

MIDAMERICA XX

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

Edited by
DAVID D. ANDERSON

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In honor of
Jane S. Bakerman

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PREFACE

When, in 1972 and 1973, I began to think and talk about a journal to be called *MidAmerica*, I received three kinds of comments from those to whom I mentioned it: one, usually but not exclusively from academic librarians, was "Not another journal!"; another, from several experienced academic editors from whom I sought advice, was "Remember, academic journals are notoriously short-lived"; a third, from an old friend, was "Why not?": "Why not?" prevailed, and *MidAmerica I* went to press in October, 1973, to appear early in 1974.

The two decades since the appearance of *MidAmerica I* with its ten varied, perceptive essays, most of them by people still active in the Society, have validated a statement in the preface of that volume. Perhaps brashly, it said, "As *MidAmerica II, III, IV*, and beyond will make evident, this first volume will have become the point of departure for further, even more diverse explorations that continue to reflect the dedication of the Society and its members to the study of the literature of the American Midwest, past, present, and future." That prediction, I'm pleased to report, has certainly become a reality in the past twenty years, and as the dedication, determination, and insight of the members continue on into the future, so will the journal itself, as it reflects the interests and imagination of those who have made it possible.

Suitably, *MidAmerica XX* is dedicated to Jane S. Bakerman, pioneer member of the Society, dedicated scholar, frequent contributor to *MidAmerica*, and recipient of the MidAmerica Award for 1993.

June, 1994

DAVID D. ANDERSON

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IN GOOD TIME

SHARON KLANDER

i.

First, another week of blanched sky
come down to meet and mimic the worn olive
of August trees, the clouds' dull
congestion settled on lungs and limbs.
He walks a block or two before giving in,
surrendering assumptions of color
that fail him, understanding such
exhaustion. In a month he, too, will mark
another year, learn to let go of a summer
lingering and close.

ii.

Mahogany bruises with each pass
of the plane as he works on wood
that seems to breathe its grain
in sparse basement light—a gift
for the church he longs for as a man
who finds a yellowed Bible aches
for his mother's soothing stories.
If a cross could be simple,

he'd make it so. But these flat-
cut planks, sanded and smooth
as forgiveness, will soon spell the scars
of doubtful prayer, this mortised crux
strain with a barely perceptible body
held so high above a distant altar.

iii.

And still the roses bloom random
 in the month's first chill,
 as he watches his wife clip below the thorn
 each blown face. The sun takes longer to heat,
 leaving the collared buds a few hours tight
 before opening them gently as a hand,
 the fragrant whorls relaxed and released
 in petals she keeps in a vase.

iv.

How does a quiet man celebrate? He lives
 the day's unsalaried time as he wants,
 celebrates September's nervous pick
 at maple's hem, the unraveling elms beginning
 their alchemic stain, the uncontrollable bleed
 that takes his vision upward.

Ohio University-Lancaster

DINING CAR

LINDA RYEGUILD-FORSYTHE

For as long as anyone in New Orleans could remember they had been called "Poor Ellen" and "Little Raymond." Their mother, Mary Margaret Rocheambeau, died at Charity hospital when Poor Ellen was twelve and Little Raymond was two. A stranger from Chicago or Grand Rapids could have been there that day and walked past the chipped iron beds crowded into that ward of Charity Hospital without ever realizing it was the second half of the twentieth century.

As Mary Margaret Rocheambeau lay dying, her husband sat in the dilapidated wooden swing on the front porch of their small shotgun house in the Ninth Ward. When his wife died, he left for good, and Poor Ellen brought Little Raymond home to no one. She inherited a very small, run-down house with a very large, high interest mortgage and a lace mitten with \$856 dollars in it. Her mother had kept it hidden at the bottom of a Kleenex box in case of an emergency.

Even though she had been mostly an A student, Poor Ellen never went back to school. Not even after Aunt Elody moved in to give Little Raymond some "mothering up" and to help his sister learn to "have a little more fun in life, honey." Aunt Elody's husband stayed in the front bedroom until he succumbed to his "sickness" which consisted of a broken pattern of "bad days" and "bad spells." He could have been suffering with anything from cancer to alcoholism, such is the power of Southern euphemism.

Aunt Elody, at fifty-three, was called "a real partier." She kept Mardi Gras decorations up all year long. Ray grew up in a paper party world of gold foil and purple and green streamers. Mardi Gras necklaces hung over the curtain rods like jewels of pirates as real as cathedral windows: green-gold-purple. A Mardi

Gras banner hung crookedly on the wall surrounded by dozens and dozens of the green paper carnations that Aunt Elody would get on St. Patrick's day when she kissed all the men in the parade. Aunt Elody was famous for her red beans and rice—a secret version of the New Orleans classic dish that she taught Poor Ellen how to make, the two of them crowded over a huge black and white flecked enamel pot. The earthy, steamy, spicy scent—even mixed with the flowers and the garbage and the cats—was exotic and homey, one of the best sense memories that Ray and Ellen kept from their childhood.

After her husband died Aunt Elody lived with a series of men that drank alot of Budweiser and generally kept improving on the part of the wicked step uncle. Over the years, with seemingly systematic skill, they transformed Aunt Elody into a caricature. Her body grew swollen with beer and food. Her arms always had bruises from bumping into the decorated walls and once she saw a UFO land under the front porch in the afternoon. Then, Robert E. Sherfer (always called Robert E.) moved in and started stacking the cases of beer in the second room of the Shotgun house, the empties on one side and the fulls on the other. Aunt Elody alternated between two flowered house dresses, both usually hopelessly stained with food, beer and other problems of the day. She stopped “inviting over folks,” but she continued to drink and cook and go to most of the big parades. She suffered as many head injuries as some boxers and faced life with the same level of grim persistence and complete lack of both perspective and self-pity. Sometimes she would get up in the morning and make eggs & grits for Ellen and Raymond. She'd tell them to clean up their plates and while they ate she'd sit at the table with a big sponge and spread on layer after layer of pancake make-up in a color called “Ivory Rose.”

Robert E. would always get up really late, usually after Raymond got home from school. He would loom in the bedroom archway, huge in his yellowed underwear. Ray couldn't look away from the pale, translucent, naked legs and feet. Skin the color of skim milk with huge fat blue veins snaking under it. Thick yellowed toenails stuck out of his blue terry cloth slippers. Robert E. spent most of his time on the settee watching game shows and football, waiting for his benefit check.

Ellen avoided Robert E. by going to Marguerite's house. Ray would walk to the levee and wonder where the Mississippi river came from. Ellen said it started way up North in mountains covered with snow. Ray tried to imagine mountains and snow turning into a river, but he just couldn't visualize it. One day on the levee Ray was found by a dog, a medium size, filthy, male dog with a dull black & white splotched coat. The dog stood absolutely still and then, very gently, lifted up one grimy skinny paw and put it on Raymond's knee.

Ray got to keep him. It was his and Ellen's house after all. Robert E., of course, hated the dog and shoved or kicked him whenever he got the chance. Ray called the dog Ulysses, a small joke that no one got. Ray loved Ulysses and let him sleep in his bed but, of course, it was Ellen who remembered to feed him, adding little scraps of her dinner. However much she fed him, he always wanted more. Learned early enough, hunger is usually not curable.

Ulysses would wolf down whole pounds of butter or lard if Ellen turned her back while she was baking. He ate raw food, cooked food, and spoiled food. He approached the gristly, discarded parts of dinner as eagerly as the tidbits that were saved for him. And he just loved shrimp heads. If Ellen cooked shrimp on a non-trash day, she'd put the heads in a bag in the back shed to isolate the penetrating smell. The door to the shed was always closed, but Ulysses always got in anyway. He'd come back in the house and bring with him that unmistakable offensive smell. If Robert E. was home he would kick the dog outside and down the back porch steps and hook him to a short thick chain fastened to the laundry post. Ellen would go out, wash him in tomato juice & vinegar, and bring him back in.

One horrible Sunday afternoon Ellen had a roast cooling on the formica table next to the sweet potato pie and Robert E. was in the living room with the football game when Ulysses raised himself up on his hind legs, delicately, like a trained bear or elephant. In a quick movement he dropped his neck, picked up the roast and carried it in his mouth—like a newspaper—out the open back door. By the time Ray got to the dog, Ellen's roast was mostly chewed and covered with dust. Ray took the dog and hid under the front porch for the rest of the day. He heard shouting and furniture being scraped back and forth. He

drew designs in the dirt and petted Ulysses and killed bugs and finally just lay still, dusty and thirsty and sweaty with Ulysses panting beside him. The air was dark and heavy and thick with mosquitoes when they went in the house and straight to his room. No one ever said a word about it.

The next time it happened the roast was on the table, in front of Robert E., waiting to be carved. Ulysses lunged gracefully for the meat and got it, but this time Robert E. was there and caught the dog before he got out the door. Ulysses, swift and deliberate as a matador, dropped the roast and lunged at the human leg. The owner of the leg grabbed the doorstep and started clubbing the dog; the owner of the dog threw himself at Robert E., clawing and biting.

Aunt Elody took Robert E. to Doctor John down the street to be fixed up. Ellen took Ray to the emergency room at Charity and she brought her mother's lace mitten full of money with her. The dog was left in the back yard until the city people came to take him away.

Ray got three stitches in his mouth, thirteen on his cheek and a cast on his left arm. The doctor signed it and told him all his friends at school could do the same thing. It didn't matter that Ray had no friends at school, because he never went back there or saw Aunt Elody or Robert E. again. One minute there was a house with okra and pole beans growing in the back and neighbors and a quilt that had been made by hand, out of saved scraps of material and the next minute Ray and Ellen were part of the railroad heading north into the unknown. Like many who had gone before them, they had no suitcases.

Ray got aboard the train called *The City of New Orleans* with three pralines and two comic books. Ellen explained that they were going to the North where it would snow and she would get a job making brand new cars. In Ray's mind, this became confused with the North Pole and Christmas. Michigan was part of the North Pole and the new cars were presents for good adults.

The train was spectacular, nothing like the dilapidated buses and streetcars of New Orleans. The dark blue seats were like velvet and they could change positions. Ray moved the seat up and back, up and back, until the lady behind him complained to Ellen. Outside the enormous windows were the Swamplands.

Ray had heard about them, of course. Everyone knew about alligators and voodoo and all. But to see it! What he saw was flat brown water, sometimes fingering into bayous, and thick Cypress stumps withering into witch's fingers. He stared past the shrouds of Spanish moss and waited to see a Cajun boat or shack on stilts or—well—he really would have liked to see an alligator fight or a naked voodoo priestess dancing with a giant snake.

He did see the flat, empty water become flat, empty land without it ever occurring to him that secret ceremonies are seldom held near train tracks. Ray didn't realize how hungry he was until twilight began to curtain his view of the world.

"First seating in the dining car, four cars ahead. First seating in the dining car, four cars ahead."

Ray and Ellen walked through a series of huge doors that closed off the cars. Finally, a door slid back to reveal small, white, linen-covered tables with large heavy silverware that gleamed in the light of tiny pink shaded lamps. There was a man in a matching white uniform, all white except for his face and hands. The white of the linens was absolute and unblemished, beyond anything Ray had ever imagined, even when he thought of angels or snow.

"Dinner for two?" the man studied Ellen impassively and her face paled until it was the color of dead flowers.

"No, we've just gotten lost."

The huge door clicked back into place behind them.

"Are we going to eat supper there?"

"No. Are you hungry?"

"No."

Children Ray's age in Michigan no longer believed in Santa and no one wanted Ellen to help make cars, but she got a job answering phones with her sweet, soft southern voice. Ray waited for snow, half certain that it was another one of those lies that adults are allowed to tell children. But there *was* snow and snow was magnificent beyond imagination! No one in Michigan seemed to understand that. They'd say "Boy, I bet you miss Louisiana now." and they always said it funny: "Louise-eee-anna." And they would complain about the wonderful hard cold which was clear and loud like a brass band.

How could you explain New Orleans and the heat that rolled over you and pressed against you as salt trickled down your hot

skin and the brilliant yellow light burned through the green leaves. Moving into the house for a drink was impossible when your body was packed in air like clay in cotton batting. You just sat in the broken porch swing while the light thickened and turned violet twisting around you in thick purple layers until finally you had to struggle to get up, moving against the sodden cloth, pulling it away from your limp body.

People in Michigan crunched through the clear bright air, complaining about wind chill factors, while the cold made everything separate, encased in its own crystal space. The air had gotten colder and colder, like an oven being turned off, and the leaves had changed to dry brown things like burned cookies. Not like in Louisiana where green things, dead from a dreaded frost, turned slimy and black as the burst exterior plumbing sent up slim arcs of freezing water.

In Michigan there was a calm stoic acceptance of winter yet they were dead to the amazement of it. Everything was white, quieter—much quieter—almost holy. The best was at night when the snow stretched in soft mounds and fields, almost purple, and when you stood outside looking at the deserted golf course it felt somehow like the St. Louis Cathedral that Ellen had taken him to once for Easter.

Ray felt it was sort of wrong to touch snow. He ignored the other children as they made weapons out of it. Ray liked to just sit near the snow under a tree or on a bare rock and watch it until his body hummed with the quiet. He saw smaller children, with their pink tongues sticking out, trying to catch snow flakes. He did that too, but he never caught one. How could there be so many, enough to cover houses, but never once would one land on his tongue? When he came in, Ellen would give him hot cinnamon coffee and red beans and rice, spicy and perfect. A great thing to eat after being in the snow.

People in Michigan ate incomprehensible things. Macaroni and hamburger meat in bright orange sauce. Hamburger meat in a red sauce on buns. Bread piled up with sliced thin, grey meat. These were served often for school lunch. Some children would bring big half moon pastry things, that were heavy like bricks.

School was a nightmare. The class work was so far advanced that it felt like science fiction. Ray's old parish school was public, therefore largely black and hopelessly substandard. As one of

a handful of trashy whites, Ray had learned the rules of the minority: don't show off; don't talk back; don't carry money; don't excel. The last had been easy. His mind had slogged dimly through the grimy outdated books as insects darted from the dark corners and sweaty feet shuffled restlessly on the pock marked linoleum. Mrs. Fortham, his fifth grade teacher, still dragged boys by their ears down the hall to the principal's office.

In Michigan the schools were brick and clean, like hospitals. Teachers dressed like they were going to church. You signed your name and got crisp books with colored pictures on the cover and a number stamped inside. Bells rang and everyone rushed about in a giant scrambling like fish in nets. When Ray didn't play football, the white students called him names he didn't understand, then ignored him. The black students just ignored him. There was a different racial thing in Michigan but Ray never really understood it, partially because he was the only student who was both southern and white. He never thought of himself as belonging to a real race anyway or any kind of group. He was always alone. One day his bike, while chained to a bike rack, was severely beaten and twisted into ugly shapes, the fenders battered, the tires splayed and burst. Ray walked to and from school after that. All of it was bearable except for Mr. Lawrence and Dr. Howard.

Dr. Howard was the way Ray always thought a Yankee woman would be. She spoke very fast and loud; she knew everyone's name and they all listened to her. She talked to Ray about "his adjustment" and encouraged him to play football and he couldn't explain to her why he wouldn't. She smiled when he called her "Ma'am" and said he was very well brought up, a mistake no one from home would have made.

It was worse with Mr. Lawrence. He was short and thin and had very little hair that he pulled across his head like trolley tracks. He taught English. Mr. Lawrence introduced Ray to the students as someone "who would give the class fresh insight into William Faulkner." Ray, who had never heard of William Faulkner, was not exactly sure what insight was. Ray read a story called "A Rose from Emily" three times because Mr. Lawrence wanted him to talk to the class about it and give his insight.

Sometime before the snow, Ellen got a letter from Mr. Lawrence asking her to come in for a conference, so she had a

talk with Ray over dinner. Dinner was *perch etouffée*. You couldn't cook the shrimp they sold in Michigan. They all came with their heads off, obscene little gray crescents, Ellen said they tasted like cardboard no matter how you fixed them. She asked if he had been "acting up" in school. That was not true at all, but Ray had been leaving school more and more and going down by the decaying shed or walking from stone to stone across Rugg's Brook, or climbing one of the really huge, really fantastic autumn trees to sit in a cloud of brilliant gold-red leaves like an emperor. He was fairly sure this was against the rules but there was nobody to watch you and keep you in; no fences, nothing.

They had fried fish the night she told him about her conference with Mr. Lawrence. The crust was spicy and exactly crisp, the whitefish sweet and melting inside. Ellen had taken Ray out to eat fried fish in a restaurant in Michigan once. They were served a big, thick, square block of spongy fish, cool in the center, sitting under a thick coat of sodden bread crumbs. People did something like that with the pralines in Michigan, they made them into thick, square, gummy blocks called fudge. Ellen explained that Mr. Lawrence wanted to meet with Ray after school every Monday and Wednesday.

The tutorials were not a success. Ray couldn't understand the concept of a teacher trying to help him and thought he was being punished. Mr. Lawrence was too involved in his subject to comprehend and take into consideration Ray's total lack of primary educational preparation. Mr. Lawrence had never been outside of Michigan except for one trip to Ohio.

Ray had twelve minutes between the end of school and his hour with Mr. Lawrence. He usually spent it outside by his favorite tree. One day they were waiting for him. First they started in about football and when he didn't react they escalated. When they started to hit him, he curled up into a ball, thinking that back home white kids wouldn't help black kids beat him up even if he was Ray Rocheambeau.

Afterwards he washed up in the boy's room and then went to the tutorial as usual.

When Mr. Lawrence asked what had happened to him, he answered that it didn't matter. Mr. Lawrence immediately drove Ray home and fussed over him with Ellen. Ray still wouldn't

talk about it. Ellen surprised herself by inviting Mr. Lawrence to stay to supper and he surprised everyone by accepting.

The dinner was a tremendous success. After that meal everything began to change, in small slow ways like the seasons. Ellen started buying new things for the house, small things like a cookie jar and a pair of brass candlesticks. Mr. Lawrence brought her apples or fudge and once a pot holder that was shaped like the state of Michigan. He called her Miss Rocheambeau and then Ellen Edith, which was her full name, and then he called her E.E. which was also the name of a poet he really liked and whose poems he would read aloud sometimes after dinner. Ray listened and tried to understand how hands could be like rain, tried to think of them as all wet and see through. Sometimes he almost sensed something in poetry—a very different thing, like English teachers laughing at English teacher rules and going bowling—but then it was gone.

E.E. made cornbread and fried oysters. Mr. Lawrence brought over a phonograph. The sound of the records had an odd distorted quality to Ray. There was no music in Michigan. In New Orleans, music was interwoven with time, with something in the quality of the light. There was no music in Michigan except in the snow. Maybe there was poetry in Michigan instead of music. There was *Hiawatha* which was pretty good in a way, but maybe some poetry was a joke like the record of T.S. Eliot that Mr. Lawrence brought over. T.S. Eliot was hilarious and sounded sort of like Frankenstein. There was one more poetry record. It was Dylan Thomas, and he had to be from New Orleans; Ray was almost sure of it.

Ray's thirteenth birthday was the best day of his entire life. Ellen officially let him stay home from school and brought him coffee and sweet potato muffins in bed. In the evening he had his first birthday party ever. Ellen made his favorite stuffed aubergines. Mr. Lawrence called them eggplants and they all laughed about what a stupid name that was. He brought a bottle of cherry wine, with a sweet fruity taste like cough syrup with the medicine taken out, and they all drank it. Ellen gave Ray new jeans and a new wallet and a gigantic blue sweater that she had knitted herself. Mr. Lawrence gave him a golden cage with two parakeets in it.

Ray barely noticed the cake and didn't really listen to the new record on the phonograph. His eyes never left the birds. They moved in small, bright/delicate, gentle/swift gestures. One had violet feathers that lightened into lavender at the head, with the wings and tail a soft grey. The other bird was a violent tropical bouquet of chartreuse, kelly green, emerald green and bright lemon yellow. They had dull yellow beaks like cartoon noses and eyes like small black beads. Ray called the purple one Grant and so he had to find something that started with an S for the other and finally picked Susannah. Mr. Lawrence also gave Ray a book *Caring for your Parakeet*. It was 42 pages long, with pictures. It was the only book that Ray had ever finished.

Ellen's job changed from answering phones to making coffee and rolling up ham & cheese into neat cylinders for executive lunches. It was decided that her melodic southern voice, the reason they had hired her, gave the impression that they were importing a work force. Ray stopped going to school almost entirely. He ate breakfast with Ellen and when she left for work he would spend the day with his birds. He tried to teach them to do tricks and to talk.

"Hello, Ray. Hello, Ray. Hello, Ray." he would repeat tirelessly in a low even voice the way the book said to "Hello, Ray. Hello, Ray. Hello, Ray. Hello, Ray." The birds continued to make only parakeet sounds, but he never thought of giving up. It was the first real goal he had ever worked for.

Ellen Edith Rocheambeau was so close to being happy that she was almost sick to her stomach a lot of the time. She changed; nothing radical like wearing make-up or buying clothes, but she stopped wearing combs in her hair and her eye glasses. This hampered her vision everywhere except in the kitchen. Ellen knew the kitchen so well that a blindfold would barely cause her to hesitate between the thyme and the bay leaves. She had absolutely no expectations and avoided, with almost superstitious intensity, any thought of her future. She started to hug Ray good bye when she left in the morning. An amazing gesture that went unnoticed. Ray's life revolved around the birds.

He would let them out of the cage during the day and they would change the living room with its plaid wool sofa and scarred coffee table, into an amazon rain forest. Ray's imagina-

tion, which had wisely been kept tightly shuttered, blossomed dangerously fast and full as he sat in his little Michigan jungle.

Susannah was the more acrobatic and athletic bird; she climbed the curtains then flew around the room in a streak of color, landing on the wingback chair and shrieking in triumph. She could hang by her feet from the curtain pull like a circus bird and stretch her wings out like a hood ornament. Ray built her a playground out of twigs and glue and then buried it in the backyard after he learned the hazard of glue while rereading the chapter on "How to parakeet proof your home."

Neil Lawrence came over at least three nights a week and sometimes after dinner all of them would sit on the plaid sofa, like a family, and watch television while Susannah and Grant twittered contentedly in their cage. The families on the TV set solved problems of allowances and lost football tickets while the three of them sat on the sofa, full of another remarkable dinner and a sense of place that should have been a storm warning to someone.

It all ended on Thanksgiving. Ray almost didn't notice it happen. Ellen had been cooking for three days and cleaning for two. The smells in the house had transformed the anonymous, ungracefully duplexed, little structure into a home with gingerbread cottage gaiety. Mr. Lawrence was bringing his mother to dinner. She didn't get out much. Ray had gathered that there was something wrong with her; she had trouble walking or sitting or something.

Most of her trouble was that she weighed over three hundred pounds. It took experience and patience for Neil Lawrence to get his mother out of the small dark blue Ford. She had a gold topped cane in one hand and Neil Lawrence used both of his thin arms to support the other giant elbow as she made her way slowly up the steps and into the house. She was lowered into the wingback chair which creaked alarmingly. Mrs. Lawrence wore a dark red pantsuit of some unfortunately clingy material with a matching jacket. She had lots of necklaces and lots of moles and greying black hair that hung down to the middle of her back, like a young girl's, contrasting oddly with her heavy jowls. Her eyes, set back in pouches of skin, were a wonderful blue. Not a cold pale color or the moody blue that is almost

grey, but a warm generous Caribbean ocean blue, absolutely clear and completely intelligent.

