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Review of The Selected Letters of Frederick Manfred, 1932- 1954.

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The book contains sixteen pages of introductions, four pages of notes and acknowledgments, twelve unnumbered pages of photographs (following p. 314), 382 pages of letters, and a very helpful seventeen-page index. The 271 letters included have made a substantial book, yet the editors tell us that "more than 800 pieces of correspondence dating from 1932 to 1954 have been set aside" (18). The editors have arranged the letters chronologically, and at the beginning of each year have provided a summary of the major events, concerns, and themes reflected in the letters.

The editors have not given us an explicit statement of the criteria used in winnowing out these letters, but by implication it is clear that the selection seeks to present letters that will bridge the gap between the magnitude of Manfred's literary achievement and the smallness of his reputation. I don't know that it can do that. But it certainly can enhance respect for Manfred's achievement in all sorts of ways. One gets especially in the early letters a clear sense of how difficult it was for Frederick Feikema, the farm boy, to come to believe that he was a man of letters. One also gets throughout, despite his rejection of Calvinistic doctrine, a sense of the inevitability that he should become a man of letters, that there was something predestined both about his total output and about any single work. The letters show a consistency of vision that belies the impression that his interests and themes and style changed significantly about the time that he changed his pen name from Feike Feikema. The letters show that he has from the beginning been as he continues to be today, a constant fountain of ideas for novels still to come, ten or twelve other novels rising whenever one is splashing out. There is again and again a very clear picture of the lengthy gathering and extensive reworking by which the novels are produced; they often exist as titles or titles and constantly expanding notes for ten or twenty years before they become drafts. The letters show the constant struggles with publishers and reviewers to get his books accepted, to get them understood, struggles particularly

The Selected Letters of Frederick Manfred, 1932-1954. Edited by Arthur R. Huseboe and Nancy Owen Nelson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989. Illustrations, bibliography, index. 421 pp. \$35.00.

This is an impressive piece of work by the University of Nebraska Press, by Arthur R. Huseboe and Nancy Owen Nelson, and of course by Frederick Manfred, and it will prove to be useful to scholars and critics of midwestern literature and more broadly as well.

with eastern reviewers and the eastern literary establishment. Once one of his books is published, it comes in for repeated reference and explanation as he writes of it to his friends and correspondents. He tells us year by year what he has been reading and often gives clues to literary antecedents he is aware of for one or another of his books, as when he says that *This is the Year* ought to be examined in relation to the classical Greek dramatists (274).

Obviously the letters will be very, very helpful to all of us engaged in the tasks of explicating the texts he has produced, of understanding more completely his creative processes, and of understanding his theories of writing and the relation of his own production to those theories. But the letters are much more broadly revealing as well, for Manfred took an active interest in local and national politics and is in touch with most of the political and intellectual currents of the time. These wide-ranging interests come into the letters again and again. There are many telling vignettes reflecting his passion for realism, e.g., "Marguerite Young, who is being hailed as a sort of modern female John Donne, I met too. She has a flat exterior, evasive brown dog eyes, a shaggy mass of hair . . . and slovenly clothes. She affects . . ." (192). One of the most distinctive letters in the book is an appeal he wrote in 1946 to President Harry S. Truman "for the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Division of the Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences and Professions of America"; he was very concerned about the threat of atomic destruction, and he continued to be. Indeed it was that threat that led him to make two caches of his accumulating correspondence, one at the University of Minnesota and one at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

This selection from that latter collection shows that his correspondents include most of the major literati of the forties and fifties, although curiously not Walter van Tilburg Clark or Henry Nash Smith, and there is not a single reference to Vardis Fisher.

This is an exciting collection. Perhaps still

more exciting is the collection to which this small sample points. The editors tell us that they now have 3000 letters on file at Augustana College, and have indexed the letters with Manfred's help through 1970. What a mine for scholars and critics!

The University of Nebraska Press has given this selection of letters a format which is efficient, handsome—in a word, elegant. The book looks to be as significant as indeed it is—an essential book for students of midwestern American literature and culture.

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