The Place of the Arts

And now a few words in respect to this Western World. In short I could say it is not N. E. by any means, either in respect to intelligence, morality, or refinement of manners. And if we consider the leading characteristics of the people, perhaps it is not to be wondered at, this is, love of money. And whatever other inconveniences they might suffer if they can only... get the money, they are taken little notice of and as far as I can judge, everything else is made subservient to this. Hence their inattention to learning and religion.

Letter to Peter T. Washburn from his classmate, William Jones, Walnut Hills (Lane Seminary) (Feb. 23, 1837)

It would seem from the almost entire contempt, among our money-making gentry, for every thing like the cultivation of Literature and the Arts, that, except from those who have already stepped forward and contributed to their advancement, we can expect but little in the walks of science, either encouraging to its progress, or honorable to the community, for many years to come. When the purses of our citizens shall come all to be well stored, and the latter can no longer find the charm of novelty in counting over their dollars, we may perhaps count upon their condescending now and then to lay hold of a book for amusement.

_Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette_ (1816)

Although many people in Cincinnati would have disagreed with James Hall's contention that education "is the most efficient of all the means which tend to national greatness, and individual prosperity," few citizens would have objected to his insistence that education be "of the useful kind." When knowledge "was not made subservient to the business of life," when it neither awakened
“the latent energies of the mechanic arts” nor cherished human industry, when, in short, “it added nothing to the comforts of the citizen, nothing to the resources of the state,” it served no valuable purpose. Any nation, Hall believed, would ultimately collapse if its citizens prostituted the gifts of genius to the profane cultivation of “sordid pleasure.” The decadent nations of Europe served as forceful illustrations of his views. Italy had its learned men, but “painters, fiddlers, robbers, and lazarone” composed the masses; in France, too, society was divided into the learned rich and ignorant poor. In America, he hoped, education would circulate throughout the country, “dispelling from the face of the whole land the mists of prejudice and the dark night of ignorance, and every where quickening into life the latent germs of intellect.”1 If it were to be truly effective, it had to penetrate the cottages of the laboring poor as well as the dwellings of the rich.

Hall reflected the desire, shared by many benevolent men, that polite accomplishments might sometime be universal. But this was a hope rather than a profound conviction. Most of his contemporaries assumed that the largest portion of the working population would never possess the means or leisure to acquire superfluous and ornamental attainments. Opportunities for scholarly and intellectual study, the “abstract culture” of the mind, might become increasingly available to the populace, but the dream of “universal opulence” was chimerical. The primary economic responsibilities could never be abandoned. All refinement rested upon a foundation of wealth. Only the rich man, as Hall characteristically phased it, could afford to “entwine the wreathes of fancy around the brow of wisdom.”2

This “art-leisure” theory of culture found expression in Cincinnati as well as in many other quarters during this period. The city’s spokesman

1. James Hall, An Address Delivered before the Erodelphian Society of the Miami University (Cincinnati, 1833), 8, 9.
2. Ibid., 14. Tocqueville himself had expressed this same belief in his destructive analysis of the arts in America. America’s exclusively commercial habits, he had written, diverted the popular mind from the pursuits of the arts and sciences, and only her closeness to Europe allowed her citizens to occupy themselves with mundane affairs without reverting to barbarism. See his Democracy in America, ed. Francis Bowen (Cambridge, 1864), II, 42. To Tocqueville, the possibility of an equal distribution of property could only mean the destruction of civilization, since no man would then have the means of leisure to devote himself to non-utilitarian pursuits. Like Hall, he equated “culture” with wealth and made the conventional dichotomy between the “material” and the “useful” and the “spiritual” and the “beautiful” (II, 45).
3. A contributor to the North American Review, the mouthpiece of the genteel, rejoiced in his country’s magnificent progress but regretted that material expansion had to be made at the expense of refinement. “In this cultivation of the reason,” he said, “the imagination loses its power.
admitted that the people were chiefly concerned with "useful enterprises" and attributed the dearth of intellectual projects to the youth of the country. In new countries [a Cincinnati editorial in 1820 declared], much difficulty is always experienced in bringing to maturity respectable literary institutions. The habits and resources of the people are generally unfavorable to such undertakings. In the Western country, until a few years past, we have been miserably deficient in the means of acquiring a liberal education. Our citizens appeared to be so actively engaged in pecuniary pursuits as to lose sight of those of a literary character; so ardently endeavoring to improve the fortunes of their children, as to neglect those mental attainments which would make them infinitely more respectable in society, and more serviceable to their country.4

When Michel Chevalier, an astute Frenchman, visited the city during the thirties, he found the same undeviating attention to business, the same disregard for the arts. Although he regretted the intellectual aridity of the community, he was prepared to excuse it. How otherwise, he asked, could the Americans have "achieved their great industrial conquests?" The American scene, somber and materialistic, might offend cultivated Europeans, but posterity would thank the men who had prepared "with such energy and sagacity an abode of plenty, a land of promise," who had fulfilled so magnificently the mission entrusted to them by a benevolent Providence.5

According to the art-leisure theory, refinement would come with the acquisition of wealth. After the heavy spadework had been accomplished by energetic and sagacious men, scholars and artists would create the high civilization. However, the tastes and habits engendered during the pioneer stages lingered on in the period of ease and affluence which followed. By the 1830s a large number of comparatively wealthy men lived in Cincinnati, some of them worth $100,000 and more, but not one was without some kind

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Eloquence, poetry, painting, and sculpture, do not belong to such an age; they are already declining, and they must give way before the progress of popular education, science, and the useful arts" (XXVI [1828], 218). Political economists like Francis Lieber borrowed this theory to bolster their arguments for the amassing of property. "We want accumulated property," declared Lieber; "without it, no ease; without ease; no leisure, no persevering pursuit of knowledge, no high degree of national civilization" (Manual of Political Ethics [Philadelphia, 1811], I, 111). Finally, defenders of the "peculiar institution" expatiated on the "mud-sill theory" and argued that only upon a foundation of slave labor could America create a genuine culture.

4. Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette, Jan. 18, 1820.
5. Michel Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States (Boston, 1839), 208.
of occupation and very few considered intellectual matters of any real importance.

Businessmen were content to live in the Tyre of the West and made no strenuous efforts to change their city into an Athens. Reflecting on Cincinnati's progress and the course it had chosen to follow, E. D. Mansfield concluded in 1855 that the people had dedicated themselves to Mammon. Commerce had made Porkopolis great and wealthy, but save for a few exceptions, Cincinnati leaders gave little thought to turning their city into a cultural center. The arts, Mansfield said, "should have grown up as part of the very body of society," not "as the appendages of commerce." But the pursuits of commerce and business, ostensibly valuable as a means to a higher end, had become the end itself.

Discerning citizens, undeceived by the puffings and indiscriminate plaudits of the boosters, pointed out the shallowness of their city's artistic life, the hypocrisy of its intellectual pretensions; others, as they watched societies of all kinds rise and fall, and academies, lyceums, and institutes languish into desuetude, offered excuses and extenuations. They made futile appeals for support and attacked the forces which, they believed, were seducing the people from the paths of knowledge, but their complaints and exhortations had little effect on a complacent utilitarian society.

Had they compared the popular attitude towards the arts in other sections and cities of the country with the popular attitude in Cincinnati, they would have had less reason to grieve. They would have discovered that public zeal rarely sustained non-commercial enterprises, and that educators, writers, poets, artists, and scientists met the same rebuffs in Boston and Philadelphia and New York as they did in Cincinnati. Eastern cities, old and wealthy, offered greater inducements to scholars and artists than did raw western outposts, but the businessmen of Wall Street and State Street were no more enlightened than Cincinnati merchants and professional men. Judged by contemporary standards, Cincinnati was one of the most refined and cultured communities in the country.