Instead of a standard Northern Thanksgiving dinner, Ellen had made a New Orleans feast that could certainly feed twelve or fifteen. They started with gumbo. Ellen had changed the way she made it, gradually, to take advantage of local products. Neil called it "Michigan gumbo" and it was his special favorite. Ray was fishing a mussel out of the rich dark broth, when Mrs. Lawrence started coughing. Her face turned a frightening color and Mr. Lawrence stated patting her tentatively on the back while Ellen got her a glass of water. Ray overheard something about the south and spicy food but he was shoveling his way through the perch creole.

Suddenly he realized he was the only one eating and that no one had said anything for a long time. Neil Lawrence suggested that his mother might like some plain white rice. She didn't respond; she sat silently, her heavy face quivering, and her eyes staring accusingly at the beautifully arranged food on Ellen's new table cloth. Ellen hadn't cooked any plain rice but quickly offered to get some "real mild" jambalaya which Mrs. Lawrence accepted but did not eat. All color and motion seemed to drain from Neil Lawrence. Food left his plate but he did not seem to be eating; he did not even seem to be breathing.

As soon as Mrs. Lawrence was lowered back into the chair, she snapped open her purse and began eating Hershey's Kisses, crumpling the foil into little nuggets and leaving them in a row on the coffee table. The afternoon went on as dreams go on sometimes, long past the point where you are helplessly, hopelessly trapped. Past the point where you realize it's a dream; past the point when you know you must find some way to stop it, find some way to wake up.

Mrs. Lawrence asked Ellen where she had gone to college. Mrs. Lawrence asked Ray where his parents were. Mrs. Lawrence asked her son how Ray was doing in school. Ellen sat, motionless, giving truthful answers in a quiet neutral voice. Ray offered to show Mrs. Lawrence his parakeets but she said that they might have diseases; that birds carried a serious disease that could be caught by people. Ray felt a surge of hatred toward her stronger than any negative feeling he had ever felt toward anyone—the other students at school or even Robert E. She asked him if he

played football but he didn't answer. They sat silently for a time while the parakeets hopped from branch to branch calling to each other. Mrs. Lawrence asked how they could live with "all that racket" as she rolled more bits of tinfoil in her short fat fingers and studied the bird cage with distaste.

When they finally left, Ellen went into her room leaving the dirty dishes for the first time in her life. Ray washed them. He found exactly the right size container for each leftover. He even used three of the washed out Yogurt containers that Ellen kept in a cupboard to the left of the sink.

When he was done he knocked on her door.

"No, Ray."

"Okay."

He had gotten a bell as a Thanksgiving present for the birds. It was made of different kinds of seeds all glued together with honey, or something. Ray hung it from the center of the cage. He watched for hours as Susannah circled the cage, studying the bell from all possible angles, twisting her head in quick delicate movements. Grant went to the bell as soon as it was hung and started chewing at the seeds, carving a ragged chunk out of it. Susannah hopped from perch to perch, her bright focused black eyes flickering from Ray to the bell. Ray waited silently. Time settled over the small living room like snow. Finally Susannah reached with her beak and delicately picked off one seed. Ray felt a small thrill of intimacy. "Hello," he said, "Hello, Ray. Hello, Ray. Hello, Ray. Hello, Ray. Hello, Ray."

After Thanksgiving, everything just faded like a color photograph changing to black and white because it's been left in the light too long. Ellen seemed to lose substance. The house looked dusty, even right after she cleaned it. Ray stopped going to school completely and started washing dishes at Nedini's Pizza parlor. He liked washing dishes, you could wear whatever you wanted, and the pizza pans didn't break. He worked with Howie who brought a radio to listen to the ball games. He ate pizza twice a day except on his day off, Monday when Ellen would cook dinner. The rest of the week she ate mostly egg salad sandwiches. Christmas was coming. There was a holiday feeling in town, with colored lights and big red bows on the lamp posts. Ellen made stuffed aubergines for Christmas dinner. She gave Ray a hat, sweater, gloves and scarf she had knitted in a

rough grey/beige wool. When Ellen opened Ray's present, he was as embarrassed as if he had bought her a nightgown. He had picked out a romance novel. On the cover was a beautiful green-eyed woman with long hair swirling around her in a great, red-gold halo.

Ray gave Grant & Susannah a new cage. It was a large cylinder on angled wrought iron legs, like a gold barred silo. Inside a natural branch rose diagonally from the floor of the cage sending small limbs toward the white porcelain food cups. It was perfect. Ray spent all day moving the birds in and watching them explore.

Ellen made black-eyed peas and cornbread on New Year's and they played Monopoly until 2 a.m. and drank a whole bottle of cheap champagne. The birds watched between the gold bars of their cage. Grant's purple plumage faded into the background while Susannah's feathers, almost florescent green and gold, were the only bright color in the room. The next day she sat high up on the branch in the same place all day. For two days after that she sat on top of the low porcelain food cup. The next day she died.

Ray found her when he came down from re-reading his book. He had read one section over and over.

Going Light

Very occasionally, a parakeet will grow listless for no apparent reason. The bird is not interested in eating or playing or any of its normal activities. This condition is called "going light" by bird experts. They do not know what causes a bird to go light, nor do they know how to treat it. You can try tempting the bird with its favorite foods. Unfortunately, most birds that start to go light will die within a few days because they refuse food and water.

The riotous color of the chartreuse and yellow feathers was obscene in death like the shellacked wings of a butterfly.

Ray lifted the cylinder of bars off the base and set it on the sofa. Grant flew to the TV and screamed twice. Ray stared at Susannah. She was still the only bright thing in the room. It seemed wrong that death hadn't drawn away the color from her. She should look dead now that she wasn't moving; her feathers should be grey and white like the newsprint underneath her.

Ray scooped her body up in his hand. She weighed nothing. She had no temperature, nothing to remind him of the tight hot grip of her clawed feet on his finger. He took her out the back door into the snow cold night in his T-shirt and his mind flipped to the backyard in Louisiana, the okra and pole beans and Ulysses at the end of the short thick chain, stinking of shrimp heads. Ray walked past the Chandler's house across the Henderson's yard to the shortcut. Then onto the golf course where the untouched snow stretched away in lavender mounds and gentle violet hills, like a pastel desert. He found an enormous snow bank and let himself fall into it. Totally silent in a deep depression in the snow. Totally silent, Susannah's feathers next to his cheek. It must be the next best thing to heaven, just being that cold.

East Lansing, Michigan

"A WALK THROUGH THE PARADISE GARDEN":
VACHEL LINDSAY'S IDEA OF KANSAS IN
ADVENTURES WHILE PREACHING
THE GOSPEL OF BEAUTY

MICHAEL WENTWORTH

During the summer of 1912, Vachel Lindsay, now generally dismissed as a pedestrian poet-performer of an earlier populist age long since outworn and eclipsed by the very technology he inveighed against, walked from his hometown of Springfield, Illinois, through Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico.¹ Drawing upon the letters he wrote home to his family back in Springfield, Lindsay pieced together an account of his walking tour which was eventually published by Mitchell Kennerley in 1914 under the title *Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*.²

Prior to starting his walk west, Lindsay set for himself "certain rules of travel" (rules that had evolved and proved "practicable" in previous walking expeditions in the East and South). He thus resolves "to have nothing to do with cities, railroads, money, baggage or fellow tramps"; "to begin to ask for dinner about a quarter of eleven & for supper, lodging & breakfast about a quarter of five"; "to be neat, truthful, civil & on the square"; and "to preach the Gospel of Beauty."³ Perhaps the most curious of Lindsay's vows, or "rules," is his announced intention "to preach the Gospel of Beauty," an aesthetic program directly related to the beautification of "one's own hearth & neighborhood," what Lindsay describes as "village improvement" or the "new localism." According to Lindsay, the true vagabond-aesthete is impelled to wander "over the whole nation in search of the secret of democratic beauty," with the understanding that he should not be a gypsy forever, but ultimately "should return home" and, having returned, "should plant the seeds of Art and Beauty," tending them "till they grow" (47-48).

No less curious than Lindsay's "rules of travel" is his declaration in the extended prefatory section of *The Adventures*, "Of all that I saw the State of Kansas impressed me most, and the letters home I have chosen cover, for the most part, adventures there" (54). When I first came across this declaration as a graduate student (I had been reading Lindsay in a Modern American Poetry class and, something of a self-styled bohemian at the time, I had picked up on my instructor's recommendation that I take a look at Lindsay's published accounts of his walking tours), I was at once pleasantly startled and curiously intrigued; for I had some sense of what Lindsay was talking about since I was, and still consider myself, a native Kansan. In a recent study *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture*, James R. Shortridge (professor of cultural geography at the University of Kansas) explains that compared to natives of the South, New England, and the Pacific Northwest, for example, "Middle-western folk" are almost instinctively defensive about their place of origin.⁴ I suspect that what is true of Midwesterners in general is even more true of Kansans in particular. Over the years I have frequently found myself in social situations where the inevitable question turns up: "Where are you from?" When I answer "Kansas," the general reaction (unless, through some unlikely coincidence, the other party is also a native Kansan), ranges from pity ("Oh, really," with the obvious inflection, "How sad for you.") to surprise (like someone who has just discovered the last item in a scavenger hunt—"A native Kansan! I've found one. I've got him right over here!") to outright scorn ("Yah, I remember my trip out west in '83. I never thought I'd get across that damned state!"). Kansas: that infinite space between; the ultimate death drive; the land of perfect Euclidean flatness, with all the appeal of some barren prison-asteroid out of a pulp sci-fi novel; Kansas, the place incredibly enough that Dorothy, without the slightest hint of embarrassment, wanted to get back to. How, then, to account for Lindsay's declaration? What did he see that so many others have missed? As it turns out, part of the answer involves those very topographical features that have since figured into more prosaic accounts of the state:

Kansas, laid out in roads a mile apart, criss-crossing to make a great checker-board, roads that go on & on past endless rich

farms & big farm-houses, though there is not a village or railroad for miles. (55)

Then with prophetic foresight (even in 1912), as if to give the lie to the outraged impressions of transcontinental motorists (at the same time vindicating his more leisurely, pedestrian mode of travel), he continues,

Travellers who go through in cars with roofs know little of this State. Kansas is not Kansas until we march day after day, away from the sunrise, under the blistering noon sky, on, on over a straight west-going road toward the sunset. Then we begin to have our spirits stirred by the sight of the tremendous clouds looming over the most interminable plain that ever expanded & made glorious the heart of man. (56)

This sense of vast, open, uninterrupted space is directly related to Lindsay's romantic identification of Kansas with his preconceived notion of the West. Just outside of Sedalia, Missouri, he observes that Kansas is, in fact, "the heart of the West" (87).

Ultimately, however, Lindsay's perception of Kansas, though partly informed by romantic assumptions, is based upon his actual experiences, his various "adventures," while walking across the state itself. Compared to the naturalistic and frequently sensational narrative detail in other contemporary tramping accounts (for example, Jack London's *The Road*, W. H. Davies' *Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*, or Leon Livingston's series of tramping books), Lindsay's "adventures" seem utterly inconsequential and acquire a certain charm and innocence as a result of this very inconsequentiality.

Typical of Lindsay's adventures is the occasion of his first crossing into Kansas, the exhilarating effect of which he describes shortly afterward while waiting out a shower in the railroad station at Stillwell, Kansas:

I have crossed the mystic border. I have left the Earth. I have entered Wonderland. Though I am still east of the geographical centre of the United States, in every spiritual sense I am in the West. (98)

He then recounts his first adventure after crossing this "mystic border"—his chance discovery of a row of wild strawberries:

Lo, where the farmer had cut the weeds between the row and the fence, the gentle fruits revealed themselves, growing in the

shadow down between the still-standing weeds. They shine out in a red line that stretches on and on, and a man has to resolve to stop eating several times. Just as he thinks he has conquered the desire the line gets dazzlingly red again.

The berries grow at the end of a slender stalk, clustered six in a bunch. One gathers them in bouquets, as it were, and eats off the fruit like taffy off a stick. (98-99)

This is hardly the stuff of high adventure, but the passage says much about Lindsay's sensibility, his openness to and lyrical perception of minor details overlooked by the general observer, his innocent opportunism (seizing upon the simple riches provided by the moment), his delight in Blakean particulars, his sensitivity to the natural environment. This seemingly minor episode also evokes a sense of uncorrupted nature, fruitfulness, and plenitude. There is, in fact, an Eden-esque quality to Lindsay's recollection, as nature cooperatively supports his own self-sufficiency.

Several days after crossing the "mystic border," Lindsay approaches Emporia, Kansas (the "Athens of America" and home of that "immortal editor" William Allen White). He had been walking west along the tracks of the Santa Fe railroad over the previous day and a half and at the moment is thoroughly drenched by a steady torrent of rain when, no less propitiously than the timely appearance of the wild strawberries several days before, the mist lifts and, comparing himself to Childe Roland, he suddenly discovers a shack to the right of the tracks. The shack, as it turns out, is occupied by a double-section railroad gang. Two heads pop out of the shack and "affectionately" welcome Lindsay inside where he warms himself by "a roaring red hot stove" and devours the leftovers from the work gang's lunch. Lindsay's account of this episode, yet another of the many instances of the spontaneous generosity he encounters while walking through Kansas, is of further interest as an example of Lindsay's frequent use of humor which often assumes a visual, slapstick quality. Noting, for example, that the work crew were "beginning to throw perfectly good sandwiches and extra pieces of pie through the door," he instructs them that "if any man had anything to throw away would he just wait till I stepped outside so I could catch it" (106). At other times, Lindsay's humor draws upon the fanciful hyperbole characteristic of the Southwestern tall tale. After consuming enormous

draughts of coffee, he thus reflects, "That coffee made me into a sort of thermos bottle," and he in fact is so warmed by the coffee that he manages to sleep later that night "in wet clothes in a damp blanket in the hay of a windy livery-stable without catching cold" (106).

When a day later, Lindsay does reach the "classic village of Emporia," where he stays in the home of a family friend, a Professor Kerr, his needs are accommodated in more comfortable surroundings. Compared to the hospitality of the open road, Lindsay's surroundings are almost too comfortable and the "adventure" of his visit too conventional. Noting his capitulation to modern conveniences such as running water, Lindsay confesses, with humorous self-reproach, his luxurious deviation from the "strait paths of St. Francis" (109) and the fact that he is finally an "artificial creature," after all, "dependent upon modern plumbing" (108). There are additional amenities that recommend themselves, particularly the professor's library where Lindsay sits a "very mixed-up person," anxious to move on, but for the moment too comfortably situated "to stir an inch." Nevertheless, recognizing the distracting captivations of civilized life—"the restful upper air" as he describes it—Lindsay determines, much like Jack London (though hardly for London's Marxist reasons), that "the only choice a real man can make is to stay below with the great forces of life, forever, even though he is a tramp" (111). Thus, whatever the charms of the professor's home and, more generally, of Emporia itself, Lindsay finally feels "like a bull in a china shop" and amusingly remarks, "I should have been out in the fields, eating grass" (111).

Of all Lindsay's various adventures in Kansas, certainly the most memorable and personally significant is his participation in the wheat harvest in western Kansas late in June 1912. The greatest appeal of Kansas for Lindsay—and intimately related to his admiration of the physical landscape—is the very soil itself and by extension the cultivation and productivity of that soil. Thus, in his retrospective assessment of Kansas in the introductory section of the *Adventures*, Lindsay, in a characteristic series of exclamatory epithets, describes Kansas as "the last real refuge of the constitution, since it maintains the type of agricultural civilization the constitution has in mind!"; as "the State of tremendous crops"; as "the land of the real country gentlemen,

Americans who work the soil and own the soil they work" (54-55). It is hardly surprising, then, that Lindsay should have attached such importance to his experiences as a field worker in the annual summer wheat harvest. Originally, Lindsay had no intention (in fact the idea had evidently never occurred to him) of working as a harvester and to the frequent query of strangers and new-found acquaintances along the road, "Goin' west harvestin'?" he repeatedly answers, "No." Eventually, however, he questions his original resistance. For example, in an entry dated "June 10, 1912. 3 p.m.," and written three miles west of Sedalia, Missouri, he reflects that "in a certain mystical sense" he has made himself part of the hundreds and hundreds of farms that lie between him and "machine-made America" (88). He fails at the moment to recognize that his identification with the land is, indeed, mystical because it is essentially spiritual rather than practical, but he continues in a similar vein:

I have scarcely seen anything but crops since I left home. The whole human race [with the notable exception of himself] is grubbing in the soil, and the soil is responding with tremendous vigor. (89)

Witness to such tremendous activity, Lindsay rationalizes that in walking he is working too and that, after all, his avowed purpose in undertaking his walk is to preach the Gospel of Beauty ("I suppose I am a minstrel or nothing" [89].). Finally, however, he feels his personal idleness "above all other facts on earth," expresses an eagerness "to get to work immediately," and concludes with the observation that every time he says "no" to the question of "Goin' west harvestin'?" he is "a little less brisk" about securing his needs on the road by "exchanging rhymes for bread." Two days later, he is taken in for the night by a farmer, John Humphrey. Fascinated by Humphrey's account of his own harvesting adventures and shamefully chagrined by the industry of Humphrey and his family and his own contrasting idleness, Lindsay resolves, upon Humphrey's recommendation, to harvest in Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas, "the banner wheat country of the United States" (96-96).

Twelve days later Lindsay makes good on his resolution when he is engaged for four days by a Mennonite family outside of Newton, Kansas. Following this first harvesting experience,

Lindsay walks into Newton and purchases a new outfit, including a pair of the "most indestructible of corduroys" as well as the "grandest kind of a sombrero" (to escape sun-stroke in "the next harvest-field") and starts out again, "dead broke" and happy in the realization that "if I work hereafter I can send most all my wages home, for I am now in real travelling costume" (139). He spends the Fourth of July in Raymond, Kansas where he enters a local restaurant and in exchange for a recitation of verses (including, as usual, "The Illinois Village," "The Building of Springfield," and "The Proud Farmer")—with the stipulation that the rhymes prove "sufficiently fascinating"—he earns a meal, the magnitude of which might have daunted even Thomas Wolfe: a slice of fried ham "large enough for a whole family," French fried potatoes "by the platterful," three fried eggs, milk with cream on top, a can of beans with tomato sauce, sweet apple butter, canned apples, and a pot of coffee. By the end of his meal, Lindsay begins to feel "solid as an iron and big as a Colossus of Rhodes," but in his typical hyperbolic vein, he confesses, "I could have eaten more. I could have eaten a fat Shetland pony" (157). Later that day, with the ham still "frying," though "not uncomfortably," inside him, Lindsay, in what amounts to a quietly reflective celebration of his own independence, observes that the whole day has been pervaded by a "strange intoxication":

The inebriating character of the air and the water and the intoxication that comes with the very sight of the windmills spinning alone, and the elation that comes with the companionship of the sun, and the gentleness of the occasional good Samaritans, are not easily conveyed in words. When one's spirit is just right for this sort of thing it all makes as good an Independence Day as folks are having anywhere in the United States. (157-58)

Several days later, right "in the midst of the harvest time," Lindsay actually reaches Humphrey's recommended destination: Great Bend, "in the heart of the greatest wheat country in America" (163). While sitting outside the general delivery, he is engaged to work the harvest two miles north of Great Bend, a significant occasion in Lindsay's estimation: "So far as I remember, it is the first time in my life anyone ever hunted me out and *asked* me to work for him" (164). Lindsay's second harvest proves less successful than the first. He is exhausted by the

physical demands of the harvest, particularly the overpowering force of the sun (Lindsay's major nemesis, together with grasshoppers, during his three harvests). Furthermore, he finds his supervisor, who violates the Sabbath and who, even more reproachably in Lindsay's estimation, physically abuses a young colt to the point that it eventually dies, much less congenial than his previous Mennonite employer-host. Outraged by his supervisor's maltreatment of the horse and dangerously fatigued, Lindsay leaves the farm three days later, but not without first handing the supervisor and his brother copies of *The Gospel of Beauty* and *Rhymes to Be Traded for Bread*. Checking into the Saddlerock Hotel for the night, Lindsay recovers from his physical exhaustion and, determined to set out again the next day "dead broke and fancy free," writes his family back in Springfield: "I have made an effort to graduate from beggary into the respectable laboring class, which you have so often exhorted me to do" (175).

Several days later, Lindsay reaches Wright, Kansas, where he is engaged in his third harvest by a kindly German farmer, Louis Lix. This final harvest is the most satisfying and enjoyable of Lindsay's three harvesting "adventures." Beyond the kindness and generosity of his employer, this is primarily due to the sociability and good-naturedness of his fellow field workers. In contrast to the laconic austerity of the Mennonite family and the surliness and brutality of the horse-beating supervisor and his brother, Lix's harvesting crew sing, tell stories, and joke about while working the fields. During the course of such pleasureable diversion, Lindsay even has the opportunity to preach his gospel of beauty. For example, one afternoon during a rest-period, when the usual round of songs becomes "hopelessly, prosaically pornographic," Lindsay "yearn[s] for a change" and recites from Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*. One of Lindsay's fellow workers, a wheat stacker, asks for more; Lindsay complies and eventually the stacker is so impressed that he not only commits a number of Swinburne's stanzas to heart, but resolves to purchase a personal copy of *Atalanta* and, when next visiting his wife and children in Dodge City, to seek out Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" and Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" in the public library. That Swinburne would play so well in western Kansas, of all places, would seem the most far-

fetched and paradoxical of possibilities. But the stacker's enthusiastic response—and the stacker himself as the most formidable of test cases—confirms Lindsay's notion of art and beauty as a democratic and populist, rather than a smugly elitist, proposition. By the end of his harvesting venture, Lindsay, who had been initially apprehensive from the memory of his recent physical "breakdown," has acquitted himself so admirably that Lix wants him to come back the following year and is sorry that Lindsay will not be working longer. Lindsay, consistent with his rules of travel, sends all of his wages home, though he does allow himself sufficient funds for one day's stay at Dodge City where he resolves to eat three hotel meals—"sherbet & cheese & crackers, and finger bowls at the end, and all such folly" (179-80).

Of all that Lindsay saw during his walking tour of 1912, Kansas impressed him most, and, though he never says as much directly, clearly the signal "adventures" of his journey are those associated with his involvement in the summer wheat harvest. The wheat fields themselves reconfirm, and even expand (if that is possible), his earlier visionary perception of Kansas as some kind of mystic "Wonderland." For Lindsay, Kansas "is the world of wheat," a "genial region [where] one can stand on a soap-box & see nothing else to the horizon" (180). Elsewhere, Lindsay notes the magnitude and epic grandeur of the wheat fields:

The places where the armies of wheat-sheaves are marshalled are magic places, despite their sweat & dust. There is nothing small in the panorama. All the lines of the scene are epic. (151)

Beyond the majestic sweep of the fields themselves, Lindsay derives tremendous satisfaction from his own acquired competence as a harvester. One afternoon, during his second harvest, he congratulates himself that he has "never shocked wheat with such machine-like precision" (172) and later, near the end of his harvesting stint with Lix, he is pleased to discover that he is "nearer to being a real harvester every day" (184).

With the exception of his one bout with sun-stroke and physical exhaustion, Lindsay derives a similar measure of satisfaction from his perseverance and stamina in confronting, and surviving, such physical hardships as legions of marauding grasshoppers, the unpredictable Kansas weather, and especially the blinding and oppressive heat of the Kansas sun. In spite of the

novelty of the experience and his previous indolence, Lindsay, too, proves equal to the rigorous physical exertion involved in harvesting twelve hours a day.

