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# MidAmerica XXXI

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

DAVID D. ANDERSON, EDITOR

MARCIA NOE, ISSUE EDITOR

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In Honor of  
Richard Thomas

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## PREFACE

The 34<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature was held from May 13-15, 2004, at Michigan State University. The highlight of the conference was the screening of David and Andrew Phelps's film, *The Agent*, shot in Grand Rapids. At their annual meeting, the Society's Executive Board decided to make film screenings a regular feature of future conferences. At the awards banquet, Rane Arroyo [University of Toledo] received the Gwendolyn Brooks Award for best poem read at the 2003 conference, with Martha Vertreace-Doody [Kennedy-King College] and Todd Davis [Pennsylvania State University] taking honorable mentions. Jim Gorman [Otterbein College] received the Paul Somers Award for creative prose, and Jeffrey Swenson [University of Iowa] received the Midwest Heritage Award for best essay read at the 2003 conference, with Guy Szuberla [University of Toledo] taking honorable mention. Marilyn Atlas [Ohio University] received the MidAmerica Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern literature, and Richard Thomas [Michigan State University] received the Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature.

This issue is dedicated to Richard Thomas.

## CONTENTS

Preface		4
Astrid, Sigg, and Bert		
The Gwendolyn Brooks Prize Poem	Patricia Clark	7
Shag Carpet		
The Paul Somers Prize Story	Michael Kula	8
A Heart Enshrouded in the Landscape:		
An Impressionist Reading of		
"Big Two-Hearted River"		
The Midwest Heritage Prize Essay	Luchen Li	17
Twain, Howells, and the Origin of		
Midwestern Drama	David Radavich	25
Local Color, Local News, and "The Man that		
Corrupted Hadleyburg"	Guy Szuberla	43
Theodore Dreiser, Thermodynamics, and the "Manly		
Man": An Analysis of Gender Relations		
in the Cowperwood Trilogy	Barbara Lindquist	57
Stiffed: David Mamet's Men	John Rohrkemper	69
The Strength of the Midwestern Proletariat: Meridel		
LeSueur and the Ideal Proletarian Literature	Sara Kosiba	80
Claiming a Place in the Nation:		
Wisconsin Women Experience the Civil War		
Through Private Writing	Dana Edwards	91
Portraits of the American Heartland at the		
Crossroads of the Counterculture	Dominic Ording	104
Annual Bibliography of		
Midwestern Literature 2002	Robert Beasecker	115
Recipients of the Mark Twain Award		Inside Back Cover
Recipients of the MidAmerica Award		Back Cover

## ASTRID, SIGGY, AND BERT

PATRICIA CLARK

Where the mop-head hydrangeas lolled pink and blue  
between our house and theirs, where the pear tree  
scattered its white foam outside the first-floor window

of their bedridden mother, where the rabbits escaped  
our hutch and, yes, did chew every green stalk rising

in their vegetable patch, where Bert rescued  
the child wailing behind a locked door from the dark  
cave of the garage hung with sticky curtains

of spiders. Where one day an ambulance bumped the curb  
and white-coated attendants ran to wheel out the old woman,

chrome glinting, past the improbable snowball bush,  
never to return. Oh, the sweet-smelling house—yeast,  
and lemon—where they lived without clutter of dust.

Oh black-and-white cat named Andy, Swedish too,  
no doubt, with his four meticulous paws. If we shouted

in the streets, gusty days, doing our best to loft  
paper and balsa kites flying bed-sheet strips  
for tails, if Father joined us, tall as the one fir

sailing our front-yard, showing us how to unwind string  
and *run, run into the wind*; if we careened into beds

of neat iris, no word of reprimand escaped their lips.  
Three kind muses of the first rank who came bearing  
cookies on a blue plate, they cut and mowed, pruning

an order to all that grew on the lattice of our lives—  
vanished now, names nearly lost, faces watery, erased.

## SHAG CARPET

MICHAEL KULA

On the Tuesday after Labor Day, several weeks past his fifty-ninth birthday, Charlie Butler rose from his bed and descended the flight of stairs to the kitchen where he turned on first, the coffee maker and second, the porch light which sent its yellow glow out into the predawn shadows of his yard. He glanced out the window, checking for movement in his neighbor William's house, and unlocked the side door before returning upstairs for his shower.

This was the way Charlie had begun nearly every day for the past decade, only today was one of the rough mornings that came after a night of tossing and turning in his bed, as happened often when this time of year approached, and he looked forward to the warming buzz of the caffeine almost as much as he did to his friend's company. While lying awake the night before, Charlie realized his morning coffee ritual with William had begun exactly ten years ago to the day. On Labor Day of that year, the families in his quiet Bloomington neighborhood had gathered at his house for a block party that was filled with games for the children and excessive drinking for the adults, as most of the parties had been back then.

Right before William and his wife Vanessa left, William stopped and thanked Charlie for his hospitality with that exaggerated but hollow emotion of drunkenness. "I can't thank you enough," William said as he grabbed Charlie's hand between both of his, squeezing vigorously. "Vanessa has got us cold turkey on the coffee, so eight hours from now I'll be regretting that last daiquiri. I'll be cursing you in the morning, but for now I'm thanking you. I love you, buddy." Charlie nodded, knowing the words were meaningless, and he watched as William's wife Vanessa grabbed her husband's arm trying to hurry along the drunken good-bye.

"The doctor said it was bad for his heart," she said. "But he won't listen. I even went so far as to throw the coffeemaker in the trash, so there'd be no temptation." Vanessa was a small woman with cropped

hair who seemed even smaller when she stood next to her husband. Together they had the look of a football player-cheerleader duo who'd hooked up in high school and stayed a pair ever since.

Theresa, Charlie's own wife, approached from the side and patted him on the back like a child. "Oh dear lord, Charlie could never cut out the coffee," she said. "He needs it. He's an addict."

"Never," Charlie said. "Something is going to get us sooner or later, so why worry about it." Charlie said this at the time, of course not knowing the prophetic nature of his words. "If you need a cup tomorrow morning," he said to William, "I'll leave the side door open. If the porch light is on, the coffee is hot."

At the time Charlie had made that offer half jokingly, but the following morning as he woke with a dull headache himself, he wondered if he should follow through on the plan, just in case his friend had taken him seriously. He walked downstairs, made the coffee, turned on the light and unlocked the door as he'd promised, and sure enough, when he returned from his shower there was his friend, William, at the table, his face half covered by the mouth of an earthenware mug.

"I hope you don't mind," he said. "Last night I wasn't sure if you were joking, and when I saw the light on out back, I figured what the hell. I can always quit next week."

"Anytime," Charlie said. He poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down across the table.

William raised his mug, and they toasted. "Here's to quitting next week."

But now exactly a decade later, that day had not yet to come. Over the years those morning coffees had evolved into a well-rehearsed routine that ordinarily lasted forty-five minutes, long enough to pour and finish two cups apiece and catch up on gossip or vent frustrations about whatever was troubling them at the time. It occurred to Charlie as he sat in bed last night that over the course of the past ten years he and William had spent the equivalent of four months of time together sitting at that table. Of course he'd had to turn on the light and fish the calculator from the desk drawer to figure out the exact total. But four months, he'd thought in amazement as he struggled to fall asleep. The number stuck with him. Four months, though actually more like seven months if you factored in time for sleep. It seemed to Charlie a surprisingly long time, and as

he flipped about alone in his bed, he tried to think of everyone else in his life he'd spent that much time with.

Certainly there had been his parents and siblings when he was young. Then, without a doubt, there'd been his wife Theresa, though what he would give to have her back for just a tiny fraction more of that time. After her, there was of course, their son, Michael, and probably by now, his son's wife, Julie. But all of those people were family. You were supposed to spend that much time with them, or at least you had no choice in the matter. Charlie then recalled all the people in his office and his classmates back in elementary school and junior high, back when you stayed together for every class. However, when he got out of bed again for the calculator to check, he realized once you subtracted the time for summer break and the Christmas holidays, the school kids shared only two months of time with him each year. Certainly after twenty-three years at the same company his co-workers would qualify for the list—a fact Charlie was so certain of he didn't even do the math. However he accepted them reluctantly, because although they'd been with him for so much time, they weren't really with him the same way that he'd been with William all those mornings at the table.

Finally, some time after he last looked at the clock at three a.m., Charlie remembered Margaret, the only other serious love in his life besides Theresa. He'd dated her through most of college, and although by that point in the night he was too tired to get up to calculate the total, in his sleepy rough estimate he knew they'd spent well over four months of time together. But aside from her, his co-workers, and his family, there was no one else besides William. Charlie was now certain of that, and the realization of this fact left him staring through the darkness at the ceiling, feeling something special for William, though he couldn't exactly place what that was.

In the morning after his shower, Charlie returned to the kitchen, but William wasn't there. Perhaps, he thought, William had been awake last night too, he'd realized the occasion of this anniversary, and he'd suddenly decided ten years of coffee talk were enough. Or perhaps, he feared, Vanessa had finally gotten her way after all this time: no more coffee. Charlie glanced again out the side window at their house. A light was on, someone was up. He checked his watch—6:10—this wasn't like his friend.

Charlie took their usual mugs from the dishwasher, filled his, hesitated, and then filled William's as well, something he couldn't

remember ever doing before. He set the cups on the table, poured cream in his, dropped two cubes of sugar in his friend's, the way William always drank it, and Charlie waited, not sure if it was the lack of sleep, the absence of his friend, or the shortening days of the coming fall making the room seem so dark.

Several sips into his coffee, just as Charlie reached the end of the newspaper's cover story—though truthfully he'd been reading the words but thinking about his friend and couldn't remember a thing—William walked in, his tie hanging unfastened around his neck.

"It's going to be one of those days," he said without facing Charlie. "Sorry I'm running behind." He walked to the dishwasher, looked down momentarily puzzled, then turned as if about to ask a question.

"It's here," Charlie said, gesturing to the cup across from him. "I went ahead and poured it."

"Wow, table top service," William said. "Maybe I should be late more often." William laughed, but Charlie didn't see the humor. "I hope you don't think this means I'm going to leave a tip." William laughed again, as he sat down, reaching for the sugar in a single movement.

"It's already in there," Charlie said. "Two cubes, just the way you like it. If it's cold I could top it off from the pot." Charlie sat up ready to spring to his feet if his friend wanted.

"It's fine. Sit," William said.

Charlie relaxed back into the chair the way he liked to sink into the couch after a rough day of work. The sun rising outside had begun to make the room seem brighter than it had a moment earlier.

"Too much weekend, I think," William said. "That's the thing about holidays, they always make the first day back to work even harder."

Charlie agreed but thought about how different this Labor Day had been than that one ten years earlier. The block parties had stopped some time ago when everyone's families grew too large to accommodate such a gathering and when deaths and divorces had changed the tone of neighborhood conversations. Yesterday, Charlie had spent the afternoon at a cookout at his son Michael's, where he'd enjoyed himself just fine, but where, amid his son's friends and their spouses, he'd felt more like an add-on, there purely out of Michael's courtesy or, perhaps, his sympathy. If he'd had any other option, he

was sure he wouldn't have gone, and although he was curious what William and Vanessa had done, Charlie didn't ask.

Instead he looked down at his mug and asked shyly, "Do you know what today is?"

"Tuesday. September 5<sup>th</sup>. The day after Labor Day." William laughed once again. "The day I meet with the representatives from Markoff's."

Charlie picked up a spoon but simply held it, no stirring. It was cold. He remembered William had said something last week about an appointment scheduled for today. Maybe that's why he hadn't taken notice of this special occasion.

"That's not what you meant, though, was it?" William asked.

"It's our ten-year anniversary." The words sounded silly when Charlie said them aloud, and in the silence that followed, he stirred his coffee, although it didn't need it. In the distance, he thought he heard thunder, but then remembered it was garbage day.

"You mean of this? Our coffees?"

Charlie looked at his friend, nodded, but didn't feel the urge to smile.

"I hadn't realized it, but you're right. The day after Labor Day. So that's why I got the special treatment today?" William smiled, then slurped his coffee, and swished it in his mouth. "Wow. Ten years is a long time."

That it is, Charlie thought. He wanted to explain to William how all that time added up to the equivalent of four months together, but he reconsidered. Whenever Charlie revisited the memories of that first day, he back-filled the images with pictures of how the two of them appeared now—hair thinner, stomachs and necks fuller—not as they had been then, when everything had seemed brighter and easier, the mornings less foggy. All ten years are not created equal, Charlie had discovered long ago, and he decided these last ten had been particularly rough, leaving him with the same beaten-down feeling he recognized in the matted shag carpet that lined the stairs leading up to his bedroom. He missed the smooth, clean sensation of life, like walking barefoot over cold tile.

"You know, I don't think I ever told you this—" William stopped and drank again from his coffee, a large gulp that made his neck move. "But our little routine here almost didn't last longer than that first week or two."

Charlie waited for more.

"Of course you know Vanessa has never been crazy about this, and after that first week or so of us meeting, she said I had to stop. Gave me an ultimatum." William wrapped his palms around his mug the way someone might in order to warm them. "Vanessa told me I had to stop with the coffee *or else*. She never finished that thought—don't know exactly what that *or else* meant—but I didn't want to find out. Coffee seemed a small enough sacrifice, so I agreed. I told her I would stop at the end of the week. I told her it would be easier to kick the habit on the weekend when I didn't have to worry about being cranky at work."

Charlie pushed back from the table and stood up. He recalled the period of time, three maybe four years into his marriage to Theresa when their relationship fell flat and it seemed destined to be another casualty of divorce. He topped off their coffees and sat back down.

"Thanks," William said. He dropped a single cube of sugar in his mug and stirred. "So, that was the plan. No more coffee after that Friday, and then, well—" He tapped the spoon on the rim of the cup. "I think it was that Thursday when you lost Theresa."

Charlie nodded. He had known where this was going. He could see the hesitancy in his friend's eyes and hear it in his words; even after all this time Theresa's death was still such an awkward subject, the one topic usually off limits for their morning talks; her death, Charlie liked to think, they discussed not with their words, but with their silences.

William was right. It had been a Thursday. After dinner that night, Theresa had gotten up from the couch complaining about a headache. The pain, she said, was awful, unlike anything before, she said. Charlie massaged her temples and put a washcloth across her brow, both of which helped some, she said, but still, several hours and several aspirin later while they were in bed together—Charlie had been sleeping, she apparently had not—Theresa woke him saying something serious was wrong, her hand sweaty on his skin. Her eyes were blurry, she said; she could tell this, she said, even in the dark. By the time the paramedics arrived, she'd stopped talking and moving all together, just her fist clenched around Charlie's fingers telling him she was still there.

Aneurysm.

She passed so quickly that it was still dark outside when Charlie returned from the hospital, even after waiting what had to have been several hours in some desperate hope that someone had been wrong,

made a mistake, and would come to him saying, I'm sorry for the mix up, your wife is fine, it was nothing, a migraine. As soon as he walked back into the house that early morning, he knew he should call Michael, who was then off at college, but he waited, deciding to give his son that one last night of pleasant sleep. He sat alone in the kitchen—the house still and dark—sometimes crying, sometimes staring at the wall numbly trying to imagine his wife was, in reality, up sleeping in bed. Finally, when he saw the first signs of the sun beginning to rise, he put on the coffee, turned on the porch light, and he waited for his friend. He knew William would be there that morning. As the ambulance had sped away in the darkness the night before, Charlie had seen him standing with Vanessa, both of them in their robes on their front steps as the lights of the siren flashed circles across the trees. And sure enough, William arrived that day, right on time—maybe even a few minutes early—most likely not expecting the news Charlie gave him when he entered.

"Should I go?" William asked after hearing what had happened.

"Stay," was all Charlie had said, and they drank their coffees in silence.

When Charlie looked at his friend now, both of them in those same seats they'd been in that day so long ago, he tried to imagine what it would have been like struggling through those first months after Theresa's death—or through the years that followed, for that matter—without having his friend's visit to look forward to each morning. He wanted to thank him, but the words didn't seem strong enough. Charlie sipped his coffee, hoping something would come to him because this, he felt, was something he could not communicate with silence.

"So after Theresa passed," William said hesitantly, "Vanessa backed off that ultimatum. In fact, she even encouraged me to come. She thought you could use the company."

"She was right," Charlie said. He thought about what William had just told him. If his wife hadn't died, then he wouldn't have had those four months of time with his friend, a thought that surprisingly made him both happy and sad no matter which way he looked at it. "I'm glad you told me that," he said.

William nodded. "I've wanted to for a while, but I guess the time just never felt right before now."

Charlie heard the click of the coffeemaker and listened as what had to have been a belated drip fell into the pot. These mornings were

usually full of chatter which grew louder the longer they talked and the more coffee they drank, but today Charlie could think of nothing to add. He was afraid if he started, if he found the right words, everything he'd held back through the silences for all those years would come spilling out of him like coffee from a cracked pot.

"So, wow. I can't believe it's been ten years," William said.

Charlie didn't know if his friend was referring to their coffees together or to Theresa's death. That anniversary was coming too, next week, and although deep inside he knew he was over her death by now—at least as much as he figured you ever could be—there was still that part of him that always wondered, always looked back. Through the years he had of course dated and moved on in the ways society expected him to, but that didn't mean there wasn't some moment of everyday when he'd have a brief thought of something he wanted to tell her, no matter how small—even if it was something strange, like the fact he'd enjoyed himself on a date—and each day for that tiny fraction of a second when that thought passed, it reminded him that he was always, in some small way, alone.

"You know, I was thinking," Charlie said. "How about we start a new tradition today? Coffees in the morning, then maybe a beer or a night cap in the evening. Michael gave me a bottle of scotch for my birthday. The real stuff, from when he and Julie were in Europe. Seems a waste to drink it alone."

William breathed deeply enough for Charlie to hear him exhale. He stood up, went for the coffee and poured the last parts of the pot into their cups. "I don't know. It takes a lot to get Vanessa to allow me this one vice."

"Well, it doesn't have to be alcohol. It could be something else. What about smoothies? I don't know. We could make nightly smoothies—yogurt, berries, wheat grass. All that stuff. Julie swears by them. We could turn it into a virtue. Tell Vanessa we're atoning for our coffees."

William shook his head from side to side, not a yes, not a no. "Maybe sometime," he said.

"Ok, maybe sometime. Doesn't have to be today. Whenever." Charlie sipped his coffee, wishing he could take back his offer.

"Well, here's to ten years." William raised his mug.

"And to ten more," Charlie added as they toasted.

The clink of the half-filled cups lingered in the air like the smell of the coffee.



William breathed again loudly. "Well," he said. "I might have to get going a little earlier than usual today." His chair scraped the tile floor as he stood up. "Got that meeting, you know. Maybe I'll take this last bit to go if you don't mind."

"No problem," Charlie said. "I understand." His friend stopped in front of the door and smiled. Charlie had the sudden urge to hug him, but he didn't. He wasn't like his son and his son's friends who he had watched squeeze each other tightly as they left the cookout the day before. Charlie, of course, had shared those moments with his son, but even those were somewhat infrequent, and in his head when he imagined hugging William, all he could think about was the awkward sensation of one stubbled face scrapping against another, so different than the smooth and comforting softness of a woman's skin. "Ok, well good luck with the meeting," Charlie said. He reached around William and opened the door.

"Thanks."

Charlie extended his hand, and William shook it. "No, thank you," Charlie said. As they stood there with clasped hands, Charlie held on longer than he usually would have, and he looked in his friend's eyes in the slow drawn-out way he remembered pulling back from embraces with Theresa.

William turned first. He walked down the steps to where the sidewalk met the grass and stopped. "I'll just bring the mug back when I come tomorrow morning." He raised the cup in the air in a final toastlike gesture.

"Perfect," Charlie said. He watched as his friend disappeared behind the hedge row separating their houses, and then, seeing that full daybreak had now overtaken the yard, he turned off the porch light, closed the door, and got ready for another day of work.

Carroll College

## A HEART ENSHROUDED IN THE LANDSCAPE: AN IMPRESSIONIST READING OF "BIG TWO-HEARTED RIVER"

LUCHEN LI

Hemingway once complained that no one had ever understood the story of "Big Two-Hearted River" (Young 20). Extricating the meaning of "Big Two-Hearted River" has been an uneasy task for Ernest Hemingway's readers, critics, fellow writers, and biographers. While most readers and critics have agreed with the notion that the story set by the Fox River in Michigan reflects Hemingway's purposeful retreat from World War I, Norman Mailer, D. H. Lawrence, and Hemingway biographer Kenneth S. Lynn have shared profound doubt about this notion. They contend that the war-wound interpretation of the story "was established not by textual evidence, but by what the critics knew about the author's life—or rather, by what they thought they knew about his life" (Lynn 562).

Therefore, "Big Two-Hearted River" remains an unsolved literary mystery and raises more tantalizing questions than any other Hemingway story. To solve the mystery, we may want to highlight the fact that Hemingway wrote "Big Two-Hearted River" to imitate Paul Cézanne's Impressionist landscape paintings in order to sketch the writer's own picture of man's inner landscape. In the story, this inner landscape is submerged in the natural landscape drawn by Hemingway, imitating Cézanne's style. By contextualizing the story in an Impressionist mindset and comparing Hemingway's writing style with Cézanne's strokes on the canvas, I argue that "Big Two-Hearted River" not only conceals Hemingway's inner drama of terrific intensity but also discloses his perspective on man's relationship to nature.

"Big Two-Hearted River" begins with Nick returning to country that had been burned out a year ago. He is excited over the trip because "it was a long time since Nick had looked into a stream and

seen trout" (3). Following this, Hemingway presents Nick reflecting on his past, very likely his childhood. Nick is now a grown man who has been away; he has been abroad, as we have seen, and in war. The opening page of this fishing trip establishes the atmosphere of shadows and tensions submerged in details. He finds a spot for his campsite, pitches his tent, and catches grasshoppers for bait. Each step of the process, smoothing the ground, arranging the blankets, cutting the tent's pegs and raising the canvas, is presented as part of a monotonous sequence. Next, the reader sees Nick coming out of the tent, with the same deliberate monotonousness, and cooking for supper. After he eats, "his mind was starting to work" (11). But Nick tries to control his mind by not letting it be too active; he falls asleep. Part II of the story opens on the following morning and takes Nick through a day of fishing. Different from his previous state, Nick now seems to have a terrible panic that is barely under control. This is the Hemingway style at its most extreme, which is also the perfect expression of the content of the story. Nick's mechanical movements—of cooking, casting, baiting his hook and the rest—are the mindless movements of an injured soul.

"Big Two-Hearted River" has been difficult to interpret not because we cannot read it symbolically, but because the unique Hemingway style in this story has not been convincingly explained. Hemingway revised the story extensively and considered it one of his most successful early works. Hemingway revealed in a letter to Gertrude Stein in 1924 that in "Big Two-Hearted River" he was following her example in taking the impressionist painter Paul Cézanne as his model to forge a new descriptive literary style. "Big Two-Hearted River" shows that the story was meant to be a stream-of-consciousness transcription of Hemingway's thoughts that arose while he was writing about Nick Adams's fishing trip. The story communicates insights into Hemingway's state of mind at that time. In "On Writing," Hemingway said that he wanted to write:

Like Cézanne painted. Cézanne started with all the tricks . . . He, Nick, wanted to write about country so it would be there like Cézanne had done it in paint. You had to do it from inside yourself . . . Nobody had ever written about country like that. He felt almost holy about it. It was deadly serious. You could do it if you would fight it out. If you'd lived right with your eyes . . . Nick, seeing how Cézanne would do the stretch of river and the swamp, stood up and stepped down into the stream. The water was cold and actual. He

waded across the stream, moving in the picture. (*Major Writers of Short Fiction* 541)

It is logical therefore to say that in order to understand better the significance of the "Hemingway style" in "Big Two-Hearted River," we must first know some tenets of Cézanne's painting. So what is the unique style of Cézanne's paintings?

For the sake of brevity, we may want to look into three major techniques in Cézanne's artistic styles: color, shadow, and distortion. In general, Cézanne followed the Impressionistic theory that warm colors advance while cool colors recede. Cézanne particularly believes that "Nature is more in depth than in surface" (qtd. in Loran 28). In use of color to convey the depth, Cézanne often maintained a fairly consistent light source in his paintings, and sometimes his cast shadows are a very important element in the color, form, and shape structure. The importance of his shadows lies in their indication of contrast and sometime violence. Another important ingredient of form in Cézanne's art is the use of distortion. Cézanne's distortions and alterations of reality in the landscape convey the artist's subjectivity and, often, surreal impressions of life.

Following Cézanne's art on canvas, Hemingway painted his own mental landscape, with words, through the media of the more visible natural landscape. The complexity of Nick Adams's mind corresponds to the colors, shadows, and distortions in Cézanne's paintings, and the natural landscape portrayed by Hemingway illustrates Nick's state of mind. Now let us examine how Cézanne's techniques may help us retrieve Hemingway's intentions by contouring the color, shadow, and distortion of the landscape in "Big Two-Hearted River."

