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MidAmerica, a peer-reviewed journal of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, is published annually. We welcome scholarly contributions from our members on any aspect of Midwestern literature and culture. Except for winners of our annual poetry and prose contests, we do not publish poems, short stories, or creative nonfiction. If you would like to submit a scholarly essay of not more than 15 pages or 3,750 words to be considered for publication in *MidAmerica*, please send a hard copy of your essay to Marcia Noe, 535 Elinor Street, Chattanooga, TN 37405. If your essay is selected for publication, you will then send your manuscript by electronic attachment to marcia-noe@utc.edu after making any required and/or desired changes. Please follow the most recent edition of the MLA Handbook. In documenting sources, use parenthetical citations within your essay and a list of works cited. If you include discursive notes, they should be endnotes that use Arabic, not Roman, numerals. Use no headers, footers, or page numbers. Do not put your name on your essay. Include your contact information in your cover letter to Marcia. Be sure to give your institutional affiliation.

In honor of
Joseph J. Wydeven

DAVID D. ANDERSON (1924-2011)

AN APPRECIATION

MARCIA NOE

On Saturday, December 3, 2011, I lost a colleague, a teacher, a mentor, and a cherished friend.

I met Dave Anderson in 1985 at the first meeting of The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature that I ever attended. I was an English teacher at a community college in Illinois; Dave took me to lunch at the Michigan State Room of the Kellogg Center and treated me like a respected scholar and equal. Over the years I learned many things from Dave: that an Old Fashioned is the perfect cocktail, that the power to fund is the power to kill, that the real reward is the work itself. I learned how to be cheerful in the face of ill health and disability, how to commit to a goal and persevere through setbacks and roadblocks, how to grab and hold an audience when giving a conference paper, how to let my intellectual curiosity shape my research program and find inspiration in wide-ranging reading, how to appreciate rather than denigrate the scholarship of others, and, above all, how to nurture and value relationships with people and prioritize them over publications, promotions, raises, or career advancement.

Dave published over thirty-five books and hundreds of articles and papers. He was a leading Sherwood Anderson scholar, a nationally recognized authority on Ohio literature and the Ohio frontier, and a Distinguished University Professor at Michigan State University. He was the founding editor of this journal and a co-founder of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature. He is well known for his many honors, awards, and professional accomplishments, but his larger legacy lies in the writers he mentored, the students he taught, the colleagues from all over the country he encouraged and assisted, and the hearts he touched. These days, as the university corporatizes, instruction becomes increasingly standardized, and professors are valued for the number of students they can cram into a classroom or, worse, online courses, the lesson of Dave's life becomes more valuable than ever: how to be the kind of teacher, scholar, editor, and colleague who is not merely respected and admired but also loved.

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

PREFACE

On May 13, 2010, members of The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature gathered in East Lansing for its fortieth annual meeting. Highlights included the President's Panel on the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, the Mark Twain Award panel on the fiction of Jane Hamilton, and the MidAmerica Award Panel on Art, Architecture, and Midwestern Literature. Mary Minock received the Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Prize, Dawn Comer won the Paul Somers Prize for Creative Prose, Richard B. Adams was the winner of the David Diamond Student Writing Prize, and the Jill Barnum Midwestern Heritage Essay Prize went to Joseph J. Wydeven, who also received the MidAmerica Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern literature. The Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature went to Jane Hamilton.

SSML is currently operating at a loss due to increased expenses in publishing its journals and convening its annual symposium. A major gift from the late Jane S. Bakerman has enabled us to continue our work while we seek to establish a more stable financial footing for the work ahead. SSML is also grateful to the following members and friends who have made contributions in addition to their dues. As more such contributions are received, and earlier ones are discovered in searching the archives, we will add more names to this Honor Roll: Walter Adams, David D. Anderson, Robert Beasecker, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ray B. Browne, Mary Ellen Caldwell, Louis J. Cantoni, G.B. Crump, David Diamond, Bernard F. Engel, Kenneth B. Grant, Philip A. Greasley, Theodore Haddin, Donald Hassler, Janet Ruth Heller, Ted Kennedy, Jean Laming, Barbara Lindquist, Larry Lockridge, Loren Logsdon, Bud Narveson, Marcia Noe, Mary Obuchowski, Tom Page, E. Elizabeth Raymond, Herbert K. Russell, James Seaton, Guy Szuberla, Doug Wixson, Melody Zajdel, and the family and friends of Paul Somers.

CONTENTS

Preface		8
Cutting the Cord or Leaving Factory The Gwendolyn Brooks Prize Poem	Paul Stebleton	10
The First Vision of Baseball The Paul Somers Prize for Creative Prose	James Marlow	14
"Accentuated by the Wavering Uncertain Light": Sherwood Anderson's Construction of Rural Modernity The David Diamond Student Writing Prize	Andy Oler	24
Robert Vivian's Tall Grass Trilogy: A Critical Introduction	Joseph J. Wydeven	35
Sherwood Anderson: Mentor of American Racial Identity	Margaret E. Wright-Cleveland	46
The Grammar of Segregation in the Sonnets of Gwendolyn Brooks	Margaret Rozga	63
Cross-Examining the Myth of Southern Chivalry: Gwendolyn Brooks's Emmett Till Poems	Marc Seals	74
The Heartland of Susan Glaspell's Plays	David Radavich.	81
"It Might Be Something Awful": The Movement of Sex in the Plays of William Inge	Michael Schwartz	95
Michael Cunningham's Introspective and Teacherly Narrators in *A Home at the End* *of the World*	Dominic Ording	106
The Late Twentieth-Century Rise of Regionalism: A Key to Louise Erdrich's Success	Jennifer M. Holly Wells	116
Mary Swander's *The Girls on the Roof* and the Transformation of Terror	Mary DeJong Obuchowski	127
Annual Bibliography of Midwestern Literature 2008	Robert Beasecker	133
Catch up on Midwestern Literature		194
Conference and Awards		195
Recipients of the Mark Twain Award		196
Recipients of the MidAmerica Award		Back Cover

CUTTING THE CORD OR LEAVING FACTORY

PAUL STEBLETON

I

was born
two hundred and fifty miles
to the south
birthed in an operating room
high above factory's smokestacks
tossing grey sheets into the sky
and as I grew I could feel
the rumbling of furnaces beneath my feet
from the cool earth
letting me know
factory was everything
it was the bottle I drank from, the clothes on my back
it was the bus that took me downtown
to the plant where three generations
of my family worked their youth away
fueling the fires of factory
the furnaces burning bellies of dog food and cereal
alcohol and nicotine and their bodies
brittle and bent, awaiting
the cool arms and belly of the earth to swallow them
and return them home.

I

did the walk through
day before I started factory
they placed the part in my hands
testing me
to see if I could hold it
smooth and black
I wondered why they asked me to hold it?

as I looked around
work never skipped a beat
as they watched us parade past.
next day that's where they put me
Op 30
Dial Operator
my metal whore
I called my Dad, told him I was working
for factory
he sounded happy for me
happy
my Great Grandfather who worked
the hell furnaces of iron and steel
happy
my Grandfather who built fire trucks
in a sweatbox in Battle Creek before the war
happy
my Grandmother walking endless miles
she walked on her rounds of quality control
assuring the quality of Kellogg's Frosted Flakes
happy
my Grandfather who drove those boxes
from the plant to the warehouses
and beyond
happy
my Dad who printed the cartons
for Kellogg's, Post and Ralston Purina
smelled of grease and ink
he'd sleep through the day
as a child I never knew
why?

I

watched the meat market
as years passed
walk throughs, sizing them up
sat in the break room
with the old timers
smoking cigarettes to the filters
joking about the latest

punk kid on the line
just crashed the machine
and how we'll be working overtime
to catch up . . . Oh the overtime
1400 hours one year, we kept a list
"show 'um you're a real man"
to be on page 1
I did it
two years, seven days a week twelve hours a day
4:00a.m. to 4:00p.m.
drag your ass home
shower, eat and drink as much as you can
to take the mind tenderizing pain away
pass out by 7:00p.m. to wake to the sound
of the alarm and my wife's voice mumbling
"get up
it's time to get up"
and the number of times driving to work
I can't remember how I got there
or
why I just didn't drive off the road
I would sit at my machine at lunch
afraid I would fall asleep in my car
daydreaming that if I were dead I wouldn't have to do this
yes . . . death
and our uniforms grey with blue stripes
prison stripes
watched morning t.v.
documentary, I saw death camp prisoners
working to collapse, they had that same look in their eyes
so familiar.

I
woke up
twenty miles south
of myself
I must have walked away from my machine
somehow
just walked out the door
I remember looking back

waiting for factory's shadow
to find me
snare me and carry me home
I could see the faces of my friends
see the sadness and joy
a mixture of orange juice and vodka
dancing in their eyes
as they poured their lives
into the machines open mouths
in the smoke-filled air.

I
walked for days
trying to escape factory
feeling my feet lifting
from the ground
each step moving me further away
I walked into the birth of my son
watched his first breaths of air
watched the look of relief and
amazement on my wife's face
as we welcomed him to the world
I looked out the window of our room
looked for the smoke stacks
looked for the grey sheets of smoke
that had welcomed me
took off my shoes and socks
let my feet feel the floor
to feel the rumbling of factory's machines
and felt nothing
but cold tile.

Lake Ann, Michigan

THE FIRST VISION OF BASEBALL

JAMES MARLOW

To a boy, when there was plenty to eat, the Cheyenne River Reservation was a paradise, hunting, riding my uncle's horse, swimming when the creek was high. Even during harvest time, when we had to work hard, it was joyous. The *tioshpaye* had arrived, pitched their tents, and work began—we older children picking the corn and chokecherries, the women in the steam of the kitchen boiling the Mason jars and making jam and pickles, the men in the barn selecting the steers to slaughter, the little cousins romping in the fields. At night, Uncle Jake and Grandpere told stories of the old days, often on each other, stories so good that we boys fought valiantly against sleep as long as we could, until, amidst the amused but proud laughter of relatives, we were despite our feeble protests carried to bed, vanquished by nature at last.

In town, while there was always food, there was none of this. Cousins, horse, guns, and harvest time had all been left behind. As my mother fixed up the apartment, I was told to watch Roland, who was busy pulling his new red wagon around. The wagon had been a bribe to grease the move from the reservation into town. Me, my parents figured, they didn't have to bribe. I was a big boy, all of eleven. Roland did not know it yet, but it was for the better schools that my father uprooted and moved us. All I knew was that being cooped up in town was like a punishment. I already missed my friends and riding my horse on the open, windy plains. I knew nothing here could replace what I had lost.

On the fourth day after our move, I was sitting on the lawn in front of the apartment house, back against the single sad tree, still minding Roland. Not that we have anything so fancy as a lawn in Eagle Butte, but it was a joke to call this patch of slicked-down black dirt supporting a few wretched weeds and a collection of dead cottonwood leaves and twigs a lawn.

"Hey!" I looked up to see this lanky blond kid skidding his bike toward me. When he came to a stop, he looked back at the curving skid mark in the gravel, and then looked at me proudly, as it if were a coup. "That was a good one!"

"Yeah?" I said.

"I know you. You're Billy Tall Bear. Remember me? I met you last summer at the YMCA, after swimming. I'm Hank. Remember? Did you ever get my letter?"

I pretended to remember him. The year before, I had stayed in town with my aunt for a week. I had met several white kids. Swimming was the only thing in town I liked.

"Look, I'm on my way to baseball practice." I followed his eyes down to the bat he held with both hands against the rubber handle grips of the bike, and a big brown leather glove that dangled from the middle of the handlebar.

"What of it?"

"It's a Louisville slugger, Ted Williams, 28 inches," he said in response to my eye movement, as if his words should have meant anything to me. "So, do you want to come with me to practice?"

"I've got to watch him," I said, nodding over a shoulder at Roland, who was now filling his wagon with some pebbles, a broken brick, and scraps of newspaper. Hank plucked his glove off the handlebar, and handed it to me. I put it on the wrong hand at first. He laughed. "I never played baseball," I retorted.

"Never played baseball!" He acted shocked. "Where have you been? Everybody plays baseball."

"Not on the Cheyenne River Agency. Nobody even has gloves like that." I stopped myself from asking how much the glove cost. I said instead, "No loss."

"No loss? Oh, you don't know. Listen, I'll show you. The Pheasants' ballpark is only about five blocks from here. Come with me tonight and shag fouls?"

I thought for a second, then gave up. "What is it to 'shag fouls?'"

"You know, you chase down the foul balls that pop over the stands, and they give you two bits for every one you bring back."

"Twenty-five cents? Really?"

"Yeah, you just wait in the parking lot for 'em to fly over. Sometimes you can make a lot of money. And sometimes the balls break windshields on cars, and you take the license number to the box

office and they announce it over the loud speakers. Then you get to watch the driver come running out and throw a fit."

"How much have you made?"

"Well, my luck's been bad lately. The bigger kids usually get them."

"So, you have to race them to the ball?" He nodded. I wasn't fast but at eleven you believe you are. I said, "Yeah, if my mother lets me, I'll come."

That evening Hank arrived to find me waiting outside the apartment house. He parked his bike and we trotted off toward the ballpark. He talked about baseball the whole way. Within a minute or two, we could see the stadium lights, high up on the standards. The bright yellow lights against the still pale blue of the evening sky looked like magic lanterns. They seemed to emit some vague romantic promises. I felt Hank glancing at me to see if I shared his enthusiasm yet. I was excited but I was not about to concede anything to him until I had at least seen what baseball was about.

We stopped behind the right field fence. After glancing both ways to make sure that no one was watching, he showed me the knotholes he was so proud to have discovered. By way of demonstration, he jammed his eye into one. I scarcely needed the lesson, but when I looked into the ballpark I was amazed.

"Look how green the grass is!" I cried. At this time of year, the grass on the prairies was tan and sere. "And look! Look how straight and white those lines are!"

"Those are the foul lines," Hank explained. "You have to hit the ball between them for it to be a hit, a fair ball." He was eager to teach me about baseball and I was beginning to think I would let him to do it.

We sat down to wait for the start of the game, our backs against the fence, and pulled out some stalks of grass and stuck them between our lips, pretending they were cigarettes. He was explaining some of the rules of baseball when the recording of the national anthem started. He jumped up and looked through the knothole again. I did the same and, although I did not know what to look for, I liked what I saw. The players were lined up along the baselines, hats off, for the national anthem. The colors of the caps and the uniforms delighted me; even the midnight blue uniforms of the umpires impressed me. It made them look so grave and wise—although Hank denied them that character. I took in the grandstand, which was half empty;

nonetheless, there were more people there than I had ever seen in one place before.

Exactly at the end of the anthem, someone shouted, "Play ball!" so loudly that we could easily hear it out beyond right field. When the crowd cheered, Hank said it was because the Pheasants, the home team, were trotting out to their positions on the field. He rattled off the nine fielding positions. The last, right field, was closest to us. I nodded, not wanting him to think that I did not understand everything intuitively. I am not normally given to lying, but something urged me to pretend I understood it all.

He explained each play as it happened. At first, nothing but bouncing balls, catches, and throws. It was not long, however, before we heard a sound as thrilling as a rifle shot—the crack of the hardwood bat against a baseball. The ball rose in a tremendous arc, coming toward the right field fence and the two of us. Hank had witnessed this before, so he stepped back away from the fence the better to track the flight of the ball. I stepped back too and, thrilled now, pointed at it. You could see it, white and tiny, high up in the mingled rays of the last sunlight and the stadium lights. The ball descended, elongated and darkening, until it disappeared from view. He sprang back to his knothole. By the time I got to mine and looked into the field, it was too late: the right-fielder was already throwing the ball towards the lackadaisical second baseman. Why was he not as amazed as I was?

"He didn't *catch* it!" I cried, unable to conceal my disbelief.

"Oh yes he did!" Hank said as proudly as if he'd caught it himself. "But you should have seen Andy Savage. He played last year. He could catch anything." Hank would always have the advantage of priority. But I did not care.

I kept both hands braced against the fence, for fear the knothole would get away from me, I suppose. Hank smiled as if he could see the passion taking hold of me. Baseball, I learned that evening through the knothole, was a game of precision and explosion, of ritual and exuberance, played on grass as green as paradise between lines straighter and whiter than was ever seen in nature. Baseball had taken Hank in thrall, and he wanted me to become as possessed as himself. Our eyes met as devotees.

A police car turned the corner of the road alongside the center field fence. "Down!" he said, and sat suddenly.

It took but a moment for me to do the same.

The patrol car pulled up next to us and stopped. "What are you boys doing?" said the officer riding shotgun.

"Nothing."

"You're not using those knotholes, are you? Hey, you an injun?"

"Yes," I said.

"Come here and let me get a good look at you. Chances are I'll be seeing *you* again."

I rose slowly and walked to the patrol car. The kindling joy of baseball began to sputter. Hank followed in my wake.

"What's your name and where do you live?" I told them.

The driver leaned past his partner. "How long you been off the reservation?"

"I moved to town a few days ago."

"And already you found a way to cheat white folks out of their money. I'll be! You people sure are fast at some things."

"I showed him the knotholes," Hank said. "If there's any blame, I'm the one."

"Yeah? And what's your name?"

Hank told him.

"Your father own the pharmacy?"

"Yes."

The driver tapped the other cop and put the car in gear. "Okay, then, you boys *try* to be good," he said in the tone of a joke, and he pulled the patrol car away.

"Your dad must be somebody in town," I said, hoping that the embers of my nascent joy in baseball could be revived.

"He gives them free coffee, I think." The episode had also chilled his pleasure in the knotholes, so we walked away.

"Those guys are going to have it in for me," I said. "My father warned me."

"No, no," he protested. "They just haven't seen very many Indians around." Nice try, I thought, But I liked him. He had placed himself between the police and me.

Hank suggested we go around to the front of the grandstand to shag fouls. That, he assured me, wasn't against the law. In a couple of minutes, we had stationed ourselves on the fat fenders of an old Chrysler parked directly across from the main entrance. The sky was still pale blue far up in the west, but the parking lot was now in a man-made twilight, the backwash from the lights flooding the diamond.

Hank glanced around nervously, watching for someone. Could shagging fouls be against the law too? "See the hood ornament on the car?" he said. "The one that looks like a rocket?" He was assuming his role of master of ceremonies. I looked over at the Oldsmobile and nodded. "Well, one night a guy was sitting up on the hood when a foul ball came over and he jumped off to get it and that hood ornament ripped his bag open and his balls fell out."

"No!"

"It's true. That's why I never sit on the hood." "Also," he added, "hoods dent easily and I didn't want to be charged with denting a car."

"Did you see it?"

"No, but some other guys told me."

I studied the Oldsmobile and its hood ornament again. "I don't believe it." Behind him, coming towards us, I saw what I suddenly realized he had hoped we wouldn't see. "Oh-oh."

"What? Cops again?" Hank looked around.

Two high school boys—Larry and Butch turned out to be their names—strolled toward us. Butch stood in front of Hank. "Off there, Short Stuff. This is my place."

"We were here first!" Hank protested, rather feebly.

"Well, it's my old man's car, so cramsay, if you know what's good for you."

"Prove it."

"Off, I said." Butch suddenly grabbed him by the arm, threw him to the ground, and perched himself on the fender.

"Oww! I'll report you!"

"To who? Your teacher? Can it, Squirt."

Larry gave a short, hard laugh. "Can it, Squirt! Ain't you a card!" He stepped over in front of me. "Okay, Chief, you too. Off!" Until that moment, I had not known how Indian I looked. On the reservation it had not occurred to me.

I watched Hank as he was picking himself up from the gravel. When he shook his head at me, I got off the fender, and Larry immediately climbed up on it. As we walked away, I asked Hank, "Are we going to let them do that to us?"

"What choice do we have?"

"Fight."

"They'd win. They're four years older."

"That's not the point."

"In a few years, they'll be gone and I'll be the biggest and I'll get the best spot."

I stopped. "So, what if we just stand right here?" I said, grabbing him to keep him from taking another step. "We might beat them to the balls."

"They'd just take them away." Hank pulled away and began to walk in the direction of the third base bleachers, beckoning me to follow. "Behind third base: if a foul ball lands over there, we might have a chance. Come on."

"No. I have to go home." I signaled good-bye and then, as I passed Larry and Butch, I took a long look at them. They had lit up cigarettes.

"You got a problem, Chief?" said Butch, feinting a move off the fender.

I said nothing and didn't react to his feint, but just kept walking parallel to the first base bleachers.

Hank yelled after me. "Hey, Billy! I'll come over to get you tomorrow."

I waved. I was forty yards beyond Larry and Butch when a sharp sound made us all freeze. It was the unmistakable crack of a ball off a bat, but already I could detect in the sound that the impact was not solid, that the ball was foul. I saw it first as it skimmed over the top row of the first base bleachers. Larry and Butch finally caught sight of it, but I knew they would take a last quick puff from their cigarettes before abandoning the Chrysler. The ball came down just beyond me, bounced in a parabola high off the pavement, and disappeared into the darkness, rolling past three rows of cars.

I was running for it before Larry and Butch had dropped their smokes. By the time they got to the approximate landing spot, I emerged from farther out in the lot, that hard white ball sewn with beautiful red string held aloft in the twilight for Hank to see. It was my coup.

"Way to go!" he yelled. However, I pulled the ball down as Larry and Butch walked towards me, their hands out, demanding the ball. I ran behind a Ford to get it between them and me, and when both followed me, not bothering to split up and corner me, I ran back to the strip of pavement from which the ball had bounced. As they lunged for me, I turned and threw the ball the forty or so yards to Hank. Surprised, Larry and Butch just watched the flight of the ball for a second. Hank knocked it down with his bare hands, picked it

up, and raced for the ticket office. Only then did Larry and Butch begin running. Obviously, Hank believed that if he beat them and got the ball converted into coin, we were safe. Those were the rules from time immemorial, he told me later as part of my initiation into the rites of baseball. To take a ball from a smaller boy was sanctioned by ancient precedent; however, to take money was simple theft and no one did that in those days on the Great Plains.

He did get to the box office before they did and he thrust the ball under the grate to the ticket seller. The man took it, and looked it over as he fished for a quarter in the change box.

I came running up, easily avoiding the half-hearted football block Larry tried to lay on me, as the ticket seller thumbed the bruise on the ball.

"We'll get you later," muttered Larry, but even then I knew that wasn't true. We had won fairly and they knew it.

"He don't even smoke," whined Butch. "What does he need money for?"

The ticket seller dangled a quarter over Hank's outstretched hand. "Okay, son, here's your money. Unless you want a ticket instead."

Hank glanced at me and saw no doubt. "We want two tickets," he said.

"Geez, you're quite a shyster for a little guy. Okay, what the hell? It's the fourth inning." He handed Hank two tickets. I held out my hand for one of them, and then studied it as we walked toward the entrance. Of course, Hank said he had been in the grandstand before, but his voice confessed that this was as exciting for him as for me.

We hurried up the concrete runway, the width of the field expanding with every step we took. Emerging on the first level of the grandstand, we were standing right behind home plate, out in the full glory of the lights, the crowd behind us sounding like a murmuring sea. In dazzling white uniforms, blue caps with red bills, and red socks, the players looked to me more glorious that angelic choirs in robes of light that our priest in Eagle Butte used to talk about. Before, through the knothole, I could not clearly see the chalked rectangles and circles that that were the symbols of perfection in baseball, icons in this new religion. Nor had I seen how rich a brown the infield dirt was. From this close, too, the grass was so dazzling that I had to avert my eyes for a moment. I was afraid tears might come. I knew no one on the Cheyenne River Reservation had ever seen this late in the summer, when cattle and horses rummaged for anything chewable, so much grass so green.

For relief, I turned my focus on the precision of the white bases, marking the corners of a perfect diamond. Somehow, the balance of geometric form and sensual content satisfied me to the bottom of my heart. I felt like I was in a church.

His position as M.C. was already eroding, but Hank asked, "Isn't this the most beautiful thing you ever saw?"

Still, I could not quite give him all he demanded. "No, no. The *Paha Sapa* are. The Black Hills." The moon, round and also perfect behind the left field fence, blinked at me. I felt guilty not to concede the superlative to him. But boys are boys.

Hank amended his question. "I mean the most beautiful thing you can run and play on."

The ball field, under that honest harvest moon, was making too powerful an impact for me to hold out any longer. "Oh, it is beautiful!"

A man, sitting right behind us, separated us with his hands so that he could see the field. "Then you boys never saw a woman in her altogether," he said.

His companion laughed, took a swig of beer and leered at us. "But you boys make better doors than you do windows, so go sit somewhere so I can see all this here beauty." That broke the spell, and Hank led me up the stairs to an empty row and we sat down.

"Steerike!" The umpire's hand shot up to signal strike three, and the crowd around us cheered and clapped.

"That's okay," a man sitting behind us said to his wife, "Willie is still going to make the majors. You mark my words."

"Not if he keeps swinging at bad pitches." In this town even women knew baseball.

In his elation, Hank poked me in the ribs. We were both thrilled to the bone. I am sure we both sat there enveloped in idiotic smiles for the final five innings. It was as if the crowd noise was a choral chant that sealed our initiation into a proud and ancient order. Hank and I were bonded now to each other and to this fraternal order. We were knights, or novices, or young braves, embarking on a quest which all people admired and would applaud: to play ball in the major leagues. That was now our Camelot, our Holy Black Hills. I do not exaggerate when I say that at that moment both of us knew precisely what God placed us on earth to do. At eleven, we had been gifted with a clear mission in life. What a joy that was.

On the way home after the game, still enraptured, Hank grabbed me by the right arm. "Wow! You've got a really good arm. What a

team we'd make. Are you sure you never played baseball before? You pegged that thing so straight."

I shook my head but knew I couldn't hide my smile from him. I was too elated. "Is that all it takes to play baseball," I thought, "to throw straight and to run and catch balls falling out of the night sky a hundred yards from home plate?" What a joy!

"And what luck!" he shouted. "A foul ball the first night. You know what I think? I think that means something. I think God is telling you he wants you to play baseball. I do! I believe that!"

"Well, you too!" I cried back. "You too!" The police were forgotten.

"Listen, I"m going to come get you on the way to baseball practice tomorrow. You have to join our team."

"Does it cost money?"

"No. And you can use my dad's old glove. Wait till the coach sees that arm of yours!" I was already anticipating baseball practice with the full bore of my imagination.

When we reached the apartment house, and he kicked the stand of his bike up, I said, "Thank you, *mita kola*." He asked and I told him, "it means my 'friend'."

When I walked into the living room where both my mother and father were sitting up listening to the radio, it was late.

"Well?" Father demanded. He was always thrifty with words.

I did not tell them about the police, but I told them about making a friend and learning about baseball. I told them that I was going to join a Little League team the next day. Father just nodded and looked at my mother. That was all. I knew he was pleased. He had been secretly worried about the move to town and now I had made it look like a wise decision.

I quietly stole into the tiny bedroom where Roland was already asleep. I got into bed without waking him. I believed I was too excited to fall asleep but I must have. I suppose I should claim it as a vision, not a dream, for what I dreamed that night was like a vision. I dreamt of a baseball field better than paradise, with grass thicker and softer than velvet, and I felt myself racing barefoot over the endless green outfield, a gorgeous golden glove on my hand, about to overtake and leap up to make a great catch of—the ascending moon. And from all around the horizon there was cheering. What joy.

