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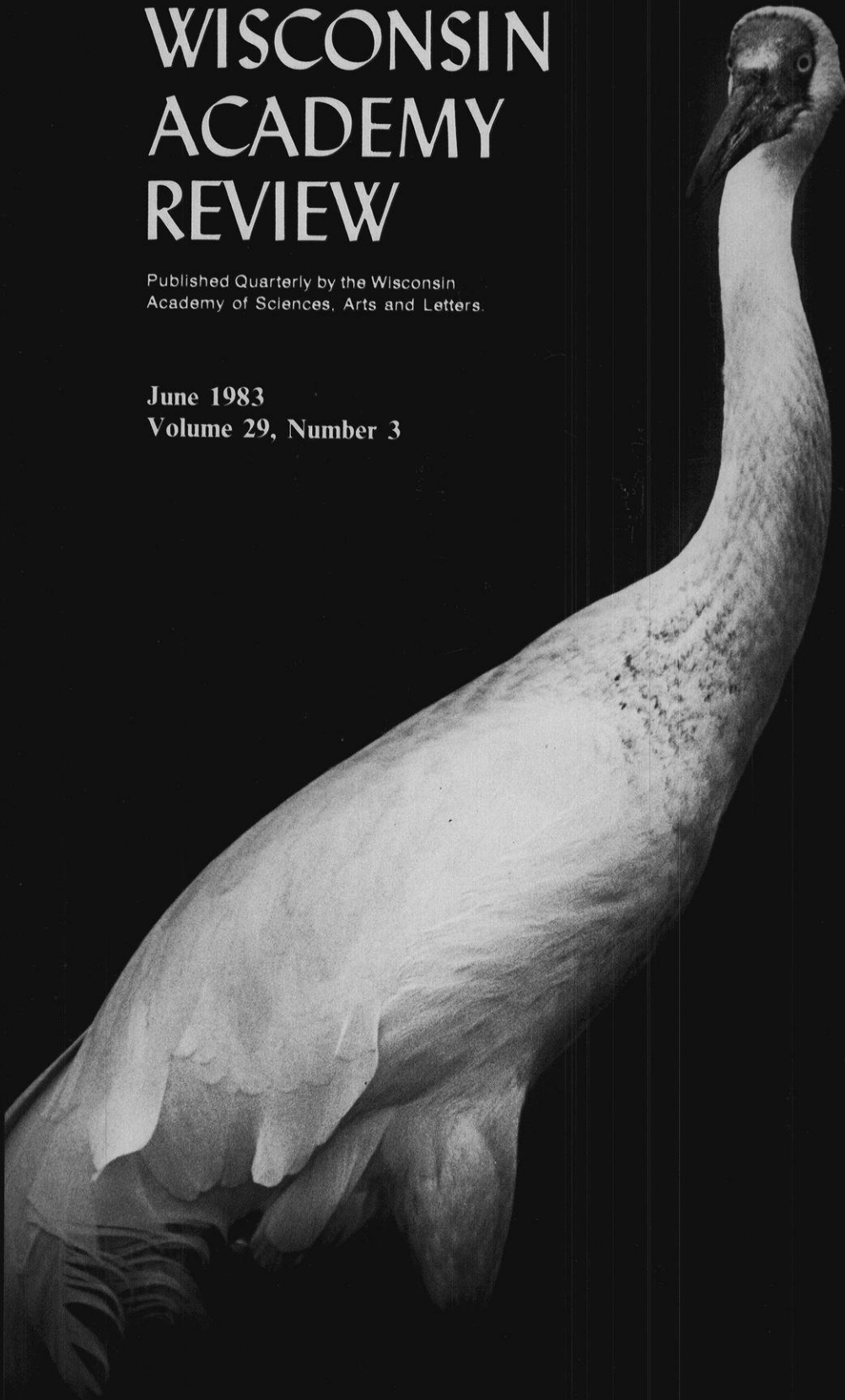
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WISCONSIN ACADEMY REVIEW

Published Quarterly by the Wisconsin
Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.

June 1983
Volume 29, Number 3



Editorial

On publishing literature

Literary conversations these days often began with a lament on the latest *New York Times* bestseller list and eventually come around to the changes in the publishing business. Since the major New York houses were bought by conglomerates in the 1960s, few houses still seek out serious fiction and poetry without regard to mass sales' potential. Alternatives to this shrinking market are self-publishing and regional and small press publishing.

Walt Whitman, James Joyce, and Robert Frost published their own books in defiance of commercial publishers' timidity. Many Wisconsin authors also seek an alternative to commercial publishers. Self-publishing doesn't mean paying a vanity press to publish a book. It means the author taking control of production and distribution, making the decisions, and financing the venture. This, as you may imagine, is not without financial peril and cost in time and frustration. After all, self-publishers are usually amateurs in a professional's game.

Another alternative to the Eastern literary establishment is small press/little mag publication, especially of short fiction and poetry. Since the twenties American little magazines have played a distinguished role in literary history, publishing first the most significant twentieth-century literary authors. Although small press quality varies, its importance in publishing noncommercial fiction and poetry is increasing. In Wisconsin we are fortunate to have two of the country's finest small press/little magazine collections at the libraries of UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee, which we can study to find appropriate magazines or presses to submit to or to learn about contemporary literature.

Other sources of information are the *Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses* (18th edition) and the *Small Press Review*, found in many libraries, and Dustbooks, Box 100, Paradise, CA 95969 for a catalog of books on small press information and distribution and on self-publishing.

Regional publishers concentrate on books of a more local interest by local writers with (usually) local distribution. Stanton & Lee publish some fiction and poetry; Northword and Wisconsin Books have begun to distribute fiction and poetry. The UW Press is becoming more interested in publishing regional literature with its new poetry series. Wisconsin small press publishers who publish literature are listed in Chris Halla's article in this issue.

Book publishing is changing, perhaps diversifying or decentralizing, but it is not becoming easier for a serious author to put literature before a nationwide audience.

—Patricia Powell

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Authors

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Ingrid Swanberg came from California to Wisconsin in 1973 and now lives in Madison with her husband and young son. Her poetry and prose have appeared in numerous small press periodicals since 1967, and she has edited and published several poetry journals. She is currently editor-in-chief of *Abraxas Magazine* and also edits and publishes a book and broadside series with Ghost Pony Press.

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David Cates went to high school in Madison and received a degree in journalism from the University of Montana. After graduation, he moved to Costa Rica, where he wrote much and read much and went swimming at the beach. He has hitchhiked around this country and traveled in Central America, Europe, and Africa.

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Ray Smith taught creative writing at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, for many years and lived in Superior. He recently moved to Washington state. Ray Smith has published poems in many journals including *Poetry*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Steelhead*, and *North Country Anvil*. Of his nine published books of poetry, the last was *Weathering* (Uzzano Press, 1980).

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Richard Boudreau is professor of English at UW-La Crosse, where he specializes in American and Wisconsin literature. He frequently reviews books for the *Wisconsin Academy Review*.

Helen Jenkins smoothed her graying hair back with one hand and ran a brush through it with the other. Her green eyes were set far apart on a wide face that narrowed abruptly to a chin. Her lips turned down slightly at the corners, as if there weren't enough room on that part of her face to hold them horizontal. She stepped back from the mirror and smiled quickly. The bus would be in at six, and she didn't want to be late.

"Mom!" The voice came from the bottom of the stairs. "Hurry up. Dad says the car's warmed up already!"

Andy had disappeared by the time she arrived at the top of the stairs.

She heard the front door slam. Tugging at the folds in her dress and brushing at a spot on her shoulder, she hurried down. As she passed through the dining room she glanced at the table, the red tablecloth, the white napkins, four settings of silver around the outside and the poinsettias in the middle. Good. The horn sounded in the driveway as she lifted her coat from the closet. On her way out, she paused to look at the table again. Silver candlesticks were placed neatly on each side of the centerpiece, and the—The candles! Oh, how could she have forgotten them! She'd have to pick some up on the way back. Her eyebrows dropped a bit when she frowned. Who ever heard of a nice

Christmas Eve dinner without candles? She put on her coat and hustled out the door as the horn in the driveway honked again.

It was a clear evening, the winter sky pointed with stars and the ground covered with dry, squeaky snow. Helen's breath clouded in front of her face as she tucked her neck down into the collar of her jacket. The air slapped her skin cold, her cheeks and legs. Jeff was backing the car from the garage in order to meet her at the end of the walk.

"Hop in, Mom," Andy said, throwing open the back door.

She ducked through the doorway and sat down, carefully tucking her dress beneath her. Her husband Jeff

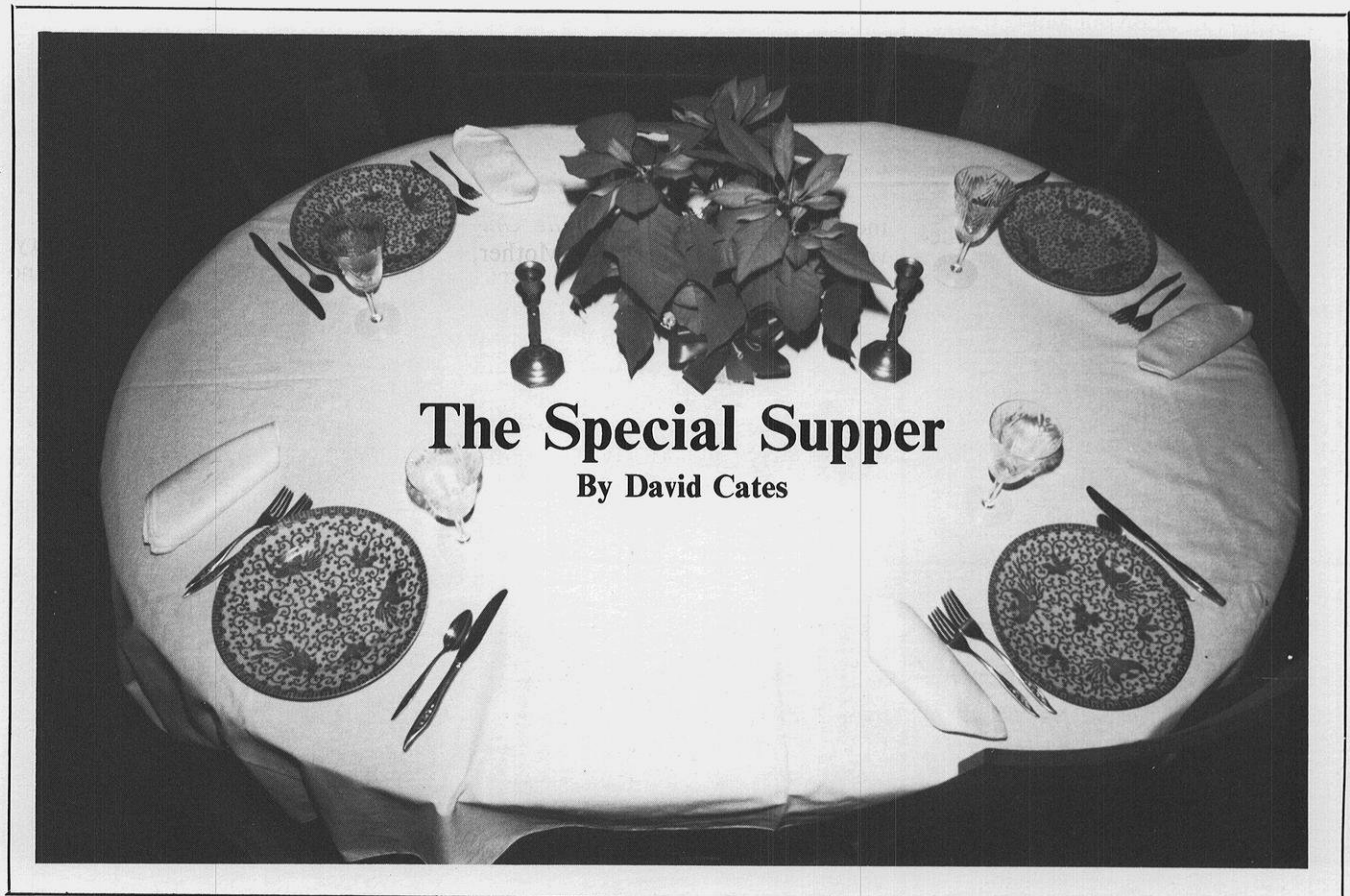


photo by Barry Powell

looked back at her from the driver's seat and patted her on the knee with his mittened hand.

"All ready, honey?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, pushing her hands under her thighs and leaning forward a little to keep warm.

"Let's go, Pops," Andy said.

They were out on the street then. Red and green tinsel letters spelled "Merry Christmas" on a banner hanging across the road on the corner. Andy was playing with the radio, getting a medley of interrupted Christmas carols as he skipped from one station to the next.

"Leave it, Andy," Jeff finally said. "No, leave it on 'Silent Night.' Look around. She's a beautiful night."

Helen looked out the window. It was silent, she thought, quiet and white. So beautiful. She'd been busy preparing and hadn't had the chance to relax. That's the way Christmases were though: baking, shopping, and cleaning, and making everything right. She usually didn't feel the quiet rest until late Christmas Eve when all the activities were over, and she could just sit in the living room strewn with wrapping paper and drink a cup of coffee by the fire. That was a relaxing time.

Tonight her oldest son Bill would be arriving from school on the bus. She'd tried to get Jeff to pay for a plane ticket because it didn't seem right that Bill was getting home so late. He was a freshman, and his last day of exams was the twenty-second. She couldn't understand that, why they'd keep freshmen at that university until December 22. How did they

expect the kids to get home? Darn, it made her so frustrated to think about. Bill'd missed the trimming of the tree. He'd missed the carolers who'd been stopping at the house the past few days. He'd missed . . . well, he might not care anyway. She'd trimmed the tree by herself this year as a matter of fact, putting up all the perennial ornaments and remembering which child made them and when. There was the popcorn string that Bill had made at a church confirmation retreat in sixth grade. There was the cotton-ball snow man . . . Even Helen had to admit there were a lot of junky things hung on the tree. She'd put them all up anyway because they'd always been there, and she wanted things to be just as Bill would remember. It was too bad he'd missed the carolers, though, for he'd always enjoyed them. Andy and Jeff had come to the front door to greet the first group, but after that they'd stayed in the family room and continued to watch TV. Andy said it embarrassed him to stand there and watch everybody sing. Jeff always acted like he was too involved in something else, but she suspected he really felt the same way his thirteen-year-old son did. Anyway, she'd enjoyed the singers, and she'd invited them in and given them cookies she'd baked and decorated. They were neighbor people or church people and they'd always invited her to join them. She'd wanted to, of course, but she didn't want to leave Andy and Jeff. Christmas was a time for families: she'd always believed that, and she didn't want to leave if they were going to stay. The bus station wasn't far now. She wondered aloud what time it was.

"Five-thirty, honey. Plenty of time," Jeff said.

"Mom, are you nervous?" Andy asked, turning around in the front seat.

"Kind of," she answered. "I'm very excited." She'd been looking forward to Bill's homecoming since he left for school in September.

"Don't worry, Mom," Andy said. "He'll be the same Bill."

"Hopefully smarter," Jeff added.

Andy turned back around in the front seat and laughed. "Wow, yeah. Billy's a college boy now. That means he's almost old. I mean he's almost married and almost a father and almost a business man or something. Can you see Bill with a briefcase? Jeez."

"I just want to hear how his last few games went," Jeff said. "We haven't gotten a letter about those, have we Ma?"

"No, honey," Helen answered. "Not that I've seen."

They were pulling between the snow banks that marked the entrance to the bus station parking lot. Jeff parked the car close to the terminal and he and Andy got out.

"Lock your door, Ma," Jeff said just before he shut his. "I don't want to find some bum curled up in the front seat when we come back."

Andy laughed and ran over next to his dad, who put his arm over his shoulder. Helen got out and pushed her door shut. She shuffled carefully on the icy pavement after them.

The air in the terminal was warm and yellow and stale. A big blow heater hung from the ceiling in the corner above a row of vending machines. Andy went right over to buy a Coke.

"Oh don't fill up on that now," Helen said, unbuttoning her coat and looking over the chairs for a clean one sufficiently apart from the bored, sad-looking folks who sat waiting. She saw a place two chairs away from a fat woman with a fluorescent orange stocking cap pulled down haphazardly on her head. "Please, Andy." She wanted to remind him of the nice dinner she had at home, but became self-conscious. The only one talking, she suddenly felt a lot of those sad, bored eyes aimed at her.

That's the way Christmases were though: baking, shopping, and cleaning and making everything right.

"Jeff, tell him no," she said to her husband.

It was too late. Andy's money was in the machine and then a plastic cup was in his hand.

"Honestly," she said to him as he came over and sat down next to her. "How can you want a Coke in these cold months?"

Jeff was over buying some Life-savers. He didn't care either, she thought. After she'd literally worn her fingers to the bone trying to make a special supper, they had to go and fill up on sweets in some dirty bus station.

"It's warm in here," Andy was saying.

"What?" She didn't know what he meant.

"It's warm in here. You asked me how I could want a Coke in the cold, but it's warm in here."

She shed her jacket from her shoulders without really paying attention to him. "Yes, it is warm." Her lips and eyes felt heavy. The bus station had taken away the Christmas feeling she'd had at home and during the quiet drive over. It was Christmas Eve, but in the station it could have been any winter night. She looked around. Not one decoration. Not one little reminder, or even music. Oh, there was a silly poster above the door, a picture of Santa Claus in a bus, but nothing really. And these poor people. Helen thought she heard the fat lady next to her snore. Oh, look, she is sleeping! The fat woman's head was back and her mouth was open wide. She snored again. Helen felt ashamed for some reason. She had her nice dress on and though it was far from new, it was clean and pressed, and not raggy. It was a shame. These people must not have anything better to put on or surely they would. Helen realized she'd let her shoulders fall forward and her back hunch. She quickly sat up straight. No. This was Christmas Eve, and after they got to where they were going, she told herself, they would put something else on.

An old man in high rubber boots and a torn sweatshirt stumbled out of the restroom on Helen's right. He had a crooked nose with wide dirty nostrils, and Helen looked away. She was

immediately sorry she hadn't at least said merry Christmas, but most likely Jeff would have told her to hush. The old man probably would have . . . well he might have asked for money or something and . . . Jeff was right. Such a horribly crooked nose though, with a red crease that must have been painful. Helen felt him looking at her shoulders and at the lace on her dress, and it made her self-conscious and put her coat back on, despite the dreadful heat. Andy and Jeff were at the desk talking to the bus man now. The bus would be in shortly. Bill would be home and the turkey would be just right. Christmas would really be here.

The bus was right on time and Bill was one of the first off. Helen recognized the blue ski jacket she'd bought him before he left for school.

He shook hands with his father and ward off a side attack from Andy, before giving Helen a hug. She was proud of her son whenever she saw him, but he seemed extra special now as she held him at arm's length looking up and down his body, marveling at the miracle of growth. He was so tall and straight and with such a smooth-shaven face and neck. She liked the way his neck looked smooth and long in the back before it disappeared under his collar. It was a boy's neck, but a man's neck too.

"Hi, Mom."

"Welcome home," is all she could think of to say. "Merry Christmas and welcome home."

Then she wanted to tell him about the tree and the carolers and what they would have for dinner, and about how she'd been waiting for him and thought it was such a shame he couldn't have come earlier, and that they'd wanted him to fly but really couldn't afford it. He was talking to Andy and Jeff about his last basketball game. She heard him say they'd lost.

"You lost your game? Oh what a shame!" she said, and then he was telling about the next one they'd have in a week. She remembered what a

short time he'd be staying—he had to leave just a few days after Christmas.

"Can't you stay home a little longer?" she asked, walking up alongside him and making Andy walk ahead.

"Mom, I can't just miss a game."

"Honey," Jeff said.

"Boy, Mom. What does he want to hang around the boring house for when he's got the Evansville game coming up?" Andy asked.

She didn't know what to say so she pretended she hadn't heard anything. Bill and Jeff continued talking about basketball. Andy was listening and trying to get a few words in. "We better be going. I've got a turkey in the oven," Helen said.

"Turkey! Good deal," Bill said, turning away from Jeff for a moment. "I've had bus station egg-salad for every meal since I left school. I missed good cooking, Ma."

"Well come on," Jeff said, walking to the side of the bus where the bags were. "Let's get going then. Gimme a hand, Andy."

Helen couldn't believe it took so long to get suitcases out of a bus. They must have had to stand there ten minutes while an old guy with a wrinkled neck and veined, pumpkin cheeks took check tickets, one at a time, and searched the assorted bags for the matching number.

On the way to the car she walked alongside Bill and asked him how his jacket fit.

"Great, Ma."

"I was so worried you'd continued growing and . . . that jacket . . . I mean one of that quality is hard to find at that price."

Bill was smiling, lugging a suitcase with one arm and extending the other horizontally for balance. What she wanted to say was how nice he looked to be home.

"Don't worry, Ma. The jacket's fine. I always wear it and it's warm. Dad, where do you want the suitcase?"

"In the back. Here. I've got the keys." Jeff was coming up from behind. "Now what did you say the other forward's name is?"

"Herd."

"Didn't he used to play for Lincoln?"

"Yeah. Jeez, Dad, how do you remember all that stuff? I don't even remember it all."

"It's easy," Andy said, jumping around in the back of the car. "He reads the sports page all the time. Always steals it from me. Anyway, Herd's the guy who used to drill those long ones from the corner." Andy was doing jump shots over his father's head as Jeff bent down to put the suitcase in the back.

Helen was waiting by the backseat door. She'd let Bill sit up front with his dad so they could talk.

"Still got the old red bomb," Bill said, slapping the hood with his hand.

"Oh yeah. It's got a new option though. The back window won't close." Jeff got in behind the wheel and unlocked the doors from the inside.

"Slight defect in the security system," Andy said, laughing.

Bill got in the front seat and Helen got in the back. Andy tried to push his way onto the front seat beside Bill.

"Andy, you sit back here," Helen said. "Let them sit alone up there. You don't have to get in there—"

"It's okay, Mom. There's enough room." It was Bill speaking from the front seat.

Andy crawled in next to Bill and shut the door. The dome light went out and from the back Helen could see the silhouettes of their three heads. They were all similarly shaped, long and rectangular. Big, medium, small. She reached up and put her hand on Bill's shoulder.

"Your hair looks so nice, Bill," she said.

"Thanks, Mom." He reached back and touched her hand.

As the car started she leaned back in her seat and began to hum to herself. Outside the window it was quiet and white. Really, it was so beautiful, she thought.



When they got home she went directly to the kitchen. The turkey would need a last basting, and she should get the rolls warmed and the cranberry sauce dished out. The salad was made and in the refrigerator. The sweet potatoes were in the small oven. Peas could be put on, and the butter sticks unwrapped and laid on their trays. She went through the dining room to put a Johnny Mathis record on the stereo. There, she thought. Christmas music really made it seem like Christmas. Now all they needed was a fire. She could get Jeff to make one. As she hurried back toward the kitchen, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror on the wall above the table. The fatigue in her face surprised her. She turned and looked at herself straight on, self-consciously adjusting her collar with her fingers. The lace wasn't a pure white anymore and the dress wasn't new, but she'd never thought of herself as . . . Honestly, she was doting like an old woman. Of course she didn't feel swept away like a young girl. That's not the way things worked. You had to get busy and arrange and *make* things special—then they were. You had to break out of the—

"Bill, give 'em here. Dad's got—"

"Yeah, okay. Now who's—"

"That's Herd . . . and that's me."