First, Hemingway colored the landscape in view as dark green and black. His stroke of the story starts with the train going on up the track out of sight, "around one of the hills of burnt timber" (3). The first paragraph of the story emphasizes that in Nick's view, where he is going to set up his bundle of canvas "there was no town, nothing but the rails and the burned-over country" (3). Also in the first paragraph, we see the stone chipped and split by the fire and the town of Seney "burned off the ground" (3). Ahead of Nick, as far as he could see, "was the pine plain" (5). Hemingway further adds a few strokes: "The burned country stopped off at the left with the range of hills. On ahead islands of dark pine trees rose out of the plain. Far off

to the left was the line of the river" (5). The dark color not only clouds the panorama of Nick's view in distance, it also smears things near him. As he stretched out, he noticed a grasshopper walk in front of him along the ground and up onto his sock. When he observed more closely, he found that:

The grasshopper was *black*. As he had walked along the road, climbing, he had started many grasshoppers from the dust. They were all black. They were not the big grasshoppers with *yellow* and *black* or *red* and *black* wings whirring out from their *black* wing sheathing as they fly up. These were just ordinary hoppers, but all a sooty *black* in color. Nick had wondered about them as he walked, without really thinking about them. Now, as he watched the black hopper that was nibbling at the wool of his sock with its fourway lip, he realized that they had all turned *black* from living in the burned-over land. (5, italics are mine)

Like Cézanne's use of color, Hemingway's touch with dark paint adds the depth of the landscape he is portraying. The color black invites the reader/spectator to search deeper in the artist's mind for the natural revelation of mood. Also like Cézanne's art, Hemingway has juxtaposed variously colored little planes—the canopy, the topless pine tree trunks, the burned ground, and the glittering river and sun—to produce an effect of transparency, depth, and fullness. As Cézanne would do on the canvas, Hemingway arranges his still lives in a spirit close to that of the most abstract painters.

Second, we must pay attention to the shadowy feeling conveyed through the use of color, shape, and structure in the story. "Big Two-Hearted River" apparently is a collection of sharp sensory details. But if it is read closely, one realizes that actually it is a kind of waking dream. There are shadows in the story that one does not see at first; the story works on several levels. The fishing is an escape from a nightmare or from realities that have become a nightmare. The opening pages of the fishing trip establish the atmosphere of shadows and tensions of which Nick is conscious. When Nick first sees the river, he sees trout "keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins" and others "in deep, fast moving water, slightly distorted," and at the bottom of the pool he finally can make out the big ones (3). The reader gets the sense that that a terrible panic is just barely under control: Nick's mechanical movements, of cooking, casting, baiting his hook and the rest, are the mindless movements of

a mentally disabled man. "Big Two-Hearted River" presents a picture of a sick man, a man who is in escape from whatever it is that makes him sick. Nick obviously knows what is the matter and what he must do about it. He must keep physically occupied, keep his hands busy; he must not think or he will be unable to sleep; he must not get too excited or he will get sick.

Among the techniques Hemingway used to create the Cézannean shadowy figure in the story is the mixed angle of perspectives. Hemingway focalizes the story through Nick, allowing the reader to visualize all of Nick's actions and surroundings. The intensely personal story, which completely immerses the reader in the actions and thoughts of Nick Adams, engages and submerges the spectator/reader in Nick's meticulous movements, and Nick appears as a shadow of the writer. What's more, the reader/spectator is also drawn to merge and identify with this shadow. The story is completely written in the third person, but it is full of images, sounds, and smells the "I" can see, hear, and taste. Hemingway exactly describes Nick's actions as he fishes for trout. Details of his fishing trip are told so clearly that the reader is almost an active participant in the expedition instead of someone reading a story.

The third Cézannean technique Hemingway applies in "Big Two-Hearted River" is distortion of shape and vision. Distortion is one of the most important ingredients of form in the art of Cézanne. In Cézanne's paintings a special section of diagrams is often given over to peculiarities of the drawing of plates and other objects used as subject matter. In the story through Nick's eyes, nature and objects are often blurred; it is either the glaring sun, the river, or the trees. For instance, Hemingway has thus depicted the burned trees:

The trunks were straight and brown without branches. The branches were high above. Some interlocked to make a solid shadow on the brown forest floor . . . . The trees had grown tall and the branches moved high, leaving in the sun this bare space they had once covered with shadow. Sharp at the edge of this extension of the forest floor commenced the sweet fern. (6-7)

Here the usual view of the forest is gone; instead, it is a twisted picture, a sheer contrast to what one may expect of the natural landscape. The above description of the brown branchless trunks in front of Nick appears to be a picture of thousands of bayonets posing into the sky.

Coupled with the use of dark color, the scene undoubtedly conveys the tension and violence of the atmosphere.

Similarly, tension is also sensed at the microscopic level. When Nick stares at trout in the river, his vision, or his mind to be exact, produces a distorted picture. "He watched them holding themselves with their noses into the current, many trout in deep, fast moving water, slightly distorted as he watched far down through the glassy convex surface of the pool, its surface pushing and swelling smooth against the resistance of the log-driven piles of the bridge" (3). Here again, through the "glassy convex surface of the pool," Hemingway gives the reader/spectator a twisted picture. It is not difficult for the reader to visualize a picture of the trout, the bridge, the surface of the water with the glaring sunlight. Viewed together with the branchless tree trunks and the burned ground, the entire landscape overhangs in confusion, like the unrecognizable and monstrous ruins of some vanished city, here Seney. But the fury of their chaos makes one think rather of volcanoes, deluges, and great forgotten cataclysms.

When Hemingway, upon finishing the story, disclosed to Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas that he had been "trying to do the country like [Paul] Cézanne" did with his painting (qtd. in Lynn 102), he was not speaking idly when he suggested that his recreations of the landscape, plus one human figure, Nick (truly Hemingway himself), were like a series of pictures by Cézanne. In "Big Two-Hearted River," not only do we find a sketch of the Seney country in Upper Michigan, a landscape with color, smell, and sound, but we also feel the deep inner drama inside Nick. However, if read as an Impressionist Cézannean painting, "Big Two-Hearted River" yields much richer meanings than what conventional interpretations have indicated. Hemingway places the essential human traits, as Impressionist painters do, on canvases organized by harmonies of color, lines. If Cézanne's purposeful distortion of natural shapes results in a new, more exciting effect of space as a positive "form-conditioning" factor, Hemingway's distortion of the landscape, through Nick's mental and physical vision, has made a thrust into space more forceful. Thus, the effect of this technique merges Hemingway's emotional landscape with the natural landscape being drawn.

One way to understand the violent emotions in "Big Two-Hearted River" is to reflect on the war and violence that Hemingway knew. The impact of twentieth-century fire power on the American troops

first exposed to combat in World War I helped produce the combination of absurdity, protest, and numbness that characterized the post-war zeitgeist. The war is usually described as the "battlefield with death unredeemed, death with no hint of heroism, none of heroic action . . . just death, helpless, hopeless, pointing to nothing but decomposition, decay, disappearance, reduction of the fair frame of life to nothingness" (Cooperman 73). Traditionally, readers and critics believe that "Big Two-Hearted River" is a soldier's retreat in nature. Such a belief is based on the notion that as a contrast, for writers like Hemingway, the very image of mountains could become the symbol of something clean and fine. Yet, this superficial serenity and natural beauty cannot completely conceal the inner violence that the war had imposed on the writer. There is an assumption that the war impact could be blunted by time. But this is not the case for Nick; it is a continuing crisis, deep inside. Hemingway, in his later career, was preoccupied with the formalization of death because his war experience showed him violence without truth, without will, and—most importantly—without virility. To understand his work, this story, and political protest or aesthetic retreat, the impact of World War I combat must be seen clearly for what it was.

The reason Hemingway imitates Cézanne's technique of description goes beyond the fact that the former just "learned how to make a landscape from Mr. Paul Cézanne" (qtd. in Young 185). Young states, "It may not be entirely clear how a writer learns to make landscapes from a painter. But it is not difficult to see that he might learn a few things about how to write natural description, and how to give fiction the sense of a physical background" (185). But we must notice the artistic effect and thematic significance in Hemingway's implementation of an Impressionist style. The few careful touches and sketches not only make Hemingway's style Cézannean or Impressionist, more importantly, these sketches are what D. H. Lawrence likens to "striking a match, lighting a brief sensational cigarette." Like Cézanne in his use of an Impressionist style in his landscape paintings, Hemingway has drawn a landscape, with Nick deeply submerged in it, not physically but metaphysically; the human figure has become one with the landscape. The character is both the artist and a figure in the story, just as in Cézanne's painting "A Modern Olympia," in which the painter is both inside and outside the art work. Like Cézanne who painted bright outdoor scenes, Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" has brought everything out-

doors and called it homelike. Also like Cézanne, who decided "to make Impressionism something solid and durable, like the art of the museums" (qtd. in Loran 25) with a patient, disciplined search for harmony of form and color, "Big Two-Hearted River" showcases Hemingway's efforts to create a subtle balance by submerging the dramatic human emotions deeply in the landscape. The landscape in the story, as in the Impressionist painting, is vast, solid, stable, serene, but the architectural strokes in the story, also as in paintings, make the feeling of solidity, stability, and serenity shaky and superficial. The forces at work in such a painting, just as in Nick's consciousness, have been brought into balance, subdued by the greater power of the artist's will. This disciplined energy, distilled from the trials of powerful emotions, gives Hemingway's style those qualities he described in terms of an iceberg, as it gave Cézanne's style its enduring strength.

Kettering University

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## TWAIN, HOWELLS, AND THE ORIGINS OF MIDWESTERN DRAMA

DAVID RADAVICH

The origins of Midwestern drama are far from being known and understood. Although Walter J. Meserve's path-breaking *Complete Plays of William Dean Howells* appeared from New York University Press in 1960, only scholars of Howells and a small group of Americanists have attempted to mine its riches. Eble's *Howells: A Century of Criticism*, like most book-length studies, fails to include a single essay on Howells's dramatic achievement. Clara and Rudolf Kirk's *William Dean Howells* includes merely a section entitled "Theater Critic of the Nineties," without discussing a single one of Howells's three dozen plays, many of them successfully performed.

In Twain studies, Henry Nash Smith's *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays* is typical in not including a single essay or chapter on Twain's drama. Thomas Schirer's *Mark Twain and the Theater* fills a conspicuous, much-needed gap, providing comprehensive discussion of Twain's infatuation with theatrics and documenting "eleven plays he began by himself" as well as collaborative ventures like *Der Gegenkandidat, or Woman in Politics*, with Siegmund Schlesinger (105; 96). However, Schirer's book attempts not "to analyze his dramatic oeuvres in depth" but to "validate the extent of his involvement with the theatre and the role it played in his creative process" (V). Shelley Fisher Fishkin's authoritative Afterword to Twain's *Is He Dead?* first written when the author was living in Vienna in 1898 but published only in fall 2003, offers very helpful, comprehensive background and source context. Yet Schirer is right to point out that most "scholars have disregarded or played down Twain's work as a dramatist" (107). And no scholar has examined the Midwest as a formative element in the dramatic achievement of either Twain or Howells or evaluated the role the region plays in their most successful stage works.

Much more scholarship needs to be done, but from what we now know, Midwestern drama apparently began with Twain and Howells, born two years apart in Missouri and Ohio respectively, whose dramatic efforts interconnected and continued throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century and beyond. Moreover, these two great figures set the direction of American letters not only in fiction but also in drama. Although both Twain and Howells left their home region to achieve recognition and opportunity in the Northeast, their enterprise represented a reverse colonization of ideas and precepts nurtured in the Midwest.

The year 1874 can be pinpointed as a seminal year in Midwestern drama. That was the year "an unauthorized dramatization of [Twain's] *The Gilded Age* starring comic actor John T. Raymond was about to be staged in San Francisco by G. B. Densmore . . ." (*Is He Dead?* 148). According to Fishkin, "the one fresh character showcased in the production was Twain's irrepressible Colonel Sellers" (148). On September 16, 1874, *Colonel Sellers* opened at the Park Theatre in New York and became one of the "biggest hits of the decade, and at one point would bring Twain more annual income than all his books combined" (149). Critical assessment of *Colonel Sellers* was almost entirely negative—"a wretched thing" or "excessively thin in texture" (149)—but Twain had created an exuberant original character in Colonel Sellers, who appeared later in a far better play co-authored with Howells.

Mark Twain, it turns out, was a playwright almost from the beginning of his career, which is no surprise to anyone familiar with the over-the-top theatrical antics of the Duke and the King in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain encountered live theatre early in childhood and became swept up in it: "I remember the first Negro musical show I ever saw. It must have been in the early forties. It was a new institution. In our village of Hannibal . . . it burst upon us as a glad and stunning surprise" (qtd. in Buckley 464). This event was not unique: "the variety of dramatic performances and their frequency of production indicate an avid theatrical interest in Hannibal" (Schirer 8). Schirer says that, "Mark Twain's infatuation with theatrics remained strong up until his death," yet he is rarely thought of as a dramatist, despite many public performances and clear relish in adopting personae and taking on all manner of voices and postures (102).

Twain's second dramatic effort was *Ah Sin*, co-written with Bret Harte. The play "opened in Washington, D.C. at the National Theater on May 7, 1877, and closed within a week" (Fishkin 150). Bordman provides a summation that by now has become the standard critical reaction: "The play . . . was a failure, but is remembered because of the speech Mark Twain, dressed in white, gave at the end. Many critics claimed the speech was better than anything in the play" (13). Fishkin offers a more in-depth discussion of this event in her Afterword to *Is He Dead?* (149-50), but it's clear that, despite the financial and critical failure of *Ah Sin*, Twain loved the theatre and returned to it repeatedly throughout his long career.

In a parallel development, William Dean Howells began his thirty-six-year playwriting career also in 1874 with performances of his first play, *Samson*, a biblically based verse drama that continued to be performed for twenty-five years (1). Howells went on to write some three dozen plays over the following decades in an astonishing variety of forms. Although he is most famous as "a gentle satirist of Boston manners" (*Cambridge* 240) in prose one-acts, he also translated plays—*Yorick's Love* (1878) is an adaptation of Manuel Tamayo y Baus's *Un Drama Nuevo* (1867)—and wrote *Priscilla*, a hilarious verse comedy satirizing the famous Miles Standish episode in American history.

Howells is a towering figure in American literature, but his involvement and lasting achievement in theatre have not been sufficiently recognized. From the perspective of Midwestern studies, Howells's connections to themes and preoccupations of his home region are markedly indirect. Most of his plays are set in the Northeast, primarily dealing with social situations and romantic relations. However, the central conflict embedded in most plays involves an outsider, usually a Midwesterner, trying to assert his identity and secure acceptance in a class-conscious society to which he doesn't belong. Whereas Twain arrived in the East with his Missouri-bred self-confidence intact and trumpets blaring, Howells struggled with issues of identity and acceptance, encoded in the conflicted situations of his plays.

Howells's early verse dramas like *Samson* and *Yorick's Love* deal with marginalized characters at a remove. *Parlor Car* (1876), by contrast, is Howells's first social comedy, featuring an awkward suitor on a train heading upstate in New York. Action centers on social trespass of various kinds. Perhaps most striking is Mr. Richard's desire

that Miss Galbraith "would speak to me half as kindly as you do that ducky . . ." (28). He asserts a non-Eastern egalitarian argument, regarding "that ducky" as "an urbane and well-formed nobleman. At any rate he's a man and brother" (28). These startling assertions announce both Howells's Midwestern perspective on social class and also his arguments in favor of what he would later call "the natural gentleman."

Howells's first contemporary full-length play, *Out of the Question* (1877), offers one of the first stage portrayals of a Midwesterner seeking validation and acceptance in the East. Into an all-female gathering at the Ponkwasset Hotel, Mr. Blake enters carrying the belongings of Leslie Bellingham, a well-off young lady he offered help to when the conveyance to the hotel was dangerously overloaded. In a striking second scene, Blake first converses with two tramps and then later rescues three young ladies from the tramps' attempted robbery. Blake's wrist is apparently broken in the exchange, but he defends the tramps: "Well, they couldn't find work just now" (49). As discussion of "the deserving poor" unfolds, Blake states his no-nonsense attitude: "I don't like eccentricity . . . I take the broken wrist for what it brings" (50).

A family fight ensues over Blake's credentials as a gentleman. It turns out that Blake has come "all the way from Omaha" and has invented "an improved locomotive driving-wheel" (50). When Leslie wants to "go into partnership" with Blake, her mother erupts: "He's a steamboat engineer, Leslie" (55). She opposes Leslie's marrying "any man whose history you despise" (55). Leslie counters, "Mr. Blake is quite as good as the gentlemen of my acquaintance, mamma . . . He's a genius" (54). In a final *coup de grace*, Leslie's brother Charles enters, recognizing Blake as the man who "fished me out of the Mississippi": "You're not going to tell me that a man who saved my life isn't a gentleman" (60). The way is finally paved for Leslie and Mr. Blake to marry.

*Out of the Question* indulges in too much debate to be theatrically successful, but the same issues are presented in *A Counterfeit Presentment* (1877), one of Howells's most famous works. In this play, the dramatic situation of *Out of the Question* is inverted. While the setting once again is the Ponkwasset Hotel, the focus is on two young men: one a clergyman of some refinement of manners, the other a talented, restless artist named Bartlett. When General Wyatt and his family arrive, they mistake Bartlett for the former suitor of

Wyatt's daughter, recently overthrown in Paris for disreputable behavior. Wyatt comes after the startled Bartlett with his stick. Bartlett is outraged at the social rebuff: "What do you think I'm made of? . . . Go? I ought to be shot away out of a mortar; I ought to be struck away by lightning!" (81).

After the mistaken identity is cleared up, Bartlett begins offering art lessons to Constance, falling in love with her in the process. His courtship seems decidedly Midwestern:

CONSTANCE. No, I don't like any sort of indirection. I believe the straightforward way is the best.

BARTLETT. Yes, so do I; but it's impossible. (97)

Bartlett feels imprisoned by language: "No, I can never tell you" (98). He witnesses himself "reduced to a body, without a soul, to a shadow, a counterfeit" (103) by a social hierarchy that excludes him.

In the end, Bartlett manages to find uneasy acceptance in the seemingly closed and judgmental world of the Northeast. This seemingly brash and uncouth man of mysterious origins, who has more talent than anyone in the play, nonetheless experiences real difficulties finding his voice and asserting his merit. In this trio of early plays, and especially in *Out of the Question* and *A Counterfeit Presentment*, Howells has dramatized the dilemma of the talented Midwesterner struggling to find visibility. Noticeable autobiographical elements, albeit encoded in the dramatic action, inform these works as cultural documents of regional intersection.

The approach taken in *Colonel Sellers as a Scientist* (1883), jointly written by Howells and Twain, is entirely different. Here Midwesterners star at the center of the action, even in the alien environment of the East. *Colonel Sellers as a Scientist* enacts a cultural clash between regions, ending with the assertion of Midwestern values as "American." It is a great puzzle why this delightful play, with its witty dialogue, irrepressible energy, clever stage business, and moderate-sized cast, is not more widely known and performed. It recalls the best features of George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart's *You Can't Take It With You* (1936), a staple of the American stage. Part of the neglect of this *Colonel Sellers* (not to be confused with the earlier, pirated play of 1874) can be blamed on incomplete or corrupted versions. Fishkin describes the 1884 version as an "ill-fated collaboration" that "opened and closed in New York on the same day" (150,



151). But Meserve makes clear that while Twain had arranged these early one-night performances in 1884, both Twain and Howells continued to work on the play. A more substantial version opened at the Lyceum Theatre, New York in 1887 (207). The final version Meserve prints in Howells's *Complete Plays* is culled from three original sources, and the result is a delight.

*Colonel Sellers as a Scientist* opens in a "showily furnished" parlor in Washington, D.C. (209). The Sellers family, including the Colonel, his wife, daughter Mary, and cousin Lafayette Hawkins, are newly arrived from Hannibal, Missouri. All members of the Sellers family except the Colonel are sensible, mild-mannered, and cautiously skeptical, if supportive, in the Midwestern way. Colonel Sellers, by contrast, is their opposite: a wildly optimistic showman akin to the Wizard of Oz, pulling levers to create scenes of wonderment. Yet like the Wizard, even he is a devoted Midwesterner, wanting to relocate the nation's capital: "Saint Louis is the political centre of the country, and will soon outstrip Chicago as the moral and religious centre" (236).

Colonel Sellers combines excessive entrepreneurship and boosterism with a fanatical belief in scientific progress. His inventions overrun the parlor, surrounding, blocking, and occasionally exploding during the action. And they have consumed all the family income, so that Mrs. Sellers and Mary must share the same outworn dress. At the same time, the inventions reveal a decidedly political dimension. Among his projects is a "constitutional amendment authorizing the President to declare war against any power excluding American pork" (210). This "pork," of course, has a double meaning: "We are destined to supply the world with pork, sir . . . American pork and the spread of American principles go hand-in-hand—the pig and the eagle are one and inseparable" (236). Another of Sellers's more fanciful inventions is a recording phonograph that generates power by means of swearing, thereby saving on manpower: "Five years from now, all the swearing will be done by machinery—on a ship" (241).

The development on which the plot turns, however, involves Colonel Sellers's experiments in "materialization," whereby cells of dead bodies can be scientifically reconstituted for further deployment: "These now idle, useless myriads of dead men can be employed in a thousand ways . . . Why shouldn't we have a permanent set of dead congressmen?" (217). Cousin Hawkins observes, "Your materialization plan beats immigration if it will work!" to

which Sellers responds, "I can furnish Europe a set of kings that can eat dynamite if they want to—it can't hurt them" (217). And of course a body becomes manifest at the end of act one: an English cousin, Rupert De Bohum, recently declared dead by the newspapers from a disastrous hotel fire, enters on cue as Sellers conducts his home materialization experiment.

Pursuing an earldom is one of Colonel Sellers's other motivating goals, through which Twain and Howells mock the American love of the titled aristocracy that the U.S. Constitution was designed to replace. Sellers's aristocratic aspirations seem largely ornamental, but they are supported by members of the family as a means of affirmation: "Why, it's a grander thing, it's a sublimer thing, it's a more enviable thing to be an English earl than to be a materialized Solomon . . ." (218). One can almost hear the authors laughing behind this line, while, as additional counterpoint, Aunt Sally and Uncle Daniel, both speaking thick black dialect, roam the house like a spectral chorus.

The scientific, entrepreneurial, and political ambitions all coalesce in the third act, as Major Suckers, aggressive reporter for *The Standard-Post*, arrives to do a story on Sellers's materialization experiments. When Sellers protests the intrusion, Suckers counters, "But in point of fact there are no private houses in America, no private affairs. The public must and will know everything" (234). Colonel Sellers shares his dream of moving the national capital to Saint Louis and re-arranging sunspots to control the climate. By the time Suckers reads back his version of the interview, Colonel Sellers has become a duke with "near relationship to the royal family" and has "just descended from the top of Washington Monument" in his "flying apparatus" (237). To this grossly distorted account, Sellers responds with Midwestern litotes: "I congratulate you on the accuracy of your report. It is seldom, sir, that these things reach the public with any degree of correctness" (238).

In the end, the extreme poverty of the family finds relief in royalties from one of Colonel Sellers's inventions, a boiler-maker "cut-off." Their fortunes are thereby saved, and daughter Mary can wed the man who rescued her during a traumatic boat wreck on the Mississippi (recalling Blake in Howells's *Out of the Question*), who turns out to be none other than the British cousin, heir to the Earl of Dover, whom Sellers thought he had "materialized." In view of De Bohum's pre-emptive claim, Colonel Sellers renounces all "thought



of an English abode," celebrating instead "the glorious freedom of an American Citizen" and waving "the flag all over" (241).

So ends a delightful, exuberant play with generous doses of satire against class pretensions, political corruption, entrepreneurial humbuggery, and scientific hot air. The values of Twain's Missouri "down-home" skepticism pervade the action, as his signature themes appear in rapid succession. But one can also see the influence of Howells's guiding intelligence, smoothing the dialogue and especially the dramatic flow from one scene to the next. Howells's contributions can also be seen by comparing this play with Twain's later *Is He Dead?*, a work which possesses the same satiric exuberance and witty conception but lacks the smooth transitions and practical scene-building of *Colonel Sellers as a Scientist*. This play deserves a contemporary hearing and may be more suitable for our public relations age wedded to technological entrepreneurship than for audiences of the 1880s.

As Howells continued writing dramas of cultural intersection in the 1880s, as well as his fiction masterpieces, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and *Indian Summer* (1886), Twain published *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1884. As Roach rightly points out, the novel offers "a rich archive of cultural performances, especially, but not exclusively, performances on stage" (339). While not technically theatre, the Duke and King episodes comment on and enact complex intersections of cultural performance. These enactments not only reveal much of Twain's thinking about performance both on stage and in everyday life; they also encode personal, social, and political values and modes of expression. Borrowing from the author's early exposure to traveling shows and popular melodramas, these scenes resonate with and inform Twain's later plays.

The characters who become anointed as the King and Duke arrive in chapter nineteen, begging for Huck to save their lives. Looking "ornery" in their ragged clothes, they carry carpet bags and trade in patent medicines, temperance redemptions, and other quickly adopted schemes, many tied explicitly to religion. The younger straggler anoints himself "the rightful Duke of Bridgewater" (162), which rather quickly degenerates into "Bilgewater." The older man, not to be outdone, claims he is "the rightful King of France" (163). Huck decides his interest lies in going along with this pretense. At a revival held at a camp meeting in the next town, the King performs as a redeemed pirate, collecting a tidy sum. Meanwhile, the Duke

arranges for performances from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard III*. In preparation, the Duke must tone down the King's booming rendition of Juliet and help him learn a hopelessly bowdlerized version of Hamlet's signature soliloquy.

