Secondary school teachers and college professors are always trying to find ways by which to enliven their classes and at the same time to convey a body of knowledge that our educated community feels every educated person ought to possess. The definition of that body of knowledge is the cause of endless debate, even squabble, in the teaching professions; most recently the head of the National Endowment for the Humanities has been lobbying for a return to what is known in many circles as the "canon" -- a curriculum based on those works which we have all agreed on serve as the basis for Western civilization, American style.

The problems inherent in establishing that canon have never seemed more acute than now. The older canon -- the curriculum that existed in schools and colleges before the 1960s -- is simply no longer acceptable to groups who have gained a voice in American education and society: Blacks and other ethnic minorities, women, sexual minorities, as well as those who insist on questioning a canon established by white, Northern Europeans for the education of their young sons.

One additional factor has been added to the brouhaha that was always present in one way or another even during the establishment of the "First" canon in the nineteenth century: that is, the tension that exists between using works that are universal in scope or using knowledge that is specific to a language or a culture or a region as a way of inculcating patriotic or national ideals. One of the goals, certainly of American higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to make Americans out of a polyglot people drawn from all over the world. As a consequence, many of the standard works that had formed the basis for classical education were replaced in American education by the startling idea of using American literature.

At the same time, American educators have always been aware of the need for a universal outlook; again, most recently we are hearing over and over again about the "global community." How, then, do we reconcile the need for national goals at the same time that we educate students for the larger world of tomorrow? As Howard Odum has said in an essay, "The Promise of Regionalism," "There has never been a time when the individual and the group were so important; when the specialized values inherent in humanity were so articulate; and when the distinctive folk personalities of the peoples of the world clamored so much for recognition, appreciation, and participation" (Regionalism in America, ed. Merrill Jensen, 401).

The teaching, study, and even writing of American literature has been a history of movement back and forth between the ideal of literary nationalism and the needs for local, regional identity that tend to work against the leveling impulse of one literature for all. Many writers and critics have engaged in arguments for the one sort of a literature over the other. The local color movement in the nineteenth century, as much as anything else served to precipitate the controversy by insisting that an American literature might be defined by the glorification of section over nation. Our sought after uniqueness would come about through the local and specific rather than the general and the nation.

It is not a controversy which allows for simple solutions. Benjamin T. Spencer, in an essay "Regionalism in Literature," provides a good overview of the problems involved. He quotes Allen Tate's dictum that "No literature can be mature without the regional consciousness," but also points out that the study of a region and its literature has often had the tendency to breed provincialism (Regionalism in America, 256).

The need to transcend provincialism is crucial, but Eudora Welty in an important essay, "Place in Fiction," makes an eloquent plea for retaining the regional impulse in literature. "The open mind and the receptive heart..." she says, "are to be gained anywhere, anytime, without necessarily moving an inch from the present address" (South Atlantic Quarterly, 1956, 55:70). But as undergraduate teachers, in search of the perfect syllabus, these theoretical ideas are not particularly helpful. In seeking to engage the interests of our students, we must carefully consider their educational needs in order for them to be educated people; we know also that we must engage their interest or jeopardize the entire undertaking.

At Hiram College we in the humanities had long been aware that the Biology Department had a
distinct advantage over us in recruiting and holding students. A 126-acre field station provided students with a "hands-on" experience that brought to life the lessons which they had learned in the classroom, particularly about animal behavior. The History Department had a similar experience when it initiated a senior seminar that used local, archival materials for the required senior paper; students were involved in writing history using only primary source materials. Other fields within the humanities seemed at a distinct disadvantage. For literature, particularly, such hands-on experience usually implied only creative writing courses, which we knew to be pedagogically unsound -- if not simply wrong-headed -- as a way to teach literature. How then to make literature as alive for an undergraduate as animal behavior was for the student holding a live duckling.