How did the Queen City derive the reputation of being an intellectual mecca? To what extent was this reputation deserved? The mere fact that the city had attracted a large number of enterprising and intelligent New Englanders made Cincinnati preeminent in the eyes of the Yankeephiles, but

7. See LHCJ, Jan. 16, 1827; Saturday Evening Chronicle of General Literature, Morals, and Arts, Dec. 20, 1828; Cincinnati Chronicle and Literary Gazette, Jan. 30, 1830; Nov. 17, 1832.
more valid reasons could be found for Cincinnati's cultural leadership in the Ohio Valley.

Cincinnati by 1838 had become the intellectual as well as the hog center of the Middle West. "Abroad," boasted the Chronicle, "Cincinnati is talked of more as the founder of a liberal system of public schools, and as a site and promoter of the College of Teachers, than for any other thing, save perhaps the swine killing." A reputation of this kind, said the Chronicle, enhanced the wealth and power of the city and reacted upon the character, property, and standing of every citizen. Businessmen, by this time, had begun to recognize the practical implications of cultural and non-profit-making institutions. Factories indicated industry, but churches, academies and museums suggested elegance and refinement. Moreover, as the citizens knew very well, these establishments brought needed capital into the city.

"Culture" thus became an exploitable commodity, and Cincinnati's cultural investments soon paid golden dividends. Her numerous private and public libraries and reading rooms, her various literary and scientific institutions made her, to outside observers, "the fountain of general intelligence." By "common consent," Cincinnati came to be "the established place for annual assemblages to the great literary, scientific, benevolent, and religious Conventions of the West." Here, "from all parts of the Valley and from the East," gathered "the collected intellectual and moral strength of our land."

Cincinnati's fortunate geographical position made it a logical convention city, but its extensive and enormously profitable publishing businesses and book trade also attracted lettered westerners and gave the city a literary atmosphere. Already in 1823 Cincinnati manufactured excellent type and printing presses, and by the close of our period the output of published material reached amazing proportions. Primers, pamphlets, sermons, mag-

11. LHCG, June 6, 1823.

Something like 85,000 volumes have been issued within the three months from the presses of Cincinnati; and, within the same time, 8000 primers and pamphlets, sermons &c. equal together to about 3000 duodecimo volumes more. Within the same time the daily and periodical presses have issued as follows: 3 daily papers, 700 copies daily; 2 semi-weekly, 850 semi-weekly; 6 weekly papers, 6,800 per week; 2 semi-monthly, 2,700, 1 monthly, 2,000 per month; 1 quarterly, 1,000 per quarter. (NWR XL [1831], 284)
magazines, and newspapers poured forth in ever-increasing numbers from busy presses. Here the Picket brothers published their own famous series of texts, and here the firm of Truman and Smith introduced and published the McGuffey readers. Cincinnati publishers and dealers became famous throughout the West.

Retail as well as wholesale dealers carried on a flourishing business. By 1838, when the first of the great "Trade Sales" for the Ohio and Mississippi valleys were held in the city, Cincinnati had become the western book mart. Booksellers and traders from surrounding towns in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana came to Cincinnati to attend the book auction. One successful dealer, Josiah T. Drake, is reported to have netted at least $80,000 annually and sometimes more. He was able to retire in less than a decade.

Thus, before the Queen City had reached the half-century mark, she no longer depended upon eastern firms for printed material. Western scholars and teachers, with "here and there a denizen of the republic of letters," journeyed periodically to Cincinnati for various conventions and meetings. Cincinnati had an answer, in the words of Timothy Flint, for those Atlantic critics who "curl the scornful lip, as though we were backwoods' ignoramuses."

Simply to understand why Cincinnati acquired a reputation as a center for artistic and intellectual activities, however, tells us little of the extent to which the people themselves were interested in such matters. Cincinnati was a conveniently located and wealthy community settled by an intelligent and enterprising people; the number and variety of schools, literary societies, musical associations, academies of art, periodicals, and book stores testify as much. But after listing the magazines and the names of the men who contributed to them, after enumerating the artists and their patrons, we still want to know

13. Cincinnati Gazette, June 12, 1880.
14. The auction system played an important part in effecting the sale and exchange of goods. Sales were usually held in cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, and since only men in the book trade were invited, they were called "Trade Sales." A committee of booksellers in the city in which the auction was to be held selected an auctioneer. An agent then published the lists of books to be sold and sent them to outside booksellers, who in turn were asked to submit their own sales lists. When the booksellers had assembled, books from all over the Union were sold to the highest bidders. The sales lasted from two to four days; settlements were made at the end, either for cash or for notes at from four to six months. The auctioneer received from 4 to 5 percent commission for his services. See Edward Hazen, The Panorama of Professions or Trades; or Every Man's Book (Philadelphia, 1837), 196–97.
15. CC, Sept. 8, 1838.
how important intellectual artistic enterprises really were to the people in Cincinnati.

Had the "fine arts" and "literature" flourished throughout this period, it would be enough, perhaps, to examine the creative productions and to take up the more sociological considerations at another time. But in fact the artistic and literary work in Cincinnati is more interesting for its limitations than its excellencies. Cincinnati "culture," taking that word in its conventional sense, was for the most part derivative and commonplace. In this chapter, I want to show why the majority of the population, like their counterparts elsewhere in the United States, found intellectual stimulation in the sub-literary and non-literary channels, and why the fine arts languished.

If the people did not read what their genteel mentors expected them to read, what were their literary preferences and why? Why was Cincinnati a poor theatrical town? Why did the Academy of Fine Arts meet with such little success in Porkopolis? It is more important to discuss these questions, it seems to me, than to analyze the interests and abilities of a talented but wholly unrepresentative minority. Intelligent and cultivated people lived in Cincinnati, like James Hall, Timothy Flint, the Beecher sisters, J. D. Frankenstein, William Shreve, Thomas Gallagher, to name only a few, but they did not impress themselves deeply on the mercantile city. The merchants constituted Cincinnati; literary men and intellectuals served as mere embellishments.

European travelers might find the mercantile spirit of Cincinnati unbearable for anyone with intellectual interests, yet no other American city, as the boosters liked to point out, supplied its citizens with a greater variety of up-to-date printed material. Readers in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans might receive foreign and eastern publications more quickly than the Cincinnati booksellers, but even before the availability of the "Trade Sales" system and rapid transportation facilities, bookstalls in Cincinnati were always plentifully stacked. Cincinnati editors sometimes printed interesting and informative articles on scientific and literary subjects. Reading rooms subscribed to the periodicals of every important city and some from

19. "Cincinnati, as far as I have known it, never had supported theatricals as it should have done. Here, at the date of which I am writing [1817], was a city of at least eight thousand inhabitants, that could not or would not afford a proper encouragement to an intellectual amusement which in Lexington, Louisville, and Nashville (each of these towns not having half the above population), met with liberal encouragement" (N. W. Ludlow, Dramatic Life as I Found It [St. Louis, 1880], 115).
abroad. Private circulating libraries were also common during the twenties and thirties. The Apprentice's Library managed to struggle on throughout this period without entirely collapsing (apparently the mechanics read avidly, but little money was provided), and the Young Men's Mercantile Library Association, after a feeble beginning, was finally able to sustain itself.

The newspaper, of course, served as the principal reading matter for all the classes in the city, although it is difficult to determine how large a proportion of the population it reached. There must have been people then, as now, who read little else. Circulation data are both scarce and unreliable. The few sets of available figures tell us little. One can only hazard a guess that the combined circulation of all the newspapers during any one year between 1819 and 1838 was not more than seven thousand or eight thousand and, prior to the middle thirties, probably much less. From the late twenties until the end of our period, anywhere from seven to ten dailies, semi-weeklies, and weeklies were being published in Cincinnati, but who can be certain of their importance and influence? One of the best-edited and renowned papers in Cincinnati had only three hundred subscribers after its third year. The annual subscription rate of eight dollars, which seems to have been the standard price of the dailies, must have placed them beyond the reach of many working-class people. Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt that copies of every paper were passed around among the non-subscribers; liquor store proprietors apparently kept a number of newspapers on hand for their regular customers.