In the following town in Arkansas, Colonel Sherburn shoots a drunkard named Boggs, after which "one long, lanky man, with long hair and a big white fur stovepipe hat" (187) re-enacts the crime for bystanders, to general approbation at the excellence of his portrayal. This performance is followed by a circus featuring a talented clown and a virtuoso set piece performed by a planted drunk who emerges, after a death-defying series of stunts on horseback, "dressed the gaudiest and prettiest you ever saw" (194). At the Duke and King's performance that night, by contrast, only twelve attend, the audience laughs at the tragic portrayals, and the two actors claim "these Arkansaw lunkheads couldn't come up to Shakespeare," a reaction Twain himself had to early performances he saw by Dan Rice, "the most popular performer in the early American circus" (194; Schirer 5).

The following chapter shows the pair building sets and the King coming on stage on all fours, naked and elaborately painted. The audience is furious about the brief show, but the Duke and King con them into keeping silent and serving as social accomplices for two more shows. On the third day (no accidental timing on Twain's part), the Duke and King "resurrect" again on the raft, labeled by all as "rapscallions" (199). Here Twain reveals the political dimensions of performance, as these two shysters are compared to real kings, whose customary rapscallion behavior is no worse than theirs.

Chapter twenty-four adds another dimension to the cultural performance, as Jim gets dressed up as King Lear wearing a sign identifying him as a "Sick Arab" so he won't be bothered by would-be intruders during the play performances. At the same time, Huck becomes re-anointed as Adolphus, servant to the King during the following scenes. As the Duke and King perpetrate their scam to impersonate the grieving uncles (one of them deaf) of the lately "diseased" Peter Wilkes, Huck must "play a chicken bone" whenever caught lying by Joanna. Later he gives a totally unconvincing performance of a Sheffield dialect. After having hid in the closet among Mary Jane's dresses, Huck steals the bag of money and places it in the coffin. At the funeral, he performs ignorance of the missing money and blames "the niggers." At this point, the earlier theatrical performances

have become cultural ones, with Huck playing active accomplice to the fraud.

In chapter twenty-eight, Twain again shifts the grounds of performance. Huck accidentally tells the truth to Mary Jane and decides to "come clean" to her about the masquerade and the money. After the real uncles arrive and as the corpse is being disinterred, Huck escapes back to the raft. The Duke and King launch into a knockdown fight of blame which eventually ends with the King "owning up" about taking the money that readers know was removed by Huck. Again Huck maintains his silence, feeling "easy and satisfied" (264).

But the climax of the novel occurs after Huck learns that the two showmen have sold Jim into slavery. Fighting strenuously with his conscience in a masterful private performance, Huck tears up the note he has written to Miss Watson informing her of the whereabouts of her runaway slave. This wonderful rendering of the battle between lying and telling the truth—about race, about human decency, and about the intersections of personal choice and social policy—is a masterstroke of theatricality imbedded in successive layers of performance.

The entire Duke and King episodes lead up to this enactment of truth at the heart of the novel. Twain has provided instances in which masquerade alternately distorts for immoral gain or reveals greater truths. Telling things straight, by contrast, can lead either to hardship and disaster or to freedom from burden and guilt. In chapter thirty-three, Huck witnesses the Duke and King being hounded out: "they was all over tar and feathers and didn't look like nothing in the world that was human—just looked like a couple of monstrous big soldier-plumes" (290). This final inversion of the earlier fake-Elizabethan costuming brings to an end the performances of two fraudulent actors, revealing their depravity as well as their social disapprobation. From a theatrical perspective, these chapters certainly delight and entertain; they also provide multi-layered instruction about the fundamental contradictions of human performance, as well as the socially constructed nature of identity and morality.

The notion of truth telling as drama also figures prominently in Howells's plays. Although he wrote in a variety of forms—from verse tragedy and comedy to adaptations of novels, melodramas, and even a musical—Howells's dramatic reputation has focused rather narrowly on the one-act social comedies he wrote in the 1880s and '90s. Yet interestingly enough, these plays continue the investiga-

tions of *Out of the Question* and *A Counterfeit Presentment*, featuring an outsider's view of Boston society. Howells never abandoned his interest in regional intersections of cultural norms and patterns of expression, and he used his own marginal status to inform the situations enacted in these comedies. Moreover, the one-acts of this period develop their own unfolding chronology and allude to each other in turn, effectively creating a multi-part sequence on common themes.

*The Sleeping Car* (1882) begins the series with Mrs. Roberts and Aunt Mary traveling by rail from Albany to Boston. Mrs. Roberts is returning home in anticipation of the arrival of her brother, Willis Campbell, from California. In a series of mistaken and changed identities, the comic action ranges from berth to berth and turns on regional contrasts between New England and California, with references to Bret Harte. One character is called simply "The Californian." Willis Campbell enters suddenly, not a Californian himself but arriving from there, to solve the mystery.

Having established Willis Campbell as both outsider and representative authorial voice, Howells threads him through a number of subsequent plays. In *The Register* (1883), Campbell—renamed Oliver Ransom—courts a Miss Reed in a continuation of action from *A Counterfeit Presentment*. Reference is made to their previous time together at the Ponkwasset Hotel, where Ransom provided her art lessons. Again the outsider male of humble origins if considerable talent struggles to communicate his feelings: "It was only because I was afraid to speak" (266) that Ransom did not clarify his romantic intentions before. The gender miscommunication becomes so universalized that, by the third and final scene, the romantic antagonists are labeled simply He and She.

In *The Elevator* (1884), guests arriving for a Christmas dinner given by Mrs. Roberts get stuck in an elevator. Here the social contrast is drawn between the drawing room and the elevator, with different manners exhibited in each. It falls to Willis Campbell, who, like Blake in *Out of the Question*, understands engineering and offers an "interposition of common sense" (313), to get the elevator running again. Serving once more as the Midwesterner who rescues an emergency situation with practicality, Campbell is celebrated as "the true hero" (313). Again in *The Garroters* (1885), Campbell performs his role as "an orphan . . . in a nest of conspirators" (351). Mr. Roberts, thinking himself robbed of a watch in Boston Commons, earlier pursued the alleged perpetrator and reclaimed his watch. It turns out that

the would-be perpetrator is Mr. Bemis and that Mr. Roberts only *thought* his watch was stolen, having mistakenly left it at home. When Mr. Bemis arrives, Campbell endeavors to orchestrate a scheme by which Mr. Roberts can explain his possession of two missing watches.

*Five O'Clock Tea* (1887) continues the courtship of Willis Campbell and a character named Amy Somers. Even in matters of love he maintains his practicality:

MRS. SOMERS. Do you often make those pretty speeches?

CAMPBELL. When I can found them on fact. (366)

The off-again, on-again courtship seen earlier in *The Register* continues in the socially disorienting context of Mrs. Somers's tea party. Campbell accuses her of tormenting and tantalizing him; in a fascinating *coup de théâtre*, he impersonates her in quasi-drag to the other guests. Finally, the two announce their engagement, bringing to a close several plays' worth of difficult wooing. By the time of *A Letter of Introduction* (1892), the two characters are actually married. But Campbell still bears the markings of his Midwestern origins: "Roberts, can't you dance a hoe-cake for him? You ought to do it on your knees, you miserable sinner!" (407).

*The Unexpected Guests* (1893) again features the newly married Campbells—only this time in their own drawing-room. Action centers on a dinner party to which too many guests arrive. Key moments of the dialogue investigate social truth telling, which Dr. Lawton considers "a female virtue" (420). Mrs. Campbell, of course, ends up lying to protect the feelings of the unexpected guests, who, it turns out, had responded affirmatively to the invitation to begin with. Again, Willis Campbell must rush in to save the day, ordering more quail for dinner, as social courage wins out. Even so, "truth [is] crushed to death" (429).

In *Unexpected Guests* and virtually all of these plays, Howells adopts a basic realistic stance amplified by nonrepresentational elements in a manner common in Midwestern drama. In *The Sleeping Car* the haunting element consists of unseen voices emanating from nearby berths; in *The Register*, it's distorted language resonating through the heating register. *The Elevator* features voices calling from the unseen car, whereas *The Garroters* centers on a metatheatrical female re-enactment of the robbery, followed by rehearsal and

unsuccessful male performance of the lie. Campbell's cross-dressing as Mrs. Somers in her wrap and fan, complete with coquettish manners, leads beyond realism in *Five O'Clock Tea*. Perhaps most evocative of all, the phonograph in the library in *Unexpected Guests* repeats poetic lines from William Cullen Bryant. Later, a downstairs phone call ominously orders additional "birds" for the humiliated hosts who have run out of food. In all these gently satiric plays, established social realism is intersected by an outside *raisonneur* and supplemented by echoes of more fundamental verities just beyond.

In *Is He Dead?* (1898), written while he was living in Vienna and published only in 2003, Twain returned to the stage with the same rollicking humor as in the Duke and King episodes of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Colonel Sellers as a Scientist*. Shelley Fisher Fishkin has done an admirable job editing this text, which Robert Goldman regards as "the best of all Twain's efforts" (124). As written, the play features a large cast, but the dozens of extras could easily be condensed and double-cast. As Fishkin rightly observes, "*Is He Dead?* may have been too 'out there' for the Victorian 1890s, but it may be just right for the twenty-first century" (203). This final stage work represents a major addition to our repertoire of nineteenth-century plays with Midwestern characters and themes.

Like *Colonel Sellers as a Scientist*, *Is He Dead?* revolves around a displaced Midwesterner, only this time in the art world of Barbizon, near Paris, during the time before 1848 when "Louis Philippe is still king" (n.p.). That character is Chicago, a young American artist who concocts a scheme whereby Jean-François Millet, based loosely on the actual nineteenth-century painter, can escape poverty and artistic neglect by faking his own demise. With this premise, Twain takes witty aim at the pomposity of celebrity worship, especially in the art world, and cut-throat trade in cultural goods by cold-hearted dealers whose clients are more valuable to them dead than they are alive. These themes have appeared before in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and elsewhere, but Twain's staging this time around—more farcical and less satiric than *Colonel Sellers*, more earthy and body-centered—creates what Fishkin rightly calls "a champagne cocktail of a play" (204).

Action in acts one and two takes place in a "lofty and spacious" studio with "faded and ragged sofa; cheap old chairs" (7). In a typical Twainian joke, the play opens with a chimney sweep stretching himself out on the white sheet covering the sofa, "exposing his

printed form" in contrasting soot (8). When Dutchy, the German-accented expositor enters, he comments ironically, "Ah, dot is splhennid - splhennid, for a fellow dot hain't had no draining in Art" (8). Not only does Twain indulge his knowledge of German, he also announces that this play will mount a frontal attack on the pretensions of the art world. Later, Chicago will follow up this fusillade by praising the "noble simplicity" of Jean-François Millet's art: "No fuss, no feathers, no tricks of color, no theatricals, just that solemn half-light . . ." (21). He is speaking of the artist's *Angelus*, one of the most famous paintings of all time. It's clear that Twain's Midwestern love of simplicity, directness, and honesty find voice through his main character.

Chicago develops his fraudulent plan after the villainous art dealer, Bastien André, abrogates an earlier contract to buy Millet's pictures. Surrounded by apprentice artists from a wide range of nationalities—whom Twain delights in parading—Chicago announces the protocol: "One of us must seem to die—must change his name and disappear . . . François Millet must die!" (46). This disappearance ruse, which runs through *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and gains added resonance in the recently published *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), becomes theatricalized as a Missouri scheme to out-sham the shamblers through elaborate, over-the-top spectacle.

The masquerade requires that Chicago and the art pupils stage a mock auction and mark unsold paintings with flamboyant SOLD placards to drive up the price for a painter who, according to planted newspaper accounts, has gone to the Barbary Coast to die (56). Dutchy serves as a one-man chorus, while Chicago accuses André of fraud. As eager buyers arrive, the price of Millet's *Sowers* is bid up to prices that seemed unimaginable only a few days before.

The pièce de résistance, however, comes as Millet becomes his own twin sister, a widow who dominates the last two acts with various permutations in cross dressing. At first she's awkward in behavior; she swears and smokes as Millet did before, and her mannerisms are decidedly unfeminine. Near the end, Twain gives us a *shtik* of the widow entering bald and toothless, laying in and on her glass eye, hair, and artificial leg. But the greater humor comes from the widow's flirtations first with Marie, Millet's girlfriend, and then with the detested André. The counterpoint of the two lovers, one couple out-

wardly lesbian and the other inwardly gay, plays havoc with both gender stereotypes and marriage as social commodity.

The funeral at the end becomes a gigantic affair, as the coffin containing bricks must be stuffed with Limburger cheese to be convincingly smelly, and royalty from all the lands attend last rites off stage with marches, guns, and fanfares. The widow announces that in a few days a new man with a wife and a new name will move into her house. This represents yet another variation on Twain's fascination with the construction of identity. Just before the eruption of the "grand International Musical Mosaic," a final jab is slipped into the mouth of the widow: "When France has committed herself to the expression of a belief, she will die a hundred thousand deaths rather than confess she has been in the wrong" (143). As he began his career, Twain ended it in *Is He Dead?* by mocking sham and pretension, corruption and manipulation, all the while affirming his Midwestern preference for honesty, simplicity, and the democratic worth of all people.

In his later years, Howells wrote melodramas, a "farce tragedy," and other pieces, but perhaps the most interesting are *The Night Before Christmas* and *The Impossible, A Mystery Play*, both published in 1910, the year of Twain's death and that of Howells's wife, Elinor. These companion plays, suitable for holiday performance, explore the intersection between religious observance and social expectations. In *The Night Before Christmas*, Mr. and Mrs. Fountain are "dead" from stuffing stockings and wrapping presents; in the course of the play, Fountain receives no fewer than seven bathrobes, one for each day of the week. As in earlier Twain and Howells plays, Fountain muses on the truth of the experience: "What if it was all a fake? . . . What if it were all as unlike the real thing, if there is any real thing, as this pagan Christmas of ours is as unlike a Christian Christmas?" (608). In the end, however, the innocent enthusiasm of children and the well-meaning, if sometimes misguided and tiresome generosity of friends at least partially redeems a holiday that has become so unbearably commercialized.

*The Impossible* is a likewise genial yet provocative parable. When one after another of the ten invited guests decline their invitation to dinner at the last minute, the Fountains are left to rearrange the dining room settings and, finally, to go out for dinner. But before they do, the telephone that has played a spectral role throughout suddenly and mysteriously intones, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and maimed and blind

and lame!" (625). As the servant mistakenly brings patrons of the Bread Line into the kitchen by way of the back stairs instead of into the dining room, the ideal solution becomes an elaborate take out. Mr. Fountain is left musing on the morality of this solution. In these two late plays, the pitfall of sentimentality is avoided by foregrounding the author's practical skepticism, which cuts through easy platitudes and only barely succumbs to the amiable resolution.

In addition to his accomplishments in drama and fiction, Howells managed to shift accepted standards for literary art through his role as editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* (1871-81) and, after 1886, as an essayist for *Harper's*. When he "praised Twain's writing as both 'dramatic and unconscious,' he set forth the terms that had also come to define the paradoxical demands upon the performer in America" (Roach 339). "Self-conscious public expression of inner feeling—Howell's 'dramatic'—must somehow derive from a legitimating source of 'unconscious' truth, an innocence beyond the reach of art but nevertheless fundamental to its authority" (Roach 339).

In championing Twain's art and that of other rising authors, Howells employed democratic standards that grew out of his Midwestern background, codifying his ideas about the "natural gentleman" articulated in *Out of the Question* and other plays. Dube dismisses Howells's dramatic achievement: by "rejecting the unusual and strange, the gross and unpleasant . . . he reduced the interest-level of his stories" (40). In his view, "Howells's plays failed primarily because of his theory of drama" "served by the commonplace" (iii). Yet Howells intentionally, in Midwestern fashion, insisted on the dramatic significance of the seemingly ordinary, the basic conflicts of everyday life. Moreover, Dube missed entirely the significant underlying conflict between one American region and another.

The dramatic works of Howells and Twain center on the Midwesterner in exile in the East. While Twain wore his Missouri heritage with pride wherever he went, Howells encoded a more conflicted inner struggle between the newly arrived Midwesterner and his Eastern milieu. As Ackerman points out, most of his plays enact "the contrast between inner (domestic) and outer (societal) experience" (4). Perhaps his drama could be more effectively staged in our own time if directors understood the covert regional tensions motivating these scripts. Like Sam Shepard, who was born and spent his first ten years in the Midwest, Howells is one of few American dramatists to investigate regional conflicts on stage beyond the Civil

War. Such cultural intersections never left his work; indeed, Howells's struggles to become recognized and accepted by Eastern society provided the single most important dynamic in his literary pilgrimage.

Between them, Twain and Howells left two rollicking comedies with Midwestern characters, *Colonel Sellers as a Scientist* and *Is He Dead?* In both instances the Midwesterners, displaced from their origins, concoct outlandish schemes for residents of their new environment. Of Howells's best plays, several others, among them *A Counterfeit Presentment* and the short comedies of manners, likewise deserve a contemporary hearing. In aesthetic terms, these two writers enshrined their preferences for directness, honesty, and plain speaking in a pragmatic world view that aligned itself "with a self-consciously American hatred of tyranny" (Roach 340) and wielded realism as its primary weapon. So ensconced is realism now in the American cultural mindset, in drama as in fiction, that it is difficult to imagine the prior atmosphere of Puritan abstraction or romantic symbolism, let alone the excesses of popular melodrama. In tandem, Twain and Howells, though they did not act alone, performed a dual body-blow to the Eastern hegemony in American literature, Twain from without and Howells from within. They also launched Midwestern drama on a path of domestic realism augmented with lyric features that came to dominate twentieth-century American theatre.

Eastern Illinois University

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## LOCAL COLOR, LOCAL NEWS, AND "THE MAN THAT CORRUPTED HADLEYBURG"

GUY SZUBERLA

Thanks to Allen Gribben's comprehensive study, *Mark Twain's Library: A Reconstruction* (1980), we know that Twain owned and probably read Richard Harding Davis's novels and short stories about heroic reporters and foreign correspondents.<sup>1</sup> Twain also owned and may have read Will Payne's *Jerry the Dreamer*, an 1896 novel pitting a socialist reporter and editor against Chicago's corrupt business titans and political bosses. Such stories, popular in the 1890s and after, presented the reporter's work as a series of romantic adventures and, sometimes, as a muscular exercise in morality. That's not to suggest that Davis, Payne, or others like them influenced Twain's characterization of reporters and editors in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1899). Quite the contrary. The newsmen crowding into Twain's Hadleyburg are characterized as workaday hacks, not one of them a fit companion for Davis's handsome heroes or Payne's crusading editor.

Twain's story of a well-planned hoax and those in Hadleyburg who fall for it demonstrates, instead, that the town's local newsmen and the visiting journalists function as compliant parts of a news gathering machine. The reader comes to understand that the Associated Press reporters and the Hadleyburg editor who strut through town are themselves regimented and controlled figures. For one thing, they report and write under the newly devised "assignment system," a management tool designed to monitor the reporter's work time and hold down the paper's costs. During the 1880s and 1890s, according to Christopher Wilson and other historians, the managers, editors, and those high up the newspaper's corporate pyramid were intent on supervising the journalists working below them. This new division of labors separated research, writing, rewriting, and editing, tasks that had once fallen to a single reporter. Under the accompanying piece-

work system, some reporters were paid by the space they succeeded in filling and, as often as not, were paid nothing for what they had worked up and written. On large metropolitan papers, publishers aimed to conduct all work through an efficient and well-defined bureaucracy. Wilson has described this management system in *The Labor of Words* (1985), characterizing such departmentalization as part of a trend towards "news standardization" (33, 37). He contends that, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the journalist's once independent role had been transformed, his autonomy circumscribed and his initiative limited. Citing the renowned business historian Albert W. Chandler, he concludes that journalists were held tightly in management's all too "visible hand." They had become part of the machinery of "collective national news gathering" (Wilson 19; 33-4).

For Twain the contrast between these managed routines and the free and easy days when he started out as a reporter must have been striking. During his apprenticeship years in the early 1850s, he wrote for the *Hannibal Journal* and, later in Iowa, for the *Muscatine Journal* and the *Keokuk Post*. At that time, personal and partisan journalism ruled in the mudflat villages and boomtowns of the Midwest. Publishers and editors, often one and the same, were in the pay of political parties and wrote their editorials and shaped the news to suit their paying sponsors. They were expected to slander political opponents, uphold local prejudices, and invent facts that worked to these ends. The historian Ted Smythe, somewhat like Wilson, suggests that these free-wheeling practices were fading away in the 1880s and 1890s, as news bureaus and large metropolitan dailies found themselves appealing to a wider readership (Wilson 18, 35; Smythe 17-29). Publishers like Hearst and Pulitzer decided that eye-grabbing sensationalism combined with some fact-based journalism might sell more papers. The news bureaus' collaborative news gathering, the heavy hand of management, and the demands of mass circulation conspired to bring an end to both the reporters' old freedoms and their supposed independence. Not too surprisingly, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," with Twain's heavy emphasis on deterministic themes, puts the new system of news gathering through some sharp, punishing satire.

It does not follow, of course, that his view of Hadleyburg and the village people will rest on simple nostalgia. His Hadleyburg may resemble, in its large, general outlines and a few of its stock characters, the picturesque old villages popularized by nineteenth-century local

color fiction. After Washington Irving's *Sleepy Hollow*, especially in the thirty or more years following the Civil War, writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Sarah Orne Jewett used the New England village to recreate a half-forgotten and mostly imagined American past. In a similar way, James Whitcomb Riley burnished the memory of his boyhood days in rural Indiana. In the popular imagination, as well as in up-market magazines like *Harper's* and *The Atlantic*, odd and quaint-speaking villagers, rugged sea captains, and lonely widows became the avatars of an indigenous American character. These sturdy, individualistic figures represented a vanishing national culture and, for many readers, figured the passing of bedrock moral and political virtues. Twain, the author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and a Hartford neighbor to Stowe, certainly knew this literary tradition, its dominant sentiments and its cultural authority. Though he makes a mock bow or two in its direction, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" works hard to undercut local color conventions and burlesque its stock figures. Twain's tale, quite pointedly, departs from the softly focused atmosphere and sentimentalized history framing Stowe's *Oldtown* and Sunny Jim Riley's *Hoosier paradise*. It's possible to say, using just one ugly coinage, that "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" can stand as a work of post-local color fiction.

For Twain, in other words, the appearance of the Associated Press reporters in Hadleyburg signaled the end of localized news and personal journalism. That shift becomes clear once Twain's characterizations of journalists in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" are set against the heroic editors and reporters in his earlier stories and sketches.<sup>2</sup> The contrast points to his recognition of the new systems of "rationalized news gathering" and "news standardization" (Wilson 34, 37). The contrast points, as well, to the new "machinery of fame" and the consequent displacement of the personal in public discourse (Fisher 163). National news bureaus, the centralization of news production, and the growth of syndication created, in their wake, the conditions for a devalued local reality.<sup>3</sup> Twain's story, in exposing the magnified distortions of public identity, defines and satirizes Hadleyburg's diminished sense of its own reality.

#### I. The "assignment system"

Pascal Covici, in *Mark Twain's Humor*, effectively summed up the plot of "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" as a "hoax" (190).



A mysterious stranger, having been insulted and injured by someone in Hadleyburg, painstakingly plots his revenge on the town. Just what injury he suffered or exactly who he is, neither the reader nor the village is to discover. Twain deftly suppresses this information. He does, on the other hand, detail the stratagems, deceptions, and complicated plotting that make up the stranger's hoax. The key to the stranger's plan—his "evil joy" in the scheming and anticipation that consumes him for over a year—lies in Hadleyburg's heretofore unassailable reputation for uprightness and honesty. Baiting his trap with a bag of gold coin said to be worth forty thousand dollars, the stranger means to corrupt the entire town (390-91). One by one, Hadleyburg's leading citizens rise to the bait, fall all over each other to claim the gold. The stranger's ruse dupes them into telling clumsy and indefensible lies, and, at a much-publicized town meeting, they put their greed and comic venality on display. At that meeting, as perhaps the mysterious stranger had always intended, dozens of reporters are on hand to snicker at every lie and watch the Hadleyburg nineteen scramble for the money, which, with fitting poetic justice, turns out to be counterfeit.

At the outset of the story, the stranger drops off the "sack contain[ing] gold coin" at the Hadleyburg home of Mary and Edward Richards, a respectable old married couple. With the sack come instructions on how to find its intended recipient: either publish the instructions or seek him out "by private inquiry" (392). Richards decides to have the instructions published in the local paper. He rushes out into the night and passes on the announcement to Cox, the "editor-proprietor" of Hadleyburg's newspaper. Cox hands it over to his foreman, who, in turn, telegraphs the Associated Press. The A.P. telegraphs back, asking for more: "*the whole thing—all the details—twelve-hundred words*" (402). The foreman fills the bill, and overnight Hadleyburg becomes famous throughout America. Before long "a strong force of correspondents," all sent on the same assignment, has descended upon the town (412).

This short narrative sequence tracing the transit of news from a local source to the Associated Press illustrates the process of collective news gathering and the changing role of local newspapers in the 1880s and 1890s. Christopher Wilson described this as a process of "channeling news events out of the *local* reporter's grasp" (31). More recently, Ted Smythe has pointed out that such centralized news-gathering practices spelled the end of the old-style partisan

newspapers. Advertisers, often located far from the home of the local papers, were taking over the role once played by political parties and local interests. Somewhat like Wilson, Smythe sees these outside commercial sponsors contributing to the standardized content of local papers. He shows that the creation of news bureaus, the use of "patent newspapers," and the wider distribution of big city papers via the railroads all worked to transform local journalism (Wilson 33; Smythe 19-20, 203-04). Smythe notes, for example, that "patent newspapers" supplied "copy that [had been] prepared and printed in a central location and distributed to country publishers, who added some local news, opinion, and advertising" (204).