She could hear Jeff and the boys talking loudly at the top of the stairs. "Top-notch."

"This is against Freeport."

"Real top-notch color."

"You think so?"

"Must be a crackerjack photographer."

"Just some kid."

"Top-notch, though. Real—"

Helen turned away from the mirror and hustled into the kitchen. "Jeff, Jeff!" she called.

"What?"

"Please come down. I need your help."

She took the salad from the refrigerator and carried it out to the dining room.

"Yes?" It was Jeff leaning over her from behind as she placed the salad on the table. She felt him kiss her neck.

"Jeff," she began, allowing herself a breath. "Will you start a fire in the fireplace?"

"Now?"

"I meant to do it but everything's done a little sooner than I planned and—"

"Bill was just showing me some slides of the team. I got this little hand slide viewer from the basement."

"Jeff—" She started to look at his face but then looked down at the floor. She could hear Andy and Bill laughing upstairs. "Please. Tonight it's important."

"Hey, relax, honey. Bill really wants me to . . ."

Helen didn't answer.

"Sure, okay," Jeff agreed. "I'll make a fire. Just a second, though. I'll give them back the slide viewer." He turned to walk toward the stairway, but then stopped. "But is something wrong? I mean . . . we usually don't . . ."

She wanted to say that that was all the more reason to have a fire. She wanted to explain about that atmosphere, and how without it Christmas was just another day except worse, like that filthy bus station and its Santa-goes-by-bus poster. She wanted to but didn't because suddenly it all seemed maudlin. There was Jeff with his big boyish features and long arms hanging dumbly at his sides. He had the little slide viewer in his shirt pocket.

"Oh, all right," she said. "Go look at the slides first. Go ahead." She turned abruptly and began arranging the poinsettia. "But hurry up."

"Hey, honey, don't be upset," Jeff said, taking her hips in hands and leaning over her shoulder again. "You were looking so forward to—Honey?"

"Stupid candles!" she said, breaking away.

"Hey, Helen! What's wrong?"

"Dinner will be ready shortly," she snapped over her shoulder.

Hurrying into the bright light of the kitchen, she felt her eyes sting behind such a blur of foolish tears that she had to locate the counter with her hand before finding a place to set the empty candlesticks. ■

Three Poems by Bink Noll

Sharing the Wee Hours With Two Classmates Long After Our Families Have Gone To Bed

I've taken pains to have the backyard
look spellbound—its back turned on the man
in the street, cold shoulder, the way high
bourgeois art by definition turns:
along the street the tight sapling fence
to screen our revels from passersby,
not one of which has passed by since one.
Out there an elm dies its artless death.

Inside the fence—besides my old friends—
ancient hackberry and walnut trees,
black lawn, color drained from flowerbeds
as though they too happen in a dream,
shrubs in mounds, white lanterns, rotting brick,
the bronze Italian fountain *plashing*—
Tennysonian sound. Otherwise,
good gin and transcendental quiet.

The universe helps out: not one bug
since we came out, and the sky at last
floats a big moon out. Hours ago
we stopped arguing about who's wrong
and concentrated on getting drunk.
If they came out and caught us, our kids
would criticize our carefree ease, whom
we've so far spared much to care about.

They can't tell yet what it's like to need
middle-aged flesh to put off its weight.
Who cares what we've talked about? We have
flown consequence so well tonight
we can't even remember of what.
We are our professors' dreams come true,
gentlemen, the flower of our time.
When we pee on the shrubbery we plash.

Our bodies feel luminous as moons—
as the three lighted ricepaper globes
hung at the far end of the terrace.
A zephyr crosses. And chills the hair
on our arms. On the wrought-iron chair arms
the first dew has begun to condense.
Dawn waits. The backdoor is miles away
when one of us must go fetch more ice.

Keeping in Touch

Weeks after Epiphany I learn by heart
your tidings—your single-sentence jottings, notes,
dittoed letters, real ones and plain best wishes.
Done, I toss them in a used grocery sack

and muffle myself for ten-below to go
burn them in an oil drum between garages.
Your names leave my hands yet leave me in Wisconsin
grateful for the year's news about all of you

one by one crossing the great meridians:

journeys, job changes, changes of address,
parents' senescence, their partings, other partings,
children grown up, espousals, spawnings, ill health,
dangers, muted hurt, good luck, gardens, honors—

the annals of people out of step enough
to care about and write their brief lives to be
read and reread in an unlettered country
given to random buddies and amnesia.

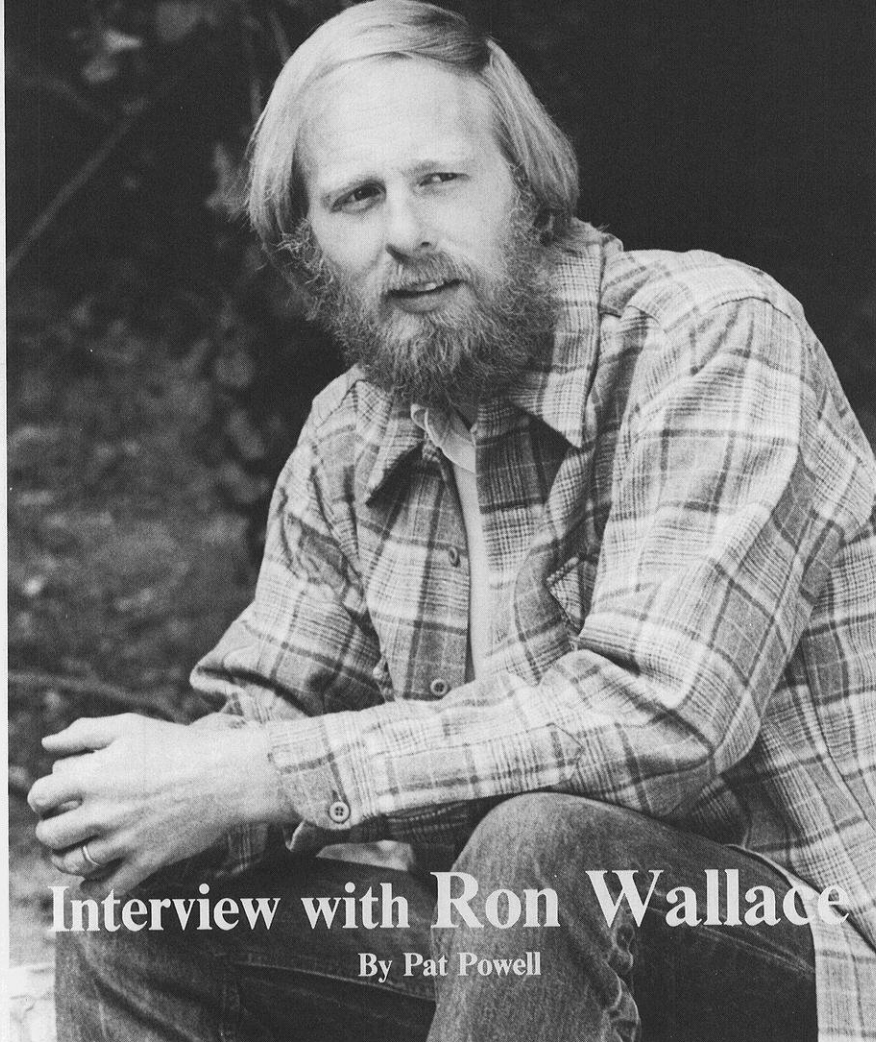
The Burglar

Some things gone, obvious and insured. Plus cash.
How could he—raised in an opposite class—*not*
have failed to distinguish the truly dear? So,
no harm done. Just the nuisance of straightening up
after the plunder and waiting for the house
to repair its privacy, as if he had
only wit enough to scratch on windowpanes
HOUSE EATS, and not to steal away with pictures
of our family comfort in that felon's skull.

Thank god. I can afford to, so to speak,
reglaze windows. "... can afford" and radicals scold
"You have too much." The burglar has vulgarized
their error. How pure—like a hyena's—his
purpose is. He sneaks in to scavenge the dream
he dreams of wealth and eats up essential parts.
Direct as a child he takes justice into
his own hands. From nursery on, MY/MINE breeds war.
More bound to it than I, my wealth degrades him.

I can afford to pretend to feel sorry
that that's what happens; but if I'd caught him, own-
ership would have clamped my hands on his throat.
As it is, he already savages on
to the next thrills of fright, of not being caught—
exquisitely wary, swift, trained: a success—
while house forgets him. Like me, it can afford
just this much wealth to be redistributed,
a sign of vigor. We eat his manhood up.

Ron Wallace, whose poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, and other magazines, is director of creative writing at UW-Madison. He has written three critical works: *Henry James and the Comic Form* (University of Michigan Press, 1975), *The Last Laugh* (University of Missouri Press, 1979), and the forthcoming *God Be With the Clown* (University of Missouri Press, 1984). A book of poetry, *Plums, Stones, Kisses & Hooks* was published by the University of Missouri Press in 1981 and just released in a paper edition. The University of Pittsburgh Press will publish his second book of poems, *Tunes For Bears To Dance To*, later this year. He lives in Madison with his wife and two daughters.



Interview with Ron Wallace

By Pat Powell

PP: What are some early influences that caused you to become a writer?

RW: In seventh grade music class Miss Replogle asked us to write something in response to Ferde Grofé's "Grande Canyon Suite." Out of fifty students in the class I was the only one who wrote a poem, about twenty lines of rhymed couplets. She singled my poem out, read it to the entire class, and pinned it on the board. Although I had written all through grade school (diaries, humorous pieces, short stories), this was the first time I had seriously entertained the idea of becoming a writer. Here was something I could do, that people seemed to value, that was fun. What better way to spend your life?

I didn't read much poetry, however, until ninth and tenth grades when Miss Bowers and Mrs. Gottlieb introduced me to Emily Dickinson and Stephen Crane. I was excited and exhilarated; I was filled with wonder and awe; I was utterly confused. I had no idea what the poems meant, but I knew that something exciting

had happened to me. Simone de Beauvoir once said that the reason she became a writer was that she wanted to be loved. When she was a child, she read George Eliot and loved George Eliot unreservedly. She wanted to be loved in that way. I think that was what I felt when I read Emily Dickinson and Stephen Crane; I loved them and I wanted to be loved in that way.

In addition to my teachers and my reading, my family was an important influence. My mother always supported and encouraged me. Without her unshakable faith along the way, I think I would have given up long ago. My father was important in another way. He was paralyzed and confined to a wheel chair with multiple sclerosis for most of my life. I think the situation made me more meditative. I thought about illness and death and things that kids with normal families perhaps don't think about. Many of my poems now reflect these concerns, and I've written a number of poems about my father and our relationship. In teaching nine-

teenth and twentieth century literature, I've noticed that many writers have had this kind of traumatic early experience.

There's another question involved here. Why does one *continue* to write? Many people who have similar early experiences stop writing at the age of nineteen or twenty. I think I write because I love language, I love making something beautiful out of language. Poetry gives one a chance to be perfectly articulate. We go through most of our lives not completing sentences, thinking of the right word or phrase five minutes too late. Yeats said, "A line will take us hours maybe;/ Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,/ Our stitching and unstitching has been naught." What I'm aiming for in my poetry is lines that are perfectly articulate, but that seem to be conversational—a moment's thought. Finally, poetry is, for me, a way of conferring immortality on experience. As time erodes important things away, poetry saves them, providing what Frost called "a momentary stay against confusion."

PP: *In what style or tradition is your poetry? Who has influenced you?*

RW: It might be useful to divide American poetry into two traditions: the Whitman tradition and the Dickinson tradition. The Whitman tradition, comprised of poets like Ginsberg, Berryman, Kenneth Koch, and Diane Wakoski, perhaps, is loud, celebratory, bardic, humorously self-aggrandizing. The Dickinson tradition, comprised of poets like Frost, Sylvia Plath, James Wright, and Lisel Mueller, perhaps, is quieter, more lyrical, more witty and self-deprecatory, more intense and concise.

I see myself in this second tradition. Of course, I have been influenced by a wide variety of poets. In college my nickname was Gerard Manley Wallace. Later, I emulated Yeats. My favorite contemporary poets include Sylvia Plath, Maxine Kumin, David Wagoner, James Wright, Richard Hugo, Lisel Mueller, Galway Kinnell.

PP: *Who are the best poets writing in English today?*

RW: In addition to those I've mentioned, I would probably have to say James Merrill, who has just published his 560-page poem, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, a book he has been working on for a decade, based on Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Most contemporary poets, content to write short lyric poems, haven't much sought the company of Dante, Milton, Spenser. Merrill has, and he's done it with grace, charm, intelligence, and playfulness.

Richard Hugo, who died last year at the age of 53, may have joined the ranks of the major American poets with his book, *The Right Madness on Skye*. Hugo's poetry is characterized by barren American landscapes, and broken-down Western towns. And yet, from the even harsher perspective of the island of Skye, he was able to achieve a powerful, affirmative vision. What I love about poets like Hugo and Merrill and the others is their richly textured language, their strong sense of form, and their affirmative view of the world.

1001 Nights

Each night I read you stories—
Sinbad, Aladdin, Periebanou, Periezade—
in that strange exotic language
you cannot possibly understand:
countenance, repast, bequeathed, nuptial,
what can these words be telling you?
What can they signify?
That I love you? That it's time to sleep?
Keep safe throughout this night?
And yet you will not let me simplify,
get angry if I explain,
and hang on every word as if
our lives depended on it.
Perhaps they do.
One day the stories will fail us,
there will be nothing left to tell,
another hand will rub your back,
another genii will rise.
But for now, sleep tight, sleep tight,
and dream of the singing tree,
the speaking bird, the golden water,
the stone that was your father
restored by morning light.

Ron Wallace
from *Tunes for Bears to Dance to*

PP: *Modern poetry is a minor art form, more written than read, with little influence. Do you agree or disagree?*

RW: It is fashionable these days to lament the death of modern poetry, to complain that there are more writers than readers, and that what is written isn't worth reading anyway. I don't think the complaints are valid; they're merely fashionable.

Dryden insisted long ago that the purpose of poetry was instruction and delight. It still is. I think there are probably more people reading and writing poetry today than ever before in history. A couple of hundred years ago, when few people were literate, the percentage of those who read poetry was much higher than it is today. But in absolute numbers, more people read poetry now. Poetry isn't a medium like television that appeals to everyone. It appeals to a certain kind of literate person. I think that's fine.

PP: *But why don't poets today appeal to a large audience?*

RW: It's frequently argued that poets don't *want* to appeal to a large audience today. However, I think every poet would love to do what Robert Frost did, which was to write poetry that appealed both to a large popular audience and to the academy. What was his magic? If I knew, I'd be using it.

There have only been two Book-of-the-Month Club poetry selections that I know of: one was Frost's *In the Clearing*; the other was one of Rod McKuen's forgettable books. Most of us would like to be Robert Frost; we wouldn't like to be Rod McKuen. If you want to appeal to a large audience today, it seems you have to compromise your art. I saw Allen Ginsberg in Madison recently singing his songs (he's got an album coming out). He can't sing; he's a bad songwriter; he can't play an instrument. He *can*

write powerful poetry, but he's decided to be an entertainer instead. He's charming on stage, and he's amusing to watch. But this is not poetry.

The large audience to which you refer watches T.V. I expect something more from poetry than I expect from T.V. At the turn of the century poets such as Yeats and Eliot expected that poetry could even take the place of religion, that poetry could save us. People may no longer believe that poetry can save us; but it's at least one thing that makes us worth saving.

PP: *Although people seldom now feel poetry can save a society, many who see poetry as therapeutic feel it can save an individual.*

RW: When I ask my students why they write poetry, they often say they do so to work through personal problems. Self-therapy isn't a bad reason to *begin* writing poetry, but if that is your main and continuing reason, you risk self-indulgence. The great contribution of contemporary poetry, from 1945 on, has been the reintroduction of the personal element. Pound, Eliot, and Auden, among others, who are personal in their own way, came to seem impersonal, rarified, overly intellectual. It was partly in response to them that Ginsberg, Lowell, Sexton, Plath, and Snodgrass started writing what has loosely been called "confessional poetry." A bad confessional poem, like some of Anne Sexton's, fails to transcend the *merely* personal accounting of one's illnesses or mental difficulties. A good confessional poem, like many of Plath's or Lowell's, expands beyond the individual to reflect the culture. Although recent poets like James Wright and Maxine Kumin have rejected the excesses of the confessional poets (what James Dickey called "yowling" and "screaming"), they continue to affirm the personal element.

PP: *If modern poetry needs neither rhyme nor meter, what separates poetry and prose?*

RW: This is an enormous question. A student of mine, Bonnie Wolkenstein, suggested a simple answer: "You get paid for prose."

Although the distinction between poetry and prose may have blurred somewhat, there *are* basic differences. To start with, poems generally require line breaks. I realize that this doesn't explain prose poems. But in a lyric poem, each line has an integrity of its own. This isn't true in prose, where the sentence or paragraph is the important unit. Poets think in lines; the poem moves in lines. A second distinction involves rhythm. The prose rhythm is one of continuity; the poetry rhythm is one of recurrence. The word "verse" derives from the Latin *versus*—a turning. The idea of turning and returning is typical of poetry. Finally, there is a difference in the function of language. In prose, language is a means to an end. It is used to tell a story or to provide information. In poetry, language is often an end in itself.

One reason that so many poets turned to free verse twenty-five years ago was that poetry had come to be defined in the popular mind in terms of rhyme and meter. If it skipped merrily along, if it rhymed, it was poetry; if it didn't, it wasn't. By dropping conventional end-rhymes and set metrical patterns, poets freed themselves to focus on the other elements of poetry: internal rhyme, speech rhythms, vivid evocative imagery, surprising metaphors. Poems may not need rhyme and meter, but they need music and rhythm.

But traditional rhyme and meter aren't dead, by any means. Almost every recent volume of contemporary poetry has some formal verse: sonnets, sestinas, rhymed couplets, terza rima. Phil Dacey, in Minnesota, is putting together an anthology of con-

temporary poetry in traditional forms entitled *Strong Measures*; in limiting it to 300 pages he has had to turn away hundreds of poems. Poets have become impatient with poems that are too free and too purely descriptive. Free verse seems best suited to lyric bursts, ecstatic emotion and language. Formal verse allows a poet to be more discursive and expository. Robert Pinsky, in *The Situation of Poetry*, attacks much contemporary poetry for relying too heavily on the image and on pure description, suggesting that free verse itself has become as rigid and predictable as formal verse had a half-century ago.

PP: *There must be pleasure for the writer as well as the reader in working within a form.*

RW: There is not only the pleasure of working within a form; there is the excitement of having a form generate the work. Villanelles, sonnets, and sestinas, for example, can practically write themselves. John Ashbery suggests that writing sestinas is like riding downhill on an old-fashioned bicycle. Once you've started down, you can't stop; the pedals move your legs. In a sestina once you've set the first stanza going, the other stanzas can take you off in surprising directions. I've found forms, lately, pleasurable for that reason.

But the form can't be too mechanical or insistent. I published a sestina in the *Atlantic* last summer. One day at the Shorewood swimming pool a lawyer who reads quite a bit but doesn't have particular knowledge of contemporary poetry, approached me, magazine in hand. "I read this poem through five or six times," he said, "before I realized that you are repeating these end words through the poem. At first I thought it was free verse." That's when you know you've succeeded—when the form seems so natural and inevitable that it is invisible.

"Traditional rhyme and meter are not dead; almost every recent volume of contemporary poetry has some formal verse."

"Poetry may not be able to save us, but it is one thing that makes us worth saving."

PP: *How do you feel about the allegation that government funding stimulates mediocre poetry which drives out good poetry, that it requires an emphasis on the democratic spread of the money and would see too much quality as elitist and therefore not fundable?*

RW: The arts have never survived on their own. Poets have always had patrons, and I see nothing wrong with the government in a democracy being a patron of the arts. And anyway, whose notion of mediocrity do we trust? Rufus Wilmot Griswold, a prominent nineteenth-century tastemaker, said that Walt Whitman knew no more about poetry than a hog knew about mathematics. T.W. Higginson, poetry editor of the *Atlantic*, thought that Emily Dickinson had a tin ear and that's why her poems didn't rhyme. I'd like to see mediocre poets like that funded.

Actually, I think the state and federal grants programs have been handled extremely well. They have, by and large, promoted quality. The one good thing Richard Nixon did as president was to beef up the National Endowment for the Arts.

PP: *Writing in The New Republic (November 25, 1978), James Atlas complains that a whole culture has grown up based on poetry, that poetry has become a lifestyle with workshops, conferences, poetry buses, and readings. The small press world, he claims, produces a profusion of material whose quality is not questioned and which is never read. He charges that poetry is just one more of the many therapies available.*

RW: I think that all of the things James Atlas decries here are actually wonderful, positive evidence of the power of poetry and its continued relevance in many people's lives. It isn't the programs that generate the interest in poetry; it's the interest in

poetry that generates the programs. Atlas has it backwards.

Writing is hard; it is self-isolating work; it brings little financial reward. Yet people continue to write and read poetry, to form poetry workshops, to set up their own small presses, to give and go to readings, to meet together to talk about poetry. Rather than being depressed by this situation, I am exhilarated by it. A poetry lifestyle! What a wonderful idea! How much better than a military lifestyle or a big business lifestyle.

PP: *What can you teach students in creative writing programs?*

RW: I never took a course in creative writing in college, I confess. I told friends who were taking such courses that I didn't think they could help me. I told them that writers learned to write by reading a lot and writing a lot. I still tell my classes that. However, I think the real reason I didn't take those courses was fear. I was afraid someone would discover that I wasn't a writer, and would tell me something I didn't want to hear. As long as nobody saw what I wrote, I was safe.

As a teacher of creative writing, however, I have seen what a workshop class can do. For one thing, it can provide a sense of community for a young writer. In the twenties, writers went to Paris, drank absinthe, and talked about their writing. Gertrude Stein helped Hemingway; Ezra Pound helped Eliot. Today, writers go to Iowa City or Madison, drink beer, and help each other.

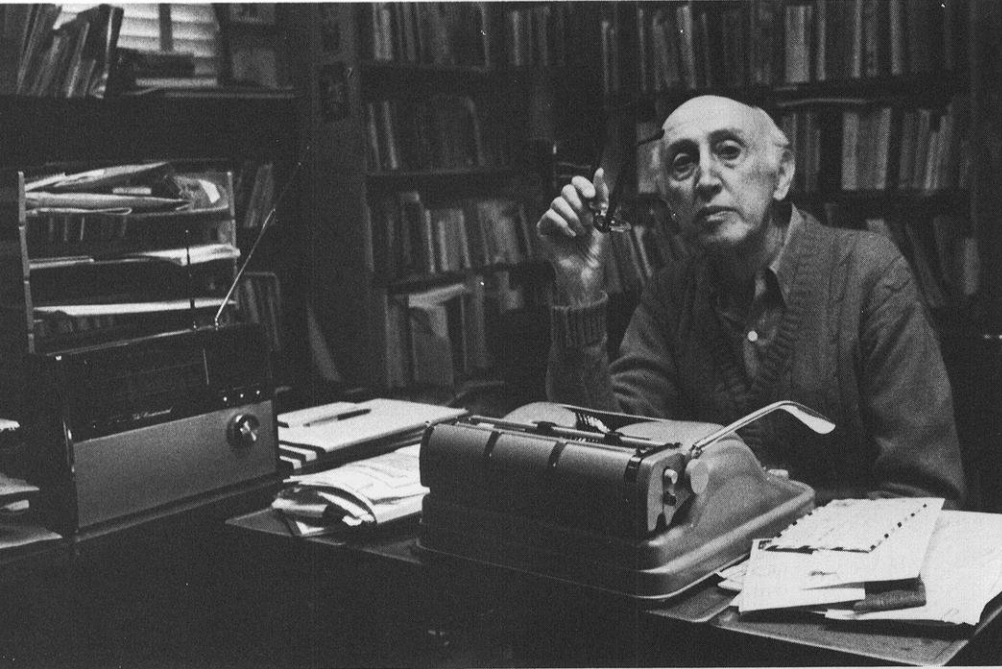
"Poetry gives one a chance to be perfectly articulate."

