

# MidAmerica XXIII

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

Edited by  
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In honor of  
Scott Donaldson

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## PREFACE

The publication of *MidAmerica XXIII* marks the beginning of the Society's second quarter-century and a year that builds on the achievements of the past with the successful twenty-sixth annual conference, the symposium "The Cultural Heritage of the Midwest" and the concurrent Midwest Poetry Festival in May, 1996. Appearing here are three outstanding contributions to the conference, the prize poem, Terence Glass's "Red Berries," the prize essay, Thomas Wetzel's "'Beyond Human understanding': Confusion and the Call in *Winesburg, Ohio*," and the prize story, Dave Diamond's "Fire in the Badlands."

Honored at the conference were Sara Paretsky of Chicago with the Mark Twain Award for 1996 for distinguished contributions to Midwestern Literature and Scott Donaldson, Cooley Professor Emeritus of the College of William and Mary, with the MidAmerica Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern Literature. For his biographies of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Macleish, and others that contribute to our understanding of the lives and literature of the Midwest, this *MidAmerica* is inscribed to Professor Donaldson.

August, 1997

DAVID D. ANDERSON

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## RED BERRIES

TERRENCE GLASS

The way the fence notches the face  
of the woods, wears sleeves of mildew  
and splits to exhale the old sun  
through the overhanging leaves,

the way the posts embrace  
dry grips of September, the way  
the grass claims the leaves  
like peelings of rust,

the way the rails hewn round  
and screwed into the fat posts  
spring knots like stillborn seeds  
where the branches once ate

until the berries behind one section,  
the red berries in twos and threes  
like guts unskinned, like blisters of blood  
the daylight has pinched

onto the green bush, the surgical  
berries incise us, yes laser the years  
packed in the heart and liver  
and intestines with the child's note,

the divorce, the roses  
piled high on the casket,  
the infant's body squirming  
in the blue-cuffed hands

that night, the chasm of white light  
in the operating room that year,  
the voices shooting to be right  
that lifetime, the way

the whole hide of the universe splits  
and the soul exhales the red berries  
and I turn and there the autumn maple  
bleeds its stalk of sunset

and your words rise from  
the bed with you, holding  
your sutures, when we love  
you say we gain energy we don't

lose it, your words rise orange  
through the blue sleeve of Decembers,  
all of them packed like ice  
around us, a solidified sea,

a journey we have put off and now  
it is time it is time to go  
to let the carpets of leaves rise  
to sail us on the whirling day.

Central State University

"BEYOND HUMAN UNDERSTANDING":  
CONFUSION AND THE CALL IN  
*WINESBURG, OHIO*

THOMAS WETZEL

Early in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, the narrator of "The Philosopher" describes the visits Dr. Parcival makes to George Willard in the offices of the *Winesburg Eagle*, where George works as the sole reporter. Although he eagerly looks forward to Dr. Parcival's daily visits to the newspaper office, George cannot quite grasp the doctor's stories, their meanings or intentions: "The tales that Doctor Parcival told George Willard began nowhere and ended nowhere. Sometimes the boy thought they must all be inventions, a pack of lies. And then again he was convinced that they contained the very essence of truth" (33). The doctor had once studied to be a minister, one who clarifies and explains the word, but now his stories have a different intention. As he tells George, "Perhaps I am trying to conceal my identity and don't want to be very definite" (33).

This sense of the indefinite, the concealed truth, and the confused narrative pervades all of *Winesburg, Ohio*, calling the reader to read indirectly, away from the obvious and confused "truth" of how the stories appear, and to look for different sorts of cues to find the essence of personal truth within Anderson's tales. From this perspective, the fact that Jesse Bentley's story, "Godliness," is by far the longest tale in *Winesburg, Ohio* may be important.<sup>1</sup> Although it has little direct connection with the rest of the book (if we look at Anderson's novel as a *Bildungsroman* of sorts with George Willard as its focal point<sup>2</sup>), "Godliness" might have something vitally important to say concerning the "story" of *Winesburg, Ohio* as a whole. By focusing on Jesse's story, which begins decades before many of the other stories in the book and which takes place (for the most part) outside the town limits of Winesburg (Dewey 251), the reader might avoid

any easy reading—any “grotesque” reading (as suggested by the old man in the novel’s introduction)—of the story’s “truth.”<sup>3</sup>

“Godliness” is a biblical story<sup>4</sup>—a confused retelling of the Abraham and Isaac story as well as other biblical narratives, a story of reaching out in the darkness, a story of hands and broken religion, of sacrifice and faith, a story of the relation between call and response. In this confusion, Jesse’s story echoes some of the confusion surrounding the sacrifice of Isaac that Søren Kierkegaard exposes in his *Fear and Trembling*. However, unlike even Kierkegaard’s reading of the Abraham and Isaac story, Jesse’s story is not the story of a *call* requiring a *response*, but of a response sent out in the night, hoping to awaken a call—a broken reminder of Abraham’s response to God: “Here I am.” Anderson’s novel, then, suggests (in a way similar to Kierkegaard) that in this distance between ancient Mount Moriah and early twentieth century Ohio—in the way the retelling of the ancient story becomes confused and convoluted—we begin to understand the depth of alienation from society involved in love and suffering today.

Jesse Bentley lives a confused life. As the narrator’s opening description of his piece-meal farmhouse suggests, to understand Jesse requires sensitive searching and watching of one’s step, an awareness of narrative mazing and confusion (45). The reader has already seen this coexistence of narrative and geographic confusion in the settings of other *Winesburg* stories. In many cases, like Elmer Cowley’s shop, the hall next to Dr. Reefy’s office, or the alley behind the New Willard Hotel, one finds refuse and revelations, confusion and clarity, or garbage and godliness, in the very same place (23-24; 174-175; 204). Along with the wandering stairs and oddly placed rooms of Jesse’s house, the geography of *Winesburg* suggest that “the place [is] full of surprises” (45), experiences and settings that clutter the individual characters’ perceptions and beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

It comes as no surprise then that Jesse Bentley lives a confused life, believing himself a prophet or patriarch much like the Old Testament figures that have peopled his mind since he first left home to become a minister (47-48). Jesse takes the matter to God, after he must return home when all his brothers are killed in the Civil War, and he is passionate in his desires, fanatical:

“I am a new kind of man come into possession of these fields,” he declared. “Look upon me, O God, and look Thou also upon my neighbors and all the men who have gone before me here! O God,

create in me another Jesse, like that one of old, to rule over men and to be the father of sons who shall be rulers!” . . . In fancy he saw himself living in old times and among old peoples. The land that lay stretched out before him became of vast significance, a place peopled by his fancy with a new race of men sprung from himself (52)

Ironically, Jesse already has begun to confuse the biblical stories.<sup>6</sup> Connecting himself with the “tree of Jesse,” the Old Testament name for the family from which came King David and later Jesus, Jesse Bentley forgets that the Old Testament Jesse never ruled over ancient Israel; indeed, the biblical Jesse remains a simple farmer and sheep herder all his life (I Samuel 16:2).

In his wish to possess the land around him and to be the father of a new race, Jesse Bentley more resembles an even older biblical patriarch, Abraham, the first to whom God gives the covenant of the Promised Land.<sup>7</sup> God came to Abraham with a call and a promise: after manifesting himself to the patriarch and talking personally with him, God says, “Here now is my covenant with you; you shall become the father of a multitude of nations. . . . I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land you are living in, the whole land of Canaan, to own in perpetuity, and I will be your God” (Genesis 17:1-8). Abraham’s response to God and the covenant is simple, yet profound: “Here I am.” Jesse Bentley takes the ancient promise of Canaan as his own, “that as the true servant of God the entire stretch of country through which he had walked should have come into his possession” (Anderson 54).

But, at the same time, and very much unlike Abraham whose faith in God and the covenant does not waver, Jesse becomes convinced that all the other Ohio farmers around him are Philistines trying to wrest the promised land away from him, and he begins to fear the arrival of a Goliath who could defeat his holy mission (55). In this fear, Jesse Bentley convolutes the biblical narratives obviously, for now he is re-enacting the role of ancient Israel’s first king, Saul, whose army faced the Philistines and who himself feared he might have to fight the Philistine champion (I Samuel 17:11). And so, as Jesse Bentley’s wife lies in bed in the throes of childbirth, he cries out to God for a champion of his own, a son to be called David, who will help him “to pluck at last all of these lands out of the hands of the Philistines and turn them to Thy service and to the building of Thy kingdom on earth” (55). But this too differs from the original

biblical story of Jesse; for his family, like Abraham and the other patriarchs, is called by God (I Samuel 16:3). The biblical David becomes a champion by default, drawn into battle with Goliath only when he takes a meal to his brothers (I Samuel 17: 12-54). In the biblical narratives, a call always precedes response. Jesse Bentley, in contrast, cries out in search of a call, hoping to draw God's attention to him: "Here I am."

The breakdown of stories here, if we are to believe Anderson's narrator, coincides with the onset of the Industrial Revolution in America's Middle West (Stouck 32-33; Anderson 52-53). In a time of mass produced, cheap books and newspapers, in an age of automotive mobility, "[m]uch of the old brutal ignorance that had in it also a kind of beautiful childlike innocence is gone forever" (Anderson 53). While the older generations filled their days with heavy labors and had no time to consider world events, Anderson's narrator points out that "[i]n our day a farmer standing by the stove in a store in his village has his mind filled to overflowing with the words of other men" (53).<sup>8</sup> The Middle Western farmer no longer ponders only the biblical stories in his quiet moments; instead, his mind is filled with glib and senseless confusion. Jesse Bentley is no exception. His mind too is filled with two conflicting influences: his faith in God and his faith in the capitalist industrialism of his age.

True, Jesse "still believed that God might at any moment make himself manifest out of the winds or the clouds" (62). But, in his own mind anyway, and in the years after his farm becomes enormously successful, he no longer demands such recognition; instead he prays for it, full of regret that fate "had not let him live in a simpler and sweeter time when at the *beckoning of some strange cloud in the sky* men left their lands and houses and went forth into the wilderness to create new races" (62, emphasis added). At the same time, though, now that he has tasted of worldly success, Jesse also has "been touched by the deep influences that were at work in the country during those years when modern industrialism was born" (63). He reads newspapers and magazines regularly and even tinkers with technological innovations like "a machine for the making of fence out of wire." In other words, as the narrator explains, "The greedy thing in him wanted to make money faster than it could be made by tilling the land" (63).

Jesse therefore wrestles between God and mammon, between spiritual and worldly success—and he begins to become somewhat

unhinged in the process.<sup>9</sup> He rejects Louise, the daughter born to his wife Katherine on the night he begged God for a son (60, 69, 78), but he desperately desires *her* son, whom we can guess Jesse demanded be called David, and whom he will later demand to raise as his own on the Bentley farm when the boy is twelve (60). After the boy has lived with Jesse for several months, the old man feels reawakening "the notion that now *he could bring from God* a word or a sign out of the sky, that the presence of the boy and man on their knees in some lonely spot in the forest would *make the miracle* he had been waiting for almost *inevitable*" (67, emphasis added). Once they reach the spot, Jesse falls to his knees and cries out with the whole left side of his face twitching, demanding to be acknowledged. David becomes afraid, believing that some "terrible man" has taken the place of his grandfather, and he runs away. The boy hits his head when he trips over some tree roots, leaving Jesse only to mutter to God, "What have I done that Thou dost not approve of me" (68). Despite his efforts to make himself noticed, Jesse does not evoke a call.

But still, Jesse does not give up. When David reaches the age of fifteen, he—like his biblical namesake—fashions himself a slingshot (80), and he carries it along as he and his grandfather return to the wilderness (81). On the way, Jesse and David collect from the flock a lamb born out of season, tying it up carefully so it cannot escape. Jesse says to David, "I saw it yesterday and it put me in mind of what I have long wanted to do." The biblical echo is ominous, for Jesse once more resembles Abraham when God comes to him: "'Take your son,' God said, 'your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah.' 'There you shall offer him as a burnt offering, on a mountain I will point out to you'" (Genesis 22:2). Jesse has become convinced that, like the ancient patriarchs, he must make a sacrifice to God (82).

As they reach "that place where Jesse had once before appealed to God and had frightened his grandson," David again becomes afraid, his face turning white like fleece (83), and he decides to untie the strings on the lamb. Equating himself with the little animal, the boy says, "If anything happens we will run away together" (83). David almost seems to sense the reenactment happening before him, and he has begun to fathom his role in this story. Although David himself does not speak, Isaac's words to Abraham seem to describe the boy's feelings: "Isaac spoke to his father Abraham. 'Father,' he



said. 'Here I am, my son,' Abraham replied. 'Look,' he said, 'here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' Abraham answered, 'My son, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering' (Genesis 22:7-8). Jesse erects a heap of sticks and sets them afire, while David sits nearby, the lamb in his arms (83). But as Jesse approaches to kill the lamb, *David* now confuses the story. He thinks Jesse is coming to kill him, and he releases the lamb and runs away with it. Jesse, having forgotten the boy, chases after only the lamb with his knife (83), but given David's sense of connection with the fate of the lamb, the ambiguity of Jesse's threat is probably real enough.

Although the biblical narrative describes a somewhat different situation that follows, the role of the son is the same in David's mind:

Then [Abraham] bound his son Isaac and put him on the altar on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and seized the knife to kill his son. But the angel of God called to him from heaven. "Abraham, Abraham," he said. "Here I am," Abraham replied. "Do not raise your hand against the boy . . . Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your son, your only son." (Genesis 22:11-12)

But here, all the stories fall apart—or fall together—depending on one's perspective. David picks up a stone and, like his biblical namesake, puts it in his sling and hurls it at Jesse. It hits Jesse squarely in the head, and he falls to the ground (I Samuel 17: 48-49). In the moment that Jesse confuses the biblical narratives and terrifies his grandson, the biblical stories coalesce and merge. Jesse the "father" of David, who wanted to be an Abraham, becomes the very Goliath he feared—a Philistine trying to uproot the promised land (I Samuel 17: 49-50). David, the grandson of Jesse, has first been turned into the sacrificial Isaac, but now he becomes David the warrior and future king after whom he was named. With even further confusion in Anderson's narrative, David's comments after Jesse falls to the ground also portray him as Cain, the fugitive wanderer who has killed God's chosen one. Although Jesse is only stunned, David still exclaims over his fallen grandfather, "I have killed the man of God and now I will myself be a man and go into the world" (Anderson 84; Genesis 4:14-16). With this moment, "[t]he shell of circumstances of [David's] life was broken and he was compelled to start forth. He left Winesburg and no one there ever saw him again" (Anderson 79).

God does not speak. Jesse, unlike Abraham, loses his "only son," and with him, the hope of creating a chosen people in a promised land. The burnt offering is a complete failure, utter confusion. There is no call—only silence. When Jesse later speaks of the matter, "[he] began to talk about God. That is all they ever got out of him. Whenever David's name was mentioned he looked vaguely at the sky and said that a messenger of God had taken the boy. 'It happened because I was too greedy for glory,' he declared and would have no more to say in the matter" (84). In the end, after all of Jesse's attempts to force God to speak, there is only the sky and the empty silence—and one feeble voice: "Here I am."

Anderson's decision to retell the Abraham and Isaac story in such a muddled fashion is not without precedent. Søren Kierkegaard, in his *Fear and Trembling*, suggests that the biblical narrative itself defies the sort of "grotesque" readings of which Anderson has warned us to be wary. There is no simple truth in the incidents on Mount Moriah, according to Kierkegaard. In this sense, Kierkegaard himself describes a very "Modernist" view of the biblical text—a view of reading and writing that would influence the literary movements of the decades after him. While he admits that "Abraham arouses [his] admiration," Kierkegaard at the same time finds him appalling (71). Noting that Abraham possesses only his belief that God has called him to sacrifice Isaac—and no objective verification of it—Kierkegaard contends, "One cannot weep over Abraham. One approaches him with a *horror religiosus*, as Israel approached Mount Sinai" (71).

Likening "the solitary man who ascends Mount Moriah" to a seeming "somnambulist who walks securely above the abyss," Kierkegaard can only ask in astonishment, ". . . [What] if this man is disordered in his mind, if he had made a mistake!" (71-72). In ironic confusion, Kierkegaard can claim,

Abraham I cannot understand. . . If people fancy that by considering the outcome of this story they might let themselves be moved to believe, they deceive themselves and want to swindle God. . . They would suck worldly wisdom out of the paradox. . . for our age is not willing to stop with faith, with its miracle of turning water into wine, it goes further, it turns wine into water. (48)

In other words, the biblical story of Abraham, much like Anderson's retelling of it in "Godliness," also is a broken story. In later biblical

narratives, the prophet Jeremiah will tell the people of Israel, after they have turned to the worship of Molech which involved human sacrifice, that God finds the Israelites' sacrifice of their children an "abomination." God, Jeremiah emphasizes, is punishing Israel for sacrificing their children, going so far as to say that Israel's God would never even imagine such a request (Jeremiah 32: 28-35)—a stark contradiction of what happened on Mount Moriah.<sup>10</sup> Put simply, in the biblical narrative, God calls Abraham to do that which God himself finds despicable. Thus, as Kierkegaard explains, those who wish to see in Abraham's act a simple expression of obedience to God have sucked all meaning from the biblical story, turning the wine of human experiences and stories into water of simplistic and abstracted truisms. In other words, seeing Abraham simply as obedient to his God is a "grotesque" reading of what actually happens.

But, Kierkegaard nonetheless believes there is truth and meaning in this story, and his comments that help to clarify Abraham's problem also offer insight into why a retelling of this story functions as the narrative center of *Winesburg, Ohio*:

[Abraham's] justification is once more the paradox; for if he is justified, it is not by virtue of anything universal, but by virtue of being the particular individual. How then does the individual assure himself that he is justified? It is easy enough to level down the whole of existence to the idea of the state or the idea of society. If one does this, one can also mediate easily enough, for then one does not encounter at all the paradox that the individual as the individual is higher than the universal. . . . [E]ither Abraham was every minute a murderer, or we are confronted by a paradox which is higher than all mediation. (72-77)

In other words, Abraham, as the father ready to sacrifice his son, has rejected his duties as father and so stands outside the universal—the ethical and moral standards of society. As Kierkegaard stresses, "His relation to Isaac, ethically speaking, is this, that the father should love the son" (81). Obviously, a loving father, in terms of ethics and society alone, cannot sacrifice his son. Abraham standing on Mount Moriah cannot fit into society, cannot place himself within a community, without surrendering the reality of what he is at that moment.<sup>11</sup> His only hope that he himself is not crazy, that he himself will not momentarily become a brutal butcher, is his faith in God—

his outstretched hand amidst the confused darkness of meaning around him.

As Kierkegaard describes this act, in *Fear and Trembling* and other texts, Abraham's hope here is the "leap of faith" (CUP 258). The leap promises to the individual "the specific weight of religion, its essence at first hand, from God himself. Then it will be said: 'behold, all is in readiness, see how the cruelty of abstraction makes the true form of worldliness only too evident[;] the abyss of eternity opens before you. . . and behold, it is God who waits. Leap, then, into the arms of God'" (PA 82). Although this leap is not a "blind leap," or an arbitrary act (Evans 274), it is nonetheless a leap in the dark because objectively, the believer has only his or her personal *faith* with which to believe that the arms of God await. As Kierkegaard puts it, the leap to God works "by virtue of the absurd" (*Fear* 51), subjective reasons and commitments that cannot be communicated objectively, abstractly or rationally, reasons that remain outside traditional modes of understanding. In other words, Kierkegaard contends, "Abraham keeps silent. . . he *cannot* speak. Therein lies [his] distress and anguish. . . . The relief of speech is that it translates [the individual] into the universal" (122).

Love, too, is a leap of faith, according to Kierkegaard. Be it love of God or love of another human being, the individual must enter into relationship with another passionately, believing fully in what is, ultimately, a reaching out in the darkness, a trust that the other will also reach out as well (*Fear* 54-55). At times, we see such a reaching out in the darkness in *Winesburg*. Whether it is Hal Winters laying his hands on Ray Pearson's shoulders in the setting sun (189), or George Willard and Helen White sitting together in the empty fairground grandstands late at night, the hands are the call beckoning to the other "to love and be loved," each time speaking for the individuals "the substance of the thing [they] felt": "I have come to this lonely place and here is the other" (225). Even George's mother Elizabeth "made a quick girl-ish movement with her hand" (211) and, in her reaching out, finds (even if only momentarily) the love of Dr. Reefy, whose own hands, like all the hands of *Winesburg*, tell "a very curious story . . . like the twisted little apples that grow in the orchards of *Winesburg*" (17).

These "twisted little apples"—the outstretched hands of the people of *Winesburg*—are good, Kierkegaard might add, "by virtue of

the absurd." Unlike the healthy, perfect apples that "have been taken from the trees by the pickers [and]. . . have been put in barrels and shipped to the cities" (17), these rejected, deformed, and very unique "gnarled apples. . . are delicious. Into a little round place at the side of the apple has been gathered all of its sweetness. . . Only the few know the sweetness of the twisted apples" (17). Winesburg's hands become symbolic of the secret sweetness, the inexpressible beauty hidden away in the individual. Those caught up in social mores and appearances miss the individual, for not only do the individual's hands express something hidden within the person, but the outstretched hand becomes an attempt to beckon to the other (Fludernik 121; D. Anderson 49).<sup>12</sup>

But more often, Anderson's narrative makes apparent the missed opportunities (D. Anderson 42-43; Cowley 53). Although there are occasional meetings of hands, more often in *Winesburg, Ohio* the outstretched hand in the darkness beckons toward nothing. Elizabeth Willard, with her lovers before her marriage "was forever putting her hand into the darkness and trying to get hold of some other hand" (208), and Louise Bentley does the same, believing that "just the touch of John Hardy's hand upon her own hand would satisfy" (76). Whether it is Wing Biddlebaum's hands seeking out the beauty in others in the dusk (13), George Willard alone in his bed groping after images of Kate Swift (150) or thrusting his hands to the starry heavens (169), or Jesse Bentley grabbing David by the shoulders and shouting out to God in the night (67), all these outstretched hands result in the same feeling (Fussell 42): as George says after missing Kate, "I have missed something. I have missed something Kate Swift was trying to tell me" (150). The outstretched hand is a response, but the call seems missing. Only the suffering of Abraham, his dark night of the soul, remains.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Reefy's comments to Elizabeth Willard about love offer some insight here, for they explain that lovers and believers themselves sometimes try too hard to make the confusion coherent and so destroy the very thing they sought:<sup>14</sup> "Love is like a wind stirring the grass beneath trees on a black night. . . . You must not try to make love definite. It is the divine accident of life. If you try to be definite and sure about it and to live beneath the trees, where soft night winds blow, the long hot day of disappointment comes swiftly and the gritty dust from passing wagons gathers upon lips inflamed and made tender by kisses" (207). Or, as the Rev. Hartman describes his own confusion

in the life of faith, "The ways of God are beyond human understanding. . . I did not understand. . . What I took to be a trial of my soul was only a preparation for a new and more beautiful fervor of spirit" (139-140). The suffering of the leap of faith, the painful waiting in the outer darkness, comes easily enough, but one cannot demand of God, of love, of life, answers: in trying to grasp what seems missing, one only pushes it further away (Stouck 41-42). One must, as the anonymous alcoholic tells Tandy Hard, relinquish the demand *to love* and instead "[d]are to be [truly] strong and courageous. . . Be strong enough to dare to *be loved*" (129-130, emphasis added). Like Abraham, one must muddle on in the darkness the best one can, and find meaning in the suffering and confusion itself.

In this moment when the possibility of love and the reality of suffering and chaos come together, Anderson perceives yet another connection with the story of Abraham and Isaac. Asked to surrender that which he most treasures for the sake of his love for God,<sup>15</sup> the story of Abraham establishes the continually recurring Jewish and Christian image of love as suffering, ultimately expressed in the "Crucified Messiah." Tom Foster, in "Drink," explains this connection to George Willard, drawing together the religious and the pedestrian, the sacred and the profane, when he learns this through a drunken reverie concerning Helen White.

"Well," he said softly, "I don't know how it was. I was happy. You see how that was. [Thoughts of] Helen White made me happy and the night did too. I wanted to suffer, to be hurt somehow. I thought that was what I should do. I wanted to suffer, you see, because everyone suffers and does wrong. . . . It was like making love, that's what I mean. . . . Don't you see how it is? It hurt me to do what I did and it made everything strange. That's why I did it." (203)

Or, as Dr. Parcival puts it to George, "The idea is very simple, so simple that if you are not careful you will forget it. It is this—that everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified" (39). Like the biblical stories of the "suffering servant," the story of Abraham, along with many of the stories in *Winesburg, Ohio*, carries with it a subtext of violence (Hoffman 191). But, perhaps it is only the violence that exists in all love, in all faith, in all human relations. The hurt and suffering in these stories is unintelligible to the individual only so long as one refuses it, instead trying to explain it away or to make it speak rationally.

But, we are many miles and many years withdrawn from Mount Moriah, with miles and years to spare in our distance from Winesburg. By recovering the Abrahamic narrative and, by extension, the Abrahamic covenant from the heart of *Winesburg, Ohio*, we discover that Anderson's novel is not a "revolt against the village," not a despairing description of human isolation, and not merely an indictment of American industrialism. As with Kierkegaard's reading of the events on Mount Moriah, *Winesburg* itself becomes a call in the darkness even today—a call that in such times as ours requires perhaps an even greater acceptance of confusion and suffering than Abraham himself accepted. As both Anderson and Kierkegaard point out, the "present age," as seen in the academic and political discourses we hear around us, works in terms of "grotesque" abstractions and simplistic objectivity that call into question both the individual and subjective truth. *Winesburg, Ohio*, then, is not simply a dusty—or radiant—relic of early modernism; it is a near prophetic call for the reader and literature to embrace suffering, to embrace the individual, to embrace confusion—not as distractions from, but as fundamental to, discovering meaning in contemporary America.<sup>16</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. Much of the criticism of *Winesburg, Ohio* does not know quite what to do with "Godliness." Although Irving Howe's comments are the extreme, they nonetheless offer a picture of how many critics have run into confusion with this story. Howe notes, "... *Winesburg* seems remarkably of a piece. The only stories that do not fit into its patterns are the four-part narrative of Jesse Bentley, a failure in any case, and possibly 'The Untold Lie,' a beautiful story measuring the distance between middle-age and youth. Of the others only 'Tandy' is so bad that its omission would help the book" (106). Howe later adds that "[t]he only conspicuous disharmony in the book is that the introductory 'Book of the Grotesque' suggests that the grotesques are victims of their willful fanaticism, while in the stories themselves grotesqueness is the result of an essentially valid resistance to forces external to its victims" (107). Despite his continual downplaying of his comments here, Howe's criticisms edit out substantial portions of the text, calling into question the "pattern" he establishes in the novel.

In contrast, the present essay suggests that "Godliness," "Tandy," and the introduction's views on the "grotesque" are absolutely central and essential to any reading of *Winesburg*. Understanding these portions of the novel will radically change our readings of the other sections as well, recovering a unity of purpose and theme in the text that many critics have missed (see notes #2 and 3 below). It is my aim, then, in this essay to try to read Anderson's novel as a whole.

2. As the anonymous "M. A." already established when he or she reviewed *Winesburg* in *The New Republic* in 1919 (87), critics have continually insisted on seeing George Willard as the central element of the novel. Edwin Fussell may have not been the first,

but he without reservation calls *Winesburg, Ohio* a "Bildungsroman of a rather familiar type[...]" the 'portrait of the artist as a young man'" (41), in which we see "the slow and often hidden current of George Willard's growth toward maturity" (43). Irving Howe refers to George as the novel's "hero" (99) and the center of the novel's action (102), or the "radiant" center of "[e]ach of these grotesques [sic] dances" (105), a reading similar to Malcolm Cowley's plot reconstruction (58). Likewise, David D. Anderson suggests that the figure of George "gives a unity to the collection that makes it approach the novel form. More important, however, is his role in fully developing Anderson's theme" of isolation as a personal, rather than a social problem, by being "the line of communication" which helps the grotesques connect with the world (44-45). He also notes that the novel shows George Willard's "growth in understanding" (61).

The problem with such views, however, is George's own failure to mature in the novel. George's views on sexuality alone, while they do progress over the course of the tales, show that he still is far from mature by the novel's end, as suggested by his easy missing of Helen White at the train station, after their supposed intense intimacy in "Sophistication." George also typifies the town and its mores to many of the outsiders portrayed in the novel, most notably Elmer Cowley (178) and Seth Richmond (120). The truth in Seth's view of George as one who knows the social badinage and "smart talking" of the town is evident in "An Awakening," where George, "eager for attention," joins in the boasting in the pool room with other Winesburg boys (166). George also cannot understand the moving insights of Tom Foster in "Drink," and when he leaves Winesburg, George misses Helen White's farewell as he sits in the train because he is trying to avoid looking like a "greenhorn," in accord with the final advice to him from his unsympathetic and brutal father (230). Finally, critics who suggest that George's decision to leave Winesburg itself is a sign of maturity have (consciously or unconsciously) accepted the now questionable reading of the novel as a "revolt against the village." The question of where George's "growth toward maturity" or "inwight into others" rests in this depiction is frankly mystifying to me.

