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Siouxland cultivation: Frederick Manfred's farm novels

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Siouxland cultivation:
Frederick Manfred's farm novels

by

Keith Edward Fynaardt

A Thesis Submitted to the
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BOOKS BY FREDERICK MANFRED

(From 1944 through 1952
Manfred published under the
name Feike Feikema)

The Golden Bowl. 1944.
Boy Almighty. 1945.
This is the Year. 1947.
The Chokecherry Tree. 1948.
The Primitive. 1949.
The Brother. 1950.
The Giant. 1951.
Lord Grizzly. 1954.
Morning Red. 1956.
Riders of Judgment. 1957.
Conquering Horse. 1958.
Wanderlust. (a revised version
of three novels. The Primitive,
The Brother, and The Giant,
published in one volume.) 1962.
Scarlet Plume. 1964.
The Man Who Looked Like the
Prince of Wales. 1965.
(reprinted in paperback as The
Secret Place)

King of Spades. 1966.
Apples of Paradise. (short
Eden Prairie. 1968.
Conversations with Frederick
Manfred. (moderated by John R.
Milk of Wolves. 1976.
Green Earth. 1977.
The Wind Blows Free.
Sons of Adam. 1980.
The Selected Letters of Frederick
No Fun on Sunday. 1990.
Of Lizards and Angels. (expected
The canon of Frederick Manfred spans almost half a century. His first novel was published in 1944 and the latest in 1990. At seventy-nine years he is in good health with another book—Of Lizards and Angels, a fourteen hundred-page saga of five generations of an upper-Midwestern family set from 1880 to 1960—about to be published. Also, he is currently working on a novel called The Wrath of Love which he says will take another year and a half, but which he is not rushing because, although he is aging, he says, "I still have plenty of time" (Interview).

Manfred has written sixteen novels, seven "ruminations" (a word he uses to describe his semi-autobiographical works), two books of short stories, two books of poetry, and a collection of essays. He has also published conversations with John R. Milton, and his letters from 1932-1954 were collected and published in 1989. In 1951 he said, "I have approximately (and optimistically) but some seventy years to spend on this earth and I haven't got the time to waste if I want to come within a thousandth of living my potential" (Giant 402). Those who know him are not surprised at what he has accomplished. By any standards (except maybe his own) Manfred has lived up to at least a thousandth of his potential, but prolific as he is, he has thus far not received the recognition he deserves.

Although several theses and dissertations have been done on Manfred's work, and some of his older books are still in
print, both appropriate recognition by critics and a large audience have eluded him. In 1948 *This is the Year*, his third novel, was both the near-unanimous choice for the Associated Press Editors' best novel of the year and praised by Sinclair Lewis (Letters 5). The novel was also nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, but was denied the honor under curious circumstances. As Manfred recalls:

The Pulitzer fiction committee had voted for *This is the Year*. Samuel Murray Butler, president of Columbia University, always announced the prizes for the various categories. Just before he made the announcement that year, he got a call from his dear friend Alice Roosevelt Longworth saying she'd fallen in love with a book called *Tales from the South Pacific* and she wanted that to have the Pulitzer Prize for fiction that year. So he ignored the fiction committee's recommendation and picked *South Pacific*. And there began James Michener's career, up, you know, into becoming a best-selling author, while I took the route I did.

(Usable Wests 79)

Manfred's second near-miss was in 1955 with *Lord Grizzly*. Robert Penn Warren, a friend of Manfred's and member of the National Book Award committee, sent Manfred a postcard telling him that he had read *Lord Grizzly* and was
voting for it for the National Book Award. As it turned out, William Faulkner's *A Fable* won. Manfred found out later from his McGraw-Hill editor--"there's always someone in the know who's willing to spill the beans," says Manfred (Usable Wests 79)--that Malcolm Cowley, chairman of the three-member committee, did not want *Lord Grizzly* to win because it was a historical novel, and Cowley thought a novelist should write about his own generation. "What Cowley did . . . was to cast five votes for *A Fable* but no votes for second or third place. Had he given even one vote to *Lord Grizzly*, that novel would have won the National Book Award for 1954" (Letters 10). Manfred had some doubts about the accuracy of the story, and he did not let the disappointment discourage his creative energy. Yet, he says, "That one would have been nice to have had, to beat out Faulkner. However, I didn't weep over it very long. I was already writing a new book when the award was announced" (Usable Wests 80).

Frederick Manfred and the Midwestern American Farm Novel

*Lord Grizzly* and the other novels of "The Buckskin Man Tales" did, however, become successful novels and are still found in paperback today. They are also considered by critics and scholars to be some of Manfred's finest writing.

Along with "The Buckskin Man Tales," the fiction he wrote about the people and places he grew up knowing is also
fine literature. The Golden Bowl (1944), This is the Year (1947), and Eden Prairie (1968), the books this thesis focuses on, are superior examples of the Midwestern American farm novel. These three books span the most important part of Manfred's career, the period in which he developed himself as a novelist and did his best work. Consequently, they illustrate the development of Manfred's overall aspirations for his writing: 1) the development of the "long view"—humankind's need to see themselves in context of the history of their place, 2) the delineation of the place he calls "Siouxland"—a region in the upper Midwest centering on the point where Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota meet, and 3) his desire to become a creative spokesman for "Siouxland."

Manfred himself says that the farm novel classification is somewhat "treacherous" because it makes one think that the characters are only going to plow and plant corn. He says that some critics who have admired him in the past and classified his work "get burned-up at me because I keep bursting from the damn categories" (Interview). He says these three books in particular are about humanity on the upper midlands, not just about farming. But he also concedes that "it is the job of professors and scholars to classify books" (Interview).

Regarded with suspicion by some and with outright contempt by others, the farm novel has suffered a poor
reputation largely due to the misconceptions of the Eastern critical establishment. Some of the criticism came in response to the over-abundance of stereotypical farm novels that either falsely romanticized farm life or reduced farmers to ignorant simpletons. Yet every genre has its weak works, and the Midwestern American farm novel is no exception largely because its subject is a relatively young culture, and that culture's written products are still attempting to make a place for themselves. The Midwest was settled later than the East, so fewer generations have lived there; therefore, the writing about the area is just beginning to reflect the people's growing concern not only with survival, but also with the history of their place and themselves. As Manfred says, "we are just beginning our great civilization here [the Midwest]" (Conversations 152).