Further, you can save young writers a lot of time by introducing them to the best contemporary poets and by suggesting exercises that will expand their imaginations and provide a larger sense of the possibilities of poetry. I've seen poets come into our program writing bad imitations of Wordsworth or Ginsberg and graduate a couple of years later writing original and unique poems. Several of my recent students have already published books and won prizes for their poetry.

PP: *What are you working on now?*

RW: I have a new collection of poems coming out this fall from the University of Pittsburgh Press, entitled *Tunes for Bears to Dance to*. The title is taken from a Flaubert quote which I think is one of the loveliest statements about writing: "Human language is like a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, when all the time we are longing to move the stars to pity." Another book I have coming out from the University of Missouri Press is *God Be With the Clown*. The title is taken from Emily Dickinson's poem, "A little madness in the spring/ is wholesome even for the king/ but God be with the clown/ who ponders this tremendous scene/ this whole experiment of green/ as if it were his own." This book analyzes humor in American poetry, a topic which has never been treated with very much seriousness. Humor is an important element of American poetry in particular. Very few poets know that John Quincy Adams was a wonderful comic poet. I deal with him, and, of course, Whitman, Dickinson, Frost, Stevens, Berryman, even Sylvia Plath.

Finally, I've been working to help establish a new poetry series with the University of Wisconsin Press. If all goes as planned, we'll be soliciting book-length manuscripts of poetry next October. As General Editor of the series I'll be especially interested in seeing the work of Wisconsin poets. Funding for the series is not yet completely approved, and further information will be available in June.■



Felix Pollak studied law in his native Vienna, but after he came to this country in 1939 as a refugee from Hitler, he became a librarian. He served in the U.S. Army in World War II. Mr. Pollak was curator of rare books at Northwestern University in Evanston and curator of special collections for the UW-Madison Memorial Library. Widely anthologized, Felix Pollak has published four books of poetry: *The Castle and the Flaw* (1963), *Say When* (1969), *Ginkgo* (1973), and *Subject to Change* (1978), now in its sixth printing. He has poems and translations forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner*, *New Letters*, and *Pembroke Magazine*.

Interview with Felix Pollak

By Pat Powell

You go into a living room with a large picture window which looks out onto a garden. You see a beautiful tree. Next to the window on the wall hangs a picture of a tree that strongly resembles the tree in the garden. You say to the owner: "Why do you hang up a picture of the tree when you have the real tree just outside?"

The tree in the picture is more beautiful and more meaningful than the tree in the garden because it has gone through the eyes and the mind of a human being who imbues the picture with certain qualities not obvious in the natural tree. A good photographer uses the lens of the camera to capture reality, but he uses his eye to see the angle, to select the lighting, to recreate the real thing. That is the difference between art and nature. Art gives meaning to nature.

—Felix Pollak

PP: *What early influences led you to write poetry rather than fiction?*

FP: That assumes that I wanted to write fiction and that fiction is superior to poetry. Actually, I did want to write fiction at first and started out with stories in German, but you need a long breath for fiction, particularly if you want to write a novel. Even for short stories, you need a sustained long breath. When I came to America, I had little time to write. So I turned to poetry, which I also had written in Vienna.

When I was in Evanston, Illinois, I found a very interesting small circle of poets, who read to each other every three or four weeks in each other's houses. One of the people there was Lisel Mueller, who has since received the Lamont and the National Book Award; she's still my best friend.

Other gifted people there stimulated each other in poetry, which got me into that groove. That was after I could write English well enough to write poetry, which took a few years. When I arrived here from Austria, I couldn't speak English, since I had Latin and Greek in school.

PP: *What were you doing in Evanston?*

FP: I was curator of rare books at Northwestern University Library. I wrote in the tired edges of my days there.

Because of my library work, I became acquainted with the little magazines, in which I subsequently published. I still write essays and occasionally fiction and aphorisms, but now I write largely poetry.

PP: *Maybe the question should have been, why did you choose to write at all?*

FP: It wasn't a choice. It was natural for me to write. I had, of course, my idols in writing whom I tried to emulate as a boy, mostly novelists. When I was in Vienna, I wrote poetry and prose. The much-read newspaper there had an insert for young writers every month. I got a prize for publishing a story in it when I was about seventeen, and I published in magazines such as *For the New Youth*. I was quite convinced very early that I would be a writer; everything else I thought of—an actor, a stage director—came later.

PP: *Who were your early idols?*

FP: I was influenced first by the classics in school, by Schiller, Goethe's poems, Heine, Lessing, Rilke, and also by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Jakob Wassermann, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Alfred Polgar. I was also very influenced by a Vienna satirist, the gadfly of Vienna who published a magazine by himself for thirty-six years, Karl Kraus. Another great idol was Herman Hesse; I corresponded with him and wrote an essay about him which he liked.

PP: *Since you have written poetry in German and in English, do you find that one language lends itself to a certain kind of poetry?*

FP: I didn't think I could possibly write in any language but German. I remember walking through the city park in Vienna with a budding young writer, who was also Jewish. We knew we had to leave Vienna, if we could. We said to each other: "Our careers are over before they really begin. Who can possibly write in any language but his native language?" He disappeared. I managed to come here. After I got into writing in English, I found that English has a certain precision and economy which is appealing, although German has a great subtlety and finesse and many musical sounds. At first I translated from the German, inside myself, and then

began to think and write in English. Today I find it much more difficult to write poetry in German than in English. But when I was in Berlin sitting in a sidewalk cafe, I found myself scribbling into my notebook a poem—in German. The language in which you live, as Wassermann once said, colors your skin.

PP: *Do you translate poetry from German to English or English to German?*

FP: Now I am working with Professor Reinhold Grimm, in the German department at the university, translating recent German poets. Also fourteen of my translations of Heinrich Heine into English were recently published in an anthology of his poetry. I enjoy translating poetry, trying to keep the spirit as well as the rhythms and rhymes in another language. I have translated my own poems from English into German and published them in Vienna. In one case, the translation is better than the original, because, I think, the poem is about Vienna.

PP: *Is German poetry today mostly free verse?*

FP: Now it is the exception, as it is here, to write in rhyme in German. But free verse doesn't mean prose or formlessness; it has rules, rhythms. There is a challenge in forms. I have been going through the English verse forms, as a finger exercise, writing quatrains, sonnets, triolets, rondels, sestinas.

PP: *If modern poetry needs neither rhyme nor meter, what is the difference between poetry and prose?*

FP: That is a difficult question. I think borders are fluid. There are prose poems and poetic prose, which Thomas Wolfe certainly wrote. I think it is less a matter of rhyme and meter than of metaphors, of images, of poetic feeling. I believe the poetry is between the words, a matter of conveying more than you say, of arousing associations in the reader and being noticeable as poetry rather than prose inherently, rather than by external

means. There are some theories that line lengths shouldn't be arbitrary but geared to the length of a row of typewriter keys or the length of breath. I go by the sense of it, by the natural sound and rhythm of the line. Sometimes what I have tried to write as a poem turned out to be prose; I left it as prose. The main thing that distinguishes poetry is the poet's sensitivity and poetic feeling.

"Poetry demands an effort; you should learn the language of poetry as you would a foreign language or musical notation."

PP: *Why say something in poetry you can say in prose?*

FP: I think there is a feeling of joy, of playing with words, hearing the sound of words. John Ciardi, in his book *How a Poem Means*, said that after class one day several youngsters came to him and said: "We want to be poets, but how do we know who can be a poet." He said to them: "Why do you want to write poetry?" A boy answered, "I have so much to say, I'm interested in so many subjects." A girl said, "I don't have a lot to say, but I like to play with words. To me it's like glass balls, I make patterns with them and enjoy the sounds." Ciardi said to him, "I think you should become a novelist or essayist or journalist, but I don't think you will write poetry." To her he said, "You probably will be a poet." There is something to that. You really have to have a love for words.

I think it is not a matter of choice. If you can say something in prose, you should. But if you feel you can convey something only in a pattern of words that might not be so precise, so denotative but more connotative, then you need to express yourself in poetry. In prose, I think, you communicate exactly what you say. In

poetry you connote more than the words say, you arouse associations in someone's mind and soul. I am thinking here of a poem by Hugo von Hofmannsthal which ends "And yet, he says much who says evening."

PP: *Do you agree with those who say that modern poetry is a minor art form, more written than read, with little influence in society?*

FP: I agree. And this doesn't bother me at all, because I don't think it matters whether it influences society or not, whether it is a best seller, whether there is a great demand for it, whether it is appreciated by the majority. I feel that art is and always has been a minority concern. If this is elitist, so be it. Elitist is a much abused term. I think elitism is a striving for excellence, something which usually does not have mass appeal.

Poetry demands an effort, not only from the writer, but from the reader. Because the words are the same words used in a newspaper, one might think they can be approached the same. I think you should approach the language of poetry as you would a foreign language, or a chess notation or musical notation. Then you are quite willing to expend the energy to understand them. We have to overcome the hurdle of having people assume that words mean the same in any context, which they don't.

PP: *But has this always been true that a person had to learn another language to understand a poet in his society? Homer and Shakespeare used words that a wide audience could understand.*

FP: Right. I don't think poetry should ever be esoteric. One should try to communicate. I want to make my poetry as understandable, as lucid as possible. Some people make poetry obscure because they think it sounds deep. Actually, deep water is clearer than a shallow muddy puddle. But there are different levels of receiving poetry. I suspect that many in Shakespeare's audience understood only the action and not the subtleties of language.

PP: *Homer and Shakespeare wanted to entertain, to tell good stories, to communicate with people. Is that even an aim of most poets today?*

FP: Maybe there is too little of that today and too much of saying things in a complicated way. People have thought my poetry was simple minded for being so direct. My friend, Lisel, has continued to write simply and has proven one can be excellent without being obscure. But I would say that poetry doesn't have to be understood at first glance. The world isn't simple, and poetry deals with complex matters that cannot be expressed simply. But the poet should strive for lucidity.

One element that makes Shakespeare great is his use of humor alternately with tragedy. I think humor is almost equivalent to intelligence. Puns are an important part of literary tradition, from Shakespeare to James Joyce who makes wonderful use of puns in *Ulysses*.

While wit and humor are generally esteemed in Europe, I find humorous poems difficult to publish here. People here equate humor with frivolity, yet we have a serious humorous tradition beginning with Mark Twain and running through James Thurber and Ogden Nash.

"Humor is almost equivalent to intelligence."

PP: *One critic of government support of the arts, Judson Jerome, alleges that government funding stimulates mediocrity and drives away good writing. He asserts that government emphasis on the democratic spread of funding makes too much quality seem elitist. "If you want a grant," he says, "promise to publish children, the elderly, minorities." (1979 Writers Digest, p. 44)*

FP: There is a grain of truth to this, but I think he exaggerates. If you encourage a lot of people, you will get a lot of dross. Many publications also mean opportunities for good poets to publish which they might not otherwise have. Because popular magazines depend on advertisers, they publish only a safe kind of poetry if any at all. Little magazines which receive government funding can do away with those unspoken taboos and give the excellent a chance to develop. I don't see anything pernicious about supporting poets. There is entirely too much false romanticism about poets starving in a garret and poetry depending on suffering. Too much money can corrupt, but too little money is even more likely to corrupt.

Certainly sometimes cliques control the National Endowment for the Arts funding, and politics are part of getting money. But I would rather be beholden to a government agency with whom I have an anonymous relationship than to a patron who expects to call the tune.

PP: *Writing in The New Republic (November 25, 1978, p. 9-12), James Atlas expresses a common view. He complains that a whole culture has grown up, "the small press world," which produces a profusion of poetry. But are these poems ever read? People make poetry a lifestyle with workshops, conferences, poetry buses, and readings. "Poetry," he laments, "has become just one more of the many therapies available."*

FP: Little magazines are largely read by people who write in them, but there's nothing terribly wrong with that. An industry can be created by the workshops, classes, and so on. But I see it as a healthy sign of life. Particularly at universities, I find poetry readings astoundingly well attended. I would rather see activity, lots of people writing, reading, and hearing poetry even though junk, mediocrity, also results. As to Atlas's charge that poetry has become another therapy, I agree that poetry should never be considered mental hygiene. Serious poetry is art and nothing else.

PP: *In what style or tradition is your own poetry?*

FP: I started out in the style of Rilke, then was drawn to certain poets in America. It is not easy to point to particular influences other than ones from my life. The life itself creates a style. You adapt and assimilate influences and make them into your own voice. I try to stay away from trends, schools. I try to be what I am.

PP: *Do you see a return to traditional verse forms by contemporary poets?*

FP: Not as a general trend, but many poets see that freedom can exist only within a frame. A strict structure provides freedom by providing limits. Experimentation is possible only within those limits. Chess has exact rules, yet no game is like any other.

PP: *What is the function of poetry?*

FP: Oscar Wilde said it is the function of art to have no function. Some people claim it is the function of art to improve society, to stop wars, to start wars. Art has done those things, but I think the function of poetry is to express whatever the poet feels strongly about. There should be no mission to serve anything outside itself. A political poem, then, should first of all be a good poem for the cause, not just a poem for a good cause.

L'art pour l'art. I believe in the autonomy of art. Margaret Anderson had on her magazine *Poetry* the slogan "Life for art's sake." I would modify that to "art for life's sake." Life depends on going beyond the necessities and thinking about beauty. After the bombing of Vienna with all the destruction and sickness and deprivation, the Viennese rebuilt the opera before housing with the consent of the majority who don't even go to the opera. That is a symbol to me and to the world. Art is not a luxury; it goes to the core.■

Aesthetics

There are such beautiful
exotic
words in the dictionary,
euphonic songs that taste good
in the mouth—salmonella,
glaucoma, catatonia, ataxia,
words like the names of
legendary heroines or goddesses
—Acne, Hysterectomy,
Emphysema, Peritonitis, or thunderous
appellations reminiscent of old
warriors and lovers—Tetanus,
Staphylococcus, Stupor,
Cyanide, Carbuncle—
it is a joy like savoring the
hues & abstract shapes in
the medical atlas—those green
gangrenes and scarlet carcinomas,
the intricate pink & silver patterns of
psoriasis like islands on a yellow sea
of skin, Rubenesque hernias, or the
Seurat-like pointillisms of atherosclerosis,
not to speak of the Japanese landscapes drawn by
cirrhosis of the liver, and the sculptures
created by certain amputations, rivalling even
the exquisite armstumps of
the Venus of Milo.

Felix Pollak

"To put it aphoristically, the difference between the language of art and the language of daily intercourse is the difference between a *mot juste* and just words."

Town Drunkard

His name, Jim Paige; occupation, painter—
of house walls, not stretched canvases. He had
the finest muscled body in the town
which he displayed, top-stripped, through summertime.

When he was sober or half-sober, none
could climb a higher tower/steeple, none
could paint with half his skill. For all of that,
he was the town's prime drunkard, and he drank
beer, whisky, wine, canned heat, and God-knows-what,
buying when he could, begging when he must.

One stormy winter night, he came into
the local diner, staggered, turned to me,
said, "There's a tall wind blowing. Not a branch
is shaking anywhere." Then he went back
into the storm to sleep in some deep ditch
beneath the piling snow. He'd slept that way
many a time before.

Up to a point,
he was the pure survivor, or he was
a Whitman/Man, Whitman/American—
or Whitman-Failure, should a failure be
a theme that rose among the leaving grass.

His mind turned into mush before he died,
and few among his townsmen marked his death.
None graced his funeral. The county paid.

He's still back there in time, solving his thirst—
and sleeping snug, deep in snowy ditches.

Town Idiot

Great sailing ears, small chin, and high cheek bones—
exactly like an elf but six feet tall,
Tom Payson wore a greening overcoat
on August days, stopped at the school playground
to swing on swings an hour, then drove home
behind a horse ramshackle at all points.
Out in the country, his failed farm became
endless despair and scandal to those folk
who prized their gestures to propriety.

One burning summer day, Tom Payson died
inside his closed farmhouse, surrounded by
a dozen cats. At least a week went past
before a neighbor broached his kitchen door.

The town selectmen had to go and get
the body carted in for burial.
And one selectman, after that grim day,
carried a loaded shotgun in his truck
to kill whatever cat he came upon
along the road, in fields, or at wood edge.

Poems by John Bennett

Smiling Man

Sometimes old Arthur Moore would visit us,
sit in the kitchen, let my uncle fill
his glass with cider from the stoneware jug,
and talk and smile and talk and smile until
he reached a magic point that he maintained
(as best he could) through all his piled-up years:
mild tipsiness. Not *too* much but not less.
I felt a kind of admiration for
his never being sober, never drunk.

Convivial, intelligent, and bland,
he kept a smile continually in place
because it was a real smile, genuine,
not planned or plotted to meet need for it.

I found it hard to understand the fact
that Arthur Moore accepted his downfalls
and never did a thing but smile at them.
He'd lost his wife, his farm, his children that
he'd never had—and finally became
a hired hand on this man's place or that.
He had no word of anger or plain pique;
he never had opinions on the course
of state or local politics, nor on
the state of his or any other soul.

In his odd way, he was a blessed man:
he never made much fuss about the world
but took it as it came and let it go.

Later, when cancer came and struck him deep,
some old friends took him into their farm home
to help him die at ease. And so he did,
still on occasion smiling his ghost smile.

Carpenter

Came inland from Portsmouth where he had served
long years as a ship's carpenter: took up
the inland Yankee ways, and when he died,
died as a Yankee townsman, full and square.

As broad as houses, not nearly as tall,
with gnarly hands and gnarly face, he strode
with toolbox in his grasp from job to job—
and what he did, he did alone and well:
he must have kept what ships he worked in trim.

The high point in his life came when the town
decided that a new retaining wall
was necessary so Elm Street would not
sink down into the river and be lost.
He got the job. Had help, that time. But while
the wall was going up, some people said:
"Pratt's Folly! That wall won't stay put in place!"
It stayed. Now fifty years in place, it stays
as firmly set as when he built it there:
Jack Pratt's strong monument.

He liked to fish—
or, rather, liked to sit upon the bank
and contemplate whatever moved his mind:
whirlpools or God or clouds or river bends.
Fish never mattered to him. Not at all.

He'd stop by at my house sometimes and take
me out with him: small boy, old man, odd pair.
One time as we sat on the river bank:
"Death comes too soon," he said, then turned to watch
his bobber bouncing softly on small waves.
No use to say it: I was too damned young
to give him back any response at all.
"No point to hurry it. Let it remain
an uncaught fish among those fish down there."
But I accepted—as I still accept.

We caught no fish that day. We never caught
a fish in all the times I went with him.
I guess he had them somehow hexed away.

Jack Pratt, good carpenter, good man. Good man.

August Derleth: The Wisconsin Saga

By Richard Boudreau

August Derleth (1909–1971) deserves, if any Midwestern writer does, the title of “Chronicler of the Upper Mississippi Valley.” With his deep interest in the area (nearly all his books are set in the region) and his amazing energy (he published some 165 volumes in his lifetime) he delineated his particular corner of the universe in a twentieth century version of *The Human Comedy*, rivaling in its wide range of characters and themes the microcosmos of that nineteenth century chronicler of French provincial life, Honore Balzac. Like him Derleth raced against time and mortality to get it all down, and like him he failed—as if both men had taken American historian John Fiske’s advice: “Work as if you were to live forever; live as if you were to die tomorrow.”

Besides several collections of short stories and novelettes about his contemporary world of Sac Prairie, out of Derleth’s fertile imagination came historical novels, related to the short fiction and with them forming a comprehensive work, called the Sac Prairie Saga. The novels of this series appeared between 1937 and 1945 and covered the years from 1837 to 1941. *Bright Journey*, about the early years of Hercules Dousman, published in 1940, originally stood with the Sac Prairie Saga, but when Derleth wrote the sequel to it, *The House on the Mound*, in 1958, he did not list it within the Sac Prairie Saga. That book and the next, *The Hills Stand Watch*, a story about the lead-mining area of Mineral Point, published in 1960, were listed merely as “novels.” Not until the appearance of *The Shadow in the Glass* in 1963 did he come up with the new and separate

designation, the Wisconsin Saga, for the accumulated volumes not set in the immediate Sac Prairie area. With the publication in 1969 of *The Wind Leans West*, a nonfiction novel about the early Milwaukee years of Alexander Mitchell, the series reached five volumes. Though Derleth planned additions to the Saga, these were unwritten at the time of his death in 1971.

The Wisconsin Saga volumes cover the years from 1812 to 1887. Unlike the Sac Prairie Saga, their narratives are not sequential but often overlap, especially during the years of territorial Wisconsin and the early years of statehood. But the more than 700,000 words contained in the Wisconsin Saga are memorable, and a comparison of their settings, both natural and reconstructed; their characters, both fictional and historic; their events, both real and imagined; and their numerous themes shed a light on his historical fiction techniques, writing ability, and outlook on life—all gleaned from a lifetime of nearly uninterrupted residence in his provincial hometown of Sac Prairie.

To another Wisconsin native, Hamlin Garland (to whom Derleth dedicated the first book of the Wisconsin Saga), such regional writing was “natural and unrestrained art” marked by “the endless and vital charm of individual peculiarity.” Dialect and local customs are obviously important elements in that peculiarity, and Derleth makes wide use of both, but in the hands of an observer of and participator in the natural environment such as he was, setting takes on a greater role than usual. In *Bright Journey*, for example, the natural world of those early years when

Wisconsin was part of Michigan Territory is presented as virginal, sublime, almost mystic—as in this description of the lower Fox River:

... They passed Green Bay and the rapids and were soon paddling through the flat country beyond, a country of woods and swamps, of low open places bordering the river, and forests coming to the water’s edge. Dawn flushed the east, but in the west the waning moon still shone yellowly, and a few stars held briefly to the sky before fading in the advancing light fanning up the eastern heaven. From all sides above the water’s sound, the dipping of paddles, came the matins of birds, the caroling of robins and thrushes, the sweet diminuendos of field sparrows, the lyricism of vesper sparrows, the mourning of turtle doves and killdeers. Woodcocks and jacksnipes still volleyed down the air, and somewhere an early hawk whickered proudly on the high wind.

In *The House on the Mound* the ancient Indian mound on which Hercules Dousman built Villa Louis and which survives both him and his wife, Jane, becomes if not the main character then the main focus of the story. In *The Hills Stand Watch* the Platte and Belmont Mounds of the setting take on even greater significance as symbols of the privations and limitations of frontier life to David Pengellen’s new wife, Candace, as opposed to her former cultivated life in the East, sentinels beyond which she cannot pass and on whose slopes she finally forfeits her life.

