professor Ramsay also suggests as reasons for the popularity and consequent development of the short story the universal American addiction to "swapping

4. Ramsay's Short Stories of America, p. 24
5. Ibid. p. 4

Note: The short story as the chosen medium of this study provides opportunity through its brevity for an examination of sharp active impressions. It offers through its abundance of examples a chance for observation of many varied instances and differing phases, thus presenting opportunity for numerous comparisons and contrasts of authors' ideas. Moreover, since the short story (according to Brander Matthews) is the literary form best suited to American life today, it may well be selected as the logical medium through which to view the panorama of American life.

The term short story is meant to include any sketch which appears to reveal adequately and with singleness of narrative aim the ideal of the French and Russian short stories, namely une tranche de vie. The emphasis must necessarily lie upon the evident authenticity of representation and the profundity of understanding rather than the artificial technicalities of plot and form.
funny stories" or, perhaps, the American passion for speed and mechanical perfection. Brander Matthews presents other factors governing the extraordinary expansion of the short story: Its perfected form had been exemplified early by Poe. Struggling magazines had been forced to rely on this form, because the writing world lacked capable serialists. Special conditions of our civilization, its vastness, heterogeneous population, and wide variety of interests, combined to make it almost impossible ever to produce the Great American Novel. Moreover, the short story made less demand upon the writer. It permitted more didacticism, arbitrary posing and suggestion, and required less consistency, less broad interpretation.

The examination of various complete files of periodicals highly rated and approved by literary men (as for instance, Harper's, Scribner's, The Dial, and Midland) reveals a steadily increasing number of local color stories in the past three decades. Save during the years of the war, when the vital interests of the nation swerved temporarily from American to foreign settings, the attention of fiction writers has been

6. Ramsay's *Short Stories of America*, p. 1
devoted more and more to the regional story which links life with habitat and reveals distinct sectional atmosphere. The Western deserts, the Southern bayous, the Pennsylvania hills, and the Central plains wheat fields have entered into American fiction as subtle, pervasive personalities.

In late years, a notable number of such regional stories have received high ratings of excellence in Edward O'Brien's *Year Book of the American Short Story*, the U. Henry Memorial Prize collections, and other prize anthologies. Further encouragement has been granted the aspiring local-colorists by such literary magazines as *The Midland*, which under the guidance of John T. Frederick, has become a most valuable force in central United States. The *Dial*, *Scribner's Magazine*, and the *American Mercury* have likewise fought the influence of cheap commercial standardization through their sponsorship of the picturesque literature of the provincial home scene.

John Macy, early in this century, urged attention to this American provincialism. He regretted that American writers had not struck more deeply into their native life, into the very surroundings that should
be of most significance.

The truth is, the whole country is crying out for those who will record it, satirize it, chant it. As literary material, it is virgin land, ancient as life and fresh as a wilderness. American literature is one occupation which is not over-crowded, in which, indeed, there is all too little competition for the newcomer to meet. There are signs that some earnest young writers are discovering the fertility of a soil that has hardly been scratched.8

As late as 1918, Henry Seidel Canby in the Atlantic deplored the soft books, "squashy" literature, the "false fiction" of a supposed idealism that had become unsound, suppressed, and perverted. The cure he proposed was more truth, more fidelity to the actual.9

By 1926 a Literary Digest poll of critics' conclusions showed one-fourth of the leading literary stars of the past ten years to be authors prominent in the Middle Western hinterland, fully an equal number from the region having gone afield elsewhere.10

Miss Dondere predicts that we are now, in spite of our uncertainty and doubt, on our way to

8. Macy, John, The Spirit of American Literature, pp. 3-17
9. Canby, Henry S., "Sentimental America", Atlantic, CXXI (April, 1918), 500-6
10. Dondere, The Prairie and the Making of Middle America, p. 424
better things. The World War jolted us from our complacency. Industry has lost its initial claim. Surely after doubt and disillusion must come an era of aspiration and achievement. While dogmatic prediction is unsafe, she asserts, one thing is sure: the prairie literature of the future will reflect the life of prairie people.11

The time limit of 1900 to 1931 is arbitrarily set in order to confine the investigation to what is commonly termed the modern or contemporary period of our literary history.

The study is selective rather than exhaustive; only stories of literary merit have been chosen, and only those which deal definitely with the Midland environment in a regional sense. Stories from inferior literary sources and those of indeterminate background have, of necessity, been ignored in this research.

In the judgment of these regional stories, wherein significant autochthonous incidents are sketched clearly against the backgrounds that serve as their causes, the critic's duty is largely that of determining the degree in which the literary art is sincere and true to life.

According to Professor Calverton, literature is, in its greatest significance, an emotionalized

11. Ibid., pp. 427-8
record of manners, customs, ideals, religions, philosophies, in short, of all of society. It should then be interpreted and judged according to the justice and authenticity of its presentation in the light of the material conditions which inspired it.\(^{12}\)

Every change in environment... must inevitably alter the nature and values of the judgments which were made previously under another environment.\(^{13}\)

He quotes Whitman:

\begin{displayquote}
Literature is big only in one way—when used as an aid in the growth of the humanities—a furthering of the cause of the masses—a means whereby men may be revealed to each other as brothers.\(^{14}\)
\end{displayquote}

Ramsay, also, stresses the importance of citizenship in literature, regarding the latter favorably as a source of imaginative training in the quality of life.\(^{15}\)

Elias Lieberman, in *The American Short Story*, brings the realization nearer in his sponsorship of the idea that all fiction has a basis in reality, that people, the raw material of these stories, are subject to numerous modifications in thought and custom, through

\(^{12}\) Calverton, V.F., *The Newer Spirit*, pp. 19-51
\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 137
\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 145
\(^{15}\) Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. viii
the influences of isolation, heat, droughts, storm, soil sterility, social restrictions, and inherited tendencies.\textsuperscript{16}

These shaping forces are the very warp and woof of the local color fabric, for the genuine local color story depends upon locality, its lasting impression being the sense of revelation of a special locality. The single effect is secured through the portrayal of this setting,\textsuperscript{17} the effect being obtained through the presentation of distinctive types of character, dialect, social usages; in general, a stress of local color background which, as a force, promotes a plot situation that could scarcely occur in any other environment. In the true local-color sketch the regional setting is the dominant element in the story, almost a phenomenal character.

This individuality of place depends, according to Ramsay, upon three factors: racial inheritance, historical and traditional influence, and the actual, natural background. The first is illustrated in the presentation of Harte's "Forty-niners", Eggleston's circuit riders, Garland's home-stealers, through

\textsuperscript{16} Lieberman, Elias, The American Short Story. pp. 1-7
\textsuperscript{17} Ramsay, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 2
presentation of the quaint qualities of dialect and character. The second finds expression in the works of Thomas Nelson Page, Sarah Orme Jewett, and Kate Chopin, who shifted the interest to social heritage. The natural background received much stress in the Nineties. The feeling of the Louisiana bayou, the Northern woods, and the Alaskan ice fields permeated the writings of Lafcadio Hearn, Mary Catherwood, Jack London, and others.

After 1900 these vital elements gradually became blended together in a general spirit of community revelation. Picturesque narrative chronicles of every isolated section in the States found their way into literature. To name but a few of the writers, the West has been treated by Wister, Hough, Neihardt; New England by Sarah Orme Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Kate Douglas Wiggin; the East by Margaret Deland, O. Henry, Edith Wharton, and Elsie Singmaster; the South by Thomas Nelson Page, Mary N. Murfree, James Branch Cabell, and Ellen Glasgow. In the Middle West, following in the wake of Hamlin Garland, the authors have been legion.
GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE MIDDLE WEST

Chapter II
II

The sun of truth strikes each part of the earth at a little different angle; it is this angle which gives life and infinite variety to literature!  

Hamlin Garland, "Crumbling Idols" 1894

Countless interpreters have viewed the spacious plains of our United States, where millions of people live and re-live daily the tense situations that slowly, but inevitably, determine history; innumerable seers and prophets have risen to voice revelations of the inter-play of these lives and their surrounding influences; and the many portrayals are as varied as the crops which grow from the soils of fertile valley, desert plain, and stony hillside, for the reactions of men to their habitats must differ in as many ways as there are homes and hearts.

Yet, in the Midland region in late years similar tones are blending in the chaos of voices; out of the restless age an attitude, a subtle force, appears to be forming; a note of dissatisfaction characterizes our literature. Novel, essay, and epic reveal it, and the greater number of short stories that have as their bases the serious treatments of commonplace life are touched with the spirit of unhappiness.

Hamlin Garland, sage spirit of the rural Middle Border in the final years of the last century, sets for the story tellers a symbol of plaint that has
been followed by scores of succeeding writers. This symbol is the spirit of discontent. In one of the powerful short stories in Other Main Travelled Roads he tears away the illusion from the so-called "idyllic" farm life, sets forth his bitter sympathy for the drab tragic lives of his contemporaries, and presents the only relief he knows for their unhappy state.

"French discontent, a noble discontent."¹ So speaks a character in "Lucetia Burns". It is better, he maintains, for one to be unhappy in striving for higher things than to be content with the grim sordid environment about him.

The note of unrest lasts even today. In those stories "full of the bitter and burning dust, the foul and trampled slush, of the common avenues of life" Hamlin Garland voiced something native to his countrymen—something "heartbreaking in its rude despair".² He revealed in these genre studies the tragic beauty of the common life, the quality of realism that characterized the French masterpieces of Flaubert and De Maupassant.

To what extent the present survival of this tendency may be directly, due to Mr. Garland's influence

1. Garland, Hamlin, Other Main Travelled Roads, p. 104
2. Howells, William Dean in Main Travelled Roads, p. 4
we can only conjecture, but this much is true: a vital, tangible artistry of diction strongly reminiscent of Garland's style has exhibited itself in the fiction of these ensuing years. An earnest attention to exact sensory detail in description, a method of characterization by means of significant action and speech, an honest insistence on the homely and unrelieved aspects of the commonplace—all these have persisted in Middle Western fiction since Main Travelled Roads first aroused stormy criticism in the nineties, and from the modern sketches as from the Middle Border prototypes emanate the same pessimistic conclusions. Miss Suckow's "Renters" betrays the same impotent suffering that characterized "Under the Lion's Paw". In each story with its skilful presentation of local incidents and imagery, we view a phase of the unbelievable cruelty of man and nature toward a luckless tenant.

Jay Sigmond's Wapsipinicon Tales reveals something of the same queer and provincial traits of rural personalities as those in Mr. Garland's "The Creamery Man" and "Uncle Ethan Ripley".

The plainly pictured misery of "A Branch Road"

3. Garland's Main Travelled Roads, pp. 197-217
4. Ibid., pp. 221-45
5. Ibid., pp. 285-99
6. Ibid., pp. 9-65
"Up the Coolly", 7 and "Lucretia Burn"8 is closely akin to Sherwood Anderson's contemporary impressions of thwarted lives.

The critical arraignment of religious falsity and bombast that occupies the minds of our newer authors appears to hark back to the then daring criticism expressed in Mr. Garland's "A Day of Grace"9 and "Elder Pill, Preacher":10

All in all, the figure of "the man with the hoe" is a pre-eminent feature of Middle Western short story treatment, and even today literary folk find little of pleasant idealism "among the corn rows".

There may be outward reasons for the survival of Garland's tendencies in the modern short story. The honest writer ever seeks for the truth of things; if these things remain the same, it is only reasonable to expect that the impressions of the seekers will have some similarity. Conditions in the Midland have to some extent remained as they were in Garland's day. Droughts, bank failures, and years of depression, have harassed the people of the farm lands. The extreme conditions of misery appealing directly to human emotions have drawn

7. Ibid., pp. 69-129
8. Other Main Travelled Roads, pp. 81-115
9. Ibid., pp. 65-78
10. Ibid., pp. 29-62
the especial attention of those who look on with sympathy and spirit of criticism. What, after all, is there to say of a condition of content and happiness? It needs no aid and demands no defense.

Putting aside the sociological, we find from the literary point of view, a likely reason for the maintenance of Garland's influence, if his it may be termed. He presented vivid pictorial sketches based on life as he himself had known and lived it. He affected no preaching, no arbitrary analysis, but presented self-revealing pictures of clarity and strength. The reader was free to interpret and feel. New avenues of appreciation were opened. One might at last see clearly a stretch of his land as it really existed, in its dreary, melancholy beauty a power capable of altering his own body and soul.

Garland's literary powers have in some respects never been excelled. His dialect smacks of the genuine. For example, one character, Uncle Ethan Ripley, tells of "buggin' his vines". There is talk of "muddin' in a crop", "pretty lively hustlin'", "yearlin's" and "the upper forty".

His local color presentations are realistic in color and in their raw sensory appeal of lately remembered experience. His sketches show us scenes of
hens burrowing in dust, long-haired colts careering wildly, haystacks in the sunlight, the rich new-ploughed land, or the more sordid glances—the meagre bread-and-milk supper, ravenous gulping of food, vile smelling rain barrels, and fly-tortured cattle.

Mr. Garland's sympathy for the downtrodden commoner reveals the brutality, poverty, deadened ambition, and lack of cultural grace in the life of the village and rural character. He presents an occasional bit of loveliness, a fleeting glimpse, enough only to suggest through vivid contrast what ought to be.

In "Up the Coolly" we view the terrible contrast between the prosperous son who has escaped the blighting effect of farm life, and his brother, broken, defeated, lost to gentleness or understanding. 11

"Among the Corn Rows" 12 pictures a brief bit of romance that we feel must be only a prelude to a tragic life of drudgery, suffering, and disappointment. In "Under the Lion's Paw" 13 we view the hopeless tragedy of the farmer, desperate for the ownership of a home and the enjoyment of common comforts, who wrenches from the

11. Main Travelled Roads, pp. 69-129
12. Ibid., pp. 133-65
13. Ibid., pp. 197-217
soil a seeming triumph, only to receive a crushing blow at the hands of a despicable landlord, who demands higher rent and higher price for the hitherto worthless land that his renter has improved. 

A somewhat milder tone characterizes a later story presented to the public in 1900. "The Electric Lady"\textsuperscript{14}, though similar to previous sketches in quality, dialect, and atmosphere, lacks the usual note of tragedy. The adolescent revolt is pictured from a detached paternal viewpoint. A reconciliation with the common things of life is effected. To the shackles of routine tasks and the monotony of the quiet rural ways, the boy returns almost gratefully.

Thus, Garland has presented to us the "land of promise" in its unlovely aspects; thus, he has sponsored among the Midlanders his gospel of a "noble discontent". Even though we cannot prove that Hamlin Garland has definite and pervasive influence upon succeeding authors, the fact remains that these qualities have survived and increased in usage since his day. He began in the Middle West the vogue of realistic sectionalism, and the vogue has become a powerful literary force.

Sherwood Anderson is perhaps the chief exponent

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 197-217
\textsuperscript{14} Garland, Hamlin, "The Electric Lady", Cosmopolitan XXIX (May, 1900), 73-83
of the proletarian outlook today. In his groups of short stories, *Winesburg, Ohio* and *The Triumph of the Egg*, he has searched out the bitter futilities and tragedies of existence which saddle the lives of small town and country folk of his own and the succeeding generation.

These collective sketches clearly serving as a *Spoon River Anthology* in prose, Anderson has, without moralizing or hedging, set out to picture the little thwarted lives of plain unattractive people cramped by the trap-like conventions of actual small town life. In these keenly conceived pictures, presented with photographic clarity of diction, the author has analyzed the individual complexities that are part of our Midwestern heritage. Family misunderstandings, brutalities of farm life, gossip of the villages, fanatical religious controversy, strict conventional codes, all these are analyzed as the forces that make life bitter and ugly, that make people ashamed to strive for beauty, self-expression, and freedom.

Nelson Antrim Crawford has called Anderson "the clearest sighted, deepest visioned interpreter of the middle west". 15 To those who, perhaps rightfully,

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resent the drabness, the hopelessness of effect, the
sudden monotony of his presentation, the author has
his own regretful answer. Beauty, he thinks, is not
yet native to us. Our present expression must stand
stark against the background of our own place and gene-
eration, and that place is, typically, dreary Winesburg,
the generation a restless horde born of an industrial
age.

Ours, Anderson believes, is

... a rich, blundering stupid life, un-
conscious of how to use its treasures, yet
seeking ever for a meaning, and educing
little by little a purpose and a good from
stray hints and fears and a little hope,
seeking to transcend the obvious meaning
which the environment forces upon it. 16

Of this life he speaks in simple, abrupt
language, meaningful with homely similes, rich with pro-
vincial simplicity. His literary art is realistic, yet
touched with transient mysticisms and dark, gloomy fan-
cies evoked by a desperate groping for something beyond
this gray realism.

The same subject matter, the Middle Western
village, has been treated in similar manner by Frances
Duzzell. Through a skilful presentation of significant
environmental features, characteristic action, and local

Short Story, p. 250
dialect, he presents the rude tragedies of life in Almont. In each story the singleness of tone makes this small town appear the veritable prison that hedges in its narrow bounds.

The sense of revolt, the ironic mood, has entered into the expression of Willa Cather. In her short sketches which deal with the Midland scene she voices a protest against the prosaic, stifling influences that curb aspiration and effort. Her sense of regret is but mildly voiced in "The Enchanted Bluff".

I wondered how it was that when Nature had taken such pains with a man, from his hands to the arch of his long foot, she had ever lost him in Sandtown.17

She passes scathing judgment upon a Kansas village through the expressed opinion of a character in "The Sculptor's Funeral".

"That is the eternal wonder of it, anyway; that it [genius] can come even from such a dung heap as this...this borderland between ruffianism and civilization."18

Glenway Wescott likewise pictures the sordid aspects of his native landscape, his extravagance of ugly picturization closely approaching the state of pathetic fallacy. With impotuous, youthful impatience,

17. Cather, Willa Sibert, "The Enchanted Bluff", Harpers, CXVIII (April, 1909), 781

18. Cather's Youth and the Bright Medusa, pp. 259, 269
sponsored perhaps by close contact with Paris, he rails bitterly at the scenes of his boyhood in "Goodbye, Wisconsin". His Wisconsin is a symbol of narrowness, a land of poverty-stricken, disappointed people, where the old pioneer spirit has become a grim pessimism.19

How much sweeter to come and go than to stay; that by way of judgment on Wisconsin.20

Others who have presented the drearier aspects of our rural communities with but small measure of hope or faith or tolerance include Thomas Jewell Craven, Edith Squier Draper, George Carver, W.A.S. Douglas, J. Hyatt Downing, Don Harrison, Harry Hartwick, Edward G. Quigley, Helen B. Russell, Winifred Sanford, and Merritt Wimberly, whose ideas and technique will be presented in succeeding chapters.

Among those local-colorists who delineate the life of the hinterland with less extravagant emphasis upon the mournful and sordid, who lend more visible touches of tolerance and sympathy, Ruth Suckow is perhaps the finest, and assuredly the most artistic. Cruelty, futility, ugliness, bitterness, and all the common woes blend into the Iowa scene of Miss Suckow's

20. Living Authors: A Book of Biographies, p. 431
stories, but withal there is a fairness of attitude, a sincere and careful portrayal that arouses a new and genuine appreciation. This writer is not hostile in her regard for her regional field; neither is she sentimentally prejudiced in favor of it, but she does have a vital sense of beauty which reveals itself even through the painfully truthful treatment of the commonplace. This artist does not sneer at her everyday world. Instead, she regards it with a humane understanding, though she is obliged at times to imply severe criticism. It is true, certain of her stories (e.g. "Renters", "Uprooted", and "A Start in Life") leave a well grounded impression of grim hopelessness, but in the main her fiction lifts one well into realms of peaceful complacency, or, at least, of acquiescence.

Eagerness and striving after other things— and back to the old things again. 21

Walter J. Muilenburg is another whose work, though touched with the brooding spirit of melancholy, reveals in numerous instances a reconciled conformity to surrounding influences. Numerous artists, most of them of the younger group, have fallen under the fateful spell of things unlovely and mournful, but like Muilenburg they are overtaken by occasional moods of optimism.

21. Suckow, Ruth, "A Rural Community" in John T. Frederick's Stories from the Midland, p. 262
in the light of which their art represents beauty rather than ugliness in the environment about them. In "Heart of Youth" Muilenburg presents the logical theme of a boy's tense, dissatisfied spirit becoming reconciled through sorrow to the spiritual beauty of his surroundings.

A moment, the boy felt as though it were the wonder and music of the horizon that called... It seemed to him there, in the darkness, that suddenly he was able to comprehend the shadows which he had not known before in his boyish dream of life.22

In other moods this author views his prairie as an inexorable and seemingly vindictive power, a monstrous fate that breaks man.

Then, as the heat of midsummer grew, the iron soul of the prairie bared itself to them. Grim, silent it seemed waiting, with torturing patience, to achieve some master-stroke of tragedy.23

Jay Sigmund's tales of his little Wapsipinicon towns may be classified among those which present the village scene from a keenly observant, yet tolerant, viewpoint. He offers us simple sketches of the commonplace country people, small town court scenes, and Main Street loafers. He reflects an intelligent interest in the manners, language, and freakish twists of character...

22. Muilenburg, Walter J., "Heart of Youth" In Edward O'Brien's Best Short Stories of 1915, p. 203
23. Muilenburg, "The Prairie", In John T. Frederick's Stories from the Midland, p. 184
of his people, and through his handling of these he assembled situations that range in artistic nature from humor to tragedy.

Similar in simplicity, homeliness, and quality of emotion are the stories of Leo L. Ward. In these we see revealed the ordinary incidents of Indiana farm life: the death of the hired man, the quarrel over the threshing "rig", the innumerable tasks of a busy farm wife.