Tocqueville had seen the American newspaper as the chief instrument for cooperative action, the painless and indispensable informer. "A newspaper," he wrote, "is an adviser who does not require to be sought, but who comes of his own accord, and talks to you briefly every day of the Common weal, without distracting you from your private affairs." Cincinnati newspapers purveyed the kind of information most calculated to interest and instruct a hard-

20. See LHCG, Aug. 1, 1821; SEC, Nov. 22, 1828; E. P. Langdon to James Findlay, Cincinnati, Nov. 21, 1825; Torrence Papers, Box IV.
21. LHCG, Jan. 10, 1823.
22. CG, Jan. 29, 1836.
24. During the 1830s, however, the Cincinnati Gazette's daily circulation, according to one authority, was around one thousand; semi-weekly, four hundred; and weekly, twenty-eight hundred. See O. E. Hooper, History of Ohio Journalism, 1793–1933 (Columbus, 1933), 73–74.
working, politically minded people. However, each paper, in addition to reporting matters of general interest, appealed more directly to the requirements and predilections of special groups. The mercantile interests, religious denominations, and political parties sponsored their own newspapers. Usually each editor rode his particular hobbyhorse on all occasions. He might campaign for schools or internal improvements or the fine arts or Andrew Jackson or western literature. Together, Cincinnati newspapers reflected pretty accurately the attitudes and interests of the local society.

The kind and quality of the material appearing in the Cincinnati newspapers between 1819 and 1838 depended largely, although not entirely, upon the tastes and policies of the editors. Some of them, as might be expected, featured the popular and sensational. Others filled their columns with informative and instructive items intended to improve the minds and morals of their subscribers and expose the machinations of the wicked. This latter group seemed particularly concerned with the responsibilities of the editor to his community and had definite notions about the functions and obligations of the press.

The editor, according to these men, not only ought to assume that his readers were rational creatures, but also should constantly work to make them more so. Therefore, a good paper supported benevolent projects, served the interests of neither man nor mob, and repudiated passion and prejudice.26 The ideal editor, pure, sincere, honest, and jealously wakeful, checked "the artful strides of selfish ambition—in branding with infamy and disgrace the violators of public trust—and in blasting forever the unhallowed schemes of political hypocrisy."27 James Gazlay, editor of the Western Tiller, differentiated the good and bad editor in the following outburst:

What is an Editor? is he the hack or thing of every political aspirant? a Swiss to all the enemies of freedom? these he ought not to be. . . . Is he the faithful recorder of the times? the sentinel who gives warning of approaching danger and keeps a just reckoning for the political ship? if he be these, may success attend his labours.28

It was very difficult, however, to carry on "a temperate search after truth, for the purpose of enlightening mankind,"29 and still play the part of the righteous watchdog. Many editors could agree in theory that sectarian zeal,

27. LHCG, Jan. 3, 1823.
29. LHCG, Jan. 31, 1823.
whether religious or political, was harmful and that newspapers should work to increase Cincinnati’s prosperity rather than quarrel among themselves over political matters. But more often than not, party loyalties determined editorial policy and influenced the character of the news items. High-minded editors momentarily forgot their solemn duties and filled their columns with gross discussions of Andrew Jackson’s marital relations or with abusive comments about John Quincy Adams’s billiard table. Campaign presses, exclusively devoted to politics, usually flourished momentarily before each important election and appealed to popular passion rather than to the intellect.30

Few papers, moreover, could maintain the high moral tone demanded by Benjamin F. Powers, editor of the Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette. The editor, after all, had to print some articles with which he did not agree. He had to satisfy many tastes and cater to the public. In printing representative opinions, some false and injurious information was likely to slip in despite editorial vigilance, and private reputations would consequently suffer. In the opinion of some, the newspaper served as a kind of gutter which carried away “all the wanton vagaries of the imagination, all the inventions of malice, all the scandal, and all the corruptions of heart in a village, town or city.”31

Spicy and slightly risqué material occasionally surfaced in the few Cincinnati papers whose editors found gutter journalism congenial and profitable. Reports of seduction cases were not uncommon, and insinuations were sometimes made about the private morals of individuals. Most adept at soiling “moral character” was the mysterious, outrageous True Blue and Castigator, a kind of depraved “Spirit of the Times,” which enjoyed a brief but sensational run in the summer of 1832. This blasphemous paper with its billingsgate, its allusions to adultery, homosexuality, and prostitution, became the channel of abuse it promised not to be. There is no way of telling how popular this paper was, but it must have been directed to a particularly low and vulgar audience.32

Even the larger and better-established papers, which had always shunned indecorous subject matter and encouraged the sciences and the arts, began

30. These exclusively partisan papers, as Mansfield pointed out, never lasted. Papers of this kind, he believed, made the American press appear to be licentious. CC, Oct. 27, 1838.
31. LHCG, Jan. 31, 1823.
32. The scurrilous and indecent character of the True Blue and Castigator helps to explain why its office was attacked and its press destroyed by a mob in the late summer of 1832. See Jewett to Willard, Cincinnati, Aug. 16, 1832. Jewett Letters (Philadelphia, Rosenbach Company).
by the thirties, at any rate, to feature sensational local incidents. An indication of the prevailing taste of the newspaper reader can be seen in the announcement of the *Cincinnati Chronicle and Literary Gazette* that it would begin to pay more attention to "robberies, thefts, murders, awful catastrophes, and wonderful escapes." 33 Most of the papers continued to print educational and scientific articles and reports along with the commercial and political items; but in turning to those themes which made "the very mouths of most people water," which tickled the vanities rather than instructed the mind, the editor lost some of his original independence. He no longer could claim that he transcended and directed popular opinion. 34

In fact, the newspaper editor in Cincinnati never was so independent as he seemed to think. In an age of conflicting parties, sects, and classes, a completely objective and impartial newspaper could never have survived. So long as no critical issues arose which forced him to take sides, the editor might look upon himself as the serene and detached observer, but this was an illusion. Jackson's "wool hat" boys found what they wanted in the radical Democratic papers; bankers, merchants, businessmen—Clay adherents for the most part—supported the larger and more conservative papers, while a feeble labor press made periodic efforts to gain permanent status. The most disinterested and courageous conservative editors had to soft-pedal their real opinions on certain occasions. Even Charles Hammond, perhaps the greatest of them all, was "willing to risk his reputation for candor and discernment," one of his critics charged, "in order to please those who are more weighty in purse than intellect." 35 Hammond himself recognized the power and influence of what he called "the business press" or the "political and commercial popes," 36 and Mansfield frankly announced his paper's policy of supporting "corporate rights." 37 Few papers existed very long without the support of the mercantile part of the community.

Nevertheless, we may assume that the average editor in Cincinnati was more independent than his counterpart today and his policies less suscepti-

34. The introduction of "yellow journalism" into the Cincinnati newspapers at this time coincided with the rise of the penny press throughout the East. Respectable Cincinnati dailies, however, never went so far as the *New York Sun*, *Transcript*, or *Herald*. See F. L. Mott, *American Journalism* (New York, 1941), 228–45. Mott nowhere mentions the kind of scandal sheet like the *True Blue and Castigator*.
35. *Cincinnati Advertiser and Ohio Phoenix*, June 1, 1836.
ble to the influence of pressure groups. Although he had difficulty in approximating the ideals of his profession, he represented in many cases the most enlightened and progressive opinion in the community. No doubt popular tastes influenced the content of his paper, but he tried nonetheless to raise the moral and intellectual level of the city.