But the source of the problem regarding the lack of critical acclaim or even attention for farm novels has been the prevailing critical opinion in the East that the Midwest has nothing of value to offer American culture or literary experience. In *The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century* Roy Meyer says that Eastern critics, especially those in the *New Yorker*, are frequently flippant toward farm fiction and seldom find in it anything of interest (184). The review the *New Yorker* gave Manfred's *This is the Year* is consistent with this attitude. The
anonymous reviewer thought that too much attention was given to the weather and details of farm life. The review called Manfred a "relentless realist" and claimed that the book had "more weather in it than anything this side of The Old Farmer's Almanac" (106). This was a typical Eastern critic's reaction to material he did not understand or care to consider more thoughtfully. The weather is necessarily an important part of any farm novel; it is a realistic element of farm life which is integral to the story.

A useful definition of the farm novel is provided by Meyer. He points out that the farm novel deals with the farm setting and "accurately handles the physical details of farm life, uses the vernacular, and reflects the attitudes, beliefs, or habits of mind often associated with farm people" (7). Of these attitudes he says, "the most important are conservatism, individualism, anti-intellectualism, hostility to the town, and a type of primitivism" (7). These characteristics accurately describe Manfred's farm novels.

Robert Wright, using a classification he says Manfred himself found useful, places The Golden Bowl, This is the Year, and Eden Prairie in a more specific category called "Cultivating the Siouxland" (Preface). Wright also includes The Chokecherry Tree (1948) and The Man Who Looked Like the Prince of Wales (1965), Manfred's fourth and fifteenth books, among the "Siouxland" cultivation novels. However, those two
books do not fit the category as well as the other three novels because they are limited in their ability to illuminate the development of the long view or "Siouxland."

The reasons for this are instructive and offer insights into the prevailing strengths and weaknesses of Manfred's work. First, neither novel emphasizes farmers or farming. Elof Lofblom, the main character of *The Chokecherry Tree*, is not a farmer; he is a young man in search of meaning in his life. The setting includes the rural areas of "Siouxland," but the dominant theme is Elof's character in search of himself. Garrett Engleking, in *The Man Who Looked Like the Prince of Wales*, is a farmer and hired hand, but the emphasis of the story is less on his life as a farmer than on his inability to control his animal passion. The action begins in "Siouxland," but the setting does not play an important role, and Garrett dies in California.

Second, both novels are unevenly written and developed. *The Chokecherry Tree* suffers from inappropriate authorial intrusion at the beginning of each chapter, and Elof is simply a weak character because he lacks depth. In *The Man Who Looked Like the Prince of Wales*, even Garrett, the protagonist, is not developed into a believable character, and too much space is given to tangential anecdotes.

Related to this second observation is Manfred's relationship to his fictional sources. Manfred's
lesser-quality work is quite consistently those books with poorly used autobiographical sources. His "ruminations" are generally considered his poorest books, and these two novels, although not intended as ruminations, suffer from the same problems. If nothing else, the documentary tone used in both books makes it evident that Manfred is dictating from memory without supplying, by way of imagination, the subtlety of character development, thematic coherence, or plot consistency.

The semi-autobiographical works are often plagued with caricature, needless detail, and extreme self-conscious musings. These negative aspects were first pointed out with the publication of the World's Wanderer trilogy: The Primitive (1949), The Brother (1950), and The Giant (1951), his fifth, sixth, and seventh books. Even John R. Milton, a friend of Manfred's and a sympathetic critic, says that "the trilogy suffers from a lack of selectivity, from personal prejudices, from moralizing, from uncontrolled excursions into the bypaths of autobiography, from an inconsistent tone, and from childish ineptness in some matters of taste" (Western Review 187). Negative reviews by major literary journals and newspapers brought Manfred a poor reputation early in a promising career. Unfortunately, a considerable part of Manfred's reputation still rests on the trilogy (Flora 13).
Despite this, Manfred himself has adamantly defended his ruminations. In the postscript to The Giant, Manfred expresses his dislike of the term "novel" because it does not adequately describe some of his and other authors' books. He provides a coinage--the "rume"--that better describes his own and others' semi-autobiographical work. The rume, he says:

... is a work of fiction built in retrospect out of the materials gathered from personal experience; the "novel" is a work of fiction built in retrospect out of the materials gathered from the lives of others. ... The rumesmith is more likely to stick to the truth; the "novelist" to invent it. ... The impetus of the rumester's creation is toward the true and the real; the impetus of the "novelist's" creation is toward the artificial. (Giant 407)

Manfred defines the "rume" as taking the "germ idea" from his life and then "externalizing" the germ idea "to express truth larger than my life truth" (Giant 404). He says that "after deep rumination ... a man cries out ... I was here ... and I had this happen to me, and this I did, and these things I saw and discovered, and this is what I think all this means in these times and in this place" (Giant 408). Manfred says that if the term "rume" were adopted, writers could make it clear from the start that their books
were based mostly on autobiographical elements and avoid the preoccupation by readers and critics on what is and what is not autobiographical. In a letter to Mark Schorer, a critic who unfavorably reviewed *This is the Year* in *Kenyon Review,* Manfred says that writers like Wolf and Maugham should not have been ashamed to have written about their own lives (Letters 277). Instead, says Manfred, the critics should "get down to the real business at hand . . . does it [the book] read well? Is it good? Is it a work of art?" (Giant 409).

Manfred's attempt to shift the focus of criticism from the source to the product has merit, yet his novelistic ruminations are, in fact, not good. In many places they do not read well. Autobiographical elements have too much control of the *World's Wanderer* trilogy, and the book's minimal success caused Doubleday to drop him. In a letter to Virgil Scott, a fellow writer and friend, Manfred says he realized that he was the first writer "to make a myth out of a certain aspect of myself and write about it. And the 'first' guy usually doesn't do too well, as literary history shows . . . I'm going to try anyway . . . I won't wail too much if I fall hopelessly short of the goal" (Letters 305).

