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Finding a New Voice: The Oregon Writing Community Between the World Wars

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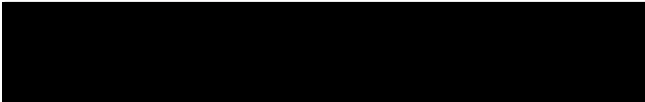
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Karen Stoner Reyes for the
Master of Arts in History presented November 24, 1986.

Title: Finding a New Voice: The Oregon Writing Community
Between the World Wars.

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:


Gordon B. Dodds, Chairman


Lisa F. Andrus


David A. Horowitz


Terence O'Donnell

The period of 1919 to 1939 was a significant one for the development of the literature of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. The literary work produced in the region prior to the first world war was greatly influenced by the "Genteel tradition" of the late nineteenth century. By 1939, however, the literature of Oregon and the region had emerged from the outdated literary standards of the pre-war

period and had found a new, realistic, natural voice, strongly regional in nature and rooted in the modern American tradition.

This change came about in large part through the efforts of a small group of Oregon writers which emerged in the 1920's. These young writers discovered a common ground in their desire to become writers and soon formed a community which was tied together by formal and informal associations and the exchange of information through editorials and correspondence. The early careers of seven of these young writers demonstrate the diversity of background and approach to writing as a career which the young writers followed. For several, the better magazine markets such as the American Mercury offered early publication experience. For the bulk of this generation, however, the learning ground was the market provided by the burgeoning "pulp" magazines of the twenties.

By the mid-twenties, tension was beginning to build within the writing community over the continuing influence of gentility on the region's writing, as represented by Colonel E. Hofer and his literary magazines, The Lariat. A second cause of tension was the growing rift between the writers who were satisfied to confine themselves to the pulp markets and those who wished to see the region's literature elevated to a more literary plane. This tension culminated

in 1927 with the publication of Status Rerum, a literary manifesto written by two young writers, H. L. Davis and James Stevens.

The publication of this manifesto provided a focal point for the development of the new "Regionalist" theory of Pacific Northwest literature, of which Professor H. G. Merriam, editor of the magazine The Frontier, became the most vocal proponent. Much of the redefinition of literary standards of the region came through the pages of this magazine between 1927 and 1939.

Ultimately, however, the literary community of Oregon, which had contributed greatly to this redefinition, began to dissolve in the early thirties, giving way to a sense of individual isolation on the part of the writers. Attempts to revitalize Oregon's faltering literary community through the establishment of new literary magazines failed, and several of the writers drifted from the region, drawn away by careers and family circumstances.

This dissolution of community was due, in large part, to the economic impact of the Great Depression, which substantially reduced the writers' markets and affected the sales of their books. The Oregon Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, which might have offered a unifying force to the state's writers, failed to do so because of internal limitations and administrative

difficulties.

By 1939, the young and energetic community of writers which had emerged in the twenties had dissolved almost completely. The legacy of their generation, the concept of Pacific Northwest regionalism, however, continues to be an important consideration in the literature of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest today.

FINDING A NEW VOICE:
THE OREGON WRITING COMMUNITY BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

by
KAREN STONER REYES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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A major portion of the materials used in compiling this paper were from the archival collections at several Pacific Northwest institutions. I am very grateful to the library and special collections staffs of the Oregon Historical Society, the University of Oregon, the University of Washington and the University of Montana for providing access to the personal papers of the figures this study is concerned with and for facilitating their use, when necessary, by providing me with photocopied documentation.

Many friends within the writing community have

contributed from their own knowledge and resources to the body of information from which this paper has been drawn. Dr. Lisa Steinman of Reed College was more than forthcoming in sharing her considerable expertise in the modernist movement with me and in providing direction and appropriate background information for this study. Tim Barnes provided inestimable assistance to this study through his unselfish sharing of information on early Portland literary history and by making available to me his valuable library of regional writing of the period. Lars Nordstrom shared with me his unpublished paper entitled, "Theories of Regionalism in Early Northwest Poetry," which was most useful; and Walt Curtis not only made available to me his library of poetry of the period, but also shared his unequalled enthusiasm for the topic.

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PREFACE

The period of 1919 to 1939 was, for Oregon literature and the literature of the Pacific Northwest, a significant one. Those twenty years marked an end to the latent strains of nineteenth century gentility which until then had dominated the literature of the region and the development of a new regionalist consciousness which has since become a dominating factor in the literature of the state. This paper will demonstrate that this change occurred to a great extent as a result of the intensity of the literary community which developed in the region during these years and will chronicle the growth of that community from its inception in the immediate post-war period through its demise in the late thirties. In doing this, the paper will focus on the careers and activities of a selected few whose interactions with each other spanned this period. These writers were both friends and enemies to each other. At times they concurred, at others they fiercely debated. But through the debates, the manifestos, the loves and the hates, they retained above all the overwhelming desire to write and a concern for the literature of the country which surrounded them.

The community formed by these writers was a fluid one. The list of individuals who comprised the core of

this group was subject to change as new writers emerged on the literary scene and old ones faded from it. The writers on whom this study concentrates were all, during their formative years, tied geographically to Oregon. However, as two decades passed, the geographic boundaries of the state had less influence on the writers. They were replaced instead by alignments based on ideological and artistic questions. Ultimately, the story of these writers as Oregonians becomes merged with the larger story of the development of Pacific Northwest literature of the period, as the impact of the Oregon community on the larger one is asserted. For that reason, the discussion of developing regionalism within the Oregon writing community must be viewed within the larger context of the Pacific Northwest.

Thankfully, several of those who figured prominently in this period of Oregon's literary development have left behind the written records of their personal thoughts and private opinions in archival collections of correspondence and ephemera. Those whose papers I consulted were James Stevens and Stewart Holbrook at the University of Washington, Charles Alexander at the University of Oregon, H. G. Merriam at the University of Montana, and Howard McKinley Corning at the Oregon Historical Society. As writers, they show an obvious care in even their private literary expression,

working often in a language which is rich and evocative of the period in which they lived. Where appropriate, I have attempted to allow them to speak for themselves.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the period between 1919 and 1939, the literature of Oregon and of the Pacific Northwest underwent a significant transition in both style and content. The work which the region produced prior to the first world war was influenced greatly by the "Genteel Tradition" of the late nineteenth century. This tradition of writing was characterized by a highly artificial literary style, which was steeped in romantic ideals of beauty and culture, fraught with classical illusion and intended to impart a sense of spiritual high-mindedness to its audience. By 1939, however, Oregon literature had emerged from the outdated, Victorian literary standards of the pre-war period and had found a new, natural and realistic voice, strongly regional in nature and firmly rooted in the modern tradition of twentieth century literature.

These changes came primarily through the efforts of a new young generation of Oregon writers. Born at the turn of the century, these young writers were children of the Progressive era, weaned on the first world war, and coming into adulthood during the turbulent 1920's. They came from the Willamette Valley college campuses and the lumbercamps

of Washington, from the cattle country of eastern Oregon and the newspaper offices of Portland and Seattle. During the 1920's, these individual writers formed an active literary community which eventually spanned the Pacific Northwest. They were tied by an informal network of publications and correspondence which provided them with a medium for the exchange of ideas and criticism, and they shared a common regional consciousness and the desire, not only to succeed individually, but to move the literature of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest forward into the world of modern literary concerns.

To better understand what the young writers faced in their attempts to bring this change about, it is necessary to first examine briefly the state of Oregon literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Like Americans across the country, Oregonians at the turn of the century expected their literature to reflect the delicacy of language and lofty ideals of the genteel period. An excellent example of this expression can be found in John B. Horner's introduction to his 1902 volume, Oregon Literature, to that date the most comprehensive attempt by an Oregonian to chronicle the development of the literature of the Oregon country. Horner wrote:

Long ago the scholars of the East passed the lamp of learning from Rome to England, and from England westward to Boston, the front door of America. From Boston the lamp lighted the way of the pioneer across mountain chains, mighty rivers and far-reaching plains till the radiance of its beams skirted the golden shores of our majestic ocean. Then it was that the song of the poet and the wisdom of the sage for the first time blended in beautiful harmony with the songs of the robin, the lark and the linnet of our valleys. These symphonies floated along on field and flower and forest, and were wafted heavenward with the prayers of the pioneer to mingle forever in adoration to the God of the Land and the Sea. This was the origin and the beginning of Oregon literature.¹

In addition to demonstrating the influence of the genteel tradition on the style of writing in vogue in Oregon at the turn of the century, Horner's writing also expresses another concern of Oregon writers, an adherence to and enthusiasm for the "Oregon experience." In its most rudimentary form this resulted in writers flocking to praise, in flowery poetry and prose such as Horner's, the natural beauty of the Pacific Northwest. The epitomy of such writing and the example of excellence held up to Oregon writers for two generations was the poem, "Beautiful Willamette," written by Oregon poet Sam Simpson in the year 1868.

Beautiful Willamette

From the Cascades' frozen gorges,
 Leaping like a child at play,
 Winding, widening through the valley,
 Bright Willamette glides away;
 Onward ever,
 Lovely River,
 Softly calling to the sea,
 Time, that scars us
 Maims and mars us,
 Leaves no track or trench on thee.

Spring's green witchery is weaving
 Braid and border for thy side;
 Grace forever haunts thy journey,
 Beauty dimples on thy tide;
 Through the purple gates of morning
 Now thy roseate ripples dance
 Golden then, when day, departing,
 On thy waters trails his lance,
 Waltzing, flashing,
 Tinkling, splashing,
 Limpid volatile and free--
 Always hurried
 To be buried
 In the bitter, moon-mad sea.

In thy crystal deeps inverted
 Swings a picture of the sky,
 Like those wavering hopes of Aidenn,
 Dimly in our dreams that lie;
 Clouded often, drowned in turmoil,
 Faint and lovely, far away--
 Weathing sunshine on the morrow,
 Breathing fragrance round today.
 Love would wander
 Here and ponder
 Hither poetry would dream;
 Life's old questions,
 Sad suggestions,
 Whence and whither? throng thy stream.

On the roaring waste of ocean
 Shall thy scattered waves be tossed.
 'Mid the surge's rhythmic thunder
 Shall thy silver tongues be lost.
 O! thy glimmering rush of gladness
 Mocks this turbid life of mine!
 Racing to the wild Forever
 Down the sloping paths of Time.
 Onward ever,
 Lovely River,
 Softly calling to the sea;
 Time, that scars us,
 Maims and mars us,
 Leaves no track or trench on thee.²

So highly lauded was Simpson for his sentimental ode that on his death in 1899, Harvey W. Scott, editor of The Oregonian, wrote, "The death of Sam L. Simpson leaves Oregon no poet of merit or reputation."³ He continued:

It has long been hoped that there might rise, among us, a mind combining enthusiasm for Oregon and its history with the insight of literary art and the gift of dramatic portrayal, and that these powers might be devoted to preservation, in the forms of historic or romantic fiction, the tone, color, sentiment and spirit of the older Oregon, now passing away.⁴

The most memorable fiction of the period did, in fact, attempt to achieve Scott's vision of Oregon literature. Frederick Homer Balch's novel of Indian life in Oregon, The Bridge of the Gods (1890), was both highly praised and well read, as were the historical novels of Eva Emery Dye, whose publication history spanned the period from 1900-1934. Along with such major Oregon voices as these, however, the average reader was inundated with a steady stream of

romantic fiction and mediocre verse in virtually every local publication across the state, much of which was the product of local, amateur storytellers and poets.

Despite this trend, some regional and local publications did attempt to offer a more elevated literary fare. The Overland Monthly, originally edited by Bret Harte, appeared in San Francisco in 1868 and for many years was the most important magazine of the Pacific coast. The magazine faltered in 1875, but was revived in a second series beginning in 1883. By the turn of the century it had become more of a "booster" magazine for the Pacific coast and as such took on a more prosperous but less literary quality.⁵ In 1923, The Overland absorbed the Los Angeles-based Out West Magazine to become The Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine. In its new format The Overland gave special attention to poetry and the arts. Under the editorship of Harry Noyes Pratt in the nineteen-twenties, the magazine would host one of the first attempts to market Oregon regionalism.⁶

In Portland, the Pacific Monthly, first published in 1898, soon became one of the most popular magazines of the Pacific coast. Progressive in attitude and aiming for a literate, forward-thinking audience, the Pacific Monthly nevertheless failed to altogether escape the pitfalls of gentility. An exploration of the fiction appearing in the

magazine at the turn of the century shows little deviation from the prevalent literary attitudes of the time. Warren L. Clare put it well when he wrote of Pacific Monthly fiction of that time:

They viewed nature from the living room window. It has an unreal quality about it, it is not nature at all, but the celebration of an ideal nature formed from imperfect knowledge of reality and sentimental notions of literature.⁷

Nevertheless, the Pacific Monthly did feature work by several notable local contributors, most significant among whom was Charles Erskine Scott (C.E.S.) Wood. Wood served as editor and in varying capacities during the last two or more years of the magazine's life. In 1911, however, the Pacific Monthly merged with the California-based Sunset Magazine, leaving Oregon and the Pacific Northwest without a comparable literary vehicle for the balance of that decade.

Wood himself left for California in 1919, dismayed by what he perceived as the deep-rooted small-town provincialism of Portland.⁸ He had been preceded in his exodus by several years by the young Portland native John Reed, who by 1910 was pursuing a journalistic career in New York on the staff of the radical magazine The Masses. Thus, during the period surrounding World War I, the Pacific Northwest lost two of its most significant literary figures. In their exodus from Oregon, Reed and Wood followed the lead

of other literary figures who left the state in their early years, including the poets Joaquin Miller and Edwin Markham.

But while the Pacific Northwest, by and large still culturally isolated from America's mainstream at the turn of the century, continued to turn out "purple prose" and to turn away her most promising sons, the bastions of the genteel tradition, which had held sway since mid-century, began to give way by 1900 to a new realism. Across the country, such writers as Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Jack London and Frank Norris were breaking ground in what was to become the modern American novel. Crane's The Red Badge of Courage (1895) and Dreiser's Sister Carrie (1900) are a clear portent of the direction which American literature was to take in the new century. It was, however, the arrival on the American scene of a magazine devoted not to fiction, but to poetry, which marks the pivotal point in the development of America's new literary consciousness.⁹

With the appearance of the first issue of Harriet Monroe's Poetry magazine in 1912, the new literary consciousness found a vehicle for its expression. By 1913, Ezra Pound was able to postulate from abroad: "The thesis I defend is: that America has a chance for a Renaissance."¹⁰

In the pages of Poetry, the poets of America followed her avant-garde of fiction writers and soon would present characters and events which would be realistically treated,

written with a new concern for modern idiom and the rhythms of American English. Such early groundbreakers as Edward Arlington Robinson and Edwin Markham were soon followed into publication in Poetry by the new generation of American poets, writers such as Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, and Edgar Lee Masters. As the Irish writer and artist Jack Yeats put it, "The fiddles are tuning up as it were, all over America." ¹¹

Poetry was followed into print by other serious small literary magazines such as The Little Review in 1914 and Others in 1915. At the same time a new generation of more general magazines, which likewise championed innovative ideas and new writing, also began to take form. Both Vanity Fair and The New Republic were born in 1914. Also in that year the magazine The Smart Set, initially a society magazine at its inception in 1900, fell into the editorial hands of the two young litterateurs, George Jean Nathan and H. L. Mencken, then only thirty-two and thirty-four years of age, respectively.

Though slowed by the upheaval of the first world war, the literary impetus gained strength in the immediate post-war years. By 1920, a new group of magazines was appearing on the newsstands. Joining the pre-war magazines of literature and ideas were the newly-revitalized The Dial and The Nation. In 1924, H. L. Mencken, editor of The Smart

Set, started a new magazine, The American Mercury. Of H. L. Mencken, Walter Lippman wrote that he was "the most powerful personal influence on this whole generation of educated people."¹² The popular satiric style and outspokenness of The American Mercury soon galvanized the young post-war reading audience and would greatly affect the careers of the young Oregon writers of the period.

For the new generation of Oregon writers of the 1920's, there were three basic avenues for national publication. The first avenue was that offered by the prestigious literary journals such as Poetry and The Dial. Publication in journals such as these could offer the writer a readership among his peers and a certain amount of prestige, but little economic advantage.

The next rung on the publication ladder was occupied by what were termed by writers of the times as "the slicks." These magazines were so designated because of their slick paper and color production format. Among these were to be found such bastions of middle class respectability as The Saturday Evening Post and Colliers. The slicks were both well paying and discriminating in editorial taste. The Saturday Evening Post was one of the most widely circulated and well read magazines in the country. In their 1929 study of Muncie, Indiana, Robert and Helen Lynd found that one in six homes in that city subscribed to The Post, while The

Dial, probably the most significant literary magazine of the twenties could expect in that same town a circulation of approximately three copies per issue.¹³ Such statistics made The Post, along with other magazines in the slick market the most sought-after publication credits of the young writers of the Pacific Northwest.

The third, and perhaps to the Oregon writers the most significant rung on the publication ladder, was "the pulps." This term is one coined to apply to the vast number of romance and adventure magazines of the early twentieth century. The pulps were a medium derived from the dime novels of the nineteenth century¹⁴ and took their name from the inexpensive wood-pulp paper on which they were printed.

Frank Muncey's Argosy, which was first published in 1882 as a children's magazine, was to become the grandfather of this new generation of magazines. Argosy was followed into the magazine market by others such as Popular in 1903 and Top Notch in 1910. The growth of the pulp market was so great that while at the close of World War I there were barely two dozen pulps, by the middle 1930's over two hundred separate titles were available.¹⁵

The serious literary community of the period looked down on the pulps with good cause,¹⁶ and they undoubtedly did little to improve the standards of the reading public. Their value, however, to the young fiction writers of the

period was two-fold. First, the pulps offered the neophyte a market for his or her work, providing a form of apprenticeship for the young and aspiring writers. Oregon writers of the period frequently found their first literary markets in such pulps as Sea Stories, Adventure, and Blue Book. Secondly, the demands of the pulp market, with its requirement for simplicity in dialogue and plot and fast pacing, had the effect of breaking down many of the vestiges of the Genteel Tradition.

The route followed by most of the young fiction writers of the period was to work their way up through the pulps to the slicks and magazines such as The American Mercury. Their ties to each other as a community prompted their movement upward through the exchange of market information and the analysis of each other's work. Emerging from the conservative literary background of the Pacific Northwest, few attempted anything of an experimental nature in their work. Most aspired, instead, to equal the work of the master storytellers such as Jack London and Joseph Conrad. From such elements as the naturalism of London and the impressionistic realism of Conrad, the young writers took the materials with which they would begin the re-definition of Oregon literature.