It is not difficult to find flaws in the Cincinnati press of the twenties and thirties. Smug, blatant, and superficial, it sometimes pandered to the worst qualities of the citizens and not infrequently misrepresented or omitted the truth. But even at their worst, these newspapers possessed a certain substance, a kind of intelligence not usually found in the mechanical news-gathering agencies of today. The mind and personality of the editor were reflected in his columns. He jealously guarded the citizens from gibes of outsiders and exhorted them to make greater efforts. Serving as a kind of secular priest, he explained and interpreted all pertinent issues. He sometimes made demands upon the intellectual capacities of his readers which few modern editors would attempt, and supplemented commercial and political information with wit, morality, and useful knowledge. Although Cincinnati newspapers did not necessarily reflect public intelligence, the better ones provided reading matter of a relatively high order and, all in all, tended to raise the level of popular culture.38

Newspapers admirably suited the requirements of a rushed and harried population eager for facts rather than refinement, and practical considerations seem also to have determined the amount and kind of books they read. Unfortunately, there is no way of determining the numbers and titles of books sold and read in Cincinnati during the twenties and thirties. But even if we do not have exact information, a few conclusions may be deduced from the booksellers' lists published in the press and library catalogues without going to the unnecessary bother of enumerating titles.

As might be expected in a city of Cincinnati's size, booksellers and stationers offered a miscellaneous assortment of scientific, historical, religious, educational, and imaginative literature. The number of treatises, compendiums, encyclopedias, and "Libraries of Knowledge" would seem to indicate that many people were looking for shortcuts to knowledge via the handbook and the survey, although solid standard works were available for anyone who had the leisure or inclination to read.39 Popular interest in politics was evi-

39. It is possible that as men acquired wealth and felt their ignorance, they sought handbooks and "outlines" much as contemporary Americans have done; the "digest" idea, at any
denced by the number of campaign biographies which poured forth continuously during the hot election years of the twenties and thirties. Treatises in political economy, surveys of the crusades, the campaigns of Napoleon, the writings of Washington, and the like provided an indiscriminate potpourri of fact for the orators. Lyceum audiences might later hear these same facts, imperfectly digested and dressed up in inflated western rhetoric.

According to Timothy Flint, however, only “one in a hundred of the reading community” read the “large and respectable octavos.” Far more representative of the popular literary tastes in Cincinnati, he said, were the “newspaper essays, ballads, tracts, small pamphlets, and the little works.” These cheaply printed publications circulated everywhere and exercised “a direct influence upon the thoughts and opinions of the great reading mass of society.” Little is known about these popular ephemeral tracts, these “dark and dingy pamphlets,” as Flint called them. Many of the almanacs, penny magazines, songbooks, religious tracts, camp-meeting hymnbooks, game books, accounts of public trials, parodies, and the like must have been simply read to pieces. At any rate, few exist today.

Another popular literary form, although perhaps restricted to a narrower stratum of society, was the novel. Americans, Tocqueville reported, preferred books which could be quickly and easily read and which were startling and violent enough to cut through the monotony of their prosaic lives. The newspaper and the pamphlet partially fulfilled these requirements, and the novel completed them. Directors of the city’s intellectual and moral welfare almost uniformly condemned the kind of writing which corrupted human nature and kindled youthful lust. Fiction, declared the classicist Alexander Kinmont in a typical statement, “pampers and bloats the intellect with unwholesome food, and enfeebles and demoralizes all future exertions of the mind.” Even so, English novels, “filled with the most false and yet fascinating accounts of ‘high life,’ and the most damnable but sentimental deeds of an Aristocracy,” crowded the shelves of the bookshops in the face of fierce opposition and stole into the closets of girls and boys.

rate, is an old one. A series like the Cabinet Cyclopaedia, popular in Cincinnati, was especially designed for artisans and mechanics although the topics it embraced were varied and general. Its main purpose, as reported in the CCLG, was to make available for popular consumption discussions of science and natural history, works on the fine arts, geography, politics, and morals, and biography, history, criticism, and general literature (April 21, 1832).

40. Western Monthly Magazine 1 (July 1827): 186.
42. Novels, elaborated Elijah Black, took up time, loosened and weakened the mind, created a distaste for study, and destroyed morals. Even Milton, he believed, erred in mingling
A few literary men like Flint and Hall tried to take a more sensible position on the question of novel reading. "Novels," the latter now maintained, "are now used to convey historical information, political wisdom and moral instruction." And Flint, a novelist himself and doubly sensitive, suggested that since people would continue to read novels, however severe the campaign against them, the moralist should reform the novel instead of trying to abolish it. Both Scott and Cooper, he noted, failed to "move the tears of virtue," but certainly Miss Edgeworth, Richardson, Mackenzie, and Flint himself mingled morality with entertainment.

Newspapers, pamphlets, and fiction together made up the bulk of popular reading in Cincinnati, and this fact probably explains why the Cincinnati periodicals devoted mainly to "literary" themes met with so little success in the Queen City.

The failure of western periodicals to survive was attributed to a number of causes, some of them farfetched and some of them not. William D. Gallagher, whose years of experience in editing unsuccessful literary journals made him a reliable judge, gave four reasons for the quick mortality of western periodicals. First, western newspapers, giving all their space to eastern and European affairs, failed to emphasize the scientific, educational, religious, and miscellaneous progress originating in the West. Second, western publishers failed to rival the mechanical excellencies, business zeal, and punctuality of the eastern publishers. Third, western writers were apathetic contributors to their own press. Fourth, western subscribers failed to pay their subscriptions. Delinquent subscribers probably were immediately responsible for the collapse of western periodicals, as the many valedictories


43. CCLG, Mar. 1, 1834. See J. T. Flanagan, James Hall, Literary Pioneer of the Ohio Valley (Minneapolis, 1941), 103–11.

44. WMR II (1828): 606; II (Dec 1828): 419–20. Apparently Flint himself lived up to his own criteria, if we are to accept the following tribute:

Mr. Flint has written much; but not one of his many works need ever cause regret, or raise a blush. A spirit of benevolence pervades all, and no where has he attempted to evince his superior knowledge of human nature, by heartless sneers at the weaknesses of mankind. The virtuous and charitable will always peruse his writings with pleasure, and posterity will hail him as a Patriarch of Western Literature. (CCLG, July 19, 1834)

and closing statements by disconsolate editors show.\footnote{See \textit{Cincinnati Mirror, and Chronicle; Devoted to Literature and Science} IV (1835): 416; \textit{WMM} V (1836): 1.} Flint mentioned as additional reasons party strife, a mania for political discussions, and double postage levied against monthly and quarterly journals.\footnote{\textit{WMR} II (1828): 367–68. See F. L. Mott, \textit{A History of American Magazines, 1741–1850} (New York, 1930), 207.}

But these explanations only illustrated one underlying and all-important fact: the people of Cincinnati had more important things to do than to support magazines and papers devoted to literature and the arts. "A literary paper," declared young Isaac Appleton Jewett, fresh from Harvard, "would not go down—or rather would \textit{go down}—It is taste which supports such, and these Buckeyes know not the significance of that word except as associated with edibles and all that."\footnote{Jewett to Willard, Columbus, May 28, 1833, Jewett Letters.} The history of the literary press in Cincinnati bears him out, although its failure to flourish must not simply be ascribed to imperfect taste. From Dr. Joseph Buchanan's \textit{Literary Cadet} (1819) to the demise of the \textit{Mirror and Chronicle} (1836), no literary paper was self-sustaining for more than a very few years.\footnote{See W. H. Venable, \textit{Beginnings of Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley} (Cincinnati, 1891), 124–26.}