Thus, what proves a productive focus on Manfred's work is not the personal psyche of the rumes, but rather the history and sense of place developed in the farm novels and historical novels.
Manfred's development of "The Long View" and "Siouxland"

In 1951, the year the last book of the World's Wanderer trilogy was published, Manfred changed his name from Feike Feikema (Fy'kah Fy'kah-ma) to Frederick Manfred because he felt his family name was difficult to pronounce, hurting him as a writer. Feike was translated from Frisian as Frederick, and Feikema, anglicized, became Fredman which he switched to Manfred (Wright note 165). Critic Joseph Flora says that Manfred's name change also "marked a new direction in his art" (8). This new direction was toward the historical novels. Lord Grizzly was the first of these and made the best-seller lists. The other "Buckskin Man Tales" would follow and have some success, but interspersed with the tales were other rumes, novels, and poetry, showing that Manfred was still "busting out of the categories."

In these works Manfred was in fact depicting what was becoming a gallery of pictures of "Siouxland" and emerging as Siouxland's voice. John R. Milton calls this gallery "the long view." He says that the thematic schemes of all Manfred's books are concerned as much with the characters' relative position in all of mankind's history as with the characters' immediate lives. All the elements of the long view, says Milton, are in Manfred's first book, The Golden Bowl, and become increasingly more complex in later books.
(Western Review 181). Manfred says that Milton picked up on the phrase for critical purposes, but that he himself had actually used the phrase to describe the view from his home on the bluffs above the Minnesota river in Bloomington. For a while Manfred called this home "Long View" or "Long Look" but later "Wrâlda"--the ancient Anglo-Saxon word for the "Earth" or "World" (Interview). What Milton sees in the phrase "long view," says Manfred, is "the long hallway of fictional and poetic pictures of "Siouxland," from the pre-white times to the present day" (Interview). It has been the life-long ambition of Manfred to paint this hallway with words.

In the epigraph to *Conquering Horse*, the earliest picture of pre-white "Siouxland," Manfred included a telling quotation by D.H. Lawrence, who had roamed the earth studying primitive peoples, asserting a mystical union between humanity and nature:

... America hurts, because it has a powerful disintegrative influence upon the white psyche. It is full of grinning unappeased aboriginal demons, too, ghosts, and it persecutes the white men. ... The very common sense of white Americans has a tinge of helplessness in it, and deep fear of what might be if they were not common-sensical. Yet one day the demons of America must be placated, the ghosts must be appeased, the Spirit
of Place atoned for. Then the true passionate love for the American soil will appear. (60)

This quotation from *Studies in Classic American Literature* is a part of what Lawrence calls "Spirit of Place":

Every continent has its own great spirit of place . . . If one wants to be free, one has to give up the illusion of doing what one likes, and seek what IT wishes done. But before you can do what IT likes, you must first break the spell of the old mastery, the old IT . . . But if we are living people in touch with the source, IT drives us and decides us. We are free only so long as we obey. (16-17)

Although Manfred says that Lawrence comes in as an intruder, trying to tell Americans how we should regard our Indians (Conversations 157), Manfred has adopted this perspective and broadened it to say that not only does place decide us, but it also chooses us. "Siouxland," says Manfred, chose him to say what it wanted said (Vinz 23). However, this is not to say that "Siouxland" picked out Manfred literally. Manfred says that as culture developed on the earth, humans became educated and language developed. So as "Siouxland" developed, it gradually got a voice. Manfred is a human part of "Siouxland"; hence "Siouxland" speaks through Manfred (Interview).
Although the elements of the long view were already apparent in The Golden Bowl, in "The Buckskin Man Tales" Manfred shows humanity's progressive movement away from a mystical association with nature. In the first tale, Conquering Horse, No Name's mystical vision, like the visions of all plains Indians, is the fundamental directive in his life. In the third tale, Lord Grizzly, the crawl of Hugh Glass becomes a metamorphosis--man becoming grizzly bear. However, by the last tale, Riders of Judgement, any visionary union with nature is gone (Wright 144). Therefore, when Manfred is writing about the farmers of "Siouxland," he emphasizes that the long view is necessary for these farmers to survive. The problem the farmers face is one inherent in modern culture. Manfred says:

Our civilization, and all the other levels of nations we have gone through, all the things we've learned to do by reason and because of common sense, has gradually wiped out our most powerful ally. And that is our primate nature. What I call the Old Lizard. Or the Old Leviathan. (Conversations 43)

The long view includes getting in touch with the Old Lizard or Lawernce's "IT." The "Siouxland" farmers have enough common sense, but because they have lost touch with their primate nature and spirit of their place they are haunted by a land they do not understand.
To get back in touch with the Old Lizard, Manfred himself pays close attention to his dreams. "If you get the Old Lizard on your side he can help you be a great writer" (Conversation 43). Manfred tries to get the Old Lizard on his side by using his dreams about his characters to get in touch with the nature of those characters. He says that he has seen Thurs, standing at the foot of his bed, and tried to talk to him. While writing many of his books, he has traveled to the scene of the action to get a sense of the place. For Lord Grizzly he did some background reading; then he crawled over Hugh's route with his leg in a splint, eating the wild berries and grubs. On the same trip he slept a night on the rocky plateau that would later be the place of No Name's vision in Conquering Horse.

The establishment of "Siouxland" has also occurred across the entirety of Manfred's work. "Siouxland" is a term coined by Manfred that includes the Southwestern corner of Minnesota, the Southeastern corner of South Dakota, the Northeastern corner of Nebraska, and the Northwestern corner of Iowa. The people who settled "Siouxland" are largely from the Northwestern part of Europe, and the majority are Protestant of one kind or another; the land itself is all drained by the Big Sioux River; and the whole area was once the home of the Sioux Indians. But "The Big Sioux River Drainage Basin" was much too long and mundane a handle, and
Manfred says that as he was writing he got tired of having to type out each town and state name as characters in *The Golden Bowl* moved about. Manfred saw the convenience of a common term, and the nature of the four-state area lent itself to one name. He thought of the term "Sioux-land" while writing *This is the Year* (Wright note 165) and created a map of it that was published inside the front cover; he later dropped the hyphen.

Some six months after the publication of *This is the Year*, the term was being picked up by advertisers because they found it convenient. The term is still in use today by businesses, schools, and other organizations. The residents of "Siouxland" use the term extensively, but few know its origin. However, Manfred cautions us that their meaning is not the same as his. He means the term to describe his fictional domain, not an actual region. "Siouxland" is much like Faulkner's "Yoknapatawpha County" or Steinbeck's "Long Valley," but neither of these fictional names, says Manfred, have been picked up and used by the people of the respective areas. The only similar appropriation of a fictional name, claims Manfred, is Thomas Hardy's Wessex, a made-up term for a fictional world, which is in fact used by the real-life residents (Interview).