Numerous other contemporaries have shown this ability to see life steadily and present it clearly, yet leave with the reader no overwhelming impression of futility, but rather a more sympathetic understanding of one's surroundings. Thomas Boyd, Frederick H. Brennan, Agnes Mary Brownell, Katherine Brush, Fleta Campbell Springer, Henry W. Dudley, Fernal Nuhn, Irma Friedrich, John Oskinson, and Clarence Sundermeyer are among those who might be so classified, though their respective treatments of the Central Plains region may as yet be limited in number.

Lines of demarcation are not easily drawn in the characterization of our contemporary short story attitudes; nevertheless, we see readily that a distinct spirit of optimism characterizes a goodly number of the local color portrayals. Not all are "dark and dreary"
Sentimentality, humor, reminiscence, and keen insistence on beauty are literary forces which lend halos of cheerfulness and serenity to the simple commonplace life of our own and neighboring states.

A wealth of optimism regarding small town life in the first half of our contemporary period is revealed in Zona Gale's *Friendship Village* and *Neighborhood Stories*. In these one finds a sentimental, friendly presentation of a brave, goodhearted people, simple, provincial and complacent. Aspects of sadness and cruelty are relegated to the background. No bit of sordidness creeps in. The author presents no criticism for the little town, but rather a definite liking for it, a pleasant toleration of its quirks and oddities. Miss Gale at this period seemed impelled by the belief that the villages, "the little towns of the time to come" were the strength of tomorrow, and to them she lent the encouragement of sympathy.

With the tumult of reconstruction following the World War, this author's attitude has changed. In later collections, *Yellow Gentians and Blue* and *Bridal Pond*, loneliness, defeat, and disillusion are bitterly, tersely presented, without the former leavens of humor and sweetness. The provincial scenery and remnants of
the old sentiment are touched with an irony hitherto unexpressed. Either Miss Gale truly sees a different world of experience, or else she caters to the supposed demand for the realistic and the mournful. The wild roses that typified a woman's "refuges from life" have given way to the yellow gentians of the "very bitter taste". Withal, one feels that a keener insight, a better blending of the actual and the hoped-for, is shown in the later works. One misses—with some satisfaction—the optimistic one-sidedness that characterized the Friendship sketches.

Rupert Hughes' In a Little Town presents for us several treatments of a village environment, supposedly that of Keokuk, Iowa. Characterized chiefly by a glib humor, with here and there a touch of satire or a hint of cruelty, the stories present creditable analyses of the village events and emotions. In the main the writer has treated the various frustrations of a mediocre and, ordinarily, unnoticed folk with serious sympathy and wisely constructive criticism. His picturesque characters, many of them subtly cartooned, learn to tolerate,

24. Friendship Village, p. 309
25. Yellow Gentians and Blue, p. 1
even to enjoy and defend, the narrow bounds of their treadmill existence through some mild philosophy of compensation. What may be regarded as Hughes' theme is voiced by the disillusioned Luke in "The Stick-in-the-Muds".

"Don't worry. We are happy enough in the dark. We have our bat-like sports and our owl-like pride, and the full sun would blind us and close up our way."26

In spite of the irony by means of which Hughes presents his criticisms of narrowness and bigotry, hopefulness predominates. The total impression is not totally pessimistic. We are reminded of that tangible ideal which is offered the nest-weavers, the cave-burrowers, the homemakers, and that ideal is that they "...prepare for the greater than themselves who shall spring from themselves."27

William Allen White represents the common processes of small town life in Kansas with a spirit of altruistic optimism and hopeful loyalty. He lays heavily upon his character's responsibility for their perverted powers, their warped ideals, and reiterates a belief in God as a fateful power that sends punishment for greed, graft, and human cruelty. With a preponderant interest in political and economic activity, a tolerance

27. Hughes' In a Little Town, p. 194
derived, perhaps, from the journalistic outlook, and a flair for humor and fitting witticism, he presents clear, recognizable studies of country towns in the making. Background is a strong factor in White's interpretations, but unlike the average local-colorist, he seldom berates his familiar environment; rather, he directs attention to strength of human character that makes an insufficient life supportable, even in a materialistic age when men lack vision.

Only occasionally (as in "The Story of Aqua Pura") does he present the devastating power of the prairie that led to the pioneer proverb, "There is no God west of Newton." He admits that there are times when neither character nor mentality can stand against the forces of nature, but he sentimentalizes as readily upon the hard won success of Colonel Hucks, victorious pioneer.

A sensitive appreciation of the Middle West and an understanding of its beauty are presented in Miss Margaret Lynn's short sketches, a number of which may, in view of their singleness of impression, be classified as short stories rather than essays. These narratives,

22. White's The Real Issue, p. 35
29. Ibid., pp. 146-67
assembled in *A Stepdaughter of the Prairie*, represent pleasant ramblings into a realm of girlhood memories, a realm of charm and romance bounded by the unbroken stretches of the prairie lands. The stories are characterized by a deeply sympathetic treatment and a disregard of ugly and painful elements. However, one clearly sees that the cultural plane of living described is much higher than that of the average settler. One feels that the collection of sketches is carefully selective of pleasanter aspects only. In contrast to the common desire for material progress, a regret for the passing of the primitive is expressed.

Soon long brown lines would divide its wonderful surface into parallel sections, and next year an uneven, undersized, yellowish crop of sod corn would take the place of this full, rich, pleasant growth. The grass under my feet would never reach its promised winter rosiness and would never turn again its rare spring green. And no other would ever come to take its place. 30

Keene Abbott, a native Nebraskan, shows the fine local color touch in his linking of the life of man with the natural forces about him. He presents the often glorified struggle with the elements in all its unlovely truth. He pictures the sinister threat.

30. Lynn, Margaret, *A Stepdaughter of the Prairie*, p. 280-1
of drought, the deadening effects of labor, loneliness, and adverse climatic conditions on mind and body, but, as well, he reflects upon the rich compensations of friendliness, hospitality, and cooperation that make the conquering of the prairie a glad experience. The "crop of kindness" is, he proclaims, the greatest achievement.

Lyman Bryson's "Alfalfa", Frances P. Dollier's "The Old Man", Merle Colby's "A Half-Quarter Section" and Elizabeth Corbett's "Scenery" illustrate, though with mediocre artistry, tastes similar to those of Abbott, namely a love for the land, the desire for land ownership, and a longing for the peace and contentment of country life.

Among the finer and more poignant presentations of the vital beauty that grows out of the provincial life is Theodore Dreiser's "The Lost Phoebe", a country idyl of rare simplicity and charm. Though it is but one of the "short and simple annals of the poor", descriptive of the quiet consummation of the lives of old farm people, its imagery and imaginative quality lend a mystical beauty that approaches poetry. The musty melancholy setting becomes a glorified background for the fine vision of the poor old man who searches for his Phoebe.

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31. Abbott, Keene, "The Wind Fighters", Outlook, CXII (Jan. 12, 1913), 103
32. Dreiser's Free and Other Stories, pp. 112-34
Dreiser's "Married"\textsuperscript{33} illustrates a nostalgic desire for the commonplace Midland and suggests the elements of the prairie soul that have been blended in the fine spirit of the young wife.

Edna Ferber's "April 25th as Usual", Mary K. Reely's "Hands", and Frances N. Chapman's "Prisoners of the Dead" present in differing degrees a spirit of optimism toward the rural and urban communities. The reader feels pleasantly drawn to the quieter thorough-fares that promise meditation and comfort.

Two narratives of similar theme and treatment, Ival McPeak's "Knowing Dad"\textsuperscript{34} and Warren L. Van Dines' "The Poet"\textsuperscript{35}, utilize the common farmland setting and the character of its humble workers as sources of profound and appealing character development. In each of these stories the boy eventually realizes the deeper significance of the drab heroism and pathetic sacrifice of parents whose influence lifted their child to a greater level of culture and happiness. In each case the boy returns with humility and grace to the quiet provincial surroundings that have fostered his greatness.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., pp. 323-50

\textsuperscript{34} Stories from the Midland, pp. 135-55

\textsuperscript{35} O'Brien's Best Short Stories of 1924, pp. 228-39
In "Two Women and Hog-Back Ridge"36, a narrative extraordinarily rich in local color interest, Melvin Van den Mark reveals the powerful personality of the Nebraska sandhills. The young teacher's keen buoyant responsiveness to the brooding mystery of the land is shown in obvious contrast to the drugged, passionless attitude of the toilers who attempt to make a living from the soil of the barren, God-forsaken land. Beyond the grim melancholy and heartbreaking cruelty that the farmers see in the stretches of sandhill, only the two women can see. To these two brave and imaginative spirits the lonely spaces become things of beauty and inspiration, challenges to the soul.

The passionate spirit of challenge is expressed similarly in Frances Gilchirst Wood's "Turkey Red", which pictures the indomitable courage of the Dakota pioneers. Against the enveloping isolation and desolation the settlers fight with the vital urge of hope. What another writer might view as the inexorable forces of fate, this author presents as conquerable material elements.

"Frontiersmen, same as us. You're living on what they did. We're getting this frontier ready for those who come after. Want our children to have a better chance than we had. Our reason's the same as theirs." [the Pilgrim Fathers] 37

36. Ibid., pp. 211-27
37. O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories, 1919, p. 107
These many examples of attitude as expressed in the local color short fiction serve to illustrate clearly the widely varying impressions that the Midland writers have sought to preserve as contributions to the increasing stock of Middletown regional literature. Sectional and personal differences, individual prejudices, and varying styles of literary craftsmanship have lent extreme characteristics of mood and motive to the sketches. The same homeland is variously portrayed as a God-forsaken waste, and as a haven of peace and plenty; as a fateful prison of lost hopes, and as a home of greater and nobler ideals. Yet, one notes with interest that in the main the interpreters of this region are similarly imbued with a restless urge for change and betterment that finds emotional expression in their prose artistry. Whether the mood of unrest be that of hopeless scorn or of cheerful optimism, it is invariably present, a moving force. Hamlin Garland's doctrine of noble discontent carries on. Enough is said of the present attitude. To arrive at a judgment of its literary value we must turn to the specific details of literary usage which unite to give these attitudes the force of genuine artistry.
III

The genuine local color story depends upon locality. The most lasting impression it gives is the sense of intimate revelation of a chosen region. To such an extent does it depend upon place that the plot can scarcely be shifted to another locality without altering the appeal or perhaps losing the entire effect of the story.¹

We do not expect from a staid Pennsylvania Dutch community the same expression of life that would emanate from a newly settled Nevada mining camp. Radically different ideals and actions are bound to arise within a Cajun district of Louisiana and an Iowa wheat farm.

Though the factors of character and traditional heritage likewise enter into the local color treatment, the physical environment is perhaps the strongest feature as regards the imagery and atmosphere of the literary product. The abiding presence of a certain climate, soil, land formation, and the forced occupations resulting from these forces will be likely to direct and shape life to a particular pattern unless

¹. Ramsay, Short Stories of America, p. 34
some conflicting spiritual power is strong enough to thwart the powers of nature.

As a method of judging the truth and beauty of an author's craftsmanship, we turn to the representations of and comments upon the actual surroundings as definite influences upon Middle Western life.

Before the beginning of our present century, Hamlin Garland spoke thus of the forces of physical surroundings which made pioneer life a misery:

It isn't so much the grime that I abhor, nor the labor that crooks their backs and makes their hands bludgeons. It's the horrible waste of life involved in it all. I don't believe God intended a man to be bent to plough-handles like that... The worst of it is, these people live lives approaching automata. They become machines to serve others more lucky or more unscrupulous than themselves.

In similar vein Sherwood Anderson is prone to judge the dreary Midland scene by its effects upon his characters. In "Death in the Woods" we see a drab, monochromatic picture of the old woman, born to her limited, unenlightened environment, going about, hens, dogs and stock following her as she gathers eggs or drags her weary way to town for groceries or dog meat.

The woman who died was one destined to feed animal life. Anyway,

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2. Garland, *Other Main Travelled Roads*, p. 103
that is all she ever did. She was feeding animal life before she was born, as a child, as a young woman, working on the farm of the German, after she married, when she grew old and when she died. She fed animal life in cows, in chickens, in pigs, in horses, in dogs, in men. .. She died in the clearing in the woods and even after her death continued feeding animal life.

Another criticism of the regional scene is found in Anderson's "The Man's Story":

In those dead flat Kansas towns lives have a way of getting ugly and messy without anything very definite having happened to make them so. One can't imagine the reasons. Let it go. It just is so, and one can't at all believe the Kansas writers about the life out there.

The morbid influence of occupation on mind is illustrated by Anderson in "The Triumph of the Egg".

I was afraid of being seen in my gay mood. .. I was doing a thing that should not be done by one who, like myself, had been raised on a chicken farm where death was a daily visitor.

"The New Englander" presents the false illusion of the corn rows which to the girl from Vermont seemed avenues of freedom. The "long tunnels running away to

5. Dial, LXVIII (March, 1920), 299
infinity", the "passage ways running out into life" became after all, desolate prisons, hateful to her in her unsatisfied loneliness.

The small town atmosphere is presented in Winesburg, Ohio as lacking in active, vital interest and conducive to loneliness, sadness, and coarseness.

The poor little houses lighted by kerosene lamps, the smoke from the chimneys mounting straight up into the air, the grunting of pigs, the women clad in cheap calico dresses and washing dishes in the kitchens, the footsteps of men coming out of the houses and going off to the stores and saloons of Main Street, the dogs barking and the children crying.

The inadequacy of amusement and pastime is frequently exhibited in Anderson's realistic bits of description.

... the Winesburg County Fair had brought crowds of country people into town. ... On the Trunion Pike, the dust from passing wagons rose in clouds. Children, curled into little balls, slept on the straw scattered on wagon beds. Their hair was full of dust and their fingers black and sticky.

In the Main Street of Winesburg, crowds filled the stores and the sidewalks. Night came on, horses whinnied, the clerks in the stores ran madly about, children became lost and cried lustily. An American town worked terribly at the task of amusing itself.

6. Dial, LXX (Feb., 1921), 149
7. Winesburg, Ohio, p. 122
8. Ibid., p. 285
Despite the insistence upon the drab and unlovely, something of the natural beauty enters into these delineations of village and rural existence. The fragrant berry fields, the hillsides of purple flowers, the red and yellow hills, the quiet corn shocks, the plaintively calling birds—all these have been selected as rare bits of beauty that influence the weary and despondent.

The whole world seemed to Ray Pearson to have become alive with something... He could not stand it... As he ran he shouted a protest against his life, against all life, against everything that makes life ugly.

This protest is the burden of Anderson's thought throughout the Winesburg series. His is a rebellious shouting against the material inhibitions that shackle life, and chief among these is the item of place. Each ugly spectacle of the Winesburg scene is an indictment of the insufficient life.

Protests quite as intense, though fewer in number, are those of Francis Buzzell. Each story is a tragedy of loneliness, of uneventful, joyless existence, enhanced unpleasantly by the personal element of intolerance. The environment enters largely into

9. Ibid., p. 250-1
each story, though this factor is closely allied with another influence, tradition, and practically merges with it.

Nearly all the young men of Abbie's generation had gone to the city, returning only in after years, with the intention of staying a week or two weeks, and leaving at the end of a day or two days. So Abbie never married. . .10

She had been born in the big house at the foot of Tillson Street; she had never lived anywhere else; she had never slept anywhere but in the black walnut bed in the south bedroom. . .11

The big house grew terrible; the rooms echoed her steps. She would have given everything for a little house of two or three small low-ceilinged rooms close to the side walk on a street where people passed up and down.12

This was the Almont environment, a snare out of which one might never escape.

Willa Cather in "A Wagner Matinee" shows another unpleasant Midwestern setting, the dreary Nebraska farm that has robbed a woman of the cultural pursuits and enjoyment which were her very soul.

The world there was the flat world of the ancients; to the east a cornfield that stretched to daybreak; to the west,

10."Lonely Places", In O'Briens Best Short Stories of 1917, p. 70

11. Ibid., p. 70

12. Ibid., p. 81
a corral that reached to sunset; between, the conquests of peace, dearer bought than those of war.13

It was this environment the young boy had fled, this monotonous space where one went

. . . ploughing forever and forever between green aisles of corn, where, as in a treadmill, one might walk from daybreak to dusk without perceiving a shadow of change.14

An excellent and authentic view, familiar to the denizens of the Midland, is shown us. This is the disheartening landscape to which the woman must return after the brief sight and sound of a musical interval.

She burst into tears and sobbed pleadingly. "I don't want to go, Clark, I don't want to go!"

I understood. For her, just outside the concert hall, lay the black pond with the cattle-tracked bluffs; the tall, unpainted house, with weather-curled boards, naked as a tower; the crock-backed ash seedlings where the dish-cloths hung to dry; the gaunt, moulting turkeys picking up refuse about the kitchen door.15

One sees a fine utilization of scene in Miss Cather's literary method. No keener contrast could be

13. Youth and the Bright Medusa, p. 242
14. Ibid., p. 241
15. Ibid., p. 246
drawn than this of the ugly farmland and the cultural beauty of the musical world.

"Love in Smoky Hill", by Thomas Jewell Craven, sketches a rich local scene of Kansas farm life as an ominous background for a tragedy of frustration, the ill-fated love of a stupid, drudging farm girl for a Bohemian hobo. Each scene and activity contributes a touch to the starved, lonely life. The reader is aware of the suffocating heat from the hot Kansas sun, the warm vapor from the fields, the vast stretches of wheat stubble like "a vast piece of toasted bread... radiating the warm savor of the ovens", the constant drive of labor necessary to save the grain, the endless cycle of toil: preserving hundreds of jars of fruit, digging potatoes, gathering fruit, drying corn, turning cider mills.

... She knew that she was doomed to an unchangeable destiny, to carry slops to pigs, to plough, to churn, to cook, to go to bed when night came, and to get up with the first peep of dawn.17

She swung the axe into the neck of the fowl; the head dropped off clean; the body fluttered in the dust a moment and was silent. Her life was just like that.18

16. Dial, LXXII (Jan., 1922), 11
17. Ibid., p. 4
18. Ibid., p. 16
The dependence of life upon the natural elements is aptly illustrated in George Carver's "The Singer", which makes one feel keenly the eminence of the winter, "the white fetters of February", as a power to be feared.

... the cold that menaced the struggling villagers, defeating their life stream of action, forcing them to retreat within and cower futilely over fires until the awakening of spring which again permitted them to take up the business of living.

Over them brooded always the spectre of winter so soon to stalk in their midst, binding them helplessly to their firesides in chains of dulness, and stifling within them every impulse but that of hope.

In Edward J. Quigley's "But the Earth Endureth Forever" the account of a fatal northern blizzard emphasizes the waste of life involved in the endless war against the elements. The storm comes like a vengeful spirit to crush out the lives of a happy courageous settler and his family.

In the southeast the gray soon tinged with a greenish yellow, and from three brightening spots some distance apart along the horizon, brassy gleams danced toward the zenith. Then, not one, but what seemed to be three suns came into sight; the white plains widened and stretched away until they

19. Midland, VIII (March, 1922), 95
20. Ibid., p. 96
touched all the rim of the great
dome of dull sky, blanching in the
weird light from that ill-boding trio.

. . . But a little later the sun-dogs
vanished. The sun itself paled like
the ghost of a moon, and the sky grew
dark as if a polar twilight had drifted
down from the north. The wind rose.
It began to whip the snow into whirling
bits of ice. From all sides the gray-
ness came creeping toward the lone dri-
ver, now starting back from the bleak
little town.21

Similar treatments of the same geographical
section are presented in Helen B. Russell's "Clean
Dirt" and J. Hyatt Downing's narratives, "Closed Roads"
and "Rewards". In these realistic studies the bleak,
unlovely surroundings are shown as insurmountable diffi-
culties that discourage and sicken the youthful charac-
ters who are awakening to a desire for finer things.

In "Clean Dirt" the environment that has
nullified and ruined the finer traits of the parents
looms as an evil influence that will work similar ill
on the children.

The kitchen into which they
straggled was messy and uninviting. . .
The reservoir of the range was stacked
with pans, smoked and grimy yet. . .
Near the stove, skillets hung from nails,
dark lines below them mapping the courses
of rivulets of grease. Crumbs, dirt,
chunks of manure tracked in from the barn,
littered the warped and splivery floor.

21. Midland, II (Jan., 1916), 6-17
To right and left lay discouraged acres of crop, thin and parched, as if barrenness were a voluntary act by means of which the land protested against the demand of an unintelligent agriculture. Less than a month ago wheat, oats, and flax had been rank and thrifty, for abundant early rains had fallen. . . But lately hot winds had blown witheringly from the furnace of the southwest, and drouth cursed the tender grain so that naught but brittle straw tipped by spars and shrivelled heads remained in the fields.22

Mr. Downing interprets the observable characteristics of the Dakota farm life as factors productive of despair and futility which sicken and alienate the human personality. He recreates the depressing atmosphere through the assembling of numerous minor details: drenched, sodden land, rutted ungraded roads, sagging fences and buildings, and scrawny, underfed animals. One feels the vacuous quiet, the unrelieved monotony of the mesas with their unending heat waves crawling in shimmering layers. The reader feels an impotent hatred for the stolid ugly buildings that hold one to the land. "One didn't go off and leave buildings".23

Perhaps the most absorbingly dramatic treatment of the Midland region as an intangible and vindictive force against which man must fight is Walter J. Muilenburg's "The Prairie". In a series of panoramic

22. Russell, Helen, "Clean Dirt", Midland, XII, (July-August, 1928), 168-9
23. Downing, J. Hyatt, "Rewards", Scribners, LXXIX (April, 1926), 412
scenes, Dantinean in conception, the two settlers, man and wife, serve as cats-paws of the elements. Hounded from their Eastern home by criticism, the two ne'er-do-wells seek solace in the prairie land, trust it as a promising paradise, only to find faith and substance destroyed by the blackening summer heat and the disastrous prairie fire. Ironically, the rain comes only after the crops are ruined and the wife's life lost in the fire.

