

MidAmerica XXVIII

*The Yearbook of the Society
for the Study of Midwestern Literature*

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The Midwestern Press
The Center for the Study of
Midwestern Literature and Culture
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1033

2001

To the Memory of
Elmer Suderman
(1920-2003)

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PREFACE

The 31st annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, held May 10-12, 2001, at Michigan State University, was noteworthy for its emphasis on theatre. John Rohrkemper, Marilyn Atlas, Jill Gidmark, Jim Seaton, Jean Strandness, and Tom Pribek performed a reading of Booth Tarkington's "The Trysting Place," organized by John Rohrkemper and dedicated to the memory of Arthur Shumaker, and students from Central Michigan University presented a reading of Sandra Seaton's "Do You Like Philip Roth?"

At the awards banquet on Friday night, Dan Gerber received the Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern Literature, and Elmer Suderman received the MidAmerica Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern literature. Diane Kendig won the Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Prize, Paul Somers won the fiction prize, and Kenneth Grant won the Midwest Heritage Award for best essay read at the 2000 conference. Honorable mentions were Todd Davis and Roy Bentley for poetry, Jim Gorman and Nancy Woodson for fiction, and Mark Graves and Michael Lasley for essays.

This issue is dedicated to the late Elmer Suderman, recipient of the MidAmerica Award for 2001.

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OUT WITH THE MONARCH, THE VOLE,
AND THE TOAD

PATRICIA CLARK

To live as they do, vulnerably, in the air,
the wing-assaulting wind, to breathe
the wind, the cool September air, and watch
the *Sweet Autumn* clematis twine and climb.
To live with the scuff and smatter of leaves
at the burrow hole, the dying fall of the pink
geranium petal, the tomato stalk blackening from last
night's chill. To live with the thought, the weight—the dead
branch pitching down to shatter in the yard,
the hawk's shadow, the days ahead
without sun. A full moon spills its cream
over Dean Lake and boys at midnight
putter on their scow. An exhalation from the lake
rises to surround them, safe with a light,
though far from shore. To live with water's depth
and dark, some force that wants to pull things
in and down. To live hidden, hurrying, hurt.
The toad finds the upturned pot and crouches there,
but the snake crawls across the flagstones' warmth
and surprises it. To live the death, the thrash
in red, the awful struggle, to let breath go.
To hunker down and yet be lifted up, skin tingling,
synapses firing, the heart a-beat, awash, eyes
wide, nose lifted to what is perceptibly near.

THEY LABOUR IN VAIN
BOOK ONE

CLAIRE VAN BREEMEN DOWNES

Zion's Glad Morning

Hail to the brightness of Zion's glad morning.
Joy to the lands that in darkness have lain!
Hushed be the accents of sorrow and mourning,
Zion in triumph begins her mild reign.

[OLD HYMN] Thomas Hastings, 1832

ARISE AND GO

Almost there—almost there—almost there, the drone of the train wheels sang into Ivy's ear. The song had gone on ever since they pulled out of the Chicago Northwestern station into grimy morning sunlight; the blue of Lake Michigan had been there beyond the windows too long and unchanging. The great journey was over except for this last bit, but Ivy wanted to be *there*, not *almost there*.

Sulky Duncan, across the aisle, must have a more exciting view, but he didn't care—too busy wishing himself back in Canada, no doubt, thinking Papa might have let him go on to university, if only they hadn't moved.

No use asking Mother to let her change places, but it must be cooler over there. Sun streamed in through the dust-smeared window, July-fierce. Ivy squirmed in her blue serge suit. Oh for cool gray linen, like that of the lady two seats ahead! (Ivy envied, too, the elegant hat with short gray plumes.) Smoothing her own skirt, she took no pride in the blue and white braid (sewed on so painfully) just like the pattern-book. Was it always going to be this hot in Illinois?

"May I get a drink, Mother?" Ivy leaned close to be heard.

"Not twenty minutes since you walked down there last. That's not seemly. Be patient until we get to Zion city." Myra Moffat's decisions were always instant and forever, but Ivy urged again, "Please, Mama—"

Myra spoke firmly. "Be a lady, Ivy!"

Pulling together the dignity of her fourteen years, Ivy turned from the erect black figure, to stare again at the lake. Was it further away? Maybe Zion City was not right on the beach—How disappointing if she couldn't see the lake from their property!

Her tied-back hair clung to her neck, curling stickily. Five days traveling—constant lurching of trains, smells of eaten lunches and too many people, smudgy heat—but this whole morning of being *almost there* seemed longer than all the rest, longer than the weeks since she first knew they were moving to Zion City.

A year ago—July of 1901—the first *Zion Banner* had come into the little gray house on Pembroke Street. The Moffats had started attending the Zion Church in Victoria because Elder Hunt, a neighbor from down the street, came and prayed for Mother when she was so sick. One important belief of Zion was that God's children could trust God for healing. Dr. Dowie, founder of the church, had come from Australia to bring the message of Divine Healing to America. Mother, desperately ill, got well.

Several months after her illness, Mother went alone to prayer meeting and brought the *Banner* home with her. On its cover, printed in vivid gold, blue, and red, was Zion's emblem: cross, sword, and crown, a snowy dove of peace flying over all.

The cover was not what Mama showed to Papa. She pointed out something in fine print on the back of the magazine, laying it down across his open book. Papa looked at her, said nothing. Mother sighed and went into the hall to put away her hat and gloves. Next day, Ivy read the words: "The Year Text for 1901 says: 'Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God.'"

Often after that, Ivy, from her little square bedroom at the head of the stairs, heard her parents talking, talking, talking, far into the night. Once her father's voice rose impatiently.

"Why should we go traipsing half across the country after this fellow Dowie, anyway?"

Ivy, huddled in her bed, heard her mother's voice, low and urgent in reply. Didn't Papa believe that John Alexander Dowie's teachings had saved Mama's life? If he was founding a City of God, surely the

had saved Mama's life? If he was founding a City of God, surely the Moffats ought to be there?

Papa was awfully slow in agreeing to come, though Mother urged him incessantly. Work was good in Victoria; he liked the climate and the people. "Flying in the face of Providence to go back to that pestilential climate," he said. "Always two workers for every job back there." No objection to Zion folks. No objection to Divine Healing—never had much use for doctors anyway. But junketing half across the country? He always shook his head and ended the discussion.

With the first of the spring came diphtheria. Ivy was very ill, too feverish and far away even to know when the health officers came and took her to the plague hospital. Only afterward she knew little Lloyd had died and Papa had gone to jail for not calling a doctor.

Papa was released after three days, not prosecuted for manslaughter as threatened, but Ivy knew as soon as they brought her home that nothing was right in the house—not only missing Lloyd and his big tumbling, cheerful noise. Papa was absent, too, his big, strong sureness all burnt out.

One night in May she heard the talking again. Mother's voice rose, shrill and accusing: "If we had been doing God's will, Lloyd needn't have died!" Footsteps. A door closing. Silence.

Mother came to Ivy's room next morning with a smile on her lips. She propped Ivy up, set the breakfast tray before her, then stepped to the window, looking out. Sunlight was a golden cloak of transfiguration about her as she turned.

"We're moving, Ivy," she said quietly. "To Zion City."

Almost there—almost there—Ivy stirred again, her restless body rebelling against blue serge, dusty sunlight, long sitting-still.

"*We're marching to Zion!*" she began to sing under her breath. Looking at her mother, she thought better of it. Lips set in their usual unyielding line, Myra Moffat sat upright on the uncomfortable plush upholstery, gloved hands folded, boots somehow free of dust. ("You can always tell a lady by her boots and gloves, Ivy.") Whatever joyous psalms Myra was singing inside, no glint of excitement escaped. Ivy let the rest of the music sing on in her brain.

Beautiful, beautiful Zion! What radiancy of glory did it hold? "Beautiful lakeshore, rolling farm-land," the articles in *The Banner* had said, but she had found it hard to picture Illinois as different from Vancouver Island or their earlier home on the Washington coast. (Duncan laughed at her assumption that Lake Michigan was filled

with salt water.) But what were the houses like? Would there still be lamp-chimneys to polish and chamber-pots to scour? Probably. She sighed, acknowledging the unhappy lot of Eve's daughters, even in a place next-door to heaven.

"Are you feeling ill?" her mother asked sharply.

"No, Mama. Will we be there soon?"

"Less than fifteen minutes." Myra smiled at her daughter, pleased at her impatience. This one shared her dream. Duncan might yearn for Victoria, for the world of lectures and laboratories which he had hoped lay just ahead, but Ivy looked toward Zion. Surely Duncan, too, would find a better happiness than mere human knowledge, once he saw God's will for him.

She glanced across at her husband. Jacob Moffat sat stern and expressionless beside Duncan. God would move in his heart, too. He would see—these were God's people, this was where they belonged. He would thank her for bringing them here, where Duncan and Ivy would be safe from the world.

Myra leaned over, brushed a straggling wisp of hair from Ivy's flushed forehead. "Sit up like a lady and put your feet flat on the floor!" she whispered.

My, the child looked hot and untidy! She herself felt strong and rested, untouched by heat, in spite of the long days of travel in stifling trains—in spite of the heavy labor of the packing. Her small body had moved relentlessly from task to task: filling the huge barrel with dishes, stowing bedding and winter clothing in the Chinese telescope cases of straw matting, scrubbing—Ivy helped, but she moved slowly, dawdling and dreaming. For Myra, the work was the dream. Each box securely roped severed another tie with a land she had never loved, brought her nearer home, back to the lake country she need never leave again. God had built a city here for her where she could serve the Lord and keep her children unspotted from the world.

Again she looked at Jacob, sitting the same way, broad-shouldered, solemn, his blue eyes curtained against the world, against her, as always. Sudden coldness gripped her wrists and the back of her neck but she looked beyond him to her tall son, then leaned towards her husband.

"Jacob, is Duncan going to be sick again?" She managed to make her ladylike whisper audible to him.

Unhurriedly, Jacob looked at his son, rigidly miserable beside the window.

"No, I don't think so."

Myra withdrew again into primness, small square hands returning to their black-gloved serenity. Jacob returned to his own thoughts. What did she think about when she sat there like that? New schemes to make them all too holy to live with, probably. If only she would be happy here—But he felt a bitter laughter breaking off the hope.

He should have given up long ago—way back in Kansas when they buried their first three little boys on the windswept prairie. Her white face, her dark eyes large with shadows, accused him across the graves: *This is your fault for bringing us here*. He had taken Myra home to Michigan, but she had never come back to him again, not really.

Now their youngest had died and he was taking her home again. Only a fool would think good might come of it. What did it matter? Lloyd was gone.

If, as Myra insisted, Lloyd's death was God's message of reproof, it was directed straight to him, for Lloyd was Jacob's child, formed in his image. Myra had loved the boy, fed him, rocked him to sleep—but he was not hers, not really. This one of his children had held all Jacob's hope for the future. Duncan, dark and scowling, was Myra's son; Ivy, however dear, was only a girl. With Lloyd gone, his future was gone. Life had to be got through somehow, somewhere—might as well be in Zion City, if that would keep Myra quiet.

The train had been slowing for some time. Now the first shudder of the brakes roused him. Already Myra was picking up the small luggage near her, handing some to Ivy, looking impatiently towards him. He stood up to reach the satchel overhead. *We'll know soon enough....*

"Look alive, Duncan," he ordered. "We're stopping at Zion City."

St. Cloud State University

WINDY MCPHERSON'S SON: SOWING THE SEEDS OF WINESBURG'S TWISTED APPLES

ROBERT DUNNE

In *Winesburg, Ohio*, Sherwood Anderson forged an original conception of the modern grotesque with an innovative understanding of the indeterminacy of language. But he did not fashion these ideas out of whole cloth; in particular, his perceptive attention to the alienation of modern Americans and their inability to communicate can be traced back to his first attempts at writing fiction. In spite of acquiring many of the trappings of middle-class success earlier in his life, Anderson eventually questioned the cultural icons of America's success myth. By the time he left his family and business in Ohio to go to Chicago, in early 1913, he was already working out in his mind what he perceived to be a negative transformation taking place in modern society. He was still quite inexperienced, however, in adopting a language and a style suitable for critiquing this transformation.

In Chicago, where he got work writing for an advertising agency, he brought with him several novel-length manuscripts, one of which resulted in his first published book, *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916).¹ In this novel we can see Anderson groping toward the level of mastery over his material that he would later achieve in *Winesburg*. By itself, *Windy McPherson's Son* is a crude, often bizarre attempt of a novice author trying to depict the social ills of the early twentieth century. In portraying these ills, he unfortunately organizes and writes about them according to the fashions of popular fiction writers. It is not a happy marriage. According to Harry Hansen, Anderson himself said of this and his other early works, "The books frankly were not good" (122).

Simply stated, the novel is a failure, in part because Anderson seems fixated on unrealistically elevating his protagonist to the level of Emersonian Great Man or Nietzschean Superman who becomes hell-bent on curing society's ills. He describes provocatively the frustrations

of modern life while offering an unrealistic fairy-tale hero as its antidote. In addition, when he was writing this novel he was not yet aware of the power of evocative language, with the result that he employs a heavy-handed, didactic approach in telling his story. Ironically, in light of *Winesburg's* introductory tale, "The Book of the Grotesque," the hero Sam McPherson is like a grotesque himself.

It is worthwhile to examine this work nonetheless, because it extends what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls our "fusion of horizons" (306) for understanding *Winesburg, Ohio*.² For in *Windy McPherson's Son*, Anderson confronts issues that will become the basis of his conception of the modern grotesque. The novel is best studied as being innovative in snatches: it begins to explore critically the negative consequences on the individual of the normalized, controlling power sources that would characterize modern industrialized America.³ In effect, the book succeeds in fleshing out the milieu of the modern grotesque. As we will see, the *material* of the modern grotesque is present in this work, but it is not successfully integrated with the *telling* of it.

Windy McPherson's Son opens in Caxton, Iowa, where Sam McPherson, a young teenager who sells newspapers, is regarded as "a figure in the town's life" (24) because of his industry and cleverness. At this early age, Sam already has an understanding of many of the power sources that affect his life. His father Windy is a loquacious alcoholic who continually causes embarrassment in Sam's life. Though accepted by the town and a regular fixture among a coterie of townsmen who loaf and talk at Wildman's grocery, Sam nevertheless feels compelled to assert his business prowess as a way to compensate for being "Windy McPherson's son." Although no one ever taunts Sam about his father, he still follows his work ethic to prove to the town that he is not another Windy:

The realisation of the fact that his father was a confirmed liar and braggart had for years cast a shadow over his days and the shadow had been made blacker by the fact that in a land where the least fortunate can laugh in the face of want he had more than once stood face to face with poverty. He believed that the logical answer to the situation was money in the bank and with all the ardour of his boy's heart he strove to realise that answer. He wanted to be a money-maker [...]. (22)

This passage efficiently illustrates some of the most important influences on Sam's life. Personally embarrassed by his father's wayward behav-

ior, Sam is also well aware of the power of town gossip, as well as the pervasive hold that the American Dream myth had on Americans in both great cities and small towns like Caxton. He not only tries constantly to manifest a rigid self-reliance, but he also convinces himself of the importance of exerting mastery over others, to be in command not only of himself but of everyone he encounters. Not surprisingly, at fifteen "the call of the city came to him" (74); his growing obsession with domination becomes too great for the little corn town. Ironically, though, Sam's hunger for power and control shows him to be the agent of his own subjection to the then prevailing ideology of "getting up in the world." Later in the novel, when Sam becomes a ruthless business tycoon in Chicago, the narrator tells us that from *that* point on, his story "ceases to be the story of a man and becomes the story of a type" (248). But, really, Sam chooses to be a type before he leaves the Caxton city limits.

The town repeatedly reinforces Sam's work ethic. Valmore, one of the cohorts who regularly gather at the grocery, admits, "It is money makes the mare go" (75). Such bromides as this fill "the very air [Sam] breathed" and feed the "belief within him that to make money and to have money would in some way make up for the old half-forgotten humiliations in the life of the McPherson family" (74). With this goal in mind, Sam quickly realizes what will help him succeed and what will not.

He is convinced that religion and thoughts about God will *not* help him, for reasons that intersect each of his major influences: his father, town gossip, and his belief in the success myth. He perceives religion and God to be embarrassing and counter-productive to his goal of being a powerful businessman. For example, while regularly in tow with his mother at church services, Sam usually fills the time by sleeping. When the minister talks to him about this, Sam is repulsed and immediately associates the minister and his message with both the sleepy town and his lying father:

He thought himself superior to the thin-lipped man ... and had he been able to express what was in his heart he might have said: "Look here, man! I am made of different stuff from all the people there at the church. I am new clay to be molded into a new man [...] I do not accept your ideas of life anymore than I accept Windy McPherson just because he happens to be my father" (39).

What finalizes his break with religion at this period in his life is his humiliation at a religious revival, where he realizes that organized reli-

gion is primarily a means of converting the townsfolk into mindless subjects. At the revival, the minister calls on the congregation to stand up and give testimony to Jesus; everyone complies, except Sam, who tries to hide behind his mother. But when he is singled out to testify, Sam embarrasses himself by garbling a line of Scripture as his response. The congregation laughs at him, and Sam storms out, angered and ashamed that he will become an object of ridicule in the town gossip. Alienated by his bungled public display of piety, Sam is convinced that church "is a place to make public asses of the people" (45).

Sex, or as Anderson parochially calls it, "the sex motive" (41), is another hindrance to Sam's drive for power and success. Sam's mentor, the self-professed dandy John Telfer, repeatedly attempts to set Sam straight concerning women. He tells Sam that women "are not the real things.... I would have you observe women's minds and avoid letting them influence your own [....] They live in a world of unrealities" (60). He persuades Sam that women function as distractions to a man of genius, whom he believes Sam to be: "I think that a man or boy who has set for himself a task had better let women and girls alone" (69). What is really at issue, though, is that "the sex motive" is something that Sam cannot readily control; hence, it remains mysterious, sometimes even dangerous, to him. As J. R. Scafidel points out, Sam eventually tries to exert control over sex in his adult years, with frustrated results: "He feels he must order this force of sex, as man has nature, so he sublimates it" (97). This imposing of order on sex becomes more obvious when Sam codifies his sexual relations with Sue Rainey in their self-conscious mission to serve "mankind through children" (188). Even though he displays a normal teenage curiosity about sex, he nonetheless subjects himself to the misogynistic views of Telfer, as when he tells himself, "I will try to be a man. I will try to not have anything to do with them—with women. I will work and make money—and—and—" (73). Sam again shows himself to be malleable to the influences of the town, in this case to advance his career in business.

A cruder manifestation of the town's negative influence is the widespread power of gossiping. For instance, Anderson contrasts Sam's humiliation at church with the arrest of Mike McCarthy, the village atheist, who is apprehended for killing a man over his wife. In an apparent state of madness, McCarthy, while in jail and with the townsfolk milling about outside, delivers a prayer which all can hear: he curses the "[s]ons of this cesspool of respectability" and identi-

fies a dozen wives with whom he has had affairs. From this outburst, Sam gains an "ugly feeling of satisfaction," because some of the women named were a moment earlier the seemingly pious participants in the revival. Another example of the pernicious influence of town gossip is Mary Underwood, Sam's schoolteacher, a figure who leads an isolated, ostracized life:

Mary did not understand the people of Caxton and the people misunderstood and distrusted her. Taking no part in the life of the town and keeping to herself and to her books she awoke a kind of fear in others. Because she did not join them at church suppers, or go from porch to porch gossiping with other women through the long summer evenings, they thought her something abnormal. (57)

After a controversial incident involving Mary and her school, the story makes the rounds in town. Sam, however, sees through the gossip and associates it with his father's penchant for telling lies (59). Mary is again thrust into the town's limelight at the funeral of Jane McPherson, Sam's mother, because she appeared at the McPherson house one night during the mother's illness. Sam goes so far as to attack two women in public who were discussing Mary, which prompts a lengthy authorial diatribe on the evils of women who gossip. Sam then publishes a letter in the local newspaper defending Mary and soon after heads to Chicago to begin his quest to succeed.

In the first book, the most effective part of the novel, Anderson presents a compelling depiction of someone who wills his own subjection by playing a role, the characteristics of which have been fashioned by various sources of power. Convinced that he must be a superior person to offset the town's watchful gaze upon the McPherson family, Sam is ever on the alert to expand his business prowess, even if that means subjecting his own natural desires. Paradoxically, at the same time he tries to project himself to the town as a budding genius in business, he loathes the town for its shallow-mindedness and its widespread control of its inhabitants, as demonstrated by the effects of its gossiping on characters like Mary Underwood. Similar to Michel Foucault's conception of the panopticon,⁴ the town serves as a place where individuals' actions stand out in relief so that they can be watched and evaluated for how well they serve or deviate from normalized morality. Characters who are uniquely individualized are regarded askance by the town. Sam does not suffer such ostracism because he embraces the work ethic that

was then revered in the nation's popular mythology. Having subjected himself to playing out his self-assigned role, Sam is, in a sense, complicit in sustaining the ideological status quo. He differs primarily by his motivation to succeed; his distaste for the town's lies is merely a projection of his hatred for his lying father, and thus it is this desire to distance himself from lies and embarrassments that propels him to reject Caxton and stake his claim in Chicago.

In the ensuing chapters after Book I, Anderson tries his best to excoriate the crushing pressure which the modern business work ethic exerts upon the individual and to grasp upon definitive answers to this problem, but his ineptitude in conveying his ideas undercuts the overall effectiveness of the novel. Having successfully depicted the milieu of the modern grotesque, Anderson undermines such success by forcing upon the reader a contrived attempt at a solution. Such overt solutions will be absent by the time he writes the *Winesburg* tales.

Early on in Chicago, Sam envisions himself becoming a self-made man, an achiever of the rags-to-riches version of the American Dream myth. Still desiring to distinguish himself from his father and the small minds of Caxton, Sam yearns to wield power over men:

He saw himself going on and on, directing, managing, ruling men. It seemed to him that there was nothing he could not do. "I will run factories and banks and maybe mines and railroads," he thought. (138)

At twenty-two, Sam already has begun to move up in the Rainey Arms Company, becoming an efficiency expert and preparing himself for his eventual takeover of the company. Over the course of only a few years, Sam and his cohorts become known as the "McPherson Chicago crowd" (249) for their boldness in controlling a number of industries. Clearly ignorant of big business, Anderson, in the sections devoted to Sam's rise to power, resorts to clichéd images of business dealings to hurry along his protagonist's growing material success. He is clearly trying hard to prepare his readers for Sam's dramatic rejection of the American Dream to pursue Truth, which is spurred on after he and his wife, Sue Rainey, split and his father-in-law, Colonel Tom, commits suicide over Sam's take-over of his company. Anderson describes Sam's rejection of material success with an intended shock value: "He, an American multi-millionaire, a man in the midst of his money-making, one who had realised the American dream, to have sickened at the feast [...]—to seek Truth, to seek God"

(258). But Anderson deludes himself and his readers into thinking that *at this moment* Sam becomes a truth-seeker, for throughout much of the novel Sam has tried to live his life according to the prescriptive "truths" of the American Dream, and, in Sam's courtship and marriage with Sue Rainey, he (as well as the author apparently) is fascinated with shaping his life around a single truth as an antidote to the ills of modern life. Ironically, a few years later in Anderson's career these will become the very characteristics of grotesqueness.

When Sam proposes marriage to Sue, she quizzes him to make sure "you are ready to believe what I believe and to live for what I want to live" (186). "Her idea was one of service to mankind through children," the narrator tells us, adding, "She had thought it all out ... and wanted a husband in accord with her ideas" (188). Sam soon agrees: "He had completely and wholly accepted Sue's conception of life" (201). Thus begins a period in Sam's life that is marked by continual failings, because three attempts to conceive a child result in miscarriages or stillbirths. The two are simply stymied over their failure to have children, and they both feel that their marriage is now without purpose. After all, Sam had confused love of his wife with love of her ideas (or truths), and he had even set aside his quest to be a great businessman, all for pursuing Sue's ideas: "He was a man with children in his loins and he had given up his struggles for business eminence for the sake of preparing himself for a kind of noble fatherhood of children, many children, strong children" (222).

For the rest of the book, Sam pursues one single truth after another, with a ludicrous procession of starts and restarts resulting. After he decides that serving humankind through children is unattainable, Sam vows to "take hold anew and work out for myself a programme for a way of life" (225). Sue meanwhile decides to pursue activities for "the great modern movement of social uplift," which become a series of exercises in parlour socialism. Sam returns to hard-hearted business practices, and, on the verge of acquiring the arms company, realizes that "The best men spend their lives seeking truth" (240). With this line as his mantra, he soon after sets out on a vagabond life, dabbling in various activities, from social reforms to bartending. The story, meanwhile, has long unraveled by this time, as we are led from one escapade to another, all dictated by Sam's near-desperate desire to embrace a definitive way to lead his life: "He had one principle of action; whenever an idea came into his mind he did not hesitate, but began trying at once the practicability of living

by following the idea" (287). Running out of ideas for him to pursue, Anderson eventually has Sam purchase three children from an uncaring mother and return home to Sue, who takes them all in.⁵

Having successfully sketched the various outlets of societal control and critiqued the means of an individual's subjection to conventional morality, Anderson fails in the end to create a cohesive and effective tale in which to portray these issues. Much of the reason stems from his being rather inexperienced at writing fiction and having been influenced by what he thought should appear in serious novels. As Anderson himself observed about the book:

At the time the book was written, circumstances and a false conception of what is due the reader of a novel led me into something like trickery in writing [...] I am afraid I had come to novel writing from novel reading. I could not leave Sam in my reader's hands having achieved nothing but money and weariness. (Qtd. in White, xxvii)

Choosing to depict Sam as a heroic Truth-seeker, Anderson seems to have painted himself into a corner: not wanting to have his protagonist, who rejects the materialistic strains of the American Dream, become a failure *according to conventional standards* (which might have caused conventional readers to question the veracity of his criticisms), he felt compelled to show his audience that Sam "makes good" after all.

