

Significance of Chicago as the Material of American Literature.

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Hail to thee, fair Chicago! On thy brow
America, thy mother, lays a crown,
Bravest among her daughters art thou,
Most strong of all her heirs of high renown.
—Harriet Monroe.

I.

First, we take a look at the "Chicago Renaissance" in American literature. What we call here the Chicago Renaissance is that big and rapid change marked on the map of American literature during the period spanning from 1890 to 1920. It is at once a qualitative change in the literary mode and a regional change on the literary map of the United States. The qualitative change means in short the emergence of naturalism and later realism versus romanticism. In the conventional opinion the rise of naturalism in America is attributed partly to the influences of European and Russian writers, namely, Zola, Flaubert, Hardy, Tolstoi and many others. But it is not so clear what decisive influences they had upon American writers of the age in regard to their literary techniques and points of view. What Mencken said about the "essential isolation of Dreiser" is to some extent applicable to other writers. Their naturalism is essentially the American naturalism.

The regional change, which stands in a close connection to the former, comes under the headline of the appearance of the West and the Middlewest on to the stage of American literature. Approximately none of virtually non-New England • Eastern American literature had been existing until 1880s. Since the New England Renaissance in 1830s (Although we may not use “renaissance” in the original sense of the word, because from the usual point of view there is no American literature as an art until 1830s) American literature had been an exclusive product of the Boston-centered region. But the year 1890 which observed the frontier terminate saw a new and in a sense independent variant of literature blossom in the Middlewest that had been the waste land in literary America. (Of course we have works of James Fenimore Cooper before then. But they are not to be classified as literature of the Middlewest in our sense of classification.)

This is a very interesting historical coincidence, although it is safer to say that the Middlewest came to play a *decisively* important part on the national stage of American literature in 1920s. When Mencken said Chicago was the literary metropolis of America he meant Chicago after the period of Dreiser, Masters, Anderson and Lewis. In this regard the appearance of the *Spoon River Anthology* in 1915 was a decisive event in the history of American literature. In '80s the New England • Eastern culture, coming to some aspect of maturity and enjoying the Van Wyck Brooks' “Indian summer”, let its literature retrospect over its history of the past development and have some pathetic feeling—feeling whether New England were not going to lose in secularization the religious, moral and spiritual grounds which it once stood on. The fact is that when the frontier, the most significant phenomenon in American history, which had progressed westward repeating the process of growth and maturation of the civilization, was dying perhaps there near the Rocky Mountains, a kind of American literature began to claim its existence here in the Middlewest, located far more eastward, especially in the Chicago-centered region.

The event can be considered, like by Brooks, as part of the

process of growth, maturation and decline of the civilization on a smaller scale. At any rate, New England literature of the time dared not turn its eye to the west but contrarily to the land beyond the Atlantic Ocean, like Henry James, while increasingly heavier was growing the fear that the world it used to depict was losing the vitality and charm which hitherto it had managed to keep in its hold. The west remained romantic, the place of romance, in the mentality of common men; this was so even when everybody could not help admitting the capitalism was marching in the West with a big stride of the giant. While many cultures other than literature began to show the fact apparently, literature obstinately refused to recognize the new comer. Not until the day of Mark Twain, perhaps no Middlewest existed in American literature except the vaguely and broadly conceived area taken as the "frontier."

The Middlewest had to wait until the later half of 1880s to become the literary object for writers who lived their own Midwestern lives. In the literary history of America this is the era when Edward Eggleston and Hamlin Garland and other writers belonging to the early Chicago school appeared to show the lives of the Midwestern farmers and city dwellers. We have scarcely got any Midwestern farmers and cities depicted in novels before this era of the rise of the naturalism. The situation we may interpret as the consequence of the consciousness of conditions of poverty-stricken Western dwellers caused by the development of the industrial capitalism or the Populistic way of thought resulting from the plight of farmers, or the cultural growth of the Midwestern cities, among when Chicago was the most prominent. But here after all the farmer novel does not stand in a close connection to our theme; and, after we have considered all our subjects, it is most dangerous to see the genesis of literature in the single light thrown by the development and maturation of the Midwestern socio-economic conditions. Since we are not attempting here to find any starter of the Chicago Renaissance, we treat the Middlewest and Chicago only as the *material* out of which certain novelists dug their subjects: a clear

distinction must be made on this point.