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"ACCENTUATED BY THE WAVERING UNCERTAIN LIGHT": SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S CONSTRUCTION OF RURAL MODERNITY

ANDY OLER

Sherwood Anderson's novel *Poor White* (1920) combines the stories of Hugh McVey and the rural community of Bidwell, Ohio, to imagine a composite regional definition of the Midwest as it socially and economically modernizes. The novel follows Hugh McVey from his origins as a dreamy, poor white boy in Missouri through his rise as a respected inventor in Bidwell, where his cabbage-setting machine proves to be the catalyst for the creation of the town's factory economy. After having success as an inventor, Hugh is incorporated into the town's factory system and has a short stint as a company man hired to get around the patents of other inventors. However, that position goes against this character's searching nature, and he makes his final transition toward a less mechanically inclined, more community-oriented searching in which he gets marginalized by the still developing industrial economy, and at the close of the novel turns toward his vexed marriage to Clara Butterworth. Anderson thus presents the problem of modern alienation but holds off on a complete resolution to it, instead offering a way of thinking about modern rurality that allows ambiguity and contradiction the free play coextensive with the more common urban-oriented definitions of modernity.[1]

By constructing Bidwell as ambiguous, contradictory, and modern, Anderson resists Allen Trachtenberg's definition of rurality as "a backwater . . . dependent" upon an urbanized system of corporate industrialism (115). Trachtenberg argues that "in the very celebration of the businessman as the epitome of American individualism, we detect signs of concern that the older individualistic virtues no longer apply, that the ability to mobilize, to concentrate, to *incorporate,* counted for more than thrift and diligence" (81). Trachtenberg

highlights the growth and structure of corporate capitalism as keys to understanding the development of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century American society and politics. In short, for Trachtenberg, *incorporation* provides a narrative of US society and culture in which the value of personal discipline has been displaced by organizational acumen and institutional growth. In *Poor White,* Anderson shares these concerns, suggesting that Hugh's rural-inspired work of invention can go only so far to help him succeed within Bidwell's corporate system. However, Anderson does not fully accept the incorporation narrative, which devalues ruralized locations; rather, he attempts to retain rural value within his construction of Hugh and Bidwell, even as Bidwell incorporates and Hugh enters (and then leaves) the corporate economy.

Anderson poses rurality in *Poor White* as part of a system of interdependence and co-evolution, effectively *re*incorporating what Trachtenberg suggests are declining values within the American industrial economy as it developed in the late nineteenth century. In this essay, I will argue that in *Poor White* Anderson attempts to balance a complex network of competing discourses and values, resisting the standard incorporation narrative by reincorporating the rural into American modernity. However, Anderson only partially succeeds in imagining modern life outside of the industrialization narrative, incorporating ruralized spaces and values within the urbanizing town of Bidwell but leaving protagonist Hugh McVey with an unresolvable conflict of rural and urban identities.

When thinking about the relationship between rural and urban in Anderson's writing, many scholars have critiqued his apparent nostalgia.[2] Beverly Hogue provides a useful counterpoint, arguing that Anderson "subvert[s] pastoral nostalgia by planting mechanical gardens, suggesting that berries, corn, and cabbages are merely cogs in the vast machine of human culture" (102). While Anderson on some level appears to regret some of the changes of modern society, Hogue indicates one way in which we mustn't see him as attempting to return to a pastoral ideal; rather, his subversion of the pastoral in the cabbage fields outside of Bidwell combines the temporal concerns of mechanized life and the pastoral to indicate how he attempts to construct a *usable present*: a version of modern life that retains some of the privileged spaces and values of rural life alongside the common vision of the urban industrial future, reincorporating the rural and balancing the two in a way that allows individuals and communities

the ability to exist in the present without succumbing to the teleology of incorporation. In this way, Anderson suggests that Raymond Williams's argument from *The Country and the City*—that persisting conceptions of the country as a nostalgic location and the city as the image of the future leave no room for the present—is limited in regard to Midwestern modernity, positing that the region is situated to provide a possible present-oriented middle space.

Hugh's formulation of his ideas about the cabbage-setting machine suggests how *Poor White* may incorporate modern mechanics and invention into rural spaces. While watching Ezra French's family plant cabbages at night, Hugh decides to use his body to figure out the machine's movements, concretizing what had been a purely intellectual pursuit and indicating Anderson's construction of rural modernity as synthetic, incorporating the mechanical mind, the human body, and the land. However, his appearance in the moment lacks definite tangibility and creates a heightened anxiety:

> Hugh arose and stood in the moonlight in the cabbage field, his arms still going stiffly up and down. The great length of his figure and his arms was accentuated by the wavering uncertain light. The laborers, aware of some strange presence, sprang to their feet and stood listening and looking. Hugh advanced toward them, still muttering words and waving his arms. Terror took hold of the workers. One of the woman plant droppers screamed and ran away across the field, and the others ran crying at her heels. "Don't do it. Go away," the older of the French boys shouted, and then he with his brothers also ran. (*Poor White* 81)

In this passage, Anderson suggests that Hugh's attempt at concretization successfully forwards his invention of the cabbage-setting machine. However, given the opportunity to judge the corresponding narrative of oncoming technological modernity, Anderson resists, a resistance that takes the form of modernist ambiguity enabled by "the wavering uncertain light": Hugh's actions embody him but his twilight combination of action and thought results in disembodiment, his figure accentuated but his identity obscured, and his humanity complicated by both myth and machine. Rather than a reflexive representation of the positive or negative aspects of the harbingers of technological modernity, Anderson juxtaposes them with their reception by a group of manual laborers who are working with older technology and under residual structures of communal labor.

The farmworkers are unable to read the creation of a labor-saving machine, the wavering light, and the combination of urban/industrial and rural/pastoral elements as signs of modernity even though, as Hugh's inspiration, they are part of its creation. The eldest French boy's declaration—"Don't do it. Go away"—is telling, potentially readable as indicating fear of bodily harm or commanding Hugh to stop his attempts at industrialization. Another response, which in some ways feeds into critiques of Anderson's nostalgic depiction of rural life, is to read the boy's command as a pat response to any indicator of change, intended both to arrest the change and banish the changer. While that reading enables a nostalgia-driven argument that Anderson's farm laborers want to preserve their way of life, their earlier complaints about working at night and the physical difficulty of plant-setting or an overheard claim like "I'd rather be a horse or a cow than what I am . . . . What's the good being alive if you have to work like this?" (*PW* 78)—suggests only a limited investment in myths of nostalgic rurality. Rather, they indicate that Anderson is offering a picture of rural modernity incorporating both residual and emergent individual and communal practices, as well as responses to the historical shifts at hand. Thus, the farmworkers' inability to read modernity doesn't signal nostalgia for a rural life of manual labor, but that—to achieve a usable present—they need to learn more effectively how to read and participate in the processes of modernization.

A 1908 advertisement for the Bemis Transplanter (Figure 1), the most popular transplanter on the market and a similar machine to the one Hugh invents,[3] suggests a corresponding project on the part of industrial capitalists to train rural people to read and understand the benefits of modern, mechanized farming methods. In contrast to Anderson's implicit suggestion of this problem, the advertisement very explicitly explains the machine's function and benefits, improving the company's bottom line by appealing to farmers' desires for easier labor and greater profit. The prominent placement of the machine's ability to help "SAVE TIME, SAVE LABOR, SAVE MONEY" and the assurance of "Profitable Crops" leads to an explanation of the various crops it can transplant, then returns to an appeal to its ease of use and simplicity. The advertisement concludes with a more general explanation of the company's other products and their contact information. In the bottom left corner is an illustration of the machine, contrasted in white—an interesting representational correspondence with Hugh's ghostly appearance—and directed outside of the ad's

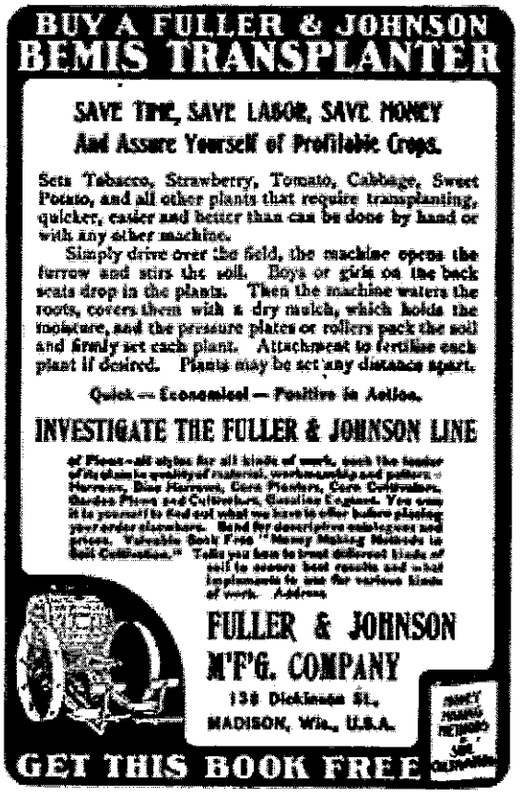

Figure 1. Advertisement for the Bemis Transplanter, *Dun's Review* (1908).

boundaries, presumably into some lucky farmer's field. Each element in the advertisement seems designed to interpellate rural users into believing that industrial products will improve life on the farm; the advertisement's genre—text mixed with image, necessary brevity of language—is suited to the educational project, also tying into discourses of the professionalization of farming.[4]

Although Hugh's machine functions similarly to the Bemis Transplanter, Anderson highlights the novel's engagement with an essentially unreadable form of farm modernization by having Hugh invent a fully mechanized transplanter, which was not actually invented until long after the novel's setting around the turn of the century.[5] The transplanters available for use in the late nineteenth century share several characteristics with Hugh's machine—they open

the furrow, water the seedling, and close the furrow—but are not fully mechanized; rather, someone must sit at the rear of the machine, manually dropping plants into the furrows. Hugh's description of the setting motion of his machine illustrates the completely mechanical process of transplanting the cabbage seedlings: "'[T]he down stroke will go so,' he muttered, and bringing up his arm swung it above his head. His fist descended into the soft ground" (*PW* 80). By creating a fully mechanized motion and introducing a machine that was several years ahead of its time, rather than a more realistic transitional invention that combines manual and mechanical labor, Anderson underscores the disorientation and disruption of industrialization's entrance into farming communities.

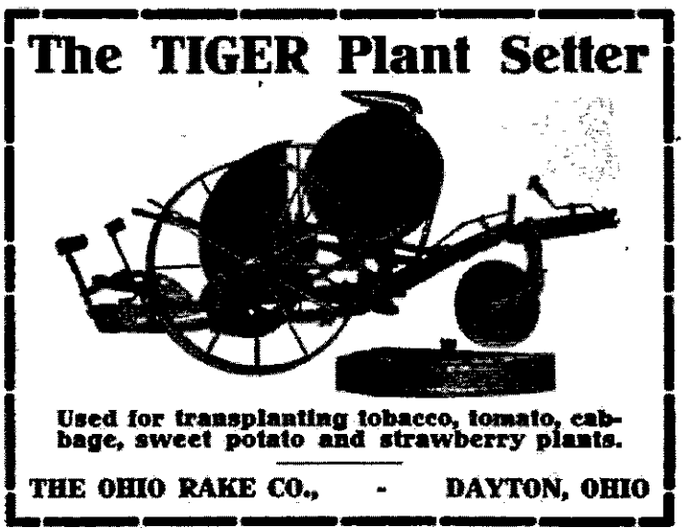

Figure 2. Advertisement for Tiger Plant Setter, *Farm Implement News Buyer's Guide* (1914).

To imagine a usable present that helps individuals and communities balance these disruptions of modernization, Anderson must manage the multiple discourses in the Midwest during this period. For example, Hugh is positioned at the intersection of multiple, frequently conflicting historical and cultural streams: rural and urban; past, present, and future; agrarian and industrial; manual and mechanical; corporate, communal, and individual; Upland

Southerner and migrant Yankee. Anderson incorporates these influences into a single character and a single community in the novel and, as a result, never resolves many of its contradictions, positing the Midwest, Bidwell, and Hugh as a quintessentially modern region, place, and character.

At the end of the novel we see how Anderson is only partially successful in his creation of a usable rural present. In this scene, Hugh returns home to Clara amid the sounds of farm and factory, they invest her pregnancy with hope for the future, and eventually turn into the house as a couple. Susan Hegeman usefully describes *Poor White*'s spatial orientation and notes that it offers no resolution to problems of modern alienation. Largely, I agree with her argument, but we begin to diverge when she argues that "Anderson seemed to wish away" the struggles and tensions within the "complex realities of places like Winesburg and Bidwell," rather retreating into nostalgia for the region (124). She argues that "what Anderson leaves us with (besides the allegorical family of Clara, Hugh, and unborn baby), is the nostalgically drawn location of the Midwest. Indeed, as we begin to think of the locale itself as yet another (non)resolution to the central conflicts Anderson puts into play, we begin to see that the Midwest as a region contains multitudes" (124). Where Hegeman finds an unsatisfactory multiplicity, I suggest that Anderson's presentation of the Midwest as a nonresolution is based on a re-incorporative network of spatial, temporal, cultural, and socioeconomic positions. I would like to consider the novel's ambiguity as a solution in itself: rather than resolving these conflicts, Anderson suggests that the Midwest and Midwesterners absorb them.

In *Poor White*'s final passage, Anderson suggests how rural and urban might coexist beyond polarities representing nostalgia versus modernization:

> As they went past the barns and the bunkhouse where several men now slept they heard, as though coming out of the past, the loud snoring of the rapidly ageing farm hand, Jim Priest, and then above that sound and above the sound of the animals stirring in the barns arose another sound, a sound shrill and intense, greetings perhaps to an unborn Hugh McVey. For some reason, perhaps to announce a shift in crews, the factories of Bidwell that were engaged in night work set up a great whistling and screaming. The sound ran up the hillside and rang in the ears of Hugh as, with his arm about Clara's shoulders, he went up the steps and in at the farmhouse door. (*PW* 363)

There is no definitive return to the rural past here. Hugh and Clara stand together amid both agrarian and industrial objects and sounds, representing past, present, and future. Two readings of this scene—their stasis within the present moment or, alternately, their decision to retreat into a symbol of the rural past—suggest how they fail at achieving an active usable present: Anderson presents a hopefulness for the unborn child, but less for Hugh and Clara. Part of that failure seems to be Hugh's inability to remain productive within Bidwell's industrial economy. While Anderson indicates that the farm sounds can exist alongside the factories, then, the fact that Hugh no longer is able to participate forces him to return to the house. But we shouldn't read Hugh's failure as complete nonresolution. Rather, in line with Anderson's claim that "the town was really the hero of the book" ("Introduction" vi), the town and countryside seem to have reached an iteration of modernity incorporating both rural and urban.[6]

Critics, however, have not generally found this as a moment of rural reincorporation; rather, they either pose the factory and its sounds as the scene's dominant element or tend toward an unspecified hopeful future based on Hugh and Clara's relationship. For Brom Weber and David D. Anderson, the whistles are "mocking" (Weber 32; D. Anderson 276), and Anderson argues that they "mark a mechanical superiority" (276). Glen Love focuses on how "the sounds of nature and life are drowned in the shriek of factory whistles" and argues how "Anderson [is] unable to express any real conviction for the world which Hugh has helped to create" (41). Stephen Enniss provides a positive cast: "With their new knowledge of themselves and with their new relationship with each other, they seem ready to leave behind them that past of confusion, misunderstanding, and loneliness" (97). My reading of *Poor White* lies in a middle ground between these. Generally, I agree with Walter Rideout's claim that Anderson leaves Hugh and Clara "head[ing] toward the uncertain future" (386)—my sense of the novel's ending is that Anderson has constructed a future in which the machines may prove superior, or Hugh and Clara's relationship may flourish, or some combination of those.

That indeterminacy is due to Anderson's attempt to incorporate rural and urban, industrial and agrarian, past and future, into a usable present. But he is only partially successful. While he imagines how the space of Midwestern rural communities may keep these elements in balance, re-incorporating the rural into urban-oriented modernity,

it becomes difficult for him to imagine the characters he has constructed as succeeding within that space and moment. As a result, Hugh and Clara cope with their predicament by returning to the house, accepting the rural but leaving behind Hugh's participation in urban industrialism, with the result that they leave any hope resting with their unborn child. Still, even that affective retreat should be read as Anderson's attempt to create a usable present for them, a workable alternative arising from their various attempts at balance and in response to the challenges they face at the close of the novel.

But while those characters come together to attempt usability, we are left with what Anderson earlier in the novel described as a region and people "rush[ing] pell-mell into a new age" (*PW* 128). In this description of the socially and economically modernizing Midwest, Anderson's attempt to imagine a usable present rests not on the "rush," but rather on the "pell-mell," that signals "a vast disorder" (*PW* 256), upending cultural hierarchies and allowing poor white characters like Hugh the potential to "find a place where he would be able to mingle freely with men and women" (*PW* 34). For Anderson, that mingling produces a moment filled with both problems and potential: a modernizing economy and society had started many places in the Midwest on a path in which their former rural identities became confused and disorderly, mingling with and incorporating urbanized values, use of space, and social elements. While Anderson sees the creative and social possibilities of the "new age," he also desires to retain certain elements of ruralized values and identities, a desire that is pegged by many critics as nostalgic. But the combination of those two apparently competing values is what allows him to imagine a thoroughly modern rurality whose re-incorporative complexity lies outside teleologies of urban industrialization, allowing ruralized identities to remain at play even within a society participating in the modern industrial economy.

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NOTES

[1]Berman, for example, notes that rural-to-urban migration is the "archetypal move . . . for young people" in modern society (18), an urban-oriented definition of modernity shared by, among others, Parrington, Williams, and Giddens. Conversely, Herring, Comentale, Casey, and Farland explore modernism and modernity in ruralized US settings and literature, contesting the treatment of urbanity as a modern default.

[2]A wide variety of critics, including Fiedler, Hegeman, Clymer, Farland, Gelfant, and Hogue, argue that Anderson infuses sentimentality and nostalgia into his representations of rural and small town life. Van Doren counters these arguments, describing Anderson and several other Midwestern writers as constituting a "revolt from the village" (154).

[3]Frank A. Bemis received a patent for his transplanting machine—used for cabbage, tobacco, potatoes, and other plants—in 1890 for improvements to existing machines. The machine was manufactured for several years by Fuller & Johnson, then later by the Madison PLow Company, and sold all over the Midwest. It was displayed at the 1893 Columbian Exposition (Ardrey 145) and was one of the most popular machines on the market, inspiring several imitators (William and Eastwood 90, Wendell 428). A 1903 lawsuit, Seiler v. Fuller & Johnson Mfg. Co., asserts that Bemis did not improve sufficiently upon previous patents, providing an interesting parallel to *Poor White*'s episode in which Hugh tries to get around the Iowa man's patent.

[4]Treating the farm as a business meant, according to Neth, that "some farm men had to put strategies that emphasized capital and production ahead of those that emphasized labor, family, and community" (5). McClelland, Bogue, and Walker also discuss the modernizing effects of a shifting system of farm organization.

[5] In 1917, Bailey notes that "the feasibility of handling cabbage by machinery is attracting the attention of growers" (148), suggesting that it was not a possibility prior to that time. Wendell does not document the existence of a "self-setting machine" until the 1920s (429).

[6]This scene's presentation of multiple possibilities for modern rurality recalls Neth's findings that rural people and communities "resist[ed] total reliance on a commercialized economy" and attempted to solve the problem of a modernizing rural society through isolation and also by "creat[ing] alternative organizations rooted in the values of farm neighborhoods" (139). In its lack of resolution to the divergent realistic possibilities for its rural-identified characters, this scene contributes to the novel's modernist-style confusion.

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ROBERT VIVIAN'S TALL GRASS TRILOGY: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

JOSEPH J. WYDEVEN

Growing up in Omaha, Nebraska, and now teaching at Alma College in Michigan, Robert Vivian has proved to be a writer of substantial ability and promise. His recent emergence as a novelist may appear to have been sudden, but, in fact, Vivian has been writing for a long time. He was best known until recently as a playwright, having a number of plays produced in New York in the 1990s. Vivian's interest in the essay form appeared next, and his essays showed up in a variety of journals in the 2000s. His first book of essays, *Cold Snap as Yearning*, appeared in 2001; a second book of essays, *The Least Cricket of Evening*, will be published in fall 2011.

Vivian's most recent work has been in the novel form, as found in his Tall Grass Trilogy: *The Mover of Bones* (2006), *Lamb Bright Saviors* (2010), and *Another Burning Kingdom* (2011). Employing Nebraska and other settings, each novel is narrated through an array of first-person voices—with echoes from sources as diverse as William Faulkner, Cormac McCarthy, Joyce Carol Oates, and the medieval mystic Julian of Norwich; biblical cadences are found everywhere in the books. With each novel, Vivian appears to have gained greater control over his materials.

Vivian's themes in the trilogy are often called apocalyptic, with resounding biblical rhythms, and characters, often the desperate down and out, who voice jeremiads—and who raise questions regarding conditions of contemporary life and the nature of redemption in our times. Vivian does not have much faith in America's late capitalistic culture of misleading marketing and frenzied consumption.[1] He expresses the anxieties of American civilization and its discontents—but he also hints at social obligations. There is a mystical quality in Vivian's portrayals of motivation, suggesting forces at work beyond free will and determinism.

To this point, the only critical responses to Vivian's trilogy appear to be reviews in newspapers and blogs. This essay is an attempt to provide a descriptive analysis of some of the key elements in the three novels. Vivian does not surrender his meanings easily, and some readers may be repelled by occasional violent language and imagery, sometimes peppered with sexuality, which give a rough contemporary jolt to the spirituality which appears to be the ultimate point of these works.

I.

The Mover of Bones is the most difficult of the three novels. It is narrated through first-person monologues by sixteen characters. Although the disparate voices effectively offer many perspectives on the bone mover and the character of the bones he moves, one suspects that several could be removed without ill effect to the novel.[2] The novel's opening and closing references to Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* ("The Song of the Earth") suggest a narrative unity that does not appear to exist—but which nevertheless provides a resounding framework.[3]

Two biblical epigraphs suggest themes for *The Mover of Bones*. The first is from Ezekiel and is the more immediately pertinent, having to do with the restoration of bones, covering them with sinew, and breathing them back to life. The second epigraph, from Mark, pertains to Christ's raising of a child from the dead—a restoration that in the novel pertains to the murdered child that a janitor "finds" in an Omaha church, and carries with him on the road to the people he encounters.

The plot centers on Jesse Breedlove, the drunken janitor who "discovers" the child's body in the cellar of Our Lady of Sorrows Church, a fictional church in Omaha. We know little about Breedlove other than that he suffered his father's abuse and was a childhood witness to his mother's sexuality: from a closet he watched "the Mexican take his mother like a dog"(3). There are descriptions of other ambiguous events as well—"all of [which] had led to his digging" (3-4). There is much ambiguity about Breedlove's role in this discovery: we are told that he finds the body "under three feet of hard clay" (1), which suggests he knew where to look—but if he knew where to look, how did this knowledge come to him? He may or may not be the murderer of the child, whose name, we discover, is Caroline Murphy.

What we do know for certain is that Breedlove moves the bones of the child from place to place throughout the United States—in order to exhibit her to "people no one would normally pay attention to: the damned, the warped, the misbegotten" (157), and to deflect many who view her from disastrous courses in life, or even to provide people with renewals of faith. Katie LeBrun, for example, finds her briefly "missing" child Nathan playing with "a beautiful girl with beautiful chestnut-colored hair" wearing "a schoolgirl's uniform"; they are being watched by a man who "looked like every picture of Jesus I had ever seen" (109-10).[4] In some important sense, then, Breedlove's role is similar to that of a preacher. His name hints that he is a Christ figure, "Jesse" stands in for "Jesus," and "Breedlove" suggests that his central role is to foster love in the world. His "sermon" is the bones of the dead girl, intended to create reflection and change in a country needing absolution.

That the United States has serious problems is reflected in various monologues. In the powerful portrait of a sixteen-year-old, Easter Hollins observes "the desolation, the barrenness I sensed at the heart of the neighborhood, at the chemical plant [where her father is vice president], or in the way our yard almost perfectly matched every other yard for miles around" (38). She wanders away from her birthday party, and coming across the Mover of Bones, she willingly gives herself into his hands.[5] Joshua Tidbowl thinks of America as "just one big car wreck . . . on a collision course with itself " (113). And the author seems to speak for himself in *Der Abschied*: in the supermarket checkout we see the "tabloid faces and their chronicle of bathos and pathos and mass hysteria that constitute the clamoring world that will never love anyone . . . fascinated, bewitched, filled with yearning for something else, anything else . . ." (157).

Several characters suggest that Breedlove's tour with the girl's bones is intended to provide opportunities to witness something profound enough to change lives. For instance, John Clearwater, who lives in a ruined Studebaker in the desert, says he dropped out because he found himself "weaving a tapestry around the symptoms of this country's demise before it fell into the shitter" (19). He sees Breedlove's tour as a deliberate attempt to "take that dead girl on the road and show her to people who needed to see her, who *had* to see her like some great salve come to blast them out of their fucking stupor" (22). Joshua Tidbowl, something of a preacher himself, says: "Breedlove had to dig up her body . . . because she lived the only life

worth living and she died the only death worth dying, preserving her integrity. Her bones had to go on a rock-'n-roll tour; they had to be excavated so that others could feel the shock of her purity" (116). To the question asked in *Der Abschied*: "Who will lead you out of the desert of your nameless longing?" (158), the answer is partly Jesse Breedlove, the dead girl's "looming guardian" (154).

The novel succeeds by offering this series of stories depicting access to Breedlove and the cargo he carries under the tarpaulin in his pickup. But some of these stories are also interesting in their own right—for example the Easter Hollins story discussed above. Others include the narrative of Lizzie Vicek, who became a poet at thirty-two, "after coming across an Edna St. Vincent Millay poem on a postcard tacked up in a Goodwill store . . . " (64); the story of Earl Dodson, a reporter-detective who seeks the true story of Jesse Breedlove; and the account of Joshua Tidbowl who glimpsed Breedlove ("the flickering God-figure") in Paducah, Kentucky, in 1967, while Tidbowl was lying "in the middle of a country highway with a truck on my neck, my teeth sharpening themselves on the hot cement" (117); and the story of Missy Sanders, a victim of rape and murder who tells her story with echoes of Julian of Norwich's "Showings" of Christ's passion from *Revelations of Divine Love.*

II.

Lamb Bright Saviors is less complex than *The Mover of Bones,* but its language is sometimes more opaque—and occasionally it appears that the often lyrical Vivian has difficulties dumbing down his language to get inside his characters' limited consciousnesses. The cast of characters is smaller, and though Vivian still employs interior monologues for much of the book, most of the seven characters have more than one monologue assigned to them.

The plot is small and contained: a preacher called Mr. Gene Godsick walks Nebraska's rural roads, seeking witnesses as he prepares for his death; he is accompanied by a thirteen-year-old girl, Mady, pulling a wagon full of Bibles.[6] The witnesses Mr. Gene gathers, picked "out from some divine lineup in the sky" (51), include an old blind woman, Marian, and four violent men, who had assaulted her and trashed her house twenty years before. These seven characters come together—as if in some cosmic plan—in Marian's house, where the men come under the influence of Marian's ethic of forgiveness and undergo a variety of redemption experiences.

Readers have reason to be puzzled by this book—the language is not always easily accessible; a careful second reading, however, brings the novel into clearer focus. Ryan Sherman is certainly puzzled: he misses a key theme of the novel because he fails to discuss the character of blind Marian—and the forgiveness she embodies. Christy Corp-Minamiji's shorter review, on the other hand, insightfully observes that "[t]he narrative structure of *Lamb Bright Saviors* echoes a religious service." And Kelly Lenox writes astutely that "every narrator is unreliable": "All of them dwell on the fringes—of society, of health, of the law, of sanity—and yet they are the salt of the earth, they are our neighbors."

The characters are grotesques, odd people thrown together for the sake of salvation. Mr. Gene Godsick is the 6'7" preacher who travels Nebraska byways preaching an incoherent sermon. In Orlando Munoz's words, he sounds "like a ventriloquist's dummy jacked up on steroids" (49). Mr. Gene's assistant, Mady Kim Seymour, had mysteriously joined him as a small child after "Mr. Gene rescued me from the fire he had somebody set" (175); she is a remarkably resilient character, suffused with joy, and she sees her task "to be his primary audience that grieves in disbelief, throwing in a few cries of mercy to ring up near the ceiling" (40). She often provides comic relief for the novel, calling her wagon "Mr. Wobbly" and her guardian angel, Rufus, "an old black man with rickety knees" (111).