3. In this essay, I am taking the warning in the introduction, "The Book of the Grotesque," rather literally. As the old man explains, "It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a galsehood" (6). The truths—virginity, passion, wealth, poverty, thrift, profligacy, carelessness, abandon, and so on—are indeed "all beautiful" as the narrator notes (5-6), but they (and the people who take them as their own) become grotesque when they use these truths as final, absolute statements about life. In addition, as Søren Kierkegaard might note, the list itself suggests that these "truths" are at best "beautiful" abstractions—objective descriptions of *subjective experiences* that speak subjective truth to individuals. In this sense, no one can make any of these experiences his or her own personal truth because they speak truth differently for each person.

David D. Anderson (41) and Irving Howe (see note #2 above) read "grotesque" differently, as have most critics. They see grotesquerie in the gnarled apples and twisted people of Winesburg. Instead, the gnarled apples to me represent the true individuality of the characters, and grotesquerie exists in their desire to escape this individuality. In other words, in *Winesburg, Ohio* it is good to be a gnarled apple, but it is *horrible* to read or live life 'grotesquely'—reductively, abstractly, absolutely, and not in terms of individual subjectivity.

4. Almost no critics take note of this view. Irving Howe and David D. Anderson both mention Anderson's desire to capture the cadences and rhythms of the biblical narratives; however, both draw short of suggesting possible biblical *story* allusions as key to understanding *Winesburg, Ohio*. Howe, for example, contends that Anderson "had not the

slightest interest in religion, but his first involvement in a literary environment had made him aware of writing and had taught him where to find its greatest English source" (96). Howe presumably means the King James Bible, although he only mentions "Gideon bibles" in the passage. David Anderson says of an incident from Sherwood Anderson's life during his formative writing years, "One day Anderson startled the copy room at the advertising agency by announcing that he 'was sold on Jesus Christ,' by which he meant the poetry he found in the New Testament" (35). Rex Burbank even goes so far to distance *Winesburg* from possible biblical allusions as to call Jesse's sacrifice "analogous to paganism as he attempts to sacrifice the lamb; he becomes a historical abstraction. When his grandson David fells him with a slingshot, the parallel with David and Goliath approaches incredibility" (76).

While I in no way wish to claim any sort of religious commitment in Anderson one way or another, I do believe these critics have missed (ignored?) an abundance of richness in *Winesburg* by looking only at the biblical language—and not the possible biblical stories—that the novel absorbs. In all my reading of *Winesburg* criticism thus far (which has not been an exhaustive search, by any means), I have found only one direct and developed reference to biblical allusions in the novel: Welford Dunaway Taylor points out that "[b]y having the final scene [of "Godliness"] suggest the Old Testament story of the boy David's slaying of the Philistine Goliath, Anderson achieves both forceful drama and biting irony. Old Jesse's grotesque perversion of the words of the scriptures is defeated in a manner suggested in the Old Testament" (23). Taylor here also uses a definition of the "grotesque" similar to my own. Even a sensitive reader like Joseph Dewey, who tries both to move "Godliness" back into discussions of *Winesburg* and to note the religious elements of the story, neglects to mention the biblical narratives at work in the text. He does allude to Jesse as an "Old Testament prophet [sic]" (254; both bad biblical scholarship and poor reading of the text, as Jesse never claims to be a prophet), and he further makes a passing reference to the biblical David (258), but he does not explore these points in any detail, instead focusing on "Godliness" as a critique of American Puritanism.

5. Dr. Reefy's office, where the forty-one year old Elizabeth Willard finally first finds love and nearly as quickly loses it, also lies amidst confusion. The office sits above the Paris Dry Goods store. at the top of a dimly lit stair, where "[t]o the left was a dark hallway filled with rubbish. Old chairs, carpenter's horses, step ladders and empty boxes lay in the darkness waiting for shins to be barked. The pile of rubbish belonged to the Paris Dry Goods Company. When a counter or a row of shelves in the store became useless, clerks carried it up the stairway and threw it on the pile" (204). Even the alleyway that Elizabeth Willard regularly sees from her window is strewn with garbage, "barrels filled with torn paper and broken bottles above which flew a black swarm of flies." Elizabeth sees in this alley, amidst this wreckage, a "rehearsal of her own life, terrible in its vividness": a "contest" between the town baker Abner Groff and a grey cat. Through the bakery's alley entrance, the cat repeatedly sneaks into Groff's bakery, and the man just as often chases it out, hurling at it "sticks, bits of broken glass, and even some of the tools of his trade" (23-24). But later in the book, Tom Foster will tell of his love for Helen White in a similar alley (202).

Similarly, Ebenezer Cowley's shop is "indescribable," according to Anderson's narrator, selling both "everything and nothing." Facing away from Main Street, away from the narrative "center" of town, Cowley and Son's sells (or more often, is unable to sell) coal, honey combs, "coat hangers, suspender buttons, cans of roof paint, bottles of rheumatism cure, and a substitute for coffee that companioned the honey in its patent willingness to serve" (174-175). The store may have something for anyone, but as Elmer Cowley laments, the family sells very little because they and their store seem "queer" to the residents of *Winesburg* (177). And then, following the narrative references to both ran-

dom mess and honey found in Ebenezer Cowley's store, Jesse's wooden house was in reality not one house but a cluster of houses joined together in a rather haphazard manner. Inside, the place was full of surprises. One went up steps from the living room into the dining room and there were always steps to be ascended or descended in passing from one room to another. At meal times the place was like a beehive. At one moment all was quiet, then doors began to open, feet clattered on stairs, a murmur of soft voices arose and people appeared from a dozen obscure corners. (45)

6. Clare Colquitt, in "Motherlove in Two Narratives of Community: *Winesburg, Ohio* and *The Country of the Pointed Firs*," suggests that "Bentley's maniacal obsession with his own 'godliness' is predicated on his crippling conviction that he himself incarnates The Word" (81). Colquitt here suggests a poststructuralist critique of Jesse's logocentrism, but her reference to the "Word" does point toward Jesse's own "bent" (as his name suggests) interpretations of Scripture.
7. Joseph Dewey, in "No God in the Sky and No God in Myself: 'Godliness' and Anderson's *Winesburg*," rightly notes that "[Jesse's] farm is critical only as a devotion to God. Absurdly he asserts his role as God's chosen. (253). Unfortunately, Dewey connects this only to American Puritanism's "City on a Hill" (254) and does not go back further into the biblical narratives themselves to see how Jesse reads himself into a much more prominent place in the "divine scheme."
8. Kierkegaard makes similar remarks about the Danish press and people. In *The Present Age*, he blasts the "reflective" nature of late nineteenth century Europe. Playing on the term's positive connotations, Kierkegaard turns "reflection" into an all-embracing excuse not to act, but first to think, and to think at excessive length—and then to think only as "society" supposedly thinks. In other words, the individual becomes a "reflection" of the mass consciousness (48). He continues, "In order that everything should be reduced to the same level, it is first of all necessary to procure a phantom, its spirit, a monstrous abstraction, an all-embracing something which is nothing, a mirage—and that phantom is *the public*. It is only in an age which is without passion, yet reflective, that such a phantom can develop itself with the help of the Press which itself becomes an abstraction. But just as sedentary professional people are the first to take up any fantastic illusion which comes their way, so a passionless, sedentary, reflective age, in which only the Press exhibits a vague sort of life, fosters this phantom" (59-60). The criticism of industrialism, professionalization, and the mass market press are strikingly similar in both Kierkegaard and Anderson.
9. David Anderson, like many critics, follows the story's narrator too closely here. Anderson suggests that Jesse's problem lies in his "doubt" in God, arising from his commitment to "the new false god of materialism, a god that depends for its success upon the continued isolation of human beings" (45-46). This reading does not take into account the already fanatical and obsessive nature of Jesse's faith even before his material success. Dewey is much more perceptive, indicting both Jesse's religion and his materialism (257-258), noting that "to deal with Jesse Bentley [and his confusion] solely in terms of acquisition is to deal only with surfaces."
10. The passage from Jeremiah alluded to here states, "Therefore—God says this—I am now putting this city into the power of the Chaldeans, into the power of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will capture it. . . . For the sons of Israel and Judah have done nothing but displease me from their youth. . . . They have built the high places of Baal in the Valley of Ben-hinnom, there to make their sons and daughters pass through the fire in honour of Molech—something I never ordered, for it never entered my thoughts that they would do such an abomination."
11. Thomas Yingling, in "*Winesburg, Ohio* and the End of Collective Experience," makes the same point about the characters in *Winesburg, Ohio*, although he is critical of the book for this very reason (100, 114).

12. Sally Adair Rigsbee, in "The Feminine in *Winesburg, Ohio*," notes, however, that even in these successful meetings between individuals, at best there seems only to be the opportunity for communication (241). Especially in the cases of male-female encounters, the potential for transcendence of society—and societal gender roles—remains ambiguous at best. She sees in Anderson's idealization of traditionally "feminine" attributes in the successful meetings—"vulnerability, tenderness, and the need for intimacy"—a prophetic call (clarified in "Tandy") that *Winesburg* itself does not meet, but only anticipates (243).
13. Irving Howe perceptively notes, "*Winesburg* is a book largely set in twilight and darkness, its backgrounds heavily shaded with gloomy blacks and marshy grays—as is proper for a world of withered men. . ."(98).
14. In emphasis of this point (and in contrast to some of his earlier views in the same book), David Anderson states that the human isolation in *Winesburg* "is not merely a product of modern materialism. Isolation originates in a narrowness of human vision and in an inability or, in some cases, an unwillingness to attempt to understand the complexities of human life and experience" (39-40). Howe adds that the characters' very desperation creates their isolation, "the very extremity of their need for love having itself become a barrier to its realization" (101), and Fussell notes that their "anxiety to escape their isolation is in itself excessive and truly symptomatic of their grotesquerie" (43-44).
15. Love of God is not the only love present in the Abraham story, however. Kierkegaard notes that Abraham's faith on Mount Moriah also expresses love for Isaac (an element that adds even further confusion to the biblical narrative). Abraham, according to Kierkegaard, must love Isaac sufficiently to let him go—to not hold onto him despite God's call—for the knight of faith "has comprehended the deep secret that also in loving another person one must be sufficient unto oneself" (55). Abraham's relation to Isaac cannot cloud his relation to God or to himself. And in this self-sufficient love, and enormous faith, Abraham is not simply enabled to give up Isaac to God, but something more happens: "By faith Abraham did not renounce his claim upon Isaac, but by faith he got Isaac" (59). Simply to surrender Isaac to God is the material of tragedy, according to Kierkegaard; to believe in God wholeheartedly, and at the same time to believe that God would not forsake his promise to him (i.e., his son Isaac), is the "double movement of the infinite"—or, faith—which Kierkegaard sees at work in the Abraham story.
16. Thanks are in order for all the people who pushed and prodded me into writing and reworking this essay which originally was part of a much longer treatment of *Winesburg, Ohio*—at UWM: Kate Ranft, Andrew Martin, Barbara Lindquist, and Nancy Gaynor, who all read and commented on versions of this essay; at Trinity College: Cliff and Linda Williams who have taught me the ideas and nuances of Kierkegaardian faith in the classroom, in conversation, and in their everyday lives; and at St. Peter and Paul parish in Milwaukee: Fr. Jack Kern, Fr. Stephen DeLeers, Fr. Bryan Massingale, and Fr. Andre Papineau, who continue to challenge me to put my own "leap of faith" into all the work I do.

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## FIRE IN THE BADLANDS

DAVE DIAMOND

The temperature was over a hundred and I'd been working the Quinn Ranch out near the Firesteel Creek, where it feeds into the James River. Riding the John Deere, chiseling the ground, digging 10 inches deep, furrowing 30 inches wide.

Old man Quinn used to say, "Disc that field soft as a baby's butt, Sonny. I wanna see it shine. You ain't bad. But listen, I want that field soft. You bet. I wanna put diapers on it."

I'd nod, swing onto the tractor, and plow it the way the old man wanted it.

Beans last year. Corn next year.

You have to rotate the crops.

The John Deere and the sun. No cassette players, heaters, air conditioners, or two-way radios like they have today. I'd just climb up and go out there and do the shanking.

You can't turn the dirt too black. You do that and it blows in the wind. You lose soil.

This was back in the 50s when Mark Uhler, The Pilot, had the spraying service and would swoop the fields in his Piper Cub, spew chemicals, wave at me before he'd pull the stick, then wing away and scrape the telephone wires over by the Norwegian Gravel.

The Pilot had flown the Piper into Plankinton the year before the heat wave. He bought a strip of land north of town, built a hanger, and started a crop-dusting service. He was only 27.

You have to know the chemicals. They're different for each crop. Spraying is high-risk. Like farming and ranching. But I thought the air work was a glamorous life compared to my job on the John Deere.

I cut the ground. The Pilot cut the sky.

The town was buzzing about his mysterious arrival, gliding down in the Piper Cub, hitching into Plankinton, buying a Fairlane, building the hanger.

Men who had been in the bars with The Pilot said he knew crops and farming. They said he'd been living down by the Yankton Indian Reservation.

One day at the Prairie Pool Hall, where I played six-card rummy with the old men for a quarter a hand, Oscar Ranhiem said, "The Pilot? Sure. The Uhler kid. He's a cookie, huh? You bet. Sharp as tacks. Found a way to work the fields without gettin' dirty. That's smart. But he drinks too much. He'll hit a telephone pole, get tangled in the wires, smash up in a cornfield. But I'm an old man, Sonny, and what you know with age is that you don't know nothing."

I'd heard that The Pilot had done time at the reform school on the outskirts of town. That was the big thing about Plankinton. We had the state correctional school.

Another rumor had The Pilot born and raised out in the Black Hills, that he'd robbed a whorehouse in Deadwood with some Indians from the Rosebud and did time at the pen in Sioux Falls.

You should try and live in a small town. Gossip, rumors, gawking stares, isolation, loneliness. Nothing to do. Seventeen years of hell for me. A lifetime of suffering for those who stay. There was the additional torture of growing up with the reform school next door and your mother saying things like, "Take a look out there, sonny. See all those boys on the other side of the fence? That's what happens when you're bad."

This lecture spilled from my mother's lips as a constant threat, a warning, a challenge. It's probably what made me bad.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Life's just a crazy way of dying.*

The Pilot told me this the Saturday night we got mixed up with the Perkins girl.

I'd staked out the front of the Prairie Pool Hall, waiting for Arlen Olsen to swing by so we could cruise Main Street in what always became a pathetic attempt to pick up farm girls.

The Pilot pulled up in his blue Fairlane, elbow hanging out the window. He yelled, "You look like you need a bottle of Grain Belt, Sonny!"

I walked across the sidewalk, stepped from the curb, and peered into The Pilot's car. He pulled a brown sack from under the seat,



peeled the top down over a fifth of Gukenheimer, took a slug and said, "Hop in."

We drove to the edge of town. The Pilot handed me the bottle. I had a sip and he said, "I'll show you something, Sonny."

He turned by the schoolhouse and headed up to the highway. We drove west to Fulton and stopped at Ole Nepsted's filling station. "Ole sells to kids. Go on in, Sonny. Buy a six-pack of Grain Belt." I lit a Camel and walked in.

Ole was a mammoth man in Lee Overalls. He opened his cooler and yanked the beer out.

I puffed on my Camel and paid him.

Mark turned east from Fulton and circled the backfields. "Bet you liked that. Just walkin' in and buyin' your own beer. Huh?"

"Felt good."

"I know what you mean."

I wondered why The Pilot was in Plankinton. But we were used to strangers — alcoholic printers, linotype operators, field workers, Mexicans up from Texas for the wheat harvest, drifters off the railroad.

Yet I had to ask. "How come you came to Plankinton? I know it's none of my business, but I was wondering about it."

The Pilot tipped his bottle, gulped a couple shots and said, "I know the rumors." He was high. He had a buzz going. He handed me the bottle. "Have a shot."

The cheap whiskey burned my bglly. My lips tingled.

"Sure," said The Pilot, "'You've heard the stories. Who hasn't? Heard I spent time out there in the reform school, heard I was in the pen for a while. But nobody knows nothin'. Maybe I drifted down from heaven in my Piper Cub. Huh? Maybe I just popped up out of hell."

And this is where The Pilot told me about life the way he saw it. "Everybody needs somethin'. I fly. But you see, life's just a crazy way of dyin' anyway, so what difference does it make? Gimme that bottle back."

I handed him the fifth. He took a drink and glanced at me. Checked me out.

"You wanna pick up the Perkins girl?" he asked.

"She goes to school with me. We'll be seniors, but she's older than me."

"She's eighteen. Puts out, right?"

I'd heard about the Perkins girl, but I'd never been able to sift any truth from the gossip that she was easy and liked a good time. She ignored high-school boys and treated me as if I were the dirt I plowed. Every time I met her in the halls she'd pull a blond curl over her eye as if to emphasize my insignificance.

The Pilot had a drink and said, "Well, you wanna go pick her up?"

The Perkins girl had a unique, square-cut face, thick lips, bright green eyes. She had the looks, you couldn't doubt that, and a way about her that caused trouble.

"Elloween, that's her name," I said.

"Where is she? I haven't seen her around town tonight."

"She goes to Mitchell on Saturday nights. Her uncle takes her over there, she hangs out by Benson's Drug Store, across the street from the Corn Palace. I think she likes to watch the tourists who stop on their way to the Black Hills."

"She make out with the tourists? She sell it to 'em?"

I had never considered that the Perkins girl might be selling herself to the tourists. "I don't know. Maybe she likes to look at the Corn Palace," I said.

"How come she likes that? It's just a big tourist trap decorated with colored maize."

\* \* \* \* \*

The Pilot was on the highway now, hot for Mitchell — the biggest town near us — ten-thousand people and the World's Only Corn Palace. We found the Perkins girl in front of Benson's, licking the top of a double-dip ice-cream cone and staring at the tourists. Mark stopped. "Ask her if she wants to go for a ride, Sonny." I stuck my head out the window. "Hey, Elloween! Need a ride?"

The Perkins girl swirled her tongue over her ice cream and cocked her head. She had on tight jeans and a red sweater. She pushed away from the building, walked over, ducked down, and looked into the car. "What are you doin' with The Pilot, Sonny?"

"Drinking."

"Yeah?"

"I got some Grain Belt. The Pilot's got Gukenheimer."

"You guys want me to get in?"

Mark cocked his chin over his right shoulder and smiled.



"Well, I'm not riding in the back seat," Elloween said. "You're crazy if you think that."

I hopped out, held the door open, and Elloween looked into the car. She scanned Mark, glanced at me, tossed her cone into the gutter and said, "I hate that damn butter brickle but I always order it."

She slid into the front seat and I got in the back.

"This your beer up here, Sonny?"

"Give me one," I said.

"Jeez, I didn't know you drank. I wouldn't have known that by lookin' at you during school."

The Pilot tipped his brown bag. "God, lemme have some of that stuff," Elloween said. She handed me a Grain Belt. The Pilot passed her the Gukenheimer.

Elloween took a drink. "Whew, Jesus! That's strong. I better chase it with some beer." She handed the bottle back to The Pilot and reached over the seat. I laid the opener in her hand.

The Pilot cut south down a side street, then turned on a dirt road. We rode two miles and took a right on the gravel that led to the Jim River bridge.

Elloween grabbed the Gukenheimer. "I'd better have another sip." She had more than a sip. I watched her tilt the bottle and gulp down two shots.

She turned quickly, blond hair swishing, and fixed her green eyes on me. "You drinkin' beer. I can't believe it. Big basketball star and all. I come to school drunk half the time."

Hev confession startled me, and I thought about how she always showed late to classes, banging the door, head high, ignoring everyone as she strutted to the back of the room.

I tried to connect with her eyes to show her I was impressed, but she shifted her gaze to The Pilot. Her hair waved off her shoulders. "Why don't we drive out to the Badlands?" she said.

The Pilot did his chin-on-the-shoulder trick, looked over at her and said, "*The Badlands?*"

"I got an aunt out there owns the Bone Dry Bar and Cafe in Wall, right down the street from Wall Drug. I stayed with her before I come out here east of the river to live with my other aunt. The Bone Dry is always full of tourists stopping to see the Badlands."

The Perkins girl turned toward me again. "My aunt Babe, she named the place the Bone Dry 'cause the Badlands is a desert full of bones. Did you know that, Sonny? The Badlands was an ocean

once?" Then she looked back at The Pilot. "Anyway, my aunt will give us booze and we can have steaks and see the sun rise out there on Fire Point. You should see the way the sun comes up over the Badlands. The way it's all pink and glowing, then catches fire. Makes you feel new. Cleans you off."

The beer and whiskey had caught up with me. I slouched down and watched Elloween's hair blow. "Yeah," I said, "why don't we go to the Badlands? I've heard about that bar in Wall."

Elloween looked over her shoulder. "How would you know about the Bone Dry, Sonny? You ever been there?"

"No, but..."

"Butt is your ass. Bet you don't even know why Wall is named Wall do you?" Before I could say anything, Elloween started up again. "Cause the Badlands is this big wall of rock and sand and clay and mountains and fossils and desolation out in the middle of cattle country just before you get to the Black Hills. Hey, gimme another shot of Guke."

The Perkins girl didn't have rules. No mother or father. She lived with an aunt and uncle. They didn't care. She was a duty, an extra expense. Anyone could tell they didn't want her.

The Pilot sipped from his sack and said, "It's a long way to Wall."

"Not if you speed. We can make Chamberlain in an hour, cross over the Missouri, drive out past Kennebec, Presho, Murdo, hit Kadoka, and we're in the Buffalo Grasslands, just a few miles out of Wall. We can stop in Chamberlain and buy some more liquor. We need some more don't we? I mean if you guys wanna go to the Badlands for the sunrise. Lemme see that beer opener again, Sonny."

The Pilot glanced at me in the rear-view mirror. He was in over the line now and so was I. Elloween popped a Grain Belt.

"Well?" she said. "We goin' to the Badlands or not? We gonna do somethin' exciting or just drive around and drink out here by Ruskin Park? If we're just gonna drive around, take me back to the Corn Palace."

"We could fly," The Pilot said. "But where would we land out there? Too hilly. How would we get into town?"

The Perkins girl pulled a pack of Pall Malls from a red purse and punched the lighter. "I like drivin' and drinkin'." She flared her cigarette, took a pull, formed a small circle in the corner of her mouth, and blew smoke at The Pilot. "Besides, I wouldn't fly anywhere in that cardboard box of yours."

\* \* \* \* \*

The sun faded near Kimball and disappeared behind a bluff on the other side of the Missouri River as we came into Chamberlain.

The Pilot stopped at the Raft Club, a roadhouse near the river bridge. "They serve underage in here," he said.

We went in and The Pilot ordered shots of Gukenheimer.

"Not for me," Elloween said, "I'll have a Black Velvet and Coke."

It was dark when we came out of the bar. I was weaving. The Pilot was drunk. The Perkins girl walked straight to the car and hopped in.

The Pilot drove over the Missouri and into the bluffs out near Reliance. He stopped at the top of a hill and turned to Elloween.

"Fuck or walk," he said.

I heard something in the ditch outside Elloween's window. A badger, raccoon, maybe a coyote. The moon had rolled in full, and I could see cattle grazing.

"Say that again," Elloween said.

"Fuck or walk, you heard me."

Elloween turned to me. "You in on this?"

"No."

The Perkins girl dragged on the Pall Mall. The lighted end glared orange in the front seat. She blew smoke and said, "I'd rather have a skunk piss on me than let you touch me."

The Pilot chuckled.

Elloween flicked the cigarette at him. He jumped around on the seat, trying to find it. She got out of the car and stared in at me.

I got out.

The Pilot said, "You better get back in, Sonny, if you wanna go home."

Elloween reached through the window and grabbed two bottles of beer.

Mark burned rubber, drove up the road, turned around, and came back speeding. He swerved at us. We jumped into the ditch.

"Creep!" Elloween shouted, running back up onto the highway. She shoved a finger at The Pilot's taillights.

I climbed out of the ditch and looked into the sky at stars big as light bulbs.

"Well, that's that," Elloween said. "You got the opener?"

"No, I left it in the car."

She walked down the ditch to a fence, found a post, and knocked the caps off the beers. She handed me one and we started hiking.

"Chamberlain's the other way," I said.

"You wanna go back to Chamberlain go ahead. I'm goin' to the Badlands."

I caught up with her. "How?"

"We'll catch a ride."

We started down the hill on the other side of Reliance. I took a sip of beer and said, "I never thought The Pilot would do somethin' like that."

"Grow up, Sonny. Men just want what's hard to get, and once they get it all they do is talk about it."

Elloween hooked her purse over her shoulder, pulled out a Pall Mall and lit it. "Men like to brag. Fish, ducks, pheasants, girls, sports. You name it. They'll give you a story about it."

I thought the Perkins girls was right about this. I was going to tell her so, but she said, "We'll go to Wall and watch the sunrise."

"The Pilot let me down. I thought he was special," I said.

Elloween sighed. "Listen, my mother, when she was alive, used to say to me, 'Elloween, what you have to realize is that it doesn't take much to make some people feel important.' The Pilot thinks he's important."

"I guess I thought he was too," I said.

"You think that about people, then you find out they're predictable. Like you. I always knew when you were gonna shoot that sweet hook shot of yours, but no one else did. That's why you score so many points. But I knew. I could see it comin'."

Elloween waved her arms at a pickup. It pulled over and backed up. Elloween peered inside and said, "Hi, where you headed?"

"Out to Pine Ridge."

"Can we ride to the Badlands?"

"Sure."

We climbed in. Elloween introduced us and said, "What's your name?"

"Lionell Kills Enemies."

"You live on the reservation, Lionell?"

"I got a house in Pine Ridge."

"You married?"

"What's this? All the questions?"

"Just being friendly, Lionell. You wanna be friendly, don't you?"

Lionell hunkered over the steering wheel. He wore a Levi jacket, a Wrangler shirt, Levi jeans, a black Stetson, and a pair of boots. There was a nasty scar on his right cheek.

Elloreen and I had both noticed the scar when we crawled into the cab. I had a feeling she was going to mention it and she did. "What gives with the scar, Lionell? How did that happen?"

Lionell was quick with the story, as if he had been waiting years to spill the beans. "When I was a kid I slipped in the snow, fell face-first on a jagged chunk of ice. It was like a knife. It ripped my jaw open."

"Jesus, ice huh? Do people ask you about it like I just did?"

"No, most people stare at me, then pretend it's not there."

Elloreen put her hand on Lionell's thigh and said, "That's the way it is out here on the Plains. People stare. I hate it. So, kick this pickup in the butt, Lionell. Let's speed."

Lionell's leg jerked and his boot slammed the gas pedal. I slid down. The wind from the open window blasted my face.

We were close to death, going eighty. The truck rattled. Elloreen lit a cigarette. "Yeah, push it up there, Lionell, hit ninety. We're on Mountain Time now. You get an extra hour in your life you can get more dangerous than danger."

"We need a beer," I said, hoping this would slow things down.

Elloreen kept her left hand on Lionell's thigh and whacked me on the shoulder with her right hand. "That's the first sense you've made tonight. Let's stop up here in Presho, Lionell."

Lionell hit the brake. The pickup jerked. We veered right. The Perkins girl punched Lionell and shouted, "Hey, nice turn! You got what it takes, Lionell."

We leveled out and drove the main street.

"Here," Elloreen said.

"Where?" Lionell asked.

Elloreen pointed at a Hamms sign. "The Land of the Sky Blue Waters. We can get a couple six-packs."

Lionell parked in front of the bar. "There's no way," he said. "I'd be hassled."

The Perkins girl thought it over. She glanced at the pickups lining the street, then glanced at Lionell. "I'll get the beer. Step aside, Sonny."

I got out and Elloreen jumped down. "Watch me," she said.

Lionell and I watched her walk toward the blinking bger sign, watched her hips, the roll of her jeans, the wrinkles in her red sweater.

"Jesus," Lionell said, "How'd you get hooked up with a girl like that? She's nuts."

"I like her though, don't you?"

Lionell smiled. "She's got you on a chase out here in the middle of nowhere. What's on her mind?"

I had no idea what was on Elloreen's mind. "A good time maybe," I said.

Lionell played with the radio until he spaced through the static and found KOMA in Oklahoma City.

"That's a good station," I said.

"Powerful too. I can hear 'em all over the state at night."

Then we sat there, both hard up for something to say, a subject to talk about, both thinking about Elloreen.

"Where you from?"

"Plankinton."

"The reform school. I was always afraid I'd end up there when I was a kid," Lionell said.

"Why didn't you?"

"I got a job with the BIA."

"I feel like I been in that reform school for seventeen years," I said.

"Like being on the reservation maybe."

"You think that, why do you work for the BIA?"