The various aspects of the author's interpretation show a marked vividness and individuality.

The prairie lay dreaming in the warmth of early summer. Level, monotonous, it stretched away until its green became drab in the far distance. It was alive, and yet lifeless; full of color, yet colorless; intangible mystery lurked in its contrast, a mystery of light and shadow tints. Strange, dreaming, lovely, it lay beneath the intense blue sky. . . It was only when earth and sky met and their colors merged that one caught the hint of the wild power of the prairie, its sweep, its changelessness, its passive cruelty and callousness.24

. . . Its beauty was savage, overpowering. There was nothing to hide the fierce, red light. The earth stretched, level and unmarked except for a single, twisted scrub oak, dying slowly by the dry creek bed—an empty horror of unobstructed space that grew indistinct in the red dimness of approaching darkness.25

24. Stories from the Midland, p. 282
25. Ibid., p. 185
The sky was always bright. The crops lay dead on the fevered soil. All animal life, too, had vanished from the plains. . . It seemed as if eternity lay about them; the past was dead, the future did not exist. They were living in an eternal present, a void that would endure forever. And always the heat, the quivering heat, and the gray menace of the horizon.26

Thus we view a brief drama of Fate: Man, hopeful and defiant, lost to a power greater than himself because he refuses to yield. Harassed from the first by poor heritage and social stigma, the two people, with the impulse of fugitives, turn to the land only to be broken by its forces.

The land and its climatic limitations appear as unconquerable elements in Joseph Piercy's "A Clear Title". The sketch shows the discouraged farmer wandering from state to state to seek refuge from the natural calamities: grasshoppers and hot winds in Kansas, swamp fevers in Arkansas, drought in Nebraska, blizzards in Dakota, ill-luck in homesteading in Oklahoma.

A strange mixture of beauty and ugliness characterizes "The Mixing", an especially artistic bit of Midland fiction by Don Harrison. One is aware

26. Ibid., p. 186-7
of the squat flat house, the huge laborers furtively gorging their food, the slouchy twisted body of the overworked wife, the evil aspect of the farmer, and in pathetic contrast the rare beauty of the moonlight on the river, the one beauty that is "mixed right". The entire story is a weary lament for the beauty that seems never to mix with man's labor. The narrative is saved from utter morbidity by a fine artistry in the handling of a melancholy mood.

Suddenly from the shadow... welled the sob of a violin—a sob so poignant in its loveliness, so mad with the helpless savagery of life, that it seemed to gather in itself the undertone of the night—the weary iterance of the locusts' clicking drone, the black mystery of shadows in the moonlight, the intense brooding of the prairie,—to gather it up in the weird rising and falling of its melody, then echo it in sighs through the spectral heaps of the barns.

A fear crept over Tom, a fear that he might be pulled into a life that he did not want to live... The ugliness of the natural environment looms as an all-powerful influence in the stories of Glenway Wescott. The author's description of the Wisconsin landscape might easily convince a reader of the fatal

27. Stories from the Midland, p. 94
28. Ibid., p. 95
disintegrating forces wrought by ugliness if it were not for the lavish usage of pathetic fallacy which lends a touch of insincerity.

The sky rolled from side to side like an animal in pain, outstretched on the soft, saturated trees. Now and again there was a groan of thunder, and lightning flickered with a glitter of enormous eyes, rolling in their sockets.29

Feeling is further superimposed upon the inanimate in such figures as these:

- . . . stubble. . . . spotted with bindweed like drops of blood.30

- . . . exhausted soil gaping through the grass.31

The bleak existence endured by the inhabitants of Mr. Wescott's homeland appears to result directly from the unnatural isolation into which life's ironic chance has placed them.

They lived like a pair of domestic animals in a pen: coarse trees on three sides, the tantalizing road on the other; no variety of duty or scene, no entertainment, no plans, nothing to expect.32

You need some excitement. I never went nowhere, never saw nothin' had to work. I guess you wouldn't have the nerve to get out of a dead hole like that if you knew you got to come back. And it's so awful still. . . . My God, It's so still you can

29. Wescott, Glenway, "Fire and Water". In Edward O'Brien's Best Short Stories of 1925, p. 270
30. Ibid., p. 278
31. Ibid., p. 278
32. Ibid., p. 272
hear the slime dripping in the well. 33

In spite of the widespread tendency toward the portrayal of gloomy elements, a happier spirit characterizes the majority of our local color stories.

What John T. Frederick calls the "vital sense of place" is present to a predominant degree in Ruth Suckow's stories. The "middle distance" is richly illuminated with the familiar aspects of the Iowa background.

A still country morning, with the smell of coming heat scorching through the coolness. . . The evergreens in the grove were motionless, the drive to the road was mysterious and hushed. The sun was a fire-red ball, round like a harvest moon, just above the skyline in the east.

She stood there a moment. She felt something good in the beginning of the day, something that she hadn't felt for a long time. 34

Appropriately enough, the emphasis is placed upon the land and crop conditions, the surest appeals to beauty in the eyes of the farmer. Muggy, steamy "corn weather" and the rich milky smell of the green corn are stressed with simple fidelity, for these are things of beauty to the country people.

33. Ibid., p. 276
34. Suckow, Ruth, "Renters", Century, CVI [new series LXXXIV] (August, 1923), 599-613
The peacefulness of the quiet scene is suggested in the call of the mourning dove, the breeze in the cottonwoods, the pink hollyhocks by the wall, the shimmering blue sky over the pasture; but beyond these looms the threat of tragedy, the fear of drought and crop failure, for the land is a harsh taskmaster, and those who would conquer it suffer physical and mental agonies.

Ordinarily Miss Suckow stresses the influences of human character and tradition more strongly than the effect of the surroundings. When the locality does find a place in her interpretation, its treatment impresses one with a rare sense of peace and satisfaction and a recognition of beauty and vitality hitherto unnoticed. The pictures of modern Iowa farms with their huge red barns, fertile fields, old apple orchards, and herds of live stock emphasize a sense of prosperous country serenity. In "Four Generations", "Golden Wedding", "The Little Girl from Town", and "Midwestern Primitive" the local impression attains a degree of charm that leads the reader to idyllic pastoral musings. Where rural misery exists, as in "Renters", or dissatisfaction and restlessness, as in "Strong as a Man" these come chiefly as results of social or personal forces quite apart from the material life.
In "A Rural Community", one of the finest of Miss Suckow's stories, the stable country environment is revealed with a reflection of natural beauty that is almost poetic.

Low rolling hills, fold after fold, smooth brown and autumnal, some plowed to soft earth-color, some set with corn stalks of pale tarnished gold... The woods lay like a colored cloud, brown, russet, red and purple-tinged.\textsuperscript{35}

One slender young cottonwood, yellow as a goldfinch and as lyric in its quality, stood in a meadow, alone.\textsuperscript{36}

The abiding sense of things elemental and satisfying forms the theme of this picturesque narrative.

The talk seemed to bring him certain country things—the bitter sappy smell of a new-felled tree, the scent of nuts in autumn woods, the tanging smell of cider in the October sun, the dry ghostly crackle of the pale-gold corn stalks left standing in the fields... These things suggested the deep stabilities of country life—the slow inevitable progression of the seasons, the nearness to earth and sky and weather, the un-changing processes of birth and death, the going of the birds in the fall and their sure return in the spring, the coming, night after night, of the familiar stars to the wide country sky.

Somehow it pleased him now to think of how deeply rooted they were. It gave him, confirmed wanderer as he was, "something to tie to".\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{35} Stories from the Midland, p. 247
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 247
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 271-2
He looked toward the dark pastures beyond the row of dusky willow trees. They widened slowly into the open country which lay silent, significant, motionless, immense, under the stars, with its sense of something abiding. To come back to it was to touch the core of things. 38

A calm disregard for scientific changes is revealed in the commonsense philosophy evolved by the old farmer from his long association with this rustic community.

"Yes they talk about changin' everything, changin' everything. All this new machinery and all. But far as I see, no one's yet found the way to make the corn grow any way but from first planting the seed, and then it gettin' watered by the rains and hit by the sun, tasselin' out and bein' cut. And folks stays about the same." 39

A similar beauty of both vision and literary statement characterizes Walter J. Muilenburg's local color narratives. These are filled with numerous crystallizations of appreciative moods, keenly interpretative observations.

On a fence post, a meadow-lark filled the silence with a liquid flow of music. 40

... a far-away straw stack which lay a mass of dull gold in the sombre setting of plowed land. 41

Close by in the sun the cornfield was a sea of shimmering green, while the

38. Ibid., p. 274-5
39. Ibid., p. 264
40. O'Brien's Best Short Stories of 1915, p. 192
41. Ibid., p. 198
more distant fields of grain were
dark against the light ash of plowed
land. 42

In "Heart of Youth" the emotional conflict
of the restless boy is fought to a victorious con-
cclusion, the commonplace aspects of nature influencing
his decision. Disgusted with the wearing drudgery
of the cultivating, the milking, and the feeding, he
plans to run away from his home. Then a tragedy of
nature shows him that his duty is to remain in order
to save and protect the home that means all to his
parents. The thrush, losing its life in a battle with
a blue racer, becomes a symbol to him.

Yet it was only a bird; such things
happened continually—they had to be;
but he could not forget the fluttering
of the dying thrush. Then, suddenly,
he remembered his mother. 43

At evening the sight of the windmill, the
kitchen light, the thin spiral of smoke, the sound
of horses crunching their grain, the sweet smell of
the hay make all seem homelike and dear to him. A
"queer pity" draws him closer to his father, and the
pantheistic impulse, the merging of soul and nature,
has its way with him.

42. Ibid., p. 191
43. Ibid., p. 201
How intense the night was! Nature seemed a living and beautiful power, ever-veiled, but always near. For a moment his father rested his hand upon the boy's shoulder. The boy moved closer to him.44

Love for the northern forest land and a fascination with its beauty are controlling forces in "The Ways of His Fathers". Mr. Muilenburg's description of the Mackinac region awakens in us an admiration for the quiet forest frontier.

As the plains of the great Mississippi Valley strike northward, they become a dead level, relieved only by the rippling sheets of water that collect on their monotonous expanse. Farther north, these plains, still level, but with outcroppings of rock, become covered with pine timber until not far from the international border, civilization tapers, and only the gloom of an endless vista of forest stretches out to the horizon. Square mile after square mile is untenanted except for the stealthy animals that find protection in this solitude. By chance, the traveler may emerge out of the dark forest into a small hidden clearing possessing, perhaps, a half dozen shanties, built of rudely-trimmed logs. These are the homes of farmers, each managing to have a long, log stable and a pasture raggedly bound by the old-fashioned rail fence. Though the soil is shallow, a light humus of woodland moss decaying for long ages in the musty dimness of forest shade, these people are able to live, simply, and in the peace of nature, far from the fever of our alert age.45

44. Ibid., p. 202

45. Midland, II (Sept., 1916), 81
The rare charm of this region, like the intangible odor of its pines, is in the end one of the chief elements which reconcile the boy and help him to beat down the imaginative fancies of wanderlust.

A like combination of wanderlust and rebellion against the milieu is treated in John Oakinson's "The Apples of Hesperides, Kansas", Clarence Sundermeyer's "World Gate", and Carolyn M. Rhone's "So Not To Be Alone".

In the first of these the boy pulls away from his temporary folly, his infatuation for the cheap waitress, and returns to the ranch in the Kansas short grass country with a new appreciation of his duty to himself and his mother. Similarly, in "World Gate" the restless boy is driven back to the home farm by sheer nostalgia for the familiar scenes and by the disgusting crudity he observes elsewhere. Entranced by the declivity between the groves—"the open gate leading out into the world beyond"—young Vernie runs away to work for a fortune, but he comes back again to the home place, no longer resentful of the monotonous plowing, the "gaspung cistern pump", or the hogs in the mud wallows.

As he reached the summit and saw the old familiar yellow house with the elms in front of it and the gleaming
windmill, a heavy something seemed to drop away from him.46

Gertrude Shields' "Her Promised Land" exhibits a young girl's return to a native scene after a disconcerting visit to the city. Her love for the hillsides, the woods, "the checkerboard valley with its squatting town" serves to satisfy her moods, and her vague day dreams of alien beauty fade into a practical interest in a "promised land" of apple orchards.

Similar to these stories of reconciliation, yet more nearly approaching the stark tragedy of Don Harrison's "The Mixing" and J. Hyatt Downing's "Closed Roads", is Miss Rhone's "So Not to be Alone". In this the young man betrays his mother's trust and takes her savings to leave the hated farm and settle in a city. His words illustrate the youthful impetuosity that fails to appreciate the quieter aspects of existence.

"... A fellow goes stale as the devil in a hole like this... Nothing to do! Nowhere to go! Nothing to see! Nothing to hear! I want to see the world, all of it; and all I see is a fool squirrel in a jackpine tree! All I hear is the old man growlin' by day and the coyotes yelpin' at night on the hill. ... I got my own life to live, Ma! I ain't mortgaged to a mountain-side!"47

Zona Gale's contributions to the local color

46. Sundermeyer, Clarence, "World Gate", Midland, XIII (Nov., 1927), 315
47. Century, CXII [new series, XC] (July, 1926) 299
literature show less than average stress upon the physical environment. The regional sense is developed mainly by means of dialect, action, and custom. Nevertheless, the little village looms as a subtle influence in the lives of its quiet retired populace. Friendship is a Wisconsin village of serenity, its chief material sights and interests being tulip beds, bonfire smoke, cream puffs in the bakery window, flocks of chickens, and new gardens. The sad and sordid aspects are ignored. "The cemetery", states the author, "is delicately put behind us, under a hill."

In Miss Gale's "Arpeggio" we see revealed another such quiet village as Friendship.

... the long sleepy street, the wet bricks, the shadows of maple leaves, the moss on the rotten picket fences and on the shingles, the old delivery-wagon and white horse turning out of an alley; somebody hanging out a washing; somebody mending a screen; somebody whipping a rug.48

As might be expected, those neighborhood communities form the bases of quaint studies of sweet sentimentality, samples of America's now outworn "Pollyanna philosophy".

In late years, the village background of Miss Gale's stories has changed. The bright cruel sunlight

48. Everybody's Magazine, XLIII (March, 1920), 71
of a revealing realism seeks out the rough details hitherto hidden in mists of kindly illusion. The severe plainness and bleak ugliness of the village and rural scenes in *Bridal Pond* and *Yellow Gentians and Blue* lack the genial touch of sympathy. The clear-cut photographic impressions of the author are presented in unrelieved reality as settings for terse, condensed narratives of loneliness, defeat, and disillusion. The old unfinished house in "Tommy Taylor"49, the dreary stockyards junction of "Last Night"50, and the unsatisfying material surroundings in "The Biography of Blade"51 represent the narrow bounds of unhappy lives.

Rupert Hughes pictures the surface features of the dull little towns, the strata of life from which so great a part of our society is grown. Hughes' typical little town, "established like thousands of other pools left in the prairies by that tidal wave of humanity sweeping westward in the middle of the last century,"52 is the ordinary American village with its Bon Ton Grocery, "movin' pitcher show", and neglected, unused "opery house".

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49. *Yellow Gentians and Blue*, pp. 74-85
52. Hughes' *In a Little Town*, p. 106
The sidewalks were full of doleful loafers and loaferesses. Men placed their chairs in the street and smoked heinous tobacco. Girls and women dawdled and jostled to and from the icecream-soda fountains.

Each little Carthage, Waupoos, Hillsdale, and Wakefield, without opportunity for material success or cultural stimulation, dooms men of lesser vision or limited freedom in its narrow Main Street to become drudges and plodders, eventually complacent with their insignificant lot. Hughes' literary treatment ranges from the sympathetic humor and sentimentality of "Don't you Care" to the bitter irony of "The Stick-in-the-Muds". In "The Mouth of the Gift Horse" his satire exposes for us the reason for the non-progressiveness and inefficiency of the town. That reason lies in the personal limitations, the self-satisfaction and distrust of the people themselves.

Keene Abbott's "Windfighters" links the life of man more closely with the forces about him. The author creates a distinctly authentic impression of the life and death struggle on the prairie. Unlike the tragedy "The Prairie", this narrative depicts the triumph of man's will and faith over the powers of nature.

53. Ibid., p. 120
The settlers, driven to desperation by the drought, are halted in their eastern pilgrimage and held by the friendly hospitality of the Irish Duras until the good rain comes at last to save the corn.

Abbott presents the sinister forecast of drought and the relenting force of nature typified by the life-giving rain.

But what cares nature for courage, or for hopes, or for human aspiration? Wind had begun to blow. Viewless fire, enormously puffing, ran in repeated whiffs across the prairie.54

Rain began to fall. On came the rush of it--tumultuous rain, panic-whirling films of the silvery, racing rain; the green ocean of corn heaved and streamed. Down plumped the water.

A damp dusty odor penetrated the house, and people drank of it, that good, wet smell!55

Abbott expresses the fine spirit of the conquering farmers, the "wind fighter" who battles on for the eventual mastery of the land.

"They did it in Iowa... They did it in Illinois. They made a corn empire of it, the richest in the world. Cultivation of the soil brought the rains. Trees grew, climate changed. God's country, you call it."56

54. **Outlook**, CXII (Jan. 12, 1916), 101
55. **Ibid.**, p. 103
56. **Ibid.**, p. 103
Both aspects of the struggle for supremacy are given artistic interpretation in the stories of William Allen White.

"The Story of Agua Pura" pictures the hardships of the Western Kansas settlers in the latter part of the nineteenth century. We view the founding of the prosperous little town and its subsequent desertion during the years of crop failure.

There was no rain that winter and the snow was hard and dry. Cattle on the range suffered for water and died by thousands. A procession from the little town started eastward early in the spring. White-canopied wagons, and wagons covered with oil table-cloths of various hues, or clad in patch-work quilts, sought the rising sun.57

One old man stays alone in the burnt-out town waiting for the one good crop that will save the country. At last, his fancy warped by hardship and disappointment, he is crazed by the sight of the rain that comes too late. This pathetic figure represents the living hope, the pluck which has subdued and is still conquering the desert.

The blighting effect of the hateful natural conditions upon the individual are shown in "A Story of the Highlands", a literary bit strongly reminiscent

57. The Real Issue, p. 29
of Hamlin Garland's early works

The even line of the horizon is seldom marred. The silence of such a scene gnaws the glamour from the heart. Men become harsh and hard; women grow withered and sodden under its blighting power. The song of wood birds is not heard; even the mournful plaint of the meadow lark loses its sentiment, where the dreary, clanking drone of the wind-mill is the one song which really brings good tidings with it. 58

Despite the agonies of defeat, men eventually win the land. The victory of the pioneer is pictured in White's "The Home Coming of Colonel Hucks".

They were young, strong, hearty people, and they conquered the wilderness. A home sprang up in the elbow of the stream. In the fall, long rows of corn shocks trailed what had been the meadow. In the summer the field stood house-high with corn. From the bluff, as the years flew by, the spectator might see the checker-board of the farm, clean cut, well kept, smiling in the sun. 59

In those years the girlish figure became bent, and the light faded in the woman's eyes, while the lithe figure of the man was gnarled by the rigors of the struggle. There were days—not years, thank God—when lips forgot their tenderness; and, as fate tugged fiercely at the curbed bit, there were times, when souls rebelled, and cried out in bitterness and despair, at the roughness of the path. 60

58. Ibid., p. 76
59. Ibid., p. 147
60. Ibid., p. 148-9
Eventually, after the lean years, the old couple revisit the old Ohio home, but the scene has lost its charm. They return eagerly to their own land, the product of their victory.

In Our Town gives us a picture of the small country town in the halcyon days of prosperity. This town, set alongside the pleasant woodlands of the creek, is an ordinary little Main Street community where "you know everybody and they all know you". Yet "our town" is a sufficiently large environment for the social climber who builds a great house of towers, minarets, and scroll-saw fretwork and settles down to the self-imposed task of founding an aristocracy in the village.61

"Our town" depends upon the surrounding agricultural community for its prosperity, and in it proper cognizance is taken of the crowds of farmers who mill about its main streets on Saturday. In "our town" the problem of the hitching posts in the court house square, the question of whether the town is to be "a beautiful little city or a cow pasture"62 is enough to wreck a political career.

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61. In Our Town, p. 219

62. Ibid., p. 279
Subsequent stories shift the scene of White's literary activities to New Raynham, the hastily assembled prairie town preoccupied with materialistic values of money and political power. Responsibility for its future rests not upon the town or the prairie limitations about it, but upon its men. Environment is conquerable. Beyond the town's crudity and insufficiency is set the hope of better things, values that a new fumbling generation may possibly achieve through the adoption of finer ideals.