Lindsay discovers further satisfaction in such simple pleasures as eating which he had previously taken for granted. Prior to his harvesting experiences, Lindsay's physical needs had been satisfied by his scheme of "trading rhymes for bread" or, on occasion, by voluntary labor, though Lindsay himself observes that "assuming a meal is worth thirty-five cents, I have never yet worked out the worth of one, at day-laborer's wages" (82). Upon entering Kansas, Lindsay's needs are involuntarily, and almost providentially, satisfied by the natural liberality and munificence of the land itself. There is something of an involuntary *otium*, or uncomplicated leisure, typical of pastoral associated with Lindsay's previous endeavors, or non-endeavors. According to his rules of the road, meals are a rather casual, improvised proposition based on the simple faith, like that (in a comparison that Lindsay would have appreciated) of the Israelites, that manna, when needed, would be at hand: "I was to begin to ask for dinner about a quarter of eleven & for supper, lodging and breakfast about a quarter of five" (49). In actually working for his board and lodging, however, meals, particularly the noon day meal, assume a special significance, at once spiritual and aesthetic as well as physical. Thus, in recounting the details of his first harvest, Lindsay observes,

To a man in a harvest-field a square meal is more thrilling than a finely-acted play. . . . Every nerve in the famished body calls frantically for reinforcements. And the nerves & soul of a man are strangely alert together. . . . I sing of the body & of the eternal soul, revived again! (146-47)

He then draws a distinction between the eating habits of office workers and those of field hands:

Men indoors in offices, whose bodies actually require little, cannot think of eating enormously without thinking of sodden over-eating, with condiments to rouse, & heavymeats & sweets to lull the flabby body till the last faint remnants of appetite have departed & the man is a monument of sleepy gluttony. (147)

In contrast to such gross, and "sodden," extravagance, Lindsay observes that "eating in a harvest field is never so. . . . To feel

life actually throbbing back into one's veins, life immense in passion, pulse and power, is not overeating" (147).

At one point in *The Adventures*, Lindsay humorously observes, "Ah, if eating were as much in my letters as in my thoughts, this would be nothing but a series of menus!" (180). Actually, it is amazing the extent to which eating preoccupies Lindsay's attention, and it is eating, though of a different sort, that provides the key to Lindsay's harvesting adventures and, more generally, to the cumulative experience of the walking tour itself. In the prefatory section to the *Adventures*, Lindsay explains that the letters (upon which the *Adventures* is based) "were avowedly written as a sort of diary of the trip, but their contents turned out to be something less than that, something more than that, and something rather different" (57). Later, "meditating on the ways of Destiny," outside of Great Bend, Kansas, "in the midst of the harvest-time," Lindsay reflects, "It seems to me I am here, not altogether by chance. But just why I am here, time must reveal" (163). As it turns out, the role Destiny has set for him, and the then unknown significance of the "turning point" in his journey when he decides to harvest once he gets West, is directly related to the spiritual and social significance he attaches to the harvest. During his first harvest, Lindsay is led to feel "the essentially patriarchal character of the harvest":

One thinks of the Book of Ruth, & the Jewish feasts of ingathering. All the New Testament parables ring in one's ears, parables of sowing & reaping, of tares and good grain, of Bread & of Leaven & the story of the Disciples plucking corn. (151-52)

This series of personal Biblical associations leads Lindsay to consider the larger social consequences of his involvement in the harvest:

I was happy indeed that I had had the strength to bear my little part in the harvest of a noble and devout household, *as well as a hand in the feeding of the wide world.* (italics added [152])

Lindsay feels himself a member of a huge collective dignified by the noble end of their labor:

What I, a stranger have done in this place, thirty thousand strangers are doing just a little to the west. We poor tramps are helping to garner that which reestablishes the nations. If only

for a little while, we have bent our back over the splendid furrows, to save a shining gift that would otherwise rot, or vanish away. (153)

Compared to his other adventures, which are essentially private and circumstantial in nature (his chance discovery of a deserted farmhouse, his sleeping in a moonlit barnloft), Lindsay's harvesting adventures are marked by a definite process of structured and constructive social engagement and are informed by an equally definite sense of purpose. Fancifully considered, Lindsay (prior to his harvesting adventures) is very much a solitary reaper. This is true literally, of course, since, as the opportunity arises, he reaps his nourishment—gathering wild strawberries and mulberries, for example—along the way. Metaphorically, however, he is equally a solitary reaper, "reaping" and "harvesting" various adventures during his cross-country tramp. In "On the Road to Nowhere," one of numerous poems later incorporated within the diary format of the *Adventures*, Lindsay speaks of the solitary tramp who, flushed with visionary expectation, sets out on the road for "nowhere, golden nowhere." He notes, however, that "All but a few fanatics / Give up their darling goal" and resign themselves to the disappointing harvest of abandoned expectations. The "sage," "the fool," the true visionary, on the other hand, resists the self-defeating snares of security, comfort, society, and complacency and "press[es] on, singing, sowing / Wild deeds without recall!" Lindsay, of course, is the very "sage" and "fool," the solitary pilgrim who, during the course of his tramp West and in his own quaint and harmless fashion, has sown his own "wild deeds." Those "deeds"—or even more aptly, in Lindsay's own terms, "adventures"—are naively self-centered and inscribed by his own puckish personality and imagination. Prior to his three harvests, then, Lindsay reaps primarily for himself. However, through his participation in the Kansas wheat harvest, Lindsay's reaping assumes a public dimension. Part of a confederacy of fellow tramps who, if only temporarily, are joined by a common enterprise and, at least in Lindsay's estimation, a common purpose, Lindsay, through his involvement in one of the most basic, and even archetypal, of human activities, now reaps for the benefit of the larger community. Lindsay's exhilarating sense of purpose and solidarity is

fully apparent in the poem "Kansas," which, like "On the Road to Nowhere," was later interpolated within the *Adventures*. The contrast between the two poems is striking and, together, they aptly chart the pivotal shift in Lindsay's adventures, or reappings, from the private to the public dimension. In "On the Road to Nowhere," neither the quest nor the destination is precisely drawn; rather, they remain deliberately, and romantically, ambiguous. The value and significance of the tramp's journey derives from its unprogrammed, erratic nature. Ironically, the personal value and benefits of such a haphazard scheme are conveyed in agricultural terms: reaping, sowing, harvesting. Compared to "On the Road to Nowhere," "Kansas" is much more definitely "centered," both in terms of purpose and location. In contrast to the personal focus of many of Lindsay's adventures before his arrival in western Kansas, the focus in "Kansas" is upon the shared experiences of the thirty thousand tramps who annually harvest in Kansas. Thus the recurring emphasis throughout the poem is upon the group, the collective ("We") rather than the individual ego ("I"): and throughout the poem, Lindsay celebrates the camaraderie and the sense of well-being that derives from the shared enterprise that engages, if only for one month out of the year, Lindsay and his fellow tramps. Moreover, such a communal effort, together with the natural—and, once again, the almost providential—liberality of the land itself ensures the satisfaction of the most basic of human needs.

We feasted high in Kansas
And had much milk and meat.
The tables groaned to give us power
Wherewith to save the wheat.
Our beds were sweet alfalfa hay
Within the barn-loft wide.
The loft doors opened out upon
The endless wheat-field tide.

The whole collective experience, as Lindsay describes it, assumes a decidedly idyllic dimension, for, despite the rigorous physical labor and the severity of the elements,

. . . all men dream in Kansas
By noonday & by night,
By sunrise yellow, red and wild
And moonrise wild & white.

"Kansas," however, records but a temporary, albeit purposeful, distraction from "the road to nowhere"; for upon leaving Dodge City, following his third harvest, Lindsay, "dead broke" once again, but "keeping all the rules of the road," begs his way across western Kansas and eastern Colorado. He receives repeated offers from "frantic farmers" along the way to assist in the harvest, but anxious to write "certain new poems" inspired by his journey, he "regretfully refuse[s] all but half-day jobs" (190-91).

Though neither Lindsay's Kansas "rhymes" nor his record of his 1912 walking tour comprise a memorable contribution to American letters (like Lindsay himself, they are largely forgotten), the *Adventures* does reveal yet another typically eccentric and naively romantic chapter in the life of one of America's most engagingly off-beat poet-artists. At the same time, the *Adventures*, no less than Thoreau's *Walden* or Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*, provides a fascinating example of the intimate and mutually reflexive bond between place and the imaginative temperament by means of which both place and self are constructively enlarged and transformed. Finally, the *Adventures* stands in fascinating relation to other tramping/excursionary accounts that figure so prominently in American culture, most notably, and poignantly, perhaps, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, which describes a far different scenario than that encountered—or, more precisely, imagined—by Lindsay thirty years before.

University of North Carolina at Wilmington

NOTES

1. For an estimate of Lindsay's diminished, and largely neglected, reputation as a poet, see Dennis Q. McNerny, "Vachel Lindsay: A Reappraisal," in *The Vision of This Land: Studies of Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, and Carl Sandburg*, ed. John E. Hallwas and Dennis J. Reader ([Macomb, Ill.]: Western Illinois University, 1976): 29-41.
2. For a bibliographic account of the *Adventures*, see Dennis Camp's prefatory remarks on the *Adventures* in *The Prose of Vachel Lindsay*, Vol. 1, ed. Dennis Camp (Peoria, Ill.: Spoon River Poetry Press, 1988): 153.
3. *Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*, in *Adventures, Rhymes & Designs Including the Prose Volume* *Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty, Together with Rhymes to Be Traded for Bread, The Village Improvement Parade, and Selections from The Village Magazine*. With an Essay by Robert F. Sayre (New York: Eakins, 1968): 49. Subsequent references to the *Adventures* are based on this edition and are noted parenthetically. For a more recent edition of the *Adventures* and other of Lindsay's prose works, see *The Prose of Vachel Lindsay*, Vol. 1, ed. Dennis Camp (Peoria, Ill.: Spoon River Poetry Press, 1988): 153-210.
4. James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989). See in particular the Preface (xiii-xiv) and the opening chapter, "Contradictory Images" (1-12).

NOT FOR WHITE MEN ONLY:
THE METHODOLOGY BEHIND THE
DICTIONARY OF MIDWESTERN LITERATURE

ROBERT DUNNE

Now that I have got your attention with my PC-sounding title, and either have piqued your curiosity or turned you off entirely, I want to touch on some issues which I think are important for the Society to consider as it continues work on the *Midwestern Dictionary*.

My title mirrors exactly the kinds of issues I want to talk about with regard to the dictionary. Rhetorically, the title "Not for White Men Only" prompted you to have expectations about what I was going to say even before my talk began. Specifically, you may be expecting me to chastise scholars of the past and present for institutionalizing a middle-class white male Midwestern canon. But, in fact, that is not the purpose of my talk here today. My purpose is to raise a flag of caution about how we in the Society will consider the rhetorical implications of the term "Midwestern Literature" and how that consideration will then determine which authors get selected for inclusion in the dictionary. Based on my paper's ideological title, you came here no doubt expecting to listen to a politically correct paper that will not, in fact, be given. So too must we make ourselves aware of the difference between our ideological expectations of that appellation "Midwestern Literature" and what any literature about the Midwest actually constitutes. In other words, we have to be wary of defining a set formula of the Midwest that would consequently result in the exclusion of authors who have written about the Midwest but who may not fit into such a formula. This is an issue that has stimulated—and plagued—other scholars' work on national and regional literary histories, and it is an issue which I think the Society will also have to grapple with.

As general editor of the second edition of the *Cambridge American Literary History* (which is still in progress), Sacvan Bercovitch has frequently discussed the problem of defining what is specifically "American" about American literature. In particular, Bercovitch has tried to distinguish between American myth (or ideology as he calls it) and American reality. He defines ideology as

the system of interlinked ideas, symbols, and beliefs by which a culture—any culture—seeks to justify and perpetuate itself: the web of rhetoric, ritual, and assumption through which society coerces, persuades, and coheres. (635)

According to Bercovitch, ideology emerges from historical realities that are re-presented "symbolically and conceptually, as though they were natural, universal, and right" (636). Bercovitch here is implying that the dominant mainstream society mythologizes historical events and then accepts the myths as the realities. One result, to extend Bercovitch's thesis, can be that a gulf is created between historical reality and mythic belief. Bercovitch's views of the disparity between myth and reality have been commonly accepted and tested by other recent editors of literary histories whose goal has been to open up literary canons. But in trying to pierce through the myth of the nation or a given region, some editors have created as many new problems as they may have resolved old ones.

The question, for example, of whether there can be a single, compact definition of any regional or national literature has been answered in problematic ways by many of today's critics (Bercovitch, Emory Elliott, Nina Baym, Paul Lauter, Jane Tompkins, among others). Simply put, such critics contend that there cannot be a unified definition of regional or national literature. The days are long gone when Robert Spiller and the other editors of the *Literary History of the United States* (1948) could claim that, "the book [we] have written tells a single and unified story" (ix), and many recent literary historians would say good riddance to those days. Emory Elliott, for example, states in the preface and introduction to the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1988), that a rhetorical consensus of what constitutes a national literature is impossible. He declares that, "There is today no unifying vision of a national identity like

that shared by many scholars at the closings of the two world wars" (xi-xii). Ironically, Elliott says that *dissensus* (to use Bercovitch's term) is the primary criterion behind the *Columbia*: "the present project is modestly postmodern: it acknowledges diversity, complexity, and contradiction by making them structural principles, and it forgoes closure as well as consensus" (xiii). He goes on to add that, "No longer is it possible, or desirable, to formulate an image of continuity when diversity of literary materials and a wide variety of critical voices are, in fact, the distinctive features of national literature" (xxi). But a problem with editing a literary history that makes diversity, complexity, and contradiction its structural principles is the very product itself. As Elliott has considered elsewhere, does not a literary history by its very nature imply a "summing up, an authoritative finality"? ("Politics" 275) Elliott's only recommendation to get around such a paradox is that the *Columbia* eventually be supplemented with an annual volume of essays that would record the changing currents of critical interpretation.

Despite such innovations, the *Columbia* received a mixed reception. In a review of the book, Giles Gunn criticizes the *Columbia* editors for stressing diversity at the expense of coherence. He all but calls the project a Babel of disparate voices, a stream of monologues rather than a "comprehensible dialogue, or at least an intelligible conversation" (120). He concludes his review by pointing out that, "If [the *Columbia*] has managed to render an image of the American literary past that is more complex, pluralistic, and subtle, it has also succeeded in making it . . . less meaningful and more muddled" (127). Gunn makes a valid appraisal which the Society should keep in mind as it sets out to define what constitutes literature of and about the Midwest.

But there is much to Bercovitch's and Elliott's goals which the Society should follow as well. Both scholars subscribe to the view that there is no single ideal or formula which characterizes the national literature. By their admittance of competing views and conflicting interpretations, they are acknowledging the diverse cultural reality of the United States (and, by extension, the reality of any particular region). But such a principle should not imply either that the numerous writers who have appeared over hundreds of years have *never* shared any points of common interests. We should constantly keep in mind that there is no

one myth or ideological paradigm of Midwestern literature; but in addition, following Gunn's line of argument, we should also look for those "comprehensible dialogues" that have taken place among the writers we will include in the dictionary.

We can look for a moment at Sherwood Anderson and Lyman Beecher as relatively odd bedfellows who nevertheless can be seen in terms of engaging in such a dialogue, or conversation. Anderson and a long line of other Midwestern writers were suspicious and critical of the intrusions of the puritanical East; Beecher, who was himself steeped in the East, wrote a diatribe in the 1830s against the backsliding of Midwesterners. Their respective views on an Eastern influence or intrusion on the Midwest provide a fascinating contrast and, in a sense, demonstrate Gunn's notion of dialogue. As an aside, my example is perhaps too pat in comparison with the more problematic issues we will encounter which center on sex, race, and diverse ethnicity.

My little aside also illustrates another thorny issue related to my concern over the Midwestern myth: how will the Society treat writers who do not fall into neat thematic continuities and who nevertheless write about life in the Midwest? Such a quandary has been addressed by literary historians of other regions, particularly the South. I have in mind *The History of Southern Literature* (1985), edited by Louis Rubin. In his introduction, Rubin admits that his one-volume work does not devote much space to pre-twentieth-century writers, and justifies his decision with this statement:

from a qualitative standpoint, the principal importance of much of the earlier literature lies in the extent to which it contributes to the development of the literary imagination that would flower in the twentieth-century Southern Renaissance. (1)

Rubin's and the other editors' history of Southern literature (lower-case) is really not a comprehensive history but a typological study of one significant period, with the Renaissance serving as the *anno domini*. Granted, the Midwestern Dictionary will avoid focusing on a single period because it is not going to be a chronological literary history. However, I think it was a sure certainty that many of us (myself included) were following Rubin's line of thinking when we composed our lists of author entries. (Just substitute the Chicago Renaissance for the Southern

Renaissance, and you get my point.) This is unavoidable, though not really a problem in itself. The Society should strive, nonetheless, to prevent the *Midwestern Dictionary* from accomplishing the same *results* that were reached by Rubin, because we will then, justifiably, open the door to criticism that *all* we did was validate the preeminence of the region's most noted period, the Chicago Renaissance.

Which brings me to another related issue. If we can define Midwestern literature so that it acknowledges both the myth of the Midwest and other depictions of life in the Midwest, we will consequently make way for the inclusion of non-traditional writers—as well as necessitate the enlistment of a diverse range of contributing scholars. Most of us have a pretty good knowledge of the traditional Midwestern literary heavyweights—the Andersons, the Dreisers, the Lewises, the Cathers—but probably we have very little grasp or even knowledge of so many others. Therefore, we will have to resort to the expertise of scholars who specialize in non-traditional writers, and thereby preclude the politically correct move to have women and minorities “represented” among both contributing scholars and author entries. And we will resort to diverse scholars and include diverse authors *because* our structural principles will make it a fact, not because we will feel obligated for self-conscious—or self-righteous—reasons.

Some critics have needlessly taken recourse to the moral high ground. Elliot, for example, seems compelled to itemize the sex-based composition of the *Columbia's* editorial board and offers his readers some moral assuagement:

In contrast to . . . [Spiller's] *LHUS* which had only one woman contributor among its sixty, the present project includes sixteen female scholars, including two of the five section editors. . . . While one quarter of the contributors is still not a fair proportion, this does mark an advancement. (“Politics” 272-73)

This nagging (and, to me, offensive) tendency among recent scholar-editors finds its numerical culmination in Paul Lauter's 1990 edition of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, in which Lauter touts the *Heath's* head-count of marginalized authors:

[A] major principle of selection has been to represent as fully as possible the varied cultures of the United States. . . . To convey

this diversity, we have included what is by far the widest sampling of the work of minority and white women writers available in any anthology of American literature. This selection includes material by 109 women of all races, 25 individual Native American authors . . . , 53 African-Americans, 13 Hispanics . . . , and 9 Asian-Americans. (xxxvi)

I do not mean to be either smug or flippant in quoting the last two passages. But in spite of their theoretical bases which freely allow for diversity, both Elliott and Lauter sound like proponents of tokenism. I do not want the Society to be attacked for privileging either the good ol' boys or tokenism; to repeat, our structural principles will make diversity a *fact* without the need to convince the dictionary's readers of our moral correctness. I am also not implying that the composition of both the editorial board and the author entries is irrelevant. Theoretical issues aside, it makes practical sense to have a diverse make-up of both. Rubin, for instance, in speaking about his Southern literary history, mentions seemingly as a badge of pride that he and the book's five senior editors (all men) were born in the South in the 1910s and 1920s and grew up immersed in the Southern Renaissance. With such a like-minded editorial board, the final product was predetermined to have a one-sided quality to it, which was characterized in the passage I quoted earlier from Rubin. And in a similar comment about the comprehensive *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (1989), Howell Raines in a review is rather blunt—and shrewd—about the Southern *Encyclopedia's* apparent lack of editorial diversity:

Of the 24 consultants chosen to assemble the major sections, only one is black and only two are women. At best, this is a blunder in public relations. At worst, it suggests that this book's vision of the South is essentially that of middle-aged, white, male academics. (3)

So, in our case, diversity will be both practical and theoretically sound.

Finally, one more related issue. If we are working on a *Midwestern Dictionary*, I think we should be more—though not exclusively—concerned with an author's Midwesternness (as that term is carefully defined) than with the aesthetic quality of that author's work. We have to acknowledge that many of the writers

whom we will dedicate with "major" 2,000-word essays are only marginally canonized figures in the larger American literary canon. Sinclair Lewis, for example, has become virtually an abandoned figure outside of Midwestern circles, and yet he will be one of only seven authors who will have major essays written about them. Of course, I am not advocating an "anything goes" position: after all, I participated in the editorial process that determined the various sizes of essays to be written about specific authors. No matter how hard we have tried to delicately phrase it in our editorial board meetings, we cannot avoid the good-better-best valuations of authors once we determine which ones are to have 2,000- or 1,000- or 50-word essays written about them.

But we do have to keep in mind the criteria we use in determining which authors are to receive major essays and which are to receive "one-liners." I come back to my point made earlier: We have to be cognizant of both the mythic, ideological "Midwestern Literature" and all other literature that is about the Midwest. We should not allow ourselves to privilege (i.e., assign to major or significant status) only those writers whom we have long associated and long accepted as *the* "Midwestern Writers" who wrote "Midwestern Literature." If we can peer through that mythic veneer of "Midwestern Literature," we will find, I am sure, many of the same authors we have always associated with the Midwest. We may also discover, however, many other authors who are writing important things about the Midwest but who are writing about a "different" Midwest than the rhetorical appellation "Midwest" about which we have had long standing expectations. As our work on the *Midwestern Dictionary* proceeds, I hope that my own ingrained expectations are all tested, confirmed, and dramatically recast. For, to borrow a line from that provisional Midwesterner T. S. Eliot, we have the opportunity with this dictionary to create something *really new*, a work which will reconfigure the region and yet serve as an accommodating home to Sherwood Anderson and Zitkala-Ša.

Central Connecticut State University

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THE LANDSCAPE AND THE SENSE OF THE PAST IN WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS'S *THE KENTONS*

EUGENE H. PATTISON

In his 1902 novel *The Kentons*, William Dean Howells studied a fictional Ohio family against long remembered ground in central Ohio, having them go to New York and then to Europe in order to get away from a suitor they consider undesirable for their eldest daughter. Howells had composed the novel in fits and starts between 1897 and 1902, prepared by over a decade of historical recollections.

As Professor George C. Carrington, Jr. has pointed out, Howells considered Ohio settings "the great American thing," as he told Brander Matthews in 1898, and had hoped to depict these settings from his experience of the Ashtabula county seat of Jefferson, to which the family had moved in 1852. He had at least dual sources for the novel's head of the family, Civil war veteran and retired Judge Kenton, naming him for Ohio frontiersman Simon Kenton, and imagining much of his conduct and surroundings from his own father, who was deceased less than ten years, and whose historical recollections he had published in 1895. (The fictional town paper, the *Intelligencer*, has the same name as the paper that William Cooper Howells once published in the town of Hamilton.)

Details at several points in the novel suggest the ways Howells drew on the Ohio landscape that he remembered. The Kenton family's home is in a generalized northern or north-central county seat; the family's name can be associated with the towns of Urbana and Kenton, in Champaign and Hardin Counties, west and northwest of Columbus. Other details locate sources somewhere between Jefferson and the railroad stops of the CCC&I in Galion or Delaware. Vague parallels with historical incidents or persons, which will emerge below, also suggest these models.

By calling it fictional "Tuskingum" he makes it a more generalized setting,¹ evocative of wider memories than those of one or two places.

Frequently at issue among reviewers and critics is the claim that the novel abandoned this landscape. As Carrington has noted, Howells composed *The Kentons* "in a roundabout way." At a very late stage of composition he put into it the Dutch material he had omitted from *Their Silver Wedding Journey* in 1897, and he added a dig at romance by satirizing George Barr McCutcheon's *Graustark* (a best seller in the summer of 1901), having the romanticizing adolescent Boyne Kenton act out part of it. But, as Carrington notes, this material was "the least digested" (TK, xxii). In his 1959 biography Edwin Cady claimed that Howells shrunk from writing "the Ohio novel" and avoided confronting fresh material by sending the Kentons abroad and having the daughter marry a Universalist minister from Brooklyn. Cady found it maddening to have Howells abandon fresh Ohio material for old European travel themes.² Contemporary reviewers divided over the novel, some appreciating the American average and admiring characters like the Judge and his younger son Boyne, and others criticizing the novel for its treatment of irrational behaviors, neuroticism, "cataleptic" indecision, or the "barbarous and illicit" in "social relations." (xxv).