The four low-life characters in the book all have a history of wretched childhoods. Years before, with no good reason beyond sheer meanness, the four of them attacked blind Marian, who has lost both her son and her husband and lives alone in a country house. An ex-convict, Nate Yarborough, has the most convoluted story, told through three monologues: in the attack on Marian's house, he had carried her into a bedroom and appears to have raped her, though details are mercifully ambiguous. Orlando Munoz has recently returned from Iraq with the head of a fellow soldier, Shindig, in a bowling bag—the result of a promise to return him to Wyoming. Gus (Danny Gustafson), whose body is covered with 140 tattoos, blames Yarborough for "plant[ing] a bad seed" in him (150). Gus befriends Oly (Jared Parker Olson), who indulges in planning Nebraska Husker football strategies and perusing his collection of pornographic magazines.

The most interesting story, perhaps, is Marian's, as it provides the motivation for what happens in her house in the presence of Mady,

the preacher dying in her bed, and her former attackers. She has only one monologue and she uses it not to talk about the savagery of the attack on her, but to provide the details of her son's death in a grain elevator fire; her life with her husband; her trip to town (trailing Lamb's Pride Yarn behind her in order to find her way back)—and her preternatural understanding that "those boys were coming to do what they did . . . less to hurt me than to act out something they thought they had to do, the ongoing mystery of violence . . ." (69). Key to the monologue is her ability and willingness to forgive the boys long *before* they arrive at her house.

At Marian's house the four characters most in need of salvation all fall under Mr. Gene's mesmerizing influence; more important, they have been prepared for the preacher's mystic message by the understanding that Marian has forgiven them. This lesson is best represented by Yarborough's extreme experience. Having been raped by three men in prison, Yarborough later comes across one of them in a North Platte, Nebraska bar—and proceeds to wreak revenge: he overwhelms the man, ties him up and puts him in the trunk of his car. As he drives, however, he realizes he has been driving towards Marian's house—and ultimately enacts a ritual of forgiveness all his own: "I forgive you," he says to the "pint-size rapist"; "I forgive what you done to me" (131). Each of the others has his own understandings and rituals.

In this way, Vivian fulfills the promise of his two epigraphs to *Bright Lamb Saviors.* The first is from the mystic Rumi: "When the hearer has become thirsty and craving, the preacher, even if he be as good as dead, becomes eloquent." This quotation speaks to the lessons conveyed erratically but nevertheless eloquently by Mr. Gene on his death bed; obviously the four, prepared by Marian, are open to spiritual suggestion at last. The second epigraph is from John Chrysostom, an early Christian father: "As long as we remain sheep, we overcome." Clearly, this epigraph suggests the novel's theme that salvation comes not from youthful excess, but from potential participation in a caring community—in this case, one based on Marian's ethic of forgiveness.

III.

Another Burning Kingdom, the concluding novel—or novella, given its brevity—is perhaps even more intense and dire than the other two. The plot is simple, the cast includes only three main characters. Some readers may find the novel somewhat disappointing in its brevity and ambiguous lack of conclusiveness to the trilogy as a whole, though its story line is compelling and its climax powerful.

The plot again entails elements of redemption with an emphasis on the possibilities of reconciliation involving two brothers, forty-six-year-old Jackson Purchase, his older brother Lem, and Lem's estranged wife, Lissa. The lives of all three have not been easy. The brothers have survived a brutal father, who tried to drown Jackson (thinking he was Lem) before he disappeared from their lives; Jackson has become a "home-grown terrorist" (9); Lem and Lissa have struggled with a difficult marriage. Jackson intends to blow up the state capitol in Lincoln (he has the bomb ready and loaded under a tarpaulin in his pickup), and Lem is driving from California to stop him. By turn—there are five rounds of monologues—all three characters reflect on the meaning of this central event in their lives and on their relationships with one another. One reviewer rightly calls the novel "an inquiry into twenty-first-century alienation, American-style" (Zelman).

Given this small cast, Vivian has opportunities to develop his characters' thinking and even at times to suggest possible changes of mind. Jackson and Lem appear to be polar opposites—or perhaps two sides to the same coin. When they were children they lived with a vicious alcoholic father who once broke Lem's arm. One of the key remembered events is the time their father threw Jackson into a water tank, in his drunkenness mistaking him for Lem—a delusion Jackson supported by offering himself instead. Jackson was in the water long enough for the doctor to suggest that his survival was a miracle. Now many years later, Jackson is a political radical convinced that America requires a terrorist wake-up call. Having made his plans to blow up the state capitol, Jackson waits inside his house in western Nebraska for Lem to come to him from California. He plans to kill Lem—to make a hero of him as a man murdered by a terrorist.

As the ex-alcoholic Lem drives at breakneck speeds across the western landscape, he ponders their past, the "chemical imbalance running inside our veins" and the possibility that Jackson's political radicalism is simply the result of "the lack of oxygen" to his brain when he was underwater for so long (28-29). His plan is to convince Jackson to give up his terrorist plan—or, if necessary, turn him over to the authorities. He does not know, of course, that Jackson plans to kill him. Lem also reviews his life with Lissa and their two children;

they have been separated for many years, but Lem contemplates possibilities for their getting back together, especially now that he has given up alcohol.

In contrast to Jackson's view of the American people—that their need for "security had turned them into ergonomic people who had orgasms according to a daily planner, who went into the sarcophagi of tanning beds and sat for days on end in front of screens, waiting to be told about what to want and what to be and how fucking happy they were going to be someday . . . They didn't want real freedom" (42)—Lem believes "This is still a beautiful country . . . the shining hope of the entire free world" (9), a position Jackson views as "clueless innocence" (65). But, of course, both brothers are naïve, Lem for his unwarranted optimism, Jackson for his view that Americans will change for the better when confronted with a terrorist act.

Meanwhile, back in California, Lissa considers her failed marriage and contemplates her guilt in taking another man on as a lover. She waits for a call from Lem, perhaps to describe the outcome of his visit to his brother; she desperately hopes that he will return so they can talk their marriage over. The reader suspects by this time that she is not totally convinced the marriage must end in divorce. She remembers as well a key event in the novel when Jackson had explained why he had slaughtered fourteen horses that he believed belonged to Lem.

The concluding section, *"Revelation,"* is shot through with ambiguity, but it appears to be fitting, for Vivian wants to suggest hope. Lem has arrived finally at Jackson's farm, and Jackson shoots him as he approaches the house in the car. Lem seeks shelter in the grass while Jackson hunts him on foot. But suddenly the earth itself conspires against this scene of potential fratricide. Vivian is quite unclear about what actually is occurring, but some evidence suggests they are in the middle of a providential series of tornadoes. Many diverse things come into view through the clouds of dust: Mt. Rushmore, the Shroud of Turin, 1950s Birmingham and the face of Martin Luther King, wild horses, "*an Amish family fourteen strong floating by at their own solemn pace*" and many more incongruous things and events from the past. (italics in original106) In the course of this action, the bomb is destroyed. We do not know for certain what happens to Jackson, but the novella ends with Lem "staggering and walking out of a field at twilight, trying to find his way home" (107).

IV.

In the collected monologues of the Tall Grass Trilogy, offering grotesque voices from the Midwest and beyond, we have a new variant of *Winesburg, Ohio*, one for the postmodern age, where the horrors of frenzied consumption and conformity reduce the world to sterile gestures instead of genuine and meaningful values. Instead of Carl Van Doren's revolt from the village, we have a revolt from a culture nurtured by money, celebrity, and an unfulfilled desire to find spiritual meaning.

The three novels do not connect in obvious ways, other than their apocalyptic character, and their emphases on reconciliation, forgiveness, and redemption. God is not much of a presence in these works, but the Sermon on the Mount is not far from their centers of meaning. It will be interesting to see how the critical reaction to the Tall Grass Trilogy will evolve: some potential approaches include an examination of Vivian's use of humor, along with his serial employment of surreal images. Another novel, *Water and Abandon,* is scheduled for publication in 2012—a novel in which Vivian apparently abandons the limitations of the monologue technique. Vivian has proved prolific and exciting, a Midwestern writer to watch carefully in years to come.

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NOTES

[1]In *Cold Snap as Yearning*, Vivian includes an essay entitled "The Tides, the Tides," about his experiences working for an insurance company in Omaha, an account pertinent to the mind-numbing rational intricacies of the insurance industry. One sample should suffice: "In that office, in my cubicle, I came to realize the horror of this city for the very first time; I felt like I was pickled in a jar of formaldehyde, as if each and every one of my senses was protracted to a point where they no longer registered real pain and joy anymore, a Kafkaesque and indefinite suspension of all flavors and sensations. I had fantasies of smashing things up, throwing a tizzy to prove I was human, breaking down, breaking away. . . . Give me anything but this cubicle and the anonymous surface of this desk, mica-laden and crushing in the extreme, the insurance of anti-life in the midst of death, anti-beauty and anti-skin, anti-love in the great hierarchy of rational means" (95). Readers may also remember the film by former Omahan Alexander Payne, *About Schmidt* (2001), beginning with images of Schmidt sitting at his empty desk at an Omaha insurance agency waiting for his retirement to start.

[2]That the novel contains occasionally misleading information is verified in my telephone interview with Vivian. The author told me that some sections of the novel had seen more extensive development in other formats. For example, regarding one of the two priests—Father O'Dowd and Father Kastell—Vivian mentions only briefly in the first section, Vivian said that he had written a much longer piece at one time—but this piece is not to be found in the novel, and thus the first section provides something of an early false lead.

Again, the section narrated by the sixteen-year-old Easter Hollins was originally written as a one- woman play.

[3]How Mahler's work functions precisely for Vivian is not exactly clear. Vivian provides only two title references from *Das Lied von der Erde* (1908)—the title of the whole work as the title of the first "chapter" of the novel, and the conclusion to the poem, *Der Abschied* ("The Farewell") to serve as the title of the final "chapter" of *The Mover of Bones*. Mahler took his material from six Chinese poems published in a volume called *The Chinese Flute,* as adapted by Hans Bethge. The titles of the six poems may give some small idea of the content—and perhaps Mahler's (and perhaps even Vivian's) interest in them: "Drinking Song of the World's Misery," "The Lonely Man in Autumn," "Of Youth," "Of Beauty," "The Drunk Man in Spring," and "The Farewell."

[4]The fact that the girl is described as having different colored hair in different accounts is puzzling (she has "long blonde hair" on page 5, "chestnut-colored hair" on page 109 and "wavy chestnut hair on page 150), suggests either that the different narrators have unreliable memories —or possibly that there are others who are imitating Breedlove's mission. This possibility deserves further investigation.

[5]Vivian's sketch of Easter Hollins is reminiscent of the powerful story by Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" in which Oates's fifteen-year-old protagonist, Connie, gives herself over to the ominous Arnold Friend (possibly the Fiend or devil himself)—but Vivian told me in our telephone interview that he did not know the story. See http://www.usfca.edu/jco/whereareyougoing/

[6]In her final monologue, Mady says, "The bible's all right if you got nothing else to read, but there sure is a lot of killing in there with salt sprinkled over everything. I was never tempted to eat it page by page like Mr. Gene did, but maybe I was missing something." (176). Vivian's short work, "Eating the Bible," is an interesting adjunct to his trilogy. This story or essay suggests that the reader has more or less reached the end of his tether in a beat-up motel room, having traveled "to this room far away your entire life," and that eating the Bible *may* be an antidote to whatever has driven him or her there: but "No one can tell you what eating the Bible will mean because no one knows; the moment of consumption will be transformed into shock waves of revelation or you'll be reduced to sickness in the bathroom, bent over and retching into the toilet."

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON: MENTOR OF AMERICAN RACIAL IDENTITY

MARGARET E. WRIGHT-CLEVELAND

In the early 1920s, after establishing himself as a major American voice with *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), *Triumph of the Egg* (1921), and *Many Marriages* (1923), Sherwood Anderson focused a great deal of his time and attention on two things: mentoring young writers and investigating race in the American South. The merging of these two interests may be Anderson's greatest legacy. From the well-documented mentorships of Jean Toomer and William Faulkner, we most remember the difficult endings of these relationships. Toomer rejected Anderson's mentorship because he felt Anderson "limits me to Negro" (letter to Waldo Frank January 1923). Faulkner's "Prophets of the New Age" (1925) and *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles* (1926) so impugned Anderson's take on primitivism that he would resort to claiming Faulkner's understanding of blacks in the American South was "sick" (Blotner 179). During his mentorship of Toomer and Faulkner, Anderson's worldview of African Americans as primitives became an insurmountable conflict in each personal relationship. However, this conflict helped develop each writer's understanding of the construction of race in America and its importance to the still developing American modernism. Because Anderson's writing touched the pulse of American culture, his belief that race was central to American letters and identity affirmed that centrality for Toomer and Faulkner. All the disputes between Anderson and his mentees focused on what each considered Anderson's outdated and limited understanding of blackness and whiteness in America, disagreements that forced Toomer and Faulkner to articulate an understanding of the relationship between blackness and whiteness different from primitivism. This new understanding would permeate Toomer's and Faulkner's contributions to American modernism throughout their careers.

I.

Our historical perspective allows us to expect a white Southerner and an African American to find race a focal point for their writing. However, the typical focus on race in America at the turn of the twentieth century was overtly on defining (and restricting) blackness, particularly, and otherness, more generally. In contrast, Anderson was a white man focused on defining whiteness; he openly applied his interpretations of blackness to his construction of whiteness. In this essay, I will argue that Toomer's and Faulkner's interactions with Anderson led both to challenge the construction of whiteness in America and to mark racial identity as central to American modernism. In "Anderson and Hemingway: Two Midwesterners Struggle with Race," forthcoming in 2012, I will argue that Anderson shaped Hemingway's understanding of race, solidifying its role as a linchpin issue for American modernism.

In her 1998 book, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism,* Sieglinde Lemke claims that "[t]he notion that modernism and primitivism are (wittingly or unwittingly) accomplices has . . . not yet become a critical commonplace of modernist scholarship" (6). Lemke then continues to demonstrate a rich history of cultural exchange between black and white modernists of many disciplines: art, music, and nonfiction. Many scholars have continued Lemke's exploration into the relationship between primitivism and modernism—notably Judith Brown, Glenn Willmott, Robin Hackett, and Elizabeth Hutchinson.[1] These studies, and many more, added greatly to our understanding of the development of transatlantic modernism, but I propose that Anderson's mentorship of Toomer and Faulkner exposes an overlooked relationship between primitivism and American modernism specifically. Toomer and Faulkner ultimately rejected primitivism as an adequate conception of the way race works in America. Each developed new formal and conceptual strategies for inscribing race (including marking whiteness as a constructed racial identity) anew through the lens of American modernism. Their earliest works established race as the hinge pin of American modernism, the cornerstone to a national identity with a fundamental hybridity that was at once denied by its masses and explored by its artists.

In the years Anderson met, mentored, and alienated Toomer and Faulkner, he settled permanently in the American South and focused his writing and thinking on the African American. Having exposed

the hollowness of the white male experience, its waning power and flickering identity, Anderson moved to solidifying whiteness through a rigidly paternal primitivism.[2] In "Notes Out of a Man's Life" (1924), Anderson writes of the strictly imposed separation of the races: "I cannot approach the negro, cannot speak intimately with him. Such an attempt on my part would arouse the suspicions of both whites and blacks" (Notebook 64). He then showcases white envy of blackness by quoting a white southern woman writer: "Above all things I should like to be a negro woman" (65). He ends, however, by embracing primitivism, both by celebrating the "non-smart and clever" art that an emotional negro could produce and by rejoicing in the shared sensuality:

> I talked to a southern man, the son of a planter. For a long time he had been at work on a novel. It was smart and clever. That was not what he wanted it to be. "If there is ever an art produced in the American south it must come from the negro," he said.
>
> "I dress in as fine linen as I can afford, wear bright ties, loud socks, carry a cane. The negroes on the docks among whom I spend so much of my time like me so. I can see the looks of approval pass from eye to eye. We have something in common. Together we love bright gaudy colors, food, the earth, the sky, the river. We love song and laughter, night, drink, and lust" (Notebook 65).

Anderson's interest in primitivism "had little to do with a genuine concern for people of African descent or for their art" and everything to do with re-articulating the worth of whiteness (Lemke148). Anderson's goal for American modernism and the national reconceptualization taking place post-World War I was a connection with what he saw as the core of humanity, that essence believed untouched and therefore unmarred by a failed civilization. By crediting the white planter with a "smart and clever" novel that failed and expressing connections between himself and southern blacks that did not include any reference to intellect or morality, Anderson celebrates the stereotype of African Americans as sensual and nonintellectual and asserts that whiteness suffers from its void of sensuality.

Anderson continues inverting the value of sensuality over intellect in "Notes" from 1925: "The negro working on the docks is envious of me sitting and thinking. I am envious of him rolling the great timbers. He thinks me an aristocrat and I think him an aristocrat.

What would I not give to accomplish something definite—related to trees, the earth, the sky, the seas! What would I not give to be a man, not the shadow of a man!" (Notebook 131). Anderson acknowledges that the current construct of society has failed the white man, but his answer—to become more like the black man—is, of course, romantic and ignores the very real social and legal restrictions placed on black-skinned Americans. Instead of condemning these restrictions and seeking a legal and social space which would welcome black contributions and provide the balance he claims white Americans need, Anderson warns the black man of a spiritual corruption that awaits him in white society: "But keep the song, black man, don't lose the song. When you lose that, we've got you, we whites. We'll get you in the end, of course. That's what makes the song sweet to hear while it lasts" (134). Such a warning contradicts the neediness of whiteness expressed earlier by Anderson and reminds all of the established hierarchy of race in America. Anderson continues his presentation of the African American mindset as preferable but doomed in "Notes" from 1925: "There are no direct connections made in such dreams. One feels sensuality, wonder, interest, quite naturally—is unashamed, does not try to be logical. It may be that thus the negro gets life. As for myself I leave the fact that I have such dreams to the psychoanalysts" (224). Though Anderson wishes he could be the type of person the "Negro" is and embrace a life without logic, he is not and cannot. Anderson is white and ruled by rationality, a human so different from black humans as to be a different species. For Anderson completes his romantic view of African Americans by equating them with Nature:

> I went to the lake. The lake, the sea, trees, rivers, negroes working in fields, these things rested me so that I could feel and work again. (Notebook 184)
>
> I lay in the weeds by the big river all night, a thousand miles of empty river, no sound—the soft lap of little waves in soft mud, the shuffle of negro feet. (Notebook 133)

Anderson's view of African Americans as primitives cements blackness as a tool for establishing and preserving whiteness.

Anderson's consistent portrayal of African Americans producing honorable work while connected to each other and at one with the land presents an "authentic" culture both unmarred by Western cul-

ture and a historical part of Western culture. Mark Whalen writes that "[t]his participation in a double community, both ancestral and interpersonal, is what Anderson felt was denied to white Americans" (*Race* 101). However, as Whalen points out, this unique double community Anderson believes exists in blackness cannot survive. The only option Anderson imagines for change is one that usurps blackness into whiteness. Either blackness stays primitive and inferior, or it dies. Anderson's desire for connection between the spirit and the land is tempered by his fear that the intellect could prevent or destroy such a connection. These convictions not only echo Anderson's rural upbringing, but also will soon find resonance with the philosophies of the Southern Agrarians. Anderson's paternalistic primitivism, developed outside the South, nonetheless effortlessly embraces the mythology of the antebellum South and aligns Anderson with many of the elite in his new home. Anderson's thinking before, during, and after his mentorship of Toomer, Hemingway, and Faulkner was both clear and kind about the hierarchy of the races in America and included a sense of poignancy for the inevitable demise of African American culture.

Though it is clear from his early letters that Toomer was aware of Sherwood Anderson and his work since 1920, there was no direct contact until 1922 when Anderson wrote Toomer to praise his work in *Double Dealer*. Toomer responded with great praise of Anderson's work, claiming "Winesburg, Ohio, and the Triumph of the Egg are elements of my growing. It is hard to think of myself as maturing without them" (Whalen, Letters, 102). Toomer goes on to tell Anderson, "There is a golden strength about your art that can come from nothing less than a creative elevation of experience . . . . Your images are clean, glowing, healthy, vibrant: sunlight on forks of trees, on mellow piles of pine boards" (Whalen 102). However, by the end of 1922, the correspondence between Toomer and Anderson was focused on "the Negro" and his role in American letters, and Toomer was offering more critique. In only his second letter to Anderson (December 29, 1922), Toomer addressed Anderson's interest in and struggle with portraying "the Negro":

> In your work I have felt you reaching for the beauty that the Negro has in him. As you say, you wanted to write not of the Negro but out of him. "Well I wasnt one. The thing I felt couldnt be truly done." I guess you're right. But this much is certain: an emotional element, a richness from him, from yourself, you have artistically woven into your own material. Notably, in Out of Nowhere into Nothing. Here your Negro, from the stand point of superficial reality, of averages, of surface plausibility, is unreal.
>
> My friends who are interested in the 'progress' of the Negro would take violent exception to such a statement as, 'By educating himself he had cut himself off from his own people.' And from a strictly social point of view, much that they would say would be true enough. But in these pages you have evoked an emotion, a sense of beauty that is easily more Negro than almost anything I have seen. And I am glad to admit my own indebtedness to you in this connection. (Whalen, *Letters,* 105, 106)

Toomer's willingness to separate a writer's errors in the physical and social portrayal of blackness from the emotional and aesthetic portrayal recognizes the complexities of a socially constructed understanding of race. One could get the physical and social details wrong because America did daily; however, seeing through the constructions to something true was valuable and possible. In this early exchange, Toomer demonstrates a willingness to believe Anderson understands the "two-ness" of being black in America, even if he cannot articulate it perfectly yet. Further correspondence with Anderson, however, will change Toomer's view.

Anderson responded to Toomer's December critique with enthusiasm, excited to talk about what it meant to be a Negro and, more importantly, a Negro artist:

> Your work is of special significance to me because it is the first negro work I have seen that strikes me as really negro. That is surely [?] splendid.
>
> In London I met a woman of your race with whom I had some good talk and with whom I have had some correspondence but in the end I felt she was a bit too negro . . . I felt something like this—that she was inclined to over-estimate everything done by a negro because a negro had done it . . . In you, that is to say in your [th—be artistry] of course and I believe you are one—and a negro artist —which is infinitely more important. (1922 Toomer Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, brackets mine)

Anderson reveals in this letter a discomfort with accepting an understanding of the African American that will challenge the power structure status quo. He first serves as judge of what is "really negro" work and what is not. Next, Anderson expresses his discomfort that an African American woman could find value in African American art simply because it was black. Anderson reveals in this anecdote an unwillingness to change the standards of art set by Europe and adopted by white America as well as a lack of awareness of why such a change might be necessary. Though Anderson claims repeatedly that he wants to embrace "the Negro" as unaltered by white America, he shows he is unable to do so. To be valuable, African American writing must meet the standards of the white American or take its place as the exotic, primitive, and lesser art form. What Anderson wants from African American letters and Toomer is a primitive voice that will both enrich and solidify the superiority of white letters—a contradiction he never acknowledges or dismisses.

By early January of 1923, Toomer confesses to Waldo Frank that Anderson "limits [him] to Negro" and that their friendship won't "go very far": "My own letters have taken Negro as a point, and from there have circled out. Sherwood, for the most part, ignores the circles" (Whalen, *Letters,* 113). In little more than a year, Toomer has come to recognize that Anderson cannot see the interwoven nature of blackness and whiteness in America, much less in Toomer himself. That blackness is useful to white America Anderson understands; that blackness cannot be separated from whiteness in America, that this "tool" has become integral to a hybrid nation is beyond Anderson's comprehension and the reason Toomer must end their professional relationship. Indeed, what Toomer saw as Anderson's little difference from "the mass which must narrow and caricature if it is to grasp the thing at all" will be the point of contention between Anderson, Hemingway, and Faulkner as well (Whalen, *Letters,* 115).

Toomer did not make any direct break with Anderson. Indeed, Anderson continued to support Toomer's work and endeavored to keep him in print. In 1923, Anderson wrote to congratulate Toomer on *Cane* and offer comfort about the disappointing sales. On January 3, 1924, Anderson penned a letter to Toomer placing his work among the Moderns:

> You I am sure belong to us, nervous distraught one, us moderns, and it is quite wonderful to think your history also in the men I [was] watching on the docks, the black men . . . I never tried to talk to them, never approached them . . . Perhaps I did not know how much I wanted a voice from them.
>
> When I first saw your stuff I was thrilled to my toes. Then I thought, "he has let the intrusive white men get him. They are going to color his style, spoil him. I guess that isn't true. You'll stay by your own, won't you. (Toomer Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, brackets mine)

Anderson begins this exchange identifying the new world order that aligns himself with Toomer: modernism. Anderson's belief that it is "quite wonderful" Toomer is connected to the black dock workers he had previously admired, the "primitives" and his admission that "[p]erhaps I did not know how much I wanted a voice from them" suggest a subconscious awareness of the integral role race, blackness in particular, would play in the development of American modernism. But Anderson cannot sustain such a view of racial reciprocity, for he quickly returns to the threat the white man poses for Toomer and encourages Toomer to "stay by your own." Anderson's work has been recognized as a precursor to American modernism, showing some elements that demonstrate the changes in structure and world view the moderns will embrace. It seems Anderson, too, helps set race as a defining concern of modernism, even as he demonstrates his inability to move beyond the stereotypes, caricatures, and power structure he has been taught to embrace.

Because Anderson's conception of race was binary and exclusive, overrun with white privilege, it was, as Mark Whalen suggests, "funded on the premise of black nonindividuation":

> Much more conducive to [Anderson] was the construction of African American community from a discreet anthropological distance, a distance that allowed the willful negation of personality or individuality. This of course precluded the development of any friendships with African Americans, as Jean Toomer soon found out. Despite the complexity of Toomer's racial heritage and despite the fact that even as *Cane* was published Toomer was disavowing the entire concept of an essentialist racial heritage, Anderson saw him purely on his own terms and brushed aside Toomer's attempts at self-definition. (*Race* 106, 107)

Anderson, then, tied "the Negro" to the black body, a physical, biological predetermination. Toomer tied race to culture. Toomer's

words to Anderson that his writing on the Negro was not completely limited by his white body, that "an emotional element, a richness from [the Negro], from yourself, you have artistically woven into your own material" reflect Toomer's growing understanding that race was culturally formed and preserved (Whalen *Letters* 105).[3] As early as June 1922, Toomer was qualifying both his biological and social identification with African Americans. In a response to John McClure's request "to know who you are, what you are doing, and to see anything whatever you have which you think might interest us," Toomer wrote:

> My position in America has been a curious one. As near as I can tell, there are seven race bloods within this body of mine. French, Dutch, Welsh, Negro, German, Jewish, and Indian. And they get along, if you will believe me, quite amicably! My father and his folks were Georgians. On my mother's side we hail from Georgia and New Orleans. My grandfather, P.B.S. Pinchback, was at one time lieutenant and then acting governor of Louisiana. The Double Dealer is on the spot of the old hunting grounds. One half of my family is definitely white, the other, definitely colored. For my own part, I have lived equally amid the two race groups. And, I alone, as far as I know, have striven for a spiritual fusion analogous to the fact of racial intermingling. It has been rough riding. Nor am I through, have just begun, in fact. This, however, has neither social nor political implications. My concern is solely with art. (Whalen *Letters* 40)

Toomer focused his experiences with biological and social hybridity on art, and his engagement with Anderson was exclusively about art. However, Anderson was looking for something in society or art that could "save" the soulless life of the average, small town, white American man and he thought he had found it in African American culture. When one culture is used to secure another's place in power, politics and society are implicated. Not only did Anderson and Toomer understand the nature of race and culture differently, they understood the role of race in American Letters differently.

In 1932 Toomer articulated an ideal view of race in America that clearly had implications beyond the world of literature. Toomer's conception broadened race beyond the binary of blackness and whiteness so much that racial categories disappeared:

> In America I am working for a vision of this country as composed of people who are Americans first, and only of certain descents as secondary matters. In order to establish my view I have had—for a time—to swing into a rather extreme position which has not allowed me to be associated with any race other than what we may call the American race. (Letter to Nancy Cunard, Toomer Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University)

Toomer's claim that one can *choose* to be associated with one race or another is not the naïve oblivion offered by Anderson in his romanticization of African Americans. Toomer's claim, instead, acknowledges the social construction of race in America and the difficulty in making people adhere to it. Every disavowal of a racial association requires vigilance by someone charged with keeping racial order—Race Men, politicians, clergy, society ladies, and vigilante groups—so that disavowal is an "extreme position." Accepting Toomer's view on "the American race," then, would alter the very construction of society in America. Anderson sought only to better use the status quo as a support for white privilege, leaving the social fabric of America intact.