NOTES

1. John B. Horner, Oregon Literature (Portland, Oregon: 1902), p. 5.
2. Anthologized in Powers, History of Oregon Literature (Portland, Oregon: 1935), pp. 301-302.
3. Alfred Powers, History of Oregon Literature (Portland, Oregon: 1935), p. 297.
4. Ibid.
5. Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1968), p. 104-5.
6. Overland Monthly, Vol. LXXXII, No. 5, May 1924, p. 231.
7. Warren L. Clare, "James Stevens: The Laborer and Literature," Research Studies, vol. 32, No. 4. December 1964, p. 361.
8. Erskine Wood, Life of Charles Erskine Scott Wood (n.p.: 1978), p. 135.
9. David Perkins, A History of Modern Poetry (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: 1976), p. 293.
10. Gorham Munson, The Awaking Twenties, A Memoir History of Literary Period (Baton Rouge, Louisiana and London, England: 1985), p. 22.
11. Allen Churchill, The Literary Decade, A Panorama of the Writers, Publishers, and Litterateurs of the 1920's (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: 1971), p. 21.
12. Munson, p. 124.
13. Helen Merrell Lynd and Lynd Robert S. Middletown A Study in American Culture. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929.
14. Ron Goulart, Cheap Thrills, An Informal History of the Pulp Magazines (New Rochelle, New York: 1972), p. 11.
15. Ibid., p. 13.

16. Even H. L. Mencken tried his hand at publishing a "pulp" magazine, Black Mask, of which he wrote: "The thing has burdened both Nathan and me with disagreeable work." For a more complete discussion of Black Mask, see Goulart, pp. 115-117.

CHAPTER II

NEW VOICES

The period between 1919 and 1924 was one of self-discovery for the young post-war generation of Pacific Northwest writers who would shape the direction of the region's literature for the next two decades. It was a period in which the new voices of Oregon literature first discovered the impulse toward literary expression, and then the need for the validation which comes to a writer with publication. The tentative attempts to reach out to other aspiring writers which began during this period resulted in relationships which contributed to the growing sense on the part of many that they were no longer isolated individuals, but part of a larger community of seriously committed writers.

An examination of the literary beginnings and early careers of seven young prose writers of the period, Charles Alexander, Ernest Haycox, Dick Wetjen, James Stevens, Stewart Holbrook, H. L. Davis and Robert Ormond Case, provided a wide cross-section of backgrounds and early approaches to writing as a profession. Statistically, the seven have much in common. All seven were born between 1891 and 1901, in a ten-year period which saw the end of the nineteenth century

and the beginning of the twentieth. With the exception of Charles Alexander, all served in some capacity in the armed forces during the first world war. Four of the seven were native Oregonians, while two arrived in Oregon only after the onset of the twenties. As that decade dawned, the young men ranged from twenty to twenty-eight years of age, part of that generation which was at the cutting edge of social and artistic change. Early in the development of their writing careers, the lives of these seven writers intersected, and the web of interrelationships which connected them significantly affected not only the course of their own careers, but the direction of Pacific Northwest literature.

The aspiring young fiction writer from Albany, Charles Alexander, provided not only the earliest, but also one of the most significant channels of literary expression for the young post-war writing community. Alexander's story is a typical one of the period. One author was prompted to suggest that Alexander's early talents were limited to "native mother-wit and willingness." With only a grade school education, the young Oregonian went to work in an Albany print shop at the age of fourteen. He advanced from "printer's devil" to reporter on the local newspaper, the Albany Democrat, then to editorialist, and finally in 1920, at the age of twenty-two, to editor of the newly-established Sunday edition of the Democrat.¹ He soon developed this

issue of the paper into a state-wide voice for Oregon writing through its literary page and his regular column of literary news and reviews entitled "Scribbledom."

Alexander's paper provided a focus for Oregon writers. Its geographic location in Albany gave it access to both scholastic input from the Willamette Valley colleges and the literary input of the urban center of the state, Portland. Its circulation soon came to include serious writers of prose and poetry from across the state, many of whom became friends of the young Albany man, corresponding regularly with him and making his office at the Democrat a frequent stop for writers traveling up or down the valley. Often impromptu discussions held at the Democrat offices while Alexander worked on his Sunday edition would become the impetus for the next issue's editorial. Through his work at the paper, Alexander developed close personal friendships with several of Oregon's developing fiction writers, including Ernest Haycox, Robert Ormond Case, and Albert Richard (Dick) Wetjen, as well as with members of the poetry community such as Howard McKinley Corning, who for a time wrote a regular poetry column for Alexander's page.

In developing his own writing style, Alexander took his lead not from the Eastern literary establishment, but from Jack London and the school of Western realism.² His earliest stories were published in the pulp magazine Black

Cat. These were followed by others, first in the slightly better Blue Book, and later by other popular magazines such as Colliers. One of his early stories, which was originally published by Colliers, "As a Dog Should," was chosen a winner in the O'Henry Short Story Competition as one of the best stories of 1922. A collection of his stories, The Fang in the Forest, was published in 1922. His second of what would be three volumes, a novel entitled Splendid Summits, was published in 1925 and was followed by Bobbie, A Great Collie, which appeared in 1926.

The mid-twenties, therefore, saw Alexander experiencing a moderate amount of literary success. He wrote to his friend Howard McKinley Corning in March of 1927:

My royalties have just come in and I have had really good sales. The Summits surprised me by coming back the last six months for a 3500 sale. I thought that book was dead. Bobbie stacked up about 6000. I've sold the film rights to the Fang to Robertson-Colar. That will be my first picture.³

While Alexander's reputation seemed at this point in his career to be still in the ascent, it would soon be eclipsed by not just one, but several of his close friends, among them Ernest Haycox and Dick Wetjen.

Born in 1899, Ernest Haycox grew up in the logging camps, ranches and small towns of turn-of-the-century Oregon. He served first in the National Guard on the Mexican border in 1916, before joining the American

Expeditionary force in France, where he spent fourteen months during World War I. Returning to Oregon after his discharge, Haycox enrolled first at Reed College in 1919-20, then after one year transferred to the University of Oregon, where he began attempting fiction under the direction of W. F. G. Thatcher, a University of Oregon friend and professor, while living in an abandoned chicken coop whose walls he literally papered with rejection slips.

Haycox published his first story, "Corporal's Story," in 1921 and initially felt drawn to write sea stories, one of the more marketable genres of the period. While still attending college, between October of 1922 and July of 1923, Haycox managed to sell five stories to Sea Stories magazine, but expressed his own lack of self-confidence to Alexander when he wrote

Sold another to sea stories t'other day. But damn 'em, they won't publish the gosh darned stories. I figure that when they proof them the effect is so awful they decide to junk the MSS. If I were an editor I would. They don't know how I wrote those stories. Adventure has not yet reacted. American sent me a nice note, but 'not quite.' 'Again please.' You bet I will.⁴

Searching, like all the young writers of the period for the right subject matter for his "voice," Haycox experimented with several genres of writing. Eventually though, he turned from other genres altogether and began working exclusively on Western stories, the work on which

his reputation would come to rest. His first novel, Free Grass, was published in 1929, after having appeared first serially in the magazine West. This would become a publication process which most of his numerous later works would follow.

While Ernest Haycox had little success writing in the "sea story" genre, Alexander's most ardent protégé, Dick Wetjen, discovered in that genre an ability to deal in fiction with what he knew best.

Born in London in the year 1900, Wetjen left school at the age of thirteen to become a seaman. After a brief period in the British army during the war, he returned to the sea, eventually landing in eastern Canada in 1920. From here he worked his way across North America to British Columbia and ultimately south to Harrisburg, Oregon, where he was working in the hop fields when he became acquainted with Alexander in Albany. Wetjen, of all of the literary acquaintances made by Alexander through the Democrat, was the one who most clearly looked to the only slightly older Alexander not only as a friend, but also as a literary editor, guide and teacher.

It was Alexander who set Wetjen, originally interested in writing poetry, on the course of becoming a successful fiction writer. "You tell me I am brilliant enough to arrive as a story writer, but not as a poet. Does that mean

I have no hope of ever being a poet?"⁵ Wetjen wrote to Alexander in a letter, and later:

But I think I'm getting the idea of this fiction stuff alright. I send you herewith a letter I had about two weeks ago. It's a good start alright, and remember, I've only been seriously writing since you chewed me up over the tree plot.⁶

Wetjen's first sale of a story was to Wide World magazine in 1922, and this was soon followed by many more in such magazines as Blue Book, Everybody's, Adventure and Colliers. The first collection of these, Captains All, was published in 1924, and a novel Way for a Sailor followed in 1928.

Just as Dick Wetjen was writing from experience in constructing his tales of sea-going adventure, several young writers emerged from the lumber camps and sawmills of the region during the 1920's. They wrote of the booming timber industry and of that new champion of the working class, the logger. Among the foremost to emerge as a champion of the Pacific Northwest logger was James Stevens. Born in 1892 in Iowa and raised in Idaho, Stevens began work at the age of eleven in a logging camp in southern Idaho and by the age of fifteen had left school completely for the life of construction and logging camps. Drafted into the army in 1917, Stevens spent two years in France during the war and in 1919 was discharged at Ft. Lewis, Washington. Returning

to Portland, a city he had formed an attachment to during his ramblings before the war, Stevens was determined to become a writer.

Although he had already had several poems published, first in the Saturday Evening Post in 1916 and later in Stars and Stripes, it wasn't until 1923 that he took the step which would start him on a serious writing career. In September of that year Stevens wrote to H. L. Mencken. In a later interview, he was to say of that letter: "I had only one thought and prayer, may this letter help me somehow to become a writer, a creator of the written word."⁷ To Mencken, Stevens wrote:

I admit the ranks of Oregon laborer gladly. Perhaps Oregon business and professional men have their superiors everywhere in America but the race of laborers in the Webfoot State is a race apart. Proportionally, it numbers more . . . it glitters with more picturesque qualities, it is flushed with more vitality and energy than the toilers of any other region in the country. Consequently Oregon is a treasure house for the writer. . . . Here are materials to draw words from any pen.⁸

Impressed with Steven's vitality, Mencken replied: "Your experiences have filled you with capital material and you write so well that an idea occurs to me: why not try something for our new American Mercury. . . ."⁹

Stevens did just that, and the result was his article, "The Uplift on the Frontier," published in the April, 1924 issue of American Mercury. It was followed by the first of

Steven's Paul Bunyan stories, the work for which he would receive the most recognition, becoming one of the foremost authorities in the nation on that American folk hero of the logging camps.

Like Stevens, Stewart Holbrook came from a background of logging camps and sawmills, though the forests of this young writer's youth were not those of the Pacific Northwest, but of his native New England. Born in 1893 in New Hampshire, Holbrook's first work experiences were in the camps of New England. After the war, in which, like most of his contemporaries, Holbrook served, he worked his way across North America to the logging camps of British Columbia. Although, unlike Stevens, Holbrook had the advantage of a completed high school education, like Stevens, he drew most of what he considered his real education from the borrowed books of friends and public libraries, reading vociferously during six years of relative isolation in the camps.

I was never to be without books. This was partly due because I bought many hundreds of books over the years and toted them into camp; and also because in the 1920's we were still in the twilight of an era when no few Americans were consistent readers of books. Almost every village, East and West, had a character known locally as eccentric. He 'read everything,' this survivor of an age when intellectual curiosity flowered as it never has since. He might call himself a Socialist, Anarchist, Single-Taxer; or perhaps Pantheist, Freethinker, Wobbly (I.W.W.), even a Democrat or Republican. Whatever the label, he bought books, owned books, read and talked books.¹⁰

Norman Maclean captured perfectly the intellectual dichotomy of life in the lumber camps of the period when he wrote in his story, "Logging and Pimping and 'Your Pal, Jim'," of his main character:

He explained to me that he made his living only partly by working. He worked just in the summer, and then this cultural side of him, as it were, took over. He holed up for the winter in some town that had a good Carnegie Public Library and the first thing he did was take out a library card. Then he went looking for a good whore, and so he spent the winter reading and pimping . . .¹¹

Holbrook and Stevens, like the Jim of Maclean's story, were irresistibly drawn to the public library. In an oral history conducted with Elwood Maunder in 1957, Stevens declared:

When I went on to Portland in the spring of 1910, the first place I headed for was the library in the old building on Stark Street. No, that was the second place. The first place when I got off the old stern-wheel river steamer, the J. N. Teal, in Portland on a rainy week-day night in March, was the old Erickson Saloon on Burnside Street. . . . Then I found the library.¹²

Holbrook also was drawn to Portland by its library, moving to the city in 1923 in part because "The Portland Public Library was the finest in the west."¹³ His move also coincided with a new job. Holbrook was able to put his desire to write and his knowledge of the lumber industry together as associate editor of the 4L Lumberman's News, the

newspaper of the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen, a management-oriented labor organization of the lumber industry. He went from associate editor to editor of the 4L News in 1926, while developing a good success rate with articles in the slick magazines such as Century and American Mercury, where his article "Wobbly Talk" appeared in January of 1926.

Mencken's iconoclastic views of American life and culture and his love of vitality in language made him, through the pages of his magazine, a natural conduit for the new, vital and masculine young voices of the Pacific Northwest. Although both Stevens and Holbrook undoubtedly benefited much from Mencken's expertise, the Oregon writer of the period who would eventually reap the most from an association with the eastern editor was H. L. Davis.

Davis, a native Oregonian, was born in ¹⁸⁹⁴1884 in Antelope, but spent much of his youth in The Dalles, where he attended high school. After a brief attempt at college at Stanford, Davis returned home, served three months in the service during 1918, then settled once again in The Dalles, working at a series of jobs, from land surveyor to railroad timekeeper.

Like other young Oregon prose writers of the time such as Albert Wetjen, Davis' first love was poetry, though unlike Wetjen, Davis was to have considerable success at the

craft. In 1919 he was awarded the prestigious Levinson award of Poetry magazine by its editor Harriet Monroe for a group entitled "Primapara." It was Davis' poetry, also, which brought him to Mencken's attention and started him on the course of fiction.

It was back in 1928 that I started writing them [the stories], under the patient guidance and encouragement of H. L. Mencken, then, of course, editor of the American Mercury. I had only written poetry then, and had sent him a poem--or maybe several--as a possible contribution. He took it--or took one, at least--and remarked in his letter about it that I ought to try some prose for him, and had I anything in mind that seemed interesting? As it happened, I had nothing whatever. . . . However, I put up a bold front, grabbed the first thing that came into my head and wheedled it into an outline under the title "A Town in Eastern Oregon," and sent it to him. Then, having gained time to reflect a little, I labored out three stories and sent them, figuring that, as in a sweepstakes, the more entries the better the percentage.¹⁴

Davis won the sweepstakes and by 1930 had three pieces accepted by Mencken and was well on his way to a career as a successful fiction writer. Unlike Davis, Stevens, and to a lesser extent Holbrook, most of Oregon's other young writers were not so easily drawn into the mainstream of slick magazine publication. Others did their apprenticeships in the pulp market. Ernest Haycox put the situation well when, during a stay in New York in 1925-26, he wrote to his former University of Oregon roommate Art Larson:

There are two ways of getting into the swim--my way of starting with the half centers [half cent per word] and writing on up through the pulp field to the big fellow. The other way is for the man that can do only the best that is in him and keep writing that best until he whips himself into shape to thunder right through and join the top notchers with his first accepted stories. This way isn't the way most men do it nowadays. Most of us prefer serving our apprenticeship with a little pay coming in. 15

Working largely in isolation from any sources of professional criticism, it is natural that the ability to successfully market their pieces and to earn a living from their writing, even in the less demanding pulp fiction market, would become for these writers a mark of success.

The development of the pulp market in the 1920's offered the neophyte writer an almost limitless market for fast-paced fiction. The standard pulp format, which was arrived at during this period, called for an average of 128 rough-edged pulp pages with a brightly colored and provocative cover of more expensive stock. The average pulp ran about six stories along with one or two longer pieces or serials, for a total of around 200,000 words of fiction. Adventure, one of the most typical pulps of the twenties and one in which many of the Oregon writers were published, was appearing every ten days by the mid-twenties, publishing one-half million words each month. With going rates at anything from one-half cent to five cents a word and averaging two to three cents, the opportunity to make a good

living was undoubtedly there for the writer who learned to pitch his work to the pulp markets.¹⁶

The economic allure of a successful career in the pulps was amply demonstrated in an anecdote relayed by Ernest Haycox to fellow pulp writer Robert Ormond Case, and by Case in turn to his friend Alexander in Albany. Case wrote:

Here's a rich one that Haycox tells me about. But don't for gosh sakes publish the names. Use the example if you wish. A fellow named George Faust writes for Western Story and other Street & Smith publications under three separate names, to wit, Max Brand, George Owen Baxter and John Frederick. For Western Story alone each year he writes 600,000 words! At 2¢ per word. Then S&S gets his novels out in paper backs and he doubles his income. \$24,000 per year. And he writes for other S&S red-blooded magazines. He has made enough to buy a N.Y. apartment house and is comfortably wealthy. But still he grinds them out. Chained to the wheel, I guess.¹⁷

The demands of the pulp market obviously had less to do with literary quality than with fast pacing, both in plot and in the speed with which a writer could work. Often, writers who chose to work in a more literate style, as did Alexander, found themselves at odds with the pulp aesthetic. As Dick Wetjen wrote to his friend Charles Alexander, coaching him on the demands of the pulp market,

You don't get enough action in a page. You've got to have something happen every line and every word of every line. It bores the reader nowadays to skim through paragraph after paragraph of description. It gives him a vivid idea of the characters and the atmosphere, but in getting the idea he loses control of the story and finds himself lost. The readers now want to know what happens. They want to know how it happens so much as what. They want thrills.¹⁸

Wetjen then tempered his own comments with the disclaimer, "Of course the above recipe is how not to write stuff of permanent literary worth, but I think it's the dope for selling to the paper-pulp mags." ¹⁹

Wetjen took his own advice, and in his early work concentrated on plot and action rather than style. In letters of this period to Alexander, he seems to be continually in search of new materials for his pulp stories. He wrote to his mentor, "Great shortage of plots. Send me some. Adventure plots needed,"²⁰ and "I can think of no really good plots and everything has gone wrong,"²¹ and "I'm about dry on plots so I'll have to come talk with you I expect,"²² and ". . . write something Adventure will take. Take some wild plot and rehash it. I am getting quite unscrupulous in these matters now."²³ Wetjen, the idealist who wrote to his friend in early 1921,

You will never convince me . . . that the dollar is the mark of success. I believe I shall always write for writing's sake and not for the gains. I shall probably starve of course . . .²⁴

was grinding out a decent living in the pulps and perfecting his abilities for the more demanding and more prestigious slick markets. As he would later write, "The pulp-paper mags are quite properly to be despised, but they do teach a man certain things that are of immense aid to him later."²⁵ Soon the writer who had written,

I feel as proud as punch to know a man who's publishing in Colliers . . . [I] feel proud to have my teacher in the top lines. Good for you, old Scout,"²⁶

was himself publishing in that pinnacle of middle class respectability, The Saturday Evening Post.