Since such unspoiled natural settings can still be found in many areas of southern Wisconsin, Derleth’s recreation of them required only close

observation, detailed recall, and a facility of expression. But in attempting historic settings Derleth needed to do extensive research. His care and skill in reconstructing the past is particularly evident in the nonfiction novel about Wisconsin's first governor, Nelson Dewey. But it is noteworthy in the entire series, providing a compendium of historic sites important in the early history of our region: Forts Howard, Winnebago, Crawford, and Snelling; the Astor posts at Mackinac Island, Green Bay, the Portage, and Prairie du Chien; the Wade House, Count Brogmar's (Count Harazthy's) store at Sauk Prairie, the shot tower at Helena, even a tavern site of a murder in Snake Hollow, now Potosi; settlements such as Cassville, Mineral Point, Platteville, and Whitewater; and finally actual buildings in Madison and Milwaukee, ranging from taverns to homes to hotels.

Important as background for his historical novels, Derleth uses them at times for wider application, for instance in this description of the new capital in 1840 Madison from the novel about Alexander Mitchell:

... Alex arrived at the office, having made his way, much to his astonishment, past mortar and pieces of sawed wood lying everywhere in the still unfinished building. He had not seen anything finished in the capitol, though the building was in use; so he was not surprised to find that the Governor's office, too, was not completely finished. ... It was already apparent to Alex that whatever conversation they would have would be had to the accompaniment of hammers ringing on the roof where large sheets of tin were being affixed.

This effectively suggests the transitoriness of civilized institutions and the shaky foundations on which all human endeavors are founded. In *The Shadow in the Glass* Nelson Dewey returns after eighteen years to Cassville which was a building when he arrived there in the first summer of the territory in 1836. Now as he looks over the peaceful settlement by the river, it seems to have been somnambulant for a decade and a half. Cassville's being passed over for final con-

sideration as the capital and now sunk nearly to a ghost town is symbolic of the enchantment on Dewey's own life, and like the town he chooses for his later years and for his dying, he has become nearly—or merely—a ghost of the past—a shadow in the glass.

Historical characters

Inextricably mixed in with the story of Wisconsin history, of course, are the actors peculiar to that drama. Since Derleth represents myriads of prominent figures of territorial and state days, it is difficult to single out a representative few. Aside from Dousman, Derleth's most realized recreation—even more engaging than Dousman—is Jane Fisher, the wife of old Joe Rolette, Astor agent at Prairie du Chien, who after Rolette's death, married Dousman. Some of the most charming scenes of *Bright Journey* are those between the two, loving one another even while Rolette still lived, but keeping decorous distance in their passion. Jane is beguiling in her coquettish ways, which Hercules appreciates to the full, and even in her anger, which more often amuses than riles the absorbed Hercules. Jane in turn is amused at "Mistaire Dousman's such handsome speeches." Her French accent sounds "vair" authentic, owing not a little perhaps, to Derleth's familiarity with the French dialect poems of the Prairie du Chien area written by Laura Sherry, native of the city and organizer of the Wisconsin Dramatic Society.

As he is in the history of our state, Henry Dodge is a recurring figure in the novels. Though he appears in all of the books, he is most prominent in *The Shadow in the Glass* where he is described in the following manner:

... and among them, the center of attention, Governor Henry Dodge, before whom Dewey presently stood to be introduced, being gazed upon by wide-set, invading eyes looking at him from above a prominent nose. Strength seemed to radiate from the Governor, and he stood casually among the men there—and the women bringing them cooling drinks—as the very embodiment of self-confident power and determination.

Always depicted as the frontiersman, Dodge is ready to fight or parley—and bluff—whatever the circumstances, his only fault, perhaps, that of too ready compromise. Derleth characterized Dodge as self-reliant and able—even when he had the governor confront that canny and formidable little Scot, Alexander Mitchell, in a marvelous scene in that scarcely made-up governor's office in 1840 Madison.

If Dodge is an abiding hero in the saga, his counterbalance in the scales of politics and types is Moses Strong of the lead mining region, an early voice in the legislative halls of Wisconsin. He appears in three of the books, most prominently in *The Hills Stand Watch*:

He was still a young man, for all his eminence in the affairs of the Territory, in his middle thirties, with a soft, wispy moustache and full, but not thick, sideburns. His chin was smooth, his nose broad, and his face, too, broad, with wide-set eyes.

The description presents Strong benignly enough, but a few lines later Derleth makes clear how the reader is to take this man: "He avoided no occasion for adding to his own laurels, having a secret eye on the governorship himself." And when Alexander Mitchell sees Strong in Council in *The Wind Leans West*, he notes the sensuous mouth and fiery eyes, concluding "this man's vanity is his weakness," and judges him—fairly from Derleth's evidence—a demagogue of the worst type.

Fictional characters

Derleth's books teem with secondary fictional characters too, usually from presettlement groups and, later, the working classes. And perhaps the earliest characterizations, the Indians and the voyageurs, are his best. Dousman has available to him many Indians as informants, one at least from every neighboring tribe, the most engaging are Kapolequa of the Fox, who dies in combat in *Bright Journey* and Thunder Walker, a Winnebago, who turns up again in *The House on the Mound*. Of course, Lt. Parr has Soaring

Hawk, a Winnebago who is his boon companion and provides comic relief with his pertinent—and impertinent—remarks about the strange ways of the white man, and who drifts West after Parr's death. Even Alexander Mitchell has, unbelievably, his right-hand Indian, Teepeekeenenee, a Menominee. The voyageurs are just as rife, especially in the Dousman books. Souligne, Lapiage, and Benoit share their knowledge with young Dousman, looking out for him but not sparing him in their work. Souligne and his house provide for the early weaving of the plot in *The House on the Mound*. Lapiage and Benoit show up in the sequel as well. But they, like Rolette himself, represent the old days and ways and cannot survive the transition to settlement of the land, signaled by coming statehood.

Perhaps the most realized and intriguing of Derleth's major fictional characters is a woman: Tamson Bishop, "the green-eyed one," as Soaring Hawk calls her. David Pengellen and the reader both see her for the first time early in *The Hills Stand Watch*:

As he walked there in the haze of last sunlight, he was suddenly aware of a woman's voice raised in song, low and sweet. It came from a little way above him, from the edge of the timber there. He listened, recognized the melody, and heard the words. "Westryn wind, when wilt thou blow? The small rain down doth rain. Christ, that my love were in my arms and I in my bed again!"

And there she sits singing a love song of longing, her long chestnut hair, "coming down softly to her shoulders, and then turning outward and up, a little wild." This beguiling lass is seventeen, straight from Cornwall, and destined to steal into David's heart as well as into the reader's. As with Jane Rolette, some of the charm arises from her queer accent and phrasing.

"Toujours l'audace," the cry of the French revolutionary Danton, could well serve as the cry of Derleth, the historical novelist. He dares to depict the famous Dr. William Beaumont as a crashing bore, to have Dousman banter with Jane Rolette in seats still warm from the lovers, Knoxville Taylor

and Jeff Davis, to use a supposed George Catlin sketch of Dousman's unrecognized son. Perhaps most audacious of all, however, is the creation of Lt. Nathaniel Parr. Of indefinite ancestry, curly headed and darkly handsome, he appears in all of the books except *Bright Journey*. Called derogatorily "Dodge's errand boy" by Governor Doty, he stands as indispensable aid to Governor Dodge. As messenger he is ubiquitous in the halls of the mighty with, however, "a faintly sardonic expression," obviously a loyal man, an ambitious man, and to many, not quite trustworthy. He does not hesitate to employ guile in using Tamson Bishop to help him along with his love affair with David Pengellen's new and immature wife.

Historic events

As with personages historic Derleth's pages are replete with events historic. *Bright Journey*, for example, begins with the capture of Mackinac Island by the British in the War of 1812 and includes the dramatic surrender of Chief Red Bird at the Portage in 1827. The entire saga covers such notable events as the competition over the location of the state capitol, the Vineyard-Arendt murder in Council, Governor Dodge's proclamation of statehood, Governor Dewey's address to the first state legislature, the entire story (spread throughout the saga) of the building of the railroad from Milwaukee to Prairie du Chien, Governor Farwell's address to the legislature (the latter from the final book, *The Wind Leans West*), and in between nearly every Indian treaty and every crucial act by every territorial governor and every state governor up to the Civil War.

Derleth's research is thorough and usually exact, though there are some discrepancies: stating that the crime the two Winnebago imprisoned in Prairie du Chien in 1826 committed was the murder of the Methode family (it was merely a treaty violation); failing to note that the Winnebago attack on the keel boats occurred the same day and cost more lives than Red Bird's attack near Prairie du Chien; presenting a charming but

apocryphal story about Juliette Kinzie's lunch packing for the Dousman party on the way to Green Bay in August of 1830 (she did not reach Fort Winnebago herself until October). Derleth even seems at odds with his own fabricated history: in *The Hills Stand Watch* Nelson Dewey's intention to run for governor of the soon-to-be-created state is known to Governor Dodge in the Autumn of 1847; in *The Shadow in the Glass* Dodge summons Dewey to Madison in the Spring of 1848 to suggest to an astonished Dewey that he seek the governorship of the new state.

Because of his general accuracy, however, it is more probable that Derleth knew the facts in each case—and altered them to his own ends. He certainly was aware of the variations in his own writings concerning Dewey's candidacy for the governorship. Perhaps the reason for his not meticulously following historic accounts is to be found in a note to the reader at the end of *The House on the Mound*. There he admits to discrepancies between that story and its predecessor, citing for himself as novelist an overriding consideration, "the author's first duty being to his fiction," not to his fact.

When the historical events and personages are sorted through and critically appraised, a remarkable finding emerges: not one of the historical events is repeated anywhere else in the long saga, though identical time frames recur in other of the books. This refusal to repeat events extends to the early novels of the Sac Prairie Saga as well. The Black Hawk War, for example, almost entirely ignored in *Bright Journey*, is treated in detail in *Wind Over Wisconsin*. These two books also record an identical conversation between Dousman and Baron Pierneau (who appears in Wisconsin Saga books too), and comparison of the two renditions is revealing: Derleth does not repeat himself. Quoted dialogue in the first is paraphrased in the second and vice-versa. Whether he was concerned about the attention span of those readers who stayed with the saga or not, Derleth seemed determined to avoid that most deadening element to reader interest, repetition.

Of the myriad themes of the books, the single one that fuses the series, even more strongly than chronology or character, is the theme of change, change from wilderness to a modicum of civilization. In *Bright Journey* the change from wilderness to early settlement is best shown through the changes in traffic on the river and the waning of the Indian and the voyageur. In *The House on the Mound* the ever-present change everywhere apparent in the growing settlement at the confluence of the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers is reenforced rather than undercut by the changeless, ancient mound. Change is most obvious in *The Hills Stand Watch* through the growing exploitation of the lead mines, its effect on the landscape, and the threat of its decline in the face of rumors of a California gold strike. In *The Shadow in the Glass* change takes place everywhere Dewey moves and lives except for Cassville, its stultified endurance symbolic of Dewey's own vain attempts to maintain permanence in an impermanent world.

Of course change is wrought, especially on the frontier, by people. A second theme as pervasive as the first, therefore, is the pursuit of success by various characters in the saga. The outstanding examples, Hercules Dousman and Alexander Mitchell, attain stunning success, becoming millionaires and lending credence to belief in the rags to riches story, the American Dream, illustrated contemporaneously in Franklin's *Autobiography*, and soon to be mythologized in Horatio Alger's novels. Nelson Dewey and David Pengellen (the latter, admittedly, not in the same league as the former) were only partially successful in this pursuit of fame and fortune. Why were they not fully successful? For both men recurrent domestic trouble seemed to sap their energies and restrict their foresight. Neither fully understood his wife nor seemed able to avoid the mounting entanglements. Dewey and his wife are like spent swimmers leaning on one another, sinking themselves, and their story ends in death and oblivion, tragic because its downward course is so unrelenting. The

Pengellen story of the love triangle conforms to the tragic mode, ending in the death of Candace, but from that depth it rises in hopefulness through David's marriage to one he does understand, one of his own kind, the "green-eyed" Tamson Bishop.

Success in these four cases—and Governor Dodge might be added—appears to be the reward of virtue, another theme that appears frequently. The most successful, Dousman and Mitchell, are presented as men of honesty, integrity, patience, prudence. Pengellen shares these attributes though he lacks the larger vision, and therefore fame and fortune in limited quantity seem to be his. All three are thorough-going realists, though Pengellen is a little callow; they look the world in the eye. Nelson Dewey, however, is too honest (as Dodge tells him point-blank in one scene). He is too indulgent with his wife and too generous with his debtors—all serious faults, no doubt—but his real failing is not lack of virtue (his rise to the governorship was the result of upright character) but an inability to face reality. He is, in short, an impractical idealist.

If virtue offers reward in the saga, then vice offers suffering and failure. John Marsh, antagonist in *Bright Journey*, is unprincipled in his dealings with all except the traitorous Sioux, and he loses everything in the end, except his life. Dousman's own vice of incontinence—his affair with Cecile Gardepi—prepares for and justifies his suffering throughout most of the novel. Nathaniel Parr's covetousness dominates him in *The Hills Stand Watch*, and as antagonist he pays for it finally with his life. Katie Dunn, self-indulgent and willful, tries to manipulate for her husband and herself political successes, dreaming of high society on the banks of the Potomac. In doing so, she becomes Dewey's antagonist, and she unwittingly pulls him into the morass with her.

In considering all of the stories of the saga, the reader uncovers attitudes toward life that appear to be a fair index of Derleth's own: chance plays a large part in human affairs; he who waits patiently will often suc-

ceed; circumstance and character are controllers of destiny; vice sometimes goes unpunished, virtue unrewarded; a realist sees life most clearly, can respond most successfully; an idealist has impaired vision and, therefore, responds ineffectively; faith in the general goodness of man is vindicated in the long run; the assaults, turmoils and sufferings of life can with equanimity be met and endured; love does not conquer all, though it does keep things humming.

Since the first book was written for one saga, another as a sequel, and the rest to fulfill special requests, the novels of the saga are uneven in quality and interest. Without doubt, the best told is *The Shadow in the Glass*, but the most readable is the earliest in composition, *Bright Journey*. The least historical of the novels, *The Hills Stand Watch* is the best structured, with a strong beginning and end uncluttered with interfering historical events and doubly unified through the use of symbolism. Like most sequels *The House on the Mound* is not as good as the original. Here it is a contrived and disappointing follow-up to the captivating courtship of the original. The most superficial of all of the novels is *The Wind Leans West*. Martha Reed as Mitchell's wife is a travesty, hardly even a cardboard figure, and Mitchell and his insurance company-bank simply cannot sustain a reader for an entire book.

Perhaps "Saga" was too grandiose a term for these five books alone; they could better be characterized as a substantial chronicle, both factual and fictional, of Wisconsin's territorial and early statehood days. Considered from that more modest viewpoint, they take on value as engaging and imaginative vehicles which dramatically acquaint readers with the early history of Wisconsin. Their unevenness on the one hand and their falling short of intense engagement of the human soul on the other keep at least this portion of Derleth's regional writings from attaining finally the height of those of Honore Balzac. That leaves the novels of the "Wisconsin Saga" somewhere between—not epic, but not pedestrian either—still worthwhile reading for the casual as well as for the serious reader.■

Grandfather

I

little son
your grandfather comes in
his face dark as a heart attack,
as fuchsias, violets, his eyes
bright as broken glass

he holds you and you smile
he claims you with kisses, praises
'We'll go fishing when you grow,'
he says I stand near
in dread of deep water
you laugh in his arms

'He never held *you* that long,'
his woman says to her son,
your father

II

he was always off to the bars
going the rounds
leaving the work to them
taking all the money
sometimes losing it
or spending it in one shot
like the time he bought the
amphibious car
set out in the yard unused
its sleek fins burned to rust
in his absence
while they did the milking
pitching shoveling feeding
plowing planting harvesting;
the times he would bring home
a pint of ice cream
for the five of them

III

one night coming home drunk
he saw the light on in the milkhouse
and slipped through the half-open door
quiet
in the habit of ambush

the dog barked and he kicked it hard
—later he said it bit him

then he grabbed it by muzzle and jaw
wrenching them open;
you could hear bone snap
then he swung it with both hands
over his shoulders
slamming it down
to the concrete
and said to your father,
who was thirteen years old.

'Teach him to bite *me*,'

and walked away

your father finished his chores—
the dog lay breathing blood
onto the freshly limed floor
—then he went to the house
to get his .22

but they stopped him
accusing him of cruelty
the old man saying nothing
in front of the t.v.

IV

little son
your grandfather holds you in his arms;
'We'll go fishing just you and me,' he croons
as if he could revoke the law of childhood
with an old man's love

'We'll go fishing when you grow,'
he says holding you over
a vase of roses, their petals
heavily dropped like blood
on the table

you reach at their redness

Indian Summer

The oaks are alive in the half dark,
the wind shakes out their gold
& roils it with indigo & rust

this is God's Country:
time stops here
with a vengeance.

Up the hill
is the cemetery
silent as a photograph,
& the Indian mounds
emptied of artifacts
& reconstructed
with careful adherence to form

the Spirit wind hurls gold here
in the autumn haze,
& those who hear it
believe.