Anderson turned down Toomer's request for financial support for a Negro Arts journal[4]; his novel *Dark Laughter* embraced primitivism; he saw no need or possibility for social equality between the races; and his interest in Toomer was consumed by a perception of Toomer as "black." Toomer was right: Anderson limited him to Negro and the result was a necessarily short-lived interaction. What is most important is the role race played in these artists' development of modernism. Anderson looked to primitivism to restore what he had exposed in his fiction as damaging American identity: the limitations of small-town white maleness; the dangers of a growing industrialism; and a cultural sphere so diminished it provided Americans with no means to cope with the jagged disorder of their lives. Anderson's appreciation for primitivism solidified the elevation of whiteness throughout the construction of modernity. Toomer's interest in dissolving the relationship between race and body was an attempt to remove the historical hierarchy and democratize cultures, making blackness and whiteness accessible to each other in ways not previously known. The interactions between Toomer and Anderson, then, suggest both understood race as the linchpin of American modernism.

II.

After an unsuccessful three-year stint as postmaster at the University of Mississippi, Faulkner resigned and moved to New

Orleans in 1925. He intended to wait in New Orleans for a ship on which he could exchange labor for passage to Europe. He ended up staying in New Orleans for six months, writing to earn money for his voyage.[5] While in New Orleans, Faulkner reconnected with Elizabeth Prall, manager of the Double Day bookstore in Lord and Taylor's, at which he had worked in New York City in 1921 (Watson 136). In the interim, Elizabeth had married Sherwood Anderson and moved to New Orleans. She invited Faulkner to stay in her house while he was in the city, and she introduced Faulkner to her husband. Anderson and Faulkner, then, established a more personal relationship than Anderson and Toomer. Many of Faulkner's letters home reflect an intimacy with the Andersons: "Elizabeth sends love. She has just had influenza, but she is up again. And then Sherwood had it. Dad should see some of the shirts and ties he has. Loud is no word. He says he likes colors and he dont (sic) give a hoot who knows it" (Watson 167); "Saturday Sherwood chartered a gasoline yacht and about 12 of us went across Lake Ponchartrain and up a river" (169). Faulkner and Anderson even shared a character, Al Jackson, exchanging wild adventures for him.[6] Nonetheless, by June of 1926, Anderson would recommend Faulkner's novel to Liveright as long as he didn't have to read it (Blotner 146).[7] What had happened in the interim?

Faulkner debuted as a literary critic with his analysis of Anderson's work. On April 26, 1925, the *Dallas Morning News* ran an article in which Faulkner's praise of *Winesburg, Ohio* was unequivocal: "But then anything any other American writer was doing at that time would have been disappointing after *Winesburg*" ("Prophets"). The many flaws he found with the other six books, however, set the tone of the review.

Faulkner gave Anderson only partial credit for the genius of *Winesburg, Ohio*, claiming: "Men grow from the soil, like corn and trees: I prefer to think of Mr. Anderson as a lusty corn field in his native Ohio" ("Prophets"). The genius of *Winesburg, Ohio* was due to Anderson's "very inexperience, his urgent need not to waste time or paper"; he could portray sympathy without mawkishness because "the gods looked out for him" ("Prophets"). Grieving a lack of humor in *Windy McPherson's Son*, Faulkner writes: "This lack of humor mitigates against him, but then growing corn has little time for humor" ("Prophets"). *Many Marriages* is weak because

Anderson "gets away from the land. When he does this he is lost" ("Prophets").

Anderson could not help notice the mixed reviews Faulkner gave his work and, understandably, he resented being defined as a simple cornfield. There is no evidence to suggest Faulkner's use of the analogy was intended to be an insult, but it may well have reflected Faulkner's belief that humans are permanently marked by the land of their raising. Faulkner would spend his career exorcising the demons of the American South in an attempt to redeem his own native land. Anderson, however, was more of a nationalist and felt his new home in the South would offer him what the rest of America needed. This idea of being rooted in and marked by a region has clear racial implications for Anderson and Faulkner. If Anderson is defined by the Midwest as Faulkner suggests, then he cannot understand these African American "primitives" he has found in the South. Anderson would probably have agreed. However, just as Anderson limited Toomer to "Negro," Faulkner limits Anderson to "whiteness," a restriction that would deeply disturb Anderson's view of himself, his work, and his role as literary icon. Joseph Blotner found evidence of such tension regarding race between Anderson and Faulkner throughout their relationship. Blotner writes:

> Not only would Anderson criticize the South, from the wealthy class to the former slave class, he thought Faulkner himself was poisoned with pernicious attitudes. He wrote later about a kind of insanity in "those decayed families making claim to aristocracy, often living very isolated lives in lonely run-down Southern towns, surrounded by Negroes." There was cruelty toward the Negroes, Anderson said, which often took the form of sexual aggression by white men. "Faulkner has got hold of the queer sort of insanity that results. He understands and draws clearly the little white businessman, the small white farmers: still at the same time, there is in him also a lot of the same old bunk about the South." (179)

Faulkner continued his critique of Anderson, reiterating the importance he found in humor as an American literary idiom, in *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles*, published privately in 1926. Meant as a farewell tribute of sorts to Anderson, who was moving to Virginia, William Spratling's caricatures and Faulkner's captions were a hit in the bohemian circles in which they traveled. Many were

amused by the book and honored to be included, but Anderson did not find it funny (Spratling 13).

Though neither the foreword nor the caricatures speak directly of race, *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles* does make oblique reference to race as part of the negotiation of American identity and American letters. First, the book is, by Spratling's admission, a "New Orleans version of Miguel Covarrubias' *The Prince of Wales and Other Famous Americans*" (Scott 313). Certainly a British Royal does not want to be considered an American, which implies Sherwood Anderson would not want to be considered a Creole, or an admittedly mixed-race person. All of the people caricatured in Spratling and Faulkner's text are white-skinned, some from old Creole families, others not, but to label Sherwood Anderson a Creole brings into common conversation the usually hidden mixed-race nature of all Americans, regardless of skin color. Additionally, the caricature of Emmett Kennedy, in particular, directly evokes the performance of race. Kennedy was a white writer and entertainer who made a living imagining and performing African American folk tales and songs and Irish American folk tales and songs. One of his books, published before *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles*, is *Black Cameos* (1924), a collection of songs and folk tales both taken from and inspired by African Americans. All were written in what was recognized at the time as African American dialect. The bohemian group that peopled the New Orleans French Quarter in the 1920s took pride in their transgression of sexual and gender constructions, bourgeois mores, and artistic rules. Faulkner and Stripling's book would subtly acknowledge the transgression of racial boundaries as well.

Perhaps more important, and most decidedly more obvious, is Faulkner's parody of Anderson's notion of the primitive in the foreword. He identifies himself as "not a native" but claims to have a "fellowship" with those who were: "though I did not know their names nor the value of their paintings, they were my brothers." Faulkner establishes the primitive point of view that there is a natural order to human actions, claiming the "atmosphere of richness and soft laughter" in the Quarter is a logical home to artists: "So it is no wonder that as one walks about the quarter one sees artists here and there on the shady side of the street corners, sketching houses and balconies. I have counted as many as forty in a single afternoon . . ."

(Foreword, *Creoles*). Indeed, the artist is instantly understood here, in his natural setting, even when first doubted:

> I saw myself incurring an obligation which I should later regret, and as we sat facing one another across my desk, I framed in my mind the words with which I should tell him No. Then he leaned forward and untied the portfolio and spread it open before me, and I understood. (Foreword, *Creoles*)

By spoofing primitivism, Faulkner dismisses Anderson's understanding of race. By bringing such into this "fond farewell," Faulkner begins to articulate an understanding of American Letters and American modernism that is tied to race.

Faulkner continued to demonstrate a tie between modernism and race in his earliest works. In his writings for the *Double Dealer* and the *Times-Picayune* in 1925,[8] Faulkner develops characters various in their ethnicity, race, and class, each interrogating the status quo of white America. "Sunset," one of the *Times-Picayune* pieces, presents an African American man who misunderstands every encounter in his search to return to Africa where a preacher told him he belonged. This character's attempt to embrace an identity he was assigned ends in tragedy. In "Ad Astra,"[9] a short story begun in 1927, Faulkner immediately focuses on the fluidity of identity either exposed or caused by the War: "I don't know what we were" is the opening line (50). Throughout the story Faulkner allows his characters to explore directly the meaning of race and its tie to identity for both those with black skin and those with white skin:

> "He [the subadar] can attend their schools among the gentleborn, the bleach-skinned," Bland said. "But he cannot hold their commission, because gentility is a matter of color and not lineage or behavior" (52).

> "I was a white man also for that moment. It is more important for the Caucasian because he is only what he can do; it is the sum of him" (53).

> "When I came to this goddamn country . . . I thought niggers were niggers. But now I'll be damned if I know what they are. What's he? Snake-charmer?" (66).

Additionally, Faulkner addresses the fluidity of class and ethnicity in "Ad Astra," both of which influence identity. His characters struggle with who they are and how they fit in and having white skin or black

skin does not simplify their struggle. They grapple with being Irish or shanty Irish; German royalty opposed to the Kaiser; Indian in the British army; and Southern. The presentation of identity as meaningless during and after World War I is a modernist aesthetic; binding race to identity and making it fluid will become a cornerstone of Faulkner's writing and is a repudiation of the primitivism Anderson espoused.

It is generally accepted that primitivism as engaged by white writers was an ideological strategy intent on staging a rupture with the preceding generation of white literary culture rather than any genuine desire to reassess interracial relationship or racial identity (Whalen 77), a definition that certainly allows primitivism, to be a central part of modernism broadly. However, Toomer and Faulkner's nearly simultaneous interactions with Sherwood Anderson regarding primitivism and race suggest American modernism would develop differently. Both rejected Anderson's notion of primitivism and constructed race that challenged instead of affirmed the status quo central to the American modernism they would develop. Though Mark Whalen argues that primitivism helped white writers critique white civilizations, a dominant focus after World War I, and that many writers believed primitivism enabled them to articulate truth; to capture reality; to be brutally honest (78), Toomer and Faulkner would, from the beginning of their careers, do all of those things by eschewing primitivism and employing, instead, a presentation of a multi-racial America that called into question the efficacy of white privilege.

Anderson certainly did not introduce the problem of race in America to Toomer or Faulkner, but it is evident from their earliest works that Anderson's understanding of blackness in America as primitive clashed with these young writers' understanding of the racial world. Through their interactions with Anderson as he explored primitivism and the American South, this clash was exposed and exacerbated. By challenging specifically Anderson's vision of whiteness instead of succumbing to it, Toomer and Faulkner made race vitally important in the American modernism they would help develop.

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NOTES

[1]See in particular Judith Brown's "A Certain Laughter: Sherwood Anderson's Experiment in Form" in *Modernist Cultures* 2.2 (2006): 138-152; Glenn Willmott's *Modernist Goods: Primitivism, the Market, and the Gift*. Toronto, ON: U of Toronto P, 2008; Robin Hackett's *Sapphic Primitivism: Productions of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Key Works of Modern Fiction*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004; and Elizabeth Hutchinson's *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2009.

[2]Mark Whalen's thoughtful *Race, Manhood, and Modernism in America* gives a thorough analysis not only of the relationship between Toomer and Anderson, *Cane* and *Triumph of the Egg*, but also of the influence of primitivism on Anderson's own understanding of whiteness and blackness. See Chapter Two: "Sherwood Anderson and Primitivism."

[3]Mark Whalen explains this idea in the conclusion of *Race, Manhood, and Modernism in America:* "If 'Negro' was about emotion and a sense of beauty, and if a white writer could understand and communicate this as well as anyone, then cultural 'belonging' and cultural authenticity are not necessarily linked to racial status" (229).

[4]In a 1922 letter most likely in response to Toomer's letter of December 29, 1922, Anderson writes he is "not enthusiastic about the magazine idea." Anderson argues that Toomer should "let someone else" bring the work of African American artists to America and confesses he doesn't know how Toomer could possibly fill a magazine with African American art since Toomer is "the only negro I've seen who seems really to have consciously the artist's impulse." (Toomer Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University)

[5]William Faulkner resigned from his postmastership on October 31, 1924. He moved to New Orleans in January, 1925, and left for Europe on July 7, 1925. He traveled to Europe with William Spratling, though the roommates did not travel together in Europe and Spratling returned to the State before Faulkner.

[6]Joseph Blotner reports in *Faulkner: A Biography, One-Volume Edition* that Anderson, inspired by his dream that he was "trying to swap a horse for a night's sleep," created Al Jackson, a descendent of Andrew Jackson, "half-man half-sheep and presently half-shark" (134). With a little help from Faulkner, Anderson created other such characters. The two "enjoyed their creation so much and it became so 'unwieldy' that they decided to write it in the form of letters to each other" (134). This work never became a book, however, because Anderson focused on finishing *Tar: A Midwestern Childhood* and Faulkner's time was devoted to writing for the *Times-Picayune*. Faulkner's letters regarding Al Jackson are published in Blotner's *Uncollected Stories of Williams Faulkner*, 1979.

[7]Blotner gives two reports of this interchange. The first is that Faulkner met Elizabeth on the street and she "relayed a message from her husband: 'He said that he will make a trade with you. If he doesn't have to read it, he will tell his publisher to take it'" (146). Estelle Franklin claimed the words Faulkner remembered were "I'll do anything for him, so long as I don't have to read his damn manuscript" (146). Faulkner was hurt by the latter.

[8]These writings were collected in book form with an introduction by Carvel Collins in 1959 and published as *New Orleans Sketches*

[9]Based on Faulkner's short story-sending schedule and correspondence, Hans Skei provides dates for the first mention of each Faulkner short story. "Ad Astra" is first known to exist on December 21, 1927, making it Faulkner's first short story, even though it was not published until 1931." Excluding the sketches of New Orleans, "A Rose for Emily" was Faulkner's first published short story, though we have no evidence he began writing it until October of 1929.

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THE GRAMMAR OF SEGREGATION IN THE SONNETS OF GWENDOLYN BROOKS

MARGARET ROZGA

Gwendolyn Brooks's first book, *A Street in Bronzeville*, begins with "kitchenette building," a thirteen-line poem that focuses attention on physical space, specifically the housing spaces allotted to African Americans in 1940s Chicago. It raises questions about a key concern not only in this volume, but in much of Brooks's poetry: the quality of inner life that such cramped and ill-equipped spaces permit. It asks whether in these circumstances a dream could "send up through onion fumes / its white and violet" and concludes with the dreaming cut off by the need to hurry to use the bathroom while the water is still at least lukewarm (*Selected Poems* 3; all future references to Brooks's poems will be to this volume). The poem picks up on an historical fact of African American life in pre-Civil Rights Chicago and on a personal fact of life for Gwendolyn Brooks.

Brooks responded poetically to the historical and personal fact of life in small crowded spaces. Not only did the kitchenette apartment become subject matter, but it also inspired Brooks's formal poetic choices. Brooks found short forms, in particular the sonnet, well-suited to her poetics. In Gwendolyn Brooks's work the sonnet is the poetic equivalent of the kitchenette apartment, a small space made to work beyond its apparent and originally intended capacity.

Brooks, of course, is not a slum lord exploiting a resource at the expense of those less fortunate or economically advantaged than she. Nor is she herself simply the unfortunate victim. Rather, she resourcefully uses the space and the form she finds available to her. Even within this challenging and imposing form, she gives voice to and validates the dreams stifled by the denial of opportunity inherent within the rules of play of the post-World War II urban North.

Brooks uses a variety of grammatical strategies in her kitchenette-like sonnets. Intricate compounding of clauses, implied subjects,

omitted articles, truncated transitive verbs, and improvised parts of speech serve as means of intensifying content. Thus Brooks's sonnet sequences replicate the density of the once more spacious building converted to kitchenettes even as they protest the conditions.

In the post-World War II period, Chicago was a major destination of the second phase of the Great Migration of African Americans from positions of de facto peonage in the still largely agricultural South to the hope of better jobs and living conditions in the North. In a twenty-year period from 1940 to 1960, the African American population of Chicago increased almost threefold, from 278,000 to 813,000. Given the absence of fair housing laws—a fact made clear in literature by Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), and in contemporary history by the Reverend Martin Luther King's 1966 Chicago campaign and marches into Cicero for open housing—African Americans new to Chicago faced a severe housing crisis. Chicago's slums were already overcrowded.

Landlords seized on the opportunity embedded in this situation by converting single-family houses, duplexes and triplexes in to one-room units "[u]sing beaver-board partitions" (Plotkin). The practice was widespread. "During the 1940s, more than 80,000 conversions of this type had occurred in Chicago, leading to a fifty-two percent increase in units lacking private bath facilities" (Plotkin). White World War II veterans with young families also rented such apartments on Chicago's Near North Side, but by far the greatest concentration of these units, and those in the poorest condition, were occupied by African Americans on the South Side. "They had less space, sunlight, and amenities" (Plotkin).

In 1939, Gwendolyn Brooks and her husband Henry Blakely began their married life in a variety of rental spaces including kitchenettes (Ford 363). In fact, Brooks recalls that Alice Manning Dickie, an editor of the *Woman's Home Companion* who came to see her about a contest she had entered, "had to climb a long flight of stairs to one of the kitchenette apartments I had not only lived in but written so much about" (qtd. in Newquist 31). This visit confirmed what Dickie had surmised, that Brooks was black, and started Brooks on her path toward a career in poetry. Up to this point Brooks faced hard questions about how to dream and develop her imagination and poetic skill in a space that did not itself contain much dreaming room.

Brooks had found encouragement from the classes she took with Inez Cunningham Stark at Chicago's South Side Community Center.

The traditional forms she practiced there included forms she had learned in her childhood reading of the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar. Poetry in several traditional forms offers models of intense and creative use of small spaces, and this lesson was not lost on Brooks. The small space of the kitchenette with all its inadequacies became both subject matter and form.

For Shakespeare the sonnet seems to have been a building spacious enough to allow for expansive development of a single theme. His sonnet 73, "That time of year thou mayest in me behold," is among his best known. It presents three quatrains, each focused on a single image, the three consecutive images arranged in order of the increasing imminence of the death. The conclusion, with its assertion that proximity to death could "make thy love more strong," may come as something of a surprise, but in the end it reaffirms the love that has all along been the poem's subject (Neilson and Hill 1383). Similarly, Sonnet 130, "My mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun," surprises in the end by rejecting the extended series of trite metaphors it first presents. Shakespeare finds space enough in fourteen lovely lines for leisurely affirmation of a love (Neilson and Hill 1392).

Brooks's sonnets are denser with conflicting ideas and more complicated. They are also generally Petrarchan in structure with an octave and sestet rather than Shakespearean. Among other well-known Petrarchan sonnets in English, there is a more relaxed unfolding of ideas, closer to the texture in Shakespeare's than to the jam-packed quality of Brooks. Elizabeth Barrett Browning takes time to count the ways of love in her Sonnet 43, "How Do I Love Thee?" William Wordsworth, of course, recognizes the sonnet as a small room, in his "Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room." But Wordsworth generally uses the sonnet form in a less confining way. He takes his time enumerating the beauties of a London morning, for example, in "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802." His list of what he sees stretches over several lines: "silent, bare, /Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie/ Open unto the fields, and to the sky; / All bright and glittering in the smokeless air" (Bernbaum 223).

There is less listing of compatible parallel nouns or coordinate adjectives and other techniques of expansion in Brooks's more cramped kitchenettes that depict realities of post-World War II segregated Chicago. Brooks's first sonnet sequence focuses on soldiers going to and on veterans returning from the war. Interestingly, "Gay

Chaps at the Bar" does not show the soldiers in their cramped homes but in bars. The poems, in fact, do not convey much sense of having a home, either physical or psychological. Their overall movement is from the soldiers' superficial appearance of order to inner turmoil and unrest.

The poems in the sequence begin with confident declarative sentences. The first one, for example, begins with a sense of assurance: "We knew how to order" (22), and the second declares, "Each body has its art" (23). But the confidence is hard to maintain, in individual sonnets as well as in the overall progression through the sequence. The octave in the first sonnet in this sequence, also called "gay chaps at the bar," includes only one other complete sentence, yet it holds together six fragments, two of these noun phrases about the trivial question of how to present their drink orders with style. Other fragments expand the initial sentence metaphorically. Not only did they know how to present their drink orders, but they knew "When to persist, or hold a hunger off" and "Knew white speech" (22). The latter items, presented thus in a variety of verbal phrases, refer to knowledge on quite a different level, so the parallelism of the series is undercut in both content and form. The slant rhyme, too, stretches almost beyond recognition in the sestet: islands and talents, stout and brought, hour and air. The sonnet ends then with grammar and form not reinforcing the initial confidence but declaring need: "We brought/ No brass fortissimo, among our talents, / to holler down the lions in this air" (22).

Others among these war sonnets seem to be constructed of contrary movements as well: on the surface an apparent confidence, compliance, or ease undercut by need, doubt, or death. In "piano after war," for example, the pianist produces music, almost powerful enough so that "old hungers/will break their coffins, rise to eat and thank" (24). But the transitive verb provides only a slant—not an exact—rhyme, and it presents an action that is never carried across to a recipient. Instead, memories of "bitter dead men" arise and cut off the life-giving effect of the art of the music.

Only in one of these sonnets does the poem's countermovement have a liberating effect. In "the white troops had their order but the Negroes looked like men," Brooks uses almost all complete sentences to present one positive effect of white and African American soldiers fighting the same war even if in segregated roles. The poem begins with reference to the fixed formula of segregation, but the extensive

and prolonged contact undercuts rigid stereotyping. The longest and most complex sentence in the poem describes the process:

> Such as boxed
> Their feelings properly, complete to tags—
> A box for dark men and a box for Other—
> Would often find the contents had been scrambled.
> Or even switched . . . . (26)

The subject of the sentence could more simply have been "those who" rather than "Such as." Brooks's choice here seems designed to be unsettling as perhaps the experience was for those involved. Otherwise this sonnet with its glimpse beyond segregation is also more syntactically regular than is generally the case with Brooks. The poem's only fragment signals a positive turn.

The final poem in this sequence may, however, suggest that any turn for the better is only temporary. Beginning with a coordinating conjunction makes clear that this sonnet, entitled "the progress," is to be read as a conclusion to the progression of the poems in this sequence. Though the octave presents soldiers maintaining a surface appearance of compliance with Army rules, the sestet once again reveals the undercurrents:

> But inward grows a soberness, an awe,
> A fear, a deepening hollow through the cold.
> For even if we come out standing up
> How shall we smile, congratulate: and how
> Settle in chairs?. . . . (29)

The future raises questions. As in "piano after war," a transitive verb remains without an object to carry the action to its finish. Congratulate whom? The colon after "congratulate" does not signal an explanatory element as colons often do. Instead, it separates what could otherwise be read as a coordinate pair of parallel phrases. The phrase following the colon suggests a greater state of rest than does the "smile" in the previous phrase, but access to this restful posture is cut off and questioned. Both the truncated transitive verb and the punctuation suggest once more the incomplete, transitory, or uncertain nature of the good the future is likely to hold.

In addition, the rhyme scheme once more suggests strain and difficulty in its stretch to the outer limits of slant rhyme: awe and how, cold and wild, up and step. There's a click of similarity in the con-

sonants, but the vowel sounds pull in different directions. As Heidi Scott notes in reference to this series of sonnets, "Brooks's slant rhymes betray a deep physical disjuncture that is only partially resolved in the resemblance of consonant sounds" (37). Outside the context of this poem's closer rhymes in the octave, and outside this poem's placement in a group of sonnets, these words would hardly be considered rhyme. Gwendolyn Brooks brings this sonnet sequence to a close in a manner that lacks not only the conclusive snap of the Shakespearean couplet but also the problem/resolution closure of the Petrarchan form she otherwise favors.

In the five-poem sonnet sequence, "children of the poor," from her Pulitzer Prize-winning second book, *Annie Allen* (1949), Brooks applies her sonnet style more directly to urban Chicago issues. The results are often cacophonous, convoluted, difficult, and sometimes, to use a Brooksian coinage, unpretty grammatically and thematically. These sonnets quite clearly work as a group, as apartments in one building, sometimes with thin beaverboard between them; only the last one seems more firmly walled off and self-contained.

The first sonnet in this sequence contrasts the colder attitude of some who have no children presented in the octave with "we others," whose greater empathy for those who suffer is described in the sestet. The latter group, not necessarily all parents themselves, are nonetheless more attuned to "the queer/ Whimper-whine" of the helpless (all quotations from the first sonnet of "children of the poor" are from page 52 of *Selected Poems*).

In this poem, items of grammatical interest abound. The first line in this poem is a sentence followed by a colon, but the explanatory phrase that follows the colon is also punctuated with a colon, as though the "mail of ice and insolence" of those who are hardened is a double layer that requires still more to penetrate and explain. The explanation in the rest of the octave seems generally clear enough. These hardened people may "perish purely," but the purity is not a personal trait of character; it is the quality of their perishing. Furthermore, as the exact internal rhyme makes clear, it is "[w]ithout a trace of grace." The sestet continues the run of fragments that follow the poem's opening sentence, though the focus is here on those sensitive to the suffering of the children of the poor. Here Brooks uses prefixes to coin new words: unridiculous, inconditions, malocclusions. The first two of these terms work to undo some of the consequences of neglect by those who have been hardened. The term

"malocculusions" provides an apt and critically praised description of both the technique and theme of this sonnet.

The turn in this sonnet is toward paradox, expressed in the assonance and alliteration of the oxymoronic assertion that "lost softness softly makes a trap for us." The children's lost softness and the softness of the loss of softness is, in separate fragments, both "a curse" and "a sugar." The parts of the poem are makeshift, working in fits and starts at a job that seems almost too much for them, analyzing the world of the children of the poor. The conflicting attitudes thus expressed are jammed into housing under one roof like the places where the poor must live. All in all, the grammatical choices in the poem create a dense texture that makes of the poem a sort of crowded kitchenette where much seems amiss and resolutions are fragmented.

The second sonnet in this sequence talks in more direct and straightforward terms and in grammatically more conventional sentences and conventional diction about this matter of being "unfinished" (all quotations from the second sonnet of "children of the poor" are from page 53 of *Selected Poems*). This poem presents a confession of inability to implement plans to remedy the situation of these children who are poor. The speaker in this poem lacks resources, "access to my proper stone," and given this emptiness, there is no sense of crowding in this poem, nor is there any sense of paradox in situation or attitude. There is, however, as Howard Faulkner points out, a grammatically conveyed sense of incompletion. The transitive verb "bear" stands without a satisfactory object, a grammatical choice critic Howard Faulkner sees as thematically relevant. He argues convincingly that this "very inconclusiveness is perfectly apt for a poem whose theme is the failure to complete" (53). He goes on to note that in this second sonnet "the reader encounters a sort of 'mal-conclusion,' an altogether fitting trailing off, leaving the reader, like the children, feeling 'unfinished'" (53).

Two of the other five sonnets in this sequence in more complex and ambiguous fashion seem to reinforce this bleak outlook for the children of the poor. The third sonnet, beginning with a coordinating conjunction that links it to the previous poem, seems to reject prayer as an answer, expressing a preference for the children to "Learn Lord will not distort nor leave the fray" (all quotations from the third sonnet of "children of the poor" are from page 53 of *Selected Poems*). Presumably the fray functions as the direct object for distort as well as for leave, and thus the sentence may urge perseverance

as "metaphysical mules" rather than reliance on merely wishing for miracles or for generosity from "frugal vestibules." The absence of an article before "Lord" makes this sentence more wobbly and less assuring than it otherwise might be. The poem concludes in a way that is also ambiguous. There is first a promise of support, but then the promise could be either to help heal or to help blind these "mites" to truth.