Rather than their being an abandonment of Ohio material, I contend that the European travels are "plotted" in such a way as to enhance and highlight the nostalgia embodied in the Kenton family's and their creator's idyllic sense of their home. Tuskingum as a town does recognize change, indexed by such small matters as the fact that "people no longer kept hens" (TK, 13), but still sanctioning the gentlemen's morning and evening home calls to the young ladies, though the customs were "long since disused in the centres of fashion." (3) The town's prime family, the Kentons, have to cope with the loss of a sense of their home to a changing world represented by the perceptions of it they encounter in their meeting with Americans of other regions, and with Europeans who make them more aware of their ignorance and shortcomings. Their travels make them more aware of their codes of behavior, and the behavior of other travelers toward the family—particularly toward the Kenton children—reflect universal flaws, weaknesses, and failings in human nature

which they cannot avoid either by flight from the region or by returning to it.

I

First of all, Judge Kenton's avocations in retirement, which are closest to Howells's own historical recollections, manifest both local values and nostalgia. It is twenty years since the War, the Judge is of the age of many of the actual authors of Civil War regimental histories, and he shares their urge to write that history. He believes his regiment's battles were episodes of personal initiative and chance, Howells writes, "and it was not strange that he should suppose, with his want of perspective, that this universal fact was purely national and American." His zeal for oral and personal history has given him the reputation of "a crank on that point" as he visits artisans and farmers in search of documents (TK, 5). In fact, nearly seventy histories of Ohio regiments had been published by the time Howells was writing *The Kentons*; nearly a third appeared while he was working on the novel. One of them, published in 1896, was Ohio-born novelist Albion Winegar Tourgee's history of the 105th Ohio Volunteer Infantry.

Howells no doubt knew that spate of material though he used only a few parts of it in his own writing. He had presented some Civil War history in the school reader, *Stories of Ohio* (1897); a prefatory list of his sources there includes Whitelaw Reid's *Ohio in the War*, which first appeared in 1868 and had been reprinted twice by 1900. And, of course, he drew heavily from Henry Howe's *Historical Collections of Ohio*, in its centennial edition of 1889-1890. He devoted three chapters (xxi-xxii) to "The Fight with Slavery," to "The Civil War in Ohio," and to "Famous Ohio Soldiers." The second of those two chapters focused on incidents that were more particularly local and would be less likely to figure in *general* histories, viz., Morgan's raids across southern Ohio, and Clement Vallandigham's "copperhead" opposition to the Civil War. The third of the chapters is more comprehensive in its way, with its catalogue of Ohio's generals. State pride for school readers is blended with a tone of romance and nostalgia: "To say that they were . . . the first soldiers of the war," Howells writes,

is to keep well within the modest truth. They believed in one another, they trusted one another, for they knew one another. The love between them, impassioned in Sherman, frank and hearty in Sheridan, tender in McPherson, deep and constant in Grant, is one of the most beautiful facts of our history, or of any history, a feeling without one ungenerous quality. It was indeed—

"A goodly fellowship of noble knights,"

such as had not been since that of King Arthur's table round.³

The tone of that passage is not far from the first characterization of Judge Kenton's historiographical penchant, and in the novel the general influence of Howells's reading is clear. Two chapters later in *Stories of Ohio*, Howells is citing Tourgee's novels as a credit to Ashtabula County.⁴ Yet while it would be difficult to tie Judge Kenton to a particular Ohio regiment, the case for Delaware sources for aspects of "Tuskingum" is supported by an interesting pair of coincidences. For among Henry Howe's sketches we find those of Howells's wife's kinsman Rutherford B. Hayes, and of William Stark Rosecrans, both born in Delaware County.⁵

But the Judge's projected history is not likely to glorify the War as other regimental histories might. Later in the novel, Ellen Kenton talks with a fellow passenger, the Brooklyn minister Breckon, about her father's interest. She notes that her father has turned against war; he has read Tolstoy, but, she says, he had "thought it all out for himself before he read Tolstoy about fighting" (TK, 101). The conversation with Breckon turns to a veiled personal question which is on Ellen's mind, a question which links the conversation with the love story which is the novel's main plot, and in this connection the assessment of middle American values is central.

Thus in his treatment of Judge Kenton's interest, Howells may be commenting on a cresting wave of Civil War interest, as if at least some of it might be matter of romance. But Howells may also be setting up an extended comparison with other literary sensibilities that have an impact on the Kentons' life. These sensibilities are drawn, first, from the classics he and his sister Victoria had read as young people in Jefferson, reflected in Ellen Kenton's reading of Tennyson, Whittier, Emerson and Longfellow (TK, 89), second, from the literary lecturers whom

he hosts when they stop on tour in Tuskingum and invites to peruse his collection of regimental papers (100), and, third, from the Graustarkian adventures which he satirizes in young Boyne Kenton's reading (chapters xx-xxiv, especially xxiii).

II

And, of course, these matters are all linked with the way in which the family deals with the "not-so-villainous-villain" of the piece, Clarence Bittridge, who represents forces of questionable change which are coming to Tuskingum. Bittridge is not exactly an outsider, of course, as the conventional romance or regional piece might make him. He has arrived in Tuskingum from a job teaching school in one of the county's villages, and has become a reporter on the Tuskingum *Intelligencer*, which can scarcely be said to have the ethic of William Cooper Howells's paper of the same name edited in Hamilton. The more salutary, less exploitative viewpoint of George Willard is only a few years away in fiction, but Bittridge's line on the fixture is more closely allied with Howells's own Bartley Hubbard, for Bittridge is "characterizing" the *Intelligencer*

with the spirit of the new journalism, and was pushing it as hardily forward on the lines of personality as if he had dropped down to it from the height of a New York or Chicago Sunday edition.

The Judge says of Bittridge that he is "all push;" he has "come out of the country with as little simplicity as if he had passed his whole life in the city" (TK, 8). Later, he will be called a "jay," much like Jeff Durgin of *The Landlord at Lion's Head* (1896), and a "hound," like a bandit or a disturber of religious meetings like those in *The Leatherwood God* (1916). The novel will allude to his residence in "Ballardsville" with his doting and foolish mother: he will refer to her advice and to her adulation of the Kentons in an attempt to make himself respectable to them. We hear enough of his unworthiness to realize why the Kentons decide to flee to New York to avoid him, but we do not directly see his affronts until he walks into the Kentons' home in Tuskingum when the Judge has returned there briefly before the family sails for Europe. The Judge's attempts at rebuff are ineffective; Bittridge even follows him to New York

in order to see the family off, asks the family's advice about plays, connives to take Ellen to the theater in his mother's place, and takes the liberty of kissing her.

How does one deal with the villain, using the models from the idyllic past? Neither Boyne nor the Judge can effectively repel Bittridge's brash physical affronts to them in the New York hotel lobby the next morning, so it remains for hot-tempered, proud Lottie Kenton, with her brother Boyne's cooperation and connivance, to write home secretly to their older brother Dick for a redress. It is here, apparently, that the cry for revenge draws on an Ohio frontier code of honor. Dick Kenton had already talked of it with his wife as they were discussing Bittridge's intrusion into their father's house (41). An instance no doubt known to Howells was that of an "Ashtabula giant," of "physical strength and commanding person," Jefferson abolitionist statesman Joshua Reed Giddings, who had fought a southern Congressman on the floor of Congress, and who felt himself pushed to challenge another southerner to a duel in order to stop his threats and abuse. As Henry Howe writes, Giddings

got out of patience and told [the bully] he would fight him and he could choose his time, place, and weapon. To this [the man] replied, 'Now is my time and my weapon a pistol.' 'Very well,' rejoined Giddings; 'all I want to settle this affair is a York shilling raw-hide.' With such a contemptuous expectoration of speech as this, but two alternatives were left to the bully: assassination, or a howling and gnashing of his teeth. Mr. Giddings was not assassinated.⁶

This, then, is the alternative that Richard Kenton takes, going to "an out-dated saddler's shop," where he asked "the owner, a veteran of his father's regiment," for a cowhide, "Kind they make out of a cow's hide and use on a man's," for which he pays "the quarter which [the saddler] said had always been the price . . . ever since he could remember," and uses it at the train station to give Bittridge the lashing that Dick thinks he deserves. The encounter leaves Dick Kenton revolted and sick, as his wife writes to the elder Mrs. Kenton.

So can that retaliation, drawn from and justified by the frontier code, really solve the family's problem? The report of it must be kept from Ellen, the family supposes, lest it make

her sympathetic to the culprit. And that retaliation cannot easily or justifiably be used on those young adult men the family meets on their travels, whose demeanor is of somewhat similar easy tone. They do not take the liberties Bittridge has taken, but the possibility is feared. Lottie Kenton, who will try to extend to Europe her pretensions to social superiority in Tuskingum, is conducting a flirtation with the Englishman Pogis, whom she has met on the ship. When in family rivalry, Boyne "hinted that he would presume on her American freedom," she taunted Boyne by offering to have him do the cowhiding if that happened (117). For all of his vague cloth, the minister Breckon proves better than the others in the category, though he thinks himself rather too full of levity for the innocence and standards of the Kenton family. He apologizes to Ellen for a religious joke which has the word "damn" in it. "I've heard," he says, "that it's hard to live up to Ohio people when you're at your best, and I do hope you'll believe I have not been quite at my best" (76-77). He is himself pursued by a matchmaking mother in his New York congregation, and he regards himself as not much better than what he sees of the other young men or learns of Bittridge. There is the American medical student Trannel, an object of Lottie's flirtation until she discovers he is of Cook's tourist parsimony (188-189). Thus there is no escape in travel from suitors who may be unfit, and going back to Tuskingum will only return them to face Bittridge. That alternative has no more imaginative power than visiting the site of the Mayflower Pilgrims' departure from Holland, with which it is juxtaposed (178-179).

An alternative to real dilemmas that is tried, however, is the way of then current romance, reflected in Boyne's reading. It is Trannel who precipitates Boyne's probably Graustarkian disaster with the Dutch police, for Trannel teases Boyne about his romance reading and suggests the queens are beckoning Boyne to run out to their carriage. And thus it is Boyne, not Lottie, who is made a fool of, as she feared he would be while he was going about with Miss Rasmith on the ship (137). And Lottie's imperious answer for the legal scrape that Trannel has provoked, is, in a sense of rejection, rage and shame, and full of injured family dignity, to persist in the frontier code as she blurts out the secret of Dick's revenge. Thus supposedly she reveals it to her sister, and this obliges her parents to deal with that supposed discovery.

But Ellen has already dealt with it—apparently with composure—because she knew of it through a self-pitying letter about it from Bittridge's mother. We might have guessed as much from the question Ellen put to Breckon while discussing the regimental history. She asks whether "it is right to revenge an injury," and the ensuing conversation barely avoids specifics, though it is abstract enough to make Breckon scruple about some conversational conduct of his own (TK, 101). But the hold of all this is broken in the course of Ellen's arrival at a decision to accept Breckon's proposal of marriage. Her parents approve, as they did not with Bittridge, but Ellen needs to have Breckon know about how Bittridge had treated her, and about how her brother had treated Bittridge. And she needs to have this matter made clear to Breckon. It is, to the extent that he regrets that it happened, and thus she can accept his proposal (219).

III

This solution to the Kentons' immediate problem rests in Ellen's marriage to Breckon, which has been characterized as yet "another conventional unconventional love-match."⁷ That solution is fortuitous, if not gratuitous, since while it considers favorably the possibility of Ellen's finding a fit mate outside the range of Tuskingum's eligibles, it may not really convince the reader that an undesirable match can always be avoided by running away. In a way *that* may be reflected in the way that the Kentons' home is described during the course of the novel. The description is brief at the novel's opening, presenting a peaceful and uncorrupted place. The Kentons

believed that they could not be so well anywhere as in the great square brick house which still kept its four acres about it, in the heart of the growing town, where the trees they had planted with their own hands topped it on three sides, and a spacious garden opened southward behind it to the summer wind. Kenton had his library, where he transacted by day such law business as he had retained in his own hands; but at night he liked to go to his wife's room and sit with her there. They left the parlors and piazzas to their girls . . . (TK, 3).

Living in Tuskingum's pride of ethnic mixture the Judge could believe

that Tuskingum enjoyed the best climate, on the whole, in the Union; that its people of mingled Virginian, Pennsylvanian, and Connecticut origin, with little recent admixture of foreign strains, were of the purest American stock, and spoke the best English in the world; they enjoyed obviously the greatest sum of happiness, and had incontestably the lowest death rate and divorce rate in the State. (4)

This characterization of a county town suggests a setting to the south of the Jefferson of Howells' youth, which would have had less of a mingled stock, and which he would know from his sister Annie's research, if not more directly, to have a reputation for bigamy and divorce.⁸ But clearly the model would not lead Howells to conclude that Tuskingum was free from dishonor, and the Kentons' absence from it and homesickness for it is more poignant because of that. "At the play and the opera" in New York the Judge thought "of the silent, lonely house in Tuskingum, dark among its leafless maples, and the life that was no more in it than if they had all died out of it . . ." (TK, 14). In the scenes where he found an excuse to return home for that quick visit before the family sailed to Europe, the description of the house and yard in spring was much more extensive than the earlier description, and it was an index of the Judge's helplessness against forces which drove him "into exile, away from everything that could make his days bright and sweet." Alone in the house, "more solitary than he could be anywhere else on earth," he wished he could "reanimate the dead body of his house with his old life"; but his tears of self-pity were interrupted by the entrance of Bittridge, further emphasizing the futility of his exile (chapter iv). Later, on shipboard, the family consider whether they are not uncultivated compared with Breckon, and this leads them to miss Tuskingum's simple comfort. When the Judge says if it that "wherever life is simplest and purest and kindest, that is the highest civilization" Ellen can almost imagine that they are in "old times," "in the library at home" (104-106). The Judge has sent home used Civil War histories he had bought at New York bookstores, and has given careful instructions for the gardens (18-19), for which he will later buy seeds in Holland (186).

Though Breckon shows high respect for the judgments of Ohio folk (TK, 77) and finds Ellen's provincialism of dialect

and dress appealing (111), and though Lottie and Pogis can flirt pleasantly in conversation about Tuskingum's commercial prospects and social customs (124), the family can be little consoled by the coastal ignorance if not disdain of the middle Ohio border reflected later among the reviews (xxiv). Their knowledge of and taste for the arts is deficient compared to that of New York (e.g., 104); the Ohio Society of New York is indifferent to the Judge (18), and the novel is sprinkled with misconceptions about such details as the presence of mountains (89) and of bands of Hungarian musicians there (94). Later, though the treatment of Boyne Kenton by the Dutch police is said to be rather gentler than what he would have received if he had run out to the carriage of German royalty (203), Mrs. Kenton's "American sense of decorum" is shocked by the freedom and intimacy of the topics in the conversation of the Dutch women to whom Lottie has introduced her, and she sends Boyne and Lottie away to keep them from hearing it (171).

Perhaps the dullness of the European settings in *The Kentons* is accounted for by the degree of homesick comparison between them and the central Ohio setting, whose summer heat is a matter of pride when the Judge is invited to visit Italy (TK, 84), even though "the imagined grandeur of Lottie's social state in Tuskingum" is offered as one way to account for Pogis's cool break with her at their debarkation (152). But perhaps it is only *her* explanation, and perhaps Howells is satirizing Lottie's imperiousness, which she still asserts regarding her older sister's wedding (221).

So, despite the nostalgia and the marriage, despite the constant reference of nearly everything to that American setting, can the Kentons go home again? Ellen cleaves unto her husband's church affiliation by accepting Lottie's decision to appoint the wedding at the First Universalist church, rather than at the Kenton home (221). Ellen's near nemesis Bittridge leaves Ohio for New York, seeking a broader field of occupational opportunity than "his kind" can have in Ohio, but with the narrative voice wondering whether his cheap ways will not confound him even there (227). By March of every winter visit to the Breckons in New York, Judge Kenton is eager to get home again (225). Young Boyne Kenton gives up his nature study and his adolescent reading of romance to begin to read law; though

he wants his sister-in-law Mary's interpretation of the near encounter with the young queen, he does not seem likely to make much of it as time goes by (224).

But those outcomes to a regional conflict are not yet what will be depicted when Joseph C. Dylks disappears from Leatherwood to be disposed of in a fictional drowning, and Jim Redfield takes up the law and is the indigenous rescuer when he marries one of that religious impostor's *inamorata*. Those resources are not yet recovered. Judge Kenton, still of his generation, does not really come along with changing times. He "works faithfully at the regimental autobiography" as something to be milked from the failing memories of regimental soldiers. The clearest acceptance of the change in the places is seen in rejection of the personal violence used to punish Bittridge, a rejection which might follow from the Judge's Tolstoyan reflections on war, and on which Breckon has never given conclusive judgment, though Ellen and her brother have concluded that it was wrong (227). The past of Tuskingum, then, is one sensed as changing both in its character and in its interpretations, to be coped with in new ways as each generation adapts to its changing times.

Alma College

NOTES

1. George C. Carrington, Jr., "Introduction" to *The Kentons* (A Selected Edition of W. D. Howells, Vol. 25 [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971]) (hereafter cited, where necessary, as TK), pp. xvi-xviii and xiii-xiv; TK, 4.27; Note to the Text, pp. 229-30.
2. Edwin H. Cady, *The Realist at War: the Later Years 1885-1920 of William Dean Howells* (Syracuse University Press, 1959), p. 263.
3. *Stories of Ohio* (New York: American Book Company, 1897), Chapters xxi-xxiii and pages 5 and 257.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
5. Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio*, I (Cincinnati, 1907), 556-563.
6. *Ibid.*, I, 271.1
7. Edwin H. Cady, *op. cit.*, p. 263.
8. Annie Howells Frechette, "A Banner Divorce County," *Century Magazine* n.s. (1900), 636-640.

PEATTIE'S *PRECIPICE* AND THE "SETTLEMENT HOUSE" NOVEL

GUY SZUBERLA

George Ade's "The Fable of the Good Fairy with the Lorgnette, and Why She Got it Good" satirized some fads and stock figures that by the late 1890s had become firmly identified with the social settlement house movement. Ade sniped, in his sharp but playful way, at high society do gooders and the lofty rhetoric of "uplift." Consider his opening shot at *noblesse oblige*:

She decided that she would allow the glory of her Presence to burst upon the Poor and the Uncultured. It would be a Big Help to the Poor and Uncultured to see what a Real Razmataz Lady was like.

She didn't propose to put on Old Clothes, and go and live with Poor People, and be One of Them, and nurse their Sick, as they do in Settlements. Not on Your Previous Existence! She was going to be Benevolent, and be Dead Swell at the Same Time.

Ade could assume, when he wrote this for *The Chicago Record* on 26 July 1899, that his readers would readily recognize the uplifters' posturing, that his comic reprise on the twinned earnestness and condescension of putting on "Old Clothes" would ring as true as the punch line of a well-worn joke. By 1899 countless newspaper stories and magazine articles had celebrated, often in breathless prose, the heroic altruism and pioneering social work of those who lived and worked in Chicago's settlement houses. Settlement house founders like Jane Addams, Graham Taylor, and Mary McDowell—and the young and dedicated college students that followed them—had come to occupy a fixed place in the popular imagination. In short, Ade positioned the figure of the "Good Fairy" and outlined his fable's compressed story lines against the ground of some well-established narrative conventions.

Chicago's journalists, as settlement houses spread throughout the city, had written and rewritten "human interest stories" on settlement house workers and their pursuit of "a higher civic life." Some, from the ranks of the city's yellow press, trumped up stories of promiscuous sex among settlement house residents, and charged, almost routinely, that Jane Addams and other settlement house workers espoused socialism, anarchism, and worse. In their turn, the city's novelists, recasting and correcting the journalists' story lines, appealed to an already well-primed interest in the colorful, radical activities of the settlements' celebrities and youthful residents. Hull House and settlement house workers, as Jane Addams put it, were a "fashionable fad" before they even began (Davis, *American Heroine*, 60).¹

Progressive reformers, throughout the 1890s and early 1900s, viewed the settlement house as a symbol of social and political ideals—as a down sized cooperative commonwealth built on scientific principles of social organization. The settlement house was to be a city or community center: a symbol of cultural order in the urban wilderness, a well-wrought melting pot in the midst of the city's ethnically diverse and socially impoverished immigrant neighborhoods. Settlement house workers, accordingly, sought "social unification" through the melding power of Anglo-American culture. As John Higham, Allen F. Davis, and, more recently, Rivka Shpak Lissak have shown, settlement house programs merged, sometimes uneasily, a tolerant pluralism with stern calls "to preserve American ideals."²

In the 1890s and early 1900s, Chicago writers were quick to respond to the settlement house movement, its message, and those young men and women of the upper-middle class who became settlement house residents and workers. Clarence Andrews, in *Chicago in Story*, lists an even dozen "social service and settlement novels" published between 1900 and 1916 (109-10). His listing might easily be enlarged to some twenty or more novels without stretching his terms or breaking the implied genre definition.

The typical settlement house novel blended, sometimes in contradictory ways, radical politics with conservative cultural beliefs and traditional gender values. Offering their readers the bland assurances of a happy ending, novelists anchored their plots in conventional tales of courtship, romance, and marriage.

However radical the characters' ideological excesses, however exotic their social experiments and living arrangements, marriage in the final chapter gave promise that basic social institutions and traditional morality would be preserved. Douglas Ramsay, warden of Henry Kitchell Webster's fictive Carter Hall, is poised to marry the beautiful Anne Coleridge; Clara Laughlin's and Charles Sheldon's novels engineer similar narrative closures through romantic matches and impending marriages. On the closing pages of Fuller's *With the Procession*, a novel of Chicago that embeds a settlement house narrative, Jane Marshall agrees to marry Theodore Brower, a somber settlement house worker. Elia W. Peattie's *The Precipice* alone threatens to spin off and away from the track of such established plot lines. In its closing chapters, the principal characters plot an experiment in marriage that sounds as radical as the social programs the settlements espoused: Kate Barrington and Karl Wander have pledged themselves to become "a Republic of Souls" in which, though married, they will live apart (417-18).

Between the "what if" of utopian fiction and the declamatory "what is" of muckraking exposés, the form and rhetoric of the settlement house novel holds a distinctive, if uncertain place. Writers of the novels considered here—somewhat like the settlement house residents and workers in their programs and manifestoes—sought to bridge the distance between the hard facts of urban, industrial reality and their reformist ideology. They too wanted to serve as cultural brokers between the so-called "better element" and the new immigrants, to define the role and the patterns of acculturation and assimilation that immigrants and their children were to follow; they sought, finally, to bring into view the larger vision of "social unification."

Their fictional representations of this vision may be further divided into three large, if overlapping categories: (1) the satiric, (2) the homiletic, and (3) the pragmatic. Henry Blake Fuller's *With the Procession* and Hobart Chatfield-Taylor's *Two Women and a Fool* (both 1895), like Ade's fable, emphasized skepticism about the young reformers' idealism. Charles Sheldon's *The Reformer* (1902)—with thumping appeals to scripture, Christian piety, and the need for repentance and conversion—worked this genre in a high-minded and homiletic register. Henry Kitchell Webster's *Duke of Cameron Avenue* (1904), Charles Tenney

Jackson's *My Brother's Keeper* (1910), Clara Laughlin's "Just Folks" (1910), and Elia W. Peattie's *The Precipice* (1914), generally eschewed satire of reformers and sermonistic rhetoric, displaying instead a common faith in the promises of sociology and progressive reform.