"The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" directly reflects some of these changes and silently points to still other effects of centralized news gathering. Twain's story was written in 1898 and first published in *Harper's Monthly* in December of 1899. The Associated Press, newly invigorated and reorganized under Chicago's Melville E. Stone and other newspapermen during the mid-1890s, had triumphed over the United Press International in 1897.<sup>4</sup> Twain's ambivalent treatment of the A.P. in this story does not in any way jibe with the extravagant tribute he was to pay the organization in 1906. At that time, he was to say in playful hyperbole: "There are only two forces that carry light to all corners of the globe—the sun in the heavens and The Associated Press down here."<sup>5</sup> His overstatement seems calculated, in a comic and casual way, to characterize the A.P.'s universal presence and its growing power as a benign force in journalism. Drawing on the views of contemporary newsmen like Whitelaw Reid, Wilson concludes that, increasingly during the 1880s and 1890s, the gathering of the news became collective and routinized. It followed that, under this system, the old-fashioned correspondent's independent status would soon wither away. Wilson asserts that the rise of the A.P. and the U.P.I. left "little room for the initiative of the individual correspondent," and the presence of such organizations often denied local reporters a chance to report on local events (37; 33-4).

Twain, of course, had learned the reporter's craft under the free and easy discipline of the 1850s. In the opening paragraphs of "The Killing of Julius Caesar 'Localized'" (1864), he summed up what it was like to be a reporter in those happy times. The short sketch, written originally for Bret Harte's literary weekly, *The Californian*, takes much of its life and comic energy from Twain's deadpan exaggeration



tion. Despite this hyperbole and his parodic flourishes, the sketch vividly defined the independence and initiative that once belonged by right to the reporter of the mid-nineteenth century:

Nothing in the world affords a newspaper reporter so much satisfaction as gathering up the details of a bloody and mysterious murder, and writing them up with aggravated circumstantiality. He takes a living delight in this labor of love—for such it is to him—especially if he knows that all the other papers have gone to press and his will be the only one that will contain the dreaded intelligence. (1864: 102)

Years of consuming tabloid journalism and long hours spent watching the “fair and balanced news” on Fox cannot diminish the pleasure packed into Twain’s burlesque. He describes, in perfectly tuned understatement and exaggeration, the detached yet eager and blood-thirsty reporter. The mock prescription for news writing that follows anticipates, in ways that seem almost uncanny, the moral posturing of contemporary telejournalists: write “up that item gloatingly, and [spice] it with a little moralizing here and plenty of blood there; and . . . pity for some, and misrepresentation and abuse for others, (who didn’t patronize the paper,) and gory gashes, and notes of warning as to the tendency of the times” (1864: 102). Here, Twain happily assumes that journalism, in its normative practices, forms, and values, must be personal and partisan. The reporter that he describes works alone, takes his satisfaction in being the only one to know and write up this sensational story. He also takes a full measure of delight in abusing, with partisan scorn, those who fail to patronize the paper. Those he attacks seem to be personal enemies or, at least, people he knows well. All these behaviors function to underline the obvious: this fictive reporter works on his own initiative and inside an intimate community setting. No editor has assigned him this story; no outside manager dictates his routines or sets limits to his time for gathering the news. He works under conditions and writes for readers that are, in every sense, localized.

Some twelve years later, when he wrote *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), Twain commented in passing on the changed and changing character of localized news. In the beginning paragraphs of chapter eleven, he sums up the town of St. Petersburg’s excited discovery of a murder. Someone has found the body of Dr. Robinson in the town graveyard; next to him lies “a gory knife.” The “ghastly news” of his murder travels fast. Twain remarks that there was “no

need of the as yet undreamed-of telegraph; the tale flew from man to man, from group to group with little less than telegraphic speed” (86). Within the village, in this fictive re-creation of an antebellum past, there is no need for the latter-day engines of news gathering and newspaper distribution. Local news was gathered and consumed inside the tightly closed circles of the community. The telegraph, and with it national syndication, regional news bureaus, and all the attendant forces of centralization, did not yet exist. But, as Twain’s softly inserted “as yet” implies, these belong to a future that is already here. Local news, channeled away by technology and national news gathering, now takes on an altered if not diminished significance.

In “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg,” Twain uses the visiting reporters and Cox, the editor-proprietor of the local paper, to index the stifling power of this new, “managed news.” To be sure, these journalists are marginal, if not quite farcical, figures. They sit at the edge of the story’s action, sometimes acting as a chorus, sometimes playing the part of court jesters. Most readers and critics have interpreted the people of Hadleyburg as akin to automata, creatures trained from birth to habits of honesty and action. Their proud civic virtue, under Twain’s satiric eye, seems little more than a set of mechanical reflexes. To underline this, he gives the town folks similar, almost interchangeable names—Wilson and Billson; Cox, Wilcox, and Wilder and so on. These are taken to be emblematic of their depersonalized condition. The unnamed reporters and correspondents, though equally depersonalized, have escaped such interpretive scrutiny and hard moral judgments. It’s worth remembering, however, that they are in Hadleyburg on assignment. They have been sent to celebrate the town’s virtues and to tell its story in terms that are predetermined and, for all that can be told, absolutely identical. Somewhat like the people of Hadleyburg, especially like the nineteen who have been set up to be publicly duped, they act and write under the direction and control of outside, impersonal forces. That the “special correspondents” react to the spectacle of the town’s exposure with uniform laughter and then, as one, melt invisibly into the Hadleyburg crowd should not in the end surprise us.

Cox, the “editor-proprietor” of Hadleyburg’s paper, illustrates the workings of “news standardization” in somewhat similar terms. With the town’s leading citizens, he marches in choreographed steps, animated by the same pious rationalizations about Hadleyburg’s rep-

utation for honesty. At the same time, this "nervous and fidgety" editor, humbled and exalted by his subordinate position in the A.P., fits squarely into the new corporate and bureaucratic systems of news gathering (398). Though Twain nowhere compares him with the independent editors who once practiced personal journalism, he does not need to labor the obvious differences. The satiric contrast and the values that inform it work their way into the story line.

It's easy enough to see how this satire works when Cox is held up against some stories of editors practicing personal journalism. Twain's sketch, "Journalism in Tennessee" (1869), supplies a vivid example of the old-style editor. Here, Twain spins out a far-fetched and farcical plot, all the while making a serious point about the independence and personal journalism of such editors. One running joke forms the main story line. The much-too-principled chief editor of the *Morning Glory and Johnson City War Whoop* attacks competing newspaper editors and political opponents with such violent rhetoric and invective that he's become engaged in a nonstop round of duels. He lives under siege in his office, and seems, at all times, to be in mortal combat with his readers. His attacks are written in language that is intemperate, deliberately provocative, and casually libelous, in his words, "peppery and to the point." The opening paragraph for his editorial, the "Spirit of the Tennessee Press" shows us what he means:

The inveterate liars of the *Semi-Weekly Earthquake* are evidently endeavoring to palm off upon a noble and chivalrous people another of their vile and brutal falsehoods with regard to that most glorious conception of the nineteenth century, the Ballyhack railroad. The idea that Buzzardville was to be left off at one side originated in their own fulsome brains—or rather in the settings which *they* regard as brains. They had better swallow this lie, and not stop to chew it either, if they want to save their abandoned reptile carcasses the cowhiding they so richly deserve. (1869: 310)

He writes his editorial by radically revising and rewriting the cub Mark Twain's "mush-and-milk journalism." No one else's words will suit or satisfy him; none can withstand the relentless "scrape and scratch" of his pen. A few lines down from his opening paragraph, he will use the editorial "We," but there's not the slightest indication that he's consulted an editorial board—and no suggestion that he's collaborated with anyone.

Alfred R. Doten, Twain's friend and fellow reporter on *The Territorial Enterprise*, also kept a loaded revolver in his desk. This was simple, unaffected prudence, since angry and offended readers, toting their own six-guns, often came calling on him. Twain's "Journalism in Tennessee," some scholars believe, paid homage to Doten's courage and fearless reporting. The same kind of tribute was extended to Joseph Goodman, editor of *The Territorial Enterprise*, who also reckoned that a well-aimed column or story might provoke a reader to take up arms against the responsible reporter.<sup>6</sup> Twain (still Sam Clemens) started writing for Goodman and the *Enterprise* in 1862. He remembered, for his biographer Albert Bigelow Paine, that Goodman "let the boys write and print in accordance with their own ideas and upon any subject."<sup>7</sup>

With such examples in mind, the absence of fearless editors and independent reporters in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" begins to take on a particular significance. It's reasonable to think of Cox as a cento figure, a hinge for a double parody swinging between the past and the present. A small-town editor confined by local limits and values, he was also obliged to work inside Christopher Wilson's modern "managed" news marketplace (18-19). That is to say, Cox lives, writes and edits his paper under conditions that preclude heroic acts and inhibit bravura performances. For him, the Associated Press and the news wire have transformed the meaning of local news. Cox is tied to a news network that can no longer be "localized" by an exertion of a single will or brought under control by strong, independent initiative. After the "reporters . . . from everywhere" invade the village, Cox and his foreman disappear into the text, displaced, or so it seems, by a national news corps (402). Christopher Wilson, commenting on "news standardization," described it as a process of "channeling news events out of the *local* reporter's grasp." A reporter working a local beat might seem to own an exclusive preserve where there was "room for his own initiative." But this turns out to be illusory. He was, Wilson contends, "just one step ahead of news standardization" and the invasion of the A.P. and competing regional wire services (33). The "strong force of special correspondents that, in Twain's story, supersedes Cox and his foreman illustrates" such "channeling." What at first seems to be local news becomes, overnight, national news and a national event, a piece and product of the machinery of national news gathering.

## II. "I hate them newspapers . . ."

When Hadleyburg awakens to find itself "world-celebrated," "its nineteen principal citizens" and its "minor and unimportant citizens" alike are suffused with a sense of their own celebrity. They act as if they're playing before an audience, because of course they are. First come "envying crowds" from neighboring towns; before long, "reporters . . . arrive from everywhere." Twain rigs one sequence so that Pinkerton, the "little mean, smirking, oily" town banker, represents the town. His set speech, given to "all comers" (including the visiting reporters), indicates how much he feels his own voice and identity amplified: "[He] believed that the example [of Hadleyburg's honesty] would now spread far and wide over the American world, and be epoch-making in the matter of moral regeneration. And so on, and so on" (402-3). The swarming presence of reporters, with the seductive promise of a national audience, induces this expansive and unctuous rhetoric. What's even more certain is that Pinkerton, like the rest of the town, expects his words, gestures, and sentiments to be broadcast to the world at large. He correctly imagines that Hadleyburg now plays out its ordinary and local life before an enlarged national audience. The whole world is watching.

One Hadleyburg citizen seems to escape almost all of the seductions of national publicity. Among the earnest, striving, and money-grubbing citizens of Hadleyburg, Jack Halliday plays the part of the happy loafer and comic misfit. In the plate published in the *Harper's Monthly* illustration, he looks like a kind of clean-shaven Muff Potter, a neatly dressed and sober version of Huck Finn's Pap.<sup>8</sup> In Twain's words, Halliday "was the loafing, good-natured, no-account, irreverent fisherman, hunter, boy's friend, stray-dog's friend, typical 'Sam Lawson' of the town" (402). The sliding reference to Harriet Beecher Stowe's Sam Lawson turns out to be a bit misleading. Lawson, the story-teller in Stowe's *Old Town Folks* (1869) and Sam Lawson's *Fireside Stories* (1872), embodied most all the virtues and shortcomings of the local color character. His dialect stories of a mythic "Old Town" consecrated the mysteries, history, and importance of the New England character. Halliday, though he may be said to spring full born from this tradition, is no Sam Lawson, no more than Hadleyburg is Stowe's "Old Town."

Twain, with purpose and point, has set Halliday and Hadleyburg at odds with the literary conventions and values of local color. We

might, for example, expect Halliday, like Lawson, to spin yarns in a quaint local dialect and dispense local legends and bits of down-home wisdom. But no one, neither Jack Halliday nor any other Hadleyburg citizen, speaks in an identifiable localized dialect. No one salts his speech with homespun metaphors. For all its local coloration, this could be a story about a Midwestern village, a Southern town, or a tale told about an old New England settlement. Nothing in their speech, nothing in their dress or sentiments, roots the people of Hadleyburg in a nameable place or specific region. Under the magnifying eyes of the national press, the localized news and characters marked as local disappear. In many respects, Twain's inversion of local color conventions here conforms to what Edward Watts calls "provincial literature," "a narrative of assimilation and absorption" (166).

Philip Fisher, with somewhat different terms and emphasis, describes this same process of "assimilation and absorption." In a wide-ranging essay on the literature and culture of the late nineteenth century, he contends that the new "machinery of fame" and celebrity induced both the destruction and displacement of the personal. The mass-circulation newspaper, the speaker's platform, the amplified voice, the billboard and the movie screen—these new media invited public speakers and "conspicuous" personalities "to imagine all life directed toward an audience" (163, 174). The resulting public identity rested uneasily on multiple representations of "the magnified and performed self" (157; 174-75).

Hadleyburg's town hall, with its speakers' "platform . . . backed by a showy draping of flags," stands as model of Fisher's seductive "public space." For the award of the "gold," the town fathers have tricked out the town hall for exhibition and performance. The eighteen citizens who lay claim to the bag of gold will perform before a crowd in this magnified space, and, as the night unfolds, find themselves exposed, their brief moment of celebrity collapsed, and their public identity shredded. Twain emphasizes that the town created this public space "to impress the stranger" who "in a large degree . . . would be connected with the press" (411-12). But in the end the town and the eighteen cannot define, much less control, their public identity and the enlarged public space that the town hall now projects. The telegraph, the wire services of the A.P., the army of special correspondents—all of these extend and magnify public identity far beyond the traditional limits of locale, certainly far beyond the public space and reality that Hadleyburg's and the neighboring towns'

newspapers might once have circumscribed. What was once local has been absorbed and destroyed inside a magnified public space.

When the public meeting, in the last minutes, lurches toward music-hall farce, and the exposure of the eighteen rises to a comic pitch, the Associated Press reporters, along with the townspeople, laugh politely, bending "their heads down" and shielding "their faces with their hands." Twain suggests that their muffled laughter amounts to an "heroic courtesy," but their conduct might also be designated part of the new corporate code of professionalized and impersonal journalism (417).

Twain made an apposite point about falsification and fraud in *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894). As Huck, Jim, and Tom fly high above the Sahara in a Jules Verne-inspired navigable balloon, Huck broods somewhat implausibly on civilization and newspapers:

Now, one of the worst things about civilization is . . . the newspapers fetches you the troubles of everybody all over the world, and keeps you downhearted and dismal 'most all the time, and it's such a heavy load for a person. I hate them newspapers; and I hate letters; and if I had my way I wouldn't allow nobody to load his troubles on to other folks he ain't acquainted with, on t'other side of the world, that way. Well, up in a balloon there ain't any of that, and it's the darlinest place there is (52).

This weary disparagement of newspapers belongs to the habitual reader, a reader like Twain, not the half-literate Huck. Neither *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* nor *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* had ever shown him reading newspapers, much less worrying about "troubles" reported from the other side of the globe.

Huck's reading of the papers is, of course, a comic misreading, akin to his sensitive misunderstanding of the trick circus rider in chapter twenty-two of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* who had pretended to be drunk and in danger of killing himself. Fearing for the man's life, Huck puzzled over the circus crowd's indifference and cruel laughter. Reading the newspapers here, Huck converts the language of the impersonal into the personal, responds to standardized news as if it were an expression of the most intimate sorrow, grief, and empathy. He resents the reporters who fetch the troubles of "folks he ain't acquainted with"; he resists, so far as he can, the imperious demand upon his sympathies, even as he falls into a "downhearted and dismal" state.

Twain wrote *Tom Sawyer Abroad* as something of a science-fiction sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and, at one remove, to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Throughout the novel, he happily and anachronistically mixes and layers different period references. Whether we're to imagine Huck reading his newspaper in antebellum St. Petersburg or in 1894 (when the novel was published) or whether, alternately, we should think of him reading the news in some fantastic future may finally be undecidable questions. This narrative moment rides on shifting and sliding temporal contexts. What's certain is that Huck says little—and can say nothing directly—that defines the reporters who fetch this news from afar and send it to him from all over the world. Like the force of correspondents in Hadleyburg, those remote figures belong to a world no longer local, but now de-localized, standardized, professionalized, and impersonal. They are the folks Huck "ain't acquainted with" who gather news about still other "folks he ain't acquainted with."

University of Toledo

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Among other fiction by Davis, Twain owned *Soldiers of Fortune* (1897) and *Gallagher, and Other Stories* (1903), a collection that included "Gallagher," the story of a "scoop." See the Richard Harding Davis entries in Allen F. Gribben, *Mark Twain's Library: A Reconstruction*, I (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980).

<sup>2</sup>For the most part I will rely on two Twain stories, "The Killing of Julius Caesar 'Localized'" and "Journalism in Tennessee." Other examples of independent editors and personal journalism can be found in Twain's "Editorial Agility," and "How I Edited an Agricultural Paper Once."

<sup>3</sup>James Melville Cox argues that local color and regionalism, as practiced by Stowe, Jewett, and other New England writers, lost its dominance by the early 1900s. He points out that as the country spread west, as the Midwest and other regions asserted their voices in literature, the cultural authority of New England and the South was necessarily diminished. New England could no longer claim to represent the national culture. Near the turn of the nineteenth century "regionalism" seem destined to become "a diminished thing." See Cox's discussion in "Regionalism: A Diminished Thing," his chapter in the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (NY: Columbia U.P. 1988), especially 761, 767.

<sup>4</sup>Oliver Gramling, *AP: The Story of News*. 1940. (Port Washington: Kenikat, 1969), 134-35.

<sup>5</sup>Twain's speech was almost entirely about spelling reform, but in the opening he praised the A.P. in these indulgent lines. For the full text of the speech, see *Mark Twain Speaking*, ed. Paul Fatout (Iowa City: U. of Iowa Pr., 1976), 522-27.

<sup>6</sup>Lawrence J. Berkove, in *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia* entry on Doten, notes that Doten and Goodman "may have been . . . 'models' for Twain's 'Journalism in Tennessee.'"

<sup>7</sup>Paine, *Mark Twain: A Biography*, I (NY: Harper's, 1912), 206-07. Twain complained about the "fearful drudgery" and "soulless drudgery" he experienced when working as a reporter for the San Francisco *Morning Call*. He remembered long hard days, twelve hours and

more, spent "scraping materials together." See *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, ed. by Charles Neider (NY: Washington Square Pr, 1961), 120.

<sup>8</sup>The half-tone plate is captioned "READY! NOW, LOOK PLEASANT PLEASE." The words, of course, appear nowhere in the text of Twain's story. See *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, 100 (Dec. 1899):38.

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## THEODORE DREISER, THERMODYNAMICS, AND THE "MANLY MAN": AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER RELATIONS IN THE COWPERWOOD TRILOGY

BARBARA LINDQUIST

As American society in the nineteenth century turned more secular, it also became enamored with science. For many people, science replaced religion, but even for those who still believed, they had a second authority to which they looked for explanations and solutions. Americans assumed that questions large and small—from our place in the universe to the proper way to prepare food—could be studied scientifically and answered definitively.<sup>1</sup>

Many excellent popular science texts existed, and they were avidly read. Eminent nineteenth-century scientists not only wrote for their peers, they also composed popular science specifically aimed at a lay audience. Americans were so interested in science that in addition to publishing popular science books, D. Appleton and Company, the major house for scientific publications, established the very successful *Popular Science Monthly*.<sup>2</sup>

American novelists were also interested in science. Theodore Dreiser and many other writers were dramatically affected by popular science, and their texts illustrate their fascination. They explored, some with more critical judgment than others, the revolutionary effects that popular science was having on virtually every aspect of society.

The cultural impact of Darwin's theory of evolution, including the influence of his ideas on American writers, is well known. But there was more to nineteenth-century science than evolution. The articulation of the first law of thermodynamics, or the law of conservation of energy, was another revolutionary scientific development. In 1847, Hermann von Helmholtz, a German physicist and physician, formulated the first law of thermodynamics. The law states that energy can

be neither created nor destroyed but can be transformed from one form to another, for example, from solar to chemical to electrical.

After Helmholtz articulated the law of conservation of energy, the concept of energy, or force, dominated explanations of the natural, mechanical, and social worlds throughout the rest of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Historians and social critics as well as novelists incorporated thermodynamics into their conceptual schemes; metaphors of energy and force appear in scientific, medical, social, political, and literary discourse.<sup>3</sup> Thermodynamics also formed a crucial part of the discussions about gender and "The Woman Question."

Some Americans learned about the law of conservation of energy by reading popular science texts by Helmholtz and other scientists. But many Americans were schooled in it by reading the English philosopher Herbert Spencer. Spencer's philosophy combined the first law of thermodynamics and his own theory of evolution, developed independent of, and published prior to Darwin's.<sup>4</sup> Richard Hofstadter argues that Spencer was one of the most influential nineteenth-century thinkers in the United States—more influential even than Darwin in forming American culture and thought (Hofstadter 18).<sup>5</sup> What is commonly referred to as Social Darwinism should more accurately be called Spencerism. Spencer's ideas not only changed American society generally, they were also critical to the debates about gender equality.

Spencer joined thermodynamics with evolutionary theory and gendered that combination to describe woman as a thermodynamic system. Spencer's notion of "vital force," based on thermodynamics, served as evidence of women's inferiority to men. In *Principles of Biology*, Spencer argues that, like plants and animals, each person has a finite amount of energy, which can either be used for individual development ("individuation") or reproduction ("genesis"). Spencer further asserts that women's reproductive systems require more energy than men's. This claim was apparently self-evident to Spencer, since he offers no support. He simply writes, "The cost of reproduction to males being so much less than it is to females, the antagonism between Genesis and Individuation is not often shown in men . . ." (*Biology* II 486). In Spencer's thermodynamic view of the body, energy being used for reproductive purposes is not available for individual growth. Spencer concludes, therefore, that compared to men, women's physical, emotional, and intellectual devel-

opment is retarded because their reproductive systems require so much energy.

Spencer's ideas were regularly published in *Popular Science Monthly*, which was founded in part to disseminate his philosophy. Spencer's construction of women as inefficient thermodynamic systems helped reinforce the existing social norms about men and women and their roles. Furthermore, his analysis lent scientific authority to this gendered status quo. Male novelists, including Theodore Dreiser, reinforced the gendered status quo by incorporating into their writing thermodynamic concepts and terminology such as force and energy, thereby helping make these concepts and the social norms associated with them part of the shared cultural knowledge. Thus, literature supported popular science explanations of human relationships and social institutions based on thermodynamics.

Dreiser is one of Ronald Martin's primary examples of a writer who helped create a "universe of force philosophy" in the United States. Martin argues that Dreiser saw "the basis of reality as some sort of force system" (229), and that he repeatedly and consistently insisted that "human motivation [was] part of the universal force network" (230). Although he does not focus on gender in his analysis, Martin does note that Dreiser expresses sexual attraction in both male and female characters as "force" (240-41). In *The Social Construction of American Realism*, Amy Kaplan points out that Dreiser often uses the term "energy" (130).

Although most Americans interpreted Spencer's philosophy optimistically, assuming it meant inevitable evolutionary progress, Dreiser's reading of Spencer affirmed Dreiser's already pessimistic view of life. It confirmed for him "the unsolvable disorder and brutality of life" (*A Book About Myself* 380-81). In his autobiography, Dreiser writes:

With a gloomy eye I began to watch how the chemical—and their children, the mechanical—forces operated through and outside [man] . . . and when I read Spencer I could only sigh. All I could think of was that since nature would not or could not do anything for man, he must, if he could, do something for himself; and of this I saw no prospect, he being a product of these self-same accidental, indifferent and bitterly cruel forces. (*Myself* 381)

Such a deterministic philosophy of life can lead to despondency as it did for Dreiser. It can also imply that human beings have no personal or social responsibility to others. If people are products of thermo-

dynamic forces (what Dreiser refers to as chemical and mechanical forces), ethical decision making is moot. This philosophy can also provide a convenient explanation for womanizing. If sexual attraction is just another uncontrollable force that operates through human beings, infidelity and promiscuity are events that cannot be prevented.

This thermodynamic rationale for womanizing—and for unethical behavior generally—are major themes in Dreiser's Cowperwood trilogy. He explains both as determined by uncontrollable "forces." The trilogy alternates between chapters devoted to Cowperwood's virtually endless number of sexual affairs and ones that describe his unscrupulous business dealings. Dreiser seems as interested in telling a sexual tale as he is in fictionalizing the history of one of America's most notorious "robber barons."