Chicago was quite an interesting material for American literature of the time. As Floyd Dell wrote in his famous essay, "Chicago in Fiction", Chicago writers "had been obsessed with Chicago", and the city had appealed to them "as problem rather than as a vast and splendid collection of fictional materials." (Of course Dell made an exaggeration.) But as the basis of the literary production she was neither a new social structure *essentially* different from New England nor a new soil in which alone the *newer spirit* could be nurtured in place of the then declining New England. The only point we pay attention to is the fact that there were a few people who knew that something not essentially different from New England was shaping itself in a region where such thing was considered did not exist. The reason of it may be largely found in literature's own domain. Yet the remarkable points are that the rise of Chicago was too rapid even for the most cautious observers to contemplate it deliberately and that the material Chicago thus formed represented, a few people thought then, some very America-like characters far more typically than the material New England.

When we say Chicago showed writers several characteristics which could be taken as those typically America-like, the material Chicago is considered as a type of the Midwestern city. And there is no necessary reason, at least for us, why it was the "Chicago" Renaissance and no else. That is to say, such a thing as the peculiar and unique character or pattern of Chicago does not exist. The character of the city has more or less in common with other cities of America; and the fact, from another point of view, is an expression of the uniformity prominent in the culture of the United States. Why and how Chicago could grow into such a typical city is of course the matter of reasonable necessity. To discover the causes of it we have to analyse the natural, geographical and social conditions of the United States at large. This analysis may explain the production of the Chicago literature at least indirectly. As we have already noticed

above, however, we are not trying to account for the character of Chicago as the basis of literary production but that of Chicago as the material of subject for literature. Then, can we say the necessary thing for us, therefore, is the cultural character of Chicago in some finished form, and not the very process of its formation? The character in its finished form becomes comprehensible of course when the observer takes a historical point of view. We here regard the process of the historical development as a flow or tendency and not as a pile of respective historical facts. In concrete terms, the historical Chicago is taken into account only in point of how typical the rapidity of her development made the "pecuniarity" of her culture. In these contexts the word "typical" does not mean that Chicago has some unique character compared with other cities of the United States but that she represents one of the characters of American culture, which we may call "pecuniarity", in the most apparent and rawest form.

The character appears of course as a complex whole of the various factors, and takes various poses in accordance with the variation of the terms of understanding. This causes the difference of expressions owing to the difference in views of life between writers of so-called Chicago school, and between themselves and writers of New England. In other words this concept of pecuniarity is a highly abstract concept and does not exist as a single and undividable entity, just as the "Americanism" does not exist as such. These are nothing else than the complex and organic expressions of all American ways of living.

II.

Let us take here a brief bird's-eye view on Chicago in 1890s. The city, with streets which have uncertainty of the frontier and gaudiness of the barbarian strangely intermingled, is resided by nearly two million people, over one half of which is of foreign birth or descent. The South Side slums packed with poor immigrants, negroes

and other under-dogs, with two miles from the high-class dwelling districts along the Michigan Avenue, is the best demonstration of prosperity versus poverty. Farther going on one will see two miraculous things—the grand University of Chicago and the White City of 1893. The Union Stockyard packs 5,000,000 hogs a year, and more than 100 million bushels of grain reaped in by the McCormick Reaping Machine are shipped. Chicago is now the *Porkopolis* of the United States and the master of the vast “Midwestern Empire”—Sinclair Lewis called it.

On the other hand, incessant reforms are exercised in vain against the violence, vice or political corruption that rule the “Black City” Chicago—Paul Bourget writes on it in farewell to the White City—while gun and speakeasy and “lady” win a world-wide notoriety of the stinking Chicago. The Pullman strike, a flower of the labor movement; the Haymarket Riot, a symbol of oppression on the radical; the interminable conflicts between colorful immigrant workers and native-Protestant Americans in religion and thought, a most conspicuous model of the racial “melting pot”; Jane Addams’ genius blooming in her Hull House; *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, a powder-mill of muckrakers. The City, being highest organized economically, is, politically and culturally, nothing else than an extended village.

Indeed, Chicago of the time might be the place of crystallization of contradiction, agony and social apprehension of America. What made these phenomena typical in Chicago? What is the best factor to reveal the Phoenix vitality Chicago possessed? What emphasized the ugliness of Chicago beyond endurance? It is not sufficient to observe the static picture of Chicago at a fixed point of time in order to answer these questions. We begin to realize what these mean when we open a volume of history of Chicago, to investigate the rut of her wonderful progress.