There were, though, those writers whose work never really moved far beyond the confines of the pulp market. Robert Ormond Case was one of the young writers who found satisfaction in the economic security of the pulp markets and contentedly settled down to the monetary rewards which they provided.

Case, like Ernest Haycox, was a graduate of the University of Oregon. Born in Dallas, Texas, in 1895, he moved with his family to Portland as a small child. In 1915 he enrolled in the University of Oregon School of Journalism but left, like Haycox, to serve in World War I before returning to college, from which he graduated in 1920. Case worked initially for The Oregonian in Portland for a brief four months before moving to the Portland Chamber of

Commerce, where he remained as a publicist for three years before retiring from the position to take up a full-time career as a writer for various pulp magazines.

Judging from the record left in his correspondence with Charles Alexander, writing for Case was always based on an economic equation, with the demands of his lifestyle continually taking precedence over his literary ambitions. "I took in \$1,200 in December and spent it all in January on a new car, a new addition to the house and a new addition to the family,"²⁷ he wrote to Alexander. "Am broke again, so am writing 2,000 words per day at 2¢ per for Western, trying to catch up to myself. When I am ahead of the game once more, will try for the Post again."²⁸ And in another letter he bemoaned his situation:

I have averaged \$406 per month since the first of the year. I do not believe in temperament. I work three hours per day and average less than 1,000 words. Western pays me 2-1/2¢ per word for everything I write. I play golf every afternoon. I weigh 188 pounds. I am lazy. I am trying to salt enough away so that I, too, can write for the big ones and keep from starving between times. I have half dozen books in mind and can't afford to write them. My living expenses are almost \$300 per month. I am comfortable. I know I am vegetating. I am oppressed by a feeling of being in a rut every once in a while. Ambition wakes up and begins to prod me. And then I hear from Dick, and his mortgage is actually worrying him! Dick, who writes for the Post!²⁹

Though Case claimed to be "soothed somewhat by the size of the check from the lowly pulp that pays my bills in

comfortable fashion,"³⁰ he too desired the achievement of publication in that magazine, sending all of his better work for what he termed "a ride to the Post" before assigning it over to his pulp publishers. His persistence did finally win out, and twelve years into his career as a professional writer he finally had a six-part book-length serial accepted by The Saturday Evening Post.

During the period between the world wars, many other Oregon writers, whether publishing in the pulp magazines of the day or writing for that elusive audience, posterity, could, like Case, claim some degree of success. Edison Marshall, the young writer from Roseburg whose adventure novels were set in all the corners of the world, proudly claimed in 1935 to have averaged one book every seven and one-half months from the publication of his first, The Voice of the Pack, in 1920. May Cleaver Strahan was notable as a writer of mystery fiction, receiving the Scotland Yard award for her book, Footprints, while in juvenile fiction, Mary Jane Carr wrote the classic children's story of westward expansion, Children of the Covered Wagon, and Vivian Bretherton, local author for women's magazines such as McCall's and Ladies Home Journal, could boast of being the creator of the popular film character, Andy Hardy. In addition, through the twenties and thirties, Oregon could claim a steady stream of fiction in the prestigious O'Brian

and O'Henry short story collections. These included work by Ben Hur Lampman, Maryland Allen, Alexander Hull, and Roderick Lull, to name just a few. Through the efforts of these writers, as well as many others, the 1920's and 30's brought to the state of Oregon and to Portland in particular a literary diversity and vitality of both prose and poetry which resulted in the formation of a significant literary community.

NOTES

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5. Dick Wetjen to Charles Alexander, undated. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
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20. Dick Wetjen to Charles Alexander, March 2yth [sic], 1922. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
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27. Robert Ormond Case to Charles Alexander, undated. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
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CHAPTER III

FORMING A COMMUNITY; 1924-1928

"Sometimes, without warning, occasions become historic." Thus Dick Wetjen opened his report on the conference of Oregon writers held at Eugene on May 3, 1924. Though few had expected the conference to be a success, writers from across the state had traveled by train and car to the University of Oregon to attend the conference.¹ Unexpectedly, the occasion resulted in one of the first significant professional gatherings of Oregon's young generation of writers. Although this gathering of writers is only one of several events which could be pointed to as that moment when the Oregon writers of the 1920's coalesced into a community, the fact remains that during the early twenties, young writers across the state were forming associations and organizations based on their common interest in writing. Portland, as the state's largest city, offered a natural center for the development of several of the new organizations which would play a large part in the growing literary image of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

Much of the early success of literary organization in Portland can be credited to John T. Hotchkiss, Portland's most competent literary promoter of the period and

manager of the city's most significant bookstore, the J. K. Gill Company. Hotchkiss was instrumental in the formation of two literary organizations, the Oregon Writers' League, created primarily for prose writers, and its counterpart, the Northwest Poetry Society, which attracted a large number of local and regional poets.

The J. K. Gill Bookstore acted as the official address for Hotchkiss's Oregon Writers' League and soon became home to a special writers' hideaway, the "Poet's Corner," a special section designated in the bookstore, where writers were urged to gather. It was "a nook where they could come, just a little sheltered from the busy work-a-day world." To achieve this atmosphere Hotchkiss had a massive stone fireplace constructed for the corner, with a mantle and bookshelves well-stocked with books by Oregon authors. To complete the home-like atmosphere, the fireplace was flanked with seats; and over the mantle hung a portrait of Oregon poet Hazel Hall.² The corner was dedicated on April 23, 1923 by the Oregon Writers' League to "writers, their friends, and all lovers of good literature" in the presence of several hundred, including most of the Oregon literary luminaries of the day.³ It was here in the Gill's bookstore corner that many of the literary gatherings of the day took place.

Hotchkiss had a keen editorial sense which prompted

Robert Ormond Case to write of him:

. . . any aspiring writer in this particular section of these United States (including Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Northern California and possibly Key West, Florida) will do well to confer with Mr. Hotchkiss as his long experience in the game enables him to forecast accurately just how well any novel or story will get by.⁴

Hotchkiss put this knowledge to work during the twenties by sponsoring, through Gill's, the publication of at least two volumes of poetry by Portland authors. The works were The Skyline Trail, by Mary Carolyn Davies, and Homespun, by Grace E. Hall.⁵ In the case of both volumes, Hotchkiss had carefully chosen work which he knew would find a sufficient audience in Oregon to warrant the monetary investment. At the time of the publication of Davies' volume, the author had only recently returned to her home town of Portland as a celebrity in the wake of developing a successful literary career in New York. Hall, on the other hand, had developed into celebrity status without leaving home. As a weekly contributor to The Oregonian, she was reported to be one of the highest salaried staff poets of any American newspaper.⁶ Her work, which was typical of that published for the general newspaper readership across the country, as well as her position on the Oregonian staff, assured for her a wide reading audience, though not necessarily the respect of her fellow Oregon writers. On

hearing of the publication of her book, Dick Wetjen ungraciously remarked to Charles Alexander:

The news about Grace's book knocked me for dead for a while. But you got to admit that it was Gill's guarantee that did it. If they were sure of a sale the publishers would run a book filled with dollar marks and nothing else.⁷

Ironically, the author of the simplistic Oregonian newspaper verse did much to further the growth of community developing among the state's younger writers. It was, for example, Grace E. Hall who helped introduce the aspiring young poet Howard McKinley Corning to Oregon's literary scene, acquainting him with Charles Alexander's pages in the Albany Democrat and urging him to

Send Charlie something. He'll print your poems handsomely and send you copies of the paper. And that way you will get to see some of the fine things he is doing. Better still, go down and see him; you'll like him.⁸

Howard McKinley Corning, who was to be one of the stalwarts of the Oregon Poetry community for the next fifty or so years, was born on a farm near Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1896 and moved to Oregon with his family in 1919. While he earned a living during these early years as a florist, Corning's serious ambition was to become a poet. He soon enrolled in the classes of Mabel Holmes Parson, who for many years taught evening classes in writing at Lincoln High

School in downtown Portland through the extension services of the University of Oregon. It was in these classes that many of Portland's would-be writers first met. By 1922 several members of this group had begun gathering informally; and early in 1924, inspired by Hotchkiss and the Oregon Writers' League, they decided to organize formally as the Northwest Poetry Society.⁹

Enthusiasm for the undertaking of a regional organization was high. After two preliminary meetings a slate of officers was chosen at the first official meeting of the group on April 4, 1924. Among the eight were at least three who represented other areas of the Northwest: Helen Maring of Seattle, Gertrude Robinson Ross of Salem, and Richard Shipp from Montana. Other officers of the initial group included Mary Carolyn Davies, who served as the group's first president, as well as Verne Bright, Manche Langley, Eleanor MacMillan and Howard McKinley Corning.

Although there were members from across the Northwest represented in the Northwest Poetry Association, it was around the activities of a coterie, who came to look on themselves as the "Portland Poets," that many of the group's activities revolved. In addition to Corning, the core of the group included Charles Oluf Olsen, Ethel Romig Fuller, Verne Bright, Quenne Lister, Borghild (Peggy) Lee, Ada Hastings Hedges and Leland Davis. This collection of aspiring

writers often met informally at each others' homes, particularly at that of the affable Olsens, or at that of fiction writer Dick Wetjen. These young Portland poets were coming of age during what Howard McKinley Corning would accurately refer to in his reminiscences of the period as "the Golden Age of American poetry--an age that today, in retrospect, still stretches like a bright band of light across the American 1920's."¹⁰

The standard for the popular poetry of the early twentieth century approximated the genteel verse of poets such as Oregon's Sam Simpson or the simplistic rhymes of the newspaper poets such as Edgar Guest and Portland's own Grace E. Hall. Influenced by the new realism in early twentieth century fiction, however, poets across the country were beginning to concern themselves with a new awareness of contemporary events, realistically treated and written in language more reflective of the speech patterns of American English. This was accompanied by concern with new poetic modes and methods, which seemed more appropriate to the use of modern idiom. With the publication of Harriet Monroe's Poetry magazine, the new "Modernist" voice in American poetry found its own vehicle. Poets such as Ezra Pound, who served as overseas editor of the publication for its first seven years, William Carlos Williams, Robert Frost, and Wallace Stevens appeared regularly in the magazine during

the teens and twenties, along with the finest of the more traditional and regional poets of the times.

Several Oregon poets had appeared in Poetry. For example, Portland native John Reed was one of the first "discoveries" of the magazine. His poem "Sanger" appeared in the first issue in December of 1912. Another ex-Portlander, Mary Carolyn Davies began to publish in the pages of the magazine after 1915. Charles Ersking Scott (C. E. S.) Wood, whose volume of poetry, The Poet in the Desert, was first published privately in Portland in 1915, was submitting poetry to the magazine and appeared in it on at least one occasion before his move from Portland to California in 1919. Portlander Hazel Hall, who died unexpectedly in 1924 after long years of confinement to a wheelchair, had poems appearing in the magazine from July, 1918, when Monroe first published one of her poems, "To A Phrase." Hall, whose work appeared in three volumes, Curtains (1921), Walkers (1923) and Cry of Time, which was published posthumously in 1928, was the most significant of the Portland poets of the early twenties. The only poet of the period whose work equaled and surpassed hers is the young man from The Dalles, H. L. Davis. Davis' award-winning "Primapara" collection from Poetry in 1919 created a standard for Oregon poetry which few came close to matching throughout the twenties and thirties.

While individual publication and recognition in the country's more prestigious literary journals was, of course, to be preferred, the formation of the Northwest Poetry Society provided a vehicle for the younger, less experienced writers to market their work en masse to the growing number of magazines interested in promoting regional poetry pages as part of their standard format. The first such success for the Oregon group came in Nov. of 1924 when Harry Noyes Pratt, editor of the newly combined Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine, printed work of several of the group in a special Oregon poets issue. In spite of the encouragement this offered the fledgling writers, the editor complained of the poor quality of work submitted to Howard Corning: "I was greatly disappointed in the response I had from the Oregon Versewriters, and judging from the material sent to me your new association up there has work to do." ¹¹

When H. L. Mencken began a series of regional poetry page in the American Mercury, James Stevens took the opportunity to write to him, promoting one of the leaders of the Portland group, Charles Olsen, and urging his publication in the magazine:

The news has just reached me--and via a logger, by the way--of your project in Oregon poetry. I want to thank you heartily and to say a word or two for Charles Oluf Olsen, the best of all the Northwestern bards.

He is a genuine Northwesterner and one of the finest of this lusty breed. As a blacksmith in mining, construction and logging camps, he was an old-timer in the tribes of hobo laborers when I was still a fuzztail in Idaho. He knows this country as Senator Reed knows the Anti-saloon League. Particularly the vast Douglas fir forests and logging camps of the Oregon and Washington coasts And he fought with the wobblies through all of their hardest battles in this country. You know his poetry of course; I think his prose is still better; but best of all is the man, C. O. Olsen himself. I thought it might interest you to hear something about him.¹²

More good stuff, I hope will be coming out of this section.

With this introduction, Olsen took the lead in promoting the Oregon writers to the editors of the American Mercury, which responded by publishing a complement of Oregon poets in the June, 1926 issue of the magazine. Included in this group were Ethel Fuller, Eleanor Hammond, Frances Holmstrom, Charles Olsen and Quenne Lister--all Portlanders, as well as Walter Evans Kidd of Eugene and H. L. Davis.

Of the collection the only truly strong poem was Davis' "Of the Dead of a Forsaken Country." Several of the other offerings, including Eleanor Hammond's "They Come for Mrs. Lindberg" and Walter Evans Kidd's "The Ranch Mother," show an attempt to work with regional materials with some success. Though maintaining strict adherence to rhyme, Kidd manages some evocative lines when he writes:

To her all things were bleakly one: the moon
 That flattens on the water-trough, the blooms¹³
 Of wild sunflowers, her crude monotonous rooms.

Eleanor Hammond uses interesting imagery with her lines:

The morgue wagon can not come up this muddy hill.
 It waits a quarter of a mile below.
 The undertaker's men plot up on foot
 Carrying a long closed basket for the dead.
 Their coat-tails flap in the wind
 Like dark crow's wings.¹⁴

But neither of these succeeds in developing an intensity such
 as Davis does in his poem which ends:

. . . What else should break earth and pace over
 the bare wild-horse land
 To rouse these cattle in the night? They splintered
 the rotting fences
 And milled and flattened the dead fruit trees
 while the close
 Whirl of shapes sucked at the sparse blossoms
 like loud breath.¹⁵

Compare these lines to those in the poem "The Shearers," by
 Frances Holmstrom:

The Titan flocks of the mountains, that ruled the
 plains in peace,
 Have bowed to the shears of the shearer, have yielded
 the golden fleece;¹⁶

or to Ethel Romig Fuller's offering "Concerning the Speech
 of Mountains," where the grandeur of a Western mountain
 landscape is described as "Sibilant with rustling leaves"
 and "Lovlier than psalms,/More potent than the benisons of

priests."¹⁷

A grim assessment of the collection was offered to Howard McKinley Corning by Dick Wetjen when he wrote:

. . . don't take it too seriously, that printing by Mencken of Oregon poets. I have a shrewd suspicion that he offered those poems in a satirical mood, as much to say, 'There, I said Oregon had no poets. Here's my proof. Most of them were pretty rank.'¹⁸

If these attempts at marketing early Oregon regionalism were only a qualified success, the Northwest Poetry Society was more successful at providing a vehicle for presentations of lectures and readings to the local literary audience.

In 1925 the group's anthologist Howard Corning began correspondence with Harold Vinal, editor and publisher of the Eastern literary magazine Voices, in an attempt to set a speaking engagement for Vinal in Portland in 1926. Although Vinal's proposed trip to Portland was cancelled in late 1925 because of illness, the group was able to bring Harriet Monroe to Portland for a speaking engagement the following March 27th.

Corning was to later write of the visit by the editor:

From our audience position we looked up at and listened to the spinsterish little lady, standing centrally on the bare platform, intoning her correctly-worded and carefully-modulated lines, little affected--it must be admitted--by her precise lyricism or her studied intellectuality. But she was 'there,' while we were only beginners with a consuming urge for self-expression.¹⁹

Corning then goes on to describe how, later, at the home of one of the group on Portland's Council Crest, Harriet Monroe graciously listened to a reading of poetry by group members and urged them on with the comment "You'll make Poetry someday." ²⁰

At least one of the group, Howard Corning, obviously had work accepted as a direct result of the visit, for in a letter to him from H. L. Davis written April 10th of the same year Davis states, "Glad to hear that H. M. finally saw reason, and I'll watch for the poems in her magazine." ²¹ Others of the Oregon group who appeared in the magazine during the balance of the twenties included Leland Davis, Elinor Norcross, Charles Olsen, Walter Evans Kidd, Ethel Romig Fuller, Borghild Lee and Verne Bright. In addition to Poetry and American Mercury, the local poets were appearing in other significant national magazines such as the New Republic, Nation, Saturday Review and Commonweal, as well as significant literary magazines such as Voices and Contemporary Verse. Their work, however, was confined to publications whose taste in poetry tended toward the mainstream. None of the Northwest Poetry Society group would have work appear in the Dial, the literary magazine which became the leading voice for modernist poetry in the country in the twenties, though Howard Corning did try the magazine with his work at least once, as is evidenced by a

note of rejection from editor Marianne Moore in his correspondence.²³

While nationally, the Portland poets were accomplishing much, locally the Northwest Poetry Society was suffering from dilettantism. In 1924 Henry Noyes Pratt had written Corning, "This getting together, reading a 'poem' and being patted on the back doesn't do any good." The fledgling Poetry Society had grown in only two years to a membership of over one hundred, while the core of serious writers within the group remained small. The democratization of the group to accommodate the needs of a much larger and more diverse group of poets resulted in the alienation of several of the founding members and more serious writers within the group.