Ingrid Swanberg

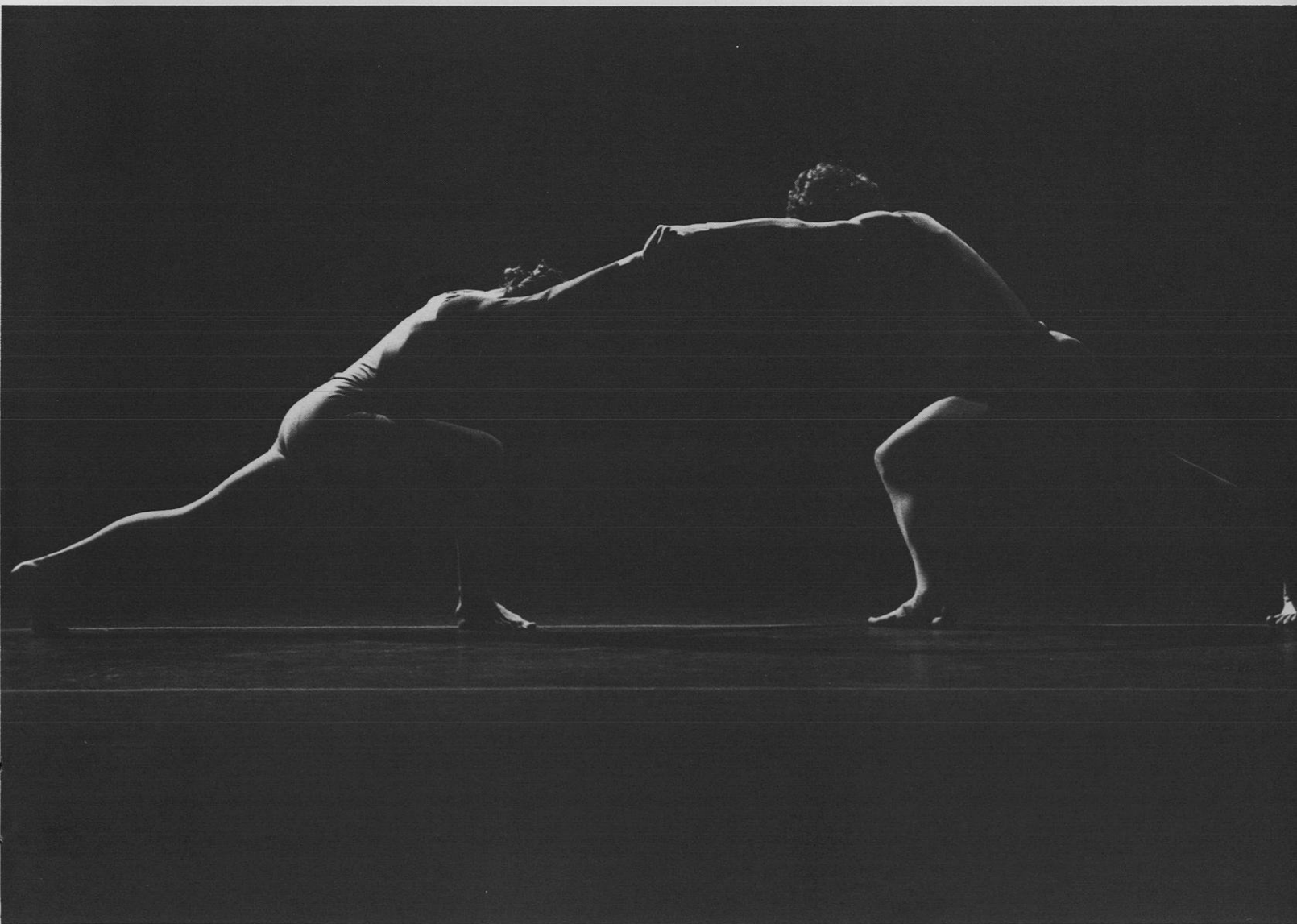
Ingrid Swanberg

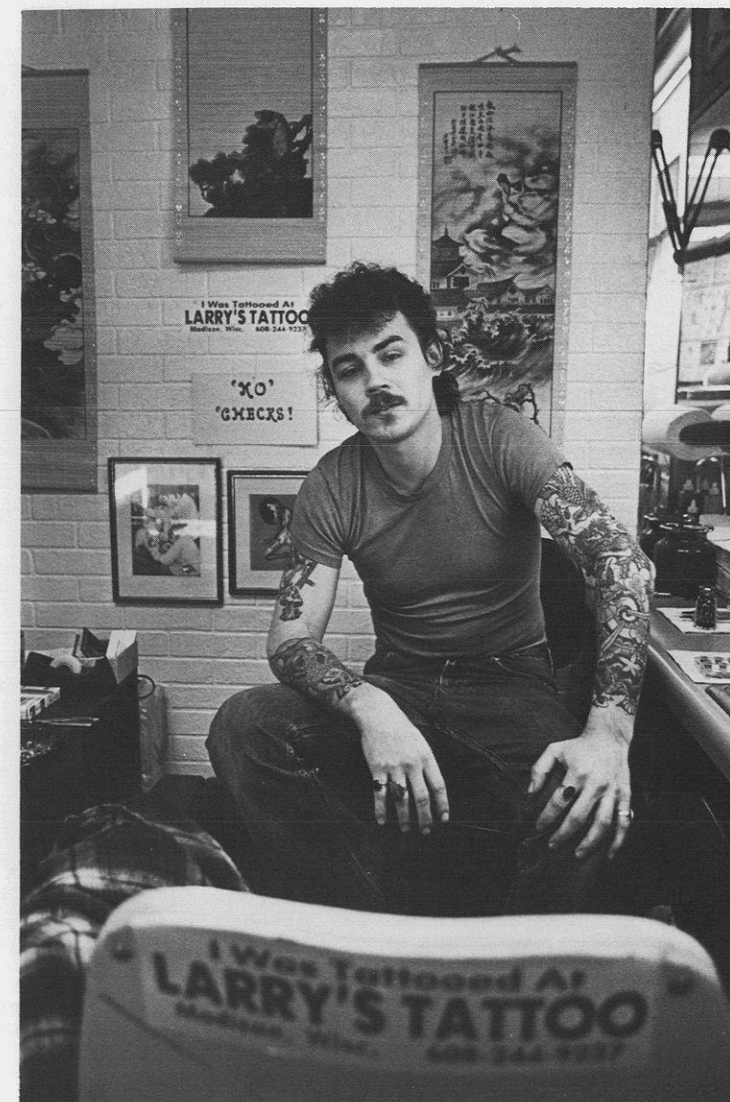
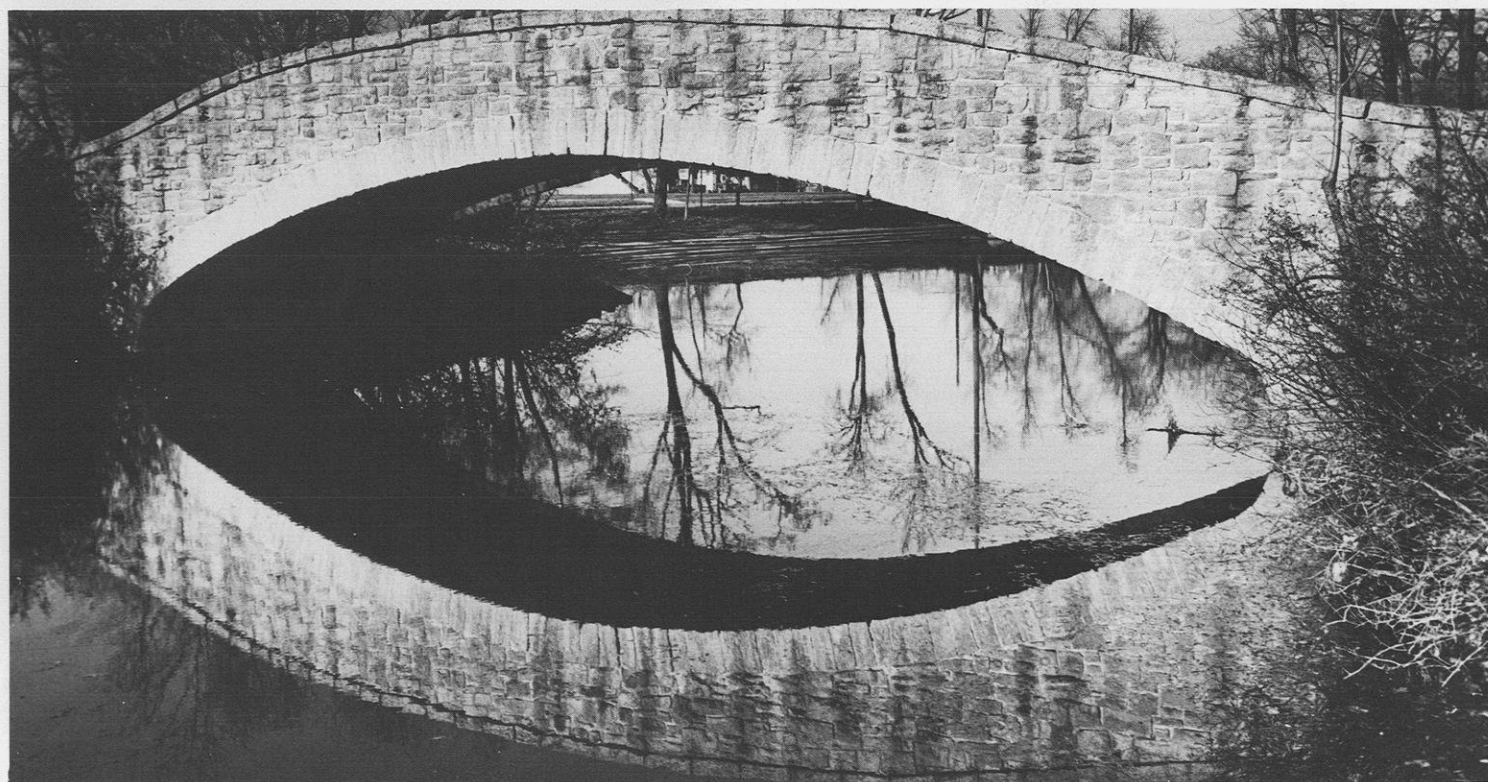
People frequently ask me what it's like to be a free-lance photojournalist, or what kind of photography I do from day to day, and I usually find myself searching in vain for a clear, concise answer. There is so much variety in my assignments that I find it impossible to generalize about the work. In the space of just a few hours, I've been sent out to photograph the President of the United States, a political rally at the state Capitol, and hookers on King Street. I've completed some assignments without ever leaving my home, and others have taken me as far as Ocho Rios, Jamaica.

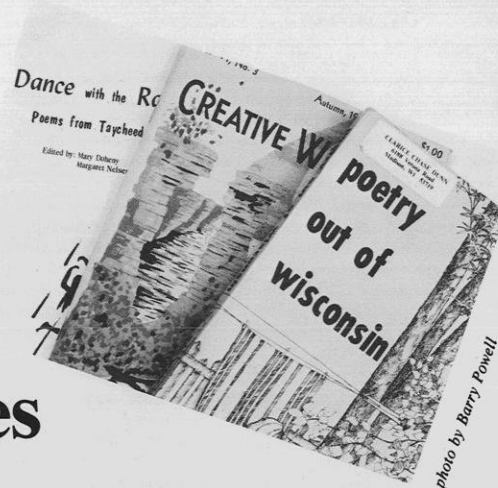
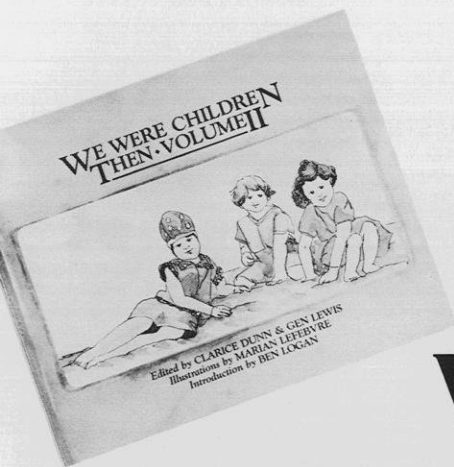
More than any other single factor, it's that kind of variety that keeps me interested in my work. I don't see how boredom could ever become a problem. The fact that the medium of photography also provides an outlet for creative and artistic expression, which everyone needs to some degree, makes this vocation even more satisfying.

Brent Nicastro

Wisconsin Photographers' Showcase







Wisconsin Writes

By Clarice Chase Dunn

Ten years ago Jesse Stuart declared Wisconsin the "writing-ist state in the Union."

He had come from Kentucky to help Wisconsin Regional Writers Association celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary at Fort Atkinson. The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters also joined in the celebration.

Stuart's words surfaced again last year as members of the Council for Wisconsin Writers, in a talk show over the state radio network, announced its Awards Day and Authors Convocation. Listeners from all over Wisconsin called in requesting information on resources for writers in their areas.

One newcomer to Wisconsin, intrigued by the statewide ferment of literary activity, wondered why Wisconsin abounds in free-lance writers.

The answers were many. Rich ethnic heritage of numerous immigrant groups. Story telling tradition. Recentness of the pioneer experience. Beautiful productive land. Feisty climate. True, all true.

But Wisconsin is not alone among states possessing these treasures. Talk show participants, after much verbal pondering, credited the Wisconsin Idea, the belief that the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state, for the proliferation of writers' groups and by-lines.

Activity did not automatically spring from credo, however. It was the University of Wisconsin Extension which implemented the ideal, rolling up its sleeves to work with farmers, lumberjacks, fishermen, housewives, and all others eager to articulate their experience.

Three ardent sleeve rollers who became literary circuit riders for UW Extension were Robert E. Gard, August Derleth, and Al P. Nelson.

In 1948 Robert Gard, then director of the Wisconsin Idea Theater, with the help of dedicated volunteers, launched the Wisconsin Rural Writers Association. And it did reach out to the boundaries of the state. The first local writers' club was organized at Phillips, population about 1500.

Before long many urban residents wanted to join the rural writers, and the name was changed to Wisconsin Regional Writers Association (WRWA) in 1956. Rural participation did not drop off, however, with the influx of city writers. The vigor of land people has remained an integral part of the organization.

From its inception, WRWA has been all inclusive in its membership. One brochure stated: "If you write, or have ever written, or hope to write, you belong to Wisconsin Regional Writers Association."

No doubt the dynamic character of the organization stems from this mix of amateur and professional, of grade-school dropout and Ph.D. Members include lumberjacks, farmers, professors, editors, literary agents, publishers, pastors, nuns, homemakers, prison inmates. . . . The age range: from teens to nonagenarians. Scholarship, folk wisdom, the ebullience of youth, the wisdom of age. Truly a grass roots organization.

Today WRWA has close to 700 paid members and serves 39 local clubs loosely affiliated with the state organization. Although the local groups are the bone marrow of

WRWA, their members are not required to join the parent group. Conversely, many WRWA members do not have local groups in their areas.

Throughout the years WRWA has provided numerous and varied services to its members. Spring and fall conferences, providing workshops in all types of writing and featuring both national and regional speakers, are held in cities and villages throughout the state. The annual Jade Ring contest awards prizes for short stories, essays, articles, drama, juveniles, and photography.

Round robins, cooperative correspondence critique groups, provide critical appraisal for those homebound or not in contact with other writers. Writers with extensive literary contacts also take advantage of the round-robin program, however.

A quarterly newsletter, *The Regional Writers*, reports sales of members and provides marketing information. News from other Wisconsin writers' groups is included.

WRWA joins the University of Wisconsin Extension and the Northern Arts Council in sponsoring the Rhinelander School of the Arts. The SOA meets yearly the last week of July and in 1983 celebrates its twentieth anniversary.

From the beginning of the Yarns of Yesteryear senior citizen reminiscence contest in 1974, WRWA has been one of the sponsors, providing cash prizes, memberships, and an awards program at spring conference. Many of the charter members of WRWA are now participants in the Yarns contest.

One of the most significant outreach programs began over twenty

Wisconsin abounds in free-lance writers and statewide literary activity.

years ago when WRWA volunteers began conducting creative writing programs in Wisconsin penal institutions: Fox Lake, Central State, Green Bay, Taycheedah, and Wau-pun. Some inmates have entered the Jade Ring contest, and winners have on occasion received awards in person at the Jade Ring banquet. WRWA has never been an organization for the elite!

Throughout its existence WRWA has proudly published the best work of its members. *Rural Wisconsin in Prose and Verse* and *Pen and Plow* defined its early years. From 1953–1961 *Creative Wisconsin*, a quality magazine, was published quarterly under the sponsorship of UW-Extension. *Wisconsin Harvest*, an anthology edited by August Derleth in 1965, is still available from Stanton and Lee Publishers.

Although originally funded by University Extension, WRWA has long been financially self-supporting. Its members still turn to UW-Extension Arts Development and Professor Emeritus Gard for counsel and resource information.

Membership dues for WRWA are eight dollars per year, four dollars for senior citizens. Those interested in joining may send checks to Gerald Kronschnabel, Membership Chairman, 1303 Lost Dauphin Road, De Pere, Wis. 54115.

Spring conference was held this year on May 7, at Fond du Lac; fall conference will be September 24–25, at Waukesha.

Although WRWA serves all categories of writers, spin-off groups have organized to provide additional opportunities in specific areas.

Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets (WFP) was founded in 1950 with Edna Meudt, frequent contributor to the *Wisconsin Academy Review*, as one of its organizers. Current membership is 230.

Poets meet twice yearly in different parts of the state, thus like WRWA bringing the organization to its members. Roll call poems are read by attending members. The organization also conducts a traveling trophy contest twice annually.

Although WFP is an autonomous organization, it has membership in the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. Members may enter any or all of the fifty state poetry contests sponsored by the National Federation. A total of \$5000 in prize money is awarded to winners.

To date the Fellowship has published five anthologies. *Poetry Out of Wisconsin*, Volume V, is now available from Jeri McCormick, 23 South Allen St., Madison, Wis. 53705.

Gerti Sennett is current president of the WFP. Poets interested in membership may send three poems to Lenore Coberly, Credentials Chairman, 4114 North Sunset Court, Madison, Wis. 53705.

In 1956, Raconteurs, an all male writers' group, was founded for the purpose of fellowship and professional advancement. As the name suggests, some of Wisconsin's finest story tellers are members. Al Nelson, Raconteur enthusiast, proudly reports that to date Rac members have sold over 200 books, 500 short stories, and thousands of articles and essays.

One notable Rac achievement was the introduction in 1967 of the Wisconsin Book Fair, an annual all-day event in Madison or Milwaukee to promote the sale of books by Wisconsin authors. Nationally known speakers, among them Jesse Stuart, were featured. The Book Fair is now conducted by WRWA at its fall conference.

The group now has 135 members who meet quarterly with speakers and exhibits of published work. For information about membership write to Al Nelson, Box 128, Delafield, Wis. 53018.

In 1964 WRWA spin-offs continued with the Raconteurs founding the Council for Wisconsin Writers (C.W.W.) to encourage excellence in Wisconsin literary output and provide exposure for published writers with promotion of their work. Through an annual contest for work published the preceding year, cash awards are made in nine categories. Entries are judged by established writers.

For the first five years of its existence C.W.W. was funded by the Johnson Foundation of Racine. Since then, benefactors have been Wisconsin corporations, organizations, and individuals interested in furthering Wisconsin's long tradition of literary achievement.

Membership is open to writers and nonwriters alike. Readers, writers, editors, publishers, librarians, literary agents, book sellers, reviewers—all meet in convocation each spring to award prizes and discuss problems both of emerging and established writers.

Each year the C.W.W. presents the Latham Sholes award to an individual who has been an outstanding friend to Wisconsin writers. Last year's recipient was Robert Gard, this year's was Gertrude Puelicher.

Annual dues are ten dollars, or fifteen dollars for husband and wife, to be paid to Leonard Archer, treasurer, 6719 Century Avenue, Middleton, Wis. 53562.

In addition to these grass roots organizations, Wisconsin writers' have access to local branches of national writers organizations such as National League of American Pen Women, Women in Communication, American Society of Journalists and Authors, and numerous press associations.

Judging from records of the past thirty-five years, if Wisconsin is not the writingist state in the Union, it is certainly one of the contenders. ■

First-Day-Of-School Quiet

But you
come hurrying back
to kiss me good-by
(almost forgotten
both of us so grown.)
You, half child—half woman
with backpack slung over one shoulder
ankles wobbling
fragrant with perennial first-day smells:
new erasers, #2 lead, and fresh crayons.
Me, half woman—half child
rising to my toes
so we won't notice
you've reached my height.

I pull wilted chrysanthemums
one-by-one
from a chipped vase
then climb the stairs
to find your bedspread smooth.

Susan Faust Casper

Poet Don'ts

I

don't say wolf poet
don't cry or howl it
you've cried wolf too often
the wolves are tired of guest appearances in your poems
the wolves are tired of the hard gristle of your verse
they crave the blueberries of the real
set the wolves free poet
do not harness their howl
do not harness their hunt
the reserve of your poem is not large enough for wolves
not wilderness enough for the whelps to grow full boned
set the wolves free poet
let them out of the zoo of your dreams
let them out of the cage of your poems
the tame wolf on the chain is not a wolf
the wolf in your poems is a big dog
only the green glitter of their eyes outside the firelight
the fire built of your poems
then speak of wolves
then you won't wish to

II

don't sit in graveyards poet
don't quote the tombstones in your poems
don't rob the dead
don't talk of worms
a man was just electrocuted here
trying to raise worms from the depths of graves
trying to dowse them out
with lightning rods stuck in the ground
let the dead lie
let them sleep in their Jesus
let the dust wait expectantly and alone
don't knock on the tomb
microphone in hand
can you give me a quotable quote Mr. Dead?
don't chase the dead down
after their accident with life
don't ponder the grief
do not eat the dirt wishing to understand
the meal of unknowing will come soon enough
let the dead lie poet
if they wish to be interviewed
they will come to you
simply believe they can speak

III

then there's insanity poet
 oh poor tired insanity!
 he walks on stage—poor tired fool dressed in hospital greens
 head jerking with thousands of milligrams of thorazine
 he doesn't even remember his name anymore
 he's been shocked so many times
 he no longer has anything cute or surreal to say
 his stance is no longer radical
 just pathetic
 he is no longer the convenient metaphor for your alienation
 from the controls of your own beliefs
 poor fool poor puppet
 while the poet pulls the strings above
 completely sane
 or at least sane enough to know he's playing for sympathy
 while the doctors in the audience
 mutter things about lack of affect
 or it was his mother's fault
 cure me cure me cries the poet
 women who do not know the game they are getting into
 will be seduced
 one can hope
 not for long

IV

then there's grandma
 poets flock to grandma like vultures
 waiting to record how she dies
 poetically
 the sharp beaks of their verse starved for news of senility
 starved to shit pity
 while their eyes give the lie away
 poor grandma
 she wandered off today
 but does the poem wander off where grandma went?
 no the poem with steel fingers pulls grandma back
 to what day it is
 grandma this is Wednesday
 say Wednesday grandma
 Wednesday
 here grandma make a lampshade of your past
 with your fingers "like stiff oak twigs"
 grandma
 wander out of the poem in peace
 the trap door is just behind the pulpit
 where the poets preach what they don't know about old age
 or the age old way you follow
 where there are no maps
 only a tinkling bell of intuition
 die into the holy face grandma
 right out of the streets of the poem

V

then there's roses
 anybody got anything
 as fresh and sweet and new to say
 as a rose is a rose
 please stand up and say it now
 otherwise sit down
 and think of something to say about thorns
 and not crowns of please
 no rose tattoos
 no rose stigmata
 no rose red cheeks
 no Glorianna roses
 no Wars of
 no rose windows
 no attar of roses
 stinking up what might be a good poem
 sit tight in your bud
 nothing wrong with budding
 the time to blossom
 will come on its own
 in its own sweet time
 don't hot-house force bloom
 be a roadside wildrose
 be rose-hip tea
 be rose madder
 that rose

Jeffery Lewis

Literary Losers Wisconsin's Little Mags and Small Presses

By Chris Halla

Losers? In a sense, yes. In another sense, no. The little magazines and small presses of Wisconsin are like their counterparts anywhere else in the U.S.: For most of them, virtually everything they publish loses money. Furthermore, it would seem the vast majority of the population is ignorant of them, while only a small portion of the people who do know of them take them seriously. If material success was all that was to be considered, little magazines and small presses would be losers indeed.

John Milton identified his audience as "few though fitting." The literary publishers of Wisconsin must agree. Their audience is certainly few, but, at the same time, it is an audience that truly appreciates the *creation* of a modern literature. It is an audience mostly of individuals—though a few institutions are insightful enough to recognize the potential future value of today's literary publishing—capable of seeing that, even though much of what appears in little magazines and small press books will be forgotten tomorrow, a few jewels may shine through and become an important part of our literary tradition. That audience, few though fitting as it is, explains why literary publishers survive here in the Badger State as elsewhere.

Literary publishing is an obsession. Though it lifts green dollars from the obsessed publishers' pockets like a thief in the night, these courageous souls go on. Even after having spent ten years as a publisher of literary curiosities myself, I cannot explain the obsession. I only know it exists. There is a need not only to preserve the literature of yesterday and today, but that of tomorrow as well.

The terms "little magazine" and "small press" are of course reflections of circulation numbers (in all but a small number of cases), but they are also misnomers used to describe ambitious ideas and ideals as they apply to the putting into print of poetry, fiction, essays, and criticism. While little magazine/small press editors/publishers for the most part would welcome circulation figures in the thousands, that is not their intention. The intention is, after all, to see that what each editor or publisher conceives to be important sees print, even if the audience should happen to be few.

That explains the "why" of little magazines and small presses. Explaining the "what" is more difficult. What can be explained however, applies to both. First of all, expect the unexpected; a little magazine or small press book may appear in your mail box (most "business" is conducted through the mail) looking very similar, if perhaps a bit more economically produced, to the glossy monthlies that appear there month after month without interruption. It is possible that they may appear unbound in a box or even a can. They may be printed on paper, but they may also be printed on cloth, leather, a packet of pencils, post cards, posters, birch bark, rice paper, balloons, or recorded on cassette tapes. And they will almost never appear on time every time. A little magazine that promises to be published quarterly may well be published four times a year, but don't set your clock by it. A small press book planned for June publication would not be out of the ordinary if it first saw print during the Christmas rush.

This sort of irregularity is seldom the fault of a lazy editor or publisher. More often it is simply a case of sparse finances. Most literary editors and publishers earn their bread and butter at the same kind of jobs as the rest of us: as brick layers and college professors, bartenders and doctors, secretaries and insurance underwriters. And on and on. One issue of a little magazine in print may mean more vegetables, less meat, or it may mean no summer vacation. No matter how irregular though, no matter what form they appear in, little magazines and all the various small press publications are a rewarding experience to those who would search them out and accept their inconsistencies.

Wisconsin is rich in literary publishing activity. A survey of even a few of our little magazines and small presses is proof enough of that.

Begin with John Judson's *Northeast*/Juniper Books (1320 Shorewood Drive, La Crosse, WI 54601). Judson is one of the most respected small press people in the country. A couple of years ago, when I surveyed a group of Wisconsin literary editors and publishers for the *Appleton Post-Crescent's View Magazine*, one of the questions asked was what the best Badger State little magazine was. *Northeast* was the overwhelming favorite. *Northeast* is a twenty-one year old semi-annual of poetry, fiction, criticism, and graphics. A twenty-five dollar subscription will net you two issues of *Northeast*, a number of books, and some gifts from Juniper Press. "Much needs to be done," says Judson, "and not on government grants (which we've always avoided), stuff like short story

collections, novels, essay collections, and we hope to be able to do them."

Tom Montag is another of Wisconsin's better known small press people. He and his wife Mary publish books and an irregular magazine (*Midwestern Letters*) under the Midwestern Writers' Publishing House (P.O. Box 8, Fairwater, WI 53931) imprint. The most notable item on the Montags' list is their *Wisconsin Poets Calendar* (\$4.95), a combination desk calendar/poetry book that has met with excellent reviews during its first two years of publication. Montag's reason for doing what he does: "I do it so I'll have something to show for my life when I get to the Pearly Gates. Somebody's gotta publish the books that don't make any money."

The Beloit Poetry Journal (Box 2, Beloit, WI 53511) has been consistently top shelf since it was founded in 1950 by David and Marion Stocking. A year's subscription is six dollars for four issues. "Since we are an international magazine, publishing out of Wisconsin is no different from publishing out of Paris or New Delhi or Maine," says Marion Stocking. "I do think, however, that we do get an unusually high percentage of good poems from Wisconsin poets . . ."

Pentagram (Box 379, Markesan, WI 53946) was founded in 1974 by Michael Tarachow in Milwaukee and moved to Markesan in 1979. "Of the fifty-one titles published to date, most of them since 1979 have been printed on the 1893 Chandler & Price letterpress, from handset type. Main purpose in the 1980s, would be to integrate the text and artifact into the kind of whole both deserve." Prices of Pentagram titles vary from \$7.50 to \$35.

Wolfsong (3123 S. Kennedy Dr., Sturtevant, WI 53177) favors writers from the Midwest, but has published a few from farther out. Editor and publisher Gary Busha says: "Generally we like poetry that respects nature and sees man as a part of nature, deeply rooted in his environment." One-year, two-issue subscriptions are \$6.

Karl Elder of *Seems* (Lakeland College, P.O. Box 359, Sheboygan, WI 53081) charges ten dollars for four issues. Questioned about the purpose of the magazine, he says: "The fact that we have no reason to do it seems to me to be every reason for publishing it. . . . The reasons go on and on, and they change, depending upon circumstances and intuition."