"It's the only legal way to kill your enemies."

The door to the bar swung open. Elloreen came out with a grocery sack full of beer. I slid out of the pick-up and let her in.

"Jesus H. Christ! I had to let that old shit in the liquor store feel me up before he'd give me any beer. I got it for free though. It's nice and cold. I made sure about that, you bet. Let's go, Lionell. I told him I'd meet him out back of the bar."

Lionell geared reverse and we took off. Elloreen opened three beers and passed them around. "Feel that bottle? Cold, huh? You like 'em cold, Lionell?"

"Yah."

"You, Sonny?"

"You bet."

"Well, let's get this pickup on the road. Let's go to the Badlands. Floor it!"

The pickup vibrated. The wind rushed through the window. "This is how to live," Elloween said, "going eighty, pushing it. Push it, Lionell. Pump it!"

We shot past Vivian, Draper, Murdo, Okaton and Belvidere. Elloween said, "Down there, off to the right is the White River. Did you know it comes up from Nebraska?"

Then Kadoka and Cactus Flat. We were on our last beer. Elloween rocked back-and-forth to the beat of a top-40 hit on KOMA. "Yeah, now we're doin' it. Big Foot Hill up ahead. The Badlands off to the left. You can see 'em out there in the moonlight. Those spires — like church steeples. But I wouldn't live out here. I wouldn't live anywhere in Dakota if I get my chance."

"Where would you live?" Lionell said, slurring his words. He was having trouble keeping the pickup under control.

"I'd go farther wewt. Out to a big city somewhere. There's no cities here on the Plains, unless you call Sioux Falls or Rapid City cities. I don't. Do you, Lionell?"

"Sioux Falls is pretty big."

"You don't know nothin', Lionell. Hey, there's another Wall Drug sign. We're almost there, only six more miles. We're gonna drink and have a big steak, then we'll go out to Fire Point and watch the sun rise. Say, why'd the Indians name it Fire Point, Lionell?"

"Cause from Peta Point, when the sun's right, the Badlands look like they're on fire. Peta means fire in Dakota and Lakota."

"See, Sonny, what've I been tellin' you? The sun comes up on Fire Point and the whole place burns. Isn't that right, Lionell?"

"That's the way it looks."

Lionell took a curve over White Water Creek. The pickup leaned. My thigh pressed into the Perkins girl. She reached down and slapped my knee. "Don't go gettin' fresh, Sonny. Lionell, he's tryin' to feel me up."

"Well, you let that guy back in Presho do it."

"We didn't pay for the beer did we? You gotta know how to play things. Gotta know when to make your move, Lionell. You know that, I bet. Isn't always nice, the things you have to do to survive. But I don't worry about it. Why worry about it? God, I need a Black Velvet."

"I was just stretching my legs, Elloween," I said.

"You're drunk, Sonny. Can't you go any faster, Lionell?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well look here! It's little Elloween! Goddam. I can't believe it."

A tired blonde walked out from behind the bar in the Bone Dry. She was short and fat. Elloween ran to her.

Lefty Frizell blared from the juke box.

Lionell and I stood by the door.

The Bone Dry was a quonset hut with a bar along the wall and tables near a small dance floor. The place was packed with tourists.

Elloween waved at Lionell and me. She had her arm around her aunt's shoulder. "Hey, this is Babe. Babe, this is Lionell and Sonny. We come to have a steak and some drinks."

Babe's happiness faded when she saw the Indian. I could feel Lionell's tension. Elloween did too.

"Hey, Lionell gave us a ride out here. He's from the Pine Ridge, Babe. Got a good job with the BIA."

Babe relaxed.

"Gave you a ride?"

"You bet. I hitchhiked out to see you, Babe."

"Aw, ain't that sweet? Shit, you come all the way out here to see me?"

Babe broke away from Elloween's arm and waddled over to Lionell and me. She stuck her hand out. "Well, hey, that's damn fine of you, Lionell. She pumped Lionell's hand, then directed her attention at me, gave me the once-over and said, "I'll bet you go to school with Elloween, huh? This your boyfriend, honey?"

Elloween glanced at me, smiled, and shrugged her shoulders. "Now, we're just friends. Right, Sonny?"

"Right."

"Well, let's get you kids somethin' to drink. You still drink' like a fish, Elloween?"

"It's all that keeps me going. I'll take a Black Velvet and Coke."

Babe laughed. "I guess I should never got you started on that stuff, huh?"

Lionell and I ordered Hamms.

Babe led us to a table in the corner. "Jesus, what a crowd, huh? You remember Saturday night in the summer, Elloween. A mad-house. All the tourists on their way to the Black Hills. The motels are booked up for the night in Rapid City and Deadwood, so we been gettin' a crowd since late afternoon."

"You're still makin' a fortune then, huh?" Elloween said.

"I'm holdin' my own, honey. But you know how it is. We have to make enough in the summer to live through the winter. Saturday night in January I might get two people in here. Tough to raise three daughters by myself. You know that, Elloween. That's why you had to go back east of the river to live with Laverne. I always hated that, when we sent you back to Plankinton. How is my sister?"

"She hates her husband. So do I."

"Oh, well, she'll never be satisfied. They treat you okay?"

"I guess," Elloween said.

"So you come out here to see me?" Babe asked.

Elloween finished her Black Velvet and Coke. "Just for tonight. We're goin' to Fire Point and see the sunrise, then I'm taking a bus to Rapid City. I'm goin' to Las Vegas."

"Las Vegas?" I said.

The Perkins girl ignored me and leaned across the table toward her aunt. "I gotta get out of here, Babe. I'm eighteen now. All I need is a little loan. Enough to buy a ticket on the Jack Rabbit bus to Rapid, then Cheyenne. I can change there, go to Las Vegas and get started."

"Jesus, honey. You can't just take off like that all alone can you? Quit school?"

"I sure can and I'm gonna. Lionell might lend me the money. Right, Lionell?"

Lionell held his Hamms up, tipped it toward Elloween and said, "I might, that's right."

"Well, I suppose you can," Babe said. "But quit school? You're close to graduation."

"I can finish in Nevada."

"What would you do there?"

"Get a room, be a waitress. Maybe I can get a job servin' drinks in a casino. They hire pretty girls. I can finish school, make my move."

"Move?"

"Yeah."

"What's that mean?" Babe asked, then waved for a round.

Elloween leaned back, slid down in her chair and said, "I got plans. I need a couple hundrud dollars. I'll pay you back, Babe. I promise I will. You can charge me interest if you wanna. Will you do it?"

Babe wiped her hands on her apron and shook her head. "Sure, I 'spose."

Elloween jumped up, hugged Babe and yelled, "Okay, then! That's that! You won't be sorry, Babe."

"I don't feel good about it. What will Laverne say? She'll be upset I gave you money to run away."

"I'm not runnin' away. I'm goin' someplace."

Our steaks and drinks came and we ate. Elloween and Babe jabbered about cousins, Wall, the tourists, and leaving South Dakota. Lionell stayed silent during the meal. When he'd finished he got up and said, "I'm goin' to Pine Ridge now."

Elloween stood up. "Don't go, Lionell. Come with me and Sonny out to Fire Point."

"I better not."

"He looks worn out," Babe said.

"I got a wife, kids, a job. I gotta go. I been all the way to Pierre on reservation business."

"Aw, come on, Lionell. Stay with me and Sonny. Go to Fire Point with us."

"I'd better not."

Elloween took Lionell's hand. "Kills Enemies. Good name. That's what I'm doin' Lionell. I'm killing my enemies. How 'bout that?"

"I seen it in your eyes," Lionell said, and started for the door. The Perkins girl grabbed his arm, whipped him around and pressed a big hug into him. Lionell's arms hung at his sides as she embraced him. Then he pushed her away and walked to the door.

"Watch out for ice, Lionell!" Elloween shouted. "Watch your moves!"

She sat down and let go a sigh. "Well, that's that. Say, Babe, can Sonny and me borrow your car so we can drive into the Badlands?"

"Honey, I don't like this business about Las Vegas. You're too young to go off half-cocked like that."

"No I'm not."

"But just leaving like that. It's risky."

"I've been trapped in this family for 18 years. There's your risk. I don't wanna go back to Laverne's, stay out here on the plains. I hate winter."

"Well, we all do, but . . ."

"You aren't listening to me, Babe."

Babe hung her head. "I guess I don't know much. Sure, you can use my car, and I'll lend you money for the bus. I know what you mean about the family."

A snake-like anxiety uncoiled from Elloween. A smile cut across her teeth. "Okay, then. Let's go, Sonny. We'll be back after sunup, Babe. The bus leaves at seven-ten for Rapid City. I can change there for Cheyenne and Las Vegas. God, I'm excited. I gotta pee."

Elloween got up and walked to the bathroom. I slid out of my chair. "I gotta go too," I said.

Babe looked up at me, a sad puppy-dog expression on her face. "Hey, what happened back there in Plankinton? Did Laverne start drinkin' bad? Did Elwood start up with Elloween again? You live there. You know. Elwood hurt Elloween? Laverne back on the vodka?"

"I don't know a thing, Babe. I swear."

This was the truth. Elwood and Laverne were strangers to me. I knew Laverne stayed home all day, and Elwood worked as a troubleshooter for the REA.

I cut for the toilet, waded through the piss on the floor inside, took a leak, and when I came out Elloween was waiting in the hallway. She nailed me against the wall and kissed me. "That's for that sweet hook shot," she whispered, then left me standing there wishing I could die with that kiss on my lips.

"Men piss on the floor!" I hollered.

\* \* \* \* \*

I followed the Perkins girl outside to the back of the Bone Dry. We took Babe's '49 Packard and drove Highway 240 south into the Badlands — the jagged buttes, the spires, the empty sockets, the remains from thirty-million years ago, the Oligocene Epoch, the dead rivers and streams, fossil skulls weathering out of rock, hills stair-stepping upward, each layer of clay and rock a different color.

We passed a bull bison, then a herd of mule deer gnawing on yucca blossoms.

"All this rock, sand, look at the buffalo, the birds. It's beautiful," Elloween said.

The sun cast a rainbow glow. A black-tailed prairie dog jumped out of a slit in the sand and sat up, little arms hanging. My head hurt. I was drunk-sober.

Elloween drove with one hand on the wheel and sipped Hamms with the other. The windows were open. She was speeding.

We took a curve around a hill and drove into the Sage Creek wilderness. A lone bison gazed at us from a dry creek-bed.

The Perkins girl tipped her beer and sucked down what was left and winked at me as she windmilled the bottle out the window. "Right up here," she said, "that's where we're headed."

We jerked to a stop on a cliff overlooking a gorge. "You're supposed to sit here and view Fire Point, but I know another place."

She jumped out and ducked under a fence. "Follow me," she said.

We worked our way down the face of the butte to a ledge above the Sheep Mountain area, a view of colored steeples, another wasted river, some volunteer pines, thousands of yucca plants, a herd of antelope — a canyon of eternal loneliness.

We sat down and Elloween said, "One slip and we're goners. That makes it more exciting. Up here on the edge of the Earth, on this ball, spinning through space . . . Jesus! Look down there. You can see all the way to Nebraska, west to the Black Hills, like big chunks of coal out there, but they're green with pine trees. Why is that? Why do they look black but they're green? Beyond the Hills you can see Wyoming. Look the other way, back to the Missouri River. See the breaks? The land belching? And the sun, like a big gold coin rollin' off the horizon? Like some of that gold they mine from the Homestead in the Hills. Soon everything will turn pink, then the fire starts. It's just the reflection off the fire on the sun, but it will look like flames out there in the canyon."

"It's beautiful," I said.

"Beautiful? Jesus, it's holy."

The way she said it, glancing at me, squeezing my hand, and that smile of hers cutting across her teeth as if The Pilot's "fuck or walk" trick had never happened.

"Life's just a crazy way of dying," I said. "The Pilot told me that."

"Don't ruin this," Elloween whispered. Then loudly: "See down there? How it's turning orange? Look at the way the sun hits those spires. You gotta know there's something out there, way out in the universe. That's your Pilot, Sonny. Out there beyond creation . . . flying away from us."

The buttes shimmered, as if the flames were shooting off the tips. But the Badlands basin was dark as a cemetery. Dead but deathless.

"The sun will shine down now, eat into the desert, and clean it," Elloween said.

She cracked open two Hamms, grabbed my hand again, and leaned against me. I slid my arm around her waist.

"Sonny?"

"Yeah?"

"You should work on that hook shot. You can't just slide into the key like that and think you're gonna score. You should practice the rest of summer. Practice, practice, practice. Patent that sweet hook. If I can see it coming, someone else will too. That will hold you back. Make a new move and get yourself a scholarship over to Black Hills State."

Elloween's confession, her Badlands lecture, her faith in me, gave me a new purpose. I'd practice the hook shot, just like she said I should.

Then, "Sonny, I want you to do it to me here."

"What?"

"On this ledge. Make love to me."

Maybe there was a God, a Pilot up there. I'd never believed that and hadn't since the day our Lutheran minister preached a sermon about how death was the key to life, ending with a warning that we should all drive carefully so we wouldn't have an accident and get killed.

But up on Fire Point, the sun pouring into the Badlands, the shadows of the junipers, the glowing spires, I realized I was part of the creation below us, part of the energy flowing through Elloween.

She pushed me down. "Stay there, like that," she said, then got up and took her jeans off.

The sun shadowed her. I tossed my beer bottle and waited for it to crack on the rocks below, but I didn't hear anything.

Elloween stood over me. She tilted her head, stared into the sun and screamed, "*Look at me! Who am I?*"

She sat down on me, still silhouetted by the sun, her blond hair shining, body a bowstring snapping at me. The Badlands were ablaze. My mind was in shreds. Elloween shouted, "The fire in the Badlands, Sonny! Do you see it?"

"Yes."

"This is crucial, Sonny. Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, I have to hear it."

"I love you! I love you, Elloween!" I hollered, my voice hollow at first, then finding sound, picking up speed and heat as it boomed off the rocks. "*I love you Elloween!*"

I wondered how different this morning might have been had there been clouds, but the sun was dazzling, and Elloween and I became flames in the fire.

"The fire in the Badlands. Do you feel it?" she whispered.

"Yes, God, I feel it!"

"This is God, Sonny!" she shouted.

*Look at me. Who am I?*

\*\*\*\*\*

We were driving back to Wall when Elloween said, "Did you see all those plants and flowers out there? The butte candles, the pricklypears, the points on the yuccas? That's to keep away anything that would harm them. People like to hurt things. They like to hurt each other the most. You gotta have a defense. You should know that, the big basketball star."

Elloween was talking about our hometown and the painful gossip. "Gotta have a good defense, damn right," I said. "Zone 'em out." It was lame, but I didn't know what else to say.

We parked in front of the Bone Dry and walked across the street to Wall Drug. Elloween bought a bus ticket and disappeared into the girl's room. She came out radiant, as if the fire in the Badlands had purified her.

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A blue and white coach turned off the highway, hit a pothole, and rumbled up the street.

Elloween waved.

The bus stopped. The doors cranked open. The driver lumbered down the steps. He took Elloween's ticket and walked into Wall Drug.

She turned to me and said, "Well, I guess that's that."

"You don't have to go."

"Oh, Sonny. I have to. I need to create something in my life. I'm tired of small towns, people judging me all the time. I don't wanna die here without going anywhere, without doing anything. I'd be like all that dead stuff in the Badlands."

The driver walked out of Wall Drug and climbed into the bus. Elloween gave me a quick hug and followed him.

She sat down in the back, pressed close to the window, and tapped her fingers on it. The bus chugged down Main, cut a U-turn, and came back up the street. I jumped off the curb and ran alongside. Elloween shook her head as if to say, "You don't know nothin', Sonny."

"Thanks, Elloween!" I shouted. "Thanks!"

She tossed an imaginary hook shot and smiled. I waved and yelled, "What's your move?"

Elloween started to say something, but the bus turned west on the blacktop and rolled toward the Black Hillw. A truck came along going the other way and left me in a swirl of hot air, staring at the back of the Jack Rabbit as it became a speck on the prairie, a bug in the sunlight.

Black Hills State University

## THE SPIRIT OF PLACE; THE PLACE OF SPIRIT

DAVID L. NEWQUIST

As people travel through South Dakota, they invariably comment on the absence of features on the landscape. Writer-humorist Bill Holm suggests the plains are just like huge mountains laid on their sides, but people are not terribly struck by unbroken horizontal perspectives ("Horizontal Grandeur"). The plains landscape, once impressive as a vast sea of grass, is littered with remnants of failed towns and marginal agri-businesses. To the persistent traveler who wishes to penetrate the bleak surfaces of the state and find evidence of life forms, the names of places are the telling artifacts of lives which have been lived there. In parts of the state, one can pass through a series of towns which weem like an absurdist parody of Anglophile sentiments: Groton, Bath, Aberdeen, and Ipswich. In other parts, the verbal signs of mean lives, often suppressed but accessible to the alert traveler, designate places such as Nigger Creek and Squaw Humper Creek. And at other localities, such as Firesteel Creek, the verbal aesthetics raise the curious imagination. *Firesteel* is a translation from the Lakota which designates a creek whose running waters laid bare layers of flint for a source of the spark-producing quartz with which to start fires. It is a name in which the stories of a people and their earth converge.

While the empirical mind notes the squalor of failed enterprises and Indian policy, the literary mind is beckoned by the placenames into a landscape of different possibilities. One can travel to the town of Waubay and the lake of that name and see the Lakota word's original meaning as the place where "water fowl build their nests." One can stop at neighboring Blue Dog Lake and ponder the Indian leader for whom it was named, Sun-ka-ta-kitan, the dog that paints itself blue. And one can stroll over a land bridge from there to Enemy Swim Lake and consider the incident of its name, a skirmish in which Lakota warriors encountered some of their traditional enemies at lakeside and forced them to swim for their lives across the lake.



All these names refer to specific places, supplying, first of all, verbal designators to geographical features. They also signify incidents, or people, or circumstances which occurred at those places. The names at once designate a reference in space and an apprehension of that place in time. They signify that a tale exists somewhere which contributes to the continuous story of life on the planet. The name captures a presence which, as Thoreau expressed it, is the point at which infinite past and infinite future meet. The literary imagination has the ability to carry these presences from different times in the mind.

Few placenames provide evidence of the continuing story of people and the earth as does Wounded Knee. Mention Wounded Knee to a knowledgeable person and one is likely to be queried if one means Wounded Knee I or Wounded Knee II, the former referring to the massacre in 1890 in which more than 200 Lakota people were killed, or the occupation in 1973 by the American Indian Movement in which two participants lost their lives. If one replies that the name reference is to a place, not an event, one usually receives a tacit "oh," indicating that the place is not as familiar as the incidents which took place there. Stephen Vincent Benet with the last line of his poem "American Names," "Bury my heart at Wounded Knee," put the name in the language of America, but, as is true of him and his work, the story and the significance have been overlain by the sediments of literary fashions. The stories of America which Benet brought to popular attention fifty and more years ago have receded into obscurity. However, Wounded Knee sticks out as a verbal outcropping, and the genuinely curious ask how the place, which designates for many the extinction of a life form, received its original name. The Lakota name is Cankpe Opi Wakpala, which is roughly translated as Wounded Knee Creek. Folk stories indicate that the creek was given this designation when a Lakota warrior was injured in the knee during a fight with a band of Crows. When the full apprehension of Wounded Knee as a place is made, it is not merely a burial site where human aspirations ended in a tragedy and a moral demise; it is a place which contains a struggle of life which reaches back into undefined history and forward into undetermined future. It is a place where the complexities of an infinite story converge in ways that a finite but apprehensive mind can perceive.

Wounded Knee is a literary landmark, also. While many works of literature memorialize and interpret the place of Wounded Knee in

many human stories, the story of Wounded Knee is too immense to be contained by a single literary work. Its geological and geographical histories run in conjunction with the many human histories, so it is not containable within known genres of written literature. As a place, it recreates in the mind of witnesses its own perspective.

Until last summer (1994), I had not visited the Wounded Knee site for about 25 years, since before the occupation of 1973. I have often passed near it, but found practical excuses for avoiding what is for me a confrontation with the stories it holds. Too many of those stories are of intellectual and moral failure, of human incoherence. As I approached the place, I was a bit disoriented. A small Catholic chapel and a crossroads store had once stood there, but both were gone. They had formed my coordinates of memory, and without them it took some time to recreate in my mind the map of the significant events. The church was burned down shortly after the 1973 occupation, but the foundation hole remained. However, without those structures, which figured prominently in the 1973 conflict, my mind surveyed more clearly the places where the massacre of 1890 took place. Near where the church stood is a mass grave for the 200-some Lakota killed in that incident. As I strolled about, however, my eye led me to a large concrete vault which bears the name of Buddy Lamont, a Lakota Viet Nam veteran killed by a sniper's bullet during the occupation of 1973. He was one of two men killed at the site that year. The other was Frank Clearwater who was struck in the head by a stray bullet that crashed through the wall of the church as he lay resting there in a sleeping bag. As I stood over the basement hole, I found I was trying to reconstruct in my mind where Clearwater was lying and where the rifle bullet must have come from. Although Clearwater said he was of Cherokee descent, his tribal affiliation was unclear and a dispute arose over whether it was appropriate for him to be buried at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation. His story is one which adds to the complexity of the story of Wounded Knee. It is a story in which the larger issues of race and culture are inseparable from matters of personality and character. The story of Frank Clearwater ends with his body driven around reservation country in a caravan looking for a place to bury him. He was finally laid to rest on the neighboring Rosebud Reservation. The stories of Wounded Knee embrace the magnanimous and the perfidious; the courageous and the vicious. It is a place; not an icon of some lofty aspect of the human spirit.

The reason that Frank Clearwater's story was suggested to me by that chapel basement hole was because my reason for being there was as part of a literary tour of significant American Indian places. During the tour, the numerous encounters with government and corporate bureaucracies had brought matters of human absurdities and incoherencies to mind. The thought of hauling a body around the countryside as part of a dispute about where it should be buried was the narrative correlative to many experiences we had during that tour. While the Wounded Knee story contains many accounts of the degradation of the human spirit, it also contains inspiring accounts. Few of them are told.

The major incident which makes the name Wounded Knee significant involves the Ghost Dance movement which led up to the murder of Sitting Bull. When the U.S. Government moved to suppress the Ghost Dance religion because it promised a revival of Indian culture and the repossession of Indian lands, it implemented a program to suppress and factionalize the Indians. A factional dispute is what set up the circumstances in which Sitting Bull was killed by Indian police, circumstances comprised of misperceived motives and misaimed fire arms. The killing, however, caused the band of aging leader Big Foot to flee from Standing Rock, where they had come to explore an alliance with Sitting Bull. Their flight led them to Wounded Knee and the slaughter of most of the band by a nervous and racially malevolent U.S. Army regiment. Although, only two American Indian people were killed in the occupation 83 years later, the meanness and raging incompetence which characterizes both incidents is the same.

What strikes a visitor to Wounded Knee is that it is a place where, in the words of William Least Heat Moon, "time and men and deeds connected" (5). As one looks down the hillside to the framework of a powwow arena and walks around the graveyard, one is aware that a formidable story has been written on this landscape. Writer Larry Woiwode explains it this way: "How can the Spirit, not only of Place, but of individual distinctiveness that place partly defines, ever be atoned for once lost?" (58-59) He suggests that landscape and spirit dwell in the particular, not the general, story, and the need to preserve the particular dimension of human experience is an imperative, if the human spirit is to be served. "Words are a witness to our thought and work," he says (63).

In a book which examines place as dimension of literary purview, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*, Kent C. Ryden states, "To experience a geographical place, it seems, is to want to communicate about it" (19). The idea of place, space, and cognitive mapping of human experience with its geographical referents is the thematic examination conducted by the book. In his foreword, Wayne Franklin distinguishes how the American Indians have given special meaning to the landscape:

Over the millennia of their solitary possession, Native Americans had evolved extraordinarily subtle place-maps, linguistic, visual, and cognitive, for which the invading Europeans and the slaves they brought had no counterpart . . . It is the stories people tell, in any case, which are the real placenames. (xi-xii)

Franklin says Ryden's book "offers new understandings of the very old human activity of place-making, and new understandings, too, of how we internalize them, remember them after we are gone" (xii). Woiwode sees this internalization as essential to a literature of place: "I know that a writer can write with authority only about those landscapes that have become entirely internal" (64). This embrasure of landscape by the human mind is the dimension of spirituality for Woiwode: "I believe that American writing stands at the threshold of being able to speak of the habitations of spirituality, or the lack of them, within the human heart as in no other period in history" (65). New dialogues on place are premised on a spiritual aspect of literature in which time is transcended and people who have occupied the earth at different times can communicate outside of time, through space. Revised definitions of spirituality remove it from the occult, the New Age modishness, and revive some metaphysical explorations by reaching into the landscape for the shapes and words which apprehend it. This literature of the landscape necessarily includes American Indian literature as the essential fundament from which the human story extends in the New World.

Places have the capability of transcending time. This idea underlies the American Indian saying that only the earth endures. To the mind which is fully indoctrinated into the concept of time as evolution, measured by terms of modish fashion which mark ages, the endurance of the earth seems a fallacious notion. Our geologic history tells us the earth is mutational and erodible; astro-physics tells us the endurance of the planet earth is not infinite. As the energy in

the solar system dissipates, the earth may be returned to some quintessence of matter by an implosion which undoes what the Big Bang did. But an idea of geologic permanence is not what the American Indian saying means by *endurance*.

The endurance of the earth in the American Indian concept is intricately and essentially involved in the use of language and in the aesthetic dimensions of language. As Emerson says in terming language fossil poetry, both the earth and the language accumulate the story of existence. Language draws its primary power from the names and the human experiences they name on the earth. Human experience is written in language which is rooted in the earth. Writer Kathleen Norris, in her book *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*, points out that the very term *geography* is derived from the Greek words for *earth* and *writing*. What endures of the earth is the human account of it which accrues in the collective mind. The endurance of the earth is a literary, not merely a geologic proposition. Humankind's most vital connection to the earth is through language.

The endurance of the earth in word is, furthermore, an assertion of spirituality. It is, however, a spirituality which has visible coordinates for its linguistic mappings. It is a spirituality which can be witnessed. The American Indians and the American transcendentalists do not define spirituality as metaphysical, but as transductive. The intricate interrelationships of all things in the universe suggest to them a force which drives evolution and the physical and biological processes, but that force converts to intellectual energies as conceptualizations. Einstein's idea of energy and matter as forms of the same being is parallel. All natural things contain the presence of mind and are present in the mind. Ralph Waldo Emerson proposed this idea in his work *Nature*. For him, language is not merely a symbology, a word is not merely a syllabic notation assigned to a thing. Language is the medium which transduces mind into matter and matter into mind. Emerson states, "What we know is a point to what we do not know." He finds a spiritual power in language as it blends experience with "the present action of the mind."

Poststructuralist literary theory brings a confounding aspect to American Indian literature and literature of the landscape. Much of the confusing discussion centers on the denial of cultural contexts as keys to literary meaning and intention. However, poststructural discussion represents a diversity of approach and thought which cannot be generalized under a single label. The idea that each reader

writes or imposes his or her own text on a literary text recalls B. F. Skinner's theory that averse human behaviors were accounted for by a language which contained too many pre-scientific terms and, therefore, a new epistemology is required in which language and belief systems are grounded in scientific experimentation. However, the antifoundationalist camp in poststructuralist thought denies that any system of beliefs can be grounded totally upon objective realities. An important perspective on structuralism is that it was largely anthropological and sociological in its focus, and consequently most poststructuralist discussion concerns itself not with how and why literary texts are made, but what happens to them once they are sprung on readers.

Scholar-critic Jane Tompkins found herself beset by problems raised by poststructuralist inquiry when she started to do extensive background readings in Puritan-American Indian relationships while preparing for a course on Colonial American literature. As she read through critical studies, she found that the perspectives from which scholars approached the issue changed decade by decade. She tried to give carefully sympathetic readings, but found that a perspectivist reading of both secondary and primary accounts obscured the facts or the possibility of even finding any facts: "The problem is that if all accounts of events are determined through and through by the observer's frame of reference, then one will never know, in any given case, what really happened" (148). She found that in fixing on indeterminacies in language, the academic debate changes from "the question of what happened in a particular instance to the question of how knowledge is arrived at" (161). This shunting of focus is addressed by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Charles Olson as particular problems in the writing and reading of literature.

Emerson saw this shift as caused by derivative mentalities. He says in *Nature*, "Hundreds of writers may be found in every long-civilized nation who for a short time believe and make others believe that they see and utter truths, who do not clothe one thought in its natural garment, but who feed unconsciously on the language created by the primary writers of the country, those, namely, who hold primarily on nature." To him when language becomes detached from its natural sources, it goes awry.