There are other problems in the book which are characteristic of Anderson's early fiction and which are noticeably absent in the *Winesburg* tales. Throughout the novel Anderson seems fascinated with those who exert power and control, even occasionally defending the robber barons of his own youth. In this and in his other early fiction before *Winesburg*, Anderson seems to prefer siding with heroic figures that emerge from the dross of society. The mass of humanity has not yet elicited Anderson's sympathies as it would by the time he writes the *Winesburg* tales. In *Windy McPherson's Son*, Anderson only occasionally displays the kind of concern for the down-and-out that will become his focal point in *Winesburg*. His depiction of Sam's mother Jane is one exception, as is the brief glimpse he gives us of a prostitute Sam encounters during his vagabond period. In this scene, he uses language that will evolve through his other early novels: "She had ... a look of hard chastity, like one whipped but not defeated" (319). Even Janet Eberly, a physical cripple but intellectual dynamo for Sam, is given fleeting treat-

ment before she dies, although Sam "thought of her as in a sense his wife" (159). The strong-willed but crippled milliner yields to the strong-willed but healthy and wealthy Sue Rainey.

Clearly intertwined with Sam's heroic quests are the author's own, as several passages about art and the artist illustrate; in these scenes the belabored Nietzschean overtones are hard to miss. For example, early in the book Telfer rhapsodizes about the true artist, and his musings neatly correspond with Sam's desire for power and Truth:

An artist is one who hungers and thirsts after perfection It is the artist who, among all men, has the divine audacity. Does he not hurl himself into a battle in which is engaged against him all of the accumulative genius of the world? (13).

Later, again having the artist in mind, Telfer tells Sam, "The world will some day grope its way into some kind of an understanding of its extraordinary men. Now they suffer terribly [...] It is only the common, the plain, unthinking man who slides peacefully through this troubled world" (55). In this book, the "common man" remains out of focus for Anderson; his preference is a societal and artistic Superman, as the narrator precisely equates the two when Sam is making his mark in Chicago: "The stroke that he saw in the hand of the successful business men about him is the stroke also of the master painter, scientist, actor, singer, prize fighter" (121).

These quasi-Nietzschean preoccupations will grow in intensity over Anderson's subsequent novels, though fortunately subsiding with *Winesburg*. But in these subsequent works he will also turn his attention more closely to those figures that will evolve into the grotesques, and he will become more adept at experimenting with language. Although it is replete with potholes, *Windy McPherson's Son* nevertheless commences Anderson's journey on the road to *Winesburg*, for, despite its many faults, it paves that road with the material of the modern grotesque.

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NOTES

¹Harry Hansen, who knew Anderson during these Chicago years, recalls that Anderson brought four novels with him; of these the two which were never published were *Talbot Whittingham* and *Mary Cochran* (117), both of which can be found in critical-edition dissertations, by Gerald Carl Nemanic and William Sanborn Pfeiffer, respectively.

²As Gadamer describes it, our understanding of a text is tentatively reached when we have entered into a "fusion of horizons" between our present situation and that of the past, culminating in the text itself (306). I would suggest that a fusion of horizons concerning *Winesburg* predates that work if we regard Anderson's early fiction as setting the groundwork for it.

³I am using the term "controlling power sources" in a Foucauldian sense, meaning the various entities in society that exert both control and subjection upon the individual. See *Madness and Civilization*, pp. 246, 249, 258, 267; *The History of Sexuality*, pp. 92-93; and *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 25-26, 92-93, 202-07.

⁴In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses at length the architectural design and psychological implications of an innovative prison model called the Panopticon, which was a tower containing not bars but open windows as well as back-lighting, with the goal of officials being able to observe undesirables without their knowing when. (Of course, the prisoners would know that they *might* be under surveillance at any time.) Calling this method of surveillance panopticism, Foucault observes that "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibilities for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; ... he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (202-03). Foucault extends this analysis from prison confinement to society at large, charging that similar means to exert control and reinforce confinement can be integrated into virtually any sphere—the military, hospitals, work places. The metaphor of the Panopticon itself, he adds, "has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole" (207).

⁵Floyd Dell, who helped get the book published, recalls that Anderson originally had Sam acquire several more children en route to Sue but that he edited the conclusion (253). Anderson himself, not satisfied with the conclusion, later revised it for a 1922 edition of the book. See Ray Lewis White's "The Revisions in *Windy McPherson's Son*, Sherwood Anderson's First Novel."

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BLANCHE ROOSEVELT AND THE THREE-DECKER NOVEL

PAUL W. MILLER

A musically talented, beautiful Midwestern girl born into a poor but proud Sandusky, Ohio, family, Blanche Tucker Roosevelt (1853-1898) grew up in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and Chicago ("Blanche Tucker" 4; "Blanche Roosevelt's Remarkable Career" 2). From an early age she had a powerful impetus to find fame and fortune, which seemed almost within her grasp five times—as an opera singer, as the wife of a titled Italian gentleman, as the intimate biographer of such famous writers and artists as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Giuseppe Verdi and Gustave Dore, as the long-term mistress of Maupassant, and finally as a writer of popular three-decker novels. It is this fifth and final attempt to find fame and fortune by writing three-deckers, beginning with *The Copper Queen* (1886) and ending with *Hazel Fane* (1891), that I will discuss later in this essay.

Before providing a brief account of Roosevelt's first four attempts to find fame and fortune, however, I need to touch briefly on the subject of the three-decker novel itself. In the latter half of the nineteenth century this form of the novel provided the standard fictional fare of middle-class Victorian readers, especially young women, even as Dickens's part-issue of works like *Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837) long continued to serve the needs of lower middle-class and working-class readers who could afford neither library subscriptions nor cheap reprints. The "three-decker," a term borrowed from eighteenth-century British warships with guns on three decks, refers, of course, to the big, three-volume works of fiction that became the approved format of popular, commercially successful British novels in the nineteenth century. Whereas in the eighteenth century, novels commonly ranged from one to seven volumes in length, by 1833, following the success of Scott's three-volume *Kenilworth* in 1821, the three-decker was already established. Its eventual dominance in the

latter half of the century is closely tied to the rise of circulating subscription libraries, which lent their patrons books throughout the year for a modest annual membership fee of a pound or so. By far the most successful and influential of these libraries was the Select Library of Charles Edward Mudie (1818-90) in London. From the 1850s to the early 1890s it gained a stranglehold on the distribution and indirectly on the publication of books in England, eventually embracing such well-known authors as Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, and George Eliot, as well as a host of minor writers. Even some American authors, such as James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville, were published in three-decker format.

At Mudie's the three-decker format was favored for several reasons. For while a certain proportion of middle-class readers might be able to buy a one-volume novel, the three-volume novel, attractively printed and well bound, would be beyond their reach to buy, but quite affordable to borrow. Thus the borrower felt he or she was getting a good deal from Mudie's, and Mudie's could order enough copies for lending to assure a profit for the author and publisher as well as the Library, meanwhile enjoying the luxury of near monopolistic book-purchasing powers combined with elastic pricing of the annual subscription fees. A listing in Mudie's became recognized as one of the best possible advertisements for a book. Furthermore, parents of innocent Victorian girls felt they could depend on Mudie, a good Christian, to oversee their daughters' reading. And so everyone was happy except rejected authors like George Moore, who violently protested that Mudie's supervision of English publishing was tantamount to unauthorized, inconsistent, and sometimes whimsical censorship, adding up to tyranny over the world of English letters by a single tradesman. To Mudie he wrote: "I hate you because you would mould all ideas to fit the narrow limits in which your own turn. I hate you because you impede the free development of our literature" (17). Though Mudie's continued as a subscription library for several decades after its first owner's death in 1890, it is hardly surprising that under the influence of French realism, the hostility of such independent authors as George Moore and George Gissing, and rapidly changing trade conditions, the publication of three-deckers declined sharply in the 1890s. Following what amounted to an 1894 ban by circulating libraries on the issuance of three-deckers, the number issued dropped from 184 in that year to only four in 1897. In the course of this decline, Mudie's lost much of its former power and

course of this decline, Mudie's lost much of its former power and national control, a blow from which it never recovered.

A popular Mudie's author, Blanche Roosevelt's first flirtation with fame came at age twenty-three, when she became the first native-born American girl to debut in opera at Covent Garden, London, on April 5, 1876, playing Violetta in *La Traviata*. But alas, her voice, though sweet, was too small for opera, so she was soon relegated to playing roles in Gilbert and Sullivan with diminishing success (Matz 26).

About the time of her operatic debut she capitalized on her exceptional beauty and brief celebrity as a singer to marry in London a shadowy Italian gentleman from Verona named Macchetta, later the Marquese D'Alligri (or D'Allegrì). But although Blanche kept the title of Marquesa or Countess until long after he disappeared like a pebble in the ocean, he failed to provide her with the wealth of which she had dreamed. If we may credit certain autobiographical hints found in her last, posthumously published *A Riviera Romance*, he soon ran off with another woman and some years later wound up disgraced and impoverished. Just possibly, like the count who plays opposite the Blanche character in *A Riviera Romance*, he became a croupier at Monte Carlo, where Roosevelt frequently went on holiday and where in 1897 she suffered the terrible carriage accident, the complications of which led to her death in London a year later.

Following her indifferent success as a singer and her failed or failing marriage to a titled foreigner, Roosevelt turned to writing as a career, starting with what we may call celebrity biography based on friendships carefully cultivated over a period of time. (In 1879 she had met Longfellow's brother-in-law, Nathan Appleton, in Paris, following which she began a correspondence with Longfellow that led to her visiting him several times in Massachusetts.) After her moderately successful publication of *The Home Life of Henry Longfellow: Reminiscences of Many Visits at Cambridge and Nahant, during the Years 1880, 1881 and 1882*, Roosevelt wrote three more intimate, anecdotal biographies of famous people, the last one, published in 1892, devoted to the French actor and playwright Victorien Sardou. Unfortunately, the fame of her biographical subjects did not rub off on her, nor were sales of these biographies sufficient to make possible the good life for which she had developed a taste early in her career as a singer—a taste that in her last years may have included gambling, an addiction about which she writes most knowledgeably in *A Riviera Romance*.

In her fourth brush with fame, Roosevelt traded her early celebrity as a singer for a kind of celebrity bordering on notoriety, becoming one of Guy de Maupassant's devoted, long-term mistresses from about 1884 until his death in 1893 (Stegmuller 186-92). In 1886 she accompanied Maupassant on part of his first trip to England. But although in 1889 she wrote in Oscar Wilde's magazine, *The Woman's World*, the first description in English of Maupassant's private life and his homes, she never capitalized on her special relationship with him to write the intimate biography she must surely have contemplated—the biography that once again might have made her famous or infamous, but which surely would have sold well in both England and America, given Maupassant's growing international reputation both as a writer and a lady killer.

The publication in 1886 of Roosevelt's novel, *The Copper Queen*, her fifth and last, probably desperate attempt to find fame and fortune, this time by writing the kind of three-decker novel described above. Roosevelt had previously written two indifferently successful works of fiction—a one-volume romance entitled *Marked "In Haste"* (1883), published anonymously in New York, followed by the two-volume *Stage-struck, or, She Would Be an Opera-Singer* (1884), published in London. However, she had not yet tried her wings with the demanding three-decker form popularized and developed by Charles E. Mudie of circulating library fame. With this first three-decker Roosevelt seems to have come as close as she ever came to popular success. *The Copper Queen* was included in the 1888 *Catalogue of the Principal English Books in Circulation at Mudie's Select Library*, and her influential friend Count Louis Hamon wrote after her death that *The Copper Queen* was "considered one of the best novels of the day" (55). Although by 1890 her two-volume *Stage-struck* was added to Mudie's list, and by 1892 her second three-decker, *Hazel Fane*, was added, with all three of her novels published in England still listed in 1895, by 1905 only her last, posthumously published one-volume novel, *A Riviera Romance* (1899), was still included, along with the biographies she had written. In short, whatever celebrity and commercial success Roosevelt may have gained from *The Copper Queen* soon passed.

What Roosevelt probably did not realize when she wrote *The Copper Queen* was that the number of three-deckers published annually was already declining. In consequence her experimentation with the form could hardly have come at a worse time. Whereas in 1884

and 1885, 193 three-deckers were published in England, in 1886, the year of publication of *The Copper Queen*, only 184 were published. By 1891, when *Hazel Fane* appeared, the number had dropped to 162, and in 1895 the number had fallen precipitously to fifty-two. By 1897, as noted above, only four were published (Griest 208).

Count Hamon's omission in his tribute to Roosevelt of any reference to her second and last three-decker, *Hazel Fane*, suggests that it was not well received, and that the fickle goddess Fame had once again eluded Roosevelt's attempt to seize her by the forelock. Her decision not to write a third three-decker probably reflects not only the failure of *Hazel Fane* to find popular success, but also the decline in the nineties of the three-decker as an economically viable literary form. Whatever her reason or reasons for abandoning this form, *Hazel Fane* was the last three-decker she wrote, followed in 1892 not by more fiction but by her last major work, another biography, this one of the French playwright and director Victorien Sardou. Following a sad succession of illnesses and accidents in the 1890s that cut short her life, Roosevelt died in 1898 at age forty-four.

In the latter part of this paper I will consider the extent to which Roosevelt met the most general requirement of fiction, a love interest, in her most successful novel, *The Copper Queen*. I will also consider how well this novel met the three-decker's special requirements, some of which relate to its three-volume structure and some to its perceived middle-class readership. Finally, I will look at pitfalls of the three-decker into which Roosevelt, along with many other practitioners of the form, sometimes fell.

Guinevere Griest, author of the best work to date on the English three-decker, has aptly summed up the most general requirement of fiction as follows: "Love and marriage, with all the variations of secret weddings, bigamy, deserted sweethearts, unfaithful husbands, wicked brothers, and mistaken identities, form an unchanging theme in the fiction of that time [the nineteenth century], as in previous times, and in our own" (125).

One of the three-decker's most important requirements relating to its form is the achievement of a satisfying ending to the three-decker as a whole, as well as some sense of closure to its first and second volumes. Another special requirement of the form is an unresolved crisis in Volume I drawing the reader into Volume II, and a second unresolved crisis in Volume II leading her into Volume III,

which, like other novels, often resolves the crisis of Volume II with the aid of romantic marriage (Griest 109).

Given the scope and complexity of the three-decker, it was important not only to establish but to highlight these patterns, so the reader would not get lost in the novel's myriad details. Thus the development of a good many successful three-deckers resembles that of a three-act play with such obvious but essential patterning as a different suitor for the heroine in each act, culminating in her acceptance of the most eligible at the end of Act III.

Perhaps the greatest minefield related to the form of the three-decker was Volume II, called by one critic "that sad second volume," famous chiefly for its tedium as the reader waited for a solution in Volume III to the central problem of the novel established in Volume I. No wonder the three-decker was described by one critic as "a sort of preposterous sandwich," with Volumes I and II providing meat on the outside and "that sad second volume" forming "a great slab of ill-baked and insipid bread between" (Griest 106).

Since the archetypal three-decker was expected to be generally instructive and fit to be read aloud to British matrons and maids, the narrator was under pressure from the anticipated readership of her novels as well as the special exigencies of the form. Therefore she not only had to watch her language but to draw her main characters from a superior class of people, among which the aristocracy or even members of the British royal family might be persuasively represented as examples of polite, refined behavior for readers to follow (Griest 127). In addition, she was expected to provide her readers with moral instruction, sometimes quite explicit, and to bring about the unequivocal triumph of virtue over villainy in her novel, at least by the end of the third volume (Griest 131-34).

Reviewing *The Copper Queen* in the context of other nineteenth-century novels, including three-deckers, one can see that Roosevelt's novel, despite some flaws in development, measures up to comparable fiction of its time fairly well. Besides including a variety of love interests unrelated to the main character, it chronicles the life of a poor but intelligent and beautiful heroine from Wisconsin named Enilda Rozen, who becomes wealthy after her father, Eric Rozen, makes a fortune in the Wild West. There she nurses back to health and falls in love with an English gentleman named John Claremont, injured in a Laramie, Wyoming, train wreck. Unlike many other three-deckers, including her own *Hazel Fane*, Roosevelt's *Copper*

Queen restricts the field of Enilda's suitors to only two, rather than the usual three or more. Besides Claremont, the reader is introduced in Volume I to a second suitor, a Wall Street financier named Ythan Florestan, who, like Claremont, appears prominently in all three volumes. Despite an apparently endless array of obstacles to her happiness, chief of which is the false and dishonorable but well-connected suitor Claremont, Enilda is surprised by joy at the end of Volume III when she marries Florestan—surprised because the man whom she once regarded as merely a good friend has become the man of her dreams. Against the background of her father's affluence and apparent respectability in Volumes I and II, two creaking subplots gradually reveal that Enilda's loving father has not only consorted with criminals but has secured his wealth by fraud. Even though these sensational subplots are amateurishly developed and poorly integrated into the novel, they are nevertheless important to its happy denouement in Volume III. Not only do they provide previously unrecognized obstacles to Enilda's happiness, but they also demonstrate the purity of Florestan's love for Enilda when he marries her even after her father has been exposed as a criminal and stripped of his wealth and after Enilda herself has been reduced to poverty. By multiplying both the real and potential threats to Enilda's happiness, these subplots make the eventual fulfillment of her romantic dreams more gratifying than they could otherwise possibly be.

Turning now from the romantic ending of the novel as a whole to the ending of Volume I, one notes that it provides the reader with a satisfying sense of closure to an important period in Enilda's life, at the same time calling attention to an unresolved crisis that leads one on to the next volume. Viewed first as a novel in its own right, and then as a preparation for Volume II, Volume I is the story of Enilda's transformation from rags to riches, from a poor, uneducated girl on the Western frontier to a self-educated, well-read, New York beauty with untold wealth at her disposal—a novel with a happy ending preparing the reader for Volume II by the sudden, unresolved crisis of her fiancé's mysterious departure to England, perhaps never to return. In Volume II, which has no sense of closure comparable to that in Volume I, Enilda is torn, on an extended visit to England, between her passionate love for the dishonorable Claremont, still mad for her love but recently married to another, and her friendship for the above-mentioned Florestan, who has followed her abroad and now besieges her with fervid proposals of marriage—an ongoing cri-

sis of grand if not epic proportions that is unresolved until the end of Volume III. Thus, although both of these volumes are successful insofar as they arouse and maintain suspense about Enilda's future marriage partner, Volume II is so much less successful as a novel in its own right that it might well be called 'that sad second volume.' In spite of its introduction of new characters, more subplots, a long philosophical discourse on the role and limitations of beauty in the world, and elaborate descriptions, all intended to charm the reader, Volume II is fundamentally little more than an elaborate, slow-moving preparation for Volume III. Admittedly, however, interest in Volume II quickens near the end, when Enilda, on her Atlantic crossing to visit London for the first time in the summer of 1876, happens to meet Claremont's wife, Lady Muriel, returning to England from a visit to Canada. Becoming friendly with Enilda, Lady Muriel invites her to visit the Claremonts in London, an invitation her husband does nothing to discourage when he meets his old flame at dockside and presents her to Muriel not as his abandoned fiancé, but merely as the American friend who nursed him back to health after the train wreck.

In Volume III the conflict between Claremont and Florestan for Enilda's favor is played out at a succession of elegant entertainments, not only with British aristocrats but with named royals present, and with the pros and cons of British hierarchical as contrasted with American egalitarian society kept constantly in view. The summer's social events begin with Enilda's presentation at Court, followed some weeks later by her attendance at the Queen's Ball on July 4, 1876, and, as the climax of her summer abroad, a dinner and ball held in Enilda's honor by the Claremonts at their London town house.

In preparation for presentation at Court, an honor secured only by American debutantes with well-heeled parents having the right political connections, Enilda takes lessons in Court etiquette from a fashionable drawing room teacher who at last pronounces her perfect, as though she had passed her entire life at Court. "It is as if you were born to the purple," her teacher says (19). Enilda's graceful kissing of the royal hand of Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace a few days later demonstrates that this young American heroine has actually achieved a goal that many potential American as well as English readers of *The Copper Queen* must have dreamed of. Moreover, in keeping with the conventional three-decker goal of writing a novel with its main characters drawn from a "superior" class of people, in this case American as well as British, Enilda's presentation at Court

provides her with an essential, ready-made entree into the best British society, gives her a kind of royal patent, as it were, as evidenced by the dizzying round of high-society dinners and balls to which she is promptly invited.

An interesting sidelight on the annual presentation of American debutantes at Court can be found in a book by Paul Shinkman, American journalist in Paris and London from 1924 to 1931, who in 1938 wrote about the then still current but dying custom of wealthy Americans having their daughters presented at Court. In that year the American Ambassador Joseph Kennedy restricted this honor to American women who were "the wives and daughters either of diplomatic representatives or of other internationally important personages, or women who were internationally important in their own right." Later that same year the Lord Chamberlain of England reinforced Kennedy's ruling by notifying certain peeresses that their presence would no longer be required at Court functions (212). This move was

directed at those impoverished ladies of title who have found it necessary to supplement their sadly reduced incomes by selling to Americans or anybody else their only remaining marketable asset—their entree into Court circles. For fixed fees, ranging from \$500 to \$5000, according to the amount of "guidance" required by the neophyte, they have contracted not only to train debutantes and others in the necessary etiquette, but also to arrange for them the coveted privilege of donning court trains and [ostrich] feathers and passing for a brief moment of triumph before the King and Queen. (213).

Soon after her successful presentation at Court, Enilda is invited to attend the Queen's Ball, held on July 4, 1876. There she is chosen to be a dance partner of His Royal Highness Prince Edward Albert (1841-1910), later Edward VII, a famous connoisseur of women or a notorious womanizer, depending on one's point of view. Among the many guests, it is only Enilda who recalls that back home in the States people are celebrating the centennial of Independence Day in Washington and Philadelphia. She also observes that at the Queen's Ball, grandly hierarchical, with the royals mingling scarcely at all with the gentry and commoners present, ordinary guests do not seem to be having nearly as exciting or jolly a time as they did at the comparatively egalitarian balls she attended in Washington (105, 108).

The last, climactic dance of the season, bringing with it a succession of shocking revelations that nevertheless lead ultimately to the novel's happy ending, is held in Enilda's honor at the Claremonts. The first epiphany of the evening comes when Claremont, supposedly alone in the conservatory with the woman he had earlier abandoned, declares his undying passion for Enilda and begs her to run off with him to Laramie, Wyoming. Playing the familiar three-decker role of the virtuous woman, a fit example for young female readers to follow, she indignantly rejects this dishonorable offer, saying that she now loves another. Next Lady Muriel, hidden behind a curtain like some character in a Shakespearean comedy, steps out to confess with remorse that she had tricked her wandering fiancé Claremont into returning home to marry her. In a vain and foolish attempt to fan the flames of his dying love, she had done so, she admits, by faking a near-fatal injury in a feigned fall from a horse. Finally, Claremont's rival Florestan, who in a nearby picture gallery had been lying on a divan day-dreaming of Enilda, steps forward in great embarrassment at both these revelations, wrongly concluding from the first one that the man Enilda now loves is not him, but another. This misconception, cleared up near the novel's end, leads of course to the marriage of Enilda and Florestan that readers have gradually come to long for, a marriage that brings this reasonably entertaining and moderately successful three-decker to its predictably happy ending.

In retrospect we see that Blanche Roosevelt's unfortunate fifth and last attempt to find fame and fortune by writing three-deckers shortly before their demise as a literary form was perhaps only marginally more successful than the previous four. Even so, she deserves to be remembered for her beauty and brains, which were exceptional, and to be recognized for her considerable accomplishments in several creative fields. She also deserves credit for her persistence and adaptability to change, especially in a period when the challenge of any career for women, especially single women or women separated from their husbands, was much greater than it is today.

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MALE AND FEMALE NARRATIVES OF SELFHOOD IN *WINESBURG, OHIO*

CLARENCE LINDSAY

"...Anderson's women are peculiarly circumscribed in their development, and the patterns of their characterization reflect both the expressive basis of Anderson's art and his narrow vision of womanhood" (Walter Miller 196).

"By the very act of idealizing women Anderson denies their essential humanity" (Walter Miller 203).

"...[Anderson] managed to define women and men at the expense of women's creative and independent natures....[he] needed to make women simpler than they are and when angry, or frustrated, or afraid, he easily moved into traditional, and safe, categories" (Atlas 253-54).

"both a deep sensitivity to female traps and an unwillingness to allow women the same choices, needs, and strengths that [the stories] allowed men" (Atlas 257).

"women in Anderson's work often appear as almost divine forces of nature, expressing love, sensuality and creativity" (Lause1).

"...a pervasive presence of a fragile, hidden 'something' that corresponds both to the lost potential of each of the grotesques and to the secret knowledge that each story is structured to reveal" (Rigsbee 178).

"The women are 'invisible' because their real identities are eclipsed by their social roles" (Rigsbee 178).