The literary monthlies, quarterlies, and reviews, which sprung up from time to time in Cincinnati, had little success in winning the support of an unenthusiastic public already perfectly contented with foreign and eastern literary importations. Cincinnati editors spoke against this slavish reliance on an alien literature. They printed stories and articles dealing with western resources, steamboats, Indians, canals, and immigration, and yet at the same time, they aped the periodicals of the seaboard and provided the same literary fare. They filled pages and pages of their magazines with meretricious and derivative poetry and fiction imitating the inanities of Felicia Hemans, Hannah More, and Miss Edgeworth and the sensationalism of Byron, Scott, and Bulwer. Cincinnati readers apparently preferred the "real thing" to the magazine equivalent and divided their time between newspapers and novels. With no general accepted literary canons to rely upon, always in danger of offending the religious-minded, and yet aware of the "vulgar" preferences of their public, the literary editor had no way to turn. Instructive essays, sermons, western sketches, and critical articles were weak substitutes for readers enchanted by the fascinating careers of Eugene Aram and Paul Clifford.\footnote{Harriet Martineau's account of the reputation of English writers in America is illustrated by popular literary taste in Cincinnati. She found Hannah More better known than}
What did these frustrated editors envisage when they spoke of the autochthonous literature which would express the character and spirit of the West? Some of them, apparently, conceived of nothing more than an exploitation of the western landscape. If the West had no ruined temples and baronial castles, if it had “nothing to connect the imagination and the heart with the past,” its mountains, lakes, prairies, rivers, and Indian mounds furnished material for artistic reflections. And what about Cincinnati? Was that not a fit subject for poetic material? There it stood, “the young, aspiring Queen of the West, with its commerce, its arts, its canals, its tens of thousands of inhabitants!” Was there nothing “in this magic transformation of a wilderness into a mighty city . . . worthy the pencil of the descriptive muse?” The impact of the wilderness upon the mind of the immigrant, the manners, scenery, and language of the West had yet to be treated. “Whether there be any in our land capable of doing the subject justice,” remarked a correspondent in the thirties, “we will not undertake to say, but we trust that the mind may yet appear that will be able to embody, before they are forgotten, those traits which are truly and peculiarly Western.”

One man during this period did succeed in setting down, if not embodying, the peculiar traits which would distinguish the future literature of the

“Shakespeare, Scott idolized, but Bulwer by far the most popular (Society in America, III, 219); Bulwer’s books are in every house; his occasional democratic aspirations are in every one’s mouth; and the morality of his books is a constant theme of discussion” (ibid.). For typical Cincinnati attitudes toward Bulwer, see CCLG, Oct. 2, 1830; Sept. 6, 1834. In general, the religious element regarded Bulwer as highly pernicious, while the beau monde read him avidly. “If they [Bulwer’s books] were generally read by the lower classes,” declared one reviewer, “there would be cause for more serious apprehension, than need be entertained while their circulation is confined to a limited number of the intelligent and reputable portion of the community” (ibid., Apr. 7, 1832).

Far more acceptable to all groups were the poems of Mrs. Hemans, for to critics like Gallagher (who felt that she “most nearly resembled Wordsworth”) she had both genius and morality: “Though seldom, perhaps never, strikingly original, she is always chaste, always interesting—always ennobling—always good” (Cincinnati Mirror and Chronicle IV [1835], 312–13). See also Timothy Flint’s tribute, WMR I (1827): 333.

Scott, of course, enjoyed an enormous vogue, particularly during the twenties in Cincinnati, and Byron was read throughout the entire period. In 1815, Byron was claimed as the West’s favorite writer (LHCC, Sept. 25), although his “conjugal infidelity” dimmed his luster. In the thirties, Cincinnatians were still debating the character of Lord Byron. CCLG, Mar. 9, 1833; Rusk, II, 1–38.

51. WMM (1827): 2.

52. CCLG, Oct. 17, 1829. Ibid., Sept. 20, 1834. This sense of uniqueness was frequently expressed. “If we are not a new people,” declared a correspondent in 1817, “we at least exist in a new state of social aggregation, and inhabit a new country, insulated from all the others, by mountains, lakes, and deserts” (LHCC, Mar. 31, 1817).
West from eastern and foreign literatures. This was the versatile and gifted Dr. Daniel Drake, whose *Discourse on the History, Character, and Prospects of the West* brilliantly outlined the qualities of what he hoped would be a new and authentic western literature. The predictions so confidently made in this western declaration of literary independence remained largely unfulfilled, but his views on the defects, achievements, and promise of western writing provide a convenient contemporary aesthetic with which to measure and evaluate the literature of his day.

Drake began, appropriately enough, by urging his youthful audience to cut themselves away from the bondage of the past and to establish an original "intercourse with nature." The intelligent observer, he said in a passage which Emerson was to echo a few years later,

supplies his mind with fresh materials of thought, instead of ruminating on the old; and nourishes it with food collected by himself, in place of what has passed through a hundred intellects, and been subjected to as many distinct concoctions.

New communities offer few intellectual advantages to the scholar, but nature opens her bounties to him and develops his poetic sensibilities. Nature stimulates his imagination "to embody and put forth, in beauty and natural order, those images which, in common minds, play in a lively confusion amid themselves." She teaches him to distinguish the sublimities in characters and actions, in a story of generosity, a clump of sweet william, or the passing clouds. Nature is revealed in the actions of children. The lone individual feels her influence in the depths of the forest.

Drake invited his listeners to look around them and to recognize the opportunities afforded by the natural resources, scenery, vegetable and animal life, physiography, and history of the West to the artist, the scientist, and the scholar. He spoke of the rapid march of civilization and of the necessity of recording for posterity the brief and quickly changing interludes. Out of these natural and crude materials, he prophesied, would come a literature "not only opulent in facts and principles, but peculiar in several of its qualities."

The literature Drake described would be as fresh and energetic as west-

54. Ibid., 7, 8, 13.
55. Ibid., 29.
ern speech, a literature enriched by language springing from the thoughts
and occupations of the people. He knew how the "great reservoir of spoken
language" strengthened the written word, and he had no great respect for
elegant and correct diction. If western speech were "inferior in refinement"
to the mother tongue, it was "superior in force, variety, and freshness." He
had no qualms about a literature "tinctured with the thoughts and terms of
business." That was only to be expected in the West. "The mechanic arts,"
he said, "... modify the public mind; supply new topics for the pen; gener-
ate strange words and phrases, as if by machinery; suggest novel modes of
illustration, and manufacture figures of speech by steam power."56

This whitmanesque attitude toward written and spoken language found
little support among the genteel professional literary critics in Cincinnati.
For them, utility and art were mutually exclusive. They wanted to create a
culture as refined and decorous as that of the East, and their zealous at-
ttempts to promote a renaissance could not disguise their instinctive conser-
vatism and provincialism. Critics like W. D. Gallagher disdained the class of
readers who found enjoyment in the antics of riverboatmen and gamblers
and in the slang of the steamboat deck. Such characters, he believed, were as
out of place in a genteel novel as in a fashionable drawing room. "This is
what, in effect, the novelist does, who delineates such beings as they appear
there," Gallagher wrote, "instead of taking them in better phrases which
they wear when in the presence of refinement, which inspires respectful lan-
guage."57 Gallagher and others like him helped to drive underground the
authentic and popular tendency in western literature and to superimpose a
spurious cultural veneer upon an apathetic public.

Articles, reviews, and stories occasionally appeared in Cincinnati literary
periodicals that reflected some of the unique qualities set down by Drake,58
but probably newspaper writing approximated more closely his conception of

56. Ibid. Compare with Timothy Flint: "The vocabulary of figures drawn from boats and
steamboats, the phrases, metaphors, allusions, that grow out of the peculiar modes of life of this
people, are at once amusing, singular, and copious" (Condensed Geography and History of the West-
ern States or the Mississippi Valley... [Cincinnati, 1828], 30, 215.