John Westburg has been publishing *North American Mentor Magazine* (Fennimore, WI 53809) for some time, and over the years he has developed a strong sense about what makes the little magazines and small presses of the world important. "Small press publishers are always harvesting in the hinterlands and discovering writers and artists who are there all the time. This is where the small press publisher serves a vital role in the cultural life of America."

Jump River Press (Rt. 1, Box 10, Prentice, WI 54556) has temporarily suspended publication of its quarterly *Jump River Review* to focus on its book series. Editor and publisher Mark Bruner submits as his statement of purpose: "To scratch and itch in places that persons with more sense generally do not."

And finally, for those who are open minded about just what literature is anyway, there is Denis Kitchen's fabulous Kitchen Sink Press (No. 2 Swamp Road, Princeton, WI 54968).

While there are critics who would say Kitchen's comics are not literature, I would be more inclined to agree with what Kitchen himself has to say: "We believe that the comic art form is a hybrid of literature and art and deserves respect as such."

There are many more little magazines and small presses in Wisconsin than those few spotlighted here. I have attempted to pick out a representative sample, if there can be such a thing. A complete list follows this commentary. You cannot be forced to care about the most contemporary of literature and support it (lip service simply isn't enough). However, you are most heartily urged to consider some of what is available. Write for catalogs, buy, subscribe, read.

John Westburg in speaking to his small press compatriots, provides a fine closing statement.

Until we all work together in helping the American public to discover the works of the small press publishers, the American public will sadly continue to miss a great part of the joy and richness of our own American culture. To be sure, fine literature is not a chore that should be left to the professors of literature. Nor is it something that one thinks only schoolmarm foist on to helpless school kids. It is the very essence of what is most joyful in human creation—in the human mind.

"The intention is to see that what each editor or publisher conceives to be important sees print, even if the audience should happen to be few."

Small presses and little magazines of Wisconsin

Abraxas, 2518 Gregory St., Madison 53711
Amazon, 2211 E. Kenwood Blvd., Milwaukee 53211
Aurora, P.O. Box 1624, Madison 53701
Ba Shiru, University of Wisconsin, 866 Van Hise, Madison 53706
Beloit Poetry Journal, P.O. Box 2, Beloit 53511
Black Mesa Press, P.O. Box 256, Madison 53701
Center for Contemporary Poetry, Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse, La Crosse 54601
Cream City Review, P.O. Box 413, English Dept., Curtin Hall, UW-Milwaukee, Milwaukee 53201
Crow King Editions, 511 Sunset Dr., Menomonie 54751
Distant Thunder Press, 1224 E. Clarke St., Milwaukee 53212
Dragonsbreath Press, Route 1, Sister Bay 54234
Druid Books, Ephraim 54211
Friends of Poetry, Dept. of English, UW-Whitewater 53190
Ghost Pony Press, 2518 Gregory Street, Madison 53711
Great Circumpolar Bear Cult, Box 468, Ashland 54806
Heavy Evidence Press, P.O. Box 92893, Milwaukee 53202
Hey Lady, Morgan Press, 1819 N. Oakland Ave., Milwaukee 53202
Jump River Press, Route 1, Box 10, Prentice 54556
Kitchen Sink Press, No. 2 Swamp Road, Princeton 54968
Lionhead Publishing, 2521 East Stratford Court, Shorewood 53211
The Madison Review, Dept. of English, H.C. White Hall, 600 N. Park Street, Madison 53706
Maledicta, 331 S. Greenfield Ave., Waukesha 53186
Membrane Press, P.O. Box 11601-Shorewood, Milwaukee 53211
Metatron Press, 2447 N. 59th Street, Milwaukee 53210
Midsummer Press, 4455 N. Oakland #308, Shorewood 53211
Midwestern Writers' Publishing House, Box 8, Fairwater 53931
Modern Haiku, P.O. Box 752, Madison 53701
New Moon, P.O. Box 2056, Madison 53701
North American Mentor Magazine, 1745 Madison Street, Fennimore 53809
Northeast/Juniper Books, 1310 Shorewood Dr., La Crosse 54601
Pentagram, Box 379, Markesan 53946
Periodically Alive, P.O. Box 1931, Milwaukee 53201
The Perishable Press LTD, P.O. Box 7, Mt. Horeb 53572
Prelude to Fantasy, Route 3, Box 193, Richland Center 53581
Primipara, P.O. Box 371, Oconto 54153
Red Weather Press, P.O. Box 1104, Eau Claire 54701
Rhiannon Press, 1105 Bradley, Eau Claire 54701

Sackbut Press, 2513 E. Webster Place, Milwaukee 53211
Salthouse Press, P.O. Box 11537, Milwaukee 53211
The Second Hand, P.O. Box 204, Plymouth 53073
Seems, c/o Lakeland College, Box 359, Sheboygan 53081
Southport Press, Dept. of English, Carthage College, Kenosha 53141
Sparrow Publishing, W308 S7144 Highway 1, Mukwonago 53149
Sun Rise Fall Down Artpress, 1341 Williamson #B, Madison 53703
Third Coast Archives, 3061 N. Newhall Street, Milwaukee 53211
Wisconsin Review, Box 276, Dempsey Hall, UW-Oshkosh, Oshkosh 54901
Wolfsong, 3123 S. Kennedy Dr., Sturtevant 53177
Woodrose, 524 Larson St., Waupaca 54981■

The Flatbed Man's Story

"This 1964 Rambler
 sitting in the woods for years,
 with long chains I winched it in,
 a grass snake drops off the hood, curls away;
 winched it up the ramp
 of the flatbed, the rocking
 dislodged all the wildlife
 at once . . . a rat jumped
 to the ground and hopped away
 on hind legs like a kangaroo.
 Mice dropped to the flatbed,
 saw the edge too high, ran crazy
 in the shadow of the car
 then as a group make the leap
 to the weeds below.
 Long-legged spiders drop,
 cover the truck, the cab;
 a chipmunk leaps
 to freedom.
 Things settle, the Rambler seems to slump,
 deserted, chained.
 A hollow wreck.
 It was getting dark. I suddenly
 got the hell out of there,
 flatbed, Rambler, me covered with spiders.
 That ain't no way to live."

Susan Peterson



Wisconsin Writers and Wisconsin Libraries

By Dennis Ribbens

What contribution do Wisconsin libraries make to Wisconsin writers? Probably their greatest contribution is carrying out their central function of enabling research. Without organized resources, both bibliographically and physically accessible, historians, scientists, and other researchers would be stymied at the outset. Many writers of fiction as well lean heavily on library resources. For example, Mark Dintenfass, while writing his most recent *Old World, New World*, spent hours pouring over old newspapers and historical documents. Frequently authors gratefully include librarians in their lists of credits.

This article, however, is concerned with a very different contribution librarians make to Wisconsin authorship, namely the attention and recognition which they give to the books written by Wisconsin writers. Frequently libraries produce exhibits of one or more Wisconsin authors. Traditionally libraries seek out authors as guest speakers for library events. In particular regional and statewide meetings of librarians give attention to Wisconsin authors as well as to national authors. For example, during the 1983 Annual Conference of the Wisconsin Library Association Constance Greene, John Barth, and Susan Engberg spoke or were honored at special sessions. In past years the Wisconsin Library Association has

heard from John Ciardi, Ben Logan, and Studs Terkel. As an example of regional activity, during the past few years the Fox Valley Library Association held programs on Wisconsin nature writers and on authors from the northeast corner of the state.

The most visible and probably the most important recognition given by Wisconsin librarians to Wisconsin authors is to be found in the work of the Literary Awards Committee of the Wisconsin Library Association. Its two major activities consist of the annual selection and presentation of the Banta Award for an outstanding book by a Wisconsin author, and the selection of additions to the growing list of Notable Wisconsin Authors. As with so many other ventures that have to do with writing in the state of Wisconsin, the work of the Literary Awards Committee began when Robert Gard in behalf of the Wisconsin Writers Council in 1972 approached the Wisconsin Library Association with an idea of cosponsoring the establishment of a Wisconsin Writer's Hall of Honor. Even though the original plans for a physical location for such a hall of honor at Fort Atkinson fell through, and although the Council for Wisconsin Writers participation in such a venture declined, the importance of recognizing significant writers from Wisconsin's past was not lost on Wisconsin librarians. The Hall of Honor evolved

into a list known as Notable Wisconsin Authors. Each year the Literary Awards Committee adds to this list which currently numbers fifty-one, a list that reads like a who's who of Wisconsin writers.

Notable Wisconsin Authors

1973	
Derleth, August	1909-1972
Ferber, Edna	1887-1968
Gale, Zona	1874-1938
Garland, Hamlin	1860-1940
Leopold, Aldo	1886-1948
Muir, John	1838-1914
Thwaites, Reuben Gold	1853-1913
Turner, Frederick Jackson	1861-1932
Wilder, Laura Ingalls	1867-1957
1974	
Kellogg, Louise Phelps	1862-1942
Lapham, Increase Allen	1811-1875
Leonard, William Ellery	1876-1944
Veblen, Thorstien Bunde	1857-1929
Wescott, Glenway	1901-
Wright, Frank Lloyd	1869-1959
1975	
Baker, Ray Stannard	1870-1946
Curti, Merle	1897-
Kinzie, Juliette	1806-1870
North, Sterling	1906-1974
Olson, Sigurd	1899-1982
White, Helen	1896-1967
1976	
Beck, Warren	1896-
Gard, Robert	1910-
Pollak, Felix	1909-
Wilder, Thornton	1897-1975

Wisconsin libraries encourage and recognize literary activity through the Wisconsin Library Association Literary Awards Committee.

1977	
Agard, Walter	1894-1978
Gregory, Horace	1898-1982
Wilcox, Ella Wheeler	1850-1919
Schorer, Mark	1908-1977
Walsh, Chad	1914-
1978	
Andrews, Roy Chapman	1884-1960
Ellis, Melvin Richard	1912-
Henry, Marguerite	1902-
Kennan, George Frost	1904-
Niedecker, Lorine	1903-1970
1979	
Ets, Marie Hall	1895-
Havighurst, Walter	1901-
Smith, Alice E.	1896-
1980	
Barton, Rebecca C.	1905-
Doran, Madeleine K.	1905-
Otto, Max C.	1876-1968
Smith, Ethel Sabin	1887-
Nesbit, Robert C.	1917-
Willard, Frances E.	1839-1898
1981	
Bennett, John Frederic	1920-
King, Charles	1844-1933
Raskin, Ellen	1928-
1982	
Daly, Maureen	1921-
Latimer, Margery	1899-1932
Percival, James Gates	1795-1856
Williams, T. Harry	1909-1979

The criteria used for selecting additions to this list are simple, yet difficult to apply. An author must have "had residence in Wisconsin" and must have written works "which are a contribution to the world of literature and ideas." As the names on the above list demonstrate, the word literature is given its broad rather than belletristic meaning. The importance of the Notable Wisconsin Authors list derives from its having been assembled over a period of over a decade by scores of librarians and book people. No list anywhere matches its reliability and authority. Its major contribution is the attention it gives to those writers who have contributed to the literary heritage of this state, a heritage largely unknown, certainly ignored. The bio-bibliographies constructed for each of the included authors are excellent places to begin their study. Through news releases of its continued work on this

list and through its wide distribution in Wisconsin communities, the Wisconsin Library Association seeks to create greater Wisconsin awareness of its literary heritage.

Recognizing the need for the Wisconsin Library Association to give attention to the work presently done by Wisconsin writers, one member of the Literary Awards Committee approached the George Banta Company, Inc., Menasha, Wisconsin, to provide financial support for an annual Wisconsin book award. For the past ten years with Banta Company's support, the Literary Awards Committee has selected the winner of the Banta Award, a medallion presented at the annual conference of the Wisconsin Library Association to a Wisconsin author of an outstanding work published in the preceding year. The presentation of the Banta Award has become a high point of each year's Wisconsin Library Association conference. As the Banta Award enters its second decade, it more and more acquires the stature of a major literary award. But probably the most important contribution this award makes is the affirmation that it provides, the endorsement that the scholarly or imaginative effort that produced the work has not gone unnoticed. I have heard several of the writers who have received the Banta Award, years after the fact, express exactly that feeling.

How is the Banta Award book selected? Criteria for the award are substantially similar to those used for the Notable Wisconsin Authors list. In its effort to contribute to bibliographic control in Wisconsin, the Literary Awards Committee attempts to list all books by Wisconsin writers. For example the 1983 list of books published in 1982 which came to the attention of the Literary Awards Committee will exceed one hundred. This list is reviewed and, after hundreds of hours of reading and committee meetings, refined to a final handful from which the winner is selected by vote. No other recognition of current literary activity in Wisconsin as objectively or rigorously reaches its choices. To win the Banta Award is to accomplish a great deal.

Banta Awards

- 1974
Theophilus North
Thornton Wilder
Harper & Row, 1973
- 1975
Time's Foot
Madeleine Doran
Privately published, 1974
- 1976
The Land Remembers
Ben Logan
Viking Press, 1975
- 1977
The Civil War, 1845-1873
Richard Current
State Historical Society
of Wisconsin, 1976
- 1978
Climates of Hunger
Reid A. Bryson
Thomas J. Murray
University of Wisconsin Press, 1977
- 1979
The Westing Game
Ellen Raskin
Dutton, 1978
- 1980
The Road from Home
David Kherdian
Greenwillow, 1979
- 1981
Bernard Shaw and the Actresses
Margot Peters
Doubleday, 1980
- 1982
Hang Me Up My Begging Bowl
Chad Walsh
Swallow Press, Ohio University
Press, 1981
- 1983
Pastorale
Susan Engberg
University of Illinois Press, 1982

Questions about those activities of the Wisconsin Library Association which support Wisconsin writers may be addressed to the Wisconsin Library Association, 1922 University Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin 53705.■



The Wisconsin Library Association annual Banta Award for outstanding literary achievement by a Wisconsin author was presented to Chad Walsh for his 1981 book of poetry, *Hang Me Up My Begging Bowl*, his sixth collection of poems. Walsh was honored as a Notable Wisconsin Author in 1977 by the Wisconsin Library Association.

While Walsh writes in other genres (he is the author of several books on C.S. Lewis, both the man and his work), his favorite form is poetry: "In my poetry I am offering whatever beauty I have been able to make incarnate in words."

Twice a Fulbright lecturer (Finland and Rome) and an ordained Episcopal priest, Walsh was professor of English at Beloit College from 1945 to 1977, when he retired to devote more time to writing. He now lives in Vermont.



Remarks by Chad Walsh upon receiving the Banta award

My hearty thanks to the Wisconsin Library Association and to the Banta Company. I deeply appreciate the recognition you are according me. Writing poetry can be a rather solitary vocation. It is a rare luxury to spend an evening in which poetry is considered one of the necessities of life.

When I was asked to prepare some brief remarks, I began thinking about the peculiar role of poetry in our society. We can't do with it or without it. Few books of poetry sell a thousand copies, but the best of them survive after most prose blockbusters have quietly disappeared.

Nor is the impact of poetry confined to a chosen few. We had a striking illustration of this during the Viet Nam war. Few may have heard the poems-plus-music (as with Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen) that helped alter the consciousness of the young. It was more as though a pebble were dropped into a pond, and the ripples spread outward and outward. People who never heard the actual poems felt their insistence at one or ten degrees removed. As much as anything, it was the poets who revealed that the war was intolerable.

Poetry has a peculiar power. The poet is a person who rides two horses at once. If he is lucky they keep in perfect step. One horse is content—something worth saying. The other is form—the strange and wonderful things a poet can do to make his poem dance rather than sedately stroll.

This involves a particular way of using language. The poet aims to make words labor overtime. One way he can do this is with allusions. In fact, a whole poem can be built around one master allusion. What would "The Waste Land" be with no reference to the ancient myth of the

Fisher King? That myth illuminates everything else in the poem, and brings past, present, and eternity into relation with one another.

Closely related to the use of allusions is metaphorical language. If I echo Burns and proclaim that my love is like a red, red rose, that does not mean that she has a sunburn. Nor is she planted in the ground. It means—what does it mean? It means that she is desirable. It means that metaphorically or literally she smells good. It also suggests that she is to be approached with caution—roses have thorns. But my explication of Burns's line of poetry has already taken us away from the actual girl. It is time now to abandon sober paraphrasing and see in imagination a red rose and smell in imagination its fragrance, and in imagination warily avoid contact with thorns. The poem says all this better and briefer than prose can.

In his quest to say as much as possible in rationed words, the poet often experiments with giving the language a new look. This of course is not confined to poets—one instantly thinks of James Joyce. But it is more characteristic of poems than of prose works. It is the poets who usually explore the far frontiers of language and who discover by trial and error how much the language can be reshaped without turning it into something monstrous.

I think I can best illustrate all these things if I take one particular poem and ask, what is the poet up to? Perhaps I labor under an illusion, but I think I can speak with most authority if I take one of my own poems and briefly run it through a highly incomplete analysis. Let me first read you the poem. Don't worry about the strange things that happen to language; I will get to that later.

When Old Joe Laid His Banjo Down

When old Joe laid his banjo
down
The mansion peeled its paint and
swayed.
The red earth weeded into ruin.

There was a drabbing of the sun,
And guestly beds were left
unmade
When old Joe laid his banjo
down.

From hills of scrub the cedars
ran,
Sank roots of wrath and sootly
stayed.
The red earth weeded into ruin.

And garden brights were overrun
By slinks of snake in hiss of
shade
When old Joe laid his banjo
down.

And father fell and buried son,
And gambling debts remained
unpaid.
The red earth weeded into ruin.

And Snopes came snooping with
his gun,
And mansion grayed in raid of
fade
When old Joe laid his banjo
down
And red earth seeded into ruin.

I think the germ of this poem came to me many years ago when I was teaching in Finland. I was invited to the meeting of a service club. As part of the program they sang a song called "Vanha Jo" which turned out to be a Finnish version of "Old Black Joe." But since Finnish goes in for long words, the translator omitted "black" to keep the rhythm right.

Years later I wrote three lines of verse and sensed that I had a villanelle in the making. The two lines, "When old Joe laid his banjo down" and "The red earth weeded into ruin" seemed made for repetition. So I was launched on a villanelle. What these repeated lines do is drive home the idea that the antebellum Southern world was dependent on black labor and would sink into ruin as soon as

"Old Joe" withdrew his support. The poem is thus, among other things, social history.

There is another theme running through the poem. The poem not only describes the downfall of the aristocratic South; it also moves a bit into Faulkner country by hinting at the encroachment of the Snopes tribe.

Perhaps the most extreme thing about the poem is the way I twist language. I suspect I was unconsciously influenced by e.e. Cummings. Somehow I had to do things to language that would make it more evocative. This helps to explain such a phrase as "drabbing of the sun" and "guestly beds." Perhaps in the back of my mind were also the words "ghostly" and "ghastly," both suggesting ruin. The climax of language distortion comes in "And garden brights were overrun/By slinks of snake in hiss of shade."

Now the poem, which began with sober language, reverts to it, but it is used to say strange and almost surrealist things, such as "And father fell and buried son." The impression

deepens of a world in decay and close to the death of all logic. The doom of that world is revealed in the figure of Snopes who comes "snooping with his gun."

Enough. But I hope this illustrates one very important thing. Content and form are not two separate things. Here, if there were not the repeated lines, the growing feeling of doom would not be as strongly evoked. Poetry is a way of saying certain things obliquely because otherwise they can scarcely be said at all.

But what does poetry do for a reader? I think the distinguished poet, William Meredith, has expressed it well:

I expect hang-gliding must be like poetry. Once you get used to it, you can't imagine not wanting the scare of it. But it's more serious than hang-gliding. Poetry is the safest known mode of human risk. You risk only staying alive.

From *Reasons for Poetry & The Reason for Criticism*, p. 23 (Library of Congress, 1982)■

Belmont Cemetery

The old man tells me of his arthritis
and the families below
as he mows the grass around the smallest graves
the pain gripping his neck like a claw.

The whole town is here
he tells me
having known them all
all his life.
He's memorized this cemetery
down to every chip of marble,
introduces me to his parents
sisters brothers aunts uncles cousins
even his schoolteacher.

He tells me of the crows nested in the pines
cawing and cawing and cawing
how he hears them now
years later
long after they've gone
and the crickets are the only sound
the cornfields and cows lying motionless beyond.

He does not think it's strange I've come
and like an old friend
asks me to visit again.

Deborah A. Route

Poetry in the North

State of the Art Update

By Leo J. Hertzell

Lee Merrill has come over from Ashland to listen to the readings. Three North Country writers this cold, wet Saturday will read from their own works in the Ruth Maney Room of Duluth's cultural Depot, a little cathedral room with a soaring ceiling, an apse curved by three windows on the street side, a speakers' table for an altar. The readers are winners in the Lake Superior Contemporary Writers Competition. Entries in the competition came from northern Wisconsin and Minnesota, from Ironwood, and beyond in the Upper Peninsula.

Lee Merrill is sitting alone in one of the thirty folding chairs lined out in the Ruth Maney Room. He is early for the reading, the only person yet arrived, and he sits in a chair over against the right hand wall holding a copy of *The Black Warrior Review*. His face is clean shaven brown oily-smooth, startlingly changed from the rough beard there a few years ago when he said he was leaving the North. "I want to get away from here," he had said. "I want to get away and do some work, get some writing done. I'll do almost anything, flip hamburgers out there if I have to." Now, three years later and he has been back for two and a half years, but this is the first time I've seen him since he's been back. He is wearing a white cotton T-shirt with a red band around the neck, a deep blue jersey loosely knotted around his shoulders, his hair clipped off carelessly in back and receding from his

smooth forehead in front. He is peering through his glasses studying *The Black Warrior Review*.

I am always glad to see Lee. It is my belief that he is one of the most interesting writers in the whole North Country. Even though he comes from Alabama and is only eleven years in the North, he seems to feel the mystery, the harshness, the elusive identity of Nature here more than any other poet. He has caught those themes in just a few poems, most of them direct and short, many of them relating to life in his cabin in the woods on Lake Nothing thirty miles south of Ashland. A few years ago he published some of these poems in a small regional anthology, *Seven Lake Superior Poets*, put out by Bearcult Press, the people who had earlier published the North Country journal called *The Great Circumpolar Bear Cult*. That journal, now sleeping, printed writers like Louis Jenkins and Mark Vinz and Philip Dentinger and boldly said in its opening manifesto that its contributors lived in the North by choice, a decision that united them in a kind of frigid bond. Merrill's poems in the anthology also revealed that bond of choice, and they included titles like "Lake Winter Depression" and "Until It Hardly Matters At All," the latter a subtle poem about the perversity of Nature in the North, disappearing ice on the Lake, and creeks that hide from visitors.

Now he says, "I'm doing a book in honor of Sig Olson. It's a collection

of poetry. It's about the way Sig loved the nonhuman world without hating the human world. John Haines and Bly and Bill Stafford and Wendell Barry are going to contribute. I don't know if Gary Sydnor'll come through. I tried to get Kenneth Rexroth, but they say he's on his way to Japan to die, terribly sick old man they say."

"You publish any poems lately?"

"You know, Le-o," he says in the high, elongated voice that sounds exactly like a very old Southern man confiding slowly some fact of shocking importance, "you know, Le-o, I haven't sent anything out this year. It's just not worth it. You know what I mean? All the energy and fighting those rejection slips. Those little magazines are all right if you're just starting out, but it's hard, I mean really hard to keep up publishing that way. You know what I mean? I'm going to wait until I get enough for a full book. What do you think about that idea, Le-o?" He peers at me unblinking through his glasses.