The final sonnet in the group begins with an introductory subordinate clause before naming the subject and then stretches through a double appositive with a double prepositional phrase and its own subordinate clause before coming to the verb and the question the octave poses. The clearest part of this sentence seems to be its rejection of superficial niceties: "a remarkable politeness/That is not kind and does not want to be" (54). The sestet seems to answer affirmatively, though the apparent clarity is soon shaded by the unusual adverb "granitely" in a puzzling phrase inserted mid-sentence. In the end this poem seems to hold out the greatest hope for equality in "the university of death" (55). Overall then, the reality in these apartments is that dreams are denied.

Yet there is the capacity of art not only to reflect grim realities but to imagine and expand a sense of the possibilities, the role of art to create space. This is the important role in this group for one of Brooks's best-known sonnets, "First Fight, Then Fiddle." Karen Jackson Ford describes how the form of this poem undercuts the chronological order set out in the title. The octave elaborates on fiddling, with emphasis on fighting coming afterward, in the follow-up sestet. Ford points out that the "But" that begins the sestet "is an admission that the poem has become distracted with fiddling. The sestet, where the problem introduced in the octave is traditionally resolved, now works assiduously to keep itself on task" (361). This inversion of the order of the terms in the title, Ford argues, suggests that art may be more than the privileged result of having space; it may be a way to fight for space. Form, in other words, complicates the discursive message. Grammatical forms, a series of closely related independent clauses in the imperative voice, add to the sense of urgency and possibility. The poem, then, suggests an answer to the question about how to maintain the ability to dream in the confined spaces of a segregated Chicago.

Though the undeniable damage of fragmentation, ambiguity, and bewilderment is inflicted by the limitations the situation imposes, the

human spirit can and does find ways to assert itself even as it resists the limitations. Poetry, like music, is one of these ways. Poetic form can be employed as a means of nurturing that spirit even when there is not yet the room, or the grammar, for it to appear in more expansive and direct ways.

In a later section of "The Womanhood" in *Annie Allen*, Brooks explores further this theme of space and the human spirit. "The rites for Cousin Vit" begins with the casket, perhaps the ultimate confining space. Yet so dynamic is Cousin Vit's spirit that the lining, the lid, and the bolts "can't hold her" (all quotations from "the rites for Cousin Vit" are from page 58). Similarly, the sentence structure, often bursts of fragments, conveys a sense of determined resistance to the confinement of tight spaces: "Oh oh. Too much. Too much. Even now, surmise, /She rises in the sunshine . . . . " The three fragments before the completed sentence, even with, and perhaps because of, the repetition within them, are more active and energized than the grammatical sentence.

Graded according to standard sentence construction rules, the fragments call to be marked as incomplete, just as Vit, measured by standards of conventional behavior, might be found wanting. But in the grammar of segregation, that is, the speaking through and against confined spaces, the fragments convey the life that will not be bound in a casket or in the standard grammatical sentence that follows. And this is a tall order, for that sentence itself affirms action, affirms that Vit rises. Significantly, the sentence also plays against a tightness, in this case the close proximity of the internal near rhyme of surmise with rises. Vit herself "must emerge" larger than life. The poem ends with a single key and emphatic word set off as a sentence, an affirmation of being: "Is." In Brooks's hands, fragments signify both the confinement to close and crowded spaces true of racial segregation and the life force and energy that resist those limitations and dream more expansive possibilities.

In her third volume, *The Bean Eaters* (1960), Brooks includes three sonnets; only two of them appear in her *Selected Poems*. These two both concern space or, more accurately, lack thereof. Grammatical choices reinforce the sense of being jammed. "A Lovely Love" is unusual for Brooks in its Shakespearean structure and theme of love. It presents the situation of two lovers unable to find privacy. The alleys, halls, or stairways where they might meet are also the bailiwick of an unsympathetic janitor, whose actions

Brooks describes in a tight phrase that employs a noun as a verb; the janitor "javelins epithet and thought" (all quotations from "A Lovely Love" are from page 101 of *Selected Poems*). A series of verbal phrases in the second quatrain gives a sense of the fast-paced dynamic of the rough and tumble of this on-the-run new love.

The third quatrain of this sonnet presents a parallel series of negations that underscores the earthly, rather than divine or otherwise highly romantic, quality of this love. As if to break away further from any romantic notion that some might want to see in the first two quatrains, this quatrain substitutes an alternating rhyme pattern rather than continue the envelope rhyme used in the first two quatrains. In form and in content, then, the lovers in this poem are left with little room. The concluding couplet leaves them in fact "Definitionless."

The second of these two sonnets is embedded within "Bronzeville Woman in a Red Hat," a poem about a white woman's negative attitude toward black women, even in the limited role of domestic helper allowed them. Written from the point of view of the white mother, the whole poem has a looser structure than the tight kitchenette sonnets. Even the embedded sonnet that conveys the mother's reaction to the black woman employee kissing her child to comfort him is less dense than most of Brooks's sonnets.

Though lines are enjambed, the sentences are mostly short and complete, suggesting the cold and firm rationality on which the mother prides herself. Three parallel assertions in the sestet seem to boast about what an ambiguous "this" accomplishes. If the referent is, as seems likely, the "unintimate love" described in the second quatrain, then Brooks has pre-empted the apparent boast of the white mother. In the first quatrain she includes a long parenthetical insertion about a deeper layer and an "[i]nheritance of approximately hate" (105), thus undercutting the apparent calm rationality the sentence structure might suggest. Here Brooks shows her skill in adapting her grammatical and syntactic choices to the poetic purpose.

The first poem in Gwendolyn Brooks's first volume of poetry, "the kitchenette" defines her task for the pre-Civil Rights era: to portray accurately life in segregated Chicago even as she encourages dreaming and creating art in its confined spaces. What better poetic means to take on this task in her first three books than the sonnet? For Brooks the sonnet is the poetic equivalent of the kitchenette. Brooks fits into its component parts, usually an octave and a sestet, conflicting ideas and attitudes, adapting as needed poetic, rhetorical,

and grammatical tools of incompletion, intensification, complication, foreshortening and short-circuiting to show how African Americans had to make do in the restricted spaces allotted to them in post-World War II Chicago. Gwendolyn Brooks also uses these fourteen-line structures to testify to an enduring human spirit, and she works to ensure that onion fumes and fried potatoes, shared bathrooms and lukewarm water, do not overwhelm that spirit.

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CROSS-EXAMINING THE MYTH OF SOUTHERN CHIVALRY: GWENDOLYN BROOKS'S EMMETT TILL POEMS

MARC SEALS

Gwendolyn Brooks has been present in my classroom since the beginning of my career. I taught literature for nine years (1990 through 1998) in the Upward Bound summer program at Florida A & M University (a historically black university in Tallahassee, Florida), and I used Gwendolyn Brooks's "We Real Cool" to convince students that poetry could be cool. My students often said, "That sounds like a rap song!" The poem was useful for persuading students to give poetry a try. Sadly, though, "We Real Cool" was often the only Brooks poem that showed up in most high school literature anthologies.

Fortunately, more recent college anthologies fare better. For example, *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (5th ed.) contains six Gwendolyn Brooks poems. Two of these poems concern the murder of Emmett Louis Till— "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon" and "The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till," both from Brooks's 1960 collection, *The Bean Eaters*. Not only are these two companion poems beautifully written, they provide an opportunity to teach students about Emmett Till, the fifteen-year-old Chicagoan who, in 1955, was murdered in Mississippi, allegedly for whistling at a white woman. Emmett Till's murder is a chapter of American history with which most students are unfamiliar. One of my students recently told me that he was a fifteen-year-old child in Chicago in 1955—the same age as Emmett Till— and he had never heard the story. Neither have most traditionally aged students. This unfamiliarity perhaps reveals a flaw of our educational system, which tends to focus on the more uplifting aspects of African American history—students have learned about Martin Luther King Jr., Booker T. Washington, and Rosa Parks,

but W. E. B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, and Emmett Till somehow rarely make it into the Black History Month curriculum. In addition to pedagogical applications, my purpose here is, in part, to explore a neglected aspect of these poems— their relationship to *each other*.

In August of 1955, fourteen-year-old Emmett Till travelled with a cousin from Chicago to Mississippi to visit family. His mother, Mamie Till, was reluctant to agree to the trip, knowing that the racial dynamic was different in the Deep South, but she eventually yielded. Even so, she carefully explained the "rules" of behavior for a black man in the Deep South. Mamie Till-Mobley wrote in her 2003 memoir, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America,* that she said to her son:

> Chicago and Mississippi were two very different places . . . . Don't start up any conversations with white people. Only talk if you're spoken to. And how do you respond? "Yes, sir," "Yes, ma'am." "No, sir," "No, ma'am." . . . If you're walking down the street and a white woman is walking toward you, step off the sidewalk, lower your head. Don't look her in the eye. Wait until she passes by, then get back on the sidewalk, keep going, don't look back. (100-101)

On the evening of August 24th, Emmett and several other boys arrived at Bryant's Grocery in Money, Mississippi. Details are murky, but Emmett apparently entered the store to purchase bubble gum. He apparently said something to the twenty-one-year-old white woman at the register (Carolyn Bryant) that flustered her. As he left the store, Emmett allegedly "let out a wolf whistle in her direction" (Pollack and Metress 2). Three nights later, several men arrived at Emmett's great-uncle's house and kidnapped the boy. He was severely beaten, horribly mutilated, and shot in the head. His body was found three days later in the Tallahatchie River, weighed down with the fan from a cotton gin tied to his body with barbed wire. Roy Bryant (Carolyn Bryant's husband) and his half brother J. W. Milam were charged with murder. Mamie Till insisted that Emmett's body be sent home to Chicago, where she demanded that the seal on the casket be broken. When she saw his corpse, she insisted upon an open-casket funeral. It is said that as many as 50,000 people viewed the body. Pictures of Emmett Till's dead body ran in *Jet* magazine. Even though the evidence against them was solid, Bryant and Milam were acquitted by a jury of twelve white men just four weeks after the murder; the jury deliberated for only sixty-seven minutes. I am

safe, I think, in contending that this case was at least as important in starting the Civil Rights Movement as Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her bus seat just two months later. The importance of this case was highlighted in 2008 when President Bush signed the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act into law, granting additional federal resources to efforts to solve this sort of crime.

In 1955, Chicago poet Gwendolyn Brooks was, like Mamie Till, the mother of a fourteen-year-old boy. Brooks told Roy Newquist:

> I wrote about the Emmett Till murder because it got to me. I was appalled like every civilized being was appalled. I was especially touched because my son was fourteen at the time, and I couldn't help but think it could have been him down there if I'd sent him to Mississippi. (Gayles 35-36)

Brooks goes on to say that she wondered what it would have been like to have been the woman—Carolyn Bryant—at whom Emmett Till directed his wolf whistle, knowing that Carolyn Bryant had had to live with—and sleep with—a murderer. This mindset *is* what Brooks explores in "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon," which is 139 lines long. In "The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till," Brooks shows us Mamie Till—with almost cruel brevity, only ten short lines.

Carolyn Bryant was raised in the Deep South, as was I. We both grew up with the understanding that there is something noble about the South, and that those who had defended Southern traditions were chivalrous. This "Southern myth" predates the Civil War— a conflict that, by the way, Southerners have been taught to call the "War of Northern Aggression," or, at least, the "War between the States." However, there seems to be a long tradition of exposing the hollowness of the idea of Southern chivalry. In 1863, *Harper's Weekly* published a Thomas Nast illustration satirizing "Southern Chivalry" with pictures of horrific wartime atrocities committed by soldiers of the Confederacy. Philosopher Charles W. Mills calls the idea of the chivalrous South "an invented delusional world, a racial fantasyland" that reveals "an agreement to *mis*interpret the world" (qtd. in May, 98, 100). Through her two Emmett Till poems, Brooks continues the tradition of exposing the myth of the chivalrous South with scathing accuracy.

The first poem, "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon," presents a disconnect between the title and the content of the poem; the "Bronzeville Mother," presumably Mamie Till, is nowhere to be seen in the poem (except in the memory of the Mississippi mother), presenting a powerful example of presence by absence. The poem, though in third person, places the reader in the mind of Carolyn Bryant. She is preparing breakfast the morning following her husband's acquittal, and she has burned the bacon; she presumably fears her husband's anger and thus hides the evidence in the trash can. Michael Davidson argues that "Carolyn Bryant configures her life around southern ballads of white womanhood under siege" (64). Indeed, she is desperately trying to force the events of the preceding month into the mold of chivalry and romance, with herself in the role of the "milk-white maid" and her husband playing the "Fine Prince" who has rescued her from the "Dark Villain." Maria Mootry posits that "Brooks's self-conscious reference to the ballad tradition deepens the irony of her dramatic context" (51). Though Carolyn Bryant confesses that she has never been able to understand such romantic ballads, she somehow senses that this is the only way to justify these awful recent events. She understands the form well enough, it seems, to see that the would-be romance has been miscast— the Dark Villain is too young, too innocent, not nearly menacing enough. She does not even remember what the boy's offense against her had been. She is less willing (in the first four stanzas) to face the fact that her husband is equally miscast, save one reference to the fact that adults "were supposed to be wise" (line 34). When her husband sits down to his breakfast, the reader sees just how princely he is— he scratches his nose and brutally slaps his misbehaving child— and when he kisses his wife and whispers (in line 119) "something about love and night and intention," it is, to say the least, distasteful— even more so, in fact, in that the line seems to conflate marital sex and lynching. Carolyn Bryant cannot get "the Decapitated exclamation points in that Other Woman's eyes" out of her mind (line 143). Her hate for her husband, at that moment, blossoms, "Bigger than all magnolias" (line 148). Magnolias are, of course, an important symbol of the South, and Mississippi is "the Magnolia State." The poem ends abruptly, without closure, other than the explicit mention of closure— an unsatisfying resolution to say the least.

Immediately following "A Bronzeville Mother," the reader is presented with the much shorter companion poem— "The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till." Like the previous poem, the shorter

poem is not what the title claims. It is not a quatrain, nor is it in ballad form; Michael Davidson suggests that these discrepancies indicate that "for Brooks the ballad is more than form; it is a vehicle for localized meanings" (65). The reader is a mere observer of Emmett's mother, who sits in her home and drinks coffee, mourning the death of her son. The only detail in the poem that is not an objective observation comes when the reader is told that "she is sorry," indicating that perhaps she feels guilt for allowing her "killed boy" to leave Chicago for Mississippi, a location that Mamie Till knew to be a dangerous place for African American males. In these ten short lines, the reader is presented with a tragic portrait of a grieving mother, what Davidson calls "a snapshot," "reinforced by color contrasts of 'red room,' 'black coffee,' 'windy grays,' and 'red prairie'" (65). Whereas the poem focusing on Carolyn Bryant lacked a meaningful ending, Mamie Till's narrative presents the reader with nothing but an ending, which brings forth what was, for this reader, a revelation about these poems. It is as if, though Mamie Till has been robbed of a voice to this point, Brooks gives Emmett Till's mother the last word— even if it is nothing but a brief statement of sorrow and remorse.

History, it seems, has also given Mamie Till the last word. Many accounts of the story— including the Wikipedia article on Mamie Till— simply say that Emmett Till was killed for having wolf-whistled at a white woman, failing to identify Carolyn Bryant by name. Carolyn Bryant has become a recluse, living with her son in Greenville, Mississippi, in a house with several signs warning that uninvited visitors will be prosecuted. Though she divorced Roy Bryant in 1979, she reportedly refuses all requests for interviews. She refused even to answer the door when Ed Bradley (from *60 Minutes*) came calling in 2004 (Leung).

The two poems may profitably be seen as one rhetorical unit—or even as one poem, as critic Michael Davidson suggests (65)—but Vivian May argues that Brooks's decision to create two distinct and separate poems is effective. May posits:

> By placing these different points of view and settings side by side, but not collapsing the two poems into one, Brooks offers a complex portrait of the interplay of race, gender, and region on one's person and one's life circumstance. She also deconstructs overly simplistic oppositions between black and white, North and South, and self and other. (99)

In fact, Brooks succeeds in simultaneously creating a single poem and two distinct poems, giving the reader two separate poems that must be read together. Additionally, the longer poem ends with the words "The last quatrain"; this stanza has three lines, not four. The shorter poem begins with the words "after the murder, after the burial"; the lower-case letter that starts the poem seems to encourage the reader to sense that he or she has burst in upon Emmett's mother in her grief. Whereas we intruded willingly into the mind of Carolyn Bryant, we are unwilling—and unable—to do so with Mamie Till. D. H. Melhem summarizes the interplay between the poems, writing, "In a kind of dialectic, the white woman comes to mourn and reject a false romantic posture, while the black mother, mourning her lost son, is immortalized with him . . ." (107). This dialectic possesses a deeper significance as well; in a deft rhetorical move, Brooks allows Mamie Till to interrupt the narrative of Carolyn Bryant. This interruption is permanent, giving Mamie Till—and thus also, by extension, Emmett—the last word, however brief.

Is giving Mamie and Emmett Till the last word enough? Clearly not. These poems will not bring justice to the men who lynched Emmett Till, nor will they erase the tragedy of his murder. However, this lack of healing may be the very point. The wound *must* remain fresh, lest such events occur again. Gwendolyn Brooks's Emmett Till poems continuously inscribe the trauma upon our cultural conscience. If these poems present subsequent generations the opportunity to learn about the story of Emmett Till, then perhaps they mean quite a lot.

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THE HEARTLAND OF SUSAN GLASPELL'S PLAYS

DAVID RADAVICH

Susan Glaspell was one of several talented female playwrights from the Midwest who remade American theatre during the first decades of the twentieth century. Although the pioneering dramatic works of Rachel Crothers, Alice Gerstenberg, Zona Gale, and Zoë Akins have received increased scholarly attention in recent years, those of Susan Glaspell have generated far more critical study. Both Crothers and Akins have suffered undeservedly from their strong association with Broadway, whose ephemeral nature, especially for comedies, rewards timeliness that sometimes militates against canonicity. The intense scholarly interest in Glaspell, however, has almost entirely neglected her regional heritage.

Susan Glaspell has been more fortunate in her academic reception for several key reasons. Her name gained wider resonance through her association with the Provincetown Players during the period in which Eugene O'Neill became acknowledged as the first great American playwright. She both acted and wrote for this troupe, with support from O'Neill and her husband, George Cram Cook. Her writing for the Provincetown received considerable attention, both at the time and subsequently, given the foundational dynamic at work. The intertextualities of Glaspell's plays with those of O'Neill have been extensively documented by Marcia Noe and others ("Intertextuality").

Another fortunate development for appreciation of Glaspell came during the late 1960s and 1970s, when, as a result of the women's movement and a social climate focusing on civil rights and diversity, compilers of college textbooks began including *Trifles* in their anthologies as a play by a representative female playwright. The jewel-like precision and brevity of this work make it perfect for educational purposes; *Trifles* is easily approached by both teachers and students yet offers sufficient complexity to foster extended classroom discussion and debate. By now a generation of readers has experi-

enced this short play, if nothing else by Susan Glaspell, contributing to her name recognition among important American women playwrights.

Another major boon has been her celebration by modernist scholars. This group of researchers has found more to like in *The Outside,* a resolutely feminist expressionist play more anguished than the understated *Trifles.* An even greater modernist favorite has been *The Verge,* yet more expressionist than *The Outside.* Although not entirely in command of its own emotional and dramatic resources, *The Verge* nonetheless represents Glaspell's restless experimentalism at its best. These two works resonate with the larger modernist canon in a way that *Trifles* does not, and they have since become solidly established there. In fact, given the relative absence of successful modernist works written for the stage, Glaspell's plays in this vein stand out with particular force and substance.

From the early plays of Mark Twain and William Dean Howells, Midwestern drama has exhibited a combination of features unique to the region. The most successful plays from the heartland have been grounded in domestic realism, which nonetheless spirals at some crucial point into more transcendental territory. Emphasis typically falls on daily human rhythms—cooking, eating, cleaning, working—that become emblematic of a cyclical regional conception of time. The characteristic Midwestern home is deeply rooted in its environment, whether rural or urban, offering security and solace; it is not plagued by the ancestral ghosts of the Northeast or South, nor unsettled by the transiency of the West. Midwestern society is conspicuously egalitarian and skeptical of authority; it also distrusts fast talking and unnecessary ornamentation, preferring reliability and "proof in the pudding." Midwestern language—direct and candid— similarly distrusts ornamentation and sometimes even seems at war with itself in coming to terms with experience, in stark contrast to the fast-talking patterns of the Northeast and the tall-tale traditions of the West.

Within this venerable Midwestern theatrical tradition, which stretches from Twain and Howells through such playwrights as Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, William Inge and on to contemporary figures like August Wilson and David Mamet, Susan Glaspell occupies a central, one might even say quintessential, place. Her settings, characters, and overall mindset embody Midwestern prerogatives at their clearest, surfacing even in plays set in the American Northeast. Yet scholarly studies of Glaspell have tended

to focus on the modernist strain in her work and have almost totally ignored her staunch Midwestern identity, an identity she cherished and celebrated on many occasions.

Among Glaspell scholars, Marcia Noe was the earliest and only investigator of the proud Midwesternness informing the majority of her work. Glaspell's is a regional perspective strongly rooted in natural history and landscape, committed to truth and social justice, and grounded in practicality. Much of this perspective undoubtedly arose from her years working as a reporter for *The Des Moines Daily News* and other Iowa newspapers, during which she covered the Iowa statehouse and, most famously, the trial of Margaret Hossack, the Iowa woman accused of murdering her abusive husband in 1900, that inspired *Trifles.* In order to understand the full range of Glaspell's dramatic achievement, one needs to examine the common Midwestern features lurking in almost all her plays, including those set in the Northeast.

Glaspell's first book-length literary efforts were two novels, *The Glory of the Conquered* (1909) and *The Visioning* (1911). In 1913, she married George Cram Cook; they settled in Greenwich Village and Provincetown (Bigsby 32). In these locations she began her dramatic career in 1914 with the light-hearted *Suppressed Desires*, coauthored with Cook, and followed up with her first solo work, the darkly serious *Trifles,* in 1916. Foremost among these works, *Trifles* has long since been recognized as a tight-knit, beautifully nuanced jewel of dramatic construction. Action takes place on a lonely farm in western Iowa. Three men—a county attorney, a sheriff, and a neighboring farmer—enter with two of their wives to investigate the mysterious strangling of John Wright. While the men arrive and depart as a kind of gendered chorus, serious in intent yet mocking what they see as female preoccupation with "trifles," the women accidentally discover both evidence and motive for the crime in the "trifles" that the men deride.

The dramatic conflict unfolds on at least two main levels. Early on, the county attorney becomes convinced that "there was nothing important here—nothing that would point to any motive" (8). From the evidence of dirty towels, he deduces Mrs. Wright's faulty housework as the cause. Mrs. Hale, wife of the neighboring farmer and acutely aware of male criticism, stiffly defends her: "It never seemed a very cheerful place" (11). This dramatic tension between genders serves as a frame within which the two women debate the causes of

the crime and guilt of Mrs. Wright, who, like the other married women, is never referred to by first name except in retrospect to recall her maiden liveliness. The evidence uncovered by the female "investigation"—dirty pans, unbaked bread, jagged quilting—unfolds the dramatic circumstances that parenthesize the murder.

After the women discover the bird cage with its wrenched-open door, they come upon the canary with its twisted neck, which functions metonymically for the strangling of John Wright himself. And the canary immediately becomes symbolic through linkage with Mrs. Wright's choral singing in earlier years. She was afraid of cats, so Mrs. Hale's later lie to the men, "We think the—cat got it," takes on added resonance (24). The canary's death also serves as a concrete reminder of Mrs. Wright's inner transformation: "How—she—did—change" (22). Mrs. Hale has seemed more sympathetic to the widow throughout, but in this section Mrs. Peters moves from her earlier conviction, "the law is the law," to "I know what stillness is" after contemplating the death of her baby on the lonely Dakota frontier (16, 27).

Trifles enacts a sophisticated discussion of crime and guilt. Not only murder is anatomized but also John Wright's killing of the gaiety and beauty of his young bride through hardness, "like a raw wind that gets to the bone" (22). On yet another level, Mrs. Hale regards her fear of visiting Mrs. Wright in her gloomy house as deeply regretful: "That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?" (27). By the end, Mrs. Peters feels nervous about being too closely identified with the law through her husband, the sheriff, and Mrs. Hale hides from the men the box containing the dead canary.

As C.W.E. Bigsby points out, *Trifles* is not a thoroughgoing feminist play; the women never directly confront male hegemony (11). Nevertheless, the women display a far more sophisticated understanding of crime, guilt, and appropriate punishment; their context is much broader than the legal, encompassing both moral and social trespass. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale are effectively silenced by the men, even as audience members witness the women's unplanned investigation and sorting through of evidence. The county attorney's claim at the end ("it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it") rings altogether hollow, especially given the shallow laughter of the men, who remain, as at the beginning, oblivious of the potentially significant details of human life (28). The revelatory nuances of interior experience remain beyond them.

Despite its grounding in stark realism, *Trifles* is a fundamentally lyric play relying on poetic refrain and rich symbolism. *The Outside* (1917) can be regarded as a companion piece in the same darkly poetic vein, although it takes place not in the Midwest but "near the tip of Cape Cod" (99). The men who come to the former life-saving station on the Outside trying to revive an unknown young drowned man criticize the women at the scene (Mrs. Patrick and Allie Mayo) and believe they're both crazy (101). In this setting, Glaspell allows Mrs. Patrick to say things that the off-stage Mrs. Wright in *Trifles* might have said: "Everything that can hurt me I want buried—buried deep . . . . What would there be for me but the Outside?" (115). The Outside, iconic symbol of the play, represents "this outer shore where men can't live" (113).

Unlike *Trifles, The Outside* is not forensic but instead seems like an intense, almost expressionist cry of anguish. The women are both outsiders—stunted, numb, almost unable to speak in the pain of their losses. The male life savers are as matter-of-fact as the men in *Trifles* but not as blind. The symbolic forces in this play—land, sea, and death—recall John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, with its female keening over the procession of dead sailors brought in on stretchers. Glaspell's *The Outside* has a similar tone and makes use of the same basic elements in what probably serves as direct homage, yet the women are wilder and more existentially disenfranchised, a further elaboration on themes initiated in *Trifles.*

The lighter one-acts in *Plays* feature sidelong yet interesting glances at the Midwest. *Suppressed Desires* offers delightful satire on Freudianism. When Henrietta tells her husband, "The trouble is not with your stomach but in your subconscious mind," Steve responds, "I'm suffering from a suppressed desire for a little peace" (234-5). Of course the conflict turns on the interpretations of dreams. Mabel, Henrietta's sister, adds a nice Midwestern touch: "I don't believe we have them [suppressed desires] in Chicago" (245). In the end Steve apologizes "about [his] subconscious mind" and Henrietta gives up psychoanalysis (261). *Tickless Time* (1918), another play Glaspell co-authored with Cook, anatomizes contemporary slavery to mechanized time divorced from the Midwestern rhythms of nature. After Ian erects his "natural" sundial and all the alarm clocks, cuckoos, and watches have been buried, pressures of neighbors, train schedules, and cooking force him to unbury "the standardized mind" (284).

From the Midwestern perspective, Glaspell's 1917 one-act comedies, *The People* and *Close the Book*, stand out. Like the later *Front Page* (1928) of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, *The People* is set in a newspaper office. Due to financial pressures, the editor, Ed, wants to close the paper. When Sara argues that their newspaper "expresses the people," Ed counters that the people "don't want to be expressed" (48). But when readers and fans "from the South and the East and the West" arrive to lobby for a "Journal of the Social Revolution" (57), the Woman from Idaho, played in the premiere by Susan Glaspell, offers a rural panorama: "A plain, dark trees off at the edge, against the trees a little house and a big barn. A flat piece of land fenced in. Stubble, furrows" (57). This play enforces the strengths and equality of women and articulates Glaspell's vision of the high calling of journalism: "To tell the truth that opens from our lives as water spread from the rocks" (58). Faced with the Midwestern invocation of Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," Ed decides, "This paper can't stop!" (58).