58. "The best productions of American literature," wrote Harriet Martineau, "are, in my
opinion, the tales and sketches in which the habits and manners of the people of the country are
delineated, with exactness, with impartiality of temper, and without much regard to the pictur-
esque" (Society in America [New York, 1837], II, 212). Such were the genre stories about Mike
Fink and Davy Crockett and some of the stories by James Hall. Occasionally one comes across
appreciative reviews of this kind of western literature (WMM V [1836]: 625–28; CCLG, Aug.
23, 1834) and intelligent essays on western language and manners, but these are exceptional.
the genuine western tone. Political editorials, discussions of social and economic problems, and a good deal of the pamphlet writing (one might call it the “utilitarian” prose) frankly aimed at presenting facts rather than literary embellishments. Charles Hammond, the truculent editor of the *Gazette,* best illustrates this neglected view in western writing. This “cannon of large calibre,” writing in a terse unadorned style, demolished the arguments of his opponents with logic, irony, and fact. Flint speaks appreciatively of Hammond’s “clear head, keen, caustic powers, ready command of a richly stored memory, various reading, and original talent, either for the purpose of reasoning invective, or ridicule.” What chiefly distinguishes his writing from the “literary” productions is its unselfconsciousness, its natural diction, its matter-of-fact tone. Flint noted his lack of pathos and sentiment, his want of polish, but the very inability of Hammond and some of his fellow editors to “soar” partially accounts for their literary toughness and the absence of the conventional rhetorical outbursts in their writing.

The love of the West for rhetoric, for fustian and flowery euphemism, is seen in most of the writings of the day. Naturally expansive Cincinnatians almost instinctively resorted to hyperbole, although teachers and literary men sometimes criticized the high-flown style. Pedagogue McGuffey admonished the College of Teachers that “lofty style is always a bad style: but in children it becomes ridiculous.” Sophomoric bombast, he charged, “disfigures the often correct sentiments in our school books. Such puerile language cheats the understanding and depraves the taste.” One has only to read the youthful effusions printed in the Cincinnati press to appreciate McGuffey’s feelings. Too often they sacrificed clarity for “strength and boldness” or were “too much encumbered with foreign matter.”

And yet, as Drake pointed out in his *Discourse,* the declamatory tone suited the expression of a free and independent people. He therefore defended rhetoric on philosophical and moral rather than aesthetic grounds. Tocqueville believed that American writers and poets compensated for the monotony of their country’s paltry actualities by surcharging their writings “with immense and incoherent imagery, with exaggerated descriptions and strange creations.” To Drake, impressed with the patriotic and utilitarian

60. *WMR* II (1828): 20.
functions of literature, declamation acted as an important "directive" force, an indispensable device during periods of dynamic expansion, when utopian visions hardly kept ahead of their concrete realizations. Republican poets had to arouse the people if society were to continue its progress:

Whenever the literature of a new country loses its metaphorical and declamatory character, the institutions which depend on public sentiment will languish and decline; as the struggling boat is carried back, by the impetuous waves of the Mississippi, as soon as the propelling power relaxes. In this region, low pressure engines are found not to answer—high steam succeeds much better; and, although an orator may now and then explode and go off in vapor, the majority make more productive voyages, than could be performed under the influence of a temperate heat.

If Ohioans read the future into their gaudy descriptions of the present, purposeful thinking drove them on, quickening and exciting their imaginations. Time and learning, Drake felt, would abate the "verbosity and intumescence" of western literature, but natural scenery and American institutions would continue for a long time "to maintain its character of floridness."

The ideal vehicle for western expression, the most popular and effective medium for exhortation, was the oration, and Drake shrewdly predicted that the oration at first would "constitute a large portion" of western literature. Certainly no other literary form touched so many various groups and classes—commercial, mechanical, and agricultural—and perhaps no other form reached such technical perfection. Too much attention has been paid to the extravagant Fourth of July declamations and not nearly enough to the hundreds of occasional addresses delivered by men of all ranks and professions. In the vast and uncharted sea of pamphlet literature published during the pre–Civil War decades can be found speeches soundly reasoned and eloquently expressed. The oration, more than any other literary form, answered Drake's chief requirement for the new literature, the mingling of the beautiful with the useful. It utilized more effectively than fiction the scenery, biography, and history of the Mississippi Valley. Usually pervaded with a religious spirit; it was the most suitable vehicle for the expression of ultra-republican and naturalistic sentiments.

Among the distinctive qualities of the new literature, Drake believed, would be its patriotism growing out of the scholar's love and understanding

63. Discourse, 32–33.
of American scenery and political institutions. In his opinion, the trans-
Allegheny regions, uncorrupted by the "foreign influences which dilute and
vitiate this virtue in the extremities," contained the uncontaminated heart of
America. The "new world of man in the depths of the new world of history"
would be depicted by "the descendants of emigrants from every country, its
elements . . . as various as the trees which now attune our hills; but its beau-
ties as resplendent as the hues of their autumn foliage."64

The dream of Daniel Drake of a virile and authentic culture growing out
of his turbulent Ohio country neglected to consider certain powerful ten-
dencies which, from the very beginning, had militated against such a flower-
ing. To Drake, the chief obstacle blocking the way was the vulgar utilitarian
completely absorbed in the shop and the marketplace:

he, whose feelings never rise above mean heat; whose idols lie on his work
bench; and whose delight is in the music of the saw; who passes,
heedlessly, by tender leaves of the young ash, and looks with exstasy on
those of his ledgers; who counts his gold by day, and dreams upon it by
night; plants in the morning; and hopes to reap at noon; talks only of prof-
itiable results; and would make the earth a great workshop—and convert
the human family into a vast body of operatives—institged by avarice and
abandoned to deeds of rapacity.65

Far from condemning his countrymen's interest in the practical, he merely
sought to show that intellectual and artistic pursuits might also be valuable
and useful. But Cincinnati rarely encouraged her intellectuals; instead, as a
local wit put it, she "seemed much disposed to look at her pork, and let poe-
try get to heaven in the way it might think best."66 For the majority, literature
qua literature was always of secondary importance.

Artificial aesthetic theories strengthened rather than dissipated this popu-
lar attitude and ran counter to the sensible and wholesome suggestions of
Dr. Drake. Most western poets, although recruited from workshop, count-
inghouse, and farm, inscribed their "momentary outgushings of irrepresible
feelings"67 in the conventional style and repudiated Drake's proposed fel-
lowship between literature and the mechanical arts. Embarrassed by "front-
tier" crudities, these writers too often sought refuge in a mawkish ideality.

64. Ibid., 41, 45.
65. Ibid., 15–16.
67. W. D. Gallagher, Selections from the Poetical Literature of the West (Cincinnati, 1841), 8.
They found no elements "of solemn and touching grandeur," no "Poetry," so they manufactured a kind of secondhand product, two parts Hemans to one part Byron, with some eighteenth-century flavoring. Once in the "howling wilderness of the west," the young Harvard exotic, Isaac Appleton Jewett, saw nothing but "mechanical and dirty facts." He whimsically confided to a Massachusetts friend:

If there be a matter of fact people on the earth, look at Ohio and you shall see them—No visions here—no poetry here—all tabernacles of the flesh—all stern realities—to a man, and a young man too, who had been wandering for years in the alesyam [sic] of literature, and living in the electricity of Harvard wit and mirth . . . to such a man be assured that the matter of fact life, the knock down and drag out character, and the soulless utilitarianism of this Western world are coolers of too frigid a nature for his temperament.68

In a community where the bulk of the people worshipped at the "tabernacle of the flesh," and the genteel literary minority tried to keep the arts uncontaminated by "dirty facts," it is easy to see why an original and spontaneous literature did not arise. Cincinnati readers relied on the East for their books; Cincinnati critics borrowed their ideas from respectable eastern reviews. What seems to us today to be the most interesting and distinctive western writing was usually here regarded as non-literary or, at best, sub-literary. The people read what other American urban-dwellers read and for the same reasons; and the newspaper, the novel, and the pamphlet, as we have seen, admirably satisfied their requirements.