"I know a fellow who started thirty years ago publishing in those little mimeographed magazines, and now he's fifty-six years old and still doing the same thing."

"Exactly."

"What happened when you went to California, back when you had the beard?"

"Le-o, we didn't get to California. We went to Washington instead and then were going to BC, but when we got the border there was some problem so we just came back. I was sure glad to see the Lake."

Bill Tecku arrives and sits down beside Merrill. Tecku looks like a disheveled Tom Wolfe. Tecku, amiable and deferential, spends much of his time with a North Country poetry recording venture called The Inner Ear. Merrill will record some of his own poetry for Ear later today.

"I've been sick, Bill," Merrill is talking to Tecku. "Had to go to the emergency room. It was my own stupid fault; I'd picked these mushrooms, and they were the kind you have to boil for a long time or they'll hurt you, and I didn't boil them long enough. It was my own fault. You know what I mean?"

It is time for the readings to begin, but the number of listeners is small, maybe only twenty people, mostly professors from the university and a few curious patrons, a handful of writers who struggle with the North, Kate Basham. A very old woman in a brown flowered dress, a rich brown scarf loosely holding her white hair on top of her head, sits in front of us. She is drinking coffee from a paper cup and eating chocolate chip cookies from the refreshment table in the back of the room.

The readings begin.

First, Ellen Hawley from Minneapolis, a small woman dressed in a deep blue shirt tucked into new jeans. Her complexion is dark; she wears earrings and looks Italian. Before reading, she offers an ingenuous apology for not wearing finer clothing. "When we got as far as Pine City, I realized I had left my good clothes on hangers back home," she says. (We think she is new at this reading business. There is no known dress code.) Not a poet, she reads a tight short story about guilt and cruelty, a mother and a son, clear prose with careful dialogue and bat symbolism. She doesn't need the manuscript in her hand as she leans back against the table at the front of the room. She knows the story by heart. . . Later, she stands by the refreshment table and says she hasn't published anything yet, is trying hard to publish this story, wants very much to get it in print and get some money for it, has it out right now to *Minnesota Monthly*. What are the chances?

Jeff Lewis from Minong gets up to read. "I've cut pulp a lot for a living," Jeff says. He is a thick man with a square face, wide leather belt, chino pants. He keeps his left hand in the left pocket of the chinos while he reads, clenching and unclenching the fingers. He reads thick, heavy, neo-classical poetry about complex struggles hidden, shadows within. He reads a mock heroic tribute to jackpines. He enunciates each syllable until the words are nearly lost in a slow succession of severed syllables, a kind of incantation in a lost dialect. I have never heard anyone read English this way before.

OL I VE D RAB GA RB OF THE CH AIR MA N/ HIS DIN KY DE PR ESS ION

Then George Roberts from Minneapolis, a high school teacher, reads from his soon-to-be-published book of verses, *SCRUT*, verses about the failures, guilt, and maybe redemption of a high school boy in a Minnesota town. Some verses deal with the fascination of the boy with a high school girl who once took off her blouse for a moment for the whole football team to see.

The old woman up front likes these verses. She claps from time to time.

"What town is that poetry about?" the old woman, still nibbling on cookies, interrupts.

"Do you really want to know, Madam? Wouldn't knowing that spoil the chance for you to . . ."

"I want to know what town those poems are about."

"Austin, Minnesota, Madam."

"You ready to go over and do the recordings now, Lee?" Tecku asks.

Robert Bly is coming back. The Lake Superior Contemporary Writers Committee at the cultural Depot has begun making plans for his three-day appearance in the fall. Much Bly talk is developing in the North.

On a grassy lot in Iron River, just across the street from the post office, stands a large, ornate, wooden gazebo. Two men sit on a bench inside the gazebo talking. It is noon in early July. The men wear sweaters, for the air is very cool. The grass is gray and dusty. There is no sun, and the haze in the sky extends all of the way to the Lake and then on to Duluth beyond.

"I agree with you. There's no doubt, Bly has done a lot of good things for poetry, no doubt. All those animals and the deep images, sure. My problem with him, though, isn't really literary. It's more religious. See, I think he wants to be some kind of priest. Did you see that video tape of him by Tom McGrath? Bly's talking on that tape in all these buildings that look like churches, he's wearing serapes that look like vestments or something, and he's giving these sermons.

Can you imagine that? Sermons. I think he wants to be the new Saint Paul. What do you think of that? Bly—Saint Paul. I don't trust somebody who wants to be Saint Paul. That bothers me."

"I see," said the second man softly.

Bill Tecku and Bill Olson, locally known as Ollie, and some friends usually produce *The Inner Ear* programs in an old blue two-story house on East Seventh Street in Superior. They have been producing fifteen and thirty minute recordings of prose and poetry for broadcast over radio for the past six years. A few years back they called the series *Something for Your Head*, and then they recorded mostly the work of local writers, who often read their own material. Now, *The Inner Ear* runs up and down the indexes of literature anthologies, mostly American, with Tecku and Olson doing most of the reading, with no particular preferences, no apparent favorites, no special prejudices, no geographic leanings, just doing standard American poets from the textbook inventory: Edwin Arlington Robinson, Hart Crane, Kenneth Fearing, Anne Sexton, Walt Whitman, Jack Kerouac, all treated pretty much alike.

Once in a while *The Inner Ear* returns to North Country material and listens to locals as it did once last winter.

... Winters in the Lake Superior Region are as long as they are harsh. The lingering quality of this season, likewise leaves its mark on regional literature in subconscious terms. The spiritual and mystical explorations of our closing selections demonstrate how the climate impacts on each writer's poetic voice and how it influences their perennial search for meaning ...

The program presented poetry by North Country writers like Bruce Tomczak, Lucien Orsoni, Steve Therrien, Tecku, and Olson.

Mostly, though, *The Inner Ear* presents establishment writers, a bit like a college survey course of American literature from 1700 to the present. Tecku and Olson are not cultural rebels using the air to bring a message of change or salvation or destruction or protest or freedom to the

listening world. They are poetry merchandizers, wholesalers' packagers of the standard brands. Once they had a competition for local writers, sixty-five entries and ten winners.

These were the judging standards: universality, development of theme, originality of language, use of poetic devices, compression of thought, expression of poetic voice, completion of thought, use of imagery.

"We want to present an overview of American poetry to the American people," says Olson. "We want to make literature listenable in people's homes. I think of it like opera. Lots of people love to hear opera in their homes and poetry ought to be that way too. We want to make poetry something that people without a literary background can enjoy. The *Inner Ear* is like an anthology for radio listeners."

"We're pretty excited about getting poetry to a big audience," says Tecku. "Poetry gets a bad rap with most people. ... There's more to poetry than just Joyce Kilmer's 'Trees' and we want people to find that out. And we want to show people how to use radio for the arts. ... Of course, we'd like to get a regular income from this too. Our programs could be put on cassettes and sold in stores."

"Do you get a lot of response to these recordings?" I ask. "Do listeners write you letters? Complaints? Fan mail? With seventy stations broadcasting these things every month I'd think you'd get a lot of mail."

"If a public radio station gets one letter from one listener," Tecku says, "the manager considers it an overwhelming response. We've never received a negative letter. But we get a lot of letters from station managers telling us how much they like what we're doing. Here, look at these."

He hands me some letters.

The *Inner Ear* recordings are broadcast regularly on more than seventy public radio stations. Production of the programs is largely funded by small grants, a series of different grants over the years, many from regional organizations. Tecku and Olson are optimistic about grants, even in grant-parched 1983. Perhaps, they say, the day will come when grant money is sufficient to provide

them with a regular salary for all this recording work.

On a cold day in early spring Tecku and Olson in the blue house on Seventh Street recorded selections from the poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson. An *Ear* associate, John Harris, was the technician. He sat in a long, narrow attic room, in front of a panel of lights and switches, reels of tape to his right, talking recording jargon to Tecku and Olson who were in the studio in the basement beside the furnace. They were practicing "Miniver Cheevy" and Olson was having trouble with the pronunciation of the word *Medici*.

"Me' dici."

"Run through that one more time."

"Miniver loved the Me' dici."

"I don't think we've got it yet, John," Tecku says.

"Miniver loved the Me' dici."

Harris winds the tape back for a retake three, four times.

"I can hear a couple of sounds back there, Ollie. Let's run through that again." Harris is trying to shape the sound now, turning knobs, "Do that again. It still isn't what we want."

"Miniver loved the Me' dici

Albeit he had never seen one."

"Sounds good. Go for a take on this."

"Miniver Cheevy," says Tecku. Ollie goes into the lines. Then on into "Mr. Flood's Party," poem on poem, the two readers alternating passages, titles, Robinson right out of the anthology.

They are recording "Mr. Flood's Party" and have reached the point two thirds of the way through the poem where the whole harmonious landscape rang "For auld lang syne" and Ollie sings the words in an old, quavering voice that sounds like the voice of Dylan Thomas in "A Child's Christmas in Wales" when he comes to "Good King Wenceslaus looked out."

Tecku and Olson are reading in Superior beside the furnace in a half-finished room with raw insulation on the walls, a ladder in the middle of the room with a microphone hanging down, a Kero-Sun heater burning on the floor, and a sign "Young Lady cleaning men's room" hanging from one of the exposed floor joists above. ■

I Must Tell You Plainly the World Is Outside

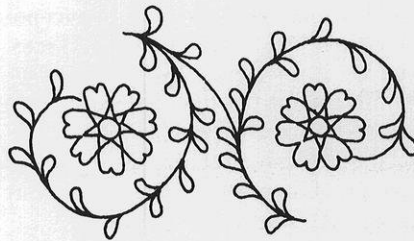
Once I watched
a yellow warbler,
dazed by a crash in a window sky,
sitting in a sunburst
pfitzer, so still, I could have salted his tail.
He watched me, a blue bent down to look at him.
In the blink of one clear black eye's liquid
I saw myself grown smaller than a gnat,
an outline blueness looking down at him.

Gianfranco Pagnucci

Moments

Mini-sun in a water bead
suspended on the probing leaf.
Lips' brief touch never arriving,
a hummingbird hovering at the blossom.
Evening rearranging the hills—
what is left
fernsharp a rush of rain.

Ray Smith



St. Michael's

"I told the policeman,"
the old lady says,
"to turn them down
while I put on my shoes."

She worries
about potatoes
set in a 425 degree oven
just before
her husband
got run over.

Her husband, it is clear
to the man with a bandaged thumb,
the wife with two brats,
and the teenage girl
who will not look up,
is by now dead.

She mourns,
"I hope the potatoes
don't burn."

Dave Engel

Atwell Park

Children spider a rope web, swing, legs thrust
out as if about to leap to heaven.
The next frame they have gone giggly, seven
sets of legs, tan and rumbling through thick dust.

Grass is dry and prickly beneath our feet.
Sand is hot where we, too large, climb and slide
into the banished memories of the child
playing shadowed games of tag, hide and seek.

Going home we dawdle in lawn sprinklers, jarred
by sudden cold spray into becoming
children, for a few instants shivering
in icy twilight filling a lost backyard.

Richard Behm



WINDFALLS

The Pursuit of Happiness

By Arthur Hove

Thomas Jefferson declared it to be an inalienable right—one of those fundamental impulses of a democratic society. Yet the pursuit of happiness did not originate with the founding of the American Republic. Happiness has been a universal craving since humans were able to grunt.

Nevertheless, the concept of happiness is not something that comes to us without prompting. The idea of happiness has been drilled into us from childhood—a time when we were more likely to be happy as a lark, a time when we were told fairy tales about people who overcame adversity to live happily ever after.

Popular songs, once implanted in our subconscious, rattle around in our thoughts at odd moments: "I want to be happy/So I can make you happy, too"; "It's a hap-hap-happy day"; "Happy talk,/Keep talking happy talk."

Children are still exposed to fairy tales—only most are beamed at them through the television tube rather than read to them as they sit by the fireside. One of the currently popular Saturday morning television shows (ostensibly intended for, but not limited to children) is called "The Smurfs." These creatures, according to a piece of promotional literature, are tiny blue people only three apples tall. A community of 100 (only one is a woman—the smurfette), the smurfs have "built a wondrous village deep in the forest run on happiness, or as they called it, 'smurfiness.'"

Although such a quality is doubtless beneficial for the little blue peo-

ple, it is questionable that the American Republic would have been pushed to its present boundaries by a group of pioneers seeking to realize their inalienable right to smurfiness.

And yet the impulse is there, no matter what you label the entity itself. Each new generation searches for its own contemporary definition of the true state of happiness. Nobody quite seems satisfied with someone else's prescription, but common themes occur over the millennia. Various literary woods are filled with aphorisms, epigrams, and epigraphs describing the essence of happiness. Here is a small sampling:

Jeremy Taylor: "He that is most knowing hath a capacity to become happy. . ."

The Bible (James I): "Behold, we count them happy which endure."

John Dryden: "Happy the man, and happy he alone,/He who can call to-day his own."

Virgil: "Happy he who could learn the causes of things and/Who put beneath his feet all fears."

Aristophanes: "Happy is the man possessing/The superior holy blessing/Of a judgment and a taste/Accurate, refined, and chaste."

Artemus Ward: "Let us all be happy and live within our means, even if we have to borrow money to do it with."

Nathaniel Hawthorne: "The happy man inevitably confines himself within ancient limits."

Anonymous: "See the happy moron,/He doesn't give a damn."

Herbert Spencer: "...no one can be perfectly happy till all are happy."

John Locke: (echoing Juvenal): "A sound mind in a sound body, is a short but full description of a happy state in this world."

It is obvious that happiness is more transcendent than perpetual. Thomas Gray has noted that "...happiness of life is made up of minute fractions. . ." while Edmund Spenser claimed that "here on earth is no sure happiness."

George Bernard Shaw thought all of the striving for happiness was poppycock anyway. "A lifetime of happiness!" he exclaimed. "No man alive could bear it: it would be hell on earth."

One of the more poignant moments in the quest for happiness in the American experience comes at the end of Eugene O'Neill's play *Long Day's Journey into Night*. There, after an evening of searing revelations about the interrelationships in the Tyrone family, Mary Tryone recalls an earlier time—when she was a senior in high school. Something happened to her then: "Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was happy for a time." That time, of course, has long passed and is now something lost in the narcotic fog which describes her life at the time of the play's action. The struggles and betrayals of the Tyrone family recall Tolstoy's contention that "All happy families resemble one another; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own fashion."

Happiness has many facets. For some it is Platonic—a state of spirit or mind. Publilius Syrus pointed out that "No man is happy who does not think himself so." Sophocles maintained "The happiest life consists in ignorance,/Before you learn to grieve and to rejoice." Anticipating the 1960s cry of the fans of the then hapless New York Mets ("You gotta believe!"), Douglas Malloch said, "You have to believe in happiness,/Or happiness never comes."

Ogden Nash was more pragmatic as he observed, "There is only one way to achieve happiness on this terrestrial ball,/And that is to have a clear conscience, or none at all." And Oscar Levant, in his usual churlish fashion, chipped in with the reminder that "Happiness is not a thing you experience, but something you remember."

Being able to rise above it all is, to some, essential to the realization of happiness. William Cowper sermonized that "Happiness depends as Nature shows,/Less on exterior things than most suppose." And Voltaire observed that the happiest of mortals "is above everything he possesses."

Others feel happiness is much more grounded in the things of this world. Two celebrated bibulants had their own recipes for happiness. Samuel Johnson said, "There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn." In this century, Bernard DeVoto noted that "The proper union of gin and vermouth is a great and sudden glory; it is one of the happiest marriages on earth and one of the shortest lived."

Still others find happiness in the quality of relationships between people. Sir William Osler said that "In the life of a young man the most essential thing for happiness is the gift of friendship." Ben Jonson made a special note that "True happiness/Consists not in the multitude of friends,/But in the worth and choice." According to Victor Hugo, "The supreme happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved."

Some are not completely swept off their feet by the prospect of romantic bliss. "Deceive not thy self by overexpecting happiness in the married estate," cautioned Thomas Fuller.

And there are those who can never detach politics from any form of human endeavor. In their eyes happiness is synonymous with tax bills or pork barrel legislation. H.A.L. Fisher went so far as to declare outright that "Politics is the art of human happiness." John Adams proclaimed that "The happiness of society is the end of government." And Thomas Jefferson, who obviously had more than one

thought on the subject, said "The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government."

Not everyone has seen government as playing such a positive and benign role. Gilbert Murray, reflecting rather the paranoia of the contemporary Age of Anxiety than the idealism of the eighteenth century Age of Reason, said: "The life and liberty and property and happiness of the common man throughout the world are at the absolute mercy of a few persons whom he has never seen, involved in complicated quarrels that he has never heard of."

And some believe that the whole pursuit of happiness is senseless in the first place. In Robertson Davies' novel, *The Manicore*, a Jungian psychiatrist, Dr. Johanna von Haller, responds to a question from the protagonist, David Staunton, about the ultimate outcome of the analysis he is undergoing. Will he be happier when he finishes?

"I do not promise happiness," Dr. von Haller exclaims, "and I don't know what it is. You New World people are, what is the word, hipped on the idea of happiness, as if it were a constant and measurable thing, and settled and excused everything. If it is anything at all it is a byproduct of other conditions of life, and some people whose lives do not appear to be at all enviable, or indeed admirable, are happy. Forget about happiness."

Few actually heed the good doctor's admonition. The pursuit of happiness goes on—unabated. We search for it in every nook and cranny of our daily lives. Some of us find, like Charlie Brown, that happiness can be realized through discovering and savoring the simple things in life: happiness is a warm puppy, or coming home from the hospital, or having your own library card.

Still others are persuaded by the logic of another comic strip philosopher, that swaggering Viking, Hagar the Horrible, who observed that "The secret of happiness is 'Be content with what you got' . . . so 'Get enough.'"

Recalling Dr. Williams' Ridge

Perhaps this beauty comes
too cheaply green ridge
sky over pure and lake

unlike the brown Passaic
sewage slow past Rutherford
the poet moved out

from Keats and delved
the word in ditches
bottles broken bodies

but kept his ridge
over all with wild
flowers—Garrett Mountain.

A boy I crossed
that river smudged
into searching the tainted

marsh grass breaking paved
lots for the redeeming
value

and one summer (the poet
was an old man) I
hoed beets on a flat

oasis amid factory
whistles under shade
of Garrett Mountain

sweating innocent of poets
perched above Patterson looked
up where Doc looked down.

Which way then
the truth that beauty
was?

Roy Shepard

Hawk

Coming up the road against
the sun, the dog and I,
we saw

him seeing us,
hulked profile in the leafless
tree.

We stepped lightly nearly
underneath when the ponderous

wings snapped to swallow
horizons, lifted

him like a sprung milkweed
fluff over the next meadow.

Roy Shepard



BOOK MARKS/WISCONSIN

PURSUING MELVILLE 1940-1980: CHAPTERS AND ESSAYS by Merton M. Sealts, Jr.; University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wis., 1982. 419 pp. \$27.50.

By Peter A. Fritzell

In more ways than one, Sealts's *Pursuing Melville* is a testimonial volume. On the part of the University of Wisconsin Press, it is a testimonial publication to a job well done and a retirement well deserved. On the part of its author, it is a testimony to what he has stood (and stands) for in a lifetime's study of the life and works of one Herman Melville—sometime dreamer, reader, author, philosopher—haunter of bookstores and libraries—father and husband—exemplary nineteenth-century American, Westerner, and quite human being. Finally, on the parts of both author and publisher, the book is testimony to a generation or more of teachers, scholars, and knowing readers who have been engaged in the often thankless—one is tempted to say nigh impossible—task of increasing America's historical and cultural self-consciousness.

Fittingly, both for its subject and its occasion (Sealts's retirement from over thirty years of Wisconsin teaching and scholarship), *Pursuing Melville* contains both solid, impersonal science (in the classical meaning of the term) and bits of personal reminiscence, if not occasional self-justifications, and ultimately a firm sense of personal satisfaction. Most of its "Chapters and Essays"—twenty in all, arranged by date of composition

or publication—have been previously published, many as scholarly articles, and a few as chapters in books (either Sealts's own or Festschrifts to others specializing in American literary studies), though all have been updated, where necessary, to adjust to changing systems of notation or to account for recent discoveries about Melville and his works. The four pieces "new" with this volume are a section of a graduate school seminar paper ("The World of Mind: Melville's Theory of Knowledge [1940]"), a chapter from Sealts's doctoral dissertation ("Melville and the Philosophers [1942]"), an essay written especially for this occasion ("Melville and the Platonic Tradition [1980]"), and "A Letter to Henry A. Murray" which acts as personal postscript both to the book and to its author's career. The remaining essays and chapters—including a good part of the sometimes affectionate, sometimes frustrated record of twenty-five years' correspondence with Charles Olson—have appeared elsewhere and are reasonably accessible to others concerned, as Sealts has been, with Melville's reading, the chronology of his short fiction, the sources of his philosophizing, or the connections between episodes and figures in his own life and his narrators' symbolic chimneys.

The justification and explanation for the republication here of some sixteen items from Sealts's scholarly career is less, then, to provide a single source for the best of his work than it is to demonstrate, in Sealts's own far too-modest words, "one scholar's

contribution to his century's knowledge and understanding of Herman Melville." As the personal preludes to the essays and chapters demonstrate, as the correspondence with Olson and Murray confirms, and as these bits of a scholar's career avow, *Pursuing Melville* is a memoir in disguise, a kind of disguise and a kind of memoir Melville himself would much appreciate, a somepart personal memoir of course, but a communal memoir as well, a memoir that exemplifies a half-century's effort and commitment by two (and now three) generations of students and scholars not simply to legitimize American literary study but to pass on what has been passed on "with the thought that American literary study—if the humanities survive at all—is still to come fully into its own in the years ahead." As Sealts himself says, "There's a gamble involved here, and perhaps some errors of choice or emphasis as well. . . ." There are miscues. There is frustration, frustration occasioned not least by one's own and one's countrymen's American impatience with the solidly and systematically factual, with the established and foundational. There is excitement, the excitement of plumbing the depths of consciousness or rising like fiery Aldebarans to the Melvillean occasion. But there is risk as well, and not only the risk of losing touch with the ordinary—the risk, too, of getting caught in the easy clarity of the mundane and purely factual. And, finally, there is irony, the irony implicit in the fairly large crew of critical and historical sailors pursuing the mys-

tery of Herman Melville as Melville himself pursued Ishmael, who pursued Ahab, who pursued. . . .

Not until we come to see the pursuit of authors, artists, and their works as we can sometimes see the pursuit of white whales and what they may signify, will this book be of more than passing interest or significance to anyone other than the small coterie who sail or wish to sail on the ship of Melvillean scholarship. When and if we *do* come to appreciate and comprehend the personal and communal effort to strike through the masks of Herman Melville (or others of his kind)—however mottled their surfaces, however unlike the blazing, reposeful whiteness of the whale—when and if we *do* come to understand the human and historic significance of literary, biographical, and bibliographic study—then perhaps this book will sell. Until that time, those in the know will have to take crew-like solace in their appreciation of the analogies between Ahab's quest to strike through the masks of fate, reality, and time—or Melville's to "plumb" the depths of the human self—and the too-often less self-conscious quests of literary critics, biographers, and their readers to plumb the depths of Melville's plumbings or to strike through Ahab's strikings.

