

Claims of the Buckeye

BY TED ROBINSON

IN a thoughtful and revealing essay on "The Minnesota Muse" recently printed in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Mr. James Gray argues convincingly for the thesis that the contemporary writers who live in Minnesota are catholic in their tastes, varied in their styles, only accidentally associated in their background, and almost entirely lacking in regionalism. This last fact, indeed, he finds more than a little dismaying. It is well, he thinks, to have the cosmopolitan attitude, but deplorable to ignore the drama of local interest. And although he speaks of a Minnesota tradition, which he traces to Charles Flandrau, this tradition appears to be rather a prideful and emulative attitude than a body of doctrine or a code of practice.

I am at once disturbed and comforted by this discovery. Disturbed, because Mr. Gray effectively destroys a vague impression of something distinctively regional, indigenous, or slightly Scandinavian, which joined a spontaneous burgeoning of brilliant talents into one homogeneous group. Comforted—for a brief moment at least—because in view of this discovery I did not seem obliged to feel so melancholy about the state of affairs in Ohio.

The melancholy was of quite recent origin, and was the result of a quite unforeseen embarrassment. After the manner of such experiences, this embarrassment, previously inconceivable, had descended twice in the course of a single day. First, a lady secretary or something called me on the telephone and said: "Will you please give us a list of Cleveland authors—the ones who are nationally known?"

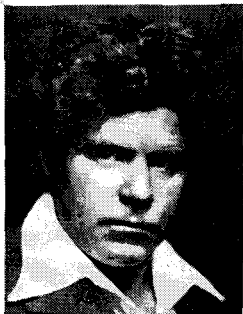
And I answered, surprising myself as well as the secretary, "There are none."

"My God, Mr. Robinson," cried the lady, "this is the Chamber of Commerce talking!"

"All right," I stammered. "I'll have the list compiled and mailed to you at once. But I can't tell you any names over the



Harry Kemp (top, left), who started tramp-
ing on life from his birthplace near Youngs-
town; Sherwood Anderson (top, right), who
was thirty-five before he began to write;
Constance Fenimore Woolson (left), a fore-
runner of regional novelists; Artemus Ward
(right), idol of the columnists who are his
successors; Jim Tully (below, left), hobo
and prize fighter, who conceived an ambi-
tion to be an author; Katherine Brush (be-
low, right), whose "Red-Headed Woman"
is "unequivocal Ohio."



to be living here now? Or may it be applied to anyone who once lived here and wrote a book? All these qualifications are unsatisfactory and misleading. One has a feeling that in order to come within fair listing, the author must, wherever he was born and wherever he lives, have clinging to his work some flavor of the state, some distinctive quality that could not have

been acquired elsewhere. Or there must be an apparent intention in his work to treat objectively of Ohio, to use it as an essential ingredient of his product. Or, finally, whether it is apparent

in his writing or not, he must be somehow conditioned by his earlier or later connection with the locality.

With these things in mind, I set down tentatively the names of Sherwood Anderson, Louis Bromfield, William Riley Burnett, Jim Tully, Hugh S. Fullerton, Katherine Brush, Rollo Walter Brown, Harlan Hatcher, Burton E. Stevenson, Walter Havighurst, James Ball Naylor, Langston Hughes, and (for sufficient reasons which may later appear) Harry Kemp.

It will take a deal of figuring to find a Greatest Common Denominator for that list.

Of that thirteen, all but one were, I believe, born in the state. Four of them still live there. Sherwood Anderson's first fame came to him from "Winesburg, Ohio" and some of his other books have the Ohio scene for their setting. Jim Tully was born near St. Mary's, brought up in an Ohio orphan asylum, and had his first bit of writing printed while he was working in a chain factory in Kent. His autobiographical novels (which means most of

telephone, because at the moment I can't think of any."

An hour later, the postman delivered to me a letter from the editor of this magazine, asking me to do a piece about Ohio Authors. And it took me ten minutes of concentration to recall more than three.

Eventually, of course, I found that there were many Ohio authors, and even a few who lived in Cleveland. But is there not something more than mildly significant in the fact that I, who have been an Ohio book reviewer for many years, could not remember any of their names offhand? It suggests that Ohio authors do not flock together, or constitute a movement or a "school" or a communal interest. They might as well be scattered over the face of the earth. And, as a matter of fact, they are.