In seeking explanations for the lack of enthusiastic support for cultural activities in Cincinnati, it is not enough to say that the people were apathetic, that they were more interested in counting dollars than reading books. There were also positive objections to the arts and scholarship. To devote one's life to useless non-productive occupations was, in a sense, to be slightly disreputable, even sinister. Did not Chevalier say that "men of leisure are looked upon in the United States as so many stepping stones to aristocracy"?69 Had not the arts been "at times the inmates of corrupt and despotic courts, the flatterers of tyranny, the panders of vice"?70 Not every man in Cincinnati

68. Jewett to Willard (?), Columbus, Aug. 4, 1831, Jewett Letters.
70. NAR XXI (1825): 460–61.
would have agreed with Horatio Greenough that "art is a noble vehicle of national gratitude and glory" and that "a man may be an artist without being ergo a blackguard and a mischievous member of society." If an artist were to succeed in Cincinnati (or, as a matter of fact, in any American city), his character and his work had to measure up to the moral standards of the community.

Every Cincinnati minister and most of the citizens, for that matter, would have held that the aesthetic features of literature, music, and painting were secondary to moral considerations. When the arts placed entertainment above piety, when they amused rather than instructed, and stimulated the evil potentialities ever latent within us, the church protested. Religious critics railed against everything from novels to pictures on moral grounds, but this moral criterion is best illustrated in the arguments used by the friends and enemies of the theater.

In 1814 a group of amateurs in Cincinnati calling themselves the Thespian Corps shocked Joshua Wilson and his fellow Presbyterians with a series of dramatic performances and precipitated what was to become a long and acrimonious controversy. Each side, characteristically enough, based its case on moral and utilitarian considerations. "Theatricus," protagonist for the thespians, championed the theater as the promoter of virtue and marshalled the names of great and moral men to his standard. Dr. Wilson, under the pseudonym of "Philanthropes," and his supporters made short work of this argument. The theater never reformed evildoers, they argued, and besides, the church could reform them more effectively. Moreover, the theater was spiritually debilitating.

Those who have attended it merely for amusement, have often found it a wearisome and painful gratification. It is calculated to lead the minds of youth from serious reflection, or if they reflect at all, their thoughts are employed on things which never had an existence but in the vain imagination of some distempered fancy like their own. It moreover unfits mankind, generally, for the common concerns of life, and induces them to believe they are what they really are not.

Throughout the following years, "lay preachers" hammered against the "vagabond profession" and the indecency of the stage, the "grossness of

72. LHGG, Mar. 14, 1815; Jan. 11, 28, 1815; Feb. 18, 1815.
73. Ibid., Oct. 24, 1823.
74. CCLG, Jan. 3, 1829.
the characters, and the displays of half-clad females.” They pointed with horror to the low comedians pandering “to the tastes of the basest and most abandoned of our population” by their “indecent equivoques, vulgar puns and undisguised profanity and obscenity.”

Friends of the theater countered the attacks with every conceivable device to dissipate what Jewett called Cincinnati’s “anti-theatrical puritanism.” They urged the people to give the theater a fair chance to prove its worth; the prize prologue of Thomas Pierce, read at the opening of Cincinnati’s first theater in the fall of 1821, asked the citizens of the “young Emporium” to reject the theater if it ever deviated from virtue:

If Honor’s voice we ever strive to hush,
Or o’er the maiden’s cheek diffuse a blush;
If ever poor neglected worth we scorn,
Or crouch to those with empty honors born;—
Oh give us not your sanction! but dismiss
The Play and Players with the indignant hiss—

None other than the distinguished and respectable Caroline Lee Hentz, novelist, dramatist, and poet, provided the prize address for the opening of James Caldwell’s ill-fated Third Street Theater in 1832. Jewett’s vindication of the theater (which won him a one-hundred-dollar prize) was also read at this time, but these astute appeals to city pride, love of virtue, and patriotism seemed to make little impression on the solid opposition.

The theater never became a dominant cultural force in Cincinnati. Even Jewett, who had been one of its persuasive defenders, regarded its decline during the thirties with no real regret and admitted that “more refined, more practical sources of human improvement” would take its place. A religious-minded community absorbed in pork, politics, and real estate, and content with the cruder forms of entertainment, hardly provided a sympathetic milieu for the theater. Religious men and practical men could agree

76. Jewett to Willard, Cincinnati, Aug. 16, 1832, Jewett Letters.
77. LHCG, June 25, 1819.
79. CCLG, July 14, 1832; Jewett Letters, Cincinnati, Aug. 16, 1832.
80. Cincinnati never became a first-class theater town. Brilliant actors and actresses played to empty houses, according to Mrs. Trollope, and the memoirs of actors bear her out.
82. Wrote Tocqueville: “People who spend every day in the week making money, and the Sunday in going to church, have nothing to invite the Muse of Comedy” (Democracy in America, II, 101).
that diversions which stimulated the imagination and seduced mankind from the "common concerns of life" were immoral.

Nor did the more orthodox among the Cincinnati ministers regard sculpture and painting with a much kinder eye. Although they carried out no systematic campaign against artists (the fine arts were not so closely associated with vice and immorality as the theater), they pointed out the biblical objections to "Painting and Statuary" and, in general, probably deterred the cultivation of the arts. Joshua Wilson's views about painting and sculpture, while not necessarily representative of the city as a whole, express the opinion of the large and influential orthodoxy.

Wilson explained the aesthetic in a letter to Daniel Drake. The principles of sound morality, he wrote, determined his attitude toward the arts. The Bible forbade the making of graven images in likenesses which serve "the creature more than the Creator" and "inflame in a high degree this lust and this pride which are clear indications of a worldly spirit." When an image or likeness is made, Wilson argued, "our attention is called off from nature to art, from the exquisite work of God to the devices of men, from reality to fictions, from truth to a lie." Only the functional, he believed, should concern the artist:

All articles of furniture needed in domestic life; all necessary parts of philosophical apparatus; all vehicles of conveyance by land or sea can be fabricated without making the image or likeness of anything in heaven above or in the earth beneath. An artist may form a knife, a spoon, a table, bureau and be not only an innocent but an estimable workman. But should he give to the handle of the knife the form of a serpent or fix on his spoon the likeness of an eagle or cause his table to stand upon the feet of a bear or mount his bureau with the heads of lions, he becomes, in my opinion, a transgressor of this moral law.83

Fulton creates; pagans and papists embellish. Wilson associated the fine arts with Catholicism. Hence his feelings that historical paintings were at their worst lies, at their best, burlesques. Great men were hallowed in song and story, not in the "meager productions of the pencil, the brush or the chisel." What could be more ridiculous than trying "to represent a living man by a senseless block of marble?"

Aware of the considerable public prejudice against the arts, the organizers

of the Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts made it plain to the people that they had no intention of encouraging painters, sculptors, and architects to provide luxuries for the rich. Artists, said the Western Tiller, should inspire correct taste

such as shall enable us, by an accurate perception of the most suitable and proper construction of everything for the uses to which it is designed, to exercise a judicious economy, and not waste our cares, our labours and our wealth upon things disproportioned and unsuitable.

Citizens of the Queen City must "distinguish between beauty and finery" and avoid the tasteless expenditures made by other rich localities who add ornaments "from a vain idea that they will produce beauty and that everything is beautiful in proportion as it is ornamental." 84

Early Cincinnati artists, in keeping with this stern dictum, restricted their efforts to "likenesses" and carving. As the city became a center of steamboat manufacturing, wood-carvers found a market for their figureheads and other kinds of carved figures and ornaments. 85 Most of the artists who worked in Cincinnati began as artisans and mechanics of one kind or another. Hiram Powers, the most famous of the Queen City sculptors, had worked in Luman Watson's organ factory, 86 invented an effective turning lathe, 87 and fashioned wax statues before beginning his artistic career. In addition to being a skilled machinist, Powers helped to manage Dorfeuille's Museum. 88 His mechanical ingenuity, as well as his ability to model "busts remarkable for their perfect resemblance," 89 accounts for his reputation in Cincinnati.