Charles Olson, also, stresses humankind's relationships and perceptions of nature as the groundwork for literature: "...the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his rela-

tion to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence" ("Projective Verse" 25). But both he and Emerson express Tompkins's concern about losing sight of the particular facts in getting involved with secondary language and the generalities it leads one to make. Olson says, "A thing, any thing, impinges on us by a more important fact, its self-existence, without reference to any other thing, in short, the very character of it which calls our attention to it, which wants us to know more about it, its particularity" ("Human Universe" 56). Emerson sees nature as insisting upon a fix on the particular: "Therefore is Space and therefore time, that man may know that things are not huddled and lumped, but sundered and individual, the wise man shows his wisdom in separations, in gradations, and his scale of creatures and of merits is as wide as nature."

Tompkins concludes that her reading of texts about American Indian relations makes evident problems, but the literary work she does is not directed at solving those problems. Her work is taken up with sorting through the mass of texts which in their contradictions seem to disqualify each others' facts, but in the end she concluded that facts were presented, but they required a level of discernment and a mental capacity to embrace numerous particular viewpoints. Emerson and Olson are more confident of the literature of the landscape and make it their point of discernment.

Our literary discourse has talked so much about how Euro-culture has changed the American landscape that we ignore how the landscape has transformed the New World mind. Certainly, if they are to remain viable, we require better readings of our planet and our literature. To visit Wounded Knee is to be referred to particular stories which could take a lifetime to collect and read, but to experience that fact is to participate in the larger narrative about the place. Literature does refer to facts; it does provide a cognitive and aesthetic means for perceiving those facts; and it does illuminate the landscape. More importantly it does allow us to communicate.

No American writer has presented the landscape as the communicative basis for the human spirit as well as Willa Cather. Her works all define character and personality by its relationship to the land and by whether the individual characters have created a habitation for their spirits. In *Song of the Lark*, Thea Kronborg has a moment which captures a transcendence of time. During a hiatus in Arizona, Thea visits a canyon of pre-historic Indian ruins daily. Here is how Cather renders in the mind of Thea the literature of the landscape:

"...there was a continuity of life that reached back into the old time... It brought her centuries nearer to these people to find that they saw their houses exactly as she saw them...a voice out of the past, not very loud, that went on saying a few simple things to the solitude eternally...Standing up in her lodge, Thea with her thumb-nail could dislodge flakes of carbon from the rock-roof—the cooking smoke of the Ancient People. They were that near!"

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# THE REGIONAL FORM AS A COMMODIFIED SITE IN HAMLIN GARLAND'S MAIN-TRAVELLED ROADS

JOHN L. SUTTON

In "God's Ravens" (published in the June 1894 issue of *Harper's*), Hamlin Garland's protagonist, Robert Bloom, feels he can escape the pressures of life in Chicago by moving back to the coulees of his native Wisconsin. This escape is not as complete as he thinks. Bloom is unable to assume the simple life he longs for and he relapses into a serious illness. Garland's ending suggests that Bloom's problem comes from his inability to see the rural inhabitants of Wisconsin as people, as a real community. Instead, Bloom's plan to commodify their quaint ways turns them into objects which he can sell to publishers in the East:

In addition to his regular work he occasionally hazarded a story for the juvenile magazines of the East... "I believe a year among those kind, unhurried people [of rural Wisconsin] will give me all the material I'll need for years, I'll write a series of studies somewhat like Jefferies' - or Barrie's - only, of course, I'll be original. I'll just take his plan about telling about the people I meet and their queer ways, so quaint and good (210).<sup>1</sup>

This passage suggests the perceived relationship of the regional writer to his subject. It embodies the common assumption that anybody able to observe a specific locale (or *local materials*) could write regional fiction. As a consequence, regional fiction was viewed as an unmediated response to local customs and the environment of a particular region. However, the "socially specific conditions" (Williams, 4) which writer and reader share (and which Garland was well aware of) make this relationship much more complicated.

Garland's representation of the upper Midwest commodifies his own stories as well as the region, thereby establishing a sub-

<sup>1</sup>All quotes from *Main-Travelled Roads* are from the 1962 Signet Classic edition unless otherwise noted.

ject position for regional writers different from writers of other literary forms. Richard Brodhead claims that regional fiction altered "the demographics of authorship because it enfranchised a new set of social knowledges as a source of literary expertise...American publishers...encouraged the production of this commodity" (118). Publication in magazines alongside the advertising of Eastern manufacturers, for instance, would change how Garland's as well as other writers' regional stories would be read, and what value would be placed on them. This 'commodity connection' seems particularly significant in the rural Midwest where availability of goods was limited. It seems to me that this relationship would both transform and reify regional identity. Michael Lund stresses the importance that regional fiction has for national identity as well. States Lund, "regionalism, in literature, was part of a larger national desire to establish an identity" (110). Regional fiction was sold along with these commodities to expand readership and create a national market for the magazine's advertisers. However, the value placed on a *knowledge* of regions, Garland's expertise of the rural Midwest, for instance, differed depending on the periodical a story appeared in. Lund explains, "Any story's context, the magazine in which it appeared, added to its meaning for an original audience" (103).

Garland suggests (in both memoirs and in his 1922 Preface to *Main-Travelled Roads*, x) that he wrote the majority of stories which make up this collection with magazines like *The Century* and *Atlantic Monthly* in mind. Garland's perception of this genteel Eastern readership certainly plays a role in his thinking about the purpose of his stories; he was writing *literature* for a refined audience. Richard Watson Gilder, editor of *The Century*, explained this to Garland, "We value correct pictures of life—of even pretty common life... People who are trying to bring up their children with refinement, and to keep their own and their children's language pure and clean, very naturally are jealous of the influence of the magazine" (quoted by Arthur John, 155). However, one must recognize that the majority of these stories were originally published alongside his own political commentary as well as other articles and advertisements in the progressive magazine, *The Arena*, and that Arena Publishing brought out the first version of this collection with the subtitle *Mississippi Valley Stories* (1891). By placing these stories in their original cultural context, I hope to show how Garland's stories of rural Midwestern farm fami-

lies rise above both the *grim realism* W. D. Howells credited them with and nostalgia associated with local color by turning the regional form into a site of economic consumption. In other words, I intend to show how the *social knowledge* of regions which Garland and his fellow writers present acquire 'extra-literary' value for both the magazine and the reading public.

I want to begin with the question of how publication of these stories in *The Arena* informs the context of their reading, and thus the meaning they had to readers. Garland was among the magazine's first contributors when it began publication under the editorship of Benjamin O. Flower in 1889. In the first issue, Flower described the magazine's distinctive mission. "*The Arena* will be a field of combat where the great intellectual giants of to-day will defend those principles which appear to them to be founded on truth, justice, and wisdom... *The Arena* occupies a field peculiarly its own, being a great, progressive exponent of modern thought" ("Prospectus of 'The Arena, The New Boston Review,' *The Arena*, December 1889, vol. 1, no.1, i). Flower argues that the literature in its pages "will be fully abreast with the best thought of the day" (Ibid.). He identifies literature written purely for entertainment purposes criminal. Instead, he sees literature as emancipating us from unjust laws and institutions, making the writer "the herald of a better state, the champion of the world's helpless and oppressed millions" ("Editorial Notes: The Highest Function of the Novel," April 1890, vol. 1, no. 5, 630). Frank Mott emphasizes Flower's mission: "it soon became apparent that social reform was the chief interest of the editor" (403).

It is significant that during the first few years of publication *The Arena* featured only two fiction writers on a regular basis (both regionalists), William Allen Dromgoole and Hamlin Garland. Miss Dromgoole's work focused on the Tennessee mountains and a group of African-Americans with a distinct cultural identity known as the Malungeons while Garland concentrated on the Midwest and the plight of the farmer. Unlike Garland's farmers, the Malungeons clearly stand as the *other*. There is an interesting contrast between these regions. The magazine testified to the authenticity of Dromgoole's depictions of the people and region. By privileging its accuracy, a knowledge of the region, over its fictional qualities, it set Dromgoole as one of the "champion[s] of the world's helpless and oppressed millions." Drom-

goole's work on the Malungeons is described as an incentive to keep reading *The Arena*:

The strange race who live in East Tennessee attracted great attention... In order to make these papers strictly correct and authoritative, the brilliant young Tennessee authoress recently set out from Boston for a second visit to the home of the Malungeons. She spent several weeks among the strange and hitherto unknown people, during which time she collected data for the first and only authoritative series of papers ever published treating the Malungeons. These papers will continue in *The Arena* (March 1891, vol. 3, no. 16, xxvii).

Dromgoole's series of papers follow other articles on the new economic opportunities in the South. Richard Brown contends that there are different social functions involved in the consumption of knowledge, leading to "alterations in politics, economy, and technology" (11). The juxtaposition of Dromgoole's stories on the Malungeons with papers on economic opportunities in the South produces the sort of knowledge which might lead to such changes. It certainly establishes the East Tennessee Mountains and the Malungeons as commodities for the writer to represent.

Garland's stories seem to have a different social purpose, reinforcing the magazine's call for social reform. However, in the context of *The Arena*, it would be expected that his stories truthfully describe the conditions in the Midwest, and they often have a documentary feel to them. Furthermore, Garland's "A Spoil of Office: A Story of the Modern West" (serialized in 6 parts beginning in January 1892) ran alongside political commentary, such as Annie Diggs' "The Farmers' Alliance and Some of its Leaders" (April 1892) in which Diggs proposed reform aimed at the Midwest as she extolled the farmers' leaders. Likewise, Nelly Booth Simmons' "Battle Hymn of Labor" (March 1892) appeared with part 4. And the title page of part 5 was juxtaposed with a poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox urging Americans to take control back from their own government; it was entitled "Reform" (May 1892). This was not very subtle. A few years later (1898), Flower "made a special drive for farmers' subscriptions" (Mott, 413).

Garland's association with *The Arena* began with a critique of Ibsen (June 1890), then the overtly political play, "Under the Wheel" (July 1890) before turning to political commentary as well as many of the stories which would make up *Main-Travelled*

*Roads*. Frank Mott argues for their appeal to the magazine and its editor, "Flower, struck by the propaganda strength of these [Garland's] simple and tragic stories of Midwestern farm life, undertook to recruit Garland for service to the reform movements and at the same time to build up his literary reputation" (409). The popularity of regionalism in periodicals during this period needs to be measured against the economic and social benefits which regional stories provided. Such stories broadened the appeal and scope of the magazine. It was not simply a Boston review concerned with improving social conditions in Eastern cities; it extended its political influence over a broad range of issues impacting American life and identity.

Garland's political commentary, "A New Declaration of Rights," (January 1891) was a twenty-eight page manifesto on how to restore the rights of the individual through the single-tax system. This article paves the way for Garland's association of land (specifically the Middle West) with reform; he extols the benefits of a single-tax in a Whitmanesque dream of American expansion, "When the word 'single-tax' is spoken by single-tax men to each other, there is nothing prosaic in its sound. Vast dreams and gleaming vistas open in their minds.. With them single-tax equals Liberty" (January 1891, vol. 3, no. 14, 159). Garland emphasizes how individualism as well as individuals are crushed by the land speculation of the privileged classes. Argues Garland, "It has opposed progress and enslaved labor... It has bred vice and crime in our city streets, and madness and brutality in the backwoods, and on the plain... It is a vast vampire under whose brooding wings our nation is being robbed of its life-blood" (*Ibid.*, 166). By the time "Uncle Ripley's Speculation" (later retitled Uncle Ethan Ripley) was published in *The Arena* in December 1891, readers would have been familiar with the magazine's views on speculation and its consequent connotations.

Garland's "Uncle Ripley's Speculation" followed on the heels of numerous articles and editorials on land speculation, and in an interest in the outcome of American expansion in the West. In the eyes of *The Arena*, this outcome hinged on the fate of the American farmer. Speculation was seen to have its pernicious influence here, turning a man's dream and labor into simple drudgery. This is familiar in Garland's stories. However, Garland's title is provocative in this context because it implicitly carries his argument against land speculation to the advertisements which surround his own stories.

In fact, Garland's story seems to fly in the face of the magazine's advertisers. A significant undercurrent in this story is the acquisition of unneeded commodities by those in the Midwest. Ethan lets the patent medicine agent paint an advertisement on his barn in hopes of obtaining another commodity, a buffalo-skin coat. He is rebuked by Mrs. Ripley for being taken in. However, Ethan responds, "you needn't take on no airs, ol' woman. I've known you to buy things you didn't need time an' time an' agin—tins an' things, an' I guess you wish you had back that ten dollars you paid for that illustrated Bible" (199). After Ethan paints over the advertisement, the issue of unneeded commodities resurfaces. Mrs. Ripley tells her husband, "I don't know as you was so very much to blame. I didn't want that Bible myself—I hold out I did, but I didn't" (206). In this surrender of individual agency to the lure of commodity, Garland sees a betrayal of higher principles (including self-deception) and perhaps more tellingly, ugliness.

Despite the assurances of the smooth-talking stranger, the advertisement is seen to have "disfigured the sweet-smelling pine boards [of the barn]" (198). After not being able to unload the bitters, itself an unneeded commodity, Ethan returns home ashamed of the advertisement: "He couldn't have felt meaner about it if he had allowed a Democratic poster to be pasted there... As he stepped out into the yard next morning that abominable, sickening, scrawling advertisement was the first thing that claimed his glance—it blotted out the beauty of the morning" (202). Likewise, the advertisement has an adverse affect on Mrs. Ripley: "She hadn't been in such a temper since her visit to New York" (203). She declares, "Lovely, ain't it! An' I've got to see it all day long. I can't look out the winder, but that thing's right in my face... I'm just about crazy with it... I've got the nightmare now, seein' it" (203). Ethan increasingly seems to see the advertisement as an effacement of something better: "Whereas before he had taken delight in having his neighbors turn and look at the building, now he kept out away in the back of the field" (203).

The attack on advertising and the commodities it promotes warns against the lure of novelties. However, Garland recognizes the "sickening sameness" (175) of life on the plains which prompts Mrs. Markham in "A Day's Pleasure" to seek satisfaction in the distraction of a visit to town. This 'sickening sameness' or feeling of imprisonment is apparent in many of the stories in *Main-Travelled Roads*. Garland connects this feeling to his 1887 visit to his parents' farm in



South Dakota, "My daro mood was deepened into bitterness by my father's farm, where I found my mother imprisoned in a small cabin on the enormous sunburned, treeless plain" (Preface to *Main-Travelled Roads*, ix). Garland clearly blames the privileged class for economic forces which rob the region of 'its life-blood' and imprison hard-working people with dreams.

"The Return of a Private" appeared in December 1890 shortly after "Under the Wheel" in an issue which also featured articles on Christianity, the 'Race Problem,' tenement housing, and an article in which E. Benjamin Andrews advocated patriotism to avert a "perilous decentralization in feeling" ("Patriotism and the Public Schools," December 1890, vol. 3, no. 13, 74). Garland's Midwestern stories also play against sectional strife, and in this way fit into the format of the magazine. The return of Private Smith ("The Return of a Private") to the coulees of Wisconsin coincides with a recognition that "His [our] war with the South was over" (139). Instead, Smith's war is with economic forces which prevent him from being a "free man again" (138) even after being discharged from the army. Garland concludes the story, "his daily running fight, with nature, and against the injustice of his fellow men was begun again... He is a gray-haired man of sixty now, and on the brown hair of his wife the white is also showing. They are fighting a hopeless battle, and must fight till God gives them furlough" (140). This melodramatic protest, in the context of the magazine, seems a protest against all economic and social injustice, as much a statement against racism as against the deplorable conditions of Boston tenements.

The context of Garland's stories in *The Arena* makes his stories more than literature. They are also apt cultural descriptions of the Midwest, descriptions which mark the relationship of the region to centers of power (the East). Local materials do not translate directly into regional fiction. The demand for this kind of writing in 19th century periodicals turns local materials into commodities, new sets of social knowledges about a region for writers and readers alike. In receiving pictures of themselves along with other commodities, readers would gain a sense of their place (in both senses of the word) and their identity as Midwesterners and Americans.

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## THE ROLES OF CHICAGO IN THE CAREERS OF ELLEN VAN VOLKENBURG AND MAURICE BROWNE

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Generally, when I think of turn-of-the century Chicago, I think of something vibrant and potential—probably Sandburg's brawling working-class Chicago, vital and somehow beneficial for artists, and I think about artistic community. But for Maurice Browne and Ellen Van Volkenburg, Chicago was ultimately disappointing. Each of these artists had a different relationship to the city. To them, Chicago was not strictly a symbol of liberation, but a real place in which they needed to make their living and their life. In the case of Browne, a place to try his luck; in the case of Van Volkenburg, because her connections were longer and deeper and therefore more variously textured, a place to make a transition from the Genteel Tradition and to escape into a fuller creativity.

In 1893, the Chicago World's Fair was an international event heralding in Modernism. There was a Woman's Building at the fair and promises of a new era for female accomplishment and recognition. The enrollment of women at the University of Chicago had outstripped that of men. There was a backlash as well, for many feared that within a few years the University of Chicago would become a women's school. Marion Talbot, Dean of Women during that time, notes that the president's report had to defend women against charges that they showed little inclination to pursue their studies in graduate school and that women who pursue higher studies were not so persistent as men and their scholarship was not of so high a grade (Rosalind Rosenberg, 17).

Floyd Dell, in 1913, may have written a text entitled *Women as World Builders* and he may have expressed confidence that Chicago was a place to nurture world-class female creators, but writers such as Susan Glaspell created characters where the city most often

appeared as a sign of danger, as a place where one risks giving up too much for too little, as a brutal center that offers less fellowship than false seduction.

Like Glaspell's characters, Maurice Browne and, even more so, Ellen Van Volkenburg are split at the root of their attitude toward the city. Neither is modern in Gertrude Stein's terms: Stein in her 1935 *Lectures in America* distinguishes American writings from nineteenth century English literature in largely western and frontier terms. Stein sees English poetry representing the "island life" rather than one moving and vast. Browne and Van Volkenburg may appreciate placelessness, chaos, but honor community, history and generations. Home, for them, is simply, ultimately, not Chicago. They do not fully, consciously at least, make the choice.

In *Too Late to Lament*, Maurice Browne's 1956 autobiography, he discusses his relationship to the city. But even before he came to America, his relationship to a Midwestern poet, Arthur Davison Ficke of Davenport, Iowa, a man he met in Bombay, India, a fellow "genius," unappreciated and unsupported, with whom he had a long lasting friendship ending only because of Ficke's death, probably made him feel that in the Midwest, near Chicago, poets lived and breathed and stretched against all odds. While Ficke may have distanced himself from the Midwest, particularly his home town where he practiced law and scorned the German, upper-middle class, materialistic values that circumscribed his life, Chicago functioned as an escape into art for him, and therefore Browne must have been attracted to that city even before he met Ellen Van Volkenburg, the woman who was to bring him there.

Chicago marked the beginning of Browne's central success. There, he no longer felt the misfit. In his autobiography he dedicates one hundred out of four hundred pages to that seven year period of his life. In the Chicago section Browne begins writing consistently in first rather than third person. He acknowledges his account is a "tale" rather than a "record" but behind the romance he hopes to demonstrate his conception of place and time. He writes that he loves the Chicago parks with their free tennis courts, their free golf-courses, their free pools and trees and grass and flowers and wilderness and fresh air (115). He found the city mentally disturbing and exciting. It was the "metropolis" of an "inland empire"; its god was the dollar and "municipal corruption" its "handiwork" (127). The extremes of luxury and squalor, the smell of blood, the stickiness of

hot pitch, each season seemed extravagant to him, windy, stormy a climate of "material and moral filth" where mental life fought for existence like a sapling in a jungle (127) and Browne rose to the occasion.

The Art Institute and Orchestra Hall were not enough and he and Van Volkenburg added the tea room as a place where art and life could blossom. Browne believed Chicago was central to his formation. And he respected the city. While Chicago mocked the dreamers, and those he knew were mostly dead when Browne was writing his autobiography, he stressed that many of their dreams came true. The Chicago River which stank like the Liffy, now, he wrote in the 1950s, has vistas of loveliness he compared to Venice; and Lake Michigan which he remembered lapping the Illinois Central's unsightly shores, has been filled in over many square miles with driveways, trees, lawns, and parks. He concludes his section concerning Chicago with a statement that his Chicago was "bohemia" and those living in his type of bohemia seldom know where they live for they are too busy making beautiful things. Browne wrote: "That country is often invaded but never conquered; an invisible land washed by an intangible ocean has no frontiers. He concluded, romantically, that he lived in that transcendent place, in his placeless Chicago, for six years (131). He made a type of abstract peace with the city.

But Van Volkenburg, freed of Chicago's Genteel Tradition, was not so comfortable either living in Chicago or transcending it. By the time she leaves Chicago to live in Seattle, she seems happy to be done with its harsh weather and emotional disappointments. As a Chicago visitor in 1919, two years after she and Browne leave the city, she writes to him that she found Chicago people good to look at after the queer characters in Salt Lake City; but she found Chicago wicked and rootless. She was thankful that they were now Westerners. In another letter dated in the same month of February she continued explaining her dissatisfaction with the city. She believed Browne would agree with her that human-made institutions like Chicago were "infinitely dreadful." In sum, she only found Michigan Avenue interesting and only the lake naturally beautiful. She believed the city to be even more terrible than she remembered while living there. She was happy to see her parents, but glad not to be living in Chicago any longer.

A writer like Sherwood Anderson might say he lived in Chicago for five years around 1913-1918 when in reality, he only lived there for eighteen months in 1913 and 1914 (William Sutton, 43-207), but

Ellen Van Volkenburg found the city inhibiting, inhuman, unnatural. It seems the more a place like Chicago is home the less likely one is to mythologize it.

Ellen Van Volkenburg of Battle Creek, Michigan, was raised in Chicago, and Maurice Browne of Reading, England, came there in 1910. With the help of Lolita Armour, a meat packing industry philanthropist, they began the Chicago Little Theatre in 1912. Another well-wisher, Mrs. Chauncy Blair, was one of her closest friends, and Mary Aldis, who had her own little theater in Lake Forest, was another supporter. She had made these wealthy friends while giving theatrical performances at social affairs for Chicago's upper class, and her connections helped her begin her theater venture. Van Volkenburg's father was a travelling salesman for the meat packer, and by the time she met Maurice Browne theirs was a prosperous family with a Northside Chicago apartment and good connections (Bernard Dukore). With the help of the Chicago elite, they hoped to make the Little Theatre an institution the magnitude of the Art Institute or the Symphony. Beauty, dramatic illusion, simplicity, unity of effect, were their goals for the theater. And they wanted community. With the services of Ellen Van Volkenburg's mother, Juliet Cooper, known as Mummy Van, who sold tickets and ran the tea room, their theater was able to provide not only plays, but lively discussions, particularly on Sunday nights. Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman lectured at the theater and Clarence Darrow, Mrs. Havelock Ellis, Lincoln Steffens, Burton Rasco, Laurence Langner, W. B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Rupert Brooke, Theodore Dreiser, Vachel Lindsay, Granville-Barker, Eugene Debs, Eunice Tietjens, and Arthur Ficke also lectured, performed, or informally made the Little Theatre a vital Chicago center, something that their contemporary, Susan Glaspell experienced substantially only in Greenwich Village. The primary reason for art was to share the great spiritual strength which passed through them (Donald Tingley, Dale Kramer, Bernard Dukore) and Ellen Van Volkenburg and Maurice Browne spent a great portion of their lives attempting to create communities to foster their art. For a time they made something workable in Chicago.

Their theater lasted five years and managed to produce forty-four plays. They left the city after the theater became bankrupt. But during those five years they made a name for themselves in Chicago and Chicago gained in prestige because of them. Donald Tingley and Bernard Dukore agree that this theater, while it did not give rise to a

major American playwright, needs to be credited with introducing to the American stage plays by Euripides, Chekhov, Strindberg, and Yeats and for its radical concepts and styles of production, particularly scenery and lighting. They produced *Trojan Women* translated by Gilbert Murray which toured the West traveling to such places as Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, and California under the sponsorship of the Women's Peace Party. One reviewer from San Francisco praised this play as having the most potent argument against war that the art of man has ever produced. During its years of existence, the Little Theatre also produced W.B. Yeats's *Womankind* and *On Baile's Strand*. During the summer of 1914, Ellen Van Volkenburg and Maurice Browne, with a \$2000 gift from another Chicago sponsor, Mrs. Seymour Edgerton, went to Europe to study the making of puppets and marionettes. They returned to put on such productions as a marionette version of *Jack and The Bean Stalk* (1913), *The Deluded Dragon* (1913), *Harlequinn and Pierrot* (1913), and *A Midsummers Night's Dream* (1916). By 1915-16, puppetry had almost usurped drama in the Little Theatre (Charles Lock). The plays had grown increasingly anti-realistic, and rhythm, dance, and ritual had become paramount in Little Theatre productions.

But during those early years, Chicago was for them what we think of as Chicago (Van Wyck Brooks). Is there one strong image of that city that unites even these two artistic partners? I think the answer is no. Chicago for The Van Volkenburg-Brownes was a complex place, as exasperating as liberating. They came to it from vastly different backgrounds and brought to it different dreams and frustrations. For Van Volkenburg, it was a place first to work as a "one-woman entertainer," and later to act, direct, and make a puppet theater. From a very early age she had an extraordinary gift of being able to memorize both the presentation style of actors and their words. She recollects "playing show" at Fort Wayne. When she saw "Zaza" at fourteen she could repeat the show at twenty. At first her talents were reserved for drawing room performances. At the University of Michigan where she graduated in 1904, she became involved in college theatrical productions. Chicago, for her, was a place to behave well within the parameters of the Genteel Tradition but be as artistically productive as she was able.

After she met Browne her drama career flourished. Van Volkenburg was an impressive talent. She let Browne appear to lead the way, but she was there, acting, negotiating, creating. He had been a poet

in England and had considered being a scholar: Browne had been commissioned to write a final chapter of Henry Morley's *First Sketch of English Literature*, but failed to produce it. His father, a parson, and his mother, a teacher at a girls' school in Eastbourne, England, had obviously influenced his interest in art's spiritual significance, but it was Van Volkenburg's interest in theater that reinforced his own and underlined the direction which would make him famous.

What he brought to Chicago was a belief in the spiritual significance of art and an international perspective. Chicago was a place for him to start afresh and make his mark. It was Browne, the European, for whom Chicago was the most liberating. He used Ellen Van Volkenburg's talent and connections to help foster a theater movement that was already in the air. Laura Dainty Pelham had already founded the Hull House Players in 1906; Mary Aldis had started a little theater at her Lake Forest home several years earlier. William Moody, from the University of Chicago, served as a mentor and supported the project. What Susan Glaspell failed to find at the University of Chicago, Browne succeeded in finding. A few months before their theater opened, Winthrop Ames had begun one in New York. At the end of 1913 there were few little theaters in the country. Five years later there were 30 within a fifty mile radius of Times Square and more than 300 beyond it. By 1920 there were thousands (*Jaurice Browne*).

Theater—melodramatic theater—and pageants were important to the generation before theirs. Sherwood Anderson's father had theatrical experience as did Eugene O'Neill's parents. The type of theater Van Volkenburg and Browne attempted was new, more simple, influenced by Gordon Craig, using screens for scenery, and stylized and rhythmic motion, but melodramatic little theaters were a significant part of late nineteenth century America, so while the styles of little theaters had changed, their existence, particularly in small towns, had not.

Although a financial failure, they made an international impression. In 1930, Shaw, in introducing Maurice Browne stressed the importance of Browne's Chicago years: "Ladies & gentleman, you all know the name of Maurice Browne. You all know that he is running six West End theaters simultaneously and ... Well, I'm here to tell you that none of these things matter a tuppenny damn. The work this man sitting behind me did twenty years ago on a fourth-floor-back in Chicago—that is what matters." Aside from the maddening

fact that Shaw had made Van Volkenburg invisible, he stressed that for Browne, Chicago had served as a creative center, and in no other locale, West or East, or Europe, had he created so much that would have lasting significance.

After the first year of the Little Theatre's existence, about half the actors quit because they did not have the say in productions they wanted. Van Volkenburg, not Browne, was the one to whom they directed their complaints: he had not listed their individual parts to stress the community of actors and actresses and this they accepted, but they had not had the right as members of the community to make decisions as to how these dramas should be presented. The actors and actresses wanted their theater to function democratically as they had been promised. The theater survived this chaos and the depression which must have ensued after half the theaters members quit, but the theater could not function without the continued support of the Chicago elite and it was not forthcoming in amounts that would save it. Their affiliation with the Peace Party did not help; nor did their serious interest in puppets.

