

Book Reviews

The Midland: A Venture in Literary Regionalism, by Milton M. Reigelman. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1975. pp. xiv, 137. \$4.25.

This fascinating book is not just a well-written literary and historical footnote about a "little magazine" that began in Iowa City in 1915 and finally succumbed to the Great Depression in Chicago eighteen years later. Nor is it simply, as the title suggests, the story of the hazards of sustaining an authentic midwestern literature without the benefits of advertising and mass circulation. Nor is it mere literary criticism, a professorial intrusion which weighs the efforts of Ruth Suckow, James Hearst, Edwin Ford Piper, Raymond Weeks, and Loren Eiseley with those "quality" writers now sanctioned by academe—Gustave Flaubert, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. S. Eliot, and Sherwood Anderson.

Certainly, all of these things are in the book.

Yet, Dr. Reigelman's balanced study (I. The History, II. The Editorial Policy—Regionalism, III. The Literature) of what H. L. Mencken once called "probably the most influential literary periodical ever set up in America" is essentially a concrete illustration of Emersonian wisdom: "There is no history. There is only biography." In sum, the well-documented story of *The Midland*, from frontispiece photograph to final words ("sustained largely through the efforts of one man"), is the biography of John T. Frederick.

John Towner Frederick (1893-1975), an Iowan from near Corning who began the magazine while an undergraduate at the University of Iowa, was the physical, financial, and spiritual force behind *The Midland*. Though ably assisted by such men as Frank Luther Mott, he kept the magazine alive with hard work, financial sacrifice, and editorial leadership as he moved it from Iowa City to such places as frontier Michigan and downtown Chicago. An inspiring teacher, a scholar, a

novelist, John Frederick never lost sight of "The Great Valley," the midwestern land and people that he loved so much. In the great age of *The Saturday Evening Post*, he believed his magazine offered a service to local writers not compromised by Eastern commercialism.

The story of *The Midland*, a magazine born in the age of the flapper, rapid industrialization, and movement to the great cities, is the story of John Frederick's American Dream. In the years when midwesterners like Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, and T. S. Eliot were East-bound, John Frederick's editorial policy was dramatized in prose and poetry with a basic theme: "It's better here, at home." The Dream was composed of essential values: (1) There is dignity and beauty in rural and small-town life, an organic setting of a whole people, not to be confused with the romantic or the genteel. (2) There is goodness in the family, wisdom in the older generation, and great love which grows out of marriage, not before it. (3) There is a Thoreauvian rapture to be discovered in the natural wonders of the region. (4) There is little delight in literary experimentation, in the prospects and realities of the city, in the battlefield once the noble words about war are forgotten. (5) There is much to explore in the area of folk humor and authentic Indian and Negro literature.

As Dr. Reigelman points out, John Frederick's Dream "served as an antidote to the great mass of commercially-inspired popular work." Never imposed, never bigoted or provincial, his Dream was always in tune with his kind and quiet personality. Its essential quality is symbolized by his continual search for young talent. Even when the bulk of manuscripts forced him to shift from personal letters to a 1927 rejection slip, Frederick measured his prose in human terms: "The manuscript interests me and I appreciate the opportunity to consider it."

John Frederick's American Dream which came crashing down in 1933 still haunts us as we read this book. Now the copies of *The Midland*, with their over 1200 poems and 400 short stories, lie buried on the third floor stacks of the Univer-

sity of Iowa library. Perhaps Dr. Reigelman was wise in keeping the final section of "The Literature" to a mere twenty-seven pages. Perhaps the prose is dated, the poetry third-rate. Yet, it is impossible to forget that fall day in 1966 when John Frederick, still burdened with his American Dream, read one of those *Midland* stories by Ruth Suckow to an Iowa University class of eighty graduate students. When he finished, they applauded.

—Brooke Workman
Iowa City

The Politics of American Individualism: Herbert Hoover in Transition, 1918-1921, by Gary Dean Best. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975. pp. vi, 202. Notes, bibliography, index. \$13.50.

Gary Dean Best has illuminated in this volume a most significant period in Twentieth Century American political history. Recent scholarship of Herbert Hoover identifies him during this period, 1918-1921, with progressivism and internationalism. This author attempts to illustrate how Hoover's progressive and internationalistic actions in this postwar era were really an outgrowth of his public philosophy of American Individualism and did not originate from any particular zeal for either progressivism or internationalism as such. In focusing on Hoover, Best deals extensively with the short-lived, but enthusiastic Hoover "boom" for the presidency; the Industrial "Peace" Conference of 1919-1920; and Hoover's spirited campaign on behalf of ratification of the Treaty of Versailles with reservations. There is also good background information on the former president's European endeavors during the First World War which prepared him for the American political arena.

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