Assuming that a large number of students come from the immediate geographical area -- or to go even farther by assuming that students choosing a college as isolated as Hiram have some interest in their surroundings -- the idea of using that area as a kind of workshop in the humanities seemed a logical step. But the history of such attempts in literature has been spotty at best. Teaching regional literature has met with much resistance in the conventional pedagogy of English studies, at least outside of specialized courses. Faced with teaching a survey course in American literature when a canon of masterpieces has got to be covered mitigates against the idea of introducing lesser known or local literature, when that literature has a diminished status in the discipline.

There are two related problems here: first there exists a pedagogy that assumes that what is being taught in a course amounts to a check-list of great works, eliminating, or minimizing, anyway, the idea that as teachers of literature we are also conveying a more general way of reading all literature no matter to what period or tradition it belongs; second, that regional literature (which is often, by the way, the literature of women or of other minorities, but that's still another issue) is in and of itself minor, unimportant and forgettable.

These are arguments which the Hiram regional studies program tried essentially to skirt. The primary premise of a grant awarded to Hiram College in 1981 by the National Endowment for the Humanities was not to establish a department of Regional Studies in which students would study -- in our case the Western Reserve -- the region in all its various aspects. There is, in fact, little justification for such a program at a small liberal arts college where we are pressed to provide basic education for most of our students. To put it bluntly there is no market for undergraduate scholars of the Western Reserve. The idea was, rather, to use the immediate region as a source for trying out a different pedagogy for teaching the humanities. There are ways in which the area can be incorporated even into traditional courses in order to provide local examples against which typical "textbook" examples might be measured.

The writers of the original proposal suggested five objectives that would guide the pedagogy of a humanities based regional studies program:

1. To capitalize on the region in order to stimulate enthusiasm for and involvement in the humanities.
2. To provide students with the opportunity to take responsibility for their own educations. Regional studies provide for the testing of significant propositions and for direct confrontations with evidence; students interacting with materials provides active learning.
3. To make students more aware of the heritage of the region and the materials for knowledge that are at hand.
4. To expand the contribution of regionally based college to its own region as a whole.
5. To assist faculty in shifting some of their scholarship to the region and its scholarly collections.

The model was tried in many disciplines, particularly courses that were more traditionally "textbook" courses than English literature. In political science, sociology, and history courses, local materials were incorporated effectively; rather than looking at race relations through a textbook case study that used Philadelphia, for instance, the Hough area in nearby Cleveland was used most. A study of urban planning focussed on Cleveland and nearby Akron although not exclusively; it was educationally much more accessible than studies of distant urban centers. In economics, biology, and environmental studies, areas that come under only a rather expanded definition of the humanities also benefited from this new approach to finding course materials for a syllabus.

It places a burden on the faculty member, clearly, since textbook materials do not typically deal with the area of northeast Ohio that we focus on. But faculty development grants provided by the grant encouraged faculty to explore local sources for teaching materials. An unexpected bonus was
the renewed enthusiasm with which we all found we were approaching courses which had become standard offerings in the curriculum. Not just students were involved in this particular benefit! Students were forced to use primary, rather than secondary materials and could often be drafted into the search for regionalia.

There were some areas in the humanities that seemed to offer little chance for the sensible inclusion of regional materials: the languages and the classics were at first hardly thought of. But grant writers should never underestimate the creativity of faculty colleagues. Two very strong regionally-oriented courses came out of the foreign language department. A colleague in the French Department included regional materials in a freshman course on "The French in America" that explored in interesting ways the long-term French influence in the Great Lakes as well as inland with a study of two communities within driving distance of Hiram: Louisville and Calkoosier (pronounced Kalamoosh) near Wooster.

To include the Classics Department would seem to stretch the pedagogy a bit too far! Not at all as it turned out. Granted there is little of value in searching out major Latin or Greek writers of the Reserve: that is, unfortunately, what misconceptions about a regional studies program might expect. Our colleague in the classics department has long taught a very popular course in historic archaeology that explores Mycenaean culture. He became fascinated with the nineteenth century theories which tried to link American Indian culture with ancient Mediterranean culture, ideas which were long ago discredited. However, such comparisons do lead to interesting speculations in general about the rise of culture and the methods of historic archaeology. The accessibility of American examples -- even local ones in the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation area (in cooperation with the Cleveland Museum of Natural History) made the reality of the Mycenaean example far more immediate to students who may never have the opportunity to participate in a dig on a site away from "home."