When the Little Theatre failed financially, Browne and Van Volkenburg were not lured to the East Coast; they did not follow in the footsteps of Sherwood Anderson and Susan Glaspell and go to New York, but rather they chose to accept a position in Seattle, Washington, to teach at the Nellie C. Cornish school of fine arts. They chose to live in a place where the terrain was less cultivated, to make their opportunities in a less defined physical and intellectual space. They taught their style of drama and direction and puppetry. Later they would go to New York and London to act, direct, produce, and write their plays; Ellen Van Volkenburg has many drafts of plays that she wrote and tried to publish in the 1940s and 1950s, after her mother's death; "Ameriga Vespucci" is signed Emily Hoyt, her pseudonym, and it is about American puritan values keeping a woman, the daughter of a famous explorer, from becoming an American. Woman thwarted is a recurrent theme in her other plays as well. "The Gorgon's Head" exists in four annotated typescripts and it is about Perseus having to kill the Medusa to save his mother's life. Browne also tried his hand at plays, "The King of the Jews," "The Mother of Gregory," "Wings Over Europe." They both wrote, taught, directed and produced plays all of the remainder of their lives, but neither one returned to do major work in Chicago, the place that made them famous.

Chicago affected the careers of Van Volkenburg and Browne profoundly but not identically. Van Volkenburg gained courage and experience and Browne direction. This Midwestern city was to be remembered by both, if not as haven, heaven then as a place that irretrievably marked their lives, a place where neither was able to remain.

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For further information on Van Volkenburg's and Browne's Chicago days one may also look at the Chicago Historical Society's holdings and at the Cloyd Head and Alice Gerstenberg collection at the Newberry Library in Chicago. Gerstenberg's lengthy, unpublished autobiography *Come Back With Me* can be found at the Newberry. In it she discusses her perspective of the Chicago Little Theatre and focuses on Ellen Van Volkenburg's contribution to that effort. Diana Haskell, the curator, is very helpful.

Most books where one finds information on Van Volkenburg focus on Browne. Among these are Shelden Cheney's *The New Movement in the Theatre* (New York: Mitchell, Kennerly), 1914; Oliver Martin Saylor's *Our American Theatre* (New York: Brentano's), 1923; Maurice Browne's *Too Late to Lament* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1956; and Dale Kramer's *Chicago Renaissance* (New York: Appleton-Century), 1966. A book with a different angle on Van Volkenburg's contribution is *Miss Aunt Nellie. The Autobiography of Nellie C. Cornish* edited by Ellen Van Volkenburg Browne and Edward Norhoff Beck (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 1964.

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## MAID OR WRITER? THE RHETORIC OF CONFORMITY AND REBELLION IN *MISS LULU BETT*

LYNN RHOADES

In an article entitled "Shall Woman, Wife Choose One of Alternatives to Housework?" published in the *Milwaukee Telegram* on January 13, 1924, Zona Gale quotes from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics*: "'A man could build a career, enter politics, develop relationships outside the home. But a woman could only marry and have children'" (qtd. in Lynch 9). Gale highlights this predicament by posing two questions faced by the middle-class women: "'Shall I marry and be a cook, maid, laundress, sumptress combined?' Or 'Shall I marry, and also be a painter, or a lawyer, or a writer, or a businesswoman or a member of any one of the 119 gainful occupations in which women are now engaged?'" (qtd. in Lynch 9). Gale chafes at the stringencies of social mores and undermines traditional ideals of marriage that are implicitly endorsed by the conventional resolution of fairy tales in the happily-ever-after marriage through a satirical look at oppressive domesticity in her novel *Miss Lulu Bett* (192). In this novel Gale dramatizes the struggle of her eponymous heroine as she strives to reconcile the rival claims of domesticity and independence. A close look at how this struggle is depicted and resolved reveals Gale's deployment of a rhetoric of conformity and rebellion to render her protagonist's plight with a blend of hopefulness and realism, a rhetoric that revises the fairy-tale resolution by presenting two versions of it, both of which involve marriage, but in each case a markedly different kind of marriage.

### I.

The rhetoric of conformity is manifest when Gale depicts the behavior of the women in the Deacon household as shallow, superficial, whimsical or unpredictable. The women characters in *Miss Lulu*

*Bett* consist of our eponymous heroine, her mother Mrs. Bett, her married sister, Ina Deacon, Ina's young daughter Monona, and her husband Dwight's adolescent daughter from a previous marriage, Di. The narrator is quick to point out the selfiwhness and hypocrisy of Lulu's sister Ina and her mother Mrs. Bett in their treatment of Lulu. For example, Ina's request—"Could you leave me another bottle of milk this morning?"—would, the narrator writes, "wring a milkman's heart" (17). Yet, Ina's sarcastic words to her sister—"I should think you might be useful"—could as effectively break Lulu's heart (21). Gale thus shows that Ina has two tones, one for males and one for her sister. The former drips with solicitous sweetness, the latter with sarcasm. Yet another example occurs when Mrs. Bett first hears of her daughter's marriage to Ninian: the mother's first concern is not for securing the happiness of her daughter, but for finding someone to assume Lulu's domestic chores. The narrator adds, "In Mrs. Bett's eyes tears gathered, but they were not for Lulu" (53). This feeble, insensitive woman thus exploits her daughter much as the rest of the family does and is "inclined to hold up her sister's excellencies to Lulu" when feeling cross (30).

Furthermore, Gale shows the family interaction to be theatrical. She characterizes the mother and the niece as attention-craving. By having niece Monona lead the rest of the family to think that she is refusing to eat, by having her continue to cry because she "enjoyed the sound of her crying" (44), Gale exposes the shallow behavior of the niece and her attention-getting efforts. Similarly, Gale shows the mother's effort to center attention on herself by refusing to eat. Monona and Mrs. Bett regularly throw "tantrims," while Ina squeals like a child one moment and is coquettish the next, adopting the persona she thinks her audience expects. Except for Lulu, whom Gale depicts as silent and introspective, Gale shows the women engaging in a childish game of manipulation, both of Dwight and each other. Although they catch Dwight's attention, his tyranny flourishes largely because of their immaturity and passivity. The women's inability to bond robs them of power, alienates them from each other, and empowers Dwight.

The reader is not clear whether Gale is indicting the female members of the family and therefore reinforcing male stereotypes of women. In her fictional representation of the family, Gale presents women's interactions as guarded and uneasy. Because there is only one male in the Deacon family, albeit one who dominates its female

members, one cannot completely argue that Lulu's gender is her handicap. In that sense, Gale's novel seems to indict the female as well as the male members of the patriarchal family. A rhetoric of rebellion would have suggested that the women in the Deacon household were patriarchal victims in their failure to see how their petty tyrannies over Lulu repeat Dwight's not-so-petty tyrannies over them. If that was indeed Gale's intent, then it was not fully achieved. In fact, the novel suggests that women and men alike were cruel to and exploitative of Lulu.

Under the guise of providing for Lulu, the family drains her of strength, energy and ambition. The Deacons think of Lulu as a financial burden rather than an asset. They think they are doing Lulu a favor by providing food and a roof over her head, conveniently forgetting that, as an unpaid domestic worker, she is an excellent bargain. Ironically, Lulu doesn't appear dissatisfied with her chores—she feels her work helps pay her keep—but her immediate family's devaluation and derogation of her contribution make her unhappy. Like Cinderella, Lulu's degradation at the hands of her own family paints a disturbing picture by emphasizing that women, too, share responsibility for perpetuating this dysfunctional society.

The reader quickly notes that with the exception of Lulu and Di, the adult females, Ina and Mrs. Bett, question neither their subordinate positions in the family nor Dwight's sense of self-importance and authority. They reinforce reductive and simplistic masculine views of female behavior, while also endorsing false and harmful stereotypes of women. *Miss Lulu Bett* could be, in this respect, read as a critique of female behavior that results from unquestioning obedience to male authority.

## II.

If, through the two women who play an important role in Lulu's life and for most of the novel shape her thinking, her mother and her sister, Gale fails to embody a critique of male authority, she does expose the limitations of male authority through the actions of Lulu and Di. In particular, Gale dramatizes these limitations through her satiric portrait of Dwight Deacon. Male authority is assailed in the novel's sustained rhetoric of rebellion that multiplies examples of the dangers of domesticity and exposes the domineering characteristics of the male head of the household. By suggesting that family ties are

oppressive and constitute the major stumbling block to self-satisfaction, the novel also reveals that danger lies within the home rather than outside it. Domesticity, according to Gale, imprisons.

Lulu's brother-in-law, Dwight Deacon, dentist, deacon, head of the household, personifies the family's limiting, self-serving nature; for him the home is little more than a stage on which to indulge his tyranny. In Dwight, Gale embodies the stereotype of the male breadwinner: tactless, insensitive, domineering, self-important and tyrannical. Because she seems to be writing an essentially comic novel, Gale presents Dwight as a ludicrous father in his egotism. While comic, however, he also provokes beyond endurance. The epitome of tactlessness and putty cruelty, he falsely entertains an image of himself as a true wit, the life of the party, "the light of his home, bringer of brightness, lightener of dull hours" (21). He insensitively draws attention to Lulu's excruciating shyness. He is not a particularly dreadful man, but one whose company everyone, except his wife Ina, seeks to avoid. He is seldom missed, and, in fact, his absences become, for Lulu, her mother Mrs. Bett, and his daughter Di, occasions for relief. Dwight thus represents Gale's satiric portrait of the stereotypical head of the household, the epitome of patriarchal power.

Within the paradigm of conformity and rebellion, Gale portrays Dwight's supremacy as a force that exacts conformity and loyalty from his dependents, all of whom happen to be women. The opening scene of the novel establishes Dwight's domineering personality. Our first peek into the shabby genteel tradition of the Deacon home is at the family dinner table. Gale presents Dwight's very first action in the novel as one that typifies his complete control of the household. He nightly adjusts the gas light, and this night is no exception. The action literally controls the home's source of light. A controller of light, Dwight is also a source of that light; in other words, he is the center of attention, the dispenser of light, of power and of the prevailing ideology. Without him, the rest of the characters will remain in a literal as well as a metaphorical darkness. Gale deftly dramatizes the domination and control that Dwight exerts over the women at the dinner table by likening his effect to that of light on a plant. Under the artificial glow of the gas jet, a small tulip plant sits prettily at center table. Gale's specifying that there are five blooms to the plant is an effort at realistic description, but it is also much more. Although two of the women (Mrs. Bett and Di) are not at the dinner table in

this scene, Dwight presides over five females in his household: his wife Ina, his mother-in-law Mrs. Bett, his sister-in-law Lulu, and his daughters Di and Monona. The coincidence between the five blooms and the five females is not fortuitous: As the source of the light, Dwight acts as the sun to the five women: The weakening plant looks, Gale carefully notes, "as anything would look whose sun was a gas jet" (18). The plant suggests not only the unity of the five women, as each of the five blooms is bound to the same container, but also their common fate, their subjection to the same patriarch. Like the tulips, the women wilt under this artificial sun of the domineering male. When Dwight learns that Lulu has bought the tulips with "his" money, he berates her, and instead of defending Lulu, Ina sits silent. In frustration, Lulu throws the plant on the woodpile, eventually returning to tear a blossom away and pin it to her blouse. The bloom, now independent, expends its life apart from its roots, foreshadowing Miss Lulu's departure.

That the women do not resist Dwight's authority is not meant to suggest their agreement with it but rather their unspoken fear of him. Part of Gale's satiric portrait of Dwight lies in her depiction of his adverse effects on the women's behavior. We long for Lulu's escape from this loveless home, or at least hope for her to develop courage. We can only agree when the narrator intrudes, "And if only she would look at her brother [Dwight] Herbert and say something. But she looked in her plate" (21). Whether unwitting or deliberate, Dwight's insensitivity to his sister-in-law, Ina's to her sister, and Mrs. Bett's to her daughter amounts to a sustained and painful mistreatment of Lulu for as long as she stays in the Deacon household.

Dwight's insensitivity also amounts to a coercion of his wife Ina into false behavior. Indeed, if we read the novel as a paradigm of the dynamics of conformity and rebellion, then we could construe the characterization of Ina as Gale's attempt to show that the price of conformity is often compromise of the authentic self. As our narrator points out, for Ina "[b]eing married to Dwight was like a perpetual rehearsal, with Dwight's self-importance for audience" (76). Gale does not make completely clear whether the wife's theatricality is primarily an expression (deliberate or inadvertent) of her disenchantment with marriage, an inability to be herself, or a refusal to indulge the luxury of being herself, and thus a willful denial of selfhood in an effort to keep the marriage going. Perhaps it is a combination of all these motives. It is not uncommon in Midwestern fiction to



encounter female characters forced to assume false roles—forced, in other words, to act parts they haven't written and don't find fully convincing. As Bernice Gallagher suggests, many Midwestern writers of Gale's era had their female characters admit that "they have to be 'actresses' and are forced to deception in an effort to conceal their unhappiness in life or their distaste for the men in their society" (9). One such man is Dwight Deacon.

### III.

As a dependent in the Deacon household, Lulu is doomed to subordinating her aspirations and desires to those of the family. Gale portrays Lulu's nominal home as anything but comforting; this is neither home, sweet home nor simple, small-town life as seen in the reputedly closeknit Midwestern family. By emphasizing Lulu's sense of exclusion and alienation, and the family's exploitation of her services and solicitude—in other words, by underscoring the parallels between Cinderella and Lulu—Gale could be said to press the fairy tale into the service of social criticism. To reinforce her rhetoric of rebellion, Gale notably resorts to two central fairy-tale characters as well as to the conventional fairy-tale resolution. Behind Lulu stands Cinderella and behind Ninian, Prince Charming, a false one, as it turns out. Gale's indebtedness to the traditional fairy tale centers in the analogues she draws between Cinderella and Lulu. Only once does Gale explicitly liken Lulu to Cinderella. Listening from the kitchen, where she has just finished cleaning up after dinner, to the general mirth and conviviality emanating from the parlor, Lulu muses: "'Everybody's got somebody to be nice to them,' . . . sitting by the kitchen window, adult yet Cinderella" (37). The parallels between Lulu and Cinderella, however, are implied throughout. In the confines of the Deacon home our Midwestern Cinderella toils. One of Lulu's heaviest ordeals is the low esteem, if not scorn, in which she is held in the Deacon household. Dwight uses the term "Miss" like a branding iron—Lulu's single status is synonymous with failure. The fact that she is single, that she has never married, elicits cruel jokes from Dwight, undermines her own self-esteem by enforcing her sense of the low regard with which the Deacons view her, and exacerbates her sense of marginality and exclusion. In her multiple yet unacknowledged roles as house cleaner, cook, nursemaid and general caretaker, Lulu proves more than just a competent worker. And yet her family re-

inforces a self-image as helpless and dependent and assigns her the drudgery of household chores. Like Cinderella, she is cook and housemaid, and, true to that role, she stands apart from the family, more servant than sister. Because she is penniless and unmarried, Lulu's domestic servitude fulfills a dual purpose: it echoes the fairy-tale characterization, for like Cinderella, Lulu dwells among the cinders and inherits her sister's worn clothing; more importantly, it parodies the patriarchal ideal of hearth and home. The effect of these analogues is to highlight the harshness of the life that Lulu leads in the Deacon household. The Deacons' unwitting socioeconomic exploitation of Lulu is part of the theme that strengthens the parallels between Cinderella and Gale's eponymous heroine.

Traditionally, Abel notes, passivity and confinement define the heroine's initial role in the fairy tale (23). Lulu at first unresistingly endures her family's abuse, but Gale's allusions to Cinderella foreshadow Lulu's revolt, since the Cinderella fairy tale is one of the few tales "in which the princess *acts*" (Callander 7). In fact, one of Lulu's important acts, once she rejects her passivity, is her intervention to thwart her niece Di's elopement with school chum Bobby Larkin, an elopement that we are given to understand would have proven disastrous to Di because it was shown to be undertaken out of romantic delusion. "Essentially it is through her own efforts," Bruno Bettelheim aptly points out, "and because of the person she is, that Cinderella is able to transcend magnificently her degraded state, despite what appear as insurmountable obstacles" (qtd. in Callander 7).

Indeed, there are many obstacles to Lulu's journey of self-recognition and as Gale begins to describe this journey, Gale seems to be changing fairy tales. Lulu's journey to self-discovery begins not long before Ninian's arrival, as she fantasizes while cleaning the house. Gale does not use the phrase "Prince Charming" in relation to Ninian, nor indeed to any of the men in the novel. Nor does she have Lulu think of Ninian in these terms. It is in the effect of his impending arrival on Lulu's imagination that Ninian begins to assume the emotional impact of a Prince Charming. Anticipating Ninian's arrival prompts Lulu to see herself with new eyes. And this new image of herself amounts to an awakening, one through which she gradually dissociates her new aspiring self, which is "alive" and "natural," from the domesticated, resigned and self-trapped in the daily realities of domestic servitude. Indeed, it is while Lulu is taking care of her chores that Gale allows us to visualize the separation of Lulu from



her servant role: "In the midst of all was Lulu herself reflected in the narrow pier glass; bodiless looking in her blue gingham gown, but somehow alive. Natural" (27). According to Brown, a woman's expression of her selfhood often "depends upon its severance from the world of work, a severance reflected in the individual's difference from her body" (63). The underlying need is to define the "body's difference from its labor, and the self's difference from the laboring body" (65). Disembodied, Lulu's head floats above her servant's frame, a representational transcendence of the corporeal that suggests there is more to Lulu than the gender role that restricts the activities of her body.

In contrast to Lulu's corporeal transcendence, family members seem reduced to the stodginess of solid, lifeless furniture. Ina is a black walnut center table, a leather rocker, a davenport, its chintz pattern seeming "to bear a design of lifted eyebrows and arch, reproachful eyes." Dwight is an upright piano "in a perpetual attitude of rearing back, with paws out, playful, but capable, too, of roaring a ready bass," while Mrs. Bett is the black fireplace, "colorless, fireless, and with a dust of ashes" (27). The parallels between Lulu's family members and furniture underscore the existential inertia of the Deacon household. In sharp contrast to Lulu's transformation, they are depicted as static.

#### IV.

The fairy-tale plot is invariably one involving dramatic transformation, one from scullery maid to princess in the case of *Cinderella*. In *Miss Lulu Bett*, the extent of Zona Gale's appropriation and adaptation of the metamorphic dimension of the fairy-tale plot is measured not only by the static-dynamic antithesis that Gale develops between Lulu and the rest of her family members but also in the antithesis between Lulu's first marriage and her second one. More specifically, the antithesis pits the false Prince Charming of the first marriage against the authentic one of the second. Gale further avails herself of the contrast between the two marriages to suggest a new definition of Prince Charming.

The first male character to play the role of Prince Charming in Lulu's life is Dwight's brother, Ninian Deacon. In her intense anticipation of his arrival, Lulu imagines that she feels his eyes looking at her out of his photograph displayed in the parlor and that he is watch-

ing her as she works. "Every day since his coming had been announced Lulu, dusting the parlor, had seen the photograph looking at her with its eyes somehow new. Or were her own eyes new?" (27). The photograph represents an eligible man that Lulu can gaze upon and fantasize about without fear of retribution. Lulu's fantasy is interrupted by voices and she watches as, outside the window, her young niece Di flirts with schoolchum Bobby Larkin: "It was if she had witnessed the exercise of some secret gift, had seen a cocoon open or an egg hatch." Lulu wonders, "How easy she done it. Got him right over. But *how*, did she do that?" (28). Listening to Di's flirtations with Bobby Larkin, Lulu looks over her shoulder at Ninian's photograph with Úa manner of speculation" (28). The gesture suggests not only Lulu's anticipation of Ninian's arrival but also her emerging view of Ninian as someone who will rescue her from an unfriendly world, someone who will awaken her from the torpor of her routine domestic chores—in other words, a Prince Charming in a fairy-tale fantasy of rescue and romance.

Lulu's romantic adventure, like Cinderella's, begins with a moonlit trip to the garden where Lulu dreams not of the prince's ball but of the brightness of the Chautauqua scene to which Ina and Dwight have gone. Her thoughts turn to Ninian, and she envisions him coming to her while she, alone, awaits his arrival in the garden in her best dress and her coral. Her vision is abruptly broken by the shrill sound of her mother's voice: "'Lulie! You come out of that damp!'" (29). The "colorless, fireless" mother thus pulls her daughter away from her dreams and back into the cloister of the Deacon home (27).

The next afternoon Ninian arrives. He is witty, he is jovial, and he is taken with Lulu. But soon warning signs appear. Ninian, says Ina, is a regular "Gulliver." Gallagher describes such men of the era as the "thoughtless and reckless, allowed to 'gallivant' while women have to plod through life" (22). With the child Monona at his knee, Ninian spins wonder-filled tales. Meanwhile, our narrator tells us, the "precision and speed of his improvisation revealed him . . . This was no fancy spun to pleasure a child. This was like lying, for its own sake" (33). Through Ninian, however, Lulu begins to blossom. Unlike the others who see Lulu only in the context of servitude, dependence and unworthiness, Ninian seems to recognize the value of her domestic contributions to the family and to appreciate her wit.

Ninian draws Lulu, a self-professed homebody, out of the house on a family picnic. Here, under the natural light, her "self" begins to develop. To Lulu's delight, the picnic leads to another social activity—a trip to the city on the train, Lulu's modern-day pumpkin carriage. Lulu dresses for the occasion as if she were a bride in an outfit "she had often thought they would 'use' for her if she died" (47). The "white waist" suggests both a bridal gown and a death robe, since marriage connotes a passage to womanhood and a symbolic death of childhood and adolescence. Lulu's hair, crimped to resemble "hair that had been worn in Lulu's girlhood," suggests her return to adolescence, to youthful hope and desires (48). While the image-conscious Deacons are mortified by Lulu's appearance, her indifference to their opinion indicates an expanding independence.

Following the play, after-dinner conversation turns to marriage, a topic Dwight, like a schoolboy, finds "overwhelmingly humorous" (50). Lulu finds herself married to Ninian through what appear to be a series of comic happenstance but what is actually a result of Ninian's machinations. When Dwight suggests they liven things up or "'They'll begin to read the funeral services over us,'" Ninian proposes "'Why not say the wedding service?'" (50). The mock exchange of marriage vows between Ninian and Lulu takes a serious turn upon the realization that Dwight, as a magistrate, is vested with the power to perform civil marriages, which he does in the restaurant where they happen to be dining. Lulu thus finds herself married to Ninian, but not living happily ever after. She soon discovers that her equation of marriage and happiness is a delusion. Lulu's prince proves unreliable, their marriage, as one-dimensional as Ninian's photograph. The marriage does not last longer than a month, for Gale has Lulu leave Ninian once she discovers he is already married to another. The discovery of Ninian's first and still-binding marriage makes his union with Lulu the opposite of a happily-ever-after marriage. Although the marriage is a sham, however, Lulu experiences an adventurous if short-lived departure from her home life.

As she travels to various cities with Ninian, her active participation in culture—highlighted by attending concerts and buying clothes—fosters worldly experience and spurs emotional growth. When she returns to the Deacon home after learning of Ninian's bigamy, the extent of this growth is measured in her new resolve to participate in family games from which she has previously been excluded. Like other Midwestern protagonists, Lulu must escape

small-town parochialism to seek her real education. Before her trip, Lulu was unwilling to participate in a game of croquet with family and guests. Instead, she would remain in the kitchen. In fairy-tale terms, Lulu's experience in what she considers the big city, Savannah, Georgia, parallels Cinderella's trip to glittering balls. After the trip, in contrast, Lulu is not only willing to join, she invites herself to the games. Lulu's new-found audacity augurs the fairy-tale transformation, one that culminates in the second and, this time real, marriage.

## V.

The reader acquires a deeper appreciation of the honesty of Lulu and Neil's discussion that leads up to the novel's second marriage proposal when compared to the hypocrisies, suppressions, and omissions that led to the first marriage proposal and subsequent false marriage. The events that lead up to the second marriage follow three main occurrences: first, Lulu's rebellion against Dwight as the main representative of patriarchal society; second, her assumption of an active role in her efforts to rescue her niece from the consequences of mistakes she, Lulu, has made; and, third, her refusal of complicity in a familial cover-up of Ninian's bigamist trap. Following Lulu's first marriage and subsequent return to the Deacon home and to servitude, Lulu, again wearing the faded dress and tattered shoes of her servant role, publicly thwarts Di's attempt to ensnare Bobby into marriage. Lulu pursues Di to a nearby town, knowing that the Deacons would be mortified at her appearance. Lulu thus sacrifices public image to the greater good. Listening as Di justifies her actions, Lulu recognizes that "she and Di actually shared some unsuspected sisterhood. It was not that they were both badgered by Dwight. It was more than that. They were two women. And she must make Di know that she understood her" (90). Lulu's intervention shows that she recognizes her own value as an independent person and that valorization of independence prompts her to act for Di's sake even though Di is dubious about the legitimacy of Lulu's actions. In fact, what prevents the marriage is Bobby's inability to secure a license because he and Di are under age. Nonetheless, Lulu's actions display a rejection of passivity. Lulu recognizes herself as an independent person and achieves a sense of identity through their solidarity. She is no longer willing to remain a passive witness to the victimization, as well as

the self-victimization, of women, in this case her niece, by false marital ideas. Lulu's intervention is a measure of her maturation. In Di's pursuit of Bobby, Lulu seems to have recognized her own earlier dependence on an unworthy male partner as a means of escaping the strictures of an oppressive household. By thwarting Di's pursuit, Lulu seems to be ending, once and for all, her own delusions about dependence on a male as a means of escape.

This rejection, which amounts to a new militancy, is exhibited in her refusal to live a lie, which in this case would be the suppression of the hidden reality of Ninian's bigamy. In *Miss Lulu Bett* Gale depicts a world in which the men subject the women to personal and public deception. Gale assails the narrow morality of small-town society whose insistence on the social conventions of respectability—of keeping up appearances at all costs and above all else—forces women to live lies. Lulu now rejects the tyranny of these conventions. To overcome the oppression that stems from repressing the truth, Lulu feels compelled to take a stand against the Deacons' deception. She determines to salvage her reputation by revealing Ninian's bigamy. Shocked that Lulu would jeopardize their good standing in the community, the Deacons convince Lulu that Di would suffer most from the family disgrace. Lulu is forced to agree to the deception but leaves the Deacon home because she refuses complicity in creating, for the community's consumption, the false and deliberately deceitful impression that it is Ninian who rejected her, not she him in protest against his hitherto hidden bigamy.

Ninian thus proves to be a false Prince Charming, unlike Neil, the man who is to shape Lulu's future. Lulu plans to leave Warbleton, finally confident in her abilities. Before leaving, she stops to say good-bye to Neil Cornish. What ensues is a marriage proposal scene whose fairy-tale enchantment lies in the equality between the young couple. This is the climactic scene in the novel. Unlike Ninian or Dwight Deacon, Cornish is no "prince" in the traditional sense. He owns a local music store even though he can't read a note, and while studying law, he admits to a nagging doubt about ever becoming a lawyer. Unlike Ninian, the dashing man-of-the-world who fascinates the Deacons and the community at large with his tales of adventure, Cornish, like Lulu, is exploring his role in society. Gale presents Cornish as a young man with no preconceived notions of male privilege or authority, one who looks on Lulu as an equal partner. Cornish, who sits "among his red and blue plush spreads, his golden oak and ebony

cases," is not the dashing prince of our imaginings; his strength is not mystery, excitement and daring—it is his sympathetic egalitarianism.

In this climactic scene, Lulu's transformation is reflected in her appearance. Wearing a city-bought dress, Lulu is "dressed in a way that will reveal her true identity" as fairy-tale princess, symbolizing her "completed . . . transformation from servant to fully actualized self" (Zipes 30). Cornish notes, "She was grave and in her eyes there was a look of dignity such as he had never seen them wear. Incredible dignity" (106).

Unlike Lulu's experience with others, including her own family, there is honesty and communication between Lulu and Neil. Perhaps most telling is Neil's stammering confession to a previous engagement: "'I-I was engaged to a girl once, but we didn't get along. I guess if you'd be willing to try me, we would get along'" (108). We are here implicitly invited to compare favorably this confession with Ninian's resolute silence about his still-binding first marriage. What might be loosely termed the marriage proposal scene is one in which the proposal is never explicitly made by either of them. The idea of a potential union emerges out of Lulu and Neil's open and sincere discussion of their concerns, anxieties and hopes for their respective futures. The dialogue specifically states how Lulu and Neil envision their respective futures. There is an equality of initiative that reflects mutual respect and implies an equality of commitment. "'I-I don't believe I'm ever going to be able to do a thing with law' Neil says. Later he adds: 'I'm not much good in a business way. . . . Sometimes I think . . . that I may never be able to make any money'" (108). Noticing Lulu's hesitation, Neil asks

'Look here. Do you like me?'

'Oh, yes!'

'Well enough—'

'It's you I was thinking of,' said Lulu. 'I'd be all right' (108).

Gale's artistry lies in her omission of the dialogue's outcome and of her introduction in the ensuing scene of Lulu and Neil as Mr. and Mrs. Neil Cornish. Neil and Lulu stop at the Deacon home to announce their marriage and say goodbye. Realizing that this legitimate marriage will expose the illegitimacy of Lulu's first marriage leaves the Deacons sputtering on the front porch. As Mr. and Mrs. Neil Cornish hurry toward the railway station, Mrs. Bett peers through the curtain. Lulu leaves without so much as a cursory farewell to her mother; nor does her mother make any attempt to congratulate Lulu. Dana Heller

rightly views the daughter's separation from the mother as establishing "further distance from the usual standards of feminine weakness and dependency" (29).