Given the love of land and the desire for ownership, the spirit can conquer. This thesis is aptly illustrated in Francis Dolliver's "The Old Man", a sketch of the faithful hired man, whose constant desire for the ownership of a piece of ground keeps him laboring hopefully year after year and eventually leads him to invest his savings in a bit of Missouri creek land described in a gaudy advertising circular. Lyman Bryson in "Alfalfa" pictures a like theme: the old ex-convict longing vainly for a home of his own, an alfalfa farm. To him the comfortable Nebraska farm and the green and purple level of the fields seem the acme of prosperity and beauty.
Edna Ferber in "April 25th As Usual" gives us a modern Wisconsin village scene in which the pictorial quality lends an atmosphere of cheer and comfort. The elderly man and woman, firmly attached to their modest middle class home and its common tasks, hurry away from the disturbing city to the familiar comforts of their own little town.

Mary Katherine Reedy in "Hands" approaches closely the technique of Zona Gale in her story of an old fashioned village, just outgrowing its picket fences and emerging into the materialistic glory of motion picture theatres and cement walks. As in Friendship Village the deficiencies of life are largely ignored.

In each of the foregoing narratives the Middle Western village leaves few marks of bitterness upon the character of its people, but rather a mellowing influence of content and peace of mind. The personalities are pictured as finer and more genial for having suffered the rigors of their hard-beaten ways of life.

The influence of place upon people is exhibited with fine pictorial technique and human understanding in Theodore Dreiser's "The Lost Phoebe". This sketch treats of a quiet rural scene:

... a part of the country which was
not so prosperous as it once had been, about three miles from one of those small towns, that instead of increasing in population is steadily decreasing.63

The background features, the old rain-beaten house under the elms and butternut trees, the ancient mildewed furniture, the orchard of gnarled apple trees, give the impression of musty, decrepit old age. The simple natures of the two old people are analyzed as having fastened themselves "like lichens on the stones of circumstance to weather their days to a crumbling conclusion."64 Beyond the simple activities of orchard, meadow, and cornfield there is no significant thought. Out of the monotonous drabness the two old people have evolved a quiet philosophy of fixed and weary submission and allowed their personalities to merge with the decadent premises about them.

Another artistic suggestion of the formation of personality through environment is found in Dreiser's "Married", wherein the artist husband presents a subtle analysis of his wife's temperament:

Where did she get it? No really common soul could have it. Here must

63. Free and Other Stories, p. 112
64. Ibid., p. 114
be something of the loneliness of the prairies, the sad patience of
the rocks and fields, the lonesomeness of the hush of the countryside
at night, the aimless, monotonous, pathetic chirping of the crickets.
Her father following down a furrow in the twilight behind straining,
toll-worn horses; her brothers binding wheat in the July sun; the sadness
of furrow scents and field fragrances in the twilight—there was something of all these things
in her sobs. 65

The sincere appreciation of the prairie is observed in Margaret Lynn's The Stepdaughter of
the Prairie. An ecstasy of enjoyment is aroused in contemplating the broad sunny spaces, the long valleys of hill slopes and curves, and the patches of wild flowers. The undisturbed scene forms a background for profound meditation and for the quiet enjoyment of cultural ideals.

I can't tell what strangeness lay in the line of wonder where the blue of the sky met the green of the hills. It was a mystery which far transcended in remoteness and promise any pot of gold of any childish tradition. 66

Nevertheless, the land with its impressive beauty demands the price of toil and tests the spirit of its pioneers. A suggestion of this elemental power

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65. Ibid., 345-6
66. Lynn's A Stepdaughter of the Prairie, p. 153-4
is found in "A Prairie Caravan".

For the stern land beyond the river was taking its pick of all that came to it, and rejecting all that were mean of spirit or weak of resolve.67

This vital spirit finds expression in Francis Gilchirst Wood's "Turkey Red", a vivid dramatic account that harks back to the days when Dakota was yet a territory, a desolate part of the Great American Desert.

Nothing but sky and plain and its voice, the wind, unless you might count a lonely sod shack blocked against the horizon, miles away from a neighbor, miles from anywhere, its red-curtained square of window glowing through the early twilight.68

This was the region of deadly blizzards, blighting droughts, and weary loneliness, a place where people grow old too soon, where women often went insane; but its courageous settlers braved the rigors of adverse climate, illness, and poverty and risked their lives for one another. In their desert bloomed a common cactus bearing a red flower, and in their windows hung red calico curtains, the color of

67. Ibid., p. 38
68. O'Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories, 1919, p. 105
courage. For people such as these a stranger sponsored a railroad, the one thing that could maintain life and bring comfort to the country.

While the scene has changed with the years, there are still remnants of the frontier and of its conditions. The author offers a challenge which, perhaps, should still hold true.

"...Now I say, damn the people anywhere in the whole country that won't pay their debts from pioneer to pioneer; that lets us fight the wilderness barehanded and die fighting".69

This popular theme of the local color writer, the presentation of the Middle Western locale as a vital challenge to its people, finds a powerful expression in Melvin Van Den Bark's "Two Women and Hog Back Ridge", a story of the barren Nebraska sand hills. Much is made of environmental influence. The reader feels an immense force arise that must conquer or be conquered. The hot winds, the lonely spaces, the ugly sod shanties, the dry grass, and the hills of worthless sand inspire the average toiler with a hopeless unquestioning fatalism.

...they are helpless and drugged, dry-eyed and passionless, with the soft hills and soft low winds that never die. Never do they whimper--

69. Ibid., p. 103-9
these lost souls; nor ever wonder about other lands from which some of them came. They ask nothing, nothing excepting that all who venture in become sand-hillers—swallowed souls. 70

The feel of the land is in the author's words. The long low soddy is "a huge dry mud-pie bread loaf" in the billowy dunes of yellow-green and lavender. The little patch of dry corn rattles "like something starved, lifeless, like a scarecrow". 71

Yet, in what to others is God-forsaken land the teacher and the worn farm-wife find the answer to subtle yearnings. They feel and understand the urge of beauty in the golden dune land.

The night was lighted by an orange moon which draped the hills with mauve and silver veils, cool, perfumed. The tumble-weeds, big as cart wheels, rolled over the hills in slow chase. Once the wagon scared up a flock of prairie chickens that glistened in the moonlight like silver birds. 72

These women alone could feel the immense poetry of the dunes and feel the vital conquering urge.

"You tell me you are a child unborn, a land of tomorrow." 73

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70. O'Brien's Best Short Stories of 1924, p. 214
71. Ibid., p. 214
72. Ibid., p. 222
73. Ibid., p. 227
That, perhaps, is the truest conclusion in regard to our native region. It is a strong and powerful land, the future of which lies in the molding hands of its people; but few are the literary artists who can make articulate the restive spirit of the Midlander, and illuminate the hidden forces of his surroundings.

By way of conclusion, one must admit that the literary conception of environment depends inevitably upon more or less transient personal mood. This is evident from the different reactions of various authors to the same milieu and varying interpretation of similar background by the same author.

The differentiation of temperament is indeed strong. Each author by the individual power of technique creates about his scene the sure of significance that he feels or chooses to develop. In striving to further the artistic tone and maintain a single impression, he is likely to overstress the "pathetic fallacy", which allows the writer to invest the neutral landscape with his own personal mood.

While each of these authors probably aims at an authentic representation of truth to life, each differs in past experience and present mood. He is
capable of telling the truth only in a selective way; that is from his own standpoint of experience at a particular time. The effects of time and physical and temperamental condition must inevitably affect the literary view. Other motives of personal propaganda and regard for public demand doubtless enter in.

Despite these differences, one sees a remarkable unanimity of purpose and spirit in our present regionalism. The Middle Western writers reflect a keen insight into our modern life and a true sympathy for an interesting region. Their short narratives are characterized by strength and originality resulting from keen observation and personal familiarity with the fundamental forms and surfaces of the land. A true feeling for nature, a lack of illusory imagination, and a commendable frankness of outlook are shown. A close adherence to place, a fidelity to scene, easily recognizable to the initiated Midlander, characterizes these local color sketches. The photographic quality of the work is, in the main, clear and satisfying. It reflects phases of an honest, artistic analysis among writers, an analysis that makes for an awareness of local possibilities, awakens one to the real nature of the country, inspires a greater appreciation of the
native scene, and leads toward the formation of a distinguishing regional spirit.

By the art of brilliant descriptive touches, richness of local imagery, and keen analysis of human response to outer forces, these authors have made the phenomena of prairie, forest, river, village, and farm live as vital presences in the experience of the people. They have given Nature with her portentous brooding influence her just due as a moving cause in the drama of life.

One sees how greatly the life of the Middle West is bent to the ungovernable powers of climate and topography. The monotony of the plain land, the isolation of its homes, the fateful vagaries of its weather are portrayed with relentless truth. On the other hand the literary re-creations of the rugged beauty of the country, the fertility of the fields, and the quietude and freedom of its uncrowded spaces make one realize the potential possibilities of a vast region that is yet in the making.

One may ignore the natural manifestations, or challenge them, or idealize them; one may regard the surrounding presence of nature as friend or enemy; the subtle force is ever present with its influence upon physical and mental life. It is a challenge to men,
but all men are not wise enough or strong enough to outwit and conquer it. Those who do are the heroes of a conquest that bids fair to be the theme of America's future epic.

The atmosphere created by the literary interpreters is yet one of gloom, for the tragic scenes have demanded first expression; but the author's consciousness is becoming aware of happier moods and fairer scenes. The boundary line of the dreary frontier has been pushed beyond the Rockies. The careful inventions and pursuits of a scientific age have brought some measure of comfort. Men have learned to combat and control the powerful forces about them. Some of our writers have become aware that beauty and peace and serenity exist among us here in the prairie country. As they make us aware of their findings, so may the rest of us begin to understand a little of the beauty that we have long overlooked.
THE TREATMENT OF LOCAL CHARACTER

Chapter IV
The natural environment, though a factor of importance in local color treatment, is not a chief influence, an all fateful power in men's lives. It must give precedence to another, the character element, an extremely obvious factor which is drawn upon in large proportion to lend regional sense to the narrative.

Many of the forces that bend life to its course are those arising within the individual. The emotions of love, hatred, fear, loyalty, and ambition, which arise from the well-spring of the soul, lend much to the composite individuality of the particular region revealed. Through the portrayal of action, speech, thought, appearance, and home setting, the authors readily re-create for us the character complex of the locality.

The form of local color which presents "all that is quaint, humorous, or pathetic in the customs, dialect, and character of the inhabitants" strongly predominates in the regional literature, the cross sections of personality serving readily as problems upon which plot may be built.

In the modern local color story a wide va-

1. Ramsay's Short Stories of America, p. 21
riety of type characters, emphasizing single personal qualities and social relations, are presented, but out of the conglomerate mass of psychic analyses we determine an average of personality. As a spectrum of colors may be converged to focus into a ray of light, so the varied manifestations of the rural and village Midlander take on a group significance.

In a study of these short stories one is impressed with the sadness and insufficiency portrayed as typical of the Midwest, but as well, one sees the strength and hardihood of spirit that enables the character to rise above the natural and human powers arrayed about him. Likewise, one is impressed by the frankness, reality, and sympathy with which the writers regard their characters. The spirit of the treatment accorded the environmental influences is identical with that which prevails in the analysis of character.

In so broad a selection of stories (one hundred or more) it is impossible to take into consideration each individual character. Rather, one must select such few representative types as may readily illustrate the author's handling of his people.

Sherwood Anderson in Winesburg, Ohio and other stories shows himself to be a master of psychic study. He pictures for us the tortured minds, the lonely lives
of a tired, inarticulate people whose opportunities for self-expression and betterment are sadly limited, not only by natural environmental forces, but by the passions and eccentricities of themselves and others. He dares to diagnose spiritual illnesses and seek to know the why of these unhappy, non-fulfilled lives. His characters impress one with their terrible authenticity. His frankness, blatant and cruel though it may seem, impresses us with its obvious sincerity and sympathy. Anderson has, indeed, delved deep into the human heart. If his characters appear freakish or monstrous to the casual reader, it is because he has given them more revealingly truthful analyses than the average author.

His representations are seemingly introspective expressions, put forth in the form of thought and action. The spoken expression plays but a limited part. The thesis of his literary treatment is well stated in a story from the Winesburg series. Kate Swift, the teacher, advises young George Willard:

"You must not become a mere peddler of words. The thing to learn is to know what people are thinking about, not what they say." 2

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2. Winesburg, Ohio, p. 192
The most appealing character in Winesburg is the drab, defeated Elizabeth Willard, whose only clear hope is that her son may be kept from a defeat like hers. An emotional, stage-struck girl, she is misunderstood and criticized by the village Grundies. No one understands her bizarre expressions of the dramatic passions with which she is endowed. No one aids what might be a true career. She is held to the village by a dull, unsatisfying marriage. The secret fire of her ambition dies, leaving her an embittered, expressionless woman.

She wanted to cry out with joy because of the words that had come from the lips of her son, but the expression of joy had become impossible to her.3

A similar character, harried by repression, is the village teacher, Kate Swift, considered as lacking in all human feelings, yet really the most eagerly passionate soul among the townspeople.

Alice Hindeman, another figure of the village scene, is, like Kate Swift, led by passionate restlessness to strange desires. Her life, a tragedy of misplaced faith, she lives a martyr to a tradition of loyalty. Betrayed by a desire for something beautiful in her narrow life, she loses the normal joys, retires

3. Ibid., p. 37
into a hopeless seclusion and tries to face bravely the fact that "many people must live and die alone even in Winesburg".

Profound understanding characterizes "Surrender", the story of Louise Bentley, "one of the race of over-sensitive women that in later days industrialism was to bring in such great numbers into the world". The delicate, imaginative girl, who hopes for the warm atmosphere of happiness, is driven to her books as a refuge from the coldness of those who misunderstand her dramatic eagerness to appear in the limelight of attention. Likewise, she is driven by a vague loneliness into a marriage unsuited to her nature.

Before such women as Louise can be understood and their lives made livable much will have to be done. Thoughtful books will have to be written and thoughtful lives lived by people about them.4

As we delve into Anderson's fiction reflective of this narrow Middle Western town, we feel with Thoreau that the majority of men lead lives of quiet desperation. His studies of frustration and bitterness are many. Wing Biddlebaum, the persecuted Socrates, whose life is ruined by the false accusations of a half-wit and who becomes in consequence an exile

4. Ibid., p. 88
from a Pennsylvania village, lives a life of terror in the little town. Wash Williams, made the ugly, soiled thing he is through the unfaithfulness of the woman he adored, descends to the level of a hideous, sordid existence. Joe Welling, the "man of ideas", appears as a strange fanatic of volcanic temperament, one whose overmastering ideas amount to fits of madness. Equally, though differently, odd is Seth Richmond, the quiet, inarticulate boy whose silence gains for him a false reputation for profundity, though in his own reticence he knows himself for an outcast whom others cannot comprehend.

Anderson recreates for us also the blank stupidity of Mook, the half-wit, who lives happily among pigs and chickens rather than among men. Quite as erratic is Elmer Cowley, queer product of inherited weakness, who is led to crazy demonstrations by a vague desire to be "different".

More tenderly poignant, yet equally cruel in its hopelessness, is the characterization of Doctor Reefy, the tender, thoughtful old man who observes and aids the sorrowful figures about him and for pastime packs his pockets with tiny bits of paper on which are written "thoughts, ends of thoughts, beginnings of
thoughts", fragments soon forgotten. Doctor Reely's story is curious and delicious,

... like the twisted little apples that grow in the orchards of Winesburg. Only the few know the sweetness of the twisted apples.5

He and his thoughts are only the gnarled, rejected fruit of the tree. Somehow, most of Anderson's characters seem to be gnarled human fruits that with greater care or finer soil might have known the beauty of full development.

Francis Buzzell reflects a treatment of character not unlike Anderson's. Old Abbie Snover in "Lonely Places" is a drab, weary creature into whose life no vital interest ever comes.

When she had become too old to be asked in marriage by any one, she had stopped going to dances and sleigh rides, and no one had asked her why. Then she had left the choir.

Except when she went to do her marketing, Abbie was never seen on the streets.6

Other pathetic oddities of Almont are Addie Erb and her girl Lottie, a simple minded, bent old woman and her queer gaping daughter. The two are

5. Ibid., p. 20
6. O'Brien's Best Short Stories of 1917, p. 71
abnormal characters of starved emotion, mournfully happy over the opportunity of attending funerals.

All evening, late into the night, they talked of the funeral. They talked about it during the meager supper; they went together to the well in the yard of their nearest neighbor and talked as they drew the water; they talked in bed, squeezing each other's arms when words failed. . . .

They walked in single file, Lottie, round-shouldered, drooped, trudging along behind Addie Erb, shrunken-chested and bent.

Up the hill they slowly climbed, Addie Erb and her girl Lottie; up the front steps, walking slowly, hands folded at their waists, heads bent. 8

"Ma's Pretties" gives us an insight into the quaint character of Sadie Brooks, a reticent, expressionless soul, whose urge for possession leads her to hoard a queer lot of trinkets: a Bible, spoons, old pieces of chain, jet beads, hair switches, and a plate of false teeth. Even more pathetic is the fumbling, inarticulate husband, the weary farm laborer who tries to forget his wife's impending death in loafing about the streets, leaning against the watering trough, waiting on Newberry's corner, scuffling a bit on the sidewalk, and hailing farmers passing by.

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7. Century, LXXXIX (November, 1914), 66
8. Ibid., p. 68
Willa Cather contributes various character sketches that seem to urge revolt from the smug narrowness of the middle class view. Though exaggerated perhaps, the various figures in "The Sculptor's Funeral" appear hideous in their power and in their weakness, as we contemplate their influence upon the sensitive, artistic nature of the boy. The reader views the mother, "the fury that made Harvey's life a hell for him".

...a kind of power about her face—a kind of brutal handsomeness, even; but it was scarred and furrowed by violence, and so colored and coarsened by fiercer passions that grief seemed never to have laid a gentle finger there. 9

One sees the father, "a feeble man, tall and frail, odorous of pipe smoke, with shaggy, unkempt grey hair and a dingy beard, tobacco stained about the mouth" 10 a man with a "dull, frightened appealing expression", a man of miserable indecision, one who stood in awe of his wife and was unable to understand his son. 11

One observes the neighbors, curious, yet awkwardly uncertain in the presence of death, none

9. *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, p. 255
of them comprehending the greatness of the young artist, yet sneeringly critical of his life. The reason for his flight from home is plain. The young man's own fine spirit has never escaped entirely the ugliness and misunderstanding of his home life. Even in death his face retains the bitterness he keenly felt in life.

Similarly, in Miss Cather's "The Joy of Nelly Dean", the gay, vital spirit of the girl and, indeed, her very life are crushed out by dissimilar but equally destructive forces: the smugly righteous ideals of her aunts and the stubborn selfishness of her husband.

Miss Cather is not without faithful adherents in her expressed doctrine of revolt against cramped ideals. Don Harrison in "The Mixing" interprets the restless, valiant spirit of a lad whose love of beauty and romance lead him unwittingly into the prairie country, where he becomes the victim of a brutal farmer. Amos, the harsh, parsimonious taskmaster personifies a type of cruel man-force that robs labor of its dignity and satisfaction. The character of his workers is suggested in a descriptive bit that recalls "The Man With the Hoe".
The men one by one crunched toward the door, long arms swinging free from slouching shoulders, heads sagging on deep chests, legs bound in their movements by over-strong muscles,—huge black bulks against the shadow of settling night.12

A figure oddly like Hamlin Garland's Lucretia Burns is described.

A woman emerged from the smoke about the stove. She stopped for a moment to brush her hair from her eyes, her big hand showing red against the deadness of her face, the pallor of which the fierce heat of the fire could not burn to life... She too slouched as the men did, with her heels on the floor, rocking her twisted body grotesquely as if her legs were shackled.13

Another dreary figure is pictured in Thomas Jewell Craven's "Love in Smoky Hill". The characterization of the ugly, inexpressive Tressa, product of a harsh narrow home life, is seemingly exaggerated to a point of disbelief. Her hair "like rain-rotted hay", her face, "narrow and misshapen, the cheeks squeezed together in ugly lines", the noticeable moles, long nose, watery eyes, and lumpy figure appear grotesque and hopeless limitations.14

Stupid, shabby, and uncomplaining, she had no time for tears and no

12. Stories from the Midland, p. 92
13. Ibid., p. 93
14. Dial., LXXII (January, 1922) 3
spirit for laughter; and it seldom occurred to her that life was anything but a cycle of toil.\textsuperscript{15}

The pathetic unattractiveness of the girl is further enhanced by the description of her wedding attire.

Her wedding dress was not very elaborate; a white cotton shirt-waist decorated with inserted pieces of coarse lace, a grey woolen skirt held together with safety pins and sagging low in front, and buttoned shoes with the toes newly daubed with blacking. Her battered hat of brown velvet was trimmed with a big pink ribbon; she was uncomfortably warm and carried her shabby coat over her arm.\textsuperscript{16}

A person as wistful and as sad as Mr. Craven's literary creation, yet buoyed up by finer ideals and the power of hope, is Ellen in George Carver's "The Singer". She is the typical figure which exists in every village, a drab, suffering creature whose disappointments people never immediately realize, and whose sorrows are seldom portrayed even in stories. Her life is a continual hope for beauty and love that never appear. Through her actions one senses the spirit that drives her to give her son what she cannot have.

Her friends gave her work in their houses. She spent long days bending over their washtubs, scorch-

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 4
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 14
ing her face and burning her hands over their cook-stoves. Sometimes hay had to be saved from the rain—she helped save it; meals had to be served to harvesters—she helped serve them. Hardship passed over her unheeded; little Jim must be cared for; and she centered her hope in him. 17

At last we see her a victim of the chance cruelties of circumstance, left alone again, living only through hope, the hope that a better life may be beyond her own.