The Cowperwood trilogy is based on the life of Charles Tyson Yerkes, who became famous as a street railway magnate, financier, and art collector in the late nineteenth century. Frank Algernon Cowperwood's motto, "I satisfy myself," is drawn directly from an interview with Yerkes (qtd. in Roberts 351). Yerkes's attitude illustrates his disregard for the people of Chicago and their demands for an end to his political bribery and for better, safer street railways.<sup>6</sup>

In the first volume of the trilogy, *The Financier*, Cowperwood amasses and then loses his entire fortune, along with city money entrusted to him in the stock market panic of 1871. The novel concludes with Yerkes in jail for embezzlement, being comforted by his young mistress. The second volume, *The Titan*, traces Cowperwood's subsequent rise as a street railway magnate in Chicago in the 1880s and his downfall resulting from a popular crusade against him. This novel also details "the gallery of women" (to use Dreiser's phrase) that Cowperwood successively seduces.<sup>7</sup> As he ages, he chooses younger and younger sexual partners. In the final chapter, when Cowperwood's business dealings in Chicago fail, Dreiser rewards his character with the youngest of all his conquests. Tellingly, Dreiser entitles the chapter "The Recompense." The third volume, *The Stoic*, describes Cowperwood's business ventures in England and his death. My analysis focuses on *The Financier* and *The Titan*. In these novels, Dreiser uses the terms "force" and "energy" countless times, employing them to explain the "hypermasculinity," dominance, and success of wealthy financiers and to account for gender relations and sexual attraction.

According to Jane Tompkins, literary texts are "attempts to redefine the social order," and fiction articulates and proposes solutions

to the problems that shape a particular historical moment (xi). The Woman Question was one of the most important issues of this period, and Dreiser's trilogy registers the era's anxiety about changes in women's status, especially the fear of sexual convergence: the "unsexing" of women and the concomitant feminizing of men.

The fear of sexual convergence was based on Spencer's idea that evolutionary progress meant increasing complexity and differentiation. In the nineteenth century, this notion implied that sexual differentiation was a sign that civilization was advancing. Any hint that men's and women's status, roles, or activities were converging was taken as a sign of evolutionary regression. In this conceptualization of sexual differentiation, gender functions like a thermodynamic economy. There is a finite amount of masculine energy and feminine energy in the system; if women assume "masculine" roles, men must inevitably become more "womanly."

Dreiser's novels not only record the era's anxieties; they offer a solution—the manly man. Sexual convergence, Dreiser suggests, can be prevented by hypermasculine men capable of dominating women. The male characters he depicts, with Cowperwood as the supreme example, are powerful, decisive, "forceful" men. In fact, both the male and female characters reinforce stereotypical masculine and feminine traits.

In *The Financier* Dreiser depicts the relationship between Cowperwood and his first wife. This relationship is indicative of the disturbing patterns of dominance and submission that Dreiser creates throughout the second volume *The Titan*. Like all of Cowperwood's relationships with women, there is an illicit aspect to this one. Cowperwood was initially attracted to Mrs. Semple while her husband was still alive. In this case, at least, Cowperwood does wait until after the husband's death before he acts. Shortly after Mr. Semple dies, and too soon for it to be proper, Cowperwood begins his campaign to convince Lillian Semple to marry him. Interestingly, although perhaps not surprisingly, Cowperwood finds Lillian sexually attractive because of her lethargy and passiveness. Dreiser describes Cowperwood's attraction in terms of an energy exchange: "Her pale, uncertain, lymphatic body extracted a form of dynamic energy from him even at this range" (*The Financier* 53). Cowperwood is only twenty years old at the time and five years younger than Mrs. Semple, yet he dominates her intellectually, emotionally, and physically.



Dreiser depicts the encounter that results in Mrs. Semple's agreeing to marry Cowperwood as a love scene with erotic overtones. Yet Cowperwood's sexual pleasure in dominating this woman is palpable—as is his satisfaction in her submission. When she insists that he stop visiting her or she will be disgraced, he forcibly embraces her. She manages to get away. He follows her, forces his way into the room where she has fled and picks her up. Dreiser writes: "She broke away and ran up the near-by stairway to her room. Cowperwood followed her swiftly. As she pushed the door to he forced it open and recaptured her. He lifted her bodily from her feet and held her crosswise, lying in his arms" (*The Financier* 54).<sup>8</sup> She demands to be released; instead, he kisses her. The narrator informs the reader that her struggling and his ability to overwhelm her made Cowperwood "very much aroused, [and] excited" (F 54).

Dreiser then depicts Mrs. Semple's complete submission. Physically overpowered and psychologically intimidated, she yields. Dreiser writes:

While she was twisting and protesting, he carried her down the stairs again into the living-room, and seated himself in the great armchair, still holding her tight in his arms. "Oh!" she sighed, falling limp on his shoulder when he refused to let her go. Then because of the set determination of his face, some intense pull in him, she smiled. "How would I ever explain if I did marry you?" she asked weakly. (F 54)

Nothing remains for her to do but respond "weakly." She is mastered. The narrator explains her submission as the result of Cowperwood's "sheer, quiet determined force" (F 51). What Dreiser characterizes as determination is better described as intimidation. Dreiser rewards this male coercion with female compliance.

Equally disturbing, Dreiser depicts Mrs. Semple as sexually aroused by this domination and simultaneously ashamed of her sexuality. He writes: "She relapsed into additional protests; but he kissed her the more. There was a deadly persuasion to his caresses. . . . He aroused a force of feeling in her which had not previously been there. She was afraid of it and ashamed" (F 55). The threat of physical violence is barely submerged throughout this scene. She finally succumbs to his "deadly persuasiveness" and agrees to marry him. Then he puts pressure on her to marry in a month. She protests that a month is too soon and suggests he wait to be sure he wants her. To demonstrate that he does, he holds her so tight that she says: "Please stop. You hurt me" (F 55). He bullies her into agreeing to

marry in three months. When she says "[b]ut you're only a boy," he responds, "[y]ou'll find out how much of a boy I am" (F 55).

Dreiser concludes this scene by implying that Mrs. Semple has had an awakening. The meaning ascribed to this encounter, in which she has been completely dominated, is that now her life can truly be fulfilled. Dreiser writes: "He seemed of a sudden to open up a new world to her, and she realized that she had never really lived before. This man represented something bigger and stronger than ever her husband had dreamed of" (F 55). This scene of sexual subjugation closes with her whispering to him her agreement to marry in three months "while he rocked her cozily in his arms" (F 55).

This passage reads like a how-to book of sexual domination for young men and women with scripted parts for both the male and female. Dreiser's depiction of sexual politics borrows terminology and concepts from the first law of thermodynamics, although, in this case, Spencer's idiosyncratic phrase for this law, "the persistence of force," captures Dreiser's portrayal better than Von Helmholtz's multi-syllabic nomenclature. In the scene with Mrs. Semple and Cowperwood, Dreiser creates a force field of dominance and submission. In doing so, he assuages the fears of a gender economy out of balance. As Cowperwood becomes more "masculine" (that is, as he asserts his power through physical and psychological intimidation), Mrs. Semple becomes more "feminine" (that is, she yields), and both are depicted as happy with the outcome. One of the *Popular Science Monthly* contributors, Edward Cope, argued that the "natural" relationship between men and women placed women in a subordinate position. To alter the "relative positions of the sexes," he claimed, would cause "antagonism" between them (725). Young men and women who studied popular science and read fiction, at least Dreiser's fiction, in their leisure hours, could find lessons on gender embedded in thermodynamics in both the popular science journals and the novels.

Dreiser amplifies this message about the "natural" relationship between men and women in *The Titan*. He repeatedly portrays relationships of dominance and submission between Cowperwood and a whole series of different "types" of women. Labeling women as "types" is one of Dreiser's favorite locutions. Aileen Butler, Cowperwood's first mistress and second wife, is a very different "type" from Lillian Semple. Cowperwood first notices Aileen when she is only sixteen, but he waits a few years before seducing her.



Aileen is beautiful, vibrant, and exudes sexuality. She is described time and again as having "force," "native force," and "innate force." Cowperwood also possesses a variety of kinds of "force," such as "magnetic force" and "mental force." And it is their mutual "forces" that Dreiser relies on to explain their attraction.

Aileen is an important female character. She illustrates some of the increased freedom women enjoyed at the time. She has a sense of her own sexuality of which she is not ashamed; she is not shy about experiencing sexual pleasure; and she uses birth control. The freedoms of women that Dreiser focuses on, however, function primarily to give men increased pleasure through greater sexual access to women. Furthermore, this "sexually liberated" female character serves to reinforce stereotypical feminine traits.

Dreiser depicts Aileen as a very affectionate, none-too-intelligent, beautiful art object who later becomes a hysterical woman and a jealous wife. All of these traits are identified as feminine by the popular science writer Edward Cope. He observes that women excel in affection, are deficient in "rational processes," are predominate in the "aesthetics of the person," and are emotional (723).

Aileen becomes the center of attention as an art object when Cowperwood has an extravagant dinner party to further his acceptance by the social elite in Chicago. For the party, Cowperwood displays, opposite each other in his gallery, a newly arrived portrait of Aileen, which he had painted while she was "still young," exuding vitality and sexuality, and a recently acquired picture by a popular artist depicting nudes in a harem. The male guests ogle the nudes, the portrait, and Aileen. Dreiser's message seems clear. Beautiful women are to be seen as art objects, to be possessed like other art objects, or positioned as harem women passively waiting to give sensual and sexual pleasure to men.

Aileen also reinforces the stereotype of women as highly emotional creatures given to episodes of hysteria. Despite Aileen's loyalty, youth, beauty, and vitality, she cannot hold Cowperwood. Dreiser catalogues one affair after another that Cowperwood pursues while married to Aileen. With each new affair, Aileen's emotional outbursts intensify. Finally, in a fit of jealousy and rage, she physically attacks Rita Sohlberg, one of Cowperwood's lovers.

Dreiser devotes several pages to detailing this attack and Cowperwood's subduing of Aileen. This scene reads like what, for some men, would amount to a sex fantasy in which a man is fought over

by two women. He rescues one and overpowers the other while threatening violence if she does not desist. The scene between Cowperwood and Aileen is very disturbing. It mimics domestic violence, with its pattern of abuse, apology, and reconciliation. Dreiser writes:

"What the devil has got into you, anyway, you fool?" he said to her, bitterly, as they carried Rita out. "What are you trying to do, anyway—murder her? Do you want the police to come in here? Stop your screaming and behave yourself, or I'll shove a handkerchief in your mouth! Stop, I tell you! Stop! Do you hear me? This is enough, you fool!" He clapped his hand over her mouth, pressing it tight and forcing her back against him. He shook her brutally, angrily. He was very strong. "Now will you stop," he insisted, "or do you want me to choke you quiet? I will, if you don't. You're out of your mind. Stop, I tell you! So this is the way you carry on when things don't go to suit you?" She was sobbing, struggling, moaning, half screaming, quite beside herself. (*The Titan* 150)<sup>9</sup>

Aileen refuses to stay in the house that night and walks out. Dreiser then depicts Cowperwood's apology and their reconciliation. Cowperwood follows her, declares he loves her, and asks for another chance. He finally forces her into an embrace and then "sobbing, she stood there agonized but happy once more, in a way" (T 159). The scene ends with them leaving together.

In her discussion of Dreiser, Irene Gammel argues that "in naturalist fiction, it is the principle of power itself that is sexualized, which accounts for naturalism's emphasis on sado-masochistic scenes in the nineteenth century and its emphasis on rape and rapist sexualities in the twentieth" (12). Although *The Titan* was published in the twentieth century, it clearly qualifies for the nineteenth century's emphasis on sado-masochistic scenes. And Dreiser draws upon thermodynamics to explain Cowperwood's behavior as a product of chemical and mechanical forces that operate through him and are beyond his control.

Through Aileen, Dreiser represents some of the social changes American women were experiencing in the late nineteenth century. But she functions primarily to show that even with these changes, women still possess stereotypical feminine traits. They are still emotional, beautiful, and nonintellectual. Even more importantly, Aileen demonstrates that, in the end, no matter how much "force" a woman has, a "forceful" man can subdue her. By choosing to depict two female characters that represent very different "types"—passive,

lethargic Lillian Semple and dynamic, energetic Aileen Butler—Dreiser assures his audience that, despite whatever evidence there may be that women's status is changing, any woman can be controlled by a sufficiently masculine man.

In the Cowperwood trilogy that portrays the life of a robber baron—that depicts such historical events as the stock market crashes, and the democratic movement in Chicago to prevent the takeover of the street railways—there is no evidence of the burgeoning women's movement. Dreiser advocates and revels in the new sexual freedom of women. But the kind of liberation represented by financial independence, intellectual achievement, or the right to vote does not form a part of the backdrop for Dreiser's historical novels.

Dreiser's reputation is that of a writer who challenged the status quo, especially middle-class social and sexual norms. In the Cowperwood trilogy, however, through his depiction of stereotypical feminine and hypermasculine male traits and of gender relations of dominance and submission, Dreiser aided and abetted those who would maintain the gendered status quo. Popular science writers borrowed from thermodynamics to argue that men and women had distinctive traits and specific roles. Altering them would result in a gender economy out of balance and cause civilization to regress. Dreiser employs thermodynamics to illustrate how to prevent an imbalance in the masculine and feminine energy in the system. His remedy is the manly man.

Arizona State University

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Americans may have looked to science because it offered a rational discourse during a time historians characterize as one of chaos and change. In *The Search for Order 1877-1920*, Robert Wiebe describes the United States during this period as "a society without a core" (12). In his view the United States lacked a national center of authority that could bring order to the rapid changes brought about by industrialization, mechanization, urbanization, nationalization, and immigration. Howard Mumford Jones describes the years 1877-1898 as "the most ominous era since the close of the Civil War" (338). Skilled workers were worse off in 1870 than 1850; the panic of 1873 brought lower wages and laid off between two and three million workers; the panic of 1893 was marked by the failure of almost seven hundred banks, the bankruptcy of the overcapitalized railroad system, and a dramatic increase in unemployment (Jones 382). Labor battles amounted to civil war. Between 1881 and 1905 there were 39,000 strikes and lockouts of more than twenty-four hours duration (Jones 383). Jones argues, not surprisingly, that this time of disorder is characterized by a search for a unifying principle. Although he devotes only part of his analysis to the impact of science, it is telling that Jones's central metaphor for these years and title of his book, *The Age of Energy*, is derived from a nineteenth-century scientific finding—the law of conservation of energy.

<sup>2</sup>Two histories of D. Appleton and Company, *Portrait of a Publisher* by Grant Overton and *The House of Appleton* by Gerard R. Wolfe, illustrate the success and importance of popular science writing in the United States during this time. Under Edward Livingston Youmans's guidance, Appletons contracted with the major scientists of the day to bring science to the American public. In addition to numerous books, they also published the *Popular Science Monthly*, initiated in 1872 and edited by Youmans, who wrote that the intention of the monthly was to have "the ablest of scientific men of different countries [explain] their views to non-scientific people" (qtd. in Wolfe 196). In 1873 Appletons started the famous International Scientific Library which was published continuously well into the twentieth century and eventually consisted of nearly one hundred volumes (Wolfe 191-92). The series covered virtually every scientific subject, including titles such as *The Study of Chemistry*, *Jelly-Fish*, *Star-Fish*, *and Sea Urchins*, *Diseases of the Memory*, *What is Electricity?*, *Physics and Politics*, and *The Science of Law*, to name only a few (Wolfe 192). As the last two titles suggest, popular science encouraged Americans to envision a relationship between science and other fields like politics and to consider other disciplines like law within a "scientific" framework. Richard Hofstadter has documented the widespread coverage of scientific developments in popular magazines such as the *North American Review* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the extensive coverage given in daily newspapers (22-24). Ronald Martin points out that poor quality popular science, either muddleheaded and/or inaccurate, was also published, for example, in the *Arena* and by the Brooklyn Ethical Association (91).

<sup>3</sup>In *Hermann von Helmholtz and the Foundations of Nineteenth Century Science*, especially the chapter entitled "Helmholtz and the Civilizing Power of Science," David Cahan argues that Helmholtz believed science had a role to play not only in understanding and controlling the natural world but also in aesthetics, politics, and society. Helmholtz successfully campaigned for science's expanded role through his popular science lectures and writing. In *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*, Anson Rabinbach examines the metaphor of the "human motor," a metaphor based on thermodynamics, which he argues was ubiquitous and provided a new scientific and cultural framework for nineteenth-century thinkers. In the historian Frederic Jackson Turner's speech on the closing of the American frontier, he attempted to construct a distinctive American character, and energy was a key element in this constellation of American characteristics. Ronald Martin points out that the very vagueness of the term "force," precursor of the term "energy," allowed it to have multiple connotations within science and encouraged its migration across the disciplinary boundary into literature. Literary critics also participated in this explosion of thermodynamic metaphors. According to Donald Pizer, both English and American literary critics incorporated Herbert Spencer's evolutionary theory based on thermodynamics into their writing.

<sup>4</sup>Spencer published his theory of evolution in the *Westminster Review* in an article entitled "A Theory of Population, Deduced From the General Law of Animal Fertility" in April of 1852, seven years prior to Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species*. In the preface to the fourth edition of *First Principles*, Spencer takes the trouble to explain this publishing history because people had come to believe mistakenly that his ideas had grown out of Darwin's. Darwin is also usually credited with the phrase "survival of the fittest," but in fact, Spencer coined it, and he set forth his theory of social selection six years prior to Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace's publication of their theory of natural selection.

<sup>5</sup>In *Social Darwinism in American Thought 1860-1915*, Hofstadter quotes a number of Spencer's contemporaries to establish that his ideas framed the discussions during this period. John Dewey perhaps captures this sense of Spencer's significance best when he says: "He [Spencer] has so thoroughly imposed his idea that even non-Spencerians must talk in his terms and adjust their problems to his statements" (20).

<sup>6</sup>Sidney Roberts, in his essay, "Portrait of a Robber Baron: Charles T. Yerkes," traces the political battle between Yerkes and the people of Chicago in their successful attempt to prevent him from circumventing the local city council and securing a fifty-year franchise on street railways in Chicago. Roberts's description of the mass democratic movement mobilized in Chicago to defeat Yerkes is fascinating. On three separate occasions mass demonstrations were organized and first 3,000, then 3,500, and then 5,000 people turned out (Robert 356-58).

<sup>7</sup>I am borrowing the phrase "gallery of women" from a collection of nonfiction and semi-fictionalized sketches about Dreiser's female friends and acquaintances entitled *A Gallery of Women*. This text and Dreiser's autobiographical writing offer a good starting point for an examination of Dreiser's own notorious womanizing. Irene Gammel's analysis of the sketch "Emanuela" in *Sexualizing Power in Naturalism* is excellent. With regard to womanizing and the genre of naturalism, Gammel writes: "Conspiring to 'normalize' male womanizing within the aesthetic and ideological boundaries of naturalism the male narrators and their womanizing characters engage in some 'fictitious dealings' of their own to convince the reader of the 'naturalness' of such male sexual politics" (183).

<sup>8</sup>Hereafter I will refer to *The Financier* with the letter F.

<sup>9</sup>Hereafter I will refer to *The Titan* with the letter T.

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## STIFFED: DAVID MAMET'S MEN

JOHN ROHRKEMPER

Let me begin by stating the obvious: David Mamet's plays are concerned centrally with men and the culture of men. Let me follow that with an only *slightly* less obvious statement: David Mamet's plays are concerned centrally with the psychically and spiritually debilitating effects of capitalism, particularly entrepreneurial capitalism. Given these two—well—givens, it's surprising that more attention hasn't been paid to the way these two apparent truisms complement each other. Carla J. McDonough is fairly typical in wanting to privilege one cause for this malaise at the expense of the other. She writes "The discontents that so many critics have identified in Mamet's work may have less to do with "America" and "capitalism" or even "business" per se than with certain assumptions concerning maleness in America." (76)

But in Mamet's work the culture of entrepreneurial capitalism and the culture of masculinity are most often equated—even fused. Mamet's men, like so many men in our culture, have conflated and internalized the values of an *apparently* static system of gender and an *apparently* "natural" economic model. Furthermore, few of Mamet's characters can even begin to question the gendered and social order of things. They are fish that can't see the water in which they swim, don't have the acumen to step outside cultural norms to examine them critically. Thus, the playwright depends largely on dramatic irony, leaves it to us to make the connections between stultified and shaky notions of both gender and economic organization mouthed by his characters.

This interest in the relationship between masculinity and the economic realities of late-twentieth century America also lies at the heart of Susan Faludi's 1999 book, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Male*. Faludi is more likely than Mamet to locate the malaise in a specifically corporate culture, but both share the belief that the American economic system privileges a rapacious individualism that

destroys our more personal and humane affiliations and commodifies the very individuals it claims to liberate. Faludi further suggests that traditional American masculine values emphasized care and nurturance of community rather than the extreme individualism that she feels characterizes the masculine image conveyed by the purveyors of our current competitive and media-driven culture. Her thesis is perhaps best captured by her statement that "We have changed fundamentally from a society that produced a culture to a culture rooted in no real society at all" (34). Mamet's men look for that society, but find a world of dog-eat-dog competitiveness that precludes any real sense of meaningful, nurturing community.

In order to examine this relationship between male culture and market culture most clearly, I will consider just two of his most celebrated plays: *American Buffalo* (1976), and *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983). Both plays have exclusively male casts and both deal centrally with masculinity and entrepreneurial capitalism. *American Buffalo* is set in Donny Dubrow's junk shop on Chicago's South Side. Dubrow has a young employee, Bobby, who has had an addiction problem in the past and may have one in the present. As the play opens, the two are planning the heist of what they believe is a valuable coin collection that they assume a neighborhood man must have. This is assumed strictly on the basis of the man's apparent affluence and the fact that recently he has purchased a buffalo nickel from the shop for \$90. When Teach, a poker buddy of Don's, shows up, he begins to horn in on the deal, seeking to oust Bobby from the heist and usurp his cut of the profits. He is successful in displacing Bobby, but the plan goes awry and the play ends in betrayal and violence.

*American Buffalo* is a good example of the ways in which Mamet's concern with masculinity and capitalism is contained in one play, but also of the ways in which critics often treat one or the other, or even both—but separately. Mamet himself offers revealingly contradictory explanations of what the play is about. In a 1978 interview with the *New York Times*, Mamet said: "The play is about the American business ethic. About how we excuse all sorts of great and small betrayals and ethical compromises called business" (Jones and Dykes 25). And from the curtain, this theme is sounded. Don calls the planned heist "business." In referring to a hood with whom he plays poker and who might be a card sharp, Don explains to Bobby that:

Fletcher is a standup guy . . . . He is a fellow stands for something . . . . You take him and you put him down in some strange town with just a nickel in his pocket, and by nightfall, he'll have the town by the balls. This is not talk, Bob, this is action . . . . Everything that I or Fletcher know we picked up on the street. That's all business is . . . common sense, experience, and talent. (4-6)

A little later, he tells Bobby, "That's what business is . . . . People taking *care* of themselves" (7).

Interestingly, Don ends the first act with the expletive, "Fucking business," which could refer to the work—the business of burglary that lies ahead of them but also could be taken as Mamet's comment on the world of business in general, words that will linger through the play's intermission and be elaborated upon in act two. This is most explicit when Teach states unabashedly that the plan he and Don are hatching is nothing more than good American entrepreneurship, maybe even a patriotic act. He tells Don:

You know what is free enterprise? . . . The freedom . . . of the *Individual* . . . To Embark on Any Fucking Course he sees Fit . . . . In order to insure his honest chance to make a profit. Am I so out of line on this? Does this make me a Commie? This country's *founded* on this. Don, you know this. (72-73)

And later, after betraying virtually all the people he and Don associate with, and, in fact, betraying Don too, Teach declares: "I don't fuck with my friends, Don. I don't fuck with my business associates. I am a businessman, I am here to do business, I am here to face facts" (83).

Mamet has talked about standing in the back of the theater as the play ended and observing that those he assumed were likely to be businessmen "left it muttering about its inadequacies and pointlessness. They weren't really mad because the play was pointless—no one can be forced to sit through an hour-and-a-half of meaningless dialogue—they were angry because the play was about them" (Jones and Dykes 25). While Mamet identified businessmen—in the guise of small-time hoods—as the subject of *American Buffalo* shortly after it premiered, ten years later he was to describe it in gendered terms, thus suggesting that the play's meaning was somewhat different. In a 1988 interview with *New Theatre Quarterly*, he said:

*American Buffalo* is classical tragedy, the protagonist of which is the junk store owner, who is trying to teach a lesson in how to behave like the excellent man to his young ward. And he is tempted by the

devil into betraying all his principles. Once he does that, he is incapable of even differentiating between simple lessons of fact, and betrays himself into allowing Teach to beat up this young fellow whom he loves. He then undergoes recognition . . . —realizing that . . . because he abdicated a moral position for one moment in favor of some momentary gain, he has let anarchy into his life and has come close to killing the thing he loves. And he realizes at the end of the play . . . that rather than his young ward needing lessons in being an excellent man, it is he himself who needs those lessons.

Mamet punctuates this view with his assertion: "That is what *American Buffalo* is about" (Jones and Dykes, 21-22).