Manfred began developing the fictional world of Siouxland by describing it as it was in his youth. The early
farm novels, The Golden Bowl and This is the Year, show the Siouxland that Manfred lived in as a young man. After the early farm novels, he turned to self-discovery of his own place in Siouxland through the ruminations; then he turned to the history of Siouxland in "The Buckskin Man Tales." After fully describing the history of Siouxland, he returned to the twentieth century experience in more farm novels and ruminations.

"The Buckskin Man Tales" in particular provide a sweeping history of Siouxland, from the plains Indians to the ranching period just before the influx of homesteaders. The series was not written in historical order. Instead, the first was Lord Grizzly (1954), about Hugh Glass and mountain-man times around 1823. The second was Riders of Judgement (1957), a reasonable recreation of the Johnson County War and, historically speaking, the last in the series—about cattlemen times in 1892. The third was Conquering Horse (1959), the first historically about Indian pre-white times in 1800. The fourth was Scarlet Plume (1964), about the Sioux Indian uprising in 1862. And the fifth was King of Spades (1966), about Black Hills justice in 1876.

However, this line of development in the canon was not what Manfred had in mind at the start. "Long before his first novel [The Golden Bowl] appeared in print, Manfred had
in mind a cycle of six to ten books about farming the Midwest" (Letters 10). In 1953 he wrote in a financial support request to the Minnesota State Historical Society that he wanted to write a trilogy to be called The Far Country. The first book, Old Hugh Glass, was "to recreate by means of imaginative fiction, a very important part of American frontier history, of the American fur trade and of the exploration of the Far West." The second book, The Lone Prairie, was to "depict the second phase, the day of the cattle kingdoms in the High Plains area." And the third book, The Golden Bowl which was already published, "depicted the third phase, the homesteader invasion and near defeat by Depression and Drought" (Letters 12).

A similar cycle of Manfred books about farming has not yet appeared, but Manfred's three farm novels The Golden Bowl, This is the Year, and Eden Prairie, cover forty-four years of his career, and together they show how Manfred's perspective of the long view, the Siouxland story, and his use of autobiographical elements became increasingly more complex.

Neither The Golden Bowl, This is the Year, nor Eden Prairie was criticized for the clumsy use of autobiographical elements as was the World's Wanderer trilogy. Nor would Manfred claim that they are the same kind of books with the same purpose and development as his rumes. The farm novels
are an effective blending of life and art, of experience and craft. Manfred was a competent novelist from the start, but it seems he needed to explore his own life in Boy Almighty (1945), a rumes about his experience in a sanatorium fighting tuberculosis; and in the World's Wanderer trilogy, the rumes about his life from the start of college to where Boy Almighty begins. Then, after exploring his own life in the rumes and further developing his craft in the farm novels, he was able, as a finely-tuned novelist and a man who knew himself well, to write "The Buckskin Man Tales" that would stand as his highest achievement. After the tales, he continued to explore his life from his grandparents' time to the time the World's Wanderer begins in the rumes Green Earth (1977). Then he returned to the farm novel genre in Eden Prairie.

In all his books it is evident that because Manfred believes, through the long view, that Siouxland chose him to be its speaker, he thinks autobiographical elements are a legitimate, if not necessary, starting place for fictional material. Even today, in his seventies, Manfred works with these same modes again and again.

The Three Farm Novels

The original title of The Golden Bowl was The Golden Bowl Be Broken, words of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes 12:6.
"Would that I had kept it!" says Manfred (Giant 403). The Biblical reference is appropriate because the Teacher's view is that all on earth is dust, and man's only purpose is to endure the trials of this life, as Maury does. In a letter to H. L. Mencken in 1945, Manfred says that the title was an actual phrase used by farmers in the dust bowl (Letters 203). (Manfred also says that he had no intention of "moving in on" the novel by Henry James of the same title (Letters 204).)

In the same letter Manfred agrees with Mencken's views on the appropriateness of the use of colloquial speech in fiction, but Manfred disagrees with Mencken's opinion that farmers don't create slang because they are stupid as a class. Manfred agrees that they are ignorant, but tells Mencken "you find millions of sleeping brains among them. Here and there you find an awakened one, and he is usually very good. He is direct, he is unabashed by city slickers, he penetrates, he is elemental, he is alive" (Letters 203).

The first draft of The Golden Bowl was written one night after a party, where Manfred related his adventures, hitchhiking to Montana to visit a friend just after he had gotten out of college (Letters 303). Manfred came home from the party and wrote all that night and into the next day. When he was finished, he realized that he had stories to tell and now had found the voice by which to tell them. It took seven drafts, two in the from of a play, before The Golden Bowl was accepted by a publisher.
Maury Grant, the main character of *The Golden Bowl*, is the son of failed farmers in the Oklahoma dust bowl of the thirties. He travels north looking for work in the Black Hills and camps one night near what appears to be an abandoned farmstead, but instead is the home of the Thors—Pa, Ma, and Kirstin. They ask him to stay and help them out because their son has died, but Maury can only shake his head, knowing the dust and drought will break them as it did his family.

When the book came out, the reviews were, for the most part, positive. Andrea Parke said in *The New York Times Book Review* that Manfred "has a knowing feel for the land. . . . With perceptions sifted through a discerning personality, his characters, dialogue and scenes emerge fired with life" (14). She also saw Manfred's broader purpose beyond character and scenes—"This is more than just the tale of one man and his struggle to find himself. It is the timeless battle against nature and of the gains measured only in the integrity of his own soul" (14). Although Parke credited Manfred with dynamic characters and dialogue, the broad thematic elements are more important in this novel than are the dramatic ones. This is made clear because Manfred is here exploring his place, and it will not be until the later books that he applies the full power of his craft to the fine details.