Ruth Suckow is not free from ugliness and satire in character portrayal, but the individual is ordinarily presented with fairness tempered by a fine tolerance for the circumstances which surround her literary figures. While these lives seem poignantly, disturbingly true, the writer's sympathetic insight frequently spies out the minor compensations which serve to make life livable, and which so many of our modern authors fail to exhibit.

While many of Miss Suckow's people could well serve as an Exhibit A illustrative of the insufficiency so often charged to Middle Western life, the author's honesty holds her to a middle ground of

17. Midland, VIII (March, 1922), p. 108
judgment. She voices the average problem and avoids the violent extremes that might easily add dramatic fervor and as readily exaggerate unjustly. Nevertheless there is a painful veracity about her characters, as for example the Kitchlers in "Renters".

A shabby country family. Fred, a lank, skinny fellow, with thin, light hair and bad teeth, several of them gone; a good-natured, ingenuous face that was getting vaguely cynical; yet with an indefinite look of youth about him. Beth... at the same time stocky and thin, with the worried-looking face of the driven mother. When she went into the grocery store to do her buying, she stood back among other rather silent, bashful, women, the baby in her arms, Ben and Harold hanging near her... She never felt like pushing forward to the counter. The Kitchlers were not good pay.18

"An Investment for the Future" shows a mildly gullible Middle Western minister away from his native village, "smiling in the secretive way of provincial people among strangers", furtively hiding his land buying interest from others. The pathetically self-conscious importance and the weakly credulous trust of the man and his wife reflect all too obviously the limited range of experience which has made the two

cautious and wary, yet readily susceptible to the blandishments of a land agent.

"Eminence" gives us a glimpse of a fatuous character influence that is eventually to produce a maladjusted small town snob. Through the picturization of a Sunday School Christmas program we are shown the influences that force the too-favored child into a state of discontent with the commonplace environment. We watch the tremulous, hopeful child being hopelessly alienated from the group by the smothering attentions of doting parents.

Mr. and Mrs. Watkins smiled slightly and clapped perfunctorily. They could not give ready applause until Florentine had had hers.

This boy had no right to come in, not even able to speak his piece, and take away some of the applause from Florentine.19

In their selfish elation the parents term their child the finest on the program, resent the comment that "they were all good", and isolate their little girl from the wistful children who might handle her big doll or touch her dress.

"Four Generations", while mainly a traditional study, includes a wealth of character types

19. American Mercury, X (March, 1927), 275
Illustrative of our present social class. One views the old grandfather, a gnarled peasant-like old man, isolated from his educated, progressive children; Charles, his son, the prosperous small town banker; Katherine, Charles' daughter, the refined product of Eastern school culture; and Phyllis, her exotic, exquisite little girl, a frail creature, fastidiously alien to the country relatives.

The impressive point of the narrative is that these four should appear together in the "four generations" photograph. Here is, indeed, a rare grouping of Middle-western types:

Grandpa. . . . small, bent like a little old troll, foreign with his black cambric skull cap, his blue, far-apart peasant eyes. . . . his thin silvery beard. His hands, gnarled from years of farm work in a new country, clasped the homemade knotted stick that he held between his knees.20

Charlie, his son. . . . plump and soft, dressed in the easy garments of good quality and yet a trifle careless, of Middle Western small-town prosperity. . . . showing his age in the folds that had come about his chin; his glasses with shell rims and gold bows; the few strands of grayish hair brushed across his pale, luminous skull. A small town banker. . . . both impressed and shamefaced at having the photograph taken.21

20. O'Brien's Best Short Stories of 1924, p. 200
21. Ibid., p. 200
Katherine, his daughter... taking after no one knew whom. Slender, a little haggard and worn, still young, her pale, delicate face... her little collar bones, her dark, intelligent weak eyes behind her thick black-rimmed glasses. Katherine had always been like that. Refined, "finicky", studious, thoughtful.22

Phyllis... vivid as a canary bird against the dark green of the foliage. ... They hadn't thought Katherine's girl would be so pretty... something faintly exotic about her liquid brown eyes with their jet-black lashes, the shining straight gold-brown hair, the thick bangs... Her little precise "Eastern accent".23

In this narrative Miss Suckow has summed up much that is valuable in the analysis of types. As a comparative study of Midland characters it can scarcely be bettered in either variety or detail.

In "Uprooted" we read two of the character sketches in which Miss Suckow excels—those of old people. One's interest is drawn to "the old man with the unfathomable look of the old peasantry".

He had done many things—farmed, kept a little grocery store, been janitor at the Court House. Now he just pottered around his barn and grounds, keeping a pig, a horse, and a few bees and chickens, raising

22. Ibid., p. 200
23. Ibid., p. 200-1
vegetables and a little corn, and living upon these things and the checks Sam sent. He had grown sweeter, vaguer and more helpless with the years.24

More pathetic is the little old grandmother with her weak fretful sobbing, "her knotted fingers with their split and blackened nails"; her thin gray hair in "the tiny braid that for years she had wound into a hard little knob at the back of her head".25

We see her pitifully attached to all her old trinkets, demanding to take her treasures with her, unwilling to leave the rickety old home, but never able to "stand against" Sam, her favorite son.

A pleasant old character is introduced to us in "A Rural Community".

Luke Hockaday was a combination of close, canny farmer, generous neighbor, and devout churchman, absorbed in his family relations, of an almost profound simplicity. He loved to talk over the ways of God and the lives of his children.26

He regarded the stranger with the wariness of a country man.27

Other examples of Miss Suckow's character-

24. Stories from the Midland, p. 279
25. Ibid., pp. 230-1
26. Ibid., p. 253
27. Ibid., p. 248
zation are presented in "Spinster and Cat" and "Strong as a Man", local color sketches equally as rich in regional quality as Elsie Singmaster's stories of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Old Toldine Schönwetter, the half pathetic spinster, lives happily in her narrow village bounds, the daily round of home tasks and the company of her cat fulfilling all her desires for comfort and satisfaction. Her character is portrayed through a review of eccentricities that govern her economical and freakish housekeeping. Mollie Schumacher is a more buoyant and hearty personality, a robust free-mannered woman of vigor and ideas who tries vainly to carve out a career though tied for affection's sake at her rural home.

Another treatment of the German personality is exhibited in Ferner Nurn's "The Old Ladies' Man". Lydia Betz, a typical small town miser, lives alone in an atmosphere of ugliness and poverty, hoarding her useless money, suspecting everybody. Her slovenliness is well depicted.

She came onto the porch, pushing her shapeless bulk unceremoniously past Mr. Walker. Her strong neck, like a tree-trunk, thrust itself forward from heavy bent shoulders. She wore no corset, and the belt of her skirt cut deep into her waist, shaping
her body into two spheroids of flesh set one on top of the other. A heavy skirt, shiny with wear, swelled over her abdomen to a ragged hem rearing ridiculously in front. Her wide, gnarly feet were encased sloppily in home-made cloth slippers.

Emma, chief character in Carolyn Hosmer Rhone's "So Not to Be Alone", is an excellent study of the German peasant type. A lumpy little woman with a hard twist of grey hair and snapping eyes, she goes stolidly about the drudgery that she hopes may free her from loneliness. The meager savings hoarded daily are to provide "a best room" where she may entertain the company she craves.

Keene Abbott's "The Wind Fighters" gives an excellent insight into the personal traits of another nationality, the immigrant stock which has contributed to the settlement of the Central Plains. The Daras, sturdy true-hearted Irish pioneers, hold bravely to their claim, willing to suffer loneliness, sorrow, and the loss of youth in order to win the prairie.

Loneliness, the power that saps vitality and meaning from so many lives, is further treated in "The Lichen" by Edna W. McCourt. The girl's instinctive fear of loneliness is sufficiently strong to bar her

29. American Mercury, XI (May, 1927), 59
from her final ambition.

She resembled the lichen, which is never an individual but a firm of two living together so intimately as to appear a single plant. . . Without complement she was not herself.29

The temperamental character of the girl appears incongruous in its small town setting.

The people of the stodgy Middle-West village were not her people. She could not keep step with them. She glided. They thumped. The older folks were her father's echo. Girls stopped whispering when she joined them. Boys looked at her as a cat watches a bird. She burned incense in her room; all the farm-house smelled of bread baking.30

Among the common village figures the gossip is ever present. Katherine Brush in "Good Wednesday" gives a lively account of the activities of the garrulous Annie Baxter, town hairdresser and organ of news distribution. The prim orderliness, abnormal modesty, and prurient, imaginative curiosity of the scandal monger is effectively suggested.

Another type character common to sections of the prairie region is young Yawkett, the yokel divinity student of Eleanor Campbell's "Restitution." Overzealous in religion, fanatically impressed with a sense

29. Dial, LXVIII (May, 1920), 586
30. Ibid., p. 590
of sin, he seems an over-drawn cartoon, a potential Elmer Gantry, minus cunning and cleverness.

An unpleasant figure all too familiar to the plains region in the early twentieth century is capably sketched by Glenway Wescott in "Prohibition". Old Riley is the notorious drunkard of pre-prohibition days, "an irresponsible animal in human form" who lets cattle out of pastures, pushes over beehives, and beats his wife. With wild flowers in his cap, grape vines knotted under his chin, this picturesque being drives home from drunken carousels only to fall in a drunken stupor when he reaches home.

A cross section of typical village character is observed in Jay Sigmund's "Subpoena". Cartoon-like figures in the court room are pictured: the gum-chewing barber, the hog buyer, the bailiff with his huge quid of tobacco, and the thick-witted freak, Arch Durner.

The hard-working, disillusioned farmer is a familiar figure in Middle Western literature. Clarence Sundermeyer in "World Gate" presents the character of "the Old Man", a joyless product of a harsh, non-prosperous epoch. Unhappy himself, he is scarcely willing
that others enjoy life. His bursts of anger, his insistence upon hard, driving labor, his swearing, and his beating of animals are the forces that drive his son from the farm.

Jay Sigmund and Leo L. Ward picture similar rural characters, hard working men, their lives narrowed to the never ending activities of planting, harvesting, and stock raising. Amos Heint, the slow shuffling man from "out ridge road way" is stoop-shouldered and "thin like the soil of his own cornfields." He labors for months to accumulate his mortgage money, only to find himself ruined by a bank failure.

The farmer personality is suggested again in Sigmund's "The Runaway". Hinton Fenmore is a thin bony farmer with walrus mustache and fast working jaws, a stubborn man "used to fighting stubborn river silt long and unsuccessfully".

Leo L. Ward's conception of the farmer is almost identical with Sigmund's In "Possession" he stresses one man's controlling influence, his complacent love for his good black land and the hard working little wife

32. Midland, XVI (Sept.-Oct., 1930), 285
whose drudgery makes his prosperity possible.

Wynne Snyder's heart was narrow like his house and deep like the old well on his lawn, and he kept the things he cherished at its very bottom. 33

Like many a farm woman, Snyder's wife is the faithful housewife who works herself to death. Her dominant trait is the craze for work. The author's realistic touches summarize the brief span of drudgery that is her life.

She planned with him when to buy more land, when to sell corn and cattle, helped him to calculate his taxes, advised him about his health, cared for his rheumatism, made his shirts, bought most of his clothes, and cut his hair when he got older and hated the waits in the barber-shop down in Kattsville. 34

The natural ambition and pride of men must find objects somewhere in life. In the rural communities the center of vital interest is frequently work. It may degenerate into a hopeless, blighting drudgery, or it may serve as an incentive and consolation. While some grow hard and coarse in pursuing work, others find in it the enlivening force of a dull existence.

Ward's "Master and Servant", strongly resembling Robert Frost's famous poem "The Death of the

33. Midland, XIV (Nov.-Dec., 1928), 283
34. Ibid., p. 284
Hired Man", reveals for us in the relations of old Zachary Morse and his employer, J.B. Reynolds, the character-complex of the average farmer. Faithful adherence to duty is the keynote of old Zachary's life. After his death the neighbors review the fifteen years of constant service of the conscientious old man who dies in the midst of the threshing because of his refusal to give up his work.

"Why what you goin' to do?" he would ask in a high irritated tone. "What'd J.B. do? He's got to get these oats out before the weather turns. Got to do it, and he's got to have somebody at the engine. Anyways, I'll be all right directly, I guess."35

Old Zach is one of those to whom the rural life was a refuge. It was his niche in the scheme of things, and he was satisfied.

"... By George, I don't think I was half as glad as he was to get back—no, sir. Just like a dog comin' home after bein' lost—just like that. Glad as everything to be with me. I could see it."36

"The Threshing Ring", another homely and realistic account, gives us a view of the prairie farmer in a mood of power and elation. The importance and

35. Midland, XIII (January, 1927), pp. 1-9
36. Ibid., pp 1-9
sense of high adventure which other men find in ships and airplanes, these men experience in the management of the threshing "rig".

"Fer he'll be right back here, wantin' to run that engine again, sure as shootin'. You can't stop Burl Testers, onct he gets some- thin' like that in his head. . . No way under blue heaven a gettin' it out a his head. He's a Testers, that's all, just as Ambrose says." 37

Numerous other writers present sympathetic sketches of old farmers who find after the hardships of their youth a quiet satisfaction in homely tasks. Lyman Bryson in "Alfalfa" briefly characterizes the elderly farmer who has lived on his land for forty years and is "good for forty more".

He had lived through his own spells of blackness to an age of kindliness and understanding. He did not know loneliness, but he knew grief, and after a moment of silence he offered the only remedy he could give; he began to talk of commonplaces. 38

The faithful hired man of Frances Dolliver's "The Old Man" is pictured as a weary, hopeful creature who finds joy in the odd jobs about the farm and inwardly broods over the fact that he owns not a single acre of his own.

37. Midland, XVI (July-August, 1930), 165
38. McClure's Magazine, LXVII (June, 1916), 31
Theodore Dreiser in "The Lost Phoebe", one of the finest of American short stories, shows us an incident in the lives of old farm folk, the typical country grandparents of the present generation. Old Henry Reifsneider and his wife are lonely derelict souls, unperturbed by the distant busy world, settled by habit into peace and sympathy with one another.

Old Henry and his wife Phoebe were as fond of each other as it is possible for two old people to be who have nothing else in this life to be fond of. Looking at their uneventful lives in the musty old farmhouse, they "divided this simple world nicely between them".

The Darby and Joan idea is likewise put forth in William Allen White's "The Homecoming of Colonel Hucks". Uncle Billy Hucks and his wife are representative Kansans of the "retired farmer" class. They are happily forgetful of past hardships, faithfully loyal to their homeland, and complacent in the remembrance of their victory over obstacles of pioneer days.

Views of those hard working, unassuming Middle Western farmers who strive doggedly toward a finer future for their children are given in Ival

39. Free and Other Stories, p. 115
McPeak's "Knowing Dad" and Warren Van Dine's "The Poet". In the first, the son recalls the sacrifices made for him. The "drab heroism" of the father who fitted his boy for finer things than he himself could understand is at last understood.

"The Poet" shows the understanding of a father for the gifted son. One sees clearly that the inarticulate efforts of the kindly father are the forces that have made the son's genius possible.

Unlike the many writers whose fictional figures are governed predominantly by the forces of repression and discontent, Zona Gale presents a different view of provincial people.

The Friendship Village stories reveal the quiet retired life of a Wisconsin Village of the early twentieth century. The author stresses the friendly, family-like consciousness of the villagers and smiles amicably at their petty eccentricities.

Much of the local color charm lies in the careless slip-shod English and the moral and proverbial sentiments which characterize the conversation.

The Friendship people are, generally speaking, a composite type, the single individual being set apart only by some minor eccentricity or foible
which attracts attention. The villagers are known for their quiet serenity, neighborliness, generosity, common sense philosophy, and "love they neighbor" religion.

One must recall, however, that the Friendship observations are recorded from the point of view of a woman who is a beneficient spectator, serenely apart from the active scene. Miss Gale overlooks the harsher facts in the lives of her people quite as consciously as Sherwood Anderson drags forth such items for clear analysis.

The sturdy independence and satisfaction of the villagers is revealed in "Nobody Sick, Nobody Poor". The charitable ladies can find no one in Friendship who is admittedly in need of medical or financial aid.

Friendship's mild, resigned view of death is exemplified in "Put On Thy Beautiful Garments" by the statement that the only difference between the dead girl and the living is that "she's through doin' the things she was born to do, an' you ain't".40

Mrs. Merriam in "The Tea Party" shows a quaint traditional taste for form as well as an economical nature. She refuses invitations for two years

40. Friendship Village, p. 266
after her husband's death because she cannot afford to throw away her best dress "made mournin' style, with crepe ornaments" and does not think it proper to wear widow's weeds to social affairs.41

Mrs. "Doctor" Helman's pride leads her to bring out her "dyin' dishes and her dyin' linen" whenever illness attacks her.

You know how Mis' Doctor always brings out her nice things when she's sick, so't if she should die an' the neighbors come in, it'd be all ship-shape.42

Aunt Cornie More's personal selfishness exhibits itself in unusual fashion when she "made her own shroud from her crocheted parlor curtains, lest these fall to a later wife of her octogenarian husband".43

Mrs. "Postmaster" Sykes is considered the social arbiter of the town, because she keeps two maids and wears a bar pin with "four solitaires" in it. Moreover:

Mis' Sykes is rilly a great society woman. They isn't anybody's funeral that she don't get to ride to the cemetery.44

41. Ibid., p. 218
42. Ibid., p. 33
43. Ibid., p. 60
44. Ibid., p. 13
Doctor June, the retired pastor, rents a pew in each of the town's three churches and contributes to each organization as "the Lord would of".\textsuperscript{45}

The goodness of Calliope Marsh is illustrated in her simple deeds of kindness and charity, her organization of a group to prepare dinner for the poor, her persuasion of the village élite to attend the laundress' humble party, her serious transference of a dream into the expression of her daily living.

"It looks to me like helpin' is what I'm for."\textsuperscript{46}

Miss Gale's objective study of the village personality is continued in her later work, but it reveals startlingly different conclusions.

"Evening" shows the life of barren fancy which makes the dreamer, Ernie Mendenhall, queer in the eyes of the townspeople.

He had fallen in love, experienced domesticity, been bored by it, and was left alone in Christmas week with the child whom none had ever begotten.\textsuperscript{47}

"The Biography of Blade" presents an interval in the life of an ordinary business man, who is

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 23
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 323
\textsuperscript{47} Bookman, LXII (December, 1925), 417
shaken out of a complacent happiness by the voice of a strange girl. He gropes in vain to clutch the brief ecstasy, only to settle again into the empty void of routine.

He woke to the sun and said, "Another fine day", a formula, not a feeling. He went to his office, and the men were pale fellows, inky, disheveled, remote. He faced the blind wall of human loneliness. He was as one who, expecting to be born, is still-born, and becomes aware not of the cradle, but of eternity.48

"The Dime" pictures the silent tragedy of the neglected old man, Grandfather Tarkoff.

He had lived a life of incredible toil. He was yellow and crooked. He was forever looking up with an unbearable air of wistfulness. His movements were calculated and uncouth. He looked like a little gnome who was not meant to show in the daytime.49

The interest in little things—an old dime, a bunch of straw flowers, tiresome old stories—shows the pitifully few pleasures of the old gentleman's life. Eventually, convinced of his uselessness, worried by his coming blindness, and hurt by his family's neglect of him, the old man takes his life.

*Yellow Gentians* and *Blue* shows a similar research of many lives and exhibits clear, unrelieved

48. O'Brien's *Best Short Stories of 1924*, p. 99
49. *Century*, CIX (April, 1925), 730
conceptions of loneliness, defeat, and disappointment. The dumb, sacrificing devotion of the father for his little child in "Bill", the fumbling aesthetic yearnings of Mr. Bilger in "The Piece", the hopeful gullibility of the old farmer in "The Spider", and the brave resourcefulness of Bellard, the failure, in "The Woman" are subtly delineated with many provincial touches.

Bridal Pond brings before us other personalities: Margate, the hard, grasping business man, who reaps where he has neither sown nor planted; Jane Mellish, the housewife who entertains a pathetic desire for authorship; Kate Bard, whose sole claim to personal pride lies in her expert housekeeping; Tattie Marsh, the village drudge, whose solace is her constant "scrubbon and cleanen".

Rupert Hughes' *In a Little Town* serves as a medium through which we become aware of other commonplace and unsung lives: Ellaphine Govers, the pathetic ugly duckling; Eddie Pouch, the shy "easy mark"; Shelby, the kindly benefactor whose efforts toward civic improvement draw upon him the scorn and suspicion of the town.

Mr. Hughes' observations reveal worlds of pathos in these seemingly insignificant lives.
Govers' dreams for her homely daughter dwindle into the mere hope that she may capture a man "tol'able well-to-do". Ellaphine's loftiest reach of splendor is a crazy quilt and her rag carpets are highly esteemed. Will Rudd, the shoe clerk, who never asks for a raise in wages or dreams of a luxury finer than his pipe and tobacco, constructs a fanciful dream life in which he watches his non-existent son fulfill his dreams of an ideal existence.

In "Pop" Mr. Hughes pays tribute to the harassed father, the plodding provider who maintains a careless, scornful family. He is proud and afraid of the wife and children who ridicule him and scorn his commonplace ideas and petty economies.

No less sympathetic, yet touched with greater satire, is the narration of Luke Mellows' failure in "The Stick-in-the-Muds", a story portraying the breaking of a genius through his own goodness of character. Unlike his ideal, Shakespeare, who dared to leave Stratford,

Luke Mellows...dreaded to leave his mother to the father who bullied them both...He could not bear to leave Kitty alone with the wretched mother who ruled her with tears.
Cowardice held some back, but the purest self sacrifice others. . .