In its deterioration, the Northwest Poetry Society was following in the steps of its counterpart, the Hotchkiss-inspired Oregon Writers' League, which failed to function effectively soon after John Hotchkiss left the Pacific Northwest in 1925 to accept a position with the publishing firm of Reilly Lee Company in Chicago. As with the poetry group, the demise of the Oregon Writers' League seems also to have been brought about through the over-democratization of the group. In the original charter, membership was limited to "Any person who has published his work in book form, has contributed to or been connected with any

reputable publication, either as a writer publisher or illustrator," but almost as an after-thought a second category for associate members was added in order to include "Patrons of the Arts who are non-producers" with these non-producing associate members to be accorded "all the privileges accorded to active members except that of being president."²⁴

While the latter category succeeded in swelling the ranks of the League, it had also the unfortunate consequence of greatly diluting the literary quality of the organization as a whole. The Oregon Writers' League shortly became an object of ridicule among the more serious, publishing writers, who showed little patience with either Hotchkiss or his retinue of would-be writers. Earl Brownlee, literary editor of the Oregon Journal, expressed the attitude of many of the more serious writers in the local community when he wrote to Charles Alexander in 1923:

What sort of a heretic and unbeliever are you?
 Don't you appreciate the sanctity of the writer's
 league and fondly contemplate the hopes of some of
 its pretenders? Doesn't even distance lend
 enchantment to your view of the mighty?²⁵

Alexander, in his own way seconding Brownlee's feelings about the Portland-centered writers' groups, wrote to Corning on hearing of his disenchantment with the Northwest Poetry Society:

Well I always told you this local stuff was the bunk . . . all this nit-wit hubbub of the 'writers' around Portland will never make a writer of anyone. It just makes some little social rep. around town so maybe they can grab off some dumbbell with money and blind and marry him. You are a serious writer, but then, . . .²⁶

Writing in the Oregon Magazine in 1927, Dick Wetjen commented upon the Oregon Writers' League's state of dissolution:

The League has lapsed into lethargy, or rather remains there. At a recent private talk between several professional writers it was suggested that the League killed itself by the admission of men and women dilettantes who apparently expected the League to show them how to cash in on their literary works. The majority of the professional writers resigned some years ago when the influx of lady poets and gentlemen soul-searchers created a heavy voting block against them.²⁷

Largely as a response to the ineffectiveness of the Oregon Writers' League and the Northwest Poetry Society, those who withdrew from the two organizations eventually came to form an affiliation with the Portland Press Club under the name of the Oregon Writers' Club. Membership in this organization was confined entirely to professionals who met the requirements of the Authors' League of America. Dick Wetjen wrote to Corning in 1927, soliciting from what he referred to as the "insurgent poet group" and urging those writers to join the Press Club contingent:

The house is a huge mansion at 17th and Division and no one is ever there, so we'd have the joint to ourselves. Nothing ever to be formal, you understand. There's a big fireplace and all and we can sit around and jaw. We want to shut out all the bores and all the dead wood.²⁸

Several of the poets joined the organization, and by the end of 1927 the membership list included Alexander Hull, Robert Ormond Case, Howard McKinley Corning, Albert Richard Wetjen, Charles Oluf Olsen, Howard J. Perry, H. L. Davis and Ernest Haycox.

With the formation of this group in the mid-twenties, the Press Club would become an important factor in developing the serious writers of the area into a cohesive community. The Press Club hosted a series of readings, receptions and banquets for everyone from local authors such as Dick Wetjen and Robert Ormond Case, who were both honored with banquets on the publication of new books, to Clarence Darrow, on whose visit to Portland's Press Club Stewart Holbrook remarked:

When Darrow was here we had him as guest at the Press Club Everybody in Portland, apparently, wanted to join the Press Club when it became known he was going to be there. We had to put a man at the door and admit only members.²⁹

In addition to the formal ties which joined writers of the Club, informal associations and friendships continued to grow among the cluster of writers. On several occasions

small groups of friends traveled together to various parts of the Pacific Northwest for the ostensible purpose of gathering background information and local color for their writing. Robert Ormond Case reported one such trip, made sometime during 1925 or 1926, to Charles Alexander:

Wetjen, Frank Pierce of Seattle, Doc Lytle of Salem . . . and myself recently completed a week's tour of the cattle sections of the state. Got lots of dope . . .

On our trip, we met one man who had heard of Dick, and read his yarns, three who were familiar with mine and five who followed Frank's stuff. Such is fame.³⁰

In 1927, Dick Wetjen reported another such foray, this time to Canada. The party on this occasion consisted of James Stevens, Dick Wetjen, H. L. Davis and William W. Woodbridge of Seattle, and was reported as literary news in Oregon Magazine, which was at the time edited by Wetjen.³¹ But undoubtedly the most newsworthy literary event of 1927 for the Oregon writers was the appearance of Carl Sandberg in the state for two public appearances, one at Willamette University in Salem, and the other at the Oregon Agricultural College (now Oregon State University) at Corvallis.

Both of the appearances were well attended by writers from Portland and elsewhere across the state who traveled to either or both towns to hear the midwestern poet read from

his work, The Prairie Years, occasionally interspersing the reading with folk ballads which he accompanied on the guitar. Following the Salem reading, which Howard McKinley Corning recalled was sponsored in part by the Wetjens, Dick Wetjen and his wife Edythe hosted a reception honoring the poet at their home. Among those who attended were Charles Alexander who drove down from Albany and Howard Corning who made the trip from Portland, as well as James Stevens and Charles Oluf Olsen, who spent the evening relaying little known verses of American folksongs to the poet for possible inclusion in the collection he was the working on entitled The American Songbag.³² It was the second reading, however, held at Corvallis, which resulted in the more memorable occasion.

At the Wetjen home, Sandburg had, James Stevens would later recall, asked about H. L. Davis, whom he had met in Chicago in 1919 when Davis traveled to that city to receive the Levinson award from Poetry. "Where the hell is H. L. Davis? He's the only poet the Pacific Northwest has got. Where is he? Why isn't he here?"³³ Sandburg's hosts for the following night were to be a young assistant professor of English at the college, Willard Wattles and his wife. Anxious to please the visiting celebrity, Wattles took pains to extend an invitation to Davis for the event. Stevens recalled the evening vividly almost forty years later in an

interview with Warren Clare:

Professor Wattles went to the door and there stood a long, lank guy, hair dangling down in his face, and his cap pushed back on his head, and in a scrawny right hand he held a pint of what was obviously whiskey. Moonshine! Everybody looked at this apparition, you know, and Wattles was advancing to greet him, and holding out his hand when up went the whiskey bottle, and there came out this hoarse voice with a distinctly Eastern Oregon cowboy accent that Davis had. 'Hi Carl! How the hell are you?' Then 'Here's a drink for you.' Of course Carl had a little drink, and Carl called me and Wetjen, and we all four had a little drink. And that was it. That was all the drinking that was done. Four drinks.³⁴

The group then moved to the site of Sandburg's reading, where his appearance was met with an overflow crowd of sixteen hundred who packed the gymnasium where he read, sitting, at Sandburg's insistence, on the stage and in the aisles.³⁵

Following the event, Sandburg and the Oregon writers retired once more to the Wattles' home, where they took up once again the previous evening's entertainment of singing folksongs, "singing, or rasping, or roaring," as Stevens recalled until 3:00 a.m. when Sandburg left to catch the San Francisco train to his next engagement. The innocent evening's entertainment, as Stevens recalled, had far-reaching effects.

So then the story went all around Oregon Agricultural College. Students and faculty, and I think others in town, probably ministers, and everybody heard of it, that there had been an ORGY at Professor Waddles' home that night. The sounds of raucus singing, and people howling. Oh, you couldn't imagine a more innocent party. It was really rustic simplicity when you think of the songs. They couldn't have been less sophisticated.³⁶

Stevens recalls this event as leading to the young professor Wattles losing his post at the college and recalls Sandburg as having come to his defense, helping Wattles to obtain work elsewhere. Whether this is true or not, the experiences in Oregon certainly did leave an impression on the professor. Writing to a friend in Oregon from Middleburg College in Vermont in 1930, Wattles declared:

There is a far more vigorous gang out there on the coast than here in this Lit'ry Center. Holbrook and Lampman and Wetjen and Olsen are only a few, along with Jim Stevens and H. L. Davis . . . I've done this, introduced Stevens' Brawnyman to at least a hundred here at the Middlebury College summer season, Breadloaf, Vermont . . .³⁷

Whatever the effect of the evening's events on the life of the young professor Wattles, the effect on the development of Pacific Northwest literature would be portentous, for the Sandburg reading marked the first meeting of James Stevens and H. L. Davis. The two rebellious young writers soon became friends and within the year would publish the co-written manifesto Status Rerum. The publication of this single document turned the literary

community of the Pacific Northwest on its ear, causing battle lines to be drawn on the question of literary quality in the region's writing from Eugene to Seattle and ultimately across the entire Pacific Northwest. The manifesto might at any other time have been considered a tempest in a teapot. Coming, however, as it did, at the singular point in the history of the Northwest letters, the publication marked a turning point in the discussion of literature of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

NOTES

1. Albert Richard Wetjen, "The Conference of Oregon Authors," Oregon Magazine, September 1924, pp. 18-20.
2. Alfred Powers, pp. 786-787.
3. Northwest Poetry Society, Newsletter, May 1923. Multnomah County Library, Portland, Oregon.
4. Robert Ormond Case to Charles Alexander. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
5. Howard McKinley Corning makes reference to J. K. Gill's underwriting of Mary Carolyn Davies' book; see his article, "Charles Alexander: Youth of the Oregon Mood," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXXIV, No. 1, March 1973, p. 49.
6. Albany Democrat, March 2, 1924, p. 4.
7. Dick Wetjen to Charles Alexander, June 9, 1922. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
8. Howard McKinley Corning, "Charles Alexander, Youth of the Oregon Mood," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXXIV, No. 1, March 1973, p. 38.
9. Albany Democrat, April 11, 1924, p. 16.
10. Howard McKinley Corning, "Charles Alexander, Youth of the Oregon Mood," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXXIV, No. 1, March 1973, p. 48.
11. Harry Noyes Pratt to Howard McKinley Corning, June 21, 1924. Howard McKinley Corning papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
12. James Stevens to H. L. Mencken, undated. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
13. American Mercury, Vol. IX, No. 35, Nov. 1926, p. 322.
14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., p. 323.
16. Ibid., p. 325.
17. Ibid., p. 322.
18. Dick Wetjen to Howard McKinley Corning, November 27, 1926. Howard McKinley Corning papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
19. Howard McKinley Corning, "All the Words on the Pages, I: H. L. Davis," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXXIII, No. 4, December 1972, p. 295.
20. Ibid.
21. H. L. Davis to Howard McKinley Corning, April 10, 1926. Howard McKinley Corning papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
22. Mariane Moore to Howard McKinley Corning, June 2, 1927. Howard McKinley Corning papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
23. Harry Noyes Pratt to Howard McKinley Corning, June 21, 1924. Howard McKinley Corning papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
24. Oregon Poetry Society, Constitution and By Laws, Multnomah County Library, Portland, Oregon.
25. Earl Brownlee to Charles Alexander, April 13, 1923. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
26. Charles Alexander to Howard McKinley Corning, March 10, 1926. Howard McKinley Corning papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
27. Oregon Magazine, September 1927, p. 20.
28. Dick Wetjen to Howard McKinley Corning, January 8, 1927. Howard McKinley Corning papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
29. Stewart Holbrook to Mike Dunten, November 3, 1930. Stewart Holbrook papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

30. Robert Ormond Case to Charles Alexander, undated. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
31. Oregon Magazine, September 26, 1927, p. 20.
32. Warren L. Clare, "Posers, Parasites and Pismires," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 1970), p. 22.
33. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
34. Ibid., p. 23.
35. Ibid.
36. Warren L. Clare, Interview with James Stevens, January 4, 1966, pp. 6-7.
37. The Spectator, September 27, 1930.

CHAPTER IV

THE LITERARY REVOLT

While the period of 1924-28 was one of intense activity within the Oregon literary community, this activity was coupled with a growing tension. Personal and organizational conflicts were but one aspect of dissatisfaction within the writing community. Increasingly during this period, the attention of writers such as Corning, Wetjen, Stevens and Davis was focused on the question of literary quality. The young writers' concerns were two-fold. The primary concern was the lingering effect of Victorian gentility on the region's writing, particularly on poetry. The secondary concern was the increasingly deleterious effect of pulp writing on the quality of literature being produced in the state.

The Oregon revolt over gentility focused on the Salem-based publication, The Lariat. This magazine, the first of several literary magazines to appear in Oregon during the twenties and thirties, was published by a wealthy Salem publisher, Colonel E. Hofer. The Colonel, as he was commonly called, was born in Iowa and as a young man had worked in the harvest fields and on railroad surveying crews before turning to journalism as a career. He worked on the

staff of an Iowa newspaper before moving to Oregon where for many years he was the publisher of a daily newspaper in the state's capital. A man of much vitality, the Colonel served in the legislature, as president of the State Editorial Association, and was active in many civic and literary organizations, including both the Northwest Poetry Society and the Oregon Writers' League. He published one novel, Jack Norton, and was the founder of a highly successful magazine, The Manufacturer, which later became The Industrial News Review. Dick Wetjen would later write of the Colonel:

Out of all this he had gained some considerable means, some enemies, a great many friends, a certain obstinacy (possibly native) and a somewhat dogmatic assertiveness that seems to inescapably attach itself to nearly every successful man.¹

Wetjen would recall his first conversation with Hofer when, arriving at the Wetjen home in a chauffeur-driven limousine, the Colonel entreated him to contribute something to the newly-conceived Lariat.

He had, he told me, all his life been intensely interested in literature. He had written a few things; he had wanted desperately in his earlier years to make of literature his career; but circumstances and necessities had always prevented. And now that he was virtually retired from business, having turned the major problems over to his sons, he was going to indulge in his hobby. He was going to publish a real magazine, a writer's magazine, a poet's magazine. He intended to publish it for five years. He had the means and the desire, and he was genuinely interested in aiding along the literary development of the State. And, I must add, he was sincere. If ever there was a labor of love it was The Lariat.²

The Lariat was conceived of as "a monthly roundup of western discussion and criticism devoted to higher standards of literature on broad cultural lines of expression."³ Through the magazine, which was published monthly beginning in January of 1923, Colonel Hofer attempted to provide a framework for "Western" poetry. However, to Hofer, the term Western had limited application. Although work appearing in the magazine incorporated regional legends and folklore, local color, geography and at times colloquial speech, in the important matters of form and theme the poetry of The Lariat continued to advocate the aesthetic of the genteel period. The Lariat was to be a champion of "clean literature and high standards," traits which in Hofer's mind were decidedly Western. Above all else, Colonel Hofer pitted himself against the modern trends in poetry, which he perceived as being, like jazz and ragtime in music, morally corrupting. In Hofer's ideal world, "Western" literature

would be saved from the corrupting influences of modernism and elevated to its rightful place in a moral and upright society.

A premium will be placed upon Truth and Beauty in the spoken word in poetry and literature. New values will be placed upon the poetry of feeling, emotion and romance. There will be a greater demand for the lyrical form that must be tender, melodious and romantic, poetry that bears the soul away upon the wings of the creative and the imaginative and transports the hearer into the world of feeling and sentiment.⁴

The magazine became increasingly more strident in its defense of the genteel tradition and its campaign against "modern" poetry, continually attacking the proponents of the new schools of writing, of imagism and of verse libre.

Ourselves, we condemn free verse as a form. To us it is anathema. . . . And it is our belief that no genius of power, however eccentric it might elect to be, will ever select so crass and crude a form.⁵

Though clearly at least an occasional reader of the more progressive Eastern literary magazines such as Poetry, Colonel Hofer's editorial opinions ran against those of Harriet Monroe much more frequently than with them. "If the ideal of poetry be the crudities of free verse, how can we grow, except backward . . ." he wrote. Hofer might have been writing of T. S. Eliot's Prufrock when he continued: "Why record the abnormalities of a diseased or drunken imagination? What is there about it to be worthy of

attention?"⁶

Though Colonel Hofer and his "Lariat School of Poetry" achieved a great following in the western states, receiving, he reported, up to two thousand poems per month from his readers, he was constantly under attack from the region's more forward-thinking literary talents. H. L. Davis wrote to Howard McKinley Corning of a poetry gathering in The Dalles:

Colonel Hofer was the oracle on one occasion when I was most reluctantly present, and the mistress of ceremonies informed me he was operating without charge. But that was in response to a question how the devil she had managed to induce anybody to come listen to that lamentable old driveller.⁷

Charles Alexander, who frequently vented his rage at "The Kernel" for reprinting poems which had first appeared in the Democrat without proper credits, called him "the publisher of the Lariat and sugar daddy of Oregon Poesy."⁸ Dick Wetjen, however, persisted in the hope that the energies of The Lariat could be put to some better purpose than that of espousing an unending stream of material "that properly belonged in the sweet nineties, or, better yet, in the ash-can."⁹ In a letter to Alexander, written at the time that Alexander received the prestigious O'Henry award, he wrote:

Hofer and I are not very thick. I dropped a suggestion to him he get a competent editor. Said you might take the job if approached right, work about three days a month for some thirty dolls [sic]. Told him I didn't know and that you were rather too high up in the literary field to bother with struggling mags but that you might help if it was put up to you as a proposition to help your native state of Oregon. Don't know if Hofer bit. Haven't heard from him since. Probably thinks I've got nerve saying he can't edit.¹⁰

Although Hofer continued to edit his own magazine and steadfastly maintained his outdated standards of literature, Wetjen himself soon was given the opportunity to affect the course of Oregon writing when, in 1924, he was offered an editorial post with the Oregon Magazine.

Oregon Magazine first appeared in the mid-teens. It was the original intention of the magazine's editor and publisher, Murray Wade, to recapture the audience of the then defunct Pacific Monthly with what would be primarily a booster magazine for the various locales and industries across the state. Wade believed that the failure of the Pacific Monthly had come through the attempts of the magazine to move away from its original intent as an "Oregon magazine" and toward becoming a national avenue for the publication of fiction. As editor of the new Oregon Magazine, Wade did not intend to fall prey to the same mistake. He boldly asserted that

What is known today as popular magazine fiction will be a 'non-resident' in the pages of ORE Magazine. The element of romance will be adequately supplied by the many intensely interesting and instructive tales of the early pioneer period.¹¹

In keeping with this, one issue of the magazine included such articles as "Why Jason Lee Came to Oregon," "A Sunday Stroll in Salem in '72," and "An Oregon Fishing Pastoral."¹² Whatever the content the magazine was consistently heavy on advertising. In a typical issue, as many as seventeen of thirty-five pages might be relegated to advertising for local business and industry.

In 1924, Dick Wetjen wrote to Charles Alexander:

I'm helping Murray Wade (know him?) to turn his little Oregon Magazine into a sort of literary sheet. Don't know whether it can be made to go yet or not. It's been published for some years as a political and general Oregon-boosting journal, glazed paper and all that. Will you give me a hand, let me have a very short story or article I can put your name to? Expect to pay for matter in about six months. I want to try to get all the real Oregon writers behind this as I think its a pretty good thing for them and the state if such a magazine exists. Can you give me any advice, you have a great more experience than myself in editing?¹³

As editor of the Oregon Magazine, Wetjen turned the focus of the magazine from economic to literary boosterism, publishing a notable number of articles on aspects of the Oregon writing scene. He did feature articles on conferences and gatherings of writers as well as on

individual writers and published commentaries on the state of Oregon letters such as Howard McKinley Corning's article, "The Redoubtable Muse," which surveyed the state of Oregon poetry for the year 1926. In addition the magazine featured a column of literary news in brief, which took the form primarily of publication notices and news of various literary association events. Under Wetjen's guidance the Oregon Magazine also began to include popular magazine fiction. Interestingly, the author whose fiction appeared most frequently during the years of Wetjen editorship was Wetjen himself. In fact, the entire magazine became subject not just to literary-boosterism, but also to Wetjen-boosterism. In one of the early issues which boasted "Edited by A. R. Wetjen" on its cover, the magazine is found to contain a short story by Wetjen, a paid half-page advertisement of his new book Captains All, and a publication notice of his forthcoming magazine fiction.¹⁴ In fairness to Wetjen, however, the magazine could also proudly claim that "there are over fifty Oregon writers who contribute to the Oregon Magazine."¹⁵

Wetjen's most notable editorial stand of the twenties, however, appeared not in the pages of his own magazine, but in the Albany newspaper (now the Democrat Herald) edited by his friend Charles Alexander. There, in December of 1926, he publicly launched the first salvo in the attack on the

bastions of Oregon literary gentility.