Close the Book takes place "in the library of middle-western people" in a university town (63). The play satirizes both university politics and America's shaky commitment to free speech. Peyton, an English teacher, has been denounced in the local press as an "Untrue American" (70). His fiancée, Jhansi, proclaims herself a gypsy, and both Peyton and Jhansi are proud of their roles as outsiders and provocateurs. But the family, descended from Revolutionary War heroes, is distressed that "there are too *many* ideas" in university circles (71). However, it turns out that the "Iowa descendants of New England families" are not as heroic as supposed, and Jhansi is not a "child of the gypsies . . . a wanderer . . . an outlaw!" but the daughter of a Baptist couple who named her after a town in India (83, 84). When various ancestors are exposed as a "grave robber" and a man who was "convicted of selling whiskey and firearms to the Indians," Grandmother offers the last words: "Close that book!" (92, 94, 96). In this play, Glaspell mocks social pretension and satirizes academic politics while underscoring a staunch commitment to free speech and truth-telling; this play enacts a lesson still chillingly relevant.

The path-breaking year of 1921 which saw *Miss Lulu Bett* win the third Pulitzer Prize for drama also saw two major plays of Susan Glaspell produced by the Provincetown Players. *The Verge* and *Inheritors* represent Glaspell's fullest exploration of the two poles of her genius. *The Verge*, which Ozieblo labels "Glaspell's most

provocative play," draws on elements from both *Trifles* and *The Outside*, but is even more expressionistic than the latter play, developed into a full-length excogitation on relationship and madness (70). The setting is duple: Acts I and III take place in a greenhouse laboratory where the central character, Claire, "pollenizes," "trying to create Reminiscence," a rare, clearly symbolic flower (64). Claire hides out in this greenhouse with no heat on a snowy winter morning and resists letting anyone enter: "I will not have you in my place!" (61). The setting of Act II is a jagged, incomplete tower: "the whole structure is as if given a twist by some terrific force—like something wrong" (78). This twisting is again symbolic, a concrete representation of Claire's apparent madness and also a foreshadowing of her lover's eventual demise.

Claire is strongly attached to her rare plants—including one called, emblematically, Breath of Life—so much so that she neglects, even acts violent toward, her only daughter, Elizabeth. Her friends all see evidence of mental sickness and urge her to quit "the sober business of growing plants" (82). But Claire argues that "madness . . . is the only chance for sanity" (82). From her perspective, as with plants, one needs to break life "into crazy things— into lesser things, and from the pieces—may come one sliver of life with vitality to find the future" (70). Yet the extent to which Claire really is insane remains unclear: at the end of Act II she threatens suicide, but in Act III claims she was only performing for the visiting nerve specialist (94).

The central relationship of the play involves Claire's extra-marital attachment to Tom; their intense dialogue forms the heart of the emotional struggle between human connectedness and escape. Tom links her to the flowers she tends: "You rare thing untouched . . . by me—lover of your apartness" (89). The pair also reiterate the fundamental dialectic of *The Outside*:

> TOM: Reach your country through the plants' country?
> CLAIRE: My country? You mean—Outside?
> TOM: No . . . . Your country is the inside, Claire. The innermost. You are disturbed because you lie too close upon the heart of life. (85)

In the end, however, Claire strangles Tom in a transfiguration of the two strangling deaths in *Trifles*. She cannot bear his impending departure and regards killing him as "MY—gift" (100). Like the

young Minnie Foster who used to sing in the choir in *Trifles,* Claire sings "Nearer My God to Thee" as the play ends.

The Verge stands as a unique work in the American theatrical canon at the most experimental extreme of Glaspell's genius. This most expressionist of her plays takes the bleak poetry of *The Outside* one step further into jagged, emblematic settings that seek to contain impossible emotional strivings and prevent a descent into madness or suicide. *The Verge* does not attempt to reconcile all that it unleashes but instead leaves us with haunting questions about life and death, sanity and madness, without satisfying answers. As in most of her work, a strong, artistically gifted woman both draws and repels all those around her. This work remains a fascinating, lyrical study of unbearable longing and anguish, what Ozieblo calls "Glaspell's most ambitious play [that] best exemplifies the degree to which the Provincetown Players had assimilated the trends of European theater" ("Suppression" 116).

Unlike the uncompromising experimental vision of *The Verge, Inheritors* returns to Midwestern realism. This is a historical drama that begins on July 4, 1879, and then leaps forty years forward in the remaining acts. The opening conflict takes place in the context of pioneer settlement of an area along the Mississippi River. Silas Morton, familiar with Black Hawk and the Native American heritage that even by 1879 had been pretty much expunged, wants to preserve his hill from developers by founding a college that will contribute to social good and partially redeem the cultural debt. Silas maintains that "Our honesty with the Indians was little to brag on" (111). Black Hawk looked to him "Noble. Noble like the forests— and the Mississippi—and the stars" (111). Acts II and III occur forty years later at the college Silas founded, now beset by the same financial pressures that he faced with the developers in 1879.

The scenes occurring in 1920 focus on the contemporary struggle between wanting to suppress dissent for financial gain versus speaking one's ideals truthfully whatever the cost. Morton College now pursues state funding, while Senator Lewis sees dangerous elements on campus undermining what he sees as "Americanism," troublesome faculty and students he wants silenced or expelled (119). This play offers a more substantive and serious examination of the issues presented earlier in *Close the Book,* and the central question is whether Americans still value free speech and are willing to fight and die for it. When Madeline, granddaughter of the founder, defends the

rights of two Hindu students to protest against British occupation of India using ideas espoused by Abraham Lincoln, the conflict comes to a head. Influential relatives try to convince Madeline to renounce her convictions, but she prefers to go to jail.

One of the most striking visual elements in *Inheritors* is Madeline's construction of an imaginary jail cell in her home: "In the moment she stands there, she is in that cell; she is all the people who are in those cells," including Fred Jordan, arrested for civil disobedience against the Great War (144). After a beautifully lucid and stirring debate over social values that go to the heart of the American experiment in democracy, Madeline willingly accepts the danger of "becoming alien to society," just as her mother and other forebears did. The narrow-minded characters in this play occasionally seem stereotypical or unsympathetic, but *Inheritors* remains one of our best historical dramas and once again articulates Glaspell's unwavering commitment to civil rights and free speech. Like the free speech issues in *Close the Book,* the central conflict—between public relations cover-up for financial gain versus free speech that dares to voice unpopular truths—is more relevant now than at any time since the McCarthy Era.

In *Chains of Dew* (1922), regionalism once again plays a major role. In fact, this sparkling comedy enacts an essential conflict between the Middle West, "the heart . . . [and] backbone of this nation" (Ben-Zvi and Gainor 141), and New York, "the brain" (153). Act I takes places in the office of the Birth Control League in New York, focusing on Nora's crusade to enlighten the public about family planning. Seymore Standish, a poet from the Midwest who is also a bank director and member of the vestry of his church, arrives as an alien figure. Despite his apparently contradictory obligations, Seymore claims that the world will be set free "by people who've grown good and sore in the Middle West . . . You see—having lived in the Middle West, I want everyone to be free" (138). This is the strongest linkage in Glaspell's oeuvre between the American heartland and the struggle for freedom and equal rights.

Tables are turned, however, in acts II and III as Nora, the ardent birth control advocate with bobbed hair, visits Seymore and his wife and mother in Bluff City, "a thinly disguised version of Davenport, Iowa" (126). Seymore's bourgeois world turns chaotic as Nora and two male friends from New York encourage Seymore's wife to found a Midwestern branch of the Birth Control League in their home. In

the end, Seymore cannot reconcile the bohemian and conventional poles of his personality, and the author cannot bring a satisfactory denouement to a conflict of regions that turns on such emblematic actions as bobbing of hair, making life-like dolls, and writing contemporary poems. If the prerogatives of the Northeast and Midwest cannot finally be reconciled, *Chains of Dew* nonetheless offers crisp dialogue in the manner of Rachel Crothers and reveals Glaspell wrestling with her own regional identifications.

Alison's House (1930), the last play published during Glaspell's lifetime, represents in many respects the culmination of her career, tying together disparate themes into a more popular format. As in *Trifles,* the plot centers on a mysterious yet powerful female who never appears but is evoked through narratives constructed by others. Alison Stanhope, like Mrs. Wright and Bernice, has suffered a debilitating romantic loss. But in this final play, the absent woman communicates her painful experience through the compelling words of her poems. Like Madeline in *Inheritors,* Alison stands as a rebel on the edge of society, though in this case her rebellion is rendered on paper and revealed only long after she is dead. And only then through the active intervention of Elsa and other young characters can her truth-telling be rescued from the ashes. In *Alison's House*, Glaspell has embedded the fight for free speech we saw in *The People, Close the Book,* and *Inheritors* not only in her own play, but in the very body of work Alison left behind.

Once again, Glaspell has set her play on the edge of the Mississippi River where she grew up, and, as in *Close the Book* and *Inheritors,* family and cultural history become major themes. The Stanhope family home on the banks of the Mississippi in Iowa, long occupied by Alison and her sister Agatha, is in the process of being broken up and sold in a manner similar to Chekhov's cherry orchard (3, 4). Yet Alison "was at home in the universe" and "knows everything" (24, 36). Agatha, distraught at the prospect of being forced out of a home she can no longer keep up, tries unsuccessfully to set fire to it. As she dies at the end of Act II, Agatha hands niece Elsa the poems of Alison's she was planning to burn; the Stanhope patriarch fears for the family's reputation, much as does Uncle George in *Close the Book*: "I cannot bear—your youth" (150). However, in the final moments, Elsa, the character who "harmed all of us" by running off with a married man, receives Alison's suppressed poems as a gift "from her century to yours" (71, 154).

Glaspell set *Alison's House* on December 31, 1899, at the turn of a new century when women would assert their own rights. Whereas the women in *Trifles* and *The Outside* cannot adequately articulate their experience, Alison and her alter ego Elsa can begin to communicate what has been suppressed. Bigsby dismisses *Alison's House* as "not a good play," preferring the craggy experimentation of *The Verge* and the historical sweep of *Inheritors* (27). Yet Gerhard Bach believes *Alison's House* "deserves critical revision, since it expresses Glaspell's cultural and artistic dilemma most immediately . . . this play is the summary statement of the author's affinity and anguish as a female artist in America with the fate of the female artist in the modern age" (247).

While *The Verge* and *Inheritors* certainly reward study and deserve to be performed, *Alison's House* is a play with broader appeal that could and did succeed on Broadway. Jackie Czerepinski points out that "neither *Bernice* nor *Alison's House* enjoys the high reputation of *Trifles,* but the thread that connects them—the power arising from absence or silence—is a thread running through all of Glaspell's work" (153). Despite an overly sentimental ending and a plot that seems sometimes too crafted, Glaspell's final drama effectively welds together the different threads of her feminism and commitment to truth-telling and free speech. Her mastery of emotional nuance, characterization, and juxtaposition of ideas finds a congenial form in *Alison's House* that continues to engage audiences.

The contributions to American theatre made by Susan Glaspell are surprisingly wide-ranging and substantive. Makowsky calls her Provincetown plays "modernism at its best: fresh, innovative, inclusive, and challenging" (51). The taut realism of *Trifles* contrasts the intense, searching lyricism of *The Outside* and *The Verge*. The lighthearted satire of *Suppressed Desires* and *Tickless Time* represents another face than that which we see in Glaspell's advocacy of civil rights in *The People, Close the Book*, and *Inheritors. Alison's House* represents a fusion of elements from most of the previous plays in a form suitable for popular performance. Her audacious, high-minded commitment to both the resources of theatrical art and the social causes of free speech and civil rights still has much to offer contemporary audiences.

Yet despite general acknowledgment that Susan Glaspell is one of the foremost dramatists of her period, "the undisputed mother of American drama," critical attention has focused almost exclusively

on feminist issues on the one hand and on Glaspell's pioneering theatrical modernism on the other, particularly in *The Verge* (qtd. Ben-Zvi 1). Gerhard Bach refers to her in one essay as a "Provincetown Playwright," as if she had no real connection to her upbringing in Iowa or life-long commitment to Midwestern experience. Some scholars, like Bigsby, seem almost embarrassed by the rural prerogatives of *Trifles*. The issues raised in *The People* and *Close the Book* have received almost no attention, while *Inheritors* and other plays are rendered as studies of female agency deracinated from any regional context.

Yet these Midwestern settings, characters, and assumptions represent an essential and enduring core of Glaspell's legacy; her achievement cannot be properly evaluated without addressing them. Marcia Noe reminded us as early as 1977 of the author's abiding attachment to her native region: "almost everything I write has its roots in the Midwest; I suppose because my own are there" (qtd. in "Susan Glaspell's Analysis of the Midwestern Character" 5). Moreover, Noe goes on to emphasize Glaspell's commitment to her home region:

> [A]s director of the Midwest Play Bureau [for the Federal Theater Project], Susan Glaspell's job was to collect manuscripts and publish plays that dealt with midwestern themes, were of special interest to midwestern audiences, and were written by midwestern playwrights. She was also responsible for selecting scripts, assisting the authors in developing them, and recommending the best scripts for production. (Noe, "Midwestern Character," 4)

Noe sees a common link between the Midwestern and New England plays in that their settings communicate "the effect of isolation upon the human spirit" and "the importance of the human community for the individual" ("Region as Metaphor" 79).

I would go further: the very experimentation of *The Outside* and *The Verge*, independent of setting, has its genesis in uncompromising Midwestern themes and values. Among these values are a staunch commitment to civil and gender rights—in the early decades of the twentieth century, the Midwest became a major center of social activism for social equality—and a penchant for no-nonsense, unadorned, even ruthless truth-telling. Like many Midwestern plays by other writers, *The Outside* and *The Verge* are deeply rooted in their landscapes. And the social structures of these plays are not hierarchical or hierarchical, as in most plays located in New England, but egalitarian and anchored resolutely in the cycles of the present.

The heartland of Susan Glaspell, understood as both regional identification and as psychic terrain of individual desire, can only be fully understood through the playwright's deep connection to the American Midwest. As a region, the Midwest is less well known than other areas of the country; its characteristic predisposition toward truth-telling and plain speaking, equality and civil rights, and strong rootedness in the immediacy of the surrounding environment is not widely recognized. But throughout her life, Susan Glaspell celebrated and lived out the cultural values of her upbringing, a culture that informs virtually all her plays, even those set in the modernist terrain of her most experimental theatre.

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"IT MIGHT BE SOMETHING AWFUL": THE MOVEMENT OF SEX IN THE PLAYS OF WILLIAM INGE

MICHAEL SCHWARTZ

In the more than fifty years since William Inge's four major plays hit Broadway, scholars have looked at the sexual element of the plays with some irony. Albert Wertheim, in "Dorothy's Friend in Kansas: The Gay Inflections of William Inge," regroups and refigures Inge's couples and coupling from a "queer" perspective, as characters, and often even their names, reveal gay codes.[1] Bruce McConachie, placing *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* in the context of Cold War containment in his work *American Theatre in the Culture of the Cold War,* points out the quaintness of Inge's once up-to-the-minute Freudian imagery: "Most of Inge's contemporary spectators during the mid-1950s would likely have agreed that his construction of 'Freudian' characters and situations was subtle and believable. It is only in retrospect that the allegorical strings are apparent" (153). Indeed, swords, javelins, and trains going through tunnels do run rampant in Inge's Midwest. This essay, in some contrast, seeks to take the character of sex in Inge's landscape on its own terms—a figure always on the move, always disruptive, usually destructive, and occasionally curative. When critics refer to Inge's work as "soap opera," whatever disparagement the term implies, there is also an acknowledgement of the movement of sex.[2] Despite the fact that sex "might be something awful," to quote the young protagonist of *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, it is this vibrant character of sex that gives Inge's plays their continued liveliness.

What Inge characters share are confrontations with Bacchus (referenced specifically in his stage directions for *Come Back, Little Sheba*) and the ever-present attendant Pan, complete with accompanying "pan-ic." When R. Baird Shuman put together his scholarly overview of Inge in 1965, he sympathetically and optimistically noted that Inge was "back in New York working on a new play, and

he is likely to remain a force in American theatre for years to come" (8). While Inge's years of artistic success were unfortunately behind him by that time, an examination of his four major plays provides insights into the maturation of the American stage and how it handles that most personal and embarrassing of human relations. As Robert Brustein caustically observed in his evisceration of the Inge oeuvre, "Inge . . . seems to have restored to Midwesterners their privilege to be as traumatized by life as any other Americans represented on Broadway" (84). Brustein's negativity aside, the statement in fact crystallizes one of Inge's key virtues as a writer—his "all-American" depiction of traumatic sex. This virtue makes itself apparent throughout Inge's major plays.

Sex has already brought about its first major crisis before Inge's initial successful play, *Come Back, Little Sheba*, begins.[3] Doc and Lola "had" to get married, and even though the baby died in childbirth, the two are committed to a lifeless marriage where sex is repressed. Lola finds solace in mildly salacious radio programming and sneaking peeks at comely young boarder Marie and her boyfriend Turk "doing some tall spooning" (*Sheba* 10).[4] It is track and field star Turk who proudly shows Lola his javelin pose (a broom stands in for the real thing), much to Lola's delight—perhaps one of Inge's less subtle allegorical strings.

Doc, in turn, nurtures a (mostly) paternal interest in the boarder, Marie, a picture of the "sweet and innocent" girl that Doc misses from his own life.[5] It is Doc's discovery that Marie is not "sweet and innocent"—his overhearing the post-coital laughter of the sexually aggressive Turk, who laughs, according to Inge's stage directions, "like a sated Bacchus" (44)—that drives him off on a murderous bender, climaxing with Doc's threatening Lola directly with a butcher knife. Doc's attack is partly directed at the now heavy and slovenly Lola—"I oughta hack off all that fat," he says, but he directs his threats to the offstage Marie and Turk as well (57). After hacking Lola, Doc intends to "wait for Marie and chop off those pretty ankles she's always dancing around on . . . then start lookin' for Turk and fix him too" (57). Doc's drunken recital of his dismemberment and castration fantasies illustrates his attempts to confront the demon he truly seeks to destroy—sex. Not insignificantly, the force of Doc's destructive tirade caused injury for the actor playing him (character actor Sidney Blackmer) more than once (Shuman 38).

After Doc dries out, he returns in the play's final scene—one of tearful, and, for many, dramatically satisfying reconciliations, that also introduces another of Inge's major themes regarding sex—resignation in its aftermath. The storm that sex has wrought has blown over, and Little Sheba, the titular lost dog, is never coming back.

Interestingly, while the daily reviewers acknowledged the importance of sex in their critiques, a certain degree of misogyny crept into their assessment of the onstage action. They placed a great deal of the responsibility, or outright blame, on the "fast and loose" behavior of Marie in driving Doc to his blow-up. For example, William Hawkins in the New York *World-Telegram* noted: "When Doc finds her sleeping with one fellow, engaged to another, all his bitterness about his own life comes to the surface" (*Critics' Reviews* 1950:349). John Chapman, writing for the *Daily News*, was firmly on the side of Doc as a disappointed paternal figure: "The girl roomer whom he has come to regard as his lost daughter is a sweet little thing—but loose" (348). Howard Barnes of the *New York Herald Tribune* was rather more blunt; not only is Marie "a wench who takes on all comers," but even the good-natured Lola is an "aging slut" (350). By locating the character of sex solely in the admittedly questionable actions of Marie, the daily reviewers diminished the pervasive power sex holds for all the main characters—the key trait that Inge's major plays share. It was Brooks Atkinson of the *New York Times* who seemed to sense this unarticulated onstage element: "There must be more to the nightmare of Doc and his wife than Mr. Inge has reported" (348). That something "more" would take center stage in Inge's next Broadway effort—a significant success in which the presence of sex was so manifest that audiences and daily critics could hardly fail to miss it.

In his introduction to *Four Plays*, Inge wrote that Joshua Logan, the director of *Picnic,* "gave it [the play] lovely picturesqueness . . . and feeling of size" (Inge xii).[6] This feeling of size seems appropriate as Inge places his Bacchus figure center stage in the character of Hal Carter—the match that drops on the powderkeg of repressed sex in Inge's "small Kansas town." As Brooks Atkinson's first-night review aptly describes, "Forces get loose that no one will ever again get under control" (*Critics' Reviews* 1953: 348).[7]

If Hal is indeed a Bacchus, he is a Bacchus who cannot control his own powers. Besides the story of Hal's misadventures on the road with which he regales good boy Alan Seymour, including getting

robbed by lusty, weed-smoking girls who "musta thought [he] was Superman" (*Picnic* 93), there's the casual showing off of his body (and sexuality) that literally arouses the townsfolk. Hal as Bacchus brings many of the main characters together for homo and heterosexual dancing in front of Mrs. Owens's house, where the sexuality cannot be contained. The failure of containment is literally embodied by Millie vomiting after too much whiskey, taken surreptitiously as Madge joins Hal (formerly Millie's date) in a mating dance ritual. Shuman astutely sums up Hal's place in the dance—"Hal . . . is, like the May Pole, a phallic representation about which a bevy of confused, dissatisfied, and frustrated women dance" (Shuman 48).

The sex dance has its consequences. As schoolteacher Rosemary discovers she's too old to seduce Hal—too old for bacchanalia or Dionysian ritual—she desperately seeks, and at last attains, marriage with boyfriend Howard. Madge is lost to Alan for good, "ruined" by Hal, and seemingly destined to follow Hal to Tulsa, as Hal hops the same train that always gave Madge "a little feeling of excitement" every time she heard it. Millie vows never to fall in love again just like a youngster swears off alcohol after too much drinking—her determination to go live in New York and write novels that shock people suggests that Hal has driven her girlish desires back underground for good. And yet, amidst the storm and its aftermath, Inge sets up sex as a force for goodness and growth as well—Mrs. Potts remembers that she's a woman, and that's a good thing, she reminds despondent mother Flo and us.[8] Once again, Brustein in his withering sarcasm, actually sums up the play quite accurately: "a satyr play glorifying the phallic male" (Brustein 85). I would submit that Brustein had an uncanny ability to enumerate Inge's virtues and refer to them as faults.

In *Bus Stop*, sex gets full play in forms casual, constructive, and destructive as Inge gathers together a disparate group of people into a small Kansas bus stop to wait out an early March snowstorm. Bus driver Carl and restaurant owner Grace find the time for an offstage quickie while the main action takes place, and while they fail miserably to keep this a secret (Sheriff Will finds Carl's overshoes outside Grace's door), the other characters and Inge seem to look tolerantly on the matter: Grace's husband has deserted her long before; Carl's marital status remains somewhat ambiguous. As Grace offers by way of explanation and semi-apology, " . . . every once in a while I gotta have me a man, just to keep m'self from gettin' grouchy" (*Bus Stop*

218). In this particular segment of the play, sex acts as a necessary if somewhat amoral curative.

For Bo and Cherie, or as Bo refers to her with a big nudge in the ribs from Inge, "Cherry," the sexual dance proves somewhat more complicated, although the complications seem to lead to the healthiest and potentially longest-lasting relationship the play offers. Bo's wildness and bullying stem from his essential innocence, which gives him the worldview that sex (or getting "familiar") with a woman is tantamount to love and marriage. Cherry, while more sexually experienced, seems to share a fundamental innocence about love and sex herself—she is touched that Bo has truly fallen in love with her and that it was she who "deflowered" him.[9] Their coupling at the play's end seems to constitute a happy ending, but the happiness is not entirely inclusive—Bo's best buddy, Virgil, is literally and figuratively left out in the cold (*Bus Stop* 219). *Bus Stop*'s other couple consists of high school girl-waitress Elma Duckworth and the dissolute Dr. Lyman, the professor who's gotten in trouble for "loitering" around schools and "getting involved" with young girls. Inge is understandably hardest on Lyman of all his characters, commenting on his "depravity" in his introductory notes to *Four Plays* (Inge x); Inge nevertheless gives Dr. Lyman some amusing commentary on teaching and higher education that would come naturally to a playwright who also taught (understandably, general wisdom points to Lyman as a heterosexual stand-in for the closeted, and perhaps in his own eyes, "depraved" Inge).[10] But even Lyman's potentially appalling machinations come to nothing—he drops the idea of meeting Elma in Topeka, and leaves having done the right thing. Lyman functions as a charming and foolish roué who bestows womanliness on Elma without the illegal and immoral sexual act itself. Nor is Lyman's one act of generosity lost on Elma: "Gee!" she responds after Grace has schooled her with regard to his carnal intentions, and Inge's stage directions note that Elma is "[v]ery moved" (*Bus Stop* 218). For Elma, unconsummated sex acts as the gift of maturity, and we witness another variation on the mercurial, yet sometimes kindly character of sex.

While most of the critics did not, in this case, write explicitly about sex (except for noting Grace and Carl's offstage recreation), Robert Coleman, writing for the *Daily Mirror*, evoked *The Canterbury Tales* (to which Dr. Lyman in the play makes a brief reference) as well as Boccaccio's *Decameron* in his positive review

(*Theatre Critics* 1955: 346). By now, Inge was something of a "can't-miss" phenomenon, with three successful plays, and, with the reworking of *Bus Stop* into one of Marilyn Monroe's most popular vehicles, three successful film adaptations of his plays emblazoning his name across the country. Inge's hot streak on Broadway would extend to one more play.[11]

Finally, with *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, Inge is, in his words, "sure enough in [his] craft" to present a final parable on the power of sex and its healthy necessity in marriage (Inge x). The two sexually wayward husbands presented in the play have opposite issues. Rubin, the "still vigorous" but frustrated cowboy, has extra-marital affairs to assert his independence and his manhood—ironically, by avoiding the primary responsibility of manhood, to be a good father to Reenie and Sonny and husband to Cora. One of the play's major conflicts centers on Cora's efforts to contain Rubin's vigor—that is, his sex drive—within socially and domestically acceptable channels ("pleasuring" the wife, as Rubin himself puts it). In contrast, Morris, the depressed dentist, hasn't touched his wife Lottie (Cora's sister) in over three years—"something inside him just got up and went for a walk, and never came back," Lottie explains, and again we can appreciate the personification of sex as an independent figure who comes and goes, even for a long walk (*Dark* 278).

Inge also reintroduces the outside sexual, or Bacchanalian, figure, although, as Bruce McConachie points out, the original Broadway audience might have missed the point due to the discrepancy between Inge's description and director Elia Kazan's casting. Kazan cast the decidedly boy-next-door type Timmy Everett rather than the dark Jewish outsider Inge called for (McConachie 151). The outsider who stirs the pot of sexuality this time is Sammy Goldenbaum, "with lustrous black hair, black eyes, and a captivating smile . . . . He could be a Persian prince, strayed from his native kingdom" (*Dark* 262). And Inge gives Sammy the function of bestower of sex in a number of key ways—he gives Sonny his decorative military sword, with which the boy immediately lunges and pretends to impale himself. ("What do you want a sword for, Sonny?" Sammy asks. "To *show* people," Sonny responds [*Dark* 267].) Sammy is also responsible for rousing Reenie's femininity and, more importantly, her vanity that leads to a ruse that proves fatal to Sammy. Because no other boy cuts in on Sammy's dancing with Reenie, Reenie pairs

Sammy with the daughter of the anti-Semitic hostess, whose insult drives the suicidal Sammy to his final act of self-destruction.[12]

Sammy, much like Hal, strives for and fails to achieve acceptance, but unlike Hal, cannot live as the perpetual outsider. And ultimately, Sammy is responsible for giving Cora the key to accept Rubin's sexuality, as Rubin's warm, naked, and aroused form provides the light that replaces the titular dark at the top of the stairs. What might, in Sonny's words, be "something awful," turns into something welcoming—an apt description for sex in Inge's plays.

Critics covering the 1957 performance were once again mostly receptive, with two reviewers (Atkinson and Coleman) going so far as to say that *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* was Inge's best.[13] The daily critics also touched on issues of sex—Frank Aston of the *World Telegram* did so rather gingerly in his assessment of Lottie: "[T]he dentist's wife has a lurking fear of her failure to meet the rudimentary urge of marriage." Watts of the *Post* was more direct: "the seemingly prim wife is in reality highly-sexed, while her sister, who appears so domineering, hearty and earthy, confesses her unhappiness at sexual relations." To examine the daily critics' responses to Inge from 1950-57 is to observe the (slightly) growing maturity of the dramatic press in dealing with the subject of sex. Inge, perhaps because of the "homey" characters he presented, gave the critics some incentive to deal with sex more matter-of-factly. Inge's leading critics toward a greater comfort in discussing sex might well have been a foreshadowing of greater cultural shifts to come. As Jeff Johnson opines with regard to Inge's work: ". . . it may have signaled the beginning of a general tearing of the social fabric of the '50s later ripped away by the counterculture of the '60s" (Johnson 25). While it is necessary not to confuse the timing with causation, it might fairly be noted that Inge's frankness helped, in a modest way, to pave the way for even greater onstage sexual frankness later.