After all, I am not sure what is meant by "an Ohio author." Is it one who was born in Ohio? Is it one who has established a permanent home within the borders of the state? Is it one who happens

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ATTITUDES TOWARD HISTORY
By CRANE BRINTON

THE SONG OF THE WORLD
By JOHN GIONO

Reviewed by Henry Seidel Canby

them) must necessarily begin in Ohio. Harry Kemp started tramping on life from his birthplace near Youngstown. Rollo Walter Brown, born and reared in the Ohio River coal mining regions, wrote all of his splendid series of novels, including "The Firemakers" and "The Hillikin," against the background of his own parish.

Burton E. Stevenson, dean of all these, has produced his many volumes of miscellaneous literature and his great popular anthologies of poetry while living in his native Chillicothe. No less faithful to his own place is Hugh S. Fullerton, whose steady output of stories continues to flow from his Westerville home. Langston Hughes spends a large part of his time in Cleveland. Harlan Hatcher has seen no occasion for deserting his academic duties at Columbus. The state has less of a hold on Burnett, who went to California after the success of "Little Caesar," and on Havighurst, whose "Pier 17" opened a larger field for him. Katherine Brush no longer resides in Ohio, but her "Red-Headed Woman" is unequivocal Ohio.

After these are admitted, the claims of the patriotic Buckeye become somewhat shadowy. In a list compiled by a loyal and thorough librarian, I find the names of Rupert Hughes and Zane Grey. It appears that Rupert Hughes received his college education at Western Reserve University in Cleveland. It is of record that Zane Grey originated in Zanesville; he is evidently named for the town's eponymous founder. This same librarian even finds some excuse for annexing such names as James Thurber, Ben Ames Williams, Fannie Hurst, and George Jean Nathan. I am unable to discover the nature of these connections, so I must dismiss them as not established.

We return to the question: have the dozen writers legitimately classed as of Ohio any common ground beyond that classification? Do they represent a movement, or even a tendency? Have they joined in subscribing to any artistic confession of faith? Do they inherit any sort of tradition from notable Ohio writers now passed from among us?

For of course we look back to the giants of old time. The influence of William Dean Howells may still be strong with his compatriots of a later generation. The memory of Alice and Phoebe Cary may still inspire the young bards; Artemus Ward and Petroleum V. Nasby may be the idols of the columnists who are their successors; John Hay and Sarah K. Bolton and John J. Platt and Thomas Buchanan Read and Harriet Beecher Stowe are surely not yet utterly forgotten. Certainly no new generation has had time to arise that can ignore Mary Hartwell Catherwood, Constance Fenimore Woolson, Brand Whitlock, Charles S. Brooks, and Earl Derr Biggers. Perhaps Langston Hughes pays grateful tribute to the memory of

Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles W. Chesnutt. The laurels are still green upon the memorial tablets of Hart Crane and Edmund Vance Cooke, who, though they differed so widely in age, in audience, and in their conception of poetry, are nevertheless a valuable part of our own literary history. And we who knew and loved him well shall not soon recover from the shock of our most recent and perhaps most tragic loss—that which we sustained when "Jake Falstaff," genius, was stricken down in his youth.

So there have been notable talents in the past, and there are notable talents today. But past and present have this negative quality in common: that the factors of no era have constituted what might be called a group, nor have any given number of contemporaries ever been conscious



WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

of a community of ideals and interests or a similarity of objectives; that there is not now and has never been a body of individual artists to which the critic might refer as "the Ohio group." I could not know positively without interviewing them all, but I venture the guess that among the thirteen whom I have listed as legitimately designated Ohio authors, there are no two who are even acquainted with each other. And if I am wrong, and there is a mutual acquaintance among several of them, I will hazard a second guess that they became acquainted at some gathering of writers in New York. Just as the urban vacationer at a summer resort strikes up a friendship with a person who turns out to be his next-door neighbor in the city, not otherwise must Buckeye brothers of the pen go abroad in order to be conscious of one another's existence.

Perhaps I have underlined this situation too heavily. But it has impressed me because of my knowledge of a strikingly contrasting situation. I have a vivid memory of a unique affair that took place

thirty-five years ago, when I was a cub reporter in Indianapolis. For some worthy cause, whose nature I have forgotten, a benefit entertainment was to be given. There was no time for rehearsals or elaborate preparations; the easiest thing was to gather a group of local writers and have each one give a brief reading from his own works.