The most important broad theme in this early novel is the long view. Don Bebeau says that "the message of the
novel is that man's survival is tied to his environment; that man's search for identity lies in the land and in rootedness; that he must not, as Maury did for years, doubt the land" (80). Robert Wright says that Manfred, in his first novel, establishes a voice and an attitude toward nature. "Nature is not, he believes, a malignant, malevolent force to be conquered, but rather it is a benign treasure to be accepted and protected" (30). Wright's comment is accurate to the degree that Manfred establishes an attitude toward nature, but Manfred does not see nature as benign. The connotations of the word imply some sort of passivity that would not be a part of Manfred's view. Latent potential would be a better description— the way in which the power of the earth is tapped is important for Manfred. If a person can see his relative position in history to the land, then he can know how to live on it. This is shown through Maury's initiation into the Thors' attitude—an attitude of trust in the land.

To achieve this vision and attitude, Maury must complete several visionary experiences. The first of these occurs while he is working for the Thors. He is lowered into a well that is being dug to retrieve a wrench that has fallen and jammed the drilling machine. His leg cramps from the cold water on the way back up through the well casing, forcing him into a fetal position. He fears that with the cramped leg he will not be able to get out and will die in the well.
However, by enduring the pain of the knee and foot, scraping along the cement casing, he can be freed (Bowl 125-128). The symbol of the earth giving birth to Maury is implied, but not explicit, and Maury's brush with death brings him closer to the Thors.

The second visionary experience occurs as Maury is leaving the Thors to look for work in the Black Hills. He sleeps outside on the ground, waiting to jump on the next freight train. When he wakes up, there is a rattlesnake lying next to him. Maury, hearing the train, is in a panic to get away from the snake, yet he knows a sudden move will mean death. Then he remembers Rattler Jack, who had rattlers for show and controlled them by being slow and deliberate, never exciting the snakes. Maury also remembers Pa Thor's words of advice in handling horses—"Always let a horse know you're comin'." Maury edges away from the snake without disturbing it, but not in time to catch the train (138-142), and this is his test of self-control, bending him to nature in order to accommodate wildlife and survive.

The third experience occurs as Maury travels through the Bad Lands. Here he sees the strange shapes and colors of the mud-rock formations, and they remind him of the faces of old friends. He remembered now, too, that Pa Thor had spoken of the Bad Lands as a place filled with history, with the bones of beasts a million ages old" (146). At once his mind is
alive with dinosaurs and other ancient beasts and the prehistoric history of the place is told as it led to Maury's own time. Maury exclaims that there are "enough things here for God to set up housekeeping" (149). He has begun to see himself as a son of the earth, in tune with its creatures and part of its history.

The final experience completes the change from Maury's abandonment of the land to his renewed faith and trust in it. He can find no peace or work, and as he sits with the other bums around the fires, he sees himself like them. But he remembers that "not one [of the bums] walked as straight and proud as did old Pa Thor" (189-190). This final realization puts him on the next train back to the farm. Through Maury's experiences Manfred plays out the proper attitude toward nature--looking at the earth in the perspective of time, encompassing its history and its peoples, then seeing one's self in that context.

Maury returns to the farm with rootedness and a sense of the long view (Bebeau 83). Early in the novel Maury told Kirstin that he once saw a worm crawling on a blade of grass, but when it reached the end it had no place to go, so Maury pushed another blade over for it to climb on. Maury then said to Kristin, "Sometimes I gotta feelin' that you people are pushing a blade of grass fer me" (99). Maury was right, and now, after his experiences, he is ready to accept the
Thors' offer. He is now ready to fight for the land, both now and in the future; and he thinks during the dust storm, "If this house blows down, we'll build another" (221).

Manfred says that as he was writing The Golden Bowl he felt the need to dig into the history of Siouxland back to the times of the dinosaurs:

One of the problems that I saw was that the people we know and from whom we draw our characters and our knowledges seemed to be two-dimensional. They had no past... not much of a past anyway... and I wanted to root everything down as deep as I could. So my first leap was way back into the dinosaur times. (Conversations 49)

Maury is therefore rooted to the history of his place in Siouxland, finds the proper attitude toward nature, and will live with hope and trust in the land.

Manfred also had to work to unite autobiographical elements with fictional material in The Golden Bowl. Manfred explains in Conversations that Maury Grant, the main character of The Golden Bowl, is not Fred Manfred even though Manfred did hitchhike west. The character Maury, says Manfred, came from a young hobo who got in the back of the same cattle truck with Manfred and some displaced dust-bowl people as they were travelling west. The young hobo asked Manfred if he wanted to go to the Black Hills with him and
told him of a plan to jump the next freight train, so they slept out by the tracks. But when morning came, there was a rattle snake lying beside Manfred; the hobo waited briefly, but then went on alone, leaving Manfred to wait until the snake crawled away (Conversations 55).

Manfred says that every time he rewrote the novel he kept two things: the young hobo and the background. The young man seemed that "he'd once been a very nice fellow, but . . . was now empty, hollow, defeated. I wasn't satisfied with that idea for myself . . . that's why in this book I have Maury return home. That's the part that's invented" (Conversations 80).

On the hitchhiking trip, Manfred also rode with a Miss Baxter, who quoted scripture to him. One night when they had stopped and stayed in cabins in Yellowstone, Manfred went to a dance and then slept in the car. Miss Baxter didn't trust leaving the food in the car with him because he was such a voracious eater, so she had a side of smoked bacon under her mattress in her canvas-sided cabin. A bear attacked the cabin and took the meat; she awoke screaming and thought it was Manfred who had gotten hungry. Much as it would have made good reading, Manfred said he didn't include this scene in The Golden Bowl because it would have pulled the book off balance (Conversations 82-83). It would have put too much emphasis on adventures that did not directly contribute to Maury's change in attitude toward the land.
The Thor family, too, were based on people from Manfred's trip west, as he recounts in *Conversations*. He rode for a short time with a family whose daughter and son-in-law were towing the stalled car of their parents. The tow car had gotten hot, so they had stopped where Manfred was waiting, and they gave him a ride for some thirty or forty miles. Manfred sat with the younger daughter on his lap for awhile. The tow car was side-swiped by a car full of drunk young men, and the old couple's car flew into the ditch, throwing them both through the windshield. They had only minor injuries, but Manfred says, "That family stuck in my mind. The father, the mother, and the girl. I am pretty sure that's where I got the old Thors. . . . So, in a sense I did pick everything up--the actual discoveries--on that trip" (*Conversations* 84).