In the November 27 issue of the paper, Alexander had reported a meeting of the Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers held to commemorate the birthday of the genteel poet Sam Simpson of "Beautiful Willamette" fame. Proposing to establish a suitable monument in the city of Portland to the poet, Dr. Carl Gregg Doney remarked in a prose style worthy of the poet himself:

In Simpson's life I see an American epic--the adventuring pioneer, touching a wide series of experiences, ranging from the primitiveness of the forests to the ecstasies of ineffable spirit. . . when I follow him, whether to listen to the mystic Willamette; to gaze upon the "white despot of the wild Cascades" or to feel the curse which bears him "Down to the wailing sea," I am held by the spirit of revelation.

. . . And tonight we honor him for what he was--a great and valiant struggler and for what he tried to be--a white soul singing in the world of wonder which enthralled him.¹⁶

Wetjen, enraged at the uncritical praise lavished on the poet, arrived at the door of the Albany paper on the following Friday evening with a bottle of scotch, fully intending to set his opinions on the matter before the paper's readership. While Alexander fitted together the editorial page, the two conspired on a piece which would expose what Wetjen, according to Howard Corning, perceived as the "methodist influence" on Oregon letters.¹⁷ Attacking the movement to establish a monument to the poet Simpson,

Wetjen indicated that the praise of the poet belied a lack of discrimination on the part of Oregon's reading public. Referring to Simpson as a poet of distinctly fourth class capabilities, Wetjen claimed that he "has no more right to be elevated as an Oregon poet standard than has the Shah of Persia the right to be held as a model of virtue."¹⁸ He closed his editorial with the challenge to Oregon writing:

Oregon has not yet produced a literature worthy of mention though many moderns are engaged in the task of producing one. If monuments and praise are to be raised and extended to such as carry the torch, we suggest the torch be held unlighted until a writer is produced worthy of carrying it. To make a classic and a yardstick of Sam Simpson is not only to insult contemporary Oregon writing but is also tantamount to setting up judgment of Oregon literature with an extremely low level.¹⁹

The devotees of the genteel school responded, and the following issue of the paper printed an article "In Defense of Sam Simpson," submitted by "A Lover of Oregon," which demonstrated that gentility would not yield ground easily. The anonymous author stated:

Had 'Beautiful Willamette' no rime [sic] or meter, it would still be poetry of high excellence, which has been aptly defined as 'interpretation of life in terms of beauty through the medium of words.'²⁰

Other members of the writing community focused not on the thesis of the argument, but on its execution. Wetjen wrote to Howard Corning of the spirited exchange which

resulted:

I suppose you've heard about the uproar I've started about Simpson being a fourth-rate poet and it being foolish to hold him up as an Oregon standard? I published first a stinger of an article about Oregon in an Eastern free-thought magazine, even more radical and that started the bees to buzz. Then the other Friday night I happened to be in Albany and helped Alexander get his paper out. He got me to write him an editorial on Simpson while we were both pretty much under the weather, being on the second quart. The printed result was something to make the gods weep as an example of rotten writing, but I managed to keep my subject matter straight enough. And as usual, the opposition picks on the obvious and slams me for my bad English, sentence construction, etc., and grows very sarcastic without answering at all my premise that Simpson is an over-rated man. The devil of it is I can't possibly make any public explanation as to the reasons for having done such a terrible piece of work.²¹

Wetjen created another uproar in 1928 when he resigned from the ever-popular Press Club, thus hoping to make a point regarding literary quality in the fiction of the region. Though united under the auspices of the Press Club as professional writers, by the mid-twenties animosities were becoming apparent between the writers of pulp fiction and adventure novels on the one hand, and those with higher literary aspirations on the other. Several of the "low-brow" writers of pulp fiction had turned writing for that market into a successful business. Ernest Haycox even took the matter so far as to establish himself in a private downtown office, where he put in regular business hours. This

pecuniary approach to writing appalled writers such as Wetjen, who, while also producing work at a steady pace for consumption in the popular fiction market, nevertheless steadfastly maintained that there was a distinction between "writing" and "literature" and constantly strived for the latter. The distinction, of course, was at many times a subtle one. Many of the writers of serious fiction, such as Wetjen himself, were just newly arrived from the pulp markets.

This subtle distinction was not lost on Robert Ormond Case when he reported Wetjen's resignation from the Press Club to Charles Alexander:

And speaking of our mutual friend Dick. The poor fellow has developed still more asinine character facets. I have never seen a chap so afflicted by the genius complex. Here's an amusing example. The Press Club gave him a banquet on the occasion of the publication of his book, "Way for a Sailor". Ben Hur Lampman, toastmaster, referred to him as a second Conrad, a glorified Jack London, an exponent of deathless prose, an honor to the Northwest, a credit to his community, an artist of unquestioned caliber--and all the rest of the artictic-Rotarian [sic] tributes that one expects on these occasions. Dick swelled beneath this tribute and got pleasantly pickled before the evening was over. A great party. Well, about two weeks later, the Press Club gave me a banquet in recognition of the publication of "Riders of the Grande Ronde." Dick was aghast. Dick was amazed. Dick refused to come. Dick resigned from the Press Club. Why? Because the Press Club was tending to suggest that I, too, was a writer. A lowly writer for pulps being placed on a par with a second Conrad? Zounds and egad!

Dick has taken a quaint stand in regard to the pulps. Pulp writers are not to be considered as writers. He forgets that his stories appearing in the pulps were the ones that gained him recognition.²²

The battle lines had already been drawn between the advocates of modern verse and those of Colonel Hofer's genteel "Lariat School." Now, with actions such as Wetjen's, a schism was clearly forming within the community of prose writers as well. The chance meeting of James Stevens and H. L. Davis at the ill-fated Carl Sandburg reading in Corvallis resulted in the elevation of these literary antagonisms to full-scale war.

Stevens, a friend of the discontented Wetjen, was already a master of the satiric style which made his articles in the American Mercury such favorites of its editor, while Davis was possessed of the fiery recklessness which would be very apparent in his later, less-than-kind portraits of Oregon which appeared in that same magazine. On an impulse on night, while deep in a discussion of the recently-attended "Parliament of Letters" in Seattle at which Colonel Hofer was elected president of a newly-formed "League of Western Writers," the two decided the time had come to publicly and vociferously declare their position on the state of literature in the Pacific Northwest. In a Eugene hotel room, with a typewriter between them, the two declared their first impulse was "to vow abstention from a

pursuit which linked us with such posers, parasites, and pismires." ²³ The final product of their explosion of energy was a literary manifesto which the authors proudly titled Status Rerum, A Manifesto upon the Present Condition of Northwestern Literature: Containing Several Near-Libelous Utterances, upon Persons in the Public Eye. The authors attempted to gain a third party to the publication in Dick Wetjen, but even the outspoken Wetjen hadn't the strength to sign his name to the document. They presented it to a Portland publisher but were rebuffed; the publisher felt the threat of libel was too strong, as the manifesto condemned either by name or implication most of the literary leaders of the Pacific Northwest. Finally, undaunted, the authors undertook the publication of the piece privately, publishing approximately two hundred copies for distribution across the Pacific Northwest. Stevens wrote to Lancaster Pollard, literary editor of the Seattle Post Intelligencer on October 17, "The manifesto, in pamphlet form, entitled 'Status Rerum' will reach you soon. It devastates the Parliament of letters." ²⁴ If anything, Stevens underestimated the effect of the document on the literary community of the Pacific Northwest.

The thesis of Status Rerum was clearly laid forth in the second paragraph. "The Northwest," the young authors asserted,

has produced a vast quantity of bilge, so vast, indeed, that the few books which are entitled to respect are totally lost in the general and seemingly interminable avalanche of tripe.²⁵

With this propitious beginning, the young rebels then proceeded to slash and burn their way across the literary community of the region.

The first attack was on the poetry of the area, and the indomitable Colonel Hofer was the prime target. His Lariat, the two asserted, was

an agglomeration of doggerel which comprises the most colossal imbecility, the most preposterous bathos, the most superb sublimity of metrical ineptitude, which the patience and perverted taste of man has ever availed to bring between covers.²⁶

Thus setting the tone of the discussion to follow, the two proceeded to similarly attack the Northwest Poetry Society and the Washington-based literary magazines Muse and Mirror and Palms, as well as Professor Glen Hughes of the University of Washington.

Moving on to a discussion of the region's short story writers, the authors indicated that those members of the literary community must have been recruited from the region's over-abundance of "'naturals,' mental weaklings, numskulls, homosexuals and other victims of mental and moral affliction." "From the humane sentiments which desire to find harmless employment from these poor creatures," they

claimed, "has come that pullulating institution, the short-story class."²⁷ They openly attacked M. Lyle Spencer of the University of Washington, accusing him of adhering to the motto, "Promote Pecuniary Prose, " as well as W. F. G. Thatcher of the University of Oregon and even Mabel Holmes Parson of the University of Oregon Extension Division. "What lies further?" they asked.

Shall we look further? Dare we look further? In common pity, no! There is a point at which curiosity ends, and perversion begins. We had almost crossed it. Let us turn our faces away.²⁸

The manifesto concludes with a call for a change from within the ranks of the new young writers of the Pacific Northwest. "Our Hercules has not yet appeared," they concluded, "but hope is surely not lacking."²⁹

The hope that Stevens and Davis had for the pamphlet was that it would spark an examination of the state of Pacific Northwest literature and perhaps inspire other young writers to higher standards than those currently in evidence in the region. Davis wrote to Howard Corning on November 9th:

Pamphlet under separate cover. We wrote it to start something. Also there may be lonely and bewildered kids here who need to be told that writing needn't necessarily be a bunch of blah, and that it doesn't have to appeal to the applesauce merchants to be good. It has stirred up a good deal of a row--Seattle's vastly stirred up! It's all very idealistic.³⁰

Davis, at home in The Dalles, was spared the brunt of the reaction to Status Rerum. Stevens, however, who was living at the time in the Puget Sound area, became the object of an overwhelming reaction from within the Seattle literary community. Seattle was, as Davis had written, "all stirred up." Status Rerum became the hotly debated subject of literary page commentaries for several weeks, culminating in what Stevens at one point threatened to espouse as "The War on the P-I Book Page."

One of the first reactions came from the Seattle writer W. W. Woodbridge, who responded to the pamphlet with a column in the Seattle Post Intelligencer on November 6th. His article, which was subtitled "Status Rerum Bunkum Est," condemned the manifesto as a "bitter tirade on Northwest Literature" and concluded with the assertion that

The 'Status Rerum' is a pitiful thing, something written evidently to cause comment and impress the lesser lights with the fact that the Northwest has two brave men who dare to tell the truth--which perhaps is that the two greatest literary gentlemen in the Northwest are James Stevens of Washington and R. L. [sic] Davis of Oregon. But I fear the manifesto has sadly failed even in this.³¹

The Post-Intelligencer's rival newspaper, the Seattle Star, also caught hold of the controversy, reviewing the piece in an article entitled "James Stevens Lashes Out at Seattle Writers." On November 12th, Stevens wrote to his friend Lancaster Pollard of the Post-Intelligencer:

Why all the bother over Status Rerum? It appears to me that its reception is confirming its charges, even if conditions that existed before its composition did not confirm them. My three books have won me no recognition or position in the Northwest, aside from praises in your erudite columns. . . . I owe nothing to Seattle or Portland or any of its babbling birds or braying asses. I have never complained about the reception accorded the books I wrote my heart and guts out to create. I didn't particularly give a damn what anyone thought of them, and I don't now. But it certainly affords me a sardonic grin to behold you and your fellow Free-Lance-hero W. W. W. retching and convulsing yourselves over a piece that required about as much thought and effort as taking a crap. News value, I suppose. Ah, well. Jesus wept over the inanities of mankind, its perfidy and et cetera. I haven't the soul of Jesus, so I can only be faintly amused. Haha.³²

Stevens' amusement with the situation waned, however, as the controversy progressed.

Lawrence Penrose offered speculation in the Seattle Star of November 14th that Stevens' motives for authoring the manifesto were to be found in his desire to establish himself as the "Mencken of the West,"³³ and was seconded by the opinion of Mary McWilliams who, too, recognized the imprint of Mencken on the author's manifesto. Defending Stevens in the Post Intelligencer as a capable if naive writer, she suggested that one day he would come to the realization that "Though I speak with the tongues of Mencken and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."³⁴ The Post-Intelligencer also printed a direct response to Woodbridge's attack on the

manifesto. Bushnell Potts came to the defense of Stevens and Davis when he wrote: "The cultural Mr. Woodbridge says, in pouting sarcasm, that they were brave men who dared to tell the truth. I say in all sincerity that they were just that." Continuing, Potts asserted that Status Rerum "holds forth not only a great hope but a splendid determination" for Pacific Northwest literature.³⁵

Oddly, the commentary which was the most personally injurious to Stevens came from his friend Lancaster Pollard of the Post-Intelligencer. In his column, "Pot-pourri," the attack on Stevens degenerated to a personal level. On November 13th Pollard published a satiric recounting of Stevens' employment as an advertising writer for the Saturday Evening Post. The piece had little to do with Status Rerum and had no apparent purpose other than to cast an unfavorable light on Stevens' literary pretensions. Angered at the direction the controversy was taking, Stevens responded in a letter of the 15th, "Speaking plainly, if I don't receive justice from you I am going to your managing editor for it." He continued,

I think it is a lousy damned shame, this whole mess. I had never dreamed of asking you to take our side. I imagined that you might give a fair resume of the thing . . . [then] offer the opportunity to reply to some of those attacked.³⁶

Instead, Stevens protested, the discussion of the manifesto

had turned into a personal attack. Stevens closed his letter with the threat that if the tone of the discussion of Status Rerum was not changed, he would expose to the newspaper audience personal correspondence regarding its planning:

It will make rich reading. . . . There is also your letter to Davis to quote from--ah, Pollard! and Woody's [W. W. Woodbridge] to me--'Of course, I am with you in this, but'--he feels so sorry for these pore [sic] 'weak idiots,' etc. Better think fast, Lancaster, think fast!³⁷

The controversy over Status Rerum raged on in the Seattle throughout the balance of the year and spread across the Pacific Northwest. As much as a month later it was still being hotly debated between Stewart Holbrook of Portland and his good friend and fellow writer, Mike Dunten of the Puget Sound area in their correspondence. Writing on December 14th, Holbrook claimed:

I can't see your point on Status Rerum. The thing was done in earnest; but it can't possibly hurt anyone except its authors. And I feel positive that both of them are heartily sick of the thing by this time.³⁸

On January 7th, while the shockwaves of Status Rerum were still reverberating, James Stevens shipped out with Dick Wetjen on a freighter bound for South America on a five-month voyage. For the former sailor Wetjen, the trip offered an opportunity to collect new materials and to

upgrade his technical knowledge of freighters for use in his writing. For Stevens it offered, though perhaps unintentionally, an escape from the controversy of Status Rerum. Stevens informed Holbrook that his intention was to collaborate with Wetjen on "a he-man sea story" of some type on their return.³⁹ However, arriving back in the Pacific Northwest in the summer of 1928, he discovered that the League of Western Writers, whose formation the year before at the Seattle "Parliament of Letters" had prompted the publication of Status Rerum, would be holding its second annual meeting in Portland. Witnessing another such convocation of writers was apparently more than the crusading Stevens could take.

Writing to H. L. Mencken at the American Mercury and enclosing a copy of Status Rerum, Stevens proposed to put his literary talent to work at exposing Colonel Hofer and the Northwest literary community to the entire nation. Mencken responded to the proposal positively and wrote to Stevens, encouraging the endeavor: "It is capital news that you are at work on the article. Let me have it at your convenience. Certainly, Colonel Hofer ought to be introduced to the Eastern literati."⁴⁰ Two weeks later he reminded Stevens, "I surely hope that you have not forgotten the article on the literati of the Northwest. They deserve loving embalming."⁴¹ The article, which Stevens entitled

"The Northwest Takes to Poesy," appeared in the American Mercury for January of 1929. The bitingly satiric profile of Colonel Hofer and his Lariat prompted his co-conspirator on Status Rerum to write:

I read Steven's article on N.W. poetry and I think he is developing craftsmanship with his pen. I enjoyed the writing, and although I did not care for the meat of the article, it did not leave a bad taste in my mouth like Status Rerum.⁴²

Although by 1929 Davis might have been eager to forget the controversy which had surrounded his and Stevens' manifesto, that would not be easily done. Status Rerum would become a call to battle for the newly-developing regional consciousness among writers of the Pacific Northwest.

NOTES

1. Dick Wetjen, "Colonel E. Hofer--An Oregon Reminiscence," The Outlander, Winter 1937, p. 20.
2. Ibid., p. 21.
3. The Lariat, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1923, cover.
4. Colonel E. Hofer, "Literature in the Radio Age," The Lariat, Vol. 1, No. 5, 1923, p. 157.
5. Colonel E. Hofer, "Saintsbury on Verse Libre," The Lariat, Vol. 1, No. 5, 1923, p. 157.
6. Colonel E. Hofer, The Lariat, Vol. 10, No. 5, 1927, pp. 529-530.
7. H. L. Davis to Howard McKinley Corning, August 30, 1926. Howard McKinley Corning papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
8. Albany Democrat, November 2, 1924.
9. Dick Wetjen to Charles Alexander, undated. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
10. Dick Wetjen to Charles Alexander, undated. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
11. Oregon Magazine, Vol. 7, No. 3, March 1922, p. 4.
12. Oregon Magazine, Vol. 6, No. 3, March 1922.
13. Dick Wetjen to Charles Alexander, March 30, 1924. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
14. Oregon Magazine, no Vol. or No., September 1924.
15. Oregon Magazine, Vol. 17, No. 5, September 1927.
16. Albany Democrat-Herald, November 27, 1926.

