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THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Report

of

Committee on Examination

This is to certify that we the undersigned, as a committee of the Graduate School, have given Jean Catel final oral examination for the degree of Master of Arts . We recommend that the degree of Master of Arts be conferred upon the candidate.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

June 10 1919

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Report  
of  
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The undersigned, acting as a Committee  
of the Graduate School, have read the accompanying  
thesis submitted by .Jean Catel  
for the degree of Master of Arts.

They approve it as a thesis meeting the require-  
ments of the Graduate School of the University of  
Minnesota, and recommend that it be accepted in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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Distinctive Images In  
Certain Living American Poets

A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Minnesota

by

Jean Catel  
licencié -es-lettres

In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Preface.

"Poetry a conqueror of the Forgetfulness  
of men."

(Ruskin.)

Is there an American poetry with characters of its own, apart from the British tradition, different in spirit from the poetry of the other nations?

If poetry is nothing but a decoration of our feelings, our fancies, our passing moods, if verse is nothing but a pleasant pattern that can be easily borrowed from an extraneous tradition, there is an American poetry. To be convinced let us consider the number of pretty poems published by the magazines or the daily press.

But if poetry, like every manifestation of art, is the very heart-beat of the race, then, we ask again "Is there an American poetry?"

-----Necessity of a "Tradition"-----

There is at the basis of every national art a distinctive imagery. For the plastic art, the basic images are statues and buildings with their aesthetic value reflected in the artists' consciousness. For Literature, they are general concepts that form the common heritage of poets or prose-writers. These concepts will force their pre-arranged harmony upon the mind of every man born in the country where they have developed. If the man happens to be an artist, a poet, he will express them in concrete terms, landscape or human type. A poet born in France cannot fail to fall under the influence of the classical and romantic images that form the tradition of French poetry. Time may modify the image of "Rodrigue" or "René"; both these images are forces in the collective consciousness of French poets. With a certain group of other images they form a tradition.

They shape the mind of the poets into a distinctive shape. The actual world where he happens to live is seen by him through that frame. They form his imaginative consciousness.

No one, it is true, thinks nowadays of going back to the original elements of French poetry except perhaps some intolerant defender of a rigidly national tradition.

We have however the privilege of living in a time when the American tradition is in the making. We can perceive the search for the common ground on which Poetry shall build her eternal monuments. A magazine like "Poetry", the ardent tool of propaganda of a large body of workers, is very enlightening on that point. See for instance

the articles published there on "tradition" (May 1913), on "The New Beauty" (April 1913), on "Nationalism in Art" (October 1914) etc.

----- The Method of its Discovery. -----

The method proposed by such artistic organs as "Poetry" and illustrated by a number of modern poets is to "register the present time in terms of the present time" (Poetry, August 1913)

1.- Let the poet go to things and men without any preconceived idea. Let him abandon, or try to abandon the British tradition. Let no extraneous image intervene between reality and his eye.

2.- Let the poet be on the look-out for the genuinely American imagery; or, to be truer to psychology, let the American imagery shape his mind. Let the vast stretch of land that extends from New-York to San-Francisco be the vivifying back-ground that the sea has been for the English poets. Let the types of men who live in that landscape be living symbols of humanity.

3.- Consequences: Landscape and men will mold the inner world of the poet. They will enlarge, shape, adorn the frame through which the universe will henceforward be contemplated. Any new actual representation of reality will partake of the shape, the color of the frame.

The frame-images will be abstract in some minds and these minds will produce thinkers. By some they will be conceived in concrete terms, and thus their freshness will be preserved and there will be artists.

----- What then is an Image? -----

This word is not taken here in its usual meaning of figure of speech, concrete picture, poetical pattern.

It is taken in its general sense:

The distinctive image will be the form summarizing certain characteristic features of America.

The image may be an abstract idea as "New-England Solitude", a living reality as "The Farmer", or a topographical entity "The Prairie", because "Solitude", "The Farmer", "The Prairie" are taken here as abstract forms, that is general syntheses of many particulars.

These forms like mysterious presences preside over the work of the imagination of poets and any artistic interpretation of the national consciousness is to be made in terms of these forms.

The distinctive images already gathered are an

interesting contribution to the making of a poetical tradition; they will reveal to us the special outline of the frame through which the American poets see the world.

They will be the prelude of the great symphony whose starting signal has been given by Whitman.

----- Object of the present study of "Distinctive Images."-----

The object of the present study is to show that there exist native images which taken together form the tradition of American poetry.

Sometimes the question of technique is so closely connected with the study of the images that a word will be said about it.

A French philosopher, Alfred Fouillée, has spoken of "Idées-Forces", as being the primary element of man's consciousness. This study is a study of the "Images-Forces" of American verse.

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Each part has a separate table of contents; to be found at the beginning of each part.

The distinctive images are indicated with A) and B). Except for the Exotic Romance which is taken as an outside scenery, it will be noticed that in the various chapters of the present study the different A)s and B)s correspond with one another; so that for instance the A) of: part-one, chapter-one must be brought together with the A)s of: part-two, chapter-one-and-two.

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Distinctive Images In  
Certain Living American Poets

There are many images in store for him whose eyes are now turned towards the New World. The blankness of a week, at sea, under a gray sky, illumined by an occasional sunset, alive with the nightly spray of stars - and there he stands before the gates of New York,<sup>1</sup> fantastically cut against the morning.

A new sense of reality takes hold of him. A chaotic diversity of buildings encompasses his steps. At dusk a blue haze creeps between the houses, through the canyons of the streets. Huge electric signs rend the darkness at night and dance above the City. On the Hudson, unreal gondolas, visible only by their many-colored lamps, glide and weave a mysterious pattern. In the morning he takes the train. Large, neat stations. - People hastening. - A cozy corner. - Through the window-pane, far-stretching landscapes meet his eye. - Tall, severe factories fling their chimneys, crowned with wavering smoke, into the sky. Lines of rustic, wooden houses divide the country here and there. Trees, huge trees, and bushes, where legend clings under his gaze, run in the opposite direction to the train. - "Going West?" - "You should know the East". - California allures him with her sunny splendor. The Indian encampments offer a novel scene to his imagination. Where is the unity of this broad landscape? The roads that link East to West are modern. Men of manifold origins have settled here. Where is the spiritual identity?

<sup>1</sup>The "Skyline"

PART I.

- Local Imagery -

Chapter I.

The "East"

Let us stop in the East. Our guide will be Robert Frost. Those who have studied him agree at least on one point: he expresses the spirit of New England, not only as shown in the individual, but also as shown in the landscape. For everywhere under the sun and the stars man is one with his material surroundings. What imagery has Robert Frost in store for us? After reading his three books of verse, A Boy's Will, Mountain Interval, and North of Boston, one realizes that Frost has no eye for the industrial growth of cities, for the transformation by man of wild spots into commercial and manufacturing centers.- The wonderful roar of factories does not attract his ear. The face of cities silhouetted in grey against the purple sky does not attract his eye. Frost has lived in "The Ghost House" which he describes in A Boy's Will. Around his youthful days there have been only "the mowing field and the woods", - He knew the "sweet companionship" of things, bushes, meadows and streams. It is not in his writings that we must seek for the poetry of Boston, of Springfield. He only listens "to the voices" of the trees. -

I wonder about the trees.  
Why do we wish to hear  
Forever the noise of these,  
More than another noise,  
So close to our dwelling-place?

He perceives the less perceptible noises in nature, - murmur of

the prairie, of the snow-buried landscape, of the breeze. And he has an eye for the minutest movements in nature, mouldering walls, mounting fire, bending of trees; for the "sturdy seedling with arched body, shouldering its way- - - "

This bucolic solitude is peopled with these images. They assume light almost dreamy figures. They are a fragrance rather than a shape. They are gentle companions, with subdued voices and discreet gestures. They account for the special undefinable charm of Frost's poetry; for their fragrance permeates its undulating lines; and its charm is as elusive as a perfume. All the loveliness of "Spring mending-time" is suggested in the first poem of North of Boston, a delicate sketch of a rustic comedy. The two characters, the poet himself and the neighbor "beyond the hill"; the scenery, a crumbling wall, with pine on one side and apple-orchard on the other; the simple, stubborn peasant with his simple "Good fences make good neighbors"; the poet bathing in the discreet beauty of Spring, perceiving the minute movements of the earth, that "which does not love a wall," "that which no one has seen or heard - - - ", that which he could call "elves" but which is not "elves" exactly.---- It is through such delicate notations that the essential charm of nature is conveyed to us by the poet. In "Blueberries" one can smell the very fragrance of the moist green landscape, with its "real sky-blue, and heavy --- blueberries---" whose color is "but a mist from the breath of the wind, a tarnish that goes at a touch of the hand ---" And is there anything more charmingly true than the closing lines

"The fruit mixed with water in layers of leaves,  
Like two kinds of jewels, a vision for thieves".  
/

a vision for thieves who are poets like the supposed speaker.

Such notations are moods, suggested, rather than clearly defined. These particular images of the rural New-England blend themselves into an "Image-Force" which is to be considered now. It is the "Image-Force" of

New-England Solitude.

Many concrete illustrations of this image may be found in the three books of the Eastern bard:

The New-England House, standing by a breezy cluster of trees, conveys the idea of loneliness. In the foreground of Frost's vision, his own house stands:

I dwell in a lonely house I know  
That vanished many a summer ago  
And left no trace but the cellar walls,  
And a cellar in which the daylight falls,  
And the purple-stemmed wild raspberries grow.

( A Boy's Will. "The Ghost-House." )

New-England is the oldest settlement of this young country. On European soil ruins are frequent. They have been an important element of poetry in the beginning Romanticism in England, France or Germany. The Byronian hero found them a suitable background for his melancholy meditative moods.

On American land this romantic flower does not blossom. And yet in Frost's poetry there is the fragrance of moss-covered walls and abandoned rooms:

In North of Boston, we find a poem of solitude whose title is "The Black Cottage."

Its nostalgic feeling of loneliness is directly conveyed to us and to make it more vivid, the poet expresses the very thought of the ~~old~~ landlady of the house.

"Everything's as she left it when she died." And though her sons intend to come and live there during the summer, it will be "hard for them to keep their word", because they live so far away, "one is out west". No: New England solitude, with only the voices of past memories, will not be disturbed. And the visitor will pass by, and the bees will continue to hum in the old walls, and the "sunset to blaze on the windows". If there are still human beings in the house, solitude surrounds their lives. Sometimes, as in "~~One~~ <sup>Old Man's</sup> ~~Winter~~ <sup>Winter Night</sup>" (Mountain Interval) this special feeling of the New England solitude is what the poet wants to express.

"And having scared the cellar under him,  
In clomping there, he scared it once again,  
In clomping off - and scared the outer night - -  
One aged man - one man - can't fill a house  
A farm, a country-side - - - -."

97 Sometimes the vision of the Solitude in which the house stands is rendered indirectly, as in "Snow" (Mountain Interval). Here the feeling of solitude grows upon us with the gradual development of the Ibsenian drama between the two farmers (the Coles) and the ~~Protestant~~ Minister. None of them mentions night, snow, mystery, which brood over and shut out the House. But they are their common preoccupation, the fear of a relentless force in the farmers' heart, the very face of duty in the minister's mind. The presentation is of Ibsenian mystery:

"The three stood listening to a fresh access  
Of wind that caught against the house à moment,  
Gulped snow, and then blew free again - the Coles  
Dressed, but dishevelled from some hours of sleep,  
Meserve, belittled in the great skin coat he wore.

Through the dialogue we are going to feel the presence of their

common "idée-fixe", with the unspoken intensity of <sup>the</sup> "Intruder" in Maeterlinck's drama.