This essay will emphasize the intertextual linkage between Chicago fiction and settlement house rhetoric and ideology. With the exception of Sidney Bremer's recent and masterful introduction to Peattie's novel, this almost forbiddingly large field remains largely uncharted and unstudied.³ Taking up but a few of the twenty or more Chicago novels in this genre cannot exhaustively define it much less give us a detailed map of it. But it may, to reprise a cliché of contemporary criticism, provide "a map for rereading" some forgotten fiction.

I.

Whatever their doctrinal and political differences, Sheldon, Webster, Laughlin, Peattie, and the many others writing fiction in the 1900s generally took an admiring, even reverential view of Chicago's settlement houses, their programs, workers, and leaders. Jane Addams, for many, was truly a "St. Jane." Peattie, who made her living as a feature writer and book reviewer for the *Chicago Tribune*, launched a "Women of the Hour" series in the October 1904 *Harper's Bazaar* with an essay on "Miss Jane Addams." Having dutifully described Addams's character, her work at Hull House and her celebrity, Peattie pulled out all the rhetorical stops:

Miss Addams has walked a long road, and she has come at last to a beautiful plateau of high altitude, where a wonderful peace lies brooding. Her melancholy eyes behold much—behold the pageants of earth and the long, terrible processions of the poor. The friendship she pours out upon them is the essence of friendship—something spiritualized and . . . universal. (1007)⁴

Such an Olympian figure exacted unqualified journalistic tributes. Translated into fiction, written into Peattie's *The Precipice*, Addams's larger-than-life words and deeds often threaten to overwhelm the novel's scale and stabilizing verisimilitude.⁵

Not all novelists adopted an Olympian standard. Chicago writers, in the early 1890s, were as liable to construct this new

character-type as a humorless zealot and a rabid follower of fashions and fads as they were to read the settlement house worker as an heroic embodiment of social and political ideals. In the same year that Hull House residents published their classic sociological study, *The Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895), Chatfield Taylor had Guy Wharton, the hero of *Two Women and a Fool*, ridicule the reformers' project in detail (159). Wharton, a dandyish, *fin de siècle* artist, finds himself falling in love with a settlement house warden, Dorothy Temple. Visiting her at Hallim Hall—one of the many faintly disguised versions of Jane Addams's Hull House in period fiction—he expects to find a "cheerless chapel and . . . sullen paupers" ministered to by austere residents. Instead, he discovers young women with "a dash of smartness in their dress." The rooms of Hallim Hall, to his amazement, are tastefully decorated with an array of French pictures, "casts of famous bits of sculpture," "a scattering of Turkish rugs," and other touches of "modernism" (154-56). Through this palace of 1890s aestheticism, Guy watches Dorothy walk

with a quick, earnest step. Her tall figure was set off by the graceful folds of a bluish linen gown, and her splendid hair was caught together in a loose knot, just where the delicate neck met the sloping shoulders. (160)

She's drawn in the text, on the page opposite this description, by none other than the maker of the 1890s most fashionable fads, Charles Dana Gibson.⁶

Henry Blake Fuller, though he gave open and generous support to the settlement house movement in an *Atlantic* essay on the "Upward Movement in Chicago" and in editorials for Chicago papers, used his novel *With the Procession* (1895) to satirize the earnestness and stylized austerities of settlement house workers. There, Jane Marshall—a high society founder of a lunch club for working women—confesses that she's attracted by the fashionable non-fashion of one settlement house resident, Theodore Brower: "He's serious. He's earnest. Besides, he hasn't a dress coat. . . . He doesn't approve of them" (125). The dress or the costume of the settlement house worker, like Mark Twain's bold, out-of-season white suit, seems to have taken on an almost iconic cast in the 1890s and early 1900s. For Ade, Chatfield-Taylor, and Fuller, the

inflexible moral posturing displayed in this costume presented an irresistible target for burlesque and deflation.

But, as the settlement house movement became established, humor and skeptical irreverence soon gave way to an earnestness that tightened into a stiff self-righteousness. Charles Sheldon's novel *The Reformer* (1902) may be said to signal this shift. Sheldon, the author of the stupendous best-seller *In His Steps*, has his hero, John Gordon, march in lock-step with the settlement house slogan: residence, research, and reform. Having told his father and his fiancée that he is a Socialist, Gordon announces that he will take up residence at Hope House where he will live among Chicago's poor: "I must know from close personal experience their daily life. I must partake of their sorrows, their privations, their misery" (29). In the series of set speeches that follow, he faces down his father's angry opposition and the breakup of his romance with the socialite Luella Marsh—she's unwilling to marry him and join him in the noble "experiment" at Hope House. Vowing to uplift and convert the "foreign-born and foreign-shaped classes," promising to purge the "cynical indifference . . . of cultured men and women," Gordon comes to identify himself and his high-minded mission with St. Paul (69). He will soon discover, in his efforts to research and reform "tenement conditions" and the city's laws, that Rufus Gordon, his banker father, is among the worst of Chicago's slum lords (74-75).

Sheldon, in creating the character of Gordon, made some self-conscious efforts to move beyond old fashioned typology and melodrama. He clumsily imitates the settlement house's use of sociology and scientific documentation by inserting statistics and photographs borrowed from *Tenement Conditions in Chicago* and the proceedings of Chicago's City Council. Pelting his text with parenthetical citations, he seems at times to be writing a government report, not a novel (89). But all these technical glossings and documentary gestures are, in the end, sunk beneath empurpled prose and a lifetime habit of tract writing. The intended "picture of social settlement work" and the horrifying view of slum conditions slacken into the form and meter of a sleepy Sunday sermon ("Preface").

Henry Kitchell Webster's publication of *The Duke of Cameron Avenue* in 1904 indicated that in that season the settlement house and the settlement house novel had become hot

commercial properties. Published in Macmillan's "Little Novels by Favorite Authors" series, this book was evidently designed for popular consumption. Webster was a professional writer, successfully producing and selling, according to one friendly reviewer, "a novel a year when he is in a serious mood."⁷ *The Duke of Cameron Avenue* seems readable even today: its plot and dialogue are fast-paced; the *mis en scene*, richly detailed. The display of detail about settlement house day-to-day routines gives us the passing illusion, moreover, that the novel was written by someone who had been on the inside, a witness to the closed door meetings of settlement residents.

Webster unfolds the story of a mythical Carter Hall through an engagingly sympathetic account of its warden's political battles. Douglas Ramsay, a heroic and "a raw-boned young man," takes on Alderman Albert Gollans, the wiley boss of Chicago's Nineteenth Ward (10). Not all that coincidentally, Webster has chosen the ward where Hull House sat and where Jane Addams waged battles over garbage collection with Johnny "de Pow Pow" Powers, a particularly powerful and corrupt ward boss. The cause of reform is bathed in bright and flattering lights: Ramsay and the settlement's youthful idealists aim to overturn Gollans, to reform the city's Sanitary laws, and to drive typhoid epidemics from the ward. Gollans, an unflinching opponent of reform, dresses for his part as "the duke of Cameron Avenue" with unfailing bad taste—he wears "patent leather boots that were too small . . . , three diamond studs . . . , and a derby hat" (25-6). The speech-making in the mass meetings is rousing: the crowd and mob scenes reverberate with colorful characters and snappy insults. For good measure, Webster teases the reader with a truncated love story, sketching the beginnings of a romance between Ramsay and Anne Coleridge, a beautiful new resident of Carter Hall.

For all its lively virtues and high-sounding rhetoric, Webster's translation of settlement house ideals proves to be somewhat problematic. One extended example may suggest the inevitable difficulties in rendering Hull House politics and its claims to pluralistic values. Following Ade and Fuller in his first chapter, he efficiently caricatures the condescending attitudes of the old-style uplifters. "A whitehaired, but fresh-complexioned woman" asserts, as if she were reading a Club paper, that the settlement's

end-purpose is "to give those poor people a glimpse of the higher life" The Association's ex-president stutters his agreement: "we want to elevate the masses by—by the leaven of culture" (15). The pragmatic Ramsay shrugs off their sentiments and rebuts their speeches. We are to read, and Webster insists that we read, Ramsay's entry into ward politics as a renunciation of old-time condescension diluted by an airy idealism. As the embodiment of the new scientific spirit and as a skillful proponent of *realpolitik*, Ramsay stands out in these exchanges as a new character-type—a pragmatic contrast to the old-fashioned friendly visitor, to the blue-nosed benevolence that president Payne and the "deep-voiced" Mrs. Ficklin represent. "Those people," he says in eulogizing a Peter Slavinski who died of typhoid, "are your neighbours" and their "ambitions and ideals are as good as yours" (21).

Ramsay will not, as the novel unfolds, live up to his espoused Christian ideals or act on the ethnic pluralism and the egalitarian values that his rhetoric invokes. Webster writes this novel with the rather bland expectation that his readers, like Ramsay, will view the ward's mixed ethnic neighborhoods—and the immigrant Germans, Poles, and Italians in them—from an assumed position of cultural superiority. In at least one respect, then, Webster's assumptions resemble the attitude of cultural superiority struck by Jane Addams and the Hull House circle. The cultural historian Rivka Shpak Lissak has commented tellingly on the conflicts and contradictions between the settlements' announced respect for the "variety" of immigrant and ethnic cultures and their assumption that Anglo-American civilization was inherently superior (8-9; 157). She points out that, in fact, the settlement house progressives were engaged in "competition" for political dominance with "the lower-middle-class ethnic leaders." The Hull House circle and other settlement house residents wanted, she argues, "to serve not only as social organizers and political leaders but also as cultural brokers to the immigrant communities" (62; 69). To this end, they successfully sought to "eliminate the influence and political control of immigrant small businessmen on the 'immigrant vote'" (63).

Lissak's analysis of the struggle between the Hull House circle and the newly-emergent ethnic leadership sets into high relief both the terms and the plot lines of the political campaign

in *The Duke of Cameron Avenue*. Her chapter on "Leadership, Cultural Brokerage, and 'Control through Alliance,'" in particular, suggests several close parallels between Webster's fictional settlement workers and the Hull House circle. Lissak shows how settlement house residents—native-born Americans, upper middle class, and part of the self-identified "better element"—sought to dominate and discredit immigrant and ethnic leadership. Like the settlement house residents in Webster's novel, they secured the cooperation of "enlightened members" among the immigrant groups' business and political leadership, even as they sought to discredit their social and religious institutions (Lissak 70-71). Webster's novel sympathetically dramatizes such strategies in representing Ramsay's controlling role in the election battles.

Ramsay does not trust Schmeckenbecker, the German cigar manufacturer that he and a Dr. Haversham have, for tactical reasons, put up as the good-government's aldermanic candidate. This rotund, blustering, and foolish-looking German must be handled, controlled, governed, and kept in constant check. He cannot be trusted to speak on his own. Ramsay must take to the platform to restate and correct the inevitable blunders spun off in Schmeckenbecker's stuttering flights of oratory. He must stand as guarantee and a "pledge," a counterweight to "the imposing solemnity of the fat little man" who seems so "undeniably comic" (69-70). What Webster shows us, in short, is that "control through alliance" that Lissak described in recounting the political tactics of Hull House and the Municipal Voters League. No immigrant or ethnic character enters the ruling circle of the fictional Carter Hall, just as no immigrant or ethnic leader played a leading role in Hull House (Lissak, 74). As readers, we are never in doubt that the power to govern, to interpret the will and the best interests of the Nineteenth Ward's immigrant and ethnic population, must be retained by Ramsay and the "better element," the tight circle within Carter Hall.

Webster's and Sheldon's novels stressed the need to convert and reform the immigrants. Neither author, so far as can be told, were ever drawn into the settlement house debate over the "cosmopolitan" ideal or swayed, in any way, by the claims of ethnic pluralism. They complacently slide over the questions of ethnic persistence and cultural diversity that agitated the Hull House circle and others in the settlement house movement.

Indifferent or hostile to immigrant culture and institutions, they did not worry about the painful difficulties that immigrants and their children faced in assimilation and acculturation. Such indifference ran counter to the announced principles and programs of the settlement movement. Jane Addams, for one, would say, in *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910), that a "higher political life" and "higher civic life" could be won only through what she called a "common intercourse" (92). That meant two things: bridging the "chasm" between European immigrants and Americans, forming "a sense of relation" between "immigrants and their children" (chapter 11).

The settlement house was intended to be a meeting point where diverse nationalities, divided generations, and warring social classes, Americans and immigrants alike, could form a new community emblemizing "communion" and "social unification."⁸ Hull House stood, in Jane Addams's words, as "a Cathedral of Humanity," including "all men in fellowship and mutual responsibility" (114). Yet, as Rivka Shpak Lissak points out, Hull House was far from being a well-wrought melting pot. It had difficulty in the 1890s and early 1900s attracting "new immigrant" adults to its clubs (112). Its leaders, moreover, seemed to believe that "foreign born cultural brokers could not meet the requirements for settlement work," and few or none, in this period, became residents (75). The Hull House circle, despite its repeated calls for the preservation of ethnic heritages, "predicted that American civilization . . . would continue to be essentially . . . Anglo American, with some selected immigrant contributions, whose impact would be negligible" (157). Lissak's book suggests that the pluralism that Addams and the Hull House circle espoused, on examination, often dwindles down to "expediency and mere rhetoric" (8-9).

Clara Laughlin's *Just Folks* took seriously the rhetoric as well as the high ideals of the settlement house movement. Her principal character, Beth Tully, is a probation officer and settlement social worker, responsible for the children of immigrant families. Renting a room in a tenement on Maxwell street, she finds a satisfaction and a sense of self-betterment in living "close to the daily problems of a few typical human beings" (37-38). That's a formula she might have found stated in Sheldon's novel or extracted from Jane Addams's chapter on the "The Subjective

Necessity for Social Settlements."⁹ Beth Tully lives close to the Caseys, Hannah Wexsmith, the Slinsky family, Rachel and Rosie Rubovitz, Slosson, the Gooches, Peter Demapopulos, and many others. The Irish Catholics, Russian Jews, Germans, Poles, and Greeks of Henry and Maxwell Street, for the most part, live amicably together. As the emissary of the settlement house and its Anglo-American culture, Beth seeks to mediate quarrels between feuding ethnic groups, moderate their prejudices, and intervene in misunderstandings between immigrant parents and their children. She's thus implicitly defined as the agent of a superior culture and the dominant political order.

Laughlin, herself a daughter of Belfast-born immigrants, strongly spells out her sympathies for the settlement's cosmopolitan ideal. She makes regular pleas for multi-ethnic tolerance, even though she occasionally drifts toward the brand of urban picturesqueness she had once practiced as an editor at *McClure's Magazine* and in her earlier "popular sentimental" fiction.¹⁰ She yields to the sentimental, for example, when she writes of Mary Casey's simple religious beliefs, even more when she tells of "Beth's tears" over Mary's "toil bent figure" (317, 337). Satirizing the petty prejudices of the Maxwell street neighborhood, Laughlin sets down with evident approval Beth Tully's view that "Greeks . . . lie for one another—like the Italians—and not against one another like the Irish and the Jews" (327). Popular stereotypes have not been eradicated, so much as they are moderated and checked by the cosmopolitan ideal.

In constructing the dynamic play of ethnic and American culture in this novel, she seems to have followed episodes and reworked the character types articulated in Jane Addams's *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, particularly the chapter on "Immigrants and their Children." There, Addams supplied a series of compressed narratives about the "misunderstandings between European immigrants and their children": "grasping" parents who take a working child's wages, children who steal to have "Americanized clothing," and others "who despise all the honest and sober ways of their immigrant parents":

Many of these children have come to grief through their premature fling into city life, having thrown off parental control as they have impatiently discarded foreign ways. . . . Such children will complain that there is "no fun" at home. (181)

Laughlin's stories reprise the Addams text and its well-defined typology of generational conflict. Angela Ann Casey, like the children in the Addams narratives, rebels against the rigidity and "stern bondage" that her immigrant parents would impose (Addams, 179). Angela runs off after the troubles her parents make over her "red shoes." Her parents try to keep her at home, to restrict her late night dancing, and to deny her a foreman's gift of a "red skirt" (45, 200). As in Addams several composite narratives, this daughter of immigrant parents claims leisure, "fun," and "Americanized clothing" as inalienable rights (180-81). The "desperate antagonism between Mikey [Casey] and his father" (271); the tyrannies and the beatings Herman Rubovitz suffers at the hands of his "foreign parents" (59); Angelo Vacca's gambling and his unwillingness to give his mother the money earned selling papers—all these episodes in "*Just Folks*" have their counterparts in the stories and type-characters Addams had constructed in "Immigrants and their Children."

Laughlin does have the power to resist settlement house sloganeering: she mimics the most glibly fashioned notions of uplift, when she parodies formulaic calls for "the reclamation of the masses" (337). And yet, at other times, her novel seems to promote the settlements' inflexible and demeaning programs of Americanization. In translating settlement house ideals into fiction, she may be said both to reproduce and to expose the unresolved tensions and contradictions in its "cosmopolitanism."

Take, for one telling example, Laughlin's representation of Dinah Slinsky, a daughter of orthodox Russian Jews. She fears losing a cherished job because, as she explains, "we are forbidden" to light fires on Shabbas. Beth counsels her:

"I, too, am sorry, Dinah; but I think you'll find that you can't get on this way. If you are content to stay in the Ghetto, you may keep your orthodoxy. But if you want to come out, to enter the big other world you must meet it on its own terms. . . . you have so much against you, at best. And you make your way so much, much harder by insisting on practices that are not sacred in the world you want to enter" (266)

This hard lesson's written out clearly for Dinah Slinsky. Her family's already given up its name—"something unpronounceable, contracted to Slinsky"—and now she must sacrifice part

of her religion (38). The "other world" can be entered, it seems, on no other terms but surrender and self-eradiation. Pluralism has its limits.

Elia W. Peattie read and reviewed Laughlin's "*Just Folks*" with high praise. She commended it for its "charm," "humor," "pathos," "heartfelt interest and excellent understanding." With a gesture toward defining Laughlin's genre choice, Peattie said this: "it is a record in fiction form of life in the crowded neighborhoods of Chicago." Most of all, she praised it for the emphasis and the value it placed on "neighborliness" (*Tribune*, 7 December 1910: 10). Her review, and this emphasis, must have been a welcome one—Peattie had been for many years literary editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. Sidney Bremer argues that Peattie, in placing this particular stress on community, invoked Jane Addams and her civic values. She and Peattie, alike, envisioned the city as a "civic family," saw the neighborhood and "the city as home" (xiv-xvi).

And yet *The Precipice* (1914), for all its affirmations of Hull House ideals of "cooperation" and Addams' idea of the "civic family," draws hard, sharp lines of division between the settlement house residents and the city's immigrant population. One or two hurried examples might outline the bounded limits of Peattie's "civic family." Kate Barrington, the principal character in the novel, is a social worker, "an officer of the Children's Protective Association." (In this and some other pieces of the plot, Peattie seems to take her cue from both Laughlin's characterization of Beth Tully and the work of the Hull House Juvenile Protective Association.) Kate Barrington's not a resident of any settlement; she lives, instead, near the University of Chicago, where she's part of a "co-operative" dining scheme. Unlike Beth Tully, she's far from Chicago's immigrant neighborhoods, removed altogether from the Nineteenth Ward and Hull House neighborhood—the territory that, by 1914, had become the conventional setting for Chicago's settlement house novels.

When Kate Barrington makes her rounds, then, she almost necessarily appears to be venturing into an alien and hostile territory. She's not, like Beth Tully, among neighbors. Peattie, in representing one of these excursions under lurid night lights, treads perilously close to the more sensational journalism of the 1890s. Theodore Dreiser, to cite a generic counterpart, alter-

nately scared and titillated his *Chicago Globe* readers with tales of his walks into a district known as the "Cheyenne, Haunt of Misery and Crime," a "city of sections and nationalities . . . [where] the streets resound with a babel of tongues endeavoring to speak . . . the English of Uncle Sam." Peattie takes Kate Barrington on a similar night walk into South Chicago. She rides in "the ill-smelling South Deering cars, crowded with the men and women with foreign faces" (301). Once there, she hears the "agonized scream" of a child. She searches fearlessly for it, running through the streets until she finds and rescues the child from the "mesh of mean homes."

As she announces her intention to "care for the child," she addresses the father in "excoriating" words:

"I'm glad you can't speak English . . . for if you could I'd say things I'd be sorry for. I'd shrivel you up, you great brute. If you've got the devil in you, can't you take it out on some one else beside a little child. . . . She has no mother, I suppose. Well, you're under arrest. Tell him, some of you who can talk English.

Her "theatrical" stance and her declamatory speech place her far above the "brute" and the crowd she faces down. In keeping with conventional views of the new immigrant as a brooding and silent creature, this dumb "brute" of a father cannot answer her or even nod to her words of condemnation. Her mastery of language sets off her superiority to the immigrants in "that miserable crowded room," for it is through her speech that "she dominated them all." Impassivity and silence shadows "the dark faces of weary men and women, heavy with Old-World, inherited woe" (306-8). Self-reliant and free of such ancestral burdens, she speaks with energy, moral purpose, and political power.

Kate, in her role as settlement house worker, is quite clearly cast as the agent of Americanization and America's superior culture. Earlier in the novel, she had found a way to free Peggy Dunn, a young Irish Catholic girl, from the burdensome restraints of her immigrant mother's religious practices. Her mother had, by praying "before a little statue of the Virgin," objected to Peggy's late night dancing. But after Kate exerts her influence, the mother relents, putting "the little bisque Virgin . . . into her own bedroom." In its place now stands "a talking-machine" (54-55). This displacement and the attendant modernization and

secularization runs in rough parallel to the stories in Addams and, more pointedly, to the scenes in Laughlin's novel where Dinah struggled over her Shabbas duties. But Peattie, in telling Peggy's joyful story, suppresses the painful conflicts that informed Laughlin's and Addams's scripts of immigrants and their children. Peggy can become American, have her "fun" and her romances—and suffer no tension with her mother or lingering regret over the break with her family and ethnic past.

In such episodes, Peattie seems both to parody and to re-interpret the master-plots of Jane Addams's "Immigrants and their Children." Humanity, the Hull House circle sincerely believed, was advancing "towards the elimination of the walls of nationality that divided the human race"—toward an "international nationality" and a "universal brotherhood" that would supplant ethnic divisions (Lissak, 141-42). Out of Chicago's racial hatreds and its babel of voices would come a new "civic family" and an America that was truly a "cosmopolitan civilization." Peattie's novel sets up the brute immigrant father and the Peggy Dunn's pliable Irish Catholic mother as the type and figure of ethnic persistence, the lingering vestiges of Old World authority that, sooner or later, would yield to a "cosmopolitan civilization."

Some paradoxes and complications cling to this view of progress and assimilation in Peattie's novel. What, again, are we to make of Kate Barrington's domination of the "weary men and women" of the "Old World"? How should we read her presumptive seizure of the child from its father? She strikes a maternal yet military stance before the crowd—her "voice ringing out like that of an officer excoriating his troops" (307). We have not come full circle back to Ade's caricatures of "the Good Fairy" and the stylish frivolities of would-be uplifters. Kate's overpowering moral certainties and high seriousness match, far more closely, the spirit and confidence of Sheldon's and Webster's political reformers.

Yet there's a distinctive turning here. Kate Barrington also represents a feminized future, the new "civic family," and the unities of a coming American civilization. Her posture and her speech embody the settlement house vision of "social unification"—she stands as a domestic counter to the city's social and political fragmentation: she speaks out in a fierce but maternal voice against brute silence, the babel of immigrant tongues, and

against the laws of the old-world fathers. Supplanting the ancestral parents, she battles the persistence of ethnic authority while quieting the clamorous voices of babel.

