

# Wind Over Wisconsin Short Guide

## Wind Over Wisconsin by August Derleth

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">Wind Over Wisconsin Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Social Concerns.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Techniques.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Literary Precedents.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Related Titles.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>

# Characters

Chalfonte Pierneau is the protagonist of this novel, but he is far from the most interesting character.

Pierneau is too good, too noble and too predictable to incur any but the most cursory interest in the reader; and, while he manages to handle any emergency, he is not very bright. He only sees the need to alter his way of earning a livelihood when another character advises him; he fails to notice the severity of the leg wound which finally claims his wife until it is too late; and he stubbornly refuses to accept the shortcomings of Black Hawk, in whom he has endowed, in his imagination, superhuman nobility.

The minor characters are quite a different matter. His friend and advisor Hercules Dousman is probably the most commanding character in the book, and he is a historic figure. In this book, Derleth outlines the early career of one of Wisconsin's most famous citizens, a man who bought out John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company and made enough money to build Villa Louis, one of the most luxurious mansions in Wisconsin. In *Wind Over Wisconsin*, Dousman is a young man just beginning to make his name in the fur trade; but his gritty cynicism, his far-sighted anticipation of the railroads and the value of wheat in Wisconsin's future, and his uncanny ability to show up in a canoe any time Pierneau faces a crisis in his professional life endear him to readers who have begun to lose patience with the protagonist just prior to Dousman's reappearance.

Black Sparrow Hawk, also drawn from history, makes only six appearances in the book; but in him Derleth has created a complex character both devoted to his principles and his people and, at the same time, willing to turn a blind eye to the fact that his enforced retirement is little more than a luxurious imprisonment. Black Hawk's fate lies at the base of the story, warning Pierneau of the transience of power and the fate that awaits any but the vigilant.

Nonhistorical, minor characters also come to life: Pierneau's wise and wizened mother; his less cultured employees; and the settlers, both responsible and reprehensible, who come to take up the government's offer of free land.

All contribute to a living early eighteenth-century Wisconsin, and offset the lack of depth in the protagonist.



## Social Concerns

As in many of his works of the "Sac Prairie Saga," in *Wind Over Wisconsin* Derleth expresses regret that, in order to build a new nation, the older nations of the Winnebago, the Saks, the Ottawas, the Chippewas, and the Potawotomis had to be supplanted. The author cares that these nations lost their land and their way of life, but he cares even more about how it was taken from them. Through his main character, Chalfonte Pierneau, Derleth expresses regret for the broken treaties, the unfair warfare, and the total disregard for Native Americans through which this country became great. He is particularly concerned that the good will of "naive" Indians was used to perpetuate the unwise policies of a hypocritical government.

While Derleth is clearly embarrassed by the way in which the land was taken from the Indians, he in no way expresses other popular 1938 social sentiments. Far from suggesting socialist or big government solutions to the problems of his early nineteenth-century protagonist, everything in the novel suggests a firm faith in free enterprise, a belief in the rights of land ownership, and a healthy respect for those who turn profits from careful use of the land. Pierneau is wisely advised to secure his rights to 4,000 acres of land, very little of which he uses or plans to use as he can expect it to increase in value. In this novel, the greatest good for one who has wisely exploited the land for the good life is to raise a son to inherit it all.

## Techniques

Wind Over Wisconsin has been criticized for lack of unity and for having a disjuncture in the middle which seems to make of it two stories rather than one. Such is not the case. The italicized pages at the beginning and end of the novel provide the unity. At the beginning, a mythical Indian brave, Soft Walker, quietly watches the Marquette and Joliet expedition in its first awed discovery of the territory then called Quisconsin, and the reader is left to fill in the blanks of what happened to Soft Walker's homeland in the following centuries. At the end, the saga returns to Soft Walker's legend, and the realization of what happens to those who cannot adapt to change. The book is about change, about Black Hawk's people's inability to move with the changes in the continent, and about for their eventual extermination. It is about the white man's ability to adjust to the forces of progress and his subsequent mastery of the land called Wisconsin.

Plot is not strong in this book. It is a chronicle of a period in American history and of the nature of a land adaptable to change. Any crisis is solved in a few pages or, at most, a few chapters.

Suspense is limited to how characters will deal with individual crises in their lives, but the greater story is one, the end of which Derleth allows his readers to supply from their vantage point, of another century in Wisconsin history.



# Themes

While *Wind Over Wisconsin* was written too soon to be, in any way, part of an environmental movement, Derleth reflected the 1930s awakening to a sense of place. As a regionalist writer, Derleth expresses loving respect for the natural beauty and the accompanying resources of the Wisconsin River valley. The beneficence of the land and its contribution to the mental health of its inhabitants are a consistent theme in the Sac Prairie novels. Pierneau learns from his surroundings the will to continue in the face of the loss of two sons, his wife, and his faith in the wisdom and strength of his Indian Chief friend Black Hawk. Repeatedly, those who would misuse the land or who do not appreciate its pantheistic possibilities are shown to be unworthy, and Derleth feels no compunction about allowing his protagonist to shoot those uncaring souls with impunity — always, of course, as an act of selfdefense.

A second theme in this novel is the need for worthy men who would wrest a living from the virgin land to change with the times. Black Hawk could not adapt to the new world and the new government, and Pierneau is reluctantly forced to replace his belief in the inherent wisdom of his Indian friend with a belief in the noble savage whose nobility fades when he is forced to deal with civilization. Pierneau himself demonstrates his worthiness as a leading citizen of the new state when he successfully converts from trapping as a way of life and a way to wealth to large scale wheat farming, anticipating railroads and all the chances for profit they would bring.

