



Maurice Sterne

AMERICAN LITERATURE TODAY

By

HERMAN GEORGE SCHEFFAUER

An English mannerism has now crept over modern American literature. And yet this very contact has in some instances thrown the American back upon himself and has resulted in certain important and significant American works, in which the American writer becomes introspective and critical and begins to analyze the life, the people and movements about him. A cold, critical realism, even a sceptical pessimism is revealed in such works as the "Spoon River Anthology" by Edgar Lee Masters and in "Winnesburg, Ohio" by Sherwood Anderson. These books, dealing with the longings, the murky, vague desires and uncertainties, the shallow lives and limited outlook of small American communities, are in their way an epitome of American life as a whole. Like "Main Street" they are an image of American life in the large, the shadow to the glaring, highly-coloured picture drawn by super-patriotism and the spiritual boomers. These books reveal the worm gnawing at the heart of American life, the inner doubt and unhappiness, the unhappiness which results from the hollowness within and the shallowness of life without — and which seeks to distract itself by a ceaseless external activity. These works, like so many American artistic and literary phenomena, may be only a passing mannerism, a kind of mimicry, an imitation under the influence of Dostoievski and Arnold Bennett. But I believe that they are also the beginning of a new attitude towards life on the part of the American author, one of critical detachment in