Peattie did not completely revise the conventions and character types that, over some twenty years, had become constituent features of the settlement house novel. What Peattie did in *The Precipice*—what Ade, Fuller, Chatfield-Taylor, Webster, Laughlin, and others had begun to do in their fiction—was to foreground and dramatize the cultural assumptions about assimilation and the “saving remnant” that had informed settlement house ideology from its beginnings. Her novel, in giving Kate Barrington her near heroic dominance and unquestioned cultural superiority, restated that ideology and amplified the genre’s characteristic narrative strategies and salvific rhetoric.

University of Toledo

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NOTES

1. Jane Addams, in *Twenty Years at Hull House*, spoke of “a higher political life” and “a higher social life fostered through common intercourse” between “educated young people” and “the masses of the people” (91-92).
2. See Davis, in *American Heroine*, on the early newspaper articles characterizing Jane Addams (60-61). The *Tribune*, for example, ran a piece on “A Project to bring the Rich and Poor Together” (8 March 1889). See also any of Graham Taylor’s regular columns in the *Chicago Daily News*, “By Graham Taylor.” Taylor, a pioneer settlement house worker and head of Chicago Commons, wrote these between 1903 til 1912.
3. This paragraph’s been adopted from the opening of an article I wrote: “Three Chicago Settlements: Their Architectural Form and Social Meaning,” *Journal of the Illinois Historical Society*, 70 (May 1977): 114-29. For John Higham’s discussion of the settlement house movement, see his chapter, “Crusade for Americanization,” in *Strangers in the Land* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), pp. 234-63.
4. Sidney Bremer’s “Introduction” to the reprint of Peattie’s *The Precipice* (Urbana: U. of Illinois, 1989) is the notable exception.
5. Ten years later, Peattie reworked this passage’s controlling metaphor—“a beautiful plateau of high altitude”—in the title of *The Precipice* and in a key scene defining her main character’s choices (415-18).
6. Kate Barrington, whose story and rhetoric freely draws on Addams, appears in the final pages, as “shining . . . , free and proud as the ‘victory’ of a sculptor’s dream” (*The Precipice*, 417).
7. Consider, in this connection, Elia W. Peattie’s 1904 *Harper’s Bazaar* description of a fashionable Jane Addams: “She likes some of the elegancies, for she was born to them. No one could ever accuse her . . . of being shabby. Yet it is only with a severe effort of memory that I am able to think of her costumes at all. I think she wears soft grayish shades of blue more than other colors. Her tailor-made suits are usually blue, and I remember one pleasing evening gown with a rich Japanese embroidery of . . . blue chrysanthemums. . . . Jewels are, naturally, not in her line, and she never has a hat upon her Smooth brown hair when she can dispense with it” (1008).
8. Charles Collins, untitled five-page typescript, beginning “He is Chicago’s most reliable and consistent novelist.” Collins, according to correspondence dated 14 September 1927, was to have this article published in *The Chicagoan*, a short-lived magazine in the style of *The New Yorker*. The typescript and correspondence are in the Henry Kitchell Webster papers. Courtesy of The Newberry Library (Chicago).
9. See Graham Taylor, “By Graham Taylor,” *Chicago Daily News* (27 September 1912):8. Taylor, speaking of the settlement house and other “neighborhood centers,” said that no person could reach “his highest development alone, but that such development comes through communion with his fellows.” The sentiment was a commonplace among settlement house workers.
10. See Addams chapter six, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, where she argues that “educated young people are seeking an outlet for that sentiment of universal brotherhood, which the best spirit of our times is forcing from an emotion into a motive” (91).
10. Charles Fanning’s incisive comment on Laughlin’s life and career describes some of her writings in the sentimental and genteel tradition. Fanning stresses the importance of her work as an editor at *McClure’s*. See his *The Irish Voice in America* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1990), 243-44.

ANOTHER LOOK AT COMMUNITY IN WINESBURG, OHIO

CLARENCE LINDSAY

The "another look" of the title does a sort of double duty. On the one hand I want my remarks to run counter to the general romantic interpretations of community that have suffused critical discussion of *Winesburg, Ohio*. I use "romantic" to refer to a familiar ethic which celebrates or privileges the individual in opposition to larger social configurations. I also want the "second look" to be considered as an extension of an essay that I wrote several years ago. In that article, "Community in *Winesburg, Ohio*: The Rhetoric of Selfhood," I began a discussion that calls into question Anderson's subscription to that romantic ethic. Even as I was finishing those remarks, I realized that I was leaving something important unsaid. Before I can finish up that discussion I need to repeat its principal arguments.

In that previous article I was anxious to show that community existed principally as part of the rhetoric of selfhood; that is, that the self used the fiction of community to dramatize and set off its imperious sense of singularity. Moreover, I insisted that it made no real difference whether the fiction of selfhood was one which enthroned the self (Wing Biddlebaum's pastoral dream of reverential students who come to worship an idolized teacher) or one which imagined the self threatened by some sort of maleficent community (Dr. Parcival's theory of the imminent and sure crucifixion that awaits him)—that in either case, the fiction satisfied the self's principal need—a desire for singular apartness. Implicit in that essay was the notion that the self was indistinguishable from the fictional process that defined it, that it only had reality in the fictions that sustained it.

In addition to the fictiveness of community there were several corollary issues that will be important to my extended discussion.

I argued that because the self was a fictional enterprise and because relationships between individuals were entirely a matter of interpretation of those fictions then all moral/personal issues were essentially aesthetic issues. There were two related aspects to this aesthetic morality: first, that it was impossible for us to authenticate the truth of a particular fiction or of a particular interpretation of a selfhood. It is impossible, for example, to determine from the text whether Wing's gentle caresses and his self's message of pure love has been misinterpreted by the slack-jawed boy or whether the boy has seen the true "hidden meaning" of the caresses, a meaning not even clear to Wing himself. We can't tell if the girl in "Paper Pills" sees the true meaning of lust under the jeweller's son's talk of virginity or whether she has imposed her own sexual meaning on his innocent, virginal text.

I may have to rescue one or two more points from that original discussion, but that should do for now. As I finished up that essay I became aware that I had stopped short and in doing so had perhaps been misleading. While it was true that community was indeed part of the machinery of selfhood, I wasn't arguing, was I (here I imagined furrowed brows and quizzical looks), that there was no such entity as a community in Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*? While it may be as I argued that individuals imagine community as a way of configuring the self, I surely didn't mean that there were no instances of concerted action or feeling that were legitimate expressions of community. I didn't mean to suggest, after all, that Wing Biddlebaum had been beaten senseless and driven from town by a fiction did I? So this essay seeks to answer those questions both raised and left unanswered by the first essay. Is there a way of talking meaningfully about community in *Winesburg, Ohio*? How is the community (or communities) constituted? And if the community does exist in a real way (not the entirely imagined entity as my first essay had perhaps implied) then what is the relationship between individual and community and what are the moral issues inherent in that relationship?

We need to return to the individual self as described in the first essay to begin to get at the ways community is constituted in *Winesburg, Ohio*. The self is a fiction that needs its special place in that fiction affirmed. A remarkable number of Winesburg residents have despaired of Winesburg ever recognizing

their specialness. They carry with them the sense of their special destiny as Jesse Bentley carries with him his conviction of his special relationship with God. But unlike Jesse they are convinced that only outside of Winesburg will their selfhoods find the right contexts and the proper recognition. Elizabeth Willard is sure that within her there is "a secret something striving to grow" (43) that she let die because she stayed in Winesburg (even though people from out of town who travel through Winesburg are confused by her certainty and tell her that "it's as dull and uninteresting as this here") (46). Seth Richmond in "The Thinker" makes love to Helen White by telling her that he is different, made for some other place. Convinced that he's not a part of the town and that it's not his fault ("I don't belong. I'll not make a fuss about it, but I'm going to get out of here") (137), he tells her that "I've got to strike out" (141). Seth Richmond, feeling superior to the rest of his community, sees Turk Smollett, the half-witted wood chopper, as representative of the normal relationship between an average person and the town. He knows that Turk will go out of his way to make a comic spectacle of himself for the town's amusement and as a way of exhibiting "his skill at wheeling the boards" (137).

Seth knew Turk Smollett, the half dangerous old wood chopper whose peculiarities added so much of color to the life of the village. He knew that when Turk got into Main Street he would become the center of a whirlwind of cries and comments, that in truth the old man was going far out of his way in order to pass through Main Street and exhibit his skill in wheeling the boards. "If George Willard were here, he'd have something to say," thought Seth. "George belongs to the town. He'd shout at Turk and Turk would shout at him. They'd both be secretly pleased at what they had said. It's different with me. I don't belong. I'll not make a fuss about it, but I'm going to get out of here." (137)

While Turk's selfhood is starkly simple, both literally and metaphorically, this scene is emblematic of what the grotesques (and we must understand that grotesqueness is the normal human condition according to Anderson) desire in their relationship with the community. Selfhood is a performance or statement of some sort of singularity, here the special wheeling skill, which needs an affirmation from an audience. Now a good part of the previous essay was taken up with showing that there were all

sorts of *imagined* audiences for these performances: Wing Biddlebaum's reverential and clean limbed students (30) in "Hands"; Enoch Robinson's "people of his own mind" (171) in "Loneliness." But as we can see in this episode with Turk and the joyfully affirming townspeople, there are actual audiences as well as imagined audiences. And we should also note that while discussions of Anderson have quite naturally focussed on the failures of individuals to have their performances affirmed, there are a number of what we might call successful selfhoods such as Turk Smollett whose sense of specialness is happily affirmed by the community. There is, of course, an important reciprocity in the community's affirmation, a reciprocity that we will discuss later. For now we can begin by saying that in one respect community in *Winesburg, Ohio* is audience for selfhoods.

As soon as we understand this dimension of community, we see related issues and immediate complications. As I've already indicated above much of the emotional and psychological drama of these stories comes from characters who are either seeking a new audience for their special selves or who have despaired of ever finding the proper audience in Winesburg: Wing Biddlebaum, Elizabeth Willard, Enoch Robinson, Louise Bentley, Elmer Cowley, Seth Richmond. The stories of those in Winesburg who have not yet either despaired of an audience for their selfhoods or who have not yet decided to take off for greener psychological pastures will revolve around a search for an acceptable audience that will affirm their self's fiction. Such audiences are hard to come by, however. In "An Awakening" we see some of the intense competition for the space and time to perform. In that story George Willard along with Seth Richmond and Art Wilson go into the pool hall which is, not surprisingly, filled with Winesburg's young males. Richmond remains silent against the wall, but George talks about women. What he has to say amounts to a declaration of his own newly sensed aggressive manhood. He warns "that women should look out for themselves, that the fellow who went out with a girl was not responsible for what happened" (182). Anderson is eager to have us see that George's burgeoning sense of manhood, his familiar adolescent self-confidence, is not purely a private feeling but is a feeling that demands some sort of public recognition. "As he talked he looked about, eager for attention" (182). The problem,

of course, is that he is not the only one who wants affirmation. As eager as he is for attention, he can only hold the floor for five minutes before Art Wilson shoulders him aside, metaphorically speaking, and begins his own story of his successful triumphs over women. Deprived of the affirmation, George Willard seeks and finds an audience who will not turn its attention to a competitor. George goes outside into the lovely night and begins to talk to himself. He begins by imagining himself a soldier inspecting and disciplining other soldiers. He then slips into a Lawrentian reverie about connecting himself to the great laws of the universe. Unlike the apparently not entirely responsive audience in the poolroom, he enchants himself; he is "hypnotized by his own words" (183). His failure with the poolroom audience is transformed into a kind of an aesthetic victory, a triumph of the depth and complexity of himself and his text as opposed to the more easily understood and, it is implied, superficial competitor, Art Wilson. And, of course, he not only holds his competitor in contempt, he also implicitly sneers at the audience who would succumb to Art Wilson "To come out of Ransom Surbeck's pool room and think things like that, he whispered. 'It is better to be alone. If I talked like Art Wilson the boys would understand me but they wouldn't understand what I've been thinking down here'" (184).

To enchant oneself with one's own selfhood after disappointment with some other public audience and then to feel superior to that public is a familiar experience in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Such turnings inward toward the private audience (often signalled by hands in pockets suggestive perhaps of a certain masturbatory nature of such discourse) occur in Seth Richmond and Enoch Robinson. In each instance there is a stage that follows the self enchantment. Intoxicated by their own grandness, each of these characters then decides that he needs a woman to affirm and share his special nature. George seeks out Belle Carpenter because he is convinced that unlike the boys at the poolhall she will "understand his mood" (185). Seth goes to Helen White, and Enoch Robinson finally admits a woman into his room and one day tries to tell her "what a big thing I was in that room" (176). The point that I want to stress here is that for Anderson even these most private acts of romantic love are inseparable from community. The romantic relationships in this novel all

need to be seen in a larger context of the self's aesthetic crisis and its need for affirming audience. Later in the essay we will look at a moral dimension to this relationship of an individual male, a public and a female. For now we begin by saying that one way to talk about community is as audience for selfhood. The struggle for acceptable audience comprises a significant portion of these stories' drama.

The problems with these community audiences goes beyond the need to compete for their attention. The fact is that they are not merely passive receptors but instead are active interpreters of the texts of selfhood presented to them. In the town where Wing Biddlebaum had lived before he had come to Winesburg, he had apparently talked of noble and gentle dreams to his students and had similarly presented himself to the town. But when one of those students dreams that Wing had done "unspeakable things" (32) to him and tells those dream as facts, men in the town subscribe to the boy's fiction and in a homophobic frenzy drive Wing from the town. The boy's fiction is accepted because it responds to "doubts that had been in men's minds concerning Adolph Meyers" (32). So Wing's idea of self (he was called Adolph Meyers before coming to Winesburg) had not been entirely accepted. There are several things worth mentioning here. First, *Winesburg, Ohio* is filled with this kind of subtle irony. The highminded and noble artist of self, the one dedicated to the gentlest and apparently sexless ideals, is the one whose text of sexless nobility is interpreted by his audience in exactly opposite terms. Either because the idiot boy has "seen through" the false abstract message of bodiless love to the "true" meaning of homosexual lust that lay under Wing's gentle words and gentle caresses or because his imposed meaning of homosexual desire strikes a responsive chord with the community's repressed and unrecognized desires, the boy is a better artist of self than Wing; he succeeds where Wing fails. It is not the aspiring artists (Enoch Robinson) or noble articulators (Wing Biddlebaum) or suffering Christs (Dr. Parcival) who are able to bring the community to rapt wonder. It is the lowly Standard Oil man, Joe Welling, the man of ideas, who enchants and forms the community into the kind of coherent, affirming audience Wing can only fantasize about (103-111). Second, we should also note the extraordinary aesthetic complexity of these rela-

tionships. Wing is the initial artist of self whose aims at audience is his students but who apparently has the larger audience of the men in the town. One of his students interprets Wing differently than the schoolteacher had intended. And then the boy becomes an artist whose own identity is mingled with his interpretation of Wing. His audience's (the men's) acceptance of his fictional self is complicated first because the audience's subscription to the less flattering interpretation may possibly, like the boy's interpretation of Wing, spring from their interpretive acuity or, just as possibly, their own unrecognized desires. Wing Biddlebaum's unsympathetic treatment by his community has most often been treated as an expression of Anderson's romantic sympathy for the individual over against an unsympathetic repressive community. But it is a great deal more complicated than that. Anderson insists on seeing the relationship of individual to community as essentially a problem of tests and interpretation of those tests. Moreover, no meaning of those tests seems to be privileged.

So community can be understood not merely as audience for the selfhoods of Winesburg but as an interpreter of those selfhoods whose interpretations sometimes affirm the individuals' sense of themselves but usually conflict with those self understandings. The community also creates its own fictions about itself and about its inhabitants. I say "community" as a sort of convenience. Obviously the fictions, or gossip if you prefer the less elegant term, must start with individuals (like the unnamed poet who gave Wing his name), but they are never identified and the tales are clearly communal enterprises. We can begin with those, for the most part, uncomplicated and harmless fictions subscribed to by the town that constitute the town's special identity. Wesley Moyer's stallion, Tony Tip, carries the hopes and pride of Winesburg when he races. His name is on everyone's lips and he reappears as the subject of communal speculation in different dramatic contests in several of the stories. Tony Tip's specialness is the town's own specialness and other than worrying about defeat there is no complication. Much the same thing can be said of Turk Smollett and the townspeople's happy affirmation of Turk's boisterous wheeling skills. Turk goes out of his way to have his performance recognized and the town is happy to do so. We are told that Seth's "peculiarities added so much color to the life of the village" (137). The town makes

Seth's distinctiveness part of their own distinctiveness, incorporates his uniqueness into their own. There is no conflict here. Often, however, such harmony between the public perception and the individual sense of self is not the case.

It's fair to say that Winesburg relishes expressions of grotesqueness as expressions of its own special distinctiveness. We are told that "Winesburg" was proud of the hands of Wing Biddlebaum in the same spirit in which it was proud of Banker White's new stone house and Wesley Moyer's bay stallion, Tony Tip, that had won the two-fifteen trot at the fall races in Cleveland" (29). But to be proud of Wing's fluttering hands, to be proud of their berry picking capacity (a record one hundred forty quarts in one day), is not, however, the same thing as the townspeople's pride in Turk Smollett's skill. Wing's hands represent at least four different knowledges or "truths" in respect to Wing. According to his own understanding they were his medium of gentle caressing idealistic love. To the idiot boy and the men in the town in Pennsylvania, they were the agents of his homosexual lust. To the sexually playful young boys and girls (the berry pickers in the story's opening paragraph), those hands are the source of a sarcastic joke that makes fun of his physical oddity and perhaps his femininity. To the broader community they are the signs of the town's own specialness (he is the Tony Tip of berry pickers). So the hands are at the center of four separate fictions or knowledges, four separate narratives, four distinct "truths" to use the term that Anderson uses in his prologue tale, "The Book of the Grotesque." Three of those narratives are community fictions although the communities are different. Or to put it a slightly different way, we can identify various communities by the fictions they tell and/or subscribe to.

It is worth reemphasizing that we cannot determine which of these fictions is authentic. When any of these communities seizes on a particular idea or interprets a selfhood in terms of a single idea, it does a kind of aesthetic violence. Yes, Wing's berry picking is amazing but to separate it from his selfless idealism makes the town's pride a falsehood. To see the mechanical rapidity of his berry picking apart from the traumatic repression of his tousling caresses fails to see an essential historical transformation. And in the same way, to focus on his selfless and sexless love without recognizing the sexual energy that may

sustain that idealism is itself a falsehood. I said earlier that there was a moral dimension to this relationship of community and individual. We can see now that that moral dimension is inextricably linked with these aesthetic issues of fictions and their interpretations. And it's a morality that post-modernist theorists should be quite happy with: to insist on a single meaning and/or to seek such a meaning is a sin; whether it's Enoch Robinson's friends only seeing the technical meaning of his painting or Enoch insisting on only his personal meaning as he crams more and more of his intended message into the dark spot, each is a sin, a falsehood.

I want to look finally at another episode where we can see this moral drama involving a community's fiction, its knowledge of an individual, from a slightly different angle. The story "Nobody Knows" has not attracted much discussion. When mentioned it's usually used to illustrate an early stage of a *Bildungsroman* in which George Willard develops in his relationship with women. I want to look at the familiar male immaturity in terms of this fictive/interpretive relationship we've been discussing. The story deserves more time than I can give it here. George has received a note from Louise Trunnion with the starkly simple sexual invitation, "I'm yours if you want me" (60). Anderson packs into this rite of passage a complicated drama involving the girl's own fictions of self (she sees her act in terms of class tension) and the narrator's awareness of the class drama unfolding as well as George Willard's complicated and to some degree contradictory awareness of the girl. As George Willard stands at the back of her house, he watches her through the screen door washing dishes by the light of a kerosene lamp (one of the ways that Anderson conveys her socially marginal status). When she emerges from the house she is somewhat coy, "How do you know that I want to go out with you," she said sulkily. "What makes you so sure?" (59) In his sexual eagerness George does not see what is perhaps obvious to the reader. The girl's desires are inseparable from her own social awareness, her perception of George as socially superior and herself as inferior. Her need to have him demonstrate some sense of pursuit is not simply female contrariness as George first interprets it. "She has a nerve!" (60) She has to return to the house for a moment and as George waits for her, we can see

that despite his sexual impatience, he is aware of the girl in several different ways.

When Louise Trunnion came out of the front door of her house she still wore the gingham dress in which she had been washing dishes. There was no hat on her head. The boy could see her standing with the doorknob in her hand talking to someone within, no doubt to old Jake Trunnion, her father. Old Jake was half deaf and she shouted (60). First he sees that the dress she wore to wash dishes is the same dress that she wears to her romantic assignation. There is a peculiar and touching pathos in this as it conveys the awkward blend of her social status and her romantic aspirations. The absence of a hat suggests both the informal nature of their walk, perhaps her recognition of the true purpose of the "walk" and, at the same time, a certain girlish vulnerability on her part. When the boy sees her talking to someone within he is sure that it must be "old Jake Trunnion, her father." That "no doubt" implies a great deal of certain knowledge on George Willard's part. Among other things it implies an awareness of her personal and social circumstances, of her burdens and of the comedy of her life with her half deaf father to whom she must shout daily banalities.

When she does come out George Willard notices that she is "not particularly comely" (60). This is not observed in a nasty manner but as if he is looking closely at her, seeing her in a sense for the first time. He notices a smudge on the side of her nose and sympathetically imagines that she must have touched her nose after handling some of the kitchen pots. Despite this realistic and sympathetic awareness he is overcome with a tender reverence, a type of chivalric paralysis. He merely wants "to touch her with his hand" (60). Still excited, it's not sexual eagerness so much as an excessive romanticism. "Just to touch the folds of the soiled gingham dress would, he decided, be an exquisite pleasure" (60). His noticing of the dirty dress shows that his chivalric worshipping exists comfortably with (and perhaps because of) his realistic knowledge of her. At this point he does not "feel very bold." (60) These feelings and knowledges are in conflict with his own desire and his other awareness of her, the "look that had lurked in the girl's eyes when they had met on the street" (60). What gives him confidence to become "wholly the male, bold and aggressive" (61) is the "whispered

tales concerning her" (61). It is when he subscribes to the town gossip, when he lets that fiction eliminate the other truths about Louise Trunnion, that his heart no longer holds any "sympathy for her" (61). To become entirely male is to lose a part of his humanity, which is to say, is to lose sight of the extraordinarily contradictory fictions that constitute Louise Trunnion. Or to put it another way in order for George to go off and consummate his passage into "manhood," he must become less of a human being. He must become a part of the community. We should stress that Anderson is not saying something so obvious as gossip is malicious or false. Louise Trunnion is by all indications a pretty loose girl. The town tales, however, in seizing on one truth become a lie. As is the case with other community fictions, both large and small, we are tempted to examine the motives behind the fiction. Just as we could speculate that the men who drove Wing Biddlebaum from the Pennsylvania town had accepted the story of his homosexuality as a way of not recognizing their own desires, we can do much the same thing here. Perhaps communities need fictions of promiscuity as either a way of controlling their own desires or masking them. Or we might be tempted into a more political explanation: the tales of Louise Trunnion's sexual escapades justify the community's social and economic marginalization of her. Or perhaps these tales are expressions of the community's guilty fear of her. Or we might offer even a feminist reading that would see George succumbing to the community's repression of women's sexual freedom with the consequent loss of his own feminine self. But, of course, we can't finally determine the motive no matter how much fun these speculations are. But what we can say with some certainty is that any town tale or community fiction or communal interpretation necessarily is false. To be a member of the community (to subscribe to its fictions) is to lose something, to be incomplete.