Throughout the major plays of Inge, sex might be likened to the powerful and potentially destructive force that loomed in the public imagination following the end of the World War II—the atomic bomb. The force of sex, Inge argues, can nurture as well as destroy, and Inge's characters are forced to come to terms with the force somehow—by joining in the celebration, hiding, succumbing to self-destruction, containing, and, perhaps for Inge's most well-adjusted characters, making peace with it. Nevertheless, given the hold sex has on Inge and his characters, there is very little in the plays that smacks

of overt vulgarity or graphic sexuality. As Shuman writes, Inge's "repressed characters suffer frustration without profanity, rage without graphic violence, pain without gore. They are obsessed with sex, yet seldom do they take more than a man's shirt off" (275).

Two quotations from critics writing during Inge's peak Broadway period might best sum up Inge's themes and perhaps even provide something of an artistic epitaph for the troubled writer who took his own life in 1973. John McClain, writing for the *New York Journal American* in a qualified positive review of *Picnic* in February of 1953, had this to say by way of summation: it "all add[s] up to little more than the fact that the primal urge is here to stay; there is little we can do about it" (*Critics' Reviews* 1953:348). The second quotation comes from Maurice Zolotow, providing a fitting summation and perhaps a prescient warning: "Prior to the Freudian revolution, men and women discovered sex through love. Nowadays love is discovered through sex. This theme has come to obsess William Inge, and he ought to realize the essential limitations of this theme before it dissipates one of our most promising dramatic talents" (Zolotow 22).

It is perhaps Inge's greatest triumph as well as his greatest limitation that he was our all-American chronicler of sex and its consequences; all his characters deal with the "primal urge," and perhaps Inge was indeed in the end dissipated through writing so thoughtfully and sensitively about this topic through his peak years in the 1950s. It would appear that Inge's instincts turned against him in his later plays as he attempted to be more explicit in his depiction of sexual violence and to examine characters beyond the ones he knew so well in the Midwest, and the story of Inge's growing depression and despairing end has been well documented. For all of Inge's memorable characters and the many fine actors who have brought them to life, perhaps the most lasting presence in Inge's plays isn't one of the cowboys, vagrants, or schoolteachers that audiences could see, but rather the presence of sex, unseen yet pervasive. As for the character of sex itself in Inge's world, the decisions the characters make in its wake are only transitory—for sex, and for Bacchus, there are always trains to catch, mighty swords to impale the unwary, and dances to dance.

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NOTES

[1]For example, in *Bus Stop*, Wertheim finds a telling anagram in the name "Elma" ("male"), along with at least a couple of puns in the name of Dr. Lyman; that is, he's dishonest plus he likes to "lie" with men (Wertheim 208). While Inge's sexuality is not directly the subject of this paper, as Jeff Johnson notes in *William Inge and the Subversion of Gender*, it is important to keep in mind that Inge's particular abilities "are essentially connected to his own crisis as a closeted homosexual living through one of the most virulently anti-gay decades in American history" (31-32).

[2]For example, Johnson notes the accusations by Robert Brustein and Gerald Weales of "soap opera sensibility" in Inge's plays (41).

[3]The name of the lost dog that gives the play its title plays on the audience's familiarity with the once-notorious "Little Sheba" belly dance from the 1893 World's Fair.

[4]References to Inge plays from William Inge, *Four Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

[5]Robert Garland of the New York *Journal American* was the only daily reviewer to note the possibility that Doc's interest in Marie might extend beyond the bounds of propriety: "Marie is also the darling double-crosser of Doc's extra-marital eye." See Garland, "An Acting Triumph for Booth, Blackmer," *Journal American* 16 Feb. 1950.

[6]Inge's kind words for Logan here are significant, as there is considerable evidence that he resented the director's treatment of his play. Ralph F. Voss notes in *A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph*: "Inge never stopped holding Picnic's ending against Logan, even when the play's prodigious success might have fostered a forgive-and-forget atmosphere" (133).

[7]Daily reviewers at the time almost unanimously commented on Hal's "animal vitality" and the central position of sex in the play. William Hawkins in his review for the New York *World Telegram* and *The Sun* wrote that Hal's "animal vitality seriously upsets the entire group." Walter F. Kerr in the *Herald Tribune* noted that Hal enters "exuding the sort of animal vitality calculated to stir a few fires." John Chapman in the *Daily News* described the play as "an absorbing comedy of sex." Only Richard Watts, Jr. in the *Post* held back slightly, admitting that "there is no doubt that all have had their lives changed and their outlook enlarged as the result of his [Hal's] dynamic and invigorating presence." See *New York Theatre Critics' Reviews* 1953 (348-351).

[8]This observation is admittedly truer of the "happy" ending that director Logan, and apparently the cast, insisted on (see Voss, especially pp. 131-136). In Inge's rewrite of *Picnic*, entitled *Summer Brave*, he reinstates the ending where Madge is left behind and resigns herself to the role of the town's easy mark. While Logan and Inge disagreed intensely on which ending was more suited to the play, they both certainly agreed upon the force and power of sex. Inge, in fact, was not entirely alone (although his was a minority opinion) regarding Logan's negative effects on *Picnic*. Harold Clurman, for example, writing for the *Nation*, complained, "It is as if a good Sherwood Anderson novel were skillfully converted into a prurient popular magazine story on its way to screen adaption" (qtd. in Voss 136). Also, Richard Watts, Jr. noted in the New York Post that "Logan's talent for showmanship occasionally interferes with the play's innate honesty" (*Theatre Critics' Reviews* 1953: 349). It is the *Herald-Tribune*'s Walter F. Kerr, however, who makes the most vociferous complaint against Logan: ". . . why he should have been tempted to apply to his firm, staccato and rigidly defined style to the fragile summer-sunset mood of William Inge's 'Picnic' is a mystery to me . . . . Every effect is carefully calculated, planned for the great big boff" (*Critics' Reviews* 1953: 350). One might wonder if Kerr was entirely aware of the connotations of "boff" when he chose that term to describe Logan's penchant for show-stopping direction.

[9]R. Baird Shuman points out the "satirical presentation of conventional morality in reverse" in Bo and Cherie's relationship: "Bo is pressing, with righteous indignation, toward the shotgun wedding which will make him an honest man" (Shuman 59). Jeff Johnson, in his

examination of Inge's "gendermandering" of his major characters (that is, constructing and then subverting gender stereotypes), notes that Bo in this case is "the ingénue" (Johnson 70).

[10]Voss notes that Dr. Lyman "is another Inge teacher-character who represents much of Inge's self-image" (155). Teachers who fit Voss's description make significant appearances in *Picnic* as well as in the one-act "The Strains of Triumph," which gives Voss the subtitle of his study on Inge. Walter Kerr, in his *Herald Tribune* review, felt that Dr. Lyman was "the play's least necessary role" (*Critics' Reviews* 1955: 346), and indeed, the professor is excised from the popular movie version directed by *Picnic* director Joshua Logan.

[11]Inge, of course, would enjoy some success as a screenwriter, most prominently with his Oscar-winning screenplay for *Splendor in the Grass*, in which he makes a brief appearance.

[12]Most of the daily critics reported Sammy's suicide, thus giving away a major and surprising plot point. See *New York Times Critics' Reviews*, edited by Rachel W. Coffin, v. XVIII, no. 27 . New York: Critics Theatre Reviews, 1958.

[13]Brooks Atkinson, "The Theatre: Illuminations by Inge" (New York *Times* 6 Dec. 1957) and Robert Coleman, "'The Dark' Is Inge's Best Play" (New York *Daily Mirror* 6 Dec. 1957).

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MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM'S INTROSPECTIVE AND TEACHERLY NARRATORS IN *A HOME AT THE END OF THE WORLD*

DOMINIC ORDING

This essay examines the narrative strategies in Michael Cunningham's *A Home at the End of the World* (1990). Cunningham's early novel tells the story of two boys and their families growing up in and out of Cleveland during the perplexing years between the early sixties and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the late eighties. The essay will be divided into three interconnected sections, each focusing on one aspect of Cunningham's unique synthesis of narrative form and content: 1) the strategy of having four characters as simultaneous first-person narrators; 2) how the narrators' introspections may succeed in providing both character and reader with helpful existential and moral guidance; and 3) how they address, or at least shed light on, the meaning of the book's title—what it means to find or not to find a home at the end of the world.

ON NARRATIVITY

Every craft-minded writer of prose or poetry has to decide what narrative point of view to use. This is why a common exercise in creative writing workshops is to have an author switch a piece from one to another. Presumably, such a shift will involve more than the mere exchange of pronouns. One might assume that there is a rationale, some sort of aesthetic vision or at least practical justification that leads a writer to choose between the first and third-person points of view. Cunningham not only chooses to use first-person narration for *A Home at the End of the World* but makes the further decision to use four different narrators who are all involved in each other's lives at the same time. And, in fact, he titles each of the sections of the book by the particular narrating character's name. This fairly unusual strategy of multiple narrators seems to be a trend of some sort in con-

temporary American fiction. Besides *A Home at the End of the World,* recent American novels using this technique include Jim Harrison's *Returning to Earth,* Toni Morrison's *A Mercy,* and Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin.*

There are, of course, risks and opportunities that come with multiple narrators. One risk is that this narrative strategy can seem like a gimmick. If the same story could be told just as well with one narrator or a single point of view, then why multiply? It can also be somewhat confusing for the less circumspect reader, who has to keep track of who's zoomin' who at any given moment. This brings up the question of the craft of writing multiple narrators. It's especially hard for a reader to follow if the voices of the narrators are similar. This is potential trouble in *A Home at the End of the World*, especially when the two main male characters are introspecting about the same people and events. Here, I'm drawing on the experience of having used the novel in class several times. Students tend to adore the book but do sometimes forget who's narrating, especially when these characters are adults later in the book. My assumption about what draws students to it is that the cast of characters is exploring their values through intense self-examination and trying to make decisions about what to do with their lives and with whom, in much the same way as many of our students get a chance to do in college.

One vast opportunity that comes with multiple narrators is the chance for them to make explicit the various possible depths of introspection that might go on in the mind of a character. While this sort of journey deep into layers of consciousness is, of course, possible with a single narrator, as in the work of Cunningham's sometimes-muse Virginia Woolf, having multiple narrators interpreting the same events—and speculating about what the others may be thinking—adds potential ambiguity and insight. Here is Woolf herself from her essay "Modern Fiction," quoted in David Lodge's *Consciousness & the Novel*, describing the sort of "atoms" "falling upon the mind" that her fictional project hopes, in part, to record: "The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms . . . life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (qtd. in Lodge 51). By using four different accounts of similar events in the so-called external world, Cunningham's novel

is able to quadruple the incessant shower and to allow for a less solipsistic halo than would one account left to its own devices.

James Wood, in his recent book *How Fiction Works*, turns inside-out the conventional understanding of how first and third-person narrators are assumed to function:

> In reality, we are stuck with third- and first-person narration. The common idea is that there is a contrast between reliable narration (third-person omniscience) and unreliable narration (the unreliable first-person narrator, who knows less about himself than the reader eventually does) . . . . Actually, first-person narration is generally more reliable than unreliable; and third-person "omniscient" narration is generally more partial than omniscient . . . . Unreliably unreliable narration is very rare, actually—about as rare as a genuinely mysterious, truly bottomless character . . . . On the other side, omniscient narration is rarely as omniscient as it seems. To begin with, authorial style generally has a way of making third-person omniscience seem partial and inflected. Authorial style tends to draw our attention toward the writer, toward the artifice of the author's construction, and so toward the writer's own impress. (5-6)

Leaving aside the thorny question of the final adjudicator of the true truth, and how a reader could ever ultimately gauge reliability or omniscience, Wood's insight most relevant here is that authorial style may misdirect our attention—a sort of distraction from the conviction of the third-person narrative itself, almost a violation of our willing suspension of disbelief. Indeed, authorial style can also distract us from the soundness of a first-person narrative, whether ostensibly reliable or not. In many ways, Cunningham's choice to use four first-person narrators spares him these troubles. Again, the key is for the voices of the four to be distinct enough so as not to sound like the same Michael Cunningham, and Cunningham does this quite well. Moreover, having four perspectives on any given matter dissolves the question of narrative reliability—or at least whether the reader ever wonders if she herself ultimately knows more than the character—because the fact of disparate interpretations has already been demonstrated.

CULTIVATED INNER LIVES AS GUIDES FOR THE PERPLEXED

A Home at the End of the World begins with two male narrators describing their respective childhoods in Cleveland. Each begins

around 1965 when he is five years old. Jon is the only child of a disillusioned southern woman, Alice, who was swept away as the teenaged belle of Ned, who spends far too much time at the movie theater he owns. Bobby has an elder brother, Carlton, and aspiring groovy hipster-type parents who seek to sympathize with the emerging youth culture. Carlton and Bobby (whom Carlton renames Frisco) plan to escape Cleveland for the utopia of Woodstock, where they will be stoned all the time and freed from the hang-ups of their current lives. The first of a series of tragedies to afflict Bobby Morrow's family comes when Carlton dies in an accident at a party thrown by their parents in 1969. In short order, Bobby's mother and father also die suddenly in separate tragic incidents brought on by their grief over losing Carlton.

Bobby is orphaned and taken under the wings of Jonathan's family. Jon grows into a gay college student and moves to New York City. Bobby remains sexually and otherwise ambiguous, and ambivalent, and stays in Cleveland baking cakes and cupcakes and listening to his record collection for years before joining Jon and his friend Clare in New York when Ned and Alice move to Arizona and don't invite Bobby to come along. The three of them have a daughter together, and buy a house near Woodstock. Much of the introspection and dialogue for all of the characters centers on the question of this new family model, how it compares to the expectations with which they grew up, and how the social upheavals of the sixties, seventies, and eighties (including the HIV/AIDS epidemic) shaped their new expectations and desires. Their imaginings of what might make for possible happiness have shifted by the end of the book, when Clare and daughter Rebecca unexpectedly bail out of the new family without warning and leave the men behind together. We are left at the end of the book wondering ultimately what the title *A Home at the End of the World* means to propose or assert or ask, a question I will return to below.

Let us now consider some examples of what the narrators learn about themselves at critical junctures. First is a scene between Jon and his father Ned. Jon is playing with a doll, which Ned says is fine but only at home because other boys might not understand. Jon agrees and thinks the following: "Standing small before him, holding the swaddled doll, I felt my first true humiliation. I recognized a deep inadequacy in myself, a foolishness. Of course I knew the baby was just a toy, and a slightly embarrassing one. A wrongful toy. How

had I let myself drift into believing otherwise?" Alice is pregnant, and Jon responds to his father's comment about the doll by saying that "Mommy doesn't want to have a baby . . . . She told me" (11). We as readers don't know if there is any truth to this claim. But it is Jon's immediate response to a shameful moment that will haunt him for the rest of his days—a classic instance of gay male shame. And the adult narrator, presumably recollecting from the perspective of the time at the end of the book, when Cunningham switches back to present tense, or even some time later, remembers the stinging humiliation as if it were a contemporary emotion.

Bobby, too, learns incredible things while narrating the scene of his parents' party; he begins to understand more about the generation gap in the late sixties and exactly what Carlton expects to find at Woodstock. The judgments he passes on the parents, their friends, and "Ohio hipness" are not so much a critique of the Midwest or of this group of friends as an acknowledgement that there must be something bigger and brighter than what they find around themselves in Cleveland:

> Our parents' parties are mannerly affairs. Their friends, schoolteachers all, bring wine jugs and guitars. They are Ohio hip. Though they hold jobs and meet mortgages, they think of themselves as independent spirits on a spying mission. They have agreed to impersonate teachers until they write their novels, finish their dissertations, or just save up enough money to set themselves free . . . . (30)

Just later, he notices a scheme Carlton is up to: "I can see by the light in his eyes what is going down. He has arranged a blind date between our parents' friends and his own. It's a Woodstock move—he is plotting a future in which young and old have business together. I agree to hang on, and go to the kitchen, hoping to sneak a few knocks of gin" (30-31). This is just before Carlton's death, which ultimately sends Bobby to Jon's house, where he does do business with the grown-ups.

Shortly before Bobby's father Burt's death—at high school graduation time—Alice blows up over drinks with Ned and Burt. She complains that Jonathan had been such a good student before he met Bobby. But she's really frustrated by how her own life has turned out. Burt says she probably did nothing wrong. Alice narrates:

> "Then what am I doing here?" I asked. I had begun tapping my glass with my fingernail. I heard the steady rhythmic tapping as if it were an annoying sound being made by someone else. I said, "Why am I living in a city I despise? How did I end up with a son who hates me? I seemed to be doing one thing and then the next, it all felt logical at the time, but sitting here at this moment, it all seems so impossible." (99)

She says she's not pretty anymore; Ned disagrees. She goes on: "'Don't you patronize me,' I told him. 'Don't you dare. You're welcome to resent me or despise me or feel bored silly by me, but don't patronize me like I was some kind of little *wife*. It's the one thing I won't have. Do you hear me? Do you understand?'" (99). She apologizes and Ned says it's been an emotional day for them all. Alice concludes the scene: "He kept his hand on mine. I looked across the table at Burt, who had fixed upon me a look of direct, dreadful understanding" (99-100). The notion of a dreadful understanding recognized in one such look is so intense and reflects the parallels between Burt's tragic situation and Alice's disillusionment. They hadn't ever been able to achieve their Woodstock freedom. They had wound up in dumpy, unhappy lives in Cleveland. What Alice and Burt see in each other's eyes is that life can often seem like a series of unsatisfied expectations—she became a housewife in a part of the country she didn't like with a largely absent husband she no longer loved; and his relatively happy family fell apart with the premature deaths of his eldest son and wife.

Clare has a similar moment of self-realization and reassessment just after Bobby moves in with her and Jon in New York and just before she seduces him to begin their sexual relationship. She is pondering her own aging and how she wound up with such a life:

> When I was younger all my lovers had been clenched, possessive people. My husband Denny had danced six hours a day, and still despised himself for dilettantism. My lover Helene had had screaming opinions on every subject from women's rights to washing spinach. I myself had had trouble deciding whether or not to wear a hat. In my twenties I'd suspected that if you peeled away my looks and habits and half-dozen strong ideas you'd have found an empty spot where the self ought to be. It had seemed like my worst secret . . . . Since my early thirties I'd been retired from love. I'd been living like a child. Just hour to hour, while other women my age went to their own children's recitals and school plays. . . . In a sense I liked the way I was aging . . . . But still, I'd expected by this time in my life to have developed a more general sense of pride in my larger

> self. I'd thought I'd be able to say, if somebody asked me, just exactly what I was doing in the world. (144-45)

This sentiment resonates eerily with Bobby's sense of himself just a few pages later, after Clare has given him a haircut for the eighties. Bobby has continued to feel a strong connection to Carlton, and often describes himself as existing part way between the land of the living and the other land:

> I might have been a body buried in a brick wall, eavesdropping on the simple business of the living . . . . Death could be like this, a simultaneous absence while your friends continued to chat among the lamps and furniture about someone who was no longer you . . . . I was living my own future and my brother's lost one as well. I represented him here as he represented me there, in some unguessable other place. (152)

The novel is full of points at which the narrators spend time reflecting on what they think of themselves and where they've come and how they've behaved, and also how others may perceive them. In fact, they often work out hypothetical scenarios for how their lives might go, and turn, and be different—not the "what if" of the past, the "if only then," but the hypothetical future: I could do and be such-and-such—how might that work out and feel?

Toward the end of the book, Clare ponders her future with Rebecca, though possibly without Jon and Bobby. She has finally begun to realize that perhaps she cannot handle such a nontraditional set up with so many competing alliances and affections. She contemplates her own youth:

> I was beginning to understand something about my mother. She'd made a choice after I was born. There wasn't room in the house or in her parsimonious nature for two difficult children. She'd been forced to choose. Maybe that was how the battle started. My father had had to fight for a share. He'd used his best weapons, his sex and recklessness, but my mother had prevailed with her powers of organization and rectitude. I'd loved my father more. He'd called me Peg and Scarlett O'Hara, said it was all right to buy anything we wanted. But toward the end, when he fell cursing on the front lawn and drunkenly broke furniture, I'd turned away from him. Finally, a child will choose order over passion or charm. (278)

And she wants Rebecca to grow up with a sense of stability, however contingent or illusory it might turn out to be after all. It isn't that

Clare can, or even necessarily would, change her own past. But she may be able to use her new insights into it to help guide herself and her daughter into safer, and perhaps saner, pathways in the future. Indeed, at the end of the book when she takes Rebecca away, she is choosing what she imagines is the life of order over passion.

WHAT HOME HOW AT WHAT END WHEN OF WHAT WORLD WHERE?

The entire book can be read as the efforts by the main ten characters to answer these questions, whether as agents acting in concert with their wills and the means at their disposal or as vessels compelled by forces outside their control, including the burden of living with their own life histories. As readers, we only have access to the inner lives of the four narrators: Bobby, Jonathan, Clare, and Jon's mother Alice. The fates and aspirations of the other six we get from narrated action, dialogue, memory, and imagination. The silent six are Bobby's brother Carlton and their parents, Isabel and Burt Morrow; Jon's father, Ned Glover; Jon's lover, Erich; and baby Rebecca.

We might begin with the question of the search for home in the literal geographic sense. The physical action of the book takes place in four main locations: Cleveland, New York City, Arizona, and Woodstock. One important section comes as the trio of lovers drives back to New York from Ned's funeral in Arizona, at which point Clare announces her pregnancy and they speculate on where they might like to settle and raise a child. The judgments about regions of the country are mainly not moral ones, as they are, say, in *The Great Gatsby*, in which the Midwest is redeemed as wholesome and innocent as opposed to the decadence back East. In Cunningham's novel, the judgments are aesthetic, although when Clare says she doesn't want her daughter "to be some sort of Heidi . . . growing up too good," Jon responds that "growing up in the country doesn't doom anybody to good behavior anymore. Most of the really interesting murderers come from derelict farms and trailer parks" (259).

The young Morrow boys plan to escape the doldrums of Cleveland for the romantic hippie dream of Woodstock; Jonathan also wants out. Their families wind up in Cleveland for no obvious reasons other than uninspiring economic ones. The Lake Erie industrial city is the butt of jokes, and Clare, a native easterner, calls it a "remote, exotic place" (248). Carlton and his parents die dismally

and unfulfilled in Cleveland. Bobby tries to make a home there for some years with Ned and Alice. They move to the unappealing desert of Arizona, where Ned dies. Shortly before his death, he tells Jon that he never expected to live in the desert. Jon asks Ned whether people ever expect to live anywhere. Ned says the question is too deep for him. The trio finally decides that quiet Woodstock, years after the concert but with a hippie vibe intact, is a good place to settle and experiment with their new family, to call home. In fact, they open The Home Café to make ends meet. After a while, Erich—now sick with AIDS—follows them from New York. In another climactic move toward a different home, Clare pretends to be taking Rebecca to visit her mother but actually plans to leave for good, taking her daughter away from the too unorthodox family and the scene of sickness and oncoming death. They head west together on the highway and the reader doesn't know what becomes of them. The three men are left behind to care for one another. Jonathan also has Ned's ashes. Thus, the question of home is not only about a place, but also about the people with whom one chooses to construct it—when one has any say in the matter.

As for the notion of the end of the world, there are multiple possible interpretations, depending in part on who is deciding. Carlton's death at the very end of the sixties certainly carries the burden of the end of that idealistic moment. Jonathan has an argument with Alice about Clare and the baby, and he lashes out that it's the end of the world, anyway, so why not let them try their new family ideal? It was near the end of the Cold War. Erich is dying of AIDS, and Jonathan is quite sure he himself is getting sick. This was before medication cocktails extended lives. The biosphere has just about taken its last breath. And the end of the millennium is at hand. The boys plan to paint Rebecca's room for when she comes back—perhaps years later— to claim her house. Bobby and Jon take Ned's ashes to set them loose in an alfalfa field in the middle of the night. Jon comments on looking for home: "I just realized how ludicrous it is to hold on to my father's ashes until I find some sort of perfect home for them. I've decided this is a perfect place. This field right here. I don't even know who owns it, do you?" (333). They have finally gotten to Woodstock, though it's less exotic and dramatic than they'd once dreamed it would be.

In the final scene of the book, Jonathan narrates as they take Erich, who can barely stand on his own, on a chilly swim.

Cunningham gives over the narrative voice to Jonathan, the character writing to the readership—a Brechtian rupture of the fourth wall:

> But as I stood in the water, something happened to me. I don't know if I can explain this. Something cracked. I had lived until then for the future, in a state of continuing expectation, and the process came suddenly to a stop while I stood nude with Bobby and Erich in a shallow platter of freezing water . . . . I wouldn't say I was happy. I was nothing so simple as happy. I was merely present, perhaps for the first time in my adult life. The moment was unextraordinary. But I had the moment, I had it completely. It inhabited me. I realized that if I died soon I would have known this, a connection with my life, its errors and cockeyed successes. (342-43)

This is in many ways a quintessential Woodstock moment: living in the present moment, being here now. And Jonathan has perhaps wound up where he wanted to be all along—at home in a loving relationship with Bobby. Perhaps for the living, the process of choosing to call a place home with however few or many beloveds, even with a sense that an end is near, need not—and should not—be so extraordinary.

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THE LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY RISE OF REGIONALISM: A KEY TO LOUISE ERDRICH'S SUCCESS

JENNIFER M. HOLLY WELLS

Louise Erdrich's first novel, *Love Medicine* (1984), quickly became a *New York Times* bestseller, as would the two later novels she published during the 1980s, *The Beet Queen* (1986) and *Tracks* (1988). Erdrich's literary talent is the cornerstone of her success, but her first novel's debut was exceptionally well-timed as it followed a refocusing of cultural and critical attention to America's marginalized voices. In the wake of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and the development of university departments devoted to specific area studies, academics came together to form regional associations for literary critics like the Western Literature Association and the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature. Regional culture, like Erdrich's landscapes, was under pressure from McDonaldization, urban sprawl, and the farm crisis of the 1970s and '80s. The regionalism of the latter part of the twentieth century was many-pronged; it advanced the work of some sources and reacted to others but always worked toward promoting regional culture alongside the national mainstream culture. Erdrich, the daughter of an Ojibwa-French mother and a German-American father, used her novels to explore this theme by articulating the relationship between a community living on a reservation and the forces outside of it. Louise Erdrich's success in the 1980s came in part because her ample talents as a writer came to fruition within the cultural movements that precipitated the rise of regionalism in the same time period.

Erdrich first benefited from the changes to the structure of universities wherein new departments were created. Within higher education, the impulse to carve out space to study historically underrepresented discourses helped propel the regionalist movement. Since regionalists' perspectives on literature and art have been at times dis-

regarded by others in the academy—because those others believed regionalism was not a high-culture pursuit—the regionalists' opening to study region came on the heels of other groups finding a place to study themselves. This trend began in the 1960s, spurred on by the Civil Rights movement; Patricia Brown reports that in "[t]he 1960s and early 1970s the research interests of a significant number of historians and social scientists began to focus on the meaning and impact of ethnicity on American history. The source of this interest was the Civil Rights movement and certain events and situations indicating that religious, racial, and national subgroups in the United States had not 'melted' as previously assumed" (359).

With the discovery that the United States was not a melting pot came an opportunity for those disenfranchised from the overarching national narrative to study their own stories. Part of the problem was that, as Brown argued, the positioning of groups, especially immigrants, in history texts made them out to be problems rather than a vibrant part of America's history (362). Since immigrants, African Americans, women, and other marginalized groups were systematically oppressed, they used this opportunity to write their own history, joining authors like Willa Cather, Henry Roth, and Ole Rølvaag in pursuit of these stories.