In a chapter of *Stiffed* that compares two industrial concerns that found themselves in economic crisis in the 1990s, Faludi emphasizes the importance of the kind of male mentoring that Mamet identifies as so central to the relationship of Don and Bob. Both the McDonnell Douglass Corporation and the Long Beach Naval Shipyard faced massive layoffs due, among other things, to reorganization of defense priorities in the wake of the end of the Cold War. But in interviewing employees who faced or had received the ax—these men at risk—she found a significant pattern of difference in response to their uncertain futures. McDonnell Douglass demanded of its employees a paramount loyalty to the corporation itself while the shipyard allowed, perhaps encouraged, a principal loyalty *among* the workers *themselves*. As a result, the primary value of the latter very male workplace was camaraderie, cooperation, teamwork, and the most valued job was mentoring. Faludi writes:

In the world of the shipyard it was . . . a man thing to find a father figure who could foster your talents, help you acquire the community connection that would confer a tangible competence. Merit in the shipyard was not about becoming a solo performer, a star. Working alone was rarely possible . . . Flourishing in the shipyard meant embracing a kind of dependency and learning to see that as a sign not of weakness but of strength, as a way of becoming a man. (71)

This statement could be almost exactly the lesson that Don wishes he could practice and pass on to the younger man that Mamet tells us he loves, and it's the very lesson that he betrays. And he betrays it largely because Teach convinces him that mutual dependence is weakness, not strength, that his affection for Bob betrays an unmasculine softness.

Whether we assume that *American Buffalo* is principally about the failure of an economic system or the failure of men to mentor

appropriately other men, one thing is certainly true: the play is about value. At a number of points in the play the characters discuss how hard it is to assess the value of a coin, how subtle and nuanced a proper appraisal of value must be. The entire action of the play is motivated by Don's initial undervaluing of the buffalo nickel that his would-be victim has purchased and the resultant sense that he has been *had* by its purchaser. But the play is also about how hard it is to pass on proper values from one man to another, about how difficult it is to be an "excellent man," to use Mamet's term. And in the terms of the play, the most important value that can make a man excellent is loyalty and all that it implies: honesty, self-sacrifice, love. Don knows the value of loyalty; he also knows that, in the world of business, there's no place for it. Early in the play he contrasts the two worlds in the context of the value of loyalty. He tells Bobby: "There's business and there's friendship" and then elaborates on the incompatibility of the two (7). But Don's great moral lapse is to allow himself to be browbeaten into believing that an external business ethic—and a harsh one at that—should replace his own personal ethic of loyalty and camaraderie.

Interestingly, most of the discussion of loyalty comes from the mouth of the most disloyal man, Mamet's "devil," Teach. When Don initially balks at betraying Bobby by cutting him out of the deal, Teach shows his skills in betrayal. He says to Don: "I gotta say something here . . . Let's siddown on this. What are we saying here? Loyalty. (Pause.) You know how I am on this. This is great. This is admirable. This loyalty. It turns my heart the things that you do for this kid . . . All I mean, a guy can be too loyal" (33-34). Then he brings Mamet's point home. He says, "Don't be dense on this. What are we saying here? Business . . . All that I'm saying, don't confuse business with pleasure" (34). Teach defines business as the real thing, the genuine thing, and defines friendship and loyalty as merely what one indulges in for pleasure. His misspeaking of a common phrase—he substitutes "turns my heart" for "turns my stomach"—suggests that, despite his assertion, he is sickened rather than heartened by Don's sense of loyalty. Teach's understanding of what is essential and inessential shows the very corruption of human values that Faludi finds at the heart of masculine malaise at the end of the century. *American Buffalo* suggests that the alternative to such values as loyalty is the kind of nihilistic litany that erupts from Teach when the

deal falls violently through. Feeling that *he* has somehow been betrayed, he bellows:

There Is No Law.  
There is No Right And Wrong.  
The World is Lies.  
There is No Friendship.  
Every Fucking Thing . . .  
Every God-forsaken Thing . . .  
We all live like cavemen . . .  
There is nothing out there . . .  
I fuck myself. (103-104)

It's appropriate that Mamet gives Teach—the absolute betrayer of loyalty—most of the overt discussion of loyalty in the play. Ultimately, Mamet, the writer justifiably praised for his extraordinarily canny ear for dialogue, for the violently beautiful, harshly elegant poetry of the inarticulate characters that people his play, locates the betrayal of human values in the disingenuous use of language. Russ Wetzstton is getting close to stating this point when he writes, in discussing *American Buffalo*, that "Mamet's extraordinary promise resides not so much in his insights into money-violence or male-female relationships . . . as in the exhilarating perfection of the language with which he expresses it" (Jones and Dykes 25).

But we need to go further. It's not just that Mamet's language is so powerful, it's that he understands the centrality of language to our very being. In fact, in writing of another play, his earlier *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, Mamet declared that "what you say influences the way you think, the way you act, not the other way round" (Jones and Dykes 18). Honest language engenders as well as renders honest thought and behavior. Dishonest language engenders—well, as we say in the computer age: garbage in, garbage out.

The characters of *American Buffalo*, even Teach, are essentially victims of the false lessons/false language of their culture. The characters of *Glengarry Glen Ross* are victims, too, but they are also clearly shown as victimizers as well. "Glengarry Glen Ross" refers to two Florida real estate developments of dubious value and to the realtors who are desperate to find buyers for them. Their desperation is fuelled by the special contest that their company has sponsored and that is coming to a close. The leading salesman for the month—and significantly they are all men—will win a Cadillac while the man

with the lowest sales will be fired. Certainly these men are victims of a fiercely exploitative system, but, as unscrupulous, hard-sell salesmen, they are victimizers—exploiters—as well, shilling for the very ideology that oppresses them.

The first act of the play takes place in three scenes portraying three booths in a Chinese restaurant next to the realty office. In the first booth, an aging, down-on-his-luck salesman, Shelly "The Machine" Levene, is pleading with the office manager, John Williamson, to throw him some strong leads. Williamson explains that it is to his personal advantage to give the best leads to the salesman most likely to close the deal and, since Levene is in last place in the contest, he has given him basically meaningless contacts: a Catch-22. In the next booth, Dave Moss shares with his fellow salesman, George Aaronow, a plan to steal the company's leads and sell them to a competitor. When Aaronow decides that he does not want to participate in the scheme, Moss strong arms him, telling him that by merely listening to the plan, he has become an accomplice before the fact. In the third booth, the leading salesman, Richard Roma, tries to pitch a deal to an unsuspecting dupe named James Lingk who, if he signs, will almost certainly guarantee that Roma will win the Cadillac.

The second act takes place in the trashed realty office the next morning. All the principals eventually appear and are sequentially interviewed—offstage—by a detective. Levine comes bursting into the office crowing about an almost miraculous sale of multiple lots that will put money in his pocket and guarantee his employment. It turns out, however, that the sale will never go through, that the buyers are notorious for treating salesmen's pitches as entertainment, and that they haven't the resources to buy the plots they have contracted for. In a surprising revelation that seals Levene's doom, it turns out that *he* and not Aaronow ended up abetting Moss in the previous night's raid on the office's leads—and Williamson has found him out.

In *American Buffalo*, Mamet equates free market capitalism and street crime, never allowing it to be entirely clear which is tenor and which vehicle; in *Glengarry Glen Ross* he does the same with capitalism and the American mania for contests that promise the opportunity to "win" more than we have earned. Perhaps we love such contests because they promise the possibility of an unfair reward when, for the most part, the economic system offers unfair deprivation, offers us less than we believe we deserve. This particular contest, however, pitting colleague against colleague in a vicious zero-sum

game, represents Mamet's view of our culture's ferocious competitiveness. The contest precludes genuine feeling and concern among the men. And all the salesmen are victims of this cruel system that offers an expensive bauble as the carrot and the destruction of a career and a man's self-identity as the stick. In these terms, the game seems fixed from the outset, a somehow *less* than zero sum game.

The opening scene of *Glengarry Glen Ross* reminds us of another salesman victimized by a system that operates simply on the cruel logic of maximizing profits at the expense of nearly all human values. Notice how much the aging salesman, Levine, sounds like Willy Loman—albeit a particularly profane Willy, and how much the office manager, Williamson, sounds like Willy's young boss, Howard, to whom Willy makes a last-ditch plea for another chance to succeed in the business, to have a life of value. Willy, in one of the most evocative and oft-quoted scenes in *Death of a Salesman*, appeals to Howard's sense of loyalty:

WILLY: If I had forty dollars a week—that's all I need. Forty dollars, Howard.

HOWARD: Kid, I can't take blood from a stone. I—

WILLY, *desperation is on him now*: Howard, the year Al Smith was nominated, your father came to me and—

HOWARD, *starting to go off*: I've got to see some people, kid.

WILLY, *stopping him*: I'm talking about your father! There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see—I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit! *After a pause*: Now pay attention. Your father—in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions.

HOWARD, *impatiently*: Now, Willy, you never averaged—

WILLY, *banging his hand on the desk*: I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928! And your father came to me—or rather, I was in the office here—it was right over this desk—and he put his hand on my shoulder—

HOWARD, *getting up*: You'll have to excuse me, Willy, I gotta see some people. Pull yourself together. (81-82)

*Glengarry Glen Ross* opens with a similar scene that takes place in a booth in the Chinese restaurant:

LEVENE: John...John...John. Okay. John. John. Look: (Pause.)

The Glengarry Highland's leads, you're sending Roma out. Fine. He's a good man. We know that he is. He's fine. All I'm saying, you look at the *board*, he's throwing . . . wait, wait, wait, he's throwing them *away*, he's throwing the leads away. All that I'm saying, that you're wasting your leads. I don't want to tell you your *job*. All that I'm saying, things get *set*, I know they do, you get a certain *mindset* . . . A guy gets a reputation. We know how this . . . all I'm saying, put a *closer* on the job. There's more than one man for the . . . Put a . . . wait a second, put a *proven man out* . . . and you watch, now *wait* a second—and you watch your *dollar* volumes . . . You start closing them for *fifty* 'stead of *twenty-five*...you put a *closer* on the . . .

WILLIAMSON: Shelly, you blew the last . . .

LEVENE: No. John. No. Let's wait, let's back up here, I did . . . will you please? Wait a second. Please. I didn't "blow" them. No, I didn't "blow" them. No. One kicked *out*, one I closed . . .

WILLIAMSON: . . . you didn't close . . .

LEVENE: . . . I, if you'd *listen* to me. Please. I *closed* the cock-sucker. His ex, John, his *ex*, I didn't know he was married . . . he, the *judge* invalidated the . . . (15-16)

And so on. Shelly's desperation, his sense that he has but a limited time to make the pitch of his life, the pitch that might *save* his life, is similar to Willy's. But notice that from the outset Shelly feels he needs to argue *against* another salesman—Roma—in order to make an argument *for* himself.

Later, as Williamson begins to try to extricate himself from this unpleasant conversation, Shelly's anger rises in a statement very reminiscent of Willy's "promises made" speech to Howard:

LEVENE: Well, I want to tell you something, fella, wasn't long I could pick up the phone, call *Murray*, and I'd have your job. You know that? Not too *long* ago. For what? For *nothing*. "Mur, this new kid burns my ass." "Shelly, he's out." You're gone before I'm back from lunch. I bought him a trip to Bermuda once . . . (26)

We hear in Levene, as we heard in Willy, a man fighting for more than his job. Having so thoroughly internalized a certain set of values that equates their prowess at sales with their very manhood, both are fighting for their lives. And because of the viciousness of this world, as Mamet portrays it, Levene must cast his own value in terms of his superiority to one colleague and his ability to do damage to the career of another. Moreover, Williamson is not merely uninterested in Levene's plight, he actually tries to shake him down, demanding

such steep kickbacks for good leads that his salesman would likely lose money even if he achieved his best sales rate ever.

In a world in which men have to prove themselves month in and month out by being Top Dog or possibly being nothing at all, there can be little room for such luxuries as loyalty or camaraderie. While these men con the strangers they pretend are such good friends in their sales pitches, they also con and betray the workmates that they treat like so much scrap on the heap. Donny Dubrow and Willy Loman—low men both—might possibly be able to achieve a kind of tragic dignity, but the salesmen of *Glengarry Glen Ross* are grotesquely comic figures in the blackest of comedies.

Interestingly, Susan Faludi begins her study of male malaise with an examination of the world at the end of the Second World War. She sees this time as a momentous turning point, a time of decision, and represents that decision with two figures of wartime journalism. One is Ernie Pyle, the reporter who, before he died during the war, chronicled the dignity and self-sacrifice of the average GI. Pyle felt the war's sacrifice would be vindicated if America could lead what he called the "Century of the Common Man" and could foster throughout the world a nonexploitative sense of human dignity. The other figure is the publisher Henry Luce, who proclaimed a victorious America would lead an "American Century" with a triumphant nation dictating a new world order with a carrot and a big stick. Luce came to believe that that world would need stealth as well as might, that it would necessitate what we came to call, during the Vietnam War, winning hearts and minds. As a media tycoon, he well understood the value of the word to serve might, to propagandize the ideology of free and ever expanding markets. Faludi rues the victory of Luce's vision over Pyle's. She feels that this is the ideology that has come to commodify the male workers she met while researching her study. It is a corporate world that has rendered language almost meaningless, a babble of corporatese that alienates workers from their work, separates them from their true feelings, from themselves.

And I think this is exactly the basis for Mamet's harshest indictment. The tired old saws and the outright lies of entrepreneurial capitalism, which our culture defines as manly, dull our capabilities to find real meaning in our personal interactions, to be genuine with each other. Both *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* dramatize the way that "what you say influences what you think, the way

you act," and the way that the dishonest and debased language of the marketplace results in dishonest and debased thought and behavior.

Elizabethtown College

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## THE STRENGTH OF THE MIDWESTERN PROLETARIAT: MERIDEL LE SUEUR AND THE IDEAL PROLETARIAN LITERATURE

SARA KOSIBA

In a speech to the 1935 American Writers' Congress, Meridel Le Sueur argued that the culture of the Midwest contained ideal characteristics for supporting a strong proletarian literature.<sup>1</sup> She contended that unlike eastern social centers such as New York City, the Midwest was closer to Marxist and Socialist ideals because of its large number of working-class individuals and unique history. Le Sueur worked to demonstrate the capacity of literature and stories of the Midwest to embody the strongest representations of the working class. In this process, Le Sueur became part of a proletarian tradition in the Midwest, writing alongside authors such as Jack Conroy, Nelson Algren, and others. The stories and novels that Le Sueur wrote contain many of the same ideas that she advocated in her American Writers' Congress speech, demonstrating firsthand how proletarian writing and the characteristics of the Midwest can merge together successfully. While we see Le Sueur as a representative Midwestern proletarian writer, we are less aware of how her politics are expressed in her fiction. When we examine some of her fiction in light of the comments she made in her speech, we find a significant connection in the way Midwestern writing interacted with the larger proletarian literary movement.

Few critics have noted the importance of Le Sueur's speech on both the development of proletarian literature and also on the development of literature in the Midwest. James Boehnlein notes that many studies of proletarian literature, both at the time the literature was at its most popular and in more recent years, overlook or ignore the importance of place or region to the story being told. He comments that Le Sueur's speech was an attempt to remedy that because, "For Le Sueur, regional studies were equated with cultural studies,

which informed her sense of a proletarian aesthetic. In other words, writing by the working class can be understood only when read in light of its place and situatedness in a particular culture" (55). In order to understand the working-class writing of the Midwest, one needs to understand the Midwest as well. Le Sueur's speech advocates understanding the connection between writing and the region it emerges from, a sentiment similar to the one expressed by other regionalist writers of the 1930s who believed literature should be examined through its cultural context.

In "Writing the Midwest: Meridel Le Sueur and the Making of a Radical Regional Tradition," Julia Mickenberg also states that this connection between region and radical thought is often overlooked when considering Le Sueur's work. Mickenberg contends that "Le Sueur has become relatively well known as a feminist with radical political leanings, but her rootedness in the Midwestern landscape has not been read as integral to those commitments" (143-44). Despite Le Sueur's own advocacy in her speech in favor of a closer relationship between region and radical or working-class literature, scholars have most often chosen to associate her only with her Communist party connections or with her work in helping get better rights and conditions for women and the working class. Mickenberg examines some of Le Sueur's regional nonfiction projects, such as her work on history and culture in *North Star Country* and other texts, as well as her work in trying to form a larger literary center in the Midwest through various publications and little magazines. Mickenberg overlooks Le Sueur's fiction and short stories, highlighting her call for regional distinction in proletarian writing but never actually examining the fictional texts Le Sueur wrote to see how they function in light of the contentions of her speech. I believe that examining Le Sueur's fiction in light of its regional influences will lead to a further understanding of how important context is to her proletarian concerns.

In 1935, Meridel Le Sueur traveled to New York to participate in the first ever American Writers' Congress, where she made an impassioned speech calling for an increase in society's acknowledgement of working-class literature from the Midwest. The Congress's main goal was to bring together writers and artists for discussion in an attempt to unify their work and their efforts under the philosophies of the Communist Party of the United States. Le Sueur was one of the few women to participate in the conference and the only woman

to have her speech, "Proletarian Literature and the Middle West," included in the published proceedings. As the only speech at the Congress to have such a strong regional angle, Le Sueur's words championed both the region she knew so well and the working-class writers of that area who she felt most embodied the culture and spirit of the Midwest. Due to the transitory population and high number of immigrant settlers, she saw the region as lacking its own distinctive identity and culture. Le Sueur believed that the key to creating a Midwestern culture lay in the hands of those working and laboring to build a life there.

Le Sueur makes several contentions in her speech about the Midwest and the characteristics that make the region ideal for proletarian literature. In the beginning of her discussion, she talks about the uniquely transient quality of Midwestern life that she sees as distinguishing it from other regions. Le Sueur speaks of a lack of permanence, an inability for Midwesterners to be settled in one place or rooted in the soil, attesting, "My family for two generations have moved from place to place, something better farther on, something opening up. All the itching feet, renegades, and banshees from the East came to the Middle West and we have been howling at the moon ever since, wanting something" ("Proletarian Literature" 135). In Le Sueur's opinion, this perpetual migratory flow among Midwestern individuals, people constantly seeking new opportunities and a better way of life, contributes to a distinctive quality of existence. Unlike individuals from other regions of the country, particularly the East, which claims a longer establishment of tradition and history, the Midwesterner is characterized by movement, always searching and often dissatisfied. These characteristics often bond people together in a common yearning for something more.

Le Sueur also highlights in her speech the potential for literature that exists in the large working-class population of the Midwest. Midwestern identity is shaped in many ways by the working classes that live and work within the region; the literature they produce would help in better characterizing that identity. "There is only one class that has begun to produce a mid-Western culture, and that is the growing yeast of the revolutionary working class arising on the Mesaba range, the wheat belt, the coal fields of Illinois, the blown and ravaged land of the Dakotas, the flour mills, the granaries" ("Proletarian Literature" 136). The Midwest's large population of struggling farmers, miners, auto workers and other individuals, as

well as the fact that Midwestern culture is still in its adolescence, makes the area ideal for the creation of proletarian literature, itself a genre looking to develop and gain credibility in American literary circles at the time Le Sueur spoke.<sup>2</sup> These proletarian writers, through their literature, could speak to each other of shared experiences and speak to the rest of the world about the reality of their experiences.

Le Sueur moves on to discuss that not only are workers and their concerns at the core of Midwestern culture, but the working class of the Midwest is also ready and able to work on further creating and defining that culture. Besides the practiced writers she mentions earlier in her speech (Conroy, Farrell, and Algren), Le Sueur describes a body of unknown writers who are slowly surfacing as significant proletarian writers. She states, "Last winter a hundred and fifty women from factory and farm wrote down their great proletarian experience under slight guidance. This was not only a terrific and gigantic experience of an exploited and dispossessed class, it was also, fragmentary perhaps, literature" ("Proletarian Literature" 137). Through this statement, Le Sueur explicitly argues that workers are capable of creating literature and shows that the power of art does not lie only in the hands of professional writers. The fact that Le Sueur has already observed firsthand how workers can be turned into writers helps to prove that there exists a group of people already suited to furthering Midwestern proletarian culture.

Le Sueur's last major contention in her speech to the American Writers' Congress was that the Midwest had no dominant literary history from which to draw support or ideas; therefore, any literature stemming from the region would reveal a true Midwestern experience. She explains, "We have never been burdened with the old tradition in literature from the old world. Every writer in the Middle West has had to work alone as far as connection with other writers is concerned, therefore he has been in closer contact with the American experience" ("Proletarian Literature" 138). While it is hard to imagine all writers in the Midwest as being free from other literary influences, Le Sueur's comment is notable for its strong conviction in the idea that the Midwest can support a literature with its own unique characteristics. Midwestern writing, especially that of the working classes, should be worthy of analysis and enjoyment on its own merits, not by comparing it to the traditions that have preceded it or by assessing it using the same standards as used with other literatures.

Le Sueur's last major point in her speech calls for writing that stays true to a Midwestern way of life.

How much of an effect Meridel Le Sueur's speech at the American Writers' Congress had on invigorating the creation and awareness of Midwestern literature is difficult to gauge. On one hand, it was a positive affirmation of the work being done by many Midwestern writers at the time. Douglas Wixon, addressing the content of Le Sueur's speech, notes,

The communal basis of art, the role of experience, the valorization of indigenous traditions—these were to form the foundation of a midwestern culture worthy of its name. These were ambitious claims, and resonant with the rhetorical fervor for which Le Sueur was known. Yet she was not alone in making them; it appeared in mid-decade that a coalition of midwestern radicals were intent on their realization. (359)

As a member of this radical coalition of Midwestern writers combining both regional concerns and class struggle, Le Sueur's own writing combined the area that she was most familiar with along with the changes she was observing within society.

Le Sueur's personal experiences in the Midwest informed much of her argument. She was born in Murray, Iowa, in 1900, raised in both Oklahoma and Kansas, attended school in Chicago, and later, after a brief period of time in New York and in California, resided for most of her adult life in Minnesota. Le Sueur's Midwestern roots exposed her to varying degrees of radical thought. Her mother and stepfather were active Socialists and their roles at the Peoples' College in Kansas embodied that philosophy. The college's main goals were to spread Socialist thought and endorse and encourage greater intellect and academic activity among the working classes. Arthur Le Sueur, her stepfather, was the first Socialist mayor of Minot, North Dakota, combining progressive elements of the Midwest and revolutionary elements within her own family. Noted Socialists such as Alexander Berkman often filled the Le Sueur family home (Schleuning 19-21). Le Sueur learned much about revolutionary and radical thought through conversations she heard and experienced while among her parents' friends. The commitment she maintained throughout her life toward the working class and toward portraying their struggles as realistically as possible in writing stemmed from many of these early lessons.

Le Sueur's novel, *The Girl*, embodies many of the characteristics she highlights in her speech, beginning with the transient population of the Midwest. Written in the 1930s but later revised and finally published in 1978, the novel focuses on an unnamed young woman who struggles to find a job and support herself in St. Paul. She herself is uprooted, having been forced to leave her home because her family was no longer able to feed and support so many people. The protagonist's lack of a clear name suggests a sense of universality, implying that she can represent the struggles of many women. Not only is the main character's life caught up in movement, but her family has also moved many times, always looking for something better. The character speaks of her father's optimism in trying to find a better way of life for his children: "He worked, he tried, he was always looking for something better, always trading something, thinking he was going to fall into something great, something that would end all our troubles tomorrow" (*The Girl* 30-31). She continues on to detail the hopefulness that infused her father's search for a better home for his family:

It was when I was three years old I remember my mother praying all night that he would come to his senses but he came back from a trip he was on and said he had traded the nice city house for a farm in Wisconsin, a bee and plum farm. What do you know about bees and plums, my mother cried. Nothing, my father said, but think of it, honey and plums, that will be different from the coal mines where I was raised. (*The Girl* 31)

Trapped in a migratory existence, the main character's family articulates the search for a better existence that Le Sueur associates so distinctly with a Midwestern way of life. Never really rooted to one spot, the family looks for a way to fulfill their dreams, or at the very least, find a more financially stable future.

Le Sueur also stated in her speech that the Midwest had great potential for stories in its working class. *The Girl* is a symbol of that potential, as it was created out of the stories that Le Sueur helped workers in the region create and record. Le Sueur's novel became a conduit for the voices of those women who might otherwise never have written or expressed their stories and showed that those stories have literary potential. She states in her afterword to the novel,

This memorial to the great and heroic women of the depression was really written by them. As part of our desperate struggle to be alive

and human we pooled our memories, experiences, and in the midst of disaster told each other our stories or wrote them down. We had a writers' group of women in the Worker's Alliance and we met every night to raise our miserable circumstances to the level of sagas, poetry, cry-outs. (*The Girl* 149)

She continues on to state that each element of her tale grew out of real stories, referencing elements of her plot and the real people who inspired them. Listening to the stories of these women enriched Le Sueur's knowledge of the struggles they faced, and she used that increased awareness to add greater authenticity to her fiction. Because she employed this reality-based composing process, Le Sueur's characters feel more like real people having real experiences than fictional creations in a contrived plot.

There are writers in the Midwest capable of advancing the struggles of the working class, according to Le Sueur's speech, and her writing and publishing efforts helped to support that group. Her personal commitment to building a network of Midwestern writers stems quite strongly from the philosophies she expressed at the American Writers' Congress. As an advocate and supporter of the potential for Midwestern literature to advance a strong proletarian literature, Le Sueur was also willing to put forth the work necessary to try to make that literature and literary community happen. As she noted in her afterward to *The Girl*, she was active in trying to unify worker-writers through her efforts in the Workers Alliance. In the spring of 1936, she was instrumental in holding the Midwest Writers' Conference in Chicago and founding the literary magazine *Midwest*, which failed after only a few issues (Mickenberg 149-50). In 1937 she taught writing classes in a workers' education program sponsored by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and published a textbook, *Worker Writers*, to teach the working classes how to write and record their stories. In her classes, she "encouraged her students to recognize the potency of the narratives and archetypes that have passed through generations of workers" (Greer 610). The group of writers Le Sueur described in her speech did exist, and she made a great effort to support those individuals and encourage their art to grow.