17. Howard McKinley Corning, "A. R. Wetjen: British Seaman in the Western Sunrise," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXXIV, No. 2, June 1973, p. 150.
18. Albany Democrat-Herald, December 4, 1926.
19. Ibid.
20. Albany Democrat-Herald, December 11, 1926.
21. Howard McKinley Corning, "A. R. Wetjen: British Seaman in the Western Sunrise, p. 151.
22. Robert Ormond Case to Charles Alexander, undated. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
23. Stevens and Davis, Status Rerum, A Manifesto upon the Present Condition of Northwestern Literature Containing Several Near-Libelous Utterances, upon Persons in the Public Eye, The Dalles, Oregon: privately printed for The craft, 1927, p. 7.
24. James Stevens to Lancaster Pollard, October 17, 1927. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
25. Stevens and Davis, Status Rerum, p. 1.
26. Ibid., p. 1.
27. Ibid., p. 4.
28. Ibid., p. 6.
29. Ibid., p. 7.
30. H. L. Davis to Howard McKinley Corning, November 9, 1927. Howard McKinley Corning papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
31. Seattle Post Intelligencer, November 6, 1927.
32. James Stevens to Lancaster Pollard, November 12, 1927. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
33. Seattle Star, November 14, 1927.
34. Seattle Post Intelligencer, November 20, 1927.

35. Seattle Post Intelligencer, November 20, 1927.
36. James Stevens to Lancaster Pollard, November 15, 1927. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
37. Ibid.
38. Stewart Holbrook to Mike Dunten, December 14, 1927. Stewart Holbrook papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
39. Ibid.
40. H. L. Mencken to James Stevens, August 24, 1928. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
41. H. L. Mencken to James Stevens, September 7, 1928. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
42. H. L. Davis to Stewart Holbrook, January 5, 1929. Stewart Holbrook papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW REGIONALISM

In publishing Status Rerum, James Stevens and H. L. Davis had hoped to promote a serious discussion on the condition of the literature of the Pacific Northwest. Instead, they found themselves immersed in a controversy which increasingly became one of private animosity and vendetta. The real significance of the manifesto might have been lost had it not fallen into the hands of Professor H. G. Merriam of the University of Montana. Merriam, as editor of the regionalist literary magazine The Frontier, transformed the furor of Status Rerum into a serious literary challenge. During the thirties, the writers of the region took up the challenge and began the work of defining a new, modern standard for the region's literature.

The Frontier magazine was originally founded in 1920 as a college literary publication for the University at Missoula. In 1927 Merriam decided to transform the publication into a regional one modeled after the highly successful Midwestern literary journal The Midland, published by John T. Frederick in Iowa City, Iowa.¹ The Midland, which began publication in 1915, was one of the first of a series of serious Western literary reviews which

would appear in the twenties and thirties. Among other such magazines were The Southwest Review, begun in 1924, Prairie Schooner in 1927, and The New Mexico Quarterly Review which dated from 1931. These and other regionalist magazines of the West had in common the desire to provide an outlet for the literary endeavors of the Western states which was independent of the Eastern literary establishment. They were, like Colonel Hofer and his Lariat, looking for the particular Western voice which would emerge from the prairies and mountains of the western United States. While the Colonel, however, expected to find in that voice a reinstatement of the Victorian taste and morality of the Genteel tradition, the new regionalist editors sought a literary honesty which would express both in form and content the reality of the western experience. With the appearance of these new magazines, and prompted by the outspokenly critical opinions of writers such as Davis and Stevens, the break with gentility seemed imminent.

Merriam knew Oregon and the Oregon writers well, having lived in Portland from 1913 to 1919 when he was a professor of English at Reed College. When he set out to launch The Frontier as a regional magazine, Oregon was one of the first sections of the west he turned to for support. Early in the fall of 1927 he began communicating with various writers in the state, announcing the new format of The Frontier and

urging them to send materials for inclusion in the magazine.² On hearing of the publication of Status Rerum, Merriam lost no time in writing to H. L. Davis to request a copy of the "lively paper."³ Receiving it, he wrote back with an enthusiastic response, claiming

Your Manifesto and Mr. Stevens' makes me love you both, in spite of the fact that you are bitterly attacking persons whom I have known for a number of years . . .⁴

With this comment Merriam forged an important link with the rebellious young group of Oregon writers. When the first issue of The Frontier appeared in the newly-expanded format in November of 1927, the back of the front cover asked, "What can the Rocky mountain and Pacific coast region do for itself in literary expression? What is the condition of literature now?" In answer to these questions, Merriam excerpted from Status Rerum the opinions of Stevens and Davis and provided information on the purchase of the manifesto.⁵ He then wrote to Davis suggesting that he would be the right person to continue the discussion by providing what he termed "the positive side to Status Rerum for the next issue of the magazine."⁶

Davis' article appeared in the March 1928 issue.⁷ The piece, entitled "Status Rerum-Allegro Ma Non Troppe," echoed Status Rerum in its opening statement: "The Northwest is not short of writers. What it lacks is literature." Davis

went on to discuss the tradition of the folksong as a type of indigenous regional literature. "These songs talk . . . of things they know and recognize . . . ," he wrote. "We began here with a new way of life, new rhythms, new occupations. We have failed to make that freshness part of ourselves."⁸ Davis reinforced Merriam's own statement of purpose:

We in this territory need to realize that literature and all art is, if it is worth anything at all, sincere expression of real life. And the roots for literature among us should be in our own rocky ground, not in the Greenwich Village dirt or Mid-west loam or European mold or, least of all, in the hothouse sifted, fertilized soil of anywhere. Out of our soil we grow, and out of our soil should come expression of ourselves, living, hating, struggling, failing, succeeding, desponding, aspiring, playing, working--being alive Truly, materials for true expression lie at hand lavishly strewn. The early day, the present day; the ranch, the mine; the lumber camp, the range; the city, the village; these have not yielded their treasure of the comedy and tragedy of human life.⁹

Merriam's quest for regionalist literature was not limited to poetry and fiction. In its "Historical Section" the magazine offered unpublished primary source materials: journals of overland journeys, early correspondence, and historical documents of various types. The magazine's "Open Range" section published first-person accounts of "outdoor experiences," while Indian folklore and ethonology also figured prominently in the magazine, as well as literary notices, book reviews and essays. By the early thirties,

Merriam had established a position in the Pacific Northwest as the leading literary editor of the region, as well as the most vociferous proponent of regionalism. The Frontier regularly featured work by many of the prominent young writers of Oregon, including Howard McKinley Corning, Borghild Lee, Charles Oluf Olsen, Ethel Romig Fuller, and of course Davis and Stevens, who for a time were both listed as contributing editors to the journal.¹⁰ The young Oregon authors who were not apparent in The Frontier were those who continued during the thirties to look to the pulp market for publication, such as Robert Ormond Case and Ernest Haycox. Dick Wetjen was supportive of the goals of The Frontier but bemoaned the fact that the magazine could not afford to pay for contributions, sending to Merriam the work which he felt was "too good for sale to the popular magazines."¹¹ The standard for fiction published in the magazine was consistently high and resulted on numerous occasions in the inclusion of work in either the O'Brian or O'Henry short story collections. Among those stories singled out for this honor were two by James Stevens, "The Romantic Sailor" in 1928 and one of his Paul Bunyan tales, "The Great Hunter of the Woods" in 1931.

In an early editorial circular for the magazine, Merriam wrote:

This magazine is presenting the life of the Northwest in authentic pictures. In its pages you see the people of the West as they are and not as dressed-up figures of impossible romance. . . . The editors demand not only that its contributions carry interest but that they be written with sincerity out of knowledge of the life they present.¹²

Steven's story, "The Romantic Sailor," provided an excellent example of this ideal of Pacific Northwest regional writing.¹³ The story was told in the voice of a young laborer who was spending one last night out on the town in San Francisco before shipping out to work in the Oregon woods. Stevens undoubtedly drew much from his own experiences in writing the vivid description of the Barbary Coast dance hall.

I was weary of the mauling, shouting crowd and the screeching, clattering music. All in a moment the men in the hall looked sweaty and boozy to me and their gaiety sounded harsh and unreal.¹⁴

Retiring to a table, the youth was jarred from a daydream to see a huge sailor swaying over him.

He was dressed in a loosefitting blue serge suit, and his throat, a flaming red from sea weather, swelled over the tight collar of a black sweater. His chin and jaws appeared singularly slight above the heavy muscularity of his body; but his grey eyes, under a whisky mist, had a sullen fire in them; and they shone beneath a tousele of coarse red hair, which had worked out from under the cap set far back on his head.¹⁵

Thinking it better to befriend the sailor than otherwise, the young man urged him to sit and was soon listening to the

sailor's sad story of love for one of the dance hall girls. The conversation meandered, and soon the sailor was recounting his knowledge of the great literature of sea-going adventure:

Me not knowing Jack Lon'on! Ho! Ho! I 'ave to larf. Kiddo I know 'im well, 'im and more. Know all the literachoor of the water. Melville and Dana and Lon'on, and Conrad, the shining lord of all of 'em! Son, did you ever read Lord Jim? No? So I reckoned. That's me--Lord Jim. I'm a romantic, too, damn it to hell! Bloody romantic.¹⁶

The sailor talked on of writers and literature to the bored young man, until the youth, exhausted of patience, announces his intention to retire for the night. "Just a minute, bucko!" the sailor commands, "I've a bit of a chore for you first. And I'll pay you well. Interduce you to literchoor, I will." With this, the sailor entreated the young man to intercede on his behalf with the dance hall girl, revealing him to her as "the 'riginal Wolf Larsen" himself. The youth gladly took on the chore and was rewarded with a note to deliver to a waterfront bar. The bartender at that bar, reading his note, turns over a thick package to him, but on opening it later in his hotel room the youth discovered that it contained nothing but books. Disappointed, he fell asleep, and rising the next morning departed for the Oregon woods, the sailor's treasure of "literchoor" left behind and forgotten in the San Francisco hotel room. "I cannot

remember the title of one of them," the young man recounted in closing, "but I am sure that they were all romantic books."

The realistically-portrayed characters of this story demonstrated Merriam's editorial taste for characters which are "not dressed-up figures of impossible romance." The flavor of working class life was captured in the depiction of the rough world of Barbary Coast bars and water front hotels, while the attempt to capture the speech pattern of the sailor lends authenticity to his depiction. The story of the frustrated dreams of the common sailor and of the ignorance of the youth is a universal one. The handling of the materials, however, creates within that universality a vivid picture of turn-of-the-century San Francisco. This ability to create a regional portrait which preserves the Western experience while expressing the universality of human existence was fundamental to Merriam's concept of regionalism. Also important was the determination to present the realities of the Western experience in all their forms, both flattering and unflattering. In this, the regionalists were forming a clear break with the genteel tradition. Proponents of the genteel tradition, such as Colonel Hofer, would not portray the crudities of life experienced by the common man. The new regionalists, however, embraced reality in all its forms, finding in

topics considered crude or immoral the vitality on which the western experience was based.

While the submissions of fiction to The Frontier often demonstrated the qualities of regionalism which Merriam required for the magazine, the poetry which crossed his desk was, by and large, disappointing to him. Dick Wetjen commented on the poetry in the magazine:

If you must run verse can't you run stuff that isn't so damned mystical. And for Christ's sake don't lets have any more laments from females who want to fly out on the wings of a bird wawy from the jaded scenes they now occupy. Every woman poet since Eve has harped on that.¹⁷

Merriam, admittedly, had great difficulty obtaining material from the poets of the Pacific Northwest which met his own standards. Too often the work had been shaped by five years of the influence of The Lariat. Commenting to Stevens on his article on Colonel Hofer which appeared in the American Mercury, Merriam noted that the piece was "a challenge and a stimulant, and would stiffen me in my rejection of twittering verse--reams of which pour into [sic] me." ¹⁸

By 1930, however, Merriam did feel confident enough in the efforts of Pacific Northwest poets to sponsor the first significant regional anthology of verse. The collection, entitled Northwest Verse, which he edited himself, was published by the Caxton Printers, Idaho's foremost regional

press. It was a collection of approximately three hundred poems by almost one hundred poets of Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. The Portland poets were heavily featured. The collection contained work by Howard McKinley Corning, Ethel Romig Fuller, and Charles Oluf Olsen, to name just a few, as well as the work of H. L. Davis and the fiction writer, Dick Wetjen. The collection was, Merriam claimed, not to be considered a culmination of Pacific Northwest efforts in poetic expression, but a beginning. "I believe that the Northwest is preparing for a literary movement which for the first time will give to the life of the region honest and rich expression," he wrote, and he offered his collection as a stock-taking of forces at hand to contribute to these changes.¹⁹ His attitude to the current state of poetry in the Pacific Northwest, as expressed in his preface, was a positive one but was qualified by several serious concerns. He described a body of regional work which was largely descriptive in nature, with a tendency toward the narrative format, features of which, in large measure, he approved. Other facets of the Pacific Northwest's regional poetry he found less attractive. Much of the work which was submitted for possible inclusion in the anthology, he complained, was in its subject matter "overconventional for true representation of either past or present Northwest life." In addition, he found the imagery

to be flat and uninteresting. "A regard for things as they are, and audacious directness in expression should yield our poets stunning imagery," he wrote. His foremost complaint, however, was that the work being produced in the Pacific Northwest was lacking any attempt at originality in verse form.

But the writers do show preference, none too fortunately, for the sonnet form, and, more fortunately, for the simple ballad metre. However, one who knows the character of Northwest civilization will feel a lack of bold molding of material into the forms the material itself would dictate. Such a reader will occasionally feel original material that calls for original form being trimmed, twisted, and even padded into the sonnet's scheme. In verse forms and in rhythms these Northwest poets are still too imitative. I should myself welcome bold, untrammelled handling of material. ²⁰

Given Merriam's strong editorial predilections, it is difficult to understand the inclusion of several of the poems in the anthology. These would appear to have more easily fitted the Lariat's standard for Western literature than that of The Frontier. Take for example Laurence Pratt's ode to his home state:

Oregon

Oregon is a deep field,
 And a forest stretching far;
 A low vale and a high hill,
 A lake, a bird, and a star.

Oregon is a calm night
 With a grey owl's fluted call;
 A cabin home, a clearing,
 A cool-voiced waterfall.

Oregon is a wind's song
 Through a sun-tipped, shadowy tree;
 A mill, a city, and a ship--
 An answered prophecy. 21

This was certainly not the "bold, untrammelled handling of material" which Merriam was striving to promote. In contrast with Pratt's poem, there are many in the collection similar in theme and form to Howard McKinley Corning's "Willow Hedge" which show a serious attempt to address the real experience of the frontier lifestyle.

Willow Hedge

The way he died was all up-hill for John.
 His family wouldn't talk about it much,
 Dying so strangely with his work boots on,
 Covered with much too nauseous to touch.
 He'd spent the full day in the upper eighty
 And when he came back to the barns a slaty
 Look was on his face, and he wouldn't speak.

He went about the chores as silently
 As evening put her lamps against the sky;
 It was as if he'd said, 'Don't think of me,
 You'll have a willow hedge there, by and by"
 They found him on the hill-rise after night
 Head covered down, face-up on friendly sod.
 The low wind whistled through the lantern light.
 He'd had his dream and stumbled home to God. 22

As in the case of Stevens' story, "The Romantic Sailor," the story of "Willow Hedge" is a universal one, telling of the desire of every man, regardless of how humble

his occupation, to leave behind some legacy of his work. Though not uplifting in the sense demanded by the genteel tradition, the poem successfully demonstrates the goal of Merriam's regionalism: the creation of a depth of sympathy with the hard reality of the western experience. In this poem, however, as in most of those in the collection, the regularity of form and the conventional rhyme scheme works against the development of the maximum emotional power.

Merriam's hope in 1930 was that the writers of the Pacific Northwest would develop new forms in which to express the Western experience. In this regard, he would be disappointed. In spite of the editor's urging, the poets of the Pacific Northwest were reluctant to depart from formal structure in an attempt to define a more organic relationship between form and function in their work. Instead, they clung tenaciously to formal verse, in particular the sonnet. Merriam expressed his growing frustration with this conservatism in an article he entitled, "Tameness in Northwest Writers and Readers," in which he wrote:

As editor of Frontier and Midland, a magazine which is honestly and painfully struggling to help the Northwest into a realization of itself, I receive scores of poems from Northwest writers. The imagery in the great mass of them is from books, largely from other poets. Why don't more of our poets see and feel the contours of our land, see our flora and fauna, see the people around them? They should adopt a declaration of independence of accepted literary expressions and use the objects in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana for their images. If they would do so, their poems would gain in freshness, and our region would receive acclaim as a place with individuality. The forms our poets use are seldom experimental ones, too often the sonnet. I should think there would be real joy in experimenting with and perfecting forms suggested by our highly individualized materials. Catch the rhythm of the Pacific surf, of the Chinook winds, of the ranges running in waves into the horizon, of the open-faced prairie. ²³

Of the Oregon poets writing during the period from 1919 to 1939, only one, H. L. Davis, successfully moved beyond the self-imposed confines of formal structure with any real degree of success. Although by 1930 he had abandoned poetry almost entirely to develop his talents in the field of fiction, Davis' early poems demonstrated the freedom from imposed form which Merriam strived unsuccessfully to encourage. Take as an example the early poem, "The Threshing-Floor."

The Threshing-Floor

See, in a dead vine,
 How many blackbirds are swinging--the lives there
 In vines and in dead leaves that need no help of you.
 Rein your horse into the salal, young man, follow down
 The clearest ground, this frosty day, to the threshing-floor.
 Red is women close together in the broken weeds,
 Watching the horses: red dresses and blue,
 Thin cloth of early-day dresses spread among the burrs.

Yellow is where the threshing-floor is, and horse's hoofs
 Beat the grain-heads into chaff; and cold wind
 Strews chaff over the bushes and to the eyes.
 Women call to the horse-driver, and laugh out
 At the man behind the horses who catches the horse-droppings
 With his hands to keep the grain clean.
 You shake in this cold wind, yet have come out-of-doors
 And crippled old man,
 To see your grain threshed again: under the sky, clearer
 Than a beach, you stand shaking, and face the chaff with
 red eyes.²⁴

I fork a horse on the hill above the threshing-floor.
 Driver and bundle-handlers, the ones in red dresses.
 I must lose none of this; because men I have known
 Are less simple, or are secret as birds in vines.

Of all the Oregon writers of the period, Davis alone seems to have taken seriously Merriam's challenge to look to the Pacific Northwest environment for an indigenous form for his writing. As late as 1939, Davis was still attempting to articulate this relationship of form to function. His own incisive technical description of this attempt was offered to Howard McKinley Corning: "The long sentences ain't supposed to be read, they are supposed to give a feeling for the contour of the landscape."²⁵

Along with his frustration at the lack of

experimentation in the regional work he was receiving for The Frontier, Merriam also encountered difficulties in the mid-1930's increasing circulation and financial support for the magazine. In 1933, when The Midland, the magazine on which The Frontier was modeled, ceased publication, Merriam took over that magazine's unexpired publicaiton list and rechristened The Frontier as Frontier and Midland.²⁶ This move substantially increased the magazine's geographic influence and circulation. By 1938, however, The Frontier and Midland, which was heavily dependent on the backing of the University of Montana as well as the local business community of Missoula, was floundering. Word of an unsympathetic University administration reached the local businesses, and revenue for the continuation of the magazine became scarce.²⁷ The editor's first impulse was to attempt an expanded format in an attempt to draw additional support for the magazine. However, he rejected this as being too costly.²⁸ Merriam also made some attempt to increase the subscription list of the magazine and approached the writers of the Pacific Northwest for suggestions, hoping perhaps to locate a single benefactor who might make the continued publication of the magazine more feasible.²⁹ But the much-needed support was not forthcoming. The last issue of Frontier and Midland came out during the summer of 1939.