Gale suggests that Lulu's change of attitude amounts to a transformation from scullery maid to princess. To fully satisfy, this transformation had to go beyond the traditional fairy-tale resolution of the happily-ever-after marriage. This transcendence is manifest in the difference between the first and the second marriage. The main characteristic of the first marriage is its conspiratorial nature and fundamental dishonesty. Because Ninian does not reveal that he is married, his proposal, however accidental it may have seemed, is based on a lie. Even though Dwight propitiates the mock-marriage proposal by reminding the prospective couple of his capacity as a magistrate to perform and sanction civil marriages, Ninian does not consider the legal and ethical consequences of a binding marriage proposal; instead, he goes along with it. Gale presents Ninian as a cunning, psychologically astute agent who preys on Lulu's sense of her vulnerability and marginality in the Deacon family. Ninian's strategy is to recognize and sympathize with Lulu's position as "upper servant" in the Deacon household. He sees in Lulu good qualities, humor and wit, that no one, including Lulu, seems to appreciate. Although we might admire Ninian for his attempts to help Lulu realize her value as a person, we are bound to condemn his deceit in pressing for her to accept the bigamist farce of their marriage.

Gale must have felt that ending Lulu's story with her first marriage and a "happily ever after" would probably have severely truncated her novel by reducing it to the unrealistic, sentimentalist, cliché-ridden resolution of the conventional fairy tale. Ending the novel with the first marriage would have constituted a resounding endorsement of the patriarchal ethos embodied in conventional fairy tales. To be sure, ending the novel with a second marriage constitutes neither a radical critique of that fairy-tale ethos nor a rejection of the traditional fairy-tale stereotypes of female passivity and male initiative. Ending the novel with the second marriage does, however, constitute a fundamental revision of fairy-tale ethos and conventions towards a greater initiative on the part of female protagonists and a fuller, more equal participation in the marriage partnership.

## VI.

The crux of *Miss Lulu* consists in the blend of conformity and rebellion that informs her heroine's actions. This blend could be read as Lulu's ambivalence in her efforts to resolve the tension between the demands of selfhood and the dictates of family. On the one hand, Lulu craves personal and emotional fulfillment. On the other, her family and, by extension, smalltown society at large, urge her to submit as a woman to the stereotypical roles of obedient daughter and self-abnegating wife. Lulu Bett's world is one in which patriarchal society forces the woman into the subservient role of a maid. The woman's predicament is that she wants to create a world that would grant her the freedom and the professionalism of a writer. Gale tried to resolve this tension by deploying a complex rhetoric of conformity and rebellion.

It is a rhetoric that Gale seems to have experienced on a personal, autobiographical level, as well. Indeed, the dichotomy between Lulu's views and her family's views on how she should live her life is at the core of Gale's own struggles. The protagonist's ordeals of trying to reconcile the conflicting demands of selfhood and family, obedience and independence, mirror tensions Gale experienced in her own life. As Lynch tells us, Gale knew that gender roles of dutiful daughter, self-abnegating wife and devoted mother privileged patriarchal society at the expense of the women they were pressed upon. Gale was also aware of the powerful influence the family wielded in enforcing these roles. She vacillated between honoring family responsibility and authority and fulfilling her own desire for a professional career as a writer. The conflict between family loyalty and independence haunted her until the death of her parents (11). While supportive of her education, her parents were possessively smothering. They wanted what they felt was best for their daughter—a safe, comfortable life as a virtuous, small-town school teacher surrounded by small-town values, ensconced within, as her mother writes, "a love greater than any one knows[,] only just Papa and me and you too" (Simonson 29). When Gale wanted to strike out on her own following her college graduation, her parents closed their home in Portage, Wisconsin, and followed her to Milwaukee. That solution proved inadequate, however, because New York beckoned seductively in the distance, glittering with a myriad opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

The autobiographical resonances are further echoed by literary and cultural ones. In her treatment of the two marriages, the false one and the real one, Zona Gale has placed herself in a well-recognized tradition of Midwestern women authors. Gallagher writes that many Midwestern women authors did not want to abolish the institution of marriage in their writing but simply wanted to alter it so that women were on a more equal footing with men (22). While baring the reality of hardships women faced, these writers did not advise escape. Writing romances in realistic social settings, yet sticking to idealized love plots, suggests that many of Gale's contemporaries were upholding the belief that "women must function within the context of society in general and of family in particular" (7). Heller suggests that many of Gale's contemporaries were operating under the belief that

The task of the woman protagonist is not drastically to change the world to suit her own needs and aspirations but somehow to resolve two conflicting imperatives: her own desire to become a self-sufficient, self-realized adult and society's demand that she become a woman. . . . [This] resolution entails accepting her social role as wife (25)

Heller goes on to point out that "the desires of the female protagonist are shaped by her need to fit herself into oppressive patriarchal structures" (25). In *Miss Lulu Bett*, Zona Gale shows how her female protagonist strives to reconcile the externally foisted duty "to fit herself into oppressive patriarchal structures" with her other need to emancipate herself from them. The latter need, an equally compelling one springing from the aspirations of the inward life, articulates Lulu's dawning awareness of her right to selfhood and Zona Gale's insistence on claiming that right for women, especially Midwestern women.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Moving to New York did not mean a complete severing of family ties, however. During her time away, her mother's letters record a stream of admonishments, warnings and pleadings to ponder the consequences of her actions and choices (Simonson 29).

Following her hard-won success on the East coast as journalist and prize-winning author, Gale, now an experienced writer with impressive literary contacts and credentials, returned to the small farming village of her childhood to devote herself to writing in the house she bought for her parents in Portage. It was not until she returned to Portage that her writing turned away from sentimentalism to a critique of smalltown society's petty cruelties and psychological and moral oppression (Lynch 10).

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## THE STRUCTURE OF SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

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When the late Irving Howe published his *Sherwood Anderson* in the second short-lived American Men of Letters series in 1951, he placed the misguided *imprimatur* of the Eastern critical establishment upon some of the most enduring misinterpretations and misjudgements in modern criticism, that is, the criticism of his subject, one of the most influential of all American moderns. Those clichés, not original with Howe, were that Anderson's only reasonably significant work was *Winesburg, Ohio*, that his novels were inept, that his other collections, with the exception of a few individual stories, were uneven at best, that, condescendingly, he deserved "a place in our culture, even if only a minor one." They continue to be so pervasive, even among scholars and critics who should know better, that they have limited even as they have directed the course of Anderson criticism since then.

Of course, Howe and his followers have, in the process, made evident a paradox in Anderson scholarship and criticism that endures even yet, a paradox that I delight in pointing out: Anderson's place and achievement are conceded to be minor, and yet, at the same time he continues to receive more scholarly, critical, and even popular attention than many writers whom the current and postwar literary canons hold to be more important. As obvious as is the logical resolution of this paradox, I shall refrain from commenting further on it in order to point out another result of the Howe-Eastern critical assessment of Anderson and his work. Because interest in Anderson and his work remains high among students, teachers, scholars, and a surprisingly broad general readership, five general and two limited-editions of *Winesburg, Ohio* alone are currently in print as well as are most of his other works and new collections of previously unpublished works, including diaries, jour-

nals, and letters, and his work is still widely anthologized. Yet most of the scholarly work on Anderson today focuses on his still-fascinating biography, and criticism continues to focus on *Winesburg, Ohio*, to the neglect of his other works.

The value of both is self-evident—I, for one, believe that we can never know enough about either Anderson or *Winesburg, Ohio*—but unfortunately this dual-minded attention neglects two important and desirable dimensions of the critical assessment of Anderson's work. First is a badly needed continued reassessment of his other works, particularly those novels such as *Many Marriages*, *Beyond Desire*, and *Kit Brandon*, which are not only not as bad as post-Howean critical wisdom continues to insist they are, but they're better than much of the work done by Anderson's contemporaries and followers. Second is the desirability of breaking new ground in Anderson criticism, not only by using as a point of departure new critical techniques provided by feminists, Neo Marxists, and others, as a paper I heard recently suggests, but also by looking at his work in new ways or with new critical insights, both of which can be suggested by what we know of his work as well as what he tells us about his creative intentions in letters, lectures, and essays.

For example, Anderson's intent and his accomplishment in putting together the collection that became *Winesburg, Ohio*, subtitled, although we usually ignore it, "A Group of Tales of Ohio Small Town Life," are clear, whether it was simply a group of tales or something more complex, even, as Anderson claimed, a novel in a form invented by himself, or whether it was influenced in form by his Chicago contemporary and rival, Edgar Lee Masters. *Winesburg, Ohio*, it is clear from Anderson's insistence and literally hundreds of critics who've assessed its structure and its achievement, is perhaps a "Dance of Death," a year in the life of a town, the initiation of George Willard into adulthood, an example of the "Revolt from the Village," or the most important of a genre known as the American short story cycle.

In each of these cases and in dozens more, Anderson's intended unity in the stories is clear, whether it is simply of people and place or more subtly, of tone and feeling, and each of these structural assessments has taught us something about Anderson's intent and his accomplishment, even as they've taught Anderson's successors—Steinbeck, Faulkner, Saroyan, Caldwell, Toomer, O'Connor, and, yes, even Hemingway—about the artistic unity Anderson had

imposed on the apparent diversity of the human lives with which he dealt in *Winesburg, Ohio* and that they, too, might impose on the apparently diverse people of their own literary places.

And yet, although Anderson's unity of purpose and achievement in *Winesburg, Ohio* is clear, as is its importance in the evolution of modern literary form, critics continue to ignore Anderson's use of what he had learned about form and structure as well as tone and mood in writing *Winesburg, Ohio* when he put together his own two later collections of stories—*The Triumph of the Egg* (1921) and *Horses and Men* (1923). Each of the two later collections lacks the obvious unifying elements of time, place, and character, beyond which the artistic elements of the ultimate oneness of *Winesburg, Ohio* may be perceived, but each of the later collections contains not only deliberate structural elements of unification that point out the direction of Anderson's intent, but each also is as unified by tone, mood, direction, and feeling as is the work that made them possible and perhaps inevitable. Each is, like *Winesburg, Ohio*, clearly a short story cycle.

The first of the collections, *The Triumph of the Egg* was completed early in 1921, just before Anderson sailed to Europe with Paul Rosenfeld and Tennessee Mitchell, and it was published late that Fall, after his return. Perhaps because of the trip Anderson made few pre or post-publication comments about it, but his references were always to "the book" or to "Triumph," to the book as a whole rather than to the collection, unlike his earlier references to *Winesburg, Ohio*, which were either as a novel or as a collection of tales, when he didn't insist that it was a new literary form.

Immediately evident are, of course, the points of contrast between *Winesburg, Ohio* and the *Triumph of the Egg*. Character, setting, and structure are the obvious elements that make *Winesburg, Ohio* more than "a Group of tales of Ohio Small Town Life" and give it the unity that lets Anderson call it a novel in a form invented by himself. Significantly, that phrase suggests his willingness, perhaps his need, to experiment with the form in which he presents his stories.

Evidence of a conscious attempt to unite the stories in *The Triumph of the Egg* into something more than a usual collection is a structural device: Anderson frames the collection with two prose poems, "The Dumb Man" at the beginning and "The Man With the Trumpet" at the end. The former is preceded by seven photographs,

each of a head done in clay by Tennessee Mitchell, a sculptress and then Anderson's wife. Each head represents a character in or an impression of one of the stories, and each, clearly, is a visual representation of a grotesque in the *Winesburg, Ohio* manner. The placement of the photos suggests a parading before "The Dumb Man" who narrates the prose poem of the people of the new collection even as the grotesques had paraded past the old writer in his dream in "The Book of the Grotesque" at the beginning of *Winesburg*.

Unlike the old writer, who fills hundreds of pages with his insights into the thoughts become truths become falsehoods that had made the grotesques who paraded through his dream, "The Dumb Man" laments not insight but its lack, the conviction that beyond the appearance of people lies a reality he cannot see, and because he cannot see he cannot speak. "I have a wonderful story to tell but know no way to tell it," he laments.

In "The Dumb Man" Anderson sets the tone and the mood of the collection even as he provides the narrative voice, that of the individual's inability to comprehend the elements of biology and society that defeat his or her understanding. Consequently, the narrator of each of the stories, whether omniscient or participant or adult looking back on the experiences of youth that still pass adult comprehension and inhibit adult communication, echoes the frustration of "The Dumb Man."

The stories that follow, beginning with "I Want to Know Why," one of the best-known and most widely-anthologized of all Anderson's stories, focus, as do the stories of *Winesburg, Ohio*, upon the individual lives of individual people at critical moments in the complexity of lives that his people can neither comprehend nor explain. Just as the narrator in "The Dumb Man" knows intuitively that beyond the appearance of human life there is a truth he can never know, the apparently adolescent narrator who pursues beauty and meaning along rural nineteenth century racetracks, only to find the opposite at the sophisticated Saratoga meet, laments the confusion of values and the inherent contradictions in human life and emotions that adults accept or to which they surrender.

But the boy, not yet corrupted, can only regret what he sees. There is a difference between the beautiful and the tawdry, the boy and the adult narrator behind the Swift-like persona of youth complain in frustration, but like the many other contradictions the boy notes, he can only cry out—and strike out in frustration at his inability to



understand what he perceives intuitively is the origin of the tragic weakness inherent in human life.

Anderson develops this theme, that of human helplessness before the imponderables and the contradictions of human life in the stories that follow. In "Seeds," a more determinedly modern story set in Chicago—and a much better story than has been generally acknowledged—the narrator tells a psychiatrist that love cannot be understood, that "It is given to no man to venture far along the road of lives"; the narrator's friend, an artist, who cannot love, recognizes intuitively what has happened to him; like the people who pass before the old writer in "The Book of the Grotesque" he has been corrupted by truths become falsehoods, the "old thoughts and beliefs—seeds planted by dead men—" have prevented his finding fulfillment as surely as they had Alice Hindman, the Reverend Cyrus Hartman, Wing Biddlebaum, Elizabeth Willard, and the other people of Winesburg.

The frustration inherent in the inability to find meaning behind the apparent contradictions in life continues in the following stories: in "The Other Woman," a "city story," the young man who is at once a poet and a government worker cannot resolve the two loves in his life; in "The Egg," another of Anderson's best known and most widely anthologized stories, set, like *Poor White*, in the town of Bidwell, the adult narrator, remembering the frustration that accompanied his father's attempt to find success, ponders the imponderables that produce grotesques, whether among chickens or humans, a secret that remains behind its impenetrable shell.

The intensity of Anderson's concern with the individual's inability to find and understand truth and fulfillment continues through the other stories: in "Unlighted Lamps" a young girl in a small town becoming a city seeks love and understanding, but neither her father nor a young man can provide it, and, repulsed, misunderstood, and alone she sits in fear in the face of her father's death and the rancous laughter of the young man. "Senility" sketches an old man in a Kentucky town who can cure "coughs, colds, consumption, or bleeding sickness" but not "the sickness in his own heart." In "The Man in the Brown Coat" Anderson portrays a historian who can understand the secrets of ancient civilizations but not those which separate him from his wife, and he sits in his room "as alone as ever any man God made."

In "Brothers" the narrator ponders the curious kinship proclaimed between the murderer in Chicago who had killed his wife over another woman and the gnarled old man in the countryside beyond; in "The Door of the Trap" a professor in a small college withdraws from a potential relationship with a student, knowing that some day she will be imprisoned by life and circumstances, but not through his efforts.

"The New Englander" is the story of Elsie Leander, who moves West with her family to Iowa, where, while her father hopes to find the success and status that had eluded him in Vermont, she knows she will find the freedom and fulfillment promised by the West. But in Iowa nothing changes. Like Alice Hindman in Winesburg, she remains a prisoner until finally she runs off into the rich, tall corn, wanting desperately "to get out of her life and into some new and sweeter life she felt must be hidden away somewhere in the fields." But again, like Alice, she can only creep home through the corn and a sudden storm to the house, "the most desolate place in the world."

Two sketches, "War" and "Motherhood," the former a story told the narrator by an old woman on a train, and the latter an incidental moment in the imponderable cycle, mark the impossible search for the meaning of the unknowable, and Anderson concludes the cycle with a novella, "Out of Nowhere Into Nothing," the story of Rosalind Wescott, a young woman who had escaped the ugliness of her drab home town of Willow Springs, Iowa, only to find the same ugliness. She returns to Willow Springs, where, for a moment, she touched the life of another human being, that of Melville Stoner, who teaches her that beyond the lies of appearance there is truth. As the story ends, she runs off down the road with a new sense of escape. For the moment it seems that she may be able to run forever into a new freedom.

The story ends on a note of subdued optimism that the title of the story denies, as do the stories that precede it. Perhaps Rosalind *can* find something, just as at the end of *Winesburg, Ohio* Anderson suggests that perhaps George Willard can find something in the world beyond Winesburg, and Anderson reiterates that possibility in his concluding prose poem, "The Man With the Trumpet." Unlike "The Dumb Man," this narrator *can* speak; he *can* tell his contemporaries that "life was sweet, that men might live," that temples to their souls might be built. The narrator understands, but do the others? Yet, he



refuses to give up: "At their fleeting harried minds I hurled a stone. I said they might build temples to themselves."

The oneness of tone, mood, feeling, and direction are as evident in *The Triumph of the Egg* as they are in *Winesburg, Ohio*, and, as in *Winesburg*, the traditional unities of time, place, and character are less binding than is Anderson's voice. Also, as in *Winesburg, Ohio*, we see the gradual completion of a life cycle which comes to maturity in the final pages. Just as *Winesburg, Ohio* and George Willard find their maturity in "Sophistication" and "Departure," the *Triumph of the Egg* comes to its fulfillment when Rosalind believes that she can run forever, a faith reiterated when the man with the trumpet finds the words that elude his predecessor. For the moment, as in that moment before the train pulls out of Winesburg station, it appears that all things are ultimately possible. But can George "paint the dreams of his manhood?" Can Rosalind run forever? Can words, like stones, penetrate the "fleeting harried minds" of the others?

Each of the stories and sketches in *The Triumph of the Egg*, like those in *Winesburg, Ohio*, stands remarkably well alone in spite of their unevenness in scope and execution, but even more evident is the fact that each is a part of the whole, that Anderson's voice is sustained throughout as it moves through frustration, bewilderment, psychological torment, and despair to a final, tentative and subdued note of hope.

This surely is the *Winesburg, Ohio* pattern, even as it is the pattern of Anderson's next collection of stories, *Horses and men*, published two years later. In it he proceeds from "Foreword" to tribute to the ancient wisdom of Theodore Dreiser to the stories, each of which appears in a pair with another, set alternately in the small-town Midwest and the city of Chicago. Like *Winesburg, Ohio*'s insistence in its sub-title that it is "A Group of Tales of Ohio Small Town Life" and *The Triumph of the Egg*'s similar insistence that it is "A Book of Impressions From American Life in Tales and Poems" (not so subtly ignoring the sculpted illustrations by Tennessee Mitchell, from whom he was on the verge of separation and divorce), the subtitle "Tales long and short, from our American life," emphasizes not the whole which Anderson strove for in the collection but the parts of which it is made.

Yet the care with which Anderson put the book together is clear; not only are the stories paired, but each of the two explores a similar dimension of the alienation and isolation that subjugate his people

and prevent the fulfillment that they seek; the settings vary from country to city, but the human predicament is one, as the first pair of stories, the Ohio racetrack story, "I'm a Fool," and the Chicago sophisticate story, "The Triumph of a Modern," make clear. In the first, a young man's harmless lies to a young woman forever preclude a relationship between them, and the young man can blame only himself; in the latter, a young clerk who would be an artist uses the stylishly modern term "breasts" in a letter to his dying aunt, knowing that he will feign an intimacy he does not feel and appeal at the same time to her repressed maternal and sexual instincts. It works; she changes her will, and the young man takes pride in his cleverness in gaining an inheritance. Both, it is evident, are losers, for remarkably similar reasons, but the young clerk has yet to learn the price he had paid in his deception.

"Unused" and "A Chicago Hamlet" continue the pairing, and each, like the others, is a story of personal failure as momentary rebellions result in tragedy. In the former a young girl's search for beauty ends in her drowning herself in Sandusky Bay, her bedraggled ostrich feathers and her limp body vividly remembered by the adult who can never forget what he witnessed as a boy; in the latter, the ugliness and barrenness of life in Chicago reflect at once the horror of the small town Ohio life out of which the narrator's friend had come and the dream that he carried with him to Chicago of a beautiful woman, a German farmer's wife striding purposefully through the woods, a woman who, he sees as she nears him, is "broken all to pieces." In both cases the illusion of beauty is no more than an illusion, for the searcher or the one who witnesses the tragedy, real or imagined, that results.

The other pairs—"The Man Who Became A Woman," one of Anderson's best and least appraised stories, and "Milk Bottles," and "The Sad Horn Blowers" and "The Man's Story"—continue the course set in the alternating pattern of the first two pairs. In the earlier pair—in a rural racing stable and an urban advertising office—the young male protagonist learns how early appearance and reality are pervertedly confused in a grotesque parody of beauty; in the latter pair Anderson reiterates the futility of attempts to escape the dehumanizing course of modern life. In "The Sad Horn Blowers" the young man and his older friend find whatever satisfaction they can in the meaningless noise of protest that the young man produces from the old man's trumpet; in "The Man's Story," retold by a narrator who

had heard the story, the narrator once removed escapes conviction for the murder of his lover—a murder he did not commit—through the confession of another, but in his emptiness and despair he might better have been hanged.

Anderson ends the collection with the story that may well be both a coda and a new beginning. As at the end of both *Winesburg, Ohio* and *The Triumph of the Egg*, in "Sophistication" and "Departure" in the former and "Out of Nowhere Into Nothing" and "The Man With the Trumpet" in the latter, Anderson ends with a story that suggests at least the possibility of a new beginning. In "An Ohio Pagan," Tom Edwards, who, in another age might have been a Welsh poet as had an ancestor, instead pursues a living first at the country racetrack, then briefly in the city of Cleveland, and then again back home on a threshing crew in Northern Ohio. But the grim harshness of his life is punctured by a glimpse of a farm woman nursing her child, and the wonder and beauty he senses is reflected in the countryside, the sky, and the smooth waters of Sandusky Bay reflected in the moonlight. Even while he knows better, Tom becomes convinced for the moment that somewhere in the towns and cities of America there were "places for beautifully satisfying adventures for all such fellows as himself."

Like *Winesburg, Ohio*'s "Departure" and *The Triumph of the Egg*'s "Out of Nowhere Into Nothing," "An Ohio Pagan" is both an ending and a beginning, an incident that brings the despair of the opening story full circle and beyond, to a new departure, a new experience that transcends the earlier mood, even while it continues. Anderson's concept of the oneness of disparate human experience, forged in *Winesburg, Ohio*, is as evident in these later collections as in the first. And, as is equally clear, Anderson has much yet to teach us about his work and his perception of human life and our too-long-stagnant understanding of both.

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## ANTI-HEROIC THEME AND STRUCTURE IN MIDWESTERN WORLD WAR I NOVELS FROM CATHER TO HEMINGWAY

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As Hemingway pointed out in his introduction to *Men at War*, "the good and true books" about World War I did not begin to come out until several years after the war (xiii). Among post-World War I Midwestern war novels in the "good and true" category, one would want to include Willa Cather's Pulitzer prize winning *One Of Ours* (1922), Thomas Boyd's autobiographical *Through the Wheat* (1923), James Stevens' satiric *Mattock* (1927), and of course Hemingway's own *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Representative of the Midwestern novels belatedly inspired by World War I, they nevertheless form a literary hierarchy of their own, with Hemingway's masterpiece at the top, followed by the fascinating complexity of Cather's art and the grisly poetic realism of Boyd's, with Stevens' Lardneresque novel about an anti-hero named Mattock bringing up the rear.

Each of these novels provides a different answer to the question of whether heroism is possible in modern warfare as defined in the popular imagination by masses of men fighting along a semi-permanent network of muddy, stinking trenches extending some 400 miles southeasterly from the Belgian coast to the border of Switzerland (Fussell 36-51). Setting this modern warfare off from previous wars was the sheer number of troops mobilized world wide, estimated at 65,000,000, with 9,000,000 soldiers dead, 21,000,000 wounded, and 28,000,000 civilians dead by Armistice Day in 1918 (U.S. War Department Statistics). What made such a vast number of casualties possible were advances in warfare like heavy artillery, automatic rifles, airplanes, poison gas, first used effectively by the Germans in 1915, and tanks, first used by the British in 1916. But the weapon in World War I novels that most commonly came to symbolize the deadly mechanization of modern war was the machine gun, capable

of cutting down soldiers like stalks of wheat. The terrifying consequences of modern weaponry were soon evident in World War I, but hard to imagine or comprehend. Thus in the first large-scale battle of the War, the Battle of the Marne, 500,000 casualties were suffered on each side from September 6 to 10, 1914. In the July, 1916 Battle of the Somme, 60,000 of the 110,000 British attackers were killed or wounded the first day. The list of unbelievably costly battles goes on and on, up to and including the first battle of the American Expeditionary Forces at Château-Thierry in June, 1917, and later at Soissons and St. Mihiel in the summer of 1918, as the great German military regime was about to collapse, unbeknownst to allied soldiers still fighting the enemy (Fussell 8-18).

In order to bring out the representativeness of these four post World War I Midwestern novels, along with some of their key differences, let me briefly review their main characters and related themes. In the process I will devote special attention to the distinctive bipolar structure of Cather's *One of Ours*, which surprisingly, in view of his condescending references to her novel, Hemingway may have emulated in *A Farewell to Arms*.

*One of Ours*, by Nebraskan Willa Cather, is the story of Claude Wheeler, a protagonist inspired by the death in battle of a dear cousin of hers, Lieutenant G. P. Cather, Jr., also from Nebraska. Initially in the novel Claude is seen as a somewhat passive figure, a lump of clay not molded, who allows his keen intellect and restless spirit to be almost extinguished by his fundamentalist Christian upbringing and education, by American materialism, by the drudgery of work on the family farm in Nebraska, and by an unconsummated, failed marriage. Then, exactly halfway through the novel, history intervenes in the form of America's entry into the war, which gives Wheeler a miraculous second chance at life (Hively 82-93). In his conviction that the expeditionary force of which he becomes a part "would make war without rage, with uncompromising generosity and chivalry," he finds a purpose and a nobility in life beyond the miserable existence he had previously known (248). He is thrilled to discover that men "could still die for an idea; and would burn all they had made to keep their dreams" (419). Thus he concludes that the future of the world is safe in spite of the scheming business types he had known back home. In France, through contacts with French civilians and with American soldiers more privileged and cultivated than he, he becomes aware of new cultural and artistic dimensions to life. This

awakening culminates in his heroic death as a lieutenant at the front, leading his troops into battle. Although in his death the reader initially senses not so much loss as the crowning fulfillment of a suddenly rich life, the ending of the novel suggests that Claude's heroism, fueled by his illusions about the goodness of society, was wasted on a world too selfish and greedy to justify his sacrifice. Yet although Cather in her novel questions the ultimate value of heroism in modern, mechanized war, she is old-fashioned enough to hang on to its possibility, and she admires its nobility, however misguided or futile it may be in a society that has largely lost the idealism that might justify heroic sacrifice.

Unlike *One of Ours*, which was Cather's fifth novel, Ohio author Thomas Boyd's *Through the Wheat* was his first. F. Scott Fitzgerald called it in his *New York Evening Post* review, "not only the best combatant story of the great war, but also the best war book since *The Red Badge of Courage*," and Edmund Wilson, not to be outdone by Fitzgerald in praising Boyd's novel, called it "probably the most authentic novel yet written by an American about war" (Boyd 276). Like Boyd himself, his protagonist Private William Hicks enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1917, participated in some of the major battles of the war, and was seriously injured in a poison gas attack. Unlike Cather's Claude, however, Hicks was never buoyed up by any chivalric, romantic or heroic notions of war (143). Even so, he was a good soldier, obeying the commands of his officers and showing initiative as a sharpshooter. Like other soldiers he is subject to such hardships and shocks as muddy trenches, body lice, bad food and sometimes no food in battle, the death, mutilation and shell shock of comrades in arms, mustard gas that blisters and blinds, enemy machine gun fire as the Marines advance through endless fields of wheat, and the stench of decomposing bodies encompassing all, until "even the tops of wheat, standing stiffly in the field, looked as if they were covered with a fetid substance" (133). Amid all these horrors Hicks stands firm until he finally goes mad, talking to German corpses and tearing their clothes and decaying flesh from their bodies when they refuse to answer his questions. Finally, at the end of the novel, when he simply goes numb on the battlefield, any reader's belief in the possibility of sustained heroism in modern war is undermined.