The above assertions represent the principal contending camps regarding Anderson's attitude toward women and the concomitant issue of his attitude toward the feminine. Miller and Atlas believe Anderson to be antagonistic to women and to the feminine; Lause

and Rigsbee believe that Anderson privileges the feminine. These critics describe an Anderson whom I do not recognize. Far from idealizing women, Anderson scrutinizes men's idealization of women. Far from making women simple, he creates some of the strongest, most complex women in American fiction. Far from subscribing to a definition of the feminine as a "fragile, hidden something," Anderson sees such definitions as part of men's rhetoric of self, part of their narcissistic self-caressings. I agree, however, that the women characters in *Winesburg, Ohio* differ from the men characters. The difference has some bearing on Anderson's complex artistry.

Winesburg, Ohio's stories preponderantly feature men. Of the twenty-five tales in *Winesburg, Ohio*, nine focus on females ("Mother," Elizabeth Willard; "Nobody Knows," Louise Trunnion; Part III of "Godliness," Louise Bentley; "Adventure," Alice Hindman; "Tandy," the unnamed daughter of Tom Hard; "The Teacher," Kate Swift; "An Awakening," Belle Carpenter; "Death," Elizabeth Willard; "Sophistication," Helen White). Moreover, at least one story ostensibly "concerning" a man equally concerns a woman. "Paper Pills" concentrates as much on Dr. Reefy's unnamed first wife as it does on Dr. Reefy. Given the secondary roles women play in so much American fiction written by men, especially canonical works, Anderson reveals a remarkable interest, literarily speaking, in women, comparing favorably with Henry James and Hawthorne in this respect. Like his male characters, Anderson's women are also grotesques, taking on specific narratives of identity by which they try to live their lives. For Anderson's women also, selfhood is an artistic enterprise, marked by crises of intended meaning, unintentional meaning, and undesired interpretations. His female characters differ from his male characters, however, in several ways. First of all, women's selfhoods involve a narrower range of narratives; at least a few of the women come to understand the fictive nature of their identities. Secondly, women do not reveal the urgent need to perform their selfhoods and, thus, do not urgently seek out audiences; consequently, women have a different relationship to language itself. Thirdly, women understand that the fictions they devise can never fully express their meaning because that meaning is uncertain. Finally, women reveal a capacity to interpret critically, carefully, and suspiciously men's authored selfhoods. I have presented these ideas separately, but clearly they intertwine, overlap, and complicate one another.

Many of the selfhoods of Anderson's women characters in *Winesburg, Ohio* center on a narrative that defines a place in the town's multi-layered social structure. Unlike men with similar social fictions, these women self-consciously, often anxiously, reflect on how they appear to Winesburg society. From the town's crusty upper crust, the socially prominent wife of the Presbyterian minister, Mrs. Hartman, to slatterns such as Louise Trunnion, women in Winesburg seem acutely sensitive to the way they are viewed in respect to their status. Mrs. Hartman, the wife of the town's most distinguished and best paid minister, belongs to a social/economic rank so high that her husband "even had a carriage of his own," which the Hartmans use for pure social display as they promenade through the town for no other purpose than to perform their social strut, the public performance revealing the need for affirmation. We measure the importance of this social self to Mrs. Hartman by her peculiar adulterous passion for social recognition as she rides in that carriage "afire with secret pride" (125).

Even Helen White, who functions in this novel as the town's aristocratic princess to whom ambitious males aspire, occasionally betrays a degree of social self-consciousness, going so far as to act against personal preference in order to effect a desired social response. She does not, for example, particularly care for the condescending college instructor, her mother's guest (from out of town of course), finding him of a "pedantic turn of mind," but she is "glad to be seen with him as he was well dressed and a stranger" and because his "presence would create an impression" (211). Elizabeth Willard, conscious of the gap between her social surroundings and her one-time expectations, "had a dread of being seen by guests in the hotel that had once belonged to her father..." (21). Lower in the social order, the calibrations, more carefully calibrated, carry more consequence, as characters self-consciously weigh consequences of their social acts. Belle Carpenter lives at the lower edge of social respectability in Winesburg and does "not think that her station in life would permit her to be seen in the company of a bartender" (156). At the very bottom of Winesburg's social order—I am excluding the wacky Hop Higgins who dreams of raising ferrets and Mook, who half-wittedly believes in the whole-wittedness of animals—are the Trunnions, their social marginality revealed in the narrator's crafted presentation. In response to Louise Trunnion's fairly clear sexual invitation, George Willard shows up at her back door (suitors go to Helen White's front door), and right before they leave to make love on a pile of boards, Louise Trunnion, girl from the wrong side of

the tracks, says to George Willard, boy from the right side of the tracks, "You think you're better than I am. Don't tell me, I guess I know," revealing that for her, this sexual act is inseparable from the rich social narratives that play in her mind (38). Only the highest stratum of the socially conscious Winesburgians escapes having to reflect on the way they are seen. Mrs. White, Anderson's representative of class snootiness, while smugly preoccupied with her social position, never contemplates anxiously or even smugly how others see her, the implication being that she is so secure at the top she does not need others' approval and could not imagine a response other than verification. She passes judgment on prospective candidates for the town's upper echelon ("Mrs. White, the banker's wife, thought him [Curtis Hartman] scholarly and refined"). But none of Winesburg's elite is elite enough to match her or hers: "There is no one here fit to associate with a girl of Helen's breeding," (214); she thus functions as a Lady Catherine deBourgh in Winesburg, Ohio. Anderson always catches these Britishisms, these shards of the old-world novels' discourse representing a way of being supposedly left behind in a European past but, in reality, still in fierce competition for American identity.

To get a sense of the difference between men and women regarding the range of narratives of identity, consider the variety and number of narratives chosen by men. This small, Midwestern town provides a fairly complete library of at least the principal genres of being. Men identify themselves (or are interpreted by others) as artists (George Willard, Enoch Robinson, Dr. Parcival); Socratic and selfless teachers of men (Wing Biddlebaum); Horatio Alger get-up-and-go men of the world (Mr. Willard); Lawrentian manly men in harmony with the great, impersonal rhythms of the universe (George Willard); natty gentility (Mr. Cowley and Mr. Carpenter); radical journalists (Joe Welling); Old Testament patriarchs (Jesse Bentley and Curtis Hartman); New Testament Christs offering salvation (Curtis Hartman); Persecuted Christs (Dr. Parcival); epic carousers (Ed Handby); intellectual/religious iconoclasts (Tom Hard); romantic overthrowers of religious authority (David Bentley); and even mysterious, wandering feminists in search of the female Messiah (the stranger in "Tandy"). In addition to the conspicuous variety of these male stories, their narratives invoke singular, or significant, or heroic enterprise in a way that women's stories do not. Examine, for example, the different ways men and women narratize their relationship to older generations, especially their parents. The repetition of a num-

ber of father/daughter pairs across story line boundaries constitutes a sub-theme of the larger generational conflict theme: Louise Trunnion toiling in domestic servitude to "Old Jake"; Louise Bentley refusing the patriarchal world of her father; Belle Carpenter attacking the power of her at-the-lower-edge-of-gentility father; Elizabeth Willard failing to listen to her dying father's advice. These women differ in their individual responses to their fathers' claims on them, but they share the common condition of wrestling with paternal power and directions. Clearly, the culture provides fewer privileged, culturally approved narratives for women to express their rebellion against parental orders, and the narratives that are available to them do not allow for flight from Winesburg¹. Louise Trunnion's separate narratives, truths, of submission to male desire on the one hand and the chivalric elevation of her own desire on the other, do not offer her a way out of her domestic responsibilities. At least, she seems to recognize that her chivalric dream will not affect her circumstances. Elizabeth Willard can only rebel against her father by marrying a man he doesn't like, effectively giving up escape with a theatrical troupe. Although her father approves of her escape, it is a rare instance of support for a woman or girl's attempt at freedom.

Generally speaking, the few acts of outright rebelliousness by women scandalize the town: Elizabeth Willard "startled the town by putting on men's clothes and riding a bicycle down Main Street" (24). Kate Swift's mother scolds her for acting like a man, and the town considers her to have a "sharp tongue." One of Winesburg's most temperamentally rebellious women, Belle Carpenter, a woman often so angry she wishes "she were a man and could fight someone with her fists" (155), hides her rebellion away from the public, keeping it on a small, personal scale. She rebels against her father's tyranny over her, but she doesn't choose a "new" story for herself. She attacks him by trying to keep him out, so to speak, of his story of genteel identity that he so needs (she smears mud on the boards he uses to press his pants); but she accepts and lives in his narrative of gentility, fearing to be seen with a suitor below her "station." Men have it easier. When men rebel, they follow congenial, culturally approved, literarily established story lines that encourage a way of being. We hear the sonorities of grand biblical and mythical fictions that sanction even tragic rebellion: "I have killed the man of God and now I will be a man and go into the world" (79). For men, flight from home, up to and including murder, is part of the standard narrative of manhood.

Seth woos Helen White by telling her how he's got to get out of his little Winesburg world: "She (his mother) hasn't thought at all about what I'm going to do in life. She thinks I'm going to stay on here forever just being a boy.... You see, I've got to strike out. I've got to get to work. It's what I'm good for" (118). It's not just the males themselves who believe these self-enchanted fictions. While there are groups ready to cock their eyebrows at too wayward energies, the town is awash with mythologies countering that repression. Various interpretive communities affirm these rebellious men. George Willard's mother and father, although each has a different story for their son in mind, pat him on the back, anxious to send him on his way. When George does leave in the final story, a chorus of disparate village citizens (both intimates and comparative strangers) participate in the coming-of-age ritual (George is taller than his father, who deferentially carries his son's bag). Helen White is "impressed" with Seth's boyish fable of manhood. Filthy, slovenly, monstrous Wash Williams, who runs around town talking about killing women, becomes a champion seen by some men as a rebel against superficial codes of respectability. Even the drunken self-destruction of Windpeter Winters fits into narratives of heroic, glorious rebellion against humdrum normality: "Most boys have seasons of wishing they could die gloriously instead of just being grocery clerks and going on with their humdrum lives" (179).

Actually, socially approved, culturally sanctioned rebellion is fairly common for men in this small Midwestern town, especially the rebellion of exile. It's no surprise, of course, that American culture romanticizes rebellion, providing lots and lots of stories tacitly affirming the shucking of the old. These affirming stories, both the ones characters use to narratize themselves and those that various communities use to narratize those characters, reflect our national self-approval, a celebration of our lighting out for the territory and an implicit denigration of what's left behind, whether a Missouri town or the continent. Nor is it surprising that the stories celebrating such leave takings are mainly for men, that the cultural narratives for women's identity—"truths" or narratives involving marriage, fidelity, intimacy, motherhood—for the most part, keep women at home.

We should not, however, confuse Anderson's recognition of the distinction between narratives for men and women with a type of conventional feminist sympathy for victimized womanhood. Anderson does not mistake the availability for men of such tri-

umphant narratives of freedom with the reality of triumphant freedom. Men do not achieve more of significance; they are not freer in any meaningful way or more happy in any meaningful way than are women. Like the conductor from "Departure," Tom Little, who has seen it all, the narrator's ironic knowledge, present in the novel's narrative imbricity, undercuts the triumph of escapist musings of individual characters. The village may be at the train station as a celebratory chorus in "Departure," but Anderson does not celebrate; he carefully and wryly observes. Through Tom Little, the conductor, Anderson grins suspiciously at Willard as the young artist leaves town, and, by implication, Anderson grins at himself, his youthful self. The conductor has "seen a thousand George Willards go out of their towns to the city" (221).

Even though the narrator ironically understands that glorious exile often ends in failure, the novel still registers a significant statistical fact regarding men and women: The conductor may have seen a thousand Willards, but not nearly as many Helen Whites. I doubt whether this clear statistical distinction—men leaving, women staying—reflects realistic conditions at the time. I suspect that as many women left small towns as did men. Anderson makes clear, however, that even the women who leave town for the city, Kate Swift for example, do so without sustaining, encouraging narratives defining such exile as triumphant womanhood or heroic overthrowing of old orders. The women mentioned earlier who are paired with fathers stay in Winesburg. Reflecting Anderson's fidelity to the stubborn realities of social/economic realism, their individual range of freedom connects to their social status. At the lowest social stratum, Louise Trunnion seems most constrained. She "can't go far" from her duties, from her menial condition. Her other identities that she inhabits without self-consciousness—maternalism and youthful companion to her pal in a youthful escapade—either offer no escape, or just a brief one. After she makes love to George, she'll go right back to washing dishes. At the highest stratum, Helen White seems freest from fatherly constraint, her father barely mentioned, seemingly a mere adjunct to the social narrative his wife enjoys. But with all that freedom, at the conclusion of *Winesburg, Ohio*, Helen White remains in town, just missing the train, literally and perhaps metaphorically, that carries George Willard away.²

Several men have social ambitions similar to those of these women. Elmer Cowley's father, for example, has left behind an agrar-

ian life to become an astonishingly unsuccessful merchant so he can indulge in the social joy of wearing his one suit every day instead of just on Sunday. As noted in previous chapters, the narrator overhears characters' social pretensions in his descriptions and in their speech: George Willard's father described as "the proprietor of the New Willard House"; the Reverend Curtis Hartman, the town's Presbyterian minister, complacently reflecting that he's "doing well enough." Men's relationships to these social fictions, indeed to all fictions of self, differ significantly, however, from women's. Men inhabit those fictions without thinking about how their idea of themselves will be received, without thinking about how others might perceive them. We may detect a hint of the elders' raised eyebrows when the Presbyterian minister gives his more powerful sermon, but Curtis Hartman gives no hint of such an awareness. Men assume that their fictions generate the response they intend. They may desire an audience, often a woman, but they assert their text and author themselves, either indifferent to, ignorant of, or presumptuous about their audience's response. The male counterparts to the women already discussed, George Willard (Helen White), Elizabeth Willard's husband, and Curtis Hartman, never seem aware of how the town perceives them socially. Even when they have an audience, these men are their own approving audience.

Men do not spend their imaginative life imagining or appearing conscious of whatever specific interpretations they may be generating.³ Put another way, men, for the most part, seem unaware of the textual, fictive nature of reality, seem unaware of themselves as texts even as they author themselves. For them, the fiction is a reality, a fiction so absorbing that it is impervious to contradictory evidence. George Willard's father "had always thought of himself as a successful man, although nothing he had ever done had turned out successfully" (22). Enoch Robinson in the stupor of fiction walks in the middle of the beaten track, in the middle of the world's road, has to be nearly run over, shouted at, to be awakened. Robinson's subsequent selfhoods metaphorically represent men's capacity for resilient and stubborn self-revision: even if awakened by a rap on the nose (George Willard) or a near lynching (Wing Biddlebaum) or multiple infidelities (Wash Williams), men re-enter their fictive stupors by rewriting themselves, incorporating past failures into new narratives that preserve their imperious singularity. Contrastingly, women demonstrate alertness to outside interpretations. When Louise Trunnion refers to George Willard's feelings of social superiority,

specifics from the story support her interpretation.⁴ Even men who construct themselves as social or community failures do so, however, without reference to the outside world. Elmer Cowley creates his fiction of "queerness" impervious to and independent of any outside signs. Dr. Parcifal thinks he's going to be crucified when no one pays any attention to him. Curtis Hartman creates a fiction of himself as uncertain savior entirely independent of the one he has decided needs salvation. Women, on the other hand, seem acutely aware of the hermeneutics of living, seem aware that they are subject to interpretation as they consciously construct themselves to be interpreted, as if aware that reality is a fiction.

While Anderson's male characters inhabit their selfhoods unconscious of their fictional nature, at the same time, these men ironically seem more urgent in their selfhood, more anxious to perform, as if in the performance they find their verification. Certainly, men seek out audiences of all sorts to either tell or perform their stories. Before Wing is traumatized by the homophobic beating in the Pennsylvania town, he tousles boyish heads, performing his selfless, schoolmaster persona. Even exiled in Winesburg, he hungers for the presence of George Willard to give him his new message of romantic selfhood: "You must forget all you have learned...You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices." Even though no one pays attention to the diatribes of murderous Wash Williams, Winesburg's monstrous misogynist, ("In Winesburg no attention was paid to Wash Williams and his hatred of his fellows" [99]), he notoriously urges his message upon everyone in town. Wash also seeks out George Willard to give him his anti-woman narrative. Dr. Parcifal regales Willard with "tales that began nowhere and ended nowhere" (29). Dr. Reefy arranges his truths to confound his friend and to read to his wife. Joe Welling will talk to anyone who will listen to him about himself and his ideas. Up and down the social scale of Winesburg, Ohio, men talk and think about who they are. When they have trouble with their audiences—George Willard not getting enough time in the pool hall, Enoch Robinson not being understood by his artist friends—they will talk to themselves or to the heavens, but most often, they seek out a woman who will understand the intricacies of their text in ways that the general public has failed to apprehend. ~

Women reveal nothing like this urgency, this need to talk, to perform. For one thing, their stories do not appear to be so dependent on verbalizing, on talking, on language. In fact, with only two exceptions, women do not appear to be especially anxious about their identity, their selfhoods. For whatever reason, women don't seem to talk that much or even think that much about who they are. Compare Mrs. Hartman with her husband. The Presbyterian minister's wife says not a word. The narrator presents her afire but speechless, content with admiration. Even one of the most mature, complex women in American fiction, Louise Trunnion, says but a few words.⁵ After her failed attempt at love, Louise Bentley opts for silence, withdrawing in feminist bitterness from what she considers a world made for men. When her son is born, she thinks, "It is a man child and will get what it wants anyway" (74). Reflecting on her decision to allow her son to live with his grandfather, she muses, "It is a place for a man child, although it was never a place for me" (55). Nevertheless, some women need to talk but cannot talk as freely as men. Liberated Kate Swift pays for her talking with her reputation as a scold. One of Jesse Bentley's repressed and dominated sisters, afraid to speak in his presence, sits on the floor of the very young David Bentley's room, waits until he is drowsy and then becomes "bold and whispered things that he later thought he must have dreamed" (56). In Anderson's vocabulary, bold usually relates to sexuality, so this little scene suggests that repressive patriarchies create these kinds of suppressed women storytellers who seek out drowsy child audiences for their secret, whispered, sexually suggestive stories. Bentley's sister is one of several women (Helen White and Kate Swift) who seem to be natural artists, but who do not define themselves as artists.

Significantly, Louise Bentley imagines escape from her father's repressive patriarchy not through the culturally approved narrative of marriage but through love, a love that depends as much on talking as on the physical. The love she imagines does not draw upon established literary genres/discourses defining the political, erotic relationships between men and women as do Louise Trunnion's note and utterance. Louise Bentley hopes for a new democracy of love in which men and women, or at least one man and one woman, will talk equally to one another. She wants John Hardy "to hold her in his arms, to tell her of his thoughts and dreams and to listen while she told him her thoughts and dreams." Given the nearly total domination of talk by men, Louise Bentley's fantasized democracy of speech, the

narrative she wants to live her life by, stands out as an unheard revolutionary proclamation. Unlike the men's congenial narratives of revolution and exile, her story is new both thematically and stylistically, with no literary resonance that I can detect. She instinctively knows that such an Edenic democracy of genders doesn't come easy. "In the darkness it will be easier to say things" (76).⁶

Women don't talk all that much; whether a masculine culture has allowed them fewer stories to tell,⁷ whether they have less to say, or whether they're afraid to say what they have to say, they simply don't seek out others and tell them their stories; but they sure do listen a lot. Not surprisingly, they listen to the very men who urgently, anxiously go about seeking audiences for the purpose of asserting their textual selves. Dr. Reefy's wife's short life with her husband is apparently filled listening to him read the "odds and ends of thoughts he had scribbled on the bits of paper" (17), with no mention of her having anything to say to him regarding her thoughts. George Willard, for a while content with himself as audience, "hypnotized by his own words" soon feels the need for Belle Carpenter because "she would understand his mood." With her as audience to his Lawrentian manhood gibberish, he "could achieve in her presence a position he had long been wanting to achieve" (162). Seth Richmond talks and talks to Helen White about how he is different from other men who talk and talk: "Everyone talks and talks," he complains to her. And after talking a fair amount, he says, "I just want to work and keep quiet" (119). Joe Welling seeks out Sarah King and risks his life to talk to her. She listens without demur and apparently without doing much talking herself: "Under the trees they walked and Joe talked" (86). And when he gets so excited about his ideas about new uses for milkweed, he needs her presence: "Wait till you see Sarah, she'll get the idea. She'll be interested. Sarah is always interested in ideas. You can't be too—smart for Sarah, now can you?" (89). We don't know exactly Sarah King's relationship to these ideas about milkweed and new vegetable kingdoms that Welling hatches. She would certainly not be the first woman to feign interest in a man's ideas during courtship.⁸ Whenever this issue comes up in class, some women give the impression that they've put up with a lot sillier things than Joe Welling's theories about new vegetable kingdoms. Maybe she's not feigning at all. Perhaps Sarah King really is interested. Maybe being in love will allow a woman to accept almost anything as interesting and true. All we can know is that Joe Welling finds her a good listener, finds her an astute judge of intelligence because, the clear implication is, she finds him

pretty dammed smart. He certainly wouldn't be the first man to think a woman smart because he thinks she thinks he's smart.

Women's critical relationships to men's stories about themselves effectively define them: how women listen to men; why they listen; how they interpret what men have to say about themselves; whether they accept the meaning that men want them to accept; whether their interpretations of men's texts impose women's own desires on men or whether women interpret men "truly." Some women critically examine the speech of the men to whom they listen eagerly or out of necessity. The girl who later becomes Dr. Reefy's wife originally had two suitors, although "suitor" may be too grand a word for the big-eared boy who "said nothing at all but always managed to get her into the darkness, where he began to kiss her" (15). So she doesn't have to listen to him, just fend him off or try to fend him off. He is one of the few aesthetically uncomplicated males giving no hint of a sense of self. The "darkness" to which he tries to lure her is metaphorical as well as literal, but he certainly isn't thinking along those lines, if indeed he's thinking at all. But her other suitor is a talker. He "talked continually of virginity;" in fact, when "with her he was never off the subject" (15). But she interprets his text quite differently from his ostensible high-minded, or at least sexless, message. She finds the "hidden meaning" underneath the apparent meaning: "Beneath his talk of virginity she began to think there was a lust greater than all the others" (16).⁹ While we don't know about Sarah King's attitude toward Joe Welling's narratives, other than that she gives the impression of affirmation, clearly the soon-to-be wife of Dr. Reefy critically suspects male utterance to the point of detecting a meaning that was certainly not the intended meaning of its author. We don't get the specifics of her exegetical powers, but some kind of probing is implied in that "beneath." Her critical independence from her suitor's text lends authority to her acceptance of Dr. Reefy's text. We don't know the nature of the truths that the doctor will read to her during their brief marriage, but the relationship between the doctor and the young woman was apparently an aesthetically happy one. She listened to him through their short winter together. We are not told if it was the nature of the truths themselves that made her an acquiescent audience or whether it was the couple's instant rapport based on his instinctive knowledge of her ("...without her saying anything he seemed to know what had happened to her" [16]) that made his text enjoyable to her. Unlike with many aesthetic/interpretive mishaps between men and

women, she sanctions his interpretive response to her. Helen White also interprets men's utterance in ways independent of their intentions. We've already mentioned her aesthetic boredom at the pretentious college instructor who drones on about the provincialism of provincial life. Her independent interpretive response to Seth Richmond's courtship narrative is more complicated. When he tells her how manful he is because he doesn't depend on talk, she seems to accept him at his textual word: "This is not a boy at all, but a strong purposeful man" (118). But she stops responding to him as a man: "Certain vague desires that had been invading her body were swept away . . ." (118). She knows she's supposed to approve the story he's telling; it's got the right socially approved, sanctified message of leaving and becoming a man. What she isn't able to quite articulate, thank God, is that Seth Richmond's discourse stylistically undermines the very point he is trying to make. Seth Richmond talks too much about his mother in his manhood story; he talks too much about not talking. Even though Helen White can't articulate her critical response, her actions eloquently enact it. She sends him home to Mom where little boys belong. She is an instinctive, if not articulate, critic.

Women's interpretive relationships to men's textual assertions provide, then, a kind of moral calibration. In addition to these women who gain a measure of freedom with interpretations that resist or subvert men's authorial intentions, some women refuse any relationship with the texts they are asked to inhabit by men. Louise Bentley, the only woman who speaks a distinctly feminist rhetoric, effectively opts out of what she thinks of as a world made exclusively for men. Another rebel against male narratives is Wash Williams's wife, sexual betrayer, Winesburg's Eve, despoiler of Wash Williams's garden, ruiner sent, Wash claims, "to prevent men making the world worthwhile" (101). When Wash describes what he considers to be the perfect world, the world before he discovers his wife's multiple infidelities, we get a sense of his sense of a woman's "perfect" relationship to one of those male stories. In Wash Williams's perfection, his perfect garden, he plants his seed in the soft loamy soil while she runs around "laughing and pretending to be afraid of the worms I uncovered" (103). Playing at that fiction—a fiction that calls up an entire civilization's commitment to courtly love, the idealization of women, and the division of labor—is what constitutes for Wash his numinous Eden. After Wash Williams discovers her sexual transgressions, we hear nary a word from her. In fact, we had heard no

words before the discovery, just her reported giggling in the garden. We have no idea why she does what she does. We just know that—prophetically and rebelliously—she will no longer play her assigned part as supportive helpmeet in her husband's narrative.