The final theme in this work, and perhaps to Derleth the most important one, is Wisconsin's history as one in which uncommon men succeeded through common pursuits. For Derleth, Wisconsin history was both romantic and exciting, and taming a primal wilderness was the work of true heroes. Such a hero was Chalfonte Pierneau. Even when he was racked with grief over Black Hawk's ignominious defeat and the death of his beloved wife, this Wisconsin hero was equal to any potential external disaster, from weather conditions that threatened his germinal farming efforts to unworthy settlers who threatened his way of life.

At the same time that he worked to thwart those settlers who would not properly appreciate the land he loved, he fostered land speculation among French counts, Virginia gentlemen, and hard-working middle Americans.

# Literary Precedents

Wind Over Wisconsin owes its being not so much to precedents as to a literary and artistic movement of the 1930s.

While Derleth claimed his "Sac Prairie Saga" to be in a league with Honore du Balzac's *Human Comedy* (1842-1846) and Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-1927), it mimics them in magnitude only. The Saga's real literary sister is the fiction of the 1930s which strove to depict a sense of place.

While the concerns of *Sac Prairie* are in no way so cosmic as those in William Faulkner's *Yoknapatawpha County*, Derleth creates from his "own postage stamp of native soil" a microcosm no less complex and no less complete.

Derleth uses the same techniques Faulkner does of introducing a minor character in one book and picking him up as the protagonist of another. Like Faulkner, he creates history, geography, social milieu, and population out of types and typical situations. Regional work of a different vein was written by Sinclair Lewis using a fictional town much like his home of Sauk Center, Minnesota. While Lewis's purpose was to expose the hypocrisy and stifling mores of his native habitat, and Derleth's was to laud the noble men (and occasionally women) who comprised his, Lewis did mentor the younger writer and sponsored his application for the Guggenheim. Lewis finally gave up on Derleth when he refused to take the time to polish his work and develop his talent; and, one supposes, when he never saw that his region was as hypocritical and restrictive as Lewis's own.

Wind Over Wisconsin itself finds a close literary cousin in the work of Faulkner's Southern compatriot, Margaret Mitchell. For his much less popular book, Derleth calls on the same skills of fitting fictional characters into particular historic events — the Black Hawk Wars, the waning of the fur trade, the opening of the land to settlers — and having them interact with historic figures — Hercules Dousman, Black Hawk, Zachary Taylor. Published just two years after *Gone With the Wind* (Mitchell, 1936), *Wind Over Wisconsin* owes none of its being to that book; it was not Derleth's first historic novel and its sentimentality and unquestioning glorification of the land have more in common with Thomas Nelson Page, a writer of historical Southern fiction from the nineteenth century.

While the best-known 1930s regional writers wrote of the South, overall the best-known and most enduring regional artists are of Derleth's Midwest.

It would not do to write of Derleth's regionalism without mention of the regional artists who made their homes and their names in the Midwest. John Stuart Curry taught at the University of Wisconsin while Derleth was beginning his saga, and both Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton had returned to the Midwest after trying the cities of the world, just as Derleth had tried editing and publishing in Minneapolis to find that his

spirit was alive only in and around Sauk City. It is in the tradition of these artists that Derleth created his Midwestern microcosm.



## Related Titles

Other novels in the "Sac Prairie Saga" are: *Still is the Summer Night*, 1937; *Any Day Now*, 1938; *Restless is the River*, 1939; *Bright Journey*, 1940; *Evening in Spring*, 1941; *Sweet Genevieve*, 1942; *Shield of the Valiant*, 1945; *Shadow of Night*, 1948; *The House of Moonlight*, 1953; *The House on the Mound*, 1958; *The Hills Stand Watch*, 1960; *The Shadow in the Glass*, 1963; and *The Wind Leads West*, 1969.

*Wind Over Wisconsin* is one of thirtyeight books and numerous shorter works written for the incomplete "Sac Prairie Saga," but it is only one of ten novels based on Wisconsin history. In the Sac Prairie series, *Wind Over Wisconsin* is set at the earliest date covering Sac Prairie life in the 1830s. It is followed by *Restless is the River*, in which Count Brogmar, briefly introduced in *Wind Over Wisconsin*, helps to found the town of Sac Prairie in the 1840s. *Shadow of Night* occurs around 1850 with the tale of a vengeful hunchback named Hasso who is won to positive thinking by the land that soothed Pierneau in times of hardship. Pierneau, his man of all work Kerry, and his mother reappear in this novel. Life in the period of 1881-1885 is covered in *Still in the Summer Night*; although in this work, as in the final Sac Prairie fictional offering, actual historic events and figures are eschewed in favor of romantic stories. *Evening in Spring*, a semi-autobiographical novel, chronicles what it was like to grow up in Sac Prairie during the 1920s.

Late in his life, Derleth segregated several Wisconsin novels with protagonists drawn from history into a "Wisconsin Saga." It is to this group that *Bright Journey* and *House on the Mound*, novels of Hercules Dousman's career belong, as does *The Shadow in the Glass*, a novel based on the career of Wisconsin's first governor. Other novels of the "Wisconsin Saga" are *The Hills Stand Watch*, about Cornish miners in the Wisconsin region near Galena, Illinois; and *The Wind Leads West*, a chronicle of the rise of banking in Wisconsin.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994