Native American and Indian Studies programs also developed at this time, like the one Erdrich participated in at Dartmouth. Much like Black Studies, Women's Studies, and Ethnic Studies, Indian Studies programs had to claim their own legitimacy through their offerings and missions. William Willard and Mary Kay Downing report that "[t]he history of Indian Studies programs in modern university settings goes back to the turbulent political climate on university campuses in the 1960s. In the beginning, Indian scholars were unsure about their fate and academe was unsure of the intellectual legitimacy of American Indian programs" (1). Indian Studies "matured as an interdisciplinary field which uses appropriate methods, theories and concepts for analysis and research concerning all the diversity of the indigenous cultures and peoples of the Americas" (7). For Erdrich, who graduated from Dartmouth in 1976 and returned in 1979 as a writer-in-residence, the experience in the program was transformative: "it was only after attending Dartmouth that Erdrich paid special attention to her Native American roots. It was there she met [Michael] Dorris . . . who founded the school's Native American studies program" (Getlin 3). Already a published poet by this time,

Erdrich was searching for a way to focus her talents. She herself reports that "I started working on an urban Indian newspaper in Boston—this and that. I didn't really get anywhere until I went to Dartmouth as a visiting writer. Then Michael and I fell in love, married, and started working together. It was like overdrive, or something" ("Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris" 78). For Erdrich, the Native American studies program provided structure and a partner, both of which inspired her to write about Native Americans.

Academics and literary critics used the reshaping of the university to find a place of their own to come together to study regionalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Preceding the establishment of the major research centers were three major regional groups, the Western Literature Association (WLA), the Society for the Study of Southern Literature (SSSL), and the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature (SSML), which cropped up within a five-year period. The first to be founded was the WLA, in 1965; SSSL followed in 1968; and SSML came together in 1971. Each was devoted to promoting the literatures of its region. Max Westbrook wrote that "When the Western Literature Association was founded . . . the term 'western' was assumed by the general public to mean 'pulp' or 'genre western,' and WLA members were at pains to focus on higher, more 'serious' literature, in order to establish their region's literary legitimacy" (xiv). This sense of needing to justify a course of study reflected the concern that regionalism somehow is not worthwhile of study; these scholars came together in part as a defense of what they valued.

SSML followed six years later in 1971, in the interests of concentrating on Midwestern literature. Like the SSSL, the SSML published a book on its regional literature: the *Dictionary of Midwestern Literature*. And like the WLA, the SSML publishes its own scholarly journals— *MidAmerica* and *Midwestern Miscellany*—in addition to scholarship published in its own *Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature Newsletter* (no longer published). David Anderson, the founder of the SSML, suggested that only in the 1970s

> has regionalism been recaptured from the mythmakers, the politicians, and the mass media as the new regionalism—the study of those elements—geographic, historical, cultural, literary, social, and mythic—that define American regions as they relate to the national whole has gained acceptance, and it is now growing rapidly in every region of the country in spite of the disbelief, doubts, and downright hostility of the same traditionalists who denied two generations ago the legitimacy of the study of American literature. (35)

Making a connection to the early scholars of regionalism, Anderson argued that this revival of regionalism also moved against the current of some American thought. Linking this development directly to that of American literary study in the 1920s, Anderson drew connections in the difficulty of establishing regionalism's value while suggesting that it is important to support regional societies. For SSML, as well as SSSL and WLA, focusing on both validating the literature as well as the value of the literature was of utmost importance. Once the literature was validated, so was the scholarship. Like the movements for Black Studies, Women's Studies, and Ethnic Studies, part of the movement's impetus was simply carving out space to study what was previously overlooked.

One major challenge for literary regionalism in the latter half of the twentieth century was the development of sameness across the country. To big cities came standardization in the form of brand names repeated on storefronts, under the influence of corporations seeking to cut business costs. Sharon Zukin wrote that beginning in

> 1973, however, centralized, multinational investment supported both continued decentralization of commercial development and a reconcentration, with enhanced stratification, of urban shopping districts . . . . Within a few years, both products and ambiance could just as well be found in shops on upper Madison Avenue or Rodeo Drive as on the rue de faubourg St. Honore or the via Montenapoleone. When local merchants were displaced by the higher rents these tenants paid, they correctly blamed the showplace boutiques whose rents were subsidized by their parent multinational corporations. (43)

This sameness enforced on the streets of New York and Los Angeles stripped them of what made each city unique, and was reflective of greater standardization in the suburbs. Anthony Flint illustrated "the post-World War II suburbanization that's in hyperdrive across the country: instant suburbs etched into open fields, curving, dead-end streets of look-alike single-family homes, expansive new schools and playing fields, and could-be-anywhere commercial strips of Lowe's and Wal-Marts and Olive Gardens, all sprinkled over miles and miles of open land" (41). In both large cities and outlying towns, the choices that citizens and consumers had were being reduced. Bigger

companies were swallowing up the spaces and profit margins of smaller ones. Restaurants with national advertising budgets outsold those with only one storefront. With the demise of these smaller retail and food service outlets went a sense of regional identity.

One major food retailer, McDonald's, provided a high-level example of how this came to pass. George Ritzer argued that McDonald's "ever-present commercials, combined with the fact that people cannot drive very far without having a McDonald's come into view, have embedded McDonald's deeply into popular consciousness" (Introduction 10). Once the marketing occurred, Ritzer suggested that part of McDonald's appeal and key to its success is that it "offers *predictability,* the assurance that all products and services will be the same over time and in all locales. The Egg McMuffin in New York will be, for all intents and purposes, identical to those in Chicago and Los Angeles. Also, those eaten next week or next year will be identical to those eaten today" (Introduction 16). McDonald's centralized taste and experience by providing the same product to each customer across the nation and across time. By eating there, a customer also disengaged from the possibility of eating at a local restaurant and experiencing local flavors, thereby undermining the individualizing experience provided by regionalism. Ritzer argued that entering a McDonald's, or any other "McDonaldized island" was an act of disconnection: "Separation implies alienation, and it could be argued that life in those settings is alienated from the rest of life. Instead of life flowing naturally into and out of these islands, the living that takes place on them tends rather to take place in largely autonomous settings" ("Islands" 37). In the context of regionalism, the alienation and autonomy that he spoke of when walking into a McDonald's or a Wal-Mart severed ties to spaces that made a region special.

The ubiquity of McDonald's shed light onto other factors facing regionalism in the 1970s and 1980s. Urban sprawl and development devoured farmland and other lands that defined a region. This process standardized the land, and made it less recognizable as a region once it filled with homes and commercial districts. *Sprawl Costs* describes the conventions of sprawl: "The first of sprawl's distinct characteristics is its significant consumption of exurban agricultural and other frail lands . . . . Agricultural acreage is lost because it often is the cheapest land available for development. Fragile environmental lands are swallowed up because they are part of the otherwise developable tracts" (12-13). Not satisfied with just slowly stripping away identity as it cleared the land, sprawl also abandoned its work once the property no longer served a developer's purpose. David Smiley notes that "[m]any shopping centers of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were remarkably successful, but they increasingly became victims of their own success as the waves of development they once led inexorably passed them by. Bigger and more lucrative shopping centers built on cheaper, undeveloped land further from denser urban areas transformed into sad shells the prouder icons of an earlier wave of suburbanization" (14). Both the original regional identity and the new suburban identity were lost in this sort of expansion; the race to be new and fashionable wiped away the collective memory of place that used to be there as well as the bricks and mortar first used to cover that memory. Region was a tertiary concern to this process of standardization of place.

In fact, the losses of landscape, coupled with the rise of agribusiness, altered the position of the small family farm, leading to a change in identity for the farmers. Jon Lauck suggests that "[f]ear of the coming of large-scale corporate farming to the grain belt drew on postwar anxieties over the changes in American farming, disruptions in rural communities, and traditional political sentiments about outsider control" (20). Agribusiness is a force of great change that undermined the purpose of a small farm. Vogeler posits that in this situation, the family farm became a myth that supported the growth of agribusiness: "[a]lthough the myth of the independent, self-determining family farm allows family farmers to identify with the agrarian bourgeoisie, their structural relations [as laborers on their own farms selling products to agribusinesses] tie them economically to the rural proletariat" (282). Agribusiness forced farmers into two unfamiliar positions: unemployed or employee. Both of these meant a change in how farming operated as a Midwestern institution. Small farmers, in order to survive, sold their produce to the larger agribusinesses, which made them into contractors within a larger food delivery system rather than independent businesspeople.

Louise Erdrich's rise in the 1980s, then, benefited from the regionalist impulses of her own time as her stories were also ones of loss and change. Her first challenge, though, was being recognized as a novelist. Because it featured American Indian characters in a distinct region, *Love Medicine* made publishing house editors apprehensive about committing to it. When Erdrich sent her manuscript

out, she received "rejection notes that said: 'People don't want to read about Indians'" (Getlin 1). Gail Caldwell argues that it was help she received from her husband, Michael Dorris, posing as a publishing agent shopping out the book, that eventually got the novel to the presses (1). Dorris reports that "We had an agent, a very prominent agent, in New York who agreed to represent the book . . . . And it didn't go anywhere; nothing happened for almost a year . . . . So I went and had stationery printed up with my name on it and claimed to be an agent and sent it out, and two major houses bid on it" ("Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris" 87). Once it was published, the work of finding an audience began. Just as the rise of regionalism was an organic process of interested parties finding their place in the academy, Erdrich's early success was attributed to the efforts of individual readers and retailers. Erdrich contended that "I distinctly owe the first sales of *Love Medicine* to word of mouth from independent booksellers. They were the ones who would pick it up and hand it to readers who came in" (Getlin 2). Erdrich's success came from the involvement of people invested in literary culture, especially those who recognized the value of new voices representing Native Americans and regionalists alike.

What the publishers feared—that there was no audience—was unfounded. The audience for books written about American Indians by American Indians was in fact growing, especially for the newcomer Erdrich, who could articulate in an accessible way the Native American experience. After *Love Medicine* was published, Erdrich "became the most popular Native American novelist" (Ruppert 179). In fact, after spending two weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list in 1983-84, *Love Medicine* was republished in 1994 in an edition that added more material and reorganized the previously published text. As *American Indian Literary Nationalism* reports, "The last years of the 1980s were an interesting time in Native letters . . . . Louise Erdrich [among others] had gained a foothold in the American literary establishment" (186). Part of her success was due to her characters, whose "tangled lives are not so radically different from the common catastrophes of mainstream Americans, certainly no more than those dreamed up by a Faulkner or Fitzgerald. And yet no reader can come away from *Love Medicine* without recognizing the essential Indianness of Erdrich's cast and concerns" (Owens 65). Here the playing field changed. Where once publishers looked askance at American Indian authors, they were now publishing them to the

delight of readers and critics who recognized connections between the lives of Native Americans and non-Native Americans. Influenced by the changes at the academy level, American Indian writers were creating new material for all kinds of readers.

Erdrich wrote within the Native letters tradition in a way that did not alienate her wider audience, thereby placing herself in the tradition of regionalists who contextualize regional experience in a national framework. Erdrich used her own experience to create characters who have a sort of "tribalism [that] is separatist enough that the community looks inward for its own history and its own shared values, yet not so separate from the world as to reject entirely individuals and institutions from the outside" (Krupat and Elliot 146). Louise Erdrich told Josie Rawson that she "grew up in North Dakota, near the border, close to the Red River Valley. My mother was from the reservation. I was raised in a small town, mainly German, and my parents taught at a BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] boarding school. And so I was raised in the church there, went to a Catholic school. I cannot imagine my characters anywhere else" (1-2).

Placing her characters on Little No Horse, the reservation town, might seem to alienate them from readers who do not live on a reservation, but as Ruppert notes, "Erdrich brought to the forefront a humor that was lacking in many of the other popular Native writers. Her work appeals to a broad audience of Native and non-Native readers partly because she explores themes so common to all her readers" (179). Erdrich's ability to invent recognizable situations on the reservation turned what seemed to be a gulf between her material and her possible publishing success into connections between her characters and her readers. Her experience with the worlds of the reservation and of the small town informed her work, allowing her novels to be accessible to readers.

Yet that accessibility does not mean that she forsook the history and sense of loss that is so common among regionalists, and doubly if not triply so among American Indian writers. *Love Medicine* starts with the death of a character, lost to alcoholism and promiscuity. *Tracks* is even more explicit about the process of loss of tribal lands as a result of American government policy. And in *The Bingo Palace* (1994), a showdown between two informal leaders of the tribe results in a clash that nearly tears it apart. In a discussion about the disappearance of the American Indian from the American continent, Erdrich remarked in an interview that "one wonders in looking down

through one's own background and heritage—'why me? Why am I one of the survivors?' And the role of the survivors is to tell the stories of those who haven't survived, and of those who can't tell them on their own, and of those who are still suffering the effects of that long and immensely arduous history" (Rothstein 2). Erdrich's statement placed her into a historical context, one of great loss and disillusionment with history. Cast in a national perspective of being a survivor of the genocide of an immense Indian population, Erdrich felt responsibility for cataloging the loss and telling the story of the contemporary Native American population. She also wanted to save the way in which her own people regionally quantified the world. Speaking about the Chippewa language, Erdrich comments that "the names and descriptions in Ojibwe, especially if you go farther into Ojibwe country, that originated with some one individual who was given some human interaction with a part of the landscape—who had that original apprehension of the world. What does it mean to lose that? It means you lose a relationship with the world that humans really need" (Rolo 5).The landscape, the region, is of immense importance to the Chippewa people as their language is built around it and their needs. To see the loss in the shriveling of the language is to see the loss to the region and to the people to whom it belongs.

The political, economic, and academic realities of the 1970s and 1980s made regionalism a viable approach to literary production and criticism, as it suggested a way to combat the cultural instability felt by Americans. In addition to this, the space that the new university departments created for neglected authors provided greater opportunities for them to become an important part of American literature. Louise Erdrich's meteoric rise in the 1980s can be attributed to her skill as a novelist and her connections to what was at stake in the changing Midwest; however, the time she spent at Dartmouth in the Native American Studies program and the timeliness of the sense of loss in her stories were critical in shaping her appeal as a contemporary author. In this time of great cultural change, both regionalists and Erdrich promoted what they saw as marginalized voices in order to capture the essence of their regions. Louise Erdrich assumed that her reading audience had very little knowledge of ancient and contemporary American Indian life and in response drew a portrait of a community that inhabited the plains alongside, yet separate from, mainstream American culture. Regionalism and Louise Erdrich

experienced breakout successes in the 1980s, and because of this success, continue to offer different perspectives on region to readers.

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MARY SWANDER'S *THE GIRLS ON THE ROOF* AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF TERROR

MARY DEJONG OBUCHOWSKI

Mary Swander, Poet Laureate of Iowa, begins her long narrative poem, *The Girls on the Roof* (2009) with this description of the Mississippi in 1993 inundating a small town she calls "Pompeii (pronounced Pom'pee)":

> with a whoosh, crack, bam-boom,
> a power so Herculean that with one
> swift slap of its hand, the water
> knocked out all the windows
> and tore the door right off
> the hinges of Crazy Eddy's Café.
> The very gates of hell opened and
> The Great Flood of the Twentieth Century
> came crashing, crashing through.

This evocation of terror conveys one of the many manifestations of fear that nature can create. The flood forces a group of eccentric Iowans, characters more bizarre than those of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, into actions that expose the basest qualities of their characters and push them even further into corruption or redemption in ways that are grotesque, comical, bizarre, and treacherous. Further, it illustrates the stoicism of small-town Midwesterners, however odd they may otherwise be, in the face of natural disasters and brings to the surface the incongruity that such events produce, including humans whose outrageous bodies and lives interact to make, for some, difficult but eventual spiritual peace. At the very least, it brings up "serious questions about the meaning of suffering, endurance, and the possibilities for human freedom" (Emmons 111). The fictitious town creates a venue for Swander to portray in certain characters a positive transformation brought about by an otherwise devastating natural event.

The flood plays a recurring role in the writing of Mary Swander, in both her prose and her poetry. An early piece on the flood, a magazine article, "Crazy Eddies," highlights the quirkiness of the events during those overwhelming and often tragic days. The article demonstrates the strength and humor of the residents in such examples as this heartbreaking yet comic description: ". . . at the Sinclair gas station in town, the dinosaur posted out front to draw in customers had a life preserver around his neck" (11). The pun in the article's title, "Crazy Eddies," evokes the arbitrariness, or seemingly incredible coincidences, wrought by the flood. In addition to portraying the havoc caused by the swirling water, it is also the name of the place where the particular events of the poem take place. Even if the proprietor of Crazy Eddy's Café isn't crazy, his patrons certainly exhibit extremes of personality and behavior.

The flood also forms a substantial section of Swander's first memoir, *Out of This World* (1995), in which she watches her neighbors' fields fill, resulting in one of their bulls appearing at her back door, where there is dry ground. In another context, she expresses amazement that members of religious denominations often at odds with each other could cooperate so amiably and constructively in mutual efforts to clean up and restore damaged communities. She also comments on the matter-of-fact attitude Midwesterners have toward disasters such as tornadoes, saying that Iowans can manage to stay calm as the storms approach (88). In an essay in *Iowa: A Celebration of Land, People & Purpose* (1995), she describes some fellow Iowans who rescue her repeatedly from such difficulties as snow and high water as men with "honesty, know-how, and willingness to help" (53). The title of the essay is "An Honest, Hopeful, Heroic People." Elsewhere, she notes, "Most of the Midwesterners I've profiled are independent, self-sufficient, and have a sense of humor" (Davis 124).

Some of those "independent" folks are also eccentrics. She reminisces about her early years in Iowa, asking, "Where else could you grow up and become friends with a man who lived in a dump and slept in a bathtub, a carpenter who played a saw, a cross-eyed electrician, and a pair of twins in their fifties who still dressed the same and walked in step downtown?" (Dyer 22). Bizarre tales told by unusual people characterize her book of poems, *Driving the Body Back* (1998). Swander based the book on a real incident: crossing Iowa to bury her mother's body, accompanied by her godmother, her mother's cousin Eileen, who told stories about Swander's eccentric great-aunts and

uncles. For the book, Swander has each relative narrate his or her own story, just as the characters do in *The Girls on the Roof.*

One might ask why *Driving the Body Back* and *The Girls on the Roof* are rendered in poetry rather than in prose. Swander's prose is relatively straightforward, though embellished by lists, and by circuitous digressions to make and strengthen the themes that she develops. In an article from *Conversant Essays: Contemporary Poets on Poetry* (1990), "Lavender," she discusses the differences among the novel, the short story, and the narrative poem. Since even long poems express a story in condensed form, she asks how authors can round out the people who appear there and make them compelling. Answering her own question, Swander explains how small details in a ballad such as "Sir Patrick Spens" can "allow characters, even in their cardboard natures, to become alive, to push us on to care about their stories, to cement that final irony of the poem" (363-64).

Along with the wavelike rhythms, sometimes flowing, sometimes pounding or swirling, the details make the poem. Swander uses a technique that brings to mind Samuel Johnson's definition of metaphysical wit as a "combination of dissimilar images" in which the "most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together," which aptly describes the objects that flow about those who people the poem, objects such as

> playpens and Big Wheels, bowling trophies
> lampshades, barstools and beer mugs,
> soap bottles, Mason jars filled with
> tomatoes, pickled peaches and beets. (34)

Even the bulls from Swander's neighbor's farm in *Out of this World* make an appearance (56-57). Similarly, in *The Girls on the Roof*, we find on the same page references to Neil Armstrong on the moon, Robert Frost's poem "Fire and Ice," and the Bible story of Noah (28). The biblical allusions reverberate symbolically, because the characters are facing the consequences of their sins and misdeeds: insensitivity, downright cruelty, adultery, jealousy, and murder. No one actually encounters Satan, but when long-dead Crazy Eddy pops out of his floating coffin on what he believes is his Judgment Day, he personifies the river as "Old Devil River, Old Beelzebub, / Old Satan of the mighty Mississippi" (61).

The Girls on the Roof brings all of these elements together in a single one-volume poem. Here, two women, the "girls on the roof,"

watch the torrents from the relative safety of the top of a café. Ten years later, their friends and family gather on the anniversary of the flood. The reconstruction of their relationships and personal gains and losses forms the narrative thread of the poem. This rousing story reveals "their secrets of the flesh and their struggles of spirit" (Miller 98-99). The fact that the speakers of the poem did not all survive the flood infuses it with an eerie quality. They might remind us of Flannery O'Connor's or Anderson's grotesques, or those speakers from beyond the grave in Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), or Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938). Living and dead, Swander's people recite their own tales of envy, adultery, homicide, love, and redemption.

An outline of the events that *The Girls on the Roof* records hardly does the book justice. Among those who have returned to the café are restless Maggie, married to the long-dead dwarf Eddy Halloran's giant son, Bigfoot; Bigfoot himself; their daughter, the beautiful and seductive dwarf Pearl; murdered Mike Fink, who lived in the dump and was lover to both mother and daughter; Pearl's ineffectual husband,Cur; and Jake-the-Snake, who calls himself "the one-man chorus of Pompeii / the guy who keeps track / of all the other slithering reptiles" (15). Collectively, they have returned to reminisce, and Jake chants:

> We gather once again
> to piece together a tall tale,
> a story too long and wide
> for a single person to spin. (14)

That Eddy and Mike, no longer living, can tell their stories and Bigfoot and Maggie are long gone (presumably in different directions), is no more unbelievable, in this context, than that the voices of the Spoon River residents come from their graves. Those reunited recount how the levee breaks and the flood sweeps the Iowans out of the restaurant; they remember that they are also swept into knowledge–Bigfoot of his wife's affair with Mike Fink, and Pearl and Maggie of their rivalry in regard to loving Mike. The rage of Bigfoot, Maggie, and Pearl is as sweeping as that of the river. Bigfoot takes the opportunity to murder Mike; when the body reaches the roof of the café, Maggie wrests it up. Stranded there, mother and daughter face off fiercely. In a section titled "Truth or Dare," Maggie attempts to escape the rooftop, and Pearl tries to kill her with the knife that was embedded in Fink's corpse. Wrestling, they land in the arms of

their bloated and stinking ex-lover. They rise in mutual agreement to dump him over the edge, reconciled.

This decision does not end the tale, however. Maggie pries the nails out of coffins with Bigfoot's knife to make a raft to ride down the Mississippi like Huck Finn, escaping the constraints of small-town life and finding a new place for herself in which to thrive and grow. The residents of Pompeii let Pearl stay on the roof for three days as punishment for the havoc she created in their lives and those of their family and the town by having an affair with her mother's lover. Jake-the-Snake finally rescues Pearl and snags Mike's body to stuff into the cooler until a makeshift funeral can be arranged – a ceremony at which Pearl remains in character to "wink / at the priest walking through the door" (82). Eddy, Mike, and others rise from their various purgatories and seek redemption, which the reader assumes they (or at least some) will receive.

Echoes of Greek mythology (Hercules), the Bible (mainly Noah but also Samson and others), and Dante's *Divine Comedy* (the gates of hell) suggest that this tall tale is not ordinary, but one of heroic scale. References to *Sesame Street* ("fried Kermits"), pinballs, and Coke tie the story firmly to the present, but such allusions to American classics as *Moby Dick* ("Call me Ishmael") and *Huckleberry Finn,* and American mythology (Mike Fink and Bigfoot) suggest that it might, if not join their ranks, at least tag along with them. Comments on Margot Fonteyn and fairy tales rub elbows with colloquialisms such as "I ain't got a pot to pee in"; the suggestions and voices are as varied as those in Eliot's *The Waste Land,* which also links recent events with those of millennia before, suggesting the universal by means of the Midwestern particular. Mississippi water instead of volcanic ash deluges this Pompeii, and souls dead and alive achieve something like spiritual wholeness. In fact, the title of one of the sections, "What the River Carried" not only parallels "What the Thunder Said" in *The Waste Land*, but also many passages from *The Girls on the Roof* echo lines from "The Fire Sermon," with its trashy landscape and promiscuous Thames-daughters. However, lines from the Mass and gospel hymns lift the characters of *The Girls on the Roof* out of the Waste Land and into the realm of the redeemed.

This is small-town sordid drama raised to epic proportions by the extraordinary disaster of the flood. Dark comedy mixes with the tragedy and turns to the brightness of salvation; elevated language

combines with the down-home talk of the narrators, and revenge finally gives way to affection. The river terrifies and destroys, it releases the most powerful of emotions and actions in those who inhabit its banks, and it returns those lost in body and soul, however implausibly, to themselves and those who love them.

The force of the river suggests how much we humans are at the mercy of the forces of nature and the forces within ourselves. In the poem, the flood looses the visceral emotions and conventional restraints on human behavior, and the unthinkable occurs in the form of incest and murder. In counterpoint, coffins from cemeteries of every denomination disgorge their contents. The hodgepodge of debris is reflected in literary allusions, with quotes and puns taken from spirituals, patriotic jargon, and books of prayer, and interspersed with rural slang and clichés. In Swander's words, these are "blended together in an offbeat requiem," a union of disparate beliefs, classes, and races. The river alters not only the landscape but also the people it overwhelms. Most importantly, Swander in her poem achieves art's transforming magic of making the everyday as well as the elemental and horrific serve the beneficent offices of love and redemption, with the promise of a hope that enables humans, both in and out of the poem, to survive the terror that life too often holds.

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ANNUAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MIDWESTERN LITERATURE, 2008

ROBERT BEASECKER, EDITOR
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This bibliography includes primary and secondary sources of Midwestern literary genres published, for the most part, during 2008. 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. However, because of space constraints, primary source materials are limited to separately published works; those appearing in literary journals and magazines are generally not included. Secondary sources, usually journal articles, books, or doctoral dissertations, are listed by subject.

Periodicals published for the first time in 2008 that relate in some way to Midwestern literature, either in subject, content, or locale, are listed alphabetically by title in the third and final section of this bibliography.

Not included in this bibliography are the following types of material: reprints or reissues of earlier works, except for some new or revised editions; baccalaureate or masters theses; entries in reference books; separate contents of collected essays or *Festschriften;* audio or video recordings; electronic databases; and internet websites which have the tendency to be unstable or ephemeral.

Abbreviations used in the citations denoting genre and publication types are as follows:

A	Anthology	juv	Juvenile fiction
bibl	Bibliography	lang	Language; linguistics

biog	Biography	M	Memoir
corr	Correspondence	N	Novel
crit	Criticism	P	Poetry
D	Drama	pub	Publishing; printing
I	Inteview(s)	rev	Review essay
jrnl	Journalism	S	Short fiction

Citations for novels, poetry, short stories, memoirs, and other types of literature about the Midwest, as well as those written by Midwestern authors, are continually sought by the editor for inclusion in this annual bibliography. Please send them to Robert Beasecker, University Libraries, Grand Valley State University, 1 Campus Drive, Allendale, Michigan 49401; or via email: beaseckr@gvsu.edu

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The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature
congratulates

David Radavich

Winner of the 2012 MidAmerica Award for
distinguished contributions to the
study of Midwestern literature

and

Sandra Seaton

Winner of the 2012 Mark Twain Award for
distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature

These awards will be presented at noon on May 11th 2012 at the Society's 42nd annual meeting, Michigan State University Union, East Lansing, Michigan, May 10-12.

For registration information, go to the
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RECIPIENTS OF THE MARK TWAIN AWARD
for distinguished contributions to Midwestern Literature

Jack Conroy	1980
Frederick Manfred	1981
Wright Morris	1982
John Voelker (Robert Traver)	1983
Harriette Arnow	1984
Gwendolyn Brooks	1985
John Knoepfle	1986
Andrew Greeley	1987
Harry Mark Petrakis	1988
Dudley Randall	1989
Jim Harrison	1990
Don Robertson	1991
Ray Bradbury	1992
Mona Van Duyn	1993
William H. Gass	1994
William Maxwell	1995
Sara Paretsky	1996
Toni Morrison	1997
Jon Hassler	
Judith Minty	1998
Virginia Hamilton	1999
William Kienzle	2000
Dan Gerber	2001
Herbert Woodward Martin	2002
David Citino	2003
Richard Thomas	2004
Margo Lagattuta	2005
David Diamond	2006
Stuart Dybek	2007
Jonis Agee	2008
Scott Russell Sanders	2009
Jane Hamilton	2010