In contrast to Wash Williams's wife and Louise Bentley, who refuse to participate in either men's narratives or those assigned by the culture, which are in many cases identical, one female eagerly clamors for the narrative a man provides her. In "Tandy," Tom Hard obsessively promotes his agnosticism and ignores his daughter, making her yet another of this collection's metaphors of historical and cultural forces, in this case the child of Godless rationalism, William Butler Yeats in Winesburg, Ohio. The story dramatizes a cultural psychomachia for the girl's future identity, a struggle between two unappealing contestants: the wandering drunkard's self-serving feminist narrative featuring the messiah woman and her father's self-absorbed, self-congratulatory atheistic narrative. Instead of the truly radical equality narrative created by Louise Bentley, so new that David Hardy had no idea what she could possibly mean, Anderson's wry version of a mysterious stranger, a nameless alcoholic who has sought out pastoral pastures to cure him of the demon drink, articulates a feminist narrative. The stranger's feminist narrative captures the girl's sense of self because her father, trapped in his own fictive world of religious iconoclasm, ignores her. The narrative and role that the stranger has taken to himself, a John the Baptist prophesying the woman Christ, is one of those self-advertisements masquerading as self-deprecation. The stranger's "truth" becomes the blueprint/narrative for the woman, a narrative that history has failed to provide her, or so the stranger laments. From the stranger's point of view, the absence of such a woman/Christ has prevented him from being saved: "I am a lover and have not found my thing to love. That is a big point if you know enough to realize what I mean. It makes my destruction inevitable, you see" (122). The thing to be loved, of course, is the messiah woman who "did not come in my time" (122). "You may be the woman," he says chillingly to the five-year-old girl who sits on her neglectful father's knees.

His feminist message has some familiar elements that will either distress us or delight us, depending on our political stance. Because of the self-aggrandizement masked as self-deprecation, I suspect the narrative. And I suspect many feminists might suspect it as well, noting his claim of singularity ("Perhaps of all men I alone understand" [122]); the self-pity hiding behind empathetic understanding expressed in the claim of equality of victimization ("I know about her

struggles and defeats. It is because of her defeats that she is to me the lovely one" [123]); and finally, the prophecy/definition/call for women to be strong in order to be loved, which is to say, creations rather than creators, receivers rather than quarterbacks, acted on rather than acting, which some feminists might say is not a new story but an old one. The stranger's complaint—that this messiah woman's daring strength to be loved, which the stranger calls "Tandy," that "men need from women and that they do not get"¹⁰—sounds suspiciously like Wash Williams's misogynistic railing that women prevent men from making the world worthwhile. Regardless of how we might variously feel about the particular narrative, clearly the little girl has been swept up into it as she refuses her old identity: "I want to be Tandy" (124). She weeps, fearing that she may not have the strength to "bear the vision the words of the drunkard had brought to her" (124), "drunkard" being the narrator's insinuated comment on the author of the text and, by implication, on the legitimacy of the narrative the girl has accepted for herself.

Without any sustaining, encouraging narrative of artistry, several women in Winesburg actually write. In one way, their artistry may seem old fashioned when compared with men's implicit radical epistemologies, aesthetics, or relationships to audience. Women do nothing so postmodernistic as write their truths on little scraps of paper and arrange and rearrange them as does Dr. Reefy; they do not mysteriously arrive in town to write a book about the omni-Christness of all men as does Dr. Parcival and then tell stories about themselves that would satisfy the most radical of narrative theorists; they do not treat their lives as plots to be manipulated and plan to fall in love so that they can then use that experience for their fiction as does George Willard; they do not go off to the big city and hobnob with other artists, complain about formalist critics, and agonize over interpretations of their works as does Enoch Robinson. They write notes about love.¹¹

When fairly young, Helen White wrote lots of notes to Seth Richmond creating "a half-expressed intimacy" (116) between them that has lasted until their young adulthood. We assume the notes express some sort of romantic infatuation on her part because some of the things said "flattered" him and convinced him he was her "favorite" (116). But Anderson carefully refuses to sentimentalize the girl's passion: "For a time she had been beset by a madness for writing notes which she addressed to Seth" (116). Unlike George Willard,¹² she seems to desire to write without any sense of wanting

to be a writer, suggesting again a subtle distinction in the cultural stories through which men and women narratize their identity. At any rate, her passion is significantly and primarily for the writing of notes, in effect for writing, rather than for Seth Richmond, stylistically presented as an afterthought. Helen White is attracted to a genre of romantic writing. The narrator tells us that the notes "reflected a mind inflamed by novel reading" (116), the "inflamed" hinting at some level of eroticism either in the novels that influenced her or in herself that influenced her interpretation of the novels. The narrator's description tells a fair amount about Helen White: she narratizes the notion of love in a distinctly literary way at a youthful age; although attracted to writing, she does not consciously set out to be an artist;¹³ for her, the general, impersonal desire to write precedes the personal emotion. That is, the personal feeling for Seth Richmond is secondary to the formal desire to write. In this last respect, she reminds us a bit of George Willard, who plots his life (his intention to fall in love with Helen White) to satisfy his developing artist narrative of self. Linked by this symmetrical relationship to the fiction of romance, an important asymmetry in their personal narratives—the novel ends with George leaving town in order to realize his dreams and Helen staying in town—signals opposed cultural possibilities (perhaps likelihoods) for men and women.¹⁴

Another young woman's note to a prospective lover also reflects literary influence of a kind. Louise Trunnion writes an extremely brief letter to George Willard: "I'm yours if you want me." At the bottom of Winesburg's social classes, individual discourse reflects other discourses. The note's language and theme sound like cheap magazine fiction although I'm not sure what exactly might be available to a girl like Louise. But of course, she need not actually have read particular texts to have absorbed the style and substance of their notions of love between a man and woman. Whatever the source, her note reveals a narratized sexuality whose eroticism depends on the erasure of the woman's self while conceding all power of sexual/romantic choice to the male, the very opposite of chivalric love. Interestingly, when she comes outside to meet George Willard, she invokes a form of courtly love: "How do you know I want to go out with you, she said sulkily. 'What makes you so sure?'" (37). This speech calls upon a tradition in which women have the power of choice and men must demonstrate their desire and worth. When she and George leave to make love, she says, "I can't go far" in a "quiet and unperturbed

voice" suggesting that even as she goes to make love for social purposes ("you think you're better than I am"), she recognizes that social realities constrain her, both literally and metaphorically. Comfortably, without *angst*, without postmodernist dread, she expresses different selves from sentence to sentence. Such textual/human multiple identities confuse George Willard: "He thought it annoying that in the darkness by the fence she had pretended there was nothing between them. She has a nerve! Well, gracious sakes, she has a nerve . . ." (37). Men are extraordinarily complex in their own texts and about their own relationships to audience. Dr. Reefy confounds his blithering sentimentalist audience, his friend John Spaniard, and speaks from his heart (and hers) to his other audience, his wife. Joe Welling uses the same discourse to bewilder purposely one audience, the opposing baseball team, while communicating precise information to another, his team. Toward women's texts, both written and oral, however, men can be remarkably dense. Perhaps because women have so much more practice at it, they are practiced interpreters, detecting "hidden" or certainly unintended meanings, choosing their men on what amounts to aesthetic grounds, or even manipulating narratives (Belle Carpenter and Mrs. Hartman) so their men will participate in the stories women prefer. Perhaps because men have little practice at listening, they prove to be critically obtuse, old fashioned in their critical expectations. George can finally make love only when he sweeps aside all other ways of knowing Louise Trunnion and settles on one story about her: "Doubt left him. The whispered tales concerning her that had gone about town gave him confidence. He became wholly the male, bold and aggressive. In his heart there was no sympathy for her" (38). Anderson, thus, defines being wholly a man in terms of a simplistic critical relationship to the many narratives that make up Louise Trunnion. He becomes a man only through a grotesque interpretive act, seizing on just one of her truths, by ignoring her aesthetic complexity, which is to say, her humanity. On the other hand, she comfortably expresses different texts, different senses of self.

Louise Bentley and John Hardy provide a clear and representative example of the problematic critical relationship of men to women's desire. In Louise's case, she writes her desire in a note to John Hardy asking him to come to her. While this note has some thematic connections to the texts of Louise Trunnion and Helen White, there are several significant differences: "I want someone to love me

and I want to love someone," she wrote." Unlike Alice Hindman, who wants to be loved; unlike the stranger in "Tandy," who hasn't "found my thing to love," Louise envisions simultaneity of loving and being loved. "If you are the one for me I want you to come into the orchard at night and make a noise under my window. It will be easy for me to crawl down over the shed and come to you. I am thinking about it all the time, so if you are to come at all you must come soon" (71). Louise Bentley's note to her future husband is the most ambitious and radically futuristic of the various texts written by women; her insistence on men's and women's absolute equality in loving and being loved makes her a spokeswoman for other women in the novel, interpreting and correcting the partial and fragmented texts of Louise Trunnion, her sister from Winesburg's underclass, and correcting Helen White's callow, self-centered text. While literary and cultural narratives clearly influence the texts and utterances of those other women, Louise Bentley's writing seems free from such influence.¹⁵ Her note calls to mind a *Romeo and Juliet* balcony scene, but she reveals no consciousness of the parallel. Her anticipated athletic climbing down from her window reverses the Shakespearean paradigm, emphasizing her more-than-equal participation and even reversal of the physical, psychological traditional dynamic in the relationship. All her Romeo has to do is "make a noise"; she'll do the climbing; it will be "easy" for her. Certainly, nothing in the style of her writing suggests literary inflammation or self-infatuation as do both Louise Trunnion's and Helen White's love letters. With respect to the literary style of her utterance, Louise Bentley is ahead of her time; her expressionist style calls to mind the expressionist art of Gertrude Stein. We can hear Melanctha Herbert in her "I am thinking about it all the time," a style certainly not available to her. The Winesburg present is probably 1890s, but Louise Bentley's girlhood would have been considerably before then. Moreover, Melanctha's narrative does not construct the sort of stylized sense of self likely to inflame anyone. The absence of literary influence and the total absence of any sort of rhetorical duplicity give the abstracted expressionist message, the desire to love and to be loved, enormous authority, arguably making it symbolic, prophetic speech. Because her future husband misinterprets this authoritative text, the ensuing crisis in the Hardys' relationship stands for a representative crisis in men and women's relationships:

Louise Bentley took John Hardy to be her lover. That was not what she wanted but it was so the young man had interpreted her approach to him, and so anxious was she to achieve something else that she made no resistance . . . All during the first year [of their marriage] Louise tried to make her husband understand the vague and intangible hunger that had led to the writing of the note and that was still unsatisfied. Again and again she crept into his arms and tried to talk of it, but always without success. Filled with his own notions of love between men and women, he began to kiss her upon the lips. That confused her so that in the end she did not want to be kissed. She did not know what she wanted. (73)

Women write about love, but behind even their most nakedly sexual invitations, there are large issues of culture, social and personal identity and the most basic of psychological needs that have nothing to do with sex. But men do not listen; they either impose their own meanings on women or do not attempt to interpret carefully their actions, their writing, or their spoken words. Taken up with authoring themselves, men are not in the habit of listening, not especially practiced at reading carefully. They have been filled with notions—inadequate, incomplete narratives as it turns out—of the love between men and women. Men's clumsy interpretive narrow-mindedness fractures the relationship between men and women, confuses women who want to be understood,¹⁶ who want understanding, empathetic critics for mates or friends rather than self-advertising artists. Women become so frustrated with men's critical obtuseness that they don't want to be kissed. Louise Bentley's frustrated response speaks not only for many women in Winesburg, Ohio—Elizabeth Willard's youthful sexual experiences do not get at what she wanted either—but she also speaks for and interprets many heroines of American fiction authored by men.

Something else makes Louise Bentley special. She understands that what she said in her note cannot express the "vague and intangible hunger" that led to its writing. She understands the ineffability and uncertainty of meaning; she knows that traditional experiences and cultural rituals—marriage, lovemaking, friendship—inadequately narratize meanings and desires that finally cannot be explained. Unlike Enoch Robinson, who confidently thinks he knows exactly what his painting means, Louise Bentley simply doesn't know what she was getting at. She's written the simplest of texts, its meaning apparently free from complicating social and cultural matri-

ces, free from the double-voiced masking complexities that characterize much of male speech.¹⁷ As simple as the text is, as authoritative as it is in its minimalist representation of desires, she knows that it doesn't get at what she meant, that her meaning is "vague and intangible," in other words, ineffable, beyond words. She knows her truth, her story, her note, are not she. In *Winesburg, Ohio*, only women come to realize that their authored selves are not reality; only women don't go back to sleep after being awakened. Alice Hindman baldly states a truth that no male grotesque confronts: "What is the matter with me? I will do something dreadful if I am not careful" (120). After failing to get her husband to talk over her story, Louise Bentley effectively drops out from the storied world, insisting that the world and its stories belong to men. Such discoveries—the fictionality of their identity; the awareness of the intractable aesthetics of relationships; the impossibility of final meaning—do not bring happiness, but they do make for heroism. The narrator may associate men with audacity, for example the town's amazement at Joe Welling's blithe intrepidity at the courtship of Sarah King or the awe inspired by Windmill Peters's reckless self-destruction. But he never talks about men as brave. In *Winesburg, Ohio*, only women act courageously.¹⁸ The narrator specifically identifies two women as brave, capable of acting heroically even as they are terrified. After Alice Hindman gives up on Ned Curry, on her stories of fidelity, on her pantheistic rain dance, she weeps "brokenheartedly," turns to the wall and "began trying to force herself to face bravely the fact that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg" (98). Contrast the narrator's sense of the authenticity of her bravery with his sly disgust at the whimpering and whining of the cowardly, self-centered, self-pitying Enoch Robinson, who also has had his sustaining fictions taken away. The narrator also registers Louise Bentley's courage in writing the note that will be misinterpreted by her future husband: "Louise had decided that she would perform the courageous act that had for weeks been in her mind" (70). Unlike George Willard's delight in his courage in going where he knows others fear to go (talking with Enoch Robinson), Louise Bentley does not congratulate herself on her courage. She's terrified to write her remarkable note. In addition to these two specifically named acts of courage, we might include the courage—and dignity—implicit in Wash Williams's wife's silent nakedness (especially when contrasted with Seth Richmond, who talks so much about his own silent dignity) and Kate Swift's selfless

artistry expressed in her ability to quietly inhabit other lives without the sort of fiction of artishood that sustained Enoch Robinson and George Willard, and finally Louise Trunnion's honest, unperturbed, unflinching recognition of what life holds for her.

Comprised of the truths that men have taken unto themselves and through which they live their lives, men's selfhoods represent the culture's dominant discourses. In women's interactions with men, women consequently enact relationships analogous to artists' relationships to the culture's privileged narratives and mythologies, relationships ranging from thoughtless embrace of the narratives provided for them at one extreme to resistant, suspicious, and discerning criticism of those privileged stories at the other extreme. In one respect, these latter relationships—the critically suspicious and resistant—represent Anderson's own artistic relationship to his culture's sanctioned mythologies. Anderson's art expressed in the *Winesburg* narrator, then, can be said to be "feminine" in this important respect—its capacity for careful, suspicious listening to others' stories. The *Winesburg* narrator differs significantly, however, from suspicious, discerning women like Louise Bentley or Alice Hindman, who evince dread at their postmodernist discovery of the fictive nature of being. Anderson's narrator eagerly attends to a fictive world, fascinated by its storied swirl. He greedily overhears/listens to/tells Winesburg's stories, his grin barely perceptible, his artfully insinuated suspicions tugging us away from and therefore lightly limning the certainties we desire, we expect, but which finally we are craftily denied. The narrator's compulsive digressions, his eagerness to listen to and to tell others' stories, measure the difference between him and Tom Little's jadedness to the generic sameness of others' stories. Caught up in his own personal moment, bored by having seen it all, Tom Little cannot carefully attend to others. With no story of his own to tell or live, *Winesburg's* narrator, however, pays fantastic heed to others. Perpetually young, like the "young indescribable thing" inside the writer who drove the procession of grotesques in front of the writer's eyes in the collection's opening tale, "The Book of the Grotesque," the narrator tirelessly, joyfully engages experience. At one point in the "Book of the Grotesque," the narrator described the writer's imagination as a not especially feminine

female: "No it wasn't a youth, it was a woman, young and wearing a coat of mail like a knight". Later he decides that the writer's imagination can't be fully described ("that indescribable thing"). Whatever the exact metaphor, whether youth or woman, the narrator makes clear that the writer's imagination has nothing to do with several of the traditional attributes of youth and the female. There is relentless energy but no childlike innocence in the youthful thing that drives the figures before his eyes; no hint of any traditional "feminine" virtues or stereotypes—the woman as compassionate sensitivity, the woman as nurturing maternal, the woman as sensual body, the woman as "fragile, hidden something"—in the perhaps female thing dressed as a warrior. In fact, that traditional femininity barely exists in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*.¹⁹ Compelled by the carnival of narratives but never in thrall to it, Anderson's narrator cunningly records the lies hidden away in the selfhoods of the Winesburg citizens. At the same time, we should not confuse *Winesburg's* narrator with Anderson himself. From his letters, autobiographies and essays, we know that facets of Anderson—his desires, his provisional aesthetic theories, his general notions, and particulars of his experience—appear in nearly every character in *Winesburg, Ohio*, exposed to the narrator's wry, dismantling, subverting scrutiny. Like a quiet, understated Walt Whitman,²⁰ Anderson walks up and down the byways of his America, the little Midwestern town of Winesburg, Ohio, where he belongs. Like Whitman, he discovers himself in his selfless attentiveness to others.²¹ Anderson sounds no barbaric yawp over Winesburg's rooftops; rather, through his narrator, he listens very carefully to each and all, democratically fascinated, democratically suspicious, listens to others' yawps, to their impassioned utterance. Without Whitman's rhapsody, Anderson sees himself, loves himself, sees others, loves others with startling honesty and clarity.

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NOTES

¹Curtis Hartman imposes on Kate Swift a liberal "woman of the world" narrative that interprets her rebellious smoking as liberated, sophisticated behavior. In so doing, he lays claim himself to the enlarged understanding. She gives no indication that she uses that narrative to dramatize herself. The liberal woman of the world narrative is part of his self-congratulatory consciousness, not hers.

²Marilyn Atlas reads the Winesburg stories differently—assuming sympathy, for example, on the narrator's part for Wash Williams and a shared antagonism between the narrator and

Wash toward Williams's wife—in pursuit of her thesis that Anderson feared women (See "Sherwood Anderson and the Women of Winesburg"). Along with Walter Miller, she believes that Anderson's idealization of women prevented his successful treatment of them, ignoring the fact that men's idealization of women is Anderson's subject in "Respectability" and "The Strength of God." For a different treatment, see Sean Lause's "The Paradox of Isolation and Sherwood Anderson's Almost Silent Women." Although Lause sentimentalizes Anderson's very unsentimental notion of the feminine "women in nature, expressing love, sensuality and creativity" (1), still he understands that Anderson creates complicated women characters. Atlas mistakes Anderson's unflinching documentation of social realities and the absence of narratives sanctioning social rebellion for women for example, for Anderson's personal preferences.

³There are two exceptions to this self-contained quality of men's selfhood, and both are exceptions that not only may prove the rule but curiously be examples of it as well. Wing Biddlebaum is so enamored of his gentle, benevolent schoolmaster persona that it takes a vicious beating to penetrate his dreamy carapace. Such bop-on-the-nose comic interruption of male indulgence in self-satisfied reverie is one of Anderson's quiet comedies. Ed Handby's fist manfully (and therefore ironically) smashes George Willard's Lawrentian boyish babble about manhood. Elmer Cowley might at first seem another contradiction. While his selfhood is not exactly based on his sense of social place, he is preoccupied with his assumption of being seen as "queer." Nothing can penetrate Elmer Cowley's self-contained fiction of perceived queerness, the guiding assumptions of which are entirely self-generated and imposed on the world. He is his own audience, oblivious to any outside influence.

⁴The facts that the town tells tales about her and that the tales are related to her promiscuity are present in "Nobody Knows." That promiscuity relegates her to social inferiority we infer from that same story, but the idea that sexual conduct provided a moral division prior to class divisions can be found in "Surrender" from the "Godliness" sequence.

⁵Kate Swift talks a fair amount, but she is another of those exceptions that end up supporting our general thesis regarding Anderson's different treatment of men and women. She is a storyteller but these stories are not about herself, at least not consciously, in the way that, say, Wing Biddlebaum's stories are about himself. She tells stories to her students, and loses herself in them, inhabits the fictions of other lives, without in any sense claiming them as hers. She gains infrequent moments of intense happiness when she thus loses her self in her story making. She is thus an artist who does not aspire to be an artist, an artist not expressing her truths but inhabiting the made-up lives of others: "... and made up strange, intimate little stories concerning the life of the dead writer. The stories were told with the air of one who had lived in the house with Charles Lamb and knew all the secrets of his private life" (138). She is different from most women in that she seems to have a conspicuous and urgent soul hunger, expressed in her street-wandering walks, linking her experience with the hungers of the very minister who sexually spies on her. Her mother identifies her wandering as masculine, connecting it with a problematic aspect of her husband and Kate's father: "More than once I've waited for your father to come home, not knowing what new mess he had gotten into" (139-140). While her mother identifies this dissatisfaction as a masculine trait, a feminist might argue that Kate Swift becomes a schoolteacher because of the narrow narrative range of identities provided for women.

⁶The "Godliness" sequence produces several cultural/historical metaphors. Louise Bentley's story in Part Three, "Surrender," presents her experience as a feminist parable. Leaving the cold, puritanically repressive patriarchy of the Father, she looks forward to the warm urbanity of modernity where she will make her way by means of her considerable intelligence: "In her eagerness to appear well Louise wanted to answer every question put to the class by the teacher" (66). Suppressed in this endeavor not by men but by women (the Hardy daughters resent her performance), she turns to John Hardy. The refusal by her

metaphorical sisters to accept her intellectual selfhood comments on the social constriction of narrative possibilities.

⁷While it is possible to argue that fewer narratives exist in the culture because women's nature demands fewer stories, Anderson seems to take care demonstrating that females have similar ambitions in their childhoods and young adulthoods, but end up taking significantly different paths. Kate Swift's storytelling desires must be satisfied by telling stories to students; George Willard, Enoch Robinson, Dr. Parcival leave their towns and go away to become artists. When young, Helen White has a passion for writing. She stays on the platform in Winesburg as George leaves for the big city. In this respect, George Willard's own mother serves as the clearest example of the difference regarding the cultural possibilities for men and women. When young, she desires the world, a desire expressed in both artistic ambition (she is "stage struck" and wants to join an acting troupe) and shocking, for Winesburg, gender innovations (she puts on "men's clothes" and rides a "bicycle down Main Street" 24). Despite her father's advice and the money he gives her to get out of town, she marries Tom Willard and is trapped in his narrative. As with Louise Bentley, Louise Trunnion, Kate Swift, and to some degree Helen White, romantic/sexual love becomes a way of searching for something else. In this respect, Anderson strikes me as significantly different from his male contemporaries who more often than not imagine, in either celebration or derogation, their women characters as representing the physical (Caddy Compson, Eula Varner, Myrtle Wilson, and Daisy Buchanan). Anderson's women are victims of their sexuality, not because they can't control their animality but because it is their narrative quest: "And then there was the second expression of her restlessness. When that came she felt for a time released and happy" (25). Elizabeth Willard's quest for significance ends in sobbing despair: "... beginning with kisses and ending, after strange wild emotions, with peace and then sobbing repentance" (25). She, like Huck, has left her civilization, lit out for the strange and wild emotional territory, the only one perhaps available to her. But her repeated wildings in the wilderness are, well, more modern in their repeated failures. This is not to say that Anderson naively believes that George's different narrative possibility, going off to become an artist, will bring happiness to George. We have the presence of returned, unhappy, failed artists (Enoch Robinson) to make us question such naivete.

⁸Women more self-consciously manipulate devices, codes, and rituals for personal, practical effect. Belle Carpenter only pretends to listen to George Willard. Mrs. Hartman conducted the courtship ritual in which her husband "pursued" her. Nell Gunther ("Nell ain't no fool" [185]) knows that her beau will balk if she brings up marriage. Men employ artistic devices for the purpose of performing their stories.

⁹We distinguish her careful, delayed exegesis "began to think" with the self-serving, free-from-attentive alertness, imposed meanings of someone like Curtis Hartman or Robinson's self-confessed indifference to what a woman says.

¹⁰The little girl's innocent child's despair, doubting her strength to inhabit a narrative that will no doubt demand strength, differs from the more mature women's response to such impossible demands. In a letter to Roger Serger, Anderson discusses men's narratizing of women. Speaking in language that echoes the opening tale's creation fable, he says, "the flesh becomes beauty, all of these vague, unorganized dreams that have been in us so long now pointed toward a fact" (324). In that opening tale, the thoughts had been "vague" and from the thoughts men made truths, the narratives that people then take to themselves to express their identities. Anderson anticipates the anger that past and later heroines of American fiction, especially fiction written by men, might very well feel in being asked to inhabit these impossible stories: "No woman could in herself be what we want, or think we want" (324). Perhaps offering one explanation of Wash Williams's wife's behavior, Anderson says, "The woman, knowing in her heart that we are asking too much of her, resents the fact. She should resent" (324).