In her own fiction, she carried over her experiences working with these individuals and also helped to raise their status by revealing their struggles through her writing. The majority of characters in Le

Sueur's novels and stories are working-class individuals. From the barroom work of her protagonist in *The Girl* to the men she covers in her report of the 1934 trucker's strike in Minneapolis in "What Happens in a Strike," the individuals in Le Sueur's writing are all concerned with making a decent living for themselves and their families and standing up for their rights. In the short story, "Salute to Spring," a man and woman desperate to improve their lives leave their sick child at home in order to attend a meeting meant to organize the area farmers. Unable to feed their children and barely able to keep farming due to loans and lack of materials, they are yearning for a way to fix the problems they face and see organizing with others as a powerful weapon against poverty. However, despite gaining a small degree of empowerment at the meeting, they return home to find their child dead. The death of their child negates much of the hope they had gained at their meeting, making the conditions they are living in seem insurmountable. At the time Le Sueur was writing, with the Great Depression looming over the country, many families faced instances of malnutrition due to lack of adequate food and resources and struggled to find ways to support themselves. In stories such as "Salute to Spring," Le Sueur captures these adversities in her literature, conveying them to families facing similar situations so that they would see they were not alone and, more importantly, circulating the story to the masses to reveal the conditions working-class individuals faced.

Le Sueur's last contention in her speech is that Midwestern writing is completely independent of all other literary genres and traditions. Her own writing, while inventive, is hard to characterize as free from all outside influence. While she advocated closer interaction between Midwestern writers, she also held regard for authors and texts outside the Midwestern tradition, especially Walt Whitman. Le Sueur may not have been as free from tradition as she hoped, but clearly she made a concerted effort to confine her writing to the Midwest and to Midwestern experience. From setting her novels and stories in cities like St. Paul, Minneapolis, or Chicago, to having her characters deal with issues that are common to the Midwest, such as the financial struggles facing farmers, Le Sueur's writing embodies Midwestern attributes in its defining characteristics and in her intent as a writer. She keeps her narrative grounded in real experiences and uses language common to the real people her characters are based on. In her literary work, this reality-based approach becomes apparent in the simple sentence structure and dialogue found, for example, in her novel, *The Girl*.

Her protagonist speaks of conditions that face her on the streets of St. Paul, "I was lucky to get a job after all the walking and hunting that Clara and I had been doing. I was lucky to have Clara showing me how to wander on the street and not be picked up by plainclothesmen and police matrons. They will pick you up, Clara told me, and give you tests and sterilize you or send you to the women's prison" (*The Girl* 1). Faced with the difficulty of moving to the city to find a job, the narrator must also learn how to navigate a new way of life as well as the rules and obstacles that come with life in the city. Le Sueur's fiction stays close to the language of actual people, letting the voice of the character convey ideas and images in the same way as a real person might, showing that a literature of real people, real Midwesterners, is possible, rather than strictly relying on a false or forced representation of reality based on more formal artistic principles.

Whether Le Sueur made a convincing argument for the superiority of the Midwest as an ideal location for proletarian literature is perhaps debatable. She did, indeed, make a strong case for the literature of the Middle West to embody the components of a strong proletarian literature; however, in comparing Midwestern proletarian writings to other working-class literature, she showed that it had far more similarities than superiorities. Her audience at the American Writers' Congress never appeared to rally behind her ideas, as proletarian literature from the Midwest failed to gain increased recognition by the rest of the United States. Perhaps without the political, social, and financial obstacles Midwestern writers faced in the Communist party, assorted political organizations, and the literary establishment, Midwestern writing by workers would have had more of a chance to grow and develop. At times, the forces against the writers simply seemed too overwhelming, despite the hard work and strong initiative with which they approached their writing, as Wixson confirms in his comment:

Unnurtured by either the establishment press or the [Communist] Party's cultural apparatus, they were actively undermined by elements within the left's cultural movement, a fact that raises questions about the left's position on working-class culture as the 1930's wore on. Whatever that position may have been at any one time, the effect was that the cultural left began to ignore the importance of creating an authentic working-class literature sensitive to regional difference. (7)

Regardless of their best efforts, Midwestern working-class writers fell victim to many of the same forces affecting the very class they

were writing about, such as money, big business, and politics. The obstacles Le Sueur and other Midwestern authors faced in their attempts to write and publish ultimately silenced them, and silenced the Midwestern masses along with them. Midwestern literature as a whole would also be perceived differently over time, particularly by the late 1940s and 1950s, as writers came to see being labeled "regional" as constrictive or simplistic, and many scholars viewed regional writing as lacking literary merit.

Meridel Le Sueur's efforts to create a strong, proletarian literature focused on the issues facing the working classes of the Midwest are important because of how they affected and assisted in developing Midwestern history and culture. Le Sueur's speech at the American Writers' Congress and the corpus of her writing mark an important chapter in Midwestern literary history. While part of the radical tradition defining the "literary left" of the early twentieth century, Le Sueur, committed to the Midwest and to the workers and people fighting and forming an existence there, became noteworthy for her difference from and defiance of other writers of the political left. Fighting to form a literature and literary community uniquely Midwestern and free of the political constraints of the eastern literary establishments, Le Sueur and other Midwestern writers deserve credit for being unafraid to break new territory and stubborn enough to stand strong in support of that territory, much like the Midwestern pioneers who first settled the stretches of land the writers called home.

Kent State University

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Le Sueur never actually defines the genre of proletarian literature in her speech; the closest description based on her words is literature of the working classes. Douglas Wixson, in *Worker-Writer in America*, notes the debate in the 1920s and 1930s regarding how proletarian literature during that time period was defined, showing that there was no clear definition among Communist or leftist writers (336-38). Barbara Foley, in *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), defines proletarian literature as "novels written in the ambience of the Communist-led cultural movements that arose and developed in the United States in the context of the Great Depression" (vii). While some critics consider other angles on the topic, this general definition forms the core of most discussions of proletarian literature. Foley also devotes a chapter to explaining the debate over defining proletarian literature and the difficulties of determining what work qualifies (86-128).

<sup>2</sup>While farmers did not always face the same concerns as agricultural and industrial workers because they had the potential to own their own land and support themselves, the struggles they faced in trying to operate their farms at a profit instead of a loss, particularly

during the 1930s, often placed them in situations similar to those of many of the other workers of the time.

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## CLAIMING A PLACE IN THE NATION: WISCONSIN WOMEN EXPERIENCE THE CIVIL WAR THROUGH PRIVATE WRITING

DANA EDWARDS

How does one place herself within a community or nation that denies her ability to participate in that nation? This central question informs the following discussion of the role of American women, focusing on those in Wisconsin, in the Civil War. It appears as though, although barred from any direct activity (aside from nursing) in the American Civil War, the women of this geographic context<sup>1</sup> asserted their nationalism and national worth within the letters, memoirs, and other autobiographical accounts that they composed during and concerning this period.<sup>1</sup> Not only did they write to maintain the morale of their soldiers, many of whom were their brothers, fathers, lovers, and husbands, they also wrote to maintain their own place within their respective societies.

This discussion is centered on the definition of nationalism put forth in the writings of Benedict Anderson and Paul Gilbert, both of whom define nationalism in similar terms: "a feeling of loyalty to one's nation[;] a sentiment of attachment to the nation rather than a belief that the nation is the proper object of such a sentiment" (Gilbert 5). These discussions of the ideology of nationalism are an interesting place to begin a study of women and nationalism because they will lead us to see that the prior notions of nation and nationalism inherently disregard the acceptance of bordered people, those on the fringe of that nation; this includes, most notably, women and minorities.

From the onset of nationalistic dialogue, women have been denied access to its parameters. While researching nationalism, I encountered very few discussions concerning the disparity between how men and women were accepted as active citizens. Paul Gilbert, in *The Philosophy of Nationalism*, never once mentions women, much less the inability for women to be involved in nationalism or national movements; although, interestingly, he does discuss the ten-

sions between an immigrant group or multiethnic group and the national sentiment. As Nira Yuval-Davis claims in *Gender & Nation*, "The concept of nation assumes a complete correspondence between the boundaries of the nation and the boundaries of those who live in a specific state" (11). This notion of the one-to-one relationship of national boundaries and a nation's inhabitants fails, as Yuval-Davis continues to notice, to take into consideration that there will always be people within the given boundaries who are not accepted as members of the hegemonic nation. "As nationalism and nations have usually been discussed as part of the public political sphere, the exclusion of women from that arena has affected their exclusion from that discourse as well" (Yuval-Davis 13).

In an effort to establish a political existence, many women take to the soapbox. They use language as a means of positioning themselves in the dialogues that are going on around—and overwhelmingly without—them as well as the dialogues that are inherently their own. As many theorists argue, both feminist and humanist, with language comes power. We need only look as far as the current political speeches to see this theory in action. Historically, women have been kept from language and therefore, kept from power. As Adrienne Rich claims, "Language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence" (qtd. in Belenky *et al* 23). Maintaining silence is analogous to remaining oppressed.

During the American Civil War, a time that witnessed the heightened institutionalization of the cult of domesticity, women's roles were narrowly defined and their freedoms were few. They were not given a voice in terms of politics or government and were barely allowed freedom of expression within the home. How, then, did communication between the homefront and the warfront become such a viable outlet for women during the Civil War?

Furthermore, how do we place a value on women's private writing? Overwhelmingly, stories of the domestic existence were in vogue and many became best sellers within weeks of publication. The striking difference lies in the rift between writing that is published, and therefore explicitly valued, and private writing, those texts shared with a select few, which become valuable based on their historical contexts rather than plots. As Deborah Madsen argues in the preface to *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*, "Many texts by women express . . . the unique experience of women in history; the notion of female consciousness; the definitions of gender that

limit and oppress; and the cause of women's liberation from those restrictions" (ix). Therefore, we can value the private writing of Civil War women because it follows the paradigm used in explaining the value of female texts, i.e. published works. It is through this adherence to the written word and the effort to be engaged in a national dialogue that women took up their pens more fervently than before.

As Benedict Anderson posits in *Imagined Communities*, nationalism was perpetuated and began to flourish once print technology was readily available: "These print-languages laid the bases for national consciousnesses in three distinct ways. First . . . they created unified fields of exchange and communication . . . Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language . . . Third, [it] created languages-of-power" (44-5). This is to say that once people could write and print their ideas, the ideology of nationalism was disseminated by way of that medium. The universality of reading the same ideas linked the previously unlinkable areas of a nation by creating a congruent experience; a man in Boston could be reading the same periodical as a man in Baltimore or Charleston, thus linking the two or three men by a common experience and common understanding of the day's or month's events. Statistically, "by the 1840s America had the largest reading population ever produced" and, between 1800 and 1850 "more books [had] been written by women and about women than all that had been issued during the preceding five thousand and eight hundred years" (Kelley 10, 185). This is an intriguing thought and one that becomes all the more so when looking at how women *writing* during the American Civil War disseminated their own ideas of nationalism and community engagement.

A plausible argument may arise here between print media and the writing of women. Private writing, unless copied and shared between states or communities, may not be considered of the same importance as print media in terms of creating connections between community members; I would argue, however, that it is specifically the inability to participate in print media that propels women into personal writing. It also propels them into a personal dialogue with those members of the community who are absent and between others who are in similar situations. The lack of patriarchal oppression meant women were freer to engage in the discourse of a community.



Not only did the historical context of war compel these women to write in the manner that they did; they were also carrying on in the aftermath of the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. Although, arguably, most of the writing included in this discussion originated with women who had little contact with Seneca Falls, the reverberations of what was said and done there had a trickle-down effect on the women of Wisconsin. Their letters assume a freedom devoid of linguistic oppression: the women said what they felt. No longer confined by society's expectations of the frigid woman, their letters bring our attention to the intimacy they shared with their husbands and other males. A strong example of this is found in the letter written by Adaline Guernsey to her husband Otis, dated July 11, 1865. Otis is still confined to his duty in the Union Army and has not yet returned home:

I wish you was here to night to sleep with me . . . I will send you a kiss if you will except [sic] it . . . I will close for the night hoping you will not forget me for I never shal [sic] you as long as life remains . . . I do love you more than I can write with pen and ink my love is true to my own Otis and no one els [sic] that is sure Otis.

If we can assume that women attempted to become active in a community and assert their new-found voices through writing, then why would they write to men, the ones who arguably kept them silent? A closer look at the letters Civil War women wrote to their husbands, fathers, etc. shows a concerted effort to maintain a normal relationship. Almost all of the letters attempt to maintain the husband/wife relationship by recounting happenings within the village or city in which they live. Other letters attempt to assert the woman's knowledge of the war by engaging the male counterpart in correspondence pertaining to the activities of the war itself.

The most compelling example of the latter appears in the letters written from Sara Billings to her brother (name unknown) who was an officer in the Union Army. In this letter, Sara affects the persona of a military comrade to her brother. She is knowledgeable both about the war in general and the specificities of recent battles and movements. What should be most striking is the obvious level of education Sara has attained; most of the other letters and accounts do not give an indication that the writer(s) attended any formalized schooling—notice the spelling and grammatical errors of the above excerpt by Adaline Guernsey. In the following excerpt, Sara engages

her brother in a one-way dialogue of news she received about the recent battle fought in the Shenandoah Valley:

I have just been out to the mail box where were the papers for today containing news from General Sheridan, official reports, that he and the 19th Wisconsin defeated Early's army in the Shenandoah Valley, driving the Rebs twelve miles, catching over three thousand prisoners . . .

Within this brief excerpt, it is clear that Sara felt herself part of the on-going dialogue of war and positions herself as one of its central figures, at least in terms of the relationship between herself and her brother. She reveals knowledge of the war in a way that should remind us of the argument put forth in *Touched With Fire*, in which men, upon a miraculous experience of patriotism and moral fervor, felt themselves drawn to the battlefields. Although Sara is a woman and therefore disqualified from service, she still feels the call that her brother presumably did.

It is this call of duty that women like Sara answered in many of their letters and diary entries. The argument then becomes one of inclusion rather than emotional outlet. For women like Sara, the letters they wrote to family members in the Army were modes of engagement in the action of the war. This written engagement let them imagine for themselves a certain sense of belonging that would not have been possible otherwise. For once, women like Sara Billings were able to vocalize their knowledge of and interest in the politics of the day, without crossing severely defended lines of gender and domestic duty.

We see a similar strain in the mythologized stories of women dressing as men in order to enlist in the army. One particular story, supposedly originating in Wisconsin, tells the story of a sister indebted to her brother and thus following him into battle:

Preparations for the *deception* were made. Her raven tresses cut short, she put on man's apparel and endeavored to accustom herself to her strange and unnatural adornment. She accompanied her brother to the rendezvous of the company and notwithstanding her soldierlike appearance and the air of masculinity surrounding her, her sex was at last detected . . . [Sara] with tears in her eyes was obliged to return home . . . (Mills, emphasis mine)

I felt it important to emphasize the word "deception" because it speaks to the problem facing women in the gender-specific period surrounding the Civil War. That Sarah Collins dressed as a male was seen more as a lie than an act of heroism, or heroism. Her attempt



to engage herself in the conflict was deceptive because she did so in a manner not accepted by her society. We can almost see Sara Billings attempting a similar move; with her knowledge of and interest in the battles, she would have made an excellent soldier. Society, however, arrested her interest and allowed her to express it only in the form of personal letters.

The letters of Sara Billings were, therefore, not seen as deceptive although they more than likely did act as deceptive elements in terms of her sense of community and her place within that community. An overwhelming number of letters written by women to men stationed in the Union Army have much more to do with domestic or township happenings, not military engagements. The fact that Sara talked to her brother about the military experience and read the reports that were sent by General Sheridan show her as a woman desperately wanting to be involved on a more distinct level. The community she imagined for herself, therefore, might be populated entirely by female soldiers or nurses, women who involved themselves directly in the battles and aftermaths of battles of the Civil War. The deception then becomes an inward rather than an outward manifestation, as was the case with Sarah Collins.

It is important not to dismiss women like Sarah Collins and Sara Billings because, although they appear to be in the minority, I would argue that their experiences represented more than just themselves. More often than not, women left to "man" the homefront wished to see themselves on the battlefields and around the war room tables. Unfortunately, the majority of letters and autobiographical accounts describe the presumed roles of women left on the homefront. They took the places of their male counterparts on the farm and in the businesses. This is not to say, however, that the accounts of domestic life are not to be valued; they also serve as modes of positioning for women and enable them to become involved in the community of the Civil War.

In imagining their communities, the women of Wisconsin were quick to maintain their place(s) in society. For women such as Adaline Guernsey, Helen Eldred, June Knapp and M.P. Wightman, the experiences they had of the war and the community they imagined for themselves are important insofar as they show how women became involved, although some may argue this point, indirectly in the activity of the war. Because there are so many women who experienced the war in the same way, automatically we have the establishment of a community, one that differs from that of the antebellum

era. In taking the place of men, mostly on the homefront, women, much like their later counterparts in America and Britain during World War II, became the leaders of their communities in ways that become evident in the accounts they wrote.

Outside of a handful of women, Northern women's writing was not treasured by the reading community at large. The domestic sphere of women had to be racy and full of controversy, as we see in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, or ambiguous, as is the case with much of Emily Dickinson's Civil War writing, in order to make it into print. Therefore, when Anderson claims that print media made nationalism a greater-encompassing sentiment, he fails to see that this sentiment inherently belongs to men alone, upper-middle-class and upper-class men at that. By writing letters to their male loved ones, the women of Wisconsin, and arguably of every state in the nation, attempted to mimic (however subconsciously) the movement toward a kind of collective experience found in the print culture.

Also, by recounting life on the homestead these women attempted to legitimate their roles. For many, this was a grand opportunity to write about, to put into words, to claim ownership of the roles they played as wives, daughters, sisters, mothers. They were able to have the last word, as it were. By putting their lives into words, their lives took on meaning and depth and allowed them to conceive of themselves as active members of a larger community. The community in which they imagined themselves was that of women, presumably, but it differed from the paradigm offered by purveyors of the cult of domesticity in that it allowed them greater freedom of voice and of person.

As argued in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, women who are brought up in eras or cultures that silence women have an underdeveloped sense not only of themselves but also of other women; when they are arrested developmentally by being silenced, they project that experience onto the other women with whom they come into contact. These women imagine themselves in terms of their surroundings and their interactions with others rather than in terms of a psychological existence. We see this in many of the letters of the Wisconsin women. Adaline Guernsey writes the following to her husband in a letter dated July 11, 1865. Although the war is officially over, her husband is still on the East Coast. As an officer he was expected to stay in case of further skirmishes and to help reorganize the Union: [I have edited the following excerpt for clarity by inserting punctuation where necessary.]

Ira Palmer has got home[.] [W]e had a nice ra[in] last week[;] things are growing finely now[.] The boys worked out our ro[ad] tax last week in our district[.] [T]hey have got the corn cultivate[d] over one way[.] [T]hat corn you sent home is up and looks nice[.]

Adaline Guernsey recounts the day's and week's events for two reasons: to situate herself into the larger conversation and to meet the superficial need of keeping in contact with loved ones. To develop the notion of the imagined community further, women such as Adaline Guernsey were able to be the creators of reality for those to whom they wrote. By recounting the events of the family and town, these women were able to imagine it for their missing loved ones, thus keeping those loved ones engaged in the communities they left, and they were also able to assert control over what these loved ones were told. Thus, they imagined the community for the missing male figure; whether they told the truth or embellished it was entirely up to them, and, as such, they could refigure the community to fit their own subconscious agendas. Consider the following excerpt also taken from a letter to Otis Guernsey from his wife Adaline, dated May 1, 1865:

[T]here is a great story about Lige Ishman[.] [H]e had a woman to work for him[.] [H]e'r name was Miss Mackfarland[.] [S]he had a little boy with h[er] th[ere] and h[er] husband is in the army[.] [S]he has got a nother child with h[er] and they say it is Ishaman's . . . Oh, Otis ain't you glad ou have got one that is true to you. I love my o[wn] too much to disgrace him and myself and family[.] [Y]ou may be assure of that[.]

Is Adaline compensating for a guilty conscience, or is she merely trying to put her husband at ease concerning her sexual loyalty to him? Furthermore, she may be attempting to prove her fidelity in a motion to calm any suspicions she may have of her husband or to make him feel guilty of any possible sexual missteps by reminding him of her loyalty in this manner. Whatever the reason, she artfully interjects this story of rumored infidelity within a framing discussion of the daily work on the farm.

It is this ability to re-present any given observations or activities that causes me to argue that the personal writings of women are more than mere items of interest for history buffs and genealogists. This writing should be considered literature just as much as those works which outwardly identify themselves as fiction. After all, what is fic-

tion but the imagining of a reality, which would therefore include the personal writings discussed in this essay.

In *Private Women, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*, Mary Kelley claims, "Practically all of the literary domestics appeared in a wide variety of periodicals—literary monthlies or quarterlies, weekly story papers, or newspapers—in which they published stories, sketches, and essays . . ." What we can begin to do, with the help of Kelley's work, is to recognize that women who wrote about their domestic sphere publicly became models for those women who wrote about domesticity privately. This assumption should inform the manner in which we read the letters and other modes of autobiographical accounts by women on the domestic side of the Civil War because it encourages us to understand that they were, I would argue, writing in response to what was written in the mass media of the time. Not only were these women writing in response to the sentiment of the soldiers to whom they wrote, they were writing to participate in an already established genre: the domestic saga.

We see this most notably in three accounts written by Civil War women at the request of Ethel A. Hurn, a young researcher interested in the role of Wisconsin's women in the Civil War. Her studies led her, in 1910, to collect and organize the autobiographical stories of over twenty women concerning their adventures in Civil War-era Wisconsin. Some of the most interesting come from Mrs. M.P. Wightman, Helen Juliaette Eldred, and Mrs. L.W. Knapp.

Mrs. Wightman, like so many of the women of the Civil War, was left with children to support and no means of doing so. Her husband, Andrew B. Wightman, had been ill with typhoid fever prior to the war and entered the Union Army as soon as his health allowed him to do so. Because of her severe lack of money and limited means of making money allowed women at the time, Mrs. Wightman engaged herself in one of the only respectable jobs open to women at that time: she turned her home into a boarding house. Thus, she was able to survive the financial hardships of the war by re-creating the lack of domesticity that the war caused.

As her home and wallet became empty as a result of her husband's absence, she chose to fill it with a domestic fiction. This is interesting given the amount of attention paid to the domestic sphere and the domestic fiction of the day. Quite understandably, Mrs. Wightman felt the need to support her family and thus entered into a business arrangement; less obvious, however, is the interesting

development of a business that mimics the domesticity of nineteenth-century American—and, some would argue, to a greater extent, British—women. By recreating a domestic reality, she directly participates in the domestic dialogue of the era. This domestic writing becomes subsumed into the activity of imagining a community for herself and the nation.

This is seen with even greater emphasis in the life of Helen J. Eldred. Like Mrs. Wightman, Helen Eldred was left without means to support herself and young son, who was sixteen months old at the time of his father's enlistment. Rather than stay on the farm that she and her husband worked so hard to establish, she took up residence in a hotel in Oshkosh, only a few miles from the camp in which her husband was a soldier of the 21st Regiment. During the two years she remained at that hotel, she took on the chores of maid and nurse, dividing her time between looking after the rooms of the hotel and joining the doctors and nurses taking care of wounded Wisconsin soldiers returning home after battle.

It is interesting that Helen Eldred engaged herself in the war in such a direct way. Without argument, many women chose to aid in the nursing of the injured, but very few moved their households in order to do so. This was one way that women like Helen Eldred wrote themselves into the experience of the Civil War. Taking their clues from much-publicized accounts of women's roles of the time, they chose to immerse themselves and their families in an activity that functioned both as place marker and community involvement. From her room in the hotel, she says, "I had the opportunity to see the regiments of soldiers go out with bands playing and colors flying." By being a witness to both the "virtuous" departure and horrible arrivals, she became active in both sides of war and in her liminality, positioned herself in the center of the conflict.

When her husband's regiment was sent to the front by way of Michigan City, Indiana, she and their son took up residence in a hotel room in Albion, Michigan. There she continued the work she had done previously, only now she was in the company of other women also engaged in the activities of "mothering" soldiers. She and the other women spent hours sewing extra pockets into jackets to be worn by the soldiers.

However, the most interesting part of her account has to do with the hardships, of which, she claims, there were many, of being a "war-widow." Here, she fictionalizes a reality for herself and the

other women by claiming an analogous relationship between being left behind by their husbands and being left behind by death. For many women and other family members, going to war meant going to death, since so many of the men did not return alive.

In the last page of her account, she dramatizes life on the homefront by claiming that she and her fellow women "became victims of extortion in the matter of household supplies from heartless Copperheads who by short-weight and short-measure disposed of their commodities at a price not accordant with [their actual] market value." She emphasizes the victimization in an attempt to stage a pseudo-battle of her own, and by doing so, to draw attention to the harsh reality of life outside the battle. Even though she was, by all accounts, outside of the battle, she was engaged in a battle that very closely resembled the actual battle(s) of the Civil War. In this way, she casts herself and the other women as players in a battle not unlike the one(s) their male-counterparts were engaged in and, thus, creates a community of experience between the domestic female and her soldier-husband.