What a wonder that the bucolic poet of New England can sometimes sketch scenic situations whose spiritual impart reminds one of Maeterlinck or Ibsen! There is a fourth character in the snow-buried house, a character which is not actually present, but whose influence is felt, through a dramatic device exploited by modern dramatists, the telephone. The wife of Meserve, and her children, await <sup>his return</sup> ~~his~~ back with anxiety. Together with the reluctance of the farmers to let him go into the storm, the feeling of his dear ones is a new dramatic element.... and they are so far away; they can only be reached by the telephone. In the night aglow with the weird whiteness of snow, Meserve, the Minister, is the very image of Solitude.- And the Coles, narrow-minded, selfish farmers, do not understand him, the "Racker Sect General" with ten children under ten years old, riding through the snow on his preaching duty. The image of New England Solitude is painted through individuals. So it is in this other dramatic sketch called "In the Home-~~Stretch~~" (Mountain Interval). Here again the House stands in Solitude, in "a little stretch of mowing-field". The house is not depicted. Frost is decidedly no painter. His vision is always within himself, or rather within the "characters" of his poems. Here the image of the House grows gradually precise as the occupants talk. We see it in connection with their moods. All the features of the House are given by the artist in terms of humanity. The weeds "made tall by the water from the sink" suggest the kitchen, the dishes, the housework, and all the

poetry of the family-table. The door "snatched from our hands by none but the winds" suggest the empty vastness of the house, the Solitude. The stove suggests light and heat, elements of comfort and brightness, now absent. Outside, seen through the "dusty window", the new occupants, ourselves, with the poet, behold the fresh novelty of things, the "all of a farm", "apple, cherry, peach, pine, alder, pasture, mowing, well and brook" - a fresh surrounding of the antique house, standing in the bucolic solitude of Frost's predilection.

And again the sense of mystery brooding over the landscape, already haunted by years and memories. - Not only the House is a haunting image of Frost's, but also Nature weighs on the mind. Looking through the dusty window of her new house, the lady sees the old weeds grown up here through many years and also.

"The years themselves - who come and go  
In alternation with the weeds, the field,  
The wood ..... "

She has given up "the lighted city streets for country darkness..."  
And perhaps the Farm stands in Solitude....

"There is no village - only scattered farms" says the poet in "The Mountain" (North of Boston). Scattered farms where life secludes itself. There may be "fields, a river, and beyond more fields" (id.) There may be a mountain with pine-clad slopes, and "a dry ravine emerging from under boughs into the pasture," and a spring, "always cold in summer, warm in winter," A great sight indeed. There may <sup>be</sup> the wonder of Nature. The farmer works around, familiar with the aspect of nature; but never stepping beyond the bounds of his little world. Climbing the Mountain?

"Wouldn't seem real to climb for climbing it".

the haunting mass of the hill is impressed on his imagination . The poet sees it as a shadow "holding the town" within its range, as "a black body cut out into the skies", as a "wall beyond which I was sheltered from a wind".

"That thing takes all the room", says the New-England farmer. All the year around, the hill is a barrier with its mysteries and dangers. Not that Frost's imagination magnifies things:

"Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak"  
( "Mowing" - A Boy's Will. )

But the truth is that the New-England image is haunting: immense fields with "the whisper of scythes", somber houses with graveyards "framed in the windows", winds "working against us in the dark", trees "so old and firm, the merest mark of gloom", hills stopping the eye that might otherwise look beyond; altogether a landscape that makes the heart

"Still ache to seek  
But the feet question "Whither?" "  
( "Reluctance" - A Boy's Will. )

The New-England image /as found in Frost would tend to convey the idea of a depressing milieu, where the will loses its energy because the imagination has no wings.

Still man has conquered the forces of nature. Powerful cities display their pride where the New-England pioneers found nothing but waste and granite. They toiled in solitude and achieved things of power.

It is fair to give to the solitude image its corollary : the city-image.

#### The City.

For some reason the industrial East has not found its vates. The West has many, as we shall see later on. The East has inspired occasional poems, but not a poet. John Gould Fletcher, the artist of light and breeze, the weaver of oriental splendors, has contributed an interesting poem on New-York to be found in Poetry, a magazine of verse, in the number of July 1915.

This poem is

in rhythmic prose, symphonically treated. The leit-motiv is

"Restless hammers are carving new cities  
from the stagnant skies".

The first movement might be called "popular joy". "That day pours  
multitudes to smile - - to blot out life's misery with rejoicing".  
The second movement is "underground activity". Joy above, in the  
sun - Work beneath, in the dark. The third movement takes us again  
into the daylight. No more rejoicing: gigantic toil. "Men with  
hammers are striving to hack new projections on an edifice.....  
The last pinnacles eat into the clouds".

The last movement, being the blending of all motives, is a  
hymn to the achievement of man's power. The sun streams on the city.  
The "tower" is a "full lily stalk", and a partaker of joy in the sky, a  
"mate of the sun". The beauty is not in the detail of a house; of a  
gate; of a window. Beauty is rarely with practical business build-  
ings and factories. But factories, sky-scrappers are not abstract  
things. They bathe in the sunlight. They partake of the colors of  
dawn and rejoice in the hues of sunset. They shelter human beings.  
They stop the winds racing through the air. They ~~have~~ great possi-  
bilities of poetry. ¶ Of the powerful body of the American City,  
Amy Lowell is a delicate painter: The City

"Rigid with straight lines and angles,  
A chequered table of blacks and greys..."

"The City is heraldic with angles,  
A sombre escutcheon of argent and sable  
And countercoloured bends of rain  
Hung over a four-squared civilization."

She sings the City electric-signs lending to the night their flowery  
and humorous decoration. ("Spring Day" in Men, Women and Ghosts). She  
revels in the gorgeousness of shop-windows ("Red Slippers"). Their

coloring is a clash in the uniformity of the street. The brilliant spots of red slippers grow to sparks of scarlet in the white monotony of the blocks. They are also sounds: "clangor of billions of vermilion trumpets." She has the American vivacity in the rendering of the colors, shapes, sounds of the world. She revels in the rich white coloring of a "lunch-room in a grand central station"

( Men, Women and Ghosts. )

"The big room is colored like the petals of a magnolia".

"In an opera-house" where gold is everywhere, the prima-donna sings and

"A gold bubble which floats . . . . floats,  
Bursts against the lips of a bank President  
In the grand tier."

She recasts the new world material in richly colored and curiously shaped patterns. Even when she attempts new metrical forms, she has national gorgeousness in colors, the quaintness in shapes, the glamor in decoration. Her art is a venture, like the country where she lives. Of the artistic dynamism of the United-States we shall find more striking proofs in the Middle-West imagery.

But before proceeding any farther, let us ask what are the results of our Eastern investigation, helped by Robert Frost.

So far the images considered: "New-England Solitude" and "The City" have revealed to us two aspects of the American poetical background:

1.- A natural force isolating and hardening the human will. 2. - A partial conquest of man naturally inclined to see beauty in his own victory.

## Chapter II.

### The West.

"Chicago" may be considered as a symbol of the modern "adventure". Chicago is the Conquest over Nature. Great fighters, powerful kings were made demi-gods by the Greeks and the Romans. The poets celebrated them in their hymns. It was specially so in the legendary beginnings of the people who lived in Hellas or on the banks of the Tiber. The making of Thebes, Athens, Rome, are subject-matter for poetry. The poets then attributed to the gods the incomprehensible marvels, the unheard-of deeds that came to them through history. The pioneering period of Tullus Hostilius and the Etruscan kings who made Rome is a period appealing to the imagination. The making of Chicago, though recent, is of the same kind. Sandburg does not see in its beautiful strength or its colossal architecture the hands of gods. But his feeling towards its growth is of a religious character. "Chicago" is the opening of Carl Sandburg's first book of verse. It gives its name to the whole volume. It is the resounding prelude of the poet's orchestral poetry. There is an invocation :

Hog-butcher for the World,  
Tool-maker, Stacker of wheat.

City of the big-shoulders!

Sandburg with uplifted hands is the priest of a modern cult. His epithets are Homeric. The object of his adoration is a Person. The brass instruments have struck the leit-motiv. Now, in an undertone the poet sings the wickedness of his Town: the painted woman, the gunman, wanton hunger, three variations in one key. Then there is a crescendo, in which the trombone brings in the central-motive :

"laughing"— while the strings play the variations, "white teeth, young man, ignorant fighter....." At least all the orchestra in a final fortissimo repeats the invocation which becomes the uproar of the City herself in her youthful and relentless pride. But— The brief analysis of the poem given will suffice to show the admirable treatment of Images by Sandberg. Not only is the idea of singing Chicago, hog-butcher and tool-maker, new; but the choice and combination of images is also personal and to be found nowhere in modern poetry. In fact, it is noticeable that one would seek in vain in the Western Imagery for the mere description of cities,— Minneapolis and Saint Paul are mentioned by Sandberg ("Prairie"-Cornhuskers) as "sisters in the same house, growing up, throwing slang".— The numerous cities of the industrial Middle-West, identical in outward outline, teeming with ugly dark buildings, have no poetical image to supply the artist with. They cannot be anything but a symbol of strength as Chicago is to Sandberg.

Of the growing wealth and selfishness of Chicago we have a poetical suggestion in Masters' poem "The Bay-Window". (The Great Valley.) We have here the image of the rapid growth of the City and her irresistible conquest over nature. In the bay-window there sits a lady who sees

"The oak cut and mansions fill  
Gradually year by year the waste of sand  
Till Prairie-Avenue becomes the street  
Of millionaires ....."

All the poetry of the Lady's solitude in the overwhelming Town is carefully worked out. The image of Masters is analytic. This Character is obvious in the other poem of his, "The Loop"

(Songs and Satires). "There is not the quick flash of vision" here, Amy Lowell writes in her book on the Tendencies in modern American poetry —.

Except in some of the sketches of "Spoon River Anthology", there is seldom the flash of synthetic images in Masters' poetry. "The Loop" is the cumulative succession of the picturesque and moral traits whose chaos constitutes Chicago. The Poet is apt to see an interesting feature of man's activity in the meanest thing: Masters crowds his poem with color, odor, sound, movement, thought. We do not find in him the blending of such different aspects into one Image forcing its comprehensive beauty upon the mind. We do not see from above. We are taken by the hand and shown about the City. The poet, our guide, can rouse our interest with the preliminary "snow-white glimpse of sea,- and the masts that take the sunset's gildings .....". He expresses with ~~the~~ felicity ~~we thank him for~~ "the blue-gray air enshrouding, as with a cyclops' cape, the man-made hills..." And though Masters' vision takes the classical shape of a cyclopean mantle, the Image strikes the reader as being distinctively American. The "man-made hills and the towers of granite where the city crowd<sup>1</sup>", are a feature of the New-world Life susceptible of poetical treatment.

Particular features of the city life, more than others thrown into relief, are found in the modern poets who have an eye and an ear for the intense vitality of their surroundings. Miss Harriet Monroe, who is not only the indefatigable editor of "Poetry", a magazine of verse, has written an interesting poem on "The Hotel". Now an hotel is undoubtedly an important spot of American life. In its large waiting-room, in its carpeted lobby, the observer may feel the throbbing pulse of the city. Miss Harriet Monroe, much after the style of Carl Sandburg, wrote a symphonic poem whose climax is the glorification of "God inside the souls, God veiled... but ever alive struggling and rising again, seeking the light,

freeing the world". The whole poem suggests the passage through the various rooms, gilded parlors, sumptuous bar, glittering café, white-tiled kitchen, into

"the high-piled honeycomb of waxwhite cells"

and into "the soul inside" of the people living there, and, in the soul, to God.

Let us bear in mind the spiritual climax reached by the broadly descriptive<sup>1</sup> of Miss Harriet Monroe. It is characteristic of the moral tendencies of the American verse which we are studying.

The image of the Middle-West city has brought us to the point where the soul of things is depicted or at least suggested. As we found "in the past" the rural image together with the city-image, in the same way the poetical West offers us together with "Chicago", an aspect of its agricultural background: This is the image of

#### The Prairie.

The prairie is not far away from the spots where industrial cities rise. Towns have been built right in the prairie. Some have lovely lawns that were not long ago parts of infinite prairies. People go for their holidays to places whose wild scenery is untouched by the hand of man. There is a longing for the prairie breath and horizons unchoked by sky-scrapers.