The Greek Slave and other later works of Powers hardly reveal any influence of the practical apprenticeship which the "Praxiteles of the Western World" underwent in Cincinnati. His career represents the pendulum swing from the extreme of the real and the practical to the spiritual, from science and utility to the ideal. The conception of the arts as a practical branch of mechanics had won support because it was at once utilitarian and moral. But by the late twenties and thirties in America, critics began to insist that the

84. W7; June 6, 1828.
85. H. A. Ford and K. B. Ford, History of Cincinnati, Ohio, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches (Cleveland, 1881), 237.
86. MC IV (1825): 217.
87. WMM II (1835): 245.
89. CCLG, Nov. 29, 1834.
arts had a higher and more uplifting, if less practical, function. Painting, "like eloquence, poetry, and other fine arts," exhibited the "higher" and "better" principles of human nature and tended "to raise the mind above the sordid interests of a merely material life." Mere "mechanical labor" could no longer masquerade as fine arts. The man who painted brass kettles and dead game was perhaps "more refined than the tinker or cook who handles the originals," but far inferior to the artist who endowed "with form and color the beautiful objects of his own invention." Cincinnati artists were invited to contemplate western forests, rivers, and sunsets: natural scenery which touched the "highest affections of humanity" and "inspired the soul of man with visions of the ideal, the beautiful, the immortal."

This idealistic view of the nature and purpose of art never seemed to have influenced popular taste in Cincinnati. Exact representations of people and things were preferred to idealized landscapes; artistic considerations were always secondary. The untrained spectators who came to stare at the great panoramic paintings on three hundred square feet of canvas, spectacles like Dunlop's Christ Rejected, Hervieu's Landing of Lafayette, or Sinclair's Grand Peristrophic or Moving Panorama of the different events in the life of Napoleon, judged them by their ethical or newsreel values rather than by their artistic merits. Accuracy of delineation was the most important popular criterion. Auguste Hervieu, the companion of Mrs. Trollope, worked sixteen months on his painting of Lafayette's landing at Cincinnati, but his likenesses of Lafayette and of other distinguished Cincinnatians did not satisfy everybody. He protested in vain that the historical painter did not have "to present likenesses of every eye, nose, mouth, coat, waist-coat and breeches, that were in actual presence at the event he chose for his subject." That is precisely what the literal-minded public expected.

Few people actually bothered to see Hervieu's specially housed and heralded panorama, which commemorated a gala day in the history of Cincinnati. Artistic enterprise had never drawn the public support anticipated by the organizers of the Academy of Fine Arts. Even the Academy's first exhibit had to close down after six weeks, because the admission fees of the 150 people who attended did not even provide enough money to pay the doorman or furnish candles. A small number of art patrons, men like Peyton

90. Ibid., Dec. 7, 1833.
91. NAP XXXI (1830): 309; XXXIII (1831): 512.
92. CMWGLS IV (1836): 262.
93. CCLG, Jan. 9, 1830.
94. SEC, Dec. 20, 1828. The academy had finally been established after several years of agitation. Serving on its board of trustees were John P. Foote, Oliver Lovel, Daniel Gano, Mor-
Symmes, Nicholas Longworth, John and Samuel Foote, John Locke, Reuben Springer, Salmon Chase, Jacob Burnet, F. W. Thomas, and others, offered encouragement and support to beginning artists, but these men seem to have offended as many as they helped.

Cincinnati artists, never a conventional group, sometimes resented the patronizing attitude of their would-be sponsors. And, it must be admitted, the resentment was not entirely unjustified. Nicholas Longworth, the wealthiest man in Cincinnati and the most prominent Maecenas in the West, had a peculiar facility for annoying mettlesome young artists, if we are to credit the aspersions against "old Nick" in the letters of Thomas Buchanan Read.95 John P. Frankenstein, brother of Godfrey, the landscape painter, disliked Longworth enough to devote a great part of a long and savage satirical poem to his many imperfections.

Coming to Cincinnati in 1832,96 Frankenstein began to acquire some reputation as a painter while still in his teens. But he somehow got into the bad graces of the Queen City Midas and eventually left for the East with no regrets. He got his revenge in 1864 when, impoverished and bitter, he paid his respects to the American bourgeoisie and "Nick Littleworth" in his poem *American Art: Its Awful Altitude*. This work is principally an attack against the materialism, prudishness, and hypocrisy of the age, but he makes Longworth and Cincinnati symbolize everything that was wrong with American culture. In America, he complains, the artist must accept the snubs of the man

Who waxes rich with rise of real estate,
Who onions, beans, pork, whisky learns to rate,
Who in man's lowest wants can speculate,
Ay, getting rich, can found an upper class,
Though he sold whiskey at three cents the glass.

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Longworth becomes the epitome of vulgarity and materialism, an obscene old man who grudgingly doles out pennies to the poor he helped to ruin and who judges all pictures by the smoothness of the canvas.

His house will not all through, above, below,
Two Thousand dollars worth of Fine Arts show!
Pictures, he says, he buys at auction, low;
What business tact! on this he builds his fame.
And honor makes of what should be a shame!

He pays fond tribute to Cincinnati in the following lines:

Oh, prophet Mansfield, statistician, say
When Gotham to Porkopolis gives way—
Has it not come yet, Mansfield-fate-fixed-day?
If smoke proves fire, the Western Queen will stand
First may be ’mong the cities of the land;
If human gasbags are of greatest measure,
The Western city has enormous treasure.97

Cincinnati may have contained a number of “human gasbags,” but it is probable that the arts received about the same amount of encouragement here as in eastern cities. The rich, though as a class less numerous in Cincinnati than in the seaboard towns, shared the attitudes of their eastern counterparts. If art academies survived with less difficulty in New York and Boston, the same “profundity of ignorance” characterized the critical pronouncements of the Philadelphian, the Gothamite, and the Porkopolitan. The rich and intelligent in East and West were equally genteel, the lower classes just as apathetic to the arts. “The further one inquires,” an authority has written, “the more impressive becomes the evidence, not that the Middle West was out of touch with the East, but that art events in the Ohio and Mississippi Valley after 1825 closely paralleled what was happening in the settled East.”98

In the last analysis the ordinary citizen in Cincinnati, like the ordinary American, got more enjoyment from a “carnival of wild beasts” than from an exhibit of paintings, because the first seemed to him genuine and authentic, the last pointless and dull. A few were really interested in artistic and intel-

lectual matters; more supported the arts out of a vague sense of duty. The majority had no interest in "culture."

Had there been more Daniel Drakes, men passionately attached to the West who realized the necessity of relating literature and art to the needs of the community, something recognizable as "Western culture" might have emerged. Unfortunately, too many intellectuals wanted to superimpose a derivative "culture" on an uninterested population. Writers and artists even so had to overcome a great deal of strong opposition in a Protestant and utilitarian society. Those who capitulated to genteel and conventional standards and who repudiated functionalism and fact unconsciously alienated the very classes whose support they needed. It is also significant that so many of them during the twenties and thirties thought of their age as "unpoetic" per se and incapable of sustaining art.

Was there anything in the work of Cincinnati writers and artists that could be recognized as distinctively western? Perhaps so, if vehemence of expression or floridness of language or largeness of conception can be regarded as peculiar to the West. But for the most part, one is more impressed by the absence of distinctive qualities in the work of Cincinnati's writers and artists. By national standards, some of the poetry composed in Cincinnati was no worse and perhaps better than the local poetry published in other cities of the country. F. W. Thomas, W. D. Gallagher, and a few others received favorable notice in outside periodicals. Not all of them imitated what Timothy Flint called the "glaring, gaudy, gossamer, 'downy softness of the purple plum' poetry of Mrs. Hemans and her school of American disciples." But there is no particular reason to ascribe unique qualities to poets or to writers like Timothy Flint and James Hall merely because they wrote about western themes and lived in Cincinnati. The works of these men were ignored or unknown for the same reasons that the works of other artists were ignored in their own cities. Cincinnati's attitude toward "culture" reflected the national attitude in microcosm.