But in a letter to Virgil Scott in 1950, Manfred makes clear what wasn't autobiographical in *The Golden Bowl*:

... I never lived in Dust Bowl times. I was in high school and college at the time, and during high school days lived in an area that was on the edge of it ... I did not stay in a farm house like Pa Thor's. I never met a girl like Kirsten ... I never looked for work in the Black Hills ... I never built a dam against water. But I did hitch-hike through it [the dust bowl] in '34 as a college student flushed with a diploma and a
nice suit and eight bucks in my pocket to visit a friend . . . I did meet a young broken hobo for a few hours one night and it is on my memory of him that I built the story. I did see the dust drifts in '34, and I did see the hungry people, and I did see dead cattle. But I never lived it.

(Letters 303)

Years later, Manfred published a book of reminiscences, *The Wind Blows Free* (1979). In it Manfred recounts the actual journey he had as a young man. Written in the third person, Manfred says that the incidents were so long ago that the Fred in the book is almost a stranger to him now (Interview).

*In This is the Year*, set in the northwestern corner of Iowa, Manfred examines another attitude toward nature. This time the protagonist is, at the beginning, like Maury Grant, ignorant in his approach to nature. But unlike Maury, Pier Frixen does not complete visionary experiences that lead him to a positive relationship with nature; instead he uses brute force to take what living he can from the earth. Ultimately, he fails. In Manfred's scheme the relationship of man to the earth progresses from the view that one only needs to believe in the land, to the view that along with believing in the land one must care for, understand, and nurture it.

*This is the Year* was written about the same time as *The Golden Bowl*. When an early version of *This is the Year* was
rejected, Manfred put it aside and worked on *The Golden Bowl* (Timmerman 25-26). In returning to *This is the Year* Manfred studied the weather records from the Iowa Department of Meteorology for the years 1918 to 1936, then chose five years where the weather was very dramatic. He used these real-life weather patterns as material for his fiction. By weaving the two together he was able to produce a unified whole. As Manfred says the weather was the warp of the book and the fictional characters the woof (Conversations 87).

*This is the Year* is the story of Pier Frixen, the son of Frisian immigrant farmers. It begins with Pier's marriage; takes him through prosperous years and the birth of a son, Teo; then brings him to years of struggle—his father's accidental death, a miscarriage, and drought. Each year Pier dreams it will be "the year" for his success, but finally Pier is beaten and must sell the farm. Pier's potentially positive relationship with nature is highlighted by Pederson, the county agent, who tells him that his land will produce if treated right. But Pier is stubborn and ignorant. He fails to care for his land or his wife, and he loses both.

When *This is the Year* came out, reviews were mixed. In *The New York Times Book Review* Nona Balakian said Manfred is apt at "combining accuracy of observation with intensity of sensation" (20). And she said:

An awareness of earth-sensation is something new and good in our literature, and Feikerna [Manfred]
deserves acclaim not simply for the authenticity of his details but for his ability to communicate the pain and pleasure that the earth can bring to those that are close it. (20)

She said that Teo is one of the "most appealing" children in modern fiction, but that the other characters, especially Pier, lack an inner life to bring them close to the reader (20). Harrison Smith wrote in *Saturday Review* that "The simple earthy language in which the book is written gives this book vitality and fascination. Mr. Feikema has written, not the final novel of man's inhumanity to nature, but one that should suffice for years to come" (17).

On the other hand, a reviewer in *The New Yorker* called Manfred a rich, but harsh talent. And Mark Schorer said in *Kenyon Review* that in the book "there is a near total failure to differentiate subject from experience, and a total failure to extract theme from subject" (628). The book, he said, is an "unexplored lump of experience . . . failing to scrutinize the material through the only means the artist has, technique" (629).

While *This is the Year* received some caustic criticism when compared to *The Golden Bowl*, few would deny that Manfred had created strong characters in *This is the Year*. Nertha and Kaia are Manfred's first women characters with depth, and Pier is well-developed because we see him over a twenty year
period—as bridegroom, husband, father, neighbor, and farmer (Flora 11). Roy Meyer agrees that although Pier Frixen is ignorant and stubborn, he remains thoroughly human—"perhaps comes closer to the stuff of real character portrayal than any other personality in recent farm fiction" (193).

The character of Nertha is not only Pier's wife, but she also represents the earth; throughout the novel Manfred describes Nertha by comparing her to it. As in The Golden Bowl, Manfred personifies the earth, but in This is the Year he uses a fecund woman to represent its potential, not a dying old man. Pointedly, Pier is married and begins farming at the same time; both his new wife and his farm are fresh and full of potential.

The name Nertha comes from the Angles' and Saxons' goddess of plenty or cornucopia—Nerthus (Conversations 88). And like the origin of the name, Nertha and the farm she represents are a potential cornucopia for Pier. However, Manfred uses the name in an ironic sense because this Nertha becomes barren. It is Pier's mistreatment of Nertha as wife and farm that brings on the barrenness, and Manfred effectively uses the abusive husband-wife relationship metaphorically to parallel the disastrous farmer-land relationship.

Pier sees the land as female: "He loved the land. The prairie seas, the sloping surfaces, caught his masculine eye."
The vast earth was a wonderful giant of a woman. Her massive curves stirred the timeless bull in him" (Year 21). As Pier thinks of conceiving a child with his new wife he thinks of it in the same way he thinks of spring planting, "It was Spring and time to seed. It was time to cut his furrow on the land with a plow. It was time to cut his name on the stone of the future with a son" (10). But when Pier sows his seeds he is rough and ignorant:

The man the plow and the horses were one, were the same, a bull; the earth a heifer beneath. . . . Relentlessly the plowing bull pursued the reeling heifer-earth. Soft and yielding, her soft fleshes ripped open, bleeding, running trickles of water, she suffered him his satisfaction. (130-131)

Pederson, the county agent, tells Pier that he will ruin his land and his wife if he does not treat them right. "Treat a woman right and she'll treat you right. Meal. Love. But treat her wrong, beat her, kick her, tear her clothes off, and she'll either whore or suicide" (316). Pier does not listen to Pederson, and Nertha dies in a second miscarriage.

The farm, too, suffers from Pier's abuse. Erosion takes his topsoil because he refuses to contour plow, and his son Teo—who sees the importance of farming with brains rather than brute force—will not help his father because Pier refuses to listen to what Pier considers his foolish
school-boy ideas. The farm must finally be sold, and at the sale Pederson tells him, "You yourself sowed the seed of the rod that's now beating you, Pier" (603).