Before summing up I want to make one last point. I have had to talk, for convenience sake, as if there were indeed an abstract entity called the community. I do not want to suggest, however, that there is any meaningful narrative or fiction subscribed to by the entire populace that would define a central value or set of values which would in turn define "the community." The fact of the matter is that whenever we look closely we will find competing fictions. To live in Winesburg, Ohio is

to live in this fictive interpretive whirl of contending fictions and contending interpretations of those fictions. Aside perhaps from Tony Tip and maybe Turk Smollett there doesn't seem to be much coherent agreement on anyone or anything. So in the sense of a coherent set of moral agreements indicated by a shared fiction there is no community in Winesburg. Community in Winesburg does exist, however, in another significant unanimity. Everyone in Winesburg is known. There is disagreement, however, on the *way* each is known. The people in Winesburg, for example, all seem to know of Wash Williams' misanthropic feelings, but they mean different things to different sets of people depending apparently on these individual communities' needs. Some of the women see him as a threat to civilization and respectability (122). But some of the men see in Wash a rebellion against those things that they themselves have not had "the courage to resent" (122). But he is known. "Respectability" begins with the narrator telling us that if you had lived in Winesburg, Ohio you would have had no trouble in seeing the resemblance of a huge grotesque monkey residing in one of the city zoos to Wash Williams. While the monkey would be a mystery for city dwellers anyone who had lived in Winesburg would say, "As he sits in the corner there, the beast is exactly like old Wash sitting on the grass in the station yard on a summer evening after he has closed his office for the night" (121). Everyone in Winesburg is talked about, the subject of tales, stories and gossip. Read back and notice how every character seems to be introduced with some sort of recognition of these communal fictions that surround them, some notation of the fact that they are the center of a story or stories. It is the narrator, of course, who is the representative of community in this sense. Every character he comes to he seems ready to digress as if nearly overcome by the appeal of that particular story. He is always calling himself back to his appointed task. Those digressions or near digressions create for us the sense of a community defined not by uniform fictions but by a uniform set of subjects for fictions to be about. It is precisely the absence of community in this last sense that so weakens Anderson's city fictions. All the energy of these crises of selfhood, the aesthetic dramas of the frictions between individual fictions of self and various communities of interpretation, can't exist because Anderson either did

not believe that community existed in that way in the city or he did not have the necessary knowledge of such a community.

Let me see if I can put in an orderly and connected fashion the principal ideas relating to community in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Community is audience and audiences for the performance of selfhood. The search for acceptable and accepting audience(s) motivates a large number of Winesburg residents. But the community is not merely passive or affirming audience but an audience who is an active interpreter of those fictions of selfhood. Those interpretations are usually at odds with the individual's understanding of his narrative of self. While we speculate and take sides emotionally, there is no way to arbitrate these conflicts. In addition to interpretations of selfhoods, the community is an active creator of its own fictions. Some are simple statements of community superiority but others are fictions which have at their center an individual, sort of a communal creation of a selfhood. The authenticity of these community fictions, like community interpretations, and the motivation behind these fictions are both problematic and finally indeterminate. Moreover, there is no single, substantive narrative subscribed to by the entire population. No community exists in this sense of the word. While there is no unanimity of interpretation of individual selfhoods there is a community in the sense of unanimity of subjects of interpretations and fictions.

University of Toledo

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THE DRAMATIC LANDSCAPE OF SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S FICTION

DAVID D. ANDERSON

Sherwood Anderson was born in 1876 in the town of Camden, Preble County, Ohio, in the rolling hills of Southwestern Ohio, and nearly sixty-five years later he was buried near the crest of Round Hill Cemetery, Marion, Smyth County, Virginia, near where, in the rolling hills of Grayson County, he had made his home if not his permanent residence for the last sixteen years of his life. Between his unremembered birthplace, which existed for him only in his imagination, and the hills of Western Virginia, where he found his identity as "an incurable small-town man" and the only lasting love of his life, he had grown up in the town of Clyde in Northwestern Ohio; he had served in the Army in Cuba in the Spanish-American War; he had lived in Chicago at three crucial points in his life, in Cleveland and Elyria, Ohio, as a rising young salesman, manufacturer, and spokesman for the new age, and for briefer periods in New York and New Orleans. But no place in his life became permanent, and for the last two decades of his life, he was an incurable wanderer—to Europe, to California, to Mexico, to the Gulf Coast, to his home country, to countless mill towns in the South as they still struggled to find themselves three generations after the Civil War.

Yet, in spite of the variety of places with which Anderson was associated for varying periods of time in a life that ranged as widely in memory and imagination as it did in fact, Anderson and his work, like so many American writers before and after him, have been linked permanently to a relatively small piece of the vast national landscape. Thoreau's Walden Pond, Mark Twain's Mississippi River Valley, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, Cather's Nebraska, Farrell's Chicago are firmly fixed in

the American literary imagination; just as permanently fixed is the small town on Northwestern Ohio's lake plain, where Wine Creek turns north to Sandusky Bay in Lake Erie, the town that Anderson called Winesburg, Ohio.

Physically and geographically Anderson's Winesburg is the Clyde, Ohio, he remembered from his youth, as Thad Hurd and others have shown, and Main Street, Waterworks Pond, the fair grounds, the Presbyterian Church, Hern's Grocery, and other places are still clearly identifiable, as are the sites of the railroad station, the New Willard House, Trunnion Pike, and the *Clyde Enterprise* office, which Anderson had moved onto Main Street as that of the *Winesburg Eagle*. Whether the Winesburg, Ohio, of Anderson's best-known work, the Caxton, Iowa, of *Windy McPherson's Son*, or the Bidwell, Ohio, of *Poor White*, Clyde, Ohio, transmuted by memory, talent, and imagination, has become one of the most durable of American literary places, and it is linked permanently with the name and place of Sherwood Anderson in American literary history.

But in spite of the prominence given the role of place in critical assessments of Anderson's work, beginning with Carl Van Doren's insistence in *The Nation* in 1921 that Anderson's work was part of a movement he called "the revolt from the village," place in Anderson's work is, as it is in the last lines of *Winesburg, Ohio*, little more than background, upon which George Willard might "paint the dreams of his manhood" and against which Anderson projected the dramatic landscape of the inner lives of his people.

That background, whether of Caxton, Winesburg, Bidwell, or the countless other communities, named or unnamed, in the late nineteenth century Midwest or the Virginia hills or the Southern mill towns of the twenties and thirties, is compounded of the elements that give life and direction to the town and its people. Most evident among those elements and basic to the town or community is the social order, which, in Caxton, Winesburg, or Bidwell, is as clear and fixed from the perspective of each of his people as are the seasons that provide the cyclical rhythm of their lives. In Caxton, in Winesburg, in Bidwell, each of Anderson's people is identified and in turn identifies himself or herself as the result of that place, and that place has much

but not everything to do with the relationships that promise or deny fulfillment in fact or in the imagination.

Yet identity in the social order is the most superficial element of self or public knowledge, as Anderson makes clear; thus, among Anderson's protagonists, Sam McPherson is both the son of Windy, the ne-er-do-well, and the young man determined to rise in the great world beyond Caxton; Hugh McVey, the poor white, is a technician, a telegrapher and a tinkerer, who, more than anyone else in Bidwell, has his finger on the pulse of the new industrialism; George Willard is, as the reporter on the *Winesburg Eagle*, the town's ear as well as its voice, but more importantly, he is the means by which many of the people of the town hope to realize the dreams and find the fulfillment that has eluded them; John Webster of *Many Marriages* and a nameless Wisconsin town is a business success until he is forced to face and explain the failure that is beyond his understanding; Tar Moorhead of *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* runs out of a mythical Camden and his childhood in a realistic but nameless Mid-American town into a world in which those who "tend up" to their jobs are rewarded, according to the myth of the town and of late 19th century America.

Just as Anderson's protagonists are most easily identified by their contemporaries through their places in the social order of the town, so are those who fill the shops, the streets, the factories, churches and schools as part of the background of the town. These are the people, Anderson's most memorable creations, whom he called grotesques, people who are unable to articulate their dreams, ambitions, and feelings and consequently turn into themselves and remain unfilled and alone. But in the social order of the town each has a clear identity: Windy McPherson is a buffoon; Wing Biddlebaum, who lives alone on the outskirts of Winesburg, is a figure of fun but an efficient berry picker; Elizabeth Willard is the sickly mother of George and matriarch of the failing New Willard House; her husband Tom would be an entrepreneur if he knew how; Drs. Reefy and Parcival are the town's intellectuals and professional men, aloof and apparently in control; Alice Hindman is the maiden lady, the clerk in Winney's Dry Goods Store; the Reverend Curtis Hartman, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Winesburg, is the eloquent arbiter of the moral order; Kate Swift, like Alice Hindman, is a maiden lady,

true to her calling as a teacher. Wash Williams is repulsive, but a skilled telegrapher who links the town to the greater world.

These and the other people of the town of Winesburg have a place and an identity that is clear to all the people of the town and to Anderson's reader as, in each story, one of them comes into clear focus in the long moment that is the appropriate tale, and then fades again into the background of the changeless town. In Bidwell, however, the town that, in *Poor White*, had been another Winesburg and in the novel was to become in Anderson's words another Akron, an industrial city of nameless masses, the people of the town, each of them a grotesque, become the victims not of isolation or anonymity or frustration in a timeless, changeless town but of the dynamics of social change. Thus, Joe Wainsworth, the harness maker and Peter Fry, the blacksmith, secure in their places in the stable, orderly town, together with countless farm hands in the countryside, are displaced and destroyed by change as, in the eyes of the town rapidly becoming an industrial city, Joe and Pete simply go crazy, while the nameless ones become extensions of the machines they despise.

Like the social order, the moral order of Anderson's towns is equally clear to its inhabitants. Morality, like identity, is defined through appearance, and its presence or absence is indeed often determined by appearance. As long as nobody knows of George Willard's sex adventure with Louise Trunnion, his place among the town's respected and respectable is secure; Alice Hindman's momentary lapse in her tightly controlled existence passes unseen, and her role as the town sees her remains intact; The Reverend Curtis Hartman, pastor of the Presbyterian Church that held itself aloof from the other churches of the town, is aware that his weaknesses of mission and of spirit are as hidden to his congregation as his ultimate triumph over the sins of the flesh; Helen White's grace and beauty are reflections not only of her position in the town as the banker's daughter but of the untouchability of virtue and the durability of the myth of the good girl.

To Anderson the social order and the moral order of the town are reinforced by the natural order of time, of the ebb and flow of the seasons, ranging from the silent emptiness of winter nights to the crowds on Main Street on Saturday nights

in the spring, the subdued melancholy of fair week in the fall, and the replication of biblical planting, harvesting, and sacrifice in the fertile fields north of town in a confused sense of mission.

All this—the complexity of the social order, the moral order, the natural order beyond the apparent simplicity and placidity of the town's appearance—is important to Anderson's depiction of the lives of his protagonists as they advance confidently to the fulfillment that they are convinced they will find—Sam McPherson in business, George Willard as a writer, Hugh McVey as an inventor-entrepreneur, John Webster in the love that had eluded him; and only George, at the beginning of his search, is unaware of his inevitable failure and the necessity of a renewed search, like Huckleberry Finn, in a new direction with a new goal, yet still driven.

In that new direction Sam McPherson, Windy's son, is haunted by the public humiliation of Windy's failure, an image that pursues him to the end; as Hugh McVey finds the love that had eluded him, the whistles of the factories he has created echo mockingly in his ears; as John Webster runs off with the woman he thought he had loved, he remains as confused as he is alone.

But beyond these lives lived in confidence and ultimate confusion in the forefront of Anderson's works, beyond the search that drives his people toward temporary success and ultimate human failure, going through the motions of life, and living and functioning within the complex orders that govern the town and interpret it to its people, beyond social, moral, and natural identity lies the landscape of the drama of the inner human life that gives substance to Anderson's work. At the same time it makes clear the fact that Anderson's work is not about the towns with which his name and work are indelibly associated but about the people who live in them and who live everywhere, people Anderson had known in Clyde, in Chicago, in Elyria, in the army, in the trains that cross the Midwestern countryside, making possible the movement, the search, that drives his people to their ultimate self-realization.

The reality of Anderson's people, especially of those whom he called grotesques—and, Dr. Parcival warns us, we are all Christ and we are all crucified—is not the surface order of the town upon which the myth of the small town is based, nor the individual seen by his or her contemporaries. It is, instead, the

reality of each human psyche as it seeks a meaning, a fulfillment that it can neither define nor understand. It is this inner turmoil that Anderson lets us glimpse momentarily and in that moment come to an understanding and find in ourselves a compassion that forever eludes the people of Caxton, of Winesburg, of Bidwell, of all of the towns that mark the fertile imaginary landscape of Anderson's Mid-America.

Thus, each of Anderson's works tells two stories, that of the town and the people who, in reality or imagination, promise to direct and surpass it in the unfolding of the American myth of success, and that of the people whose lives are background to the unfolding drama of their time. This second story, that which gives life and depth to the story and the town is Anderson's most durable contribution to the literature of our time and place. The first story, that of the life and order of the town and of each of the dozens of individuals who give it life, is structurally and organically the foundation of the work, but without the second, the first would be hollow and insignificant, the substance of descriptive reporting rather than intuitive interpretation.

Each of Anderson's grotesques, whether of Winesburg or Bidwell or Caxton or the nameless towns of Anderson's Mid-America, is first of all drawn in the clear relationship to the life of the town as he or she is seen and understood by the other townspeople. But, Anderson makes clear, that relationship is not reality; it is the appearance of reality. The reality of each of his people is the inner turmoil that has made each of them what he or she is, and the laying bare of that inner turmoil rather than the delineation of the surface relationships in the life of the town provides the substance, the dramatic landscape, of Anderson's fiction.

For all of his people the social and moral relationships of their lives are part of the apparent whole of a community that seems to be one, sharing common values and beliefs, and each has a place, whether he or she is successful or not; but the inner reality of each life is unique, and its suffering is not shared but solitary, the product of what Anderson, in "The Book of the Grotesque," calls ideas become truths become the lies by which each of them, in his or her confusion and frustration, attempts to live.

Thus, in "Hands," Wing Biddlebaum lives on the outskirts of Winesburg, isolated, alone, and the subject of cruel humor, a grotesque in appearance as well as spiritually. But once a year,

in berry-picking time, his rapid, expressive hands make him a local celebrity. Wing's attempts to break out of his isolation, to talk to his friend George Willard, are futile, and he loses himself in his dread. George knows intuitively that Wing's hands are the secret of his isolation and his fear, but George is afraid to find out the truth. In a moment of intuitive insight and revelation Anderson reveals the nature and the source of Wing's inner turmoil and his grotesqueness. As a school teacher miles away and years in the past Wing had attempted to describe to his students the greater, more imaginative world, a world he still dreamed of, a world greater than they could imagine, the world he wanted to describe to George Willard. But in his excitement Wing touched his students with his expressive hands which took on a life of their own in his excitement. The language of touch is as eloquent and, at the same time as subject to misinterpretation as any other, and Wing, accused of abusing his students, is driven from the town, to live in fear and frustration on the outskirts of Winesburg, his dream neither articulated nor shared. In his fear and bewilderment, he is doomed to spend his life alone in his little house or walking nervously back and forth on its half decayed veranda, frustrated at his inability to articulate or share his dream with his young friend.

Like each of the other grotesques, whether of Winesburg or Anderson's other Midwestern towns, Wing is apparently in the town, part of its life, its self-image, and its complex diversity, but in reality, in the life of both his imagination and his fear, he is neither in the town nor of it. His reality is compounded of terror remembered and isolation intensified by the fear engendered by his certainty that he cannot communicate what he knows is true. Only when he is alone—or picking berries—can he permit his hands to move in the graceful eloquence that is their nature.

Wing Biddlebaum's appearance, pattern of living, and psychological isolation merge on the literal and social periphery of the town, as does the complex makeup of many of the other characters: Windy McPherson in *Windy McPherson's Son*; the old craftsmen distorted into grotesqueries and violence in *Poor White*; and the people of Winesburg—Wash Williams of "Respectability," Elmer Cowley of "Queer," Enoch Robinson of "Loneliness," Elizabeth Willard of "Mother," and others of the residents

of the town—each of whom seeks out George Willard to find a means and a moment of understanding that will transcend the fear and frustration that isolates him or her. Inevitably, each fails, even as he or she contributes to George's intuitive understanding of the psychological suffering that dominates human life, even in Winesburg. These are the people George seeks out, too, knowing that they have something to teach him, if he can only learn to understand. But inevitably he, too, fails, yet he carries something of each with him as he goes into his manhood.

But less obvious, either to George or to any of the grotesques is the relationship between the demands of daily life in the town and the psychological suffering that lies inside them, even for many of those who are apparently well integrated into the social, moral, and economic life of the town.

In the stories devoted to these apparently well-integrated members of the community, the essence of each is revealed in a moment in which Anderson as omniscient author or George as sympathetic ear permits that person's torment to break the surface in much the same manner as a drowning person's hand might break the surface in one last grasp at an elusive salvation. Jesse Bentley's success as a farmer has produced his confused conviction that God had chosen him for God's service, but that conviction terrorizes, torments, and defeats three generations of his own family and ultimately himself; the Reverend Curtis Hartman fuses doubts and sexual frustration into a conviction that God has given him the strength to endure and to triumph over the flesh; in "The Untold Lie" Ray Pearson learns that every truth is a lie, that understanding is beyond reach, and there is nothing he can do; in "The Philosopher," Dr. Parcival, like Dr. Reefy in "Paper Pills" and the seven-year-old child in "Tandy," knows that neither communication nor understanding is possible among human beings except in rare, unpredictable moments of intuitive understanding and love. For the two medical practitioners in the town, such moments are virtually impossible. For them as for most of Anderson's people, the surface of life is impenetrable, and fulfillment, love, and understanding are consequently beyond reach. Reefy's reaction is ironic, and Parcival's is tormented, but the nameless child who knows she is Tandy knows, too, that beyond suffering lies understanding.

However, like Wing Biddlebaum, she is a victim of a vision she finds impossible to communicate, to understand, or to share.

In laying bare the truth of each human life in a moment that penetrates the surface of each and reveals the torment that lies within, Anderson defines in each case the reality that lies beyond his myth of the grotesque. If myth is, as Northrop Frye has defined it, "the only possible language of concern" in which otherwise undefinable truth can be expressed, it is clear that Anderson speaks in that language in searching for the individual human truths that lie beyond what we are taught is reality. But to Anderson the reality of human life is not found in its community with others; rather each human truth is individual, and Anderson's concern is with the psychological truth that, hidden from the town, lies within each unique individual who appears, however briefly, in his work. That concern, expressed in the most durable of Midwestern American myths, defines the essence of each of Anderson's people; it provides the dramatic landscape of his fiction; and it speaks of their inner lives with reverence, with compassion, and with understanding. At this point, for Anderson and for us, the languages of myth and human reality become one.

Michigan State University

HEMINGWAY'S POSTHUMOUS FICTION, 1961-87: A RORSCHACH TEST FOR CRITICS

PAUL W. MILLER

From 1961, the year of Hemingway's death, to 1987, the following five works by Hemingway have been published, consisting entirely or partly of previously unpublished fiction: *A Moveable Feast* (1964), *Islands in the Stream* (1970), *The Nick Adams Stories* (1972), *The Garden of Eden* (1986), and *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (1987). As one might expect, reviewers, critics and scholars became less enthusiastic about this spate of posthumous publications as the insatiable demand for new Hemingway masterpieces was met by the expedient of publishing works increasingly far from completion and lower in quality. Beyond this predictable response to the publication of Hemingway's posthumous fiction, there has emerged a significant pattern of critical response aligning biographical and "style" critics (strange bedfellows!), on the one hand, and esthetic, including generic and thematic critics, on the other. Whereas this first group of critics supports the publication of any work by Hemingway that illuminates his life or legend, or achieves in certain passages the famous "Hemingway style," the second group excoriates the publication of works that have arguably failed to achieve the author's generic or thematic intentions. Moreover, it appears that these two broadly differentiated, traditional approaches to Hemingway criticism may still be more frequently employed and more influential than the specialized feminist, psychoanalytic, historicist and structuralist approaches which according to a recent British critic, Peter Messent, are dominant in Hemingway criticism today (273). For the sake of convenience I will refer to my first grouping as biographical critics, including "style" critics who regard an author's style as an extension of his persona rather than a unifying principle of the

entire work under consideration. The second grouping I will henceforth refer to as esthetic critics, who focus their attention on the coherence and excellence of the work as a whole rather than on the work as an extension of the author's psyche.

First I will illustrate briefly the decline of enthusiasm for Hemingway's posthumously published fiction from the zenith following *A Moveable Feast* to its nadir following the appearance of *The Complete Short Stories*. Then in somewhat more detail I will review the relatively positive, sometimes rave reviews given successive posthumous works by biographical critics as contrasted with the typically unenthusiastic, often downright hostile responses of esthetic critics. Overall, it appears that despite the vitriol of the esthetic critics, the biographical critics, aided and abetted by the commercial interests of Hemingway's heirs and his publisher, have carried the day. Meanwhile the general public continues eager to buy, and perhaps to read, any new work with Hemingway's name affixed thereto, no matter how far removed from Hemingway's manuscript the published text might be.

The general enthusiasm for Hemingway's fictionalized memoir, *A Moveable Feast*, may be illustrated by the tone of Charles Poore writing in the *N.Y. Times* of May 5, 1964: "Here is Hemingway at his best. No one has ever written about Paris in the nineteen-twenties as well as Hemingway" (41). By way of contrast, the jaded tone of Paul Smith's response to Scribner's 1987 additions to the Hemingway short story corpus was typical of all but die-hard Hemingway worshippers. Smith wrote that the items presented as new short stories in *The Complete Short Stories* "were neither intended as stories nor meant to be published—indeed some were never meant to be read" (396).

Though almost all stripes of reviewers found something to praise in *A Moveable Feast*, as illustrated above by Poore's response to the perceived excellence of Hemingway's writing, J. Maclaren-Ross, like other biographically oriented critics and scholars, fastened his attention on the book as a revelation of Hemingway's life and the people around him in the twenties: "The real interest in the book lies . . . in his portraits of the famous contemporaries with whom he came in contact, and the self-revelation contained in the personal reactions which he now claims they aroused in him" (88-95).

The critical response to Hemingway's next posthumous fiction, *Islands in the Stream*, was much more divided, with biographical and esthetic critics sharply opposed. While most reviewers recognized that *Islands* was not one of Hemingway's great works, the biographical critics typically defended not only its publication, but its capacity to reveal the author behind the events portrayed. Thus Robert Kirsch wrote: "Now we know the real power of the novel, not to be judged solely in literary terms but rather as a testament of a man who for all his faults . . . was one of the best we ever had, and through his art made us part of his search" (46). Edmund Fuller, representing those biographical critics for whom the personal style achieved in a work becomes an important measure of the author's success, had this to say:

What ultimately makes *Islands in the Stream* rewarding and worth publishing in spite of its flaws is the unique personal stamp on both its best and its worst. It is pure Hemingway, and there are scenes and passages as good as anything in his work. When he is bad it is the idiosyncratic badness of a great writer which is quite another thing than the badness of mediocrity. (10)

The esthetic critics, however, were not so easily mollified by Hemingway's alleged achievement of a personal style in *Islands*. Bernard Oldsey, after commiserating with Mrs. Hemingway and Charles Scribner, Jr. on the difficulty of the editorial task they had set themselves, said they should have got themselves a "shit detector," which according to Hemingway was a writer's best gift. "Now more of it [i.e. bad Hemingway] than has ever before been brought together in one book has been published as something of a novel, *Islands in the Stream*" (376). Convinced that everything but the third part, "At Sea," belongs to the corpus rather than the canon of Hemingway's work, Oldsey argued that *Islands* should have been cut to the bone, possibly to form a short novel, or should have been published in scholarly form as part of "the papers" of Ernest Hemingway (378).