Given that little spur of initiative, that little armor of selfish indifference to the clinging hands at home, and how many a soul might not have reached the stars. 50

William Allen White shows talent for effective character portrayal, which is exhibited in the indirect manner from the journalistic point of view. Mr. White has a tendency not frequently observed in other authors, to show the influences bearing upon the formation of such character.

Lalla Longford is the social arbiter of the Kansas town, a leader who works selfishly for herself, manages all forms of organization, works her way into publicity, and leads men on with witch-like fascination. The secret of her forceful, dramatic character is attributed partly to the tempestuous nature of her father, partly to the temperament of her mother, and a trifle to circumstance. 51

The "Prominent Citizen" 52 Boyce Kilworth, is pictured as ambitious, smugly aristocratic, and

50. O'Brien's Best Short Stories of 1920, p. 113
51. God's Puppets, p. 1-71
52. Ibid., pp. 72-200
pseudo-pious, presenting a respectable appearance, yet cheating at every turn to accumulate money and reputation. The formation of his false personality has been effected by a mother who believed in a gospel of work and gain, and it has been nourished by praise, ownership, and the "leprosy of easy success".

In contrast to him stands Caleb Hale, the half-brother he has cheated. Caleb discovers in time the worthy things in life, buries his money, and lives for his family and flowers, finding more joy in the Hale Delphinium than in money.

"By the Rod of His Wrath" introduces a group of picturesque sketches of personality typical of the author's journalistic style. The quoted excerpts suggest the character qualities of John Markley, Mrs. Markley, and Isabel Hobart.

...he kept the habits of his youth, rose early, washed at the kitchen basin, and was the first man at his office in the morning. At night, after a hard day's work he smoked a cob-pipe in the basement, where he could spit into the furnace and watch the fire until nine o'clock, when he put out the cat and bedded down the fire while "Ma" set the buckwheat cake. 53

...Giving her missionary teas, looking after the poor of her church, making

53. In Our Town, p. 97
her famous doughnuts for the so-
cials, doing her part at the Re-
lief Corps chicken-pie supper,
digging her club paper out of the
encyclopedia, and making over her
black silk the third time for every
day. 54

... From a brassy street-gadding
child of twelve, whose mother crowded
her into grown-up society before she
left high school, and let her spell
her name Ysabell, she had grown into
womanhood like a rank weed. 55

The stories from In Our Town include a
strong vein of humor, with attention to eccentrici-
ties of local speech. The garrulous pomposity of
old Alphabetical Morrison, an ambitious visionary,
is well illustrated in "A Question of Climate".

"Of course it failed; here I go
pawing up the earth, milking out the
surplus capital of the offote East,
and building up this town—and what
happens? Four thousand old silurian
fossils comb the moss on the north
side of 'em with mussel shell, and
turn over and yawn that old Alphabe-
tical is visionary. Here I get a
canning factory and nobody eats the
goods. I hustle up a woolen factory
and the community quits wearing trow-
sers; I build for them a street car
line to haul them to and from their
palatial homes, and what do the sun-
baked mud turtles do but jump off the
log into the water and hide from them
cars like they were chariots of fire." 56

Mr. White's narratives are replete with

54. Ibid., p. 101
55. Ibid., p. 99
56. Ibid., p. 152
pictorial touches that suggest the character of the villagers. As for instance:

The Worthingtons...had ventured no further into the social whirl of the town than to entertain the new Presbyterian preacher at tea, and to lend their lawn to the King's daughters for a social, sending in a bill to the society for the eggs used in the coffee and the gasoline used in heating it.57

The description of the home setting as a device for suggesting character qualities is found to a marked degree in the local color narratives. Miss Suckow is especially adept at the use of this technique. In "Uprooted" the taste of the old people is suggested by various odds and ends: the lace curtains, the knitted tidies, the big illustrated Bible, and the funeral memorial card on the old organ. Old-fashioned quaintness is suggested in "A Rural Community" by mention of the treasured household gods. The old album, the stereoscope, the Home Friend magazine, the exhibit of reunion and wedding photographs mark a reverence for the traditional. Similar elements of the home environment are utilized in Willa Cather's "The Sculptor's Funeral" to suggest the cultural level of the country people: ugly hanging lamps, clover green plush upholstery.

57. Ibid., p. 228
painted plaques and crayon portraits.

The peculiar customs and mannerisms of the provincial people are illustrated frequently in regional stories. Francis Buzzell in "Ma's Pretties" pictures the kindly neighbor coming in to "tidy up" the house, brew tea, and decorate the rooms with flowers. Leo Ward's "Possession" treats similar customs. "Ma's Pretties" suggests the sentimental usage of giving to close friends treasured kick-knacks of the deceased. "The Sculptor's Funeral" describes the funeral observance of "sitting up" with the corpse. Ward's "Master and Servant" also includes mention of this custom.

Other assorted characteristics of the Midland region are suggested in the work of various regionalists: the men's prejudice against assisting in household work, the common practice of idling in the stores and on street corners, the lending of dishes and foods for parties, the addiction to the daily newspaper as reading material, the early rising in the morning in the farming communities, the slow, uncertain, but jovial, conversation characteristic of agricultural classes, the judgment of housewives according to the quality of their housekeeping and cooking.
Dialect as a characteristic of the Midland communities merits in itself a complete research study. A wealth of picturesque colloquialisms found in this investigation add materially to the interest of the narratives and serve as indexes to the character and culture of the persons presented.

"Rip saw", [whiskey], "pretties" [trinkets], "way behind" [common financial lament], and "rig" [vehicle or machine] are but a few of the provincial usages. We read with interest the following: "whale him with a rawhide", "burnt dog, land poor sharks", "sore as a wet hen"", "fixed up like a Christmas tree", and "stepping like a hen in high oats", all common expressions reflective of the common experience of prairie people.

Rupert Hughes' *In a Little Town* is full of slangy idiom and slip-shod, ill-pronounced English. The characters speak of "chalklut" and "cokernut" cake and "rhubob" pie. Their speech includes "dawgs" "ain't", "crickety", as well as quantities of double negatives, marked elisions and slurs, and faulty pronunciation of common terms.

The following are rare examples of speech usage illustrative of the minor differences wrought
by local tradition.

"Now you hush, Henry... If yuh don't, I'll leave yuh. I'll git up and walk out of here some day, and then where would y' be?"58

"Whur is this yur West whur they're all a-gitten to?... En Ohio et's Illinois. In Illinois ef a man says he's gitten West you kin tuck on your pants' legs and wager it's Missouri he's lighten out fer. And on Missouri et's Gawd knows whur. West! Hell, there n'est no sech place!"59

"My gosh—all-Pete!... Nova, where yuh been? Leavin' me the hull while to lug them brats around. We're hitchin' up. Yer paw'll be hornet-mad if the cows ain't milked when he gits there. We'll haf' to stop to the doc's, though. I'm that tuckered out! Introduce me to yer friend, why can't yuh—like a lady?"60

"We come back the Nickerawgy route... God, leetle boy. Your grandpappy has seed a lot of things... a heap of things."61

Grandma Mellish was wiping her spectacles on her petticoat. "You better keep your cap set for Rufus Commons's son," she said. "He's got his pa's purse and his gran'dad's jaw. Don't you let him slip through your fingers."62

58. "The Lost Phoebe", p. 116

59. Colby, Merle, "A Half-Quarter Section", Atlantic, CXLVII (May, 1929), 619

60. Russell, Helen, "Clean Dirt" Midland, XII (July-August, 1928), 175

61. Summers, Floyd, "Home from Californy", Midland, XVI (Sept.-Oct., 1930), 277

62. Gale, Zona, "White Bread", In Bridal Pond, p. 117
"Tell them to go right along, plumb to thunder, afoot or ahoss-back..."

"These aid societies are a brassy lot... Always got their claws out for somebody's snuff-box."

"It's good enough, what there is of it... and there's enough of it such as it is."64

Keene Abbott's "Maybe Wild Parsnips", narrative of the Nebraska farmlands, includes effective bits of the broken English characteristic of the German and Bohemian settlers.

"Ooh, there is Ludwig I have forgot! He should, maybe, have had some medicine. He is five years old now, and broke out with pimples. Weed-poisoning, I shouldn't wonder. Say, Ropez, how you think it is? Do you think it is wild parsnips?"65

"I am cutting grass. He is grabbing me right off the seat of the mower machine. Yes, zur; that's how it is. I get awful bad shake-up. And when a man shake you up... Me, I don't like that. He kicks, too. It ain't good. I get despise on a man if he kick me."66

In this wealth of character portrayal, which contributes so much to Midland literature, we obtain

63. Ibid., p. 126
64. Ibid., p. 139
65. Harper's CXIX (July, 1914), 275
66. Ibid., p. 274
the single impression through the racial setting no less than through that of the natural background. We are able to view the human character of the restricted locality in its relation to the broader consciousness of the nation.

The democratic experiment in America has made the study of village and rural life a worthy topic. The life experience of the common man has gained vital importance. His manner, speech, ideas, and peculiarities have attained greater value, and through them we have gained a deeper understanding of his life than the sentimental idylls of earlier years have ever been able to give.

The regionalists, many of them revolting from the irksome neighborhood inhibitions of the Middle Western farm or village, have dared to present the unlovely truth in the lives of those about them. It is significant that the greater number of these characters, as represented in the local color story, are creatures of disillusion, disappointment, and frustration. These scores of unfulfilled lives are separately and distinctly criticisms of our present society, definite bases for the scornful attitudes toward the so-called narrow and unbeautiful Middle West.
This investigation is not completed without regret for this obviously depressing aspect. The tragic isolation and emptiness of spirit, the betrayal into ugliness and spiritual inertia tests the attitude of the gayest optimist.

Despite the authors' sympathetic treatment of Midland characters and the frequent suggestion of the compensations which keep them dwelling in inert complacency, despite the stress of the finer sensibilities in the middle class, the average sentiment of the stories presents the typical Middle Western character as an unsatisfied spirit, blundering on, if at all, to some vague goal. He may be stunned into complacency; he may have evolved a philosophy that sustains him; but nevertheless he is a cheated mortal, lacking in culture and the finer attributes that should exist to make him greater and happier. Traditional and natural forces and the play of other personalities upon him keep him unawakened, unaware of his possibilities or at least, unable to develop them.

It is true, he is emerging from this state. Out of coarseness, repression, poverty, and pessimism he is reaching toward new powers, finer desires, and
greater peace. Through his craving for freedom and his restless energy he is evolving a finer future.

He may resent the criticisms leveled at him through books, magazines, and the daily press; he may feel himself unduly pitied, scorned, or caricatured, but the spur of the revelations force him to move, however silently and resentfully, toward tangible ideals that others have realized. Our thanks is due these many authors whose powerful studies in character point the way to a finer Midland spirit.
THE TREATMENT OF TRADITIONAL INFLUENCE

Chapter V
Closely associated with the character element in the local color story, and in fact merging with it to a marked degree, is the factor of traditional or historical principle of conduct, an influence that sinks deeply into the individual and community life. The revered standards of the past and the formative forces that are in the making form a social heritage that is perhaps the strongest governing influence in the development of man. Ramsay rates the traditional element as an influence more profound than the factor of character, and as one that commonly escapes the attention of the outsider. This, he states, requires in its interpretation "the inborn understanding and sympathy of a native".

Certain it is that the traditional finds quantitative interpretation and criticism in local color literature. In this study of Middle Western regionalism it plays a lesser part than it might in an older section, for the comparatively new country in its few years of development has formed but few established modes of conduct. Such manifestations of the shaping force of tradition as authors do perceive find their way into the literary production partly as entertaining bits of pictorial filler, but
chiefly as obvious arguments for progressive change. A surprisingly large number of the narratives suggest revolt against staled custom, against conformity to doubtful religious symbols, foreign usages, and out-dated conventional codes.

Scarcely an author fails to indicate a definite attitude toward progress, the process that wars constantly with the established order of life. In many instances the stories are motivated entirely by the powers of tradition. However, one finds sadly confused and uncertain opinions reflected in the literary productions. One is aware that progress is expected and wanted, and yet its changes are judged as unsatisfactory and insufficient.

Few writers have accepted the slow complacent attitude toward progress as graciously as has Miss Gale in her earlier sketches. The popular Friendship Village attitude is well expressed in the words of Calliope Marsh, spokeswoman of the mildly conservative village philosophy.

"Land, land, I like New as well as anybody. But I want it should be put in the old kind o' gentle, like an i-dee in your mind, an' not sudden, like a bullet in your brain." 1

In such a village, where one might produce

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1. *Friendship Village*, p. 8
an ominous hush by the mere act of "serving a salad unknown in Friendship" the struggle for individual expression is certain to be difficult.

"I use to want to talk about things that wasn't commonly mentioned here in Friendship...like little things I'd read about noted people an' what they'd said an' done--an' like that. But when you brought 'em up in the conversation, folks thought you was tryin' to show off. An' if you quoted a verse o' poetry in company, my land, there was a hush like you'd swore. So gradually I'd got to keepin' still about such things."

Despite the neglect of cultural things the little town adjusts itself slowly to the tangible material changes. Miss Gale observes with mild humor the admissions of improvement.

"Zittelhoff's rill up to date. Him an' Mink, the barber, keep runnin' each other to see who can get the most citified things. No soonner'd Zittelhoff get his pulleys than Mink, he put in shower-baths. An' when Mink bought a buzz fan, Zittelhoff sent for the lavendar cloth to spread over 'em before the coffin comes. It makes it rill nice for Friendship."

2. Ibid., p. 225
3. Ibid., pp. 298-9
4. Ibid., p. 268
But Friendship is a village of the early twentieth century. In the Neighborhood Stories of a later date the consciousness of greater changes, the transformations that must come with new inventions and social conditions, is admitted. The later collections, Bridal Pond and Yellow Gentians and Blue emphasize bitterly the problems that have arisen through social forces. The underlying friendliness of Friendship Village gives way to the vacuous self-interest of a prosperous Muscoda ["The Biography of Blade"] and the industrial cruelty of a factory town ["Wisconsin Note Book"].

Sherwood Anderson in Winesburg, Ohio rails against the smugness of the tradition-bound community, and at the same time belittles the new era that has transformed it. He illustrates the vast changes that have arisen with the roar and rattle of industrialism, the voices of millions from over seas, the growth of cities, and the spread of transportation lines.

Much of the old brutal ignorance that had in it also a kind of beautiful innocence is gone forever. The farmer by the stove is brother to the men of the cities, and if you listen you will find him talking as glibly and as senselessly as the best city man of us all.5

5. Winesburg, Ohio, p. 66
In "The Return" Anderson presents a disillusioning revelation of the changes observed in late years. The prosperous gentleman returns after eighteen years to his home town, hopeful in the light of reminiscence of finding retrospective joy in the old scenes.

One saw pictures of that sort of thing in the movies—a man coming back to his native village after twenty years; a new beauty taking the place of the beauty of youth—something like that.6

Disgusted after an evening of dancing and drinking with comparative strangers, he leaves the town, brooding restlessly upon the disillusioning forces that have saddened and hardened his former friends.

The spirit of unrest generated by crumbling tradition finds expression in Ruth Suckow's "Four Generations", a splendid treatment of the differences that arise as members of a family grow away from each other.

Four successive stages in the social evolution of a German family are symbolized in the figures posed for the "four generations" photograph. Material and cultural changes have brought to the younger generations a measure of prosperity and sophistication and as well an unrest and dissatisfaction. One sees the great-grandfather, a peasant farmer, alienated from his son,

6. Century, CX [new series: LXXXVII] (May, 1925), 5
the son, disappointed because his daughter's culture has robbed him of her companionship, and the daughter, irritated by the minor vulgarities of her country relatives, educating her own child to a still further alienation from the rural folk who hold to simpler ways of life. The story presents clearly a contrast of conditions that might be labeled Complacency versus Discontent. It presents the stolid indifference and self-satisfaction that halts progress, in clear contrast to the dissatisfaction that a degree of progress has brought. One is impressed with the inevitable fact that social evolution is but a constant struggle against forces of the past, a struggle that is never completely satisfying in its partial victories.

Enough has been said of the view of social transformation and its half-portion quota of resultant happiness. Change is an urgent and inevitable fact, but its hindrances are legion. These obstacles are the plot crises about which our literary interpreters are concerned.

The extreme complacency pictured by Miss Suckow in "Four Generations" is the resistant influence with which the majority of our American writers busy themselves today. Scorned in novel, poetry,
essay and short story alike, self-satisfaction has come to be regarded as the chief stumbling block in the way of advancement. In "Four Generations" the limited objectives of life are presented. A narrow interest in corn crops, live stock, heavy rich meals, and neighborhood gossip is reflected. The rural characters exhibit scant interest in fastidious dress or manner and little apparent desire for the cultural benefits that money can procure. Only those with a courageous spirit of revolt make escape from the Iowa farmlands.

"Query" by Henry W. Dudley shows a man's brief and transient vision of idealism lost in the realism of a commonplace social attitude. Stirring vaguely to a dim notion of architectural beauty inspired by a library book, the man seeks in vain to share his vision with his fellows, to find aid in his search for the "something" that they are overlooking. His inarticulate expression finds no answering voice among his Kiwanis brethren who seem suddenly satisfied with quantities of food, traveling men's stories, and new advertising policies for Winwood City. Against the background of ugly angular houses and windbreaks of jagged trees, the vision of beauty
fades for lack of understanding. Gothic grandeur can have no place against the flat "screen of neatness, order, and prosperity" that is the present day Nebraska countryside.

A similar ironic spectacle is introduced in Ferner Nuhn's "Millenium", the account of the enthusiastic highschool teacher of Maple City, Iowa, who tries with ingenuous eagerness to bring the country people new ideas of advancement. He finds his declamatory high seriousness futile as an awakening force among the unresponsive farmers. The ideals of internationalism, Christian pacifism, and the Golden Rule in business stir his hearers far less than the prospect of the "box social" auction. He hopefully decides to transfer his "new slants on things" to his classes.

"If every teacher would do his duty, we'd have a different nation in a generation"?

His premise, a favorite Middle Western shibboleth, suggests the popular optimism regarding the younger generation.

The stolidity and monotony of traditional usage and conformity to custom are suggested in Francis Buzzell's "Lonely Places". Old Abbie, the solitary

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7. American Mercury, XIV (June, 1928), 178
survivor of her family, is a sad example of a personality bound by the forces of the past. Every evening she lights her lamp and sits by it. Every Saturday, as her parents have done, she goes to the store, always on the east side of the street, always with hired man Chris following. Everything in her life—fire-making, dusting, sweeping, baking—horribly the same, the old woman grows almost demented with the changeless inertia of her existence.

A like impression is given by Zona Gale's "White Bread", a narrative of the Bridal Pond collection.

There the hush was more prominent than the furnishings. All had been as it was for a very long time. Old reasons for arrangement had disappeared, but the arrangements stayed. The clock was wrong, the crayon portraits were almost certainly of those no longer living. There was an odor, not of padded carpeting, not of damp wall-paper paste, not of chimney soot, but unallied to rooms where folk go and come.8

The unimaginative routine of small town life is ordinarily not conducive to the formation of new and brilliant ideals, unless the inspiration of escape arises within the individual. Even if such urge makes

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8. Bridal Pond, pp. 133-4
itself known, the influences of material necessity are likely to nullify its force. This our regionalists would have us believe.

Sherwood Anderson in "The Triumph of the Egg" sets forth the meagre activities of the working man of an earlier day. Farm work of the week is followed by no livelier diversion than the Saturday trip to town, beer drinking and visiting, and the trip homeward.

The commonplace activities of the average middle class existence are shown in Rupert Hughes' "Don't You Care", wherein the interests of the plodding Eddie Pouch are set forth. No smoking, lodge affiliation, theatre going, or social affairs find place in his life. He reads the daily paper, the Sunday School journal, and the Bible. An occasional church "sociable" serves as society life, a revival meeting as drama. Ferner Muhn in "The Old Ladies' Man" presents a like picture of quiet, uneventful home life.

The narrow limits of a life typical of millions in the United States today serves as the literary fiber of Zona Gale's "The Biography of Blade".
Blade's life centers about his dusty office, his wife, "their four children, contentious, smelling of toilet soap. . . the steak, the appl pie, the general argument about the pronunciation of slough."9

They were business men and their wives, the accustomed, the dutiful, the numb. There was a rote of jest, of retort, of innuendo. There were the thrilling potentialities and the deathly routine of being.10

The interest in the habitual forms of pastime among the rural and village people betrays a serious lack of cultural opportunity. Until comparatively late years isolation, poverty, and lack of education have limited the range of attractions largely to Sunday School and church affairs, carnivals, county fairs, and motion picture shows.

The attraction at the Fairfield township schoolhouse was a box social. A box social at the schoolhouse brought farmers and their families from miles around. Even the movies in Maple City, to which the young people often went by auto, could not compete with it in attraction.11

The second morning of the annual fair meant a prodigious scramble of preparation among the young Paryzekas. This was the heyday of their entire year—a day dedicated to the spirit of carnival, and memorable throughout

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9. O'Brien's Best Short Stories of 1924, p. 95  
10. Ibid., p. 96  
11. Nuhn, Ferner, "Millenium", American Mercury, XIV (June, 1928), 179
the remaining three hundred sixty-four for ice cream cones, pink lemonade and sizzling onion and hamburger sandwiches—a day discordantly glorious with the medley of bands and penny squawkers and all the noises of a rustic crowd at play.12

"The Dime", Zona Gale's story, observes the interest of the country people in the attractions of the county fair: the prize cattle, blue-ribbon horses, trotting races, the balls of golden butter, the creamy cakes, the garden flowers, the nine-foot sunflowers, and the merry-go-round.