Roy Meyer and Delbert Wylder suggest that Manfred is speaking through Pederson. Meyer calls Pederson "the author's mouthpiece" (197), and Wylder says that in the early novels "the reader has difficulty distinguishing between the voice of the character and Manfred's own voice" (21). Meyer's criticism is accurate in that Pederson expresses Manfred's long view. But Manfred's use of Pederson is not didactic to the degree that Meyer's comment suggests, because Manfred's intent in the novel is not to preach conservation. Wylder may be seeing in Pederson what Nancy Nelson calls the voice of the "poet-commentator." She says that the italicized material at the beginning, end, and before separate sections of The Golden Bowl and This is the Year constitute the poet's voice, or the voice of the long view, leading the characters (56-67).

Meyer also calls the book a "conservation tract" (211). But Manfred himself says that preaching conservation was not Pederson's role as much as presenting a new voice of the long view that Pier could not hear, not because Pier was ignorant, but because the "culture wasn't old enough yet to show him how to use his talent" (West of Miss. 38). Pier's need to focus on survival in a new land led him to put faith in his
strength to survive. Teo and Pederson have taken the time to study the land and learned to understand and appreciate it.

In several places Pier calls Pederson the "Old Dreamer." Pier gives him the name because he thinks Pederson is impractical and foolish. However, Manfred observes, "It is curious that I should have called him [Pederson] the Old Dreamer," because it takes one who dreams, who is in touch with the land, with the long view, to understand how to treat the earth (Conversations 88). In short, Pederson is the visionary figure in This is the Year.

Pier does not have the long view and so he cannot understand how to treat his wife or the land. Nor does Pier, through his experiences, come to find the long view. He leaves the farm as ignorant as he came to it. He sees neither the history of Siouxland nor his place in that history. Siouxland was not always tilled by farmers, nor will it always be, suggests Manfred, especially if farmers like Pier continue to destroy it. Pier's hope in the potential of his land is crushed because without his understanding and care the land will be barren. The hope that Pier has from the start is what Maury had to find, but hope alone will not bring the success that comes only through harmony with nature.

Despite Pier's losses he manages to survive, and for that reason, says Manfred, he is heroic--for the most
important thing for a man to do is to survive. Yet ironically, Pier's heroism only deepens the tragedy for Nertha and Pederson because they are doomed and thwarted by people like Pier and have not fruitfully changed them (Conversations 89-90).

This is the Year, like The Golden Bowl, successfully combines autobiographical elements with fictional material. In his letter to Virgil Scott concerning the use of autobiography in The Golden Bowl, Manfred also explains what was autobiographical and what the imaginative elements were in This is the Year:

I never lived in a town called Starum . . . I never lived near the Hills of the Lord. I am not Pier. Pier is a combination of my father and my uncles and my neighbors, those among them who have great vigor and latent but undeveloped brains and who behave like all male men have behaved in mankind's history. Teo is not me. Teo is in part my brothers, and in part the boy with brains who feels unused in the country, and to the extent that I have felt that I am in him. Nertha is not my mother. . . . My mother was a great rock of a woman I myself happened to dislike farming as a lad. I came to love the country after I lived in the Twin Cities for awhile, and went back to it, and studied it, and dug out all sorts of facts . . .
then wrote it and invested it with all the power of my imagination. . . . Alde Romke, Teo's grandpa, was based on an uncle of mine. My own grampa Feike was another man entirely. My own father was highly religious; Pier was belligerently against it. I never fell from the barn, or fell into a manure pile, nor saw a coyote-rabbit hunt, nor a "penny sale," nor knew a county agent, nor got lost in a snowstorm with a heifer, nor had a neighbor like Kaia, nor knew a Blacktail, nor had a mother who had miscarriages, etc. Nor did my father end his farming broke; he wound up with some money. (Letters 304)

Several important events in Pier's life did, however, come from Manfred's father's life. In 1979 Manfred wrote an essay entitled "Ninety is Enough: A Portrait of my Father," in which he chronicles his father's life. From this essay it is evident that Manfred's father did have some of the experiences that Manfred described Pier Frixen going through. His father fell off the barn and off the windmill, and in both cases had the presence of mind or instinct, like Pier Frixen, to guide himself to a reasonably safe fall: from the barn roof into a manure pile, and from the windmill out onto the ground, recoiling to break the fall. Manfred's brother Ed had his foot caught in a corn picker, and like Pier and
his son Teo, Manfred's father had to extract Ed's leg from the machine (Iowa Review passim). In Conversations Manfred says, "There is a lot of my father in that book This is the Year... In a grudging sort of way I show my admiration for him because I put him in a book and made a hero out of him. And I dedicated the book to him. My father was a remarkable fellow" (59).

Robert Wright says that This is the Year gives "the true feeling of Manfred's early life" (16), but Green Earth (1977), a rumie published thirty years after This is the Year, is the autobiographical account of Manfred's parents and his life at home on the farm until he went to college. Some of the experiences in This is the Year were based on real-life events, but the effect and feeling built up around those events by Manfred's imagination created a fictional world with its own feelings, feelings not necessarily similar to those of real life. So the feeling from "Ninety is Enough" is one of admiration—at eighty-eight Manfred's father learns to read. But this is far different from the feeling of loss at the end of This is the Year where Pier stumbles away from the farm in illiterate ignorance. It seems clear, then, that Manfred wanted to stress Pier's failure due to lack of vision and faith, in direct contrast to Manfred's own father.

Eden Prairie, the third farm novel, was written twenty-one years after This is the Year. During this time
Manfred wrote fifteen more books developing the background of Siouxland--"The Buckskin Man Tales," rumes, poetry, and short stories. This accomplished, Manfred's writing in *Eden Prairie* reflects the increasing complexity of life in Siouxland.

In *Eden Prairie* the characters themselves take on more importance than either Maury or Pier, who are less important in their own right than they are for the beliefs they hold. Maury and Pier are the figurative fathers of Kon, Brant, and Charlie. They are the early settlers of Siouxland, and so face the initial trials of staking their claims. Some, like Maury, learn to live with the land and survive; others, like Pier, do not. But both provide the next generation with easier lives in a new land. The next generation is not without its own problems, however. Damage caused by the likes of Pier must be repaired, and the "spirits of place" remain and must be appeased. But now the spirits manifest themselves in human-to-human instead of human-to-land relationships.

