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### Altman, Cary Oscar - "Buckeye"

Mary Altman Oppy

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Altman, Cary Oscar

by his daughter,  
Mary Altman Oppy  
May 1926

"Buckeye"

Walk once more down to the end of the hall of that ivy-clad building, over the well-worn boards smelling faintly of polish. Turn to the right into a quiet, cool classroom. The light from the high Gothic windows seems palely tinged with green as if filtered through the ivy leaves that are fluttering outside the half-opened windows. In one corner of the room shelves filled with books extend to the ceiling. The blackboard is covered with the quaint, crabbed hieroglyphics so familiar to hundreds of students who came for encouragement, advice, or just good "talk" about books during the thirty-two years in which Professor Cary Oscar Altman taught English at Otterbein. At the roll-top desk in the corner sits "Prof," with his silvered shock of hair, his face and hands browned and weathered from his hobbies, gardening and fishing. He is wearing his famous black bow tie.

The atmosphere of this classroom always seemed particularly suitable for the study of the world's great literature; but more important, the professor seemed particularly suited to his work. For here was a teacher, not a pedant; here was a mind that not only understood but felt what Matthew Arnold meant when he wrote about the best that has been thought and said in the world. Professor Altman believed in the worth and the force of his materials, and he spent his life sharing with his students his insights about and his love for literature. Not only that--he encouraged them to write some themselves. Over the years he taught many courses, among them the Nineteenth Century Essayists, the Romantics, Browning and Tennyson, Shakespeare, Contemporary Drama, American Literature, Poetic Forms, and Creative Writing. Remember?

What was the background of this man? At least in the early years it would have seemed highly unlikely that he would become a college professor. In a note among his papers he writes: "Born June 12, 1879, in a square brick house on a farm four miles north of Bluffton, Ohio, one mile south of Webster, now no longer in existence, situated on a cross-roads connecting the county line road between Putnam and Hancock counties and what was called the Ottawa Pike." His parents were first-generation American farmers, his grandmother having come from Bingen-on-the-Rhine and his grandfather from Switzerland, where he had been a schoolteacher. While Cary was in high school, his father died. The farm was sold, and his mother, a devout United Brethern, divided the money into equal portions for loan to her seven children. Cary, a voracious reader of any and every book he could lay his hands on, at seventeen took his share and set out in the fall of 1896 to attend the Academy at Otterbein University. After one year at the Academy, he returned to Pandora High School. In 1898, although he had not yet graduated from high school, he obtained, at the age of nineteen, a certificate to teach and spent one year teaching in a small country school. But the link with Otterbein was strong, so back he came in 1899 for another year. Then back to teach at a school called Victory. Then finally there was enough money for him to spend four consecutive years at Otterbein, where he graduated in 1905 with the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

Not all his time at college was spent with books, however. He quarterbacked the varsity football team at a time when Otterbein played Ohio State. Sometimes even today it is recalled that Otterbein once defeated Ohio State, 42-6. On the football field Cary acquired the nickname by which both faculty and students best remember him. As he walked off the scrimmage field one afternoon, a student by the name of Clyde E. Cowan asked him where he came

from. When Cary replied, "I'm from Ohio," Cowan said, "Oh, you're a Buckeye then." Somehow the nickname "Buckeye" stuck; it was a name that not only seemed to suit him but to please him as well. "Buckeye" was an influential member of Philophronia Literary Society and also a member of what could probably be termed the first fraternity on the campus, a secret organization called the "Props" composed of eight men, four from Philophronia and four from Philomathia. As insignia these eight wore a tiny gold skull-and-crossbones with emerald eyes. Holding top-secret meetings somewhere on Schrock Road, they contrived for a time to influence the political and social arrangements of campus life.

After graduation, "Buckeye" returned to Pandora High School, first as assistant principal, then principal. After five years there he became principal at Ottawa, Ohio, where he met Miss Charlotte Kolhoff, whom he was later to marry in 1914. (Their two children, Mary and Howard, are both graduates of Otterbein.) In 1911 he became a Fellow and Assistant in English at Ohio State University, receiving his Master's Degree in 1912. After teaching one year at the University of Minnesota and two years at Yankton College, South Dakota, he was appointed Professor of English Composition and Rhetoric at Otterbein in 1916, where he was to remain until his retirement in 1948.

In 1919, Professor Altman helped a group of students interested in creative writing to organize the Quiz and Quill Club, an organization which he sponsored until 1947. Each year since its founding, the Club has published a magazine of verse and prose. For the first five years, one volume was issued, and two volumes annually thereafter, one in the fall and one in the spring. The successful continuation of a literary magazine on a college campus is of course neither sure nor easy. Printing of limited editions is always costly. Sometimes, particularly during the depression years, it

seemed as if it would be impossible to continue publishing the magazine; but "Prof," quietly determined, and always convinced of the value of the Quiz and Quill magazine, fought for the funds necessary to enable publication.