¹¹] disagree with Sally Rigsbee's definition of Anderson's notion of the feminine: "... a pervasive presences of a fragile, hidden 'something' that corresponds both to the lost potential of each of the grotesques and to the secret knowledge that each story is structured to reveal" (178). She does point to the crucial role of love in women's lives: "The tragic loss which characterizes the lives of Louise Bentley and Alice Hindman and the accompanying shriveling of their sexuality and their capacity for affection suggest that Anderson regarded the failure to find fulfillment in love as a crucial issue of female identity" (180). On the other hand, I must admit that Anderson is capable of apparently sentimentalizing women along traditional, stereotypical lines. For example, in his last autobiographical writings, he was given to saying that women want to be, men want to create (*Memoirs* 550-551). He sometimes gets tender about tenderness (*Memoirs* 3), suggesting that tenderness is the opposite of the grotesque. But two things need to be kept in mind: first, the autobiographies themselves are artful, using juxtaposing and subverting strategies; second, even if we accept without question the autobiographies' sentimentalist pronouncements and ignore the autobiographies' contradicting assertions, we must remember these facts: what tenderness we find in *Winesburg, Ohio* is either part of men's rhetorical presentation of themselves (Wing); part of their duplicitous textual selves (Wash) used to cloak other less "tender" aspects of their character; or part of men's rhetorical construction of women (Enoch Robinson) used to both to express and to mask their own self-celebration.

¹²See "The Thinker" where George Willard announces his intention to fall in love (112) with Helen White so that he can finish the love story that he has already started.

¹³Another of the female artists *manqué*, Kate Swift, does not think of herself as an artist, but effectively and artistically tells stories, providing another instance of a woman who might benefit by a culturally approved story of artisthood for women.

¹⁴See Sean Lausé's discussion of Sherwood Anderson's almost silent women: "[Anderson's] deepest sympathies are reserved for the women who are not allowed even the promise of a new self . . . each of these women [Helen White, Mary Webster, Natalie Schwartz] has potential for a deeper, more intense life, yet each is surrounded by walls of silence" (8). While he sentimentalizes Anderson's notion of the feminine, he understands what others sometimes do not, that Anderson values the feminine.

¹⁵Another distinction to be made between men and women is the large differences in their literary influences. We hear in men's voices a wide range of antecedent literary voices, cadences, and styles: biblical, both Old and New Testaments (Jesse Bentley, Wash Williams, Curtis Hartman); Shakespeare (Wash Williams); Puritan sermonizers (Wash Williams); Greek pastoral (Wing Biddlebaum); pastoral (nearly everyone); Horatio Alger (Mr. Willard); Jane Austen or the equivalent (Curtis Hartman) to name only a few. Nothing like this diversity of literary precedents exists in women's speech, written or uttered. Elizabeth Willard, in keeping with her dramatic ambitions, does create a scene in her mind that clearly shows the influence of classical Greek tragedy.

¹⁶Kate Swift is not one of the actual writers although her storytelling at her school suggests she may be an artist *manqué*. She is the only woman in the collection who might be said to have an urgent sense of selfhood, an urgency expressed in her soul-hungering walks at all times of day and night. She also is the only woman to seek out an audience to talk to. Her message to George Willard ostensibly teaches important aesthetic lessons: a relationship to experience, an implication apparently that only artists who live life can write about it ("You will have to know life . . . Now it's time to be living" [140]); an attitude toward the seriousness of his craft and the importance of being a serious artist ("You must not become a mere peddler of words" [140]); an insistence that an artist must be a suspicious critic of his subjects' speech, that the truth is not in the actual text but lies in the unspoken interior ("The thing to learn is to know what people are thinking about, not what they say" [140]). We've seen Helen White and Dr. Reefy's wife exercise this sort of exe-

gesis on men's speech. We've seen men fail to understand that the apparent meaning is not the only or entire meaning. Kate Swift's lesson in aesthetics can also be seen as a plea to be interpreted correctly. The description of her desire that he become the kind of artist she hopes mingles the language of eros and literary criticism:

As he turned to go she spoke his name softly and with an impulsive movement took hold of his hand. Because the reporter was rapidly becoming a man something of his man's appeal, combined with the winsomeness of the boy, stirred the heart of the lonely woman. A passionate desire to have him understand the import of life, to learn to interpret it truly and wisely, swept over her. (141)

Like all those who talk earnestly to George, she has herself in mind. Her physical desire is inextricably linked to language about interpretation because she wants to be interpreted correctly. In this respect she is perhaps less mature than Louise Bentley whose frustration makes her recognize that her "meaning" is beyond words, unknowable.

¹⁷Men's speech is often double voiced, containing self-parodying underminings of the ostensible values of the main discourse. See, for example, Wing Biddlebaum's dreamily reminiscent description of his perfect dream (8). The speech contains all sort of homoerotic suggestions undermining the privileged pastoral romanticism.

¹⁸I fudge, but ever so slightly. The narrator describes Wash Williams as a 'man of courage' (99). But the courage, apparently, consists of his total immersion in his misogynistic, anti-social narrative. His rebellion against social codes makes him a champion in the eyes of repressed males, providing another instance of cultural narratives sanctioning male rebellion. The narrator gives no hint that Wash acts bravely in the sense of these women who are conscious of the dangers of their actions.

¹⁹Louise Bentley reveals the only instance of tender maternalism in *Winesburg, Ohio*, a tenderness that must contend with her bitter feminist anger: "Sometimes she stayed in the room with him all day, walking about and occasionally creeping close to touch him tenderly with her hands, and then other days came when she did not want to see or be near the tiny bit of humanity that had come into the house. When John Hardy reproached her for her cruelty, she laughed. 'It is a man child and will get what it wants anyway,' she said sharply. 'Had it been a woman child there is nothing in the world I would not have done for it.'"

²⁰Anderson did not especially like Whitman, seeing him as dishonest. See his letter to Van Wyck Brooks (40-41).

²¹Anderson talks different ways to different people at different times about the relationship of his personal experience to his art. Sometimes, he talks about a straightforward relationship, his life expressed in his art: "All a man is should be found in his work" (to Risley, *Letters* 395); "The work of any writer and for that matter any artist in any of the seven arts should contain within it the story of his own life" ("Man and his Imagination" 58). Sometimes he talks about the impersonality of art as a way of escaping self: "I presume it [art] is the power of losing self. Self is the grand disease. It is all we are trying to lose" (to John Anderson, *Letters* 167). More often, he sees in this impersonality a kind of paradox—that only through selfless empathy does the writer come to know himself: "... understanding of the life of any other American, rich or poor, high or low, I could, by that road, get a little at self" (*Memoirs* 238); "My notion is that no man knows himself or can arrive at the truth concerning himself except by what seems like indirection" (to Burrow, *Letters* 50). Also in this letter he argues that the best way to get at America is through the depiction of the individual. So, by analogy, the best way to get at himself is through the individual. Also, see Lawry's "'Death in the Woods' and the Artist's Self in Sherwood Anderson" for a discussion of Anderson's theory of the selfless artist. Other times he seems to believe that he does not exist at all; that he is simply what he has imaginatively

inhabited: "It may be that I don't exist. I have been, in imagination, so many other people." (to Roger Serjel *Letters* 413). A variation of the notion of the artist discovering himself in others is that the artist becomes what he empathetically gives himself over to (see Anderson's letter to Laura Copenhagen [246]).

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*PATTY JANE'S HOUSE OF CURL: RESTYLING
WOMEN'S LITERATURE IN THE
MIDWESTERN CLASSROOM*

JILL BARNUM

One of the few tried-and-true literature classes to survive repeated curriculum revision cuts at my open admissions college at the University of Minnesota is GC 1366 Images of Women in Literature. It is a course I have taught for twenty years and, though I'm neither a feminist nor a scholar of feminist theory, I genuinely enjoy it. The course, which fulfills a general humanities requirement, always fills and there's a waiting list. Its appeal crosses gender lines; there are always half a dozen active and open-minded men in the classroom. And this past semester, in fact, my teaching assistant, one of the best I've worked with, was male.

For several years I've been using an anthology whose title mirrors that of the course, Mary Ann Ferguson's *Images of Women in Literature*, 5th edition, Houghton Mifflin. I vary the novels that are also required reading. This semester they included Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Jane Urquhart's *Away*. These novels dovetail nicely into the thematic categories that Ferguson's anthology sets up: The Wife, The Mother, Woman on a Pedestal, The Sex Object, Women without Men, Woman Becoming. But it occurred to me I could do more by way of making the novels I select relevant for my Minnesota students. Rather than give them Urquhart's Ireland and Canada, Kingston's California, or even Morrison's Ohio, I had a hunch there must be a book with strong feminine characters and a strong, more narrowly localized flavor. And I found it: Lorna Landvik's *Patty Jane's House of Curl* (1995). In the words of a *St. Paul Pioneer Press* review, homespun wisdom peppers every page and family bonds triumph in this unpretentious tale of tender/tough females with "the emotional warmth of Lake Wobegon."

Landvik traces the trajectory of her own life in that of her narrator's, and what the two share holds major appeal and relevance for my students as well: the scenario of a person born in the Midwest, attending a Midwestern university, then springing free and lighting out for the territories (California, in the case of Landvik and her narrator) where she lives for a number of years before returning to bosom of home and family back in the Midwest and getting it right. This is, in fact, one of the defining hallmarks of Midwestern literature, so characterized by Clarence Andrews at the inception of Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature three decades ago, a theme recast time and again in our novels and plays: return of the prodigal.

Besides writing magazine pieces in San Francisco, Landvik worked as a stand-up comic at the Comedy Store and Comedy Improv, scouted bands for Atlantic Records, and was a speed typist in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics before her return to Minneapolis, where she lives now with her family and acts and writes. Her second novel, *Your Oasis on Flame Lake* (1998), continues the small-town Minnesota focus with a pair of girlfriends voted "Least Changed" at their twentieth high school reunion. A third novel, *The Tall Pine Polka* (1999), is set near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Like David Mamet's *State and Main*, this is to be a tale of how a city-slick Hollywood film crew unsettles a small-town "with quaintness up the wazoo."

Of Landvik's three novels, *Patty Jane's House of Curl* is most appropriate for my Midwestern Women's Lit classroom because its strength is its circle of well-meaning though eccentric women, because the story unravels in polite, understated Minnesota diction such as you might hear in a friend's kitchen, and because the geographical details Landvik uses the students know like the back of their hand: Lake Street, the Foshay Tower, Washington Avenue, Minnehaha Falls, Roosevelt High, Lake Calhoun. The campy title promises good-natured gossip as women bare their souls and their gray roots to understanding hairdressers in this culture, which is as much support group as beauty salon. In exaggeratedly odd twists, tragedy follows comedy as things mostly resolve pretty well for these above-average characters.

Although Landvik builds her plot around two close-knit sisters, Patty Jane and Harriet, she doesn't so much conjure the cosmetics of beauticians as explain, in sentimental terms, how two kindhearted, forthright sisters survive hardship. The story begins in 1953, at Patty

Jane's wedding to drop-dead gorgeous Norwegian Thor. The bride becomes pregnant on their wedding night, which frightens her husband and eventually prompts his mysterious disappearance just days before their daughter is born.

Meanwhile, it's love at first sight for Harriet and Avel, a doting millionaire. They're blissfully happy together, so when Avel goes on a business trip to Colombia just before their scheduled nuptials, it's a sure bet that his plane will crash. The ensuing years pass quickly as the sisters, Patty Jane's daughter Nora, and Thor's mother Ione adjust to single life under the same roof. Patty Jane opens the eponymous salon where Nora answers the phone and Ione keeps the clients happy with Norwegian baked goods, but Harriet never gets over Avel. She develops a serious drinking problem that leads to prostitution and sinks to life in the gutter, but she's pulled out by Reese, a policeman and recovered alcoholic. Their shared pasts pave the way for a shared future as they fall in love and marry. Patty Jane has designs of her own, on Clyde Chuka (who is always referred to by both his names), the beguiling Native American sculptor who is manicurist at her salon; although it takes him a while to dare slip into the love life of his boss who's still technically married, he does.

About this time, Thor reappears in a strange scene; impaired and almost catatonic, he has been held prisoner and love slave for years by a crazed woman, a dentist, whose long-ago visits to Patty Jane's salon always caused a ruckus. To cut to the finish line, all's well that ends well: the crazed lady dentist dies, leaving Thor her mansion on West River Parkway, which Patty Jane transforms into her salon. After practicing law in California, Patty Jane's daughter Nora moves back to Minneapolis; she is legal adviser to Patty Jane's clients and dotes on her mentally impaired father, assisting him in the production of his birdhouses, which sell like hotcakes. Clyde Chuka and Patty Jane have a child together. As if to counterbalance all this happiness, Harriet dies of emphysema, surrounded by her family at home, but Nora's memory of her aunt exposes the silver lining: "This might be a test. Our family has had some rough times—some real rough times, but you know what? The good times would still tip the scale. And do you know why? Good old love, sweet love" (273).

The good life in the Midwest would not be complete without some heavy-handed moralizing, and *Patty Jane's House of Curl* lays it on thick, to make sure even the densest of Norwegian bachelor farmers gets it. Family values, first of all, are the bricks and mortar

of the novel. At fifteen, Nora has never met her father before she comes to know him as a shadow of the Adonis he was, but the tenderness with which she relates to him is the role of a true daughter:

When she wasn't working or with her friends downtown or at Lake Nokomis, Nora was in the basement with Thor and his birdhouses, helping him paint a roof or glue a shutter or file a rectangular front door for a blue jay. She felt Thor's basement workshop was the only tranquil place in the house, and her father the only person she didn't need to pretend to. (269)

Whatever success and happiness the characters achieve, and it is considerable, evolves from their care and nurture of each other. Even after Harriet dies, Patty Jane feels their closeness:

"Look at this, Harriet," whispered Patty Jane. She spoke not to the pale grey coffin but to the green and blue of land and sky, to the trees still heavy with leaves and birds, to the clouds unraveling like bolts of cotton . . . She was going to walk around the neighborhood and see and hear Harriet in its landmarks, in the streets and houses and lakes they had known together. She planned to walk a long time and then with gratitude and sorrow, go home. Home was always the place she went to when she had to start over. (278-279)

The sex scenes are sweet and polite, with a PG rating:

When he began pulling down her panties and garter belt, Harriet said, "Avel, do you know what you're doing?"

"Absolutely" he said. "Now unbutton my fly, would you please? Let's liberate the Ally."

As they rolled and undulated, leaving imprints of their bodies in the wet sand, Harriet thought, "This is like a musical score, and I'll lose consciousness at the crescendo." When Avel arched his back and cried out, Harriet joined him, her voice like an animal's she had never heard.

They lay together, holding tight until they stopped trembling.

"Thank you, my darling," said Avel, smoothing a tendril of hair from Harriet's face. "Thank you for the most exquisite moment of my life."

"You're welcome," said Harriet and gently bit his lower lip. "Now let's go to the car for another round."

They dressed each other as breaking clouds raced across a pale moon and an owl watched them from a tall dark pine. (106)

But the book's moralizing can become preachy; its final third is an aggressive grandstand against tobacco and alcohol. Alcoholics Anonymous is praised and visited as several scenarios reveal how Demon Rum can wreck lives: "Booze is like a mean old cur who goes after those who won't bite back, people with big hearts and sad souls" (173). Harriet's suffering from lung cancer and her final months aren't pretty, but the family rallies, comforting each other with homespun philosophy: "Grief is a lot like sobriety; you get through it one day at a time."

Having settled on *Patty Jane's House of Curl* for a classroom adoption, I've been experimenting with how to use it most effectively. Next year I'll make it a required text. This past semester, my first use of the book, I assigned it as one of three supplemental texts the students chose from for their end-of-semester group presentation. These group presentations give the students a chance to analyze and prepare with three or four others some aspect of a literary work that they then present to the class. These works are not studied or discussed by the class in advance; all groups may select the same novel, or all may select a different novel, but it must be one on the supplemental list. Imagination is encouraged and rewarded, talent is a plus, and preparation of a visual or handout is required. The key is for the students to select a scene or an idea which speaks to them collectively, which gives them an epiphany of some sort, which changes their minds about something or which challenges long-held beliefs.

Among presentations based on *Patty Jane's House of Curl* in my recent class, several groups did role-plays of key scenes, with one student first giving an introduction to set the context. Points of an emotional breaking point were popular, such as when Harriet learns of Avel's plane crash, or when Harriet and Clyde Chuka, who have discovered Thor walking out of a bar, break the news to Patty Jane that he is still alive and they're bringing him home. Another group researched the music in the book ("Mockin' Bird Hill," "Shrimp Boats," and "What a Wonderful World") and presented a concert of "Nora" on trumpet and "Harriet" on harp and vocals. Still another group presented the opening reception of Clyde Chuka's first official art exhibit, complete with gallery of his metal, paint and feather creations and with a narrative by "Clyde" about what had been his inspirations.

Other possibilities for using the book in class occur to me. There are any number of related films which could play off it in different thematic ways: *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Terms of Endearment*,

Antonia's Line, *Steel Magnolias*, *Shampoo*, and *Venus Beauty Institute*. Or, for a multicultural women's festival unit, it could be paired with Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, Cynthia Kadohata's *The Floating World*, and Sandra Benitez's *The Place Where the Sea Remembers*. I might offer it as part of a multi-genred exploration of the female character with Susan Glaspell's play *Trifles*, poetry that includes "Warning" by Jenny Joseph ("When I am an old woman I shall wear purple/ With a red hat which doesn't go and doesn't suit me"), and music by Libby Larsen, whose musical about Jenny Lind, called *Barnum's Bird*, recently premiered in Minneapolis on its way to New York.

In the final analysis, although I selected *Patty Jane's House of Curl* for its localization of appeal, the novel's reach is really much broader than Minnesota or even the Midwest. The book's energy, verve, and affirmation of life cross all geographical lines to celebrate the tender, tenacious, enduring female spirit. It's Patty Jane choosing pregnancy at forty-six. It's Nora back in Minnesota "when the wind-chill factor was 20 below zero for two weeks" (289), choosing tobogganing and skating rather than moving back to California. "We can all cry," Nora muses in the passage that closes the book, "but the laughter will sneak in, just as tears have been known to crash our fun. And when we finish blowing our noses, we'll put on the coffee pot and have dessert, as we always do" (292).

The University of Minnesota

TWENTIETH-CENTURY BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ON NINETEENTH-CENTURY MICHIGAN

MARY DEJONG OBUCHOWSKI

There has been a burgeoning of books for children and young people in recent years, and Michigan has produced a particularly fine share, among them books by Joan Blos, Iola Fuller, and Gloria Whelan, all winners of major awards. These authors have taken up some nineteenth-century matters which are still vital in the twenty-first century.

Those issues begin with the encroachment first by explorers and then by traders and missionaries in what has been called the Old Northwest: Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Once they had broken a path, others followed. With lucrative resources suddenly available, American, British, and French troops set up forts to protect the claims of their countrymen. Then came the immigrants who, for various reasons, chose to settle the territory, clear-cutting the forests and breaking the prairie, no matter the hardships. These groups made use of the indigenous people as guides, sources of knowledge of survival, and military allies; then they pushed them off the land of their ancestors and sustenance, turning them into enemies at worst, residents on sufferance at best. These various conditions naturally engendered a number of conflicts: the French and Indian War, the War of 1812, the institution of slavery, and the Civil War; all set friend against friend, family against family, and brother against brother.

The books under present consideration treat some of the conditions in the Michigan of the first half of the nineteenth century: the fur trade, with Mackinac Island as its center; the War of 1812; immigration and settlement by homesteaders in central and southern Michigan; the displacement and other mistreatment of Native Americans; and the underground railway. The books were written not entirely for young people, although that is their principal audience. They were written by people who were not present or involved

in the situations but who used primary materials; hence, the books present a credible and sympathetic portrait of those who faced hardship and exploitation during that period. Discussion of them follows more or less in chronological order of the events they record.

Iola Fuller, also known as Iola Fuller McCoy, wrote *The Loon Feather* while she was a student at the University of Michigan and won a major Hopwood award for it in 1939. In it, Oneta, daughter of Tecumseh, narrates events from her birth in 1806 until about 1924. She opens by discussing the conflicts among Sioux and Ojibway that preceded the French and Indian War between European settlers and Native Americans and the War of 1812 between the Americans and the British. In the latter, the Shawnee chief Tecumseh joined the British, and now, after their defeat, he tries to unite the tribes against the Americans who are pushing them off from their land but is killed by the "Long Knives" in 1913 or 1914. Oneta relates how his widow, Naneda, marries an aristocratic Frenchman, Pierre Debans, who tries to make her conform to European ways. She bears him a child, Paul, and dies of scarlet fever. Pierre adopts Oneta but sends her to school for twelve years at a convent in Quebec, where she learns to act like a European. Pierre, though kind to his family, embodies the worst of European prejudices against Native Americans in general. His son Paul, who is half Shawnee, finds success by creating a fishing trade, merging the talents of Native Americans, *voyageurs*, and European and American trading companies. Oneta, too, uses the diplomatic talents she has inherited from her father, Tecumseh, to stave off open rebellion by the tribes at Mackinac when the U.S. government reneges on its payments for their territories, and it is clear to present readers that federal entities will continue to break treaties and force the tribes further and further west.

Apparently Iola Fuller was a very private person and not much is known about her life or her handling of primary materials, but her use of history here and elsewhere appears sound and her details look authentic. She also wrote other historical novels set on the North American continent. *The Gilded Torch* (1957) tells of the life and career of Sieur de La Salle, who explored the St. Lawrence, Great Lakes, and beyond. *The Shining Trail* (1943) follows *The Loon Feather* in chronology and theme, describing the attempts of Black Hawk, Tecumseh's successor, to unite the tribes west of the Mississippi to defend their land, and ending with their total defeat.

Gloria Whelan has written almost twenty books for children and young people. In 2000, she won a National Book Award for *Wingless Bird*, a story about a young girl in India whose family marries her to a sick boy; the boy's family needs her dowry to take him to the Ganges in the belief that it will cure him. Nevertheless, he dies and his family abandons her. Still only a child, she must and does find a way to make a life for herself in an inhospitable society.

However, Whelan set most of her books in Michigan and many of them take up aspects of Michigan history. Her narratives also show careful acquaintance with historical records and Native American customs. One trilogy for young adult readers, beginning with *Once on This Island* (1995), continuing in *Farewell to the Island* (1998), and concluding with *Return to the Island* (2000), repeats some of the conditions recorded in *The Loon Feather*, this time from the point of view of a girl of French-Irish heritage, Mary O'Shea. She sees her family and friends divided by their loyalties to the British, Americans, and Native Americans during the War of 1812. Her father fights on the American side, and because his wife is dead, the children remain at home alone, learning how to survive winters of desperate hardship. Mary's sister marries an English officer, creating a conflict within the family. While Mary visits that sister in England, an English sailor from a landed family courts her, but she returns to Mackinac Island and marries the Native American boy she has grown up with, a young man who uses his combination of missionary education and tribal skills, knowledge, and heritage to help his people.

Another trilogy, this one for younger readers, takes place somewhat later, in the 1830s and early 1840s, near Saginaw. Starting with *Next Spring an Oriole* (1987), it follows the progress of the Mitchell family, who move from Virginia to live west of Saginaw, where the forests have not yet been cut. They encounter difficulties like those satirized in Caroline Kirkland's books: impossible roads and helpful but uncouth neighbors from whom they acquire lice. They also help some Potawatomi through illness; in return, the Native Americans provide the Mitchells with food to make it through their first winter. The sequel, *Night of the Full Moon* (1993), shows the 1840 forcible westward removal of the Potawatomi through the child Libby Mitchell's eyes. In this case, the land goes to settlers. In the third book in the series, *The Shadow of the Wolf* (1997), the lumber industry tries to take back land which has been bought from and resold to Ottawas. Libby compares the situation of the Native

American tribes to that of the wild animals, whose territory is quickly growing smaller.

Whelan takes up prejudice against Native Americans in two more books for young readers, *The Indian School* (1996) and *Miranda's Last Stand* (1999). In the former Whelan shows through the eyes of a young girl the pressures by Whites to make Native Americans conform to their standards, and in the latter, the hatred between races that comes from the conflicts over territory. In both cases, friendships among the children help the adults overcome unreasoning emotions and stereotypes.

In *Friends* (1997), still another book for young readers, Whelan uses a true story to illustrate prejudice against African Americans as well as the role of Marshall, Michigan, in the antislavery movement. The Crosswhite family has come to Marshall via the Underground Railroad. Martha Crosswhite's fictional best friend, Hilda Lovett, is shocked to find that both her schoolteacher and the family lawyer disapprove of her friendship. When slave catchers come from Kentucky to take back the Crosswhites, other citizens of Marshall help them escape to Canada but face prosecution under the Fugitive Slave Law for helping them. The Federal Court trial in Detroit gives Whelan an opportunity to describe more of the Underground Railroad as well as the circumstances under which African Americans were living there. Although the outcome of the trial is that General Gorham, the primary spokesman for the slaves' protectors, is heavily fined, still another citizen of Marshall, Zachariah Chandler, pays that fine. Whelan notes at the end that Chandler went on to become a United States Senator and Secretary of the Interior.

Whelan's descriptions of Michigan landscape reflect her long residence on a lake near Petoskey. Her renderings of historical events come from wide reading of Michigan history.