*Eden Prairie*, as Manfred himself emphasizes, stretches the boundaries of the farm novel. The characters do much more than plow and plant corn; some of the action occurs in town, and two of the characters are not farmers. The lives of the farmers are different from the lives of the earlier generations in Siouxland; they have cars and telephones, and
their lives are not so isolated. However, the book remains a farm novel because it is accurate in describing farm life; it uses the language of farmers, and it reflects their attitudes. *Eden Prairie* is a novel with real tension and character study, and in light of the long view of Siouxland, it is a novel inseparable from its place.

Like *This is the Year*, *Eden Prairie* is set in the farm country of Northwest Iowa. The novel is divided into eight sections, each rendered from the perspective of one of the Harmer family. The three brothers, Charlie, Brant, and Kon are brothers in name only. Charlie, the oldest, is brutal and vulgar; Brant is haunted by spirits and loves his brother Kon more than his own wife; and Kon, the youngest, is sensitive and fragile. Charlie and Brant, like their father, are farmers, but Kon is a schoolteacher. Kon meets Karen Alfredson, an equally fragile innocent, who also teaches in a country school. They eventually decide to marry, and Brant, feeling rejected by Kon, takes his own life.

The main theme of *Eden Prairie*, like the theme of *The Golden Bowl* and *This is the Year*, is the human relationship to nature or, more specifically, the Siouxlanders' relationship to Siouxland. But in *Eden Prairie* consideration is given to several different relationships to nature. Joseph Flora says that through the various relationships Manfred is showing the flaws of the Siouxlanders in their attempt to realize an Eden on the prairie (24).
Anse Harmer, the boys' father, is the only character with a positive relationship to the land. He is a successful farmer, seventy years old but still strong and healthy. He grew up in Ohio, where his parents died. He was forced to make it on his own, so he took a job driving horses west. The horses bolted when Indians scared them, and it took Anse several months to round them up again, but as he rode around Siouxland he fell in love with the land, its buffalo skulls, cottonwood trees, and long grass. He says, "This is where I'm going to live. . . . Why, this prairie here is like the Garden of Eden itself" (131).

Charlie is jealous of his father's success. He tells his father that he is too old to farm, that he should get off the place and let him take over. His approach is one of brute force. Like Pier, he tires to bull his way through life. He acts only for his own benefit, even to the extreme of asking Brant to trade wives because he has produced no offspring with his own.

Kon is the opposite of Charlie. He is mild-mannered and sensitive. While he works hard on the farm for his father, his place is not outdoors. Charlie makes fun of him, but it is clear that Kon, though weak and impotent physically, sees beyond Charlie's ignorance. Kon and his wife Karen are innocents caught in Charlie's vulgar world. Karen thinks she has been violated by the doctor's routine exam; Kon's sensitivity to natural beauty is ridiculed by Charlie; and
both are shocked by the normal sexual behavior of their dog. Like the two butterflies in the book's introduction, they are vulnerable to forces they cannot control.

The power given to both Charlie's and Kon's viewpoints is what makes the novel excellent, says Max Westbrook (Western Review 307-8). And the tension built up between these two positions is too much for the middle brother, Brant, to bear. He becomes increasingly paranoid about spirits as the novel progresses. He can find no love except in the memory of his times with Kon: "Kon was gone. All those wonderful times they'd had together as boys, they'd been for nothing" (268). Brant's wife, Mildred, senses his homosexual feelings for Kon. When she calls Kon to tell him of her husband's suicide, she says, "You two were always so close, so maybe when you get here you can tell me why Brant killed himself today" (Eden Prairie 318).

No one's relationship to Siouxland is guided directly by the long view. Anse, who may have seen something important in the past and his place, is the most successful. In the end, Kon and Karen may have some hope because they have confronted their human nature. But neither has Maury's vision or his potentially positive relationship. Charlie, like Pier, is going nowhere, and Brant fails because his relationships have become so confused that it is all but impossible for him to see the long view.
As in the other farm novels in *Eden Prairie*, Manfred successfully blends autobiographical elements with fictional material. Karen Alfredson was modeled after Manfred's Aunt Kathryn, who was "inclined to the beauties of life and not the crudities of life." Recalls Manfred, "how she managed to exist for some seventy years without really discovering she is a human animal is beyond me" (Conversations 18). His Aunt Kathryn was also a schoolteacher who taught Manfred in her one-room country school. She had published a small book of poems and later collected all of Manfred's books and kept a scrapbook of his life. Apparently, though, she never read the books after finding the seduction scene in *The Golden Bowl* (Wright 47).

When Kathryn's husband died, Manfred went to help with the arrangements. He says the death of her husband got her thinking and she kept "rattling on about deep things" (Interview). She began telling the story of a relative's suicide. The relative was married to a very beautiful woman, but they had sex only once a year because, as Manfred found out later, he was homosexual. Like Brant, he finally put a shotgun in his mouth and pulled the trigger with his toe. Being forced to live in a male role was too much for him, says Manfred (Interview).

In *Eden Prairie*, as in *The Golden Bowl* and *This is the Year*, Manfred skillfully incorporates autobiographical
material into his fiction. The use of his own life experiences for Maury, his father's life for Pier, and relatives' lives for Brant and Karen are all accomplished effectively unlike his use of autobiography in the rumes. 

*Eden Prairie* also shows the position of the Siouxlander relative to Siouxland at the time of the second and third generation of European settlers, and the book again reinforces the need for the long view of Siouxland.

When viewed within Frederick Manfred's canon, *The Golden Bowl, This is the Year*, and *Eden Prairie* chart his realization and application of the long view, the delineation of Siouxland, and the skillful incorporation of autobiographical material. *The Golden Bowl* both introduces us to and shows Maury's initiation into the long view. Siouxland is described but not yet named, and Manfred finds his voice by using a real-life trip as the starting point for his fiction.

In *This is the Year* the long view is shown to be not only trust and faith, in the land but also the care and nurturing of it. Siouxland is named and portrayed as a living, feeling woman. Memories of Manfred's life on the farm as well as incidents from his father's life provide material for his imagination.
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