At first glance, though, this approach seemed even more problematic for literature classes. Whey bother trying to use local materials when it was fairly common knowledge to all of us that Ohio in general and the Reserve specifically simply HAVE no history of literary creativity -- or so we thought.

When the pedagogy is understood -- that is, we are not using a local example of a novel or a poem in place of a masterpiece or standard work of American literature -- the problem still remains how to find examples of such works and how then to incorporate them meaningfully in a course.

Let me try to give some examples of ways in which a number of Hiram faculty were able to do it, as well as our reactions to the effectiveness of using local materials as a way to spur student interest and to illustrate the effect which national trends or movements had on a local level -- the level, after all, on which most of us will live most of our lives.

Our first foray into using regional materials in literature courses was in the Hiram freshman program known as the Freshman Colloquium. Without giving you all of the details of the course, it is essentially a topics course that is meant not to be an introduction to a discipline, but an introduction to the importance of good writing and speaking within the framework of a topic in a particular discipline. Courses in existence already -- a course that explored the literature of the frontier and the Westward journey, a course in the American short story, and a course in American folklore -- were revised to include local materials.

William Dean Howells' childhood reminiscence of growing up in frontier Ohio as well as the diary of Jonathan Hale published by the Western Reserve Historical Society spurred interest in the somewhat (to students, anyway) novel thought that Ohio was at one time the frontier. Juxtaposed with Willa Cather's O Pioneers and Ole Roelvaag's classic Giants in the Earth, these local works provoked thoughtful discussion.

We have also the distinct advantage of being in Sherwood Anderson territory, whose stories were natural inclusions in a course on the development of the short story. The colleague working with folklore had always had students collect local folklore, and he was able to expand that part of the course in a way that students found most helpful.

I put together a new colloquium on rural America, which I had always wanted to teach, partly because at Hiram we have ambivalent feelings about our rural setting and partly because half our students come from rural, half from urban areas -- and few of them have ever really thought about what that might mean for them. Louis Bromfield's aptly titled novel The Farm provided both a local fictional example and a perfect site for a field trip since it was based on the author's childhood experience of a family homestead not unlike the place he was later to transform into Malabar Farm near Mansfield. There is no question in my mind that the conjunction of a work of art with an actual place
that bore remarkable resemblance to it provided one of the better experiences I've ever had exploring with students the genesis of an art work as well as the understanding of themes and motifs in that work.

A year later I decided to choose as my colloquium topic the impact of immigration on American literature, as a result of the tricentennial celebration of the arrival of Germans to America and the widely known fact that many students of this generation are interested in exploring family history and their own past. It seemed at first that to find local examples for this topic would be particularly trying, but only a relatively brief search turned up a number of works that again stirred genuine interest among my students. Thomas Bell's powerful novel *Out of This Furnace*, a study of the immigrant labor force in Pittsburgh evoked eloquent response from several students in the class from nearby Youngstown. Herbert Gold's *Fathers*, which traces two generations of a Russian/Jewish emigre family in Cleveland provided one of those teaching experiences which we all dream about.

It is a poetic, funny, eloquent novel of local Cleveland color; more importantly it is a "portrait of the artist as a young man in America" which students (and I've used it now at least three times) have identified with to an unforeseen extent. As all good literature, it transcends any of the labels we might attach to it: it is, thank God, neither a Cleveland novel, nor an immigrant novel, nor an explicitly Jewish novel, nor a *Bildungsroman*, but the catalyst for the kind of literary experience that one strives to give a freshman who is resistant to the seductions of art and beauty.

And the novel provides a piece of wonderful serendipity that always makes the teaching of literature a joy. The precocious narrator of the novel -- obviously the young Herbert Gold himself -- in order to impress a pretty soulmate from Detroit, basks in the knowledge that "Hart Crane was the other poet from Cleveland" (254). Few are the freshmen (or upperclassmen, either, for that matter) who recognize that allusion; it has always provoked near pandemonium in the class when they find out (1) who Hart Crane was and (2) that he was not from Cleveland -- at least originally -- but from Garretsville, the somewhat grim little village that abuts on bucolic Hiram. They, too, might one day join Herbert Gold in San Francisco to enjoy the dolce vita.