Joan Blos's 1987 book, *Brothers of the Heart*, takes up the story of a family that appeared briefly in her Newberry Medal-winning book, *A Gathering of Days: A New England Girl's Journal, 1830-32* (1979). In *Brothers of the Heart*, the Perkins family has moved from New Hampshire to Ohio and thence to southern Michigan. The Perkinses have an arduous journey and find the property they have bought sight unseen to be very different from what they have envisioned, another experience not unlike that described in Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home: Who'll Follow?* Illness, difficult farming, and limited availability of employment make life very hard. Young Shem Perkins is disabled by a lame foot and so finds both working

and gaining respect from his father and his neighbors especially challenging under these circumstances. Caught up in wildcat banking scams and on bad terms with his father, he leaves without goodbyes and finds a job as a clerk on the Detroit wharves. His hard work wins him a place on a fur-trading expedition, but because of his lame foot, the crew leaves him behind, alone in the winter in an isolated cabin probably located somewhere in the northwestern part of Michigan's lower peninsula. An elderly Ottawa woman who lacks the strength to travel south with her tribe befriends Shem. Before she finally dies, she teaches Shem survival skills and the confidence to return to his own people as well as an understanding of her people's ways. Unlike the other authors, Blos is not a native of Michigan (although she has lived in Ann Arbor for many years); however, it is clear that she has done extensive and meticulous research, drawing on the writings of Andrew Blackbird, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, and pioneer accounts.

Thus, having utilized books and documents that belong to Michigan settlers and their history, the authors open to young people a number of kinds of information. They contribute to their readers' knowledge about the period, about the territory, and about the people who occupied it. Most Americans are descended from immigrants, and it is worthwhile to consider the reasons our ancestors came here, or, alternately, were brought here against their wills, as slaves, indentured servants, or prisoners. Some came for economic or religious reasons, or both; others came as refugees from war or other political circumstances. Those of Native American heritage have their own stories. Almost all involve history and hardship of one kind or another. My own ancestors left the Netherlands as many did, among whole congregations of churches, invited by tentative immigrants who settled and invited them to this land of economic opportunity. The group who came to Michigan traveled by water as far as they could through the Erie Canal, then walked the rest of the way to settle along Lake Michigan. How my Iowa forebears reached that territory so much farther west I can only imagine. All of us have stories in our backgrounds, either of arriving or of being pushed away by those arrivals.

The books discussed here contain stories that tell at least some of us where we came from, and why. Documents and books that they depend on from the period they recount contain firsthand accounts, giving details, reactions, and attitudes of those who were actually there. The experiences they record contribute to who we are now and

who we and our children will be in the future. They offer us reasons to respect our ancestors, the people who inhabited this area before they were here, and the people who are immigrating even today. They explain aspects of our Midwestern heritage even as they evolve.

The books that come out of this research go even further. In formats that are colorful, entertaining, even compelling, they interpret historical events from the perspectives of current generations and focus them on issues that the authors consider both interesting for their readers and important to help in determining those readers' conceptions of their history. The challenges of breaking new ground, whether it is literal prairie soil or previously unknown areas of technology, are those that face every generation. So are the conflicts among friends and family members. We may not take opposite sides in military battles these days, but politics sometimes divides us just as drastically, as do matters of generational difference. We have a common history in our uprooting Native tribes from their land and gambling at the casinos that replace their original livelihoods, in our providing refuge on the Underground Railroad and participating in desegregation, in our sending our ancestors to one side or another of the Civil War and supporting or opposing other wars. In the language of the present, these books affirm that all of us as citizens of the twenty-first century and as residents of the Midwest have much earlier roots.

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STYLISTIC FEATURES OF EARLY RED RIVER VALLEY POETRY

LAWRENCE MOE

1.

This paper calls for context. And perhaps I shall have little to offer but context. I shall weave contexts around a nominal subject, decentered by my observations at first into catalysis of more weaving still, before the subject finally vanishes altogether, my work more and more like Stan Laurel's banana—layer after layer of peelings with a vacancy of fruit at the core.

Here lies the body of our Anna,
Done to death by a banana.
It wasn't the fruit that laid her low,
But the skin of the thing that made her go.¹

But maybe this concern of mine arises simply as a reaction to my former view that literary criticism could be objective. If criticism is autobiographical anyway, I might as well be overt.

When I started work on the early poetry of the Red River Valley of the North a few years back, I had some difficulty explaining my interest in the subject, even to myself. I admit to being goaded on by my indignant response to an authority who had assured me that there were no books on this subject because there was no such subject, no such poetry. At least that exchange suggested a fresh field for research. I imagined then that my work would be mainly "discovery," the location of forgotten primary texts. I would simply organize the fruits of my labor—with hardly any peelings, so to speak—into an anthology bearing only the faintest burden of commentary. A trusted advisor discouraged me from unchaining any bias: "Let the poems speak for themselves!" Yet as my research went on and the number of poems I had recovered from this allegedly unpoetic time

and place climbed into the thousands, I progressively became less confident, less interested even in an anthology.

At the same time, I was finding myself rewarded not only by Valley verse, but also by the poets' stories, as far as these mostly undocumented lives might be reconstructed. Increasingly satisfying too was the search itself, the historical detective work, personal contacts about the Valley, travel there to visit archives and other sites, and especially the serendipitous illuminations. For instance, one forgotten poet of the 1920s caught my attention just by using terms like "ecstasy," "vagrant scent," "a rhythm wild and free"—shockingly sensual diction relative to the usual stylistic baselines of the pious folks of the Valley. The heartbreaking story I eventually uncovered in this case was that of a robust, handsome young man savaged by WWI and doomed to a cruel and wasting death who, during that awful time, published over one hundred poems of lost life and love under the pen name, "Colorado Pete." His sensual thoughts turned out to be sad memories through which "clouds, like dreams, ride white and frail— / Lost longings, one by one," in poems where "when your dreams are ashen, as are mine / Nothing will matter" (360-61). Such positive response as I have received from sharing Pete's work tends to focus on my narrative of discovery and to include the sense that there *is* something worth seeking in the biographical-literary synergies between Pete and his verse.

Since 1995, I have given thirty-five presentations on this project, at academic conferences, community events, twice on public television, in Europe, and in the Valley itself. And I have noted a general principle that may come as no surprise: the further in experiential or imaginative distance from the Valley, the lower the interest in, or appreciation of the material. Yet in certain Midwestern communities, and among some continental Scandinavians maintaining connections to the Valley, my readings and commentary about Valley verse have produced noteworthy engagement. In my hometown of Minneapolis, for instance, live many thousands of people who left or who are descended from folks who left North Dakota and "went down to the cities," as the phrase goes, during the last seventy-five years of rural depopulation. And I am one of them.

Is that then my orientation to this material? That I woke up one day and found myself to be a diasporic writer, understood best by the Valley settlers' scattered relatives and descendants still mindful of the harsh yet Edenic valley that remains, from just over a century ago,

the ground and beginning of our families' American histories this side of the curtaining, one-way immigration crossings? A kind of identity vacuum is in play here, connected to a keen Midwestern sense of place, to secondary out-migration, and to desire. These feelings were expressed in a 1946 book called *Not So Wild a Dream*, by journalist Eric Sevareid, born in 1912 somewhat west of the Valley, the son of a Norwegian prairie homesteader:

North Dakota. Why have I not returned for so many years? Why have so few from those prairies ever returned? Where is its written chapter in the long and varied American story? In distant cities when someone would ask: "Where are you from?" and I would answer: "North Dakota," they would merely nod politely and change the subject, having no point of common reference. They knew no one else from there. It was a large, rectangular blank spot in the nation's mind. I was that kind of child who relates reality to books, and in the books I found so little about my native region. In the geography, among the pictures of Chicago's skyline, Florida's palms, and the redwoods of California, there was one small snapshot of North Dakota. It showed a waving wheatfield. I could see *that* simply by turning my head to the sixth-grade window. Was that all there was, all we had? . . . very early I acquired a sense of having no identity in the world, of inhabiting, by some cruel mistake, an outland, a lost and forgotten place upon the far horizon of my country. Sometimes when galloping a barebacked horse across the pastures in pursuit of some neighbor's straying cattle, I had for a moment a sharp sense of the prairie's beauty, but it always died quickly away, and the unattainable places of the books were again more beautiful, more real. (5)

All of my great-grandparents were sodbusters, homesteading on the prairie in the '80s, in the lower end of the Valley on the North Dakota side. My grandparents, born in pioneer log cabins and frame huts in the '90s, stayed in the Valley. My parents, however, did something a little different and moved down to the cities after my father came home from World War II, having seen Paris, unwilling now to be kept down on the farm. So I was born in the cities, the three of us a sort of North Dakota colony on the Southside of Minneapolis where we had no family. Holidays and all summer for my mother and me were spent in the Valley with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and neighbors. Those sojourns, in retrospect, were for me a link with the nineteenth-century emigrant culture sometimes developing more slowly relative to the parent country left behind. Norwegians have

told me that they found language and folkways in North Dakota long since superceded in Norway. Something about the prairie culture of this Midwestern community, sited in isolation, seems to have had not only an ossifying but a supercharging effect on such Nordic traits as taciturnity and stoicism, my paternal grandfather being a profound case in point. I believe he had a rich interior life. My childish mind made no attempts at cross-cultural analysis, of course; I accepted the society I found there and loved my prairie family, whom I remember with that ineffably beautiful Norwegian in all their speech.

A "vacation" for me meant eight hours in the Dodge Meadowlark or aboard the mighty Empire Builder, heading northwest through the rolling glacial till of Minnesota lakes and forests, finally descending almost imperceptibly into the appallingly flat and open space so very incongruously called "the Valley." We entered the Valley in its south-east with our destination in its northwest, meaning that nearly half the trip was spent in motion parallel to the Valley's north-south axis, which slopes to the north at a rate less than a foot per mile, the unobtrusive sides of the Valley receding from sight soon after one strikes out onto the vast Valley floor. I thought of communities in Pembina County as being way, way out on the prairie, as Sevareid said, "upon the far horizon of my country" (5). I suppose I was a teenager fiddling idly with a map before I realized that, say, Hamilton was only ten miles from the river, only twenty from the "Pembina Escarpment" marking the Valley's western border but invisible from that town. Yet my more precise adult knowledge that the Valley is longer than wide does not diminish my awe of its scope.

A city boy, I was accustomed to having my vision checked by obstructions no more than one hundred feet away in any direction most of the time, the city's parks and lakes exceptionally offering expanses up to a mile or so. Real open flatness is different. In his 1985 *Journal of a Prairie Year*, Minnesotan Paul Grunchow struggled admirably with prairie flatness:

It is flat, I suppose, as the deserts are flat, as the oceans are flat, as the polar ice caps are flat. It is flat because of the immensity of its distances. The prairie is like a daydream. It is one of those plainly visible things that you can't photograph. No camera lens can take in a big enough piece of it. The prairie landscape embraces the whole of the sky. Its image is globular, but without the distortion you get in a wide-angle lens. Any undistorted image is too flat to represent the impression of immersion that is central to being on the

prairie. The experience is a kind of baptism. The moon is the closest of the celestial objects; it makes the largest image; it affords the best light for prolonged examination; it is visible in the greatest detail. But no amount of walking will get you any closer to it, and you can't reach out and touch it. The prairie, in this respect, resembles the moon. The essential feature of the prairie is its horizon, which you can neither walk to nor touch. It is like the horizon of the sea.

We are as helpless as babies about this. Whatever we can see and do not understand and must acknowledge, we make over in our own image. We cross them in the craft of egocentricity. (x)

Eighteenth-century French explorers, the first Europeans in the Valley, used nautical techniques and terms to move across and to describe the prairie. In a mostly dry scientific chapter about the Valley published in 1909, geologist Warren Upham allows himself to wander a bit into the phenomenological experience of the Valley:

In crossing this almost perfectly level valley on clear days, the higher land at its sides, and the groves along its rivers, are first seen in the distance as if their upper edges were raised a little above the horizon, with a very narrow strip of sky below. The first appearance of the treetops thus somewhat resembles that of dense flocks of birds flying very low several miles away. But rising a few feet, as from the ground to a wagon, or by nearer approach, the outlines become clearly defined as a grove, with a mere line of sky beneath it.

Besides this mirage, the traveler is also reminded, in the same manner as at sea, that the earth is round. The surface of the plain is seen only for a distance of three or four miles; houses and grain stacks have their tops visible first, after which in approaching, they gradually come into full view; and the highlands, ten or fifteen miles away, forming the side of the valley, apparently lie beyond a wide depression, like a distant high coast. (16-17)

The fact is that those bordering highlands *were* distant high coasts a mere 8,000 years ago. The Red River Valley is a dry lakebed. For some 3,000 years as the last glacier retreated north, growing Lake Agassiz lay to its south, supplied by melt water. At its height, this lake was larger than today's Great Lakes together. The lobe of Lake Agassiz south of the Canadian border was some 250 miles long, 25 to 70 miles wide, wider still in the north, an area the size of Denmark. Since the lakebed sloped down northwards, the water was about 200 feet deep where Fargo is now, 300 feet over Grand Forks, and 450

feet deep at the Canadian border (Upham 29). As the retreating glacier passed the southern tip of Hudson's Bay, the lake drained into the sea leaving behind its empty form and the trickle of the Red River flowing north down the basin. This history accounts for that Zen-evocative flatness and the rich sedimentary topsoil (over 100 feet thick) that made the Valley so attractive to large-scale grain farming the moment railroads arrived in 1871. Contributing to the cultural coherence of the Valley is its rapid settlement, complete in a single generation. Consider US census figures of the Valley counties: 1870: 1,000 persons; 1880: 56,000; 1890: 166,000; 1900: 350,000 (Lamphere 234).

I recently drove up to the Valley. I approached from the southeast on Highway 9, because I knew that a century ago geologists had named the major succession of beach lines for whistle-stops along the Great Northern railroad, parallel to which Highway 9 has since been built. That is, the old rail line descended into the basin perpendicular to the series of concentric beach lines formed as the lake gradually shrank over a period of centuries. The outermost line, the "Herman" beach line, intersected the railway somewhere near Herman, Minnesota. Could I find it? I paused about a mile south of town where the road had been cut by overland flooding, climbed up on the railway grade, and scanned the horizon with binoculars, not having much luck. By and by a farmer pulled up and asked if I were with the highway department. I ambled over and told him I was studying geology. "Well then," he said, "You're looking for the Herman Beach. Let's see, it was '56 when I went down to the cities. I was in a U of M geology class and the professor said, 'Now I'm going to tell you about something you've never heard of, the Herman Beach.'" I interrupted him and said, "Mr. Professor, excuse me sir, but I *live* on the Herman Beach!" My interlocutor went on to explain that much of the beach line had been plowed into the fields and was indeed invisible, but that worthless patch of sand a bit west of Herman had been the town dump time out of mind, and the beach was pronounced there, as it was at his nearby farm. So I thanked him, turned down his invitation to join him at the Lutheran potluck to which he was en route, and drove over to the dump. Pay dirt. Sandy hillocks, undulating in rows, were unmistakably once a beach, despite being scattered with old washing machines and other jetsam. Within an elongated area of perhaps five acres, it was a beach. I looked northwest and saw extending to the limit of vision the strange

flatness, little wisps of mist streaking up here and there as the last snowdrifts sublimated vapors into the air. Not much imagination was required to fill in that prairie with a sea. Sitting on the beach, I looked to the southwest and saw a farmstead situated on another sandy plinth—my new friend's no doubt.

2.

The poetry I have collected was written in or about the Red River Valley, or by someone connected to the Valley, from the European settlement down to 1940, a somewhat arbitrary *terminus ad quam*. The period of greatest production comes after World War I, when in many families the first native-born generation was maturing upon their American educations, and the literary infrastructure of universities, poetry clubs, and publication opportunities was better established in the region. Verse earlier than that is harder to find, so I infer less was published or preserved; I don't know that any less was written. Some of the earlier verse is already backward looking and sentimental in celebration of settlement histories. In 1909, for example, P. H. Donohue of Grand Forks remembered the railway-displaced glory days of the Red River steamboats in a poem called "A Ballad of the Red," which opens with these stanzas:

Now again 'tis lovely May, by the riverside I stray,
And the song birds sing around and over head,
And I watch the river flow as I did long years ago
When the Selkirk in her glory sailed the Red.

As I watch the river flow, I think on the long ago
When each pioneer was granted a homestead
In the land so bright and new, in the land so fair to view
In the valley of the famous River Red. . . . (344)

The oldest Valley poem I found is "The Grand Valley" by Hugh Militt, published in *The Fargo Republican* of November 22, 1879, with these opening stanzas:

O, grand is the land in our valley
Where muscle and intellect rally
Where a fellow can squat, be he native or not
And the land office keeping the tally.

Where the seasons are all in your favor
Giving courage and strength to your labor
Neither boulder or stump interfere with the jump

That you make on the claim of your neighbor . . .

The longest early Valley poem—in many ways the strangest—is a work of 1,240 lines called *Infinity or Nature's God*, published as a book in 1909 by a Grand Forks physician named F. J. Duggan, who describes his inspiration in a preface:

. . . the author had the misfortune to sustain a fracture of the neck of the femur . . . and after experiencing intense suffering for about a week, he suddenly obtained some relief, and then as he, undisturbed, lay on his fracture-bed, his mind inverted to the matter which forms the subject of this manuscript. The contemplation of the beauty and harmony of nature was so fascinating, that anxieties, troubles, and pain were forgotten,—a pleasant semi-conscious reverie took possession of his mind, which assumed more or less of a clairvoyant condition, and under the impulse of an irresistible influence, the message delivered was transferred to paper in the form in which it is presented. For four long months did he lie on this fracture-bed, daily visited by this strange muse, whose promptings made the task easy, and who must, most assuredly, be held responsible for the existence of the poem,—the author being simply the medium of transmission. (Preface)

The wacky verse that follows, in rhymed couplets of varying length, amounts to an exception that proves the rule about early Red River Valley poetry, though I have to admit that there's something about the man's style in every sense but the literary that I do like.

Formally, the rule in early Valley verse is the lyric, generally metered more or less competently, usually rhymed exactly with little slant-rhyme in evidence, except perhaps in cases of possible dialect coloration, as with the Norwegian-speaking poet of the 1920s, Stella Dahl, whose rhymes include terminal [z] with [s]:

In June we have roses;
In July we have noise;
In September everything
That people can voice. (Dahl)

The late-nineteenth-century school primers had potent stylistic influence, and one sometimes can discern imitation of a classic in isolated examples. There is a scattering of free verse through the corpus, typical of more progressive poets whose emotions demand less conventional expression. And there are academic poems, usually by professors at one of the Valley institutions. Unfortunately, these often

disappoint in their hyperformality and self-consciously learned styles and topics. Professor Gottfried Hult of the University of North Dakota, for instance, brought out several volumes of poetry through East Coast publishers starting in 1909. But his poems have titles like "Not That Above His Grave the World May Heed," and "Xenophon," and they do not usually disappoint the expectation of silly stuffiness. They are rarely distinctive of the Valley.

Verse features most distinctive of the Red River Valley are, of course, those that evoke the recognizable place, for example by working with the flatness, incessant wind, wheat farming, grass and straw fires, immense hemisphere of sky, clouds of all form and hue, grasshoppers, geese upon their flyways, other flora and fauna, memories of homesteading, horse power and steam threshing, grain elevators with their smells, tracks and trains, arctic cold and blizzards and drifting snow, Norwegian coffee and *lefse*, dust, the glacial lake and its impossibly large bed, prairie graveyards, and overwhelming Valley sunrises and sunsets. Excerpts or whole poems could be educated for all of these and more, but let me offer just a few samples.

In the 1930s Fargo poet Psyche M. Gooden wrote "Lilac-Time in the Valley," mingling "vagrant breezes" on the "windswept prairie" with birds and especially flowers to suggest thoughts of "A heaven down here on the earth," culminating in the "old homestead" image:

It's lilac-time in the valley,
The Valley of the "red,"
With vagrant breezes blowing;
With sunshine overhead.
The robin red-breast hops about
In saucy, lordly fashion;
The uncouth blue-jay screams aloud
And scolds in stormy passion.

The whole world seems a garden,
A garden wondrous fair:
There're bridal wreath and iris,
And ferns called "maiden hair."
There're bleeding-heart and tulips,
The snowball round and white.
There are honeysuckle blossoms,
So pink, so sweet, so bright.

Far out on the wind-swept prairies
The crocus lifts its head

On sunny slope of hillside,
Though the grass around it is dead.
Down in the woods by the river,
From under the leaf-mold deep,
Myriads of sweet blue violets
Have risen from their sleep.

But here in the "Red River Valley"
Through May-time's sunny hours
Bloom millions of purple lilacs,
Those regal stately flowers.
The air, so filled with fragrance,
Intoxicates one like wine;
It sets the universe singing,
It cheers this heart of mine.

Methinks were I seeking a heaven,
A heaven down here on the earth,
With all that brings contentment,
Peace, joy, and things of worth,
I'd follow the trail, the long white trail
That leads to the old homestead,
When it's Lilac-Time in the valley,
In the Valley of the Red. (75)

Paul Southworth Bliss was a W.P.A. official who lived in the Valley for a time, and his 1934 book *Spin Dance and Spring Comes to Shaw's Garden* includes his poem "Grain Elevator." Solitary skyscrapers of the prairie, elevators can still exert monumental dominance over towns or other low-lying surroundings; the effect seems even more pronounced in historical photographs taken before a village's trees have matured. This little poem recognizes that stature, along with wheat's prime economic significance, by twice calling the elevator a "temple"; the play of rising and setting sun upon it implies the level flatness of the round horizon. Using this poem in public readings, I find a measurement of an audience's Valley sensibility in the degree to which listeners visibly or audibly anticipate the last line before I pronounce it:

In the vast, diffused
Yellow of early sunset, I see
The dark turret of a
North Dakota temple.
What angled sturdiness!

The first thing the sun shines on
 In the morning, and the
 Last thing it shines upon at night
 Is that
 Gigantic
 Geometrical
 Garnet-colored temple
 Of North Dakota—
 The grain elevator. (31)

Eva K. Anglesburg was born and raised in the Valley, where she wrote two books of poetry. Especially in her *Of the Level Land* (1935), but also in *For Many Moods* (1938), she creates sharply recognizable poetry of place. Of course she foregrounds the oceanic boundlessness of her flat environment, e.g., "... the Valley of the Red for miles unnumbered lies as level / As a sleeping sea ... (Land 14). I cited above a geologist's excursus on flatland mirage and a memoirist's "globular" prairie image; Anglesburg also sees her level land in these ways, writing sometimes in a Blakean manner, her human perception projected afar, vivifying flat prairie into curving paradox:

When morn, that rose and opal interim,
 By the mirage's magic once again
 Uplifts the edge of this tremendous plain,
 It forms a bowl whose amethystine brim
 Looms purple as some mountain range's rim
 Against the wall of heaven. (Land 12)

One of Anglesburg's "Prairie Murals" is a Spenserian stanza called 'Flame Fantasy' that energetically combines the oceanlike Valley plain, its constant wind, big sky, suggestive clouds, drifting snow, and the sunset too, all within the aroused imagination's eye:

The snowy plain, wind sculptured like the sea,
 The wintry sky, where clouds hung fold on fold,
 Transmuted by the sunset's alchemy,
 Became a blazing sea of fluid gold.
 Here fiery-crested, black-troughed billows rolled,
 Then flared and, like a smelter's maw, became
 A swirl of fire too dazzling to behold;
 An awe-inspiring universe of flame
 Which Satan must have yearned most ardently to claim.
 (Moods 20)

A final example of tranquil and reflective mood is another poem from the 1930s. Valley poet Edwin Rolfson was a teacher in Mayville, North Dakota, and he called this one "The Sky." Here, the rounded or globular effect of open prairie space appears in the bowl image:

Today the sky
 Is like my old blue bowl
 Turned upside down,
 That I used to eat oatmeal from.
 The dark silhouette of trees
 In the distance,
 Is the chipped edge.
 The solitary white cloud
 Is where the blue enamel
 Has worn away.
 I liked my blue bowl. (201)

The paragraphs above illustrate some stylistic features of early Red River Valley poetry, as aligned into constellations drawn from the Valley land, climate, and culture with the personality, craft, and spirit of the poets. And bridging between Valley writers and readers, the meta-stylistic features of recognition, connection, and longing establish the imaginative contexts within which the verse takes its animation and its meaning.

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NOTE

¹This quatrain is reportedly carved on the tombstone of Anna Hepewell (or Hopewell) in Enosburg Falls, Vermont. It has been published in several versions; I quote one found in "Epitaph Humor at <<http://www.pennyparker2.com/epitaph.html>>

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EAST MEETS MIDWEST IN CAROLINE KIRKLAND'S WESTERN CLEARINGS

DENISE KAY JACOBS

Caroline Kirkland, Midwestern writer and one of the precursors of the realistic and local color movements, came by the material in her sketches honestly. In 1836, when her husband, William, was buying up property in what was to become Pinckney, Michigan (Livingston County), the Kirklands were part of what we now refer to as the Great Michigan Land Fever, an episode in Michigan's history summarized neatly in the following excerpt from Annette Kolodny's *The Land Before Her* (1984):

These were the days of the great Michigan land fever, when it was said that over a thousand new emigrants a day poured into Detroit—a few to stay, most to push on into the wilderness. So quickly did immigration in these years swell the population that in 1837 Michigan changed its status from a territory to a state. Completion of the Erie Canal and steamers across the Great Lakes to Detroit had earlier made the area accessible. Reports of Michigan's rich sandy loam now made it desirable. (131)

The Kirklands were among those who pushed on with every intention of staying, even though it did not work out that way. According to Kolodny, when the Kirklands set off for Detroit from New York so that William could become principal at the new Detroit Female Seminary "it was with every intention of buying land and founding a settlement on the Michigan frontier" (131). Within two years, William apparently owned eight hundred acres and controlled over thirteen hundred acres of prairie, forest, and swamp in the area we now know as Pinckney. The Kirklands left Detroit and began living on their wilderness land within a year or two of arriving in Detroit (Kolodny 131).