Read "The Boy on the Prairie", a poem published in the "Midland" a magazine of the Middle-West. The poet, Piper, imagines an American boy who amidst the wild beauty of his surroundings knows little of the great national life of his country. He can ride a pony; he can cut strange toys in wood; he revels in the sunshine of April when "the first elm seeds shower on the grass"; he beholds the sun laugh in the morning dew, "a shimmer"; all the poetry stored in the neighborhood of cities, all the imagery of Nature, is there for the imagination to feed upon. Ford Piper adds that the boy reads "sometimes the weekly newspaper". Lincoln and Grant are "his greatest men". This boy will lead his prairie-life some day for the allurements of the city. But the endless stretch of grass which was the vivifying background of his youth will ever fill his memory. If he has the poetical gift and tries to express his inward world, The Prairie will send his perfumes and its hues back from the depth of time. The Prairie is already the Past for the poets of the New...

World. And the Past is apt to create poetry. With raw material Time can make beauty. However hard and tearful may be our first experience in life, when they come back to us, under the guise of recollections, they are "things of beauty." However mean or ugly, or "banal," may have been the religion of the Druids, the French oak and mistletoe are still crowded with legendary memories. And in the breeze that rustles through their branches we still hear the long-extinct voices of our forefathers. The Prairie cannot fail to become the poetical background of the Pioneering Age - already teeming with heroic achievements.

How far the Prairie-Image can become an intimate part of the poet's world is shown by Vachel Lindsay's "The Prairie Battlements" in *The Chinese Nightingale*:

"Here upon the prairie  
Is our ancestral hall...."

What is this ancestral hall, with its dome made of agate, its walls of cornelian, its cellar crowded with ghouls, its stairs with fairies?

"Still in snow and sunshine  
Stands our ancestral hall  
And legends walk about....."

Lindsay's Imagery is here, as it often proves to be in this poet, of a classical character. The "ancestral hall" is borrowed from any old country of Europe. It shows that the Prairie can be thought of and described, as the old forests and lands of the old world, by means of old words and phrases. That the Prairie scenery and people have characters of their own and can be distinctive of an important part of the life in America is shown by such novels as Hamlin Garland's "A Son of the Middle Border" or Willa Cather's "My Antonia," where we are taught that "no one who has not grown up in a little prairie town can know anything about it. It is a kind of free-masonry...." Lindsay and Masters (to whom the poem "The Prairie

"Battlements" is dedicated) belong to this freemasonry. And so does Carl Sandburg who, after having put up the divine statue of Chicago at the entrance of his first temple to Poetry, builds an elaborate altar to the Prairie at the entrance of his second one: Corn-huskers begins with a many-colored Symphony, where the murmurs and the noises of the Prairie blend together with the passing shadows and the eternal lights.

Here again (as in "Chicago") we find the same grip of vision, the chaotic contemplation of Nature, the rough rendering of the variety of outward colors and sounds, the illogical outburst of an overcrowded imagination. There is ~~no~~ apparently<sup>no</sup> composition. Is there harmony in the manifold life of the Prairie herself? Yet, as in "Chicago", the poet's strong personality groups what features seem disconnected, blends divergent colors, brings in the "leit-motiv," and in the end soaring above the accidents of his description, utters its own mind in its own words. We find here all the poetry of primitive life and beauty. The Prairie speaks, being the eternal Force always defied by men:

"The running water babbled to the deer, the  
cottontail, the gopher.....  
I nourished the lonely men on horses...."

The first men who came in wagons "making streets and schools" are dead. And still she is there. She is "the Eternal".

"I hold the dust of these (men) amid changing stars,  
I last while old wars are fought....  
I have seen the red births and the red deaths  
Of sons and daughters. I take peace or war,  
I say nothing and wait".

And she is proud of the huge, active cities that rise out of her dust. She shouts their names as a mother the names of her handsome children: "Omaha, Kansas City, Minneapolis and St. Paul".

The poet is so full of his vision that he identifies himself

with the Prairie. All the picturesque details of the Prairie life are hinted at - "the boy with mittens, a pork-chop sandwich and a V of gooseberry pie" - "the radishes ..." - "the farmer's daughter" - "the crowd at a Fourth of July picnic..." - "the Cornhuskers with their bandannas...". The Imagery of the poet is fresh, because it is taken directly from the real world where he moves, because there is a direct enjoyment of things, whose loveliness is directly conveyed to us. Those who find some difficulty in enjoying this kind of poetry should forget the patterns of the old for a while, (if it is impossible for them to forget them altogether). Conventional Poetry has cut the beautiful world into small compartments and for each of them it has accepted a definite image. - But it had no right to spoil the harmony of things, in which the colors and the sounds bathe in a beautiful light, each partaking of the general loveliness. The attempt of Debussy to restore the primitive harmony of things through music is a distinctive manifestation of modern art. The treatment of Images by Carl Sandburg is musical in the same respect. Santa-Yana may call this sort of verse "barbarian". Whitman, after Browning, Sandburg after Whitman, may not be flawless artists. Their comprehension of the beauty of things is undeniable. Some poems of Sandburg's taken apart may seem meaningless and some will smile at their vulgar realism. But it is no more fair to detach a poem out of Sandburg's whole production than to pluck a flower from the fields of Spring and rail at its scentless and colorless petals. Bearing this in mind any image of Sandburg's "Prairie" has the freshness of the dew on a morning grass-blade, or the velvet on a butterfly's wing. And all the images whose complex harmony makes the Prairie's life are more than mere images - they are visions, phantoms -

"These phantoms come into the talk and wonder of people on the front porch of a farmhouse late summer nights..... The shapes that are gone are here....."

The Past is among the living. The Prairie is peopled with memories, just as "songs are hidden in eggs". And when "Spring slips back", the poet again feels the possibility of songs in the Prairie. For the Prairie is a Song to him, a Song "long as the layer of black loam we go to..." So the motive of the very first lines is brought back: "I was born on the Prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a slogan." Behind the chaos of things there is the harmony of a song. If the world seems to you rough-hewn, listen to the music of its background. Men have arranged the material world to their convenience. Their needs have altered the primitive beauty of things. To rule over their hostile forces man has modified their natural arrangement. We see things no longer "sub specie <sup>it</sup> aeternitatis". We have been taught by experience to consider them in the dim light of "practicality". Their deep meaning, their all-embracing music, has been forgotten. Some artists have the privilege to hear, in their unconventional minds, the distant strains that come from things. Carl Sandburg identifies the world-song with his own <sup>consciousness</sup> ~~conscience~~.

"The Prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy in the prairie arms on the prairie heart....."  
In the end of his hymn the poet speaks the very soul of the Prairie:

"I speak of new cities and new people.  
I tell you there is nothing in the world  
only an ocean of to-morrow,  
a sky of tomorrow!....."

This is the Song hidden in every aspect of the Prairie. The various images of the poem have assembled themselves as far as they were a note of the whole symphony. Because of this musical treatment of

American images, Carl Sandburg will occupy the position of a national poet.

It would be easy to find in his two volumes of verse terms that convey his musical comprehension of things. Suffice it here to refer the reader to another poem in *Cornhuskers*, dealing with Prairie imagery. "Prairie Waters by Night" shows the personal technique of Sandburg. The very choice of terms is obviously guided by the Image-to-create (litany - much music - song-of day end - choir chanting - new psalms...). The poem consists of three moments, which are at the same time color, movement, sound - first, birds raising a night-song, joining a litany of running water; second, willows drowsing on the shoulders of the running water and sleeping from much music; third, low laughter of a red moon coming down. How the three moments are woven together is shown in the grammatical construction itself. The first moment weaves itself into the second one by the recurrence of the water motive. Again the general impression is rendered, and this time more strikingly - "joined songs of day-end, feathery throats and stony waters in a choir....". The correspondence between the day-end sounds is conveyed to the reader by the corresponding construction "feathery throats and stony waters." The new shade in feeling is given by the religious terms, "choir chanting, new psalms." Thus the impression grows wider and deeper by the bringing in of new elements, which closely connect themselves to the preceding ones. The third moment brings in an unexpected element, a color which is also a sound, as sounds and colors are one vibration in a poet's sensitiveness. "Low laughter of a red moon comes down." In the murmuring slumber

of the landscape, the sudden introduction of the red moon has the effect of ~~the~~ laugh<sup>in</sup> a quiet place. "And the willows ~~re~~use drowse and sleep on the shoulders of the running water". The night peace is not troubled. The drowsiness of things is even accentuated by the jarring noise of the moon.

Broad in outline, delicate in detail, comprehensive as music, the images of Sandburg take hold of our sensibilities in the same large and forcible way as the very reality of the New World.

Of the agricultural Middle-West we have still other suggestions in Sandburg. Instead of the severe lines of the Eastern landscape, we have here the "high<sup>r</sup> majestic fooling of the yellow corn" ("Laughing Corn" in Cornhuskers), the "tomatoes shining in the October sun with red hearts" ("Falltime" - Cornhuskers), and "the Pussy-Willow", and "Potato Blossoms", all the picturesque wealth which nature displays between "the Shed of the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachian".

Sandburg has an eye for the exuberant forms of life. The spirituality which he gives ~~has~~ their interpretation is conveyed to us indirectly because the poet is concerned with the outline, the fragrance of fresh things.

If their soul palpitates underneath the wealth of the ~~the~~ colors and shapes, <sup>of Sandburg's imagery</sup> it is manifestly expressed by another bard of the Middle-West Nicholas Vachel Lindsay. While Sandburg lets his physical being expand in the powerful breath of nature, Lindsay is attentive to the "spirit-power" of things.

"Who can pass a village church  
By night in these clean prairie lands,  
Without a touch of Spirit Power?  
Who can pass a district school  
Without the hope that there may wait  
Some baby-heart the books shall flame?"

"The Illinois Village"-

General William Booth and other poems.

When he sings his own town, Springfield, it is with religious ardor: his idea is to build in this Middle-West, where he grew up, an altar to his God of humanitarian beauty. Deaf to the "blatant restless life" of his country, though he feels its greatness, Nicholas Vachel Lindsay,

he lives in another plane. His spiritual world is people with "the geniuses of the Maple, Elm, Oak, the secrets hidden in each grain of corn."

In Sandburg we found the Energy-Image as the poetical interpretation of Chicago and the Prairie; with Vachel Lindsay we have gone a step further towards the spiritualisation of American realities. There is more Beauty in Sandburg. But there is more Spirit in the wandering bard of Springfield.

Chapter III.

Side-Scenery.

"After the war, after the fierce modern music  
Of rivets and hammers and trams,  
After the shout of the giant  
Youthful and brawling and strong  
Building the cities of men,  
Here is the desert of silence,  
Blinking and blind in the sun -  
An old, old woman who mumbles her beads  
And crumbles to stone."

(New Mexico Songs by Alice Corbin

"Poetry", November, 1917)

"As one escapes from under the New York sky-scrappers and sails southward into tropic seas the poem grows in dignity, finally culminating in epic grandeur in Panama - - - ~~the~~ Central America with Mexico as well act out an immediate melodrama...." (Miss E. Monroe, Poetry: October, 1913).

There seems to be a question of the attraction of the Southern landscape and older civilization. The same literary phenomenon is shown by the literature of France. Spain and Italy, or Provence intermediate between North-Central France and these two more Southern countries, always acted as poles of attraction. Corneille sought for heroic "mise en scène" in legendary Spain; ~~A~~ Hugo for picturesque details in Spanish <sup>H</sup>History or <sup>L</sup>Landscape, Musset went to Italy for melodramatic action; Albert Samain looked at the splendor of Southern sky and life. Auguste Angelier found a reminiscence of ancient beauty in the lines of the Southern landscape. None of them ceased to be French because they expressed their dream in colors and shapes of the gaily colored South. North America becomes South America through the <sup>South western</sup> Southern States and Mexico. The

South-West, now belonging to the United States, was formerly Spanish or Mexican. It comprises California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Utah.... Their very names suggest another civilization, flourishing under a warmer sun. They are a proof of the immense wealth of Images which the United States afford to the imagination. They are a golden girdle to the wind-swept plains where Chicago stands. They are the path towards South America, where another language is spoken, linking the people to one of the oldest civilizations of Europe, that of chivalrous and monastic Spain. An artist does not cease to be North American who listens to the far-off voices of Mexico or Peru. Has not a part of his own country been once under the direct influence of Spanish-speaking men?