Many women were forced to give up the lives they had made for themselves when the war broke out in 1861. Mrs. L.W. Knapp wrote about one such experience in her autobiographical account. Surprisingly, she was enrolled in school, the Academy of Platteville, when the war commenced but, "owing to the scarcity of men and being a farmer's daughter, [she] was soon obliged to leave the school of which [she] was very fond and take [her] place on the farm." With the onset of war, she was forced to leave behind a way of life and take up another, thus re-casting her into a new and challenging role. Her account of this transition tells us much about her emotions at the time and also gives us insight into the severity of the changing role of the Civil War woman:

No one but those who passed through those days can realize the hardships one had to endure. Pen can't describe it. The suspense for the loved ones who were gone, the sadness depicted on the countenance of every one made one's heartache. It was enough to break the constitution of the strongest and was the death of many.

Further in her account, she interestingly creates a shift in focus when discussing hardships by casting the husband as the helpless bystander:

This one of many incidents comes to my mind. The husband had to go and leave his family of 2 small children. Soon after he had gone another baby came and the mother died. The husband could not

come home to see his wife laid away but had to bear it with an almost broken heart.

With the retelling of this memory, she turns the tables on assumed female sentimentality and victimization and creates an imagined reality for the male character. By recounting a story of the death of a wife, where we would expect the death of the husband in battle, Mrs. Knapp effectively shows the similarity of experience on both sides of the battle, both the battlefield and the homefront.

As Mary Kelley notes, this is a common occurrence in novels and stories about the domestic sphere. "Finding themselves in a new role [presumably that of the male], the literary domestics nevertheless could not discard a traditional identity, and literary domesticity represented a new, public, retelling of old, private tales" (222). To take this one step further, I will argue that it was because of this inability to discard the traditional identity that female writers of the domestic chose to keep their heroines in the domestic sphere, thus forcing their heroism to be enacted within that sphere. The husband from the story excerpted above is unable to save his wife; she becomes a martyr of domesticity—a woman who has died as a result of her place within the home. We assume that the woman died in childbirth, given the relationship between cause and effect.

To link Mrs. Knapp more securely to the tradition of fiction making, I would argue that the tone of Mrs. Knapp's account differs from previous ones mentioned in that it focuses more on the domestic hardships than others. Obviously, they all mention the situation of Wisconsin women during the Civil War to be full of hard times and strained relationships, but Mrs. Knapp's narrative speaks of the women's experiences with a heightened dramatic tone. We do not know for certain that the story told about the dead wife and her husband's inability to see her is true (although I am quite certain situations like this did arise); and, therefore, we might speculate that the story is a Civil War legend passed to the audience as a means of victimizing men and creating a reality of helplessness that permeated gender lines, thereby rewriting the communities of both women and men by imagining the women as the stronger sex.

A discussion of women's Civil War private writing takes into consideration a plethora of interlinking arguments. Working forward from the assumption that the writing was an attempt to become engaged in a national dialogue, and secondly, an attempt to keep up

the reality of a community, we can see how other factors, such as fiction making, have a direct impact upon these writings.

Marquette University

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>I use the term "geographic context" to mark the effect geography plays in experience. The experiences of Wisconsin women are markedly different from those of other Northern women and Southern women. I researched the private writings of Southern women and found that, for most, the war had a less decipherable impact on their personal writings because of the nearness of combat. Their lives were upset in terms of goods and services in ways that the lives of Wisconsin women were not. Given their proximity to the physicality of the war, their means of representing community and of developing a national identity were almost non-existent.

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## PORTRAITS OF THE AMERICAN HEARTLAND AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE COUNTERCULTURE

DOMINIC ORDING

This essay is about memory, history, and representation. Appropriate sub-titles might include "Why We Are So Obsessed with 1967-1973, and Why We Should Be" or "Alone Again, Natch." Since Microsoft Word doesn't yet accept "natch" as a word proper, and since in my experience it's only about fifteen minutes old as a word anyhow (from when Anna Quindlen used it in her *Newsweek* column), I should explain that this sub-title is a reference to the melancholy Gilbert O'Sullivan song "Alone Again, Naturally" that was #1 on the Billboard singles chart for six weeks in the summer of 1972, and also a reference to the relative isolation of the current administration in its foreign policy. This paper grew out of a talk given at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature in May 2004. I had almost successfully resisted the temptation to include any mention of current affairs in my presentation last May. But that became impossible with the then-recent news of the abuse of prisoners in Iraq. To ignore this news would have been irresponsible and immoral, especially given the topic of my remarks. In fact, our responsibility to connect events, and representations of events, from the historical period with which I'm concerned to current world affairs seems increasingly urgent every day; and the insistent contemporary resonance of these years became glaringly evident in the 2004 presidential election, when the Bush and Kerry campaigns exchanged criticisms in the media about the candidates' respective military service during the conflict in Vietnam.

This essay examines portraits of the American Heartland—which is itself a metaphor for and a microcosm of the United States as a whole—looking back at the period between 1967 and 1973. These are the years during which what is often called the counterculture flourished. My central argument is that our attempts to analyze and interpret these portraits may provide keys to making sense of our current situation. As one American sage, George Santayana, puts it, in

an aphorism that has become a cliché: "Those who cannot learn from the past are condemned to repeat it" (284). If we grant this truism, then it follows that our collective inquiry into representations of the events of the late sixties and early seventies—especially regarding the Vietnam conflict (what is called The American War in Vietnam itself) and its cultural context—is hardly of mere academic interest. For better or worse, we seem to be in a cultural moment obsessed with the late sixties and early seventies. This obsession is all the more striking and enigmatically right on time given the events of the early years of our new century.

What follows will, I hope, urge other scholars in the field to examine revisionist histories of the sixties and seventies, and, more specifically, the ways in which representations of the war and the counterculture have evolved and devolved over the years. This said, perhaps it is rhetorically advisable to divide the paper into four sections. First is the problem of the historical periodization of the late sixties and early seventies. Second is the problem of geographically placing the American Heartland. It gave me great pleasure to share a panel at the conference with a paper on Garrison Keillor, as his Lake Wobegon closely resembles what I take to be both the American Heartland and the America of contemporary folklore. The third puzzle of this project is to gather and interpret a lineage of the most relevant media portraits of the time and place I'm concerned with. Fourth and finally, I will examine Michael Cunningham's short story "White Angel" from 1989 and Tim O'Brien's book of fiction, *The Things They Carried* from 1990 in order to illuminate what these texts tell us about how the years of the Woodstock-era counterculture and the military conflict in Vietnam were represented twenty years later, and what these representations might offer us as insights into our own situation fifteen years hence.

Regarding periodization, any attempt to slice history up into centuries, decades, or even years, as though these were neat demarcations, is troublesome at best, as we all realize. One tempting example I offer to first-year university students, as we wrestle with the basics of historiography, is that the twenties seem neatly book-ended between the end of the Great War in 1919 and the stock market crash in 1929. But collective human experience is not so neatly ordered. While it may seem like a shopworn or obvious point that things are rarely ever so neat, attempts to analyze American history in terms of decades, in both popular culture and academic discourse, seem des-

tinued to go on and on. The period I'm concerned with at present, 1967-1973, for instance, is often lumped in with "the '60s" or "the '70s." Roughly speaking, these are the years between the Summer of Love and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. Whatever bookends one puts around them, they are the years of the height of the antiwar protests and the counterculture. People will no doubt continue to argue whether the sixties ended at Altamont or at Kent State or at some other unsettling place and time, and whether the seventies began with the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* or with Nixon's ascendancy to the Oval Office, or with Watergate. But the very contentious nature of such conversations is evidence that these events matter a whole lot and may provide insight into contemporary affairs—a possibility perhaps more crucial at this time than at any other in recent memory. It continues to surprise me how little students in my classes have been taught about the military conflict in Vietnam; oftentimes, it's as though they were given the same American history textbook that I read in 1979 as a junior in high school. Such books, or their teachers, end the discussion somewhere in the idealistic sixties, with people landing on the moon and purportedly forever ending racial discrimination but neglect much of the political and cultural upheaval that was going on then and that continues to simmer today. These same students do, however, seem somehow to maintain a vivid, however vicarious, collective memory of seventies fashion. While I do not wish here to demean attention to fashion (as what people choose, or can afford, to wear often provides insights into broader cultural trends), nor to expect others to keep track of international affairs, it seems a bit odd to live in a milieu in which bell bottoms and platform shoes are so much more familiar than My Lai and Agent Orange. At the time of this writing, news reports emerge telling us that recent news reports are actually paid political advertisements. It would be arrogant to expect any of us to be able to distinguish reality from unreality in such a malleable cultural portrait. When even "the news" is "reality television," then it's all the more important to seek wisdom, if not refuge, in lessons from history.

We are just now beginning to emerge from the pop cultural version of retro-seventies *sh\*tick* that saturated much of the nineties. Recently, several scholarly monographs have been published about the seventies—an indication that we may be ready for a more serious reflection on that turbulent and heretofore largely neglected period. What most concerns me here and now is not only what we might learn about the

situation in Iraq from remembering what happened in Vietnam (although this is absolutely vital), but also where we find ourselves today in relation to the so-called revolutions that were going on then (forgive me if I leave anybody out): The Civil Rights Movement, the Sexual Revolution, Women's Liberation, Homosexual Liberation, and the crises of being young, old, and in-between brought about by the Organizational Capitalist System as diagnosed by thinkers such as Paul Goodman in his book *Growing Up Absurd*, published in 1960. I take it to be quite apparent and widely established by benevolent historians and other cultural critics that both the civil rights and the women's movements experienced some of their steepest declines sometime in the eighties. Whether or not people in general are now having satisfactory and/or safer sex remains a fairly private matter in the minds of most, with the exception of those active in arenas where sexuality is talked about openly and honestly, as opposed often to the fields of advertising and entertainment, where hypocritical and uncritical mockery is often made of any rational distinction between the public and private realms of human existence (e.g., the Janet Jackson Super Bowl nipple debacle). The American Heartland is portrayed as having been outraged by having to suffer the sight of a nipple. Yet most of us have seen, and sucked, nipples as we entered the human community. What we may risk losing in this strange ideological labyrinth is the significance and challenge of the old feminist dictum that the personal is political, whether we agree with it or not. Perhaps the political must become more personal in our time, rather than having the seemingly endless stream of bad or irrelevant news, even on National Public Radio, serve as an unpleasant aftertaste with which to start the day. Such questions have only just begun to appear prominently in academic discussions and will no doubt continue to do so with increasing visibility in the near future. I raise them now only to support the claim that we may have a lot to learn from the late sixties and early seventies. I intend not to endorse a blind or acquiescent nostalgia for a better time in the past, but I do argue against the wholesale rejection of nostalgia so common in academic circles today. George Santayana's brilliant body of work and his influence on American letters may have been sorely neglected in recent years, but this single assertion continues to speak to freethinkers of all political bents. We do have important things to learn from the past, even if it's futile and unproductive to imagine that we could—or should want to—ever truly go back in time,

to the so-called "good old days," back to the time of the mythical Heartland.

Writing about how we might productively put history in the service of contemporary concerns, Shelton Waldrep puts it quite solidly in the introduction to his collection of essays called *The Seventies: The Age of Glitter in Popular Culture* (2000):

[The] sixties no longer seem to be the inevitable moment of crisis in the century—hence, the starting point of any discussion of the decades that have come after it. Rather, the seventies have now become a key part of the equation of our millennial anxiety—the place to look to for the answer to the question: Who have we become at the century's end? Whether in "high" art or mass culture, the seventies were a time when the use of technology and self-referential popular culture began to evidence the full postmodern effect of the rise of late capitalism. The clue to our own present seems mysteriously locked somewhere in that slippery decade. (1-2)

Indeed, it is not only the periodization of a slippery historical period that seems dangerously slippery. Our sense of spatial geography also seems hard to pin down in the contemporary, "postmodern" world. The question arises: just where and what is the American Heartland? Notions of what constitutes the Middle West have shifted significantly since the Colonial period, and one's own version of, for instance, which states are included within its boundaries depends largely on where and when one learned US geography, as I know from asking students from all around to place it on a map. Does it include West Virginia? Oklahoma? My interest in this essay is in the Heartland as an imaginary ideal—a mythical place that stands for the myth of the United States of America herself. At least since Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* and through Kerouac's *On the Road* and through political campaigns and stump speeches (including Reagan's unforgettable "It's morning again in America" campaign), the Heartland has come to represent our imaginary innocent Eden. Much of the world, including many coastal Americans, imagines the Heartland as everything between Buffalo and Denver. (Think of the maps sold at tourist traps in Manhattan that represent Manhattan as the center of the universe, with only Los Angeles as a speck on the other side.) I once worked with a very smart and kind young man who grew up in Providence and was about to move to Lincoln. He asked me about the Midwest. He told me that as a child he imagined that people in

the Midwest were merely *bigger* than regular people (because of his visions of large, open spaces on the plains, perhaps, or because we are corn-fed with purity—along with the cows that saunter unencumbered through the streets of Chicago). I, for one, grew up in mid-Michigan in the sixties and seventies in a household probably quite a bit more counter-cultural than many in our town. But we had no cows, nor any extra dose of innocence or purity (though we are slightly larger than average).

What is most important about this anecdote about Greg (I will call him Greg, and his name is Greg) is the power of mythology to shape our notions of times and places. In order for us to hope to learn anything from critically studying the Woodstock years, it is essential to notice the great shift in representations of them between then and now. Representations of the military conflict in Vietnam, for instance, have gone through many changes in the years since the fall of Saigon in 1975. And several prominent cultural productions focus on the presence of the Vietnam conflict in the minds of the Heartland. In these productions, the Heartland is portrayed as a refuge of old-fashioned naivete soon to be thrust into the reality of sophistication and war. Of course, these homes in the Heartland were never as naïve as they have been portrayed. The portrayal of the Virgin Heartland is often used for very specific and calculated ideological purposes.

The year 1979, for instance, saw the production of several cultural artifacts that were highly critical of the Vietnam conflict. One exemplary film, *The War at Home*, was nominated for a best documentary Oscar. It features the sleepy little all-American town of Madison, Wisconsin. The film begins with a Chamber of Commerce-type commercial portraying Madison as a friendly, prosperous, and wholesome place with a Rose Bowl-caliber football team. Quickly, however, the city is transformed into the site of extremely strident and violent antiwar demonstrations that polarized this university community and state capital, as they did the entire nation. This was Heartland Madison, though—not Berkeley or Columbia. Film footage includes crowds of students being beaten bloody with police clubs. Rhetorical strategies used by filmmakers Glenn Silber and Barry Alexander Brown include late-seventies interviews with those involved, including university and city officials and protesters—the most striking being one of the men involved in blowing up the Army Math Research Building, an assault during which one graduate student was killed. While the moral ambiguity of both the war and the



protests against it is present throughout the film, its ideological sympathies are clearly anti-Establishment.

Another exemplary artifact from 1979 is the film version of the Broadway musical *Hair*, in which the Claude Bukowski character boards a bus in the Heartland on his way to serve in Vietnam only to be thrust into an identity crisis by a gang of Manhattan sophisticate hippies. While the film is much sillier than the original stage play, this is a squarely antiwar effort. The hippies are the heroes, and the Age of Aquarius is celebrated as a newer, better, and ultimately, wiser age than the previous one. Numerous other antiwar films from the late seventies include *Coming Home*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Apocalypse Now*. Thus, right up until the beginning of the Reagan years, media representations of this period remained somewhat sympathetic to the youth culture and the, by then, already old and tottering New Left.

Suddenly, however, the general character of Hollywood representations of the military and the entire Woodstock period began to change. In the early eighties, we saw prominent films that portrayed life in the military as at least noble if not downright fun. Recall as you are able the appearance of films like *Taps*, *An Officer and a Gentleman*, and Goldie Hawn as the happy-go-goofy Private Benjamin. The production and huge popularity of such films would have been unthinkable only a year or two earlier. One lesson to be learned from this sudden shift is not only how quickly popular cultural production changes but how fickle American political opinion can be and how easily it can be manipulated by media artifacts. The same week that Rush Limbaugh was reported to have referred to the atrocities in Iraq as mere fraternity pranks, word had it that the Pentagon was trying to suppress the circulation of new photos and videos that promised to be even more unsettling than what had been seen up to that time. I should insert a qualifier here. Since I don't watch television, I rely on what I've been told or have heard on National Public Radio or seen in print for specifics about current events and visual images from Iraq. But hearing such images described in words is hardly less unsettling than seeing them. I should mention one more film from the eighties that illustrates this Hollywood shift: *The Big Chill*. This picture features a group of self-proclaimed former anti-Establishment folks who come back together for the funeral of a friend. As they lament the difficulty of rekindling their former intimacy, they also ask what happened to the values they shared while in college in the late sixties at the University of

Michigan. The superficial highlight of their weekend together is the Wolverine-Spartan football game on TV. What the film's audience isn't privy to is what their idealistic values had been or what socio-political issues they struggled with. In fact, the entire segment of the film that featured flashbacks to Ann Arbor during that time was cut from the final version. I don't know why or what it contained. It's not included on the DVD, possibly because Kevin Costner, who played the dead suicide, was omitted entirely from the version finally released. The characters never have a substantive moral crisis; they merely go back to their yuppie lives, in apparent agreement that that was then and this is now, and the world changes, and that's just how life is. Such comfy apolitical resignation and acquiescence to The System has characterized much so-called postmodern cultural production through the eighties and nineties and into the present.

Amidst such comfy production, however, there has also been an accompanying oppositional shift in representations away from this bland and relatively apolitical characterization of the period. For example, two literary representations, from 1989 and 1990 respectively, appeared, just as the retro-seventies explosion was taking over pop culture, both of which offer ambiguous and insightful if not rosy commentaries on what we might garner from reflections on the Woodstock Era. Michael Cunningham's short story, "White Angel," published in *The New Yorker* in 1989, which has since been expanded into a novel and film (both entitled *A Home at the End of the World*), is a tale of two young brothers living in a decidedly bland and unhip suburb of Cleveland who dream of going off to join the Woodstock Nation just after the concert itself has finished. This tale is an unabashed allegory for the revolutionary zeal and idealism of that generation of young people. The climax of the piece occurs during a party at which two generations seem on the verge of uniting. Frisco, the younger brother and narrator, who goes back to being plain old Bobby at the end, here expresses the excitement of the moment—the Woodstock moment—that he doesn't want to miss after being sent to bed. Alone on his "narrow bed, feeling the music hum in the coiled springs," he intuits the transformation going on as the party intensifies. Generations are coming together, becoming groovy together, and the world will never be quite the same after the revolution. Cunningham narrates his realization thus: "Life is cracking open right there in our house. People are changing. By tomorrow, no one will be quite the same. How can they let me miss it?" (103).



However, the party ends when the elder brother has a tragic and deadly accident. The moral of the story, in my reading, is not that idealism and progressive social change will suffer an inevitable demise, but that they are fragile and extremely vulnerable given the system as we have known it since at least the late sixties. Kent State resonates throughout Cunningham's piece: if enough of a perceived threat is posed to the powers that be, then this is what will happen.

In similar fashion, Tim O'Brien's fictional work, *The Things They Carried*, allows room for a tempered optimism even in the direst of straits. The main character, often named Tim O'Brien, finds himself drafted into a war he doesn't believe in just as he is about to begin graduate studies at Harvard. O'Brien the writer poses questions to the reader that stand today as helpful considerations as we examine conditions in the first decade of the new century. Indeed, I regularly ask my students today to pose the mercifully hypothetical question to themselves: What would I do if I received a draft notice in the mail one day? In this passage, O'Brien's narrator contemplates swimming to Canada to avoid military service:

You're twenty-one years old, you're scared, and there's a hard squeezing pressure in your chest.

What would you do?

Would you jump? Would you feel pity for yourself? Would you think about your family and your childhood and your dreams and all you're leaving behind? Would it hurt? Would you feel like dying? Would you cry, as I did?

I tried to swallow it back. I tried to smile, except I was crying.

Now, perhaps, you can understand why I've never told this story before. It's not just the embarrassment of tears. That's part of it, no doubt, but what embarrasses me much more, and always will, is the paralysis that took my heart. Amoral freeze: I couldn't decide, I couldn't act, I couldn't comport myself with even a pretense of modest human dignity.

All I could do was cry. Quietly, not bawling, just the chest-choke . . . .

Canada had become a pitiful fantasy. Silly and hopeless. It was no longer a possibility. Right then, with the shore so close, I understood that I would not do what I should do. I would not swim away from my hometown and my country and my life. I would not be brave. That old image of myself as a hero, as a man of conscience and courage, all that was just a threadbare pipe dream. (56-57)

Thus, O'Brien's narrator sacrifices his honor in northern Minnesota, surely not too far from Lake Wobegon, because he is scared to defy what he himself sees as the unjust demands and policies of his country. The narrator's self-disclosure is very much bound up with his strong connection to the normative moral constrictions of the idealized Midwest—the mythical heart of America. During his delusional epiphany, the moment when he decides to go to war, the narrator imagines what his townspeople might think of him:

I saw my parents calling to me from the far shoreline. I saw my brother and sister, all the townsfolk, the mayor and the entire Chamber of Commerce and all my old teachers and girlfriends and high school buddies. Like some weird sporting event: everybody screaming from the sidelines, rooting me on—a loud stadium roar. Hotdogs and popcorn—stadium smells, stadium heat. A squad of cheerleaders did cartwheels along the banks of the Rainy River; they had megaphones and pompoms and smooth brown thighs. (58)

O'Brien the writer spends much of the book explaining how telling stories about the experience of being in Vietnam is one way to attempt to come to terms with its horror and ultimate meaning in the characters' lives. He closes the book with the tale of a young girl, Linda, his pre-adolescent girlfriend, who has a brain tumor and dies. She comes to speak to him after her death and tries to explain to him that death is not necessarily as bad as it's often made out to be. She described being dead as being "like being inside a book that nobody's reading . . . . All you can do is wait. Just hoping somebody'll pick it up and start reading" (245). The middle-aged narrator ends the book with the following metaphysical commentary—an existential assertion of the connectedness of human subjectivity through time, one which might serve as an antidote to recent academic arguments that call into question the very notion of the inner life. The book ends with the following motif of life everlasting. O'Brien's narrator asserts: "I'm young and happy. I'll never die. I'm skimming across the surface of my own history . . . and when I take a high leap into the dark and come down thirty years later, I realize it is as Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story" (246).

O'Brien thus returns to the innocence of youth at the end of the book, looking hopefully back to a time before idealism had been crushed by the ostensible reality of the material world-in-hand of the later seventies. I would argue that his attempt to save "Timmy" is

not mere naïve nostalgia, but an effort to learn, sustain, and put into practice insights from well-considered memory that can serve to teach us all something about the current state of affairs. This is yet another example of how memory and the study of history might help us to understand our current situation.

A few films that may not get the distribution or audience they deserve can further this end. *Unfinished Symphony* is a very recent documentary about the returning Vietnam veterans' 1971 protest against the war in Lexington, Massachusetts, set to the gorgeous music of Henryk Gorecki's 3<sup>rd</sup> symphony. The *Weather Underground* is an Oscar-nominated documentary created by Bill Siegel and East Lansing native Sam Green that was shown at the recent East Lansing Film Festival. The film is very reminiscent of *The War at Home*, as it interviews members of the group today. Finally, *Fog of War*, about Secretary of State Robert McNamara and the military conflict in Vietnam, which won the documentary Oscar in 2004, is now also available for rental. I make these recommendations because of the importance of memory and history and representation. If we truly care about the current state of affairs and believe that we have any influence over it, then it is incumbent upon us to seek whatever wisdom we might gain from the past.

Michigan State University

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## ANNUAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MIDWESTERN LITERATURE, 2002

ROBERT BEASECKER, EDITOR  
 Grand Valley State University

Contributor: Michael E. Butler, *University of Kansas*

This bibliography includes primary and secondary sources of Midwestern literary genres published, for the most part, during 2002. Criteria for inclusion of authors are birth or residence within the twelve-state area that defines the Midwest. Fiction and poetry using Midwestern locales are included irrespective of their authors' ties with this region. Primary sources are listed alphabetically by author, including (if applicable) designations of locale within square brackets at the end of each citation. Secondary sources, usually journal articles, books, or doctoral dissertations, are listed by subject. See references are of two kinds: those so designated within square brackets are to be found in the Secondary Sources section; those without square brackets are to be found in the Primary Sources section.

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#### RECIPIENTS OF THE NAISL TWIN TOWNS

(for distinguished contributions to the field of American literature)

David Conway	1970-71
Frederick Moten	1971-72
William S. Burroughs	1972-73
Robert M. Coates	1973-74
Edmund Spenser	1974-75
John G. Saxe	1975-76
Robert M. Coates	1976-77
Annals of the City	1977-78
John G. Saxe	1978-79
Edmund Spenser	1979-80
John G. Saxe	1980-81
Edmund Spenser	1981-82
Robert M. Coates	1982-83
William S. Burroughs	1983-84
John G. Saxe	1984-85
Edmund Spenser	1985-86
John G. Saxe	1986-87
Edmund Spenser	1987-88
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Edmund Spenser	2255-56
John G. Saxe	2256-57
Edmund Spenser	2257-58
John G. Saxe	2258-59
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Edmund Spenser	2365-66
John G. Saxe	2366-67
Edmund Spenser	2367-6

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Robert H. H. H.	2094
William H. H. H.	2095
Charles H. H. H.	2096
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John H. H. H.	2100