When Chicago set out in a town of less than two hundred inhabitants with forty-three houses, New York was a city of two hundred thousand, with Irving Cooper and Bryant, and Boston, seventy thousand, with Emerson and the two century old Harvard. In the next

seventy Years Chicago grew into a number-two city of might and wealth, the next-two-New York giant.

The rapider and quicker the material development, the purer and stronger may be the expression of the value which constitutes the standard of valuation. The standard value in America, including New England, is the pecuniary value bemonstrated in the material success. This materiality is a character common to every modern civilization, the paramount form of which can be called the "machine" civilization, in the technological sense of the word. In America, because of the peculiarity in the origin of the nation and non-existence of the preventive conditions, this character we may suppose prevailed in a more manifest form than in Europe. American equality of status and opportunity, even in New England at least in early days, helped to tighten the confinement of the method to acquire distinction and repute within the sole range of the pecuniary success. When the young men from New England were discovering *Success* in the west, for the sake of which they had come away from their homes, what thing could be of more importance than to display the Success? We suppose so on the ground that the builders of Chicago were not substantially the pioneers who cleared and cultivated and seeded the wilderness, but men who got behind them the capitalistic "boosters" of the East where some financial capitals had been already established, and that Chicago thus set as a commercial city from the beginning. The methods and means they made use of in Chicago were alien in no respect to those in the contemporary Eastern cities. In short, the foundation of Chicago was begun and done chiefly on capitals acquired by some way far remote from that of so-called the puritanic industry and thrift. Anything was forgiven if it made money. We can recognize on every page of the history of Chicago the salient feature persuasive enough to convince us that the nature of the standard value which constitutes the vitality of her amazing development can not be measured but in terms of the pecuniary success. And when we think of it we are reminded Chicago had for her growth only

seventy years since 1833, no, substantially thirty years since the Civil War, and easily suppose she could have scarce composure to retrospect and reflect over the trail she had sped along, perhaps until the Great Fair of 1863.

In case of New England, we can imagine, having a much longer history of civilization than Chicago, even if almost nothing when compared with nations of Old World, the pecuniary character of culturer was diversified and elaborated into too many directions and kinds to appear in the raw and immediate form so often as it did in Chicago. It was a great event for the consciousness of Chicago, the country town of 1833 who had endured through several panics and depressions suffering less damages than New York and, within one generation and a half, established herself as a city next to New York in respect to the material civilization, could hold the Columbian Exposition that seemed to be the symbol of its power. As Charles Zueblin saw, it was "a miniature of an ideal city; a symbol of regeneration... unique in being an epitome of what we had done and a prophecy of what we could do if content with nothing but the best. "When New England of 1890s, facing the contradictions found in its own body, began to feel less confident, Chicago was perhaps a most subjectively confident city. We naturally guess that such Chicago offered some golden materials to literature now conscious of these contradiction of its America.

Writers of the Chicago school supposed that they could represent the character of America by depicting Chicago. No doubt whatever pictures they made up Chicago into, and however alien seemed their worlds to real Chicago, these are ultimately of America, and we are looking at American literature in terms of *an* America. When we contemplate the contemporary Chicago and New England at that time, we may find some apparently conflicting features traceable to the difference of the degree of each cultural development. Yet since we take American literature as a unit, the primary matter for us is to

discover among various American literatures assuming characters inconsistent with each other at sight, some universal and essential moment of *the American*. An American writer can make *the human* most easily out of the extremely American. The American need not to come down on the *average universal* dimension. Otherwise we cannot make it obvious that American literature, sometimes appearing under the guise of the deterministic pessimism, of the self-assault by the muckraking novel, or of the mockery at the petty bourgeois mind, has marched, after all, with something like an ever underlying "will to forward".

(from: the Introduction to my "Novels of Robert Herrick: study in the Cliff City of 20th century"; footnotes and comments omitted.)

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2	12	疑問	疑問
4	1	資本	資産
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65	14	契約と扱われる	契約として扱われる
66	10	。	、 ^{註 16}
67	9	主張	主張 ^{註 18}
68	10	主張する。	主張する。
68	22	請要	必要
68	29	組合	組合
69	2	Classificatin	Classification
69	21	一時解雇)	一時解雇 (
70	3	クラスの	クラスに
70	5	約協	協約
73	4	Union	Individual
76	17	被用集団	被用者集団
77	2	Harv	Columbia
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