As a matter of fact the Southern nations of the New World occupy a noteworthy place in the English literature of America. In "La Venus de la Habana", a book of poems by Earl Leo Brownson, we find the Cuban imagery. In Alan Seeger's Poems (Poetry, April, 1917) we find the Mexican subject. Poems by Chocano, the most brilliant interpreter of the picturesque New World, have been translated by J. P. Rice, the professor of Spanish at Williams College (Massachusetts). Other translations of South American poets have been contributed by the indefatigable Alice Stone Blackwell of Boston. Such literary pioneers keep up the tradition of the former poets of the United States, Lowell, Bryant, Longfellow, who showed interest in the South American forms of poetry. In modern times Ruben Dario has been the poet who has attracted most attention: the Hispanic Society of America published a book with eleven poems of his both in Spanish and English, the English translations being by Thomas Walsh and the Nicaraguan Salomon de la Selva, who is himself a very delicate artist in verse. There are many stray translations of his poems by Miss Alice

Stone Blackwell, Agnes Blake Poor, Robert Shores, Alfred Coester. Besides there have been a special number of Latin American poets in Others, where Dario, Chocano, are represented. A <sup>periodical</sup> publication entitled Pan American Poetry started by Salomon de la Selva in 1918 had only one publication: Brazilian poetry in Portuguese was included. This attempt at an artistic fellowship was commendable, if we consider that the first (and last) number gave hopes of broad sympathies between the self-centred Robert Frost, the universal Ruben Dario, the lyrical Amy Lowell, the democratic Vachel Lindsay. After the death of Pan American Poetry, ~~the same thing~~ <sup>a similar attempt</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>made</sup> ~~tried~~ by la Revista de Indias (1918) but only two numbers appeared. It has been done more systematically and <sup>on</sup> ~~with~~ a pecuniary basis ~~again~~ by Salomon de la Selva in the Pan American Magazine.

Traditional Mexico appears in some American novels such as the popular one of Lew Wallace, The Fair God. Modern Mexico appears in a good many books such as the well known Robert Herrick's His Great Adventure. In more popular forms of amusement, Mexican scenery and life serve as a picturesque background or subject-matter (moving pictures).

The external beauty of the South West is as frequent in painting as it is in poetry. It sometimes includes Mexico (<sup>Lockwood</sup> ~~Lakewood~~ de Forest). The Spanish architecture of Mexico, reflected in the California Catholic Missiones of the late XVIIIth and early XIXth Centuries, seems to exert an attraction over the North American architects and artists. The subject of the architectural influence of Mexico is dealt with in Spanish Colonial Architecture by Sylvester Baxter.

To come back to our precise subjects, after the preceding hints have given an idea of the Southern spell over Northern imagina-

tions: what Images has poetry found in the warm and rich scenery of the South Western states? The "Old South" has inspired John Gould Fletcher, attentive to its blazing color, and mysterious voices. His poem strikes a note which we would vainly seek in Frost or Sandburg. ("The Old South", Poetry, July, 1915). In the first part we find some pictures<sup>g</sup> give touches: "the sun swinging his heavy-jeweled mace - the Spanish moss - the palmetto leaves - the boiling savannah - grasshoppers and cicadas." Special terms force themselves on the poet's mind, just as the clear-out lines of the landscape on his imagination. After wealth of light and color in Nature, Joy in the people is the second note of the poem - "The Carnival King of Fools rules the City". After the revel in light and glee, the nerves relax, and gray dullness overcomes the mind.

"Now autumn comes... the old plantation sleeps... Old age creeps upon us and life is gray..".

Then, as in all Southern countries where people do not fear or expect the cold, where the natives are less particular about the cosiness of their homes,

"There will be gaps in the floor and the doors will swing open to all....."

The wind will slam the door and vague terrors will creep in.

"Who knows? Perhaps it was two ghosts who chattered together through agued lips and rattling teeth....."

The very image of death will be present:

"A crazy deaf woman with a bent stick threatens us in a quavering voice....."

To children's or poets' imagination this is a ghostly apparition, hardly alive, a witch roused from her deathlike sleep by the intrusion of men

"Let us go.... The dead are best dead and forgotten."



Time's inviolate sentinel", is <sup>carried</sup> enclosed in her verse of <sup>in</sup> "Poetry - September, 1914"

"And the lost love of mournful lands  
It knows alone and guards too well...."

Of the sunbaked desert of the South, Alice Corbin has felt and expressed the nostalgic charm,

"A herd boy on the horizon driving goats -  
Uninterrupted sky and blown sand -  
Space - volume - silence."

The crude colors or the clean-cut shapes of her surrounding<sup>s</sup> arrange themselves into a picture:

The hill cedars and pinons  
Point upward like flames.....  
Willows along the acequias in  
  the valley  
Give cool streams of green.  
Beyond, on the bare hillsides  
Yellow and red gashes and  
  bleached white paths  
Give foothold to the burros..."

(Poetry, February, 1917)

It is noticeable, though this is not the subject of our discussion, that local terms are often used to express local imagery. This is a new enrichment to American Poetry of to-day.

Of the lyrical landscape of the South we found an expression in <sup>Grace</sup> Hazard Conkling's "Symphony of a Mexican Garden".

(Poetry, October 1912).

"If form could waken into lyric sound  
this flock of irises,"

and "The hibiscus" already sung by Miss H. Monroe, would mingle their music <sup>with</sup> the melody of birds. And Mrs. Conkling has learnt to understand the secret of flowers -

"The jasmine flower upon my heart  
Is an insistent word....."  
"O leave the sultry passion-flowers  
  growing where they are.  
I fear their sombre yellow deeps,  
Their whirling fringe of black..."

Flowers are the jewels of Southern Nature. They are associated with her moods, autumnal violets,

~~cakes~~<sup>fun</sup>-flowers of the "glancing April hours".

(Songs for Places - Poetry - December 1917)

Frost showed us the moral significance of the Eastern landscape. Sandburg the powerful possibilities of the wilderness - the Southern artists display the overbearing wealth of tropical Nature. The language is as different as the Image.- Everywhere there is a genuine response of the poet to the traits and conditions of his place. If the so-called new movement <sup>in</sup> ~~of~~ American poetry is an attempt at a sincere rendering of the "American moment", then who could deny it citizenship in the City of Art?

The following pages will show the conclusions already hinted at to be true. The lesson is great which the American Poets of today give to the world - struggling with an English tradition, attentive to the Whitmanic glamor, their desire is to give their words (oaks of the Prairie, birches of the East, roses of the South) <sup>an</sup> autochthonic roots in their soil. It expresses the longing for a tradition, and very likely its discovery.

Something should be said of the Far-West Imagery, which may be considered as the prolongation of the picturesque romantic South. Except for the Pacific Coast, the wild Far-West with its artistic possibilities seems to be a recent discovery. Of course Californian scenery and life, so akin to the life and scenery of Mexico, has supplied the American poets with colors and forms. Caroline Hazard has a book on The Yosemite, a Californian valley. J. W. Beach has, still unpublished, poems delicately scented with the pinetree perfumes, deeply colored with the blue canyons, alive with the hidden springs of California. In him we find again the joyful shape of the

hibiscus:

"My teeth hold always a scarlet flower

Bitten from a branch of the roadway hibiscus...."

Charles Warren Stoddard in his posthumous book of Poems published in 1917 has many poems permeated with California perfume.

Bret Harte opened the poetical West, but, as Miss Harriet Monroe says, "his was the West of the gold-fevered Easterners."

A source of picturesque legend, raised, as it were, to the second power, has sprung from the soil of the Indian peopled Far-West. With the imagery borrowed from the Indian ways of living, another "nuance" of exotism enters the American verse.

#### The Indian Tincture.

Together with the prairie image, all the associations relative to the aboriginal tribes represent the past and as such may become a source of poetry.

Carl Sandburg could not be indifferent to the Indian reminiscences that cling to certain places. Everything revealing a primitive force is respected and cherished by his imagination. In Cornhuskers he has a poem on "the Indian West" treated ~~in~~ the symphonic comprehension which is characteristic of his personal technique.

"O foxes, baby-moon, runners, you are the panel of memory, fire-writing, to-night of the Redman's dreams."

The night is peopled with Mississippi ghosts, "riding ponies". With Carl Sandburg the image of the Mississippi becomes a part of the poetical wealth of America. When the moon, "a silver pagoose canoe," sails in the Western sky, the poet fulfills his mission in evoking the ghosts of a by-gone age. Whether in the prairie, where men have come to build houses, or in the Mississippi valley ringing with the whistles of the river boats, the poet seeks for the hidden associations of things.

Others have gone to the places where the Indian legend still displays its pageant. Miss Constance Lindsay Skinner was brought up among the Indian tribes of the Northwest. She became interested in the primitive musical themes of the Indians and it is said "the Chief's Prayer after the Salmon-Catch" achieved the form and beat of the "Bilgula death-song"

"Bilgula death-song" in the original tongue. But we are here ~~only~~  
<sup>concerned</sup>  
~~preoccupied~~ with Images. Has the progressive interest <sup>in</sup> ~~towards~~ the  
Indians been a source of new Images? The vision of things revealed  
in Constance Skinner's poetry is certainly different from the vision  
we have admired in Frost, Sandburg and the others. It adds a new  
note in the great American Symphony. It is a note of primitive  
pantheism. The aspect of Nature, the forest, the sea, are considered  
as sympathetic or indifferent and sometimes dreadful forces:

"O Earth, Earth, great Earth,  
Mate of God and mother of me,  
Say where is she, the Bearer of morning,  
My bringer of Song....."

sings the lover wandering in the forest alone. All emotions are  
associated with Nature, and Nature is God

"O Kia - Kunaë, praise.....  
Thou hast opened thy hand among the stars  
And sprinkled the sea with food."

Even in Death the Indian shares in the universal glory. Swung on the  
topmost branches of the "sweet-smelling" cedar, the dead men are  
"held in the Last Caress under open sky". There is an enlargement  
of the poetical horizon. The forests assume wilder faces, deeper  
eyes. The winds have hollower voices. The sea is a mysterious  
giver of fish.

"I am the Conqueror of women.....  
Ai! They follow, follow my bright moccasins  
Through the crooked trails of the woods."

"She comes, Tem - Eyo - Kwi,  
The maiden who has known love!....  
Wake, sons, lovers, young chiefs, hunters with arrows  
The women await you in secret places.  
They have hidden themselves in the leafy shelters:  
All the green leagues of the forest are ashake  
with invitations."

Then the poet shows us the crowd of men

"enter the forest with the tramp of <sup>thunder</sup> forest and the  
darkness of storm."

To <sup>animate</sup> ~~renewate~~ Nature's Imagery let us <sup>animate</sup> ~~renewate~~ the associations that cling to her trees, her sky, her waters. The "Cedar" considered in the Indian light becomes the cradle of children :

"Swing my chiefling fragrantly  
On the Cedar-branch.  
Cedar, Cedar tenderly  
Sway to the swinging wind."

And also the bed where the dead sleep :

"Tenderly receive me,  
Sweet-smelling arms of cedar....."

The Cedar supplies fibre for weaving baskets, mats, whips, ornaments used in religious ceremonies:

"In the dawn I gathered cedar-boughs  
For the plaiting of the whip....  
O sweet-smelling juice of cedar,  
Life-ooze of love....."

In the folk-lore of the Indians the American art seems to be seeking for refreshing springs. When better known the popular images of the Indian songs may become part of the poetical heritage of America. At least the world vision which they reveal may tincture the accepted vision of the New-world artists.

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PART III.

TYPES.

That is the ground, the sky, the city where America lives and sings. We have tried to bind together the most characteristic flowers and to blend into a many-tuned symphony the voices of this immense garden. Now what about the souls that live under its wind-swept sky? What images have the multi-racial men and women of North America produced under the pen of her poets?

Chapter I.

East.