And so it was done, almost extemporaneously. And there appeared on the stage of English's Opera House that night, these close friends and (for the most part) near neighbors:

General Lew Wallace, James Whitcomb Riley, Maurice Thompson, Booth Tarkington, Meredith Nicholson, George Barr McCutcheon, George Ade, Charles Major, and Mary Hartwell Catherwood.

A community that can bring together a group like that at a moment's notice can boast with justification of having a Group. Outside of New York City, where literary workers clot together for business purposes, you will not find such an aggregation. Those writers may not all appear of the highest importance today; but when you consider that five of the list had written the best selling novels of the era—"Alice of Old Vincennes," "When Knighthood Was in Flower," "Graustark," "Lazarre," and "The Gentleman from Indiana"—that one was by all odds the most popular living American poet, and another the most talked-about American humorist; and that the oldest of them all had written one of the most widely read historical romances of all time—you will have to acknowledge that here was a more than remarkable body of neighborly authors.

The Indiana Group appears to have been a peculiar phenomenon, not yet satisfactorily accounted for. In the early nineteen-twenties came a Chicago group, as conspicuous in some of its elements. There have been San Francisco gatherings of writers, too, and occasional congestions in Kansas, Virginia, and Boston. One omits the seasonal settlements in summer and winter resorts; I think it would be far from the purpose to consider a Provincetown or a Taos school of literature. And I conclude that the plight of Ohio is not a plight at all, but the natural and expected state of affairs in any state; and more especially in any state that is thickly and evenly populated and contains many large centers of population and a great number of colleges and universities. The intellectual life, the creative processes, in such territories is spread over a large area, and has no centripetal tendency. The lack of common rendezvous results not from too few foci but from too many.

I may seem to be trying to find excuses for Ohio. But what I am trying to show is that excuses are not necessary for the absence of a phenomenon which is abnormal

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Baggage-Smasher to Blood

A DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN ENGLISH ON HISTORICAL PRINCIPLES. Compiled at the University of Chicago under the editorship of Sir William Craigie and James R. Hulbert. Part II, *Baggage-smasher—Blood*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1937. \$4.

Reviewed by J. B. DUDEK

NEARLY a year has elapsed since the appearance of Part I of the colossal historical dictionary of American English under way at the University of Chicago. The present reviewer having, in these columns (*The Saturday Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 20; September 12, 1936), sufficiently gasped his admiration of the work as a whole, will now dismiss it in general with the remark that the division just to hand, comprising pages 117-244, continues to evidence the almost superhuman ability not only of the editors but also of the printers and proofreaders. Sir William is, I understand, no longer personally engaged in the actual production, but his collaborators are on the job and doing it well. It is to be hoped that the intervals between issue of succeeding parts will not be so long. At the present rate, it will take a lifetime to publish the work, and since only those in their fifties are likely to appreciate the separate portions, few can reasonably expect to see it complete. The labor and energy required for an undertaking of such magnitude must, however, be considered; so, even if one misses the end, keeping pace with the publication serially will still have been a worthwhile experience.

This second part begins, appropriately, with a typical American invention, both as to the term and the thing signified—*baggage-smasher*. Like many another item listed, this compound word provokes reminiscence. The dictionary does not mark it obsolete, but I believe it is at least obsolescent. Baggage-smashers are neither so common nor so vicious as they were in the good old days when the railroads had the travelling public by the throat. Nowadays, to be sure, most people go in their own cars and themselves do what smashing is done. But judgment has overtaken the railroads, and competition from buses and airplanes has undoubtedly forced them to do something about the manhandling of passengers' trunks and other portables. In many private opinion, the chaps in charge of luggage on air transports never acquired the art of baggage-smashing, and I am told that those on long-distance bus lines show equal regard for other people's property. Anyway, even on the railroads there has been enough diminution of violence to warrant the suspicion that the baggage-smasher is extinct or rapidly becoming so. So, it is well that the "Dictionary of American English" records for posterity the meaning

of baggage-smasher and that at least in one state (Illinois) baggage-smashing was punishable by law. The penalty is not stated, but boiling in oil would not have been too severe.