Published literary critic and historian, Peter A. Fritzell is an associate professor of English at Lawrence University and, coincidentally, heir to the position Merton M. Sealts, Jr. held before he became professor of English at UW-Madison.

THE JENS JENSEN I KNEW by Sid Telfer, Sr.; Driftwood Farms Press, P.O. Box 74, Ellison Bay, 1982. 86 pp. \$11.95 cloth; \$7.95 paper.

By Richard Boudreau

Born in 1860 in Denmark, Jens Jensen came to this country at the age of 24, eventually settling in Chicago. Determination and hard work soon gave him wide responsibilities with the Chicago Park Department. Over the years he renovated old parks, laid out new ones, created neighborhood playgrounds, and finally pushed for

the creation of the Forest Reserves of Cook County. With a growing reputation as a genius in the developing field of landscape architecture, he went into private practice in 1908. Among other projects he laid out the grounds for Greenfield Village at Dearborn, Michigan, designed the Ford Pavilion and surrounding grounds for the Chicago's World Fair in 1933, and planned the Lincoln Memorial Gardens in Springfield, Illinois.

After successes in his field that rivaled those of his contemporary Frank Lloyd Wright, he began to look about for a location of a school through which to perpetuate his theories about landscaping, about nature, and about living. That purpose led him to Door County for the first time in 1919. But not until the death of his wife in 1935 did he move permanently to the Ellison Bay area. He spent the remainder of his life there, developing his unusual school and laying out its acreage, the combination of which he called The Clearing.

Though many people know something of The Clearing, perhaps even have visited it, most know very little about the man who founded it. Now thanks to this modest (both in size and in tone) book, we can know him as well as our next-door neighbor. Sid Telfer, Sr., a Door County orchardman most of his long life—he's 88—was next-door neighbor to Jensen for many years, from 1935 to Jensen's death in 1951. And this book is rich in Telfer's own recollections—not other people's—of their enduring friendship.

It is the man, not his accomplishments, that we come to know in the pages of this book. His great love for unspoiled nature delayed getting electricity to his school for some time because he would allow no trees to be cut to accomplish it. The new school building was constructed of native fieldstone taken up from the immediate vicinity, and when weathered stones were needed, they were pried loose, but Jensen insisted on the holes being covered with nearby vegetation to hide the scar as nature would eventually do on its own.

This same love of the natural caused him to leave undisturbed a

large fox snake that often sunned itself in an ivy near his woodshed door, much to the discomfort of some of his many visitors. When he learned the renters of his farmhouse had killed a deer, he had them leave, not wanting anyone on the property who destroyed wildlife. And during his last illness he received as a gift from his long-time friend, Emma Toft, a small skunk, which, after his initial surprise, he accepted gladly.

"I want to be honest and factual," Telfer says in the introduction. He is that and more—absolutely straightforward, unembellished, weighty per word. It is the author's integrity and honesty and humility that solidly mortars it all together.

ADVENTURES IN AN AMERICAN'S LITERATURE by Norbert Blei; The Ellis Press, P.O. Box 1443, Peoria, Illinois, 1982. 183 pp., paper, \$5.95.

By Richard Boudreau

The actual composition of this book predates Blei's *Door Way*, 1981, a sparkling collection of interviews with Door County locals; refers to some of the short stories in *The Hour of the Sunshine Now*, 1976, a solid collection, half set in his native Chicago, half in his adopted Wisconsin, the title story haunting, haunting; and helps explain the mix of language and watercolor of his whimsical first book, *The Watercolored Word*, 1969.

But *Adventures in an American's Literature* (a play on the title of that ubiquitous high school text, *Adventures in American Literature*) is most closely connected to Blei's *The Second Novel*, 1979; it is, in fact, the missing first novel, though second printed, as he acknowledges in the "Introductory Notes." If the previous novel was about writing, then, according to Blei, this one is about teaching.

The "adventures" are those of a character called Miroslav Blazen, who becomes Hassock, who becomes Tewa, who becomes—whatever—for, the narrator says, we name ourselves, "it's the American way." And these are all guises of the novel's voice. "At times I think I'm the main character," the narrator says to a friend of

his. "Then I meet men like you, women like this, and I know I still amount to nothing, and the story may never end."

The story may not end, but like a play it does build to a climax. The first act presents scenes from the narrator's high school years in a tough Chicago neighborhood. Well on the way to confirmed felony, Blazen is saved only by an interest in reading and by a "fag" English teacher named Castrati and a Jewish history teacher called Moss. Haphazard college and Blazen graduates into high school teaching himself. His ambivalent approach toward students as difficult as he had been fails, and by the end of the year his teaching career is in shambles.

The middle act is almost a descent into Hell. With wife, Betty, he takes a trip to Mexico where he comes face to face with death—figuratively in the bull ring, literally in their hotel room. With raging fever subsiding, he, with Betty, slumps back to the states. Nine months of unengaging substitute teaching and he's again in need of therapy, this time a trip to Europe—Sweden and Betty, Copenhagen and Astrid (a merry-go-round one-nighter), and Yugoslavia, his father's ancestral home, where things, including his marriage, fall apart.

Back in the states, he has been transformed through his breakdown. In the final act he is no longer Blazen (the "I" of the first two parts) but Hassock (the "he" of Part Three), and the voice over-ride of the earlier sections becomes clear. Hassock, the rebel, cause or no cause, Hassock, the earthy, the primal, Hassock the destroyer of pretense, the enemy of conformity. As Hassock he gets that second chance that Blazen wanted, the chance to try out real teaching on real students. And it all ends, in this story right out of the rebellious sixties, where it all ends.

The Second Novel contained some brilliant splashes of writing but lacked unity and sustained drive; this novel is strong in structure and contains good, sustained writing. Blei's handling of dialogue is masterful like that of Hemingway, and some scenes are as intense as any from, say, the likes of Thomas Wolfe. And some of his

characters, Lenore, Green-eyes, Reckelson, Crakow, are adventures for the reader just as Henry Miller, Kenneth Patchen, William Saroyan, Wallace Stevens are for Hassock (and Blei obviously).

Hassock is right, of course, we do name ourselves. But he fails to note that just as often others name us. So, after five books, who or what is Blei? He is simply a spinner of yarns, purely a teller of tales, overwhelmingly a member of that most difficult of professions, writing.

Richard Boudreau teaches Wisconsin and American literature at UW-La Crosse.

PASTORALE by Susan Engberg; University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1982. 161 pp. \$11.95 (\$4.95 paperback).

By Dennis Ribbens

It was her great talent, her great mission, she told herself as she crossed decisively to the kitchen to make herself coffee and oatmeal, that she could imagine the largest effects from the smallest acts. It was a sense of history, that's what it was; the sense of her place in the historic line of Christ's servants was a disquieting nimbus around her that would not let her say, 'It makes no difference.' And so she had opinions—how could she help it, when she saw some child stumbling in the dark of dumbness, all because no one had ever taken the trouble to talk to him. Or when some stupid ox of a man was let into some position of authority, all because—well, sometimes she wasn't quite sure why such things happened.

That passage is vintage Engberg. Helene, the main character of the short story "Lambs of God," though more fragile than most, is one of many women Engberg writes about, women who are very different and yet who are somehow all the same woman. Helene, the intelligent one, who could give a lecture and then run home to make applesauce. Helene, who regulated every small movement of her children and husband and yet saw them slipping out of her control. Sen-

sitive yet practical, calm yet unraveled. A burdened woman, struggling to make sense of her world; like the French sculptor she read about, herself also on "a never ending, lifelong search" for the stasis only a photograph could provide, but a perverse world of children, fire, cats, and candy could not.

The last story, "Parts of Speech," probably the best place to begin the book, recalls the thoughts and experiences of Julia Trilling during the weeks after her husband's death. Engberg's craft and eye are impeccable, like Julia's sense of "the physicality of her husband's non-appearance." The story centers on Julia's bicycle trip into the country, to an old farm, and into her own past, leading to her rediscovery of life "a stupendous pot, containing everything, everything." Her's was a search to reestablish connections—with life, a dead husband, a helpful brother, a college son, herself.

This book contains eight perfectly wonderful short stories, rich, dense, and metaphoric, and written with a rarely found care for detail, balance, and diction. "The Face of the Deep," a story of pastels, muted tones, filtered lights, tells of an outing to Lake Michigan by a single girl, her male friend, and his elderly grandmother—a story of separations, connections, and longings. "The Lap of Peace" (my favorite) metaphorically probes two very different people, husband and wife, waiting the birth of a child and the visit of a parent. "Pastorale," the weakest story, reflects on a mother's stress over the loss of a child. "Small Voices" is the mythic tale of two motherless children, one an angel ministering to the need of the other, though not without need for ministering herself. "The Land of Plenty" powerfully captures the anguish of a young deserted mother who attempts to bring order and love to the lives of her children in the face of an unexpected visit by her husband, and who moves from anger to rest through the care of a friend and her own ability to forgive. "Trio" is among the best of these excellent stories, the only one with a male protagonist, but who also is cast in a domestic role of caring for his children,

taking them to piano lessons, and learning through these experiences and his separation from his wife a great deal about himself, and about parent-child feelings, and about women's aspirations.

Susan Engberg, born in Iowa, educated at Lawrence, and now residing in Milwaukee, in this collection offers stories that deserve several readings. Various themes and images recur: dreams, tears, lost religion, symbolic titles, deaths, rain, separations, quests for some hold on life, searches for some clearer vision of how to order one's self. In these stories one finds courage and joy, weakness and sadness. Around at least one corner every reader will find something of him or herself. These are not stories *by* a woman, *about* women, *for* women. These are rather stories *by* an uncommonly perceptive and skillful writer, *about* people who long to make connections with others and with themselves, *for* everyone.

Dennis Ribbens is librarian at Lawrence University.

NATIVE'S RETURN by Herbert Kubly; Stein and Day, New York, 1981. 342 pp. \$14.95.

By Dale O'Brien

Herbert Kubly of New Glarus, Wisconsin, a writer of distinction and achievement without equal among his contemporaries in the state, went repeatedly to Switzerland during the past thirty years to uncover his roots and discover himself. He found a land of economic wealth and spiritual poverty, a national psyche still crippled by the medieval demons of Calvinism, Zwingliism, sexual repression, paranoia, xenophobia, fear of non-conformity and pleasure, and the unknown and untried. And he found echoes of some of these afflictions in himself.

Native's Return is the work of a brave and hurting man and a skilled and painstaking observer. It must have required a monumental determination by Kubly to strip both the land of his fathers (a land that was home to them for more than a mil-

lenium) and his own soul so defenselessly naked before the world when the culture from which he comes would regard with distaste the revelation of even the slightest intimacy. This he has done, however, with humility, a weeping tenderness, and a love mixed with outrage and perplexity.

Mostly, the book is an account of his experiences in a major city, Zurich, and a hamlet, Elm, in the Canton of Glarus from which his people came to Wisconsin. He hardly neglects the rest of Switzerland, however, for he visited and studied most of it, usually in the company of his great friend Kap Rhyner, a Swiss Renaissance man who, it seems, was forever hurtling his car at rocket speeds around high altitude, snaking roads, through the blizzards and the fogs thick as cheese souffles with Kubly as terrified passenger. Kap, a distant relative (as who, almost, wasn't) of the author, is an engineer, a stone mason, a visionary land developer, a restorer of ancient villages, a gallant, sensitive, sophisticated, and sometimes despairing Swiss patriot. He is a subject to whom Kubly should address himself fully in another book.

The author was extraordinarily blessed with the connections that could gain him introductions to almost anyone he wished to interview: the nation's president (a woman in a country last in Europe to grant the franchise to women), the chairmen of the powerful Swiss banks, the late Karl Barth, the most renowned theologian of our time, the leading Jungian psychiatrist, farmers (some of them his cousins), journalists, innkeepers, a woman preacher, a cross-section of the entire society. So detailed are his descriptions and his recall that one imagines he carried a tape recorder everywhere he went or unobtrusively took endless notes in shorthand.

"We (the Swiss) are quite religious but not very Christian," Kubly quotes Professor Barth. "In the gospels Jesus said man cannot live by God and mammon both. But we Swiss prove Him wrong . . . Religion in Switzerland is mostly practical materialism . . . It is the tragedy of the church that her greatest Philistines are inside

rather than outside her gates . . ."

The most revealing interview—and the best chapter in the book, I think—is with the late Yolande Jacobi, disciple of Carl Jung and, in her time, Switzerland's most eminent psychotherapist. "The legendary Swiss efficiency . . . is real enough when they deal with inanimate materials and with controllable objects . . . But the 'efficiency' falls apart completely when it is confronted with the uncontrollable human factor, with people . . . Contention becomes persecution and logical behavior is abandoned to emotionality and hysterical outbursts," the author quotes Dr. Jacobi. "This is a national trait. Everyone has a trace of it, everyone feels himself constantly observed and judged . . . Jealousy is one of (our) two strongest emotions. The other is fear . . . Insurance premiums come to a quarter of one's annual income . . . One of the greatest fears of the Swiss is sex. The revulsion goes back to what Jung called 'group incest' which was once so strong in mountain villages and huts. (Sex) is all crude bestiality, an act of hostility . . . Orgy excesses are very important to the Swiss . . ." Dr. Jacobi told Kubly. The land, alas, is not all happy yodelers, spectacular mountains, and edelweiss.

Kubly concludes that the people of Elm, his ancestors' home, along with all the Swiss, "were caught in the vise of an unrelenting past and an unknown future and the present was a battlefield." And yet, in one of the book's unending descents into the labyrinths of Swiss culture and character, he comes to terms of a sort with the ghosts of his past. He relates that before he left Switzerland the last time (in 1977) he had his own grandson's name entered in the genealogical record at the courthouse in Glarus, thus adding a new link in a chain of descent that stretches into the dim distance of the fifteenth century. "A peace was made" is the book's final line.

This wrenching and often soul-searing work is by a gifted native son who won the National Book Award in 1956 for *American in Italy* and who has published at least eight other books including a volume of exquisite short stories. *Native's Return* may not

make Kubly New Glarus's favorite native son, but it should. He's told the Swiss, both here and there, who they are and whence they came. They will be the wiser and more understanding after drinking from this bitersweet cup.

Dale O'Brien, a past WASAL president and frequent contributor to the Review, has recently moved to Alabama.

THE EMPTY MEADOW by Ben Logan; Stanton and Lee, Madison, 1982. 221 pp. \$14.95.

By Richard Boudreau

In his first book, *The Land Remembers*, Ben Logan drew on the experiences of his growing-up years on a ridge farm above the Mississippi River Valley in western Wisconsin. The book was an immediate, and has become an enduring, success. Arranged according to seasons of the year, it is a heart-warming blend of rich detail and humorous anecdote with a touch of the poetic and the philosophic. Logan's new book, *The Empty Meadow*, is fiction, but the setting is obviously the same hilltop world of the first, its hero, Steve Larson, much like Logan himself, and its feel for the locale as strong as ever.

The novel tells about the seventeenth summer in the life of a farm boy about to step into adulthood. Set in the year 1939, it presents a world of easy-going living: a fishing excursion with the family to the Mississippi following a night rain that stopped haying; rifle shooting at targets mounted inside old tires and rolled down a hill; riding atop a box car for a visit to nearby La Crosse. And there are characters not likely to be forgotten: the brothers known only by their nicknames, Tools, who loved to tinker with machinery, Bottles, who loved to drink, Girls, who loved to chase girls; ninety-seven year old Bill Wallin, the "Oldest Man in the World"; and Harvey Shields.

A forty-year-old man tied to taking care of his mother, Harvey Shields has no life of his own. He figures in one of several memorable scenes in the book. Heading home in the family

car one Saturday night, Steve, in one of those senseless, though obligatory, rituals of foolhardiness, tears down a particular hill, comes into a sharp gravel turn at the bottom and slides cross-ways over the bridge to a stop on the far side. And there stands Harvey. Would Steve do it again with Harvey along? Steve complies with a perfect turn and skid, and Harvey, muttering only, "My God! My the living God!" walks away from the car and, Steve later learns, from his mother as well.

With bits of sage advice from the Oldest Man in the World Steve proceeds to find and then to lose four different girls. But the girls Steve is involved with are less important to the story than the change they work in him. His arousal is not merely sexual but emotional as well; he learns love, tenderness, vulgarity, triumph and loss—and regret. By the end of the story he has undergone a transformation, a change so complete that he has left the world of childhood, the meadow below his farm home empty of his former imaginative peoplings.

One of the joys of the book is Logan's use of dialect and vintage terms: "dusthopper" (grasshopper), "shadfly" (fishfly), "footfeed" (accelerator), "thank-you-ma'ams" (angled ruts in the sloping roads to take run-offs), and "taffy-pulling conversation" (conversation that gets stickier and stickier). He has a keen ear and a talent for getting down dialogue that rings true: "Come on." "Where are you going?" "Out of here." "What you talking about?" "I don't know. Come on!" "I'm not going anywhere!" "Yes you are." "Why the hell for?" "Because she was very nice to me one time."

But the premise on which the story rests is souring: that the law of the land for males is constant preoccupation with sex and for females ready gratification of masculine desire. "Ain't that what girls are for?" is the pervasive viewpoint though Steve, at least, is in the process of pulling himself out of the amoral morass. "Yeah," he says toward the end, "but do you know what to do after you do what you do when you catch one?" For Steve the "third ultimate," sex, is inadequate in itself; he needs a hetero-

osexual relationship that goes beyond that.

Something must be said about the format of the book: its heavier, more porous paper, large and clear print, wide pages and roomy margins unhurriedly but compellingly beguile the reader on. Reenforcing the ample and old-fashioned world of the story are the chiaroscuro sketches of Marian Lefebvre which introduce each chapter.

THE CARRABASSETT, SWEET WILLIAM, WAS MY RIVER by John Judson; Juniper Press, 1310 Shorewood Drive, La Crosse, WI 54601, 1982. 154 pp. \$15.00 cloth, \$9.00 paper.

By Richard Boudreau

After several volumes of poetry John Judson, creative writing teacher at UW-La Crosse, presents a book of prose, or at least a book that nearly avoids poetic arrangements. Even so, it demands close attention to line, an ear for resonance, an eye for imagery, a mind open and agile, and a willingness to suspend grasp of the whole for the part.

On the surface the book is about death: The "Sweet William" of the title is Judson's oldest son, killed in a skiing accident on Sugarloaf Mountain, Maine, in March, 1972. The Carrabassett is the river running from that mountain to the sea and in whose valley Judson's father died of a heart attack only months before William. There are other deaths in the book: of an unnamed UW-La Crosse student, of Harry, who taught Judson trout fishing in the Carrabassett, of Great Aunt Millie, of a nest of baby robins.

Yet the book is not morbid nor sentimental. It is a record not of the losses but of the struggle to absorb them, to deal with them. The first summer (Part I) Judson and his wife, Joanne, get their remaining children, Lisa, Gary, and Sara, out biking, hiking, and camping so that they, at least, can see that life goes on, that the family, fragmented by tragedy, can still be whole, if not entire. The second summer (Part III) the Judsons take the next step; they return to their

summer camp in Maine. Husband and wife, at least, must enter the valley and look on the mountain. "We have been practicing all of our lives to go," Judson writes, and in a passage moving because of its starkness, they confront Sugarloaf.

At all points Judson finds the rituals of grief inappropriate or inadequate. "In this country we are taught that to lament properly, we must bathe in the dead's ashes for the sakes of our egos," he notes. Since he refuses to do that, he is thrown back upon himself, and that self is a poet, a shaper (as he calls himself in two fragments) of metaphor: "We must acknowledge (metaphor's) alien spirit and the humility it brings us to, before we can become civil or human. Thus, metaphor and its human insistence is the real root of society and education. Only its wisdom can lead us to love."

If metaphor plays such a basic role in the very forms of social intercourse and living, including dealing with death, then our system of passing on our cultural values is upside-down, founded on wrong principles. In a series of letters (Part II)—to the chancellor of his university, to students, and to writer friend, "George"—Judson argues the impossibility and wrongheadedness of trying to quantify what goes on between student and teacher. The curriculum, he says, "... is not made of, nor for, money"; education must concern itself with "... what it is to need to be human."

Imagery and its resonances (the "mountain," for example, which also includes Witch's Tit in Korea and the Cold Mountain of Han Shan) provide a sort of unity to what seems a literary salmagundi: a fragment of an "Act One" precedes the title page, an "Act Four" lies near the end of the book, an interlude separates Parts I and II, and the rest is made up of several dialogues, journal entries, letters, notes, poems, catalog descriptions, news items, prose speculation, and prose narrative. Yet all assumes form through a tripartite arrangement based on chronological order, and all elements of the literary collage coalesce. It might be called an "experimental novel," but a better term, perhaps, is a "spiritual auto-

biography."

"If there is a moral to all this," Judson says late in the book, "I suppose it is: It is not what we have, but what has us; not what we choose, but what chooses us to see through our eyes."

There is something Hawthornesque or Melvillean about the ambiguity of that statement concerning the ambiguity of the human condition.

Richard Boudreau teaches American literature at UW-La Crosse.

Letters

I was delighted with the Art in Wisconsin issue of the Review, which arrived last week, but I am really writing to tell you of one reaction to the Wetlands issue. A friend who is a photogrammetrist and also concerned with conservation saw a copy and says it is the best work on wetlands for the intelligent amateur that he has seen. He has been buying up copies and giving them to friends at every conference he attends. I thought you would like to know.

Kay Whitford
Milwaukee

I want to compliment the Academy on the recent issue "Wisconsin Painters and Printmakers." It was a beautiful edition, expensively and tastefully done.

However, I was amazed at the omission of Andy Balkin among the printmakers. If anyone represents printmaking, especially in our community, it's Andy. For several years he's run a studio on Park Street, operating facilities otherwise unavailable except at the university. Without access to Andy's presses and help such fine artists as Dagny Quisling Myrah, Bella Goebel, Paula Neiss, etc. would not have the facilities to produce.

On his own Andy Balkin is recognized nationally as a fine printmaker and is represented in twenty-seven galleries. It was an appalling omission.

Barbara Rewey
Madison

Letters

May I offer three comments on the December *Academy Review* devoted to Wisconsin Wetlands?

1. Patricia Powell deserves more conspicuous credit for the long hours of hard work that went into expertly putting this complex issue together. (Her name was evidently inadvertently omitted from the editorial.)

2. The letter writer she refers to also deserves credit. I have learned that he is Charles Luthin, an enthusiastic and capable young American zoologist who visited Madison in December, 1982, just long enough to complete his masters' thesis at the UW (and receive a copy of the Review) before returning to his position with the Vogels Park Walsrode, West Germany.

3. Like all "issues," this one was out of date by the time it saw print. A very important symposium was omitted from the references on page 7 because notice of its arrival in Steenbock Library came on the day the Review went to press. This latest gold mine of information is the First International Conference on Wetlands held in New Delhi, September 10-17, 1980, published in 1982 at Jaipur by several cooperating institutions. Many of the contributors are American and much of the excellent original and review material applies directly or indirectly to Wisconsin. In two volumes (total 664 pages), the fifty papers are edited by B. Gopal, R.E. Turner, R.G. Wetzel, and D.F. Whigham. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been generously distributing copies.

James H. Zimmerman
Madison

I received the December 1982 number of the *Wisconsin Academy Review* through my membership in Citizens' Natural Resources Association of Wisconsin and found the articles very interesting. For that reason, I am subscribing. I happen to live near Chiwaukee Prairie and have long been interested in Wisconsin conservation.

Hazel L. Hurlbutt
Waukegan, IL



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