In the pastoral atmosphere of Frost's poetry, a hard race lives. Indistinct in outline and clear cut in mind, farmers, old women, vagabonds, speak to us through the poet's art. Their voices are deep and far reaching. Even his occasional youths have poised voices. The Eastern solitude invites to self-concentration. Words are not decorations of this country life. Seriousness broods over things and men. And yet there is no other means for the reader wishing to know Frost's men and women than listening to their voices. Our poet has the same dramatic device that we find in Robert Browning's poetry. The latter has acquainted us with brilliantly speaking people. Voiced from Italy, refined voices from the Renaissance sing and twitter in his verse. The same thing in Robert Frost, only the voices are modern, hard and sad. They give birth to some characteristic images, the first of which will be the image of

The Solitary Ones

This image has a concrete expression in many poems and especially in "Snow" in ~~Interval~~ Mountain-Interval. The true characters of this dramatic piece are two farmers, the Coles, husband and wife. They dwell in a solitary house (see Part I, chapter I), now encompassed with night and snow. Their appearance is briefly conveyed to us: "dishevelled from some hours of sleep". The man is smoking a pipe. What else can be done at such a late hour when all the world is silence and storm?

Meserve, the minister, has intruded upon their solitude. Despite night and snow he is about to depart and

depart and accomplish his errand. The woman Coles is a creature of instinct. She has no sympathy for the minister. Yet she calls him "Brother Meserve", as people are wont to call him "round there". "He seems to have lost off his Christian name". Why did she call him "Brother"? She detests him, "with his ten children under ten years old".

"I hate his wretched little Racker Sect,  
All's ever I heard of it, which isn't much - "

Meserve to that country-woman is a superior being; he is "stone-deaf" to common sense.

"What is he doing out a night like this?"

She knows better. She is restless, nervous, though she tries to discuss the Meserve case with self-composure. The woman Coles has always had her own way. Who, in the Farm, the Pasture, the Hill, who could have stood in her path? She knows how to manage trees, and poultry. When snow comes, stopping activity with light, she retires into her home. What can be the meaning of this religious conscience? Her instinct rebels against it. Her practical sense is of no use, in this circumstance. Instinctively also she is afraid of the snow-storm whose idea means duty to Meserve; "That says I must go on,"

"That wants me as war might if it came  
Ask took any man."

This is what she cannot understand. Her nerves are under a strain. Her husband knows her well and that she is not able to stand the idea of death. She is after all a poorly endowed creature. She hates the word "God" being brought into a conversation. She cannot face death. When there is some reason to believe that the minister died in his fight with the snow-storm, she feels remorseful,

"Why did I ever let him leave this house!"

She may feel pity for a victim. She has nothing but disdain and hatred for the triumphant. Her rancour gushes forth when she hears that he is back at home, after his victory over the fearful forces of night and storm.

"What spoiled our night was to him just his fun."

"Fun" is what that old woman will never understand. The man at least has understood something there was in Meserve's conscience worth understanding. He has the same timidity, with less bitterness. He dares not speak his mind, though his mind may nourish nice thoughts. He wants his wife to talk Meserve out of his purpose.

"I should have thought, though, you could make him hear you". What the minister is about, he knows. "He has to preach". But why he goes out on such a night, he does not see. He would not dislike "the man to freeze an ear or two". But he cannot forbear admiring him slightly. He is more reasonable and more reasoning than his wife.

"Let me  
Show you how it's piling up against you.  
You see the snow-white through the white of frost?  
Ask Helen....."

he says to the "tough-minded" minister. While Helen Cole is scared by the weird talk of Meserve whose imagination plays with the nightly vision of the storm, he has the good-natured common-sense conclusion

"Let him talk, Helen, and perhaps he'll stay".

While Helen Cole cannot bear the idea of her being defeated in her attempt at persuasion, he silently admits the higher reasons of duty. And his coarseness has been slightly moved by the passing fragrance of a soul.

"It's quiet as an empty church without him".

What has been the life of these two New England farmers we do not

know. Robert Frost suggests it has been as hard and barren a life as the surrounding granite. "Frost's is not the kindly New England of Whittier, nor the humorous and sensible one of Lowell;" Amy Lowell writes in her book on the modern tendencies of American poetry. The Coles are representatives of their New England environment, sensible to excess and very roughly kind. Is then Frost's New England still hardening? The Surviving Will.

What will the character of Meserve, the minister going out to preach through night and snow, teach us?

He is tender, though firm. "I didn't call you to ask you to invite me home", he says to his wife whom he has called on the telephone to reassure. He speaks of his horses with affection: "the darlings". He has ten children under ten years old. He is the chief minister of a Sect. He is evangelical in many ways. He has a religious feeling for the home, quiet and warm "in spite of all the illimitable dark and cold and storm". He expresses himself with the suave intonation and words of a priest :

*And by* "And by so doing give these three, lamp, dog, ~~and book-leaf,~~  
*book-leaf* that keep near you, their repose."

His evangelical sympathy extends to all things, horses, dog, lamp, books....But there is the same sombreness about him, that surrounds the Coles. The same hardness in his decision, though decked with rhetorical garlands. His excuse for his haughtiness toward the Coles is that his world is not the earth. His world is supernatural. He has to fight to prove his Conscience to be right. He is the direct descendant of the first settlers in New England. Their combat was against natural forces, against men of primitive existence. Meserve is still a pioneering will.

"That wants me as a war might if it came."

And when it <sup>does</sup> ~~will~~ come there will be many Meserves to go and die with the same cold resolution.

So the two characters, Meserve the minister and the Farmers are two aspects of the same conscience: stubborn common-sense of duty: no mysticism, but an adventurous will. Such a conscience has developed in a secluded horizon. The New-England solitude has hardened the will, as shown in the selfishness of the Coles, and the puritanism of Meserve.

The Coles may be taken as types of the degenerated humanity; Meserve as the typical instance of a conscience that wants to follow its own dictate<sup>s</sup>.

In Mountain-Interval we have the combination of both types in the picture of the old man sleeping in the desolate solitude of "a creaking room". "

"What kept him from remembering what it was  
That brought to that creaking room was age."

The house stands by itself. The "outer night", made still more solitary by its familiar crack of branches, the outer night surrounds his agony: how could the life of this old man be otherwise designated?

"A light he was to no one but himself....  
A quiet light, and then not even that."

Again we admire in Robert Frost's description the simplicity of terms, so pregnant with emotion. What has the old man's life left him to care for? "Snow upon the roof"- "Icicles along the wall." Who will keep them while he sleeps? The moon, "the broken moon". Where could a more pathetic image of desolation be found? Perhaps the old man was a farmer like Coles. Perhaps he was a minister like Meserve. Their wrinkled humanity cannot fill a house- a farm, a country side. Who cares for an old man with nothing left in him of what makes life valuable? An old man's will is slumbering and, if not by death, shall never be awakened.

Another poem by the same artist completes the picture of the sleeping old man: there may be in his "quiet light" the spark of his once powerful will. There may be in his energy, flowing out of him, the vague desire of doing something. In the <sup>production</sup> ~~scene~~ of his own degeneration his will may experience a last palpitation. He

may think of:

"Some humble way to save his self-respect"  
("The Death of the <sup>H</sup>aired Man" - North of Boston).

In this poem Robert Frost tells us of Silas who after vagabonding comes back to Mary and Warren's farm. He could build a load of hay, once. And now, feeling death near him, he has come back home- yes, home, though he is nothing to Mary and Warren. Silas is the very image of desolation. He has nothing to look backward to, nothing to look forward to. Yet in this blank dry soul there is a spot of light: ~~He~~ he has come back "to clear the upper pasture".

"You must not laugh at him, he has a plan"

says Mary to her husband. The plan of his last day is the plan that fills his ~~all~~ whole life. His existence may have fallen short of his ~~ambition~~ ambition. His vagabonding has been a wreck. Still the idea has emerged and now illumines the darkness of his death. For he will die the very moment of his return to the place where once his will could do something.

The image of death is omnipresent in Frost's poetry. For death is the greatest solitude. It may be said that his men and women lead a death-in-life existence: ~~these~~ they will cannot grasp ~~that~~ something definite, in its immense solitude, but works in silence and emptiness. This is the reason why we find in Robert Frost so many cases of insanity.

### The Regenerated.

In "Home Burial" (North of Boston) we have the suggestion of a small graveyard so near the house that "the window frames the whole of it". This is a haunting sight for the mother whose child is buried under the mound. She can remember the burial. Her husband, while digging himself the little grave, was saying:

"Three foggy mornings and one rainy day  
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build,"

and now, with the thought of her husband's hardness, she cannot stay in the neighborhood of the graveyard. She wants to rush away. Again the poet sees and depicts the dramatic possibility that arises from this situation. The husband and his wife are separated by an infinity ~~of~~ of feeling. They live on in their respective solitudes: the man goes on his path peopled by his every day concerns; the woman stays at home, under the stress of the sad memory. One day he discovers their estrangement and exclaims:

"My words are nearly always an offence.  
I don't know how to speak of anything  
So as to please you....."

Her exasperated feeling clashes with his mediocre, matter-of-fact, kind of nature. Souls are impenetrable; Meserve is a secret to Helen Cole; the mother is a mystery to the dead child's father. Robert Frost's people lead dark lives, in lonely cottages, solitary farm-houses. And in their dark environment they darken other people's lives.

The mother running away from home because she can no longer stand the sight of her child's grave which was dug by the very hands of her husband, is on the verge of insanity. The old man sleeping by himself in the desolate house is unconscious. Madness threatens to get hold of these solitary souls. As a matter of fact, we have some mad characters in R. Frost. North of Boston offers a monologue of a "servant to servants", where one can feel the note of coming insanity. She also leads a mechanical life: washing plates, in front of a window overlooking the never-changing landscape of a pretty lake. She feels a vague longing :

"It's rest I want - there I have said it -  
from cooking meals for hungry hired men  
and washing dishes after them - "

She tells us that "her father's brother wasn't right" and that she herself has "been away---The State Asylum". She can dwell on her remembrances, how ~~the~~ mad man was said to have been bitten by a dog, how he was kept in a cage, how he would shout at nights and then "crow", the "only fun we had". The cage stayed where it was; and she sometimes thinks of the smooth hickory bars and says to herself :

"It's time I took my turn upstairs in jail".

Some such "idée-fixe" is to be found in another monologue of an

Eastern character in Amy Lowell's Men, Women and Ghosts. The old lady of "Turnpike" has stepped into Miss Priest's house to say good-bye. She is leaving for Chicago. She can no longer stay in this countryside where people look on her as insane. "I aint goin' to end in no county 'sylum" she declares. She was caught "digging and digging day in and day out" because she thought she had hidden in the ground a man's hand she happened to find ~~laying~~ at her feet, one night <sup>when</sup> she had gone out to breathe the sweet scent of "laylock bushes". Her overbearing idea was to make sure that this hand was a real one, that her experience had not been a mere hallucination. In despair of regaining her moral tranquility, she goes away. She goes West - towards new things and men. "Chicago" shouts from afar. The only remedy to the New England haunting Solitudes is perhaps to plunge into the roaring cities or the refreshing woods of the Middle West.

All the section called "The Overgrown Pasture" in Amy Lowell's book contains <sup>bits of</sup> dramatic narratives: lively dialogues, with the picturesqueness of the Eastern English, the suggestion of vocal inflections, and the clever indication by means of the very words pronounced of gestures and movements. Amy Lowell's women are driven to the point of madness by silent solitude, unloving companionship. <sup>Like</sup> ~~As~~ Robert Frost's, her rural New England is peopled by ghosts. Real men have emigrated towards the West, welcoming adventure and wide spaces.

## Chapter II.

The West.

Like Frost, Edgar Lee Masters is interested in man's tragedy-- and comedy. He is himself the product of Eastern emigrants<sup>4</sup>. He is a new man in a new country. His work has the rawness of a young civilization, but also the broad sincerity of its soul.