Like Thomas Boyd, James Stevens, author of *Mattock*, served in France during World War I, but in the infantry, not the Marines. Like

his protagonist Private Parvin Mattock, who came to France from the wheat fields of Kansas, Stevens, born in Albia, Iowa, also came out of the rural Midwest. And like his protagonist, Stevens served in the army as a corporal, but let us hope that there the resemblance ends. Indeed Stevens, far from being an autobiographical writer like Boyd, soon reveals himself to be a follower of Ring Lardner, a writer dismissed by the fatuous Lieutenant Dill in the novel as a story teller "who only writes up low guys in a low lingo and he ain't got no tekneek" (83). Mattock is just such a "low guy," and Stevens' technique, like Lardner's in "Haircut," unerringly reveals his protagonist's foul character by the toads issuing from his mouth in the "low lingo" of his first-person narrative that is at the heart of Stevens' satiric method. For although Mattock perceives himself to be a good "Christian American soldier" who only occasionally backslides into sin, the reader soon recognizes him as a hypocritical holy Joe who never misses a drinking spree or a trip to the French whorehouses. Furthermore, he rats on his army buddies in order to ingratiate himself with the loathsome Lieutenant Dill until finally promoted to corporal for his pains. Worst of all in the context of war, he proves himself to be a coward who, after six week of intensive training for battle, is awakened from complacency by the insane laughter of a shell-shocked soldier back from the trenches who had seen his friend's bloody head roll down a hill. From that time forward, Mattock, convinced that war in the trenches could be hazardous to his health, schemes to make sure that although his buddies may go to the front, he never will. Meanwhile his former best army buddy, with whom he would have been serving at the front had he not been kept back by Dill to spy on the troops, has his leg blown off in battle. In Stevens' novel there are no heroes; the ground is divided between cowardly, self-indulgent hypocrites like Mattock, and those like his erstwhile buddy who, either from a sense of duty or from submission to that great machine of war the army, take their chances of survival at the front.

Like Cather, but unlike Boyd and Stevens, Hemingway would seem to have had two strikes against him when he undertook to write a World War I novel. In the first place, he never got closer to the German trenches than Paris, where he spent a couple of days in early June, 1918 before leaving for Milan by train with other American Red Cross volunteers. From Milan he was promptly assigned to the Red Cross base in Schio, northwest of Venice. After two weeks of

comparative inactivity as an ambulance driver, he volunteered to distribute refreshments from a canteen to front line troops. At Fossalta de Piave on July 8, the seventh day of this assignment, he was seriously injured in both legs by multiple shrapnel wounds from an exploding Austrian mortar shell. After spending several days in a field hospital, he arrived on July 17 at the American Red Cross Hospital in Milan, where he promptly fell in love with the American nurse Agnes von Kurowsky (Villard 216-19). Partially recovered by late October, he received permission to visit the front line to see all his friends at work during one of the last major Italian offensives of the war. But because of a renewed attack of jaundice he had to return almost at once to the hospital in Milan (Meyers 39; Lynn 89). On this inglorious note his World War I career as a Red Cross volunteer ended. He returned home in January, 1919 after some eight months abroad. Not until March did he receive Agnes's "Dear John" or rather her "Ernie, dear boy" letter, breaking what he regarded as her commitment to marry him (Villard 246). It was from such limited, non-combatant experience of war in the Italian hinterland, supplemented by exhaustive reading and a powerful imagination, that he was able to create in *A Farewell to Arms* a narrative so authentic that for years Italian critics, some of whom had taken part in the October, 1917 retreat near Caporetto, could not believe that its author had not actually witnessed this famous retreat, which took place a year before Hemingway got to Italy, over terrain he had never seen when he wrote the novel (Reynolds 5-7).

In a letter to Edmund Wilson written in November, 1923, six years before publication of *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway maintained that Cather's prize-winning *One of Ours* was not to be taken seriously as a World War I novel. "Wasn't . . . [Cather's] last scene in the lines wonderful? Do you know where it came from? The battle scene in *Birth of A Nation*. I identified episode after episode, Catherized. Poor woman she had to get her war experience somewhere" (*Selected Letters* 105). Here Hemingway exaggerates Cather's use of *Birth of a Nation*, if indeed she used it at all, but he has surely hit upon a striking similarity in the two works, both of which portray selfless bravery and heroic leadership in war. On his Atlantic crossing two months after this letter, Hemingway did a bit of Catherizing on his own by jocularly converting the name of his ship, the *Antonia*, into *My Antonia* (Lynn 225). All in good fun, yet his snide, patronizing, and sexist attack on Cather in the Wilson let-

ter recalls similar attacks he made on such early mentors and rivals as Gertrude Stein and Fitzgerald, obsessive behavior continued in his vicious attack on Sherwood Anderson and on Cather once again in *The Torrents of Spring*, written in November, 1925 (Meyers 167; *Torrents* 89). Indeed, if we were to test the truth and honesty of his letter to Wilson with the aid of Hemingway's own famous "shit detector," we might conclude that he not only took Cather seriously as a major American novelist, but that he studied *One of Ours* closely, even as he studied Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, to discover how writers like himself, with little or no firsthand experience of battle, have nevertheless succeeded in writing significant war novels. A useful structural principle he may have learned from Cather and eventually applied in *A Farewell to Arms* was the principle of sustained contrast developed in *One of Ours* between Claude's peacetime existence and marriage in Nebraska, associated with spiritual death, and his wartime experience in France, associated with rebirth and resurrection. Besides contributing to the theme of her novel, this device enabled Cather to limit the number and scope of her battle scenes, thus minimizing the difficulty of sustaining the leap of imagination required to portray vividly and authentically the battle scenes she had never experienced.

Whether or not Hemingway adopted the principle of sustained contrast between war and romance from *One of Ours*, the fact remains that in the two extant, regrettably undated chapters of what Bernard Oldsey has described as "the original or a very early version of the beginning of *A Farewell to Arms*," no such principle is employed. Instead the wounded protagonist, Emmett Hancock rather than Frederic Henry by name, is arriving in Chapter One as the first American casualty at a Milan military hospital, where there is difficulty getting him to an upper floor in an elevator, as in the corresponding Chapter XIII of the published novel. In Chapter II there are attending nurses but none resembling Catherine Barkley, and there is no love scene corresponding to the one in Chapter XIV of the published novel where Frederic realizes he is in love with Catherine (Oldsey 58-59). Though undated, this "ur-opening" exhibits such signs of Hemingway's early composition as "sketchiness and indecision in respect to prose quality and narrative detail" (60). Consequently Oldsey tentatively but persuasively assigns its composition to the early period of "trying out," from 1919 to 1921, before Cather's novel was published. (Another scholar, Paul Smith, has "specula-

tively" settled on a later date, 1924 or 1925, on less substantial evidence [51, n. 28]). But regardless of the correct date, sometime between the composition of the "ur-opening" and the fully developed novel of 1928-29, Hemingway must have changed the protagonist Emmett Hancock, who closely resembled young Ernest Hemingway in 1918, into a more experienced, sophisticated protagonist, and substituted first person narration for the third person narrative of the original. More important, in order to establish a sustained dramatic polarity between war and romance, perhaps in order to "Catherize" it, so to speak, he moved his protagonist's experience back from 1918 to the 1917 disaster of Caporetto and created as a romantic heroine for Frederic Henry the irresistibly attractive Scottish nurse Catherine Barkley, who does not appear in the original version but who inevitably reminds the informed reader of Hemingway's own bitter-sweet, abortive romance with Agnes. Doubtless Hemingway's choice of Caporetto was dictated by the collapse of patriotic idealism it represented to his protagonist as well as to the Italian Second Army, with 600,000 soldiers lost and 250,000 taken prisoner over a two week period, a disaster exceeded for Lieutenant Henry only by his loss of Catherine in childbirth at the end (Liddell Hart 306, 361).

Although both Cather and Hemingway make sustained use of contrast in these novels, their handling of both contrast and theme is different. Thus whereas Cather ends Claude's civilian life and begins his military life exactly halfway through her novel, Hemingway intertwines the themes of war and romance throughout, beginning with Frederic's meeting Catherine Barkley at a British hospital near the Italian front, just about the time Lieutenant Henry is preparing his ambulance posts for a planned attack against the Austrians. Hemingway's approach works better than Cather's because it lends itself to more gradual character development and a more gradual shift of emphasis from war to romance, a process accelerated two-thirds of the way through the novel by the retreat from Caporetto, after which Lieutenant Henry deserts the army to return to Catherine in Milan. In Cather's novel, which is virtually split in two, the change in Claude's character from passivity in the first half to energetic leadership as an officer in the second, strains credulity.

Although the theme of Cather's novel would seem initially to be much more optimistic than Hemingway's, the more one ponders the matter the more doubtful this conclusion becomes. For although Claude dies with his army ideals intact, he does not have to face, as

his surviving comrades do, the return to civilian life "where it seemed the flood of meanness and greed had been held back just long enough for the boys to go over, and then swept down and engulfed everything that was left at home." Claude's mother, realizing that her son died "believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be," concludes that perhaps it was as well for him "to see that vision, and then to see no more." Meanwhile she agonizes with the returning soldiers who cannot bear awakening to the selfishness and ugliness of civilian life: "One by one the heroes of that war, the men of dazzling soldiership, leave prematurely the world they have come back to. Airmen whose deeds were tales of wonder. . . . one by one they quietly die by their own hand" (458). Thus Claude's brief moments of happiness, based on his illusions about the goodness, glory and endless potentialities of life, and the desperate endings of his comrades, based on their knowledge of life in the post-war world, contribute about equally to the pessimism of Cather's novel. Contrary to what Claude thinks, the modern world is not a fit dwelling place for heroes, but for morally degraded, selfish human beings.

In portraying the eventual isolation of Frederic Henry as a representative individual in the war-ravaged, modern world of which he feels less and less a part, Hemingway's novel is about equally bleak. By the end of *A Farewell to Arms*, love, which appeared at the beginning to provide a real contrast to war, a more or less permanent refuge from death, isolation and loneliness, turns out to be just one more deceitful "trap," as Frederic realizes when Catherine dies. All that is left for him and us to contemplate is his memories presented artistically in the form of a first-person narrative unfolding apparently warm and alive before us, but in fact more like a marble effigy, or like Catherine's beautiful corpse as it lies before Frederic in a hospital room at the novel's end. Far from suggesting that her death should be construed as a fitting punishment for his unheroic or anti-heroic desertion from the army, the novel invites our admiration of Lieutenant Henry as a man with enough sanity and courage to escape from the madness of modern war, whatever the cost to his reputation or future life. He had heard much of heroism in war but had never seen it. In his own oft-quoted words,

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them...and had read

them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations...and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. (184-85)

Lieutenant Henry's decorations, awarded for injuries received while he was eating cheese, became for him just one more example of the hollowness of glory (163).

Although initially Cather's novel seems to be set off from the other three by her recognizing in Claude the possibility of heroism even in modern war, by the end it becomes clear that his heroism, though real, is based on illusion, and that the wartime idealism he shares with many others is but a brief aberration from the ongoing selfishness and materialism of industrial society. Ignoring the capacity of mechanized war to drive good soldiers like Hicks absolutely mad, ignoring also the rascality and hypocrisy of soldiers like Mattock, Cather's novel nevertheless flirted with the cynical conclusion Hemingway's protagonist was to draw, that life itself, not war, is the ultimate zero end-game. *A Farewell to Arms* is better integrated than Cather's novel. Yet in spite of Hemingway's oblique disclaimers of any possible influence of her work on his, his novel may have benefited greatly from the structural principle of bipolarity illustrated by *One of Ours* and adopted by Hemingway as he moved from the early, autobiographical "ur-opening" of his novel to the carefully developed contrast between war and love implicit even in the ambiguous title of *A Farewell to Arms*.

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## AEROPLANE IN FURS: THE LANGUAGE OF MASOCHISM AND THE WILL TO SUBMIT IN "CAPE HATTERAS"

PATRICK HURLEY

All the different and frequently discordant tunes we heard in masochism, finally united in a full and sonorous accord: to uphold oneself despite all force, and, where this is not possible, to perish in spite of all force. That is the grim tragicomedy of the martyr-attitude of modern man or at least of its essential characters. Here is a tale of human frailty and sorrow which is at the same time a tale of human force and lust.

(*Masochism and Modern Man*, Theodor Reik, 1941 433)

But to fool one's self that definitions are being reached by merely referring frequently to skyscrapers, radio antennae, steam whistles, or other surface phenomena of our time is merely to paint a photograph. I think that what is interesting and significant will emerge only under the circumstances of our submission to, and examination and assimilation of the organic effects on us of these and other fundamental factors of our experience.

(from *General Aims and Theories*, Hart Crane, 1937)

Hart Crane defines man's role in modern society through a poem not *about* a bridge but *to* one. "The Bridge" is at once an ode, a prayer, and the emotional-linguistic manifestation of a true desire to merge the organic self with the inorganic structure of the bridge itself. To encompass the physical entity is to appropriate that which the bridge represents. The bridge must be viewed as the ultimate icon of passivity in the modern world: one travels over, under, across the bridge but never to it. Consider the visual image of a bridge: bound by wires, impaled by girders, forced supine between two points, all to satisfy the never ending lustful urges of a rigid line of traffic. This traffic travels back and forth across the bridge, though, so Crane's peregrinations from apotheosis *of* the bridge to desire for symbiotic



union *with* it are perfectly logical. For centuries, as the Western psyche developed, humankind grew accustomed to self-denial in the hope that an afterlife would erase the scars of a lifetime of suffering. Not only has twentieth century society come to view suffering as an end in itself though, we have learned to derive pleasure from it. Thus the paradox of masochism—simultaneous id and ego satisfaction—becomes the underlying text of “The Bridge.”

Although the language of masochism exists throughout the poem, it is most intense near the center, in “Cape Hatteras.” The airplane section of the poem, moreover, contains the core of Crane’s paradoxical message—survival in the modern world demands the transformation of the will: it must become the *will to submit*. The entire universe is being forced to change by some power which is only partially represented by technology. “The nasal whine of power whips a new universe”: the universe is simultaneously punished and recreated for the modern age by a whip. The subtle mysteries of the starlight become, for Crane, “sharp ammoniac proverbs” which threaten to gouge out the eyes. Even the mechanical sounds of the new age are shrouded in velvet, like a cruel mistress.

The overriding image of the opening of this section of the poem is one of being bound. In this new myth, however, techno-bondage seems to imply some benefits beyond the physical pleasure associated with it. Through rhyme, Crane unites two ideas each syntactically associated with bondage, in a manner which seems to imply some causal relationship: “Power’s script,—wound, bobbin-bound, refined—/. . . /Of steely gizzards—axle-bound, confined.” Crane offers the grace of refinement only through the sacrament of confinement. This notion of “grace” through self-denial, however, is clearly associated with the old myths; yet, the rapturous depiction of the airplane belies a kind of pleasure implicit in the act of submission itself.

Crane’s strange notion of submission/power/control is virtually defined in a single word used twice in the airplane section of “Cape Hatteras” but nowhere else in Crane’s *oeuvre*—*script* (*A Concordance to the Poetry of Hart Crane*, ed. Gary Lane 208). The dual meaning of this word enforces man’s relationship to the force manifested by technology. “Power’s script” and “prophetic script” are separated by sixteen lines describing the *harnessed*, *coiled* submissive in the throes of the *blind ecstasy* of helplessness. Script is at once the pre-written text which the submissive follows without deviation.

Power writes the script which we “will” in order to “control” our fate—thus it becomes prophecy. At the time Crane was writing “The Bridge,” though, *script* had another meaning which is very relevant to his philosophy of myth, the will, and submission: *script* was “junky slang” for the narcotic prescription obtained by addicts under the pretense of health problems (William S. Burroughs, *passim*). Submission to power is a strong addiction—contemporary man’s search for meaning/myth in a world of chaos is not achieved until his submission is complete. Thus the socio-cultural milieu of the Modern Era gave rise to fascism, war, and blind obedience to tyrannical demagogues.

Crane’s speaker gives in completely to the “fierce schedules,” essentially willing the doom that he knows is inevitable. The new myth gives a paradoxical sense of *control* only when one yields all control to the forces of modern technology. Submission could never reach its absolute conclusion in the old myth for one could only submit *to* something else. Crane’s new myth transforms submission—in its ultimate form the slave loses his identity completely and begins to merge with his master through complete submission; thus gaining new power, new identity, and, ultimately, auto-apotheosis. Crane reveals his philosophy of reversal by raising up Milton’s vanquished hell, in the form of an airplane, to lash the soft white flesh of heaven: “Hell’s belt springs wider into heaven’s plumed side.” We see how Crane uses circular structures and inversions to equate opposites, where submission is defined as power: impotence *iw* power, descension ascends, and death becomes life.

Divine union through submission is iconologically represented by pilot and plane in “Cape Hatteras.” The pilot is charged by the speaker “To conjugate infinity’s dim marge—/ Anew . . . !”; but, first he must receive “benediction” and “sure reprieve.” These blessings, however, are conferred upon the pilot through the medium of the plane—specifically as it is shot down. As complete union is anticipated, the lines speed up and split into two halves while the language takes on an ecstatic tone: the plane’s deathward spiraling is modified by *giddily*, its gyring path becomes a dance, and pilot and plane race, cheek to fuselage, to their ultimate union.

One word, set apart by ellipses on each side—*dispersion*—halts the speed and fury of the preceding passage and introduces the sense of calm which surrounds the “union” of submissive and master. The onomatopoeic beauty of *dispersion* is unmatched elsewhere in



Crane: the d of d(is)—an alveolar plosive—suggests an impact and, perhaps, the loss of identity; the p of p(er)—a labial plosive—suggests both explosion and forced union; the s of s(ion)—an alveolar fricative—suggests purgation through fire. The word seems to have been chosen more for its sound than its sense, however, as there is no real feeling of separation. Any implied disunity is reversed by the continuation of the line: “into mashed and shapeless debris.” The submissive and master are separated only from their former selves—they no longer exist as individual entities: they are one. Through an act of complete submission, the pilot has erased “infinity’s dim marge” by simultaneously ceasing to exist and recreating himself. Submission is the “high bravery” of which Crane speaks.

The philosophy of submission espoused by Crane in the airplane section is framed by the opening (62 lines) and the closing (74 lines) of “Cape Hatteras.” The opening frame connects the lines to come with the preceding section of the poem by invoking such familiar identities/images as Walt Whitman and Pocahontas. If the airplane section speaks of re-creating and the founding/finding of a new myth, then the opening of “Cape Hatteras” discusses the original creation and voices the old myths. As history progresses through the lines, the airplane is prefigured: “Man hears himself an engine in a cloud!” The symbiotic sadomasochism of the airplane section is thus established while the final lines of the frame characterize the survivor of the modern world as one who is “bright with myth!”

After the crash, the closing frame returns to Walt Whitman. Crane fuses himself with Whitman—he describes how Whitman’s lines sent him to nature to find that myth; yet, ultimately he found it in technology. Walt Whitman submitted to nature and its beautiful undulations until they became a part of one another—inseparable. Crane, on the other hand, must offer his complete submission to the rhythms of the machine. His continual submission will carry him forward: “And onward yielding past my utmost year.” It is this “act” of passivity which will bring him to “that great Bridge, our myth, whereof I sing!” Until one’s passivity is as complete as that of the Bridge, one may not achieve the transformation of the airplane.

If the myth of the poem is the Bridge, and the Bridge is an icon of submission, then the poem is really about the myth of submission. For Crane, submission is not a weakness, it is a supreme act of the will—one must give in completely and become the Bridge in order to gain back the power and control one has yielded. “Cape Hatteras”

is Crane’s attempt to define the undefinable—to justify the paradox of submission. His myth is ultimately, as all other myths, about transformation and rebirth—Crane sings of the will to submit as road to the will to power. Pleasure and pain coexist at the moment of *dispersion*, man is reborn, and the Bridge ceases to exist.

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## THE BLUES IN LANGSTON HUGHES'S NOT WITHOUT LAUGHTER

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From childhood, Langston Hughes was exposed to numerous blues styles and artists through both recording and live performance. In *The Big Sea*, an autobiography of his early years, he writes that his first blues poem, "The Weary Blues," "included the first blues verse [he'd] ever heard way back in Lawrence, Kansas, when [he] was a kid" (215). As he came of age during the classic period of the blues—between 1920 and the stockmarket crash of 1929—major developments in the artistic and commercial aspects of blues music were underway. For the first time, blues songs were recorded and popularized: while the "downhome" blues was sung by men, often farmers or migratory workers accompanying themselves on guitar at neighborhood gatherings, female singers dominated the city scene, recording and performing their own brand of commercial, yet fervent blues accompanied by highly trained jazz instrumentalists (Titon xiii-xv).

Over the years, Hughes absorbed this rich musical climate and produced a significant body of blues-inspired poems, many of which are among his most respected works. The poems of his first collection *The Weary Blues* (1926) preserve the blues ethos, yet often modify its artistic structure by blending it with poetic diction and free verse. These "blues variations," which incorporated, yet adapted, traditional 12-bar blues stanzas, created a distinct poetry—as Steven Tracy's work contends, one which embraced African-American culture, yet sought to expand its audience by interpreting its traditions for a middle class reader (47-8).

In his second and third blues collections—*Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) and *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942)—Hughes's subtle shift to poems modelled precisely on authentic 12-bar blues lyrics suggests his growing preference for *representing* rather than *inter-*

*preting* blues culture. By foregoing the structural polish and cultural mediation of his blues-based verse, he allows his blues characters to speak in their own language and form, resulting in poetry that is virtually indistinguishable from actual vaudeville song lyrics. The content and style of these poems reflect Hughes's preference for the female vaudeville blues of the city; in particular, he admired the work of singer Bessie Smith (1895-1937), who, as the "most popular race artist of the decade" (Titon 209), became known as the "Empress of the Blues." The poet devotes a chapter to her in his *Famous Negro Music Makers*, a biography for children; and in *The Big Sea* he writes that while in Macon, Georgia with writer Zora Neale Hurston, he heard Bessie singing in a small theater. "But you didn't have to go near the theater to hear Bessie sing," he writes. "You could hear her blocks away" (296). He most clearly affirms Bessie's significant role in the era's African-American cultural climate when he proclaims in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain": "Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near-intellectuals until they listen and pevhaps understand" (694).

Inspired by his exposure to such singers as Bessie Smith, Hughes's blues poems capture the emotion, subject matter, and technique of blues song and performance. His blues women sing of lost love, financial hardship, alcohol abuse, and racial conflict, particularly between blacks and their "high yellow" counterparts of mixed heritage. And, while even musical notation cannot adequately represent the movement of the blues voice with its slides, slurs, asymmetrical line breaks, and vocal grinding, Hughes's poems reflect the spirit of the aural tradition by mimicking the improvisational style of blues as well as its offbeat phrasing and lyric interruptions. According to Richard Long, Hughes's body of blues poems, "at once evocations of the life of the folk and a reflection of a musical form as well as of a musical ethos, provided him a degree of distinction as a poet shared by no other of his contemporaries" (133).

With the popular and critical acclaim of the blues poetry, it is no wonder that Arna Bontemps, Hughes's close friend and contemporary, believed Hughes blues-infused novel, *Not Without Laughter* was "long overdue" (9). Published in 1930, the writer's only novel and most thoroughly Midwestern work, not only secured his reputation as a major American writer and leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance, but provided a genre in which to expand on his poetic

depictions of blues themes and techniques. A highly autobiographical work, the novel portrays the experience of Sandy Rogers, a sensitive and studious black boy growing up in smalltown Kansas with his grandmother Hager as the primary guardian and central figure in his life. Other family members come and go, yet through their actions Sandy has the opportunity to observe a variety of possible approaches to living as an African-American in a predominantly white society. His mother, Annjee, chooses to endure quietly the unjust, constant criticisms of her white employer in order to support Sandy and her husband, Jimboy, who will not work. Sandy's two Aunt's have different responses to their plight: while, in anger, Aunt Harriett chooses to live as a prostitute and then a blues singer rather than abide a white boss, Aunt Tempy models her actions after her white employer's and becomes a middle class Episcopalian intent on living the refined lifestyle admired by whites.

Sandy is presented as the only character open to all his possibilities as a black American. He admires his grandmother's deep religious faith, work ethic, and allegiance to Booker T. Washington's view of black progress through industry. He excels at school and admires W. E. B. DuBois's editorials in his Aunt Tempy's issues of *The Crisis*. At the same time, however, he delights in the blues music and irreverent performances of his father and Aunt Harriett which provide relief from his family's constant financial and social struggles.

Like a character itself, the blues becomes a constant and central presence in Hughes's novel. While the author incorporates blues lyrics throughout the work to lend authenticity and a sense of the art form's rhythms, structure, and sound, he also provides a broader view of the blues' role in African-American life during the teens and twenties. As in his poetry, he depicts the worlds of both the male "downhome" and female "vaudeville" blues, but particularly highlights the experience of the female blues singer, Aunt Harriett. Yet while the blues lives and breathes in Hughes's downhome and vaudeville blues singers, it also affects the lives and outlooks of those assembled to hear it in the neighborhood and the concert hall. As fiction, *Not Without Laughter* gives Hughes the opportunity to create a more fully developed portrait of the blues ethos, and to present differing African-American views about the blues' cultural and artistic value.

Anjee's husband, Jimboy, performs the novel's first blues in a chapter titled "Guitar": singing so that "[a]ll the neighborhood could

hear his rich low baritone voice giving birth to the blues," he reclines with his "long, lazy length resting on the kitchen-door-sill, back against the jamb, feet in the yard, fingers picking his sweet guitar, left hand holding against its finger-board the back of an old pocket-knife upward, downward, getting thus weird croons and sighs from the vibrating strings" (60). Here, Jimboy seems to represent the prototypical "downhome" blues singer—a male vocalist accompanying himself on guitar in an intimate, nonprofessional performance setting. Even Hughes's depiction of Jimboy's "weird croons" suggests the character of the downhome genre: historian Jeff Titon relates how listeners often describe the sound of the folk blues as "odd" or "strange," as well as how Paramount, in 1926, used the term "weird" itself "to advertise recordings of [downhome blues singer] Blind Lemon Jefferson's songs" (xvii).

Jimboy, the sometime laborer and perpetual drifter, remembers from his travels "brown-skin mamas in Natchez, Shreveport, Dallas" and "Creole women in Baton Rouge, Louisiana" (60) as he sings:

Did you ever see peaches  
Growin' on a watermelon vine?  
Says did you ever see peaches  
On a watermelon vine?  
Did you ever see a woman  
That I couldn't get for mine? (61)

In contrast to the city-inspired "vaudeville" blues Aunt Harriett would sing in Chicago, this blues stanza focuses on rural settings and imagery characteristic of the "downhome" blues.

Southern inspiration continues when Jimboy sings both parts of a lovers' blues duet, "crying grotesquely, crying absurdly in the summer night" about a woman who does not want her man to leave for the North (64). Hughes writes: "On and on the song complained, man-verses and woman-verses, to the evening air in stanzas that Jimboy had heard in the pine-woods of Arkansas from the lumbercamp workers" (65). While Jimboy brings many of his lyrics to the Midwest after travelling in the South, at times he is inspired to follow the tradition of impromptu folk blues by singing simple stanzas "created in his own mouth then and there":

O, I done made ma bed,  
Says, I done made ma bed.  
Down in some lonesome grave  
I done made ma bed. (65)

In this case, Jimboy's improvisation is reminiscent of slavery-born Southern field blues, a tradition of basic verses that produce a call-and-response effect. Clearly, Jimboy's embodiment of the "down-home" blues persona—wandering and all—helps Hughes create a rich character representative of a specific segment of blues culture.

As the novel progresses, Hughes focuses more intently on the female vaudeville blues as he traces Aunt Harriett's journey from rebellious youth to prostitute to successful vaudeville blues singer with a degree of financial stability. Beginning when Harriett was "a little girl with braided hair, [Jimboy] would amuse himself by teaching her the old Southern songs, the popular rag-time ditties, and the hundreds of varying verses of the blues that he would pick up in the big dirty cities of the South" (63). Yet while Jimboy sings of the rural South's "peaches" and "watermelon vines," Harriett gravitates toward the more stylized blues mode. Even when she is a young Kansan, her voice echoes the urban themes of the vaudeville "queens" of the twenties. She sings in a "plaintive moan," "I wonder where ma easy rider's gone?/He done left me, put ma new gold watch in pawn" (62). Her stanzas also capture the driving syncopation and slick, yet extemporaneous feel of vaudeville performance:

Now I see that you don't want me,  
So it's fare thee, fare thee well!  
Lawd, I see that you don't want me,  
So it's fare—thee—well!  
I can still get plenty lovin',  
An' you can go to—Kansas City! (61)

In the stanza's third line, the word "Lawd" clearly imitates the way vaudeville blues singers like Bessie Smith modify repeated lines by changing the word on the upbeat. By abbreviating the initial "So it's fare thee, fare thee well!" to "So it's fare—thee—well!" in line four, Hughes energizes the lyric with further improvisational variation. His dashes mimic the rhythmic changes of the blues voice as it shifts to longer note values that punch and pulse, while seeming to pull the tempo back to a lazier pace.