NOTES

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22. Howard McKinley Corning, "Willow Hedge," Northwest Verse, An Anthology (Caldwell, Idaho: 1931), p. 83.
23. H. G. Merriam, "Tameness in Northwest Writers and Readers," Northwest Literary Review, Vol. 1, No. 4 (September-October 1935), p. 6.
24. H. L. Davis, "the Threshing Floor," The Selected Poems of H. L. Davis (Boise, Idaho: 1938), p. 7.
25. H. L. Davis to Howard McKinley Corning, November 9, 1939. Howard McKinley Corning papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
26. H. G. Merriam to H. L. Davis, August 31, 1933. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
27. H. G. Merriam to H. L. Davis, December 30, 1938. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

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CHAPTER VI

THE COMMUNITY DISSOLVES

By 1927, when H. H. Merriam first announced his intention of fostering a new concept of regionalist literature for the Pacific Northwest, the aspiring young Oregon writers of the early twenties were coming to artistic maturity. During the 1930's, they would continue aggressively to pursue their varied literary careers. The sense of community, however, which had been forged during the twenties, soon foundered. Increasingly, as the decade progressed, the comradeship of the twenties gave way to a sense of personal and professional isolation.

Among the reasons for such isolation were the changes brought on by maturity and a growing sense of adult responsibility. Born, by and large, in the 1890's, the young writers were, in the 1920's, filled with youthful exuberance. As the next decade approached, however, they found themselves settling down to the responsibilities of marriage and family life. Professional and family pressures forced several of the writers away from the Pacific Northwest, while others remained to face the disillusionment of the Great Depression, which greatly accentuated the

difficulty of the thirties period. Though the economic difficulty of the Depression for writers was ameliorated somewhat by the establishment of the Oregon Writer's Project of the Works Progress Administration, problems within the project only served to accentuate the individual writers' sense of isolation from community.¹ By 1939, the community of Oregon writers which had existed in the early twenties had dissolved almost completely.

The publication of Status Rerum and the advent of the new, regionalist Frontier in the fall of 1927 marked the end of the Age of Innocence of Pacific Northwest writing. Though it would be overly optimistic to project that the break from the genteel tradition in the region's writing was complete with these events, the process had definitely begun. In August of 1928, even before James Stevens' scathing article, "The Northwest Takes to Poesy," had appeared in the American Mercury, Colonel Hofer announced his intention to retire as editor of The Lariat. Whether Hofer's decision was in any way precipitated by the furor surrounding the denunciation of his magazine in Status Rerum is unknown. He had maintained from the start of his enterprise the intention of giving The Lariat only five years of his life.² That five years came to a close for Hofer with the 1928 meeting of his creation, the League of Western Writers, in Portland.

Explaining his decision to retire as editor of the magazine in the August issue of the Overland Monthly, Hofer wrote:

A literary magazine in the West is the hardest to keep the breath of life in its body or to keep its life blood in circulation of anything ever brought into existence. ³

During the five years since The Lariat's inception, the Colonel was estimated to have spent between ten and twenty thousand dollars per year from his personal resources on its publication and promotion.⁴ Though Hofer turned the magazine over to another publisher with wishes for its continued success, without the resources and personal commitment of the Colonel, The Lariat ceased publication within a short time.

Oregon writers lost another local avenue for publication in 1931, when Charles Alexander's Saturday section (formally his writer's page in the Albany Sunday Democrat) was discontinued. This literary page had for more than ten years been a primary source of information and the exchange of ideas within the Oregon writing community. Howard McKinley Corning expressed his regret at the passing of the page in a letter to Alexander:

I have always believed that your page encouraged me tremendously in those early days when I was writing much and seeking an audience It was the first honest landmark in the growth of Oregon literature, still in its young stages. You, as editor, are to be highly commended.⁵

The demise of both Alexander's page in the Albany Democrat and Colonel Hofer's The Lariat left Oregon for several years with no state-based avenue for literary news and publication. Dick Wetjen, no longer editor of Oregon Magazine, wrote to H. G. Merriam in the fall of 1932, expressing the need for a new Oregon-based magazine. "I wish we could get a magazine started in this city," he wrote. "We have a considerable colony of writers here, and many of them occasionally turn out some first rate work."⁶ He followed up this letter with another within a month, this time announcing his own intention of doing just that.⁷ The magazine, which Wetjen undertook to co-edit with another young writer and neighbor of his, Roderick Lull, would include verse, essays, and stories. The first issue of the magazine, which Wetjen titled The Outlander was published during the winter of 1933. The associate editors were the Seattle writer, Nard Jones, Myron Griffin and Borghild Lee. The format was an inexpensive one: stapled mimeographed sheets.⁸

Editorially, The Outlander was outspokenly anti-regional in nature. Its declared intention was printed on

the frontispiece of the first issue:

The Outlander, a Quarterly Literary Review, has no axe to grind. It represents no schools, favors no cliques. Its sole purpose is to publish and to encourage the production of literary matter of creative importance. It only asks that its contributors have something to say, and say it well. It is not concerned with regionalism or with any other movement that judges literature by its geographical location. It is concerned solely with ideas and their finest presentation.⁹

Anxious to promote the magazine as a forum for the exchange of literary ideas, Wetjen invited Merriam to respond on the question of regionalism.¹⁰ He also invited his old and always outspoken friend, James Stevens, to contribute a piece for the new magazine. In his usual bombastic style, Stevens replied with an article entitled "To Hell with The Outlander," a collage of his former complaints against the literary establishment in general and the creation of new literary magazines in particular.¹¹ Stevens' concluding wish for the new enterprise, "I hope it sinks," proved prophetic. After only three issues the magazine was suspended.

Another effort which began in Portland in 1933 was The Literary Monthly, which was first published in December of that year. In contrast to The Outlander's inexpensive format, The Literary Monthly was beautifully printed, with hand-set type and linoleum-cut illustrations by the young Portland artist, Louis Bunce.¹² Also in contrast to The

Outlander was the editorial policy, which once again returned to a regionalist theme. The editors had, they claimed, "the aim of presenting to readers in the Northwest, a literary periodical whose character will be not only acceptable, but peculiar and sympathetic to these readers."¹³ In spite of the obvious differences between the two magazines, after the failure of The Outlander Wetjen and Myron Griffin merged their efforts with those of magazine editors, Dan Northup and Ken Tillson. This magazine was destined to go through yet one more incarnation, this time as The Literary Magazine, when its editors were prompted, perhaps, by high production costs to forsake hand printing.¹⁴ "The Lit. Monthly crowd is nuts," Wetjen wrote to Merriam in May of 1934. "They change their minds with every issue. They told me weeks ago they were quitting. Now they think they'll get out two more issues. I give up."¹⁵ With the May-June issue, however, the magazine disappeared entirely. The Dilletante, edited by Doris Bailey, had an even shorter life span, lasting only one issue.¹⁶

The last attempt during the thirties at the creation of an Oregon-based literary magazine came in 1935. Courtland Matthews, a young writer who worked with Stewart Holbrook at the 4L Lumber News, decided to attempt a magazine different from earlier attempts of the decade. "I am on the verge of a more or less noble experiment," he wrote to H. G. Merriam.

"I am about to launch another literary magazine."¹⁷

However, instead of directing his new magazine only to writers, Matthews hoped to interest a more general audience, imparting a keener understanding of the Pacific Northwest's literature to the non-literary reader, through articles and essays on the state of literature in the region.¹⁸ Matthews projected the ability of the magazine to eventually reach a subscription of from three to six thousand,¹⁹ a tremendous figure considering the fact that The Outlander had been able to gather less than a dozen subscriptions from the Portland area.²⁰ Though Matthews did considerably better, gathering a total of around two hundred and seventy, the income from the magazine wasn't even sufficient to meet its printing costs.²¹ The magazine, following others of the decade, collapsed in December of 1935, after only four issues.

The failure to maintain a viable literary publication in Oregon during the thirties was undoubtedly due in part to the state of flux within the writing community of the period. The young writers were feeling the need to expand their horizons, both creatively and physically. Several made trips beyond Oregon and the Pacific Northwest in search of expanded opportunities. For most, this meant the obligatory writer's pilgrimage to the center of the American publishing industry in New York. Ernest Haycox was one of the first to make the sojourn and would later write of the

experience, "I got the idea I should be near the Eastern publishers, so I went to New York and starved for a year. Finally I sold a story and came home to Oregon."²² A second visit to that state was more successful, at least personally. On that trip Haycox met and married his wife.

Howard McKinley Corning, the most aggressive of the Portland poets, made a similar trip during the winter of 1929-30. Hoping to remain in the East for some time, Corning applied for a fellowship to Yaddo Artists Colony in upstate New York. The fellowship, however, wasn't granted,²³ and Corning, too, returned home without making any significant professional inroads. Dick Wetjen wrote to Corning from Portland, "Don't stay in N.Y. too long. It's death on writers, like Hollywood."²⁴ These turned out to be prophetic words, for in 1930 Wetjen himself left for Hollywood where he attempted to do a screen adaptation of his own novel, Way for a Sailor. Though the film was eventually completed, it was not with the author as screen writer,²⁵ and Wetjen, like Haycox and Corning, soon returned home to Oregon.

Other writers, however, most noticeably James Stevens and H. L. Davis, permanently left Oregon during this period. Both relocated, at least initially, in the Puget Sound area. By the fall of 1927, Stevens had already joined writers such as Nard Jones and Jim Marshall there. The following year,

the recently-married Davis joined them, living first in Seattle and eventually on Bainbridge Island. Although Portland maintained its reputation as the most vital center for poetry in the Pacific Northwest, the Puget Sound region soon developed undisputed dominance in the field of fiction.²⁶

There, in 1929, Stevens and Davis began work on yet another creative collaboration, a radio project centered on Stevens' Paul Bunyan stories. Stevens drew additionally on his Portland friend and fellow logging enthusiast, Stewart Holbrook, for help on the project. The stories were Stevens' contribution, while Holbrook was responsible for writing "continuity" for the scripts.²⁷ Davis ended each segment with a rendition of some American folk song.

Davis was also beginning to write prose pieces for H. L. Mencken at the American Mercury,²⁸ while Stevens was working on a new book, to be titled Saginaw Paul Bunyan.²⁹ In Portland, even the poets were turning to fiction. During the late twenties and early thirties, Howard McKinley Corning, Charles Oluf Olsen, and others tried their hands at it in an attempt to break into the lucrative popular fiction market.³⁰ For the confirmed pulp writers such as Ernest Haycox and Robert Ormond Case, the period was one in which they were able to consolidate their markets and concentrate on a steady outflow of work to the publishers of their western and adventure stories. Probably, none of the

writers could foresee the difficult years to come, as America faced the Great Depression.

A portent of the effect of the Depression on Oregon writers came to Stewart Holbrook as early as October of 1929 when the company attempting to market his collaborative efforts with James Stevens on the Paul Bunyan radio pieces failed to find a market. "I have stopped writing the Bunyan things," he wrote.

The company never sold the stories; it has had several set-backs. . . . Prosperity may be just around the corner, but it is not here. . . . So now I'm turning to literature again.³¹

But literary markets, as well, would soon follow other businesses in the decline. In July of 1931, Dick Wetjen wrote to H. G. Merriam:

I sold my last Post story to Metro Goldwyn, otherwise I'd be starving. All magazines have shut down and rates are tumbling like the devil. When I'll be able to afford to start another book I don't know.³²

And two years later, in July of 1933, he wrote again:

Since you last heard from me things have gone from bad to worse and maybe worse than that. I think the only writer making any money at times is Haycox. . . . The rest of the gang here have sold nothing all year, and save for a sale to the Post (at badly slashed rates) I've sold nothing since March; and there seems no immediate hope of things getting any better.³³

Though Wetjen seems to have believed that Ernest Haycox, firmly entrenched in the pulps, was spared the brunt of the bad market, other pulp writers were not. In October of that same year, Wetjen reported, "Markets are still lousy. Frank Richardson Pierce and Robert Case [pulp men] were out to see me on Sunday and moaned all over my rugs."³⁴ In an attempt to organize the ranks of America's popular fiction authors, a group calling itself the American Fiction Guild formed in New York. The avowed purpose of the organization was to save the pulp markets. Dick Wetjen took the lead in Oregon and organized a local chapter. Writing to Merriam and urging him to join the effort, Wetjen put the matter succinctly: "We're not speaking of art now, of course; just a bunch of people who are seeing their livelihood going away from them."³⁵

The Depression years grew increasingly harder for the Oregon writers. They socialized infrequently,³⁶ and Wetjen reported, "I know three or four poets and writers here who are actually in the bread line, and one who came to the point of selling the typewriter."³⁷ It was James Stevens, though, of the young Oregon writers, who undoubtedly suffered the most from the effects of the Depression.

Like Haycox and Corning, Stevens, too, as the thirties approached, had a desire to travel to the Eastern publishing centers. In 1930, with his new wife Theresa, Stevens left

Seattle to go east. His intention was to meet in New York with his publisher, Alfred Knopf, then to do some research in the Michigan forests for his work in progress, Saginaw Paul Bunyan. The Stevenses hoped then to travel home to the Pacific Northwest via the Panama Canal.³⁸ While they were still in New York, however, the bank failures of the Depression began. Knowing of their plan to spend time in Michigan before returning home, Knopf advised them to "take [their savings] to Detroit and put it in the largest bank in Detroit. If that goes," he asserted, "the country'll go."³⁹

Leaving New York, the young couple lived first for a time in Bay City, Michigan and then in Grayling, while the young author collected materials for his writing. Finally, they ended up in Detroit, where Stevens hoped to gather information for another book, when they were caught in the Michigan bank failure there, losing everything save the eight dollars they happened to have in their apartment at the time. To complicate an already bad situation, James Stevens had contracted colitis during his South American voyage with Dick Wetjen in 1928 and was becoming increasingly ill, finally requiring an operation. Broke, sick and unable to sell any stories because of the ruined magazine market, the Stevenses went home to Theresa's family to live. The couple made one unsuccessful attempt to return to Portland, but found themselves eventually living out the

Depression in the small community of Koontz Lake, Indiana, while Stevens discovered one steady market for his writing in a small publication entitled Everyweek Magazine. Theresa Stevens talked of these experiences in an interview conducted with her husband:

. . . So we went out and lived in this cottage. This is when he began turning out this junk so we'd have something to eat. He just looked sicker and sicker the whole darn time. . . . Some people get high blood pressure but this is what was the matter with him. The depression. . . . We didn't mind so much being poor, and being alone, but when you're a writer and you can't turn it out, and it won't come, and you get sicker and sicker and the psychology of the situation increases the sickness, it is really rough.⁴⁰

Finally, in 1936, Stevens was offered a position with the West Coast Lumberman's Association in Seattle. He gladly accepted the job and found himself back in the Pacific Northwest. No longer, however, was he the iconoclastic young author of Paul Bunyan stories. Stevens had settled into middle age and the security of steady employment. "We found ourselves again," Theresa Stevens said. "But it was rough, it was really rough."⁴¹

Ironically, this same period was a very productive one for some. H. L. Davis, in particular, achieved his greatest recognition during these years. Davis remained in the Seattle area until 1932, when, with the help of H. L. Mencken and Harriet Monroe, he received a Guggenheim

Fellowship.⁴² With the proceeds, Davis and his wife Marion moved to Mexico, where they stayed for the next two years while he worked on a novel of Oregon to be titled Honey in the Horn. This novel, in turn, won for him the Pulitzer Prize in 1936 and established his reputation as the foremost writer of Oregon. Oddly, though, Davis was never to return to the state which had fostered his prize-winning novel.

Another of the Oregon writers whose career took an ironic turn during this period was Stewart Holbrook. Strangely, in the middle of the Depression, when other writers were struggling to make a living with their work, Holbrook unexpectedly gave up his full time position with the 4L Lumberman's News to face the uncertainty of a writer's existence. He began the enterprise in the best of spirits, determined to better his one hundred and fifty dollar per month paycheck with free-lance writing.⁴³ He wrote to his good friend Mike Dunten after one year at the new profession:

At free lancing I have not yet been a huge success. I have, however, managed to make as much as I was with the 4L, and I like the work immensely. I work harder now than then; haven't had a drink of anything stronger than coca-cola for two months; walk five to ten miles daily, eat like a horse and am feeling fine.⁴⁴

Holbrook's optimistic outlook persisted through that year, and as 1935 approached he viewed its coming

philosophically.

The year 1934 closes with the nation, and possibly the world, in a chaotic state unequalled in our time. I doubt if things were in worse upheaval in the 1840's. But I find I view everything with a benign and rather disinterested eye. If I live throughout 1935, I promise you I will have completed my first book and sent it to a publisher. Other than that, and to eat, sleep, read and smoke on occasion, and also to hear [from] you in lieu of personal contact, I have no great agenda on tap.⁴⁵

Nineteen thirty-five, however, proved a harder year for the young writer. In March he wrote: "Not for many years have I lived on so little money as in the past four months."⁴⁶ Holbrook was occupied the balance of that year writing pulp mystery novels, but his situation changed in late 1935 when he was appointed general editor of the Oregon State Guide, the primary project of the newly-organized Oregon Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

In contemplating the establishment of the Oregon Writers' Project, George Cronyn, assistant director of the Federal Writers' Project, had contacted state WPA director, E. J. Griffith, in October of 1935, suggesting H. L. Davis as director of the Oregon project.⁴⁷ Griffith did some research into the idea and then wired Cronyn that "Davis is an excellent poet and should therefore be a very competent executive, which his friends confirm."⁴⁸ This statement fairly well sums up the tone of the WPA's Oregon Writers' Project's relationship to the Oregon writing community of

the thirties. Stiffled by Federal regulations and an overpowering bureaucratic structure, the project was doomed to provide little artistic support to the Oregon writing community at large.

As director, E. J. Griffith eventually hired Alfred Powers, Dean of the General Extension Division of Education for the University of Oregon. Powers had only recently completed his eight hundred page History of Oregon Literature, which leant him an air of authority on Oregon writing and made him a natural second choice for the position. Holbrook, as general editor of the Oregon State Guide, was responsible for the work of the fifty-four writers employed on that particular volume.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, the federal stipulation that no more than one in ten of the workers on the project be uncertified as relief workers greatly decreased the opportunities for hiring competent and committed writers for the staff.⁵⁰ Most of the area's fiction writers were maintaining some form of income from the magazine market, however, little, and were therefore ineligible for certification as relief-workers.⁵¹

It is not surprising, then, that of those seriously committed writers who found work on the project, most were from among the ranks of poets, who received little or no recompense for their literary work on the open market.