Here "One misses the dead" wrote Rupert Brooke in his Letters from America. ~~Master~~ Masters answered the demand of the youthful poet. His work is the sad symphony of the dead. The "little deaths" are significant to the poet no less than the great dead whose glorious existence is a matter for admiration or sorrow. Little deaths are the failures of men; little deaths are the secret aspirations that shall never be fulfilled; little deaths are the silent loves that have been thwarted; little deaths are the daily retractions of the will. ~~See~~ Masters has bent over the human soul and has seen the poignancy of these deaths. His work is the story of human limitations. His poetry is full of the bitterness of renunciation.

His images are local, and consequently enter within the range of this study. We shall take three great instances of the poetical treatment of his Western tragedies: (1), "~~The lady at~~ The bay-window" in The Great Valley is the Image of Yesterday's isolation in the continuous growth of proud and youthful Chicago; (2), "Excluded Middle" in Toward the Gulf is the Image of an American family ruined by the effects of an Heredity whose evil starts with an inharmonious marriage; (3), "Spoon River Anthology" is the Image of a typical Middle-Western town whose complex existence is revealed by its entombed voices.

1. "The lady at the bay-window" is the dramatic presentation of a character. A lady is seen, somewhere in Chicago, sitting at her

window with a book or a fan. These two objects are associated with her as the essential attribute of any allegorical painting. The book means Memory or Imagination to the old Lady. She may be reading of countries where she used to live in her happy youthful years. She may be constructing out of its dead pages elusive visions that efface the ugliness of her solitude. The fan contains in its folded silk the fragrance of by-gone pleasure. Book and fan are her two companions in her estrangement. She has been adored. Gradually the crowd that filled her opulent life vanished, making her existence a deserted strand. Even her daughter could not bear the idea of "long years of loneliness...at some bay-window, - no, it could not be." She stayed with her some time then left her to solitude. The art of Masters never isolates its creations in time or space. This "atmosphere - quality" of the poet appears still more clearly in his "Spoon River" choral evocation. "The Lady at the bay-window" is the Witness of the growth of her city. It is worth remarking that we have here again the idea we found in Carl Sandburg's "Prairie". The Prairie also is the Witness of the modern Epic of America. She sees men come with huge machinery to build houses, bridges, roads. She glories in the beauty of her sons, for she made men what they are, indefatigable pioneers. She is always there, eternal amidst the changes of human evolution. Sandburg's treatment of this New-world idea is mystical. Masters' treatment is purely dramatic. Sandburg listens to the distant voices of the wilderness. Masters sees the pettiness and the tragedies of man. Both are aware of the selfishness of growing cities. "The Lady at the bay-window" is an image of what relentless sufferance<sup>ing</sup> the brutality of Chicago may have inflicted upon obscure beings, in some remote corner. Here, the Lady, though obscure at present, was once known and worshiped<sup>d</sup>.

Her surroundings speak of her vanished glory. Every object could tell a story of joy, of cherished sadness, of youth. The gorgeousness of an American wealthy home is conveyed to us."

"Etruscan things, and faience peacock blue,  
and Oriental jade....."

All this wealth brings her isolation into greater relief. It makes it "a royal isolation", perhaps more difficult to bear.

"Yet she was beautiful....."

These are her own words to herself. Perhaps she does not express her regret so clearly. But the poet reads the passing clouds in human eyes.

"Yet she was beautiful....."

What does it matter to the new-comers and the "nouveaux-riches" in the great city? This is the past -

"Who's that old woman at the window?"

She is the Past. And for Chicago life means looking forward. The past "is but a bucket of ashes", Sandburg has written. Chicago is young and proud to be young. With "ashes" Chicago could build nothing. <sup>the lady at</sup> ~~"The Lady at~~ "The bay-window" lives in inactive memories.

Masters has depicted her with a touch of tenderness.

2. Bitter and pathetic is the family picture in "Middle-Excluded". This poem illustrates the imaginative process of Masters. A "daguerreotype" is the starting point - a woman in a balloon-like skirt of silk, eyes of fiery blackness, hands lying loosely one in the other; a man with blue eyes, a long nose, his face a massive Calvinism. They were husband and wife. Masters develops analytically all the dramatic realities which are contained in the old picture. He sees the marriage of the two portrayed persons. Their difference in outward appearance suggests to him a difference in character. She was reason and he was faith -

"She saw God as merciless law,  
And he knew God as divine love...."

Masters is a lawyer. He can see at a glance the different parts of a psychological case. His mind's eye is trained to read into people's private lives. Besides, seeking for responsibilities in human dissensions, he can trace up and down the hereditary influences. The result of the union of the rationalistic Puritan with the sentimental mystic produces a long line of moral wreckage. Masters' psychological notations take the form of statistics. Here is the list of the children with their objective characterisation.

"Janet a religious fanatic and a virago.  
"Miranda made her husband kill himself.  
"Louise was a nymphomaniac...  
and became a Christian Scientist.  
"Deborah was a Puritan of Puritans.  
"Herman, a rebel son, a victim...."

It is noticeable that the clashing between the reasonable fanatic and the man's emotionalism has in each case produced a rebellion ending in renunciation. The concrete case of Herman is the most characteristic and worth considering. In him the disharmony of his parents' union becomes a revolt. Herman thinks the world is wrong, because he does not understand it. He cannot admit of a compromise, which would probably be the wise solution to his problem. He runs to extremes. For him it is not true that "in medio stat virtus". His intellectual violence makes him a fighter. All Masters' heroes are fighters. Most of them realize too late they have been fighting illusions. Herman "has made life a punching ball". But life

"Just like a punching bag will stand your whacks  
of Hatred and denial....."

Broken down by his struggle, Herman abandons "ogai speranza". He sits by the fire one day, sees his father's and mother's daguerreotype. "Some spectral speculations fill his brains...." He ponders over that "horrible atavism" which "left him a lifeless soul"

"A lifeless soul" was also the lot of Henry Layton (Spoon River Anthology). "Excluded Middle" is nothing but the enlargement of Henry Layton's story. And one wonders which is more poetical, of the short story <sup>or</sup> and the lengthy analysis. In both cases a reality - here a picture, there a tombstone - a reality unfolding a series of images. In both cases the poetry of a dramatic clashing, ended by death.

3. Spoon River Anthology is wrapped in the great silence of Death. Critics have denied the poetical gift to Edgar Lee Masters. His short sketches, they say, speak in common prose of nothing but thwarted desires, vulgar appetites, daily renunciations. We grant that. But these vulgarities, to which we may not pay attention in real life, are here clothed in the poetry of death. We do not hear real men and women. We hear souls, stripped of their earthly limitations. There is beauty in this mere sincerity. Ideas matter little. Feelings may be independent of our wills. Foibles may be divine fancies. Our will may be nothing but the will of Nature realizing itself through our ephemeral form. The book of Masters bathes in the poetry of "super-naturalism". Before we gather the constitutive elements of the little Western town image, let us ask the poet his vision of the after-life. To convey this vision to us he uses earthly terms which render it all the more vivid. Doc Hill speaks of "his soul trembling.....at the railing of the new life." Sometimes the terms are vague, expressing the mystery of the unknown. Cooney Potter mentions the Elysian region as "Here". Sam Hookey speaks in terms of classical mythology: "On entering these regions I met a shadow..." Another who loved the youth of earthly Spring and dreamt of the peace of heaven, is now "where it's neither earth nor heaven". The great silence of the tomb is con-

veyed to us by many of the Spoon-River departed. Sarah Brown's soul lies rapturous

"In the blest Nirvana of eternal light".

Zenas Witt, whose life was interwoven with dreams, sleeps now "the sleep without dreams,

"Here on the hill by the river".

Washington McNeely, who saw Life's disgraces "sitting under a cedar-tree", thanks maternal Earth for her "rocking the fallen leaf to sleep". Rarely do the echoes of life hover over the dead. Hare Drummer has dreams of life in the silence of the grave: "autumn smoke, murmurs of the vale". But he is an exception. Death is a "wingless void", or a "quiet field". It is the repose where the Soul sees truth and beauty. If we turn back to the opening poem of Masters' book "The Hill", we are more apt to feel its poetry -

"All, all, are sleeping on the hill."

Spoon River Hill becomes one of those spiritual spots that Maurice Barrés assigns to any Nation on earth, as an ethical heritage. The image of this Hill, with its poetical possibilities, will go down in the history of American literature. Its dead will again rise and speak their truths, whose combination makes Truth, to generations of artists.

The little truths are not pleasant to look at. This is a timely reaction against romance. It is a "liet-commun" of humanity that the physical body is endowed with a spiritual power which we call Soul. It is a "liet-commun" that all the misery and sorrow of man comes from the tragic struggle of the Spirit to overcome the tyrannous sway of the body. That this struggle goes on without repeated falls, humiliating failures, degrading acceptances, momentary flights, may be the conclusion of unsatisfying psychologies. The

theory is too "simpliste". Under the romantic light we see the great antithesis solved in moon contemplations and oriental apathies. Under the glaring light of "humor" we see pettinesses commanding a whole life. In the pioneering Middle West "bruised lives" are necessary so that in the end the Spirit may triumph. Of the <sup>out of the way,</sup> "sideway" obscure existences Masters gives us many Images. Here is "Indignation Jones" a carpenter, of good Welsh stock, who has been to school; here he is, "creeping like a snail through the days of his life". Here is Flossie Cabanis, "a broken failure"; Here is Albert Schirding who raised many children and was left "a crow on the abandoned branch", Elsa Wertman, a peasant girl from Germany: her illegitimate son becomes a famous politician in whose glory she is forbidden to share; and Archibald Higbie "weighted down with western soil", aspiring in vain towards the realization of his artistic ideal; and Granville Calhoun, a thwarted judge, seized with the spirit of revenge, smitten with paralysis; and tender Emily Sparks, a simple teacher, old maid, virgin heart, true to her first and only affection, Reuben Santier; Reuben Santier himself wasting his life abroad with women, Here is George Gray "hungering for meaning in his life", and dying unsatisfied.

"To put meaning in one's life may end in madness".

All the creatures of Masters' imagination aspire towards the Idea of their existence. A few "end in madness". All are hurled against impossibilities. It is the sense of the infinite longing of their hearts that makes them great; it is their poor achievement in practical life that makes them despicable. The compromise which we call life between our corporeal and divine essences takes the form of a lie in Masters' Anthology. Lies in ourselves, lies in marriage, lies in society, lies in love, lies in patriotism (Knowl<sup>t</sup> Hoheimer),

lies in religion. Only the lie is so human that the reader forgives Spoon River and recognizes in its misery an image of struggling man.

From the Hill a choral hymn of sorrow ascends towards God. It contains the unsatisfied wishes of a past generation. The god of the Middle West was deaf to Spoon River. The <sup>e</sup>ffort of the small town has been a failure. But no failure is in vain. The path to Heaven is paved with bruised lives. It is the path to Heaven all the same. The hymn of sorrow that floats on the Hill contains the promise of a better world. New voices have come. Spoon River has become a great-er city. Its horizon has broadened. Its men and women have again and again seen the face of "Delphic Apollo" (Webster Ford) and died "in the fire, with the song of spring". Some have outstretched their hands and "touched the stars". Eyes full of the Apollian vision, hands touched with the star-dust, feet that tread the ideal mountains, prepare a stronger and more successful generation for the Middle-West. Edgard Lee Masters remains as the poet of the living Image of ~~Pioneering~~ Spirituality.

The haunting vision of ~~pioneering~~ times fill the poetry of another bard of the Middle West, Nicholas Vachel Lindsay. <sup>Like</sup> As Masters, he glorifies the primitive forces that made the United States what they are. But he sees "types" or "masses", while Masters sees individualities. Lindsay's imagination is mystical; epic themes treated with a religious phraseology. Of the majesty of the primeval Work in Western states Lindsay gives us a typical illustration in "The proud farmer" (General W. <sup>William</sup> Booth and other poems). The Spirit-power of such pioneers is rendered in terms that suggest other great spiritualities of the world (Knighthood- a statesman in the fields- his tribe). The proud farmer now sleeps under the "ragged grass"; and with him all the men who "gave their church their best". With the

dead of Spoon River, they spiritualize the ground on which America is constructing her poetry with her civilization.