Walter J. Hilenburg in "At the End of the Road" comments upon the country town carnival with its crowds jostling about hamburger stands and merry-go-rounds, exhibiting despite their animation an undercurrent of weariness, their senses too dulled by farm drudgery to appreciate a change. Glenway Wescott and Sherwood Anderson also have included picturesque sketches of the carnival scene.

The charivari, time-honored custom of the Plains country, is described by Zona Gale.

This custom of the countryside offered to the newly married was the highest form of romance, next to love. So they prepared the bones, combs, tin pans, the cow bell and the horse fiddle.

12. Russell, Helen, "Clean Dirt", Midland, XII (July-August, 1928), 163
And one midnight, gathered about Obald's old house, they broke into such wild turbulence and clangor that for miles about the farmers heard the scraping, the groaning, and the shrieks.13

Miss Suckow's "Golden Wedding" concerns itself with a most engaging account of another traditional custom, the "surprise party" anniversary celebration with its attendant publicity in the local newspaper.

A further suggestion of provincial tastes in pastime is found in Miss Gale's "The Cobweb" from the Bridal Pond collection.

Thursdays, at seven o'clock, the new Timber Library opened for an hour. Unless there was a band concert, or a moving picture show, or a night that Timber called "real bad and sloppy out", Ermon's store was the center of village life. A corner of the store was the City Library. a section of shelves beyond the canned goods and above the salt-fish barrel.14

Everybody who took a book bought something: Kenilworth and ten cents worth of crackers; David Copperfield and a jug of vinegar; Vanity Fair and a pound of prunes.15

In the dozens of traditional usages and eccentricities which form the warp and woof of our past and present provincial life we see authentic manifes-

13. Yellow Gentians and Blue, p. 7
15. Ibid., p. 164
tations of regional manner and custom.

A deeper understanding of the prairie folk is revealed through these odds and ends of custom and belief: the family rites of caring for the graves in the cemetery ["A Rural Community"], the carrying of the old settler back to the prairie graveyard of his old neighborhood ["Home From Californy"], the attachment to old heirlooms and family treasures ["The Lost Phoebe", "The Spider"].

Anyhow, this chest is about all that's left. Ma set such store by it. I hate to sell it, but what can I do? I can't take it out West. They charge five dollars a hundred for freight. 16

"White Bread" represents the profound spiritual struggle of the village woman, Jane Mellish, who hesitates in sacrificing her dearest possession, a traditional white bread "receipt", to the church cook book. 17

"April 25th As Usual" pictures a typical village attic filled with the hoarded treasures of years: the funeral wheat wreath, pink cambric rose hats, crayon portraits of the grandparents.


17. Bridal Fong, pp. 107-49
Ordinarily, one feels a certain sense of fondness toward these traditional tendencies, these old things and manners, but when the attachment to the old inhibits the new, the result is dissatisfaction and strife. A stilted veneration for customary form frequently arouses war between the simple life and the progressive.

Rupert Hughes' "The Mouth of the Gift Horse" shows how a man's honest efforts to better his little town are met with slight and rebuff, because the customary habits hold stolidly against the new. The electric line fails because "the people that had gas hated to change". The new "opery house" offends the church people. Golf is too novel and strenuous.

A like intolerance for the unfamiliar is manifested in Melvin Van Den Bark's "Two Women and Hog Back Ridge". The ignorant member of the school board accuses the teacher of immorality because she attends dances and walks alone on the ridges at night. Moreover, her poetic reference to the dune-land as "a child unborn" is regarded by the sand-hiller as immoral and unbecoming a "school ma'm".

The intolerant domination of parent or relative forms a problem upon which many a sketch of
tradition is based. The great number of narratives illustrative of this theme suggest clearly that the factor of narrow, repressive paternalism is one of the chief obstacles to progress in our present age.

Rupert Hughes' "The Stick-in-the-Muds" forces upon us the tremendous insignificance of a father's strict rule. The young genius, hopeful of a career in authorship, is forbidden the school, the theatre, the reading he craves and is forced into a dreary round of bookkeeping that ties him permanently to the insignificant village.

Fanatic narrowness is exhibited in "Closed Roads", wherein young Danny Bartels is denied an opportunity to pursue a musical career because of his father's religious aversion to music.

Themes almost identical with these are treated in Willa Cather's "The Sculptor's Funeral" and "The Joy of Nelly Deane", Glenway Wescott's "Fire and Water," Sherwood Anderson's "Elizabeth Willard", Clarence Sundermeyer's "World Gate", Helen Russell's "Clean Dirt", Irma Friedrich's "Emancipation" and Edith Squier Draper's "Fourteen" and "The Fruit at Singapore".

A social tradition even more vigorously assailed in modern fiction is that of religious orthodoxy.
the chief bone of contention in the Middle Western and Southern regions of the country. In the Central States, characterized by H.L. Mencken as "the Bible Belt" of America, the old religious beliefs and observances form the nucleus of an uncommonly large number of literary works. Attitudes vary, but in greater part, the forces of opinion are directed against the orthodox observances that cramp the modern personality.

Our Friendship Villages and their kind still cling to their substantial orthodoxies, the inherited religion fitting well into their quiet, undisturbed way of living. The people cheerfully act "as the Lord would of", hold their communion service to be a notable event, and work sociably together in charitable exertion at bazaars, church sociables, and missionary meetings. Their attitude toward the unorthodox is that of mildly charitably and uncomprehending tolerance.

"She's got hold o' some kind of a Persian book, in a decorated cover, from the City; an' now she says your soul is like when you look in a lookin' glass—that there ain't really nothin' there... poor Mis' Holcomb... I guess she ain't rill balanced. But we ought to go to see her. We always consult Mis' Holcomb about everything."18

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18. Friendship Village, p. 38
The little town depicted by Rupert Hughes takes its religion seriously, every proper family sending the children to Sunday School and granting a righteous respect to all those who "mean well" and go to church and prayer meeting regularly. Minor deviations such as refusal to postpone the charity festival on account of a funeral or such as an elder's dancing activities are sanctioned after some slight flurry among the faithful.

Sympathetic acceptance of the narrow orthodox view is reflected in few local color stories. Invariably, ridicule and bitter criticism find active expression in these studies of the provincial conscience.

Eleanor Campbell in "Restitution" subtly ridicules a potential Elmor Gantry possessed by an unnatural religious fervor. What in "the palmy days of Methodism" might have passed for a sincere religious tract is here a complete cartoon. Young Yawkett, the over-wrought divinity student who frowns righteous-ly at cigars, bobbed hair, and short skirts, is caricatured at his religious exhortations designed to further a campaign for his college.

Imagine a little town without movies or Sunday newspapers, or a
dance-hall, or road-house, or any of those dens of iniquity! Stores that refused to handle cigarettes or rouge! No sleeveless dresses, or indecent skirts, or bobbed hair! A library without a single copy of Darwin, or Tom Paine, or any of that atheistic poison! A town of faith and prayer and rejoicing. He felt inspired. He held out his hands as the Lord might do in pointing out New Nazareth to the angels, and his voice broke as he cried "New Nazareth... the sweetest, cleanest, purest little town on God's foot-stool!"  

The earlier religious fanaticism from which our present is evolved is aptly pictured by Sherwood Anderson in "Godliness", a study of Jesse Bently, typical religionist of a past century, who is led by his belief to invite strange signs from God. 

Men labored too hard and were too tired to read. In them was no desire for words printed upon paper. As they worked in the fields, vague, half-formed thoughts took possession of them. They believed in God and in God's power to control their lives... The churches were the center of social and intellectual life.

Jesse thought that as the true servant of God the entire stretch of country through which he had walked should have come into his possession. He thought of his dead brothers and blamed them that they had not worked harder and achieved more.

19. Midland, XVI (Nov.-Dec., 1930), 311
20. Winesburg, Ohio, p. 66
21. Ibid., p. 68
Driven by his Biblical beliefs, the old man walks in his fields praying for signs from God and asking for a son to help him wrest the land from "the Philistines".

The continuation of the old religious fervor in our modern age is shown vividly by Fleta Campbell Springer's "Ceremony in White", a story of social ostracism, including an account of a river baptism in an Oklahoma town. The scene that prompts derisive comments from the younger people and solemnly appreciative murmurs from their elders shows us the strength of traditional feeling in the Midland today.

In the foreground the evangelist was descending the river bank. Half way down he turned and reached up his hand. A white-robed figure detached itself from the others, came forward and, clasping the out-stretched hand, was led down the bank to the water's edge. As they entered the water, the singing burst suddenly forth again.22

The story reveals clearly the freer attitude of the present generation, an understanding not overshadowed by strict fundamentalist scruples.

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22. Harpers, CLXII (September, 1931), 461
Don Marquis in "The Meeting" and Glenway Wescott in "The Dove Came Down" present other local color sketches of the village evangelistic services. These narratives, picturing the sensational programs of religious coercion, imply criticism of the avowed sincerity and usefulness of such exhortation. The writers picture the melodramatic revival sermons with their shouted invectives against smoking, dancing, motion pictures, and immodest dress. The frenzied pleading, praying, and weeping, and the emotions of the spectacular evangelist, the village free-thinker, and the "unsaved" characters are exhibited with admirable accuracy.

The experienced backslider becomes in time a sort of connoisseur of revival meetings; he dreads them, while he hungers for them; he fights against "salvation", knowing all the time he will yield to it. . . the nervous excitement, the psychic stimulation of being hauled out of that state of sin periodically.23

. . . He noticed the dejection or weakness, or mere poverty of temperament of the people around him. They were in large part mothers with children, old men and women, more often than not alone, spinsters in twos and threes;

23. Harper's, CLIX (Nov., 1929), 597
he looked in vain for a man of his age.24

The stifling effect of the orthodox religion is further attacked by Edith Squier Draper in her stories of Ohio, Minnesota, and Kansas towns. "Fourteen" illustrates the sorry effect of coercion and fanaticism upon the life of a normal, imaginative child. The shouting, the melodramatic prayers, the dreary wailing of hymns, and the pleadings of old women exhorters present an all too authentic picture of revered religious forms that are passing into the limbo of the forgotten.

"The Fruit at Singapore" is a study of the same child suffering under the cruel domination of a fanatically religious father, who terrorizes the girl and takes from her the "sinful" romantic novels she loves. One sees the child's finer nature, her ecstatic response to beauty, and her imaginative tastes being ground under the heel of over-zealous fundamentalism.

The small town intolerance of contrary religious belief is neatly illustrated:

... Over there across the street
HE ... He was a Free Thinker ... She was more afraid of a Free Thinker

24. Harper's, CLVI (April, 1928), p. 633
than of Hell. She did not know why. She just was.25

Willa Cather's "The Joy of Nelly Deane" criticizes the smug narrowness of Riverbend Village which crushes the fine impulsiveness and ambition of the girl. Her life is governed by three fatuous old ladies who seek constantly for influences to subdue her happy nature. They are satisfied when she is baptized in the Baptist church and married to a stern, common-sensible man. Her subsequent death, the result of cruel material circumstances, is blandly explained from the village point of view as fore-ordained and inevitable.

We mustn't look at it that way, dear... We must just feel that her Lord wanted her then, and took her to himself.26

"Preacher's Wife", by Morritt Wimberly, shows the inner aspect of the old-fashioned strict religious belief. Faithful adherence to a barren dogma keeps the preacher's family in mental and financial poverty. The Reverend Bowman, whose stern faith leads him to "put his foot down on dancing" and preach

25. Midland, XIV (Nov.-Dec., 1923), 277
26. Century, LXXXII (Oct. 1911), 865
"pure unadulterated gospel", finds himself shifted from parish to parish because he cannot conform to modern views. The docile wife judges all according to a literal belief in the Bible and fails to see how her religion is keeping her from a useful, happy life.

The tyranny of religious tradition is hardly exceeded by any other social force unless that of inherited foreign custom. The ways of an alien people in a new world last long and resist the blending forces of amalgamation. Our local colorists take definite notice of this prevailing influence upon community progress.

An excellent treatment of the conflict between the old and the new in the American "Melting Pot" process is exhibited in Irma Friedrich's "Emancipation", a narrative dealing with a young girl's rebellion against traditional German wedding customs. Violently angry at the arbitrary parental proceedings by which she has been unwillingly betrothed, the girl gets her revenge by halting the wedding ceremony until the bridegroom makes a formal proposal.

The story is replete with the genuine homely touches that suggest the German-American community.
The girl resents the Low German, the broken dialect, and all the old country observances that shackle her freedom. The heavy humor of the uncles, the expectation that good wives will be hard workers, and the jovial toasting of the guests are repulsive to her. Her hatred for these, for strong parental authority, and finally for the "obey" in the marriage service, lead her to revolt.

The stolid fact of alien custom serves as the keynote in "The Procession" also. Miss Gale depicts the rebellion of young Marin against the quaint old-world betrothal ceremony demanded by his parents. His refusal to participate in such a parade and service leads him to desert his parents and his fiancée.

Ferner Nuhn's "The Old Ladies' Man" shows in the character of old Lydia Betz the effect of the fiery commandments of her forbears: work and save. In her old age, still goaded by these precepts, she produces the spectacle of "a dirty peasant grubbing out her life in a plate glass mansion".27

Ruth Suckow's "Spinster and Cat" illustrates

27. American Mercury, XI (May, 1927), 58-9
the conservative complacency of the old German woman who scoffs at adventure and discovery.

"... Ach! such things everywhere!
... Why don't he tend to his own business? I stay to home."28

In "Midwestern Primitive" one observes Mrs. Hobenschuh, the old-fashioned German mother whose self-satisfied pride in her flowers, heirlooms, and daily duties makes her content with the old ways and scenes. In contrast, the modern daughter, impatient with her mother's odd tastes, grows restive in the little "stick-in-the-mud berg" and seeks unsuccessfully to imitate the ways of the city.

Miss Suckow reproduces the quaint, out-of-the-way charm of a provincial region that will exist but a few years longer in our present industrial age.

The difficulty of revolt from the quiet monotonous customs of the Americanized German neighborhood is the substance of "Strong as a Man". Mollie Schumacher, a vigorous, imaginative woman who tries to escape the farm routine for a different career, finds herself balked by the traditional ideals of her family and neighbors.

28. Harper's, CLVII (June, 1928), 66
If Mollie had any real sense about things she'd marry some farmer around here—a widower, somebody who needed a good strong wife and would be glad to have her; her friends would help her look around for somebody—or else she'd make up her mind to settle down where she was...and attend to things at home.29

Walter J. Muilenburg's "The Ways of the Fathers" shows the quiet traditional force of past custom which influences the son of Scandinavian parents to subside into his frontier environment. Restless for a view of the distant world, he nevertheless ignores his vague wanderlust to settle into the habitual ways of his native community.

The quiet non-progressive life of a transplanted peasantry is sympathetically portrayed in Miss Suckow's "A Rural Community".

It was a country community made up almost wholly of retired farmers, and they either of English birth or English descent. It had always had something quaint and rustic about it. Besides, all hill and timber countries were behind the times; and Walnut was just at the edge of that patch of rocky wooded country in the northeastern corner of Iowa.30

Throughout the story the mention of English influence

29. Harper's, CLVIII (April, 1929), 545
30. Stories from the Midland, p. 246
is reiterated: the old familiar ways of speech, the slow deliberation, "the flavor of rural England" still intact.

She looked horrified. He remembered now that no male Hockaday had ever invaded the kitchen except to fill the wood-box and empty the slops. That was the English of it.31

Their calm eyes, slow speech, their clumsy shoes and rosy cheeks—they were astonishingly like the English yokels whom he had seen about the doors of thatched-roofed cottages.32

The materialistic obsession as a social force finds plentiful interpretation and criticism in Middle Western fiction today. The pioneer urge for the acquisition of land, in its later manifestations, seems frequently a less laudable ambition, and in fact an evil.

William Allen White, who undertakes in his narratives of small town life to consider the various forces of social influence, casts numerous invectives at the false ideals and misuses of power which characterize our acquisitive age. In God's Puppets he shows the bases for the false qualities and insufficiencies of the prairie town. He condemns its

31. Ibid., p. 254
32. Ibid., p. 269
materialistic greed and its political slanders, the misguided gropings of a fumbling generation.

...for inheritance and environment had planted in Charley Herrington's heart a sad and miserable bed of poisons. The age had planted its shams; its false valuations; its meaningless architecture, its fortunes founded on fraud; its lies and cheats in religion, and its mawkish sentiment in art.

The home had told Charley Herrington that money makes right; that money brings happiness; that money marks the distinction among men... So in choosing his destiny, Charley Herrington had chosen with blind eyes.33

The criticism is reiterated in "The One a Pharisee". The pseudo-respectable citizen cheats at every turn to accumulate money and reputation. The theme of greed serves as the keynote of "By the Rod of His Wrath", in which the wealthy Markleys, scorned by the rest of the town, endeavor to buy back their social status with civic ostentation and obvious generosities.

The material needs of men as the chief motive powers of their existence gain attention in numerous stories of farm life. For example, "Love in Smoky Hill" shows the constant drive of farm work which keeps the family in a state of comparative

33. God's Puppets, p. 209
slavery, all laboring from dawn till dusk to get
two hundred acres of grain cut and stacked while the
fine weather lasts. Education and social life are
scorned in view of a craze to grow rich. The deaden-
ing routine of work becomes the sole expression of
the family.

An additional diatribe against the mercen-
ary narrowness of many country people is included in
"The Sculptor's Funeral". The neighbors, unable to
appreciate the greatness of the artist, sneer openly
at the money wasted on his education. This, to their
way of thinking, had better have been spent on farms.

Winifred Sanford in "Windfall" shows the
effect of sudden unexpected wealth upon a poor family
educated only to the drudgery of farm life. The
parents' inability to enjoy ease and comfort after a
life of toil, and the lack of moral principle among
the newly-rich children are suggested in a bleakly
realistic sketch truly descriptive of the Middle West-
ern oil fields.

The distortion of normal lives by the exi-
gencies of financial and social demand is presented
in Agnes Mary Brownell's "Doc Green's Practice".
The doctor's social pride and his desire to "get on" in life before he marries lead him to postpone and eventually forego his marriage to the girl whose life is based upon his promise. Overfond of prosperity and style, the doctor waits until he tires of his faithful fiancee and then in a mis-mated union with a younger girl he tries in vain to find happiness in his accumulated wealth.

The power of social pride is represented further in William Allen White's "The Passing of Priscilla Winthrop", a keenly satirical account of a social leader's fight to retain her superiority in the small town circle. The ambitious women play a ridiculous game, striving to outdo one another with rare foods, fine silverware, and noted guests. "By the Rod of His Wrath" presents the ludicrous spectacle of scorned social climbers buying attention through the giving of donations, the sponsorship of civic organizations, and the buying of church bells and pipe-organs.

The inherent sense of social classification invariably creates a limited caste consciousness in any community. Miss Suckow in "Uprooted" shows the artificial barriers that possession of money has set
up between members of a family. The social and financial status of "the relationship" is pictured in all its inequality. Sam, the wealthy brother, takes precedence over Art and Hat, the poverty-stricken members of the group.

Sam refused to give up his air of cheerful briskness. He was convicted, but his riches made him bold. When it came right down to it, he had the say-so and they all knew it. 34

The social differences between town and country people are further delineated in "The Little Girl From Town". The stylish, patronizing child of wealth appears in marked contrast to the humble farm children whose common culture makes them seem strange to her.

A similar expression of social distinction appears in Miss Lynn's A Stepdaughter of the Prairie.

The little broken-spoken Germans on the east of us, and the sandy little Irish on the west, were as impossible as the little aborigines in the hollow, who came from the bluffs and had underwear made out of discarded flour-sacks. 35

Numerous other excerpts from the regional narratives illustrate the social differences of Middle

34. Stories from the Midland, p. 278
35. Lynn, Margaret, A Stepdaughter of the Prairie, p. 58
Western society, past and present.

The Presbyterian Church held itself somewhat aloof from the other churches of Winesburg. It was larger and more imposing, and its minister was better paid. He even had a carriage of his own and on summer evenings sometimes drove about town with his wife.\(^3^6\)

In Winesburg servants were hard to get. The woman who wanted help in her house work employed a "hired girl" who insisted on sitting at the table with the family.\(^3^7\)

And now for the first time they were sure of seeing the interior of the big house. No one would turn them away; this they knew from many years of funeral-going. They would sit in the big house the windows of which looked down so grandly upon their little cottage.\(^3^8\)

According to the traditional manner social distinction is acknowledged in Friendship Village. The ladies are properly designated according to the vocations of their husbands. One finds reference to Mis' Postmaster Sykes, Mis' Photographer Sturgis, and Mis' Mayor Uppers. The woman who has had two husbands does honor to both by acclaiming herself Mrs. Ricker and Kitton.

In the provincial town every minor achievement

\(^3^6\). *Winesburg, Ohio*, p. 172
\(^3^7\). *Ibid.*, p. 256
\(^3^8\). *Century*, LXXXIX (Nov., 1914), 66
adds to social prestige.

    She's a very superior woman,—she
graduated in Oilis in the city,—an'"  
she's fitted for any society, say
where who will.39

    This great creature—president of
the Katy Town School Board, bass
singer in the First Church choir—
was on his way to his night's work
as foreman in the Katy Town Epitome
composing room.40

    Among the formative traditions of our pres-
ent industrial age, one finds numerous economic fac-
tors serving to inhibit existence. While poverty, law,
and other such superimposed conditions are perhaps not
commonly classified as tradition, mention is made of
them here as such, because they, as inevitable inheri-
tances, exert unavoidable influence as strongly as do
the tastes, convictions, and customs that form the
normal human heritage.