Later, in the chapter "Dance," Hughes portrays the blues of the dance hall as "Benbow's Famous Kansas City Band" accompanies the working class African-Americans who have come to dance in their leisure moments. In this scene, the blues is both a soothing unifier and a wicked reminder of their common and individual struggles.

Like a tonic, the music bids them to circle and turn together. Yet despite the energetic drummer, the myriad colors of swirling dresses and suits, and "faces gleaming like circus balloons," Hughes underscores the pain beneath the moment of communal catharsis with chilling imagery: W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues" "spread[s] itself like a bitter syrup over thu hall," and "the cynical banjo covered unplumbable depths with a plinking surface of staccato gaiety, like the sparkling bubbles that rise on deep water over a man who has just drowned himself" (102-3). In such passages, Hughes suggests the fundamental dichotomy of the musical form: at once, the blues is a celebration song and a dirge.

When the band shifts from the "St. Louis," "Memphis," and "Yellow Dog" city blues to "just the plain old familiar blues, heart-breaking and extravagant, ma-baby's-gone-fr'm-me-blues," the sweaty dancers moment of catharsis crescendos and they become oblivious to one another. While they dance together to the pulsing rhythm "their feet had gone down through the floor into the earth, each dancer's alone—down into the center of things" (104). At this point Hughes best captures the spiritual, even primal, nature of the blues. No longer hearing the words, the dancers become enmeshed physically and mentally in the pulsating, "utterly despondent music" (104). While their "mindw had gone off to the heart of loneliness," their bodies moved rhythmically as if attempting to retreat from misery with each step. Freed from printed bars and chords, the musicians also proceed on instinct: "these mean old weary blues [came] from a little orchestra of four men who needed no written music because they couldn't have read it" (105).

The evening at the dance hall serves as a defining moment in Harriett's rebellion against white society and the Christian tolerance around which her mother's life is based. When Hager must leave to care for a sick neighbor, she entrusts Harriett to stay home with her nephew, Sandy. Yet when Harriett's boyfriend, Mingo, knocks at the front door to go hear Benbow's Band at Chaver's Hall, she agrees to take the child with them, and returns after 4 A.M. to Hager Williams with "a bundle of switches on the floor at her feet" (108). Following this episode, Harriett leaves town with a travelling carnival; she comes home and lives in the town's "Bottoms" as a prostitute before getting a break in Kansas City, and then Chicago, as a singer who comes to be known as "The Princess of the Blues."

By making a complete break from her Christian mother, Harriett chooses an independent life that, while difficult, does not force her to acquiesce to, tolerate, or assimilate with the white race she sees as bigoted. Her departure from her family's Baptist faith and entry into the blues concert hall portrays the deep division between the Christian and blues black worlds of the time—a division that has been developing in the Williams family since Hager's requests for "When de Saints Come Marchin' In'... something Christian from de church" (65) were rejected by the blues-singing Jimboy and Harriett. "Bound straight fo' de devil, that what they is," Hager contends (61).

Surprisingly, Hughes's blues poems deviate from the strictly secular nature of vaudeville blues by depicting Christianity and the promise of an afterlife as vital forces in African-American spiritual and psychological experience. In *Not Without Laughter*, however, the writer seems to model Harriett after actual blues women like Bessie Smith whose lyrics do not cry to God or Christ in despair. Hughes has been quoted as saying that Smith's blues were marked by a "sadness... not softened with tears, but hardened with laughter, the absurd, incongruous laughter of a sadness without even a god to appeal to" (qtd. in Harrison 53). Like Bessie Smith's, Harriett's blues persona seems to rely on personal strength, confidence, and perseverance to overcome obstacles. Perhaps the nature of the art form—the fact that blues lines are intended to be *sung*—can explain the absence in the lyrics of both hope for heaven and a relationship with God. The act of singing the blues itself provides a highly personal, spiritual outlet.

In the novel's final chapter, "Princess of the Blues," Sandy and his mother, now in Chicago, hear Aunt Harriett sing at the Monogram Theatre on State Street. The theatre, crowded to capacity, holds "a typical Black Belt audience, laughing uproariously, stamping its feet to the music, kidding the actors, and joining in the performance, too" (291).

Following tap-dancing and comedic acts, Harriett appears from behind luxurious, blue velvet curtains "in a dress of glowing orange, flame-like against the ebony of her skin, barbaric, yet beautiful as a jungle princess" (293). Like Bessie Smith and other divas billed as "queens" of the blues—complete with crowns on their promotional posters—Harriett seems dressed for the part, perhaps as Titon suggests, "burlesquing the opera prima donna" (xv). Her first number, "a new song—a popular version of an old Negro melody, refashioned with words from Broadway" (293), reflects the heavy influence of

sophisticated musical comedies on the vaudeville blues of the twenties (Titon xv). The "hesitating delicate jazz" of the piano behind her suggests the trend for vaudeville accompanists who were "music hall professionals, veterans of countless tours on the black stage circuit" (Titon xvi).

Yet Harriett's Chicago performance evokes a variety of blues moods and modes. For her second number, she dons a blue calico apron, "with a bandanna handkerchief knotted about her head" (293). The piano man begins to play blues—"the old familiar folk-blues"—and she sings a downhome tune similar to those sung by Jimboy years earlier:

Red Sun' red sun' why don't you rise today?  
Red sun, O sun! Why don't you rise today?  
Ma heart is breakin'—ma baby's gone away. (293)

Like the songs of male downhome blues wingers, this stanza does not provide latitude for improvisation like the city blues sung in the dance hall. Harriett's Black Belt audience—with roots in the folk tradition—responds enthusiastically and empathetically: "whee-ee-e!...Hab mercy!...Moan it, gal!" (294). Finally, she performs a dance-song "in a sparkling dress of white sequins, ending the act with a mad collection of steps and a swift sudden whirl across the stage as the orchestra joined Billy's piano in a triumphant arch of jazz" (294). As she leaves the stage, "the audience yelled and clapped and whistled for more, stamping their feet and turning to one another with shouted comments of enjoyment" (294).

Hughes's depiction of the vaudeville diva's milieu—the theater atmosphere, audience interaction, and blues performance experience—suggests that for talented black women, blues singing could be an empowering profession during its decades of popularity. Blues singing gives Harriett a chance to earn a living away from the domestic sphere, attain business acumen, and express her spiritual passion outside the church. As her career builds, she gains financial independence, acclaim, and acceptance; ironically, she is the one who, though a former prostitute, offers Sandy support for continuing his education.

Even so, Hughes does not sugar coat Harriett's life: smoking and drinking have deepened and hoarsened her voice; she and her piano player, Billy, have had "hard times" on their way from Stanton, Kansas, to Chicago (296). Yet, most importantly, as a black woman

Harriet believes she has found a more just, merit-based system in the uncertain theatrical world: here, she is judged by her talent, her ability to draw crowds, not by her color. "Things are breakin' pretty good for spade acts—since Jews are not like the rest of the white folks," she tells Sandy and Anjee backstage. "They will give you a break if you've got some hot numbers to show 'em, whether you're colored or not. And Jews control the theatres" (296).

Yet in *Not Without Laughter* the blues do not have the final word. As Sandy and Anjee walk home from the theatre they come upon a little Southern church in a sidestreet, where "some old black worshippers" sing:

By an' by when de mawnin' comes,  
Saints an' sinners all are gathered home....  
"It's beautiful!" Sandy cried—for, vibrant and steady like a stream  
of living faith, their song filled the whole night:  
An we'll understand it better by an' by! (299)

One senses Sandy recognizes the underlying similarities between the church singers' spiritual—like the ones his grandmother had sung—and his aunt's soulful blues. While belonging to separate spheres in the black community, both seek to address and assuage the contrast between the promise of the American Dream and the disappointing realities of post-slavery, African-American life. Hughes referred to this theme as a "montage of a dream deferred. A great big dream—yet to come—and always *yet*—to become ultimately and finally true." The blues art form—portrayed in both Hughes's poetry and fiction—seems to advance the writer's philosophy of accepting the sting of reality with hope and even humor. *Not Without Laughter* represents Hughes's most comprehensive tribute to the artists who explored the core of the African-American spirit, the depths of racial despair, and the struggle to make the deferred dream realized.

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## GWENDOLYN BROOKS AT EIGHTY: A RETROSPECTIVE

PHILIP GREASLEY

Gwendolyn Brooks was born on June 7, 1917. In the eighty years since then, she has produced a significant body of poetry, a novel, and an autobiography. She has also functioned as book reviewer, editor, publisher, teacher, and mentor. Brooks has won most major awards available to poets, including the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and two Guggenheim Fellowships. She has been recognized as Poet-Laureate of Illinois and Poet-Laureate of the United States under the earlier name, Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, and has received honorary doctorates from dozens of American universities.

Given Brooks's status as a major twentieth century American poet, several biographies exist along with much literary criticism of her writings. Yet despite the wealth of material by and about Gwendolyn Brooks, central questions remain. Perhaps most central is that of the reasons behind and the implications of her much heralded poetic shifts following 1967. This paper will assert underlying philosophical and poetic principles responsible for both Brooks's consistent, continuously evolving poetics through 1967 and her apparently radical shifts following 1967, shifts that include movement away from previous patterns of language and style as well as from earlier assumptions about the poetic audience, the relationship between poet and audience, and poetry's role in contemporary society.

Multiple approaches are used. First, a "new critical" approach to her poetry is applied, relying on the poet's own experientially-tied poetic statements to buttress positions. Second, Brooks's autobiography, *Report from Part One*, is cited for its even more direct authorial comment. Finally, George Kent's authorized biography, *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*, and other biographical and critical sources provide additional support.

### *Gwendolyn Brooks, Identity and Core Values:*

Gwendolyn Brooks—as African American, woman, poet, and citizen—lives by and acts upon principle. To understand her poetic and philosophical stances, we must first grasp her sense of self and her most central values. Born in 1917, Gwendolyn Brooks grows up a Negro female in a dominantly white male society. Clearly, her experiences as black American and female shape her values, but they don't undermine her faith in the universality of life values and impulses. She is a child of the black middle to upper-middle class, born of highly-educated parents with pretensions to intellect and leadership in Chicago's black community. Although race undoubtedly circumscribes her parents' life possibilities, as a child, Gwendolyn Brooks lives in a single-family home in an attractive southside Chicago neighborhood. Her life is ordered and stable. Middle-class values perhaps even more than racial orientations shape her view of self, American society, and life.

Brooks's earliest strong experiences of prejudice appear to occur in the black, not the white, community. In her "ballad of chocolate Mabbie," from *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), Brooks reflects her own acknowledged early experiences as she describes Mabbie, a girl of seven, "cut from a chocolate bar...[who] thought life was heaven" but lost William Boone, the boy of her young dreams, to "a lemon-hued lynx/with sand waves loving her brow. ...[leaving] Mabbie alone by the grammar school gates." (*Blacks*, 30). Thus, Gwendolyn Brooks comes to realize early on that her relatively dark skin and physical features decrease her status, popularity, and sexual attractiveness among blacks. In later years, Brooks retells the same story in an exaggerated version using the young black male character in "The Life of Lincoln West."

Brooks's early sense of physical inferiority and low status reinforce her innate shyness and reclusiveness, a tendency that success and recognition have only limited, not fully erased. Brooks's reclusiveness, very dark skin, and pronounced Negroid features lead her to recognize very early that recognition and success are likely to come to her only through intellect and artistry. Later, as a young adult, these same qualities—intellect, artistic ability, and leadership premised on a stable, permanent family and community—provide the core of Brooks's positive self-image and emergent personal pride. Throughout her life, Brooks's successes consistently link artistic creation with focus on her Chicago black community.

**Brooks's Worldview:**

As a black middle class child, Gwendolyn Brooks partakes of many typical middle class values and orientations, particularly those of family, in the traditional as well as the more inclusive sense of the word; individual and community responsibility; and God. Growing up with at least some degree of certainty, permanency, and access to the finer things in life, she maintains a positive, nonfatalistic worldview and an optimistic faith in the goodness of all human beings and in the strength of logic and graphic presentation to expose and eliminate abuses and enhance human sympathy and harmony.

Later, as an adult, many differences undoubtedly arise in Gwendolyn Brooks's marriage with Henry Blakely. In addition to the intellectual and artistic competition of two aspiring writers, one central point of difference, however, relates to Henry's career options and income possibilities as a black man in America during the Depression. George Kent asserts that Gwendolyn, less directly and immediately confronted by the realities of racial prejudice and job, salary, and housing discrimination, believes during the Depression years that Henry isn't trying hard enough and that with effort he can achieve success and provide his family with greater income, security, and abundance. Henry, on the other hand, feels his wife naively optimistic.

Given Brooks's strong beliefs and determination to live by her principles, her poetry is strongly values-based, centering on issues of individual and societal responsibility, attempting to influence thought on issues of social importance, and maintaining an underlying optimistic faith in human beings and the ultimate victory of good. In the early years of her publishing career, Brooks's predominantly artistic orientation, the nature of the times, and several opportune conjunctions between writer, publisher, and audience foster Brooks, reinforce her instinctive tendencies as a thinker and poet, and pave the way to early success.

**Brooks's Early Readership:**

At mid-century and later, new volumes of elite American poetry typically sell to small audiences. Brooks's first several volumes of poetry, for example, typically sell only two and three thousand copies each before first going out of print. With numbers this low, Brooks is clearly writing for a small elite audience with relatively high educational levels and knowledge of traditional poetic forms. In 1945,

when Brooks's first volume of poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville*, is published by Harper, statistically this means that Brooks's audience is likely to be predominantly white. Furthermore, although realistic fiction emerged early and evolved rapidly, American poetry remained largely tied to earlier romantic poetic techniques, language, and orientation until well into the twentieth century. Even with the onset of realistic American poetry and despite many much-heralded examples of early realistic American poetry notable for their shock value, the range of topics regularly considered in twentieth century American poetry widens fairly slowly.

Given Brooks's predominantly white readership in the early years and the relatively infrequent previous coverage of black life in twentieth century poetry, as an emerging black female poet Brooks's poetry might well appeal to her largely educated, elite white audiences in the mid-1940s for several reasons. First, poetic renderings of life in Chicago's black community offer liberal readers sympathetic insights into a philosophical and experiential "Africa," a graphic presentation of a downtrodden population previously little represented or recognized in American poetry and only haltingly emerging as a cultural force. Less humanitarian readers may well welcome any poetry capturing the quirks of black life as providing a basis for reaffirming white dominance and superiority and reasserting a negatively paternalistic view of black "local color" in both the limited literary and the larger, more pejorative ideological senses of the word. For both posited groups of white elite readers, the philosophy underlying Brooks's poetry is crucial to the degree of white acceptance and, therefore, to her opportunities to publish.

Gwendolyn Brooks's philosophical positions discussed above allow many white readers to accept her writings without offense or hostility born of recrimination or alienation. Brooks, like they themselves, believes in God, in religion, in the dominance of the forces of good, in self-reliance and social responsibility. Even more important, Gwendolyn Brooks, like most black American leaders in the mid-1940s, subscribes to integrationist-assimilationist theories on Negro advancement in American society and, by inference, with their underlying premise that positive individual, social, and poetic models are white and that, with luck and hard work, blacks will slowly achieve "correct" or "right" white middle class values, standards, and orientations and increasingly win acceptance into white society. In other words, this theory implies that African Americans have no rea-



son to maintain black values or aspirations—they should instead aspire to whiteness.

Given the passage of time, it's easy to see the fallacies of both the integrationist-assimilationist model and its philosophical underpinnings; however, in 1945, only eighty years after the Civil War and slavery, the sense within the American black community of progress achieved must be significant despite ongoing blatant segregation, inequities in jobs, salaries, housing, education, voting rights, and most other areas of life. Despite the continuing presence of black voices decrying the subjection of blacks in white American society, most mainstream black leaders in America from the Civil War through the 1950s have consciously opted for pragmatic incremental progress at the cost of abstract philosophical purity. These black leaders have first put the highest priority on securing opportunities for low level jobs so Negroes can feed themselves and have slowly progressed over time to seek greater rights and freedoms for black Americans.

#### ***Brooks's Poetic Appeal:***

The specific aesthetic appeal of Brooks's poetry works in conjunction with her philosophical attractiveness and political acceptability to mid-century white readers to make her pre-1967 poetry accessible and attractive to white readers of the period. While Brooks's poetry is highly particular and sensory, its appeal is primarily aesthetic and intellectual. Many factors contribute to this effect. First, Brooks's philosophy recognizes complexity, nuance, and irony; and her poetry regularly reflects these elements. As such, her poetry is typically not polarized, not "black and white," or, to move the analogy to the political realm, not black versus white. Instead, her poetry regularly recognizes multiple sometimes contradictory or offsetting elements. Second, like Emily Dickinson, with her dictum, "Tell the truth but tell it slant," Brooks regularly depends for effect on unexpected conjunctions and uses of language. These conjunctions require readers to intellectually compare the current language and situation with the expected language and situations. Third, her poetry itself is complex; making multiple appeals, some logical, some linguistic, some image-based, some lodged in the technical artistic "craft" of poetic construction, including the possibilities of the poetic line and phrase. Fourth, rather than focusing on direct

unambiguous statements addressing large-scale issues, Brooks's poetry typically encapsulates universal truth in very sensory portrayal of particular small scale images and situations. Said another way, Brooks's poetry is primarily aesthetic and intellectual, not propagandistic.

Several effects arise inevitably from this complex of aesthetic elements. First, absorbing the multiplicity of elements and appeals requires intellectual and aesthetic combination and transformation of received elements. As such, Brooks's appeal is thoughtful, complex, multi-layered, requiring a delayed, ruminative response—not immediate, visceral, and action-oriented. Clearly, Brooks's poetic sense, like her world view, is that the experience of the poem and the truth of life reside in the tension between elements, not in any one single part. In adopting an essentially intellectual-aesthetic orientation for her poetry, Brooks's carefully crafted form, language, and images often capture experiences of immense inequity, horror, and brutality, but these potentially visceral experiences are always aesthetically "framed" by the poem's language and organization, making them unavailable to immediate rage or action. In this way, Gwendolyn Brooks's pre-1967 poetry functions much like Walter Cronkite's ten years of weekly Vietnam body counts. He presents horrifying facts in measured, sober language in carefully allocated time segments framed by his trademark closing, "That's the way it is." The unspoken yet underlying suggestion is that any individual horrible event is an anomaly that can nonetheless be readily enfolded in larger predictable fostering order. Said more simply, Gwendolyn Brooks is primarily an elite, not a popular, poet. She believes that the experience of the poem should be more than the plot summary. Her poetry transmutes life's rough elements into smooth, durable art.

Brooks's instinctively intellectual and aesthetic orientation to poetry is opportune for a black poet in the forties, fifties, and sixties. Her natural tendency to focus on the intellectual and aesthetic, the "craft" element in literature, allows her to present serious, significant issues for consideration without making them too directly and immediately confrontational for consideration by elite white readers. As such, she can raise serious issues of prejudice and injustice without racially polarizing her audience. Her writing is much like that of Ralph Ellison in this regard.

### *The 1967 "Sea Change":*

The 1960s are tumultuous. The slow but steady progress of blacks through World War II, the immense prospects of the "American Century" following World War II, the fatherly presidency of war-hero Dwight David Eisenhower, the 1954 US Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* overruling the "separate but equal" standard established in 1896 by *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the American military's assumption of leadership in advancing minorities, the promise of a reasoned, intellectually and humanitarian-based Camelot for America under John F. Kennedy, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 make prospects for American blacks appear very good. Yet in the 1960s African American hopes come crashing down in a string of assassinations, bombings, and a rising tide of blood that call into question for blacks all assumptions of hope, progress, and humanitarian right-mindedness by those in power. Medgar Evers (June 12, 1963), John Fitzgerald Kennedy (November 22, 1963), Malcolm X (February 21, 1965), Martin Luther King, (April 4, 1968), Robert F. Kennedy (June 6, 1968), and others fall to the onslaught. In 1963 fire-bombings of black churches in Birmingham, Alabama, shake the black community. The nation becomes increasingly polarized, and, with events like the 1968 My Lai massacre, an ever-larger percentage of Americans comes to question the moral ascendancy of America's leaders and its position in the world. Richard Nixon's route to the Presidency in 1968 relies at least partially on his "Southern Strategy," which spreads dissention and polarization—forcing Americans sooner or later to choose between "America, love it or leave it" and "America, come home."

The April 4, 1968, assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King in Memphis, Tennessee, hastens the radicalization of the black community. This non-violent leader, with his dream that "my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (August 28, 1963 "I Have a Dream" Speech, Washington, D.C.), falls victim to racism, hatred, and force. Although he himself has already moved to more aggressive confrontation with ruling white society in the years preceding his death, with him fall the hopes of the more moderate black community. The center becomes increasingly radicalized.

The civil rights movement heats up in the sixties. Traditional hate messages of groups like the Klu Klux Klan are directly voiced or

demonstrated by individuals carrying political and legal authority in the Deep South. Direct confrontations occur. In 1955 and 1956 Selma and Montgomery entered the history books with a bus boycott; in March 1965 those names return with a bullet on a five day march for voting rights. 1965 and 1966 see the increasing radicalization of the black movement, with Malcolm X's assassination and the loss of dominance by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Stokely Carmichael. Black heroes are increasingly those directly confronting white rule.

In the 1960s America's racial and political ferment comes to a head in Gwendolyn Brooks's back yard. In 1966 Chicago is the site of Martin Luther King's first major campaign outside the South to end discrimination in jobs, housing, and education. In the days following the April 4, 1968, assassination of Dr. King, Mayor Richard J. Daley issues his famous "shoot to kill" order, pouring emotional gasoline on Chicago's already physically and ideologically burning racial ghettos. With summer and the 1968 Democratic Convention, the forces of national division are definitively deployed. The Democrats, with a sitting President and his Vice President seeking nomination to the Presidency, are forced to maintain the righteousness of the Vietnamese war. Opposing this position are young people from across the nation who concur with Dr. King in maintaining that Vietnam is an unjust war and that America's political leadership is forcing them, particularly those not shielded by money, power, and political influence, to pay with their lives to maintain obscene war profits for American corporations.

In this highly polarized situation, the young and politically-disaffected oppose the forces of "law and order," political power, and control. Huge numbers of Chicago police at the Democratic Convention are augmented by large contingents of uniformed National Guard troops—all in riot gear. Many on both sides are spoiling for a fight. In fact, so obvious is the eventuality of confrontation even months before that Chicago is chosen as the convention site. Mayor Daley, the last and strongest of the big-city political bosses, the man whose Chicago ballot machinations delivered the 1962 presidential election to John F. Kennedy, is seen as the only man in the country who can maintain order during the 1968 convention. With his promise to do just that, the convention comes to Chicago, and with it comes America's fullest confrontation with political power. Polar-

ization by power, class, age, region, and race is intensifying. Open rebellion against constituted authority is increasingly the norm, not the exception.

Yet the full-fledged rebellion so fully in evidence in Grant Park, on Michigan Avenue, and in Chicago's sweltering slum-clearance "projects" during summer 1968 begins much earlier. Some African Americans have always followed the tenets of W. E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, and later black proponents of racial separation, hatred, or violence. By the mid-1960s, black writers and intellectuals increasingly express rage. In the April 1965 *Negro Digest* symposium, William Melvin Kelley "call[s] for the [black] writer to address a black audience rather than a white regarding his pain: 'the Negro writer believes that he must tell the white man where it's at, as if the white man has oppressed the Negro for the last 346 years without really being aware of it.' Instead, the Negro writer must use his art...to help the Negro to find those things that were robbed from him on the shores of Africa, to help repair the damage done to the soul of the Negro in the past three centuries'" (Kent; 183). Clearly, faith in the integrationist-assimilationist model has waned, and dominant writers of that orientation, like Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, are being supplanted by those with more radical views.

These newly assertive positions are ever more strongly asserted at mid and late-1960s writers' conferences, including the now famous Fisk University conference, "The Black Writer and Human Rights," of April 1967, attended by Gwendolyn Brooks as well as several radical black writers. There Lerone Bennett reiterates Kelley's earlier call to black writers "to come home to the black community. Bennett find[s]...it extraordinary 'that a man or an oppressed person would choose to address his oppressors, primarily'" and call[s]...for a "literature of transformation" (Kent, 198, 197).

Brooks, herself a product of middle-class values and integrationist-assimilationist philosophy and only beginning her transition from her earlier elite poetic orientation focusing on technical merit, is amazed and appalled by these views. Clearly, however, the increasingly strong and ever more frequent calls for black writers to write directly to black people, returning to them their history, pride, and sense of direction, exert a strong effect on her. Clearly, also, in the years to follow Brooks's skills as an elite poet schooled primarily in white European-based poetic traditions merge consciously with her need to support, affirm, and address the black community—her fam-

ily—to reconnect them with their history and to instill pride and direction for the future. By 1972, as reported in her autobiography, *Report from Part One*, Brooks's direction is clear. She says: "My aim, in my next future, is to write poems that will somehow successfully 'call'...all black people: black people in taverns, black people in alleys, black people in gutters, schools, offices, factories, prisons, the consulate; I wish to reach black people in pulpits, black people in mines, on farms, on thrones; not always to 'teach'—I shall wish often to entertain, to illumine. My newish voice will not be an imitation of the contemporary young black voice, which I do so admire, but an extending adaptation of today's G. B. voice" (183). Her (1970) *Family Pictures*, with its testaments to black heroes past and present and directives to the black community, shows her clearly embarked on that road.

Several factors undoubtedly lead Gwendolyn Brooks to her post-1967 poetic perspective. First, in addition to the societal forces described above, black artists and leaders present compelling evidence of continuing conscious efforts by whites in power to maintain black subjugation. They also provide a viable though painful strategy for redressing wrongs. Second, as a black woman in white American society, even one distanced by fame and literary success from some travails of the black community, Brooks herself has felt the negative effects of prejudice and discrimination. As a mother of two, she feels these things not only for herself but for her children. It is time to take a stand for them if not for herself. Third, she has always sought solidarity with the black community. A look at her writings discloses nothing not focused on life in the black community—her community. Fourth, her instinct to teach and to serve as an intellectual leader and mentor to Chicago's black community remains constant, but if she is to directly teach and mentor the black community, she realizes as never before the need for a wide black audience.

In making this conscious choice, Gwendolyn Brooks never rejects her earlier faith in the common humanity of all regardless of color; rather, she changes her target audience, now consciously writing to the black community, not to elite white audiences. In making this decision, Brooks faces the corollary—the need to modify poetic approaches, techniques, and styles to directly address a mass black audience. Even the previously-quoted language in her *Report from Part One* declaration of future poetic directions and emphases exemplifies this shift. Here we see the repetitive oral line, very much like

Whitman's, designed to assert a sense of order and immediate understanding from a listening mass audience.

Gwendolyn Brooks has always lived by and acted upon principle. Her conscious choice of direct address to the black community is not one she will regret or recant. In making the resulting poetic change, however, she has been forced to deal with new poetic problems and issues as she speaks to and for a mass audience. These authorial choices are the same difficult ones previously faced by earlier elite American writers like Thoreau, Whitman, London, Sinclair, and Sandburg as they attempted to present their findings broadly to Americans. These choices include those of complexity of message, simplicity of presentation, selection of poetic voice, and dominance of literary craft or moral message. In this last dichotomy, that between art and life, Brooks has sought to move to the mainstream in her mentoring messages to the African American community, but she has steadfastly remained true to craft as well, to the transmutation that must occur if individual time-based experience is to rise to timeless permanency and general truth.

Brooks has conscientiously attempted to fill both roles—black American and American poet. Two areas shed light on these consciously-assumed double roles. The first is Brooks's shifting of publishers after decades of publication with Harper. While it's true that the retirement of her long-time Harper editor, Elizabeth Lawrence, precipitates the break, it's also true that Brooks is determined to use her increasing prestige in the literary community to aid black publishers, particularly individuals she likes and respects, as well as young black writers. In this regard, her sense of community or "family" in the larger sense clearly operates. This same continuing sense of family operates in a more limited context when she becomes her own publisher. Her press, originally the Brooks Press, is later renamed the David Company to honor her father.

Brooks's revision of poems and her selection of poems for later collections of earlier poetry shed great light on her sense of the relative poetic strength of her poems as well as on her sense of the central moral messages to be presented to readers. This topic is itself worthy of an extended paper. In short, however, her selections and revisions reflect aesthetic as well as philosophical choices. While maintaining a significant range of coverage, later collections emphasize Brooks's efforts to focus and give point to her continuing cen-

tral mentoring theme by citing positive models, describing abuses, and providing directions for the black community.

While Gwendolyn Brooks is an African American dedicated to advancing the black community, she has gone beyond nostalgically romantic efforts to personally reconnect to Africa—America is the garden she has chosen to cultivate. Her cultivation, though marked by shifts with time and events, has remained dedicated and absolutely consistent. Her guiding principles have always been God, family, responsibility, artistry, and leadership. She is a great poet, a worthy leader of the African American community, and a strongly-principled American worthy of great celebration.

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