Let the reader remember the conclusions reached in part I chapter I: a natural force hardened the will of men who have however partly conquered nature; chapter II has shown Sandburg discovering beauty, and Lindsay discovering spirit in the victory of man.

Part II has shown various types of men defeated in their struggle for mastery over the physical and social forces, but ever aspiring towards perfection.

While the nation is thus preparing its way, symbols of the national ideal have arisen above individuals and particularities. WE have now to consider the national image.

Chapter III.

National Image.

In the variety of Images we have collected so far we can already perceive a unity. For the multi-racial United States are growing to be one Nation. The national tradition is everywhere two-fold, artistic and historic. History, however, is dependent on Art. To be a spiritual force the historical Image has to be clothed in Art's dress. In France Roland, the Crusaders, the Revolution, Napoleon, 1870 have become intimate parts of the poetical treasure. In the United States, a new-born country, we find some such national themes, which belong to the East, to the South, to the West; they are representative figures, embodying the national Spirit. It is possible to speak of America as "the land of Lincoln, the land of Grant, the land of Lee". (Sandburg) It was perhaps the ambition of Whitman to become the Spiritual genius of his country. But it is difficult for one man in his limited condition to become the beholder of so immense a landscape, and the singer of so complex a soul.

In History the modern poets have found possibilities of national imagery. Lincoln is a great figure in the Epic of America. Every poet of this country is a contributor to the Lincoln legend. Witter Bynner's "Lincoln" is <sup>overflowing</sup> ~~redundant~~ with the spirit of democracy. The originality of this poem consists in its being a direct impression of the Hero as seen by the eyes and through the mind of a farmer. "I don't mean that everything about him

wa'n't all right, you understand,  
It's just - well, I was a farmer -  
And he was my neighbor, anybody's neighbor."

Lincoln's physical appearance is suggested (thin faced, long-necked). More abstract, more pompous, is Percy MacKaye's epic Ode. The direct

realism of Bynner is here replaced by a "second plane" vision. The idea is the same: Lincoln presented as the Image of the leader of democracy. He

"Leads still his tribes  
to uplands of glad peace".

*Lincoln*  
Arlington Robinson's poem on the same theme presents less of a national Image. His ode, beautiful in its precise and heavy phraseology, will never take hold of the popular mind. As is always the case with this thinker-poet, his verse will remain the secret enjoyment of "connoisseurs". Destined to become the common treasure of the Nation are Markham's and Fletcher's poems on the "Captain". Both tend to draw the vast picture of a Man sprung from the American soil, of a Hero owing to his origin the genuineness and welcome of his humanity. Markham's image of Lincoln as a

"Lordly cedar, green with boughs,  
going down with a great shout upon the hills  
and leaving a lonesome place against the sky"

has the majestic beauty of a biblical evocation.

John Gould Fletcher enfolds Lincoln in the star-spangled flag and strews over his dead body all the flowers of America. The great shadow becomes one with the symbols of the Nation and of the Soil:

"Strew over him flowers -  
Blue forget-me-nots from the North and  
the bright pink arbutus from the East,  
and from the West rich orange blossom.  
But from the heart of the land take the passion flower...  
and beside it there lay also one lovely snow-white  
magnolia  
Bitter for remembrance of the healing which has  
passed!!

This flower-homage of the large country to her hero is an image likely to appeal to the public imagination. *91* Still more directly addressed to the Nation are the two Lincoln poems of Vachel Lindsay's. The image of Lincoln, the gaunt sturdy product of the Middle-West soil, could not but force itself upon the democratic imagination of the Illinois bard.

"Would that I might rouse the Lincoln in you all"  
he writes in the small poem on Lincoln in General W. <sup>William</sup> Booth and other poems. In the last stanza of this book he exclaims

"We must have many Lincoln-hearted men."

In Lindsay's mind "Lincoln" has already become a quality, an epithet. To be a "Lincoln", to have a "Lincoln-heart", such propositions have for him and his country a spiritual sense. Lincoln has become an Idea in the heritage of American Ideas. It will not cease to be a living Image in Art as long as there <sup>shall</sup> will be good sculptors or national poets like Lindsay. In his poem Lindsay has the really national evocation of a hero. Lincoln rises from his tomb, at midnight. The atmosphere of the "midnight" mystery enfolds the apparition. Yet the material details are precisely drawn. There is the old Court house, here the Market of Lincoln's native town, Every American citizen will recognize the place, and the Hero. For he wears his suit of ancient black, his famous high top hat, and plain worn shawl. The figure will be as familiar to the American imagination as Napoleon with his grey coat and small hat to the French imagination. "He is among us", Lindsay proceeds. The great dead of a nation are ever-living shadows. How could Lincoln, the great American, sleep? His dear country is at war. He shares in America's present sorrow and hope. His heart is full of the tormenting visions which fill the heart of American mothers and wives. He walks "portentous.... at midnight". In a humorous fancy, Lindsay has raised from his tomb another great American, and sent him to share in the actual preoccupations =

"Mark Twain and Joan of Arc".

The mere bringing together of these two national figures, the French Saviour, and the American Jester, shows Vachel Lindsay's purpose. His treatment of national Images is really epic.

In the same way he has dealt with Masses. He is properly the Imagist poet of American Crowds. The American crowd has a rythm of its own: a swing, sometimes graceful, sometimes disharmonic, unconsciously or willingly obeying the time of the banjo or the trombone. Popular motives hover over the dance.— <sup>A</sup> Religious refrains or love songs. The great novelty and merit of Vachel Lindsay's art is to be as exact a reproduction of the popular rythm as <sup>it</sup> is possible for words and verse to be. Along with Lincoln, the hero of political earnestness, General Booth, the hero of religious earnestness, could not fail to appeal to Lindsay. The poem gives its title to the book. It is the Image of Booth amidst his Crowd, the choice and arrangement of syllables suggesting the sounds of the instruments and the human voices whose blending gave its character to the Salvation Army meetings.

"Booth led boldly with his big <sup>ass</sup> brass drum,  
Booth died blind and still by Faith he trod...  
And when Booth halted by the curb for prayer  
He saw his Master thro' the flag-filled air."

These are images that Lindsay may be proud to hand to the future generations of poets.

A nation turns to <sup>it</sup> his "hero worship" when an example is needed to face a perilous situation, or a hope to hold on in a trial. The <sup>present</sup> actual war has stirred in the world its slumbering patriotisms. Flames have sprung from all national soils. Artists have responded to their country's appeal. Poets have wept with mothers deprived of their sons or shouted "To arms" in the crowd. Poetry with moral or national aim is perhaps the hardest to write. Only a few poems will remain among the great quantity of verse written during the <sup>present</sup> actual war. America has cropped many war-images. For Katherine Lee Bates Americans are

"Freedom's Crusaders  
Who war against war."

Induced to epic expression by the great national Event she hails her country's young soldiers as

"New Knights! true Knights!....."

and proves to be a worker in the building of the American Tradition:

"Lincoln leads in the Last Crusade".

The association of by-gone days with the present time has been a "leit motiv" of the modern war poetry. It links the Present with the Past. It gives a deeper foundation to the edifice of glory erected by the "boys in Khaki". Carl Sandburg the poet of the epic Prairie, proves to be in his second volume Cornhuskers, the poet the "great adventure". Sandburg is opposed to any kind of war. His first volume has many protestations against "killers". The rush of thousands of strong youthful men to "the job of killing" is a madness incompatible with his humanitarianism. In the opening poem of Cornhuskers he still declares that wars are passing accidents. The Cornhuskers, his brothers, do not look backwards. Their lives are made of "tomorrows". The past is "but a bucket of ashes" for them and himself. The last poem of the volume "The four brothers" suggests a newly grown idea of the national tradition. Sandburg "has thought it over in night-watches" and has come to the conclusion that

"Nothing but fighters will keep alive the names of those who left red prints of bleeding feet at Valley Forge at Christmas."

What we have here is not of course a self-denial. Sandburg's vision of the world is harmonious. We could not understand a change affecting its essential tonality (in spite of some jarring notes coming from the vivacity of his perception). His new vision of military glory is another form of his cult for physical strength, and resistance to hardships. This cult is natural in the poet of the pioneering ages of America. "Nothing but fighters...", "hunters", can up-

hold the "élan" given by the first plodders of America. "Gettysburg, Chickamauga" are images that mean a display of energy - and the "morning star of Appomattox" will still shine as gloriously as the sun of Austerlitz if modern America proves worthy of its effulgence.

Sandburg's vision is alive with the crowd of soldiers that rose to answer the call of the country. The Army image enters literature with this poet. Forever will the

"Cowpunchers, cornhuskers, shopmen, ready in Khaki.."

form a national image as seen through Sandburg's mind. Again we find in his verse the synthetic vision of the immense land of the United States in connection with the Army Image. Sandburg never separates man from the soil. The Image of indomitable energy displayed by the "boys in khaki" is enlarged by the suggestion of the immense space in which they move

"Swinging arms, and swinging legs"

Going along  
Going along  
On the roads from San Antonio to Athens,  
from Seattle to Bagdad....."

The epic Image of the whole country giving its sons for the glory of the "Flag, a shot-ridden rag", is conveyed in Edith Wharton's popular poem, "You and You". America becomes real with its "piping prairie town, the city's roaring blocks, the Rockies, the Coast, the cedar swamps, the rice and sugar brakes....." From every part, North, South, East, West, men have assembled under the flag that became a living reality.

It seems to be in the National Image that poets realize the unity of the multi-racial and multiform United States.

"I will not make poems with reference to parts"

wrote Whitman who has the ambition to represent America in its epic

grandeur. "Reference to ensemble" was his artistic scheme.

The present study of the picturesque and the human particularities of the United States of America has shown that these particularities group themselves in general ~~Series~~ Images, acting as forces on the minds of the poets. "Solitude", "the Prairie" are two examples of the Image-Force whose dynamism determines the mysterious workings of the artist's consciousness.

This chapter has added some new particularities that tend to form a historical background to the country. Lincoln, Booth, the War, such images refer to what Whitman called "the ensemble" and, we think, may form the beginning of the National Image. Let the reader notice again that the basis of the new image rests on realities such as "Lincoln", "the Boys in Khaki", "the Flag". In the same way as the city-image for instance rests on a certain number of picturesque details, moral or aesthetic qualities, which it summarizes in its powerful symbol.

We must now combine the results of the various chapters of our study and characterize the artistic tradition that the "Image-Force" of the American poetry are creating under our eyes.

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Part III

Chapter I.

As a nation the American people are youthful and happy. They feel no limitations to their exuberant life. Their spiritual horizon seems to be boundless because of the boundless horizon of their land.

1. The vastness of the landscape accounts for the breath of the open air that fills the modern verse of America. There is a wind blowing in the delicate sketches of Robert Frost. His "Solitudes" teem with waters, and fragrant breezes. They are a limitless enjoyment to the poet. They are so vast that the imagination must cling to a definite object on which to feed, a birch swung by the wind, the ice, or a boy "too far from town to learn Baseball." They are so vast that man knows nothing of life here except the mowing field, the murmuring brook, or the overshadowing hill. Things in Robert Frost's solitude are an Infinity in themselves. So <sup>might</sup> ~~could~~ be the consciences of his farmers and country-people if, like trees and snow, conscience could live and develop in a proud solitude. There is a new character in the rural poetry of the New England singer. He has shaken off the dust of the old imagery. He has discarded the worn-out patterns. His nature is still the wilderness in its untouched immensity. He approaches it as a new-comer and loses himself in the boundless contemplation of its forms. He is the poet of the rural immensity, as English poets have been the singers of the ocean.