Those included Ada Hastings Hedges, who was hired as supervising editor of the Guide, as well as Verne Bright, Charles Oluf Olsen, and Howard McKinley Corning. The general level of skill, however, which was found among the writers of the project, was so low that Holbrook was prompted to write in February of 1936: ". . . I count our competents as 4 in the 54 whose copy I am attempting to edit, or re-write."⁵²

In reporting his appointment to his friend, Mike Dunten, Holbrook wrote: "I have been appointed state editor for the American Guide, the boondogling [sic] WPA project of which you have undoubtabley [sic] read."⁵³ His estimation of the project did not increase as his association with it continued. He later reported that "the turning out of boondoggerel goes on apace,"⁵⁴ and eventually confided:

I have said little to you about my work on the Guide, and shall say little more. It'll keep until we meet, when I'll give you an earfull on govt. subsidy of writers. . . . I am coming to think that even an iota of ability looms large in this PWA [WPA] buggery.⁵⁵

The greatest failure of the WPA writing project in Oregon was that the writing conducted under the auspices of the program was by and large not creative in nature. Rather than working on stories, novels or poetry, the authors were put to work compiling historical and statistical data and converting that information into a federally-approved image

for the state of Oregon. H. L. Davis expressed his opinion of this to Howard McKinley Corning when he wrote:

It would be amusing if the thing weren't so obvious, to point out that one can think up nothing better to do with a genuine and acknowledged poet than to put him to cobbling up gouty particulars about grade school curriculae in 1850 and how to drive to Nisqually without missing the fish hatchery or the panorama of the prune orchards. It would be precisely as idiotic if the WPA artists were hired for their ability to paint pictures and then put to work whitewashing chicken houses.⁵⁶

The Oregon Writers' Project had, from the start, been fraught with serious problems, both administrative and artistic. In 1937, a potential walk-out by the staff was only averted through the removal of Alfred Powers as Director.⁵⁷ Though the project staggered on until 1942 and did, in the final analysis, produce a significant number of written works on various aspects of the state, it could provide neither the cohesion badly needed within the disintegrating writing community, nor any artistic direction for the writers of the state.

By the late 1930's, the writers who had composed the literary community of the twenties were geographically scattered and artistically isolated from each other. The high hopes and aspirations of the early twenties, which had been a major factor in establishing a sense of community, were replaced by a sense of disillusionment which the federally-funded WPA Writers' Project had not been able to dispel.

Just as he had been one of the first to activate the community of the twenties through his column in the Albany Democrat, Charles Alexander was one of the first to fade. Alexander virtually disappeared from the Oregon writing scene after 1931. This may have been due in part to the bad reception awarded his novel The Splendid Summits in 1925 and his failure to successfully publish a later work, North Smith, which had been tentatively announced for publication in 1927, but which never appeared.⁵⁸

By the 1930's the realities of the market place had become apparent. In spite of his success with magazine publication, Dick Wetjen's first book, Captains All, sold fewer than 400 copies.⁵⁹ Fiddler's Green, published in 1931, had similarly bad reception. "The fact that it [Fiddler's Green] didn't go over very well," he later wrote, "just about cured me of books, that is anything serious, again."⁶⁰ James Stevens' wife Theresa attributed much of her husband's illness during the early thirties to the Depression and to his having "written a book as fine and as big as the Saginaw Paul and nothing. . . . This book didn't sell at all. Knopf put it out but it didn't sell."⁶¹

Isolated and discouraged, the writers eventually lost touch with each other. In 1938, in one of his last letters to H. G. Merriam, Dick Wetjen wrote from his new home in San Francisco:

I've been out of touch with northwest things since I made a voyage to Australa [sic] a couple of years ago, and then settled in this city. Occasionally I get a note from up north, containing a little news, but by and large there is mostly silence as it appears all the old crowd has split up, or is mad at someone else, or has died or faded from view. I haven't heard from Stevens in years. . . . What is he doing now, if anything? I haven't seen him in print for a long time. . . . and H. L. Davis seems to hide from everyone, though I hear he has bought a house somewhere in the Valley of the Moon. Charles Oluf Olsen seems to have vanished, but I do hear from Borghild Lee occasionally. I understand she's running a criticism school now in Portland. Anyway, the slaughter seems to be terrific. . . . Half the new boys only know Mencken even as a sort of myth, and every time I pick up a magazine I see so many new names I feel strange. . . . It makes me feel both a little aged and also somewhat 62 alarmed at the way you can drop out of sight.

In the late thirties, Charles Alexander published one last string of stories, which appeared in Colliers. This prompted Howard McKinley Corning to renew his correspondence with the Albany man, which had lapsed for several years. In 1939, Alexander wrote of the literary community of which they had both played significant parts during the past two decades:

I've often speculated about the big rush of scribblers who gushed up in the Northwest so uncalled for; of every slant, and mostly mediocre, and how mostly they've been unable to handle themselves, to scrape free of the provincial quagmire tugging 'em back down. Like the first fish who crawled ashore, I guess, trying to stay clear of the sea and breathe, and gasping themselves out after a bit. Primitive throes. Well, I told you I had the whole afternoon and nothing to do. But maybe you haven't. 63

NOTES

1. For a complete discussion of problems within the Oregon Writers' Project, see Thomas James Ptacek's unpublished thesis, "The Federal Writers' Project in Oregon, 1935-1942: A Case Study," Portland, Oregon, 1979.
2. Dick Wetjen, "Colonel E. Hofer, An Oregon Reminiscence," The Outlander, Winter 1937, p. 20.
3. Powers, Alfred. History of Oregon Literature. Portland, Oregon: Metropolitan Press, Publishers, 1935, p.788.
4. James Stevens, "The Northwest Takes to Poesy," American Mercury, Vol. 16, January 1929, p. 70.
5. Howard McKinley Corning to Charles Alexander, June 6, 1931. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.
6. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, November 2, 1932. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
7. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, December 15, 1932. H. g. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
8. Few copies of The Outlander have survived. There is, however a complete run of the magazine in the Multnomah County Public Library, Portland, Oregon.
9. The Outlander, No. 1, Winter 1933.
10. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, December 15, 1932. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
11. James Stevens, "To Hell with the Outlander," The Outlander, No. 1, Winter 1933, p. 46.
12. Complete runs of The Literary Monthly and The Literary Magazine are available at the Multnomah County Public Library, Portland, Oregon.

13. The Literary Monthly, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 1933, p. 2.
14. The change in format between The Literary Monthly and The Literary Magazine is evident on examination of copies held at the Multnomah County Public Library, Portland, Oregon.
15. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, May 22, 1934. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
16. Powers, Alfred. History of Oregon Literature. Portland, Oregon: Metropolitan Press, Publishers, 1935, p. 726.
17. Courtland Matthews to H. G. Merriam, February 17, 1935. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
18. Ibid.
19. Courtland Matthews to H. G. Merriam, February 17, 1935. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
20. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, October 7, 1938. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
21. Courtland Matthews to H. G. Merriam, December 11, 1935. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
22. Helenie Stratton, "Portland Authors," undated newsclipping. Vertical file, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
23. See Howard McKinley correspondence with Yaddo. Howard McKinley Corning papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon. It is interesting to note that at the time of his application to Yaddo, Corning was corresponding with Robert Frost and asked Frost to write a letter of recommendation to the artist's colony.
24. Howard McKinley Corning, "A. R. Wetjen: British Seaman in the Western Sunrise," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXXIV, No. 2 (June 1973), p. 175.
25. Ibid., p. 176

26. Courtland Matthews to H. G. Merriam, April 9, 1933, H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
27. James Stevens to Mike Dunten, December 12, 1928. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
28. H. L. Davis, Team Bells Woke Me and Other Stories. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1953, p. x.
29. Warren L. Clare, Interview with James Stevens, January 4, 1966, p. 1.
30. Howard McKinley Corning, "A. R. Wetjen: British Seaman in the Western Sunrise", p. 175; "Charles Alexander: Youth of the Oregon Mood," p. 57.
31. Stewart Holbrook to Mike Dunten, August 1, 1929. Stewart Holbrook papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
32. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, July 17, 1931. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
33. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, July 15, 1932. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
34. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, October 10, 1932. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
35. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, July 15, 1932. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
36. Howard McKinley Corning, "The Prose and the Poetry of It," p. 259.
37. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, July 15, 1932. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
38. Warren L. Clare, Interview with James Stevens, January 4, 1966, p. 14. The subsequent account of the Stevens' trials during the Depression is from this source.
39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., p. 15
41. Ibid.
42. Howard McKinley Corning, "All the Words on the Pages, I: H. L. Davis," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXXIII, No. 4, December 1972, p. 312.
43. James Stevens to Mike Dunten, September 13, 1934. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
44. James Stevens to Mike Dunten, June 27, 1934. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
45. James Stevens to Mike Dunten, December 28, 1934. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
46. James Stevens to Mike Dunten, March 2, 1935. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
47. Thomas James Ptacek, "The Federal Writers' Project in Oregon, 1935-1942: A Case Study," unpublished thesis, Portland State University, 1979, p. 44.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., p. 45.
50. Ibid., p. 46.
51. Ibid., p. 49.
52. James Stevens to Mike Dunten, February 17, 1936. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
53. James Stevens to Mike Dunten, December 29, 1935. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
54. James Stevens to Mike Dunten, February 1, 1936. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

55. James Stevens to Mike Dunten, February 17, 1936. James Stevens papers, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
56. Howard McKinley Corning, "All the Words on the Pages, I: H. L. Davis," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXIII, No. 4, December 1972, p. 324.
57. For a complete discussion of the problems within the WPA Oregon Writers' Project, see Thomas James Ptacek's study of that project.
58. Howard McKinley Corning, "Charles Alexander: Youth of the Oregon Mood," p. 55.
59. Dick Wetjen, "As the Modern Author Sees It," The Frontier, Vol. 12, No. 1, November 1931, p. 83.
60. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, October 7, 1938. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
61. Warren L. Clare, Interview with James Stevens, January 4, 1966, p. 15.
62. Dick Wetjen to H. G. Merriam, October 7, 1938. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
63. Charles Alexander to Howard McKinley Corning, July 6, 1939. Howard McKinley Corning Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

As the 1930's drew to a close, the generation of writers which had been the bright promise for Oregon literature in the early 1920's was coming into middle age. For most, their finest literary accomplishments were already behind them.

After his brief resurgence of writing in the late 1930's, Charles Alexander settled into life as a shop man at the Albany paper on which he had worked for so many years.¹ Dick Wetjen continued to live in San Francisco until his death in 1948, writing for the popular magazine market. His work, however, was never as strong as that of his early stories such as "Pound for Pound" and "Strain," the stories which had won him the most critical acclaim during the twenties and thirties.²

James Stevens, on his return from the midwest in 1937, settled into his position with the West Coast Lumberman's Association, where the demands of his job took him away from creative work. Stevens remained with the Lumberman's Association for twenty years. By the time of his retirement in 1957, he was more often consulted as an authority on Paul Bunyan than as a writer.³

Stewart Holbrook, who had been dubbed by Alfred Powers as early as 1935 as "Oregon's lowbrow historian," moved to the east coast for a period, but ultimately returned to Portland, where he became a literary fixture, continuing to publish books on a wide variety of topics until 1963. He is still, however, best known as the author of Holy Old Mackinaw, "the natural history of the lumberjack," which was published in 1939. H. L. Davis, too, continued to write, but never again achieved the level of public success with any of his later work that he had with Honey in the Horn. Perhaps the greatest loss to Oregon literature was Davis's movement away from poetry and to fiction. His early poems are so clearly superior to anything else produced in the region that they warrant speculation on the impact he might have had as a poet had he continued to work in that medium.

It is ironic that, of all the writers, it is the "pulp man," Ernest Haycox, whose work ultimately had the most enduring effect on the general public. As a writer of westerns, Haycox, who died in 1950, has been credited with the elevation of the western to the level of literature.⁴ An entire generation became familiar with Haycox's stories through their screen adaptations into Hollywood movies. Among those which were adapted for film were his story "Stage to Lordsbury," which emerged as the John Ford classic, Stagecoach.

Of the lively and vocal poetry community of the period, little of enduring quality remains. Due, in great part to the reluctance of the poets of the period to forsake the sonnet form, their work remained limited in appeal. Howard McKinley Corning was the only one among them to attain publication in book form from any other than a regional press, and that was with his first volume, These People, which was published in 1926. Corning also, along with poet Ethel Romig Fuller, achieved the appointment as Poet Laureate for the state. For many of the others, however, scattered magazine and anthology pieces are all the evidence which remains of their writing careers. Charles Oluf Olsen, for example, the robust blacksmith-poet of whom James Stevens wrote such a glowing account to H. L. Mencken in the twenties, is represented in the Multnomah County Public Library only by a partially-completed history of Milwaukie, Oregon, which was begun during his employment in the WPA.

The combined literary output of this generation of writers was staggering. Charles Alexander alone published upwards of three hundred stories,⁵ while pulp writer Robert Ormond Case is credited with over two hundred novelettes, short stories and articles.⁶ No single writer's record of accomplishment, however, is as significant as the change in direction which these writers, as a generation, brought to Oregon literature. This change came, not as the result of

any single person or happening, but through an interweaving of attitudes and events which occurred within the context of the community which these writers formed.

The literature of the Pacific Northwest which emerged from the 1930's bore little resemblance to that of a short two decades before. The vestiges of Victorian gentility, which had been the dominant factor in pre-war literature, had all but disappeared from the serious writing of the region, taking with them romanticized images of pioneer mother and noble savage, majestic mountain and limpid lake. In their place, writers had discovered a new realism, gladly aware of the ugliness as well as the beauty of the Western experience. "If Northwesterners have something to say, they must say it in their own tongue,"⁷ wrote James Stevens in 1930. By the end of that decade the writers of the region had found that tongue and were beginning to speak.

The movement toward a new, vital literature in the Pacific Northwest owes as much to Colonel E. Hofer and his Lariat magazine as to James Stevens or H. G. Merriam, for without action there can be no reaction. Much of the formulation of regionalist theory of the period was a direct reaction to the definition of Western writing formulated by Colonel Hofer through his magazine. So appalled, however, were his contemporary critics by the Colonel's lack of editorial discrimination, that they failed to see the larger

implications of his efforts.

In his desire to express the Western experience as he perceived it, Colonel Hofer, through The Lariat, opened the doors of literary expression, not to just a select few, but to any and all who cared to express themselves. In doing so, the Colonel inadvertently contributed to the democratization of Pacific Northwest literature. Many of The Lariat's most avid readers were found among the loggers, cow-hands, miners, and sheep herders of the region. These readers submitted work to the magazine which the Colonel gratefully accepted. Much of that work approximated that of mill worker P. L. Chance, whose poem on the restriction of immigration ends:

This sawmill has prospered beyond a doubt,
 As can be plainly seen.
 And if we can keep the foreigner out
 We can keep the village clean. 8

That the work had little literary merit is clear. Its significance lies in the fact that the poem was written by a mill worker and that the subject reflects the concerns of his life. By opening his magazine to the variety of experiences reflected in the lives of his readers, the Colonel, perhaps without even realizing it, had taken poetry out of the parlor and started it on the road to regionalism.

What Colonel Hofer shared with later regionalist magazines was the desire to define a "Western" literature.

Unfortunately, his view of what the region's literature should be was clouded by the outdated precepts of gentility which had been the standard for his generation. By 1927, and the publication of Status Rerum, the young writers of the Pacific Northwest were rejecting these outmoded standards. It was left for H. G. Merriam, however, to attempt to articulate the new standards and to construct a theory of literary regionalism for the Pacific Northwest. In doing so, Merriam wished to open up Pacific Northwest writing, not only in terms of subject matter, but also in regard to form. In doing this, he was only partially successful. The writers of the region during the twenties and thirties, while moving toward a freer handling of indigenous materials, failed in any significant way to move away from the traditional and more restrictive forms.

Ironically, though Merriam himself constantly urged more experimentation in the work of Pacific Northwest writers, especially the poets, he was, like Colonel Hofer before him, subject to a distinctly provincial attitude, which worked against any substantive change. In an early issue of The Lariat, Colonel Hofer had urged his readers to become "literary scouts" and to "brush aside the trash that is swamping the West from the East. . . ." ⁹ Merriam as well, for all of his complaints against the Colonel, was subject to the same suspicion of a debilitating Eastern

influence in anything of a truly avant garde nature. He wrote to H. L. Davis in 1930 that

It has been suggested that in The Frontier we publish more experimental work of a sophisticated nature. In my judgment that cannot be an important function of The Frontier. I don't believe that our country has reached that stage, and personally I hope that the crazy sophistication that is running through the East will get drowned in the Mississippi. I want The Frontier to remain definitely, as you once vigorously advised me it should be and remain, provincial.¹⁰

Such limitations severely handicapped Merriam's regionalist intention and may have contributed to the demise of the magazine in the late thirties. The questions which surround the issue of regionalism, however, continue to be of serious concern to writers of the Pacific Northwest. The most ambitious forum for the discussion occurred at a Writer's Conference on Regionalism held at Reed College in 1946, at which Merriam was one of the speakers. The proceedings of the conference were collected in a volume entitled Northwest Harvest, A Regional Stock-Taking and demonstrate the variety of opinion on regionalist theory of the period. The process of defining a literature for Oregon and the Pacific Northwest, however, continues through the 1980's with such works as Regionalism and the Pacific Northwest, published by the Oregon State University Press (1983), and An Anthology of Northwest Writing: 1900-1950 (1979), published by Northwest Review Books. As Howard

McKinley Corning was prompted to write to Charles Alexander in an undated letter written sometime in the late thirties:

Sure we have fiction writers, just as we have poets. Successful fiction writers and successful poets; but the living heart, the authentic voice of the state is not clamorously apparent in their products. However, we are only on the literary frontier, the few who have been before us have been scouts. It is for us to cultivate and nurture the fruit. Perhaps, we shall yet speak truly and so be recognized. ¹¹

NOTES

1. Corning, "The Prose and the Poetry of It," p. 257.
2. Ibid., pp. 259-261.
3. For a discussion of Stevens' role as folklorist, see Maunder's interview, pp. 31-33.
4. Jon Tuska and Vicki Piekarski, eds., Encyclopedia of Frontier and Western Fiction (New York: 1983), p. 156.
5. Corning, "The Prose and the Poetry of It," pp. 261-262.
6. "Noted Ex-Portland Writer Dies in Bay Area at 68," The Sunday Oregonian, March 29, 1964. Vertical file, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
7. James Stevens to H. G. Merriam, November 29, 1930. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
8. Stevens, "the Northwest Turns to Poesy," p. 65.
9. Ibid., p. 67.
10. H. G. Merriam to H. L. Davis, June 11, 1930. H. G. Merriam papers, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
11. Howard McKinley Corning to Charles Alexander, undated. Charles Alexander papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

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