While on the frontier, Caroline managed the household affairs, gave birth to a baby, and wrote letters home to the East. In her cor-

respondence, Kirkland described her frontier existence and her neighbors and their customs; and, as such, her correspondence had a clearly Eastern middle or upper-middle-class audience. These letters eventually created a framework for *A New Home: Who'll Follow* (1839), the text that establishes Kirkland as one of the first women to write about life on the frontier, one of the first authors to write about the frontier from a female perspective, and one of the first authors to write about the frontier from a realistic perspective as opposed to more romanticized versions of frontier life.

Jennifer Banks describes *A New Home: Who'll Follow*, Kirkland's major work, as "a success story about a middle-class woman from the East who learned to live in the West [and] . . . a realistic account of the high price many women paid for emigrating to the frontier" (136). For all Kirkland's literary success—and she was successful—the Michigan frontier extracted a price both in terms of physical hardship and financial loss. (The Kirklands were swindled out of their property by a fraudulent land dealer and returned to the East in financial straits.) Nonetheless, the frontier also provided Kirkland with a marketable writing subject, no small thing for a woman in the 1800s.

In the preface of *Western Clearings* (1845), a compilation of sketches, many of which had been previously published in periodicals such as *The Knickerbocker Magazine*, *Graham's*, and *The Gift*, Kirkland expresses her motivation for writing with a comparison between traveling in the Midwest and traveling in England, claiming that "a traveler may go to England without finding much that he feels prompted to record for the amusement of friends at home" (vi). Kirkland extends her analogy in the following excerpt. The first few lines reference an American in England:

Almost everybody has been there before him; and while the language and manners are essentially the same as his own, the peculiarities that may strike him have already been reported so often and so well, that even the best sketches seem almost like mere repetitions . . . of the observations of others. But the wild West has had few visitors and fewer describers. Its history may be homely, but it is original. It is like nothing else in the wide world, and so various that successive travelers may continue to give their views of it for years to come, without fear of exhausting its peculiarities. Language, ideas, manners, customs—all are new; yes! even language; for to the instructed person from one of our great Eastern cities, the talk of the

true back-woodsman is scarce intelligible. His indescribable *twang* is, to be sure, no further from good English than the *patois* of many of the English counties. But at the West this curious talker is your neighbour and equal, while in the elder country he would never come in your way unless you sought him purposely to hear his jargon. And for ideas, the settler has some of the strangest that ever were harboured in human brain, mixed with so much real shrewdness, practical wisdom, and ready wit, that one cannot but wonder how nature and a warping of blinding education can be so at variance. (vi)

Kirkland was committed to promoting the westward expansion movement, yet she took a realistic approach to writing about the Midwest that took in the hardships and difficulties inherent in trying to establish a home in the wilderness; hence she wrote from two potentially oppositional perspectives. The combination of these two perspectives was akin to inviting someone over for dinner and then telling them they will not like what is being served; it creates a certain dissonance. Should I go or should I not? In truth, not everyone reading frontier literature moved to the frontier, but it is possible that by reading about it from the armchair and the fireside, Kirkland's Eastern audience could feel as if they were participating in a broader social democracy, a concept inherent in the philosophy of Western exceptionalism, which will be explained in more detail later.

In his bibliographic commentary, Gerald Nemanic observes that while one scholar finds a parallel relation between actual Michigan history and [Kirkland's] narratives, "another finds Kirkland little more than a romanticizer of the western settlements," contending her work is merely propaganda for the land boom (264), criticism with just enough truth in it to make it worth exploring and criticism that becomes understandable in the context of Western exceptionalism mentioned above. Peebles notes that, especially as a magazine writer, Kirkland seemed ". . . determined to promote an image of the West as a cradle of economic and social democracy" (par. 2), a component of Western exceptionalism and a factor that created a certain dissonance in Kirkland's writing that Nemanic's source may not have understood.

Peebles explains Western exceptionalism as a mythology that characterizes life in the West as fundamentally different from life in the East and one in which the "West emerges as a source of hope for American society" (par. 7). As committed as Kirkland was to the

image of the West as "a cradle of economic and social democracy," she, like all of us, was a product of her own upbringing (par. 2). So, while Kirkland's life experience uniquely positioned her to write about the frontier, it also created audience problems when she began to publish. For example, the Easterner in Kirkland bemoaned the lack of civilization on the frontier, an attitude that was to create problems with Kirkland's frontier neighbors who were offended by the parody of their rough mannerisms. Dorothy Ann Webb notes "Kirkland found herself at odds with the citizens of Pinckney . . . when the local Michigan paper reprinted parts of *A New Home: Who'll Follow*" (40). *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* contends that even though Kirkland tried to remedy this insult in her next book, *Forest Life* (1842), with the claim that all her characters were imaginary ". . . social relations were nonetheless strained" (Myerson 195). It is possible that Kirkland's penchant for exaggeration caused her Midwestern neighbors to misunderstand her intentions, or she may simply have underestimated her neighbors' sensibilities.

While Kirkland's penchant for exaggeration—a characteristic of local-color writing—created problems with her frontier audience, it, potentially, at least, could have created equal problems among her Eastern audience, which she did not spare. Kirkland risked alienating her frontier neighbors if she poked too much fun at their unrefined attempts at civilization; and she may have risked offending her Eastern readers if she poked too much fun at their sophisticated airs, as she does in "Ambuscades," the story of Tom Oliver and the two women who would gladly marry him: "fair and poor Emma who is devoted to her widowed mother and ailing brother and Miss Celestina Pye, heiress of a woman of property" (WC 121). In "Ambuscades," the East takes a number of blows both in the person of Miss Pye and her Eastern fear of rattlesnakes" (127) and in Oliver's remarks about the East every time he returns from a visit. For example, when Oliver returns from his first visit East, he claims that it was not what it was cracked up to be" (120). A neighbor tells Oliver he expected him to come back "so big that a man couldn't touch you with a ten foot pole," but is reassured by Tom's attitude and observes that Tom "didn't stay long enough to get uppish" (124).

Lori Merish contends that Kirkland's primary audience was one of "fashionable, genteel Easterners whose values she both playfully mocks and shares" (494). They apparently took the mocking well. Perhaps Kirkland knew they would, or perhaps she simply banked on

the human tendency to believe that satire and sermons are directed at someone other than self.

At any rate, we know that Kirkland's publications were well received. In his review of *Western Clearings*, William Cullen Bryant comments that Kirkland's reputation created a "quick circulation over the whole country" (quoted in Riley 210), so we know that her work was well received. We know, for example, that *A New Home: Who'll Follow* was a popular and critical success, and reviewers praised Kirkland's realistic depictions, which, they noted, were rare during a time when sentimental fluff was all too common in pop fiction (Kimbel 239).

Not all criticism of Kirkland's work is positive, of course. The sketches that appeared in popular magazines and in *Western Clearings* have been criticized for revealing a "preoccupation with sentimental romance" (Kimbel 241). Some suggest that Kirkland's sketches were motivated more by economics than literary concerns (Kimbel 241), a rationale that assumes the rather tenuous supposition that authors ought to apologize for earning an income. Nevertheless, according to Peeples, "the publishing system of the 1840s practically forced American writers into the magazines; since books by English authors could be reprinted free of royalties, publishers generally paid American authors very little for book-length manuscripts" (par. 3). More to the literary point (about romance), if we incorporate Peeples's observation that Kirkland's theme of love's triumph over the "old-world obstacle of class" is a component of Western exceptionalism and only added to the possibilities for satire (par. 10), then the romantic theme of *Western Clearings* (mating rituals, mostly) can be viewed very simply as a plot device.

An understanding of the philosophy of Western exceptionalism is essential to understanding Kirkland's popularity with Eastern audiences both in terms of the Eastern public's fascination with frontier life and their apparent acceptance of Kirkland's satire, even when it was directed at them. Peeples contends that Kirkland was able to "tap into the myth of the frontier as a nurturing ground for a truly democratic society, one in which class constraints were mere vestiges of an older culture, doomed to extinction in a land of equal opportunity" (par. 11). With that in mind, laughing at oneself or one's predisposition to pretentiousness or sophistication seems an almost democratic action. Kirkland's Old-World Easterners might have accepted a satire of themselves and their pretentious airs as a sort of penance.

In "The Schoolmaster's Progress," a story in which an Eastern visitor, Ms. Bangle, sets her romantic sights on young Master Horner, the local schoolmaster (who is not the least interested in Miss Bangle), we find that Kirkland is ruthless in her descriptions of Bangle's haughty Eastern airs. Consider this:

Ms. Bangle possessed a manner [that] bespoke for her that high consideration which she felt to be her due. Yet she condescended to be amused by the rustics and their awkward attempts at gaiety and elegance; and, to say truth, few of the village merry-makings escaped her, though she wore always the air of great superiority. (23)

When Ms. Bangle finds Master Horner oblivious of her charms, she deviously concocts a romantic letter-writing campaign in which Horner believes he is receiving letters from a local girl he cares about. Ms. Bangle cannot understand how Horner could prefer a local girl to her charms. When Bangle's plot is exposed, Master Horner is proved a bit of a ninny, but Ms. Bangle is an out-and-out villain; the townspeople railroad her out of town, and she disappears for the East, never to be heard of again. Kirkland may as well have added, "and good riddance!"

In Peeples's analysis of "A Harvest Musings," a 1942 *Knickerbocker* sketch, he claims Kirkland implies a "moral superiority" of the Western laborer. By the same rationale, making Ms. Bangle the villain in "The Schoolmaster's Progress" suggests a moral weakness in her, the Easterner, which Kirkland juxtaposes against the moral strength of the villagers.

Nonetheless, Kirkland's popularity holds. Another (related) explanation for her success as a writer might be one she offers herself, in a different context. In the preface to "Love vs. Aristocracy" (WC), Kirkland identifies a human frailty as she so often does, indirectly and in the form of a parable—this time the parable focuses on a "toper who had forsworn drink, yet afterward perceiving the contents of a brother sinner's bottle to be spilt, could not forbear falling on his knees to drink the liquor from the frozen hoof-prints in the road" (WC 37). In this context, Kirkland explains that we have a tendency to "satis[fy] our consciences by theory" (WC 37). With this in mind, it is possible to imagine that just as people today might, upon viewing an episode of the *X-Files*, walk away feeling smugly and radically anti-government (when all they have done is watch a television show), Kirkland's readers might have felt as if they were participating in a broader democracy if they could laugh at themselves.

In order to frame Kirkland's use of satire, it is helpful to think of satire as a literary manner that blends a critical attitude with humor and wit for the purpose of improving human institutions (Holman and Harmon 447). If that definition is applied to Kirkland's work along with Holman and Harmon's contention that true satirists "... attempt through laughter not so much to tear down ... as to inspire remodeling" (447), we see that Kirkland employs satire in order to criticize the human propensity to pretentiousness, a commodity she apparently found abundant in both her Eastern and Midwestern acquaintances.

Personal loyalties and Western Exceptionalism aside, the global deficiencies of human character that Kirkland observed may well account for her broadly based satire, for, as already indicated, she does not limit it to her frontier neighbors. In fact, Kirkland spreads satire so widely that it is sometimes difficult to determine if the butt of her satire is the Easterner with his sophisticated airs or the hapless Midwesterner who mimics those airs. In "Ambuscades," for example, Kirkland exaggerates the party-giving mannerisms of the Midwesterners but in the same description manages to take a jab at Eastern fashion. In the text immediately preceding the following paragraph, Kirkland describes the wild game that has been generously provided for a party. She then elaborates on party preparations:

There were days works of cake, and pies, and custards, not to speak of an unspeakable variety of minor adjuncts. The very gathering of the cups and saucers, and plates, and knives, and spoons, was a serious business. In the country it is still customary to provide for as many guests as you invite—another proof that we are behind the age. (WC 131)

In this passage Kirkland spoofs the Midwesterners' lack of amenities, but her implication that Eastern guests might well go hungry (in spite of all sorts of amenities) is an illustration of Kirkland's contention that the "great ones of the earth might learn many a lesson from the little" (WC 35), especially if the "great ones" are interpreted as Easterners and the "little" or "miniature" as Midwesterners. However, the following extended description of the same party might illustrate Kirkland's claim that those things which have a "certain dignity on a comparatively large scale ... [are] ... simply laughable when ... seen in miniature" (WC 35):

When every corner of the board (and they were many, since no two

tables in the neighbourhood matched in size or shape,) was filled, it became the duty of the beaux to play the part of waiters, which devoir was performed with various grace by the various youths concerned. A roast pig was to be carved and a huge chicken distributed; bowls of pickles, and plates of hot biscuits were to be handed about; and worse than all, a ceaseless succession of cups of tea required all the skill and discretion of the preux hevaliers. Some scalding there was, but not serious; much pretty shrieking, and not a little unrefined laughter . . . but upon the whole, the party presented the true party aspect, saving and excepting some few conventional prejudices as to the dress of the company and the nature of the refreshments. (WC 132)

Those with the conventional prejudices may well have been victims of Eastern bias, but we cannot be certain. These two passages together indicate the necessity of reading Kirkland closely in order to ascertain her meaning. It's good that the frontier partiers provide substantially for their guests but not necessarily so good that they attempt to do so in an Eastern fashion?

Kirkland speaks to the issue of pretentiousness in an informal preface (or editorial rambling) in the beginning of "Love vs. Aristocracy," in which she creates a rhetorical anecdote around children. "A little boy," she states, will "put a napkin about his neck for a cravat" and the little girl . . . "will supply her ideal of a veil by pinning a pocket handkerchief to her bonnet" (35). These are illustrations designed to demonstrate external shows of refinement that Kirkland came to find of little value on the frontier, so much so that they took on pretentiousness in context. This is not to say, however, that Kirkland has no interest in either refinement or civility. In her 1993 study of Kirkland's attitudes toward refinement and taste in *A New Home: Who'll Follow?* Lori Merish describes Kirkland's philosophy in terms of "Whiggish elitism" (503), claiming that, in Kirkland's estimation:

[r]efinement of sensibility and an increased appreciation of objects and persons in one's daily surroundings would be manifested materially in improved manners. Gentleness toward others would indicate the incorporation of the Christian precept of benevolence, and, as one's taste develops, one would gradually learn to keep one's feet off the mahogany coffee table and forgo spitting on the Brussels rug. (502)

Maybe—although the same attitude is harder to find in *Western Clearings*.

In *Western Clearings*, Kirkland dismisses pretentiousness and advocates a refinement that can be understood as a civility rooted in those traditions that have human worth and add value to the human experience. Kirkland may have placed a mahogany table or Brussels rug in that category in *A New Home: Who'll Follow*, but in *Western Clearings*, true refinement has little to do with table settings, matching chairs, or fancy garments. When Kirkland attempts to parallel her analogy of children playing dress-up with that of Midwestern attempts at Eastern sophistication, she closes with the suggestion that "real refinement" (emphasis mine) is not readily found in either the city mouse or the country mouse, as follows:

But what affords us most amusement, is the awkward attempt of the rustic, to copy the airs and graces which have caught his fancy as he saw them exhibited in town; or, still more naturally, those which have been displayed on purpose to dazzle him, during the stay of some "mould of fashion" in the country. How exquisitely funny are his efforts and their failure! . . . The country imitates the town, most sadly; and it is really melancholy, to one who loves his kind, to see how obstinately people will throw away real comforts and advantages in the vain chase of what does not belong to solitude and freedom. The restraints necessary to city life are there compensated by many advantages resulting from close contact with others; while in the country those restraints are simply odious, curtailing the real advantages of the position, yet entirely incapable of substituting those which belong to the city. Real refinement is as possible in the one case as in the other. Would it were more heartily sought in both! (WC 35-36)

Given that *Western Clearings* has a clearly Eastern audience, Kirkland's hope that "real refinement" would be sought "more heartily" in both the city and the frontier cannot be construed as a sop to the Midwestern audience but must be understood as social commentary on the human condition, wherever it is found.

"Ambuscades" illustrates Kirkland's interest in genuine civility. Kirkland describes Tom Oliver with lavish praise for his physical attributes:

There is almost enough of him to make two drawing-room heroes. Tom is long, and strong, and lithe enough to stand for a Kentucky Apollo; and in his fringed hunting-shirt, with rifle in hand, and a dashing coon-skin cap overshadowing his dark eyes, he is no bad personification of the Genius of the West. And this is playing the West

a great compliment; for there is a wild grace and beauty about Tom's whole appearance that is not to be found everywhere. (WC 118)

However, it becomes clear in the context of the story that what she values in him has nothing to do with the girth of his chest or other superficial values. What Kirkland really values is the steadfastness of character Oliver shows in the face of his mother's death and the genuine devotion he shows during her extended illness:

Night and day did he watch by her bedside . . . His hand administered the remedies, and offered the draught to the parched lip, and smoothed the pillows, and fanned the fainting brow. And when the last dread moment came, the same kind and dear hand was clasped in the chill embrace of the dying, and afterwards closed with pious care the eyes that had so long looked upon him with more than a mother's love. Then and long afterward Tom mourned for his poor old mother as if she had been a youthful bride. He has a kind heart. (WC 118-119)

Tom later shows this same devotion to the ailing brother of Emma (whom he secretly and bashfully loves) through a regular supply of fresh venison. Tom Oliver, romantic bumbler that he may be, is characteristic of the real refinement that Kirkland finds so scarce on the frontier and in the East alike.

By all accounts, Caroline Kirkland appears to have possessed a measure of the refinement she sought in others. A eulogy that appeared in the New York *Evening Post* contends that Kirkland's "conversation . . . was even more agreeable than her writing, and in society no one could be more entertaining and attractive." The same eulogy addresses the potential inherent in Kirkland's satire for offense and reassures the reader that none was intended. In addition, it addresses the "fidelity of detail" that we now know served to make Kirkland's work valuable for its historical account as well as to place her in the forefront of the realistic period of literature:

Mrs. Kirkland was among the most original and vigorous of all our female authors; her sketches of Western life have never been surpassed for fidelity of detail, and liveliness of humor; they exaggerate, perhaps, the traits of character, and the incidents of the rude life of the border; but they are conceived in the most kindly spirit, and only likely to give offence to those who feel themselves satirized by her pen. (Littell)

Never let it be said that Kirkland was a "romanticizer of western settlements" or a propaganda agent "for the land boom" (Nemanic 264). She was, as Nemanic concludes and as most scholars agree, a major contributor to American literature and an author whose Midwestern works "present a realistic account, often satiric in tone, of the Michigan frontier." In addition, she was an "early and significant precursor of the realistic and local color movements" (Nemanic 264). Beyond all that—and much more that contemporary scholars are discovering—Kirkland may well be one of the most underrated and underestimated literary observers of human character we have yet to ignore.

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AUGUST DERLETH AND POETRY OUT OF WISCONSIN

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In 1934, Wisconsin writer August Derleth must have felt himself on the brink of the success that would give him the national reputation he so craved. He had graduated as an English major from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1930, passed six unhappy months working for Fawcett Publishing in Minneapolis, and then given up his editorial post—so foolhardy an act in the growing Depression—to return to Sauk City, Wisconsin, to his parents' house, where he proposed to make his career as a professional writer. It was a small house, in the way that working-class houses are, and Derleth was a big man. His parents, Rose and William, were patient with their older child, and Derleth began the process of achieving his independence by writing weird fiction destined for the pulp market to earn ready cash and regionalist short stories and poetry to build his reputation as Wisconsin's most distinguished writer.

In those first few years of the Depression, Derleth worked with what came to be recognized as his incredible capacity and speed to publish tales of horror for the rather unsophisticated readers of *Weird Tales* magazine and its cohorts as well as regional short stories and poetry for little magazines and literary journals. His mentor at the time, H. P. Lovecraft, recognized that Derleth was determined to achieve more than literary hackwork. Writing to Donald Wandrei, Lovecraft expressed his admiration for Derleth's creative capacity and his assessment of the intellectual growth that had thus far taken place:

Derleth impressed me tremendously favourably from the moment I began to hear from him personally. I saw that he had a prodigious fund of activity & reserve mental energy, & that it would only be a question of time before he began to correlate it to real aesthetic advantage. There was a bit of callow egotism also—but that was only to be expected . . . And surely enough, as the years passed, I

saw that the kid was truly growing. The delicate reminiscent sketches begun a couple of years ago were the final proof—for there, indeed, he had reached what was unmistakably sincere & serious self-expression of a high order. . . . There was no disputing that he *really had something to say*...& that he was trying to say it honestly & effectively, with a minimum of the jaunty hack devices & stylistic tricks which went into his printed pot-boiling material.¹

Derleth's poetry and serious prose began to appear with increasing regularity in quality magazines such as *Midland*, *Pagany*, *Ten Story Book* and eventually *Scribners*. In November 1934, Raymond E. F. Larsson sent Derleth a postcard inviting him to submit poetry for a two-page collection of new Midwestern poetry for *The New Republic*. Derleth sent Larsson some of his recent work, and Larsson accepted one poem, "Three Birds." From this small contact sprung a lifelong relationship in poetry between these two poets as well as the first major anthology of Wisconsin poetry, *Poetry Out of Wisconsin*.

Called by Kenneth Rexroth, "the best Catholic poet of his time," Raymond Edward Francis Larsson has all but disappeared from print. A 1983 M.A. thesis at Notre Dame, which houses the major collection of his papers, is titled Raymond Larsson: A Forgotten American Poet. Although he continues to be barely remembered, at one time he was frequently a published and well-respected practicing poet. He was published in *Harper's*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The Saturday Review*, in *Transition*, *Dial*, *Poetry*, and numerous other small poetry and more popular magazines. Born in 1901 into a Green Bay, Wisconsin, Lutheran household, Larsson left Wisconsin at the end of World War I to live the life of an expatriate. He traveled Europe and for a while settled into the American writing community in Paris. He returned to the United States and in 1932 converted to Roman Catholicism. Following his conversion came frequent publication in the *Catholic Worker* and *Commonweal*. Larsson would publish four volumes of poetry during his life: *O City, Cities* (1929), *Wherefore Peace* (1932), *Weep and Prepare: Selected Poems 1926-1939* (1940), and *Book Like a Bow Curved*, his last (1961). Though he continued to write poetry until shortly before his death in the early 1980s, he would publish infrequently. Larsson corresponded with Derleth, Kay Boyle, e.e. cummings, Robert Lowell, Archibald Macleish, Thomas Merton, Theodore Roethke, Allen Tate, and Mark Van Doren even after he dropped from public view.

Derleth's *Wisconsin Writers and Writing* reveals the reason for Larsson's disappearance and the sporadic nature of his correspondence:

A long period of silence followed. Manuscript copies of his poems flowed erratically to my desk in a flurry of correspondence—sometimes books of them—and then again silence. But it was noticeable that a growing paranoid tendency began to be manifest in his letters, and, after a long period without correspondence, I learned that he had suffered a breakdown and had been confined as a schizoid personality in the Hudson River State Hospital. This confinement, however, did not block his creativity, and though some of the poems were irrational, the majority of them were informed with what George Dangerfield called “a note of pure joy.” (112)

A reviewer found his last book, *Book Like a Bow Curved*, “almost flawless in execution—the mature craftsmanship of a consummately dedicated artist” (113). At the time of Derleth's essay, Larsson was still institutionalized, though the editors of the literary journal *Jubilee* were engaged in securing his release. I have yet to find out if they or anyone else was successful in ending his confinement.

Derleth and Larsson possessed some superficial qualities in common: both were Roman Catholic, both from Wisconsin, and both poets—Larsson with two volumes published, Derleth with one taking shape. In both temperament and taste they were as different as could be. Larsson's spirituality informed all his activities—later on in their friendship he would date letters to Derleth by saint's day. In an early letter, Larsson reluctantly agreed to read Derleth's first published detective novel, *Murder Stalks the Wakely Family*, a huge concession from a man who regretted having read Poe and the various murder stories in his youth. Larsson felt the vicarious pleasure one took in experiencing the violence of these works was immoral.² Derleth, on the other hand, lived by writing the horror tales and murder mysteries that Larsson found repellent. Still, they found common ground in their poetry, with Larsson serving the role of mentor, offering Derleth suggestions, sometimes revising lines for him, sometimes bluntly announcing a poem's failure. Derleth listened carefully to Larsson, and *Hawk on the Wind* published in 1938 by Rittenhouse shows clear signs of Larsson's editorial assistance.

In early 1936, long before Larsson's illness developed, Derleth wrote Larsson that he had made arrangements with Henry Harrison

in New York to bring out an anthology of Wisconsin poetry. Larsson responded enthusiastically that he had been planning on doing the same thing himself and since Derleth already had a commitment from Henry Harrison to publish the book “there seems nothing sensible to do but to combine mine with yours.”³ Larsson had envisioned an anthology that would include the earliest poetry from the European settlers of the territory through to those Wisconsin poets currently writing. Their first step in preparing this anthology of Wisconsin writers was to determine what made a poet a Wisconsin poet. Their decision privileged inclusivity, as the Forward to *Poetry Out of Wisconsin* indicates their criteria:

Those of us who are native and still resident offered no problem, but what of those native writers who had lived here from ten to twenty years of their lives and now lived officially elsewhere? Of those who are now resident, but have lived an equal time in another state, or other states? Of those who had been educated here—and such education is certainly in many cases tantamount to cultural influence within our borders—and had since gone elsewhere? No line could be drawn; so, while the bulk of the poetry in this volume is by native and still resident poets, or by long-resident non-native poets, there is included poetry by writers who have lived only briefly in Wisconsin.