Farther inland is Carl Sandburg. In his verse is the smell of the forest, the prairie, the soil. He sees things and man in connection with their immensity. His poetry exemplifies the survival of the spirit of adventure. Not only does he sing the "Prairie", mother of men; not only does he extol Chicago the great; all his thought is moulded in the pattern of immensity. For him words are images and his images are always suggestions of the infinitely little or the infinitely great. He expresses his struggling self in terms of "fire" ( "Kin" ) creeping into all things; of "hunger" (Chicago Poems); of "dust", "dusk", "dreams" ( *id.* ). Only the physical basis of humanity is everlasting. "I am dust of men", sings the Prairie. And while men fretfully pursue their dreams, "the years give mist and ashes" ( *id.* ); and while men sow their glory in the ground the "grass covers all". The results of the great struggle for existence takes in his imagination the form of "dust" ("The dust of the travelled road shall touch my hands" (Chicago Poems)). The force that urges him along and reduces his effort to ashes is the "wind's drive and whirl" ( *idem* ) There is an Infinity behind him: dust, ashes, dusk, remains of man's dreams and toil; there is an infinity before him, road, hazy distance, hills, "slashed with rain". Man comes from the "loam" and goes towards a, "Ocean of to-morrows".

More material than Robert Frost's or Carl Sandburg's, is Vachel Lindsay's poetical horizon. He is the vagabond, whose "space-category" has been broadened by his wanderings and out-of-door chantings. The great breath of the American continent has flooded into his verse. All the noises that fill the sky are here, the "crooning of the morning, the horns of the westbound and eastbound

autos, the sweet, sweet, sweet, of the birds" ("The Santa-Fe Trail" - The Congo ) The sonorous <sup>progen</sup> ~~trip~~ of the train linking East to West, is the theme of his remarkable humoresque. The immensity of the United States displays itself to the poet's eyes:

"While I sit by the milestone  
And watch the sky,  
The United States  
Goes by."

He sees masses, moving in ~~pace~~ <sup>line</sup> and space ("A study of the Negro-race" - The Congo ). He can reconstruct the broad vision of an entire civilization by means of scattered decorative features ("The Chinese Nightingale"). He really has the "universality" of the American land, stretching from the New England coast to the Chinese-tinctured cities of the Pacific.

We have already noticed the tentative character of another form of American poetry.<sup>1</sup> The Prairie has not been exhausted; the Western wilderness begins to tempt the artistic explorer. Untouched solitudes appeal to the poet's imagination. The great proportions of things erected in the immensity mould the poetical vision - and the notion of possible creations behind the visible surrounding still enlarges it.

2 - To be master of the material possibilities of this land, man has to exert a considerable energy. The pioneering age is not over. All forms of life have recently created or are in the making. Idea means creation, here, and creation means energy. We may say that primarily the American landscape is a power, a source of production. The wilderness has a stimulating influence. It means wealth to some; to others it is poetry. Poetry or wealth are there in reserve. It takes a venturesome mind to give birth to such pos-

1. See "The Indian in here"

sibilities. The landscape might be described here as an epic dynamism. After what has been said in this discussion of Carl Sandburg's images the qualification applies very clearly to him. He does not see the color or forms of the Prairie in themselves. He rarely enjoys nature's attitude for their pure beauty. They mean energy to him - the landscape in Sandburg's poetry is after all the background of man's activity. So it is in Robert Frost's pastorals, only his dynamism has already come to a less blatant stage. There are some signs of fatigue in his race of farmers. We must not forget, however, that one meets "Meserves" in New England. They are representatives of the old energy. And they still give examples of an indomitable will. There is also the old man whose lazy vagabondings end in the last desire of "doing something". And we feel that the latent energy of Robert Frost's New Englanders will realize itself splendidly under new conditions and a new sky.

The world means movement to the Americans, for movement is energy in action. In poetry movement may be "lyricism" or "dramatism". Lyricism is the flight of the poet's imagination unsatisfied with the present conditions of life. Dramatism is the objective realization of the antithetic elements of life. Dramatism was the primary form of art common to all young nations of our planet. The "Ivory-tower" is the product of an older civilization. Lyricism blossoms in the solitude of discontented prides. The modern poetry of America is essentially "dramatic". What are the poems of Robert Frost? Tragedies of every-day life, conveying to us the universal tragedy of impenetrable souls. What are the poems of Edgard Lee Masters? Dramatic monologs or dialogs containing all the sincerity of a soul. What are the symphonies of Vachel Lindsay? Epic re-

constructions, that is synthesis of the dramatic elements inclosed in collectivities, masses, crowds. "Simon Legree" is the negroe's conception of Hell and devil. "General William Booth" is the white's conception of Heaven. What appeals to Lindsay is the movement of the physical body, and the spirituality hidden in the gesture, the inflection of the voice. He calls his poetry "Higher Vaudeville"

- What is the American Vaudeville? It seems to be the combining of song, dance, play, elements blended in musical accompaniment. Vachel Lindsay, aware of the appeal of the vaudeville-show to the crowd, thinks it needs the touch of art to become a national game. Poetry as a national game, such is the ideal of the Illinois minstrel. He has understood the essential enjoyment of a youthful happy country: movement of the physical body, along with the beauty of the human voice chanting resounding syllables. Finally the one American image would be the Dance-Image; if we understand not only physical movement, but also spiritual meaning. A group of poets seek to reproduce the Indian, Cow-boy, Negro popular tunes in American verse. Benet, Miss Wyatt, DeGordon, Miss Skinner, are well known - Miss Helen Hoyt has some interesting dance-poems,

"O let me speak from my toes' tips  
Of my treasure and zest ....."

To reveal the myriad-minded exuberant life of the United States is the common ideal of these poets. A new form of expression is felt necessary.

The vastness of the land imposes the "fresco-form" of art <sup>on</sup> the poets who care to represent America, that is to say, to be themselves. Percy MacKaye with his democratic Pageant is consistent with the "new movement"

Secondly, the American fresco receives from the "general movement" of the nation its character of dramatic development or dancing procession. In this meaning it is true that the American poetry of today is "primitive". Its images are primitive (they come from the soil, the sky, the cities). They appeal to audiences, that is to say, to the primitive reality of a nation - For in a nation the individuality comes after the collectivity. Before they become the lyric heritage of poets, they had to be the primary treasure of the American democracy.

## Chapter II.

We recognize in the high spirits of the new movement a new sort of paganism. Hunger for direct sensations, their passage into the blatant world of action, Is there no place in the modern poetry of the United States, for the deeper feeling involved in all the spiritual manifestations of man?

All primitive art is religion. In a double sense what we called the primitive poetry of America is religious. It is religious because, in spite of its break with the Anglo-Saxon tradition, it still retains in terms or in spirit the Puritanism of the race; it is religious because it consciously offers a spiritual aim to the idealism of the nation. It is not easy to discover terms of religion in the three volumes of Robert Frost. But his whole attitude is puritanical. His world is not a "thing of beauty". It is an object of respectful love. "Earth is the right place for love" he says in Mountain Interval. He does not escape into a supernatural world- a blade of grass, a passing cloud arrest his eye and satisfy his mind. Few flowers lend their color or fragrance to his

poetry. Only things that mean pastoral duties, mowing field, crumbling wall, germinating seed, attract his notice and capture his sympathy. To these he gives his "love", regardless of their beauty.

"We love the things we love for what they are" ("Hyla Brook" - Mountain Interval). Even a brook dried up by the heat of June is an object ~~for~~ love. There must be an explanation for a brook "run out of song and speed." Frost gives the two possible reasons. It has "Either gone groping underground", "or flourished and come up in jewel-weed". It is "a brook to none but who remember long". The poet's observation is honest, accurate, respectful. His personality is restrained. The puritan keeps his imagination under constant watch. It is a deceiving faculty. The puritan wants to be true to facts because fact is the serious side of life. Beauty is a thing of error, beauty in nature, in man, or in words. We would seek in vain for words of beauty, in his work: nothing like the revelry of romanticism in sonorous phraseology. We would vainly seek in his picture of pastoral life for fine dresses, fine attitudes, fine feelings - nothing like the idyllic ~~love~~<sup>love</sup> lines of a Corot's painting.

His severity of line and expenditure of language are again puritanical in their being the outward aspect of conscience. "A Boy's Will" is the proof that Robert Frost practised introspection before trying to understand the world around him. In his second and third volumes we have a man looking at nature and his neighbors with the same seriousness, <sup>as</sup> he considered himself. We are not surprised to find that the lives of his farmers are almost without exception cases of conscience. And so are all the aspects of nature. "Mending a Wall" becomes a case of conscience between Rob-

ert Frost and his neighbor. Trees become a thing of wonder:

" Why do we wish to bear  
forever the noise of these,  
More than another noise  
So close to our dwelling-place? "

Though no mention is made of the presence of God in nature, his poetry is permeated with the sense of mystery. A dim presence inhabits things, farms, trees, rivers - it is a force, to be feared (as in "Snow"), to be worshipped, or in any case to be respected.

Seriousness with a touch of mystery, because the whole world is a case of conscience, this is the reason why Frost's poetry may be said to be religious.

In what sense does Master's poetry fall under the same head? The question has been answered when his idealism has been discussed a propos of Spoon-River-Anthology. The sacredness of the human will is his contribution. Carl Sandburg has an enlargement of the idea of divinity: his God is humanity. He worships human force in its physical manifestations. Chicago, as we have seen, is worshipped because she is "so proud to be alive". The images applied to the huge city are expressive of physical energy. Chicago is "fierce as a dog lapping for action"; "cunning as a savage"; "as a fighter...." etc. "Half-naked, sweating, laughing under the smoke with white teeth," Chicago is the Image of the Worker. And the worker represents to Sandburg the modern force to be respected and loved. In "The four brothers" (Cornhuskers) we find "the Cross of Jesus" coupled with "the red and running life poured out by the mothers of the world....." His religion is Life manifesting its endless energy in man. He sings the victory of "the winner against a blizzard", (Cornhuskers) He sings the cruelty of war killing

thousands of men "chosen for shining teeth, sharp eyes, and a running of young, warm blood in their wrists". (Chicago poems). Except for some picturesque aspects of nature, the main body of his poetry offers no suggestion of pure beauty. In that sense he can be said to be as puritanical in his religion of energy as Frost in his religion of Conscience. Were we not right in saying at the beginning of the present chapter that the paganism of the New Poetry is a new Puritanism? It is expressed in Biblical terms in the poems of Vachel Lindsay. He is interested in every sort of religious experience he comes across. He tells us in "Poetry", October 1917, about the seriousness of a negro sermon. He does not smile "at the profound passion" displayed in such ceremonies. His attempt is to "use the phrases in the same spirit that they were originally uttered." He sees naturally collectivities under their religious aspect. (His jubilee-song of "King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba" in The Chinese Nightingale). He interprets the facts of life religiously. The firemen's ball that took place in Springfield (Illinois) November, 1913, becomes under his pen a religious symbol ("Section three" of the poem in The Congo). "Christ" is a recurring figure in his verse. ("Where is the real non-resistant" in The Chinese Nightingale). His vision expresses itself in biblical terms ("How I walked alone in the jungles of Heaven" in The Chinese Nightingale.) "Christ" means to him the future state of humanity where there will be no war :

" Christ shall come  
And make the nations merciful  
Mating the bayonet and drum"

Even when his vision bears no spiritual character, religious terms naturally crowd his imagination. At the end of "The Santa-Fe Trail"

(The Congo) wanting to express the peaceful night that closes around him, after a moisy day, he writes

"Listen to the whistling flutes without price  
Of myriad prophets out of paradise.."

The word "Paradise" is familiar to him, as "running blood" is to Sandburg, "idea" to Masters. They represent their religious interpretation of the world.

The Puritanic tendency lies at the heart of the race that, from the first New England settlements, has covered the immensity of the United States. We find it in the literary tradition of this country and very clearly exemplified in the case of the most distinguished precursors of the poets of today, Arlington Robinson.

"It is the faith within the fear  
That holds us to the life we curse;  
So let us in ourselves revere  
The Self which is the Universe."

How far Puritanism goes with the exuberance of life that we discovered to be the first characteristic of the New Poetry, is the question that the future will solve.

Already such poets as Lindsay, Masters, Sandburg, Frost, present an interesting blending of both currents. Their pagan sensualism has a spiritual basis and thus tends to religion; their Puritanism applies to life in its physical forms and thus tends to sensualism. Still one feels that the blending is not yet an accomplished fact. But the new beauty is in the making. And it is a comfort and a joy that beautiful things are created in the struggle for beauty in which the great artists of the New World are engaged.