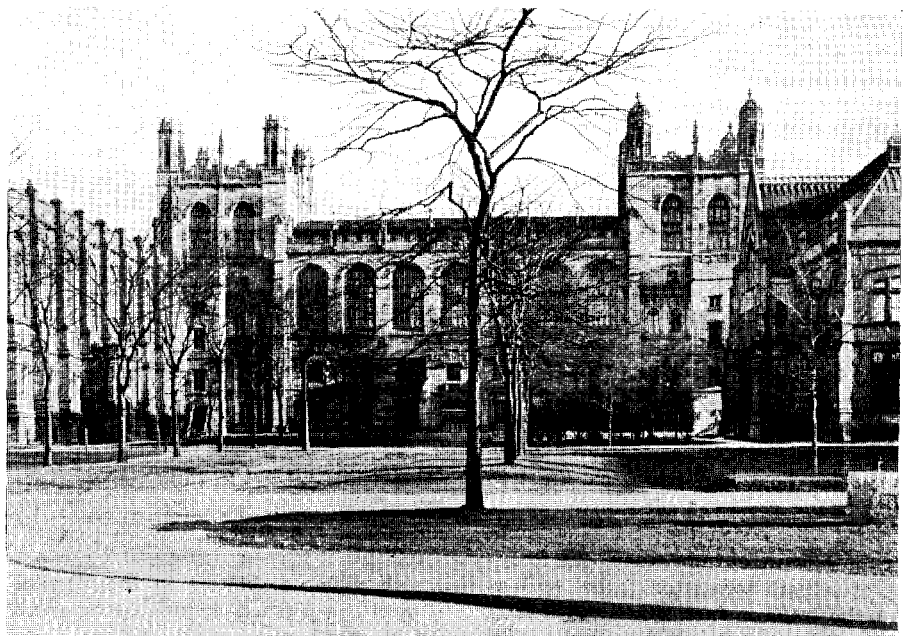
The Dictionary unfortunately (though of course it had to stop somewhere) closes its observations with the end of the past century. I pause to lament that the general run of Americans is absolutely indifferent to a study of their own language. They are so absorbed, at the moment, with movie slush and radio blah that picturesque locutions come and go, and sudden developments, for better or worse, take place in their lingo which will probably never be investigated or catalogued. Is any one, for instance, making note of "rumba" and "strip tease" or other terpsichorean atrocities which, a decade hence, will be as unknown as the comparatively civilized *barn-dance*? How soon will the "scanties" and "bras" (*bras-sières*) now affected by sweet young things take their place in the lexicographical museum with the bustle—that peculiar contrivance for the enhancement of feminine posteriors which for eighty years or so, according to citations in the present work, was popularly known as a *bishop*?

More than a column is devoted to *barbecue*, but, because of the terminus imposed, there is no mention of the *barbecue-stands* which have multiplied on street corners and along roadsides during the past few years. Nor is the spelling "Bar-B-Q" noted, though Neon and other signs so have it, to the extent that public school graduates, if able to read at all, cannot pronounce the word spelled in full. The *blind pig* and *blind tiger* became so common during the Noble Experiment

that most people, including myself, accounted them among the blessings flowing from the XVIIIth Amendment. As a matter of fact, state and local laws had taken cognizance of both at least thirty years earlier, threatening suitable punishment for proprietors thereof. But here again the reader is left under the impression that they are still current in the American language. I seriously doubt that there is a real blind pig running in the United States today, and asking the way to a blind tiger would excite almost as much curiosity as a horse and buggy. Other colloquialisms will, of course, live longer, perhaps indefinitely; but competent statisticians should be charting their birth, their blood pressure and temperature, and, if need be, their death. Even, in some cases, their resurrection.

Similarly with that almost virgin field, American slang. The Dictionary takes very slight notice of it, but does embalm a few choice specimens: *e.g.*, *beer-slinger* (analogous to *hash-slinger*, still current), which passed out for a time but is being revived since Repeal; and *biscuit-shooter*, still going strong. *Big*, as a modifier of *bug*, *ditch*, *dust*, *head* and *money*, is adequately treated, but *big house* in the sense of penitentiary is evidently too recent for the compilers, though a quotation dated 1898 foreshadows this meaning. For *big stiff* the enquirer will have to await the S-section. Whether *big shot* will also be found there or not is problematical. Apparently not. *Blood* is recorded in two slang senses: one certainly long obsolete, though this is not indicated; the other, though still in use, now rather rare.

Among importations from foreign languages included in the current fascicle there is *b'hoy*, from the Irish. The concluding entry is *Blood Indian*, another purely American contribution to the English language. It is a proper term denoting a member of the Kainah tribe.



AT CHICAGO UNIVERSITY THE DICTIONARY WAS COMPILED