A grouping of nineteenth century stories about the German settlement at Zoor by Constance Fenimore Woolson, narrated by a Cleveland "woman of means" provided a nice contrast with Gold's memoir of his ethnic youth; they had appeared in periodical literature in the 1870s and were easily reproduced. Needless to say, sites in Cleveland -- the West Side Market, the Russian Orthodox Cathedral -- and a trip to Zoar were more than gratuitous sightseeing trips, giving students a palpable taste of the effect which place has on the flavor of fiction.

Even courses in Freshman Composition, often the bane of the teacher's existence, have provided an opportunity for the regional outlook. Since most of our composition courses include a contemporary novel there has been ample opportunity for using regional fiction. Here is where we have discovered, also, how basically unfair we can be about the quality of local materials against "better" stuff that emanates either from New York or Los Angeles. We need make no apologies for including Toni Morrison's *Sula* in a course (freshman or not!). I am just this week using the brand new paperback of Joan Chase's *During the Reign of the Queen of Persia* with freshmen; they come to it with absolutely no preconceptions; it is not to be found in any version of *Masterplots* or *Cliff Notes*; it contains many issues that are at the heart of any good literature. Its northern Ohio setting is not gratuitous, but it doesn't provide the only reason for using the novel either.

The real test of using regional materials is to find the truly local piece; again, serendipity in the form of a bicentennial project of the Mantua Historical Society provided inexpensive hardbound reprints of a genuinely local novel: *The Portrait* by A. G. Riddle, published in 1878 and set in the immediate area of Hiram and Mantua. No need in this case for long, expensive field trips! The locale is immediately recognizable even to those freshman who have only been in the college for a few weeks. Riddle had a local following in the post Civil War period, and his novels were even reviewed nationally on occasion. The novel has many of the marks of nineteenth century popular fiction, but exactly for this reason it has been a good subject for study. A colleague and I have used it in several courses, including the survey course in American literature where it serves as a very interesting contrast with the contemporaneous novels of Twain, with which it shares some very interesting characteristics.

The novel uses several recongizable places: the Cuyahoga River, an old tavern which is still standing, even only slightly altered names of families who are still prominent in the area -- in fact, students have actually sought out the graves of the people who are the main characters in the book and have found them! Just as interesting is the fact that local history and lore have also been
incorporated in the book which many of our students pick up before their reading of the book. The so-called "Mormon incident" in Hiram's history is luridly portrayed in this novel and provides an opportunity for comparing history with fiction as well as examining nineteenth century attitudes toward eroticism: Joseph Smith is portrayed as a sensual corrupter of young women.

The novel is neither a masterpiece, nor is it junk. A syllabus would not normally have room for it, but we have found that its very obscurity has been an advantage. Students have many prejudices against the "great works" of the canon, and we have found that illustrating the characteristics of nineteenth century prose using a work of this sort actually benefits the readers when they turn to the more famous work. Not that *Huck Finn* looks better simply by having been preceded by *The Portrait*! But students have been more willing to believe that Twain came out of a literary tradition larger than Missouri, and that many of the choices which he made in his fiction were conscious choices rather than accidents or the fantasies of twentieth century critics.

After four years of local or regional literature in our courses as a way of trying to provide for students a kind of field experience in the humanities, and after reading endless student evaluations of courses where this has been done, we feel that the experiment has worked. It has not been necessary to eliminate good literature in order to teach minor literature; if anything we have discovered fine works that were sleepers. Students have not groaned any louder about Riddle's *The Portrait* or Conrad Richter's trilogy of Ohio pioneer novels than they groan when presented with *The Scarlet Letter* or *Red Badge of Courage*. The bonus has been that they have approached these classic works of American fiction with an enhanced understanding of the contemporary literary scene. Many of the groans have actually turned to sounds of suppressed enthusiasm -- for all of literature. That's what we hoped to accomplish!