These broad criteria explain the inclusion of Kenneth Rexroth and Louis Zukofsky in the anthology, both of whom were born and lived elsewhere but had spent part of their lives in Wisconsin.⁴

Derleth and Larsson began contacting contemporary poets in care of *Poetry* magazine. Larsson, for example, wrote Grant Hyde Code, Glenway Westcott, and Louis Zukofsky, while Derleth worked from a list that included Ralph E. Green, Emily Powers Iglehart, and Lorine Niedecker. The nineteenth-century poets proved to be an easier task to compile than they initially expected, for Wisconsin researcher Rueben G. Thwaites had prepared a bibliography of works written by Wisconsin writers from the settling of the territory to 1893. Derleth and Larsson had only a period of forty years of poetry to research on their own.

Though Larsson proved to be Derleth's mentor when it came to poetry, Derleth was the dominant partner in the collaboration on *Poetry Out of Wisconsin*. Larsson knew Henry Harrison by reputation and did not like him. He was firm in his position that he would

not participate in editing the anthology if contemporary contributors did not receive at least one and preferably two copies of the anthology as their compensation for contributing to the publication. Harrison was to receive all proceeds from the sale of the book, and he presumably agreed to Larsson's stipulation. When it came to other matters, Larsson was not as lucky. He felt that the biographical sketches should be placed at the end of the collection, not preceding each of the author entries. He also thought there should be individual introductions: "I think there should be 2—yours, mine, each of 2,500 words or less, as we wish. This way we could both 'have our say' with least fuss by post."⁵ He begged Derleth to make sure that Harrison produced a tasteful, dignified cover for the collection. As a title, Larsson preferred "A State of Poetry: Wisconsin Poets, 1633-1937." "I even prefer," he wrote, "Poets of Wisconsin" to "Poetry Out of Wisconsin." A brief inspection of the anthology likely objectified Larsson's disappointment—his preferences fallen victim to Derleth's will.

Poetry Out of Wisconsin was released in late 1937 in bright orange wraps, the fine wood engraving by Frank Utpatel a visual brown blur mismatching the bold black type of the text. Inside, a single co-authored preface of roughly 2,500 words gave neither of the editors their "own say." The anthology was organized alphabetically, beginning with Olga Achtenhagen and ending with Louis Zukofsky. For some strange reason, Derleth and Larsson included between the poetry and a bibliography of Wisconsin poetry, a seven-page compilation of Wisconsin Epitaphs. *Poetry Out of Wisconsin* contains some fine poetry, but falls short of the ideal Larsson had envisioned.

The first anthology of Wisconsin poetry, *Poetry Out of Wisconsin* was regional but not regionalist. Derleth and Larsson concluded their Preface by remarking that "within the boundaries of this state, the course of poetry throughout the nation for the past hundred years is traced." Much of the poetry had little to do with Wisconsin; Derleth, for example, included his poem "Elegy: In Providence the Spring," which he had written to lament the death of his dear friend H. P. Lovecraft; Larsson included "Elegy in Memory of My Mother: On a Leaf." A few months later, reviews would warmly welcome Derleth's first collection of poetry, *Hawk on the Wind*, identifying Derleth as "a young poet with a brilliant future." *Book Review Digest* did not choose to compile a record of reviews for *Poetry Out of Wisconsin*. What little evidence exists suggests that the collection may have been

a theoretical success but a commercial failure. Neither Derleth nor Larsson had a financial interest in promoting sales, and Henry Harrison seems to have had a reputation for carelessness. Thirty-two years later, with the sponsorship of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets and the Wisconsin Arts Foundation, Derleth on his own edited *New Poetry Out of Wisconsin*. Derleth's Introduction to this sequel begins:

When Raymond E. F. Larsson and I assembled *Poetry Out of Wisconsin* over three decades ago, our purpose was to present a comprehensive historical anthology of poetry written by Wisconsin natives and/or residents. The purpose of *New Poetry Out of Wisconsin* is less ambitious; it is to offer a representative selection of poetry written by contemporary Wisconsin poets, most of them still resident in the state, some natives long moved away who still look upon themselves as Wisconsinites, some but recently gone.⁶

Among the Wisconsin poets represented with a more substantial selection of poetry was a one-time resident of the Hudson River State Hospital.

Neither *Poetry Out of Wisconsin* nor *New Poetry Out of Wisconsin* was popular beyond the borders of the state—in fact, only 2,547 copies of *New Poetry* were printed, yet these companion volumes still hold a significant place, serving as the first two representative collections of Wisconsin poetry, collections published by a pair of poets, one known as the state's most prolific writer, one hardly known at all.

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¹S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: A Life*. West Warwick, RI: Necromicon Press, 1996. 425.

²Raymond Larsson to AD, 3 March 1935.

³Raymond Larsson to AD, 23 April 1936.

⁴Forward, *Poetry Out of Wisconsin*, np.

⁵Raymond Larsson to AD, 22 June 1937.

⁶*New Poetry Out of Wisconsin*, Sauk City, WI: Stanton and Lee, 1969, xxiii.

SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THE
STATE OF—MISSOURI: HAMLET, CLAUDIUS, AND
HUCKLEBERRY FINN

JOHN ROHRKEMPER

A few years ago while teaching *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, I struggled with a way to disabuse my students of the idea that Huck, as he appears in this novel, is a happy-go-lucky adolescent, ready to pick up his fishing pole and sleep contentedly on the river bank beneath his straw hat while waiting for a nibble. After all, this is the motherless child with an abusive father, placed in a foster home he finds confining, a boy caught between his head and his heart—his conscience and his heart, in his own words—and that conscience is particularly troubled for most of the novel since, among other things, he's committing a felony in hiding and helping a runaway slave. Groping for a way to help my students see just how heavily the world sits on Huck's shoulders, I suggested that, in many ways, he might be compared with Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet. That comparison caught their attention, though from the disbelieving looks that some of them gave me, they seemed to think *me* as mad as another Shakespearean hero, old King Lear.

It's obvious that Shakespeare, in general, was on Twain's mind as he wrote *Huckleberry Finn*—as when he makes use of Shakespeare directly when the King and Duke pose as Shakespearean actors and mangle the Bard's soliloquies. Others have suggested that the elopement of the young lovers from the feuding families of the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons alludes to *Romeo and Juliet*. But, beyond that, throughout his career, Twain read and made use of Shakespeare in his writing. One of his last works, published just a year before he died, was a book-length essay, *Is Shakespeare Dead?* It's a strange work that seems at first to be a send-up of the ongoing investigation as to whether William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon really wrote the plays attributed to his name.

Fairly quickly, however, it becomes apparent that Twain himself was a doubter, and he offers up a quirky, sometimes witty, often wrong-headed assessment of the controversy. He concludes that Francis Bacon probably wrote the plays, since the author of such great plays must have possessed "wisdom, erudition, imagination, capriciousness of mind, grace, and majesty of expression" (116). This assessment comes from a relatively uneducated, small-town boy from the rough-and-tumble West who grew into *Life on the Mississippi*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and so many other works that are so wise, imaginative, and capricious, and in their own way are often erudite, graceful, and even majestic. It's disappointing that he could not imagine of Shakespeare the same kind of growth that he himself had experienced. Despite Twain's doubts, *Is Shakespeare Dead?* demonstrates the intensity he brought to his study of Shakespeare.

During the 1860s Twain wrote a Shakespearean parody, "The Killing of Julius Caesar 'Localized.'" His interest in Shakespeare intensified in the 1870s, and in 1873 he made a pilgrimage to Stratford as part of his research for his novel of Tudor England, *The Prince and the Pauper*. In 1876 Twain wrote a story entitled "1601," otherwise called, "Conversation, As it was by the Social Fireside, in the Time of the Tudors." Leslie Fiedler has called "1601" a "hard-core pornographic skit" (1), and indeed the piece, written in Elizabethan dialect, gathers Queen Elizabeth, Francis Bacon, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and others in pleasant conversation that quickly turns to graphic discussion of flatulence, masturbation, and intercourse. Twain's research had led him to conclude that the pre-Puritan, pre-Victorian Elizabethans enjoyed a great frankness about bodily matters, and this information seemed both to intrigue and disconcert him. After publishing *The Prince and the Pauper* in 1878, he began work on a 14,000 word "Burlesque of *Hamlet*" that he abandoned in 1881—just four years before the publication of *Huckleberry Finn*. Though he may never have finished his "Burlesque," the mangled soliloquy offered by the King and Duke in *Huckleberry Finn* is indeed a burlesque of Hamlet's most famous soliloquy (and a mad-cap amalgam of *Macbeth* and many other plays):

To be or not to be; that is the bare bodkin
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would fardels bear, till Birnam Wood do come to
Dunsinane,

But that the fear of something after death
 Murders the innocent sleep,
 Great nature's second course,
 And makes us rather sling the arrows of outrageous fortune.... (179)

And so on. Clearly, Shakespeare, and *Hamlet* in particular, was in Twain's consciousness as he wrote his greatest novel.

So, Huck's connection with Hamlet might not be as far-fetched as some of my doubting students at first thought. Let's look at some of the similarities that make him Hamlet-like despite some obvious differences. First, and most to the point that I was trying to make with my students, both are brooders who tend to take on the world's problems as their own—this despite the image of a carefree, happy-go-lucky Huck that informs the popular view. We see Huck's brooding side as early as the first chapter when he escapes to his bedroom one evening to avoid the "pecking" of the Widow's sister, Miss Watson. Feeling low-down and sad, Huck tells us that he:

set down in a chair by the window and tried to think of something cheerful, but it warn't no use. I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead. The stars were shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooing about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; and the wind was trying to whisper something to me and I couldn't make out what it was, and so it made the cold shivers run over me. Then, way out in the woods I heard the kind of sound a ghost makes when it wants to tell about something that's on its mind and can't make itself understood and so can't rest easy in its grave and has to go about every night grieving. I got so down-hearted and scared, I did wish I had some company. (4)

As melancholy as his Danish counterpart, Huck even imagines ghosts speaking to him.

Moreover, both Huck and Hamlet have parent problems that parallel larger societal problems. Of course Hamlet's father has been murdered—as Huck's will be though he won't know it until the end of the novel. And both have to deal with difficult parent figures. Hamlet is bitterly disappointed in his mother's behavior and hates his stepfather Claudius even before he finds out that he was King Hamlet's murderer. Huck doesn't hate his parents, but he certainly is frightened of his violent, drunken father, Pap, and he feels uncomfortable in the Widow Douglass's claustrophobic household.

Furthermore, both Hamlet and Huck find themselves in corrupted societies. If there is something rotten in the state of Denmark—regicide, fratricide, adultery, incest, usurpation—there also is something rotten in Missouri, in the antebellum South: principally the curse of slavery, and more generally the hypocrisy that grows from and nourishes the "peculiar institution." Pap is the novel's most virulent racist, but Miss Watson may be the most insidious example of the corruption of a slaveholding society. By her society's standards, the standards Huck inherits, she is an upstanding, moral Christian woman, but, unlike Pap, she actually is a slave owner, and it is her decision to sell Jim down the river that precipitates his flight.

There are further similarities. Both Hamlet and Huck are burdened, challenged to do the right thing, by a father or father figure: King Hamlet's ghost, who requires of his son revenge for his murder; and Jim, a kind of surrogate father to Huck as they journey down the river, who requires Huck to violate his society's norms and help him escape slavery. This challenge to do what is right leads both young men to become (apparent) enemies of their societies, to challenge the king, on the one hand, and the rule of slavery on the other. In both cases, however, the rebel's mantle helps to liberate the hero, allows each to achieve a new and greater understanding of "the nature of things." Hamlet tells Horatio of things that he's never dream'd of in his philosophy, and Huck, were he just a little more inclined to point out Tom Sawyer's shortcomings, might say the same to his bookish friend after his experiences on the river.

In another similarity, both the drama and the novel are studies in deception, portraits of characters who are not as they seem, who lie to themselves and/or others as a strategy to manipulate, to prosper, to survive. And, to survive in such worlds, Hamlet and Huck both conceal their identities. On one level they do so for the obvious reason: they wear masks as a shield against potential enemies. At another level, they don the masks as a way of exploring their own identities—as young people have always done, even to today. This last, psychic masking and unmasking is particularly important at the moment we meet each character, because each faces a wrenching crisis of identity.

As a consequence, each hero is temporarily paralyzed by indecision as he tries to overcome the key dilemma he faces. Hamlet, of course, is famous for his indecision. The root cause of his hesitation in acting out the revenge demanded by his father's ghost is that he is caught between two ways of knowing: between knowing the world

intellectually and knowing the world viscerally or intuitively. As a young university scholar of the Renaissance (for, despite the ostensibly Medieval setting, the play is very much of the later period), Hamlet is a product of the humanism of that era. It's safe to say that, prior to being summoned home from Wittenburg for his father's funeral, Hamlet would have shared with Shakespeare an appreciation for the optimistic humanistic philosophers of the age, such as Michele de Montaigne or Peter de la Primaudaye, who rhapsodized about creation, about "the lively brightness, rare beauty, and incomparable force of the sun and the moon...the infinite number of goodly stars...[and the] excellent and constant order of all these things," as well as the wonder of the "lower...elementary region" of earth, and ultimately the glory of mankind: "I cannot marvel enough at the excellency of Man," Primaudaye wrote, "for whom all these things were created, and are maintained and preserved in their being and moving" (117).

But Hamlet has come home to a Denmark girding for war, with his father suddenly dead, his mother hastily remarried—and to his father's brother, the new king, Claudius. Is the marriage so hasty as to mean that his mother and stepfather had had an adulterous relationship? Should their relationship be thought of as incestuous? These questions plague the young prince. And, of course, early on, Hamlet learns that there is an even more nefarious twist: his father was murdered by the man who now shares his mother's bed, who rules the kingdom, and who would call Hamlet son. If Hamlet knows intellectually the humanism of the time, he also has come to learn in his heart—or his gut—the lower depths to which humanity can sink. The prince sums up this double vision in his meeting with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'er-hanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals. And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me, nor woman neither. (2.2.283-98)

Caught between these two ways of knowing, both powerful, one deeply ingrained, one shockingly immediate, is it any wonder that Hamlet finds it difficult to act, to choose *one* of the two that will allow him to act with some decisiveness?

Huck is caught in a similar dilemma. He knows well the moral lessons taught by his culture, preeminent among them the absolute lessons that stem from the basic premise of the American institution of slavery: that the African American is inferior to whites in all things and that he is fit for nothing more than slavery. And he has internalized the cultural imperative that all whites must be complicit, even vigilant, in preserving a hierarchy with blacks on the utter bottom in all things. Thus, even Pap can feel righteous superiority to the most educated and accomplished black man he ever encounters. Throughout the journey down the river and his deepening friendship with Jim, Huck is plagued by the voice of his conscience that continually reminds him of his responsibility to maintain the rigid racial order of his society and to turn in Jim to the authorities, who will return him to Miss Watson. His *conscience*, the moral system he has learned from his culture, is at direct odds with the inclinations of his *heart*, his natural, intuitive sense of right and wrong. Henry Nash Smith's cogent and still relevant discussion of Huck's internal struggle in his 1962 work, *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer*, situates Huck's dilemma—caught between a deformed conscience and a sound heart—in the context of the general hypocrisy of Southern antebellum life: in a society as false as Claudius's Elsinore, as rotten as the "state of Denmark."

But, for all these similarities between Hamlet and Huck, at Huck's crucial moment, the moral climax of the novel, Twain makes him sound less like the prince and more like his nemesis, the usurper, King Claudius. I'm referring to Huck's ultimate moral test in the thirty-first chapter, when he agonizes for the last time about whether or not to be true to his conscience and turn Jim over to Miss Watson; and its similarity to Claudius's only true soliloquy, in the third scene of the third act of the tragedy, when, shaken by the play that Hamlet has written to function as a mousetrap to catch "the conscience of the king," we see that the great villain is also "caught between." I'd like to look with some care at these two passages and then close by speculating on the reasons why Twain may have chosen to associate Huck with Claudius as much as Hamlet. Here's Claudius soliloquy:

Oh my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
 It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
 A brother's murder. Pray can I not,
 Though inclination be as sharp as will.
 My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
 And like a man to double business bound,
 I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
 And both neglect. What if this cursèd hand
 Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
 Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
 To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
 But to confront the visage of offence?
 And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,
 To be forstallèd ere we come to fall,
 Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up,
 My fault is past. But oh, what form of prayer
 Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"?
 That cannot be since I am still possessed
 Of those effects for which I did the murder,
 My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
 May one be pardoned and retain th' offence?
 In the corrupted currents of this world
 Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
 And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
 Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above;
 There is no shuffling, there the action lies
 In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled
 Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults
 To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
 Try what repentance can. What can it not?
 Yet what can it when one cannot repent?
 Oh wretched state! Oh bosom black as death!
 Oh limèd soul that struggling to be free
 Art more engaged! Help, angels!—Make assay!
 Bow stubborn knees and hearts with strings of steel,
 Be as soft as the sinews of a newborn babe.
 All may be well. (3.3.36-72)

At this point Claudius kneels to pray and Hamlet enters with intent to kill him. Seeing the king in prayer, however, Hamlet decides to wait until he can be sure that Claudius is in a state of sin and that his death will mean his damnation. Immediately after Hamlet leaves, Claudius

risers and says, ruefully, "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go" (3.3.97-98).

Notice how much Huck's climactic moments sound like Claudius's:

Once I said to myself it would be a thousand times better for Jim to be a slave at home where his family was...and so I'd better write a letter...to tell Miss Watson where he was....And then think of me! It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom, and if I was ever to see anybody from that town again, I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he doesn't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide it, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly. The more I studied about this, the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling. And at last it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven....showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and ain't agoing to allow no such miserable doings to go just so fur and no further....

It made me shiver. And I about made up my mind to pray; and see if I couldn't try to quit being the kind of boy I was and be better. So I kneeled down. But the words wouldn't come. Why wouldn't they? It warn't no use to try and hide it from Him. Nor from me neither. I knowed very well why they wouldn't come. It was because my heart wasn't right; it was because I warn't square; it was because I was playing double. I was letting on to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth say I would do the right thing and the clean thing...but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie—and He knowed it. You can't pray a lie—I found that out. (268-69)

In his attempt to atone for what he has come to think of as his great sin, Huck writes a letter to Miss Watson betraying Jim. But then he gets to thinking about his life with Jim on the raft, of how kind and loving he was to Huck, of how much Huck, himself, had come to care for Jim. Then he remembers the letter. He knows he's in a dilemma:

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling because I got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

"All right, then, I'll go to hell"—and tore it up.

It was awful thoughts, and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said and never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head, and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't. And for a starter I would go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again, and if I could think up anything worse, I would do that, too, because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog. (268-71)

Huck's and Claudius's examinations of their moral dilemmas bear striking similarities. Each character has a strong sense of the deep evil of his act. Claudius begins by calling his crime "rank.../ It hath the primal eldest curse upon't / A brother's murder." And Huck well knows that in the antebellum South to help a slave escape his master is "low-down" and "wicked," a legal crime and a profound moral lapse. Furthermore, they both believe that merely to "get away" with their crimes, to avoid earthly justice, does not exculpate them in the sight of a greater power. Claudius must ask himself "May one be pardoned and retain th' offence?" but he knows the answer, almost before the question is asked:

In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults
To give in evidence. (268-69)

Huck's meditation on Divine knowledge and justice sounds remarkably like Claudius's:

And at last it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven.... showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and ain't agoing to allow no such miserable doings to go just so fur and no further....

Equally striking in its similarity is each character's awareness that fine words without good intentions are meaningless in God's eyes. Claudius, after trying to pray, concedes that "My words fly up,

my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go." Huck echoes this revelation: "I was trying to make my mouth say I would do the right thing and the clean thing...but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie—and He knowed it. You can't pray a lie—I found that out." And in this novel that begins with a comical musing on the nature of lies and truth in storytelling, that features at its center the professional liars—the con men who call themselves the Duke and King, and in which Huck, himself, must often lie to protect himself and Jim, Huck reaches an interesting conclusion: that lying, itself—at least to God—is "the biggest sin of all."

Despite their sense of self-loathing, each comes to feel, at least momentarily, that he is not beyond redemption, that he can still achieve salvation. Claudius wonders, "What if this cursèd hand / Were thicker than itself with brother's blood, / Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens / To wash it white as snow?" Emboldened by this theological consideration of Divine mercy, he continues: "Whereto serves mercy / But to confront the visage of offence? / And what's in prayer but this two-fold force, / To be fore-stallèd ere we come to fall, / or pardoned being down?" And he concludes, "Then I'll look up, / My fault is past," and he does actually kneel and attempt prayer. Huck too seeks to expiate his crime and sin: "At last I had an idea, and I says, I'll go and write the letter—and then see if I can pray. Why it was astonishing, the way I felt light as a feather, right straight off, and all my troubles gone."

Eventually, of course, each "villain" comes to the decision that he cannot give up that for which he has sinned—whether "my crown, mine own ambition, and my queen," or "my friend." But each, curiously, finds the promise of damnation to be liberating. We know this in Claudius's case less from what he says than what he does: it is from this point in the play that Claudius's thoughts again turn bloody and he resolves to kill Prince Hamlet even as he had once killed the King, young Hamlet's father. Huck is more explicit about how liberated he feels after tearing up the letter to Miss Watson and resolving to "go to hell":

It was awful thoughts, and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said and never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head, and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't. And for a starter I would go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again, and if I could think up anything worse, I would do that,

too, because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog. (271)

Both Claudius and Huck realize that, once one has given up all hope of eternal salvation in heaven, one is free to pursue any earthly goal. In rejecting heaven, they both have become free agents, free to pursue their earthly ends without the restraint of conscience which, as Prince Hamlet famously says, "makes cowards of us all" (3.1.83).

Perhaps the question remains to be answered: why switch, at this point, from the implicit comparison of Huck to Hamlet and instead emphasize his similarities with Claudius? The short answer might be that by making Huck feel like an arch-criminal, a damned soul beyond forgiveness, Twain suggests the extent of Huck's heroism: he is willing to feel like a fiend in order to save his friend, to do what we know is right but which *he* thinks is horribly wrong. He literally is willing to go to Hell and burn for eternity, a concept that many of my students have a hard time wrapping their minds around, I've come to believe. While Huck possesses the nobility of one of our greatest tragic characters, he himself believes that he is akin to one of Shakespeare's greatest villains. Claudius will use his new-found moral freedom to pursue his immoral ends; we, of course, understand the irony of Twain's scheme and realize that Huck's liberation is from a mischievous conscience imposed upon him by a culture that has embraced the immorality of slavery. Huck, we know, however he might judge his own actions, is now free to do the *right* thing.

The long answer to explain this shift of focus is a bit more complex—too complex to examine here in any depth. I would just suggest, however, that, in a novel that is ever examining the tension between dualities, between opposites—land v. river, nature v. civilization; white v. black, slave v. free, heart v. conscience, Twain may wish to suggest that the apparent polar opposites of a Hamlet and a Claudius are in fact not so opposite, and that Huck, on his own identity quest, must consider which elements of the one and then the other he possesses. Twain, after all, is writing a work of realism, and every chapter of it, from the very opening paragraph in which Huck questions Twain's complete truthfulness while excusing his "stretchers," through the problematic ending, suggests the implausibility of pure good and pure evil.

So, perhaps you still would want to ask that question that I suspect would be on the tongues of so many of my students if they had

just finished reading this essay. They might say something like: "Well—yes—I see what you're saying—but do you really think Twain knew that he was saying all that—you know, thought of all that stuff when he was writing the novel?" When I get this kind of query I'm always tempted to respond: "Yes. Any other questions?" Instead I usually befuddle my students with windy discourses on the nature of multi-layered consciousness that make them wonder if I know what I am saying, or if I am just another befuddled Shakespearean fool.

In this case, though, I might refer them to a toast that Twain offered at a dinner honoring Oliver Wendell Holmes on his seventieth birthday in 1879. In that toast, later published under the title "Unconscious Plagiarism," Twain recalled how he had inadvertently plagiarized the dedication to *Innocents Abroad*, how a friend had pointed out how close it was to Holmes's dedication to the earlier published *Songs in Many Keys*. With humor and affection for the older writer, Twain then explains how "two years before, I had been laid up a couple weeks in the Sandwich Islands, and had read and reread Dr. Holmes's poems till my mental reservoir was filled up with them to the brim. The dedication lay on top, and handy, so, by-and-by, I unconsciously stole it" (57). I don't know about my students—or you—but I have faith that if Mark Twain were reading this he might admit at least to an *unconscious* if not a conscious borrowing from Shakespeare and his *Hamlet*.

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This bibliography includes primary and secondary sources of Midwestern literary genres published, for the most part, in 1997. Criteria for inclusion of authors are birth or residence in the Midwest; fiction with Midwestern locales are included irrespective of their authors' ties with this region. Primary sources are listed alphabetically by author, including locale designations within square brackets where applicable at the end of each citation. Secondary sources are listed by subject.

New periodicals that in some way relate to Midwestern literature, either in content or locale, are listed alphabetically by title in the third and last section of this bibliography.

Citations for novels, poetry, short stories, etc.—as well as critical articles about them—should be sent to the Annual Bibliography's editor: Robert Beasecker, University Library, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan 49401.

The editor and members of the bibliographic committee continually seek names and addresses of living Midwestern writers and poets, and readers are encouraged to submit names of individuals whose work may be eligible for inclusion in future compilations of this bibliography. Persons interested in becoming members of the bibliographic committee should address queries to the editor.

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