One occasion which pleased him very much was the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of Quiz and Quill. At the Quiz and Quill Breakfast in 1939 he was presented a specially-bound copy of a book called the Quiz and Quill Anthology, 1919-1939, a collection of prose and poetry written by members of the club during the twenty-year period, and edited by Miss Jean Turner. The dedication of this anthology reads:

To  
BUCKEYE

With Our Gratitude and Affection

To lead others into the miracle of  
creation, is a more subtle achievement than  
to discover for oneself only, the truth which  
lies behind all self-expression.

Through the years he always looked forward to the Quiz and Quill Breakfast at Commencement, a time when so many of his former students came to see him. One of the most pleasant activities for Quiz and Quill alumni was this breakfast, held until the group grew too large, at the home of Professor and Mrs. Altman, where members enjoyed the strawberries from Buckeye's berry patch as well as good conversation with old friends.

Finally, at sixty-nine, he was tired and decided to retire a year early so that he would have enough time for other joys. He and his wife were able to travel for some seven or eight years, and he was able to pursue his hobby, fishing, from the Florida Keys to Wisconsin lakes, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. When he thought his travelling days were over, they settled down as near to the Pacific Ocean as he could get. He had time to reread his favorites--Thoreau, Keats, Shakespeare, Arnold. He died July 20, 1960, at the age of eighty-two, and is buried at Forest Lawn, Los Angeles, California.

In the following poem, written a few years before his death, he conveyed

his impressions of the land he loved.

### "We Have Sought Beauty"

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever."  
 And we have sought beauty,  
 Not with the wild, fierce passion of Shelley,  
 Or with the keen, sensitive soul of Keats:  
 Yet we have sought for it,  
 And, sometimes from afar,  
 Have caught brief glimpses of the vision beautiful.

We have found this beauty everywhere.  
 We found it among the snow-clad Rockies of Alberta:  
 In the limpid blue of dream-like Lake Louise,  
 In the brilliant sunsets of the Upper Arrow,  
 And in the emerald shimmer of Lake Tahoe.

We have heard it in the whispering pines  
 About Sebago and the Rangeley Lakes,  
 In the roaring surf of rock-bound Maine,  
 And in the dashing spray and sullen roar of great Niagara.

We sought for beauty and it was everywhere:  
 In the rolling prairies of the West,  
 In the Painted Desert, and that huge Crevasse  
 That yawns, miles wide, where time stands still,  
 Or stretches back an eternity or two--  
 Brilliant in coloring,  
 Grand, majestic, awful.

We have sought beauty and found it everywhere,  
 In the forest-covered lands that slope toward  
 The sunset sea, we found it:  
 In the Palisades, rich with the carvings of the centuries,  
 In the geysers of the Yellowstone, the smoke-like veils  
 Of rising mist--and Old Faithful spouting gracefully;  
 In Bryce Canyon, with its vermillion cliffs,  
 Its pinnacles, domes, and towers,  
 Red, deep red, in the bright sunshine.

We found it in the Yosemite,  
 That fairy land of murmuring streams and graceful waterfalls;  
 And farther west, Mt. Shasta, rising snow capped,  
 Lonely, majestic, eternal.  
 And in the Golden Gate, spanned by a mighty bridge;  
 And looking out upon the sea, a far extending sea,  
 A sea that conjures up the mystery of all the Orient.  
 The sea, this sea--  
 Who can portray its majesty and power,  
 Its moods, its whims, its calm, its storm,  
 Its booming breakers, and its lazy tides.

Yes, we have sought beauty  
 And have found it,  
 Not only in the lofty mountains and the sea,  
 But in the glorious coloring of deep forests,  
 In the frozen mosaics of Mammoth Cave,  
 And in the tranquility and deep solemnity  
 Of the Big Trees--the Mariposa.  
 There they stand, scarred by centuries of forest fires,  
 Deep-rooted, colossal--the most venerable of living things.

The Deep South, too, has things of beauty.  
 There are the wind-swept sandy beaches,  
 Stretching for miles and miles;  
 There are the shining waters of the Gulf  
 And the Atlantic--and one bright spot,  
 The brightest of them all--the Lotus Land,  
 The Dream Land--the Florida Keys--  
 Waters of an emerald hue,  
 With shades of blue and brown and grey,  
 So interfused as if to seem  
 Reflections from Paradise. All these  
 And the rose-colored, flaming Flamingoes of Hialeah  
 That "forever float, double swan and shadow."

Yes, we have sought beauty,  
 "For a thing of beauty is a joy forever."

--"Buckeye"