    Thomas Boyd in "Good Roads" and "A Bow to
Progress" treats a modern problem common to the rural
districts. The old farmer whose land lies along the
beaten path of traffic finds the state road tax a
fatal blow to his dwindling prosperity. The old people
are obliged to forego their former comfort and quietude
and establish a tourist inn as a means of meeting their

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39. Friendship Village, p. 225
40. Bridal Pond, p. 119
added expenses. The long concrete highway, a sign of
the nation's progress, brings to the home owners along
its route the noisy distractions of traffic and trouble-
some picnickers.

Joseph Piercey's "A Clear Title" shows the
discouraging defeat of an Oklahoma settler, cheated
of his valid land claim through a law technicality.
Jay Sigmund's short sketch, "The Placard" reveals the
tragedy of a village bank failure which spells ruin
for the farmer and the many denizens of the little
town. Zona Gale's "Wisconsin Note Book" shows the
effect of unfair business competition upon the hope-
ful aspirations of an honest and ambitious family.
Rippleton, the manufacturer, broken by the trap of
small town fraud, spends the rest of his life in mi-
serable poverty.

The depressing presence of poverty as a tradi-
tional heritage casts an ominous atmosphere over much
of the Middle Western scene. This influence, keenly
felt by the great rank and file of prairie people, gains
ample attention from the present day authors.

"A Start in Life" analyzes the cruel situ-
tion of necessity which forces upon a timid, unhealthy
child the harsh responsibility of "starting in to earn"
at an early age. The miserable conditions in the fatherless home make imperative the meagre assistance of the unhappy little girl. She finds herself lonely and misunderstood among the unsympathetic Kruses whose comparative prosperity makes them unappreciative of her neglected state.

Her pinched little face had a hungry look as she stared at the potatoes and fried ham and pie. But they did not watch her and urge her to have more.

She didn't want to stay here, where she didn't belong. But Mama had told her that she must begin helping this summer.

The insurmountable difficulties which hold a family in want and misery serve as the chief substance of "Renters", another powerful story by Miss Suckow. The narrative depicts the poverty of the unlucky Iowa renters and the terrible disintegration of mind and body under the strain of hard work and human injustice.

Fred had not had much of a start. That was one reason why it had taken him so long to get ahead. His father had left him nothing. The lucky ones were the fellows whose fathers had left them a good fat piece of land. No, there wasn't much in

41. Suckow, Ruth, "A Start in Life", American Mercury, III (September, 1924), 20
42. Ibid., p. 23
Neglected illnesses, crop failures, unpaid bills, and the criticism and arrogance of the land owners keep the renters in a state of hopeless pessimism.

Other dire effects of poverty are shown in George Carver's "The Singer".

Her mother was poor, so poor that on Hallow E'en when the village boys threw cabbages at doors to frighten people, instead of being frightened she lay in wait for them and gave chase so that they would return and throw more. She often got by this means enough to provide Ellen and herself with cabbage-soup for weeks.

Conditions of poverty and social degeneration are exposed in "Clean Dirt" and "As It Began To Dawn". In the first Miss Russell shows the sordid environment in which a Dakota farm family is obliged to exist. A distinctly sociological problem equal to that of the city slums is presented in the account of the discouraging situation. The overly large family, dirty, neglected, and ill-bred, disgusts the eldest girl, whose youthful ideals can scarcely endure in the situation.

43. Century, CVI [new series: LXXXIV] (August, 1923), 600
44. Midland, VIII (March, 1922), 100
Neva Paryzek couldn't remember her mother without a baby either on hand or imminent. The regularity with which infants appeared in the Paryzek family was proverbial about the countryside.

Somewhere in her dim past, when there had been only herself and Thomas and Gertrude, Neva had enjoyed the luxuries of a nightie and of sleeping only two in a bed.45

The ignorant mother, who has "done her duty" in having her ten children, admits in her advice to her daughter the low level to which family pride has fallen.

"Neva, wa n't that Emil Hanson loatin' by the gate? If he asts yuh onto the ocean wave 'r offers yuh a hot dog san'wich, leave him treat yuh. We got other mouths to feed."46

Strikingly similar is Mrs. Draper's narrative, "As It Began To Dawn", which illustrates an equally depressing situation. The ugly and barren appearance of the isolated farm home, the presence of the eight unkempt children depending upon the eldest, a pitiful, overworked girl of thirteen, serve as pictures that recall to the old doctor a vision of the Innocent Crucified.

45. Midland, XII (July-August, 1928), 162.
46. Ibid., p. 170.
From these representative gloomy pictures it is difficult to form any other than a pessimistic conclusion regarding our traditional heritage.

To the regional story of communal consciousness tradition contributes its sense of setting with as effective singleness of impression as either the character or environmental phases. These impressions of the power of social custom maintain a mournful average. The farms and villages of the American interior seem bound in snares of hopelessness and despair. Human intercourse in the Great Valley appears to be hedged about with an utter futility of circumstance. Intolerance and stupidity seem to govern the broad stretches of what was once called "the promised land".

However, one sees against the forces of excessive paternalism and orthodoxy, against social and economic oppression, against all the inhibitions of group domination, the power of discontent working toward greater good.

Discontent is, after all, a form of aspiration which eventually creates change in the social structure. It is encouraging to note that in the regional sketch the younger and wiser characters are
in conscious revolt against both petty and ponderous repressions. If such force be maintained and strengthened through literary influence the old taboos will doubtless disappear in the span of two generations of time.

We shall never reach complete content. The inevitable differences in the outlook of each succeeding generation will preclude that state of Utopia, but the Midland can, if it will, reach such a state of freedom from traditional shackles that it may cease to be a place from which so many seek escape, but rather a place where individuality may have an opportunity to thrive.

Every environment is, in a certain sense, a frontier which natural progress leads one to outgrow. Perhaps it is best that we outgrow this static narrowness slowly and conservatively, but outgrow it we may if the proper criticism be continued and directed.
CONCLUSION

Chapter VI
VI

What a Human Comedy the spectacle is, waiting for the Balzac of our time.¹

There may come a time when a synthesis of national life may be effected. The "great American novel" may yet be written, a comprehensive work that will take account of all the profound forces of our unique civilization. Thus far, however, our fiction is bound largely to the narrower limits of locality; our narratives are at best special studies of individual characters and the several local environments. But the differences wrought throughout the vast American region by distance and isolation are being worn away by mechanical contrivances for transportation and communication. Regionalism will eventually be a quaint by-product of history, a field for retrospective research rather than for present observation.

Whoever accomplishes the true synthesis of the American civilization will need to take account of all the phases now treated singly, all the comedy and tragedy of the national scene. The great epic work will hardly be the perfect literary ideal of Mr. Wescott:

... a book about ideal people under ideal circumstances. No sort of undernourishment, no under-education, nothing partial or frustrated,

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¹ O'Brien, The Advance of the American Short Story, p. 266
no need of variety or luxury—in short, no lack of anything which, according to its children, Wisconsin denies. 2

It will be but a larger art of the general commonplace—all the regional elements blended into a masterpiece.

Not until we visualize the America of twenty or thirty years hence can we truly realize the wisdom of the makers who preserve the authentic provincialisms that must eventually be dispersed by progress. That the qualities, purposes, and most valuable content of these local studies may be recognized has been the aim of this investigation.

Our present interest is with the here and now, the local color narratives that record and commemorate, however briefly, those phases of our social life which are being lost gradually in the mighty surge of advancement. The task of study is simplified, however, by the realistic method of the authors. The modern writer of our scientific age does not look upon life through rose-colored spectacles; he sees the truth in the clearer light of realistic observation. His realistic sense spies out the simple neglected things, the passing incidents, the minor emotions, and records them with commendable lack of distortion or sentimentalizing.

2. Living Authors: A Book of Biographies, p. 431
By way of general conclusion I offer the following: The twentieth century local color narrative of the Middle Western region has attained a high degree of exactness in the realistic representation of life. Its characteristics--picturesque detail and portrayal of homely scene and character--give a true perspective which indicates a first-hand knowledge of the scene and an alertness to its problem. It is expressed in the simple idiom of the human materials with which it deals, and its lack of "glozing words" gives an impression of honesty and fidelity. It is inevitably of its locality, the description and artistic effect being truly in keeping with Middle Western life. The philosophical and emotional expressions credited to its characters are, with some few exceptions, suitable and just. There is little of the vulgar, the base, or the vindictive expressed in the author's attitudes, but rather an earnest sympathy. Above all, it gains strength through maintaining the newer spirit of criticism, the disposition to view facts of life more independently and more calmly. The authors have come to look at facts and to interpret these in the light of their sociological significance. They realize the humanitarian value of criticism. Their presentations of regional activity give a deeper insight into the character of the life about us. Through these we understand the spirit
bred by the scene, the people, and the ideas which fasten their hold upon the masses from age to age. Through these sketches from life we understand more profoundly our natural habitat and the complexities of its social structure.

A word of congratulation must be given the authors for the truly literary qualities of their folk stories. These sketches of communal life will surely claim a permanent place in national literary annals, for they represent characteristic American life with the utmost accuracy. Unafraid to use the commonplace stuff of their own lives, these writers have analyzed and reconstructed it into artistic bits that have the true ring of the known and the familiar.

There may be themes that fail to transcend the ugly materials of their inspiration. We may be repelled by some of their revelations, but it is better that we be repelled than deceived. This preponderance of desolate and mournful interpretation and the lack of attention to the more progressive aspects of midland existence may be easily explained. In the first place, one must face the fact that this pessimism is not confined to the Middle Western section alone, nor even to the United States at large; it is a general tendency characteristic
of many literary eras, ancient and modern. Like all writers, our local-colorists are prone to read into their observations their own personal dissatisfactions, to super-impose upon characters their own views rather than the subjects' own personal outlooks. A public demand for this sad literature serves to stimulate its production beyond normal proportions. Such is the state of our American literary world today. According to Frances Newman, the taste of the American reading public has for the past twenty-five years been dominantly for the mournful and ugly. Another reason for the stress upon the dolorous is largely a matter of dramatic stimulus. A difficulty, a fault, or an evil is more likely to arouse a vital interest than is a satisfactory state of things. Furthermore, the matter of difficulty may have significance. G. K. Chesterton has said (in "A Defense of Farce") that "the literature of joy is infinitely more difficult, more rare, and more triumphant than the black and white literature of pain".

Even though this note of melancholy prevails, the tendency has its obvious worth. Its value as criticism of the existing social order must not be underestimated. As the mournful realism of the Russian short story directed attention to the misery of the masses,
the direct pessimism of our own local color fiction advertises the existing weaknesses of our own social structure. The general literary attitude is particularly critical of the lack of beauty and spiritual elevation in Middle Western America, lacks which have within this century aroused the disturbing "revolt from the village". The cruel exactness of these authors is awakening readers to the actual nature of a country which is still in the testing, which demands, for its future success, more complete understanding and support than the casual loyalty of the past.

The local color narratives are not, however, without faults, the greatest being that of one-sided destructive criticism, which fails to take notice of many progressive tendencies. The writers are prone to overwork the "wind-swept spaces", "pathless plains", "intolerant Main Streets" and other terms that give an impression of wildness, monotony, and futility. Grown accustomed to pictures of Hamlin Garland's typical farmer or villages, the author (and the reader, as well) fails to understand that the rural figure of the present day is becoming a different character from that of the past and that farm and village life has attained a notable degree of prosperity. The various tendencies
toward betterment fail to receive their just due. Educational facilities, mechanical and scientific improvements, popular cultural movements, the breaking down of sectional differences, and the friendly and hospitable nature of the Midlander, are too frequently disregarded as literary material. Special mention is due some of our younger writers, notably Ruth Suckow, for having given us a vital, truthful, and complete picture of the present day regional scene.

Generally speaking, the local color story has in its numerous phases made the nature of our homeland real and vital and has presented a challenge to the lagging spirit of conquest that led originally to the settlement of this great expanse of territory. They have shown us what is about us and have left us, with the implied criticism, to the assumption and creation of what ought to be. Don Harrison in "The Mixing" has suggested the potential forces that may yet be released when their significance is finally realized.

In the multitude of stars, in the purity of the night, in the melting cry of a meadow lark, he felt a life that should be, but a life that was far away.  

3. Stories from the Midland, p. 96
APPENDIX

Comments Concerning the Literary Outlook of the Middle West
The Middle West, long recognized as of vital importance in the political and material life of the Nation, is rapidly coming to its own in the realm of letters.¹

Where the soil is well drained and climatic influences are congenial to agriculture, thriving communities spring up. Our great Middle West owes its wealth to the vast acres devoted to grain growing. The vicinity of large towns renders civilization and refining influences easy of access. In our own country, where a great foreign element is engaged in the cultivation of the soil, the type of the older generation differs from that of the younger. The gap between the old and the young widens. Problems of adjustment spring up, and many tense situations are created. The student of human nature, the writer, seizes upon these aspects for the creation of dramatic stories.²

Considered as a whole, the achievement of Middle Western writers dealing with Middle West material between 1910 and 1930 constitutes what is unquestionably

1. Clark, Don Elbert, "The Appeal of the Middle West to the Literary Historian", Midland, II (Feb., 1916), 33-8
2. Leiberman, Elias, The American Short Story, p. 7
the most considerable contribution to American literature which the century has to show thus far, and shares only with the great New England period a position of first prominence in our national letters as a whole. 3

... remarkable little periodical The Midland ... which for seven or eight years has served in its obscurity to crystallize all that is seeking a voice in the imaginative life of the Middle West ...

John T. Frederick has performed an admirable function in tilling the soil out of which art is most likely to spring. 4

The building of the Middle West as we know it today was not the work of any small or selected group of leaders. It was rather the outcome of a mass movement in which thousands of individuals took part—a great folk-migration to which history offers no parallel. 5

3. Frederick, John T., "Ruth Suckow and the Middle Western Literary Movement", English Journal, XX (Jan., 1931), 3-4


5. Anon., "A Saga of the Middle West", Review of Reviews, LXXIX (Feb., 1929), 84
As for the Middle West, Mark Twain left it and then recollected it in tranquility. Ed Howe stayed there and gave a picture of its small town life so harsh, striking, and apparently true that he started, through Sherwood Anderson, a new school of American literature. That school now interprets American life to Europe, and Europe has given its present outstanding figure the Nobel prize.6

The "Middle West", the prairie country, has been the center of active social philanthropies and political progressivism. It has formed the solid element in our diffuse national life and heterogeneous populations. . . It has been the middle in every sense of the word and in every movement. Like every mean, it has held things together and given unity and stability of movement.7

The Middle West  A place which has no fixed boundaries, no particular history; always exhausted by its rich output of food, men, and manufactured articles; loyal to none of its many creeds, prohibitions, fads, hypocracies; now letting itself be governed, now ungovernable. . . There is no Middle West. It is a certain climate, a

certain landscape; and beyond that, a state of mind
of people born where they do not want to live.

--Glenway Wescott

. . . Men are impelled to love the countryside
side in which they live. Therefore it has always
seemed to me a great pathos that the love of millions
of people must be expended on the monotony, the
swamps, the abortive hills, the flatness and the sameness
of the Middle West. There will yet be a philoso-
pher to explain the Middle West by its unimaginative
landscape. That it is a soul-sick region is attested
by its literature. Miss Cather, Mr. Sinclair Lewis,
Mr. Floyd Dell, Mr. and Mrs. Haldeman-Julius, Miss
Suckow, Mr. Frederick, Mr. Muilenburg, and lesser novelists are significantly unanimous in reporting its frustration, dullness and spiritual insolvency. The horizon of the Middle West is a flat ring, and nowhere
that you go in it, save in upper Wisconsin, will you
find relief. It is monotonous as a picket fence, and
its beauty is only that of flat surfaces, weak colors,
and the tamed and cautious order of its farms. As a
result, nervous depression is the commonplace mood of
the Middle West.9

8. Living Authors: A Book of Biographies, p. 431
9. De Voto, Bernard, "Footnote on the West", Harpers,
   CLV (Nov., 1927), 715-6
This discontent in the midst of plenty, this aspiration, keeps the Middle West even now from being a "dead level." "Where there is no vision, the people perish;" but the Middle West is not without vision. . . and is not and never has been middle class, because it has never been content.

. . . The Middle West is at the first uncertain but joyous steps of its long way. It must make its landscape of country and town say unmistakably to every beholder that those who live here live in the earthly paradise. This is a task; but the Middle West has undertaken it, has begun the centuries of its work. 10

The Valley's thought and the Valley's literature will always be tinged by certain elements due to the country, but it will probably be increasingly conscious of the universality of human problems and emotions, increasingly conscientious about the matter of presentation.

We are rightfully the heirs not only of America's but of Europe's past; for us to cast aside its experience, to evolve a completely new type of literature or of life would be a thing as impracticable in attempt as impossible in achievement. 11

10. Anon., "Spirit of the Middle West", Midland, II (Jan., 1916), 3-4
11. Dondore, Dorothy Anne, The Prairie and the Making of Middle America: Four Centuries of Description, p. 431
Our fundamental want today in the United States, with closest, ampest reference to present conditions, and to the future, is of a class, and the clear idea of a class, of native authors, literatures, far different, far higher in grade than any yet known, sacerdotal, modern, fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief—breathing into it a new breath of life. . .

Walt Whitman, Democratic Vistas12

I do not believe that we people of midwestern America, immersed as we are in affairs, hurried and harried through life by the terrible engine—industrialism—have come to the time of song. To me it seems that song belongs with and has its birth in the memory of older things than we know. . .

In middle America men are awakening. Like awkward and untrained boys we begin to turn toward maturity, and with our awakening we hunger for song. But in our towns and fields there are few memory-haunted places. . . We do not sing but mutter in the darkness. . . We but mutter and feel our way toward the promise of song. . .

Sherwood Anderson13

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12. Quoted in: Bowman, James Cloyd, Contemporary American Criticism, p. 29

The most hopeful aspect of American literature today is its widespread pessimism. This pessimism comes out of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Kansas, and California; from the sons and daughters of pioneer farmers, country doctors, small town lawyers, and country editors; from the second generation of immigrant stock, German, Swedish, Scotch, Irish; from the hungry, nomadic semi-civilization of the West.

Stuart P. Sherman

The insistence against both Hebraism and Hellenism is an antidote against the moralism and sentimentality of the recent past; and the somberly realistic approach to the life of today is a lusty challenge to a muddled democracy in the midst of a muddled world.

Percy Boynton

We shall have less sentimentality in American literature when our accumulated store of idealism disappears in a laxer generation; or when it finds due vent in a more responsible, less narrow, less monotonously prosperous life than is lived by the average fiction in America.

15. Ibid., p. 159
Hunger and Faith are the forces to stir this world that is dying of inanition; blind hunger, blind faith perhaps, dammed up in iron channels, but rusting the iron away, little flake after flake, until the torrent bursts clear in clean destruction. Then sunlight and freedom, and iron a thing of the past. 

Already two hundred years ago, American energy had become external: fled equally from the soil of the land and from the soul of man. We had no ancient tenancies to breed mellowness and contemplation. We had no fixed traditions upon which the soul could fall back and rest and gather strength. From the beginning we were a people centrifugal, nervous, impatient. No potential energy could store in us: we poured ourselves unendingly, pioneering and exploiting. The crisis finds us today, innerly depleted. We are clever. We are literate. We are materially advanced. But facing the mandate of our hour, the recreating of a world, we are more backward than the Magyar or the Slav, because we lack that spiritual substance which creates Faith and which moves mountains.

This then is our task. Whitman foresaw it and sang of it and warned us we must go through a period of

17. O'Brien, Edward J. The Advance of the American Short Story, p. 283
static suffering, of inner cultivation. We must break our impotent habit of constant issuance into petty deed. We must begin to generate within ourselves the energy which is love of life. For that energy, to whatever form the mind consigns it, is religious. Its act is creation. And in a dying world, creation is revolution.

Waldo Frank in Our America

The early explorers of the Middle West saw visions of splendor and beauty. As they guided their frail canoes down swift rivers and skirted the noisy shores of the Great Lakes, or followed savage guides through the twilight of the deep woods or across the leagues of treeless plains, they were sustained by a dream of the human achievements which were to follow them. The traveller in the Middle West today is likely to think that we have forgotten how to dream. He is likely to see from his train windows, in the hundreds of forms so much alike and the scores of little towns with their huddled laundries, garages, bake-shops, and pool-rooms, no evidence of that vision without which the people perish. Even some who have lived among us have made books which deny that we have souls. But those who love the Middle West know that its people have

their dreams, sometimes distorted to be sure by ignorance and untoward circumstance, but often as intelligent and noble as could be desired. Perhaps nowhere else in the crazed and saddened world is the spirit of man still so eager, so wistful, so unafraid. In the end we shall have beauty. We shall have splendor. Give us time.

Let not our town be large, remembering
That little Athens was the Muses' home,
That Oxford rules the heart of London still,
That Florence gave the Renaissance to Rome.
Record it for the grandson of your son--
A city is not built in a day:
Our little town cannot complete her soul
Till countless generations pass away.
Now let each child be joined as to a church,
To her perpetual hopes, each man ordained;
Let every street be made a reverent aisle
Where Music grows and Beauty is unchained.

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, from On the Building of Springfield.

19. Frederick, John, "In 1922", Midland, VIII (Jan. 1922), 40
20. Quoted from: Ramsay's Short Stories of America, p. 25
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