Two years later, *The Nick Adams Stories* appeared, edited by Philip Young, who arranged Hemingway's stories about Nick from boyhood to young manhood, in the process adding eight previously unpublished Nick stories to the canon. Since Nick has often been viewed by critics as a projection of Hemingway's youthful identity, Young's arrangement invited the favorable

attention it received from those disposed to read Hemingway's fiction autobiographically. Among such critics William F. Nolan's rhapsodic review stands out:

All of us, all writers, owe a solid debt of gratitude to Philip Young . . . for pushing his idea through to completion. Papa is dead, but here in these crystalline pages his young self still tramps the woods of Michigan, fishes its trout streams, camps on cricket-speaking night shore, meets violence, love and death—and, through it all, writes truly and wonderfully about "the last good country." Cézanne would have been proud of him. (21-22)

Supporting and providing a theoretical basis for Nolan's evaluation, Louis D. Rubin, Jr. argued that an autobiographical approach was not only singularly appropriate to reading Hemingway but essential to a full esthetic experience of his fiction. In effect, Rubin cleverly attempted to bridge the gulf between the biographical and the esthetic critics when he wrote of *The Nick Adams Stories*:

This is a fascinating collection. The fragmentary nature of the new pieces does not really interfere seriously with one's enjoyment. What we have is a more complete view of Hemingway as Nick Adams—by this I mean the esthetic experience of taking part in the writer's creation of himself in this guise. So much of reading Hemingway comes down to just that. No 20th-century writer ever projected himself more into his work, not merely with autobiographical material but in the sense of dramatizing, through style and attitude, the persona of the creator. (C-6)

Rejecting the notion that the Nick Adams stories should be read autobiographically as a chronological account of Hemingway's own process of growing up, Earl Rovit, in reviewing *The Nick Adams Stories*, illustrated the kind of esthetic approach to criticism I have here identified as generic; in the course of his review he reminded readers of the conventions governing the writing as well as the reading of short stories:

[Hemingway] knew precisely what he was doing by leaving the "new" Nick Adams sketches unpublished; and he was clearly deliberate in scattering the published Nick Adams stories amongst the "first forty-nine." He was a short story writer par excellence and he had to be keenly aware of the need for each story to be definitely framed—each a self-sustained creation,

ordering and resolving its own sense of space. . . . In all honesty, I cannot see that Hemingway's fine-honed artistry is particularly well served by this publication. (18-19)

In the *Garden of Eden* the autobiographical nature of Hemingway's fiction became even more obvious than it had been in such early works as the Nick Adams stories. Meanwhile, the biographical reading of fiction was becoming a dominant mode of interpretation, in some measure replacing the esthetic and generic criticism of the previous generation. Gerald F. Kennedy has recently pin-pointed this change:

Unlike earlier periods, in which audiences responded to texts with little concern for the identity, much less the sexual habits, of an author, we have become conditioned to thinking of works fundamentally as expressions of a particular mind or sensibility. The idea of the "author" has become a principle of interpretation, Foucault notes, and a trademark or guarantee of quality. . . . Biography has become the ur-narrative against which we examine all fictions. (460)

The attractiveness of this approach to *The Garden of Eden* must have been considerably enhanced by Scribner's titillating, tantalizing advance publicity that this autobiographical novel revealed a new, androgynous Hemingway far removed from the hairy-chested, macho Hemingway of the early novels. Without taking time out to lament the corruption of the published text, which had been cut from 200,000 to 70,000 words, biographer Kenneth Lynn drew upon Tom Jenks's "brilliant," drastically edited text and Hemingway's messy, incomplete manuscript interchangeably, as though the only significant difference between them was the greater convenience of the former (541). Where there were holes or hollow places in the Hemingway story narrated by traditional biographers, or contradictions between the Hemingway of legend and Hemingway as revealed by his posthumous fiction, a psychobiographer like Lynn would fill the lacunae by interpreting published fiction and unpublished manuscripts alike in the context of available documentary evidence (Moreland 146-47). The result was a much fuller and more rounded though not necessarily more accurate biography than traditional biographers could produce. In fact one may wonder, as twentieth century fiction becomes more autobio-

graphical, whether contemporary biography may not be in the process of becoming more like fiction, in hopes of appealing to the many readers of fiction in society today.

Lest one think that Lynn was alone in using *The Garden of Eden* mainly as the raw material of autobiographical interpretation, let me cite Frank Scafella's "Clippings from the Garden of Eden," which treats the garden in both published text and holograph, but especially in holograph, as a symbol of the protagonist David Bourne's and by extension Hemingway's own inner landscape, his creative universe, which is destroyed by his androgynous relationship with his wife (24, 29). Mark Spilka, in his influential *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny* (1990), has similarly reduced published text and manuscript to a biographical artifact, in the process judging Hemingway along with his protagonist harshly for their "betrayal of truly androgynous love, as between creative equals, and a denial of the primacy of the female within the male for his own 'independent' creativity" (310).

Though some of the biographical critics have seemed almost indifferent to the integrity of the published text so long as they had access to its manuscript variants, the outrage of the esthetic critics over the heavy editing of Hemingway's posthumous fiction reached some kind of crescendo with the publication of *The Garden of Eden*. Appalled by Jenks's cutting of Hemingway's massive manuscript to a novel of 70,000 words, by his elimination of a subplot providing an essential counterpoint to the main plot, and by his omission of any reference to Rodin's statue of two lesbian or androgynous lovers symbolically linking the two plots and serving as the novel's central image of the fall of mankind alluded to in the novel, Barbara Probst Solomon called Scribner's publication of *The Garden* "a literary crime," and English reviewer David Holloway called it "more than a hatchet-job; it was a chain-saw massacre" (Solomon 31; Holloway 9). Joining in the hue and cry of esthetic critics outraged by Jenks's redaction of the novel, generic critic Robert E. Fleming lamented that Jenks had "altered the novel so that it runs counter to the pattern of tragedy Hemingway had been preparing as he worked through the different versions of the massive manuscript" (269). Focusing on Jenks's violation of Hemingway's inferred religious intentions rather than his generic intentions for the novel, K.J. Peters argued that Jenks had all but eliminated "the religious

overtones and images that are the foundation of the manuscript, in effect robbing the readers of the basic theme of the work as suggested in the title" (18). The result was Jenks's portrayal of an artist living in an amoral Garden surrounded by "the unexplainable, random occurrences of life," in a setting sharply at odds with Hemingway's morally structured Garden "where the characters experience the consequences of their actions, actions that are, in the context of the manuscript, sins" (28).

Whereas the biographical critics appear generally to be content with any new publication by Hemingway that provides grist for their critical-biographical mill, the esthetic critics first lament, then reluctantly come to terms with each new publication that seems unworthy of Hemingway or unfaithful to his intentions but which inevitably, if imperceptibly, alters the Hemingway landscape.

In contrast to *The Garden of Eden*, which sold out the first printing of 100,000 copies in a week, *The Complete Short Stories* of Ernest Hemingway, according to Charles Scribner III's best recollection in our recent telephone conversation, sold only about 20,000-25,000 copies in the first year. It also received correspondingly less critical attention from reviewers, perhaps because it added only four minor stories and three scenes from unpublished, incomplete novels to the corpus of Hemingway's published fiction. Ignored by most biographical and esthetic reviewers of mainstream periodicals, *The Complete Short Stories* was reviewed by the professorial twosome of Gerald Locklin and Charles Stetler, who drown everything Hemingwayesque published by Hemingway, his heirs, or his editors in indiscriminate praise:

It should probably be said that we loved reading *The Garden of Eden*. We consider *A Moveable Feast* a masterpiece. *Islands in the Stream* seems to us gigantic in its ungainliness and as yet unfathomed (pun intended). . . . We have never read *To Have and Have Not* or *Across the River and into the Trees* without pleasure. We cannot think of a single uninteresting story from the previous collections. . . . At any rate, we are obviously happy with the publication of this augmented edition of the stories. (489)

Turning from Locklin and Stetler's commentary to that of Paul Smith, who decried the publication of new Hemingway stories

"not intended as stories nor meant to be published," is like plunging from the fantasy world of a hot, gushing jacuzzi into the harsh reality of an ice-cold pond (396).

Without suggesting that *all* contemporary criticism of Hemingway's posthumous fiction proceeds along biographical or esthetic paths, one cannot but be struck by the dominance of these two approaches to Hemingway's fiction published from the vault over the past three decades. Whereas the increasingly influential biographical critics and scholars continue to celebrate almost any new Hemingway manuscript published, the esthetic critics, always on the defensive, frustrated and outraged, continue to fight a losing battle against the trade publication of Hemingway's inferior, incomplete or drastically edited fiction.

In case one wishes to take a kind of amateur Rorschach test to determine whether one's fundamental approach to literature is biographical or esthetic, one need only ask oneself whether it is preferable for Hemingway's posthumous fiction to have been published as it has been to date, in sometimes severely mutilated trade editions, or to molder in the vault until such time as funds could be found to publish scholarly editions of the most fascinating and challenging fiction—surely including *A Moveable Feast* and *The Garden of Eden*—but not necessarily all the posthumous fiction. However much or little credit one may be willing to give Scribner's for their trade publications of Hemingway's posthumous fiction to date, these publications have enhanced our understanding of Hemingway the man and artist. Perhaps more important, they have established the need for scholarly editions of major posthumous works to replace the defective versions already supplied.

As much as reconstruction of posthumous texts is needed, however, it may not soon be possible. Indeed textual scholar Hershel Parker, in a 1988 address to the Hemingway Society edited by Frank Scafella in 1991, found the editing of these texts to date such a depressing topic that he put off talking about it "because I can imagine legal problems will stand in the way of any attempt to reedit in closer accord with what Hemingway wrote" (25). In the same year, Susan Beegel struck a slightly more hopeful note on the same topic. Recognizing that the cooperation of several copyright holders is needed if reconstruction of abridged posthumous publications is to be achieved

before individual copyrights expire well into the twenty-first century, she found "new reason [regrettably unspecified] to believe that joint publishing ventures can be negotiated" Let us hope for the sake of Hemingway scholarship and criticism that she is correct, and that the Hemingway Society will play an important role in this process.

Wittenberg University

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CURT JOHNSON:
CHICAGO NOVELIST AND PUBLISHER

R. CRAIG SAUTTER

When *Hobbledehoy's Hero*,¹ Curtis L. Johnson's first novel was published in Chicago in 1959, it provoked some strong reaction back in his hometown of Iowa Falls, Iowa, the fictional Mills, Iowa, of his story. The book scandalized the community, and amidst strong denunciations of its "cynical and distorted" view of the proud and placid town, the Iowa Falls Public Library immediately placed its two volumes under lock and key, particularly hoping to protect its teenagers who might be corrupted by the book's "offensive" portrayal of adolescent sexual obsessions.

The reaction of Johnson's own in-laws was even more expressive of the displeasure the book aroused. When his mother-in-law's best friend pushed through the back screen door after reading a few chapters, the two women didn't exchange a word, their pained look said it all, as they rushed into each other's arms for comfort and burst into tears. Johnson's father-in-law was even more demonstrative. When Johnson asked him what he thought of the book, he simply replied, "I burned it, of course."

Back in the big city, reviewers didn't exactly commit the volume to flames, but they apparently tried to deliver a knock-out blow before the young author could do any more damage. *Chicago Tribune* critic Robert L. Shebs blasted Johnson and his 515-page novel on the front page of the Sunday book section in vitriolic terms reserved for transgressors of a moral code the paper was dedicated to defending. "Most of the book consists of a seemingly endless colloquy among Eddie and his school mates, repeating every corny and vulgar remark that schoolboys have left far behind at that age." The review was titled and "De Nihil Nihil—from nothing nothing can come." A rather brutal judgement to nail into any emerging writer.

And as it turned out, a rather poor prediction. In subsequent years, Curt Johnson has authored three additional novels, *The Morning Light*² set in Mills ten years after *Hobbledehoy's Hero*, *Nobody's Perfect*³ a rollicking spoof of the 1960's literary scene, and in 1985, *Song For Three Voices*⁴ a devastating tale of adultery, alcoholism, and corporate deception set in Chicago, as well as a novella, *Lace and a Bobbit*,⁵ a vignette of inter-office romance. Additionally, he is the pen behind the satirical *The Forbidden Writings of Lee Wallek*, *The World's Foremost Litcrit*,⁶ which contains irreverent attacks on everything from John Foster Dulles to the official guardians of the nation's cultural agencies. He has also edited *Writers In Revolt: The "Anvil" Anthology*⁷ with Jack Conroy, and several annual anthologies of the best fiction from the literary magazines. His short stories have been selected for other best short story anthologies and for the O. Henry series.⁸ And he has twice been awarded National Endowment For The Arts Creative Writing Fellowships.⁹

But above all, Johnson is best known as the free-spirited, cantankerous, and influential editor of *December—a magazine of the arts and opinion*, one of the nation's oldest independent literary magazines and a prototype of the small literary journals that exploded on the scene in the 1960's and 70's. *December* counts among its contributors; Raymond Carver, Joyce Carol Oates, Richard Kostelanetz, George Chambers, John Bennett, Henry H. Roth, R.V. Cassill, Jack Conroy, Gordon Lish, Jerry Bumpus, Norbert Blei, Lyn Lifshin, Dave Etter, Charles Bukowski, William Stafford, Lucien Stryk, and many other well known and more obscure writers.

December was founded as a breakaway magazine from the Iowa Writer's Workshop in 1958, a place where Johnson once declined an invitation to teach. Since then it has published seven novels, six collections of short stories, three novellas, three books of essays 162 short stories exclusive of collections, 895 poems, 96 book reviews, and three plays. Johnson has been publisher and editor since 1962, when he inherited the magazine from Jeff Marks in Chicago. *December* continues to this day, though irregularly, and December Press still publishes collections of single author fiction and criticism.

In retrospect, the condemnations of *Hobbledehoy's Hero* by the folks back in Iowa and the seemingly more cosmopolitan

guardians of moral fiction, were seriously out of step with the purpose and temperament of Johnson's tale and oblivious to the quality of its writing. "Sure the book had some problems," Johnson—who I should mention for the sake of intellectual integrity is a friend of mine—recently told me. "What first novel doesn't? There were a number of technical things that should have been done to it. The first half should have been cut and compressed, but nothing was done to it. The editors liked it as it was. As for the Chicago newspaper reviewers they are particularly venomous when it comes to Chicago writers. They have such an inferiority complex, and don't want to get caught condemning something out of New York with lots of money behind it, or praising something out of Chicago. Besides, in the case of this review, there was a lot of personal animosity involved. It wasn't an honest review. Still it all came as a crushing blow, because I was young enough to put credence in what the critics said, and believed they knew what they were talking about. It took a while to recover."

By 1962, Johnson was fully recovered and struck back. Writing as Lee Wallek in *Focus Midwest*, his article "Reviewing Chicago Reviewers" began by quoting a letter to the Trib book section: "I wish to commend you for 'wringing out' all the dirt from your list of best sellers. I am a member of the library board here in Albia." After working over four papers, Wallek concluded: "There is nowhere to be found in any of the Chicago newspapers a continuing, reasonable dialogue concerning books. Chicago reviewers—those of the Establishment, at least—are not interested in sustaining such a dialogue. Consciously or unconsciously they confuse morality (for which they have a very special definition) and the flag, the protection of the young, and income tax-gossip, with the purpose of literature—which latter purpose I take to be, from Homer down through Fielding and Sterne and Smollet to Melville and Twain and Mailer, the demolition of the lies, black and white, by which a society lives, so that a man—even a farmhand who hasn't bothered to clean the barnyard off his shoes—may live better."

Herman Kogan, at the time assistant to the executive editor of the Chicago *Daily News* wrote in reply, "I resent fiercely the statement and inferences in Lee Wallek's article . . ." It didn't take those critics long to discover the identity of Wallek. "From

that point on," Johnson notes, "*December* was a marked magazine. No one would mention it or its books. When a Joyce Carol Oates' *December* piece won best short story of the year, not a word. And it still holds."

Re-reading *Hobbledehoy's Hero* more than a quarter of a century after that controversy can be a delightful and worthwhile aesthetic experience. Not only does Johnson's story authentically capture the aimlessness, anxiety, boredom, and frustration of a group of teen-aged boys coming of age deep in the American heartland at the close of World War II, but it playfully creates a set of persuasive characters faithful to the common stock inhabiting small Midwestern towns. It is rigidly loyal to their manner of speech and action, and to their unpretentious values and capricious aspirations, and genuine in exploring their simple shortcomings, tragedies, and ordinary triumphs.

"I wanted to write this novel because I liked Iowa Falls and I liked the kid on whom Eddie was based," Johnson explains. "I was living in Chicago, had been in the Navy and away at school for four years, and I wanted to remember it better. I thought it was worth preserving and I wanted to tell a story about it. Mills is just like Iowa Falls. It's dull and bigoted, and the kids are bored out of their skulls. And they did talk that way, and they were obsessed by sex, even though all the adults wanted to deny it."

A "hobbledehoy" is a youth caught between being a boy and a man, an awkward, gawky fellow. That's exactly the dilemma of the novel's narrator, Ed Quillen, also known as Injun, and his tribe of male companions as they stumble through their senior year at Mills High School. And this hobbledehoy's hero is his twenty-eight year old uncle, Henry Sanders, high school football and basketball star a decade earlier, returned from the war, by almost all accounts a hero in the Merchant Marines, now operating a small ragtag electric repair shop in Mills. Ed and his friends, but especially Ed, look to Henry for explanations about realities of the world beyond Mills, and for useful advice on secrets of success with the opposite sex. "Only one thing I know," Ed says, "for a guy in my position, without a father I mean, having a guy like Henry around was a pretty good break for me."

Ed and his best friend Ray's situation is formulated in a series of one line jokes that launch the story. We immediately get a feel for Johnson's quick witted prose and the balance it creates against his characters' sullen situation. The story begins:

RAY YAWNED. "Injun," he said, "you ever hear about the two red corpusels who lived in vein?"

Ray had a younger brother who kept him supplied with a great deal of such humor. Like "Don't write on the walls, draw pictures." "Don't whisper in class, shout." "On the other hand we have warts." You know like that.

I waited thirty seconds and then I said, "Why don't you tilt your head and let that run out, Ray? You'll feel better. . . ."

The air had a smoky scent to it, like it usually does in the early autumn, and it was a good night out, but neither of us were too cheerful. We sat on the riverbank next to Suicide Bluff thinking bitter, disappointed, disillusioned thoughts, and finally I said to him, "Ray, you think you'll ever amount to anything?"

First he yawned again and then he said, "You think the rain'll hurt the rhubarb?"

Hobbledehoy's Hero is packed with such homegrown Iowa humor. In fact, even as type was being set, Johnson rushed in daily with jokes he continued to recall from his Iowa years, seeking to give the narrative as much realistic textural support as possible. But far from being gratuitous or just "corny and vulgar" as Shebs charged, much of this banter is intentionally designed to simultaneously levitate the plot while reducing the characters' situation to a stark truth revealed through ridiculous analogy. Thus, Ed and Ray are like two corpuscles, swept away in an immense tide of sexual longing and adolescent confusion, wondering if indeed they are living in vain. And likewise, they will discover that they naturally grow, like rhubarb in the rain.

Both Ed and Ray have plenty of trouble in their young lives. They are too small to go out for sports on Mill's victoryless teams. So they are forced to attend games and socials afterwards in band uniforms. And by mid-season, they are thrown out of that cacophonous collection for their never-ending pranks. School is a particular vexation. Though Ed is clearly a good natured and kind kid with above average intelligence, he collects a string of D's and is repeatedly tossed out of class and eventually expelled for three days for his harmless jokes and "poor

attitude." School bores him senseless and is a place to put in mandatory time, compounded by almost an entire year of after-school detention, and is irrelevant to his goal of working with Henry after he graduates, if he graduates. And though he admires everything about Henry, he will not listen to Henry's advice, "Ed put your mind to it. Don't wind up like me. The only thing I'm good for is screwing in lightbulbs. Get yourself a plan. You could end up an engineer."

Mills is a town according to Ed "where there is nothing to do, ever." In the afternoon the endless drone of soap operas can be heard on radios across town. And a single plane crosses its path each day at sunset. It is a town where Frank says "the population never increases because every time a baby is born, a man leaves town." Ed and his pals drink beer, smoke cigarettes, and cruise the back farm roads at night in an old Model T they call the "Mayflower" because they hope "only puritans will come across in it." Once a week they go to the movies, they shoot pool, crash slumber parties, steal hub caps, and let the air out of tires for kicks. Yet amidst all this teen-joking around, Ed is still struck with a melancholy best expressed in the slow blues of "Sleepy Baby" by Freddy Martin's band played on an old phonograph up in Henry's shop. "That's all I care about, It's you and I together from here on out, My dreams and I agree, So sleepy baby dream of me." Except for Ed there is no "you" and his loneliness seems to him like what an author in his English class called "welt-schmerz" which his teacher fortunately translates as "world-sickness." "Whatever it was, I sure had it," Ed laments.

By far, Ed's greatest problems is with girls. And though he thinks about them constantly, he doesn't hold them in very high regard personally. "Girls don't have any sense," Ed tells us. "If they had any sense they wouldn't act so dumb. Lookit how they work and slave over school work and how they hang out talking and giggling all the time and making out like they're so sweet and goddam nice . . . all they are is trouble." When Oster's girl breaks up with him, Ed repeats a solution he's heard up in the shop from old John Jord. "What they should do is open up official whorehouses and then when you wanted one, just go there. And then you wouldn't have to bother dating them a hundred times and making conversation and taking them to

dances." But then he wonders if his plan were instituted, "Who'd ever marry them then?"

Frank, coolest of the crowd, calls him "dateless Ed," so in order to remove the stigma, he agrees to a bet that he'll get a date within a month. After weeks of procrastination, he makes his move. Naturally girls in his own class are out of the question, so he invites a sophomore farm girl to the movies. Ray taunts, "I hope you marry that Slyvia, Ed, really, five or six years from now when she's almost old enough." And a senior girl remarks, "Farm girls are awfully cute. Sometimes anyway. The way some of them are forced to wear those ugly dresses though . . ." Ed loses his bet when Slyvia stands him up. But even though his money is lost, he finally prevails upon her to go out to prove he wasn't chicken. But the date goes badly. Nor can he ever get up the nerve to ask out Ruth Owens, the only girl in school he really admires for personality as well as looks. Later, after walking another girl home, he muses, "you really must be worthless for a girl to deny a person a simple goodnight kiss."

By the time the senior prom rolls around, it's Ray, not Ed who is taking Slyvia. "It depresses me," Ray said gloomily. "What does?" Trolley asked. "Taking a girl to the prom." "Quiet," Trolley said, "You'll make Ed jealous." Ed who has been thrice turned away replies, "I didn't ask anyone, you save a lot of money going stag." We know otherwise. One night during spring vacation, he revealed, ". . . just before I dropped off, I was wishing so hard that someday things would straighten out for me like they were for Henry, that it was dangerously close to praying. I think that if I could have been sure that someday I'd be getting along okay at school or better yet out of it, and getting along okay at home, and okay with the girls, I would have—well, I would have done anything legal you could think of, I think."

Ed holds Henry up as the standard of success. "Even three-quarters lit, he was the best pool player in the whole town, or county for that matter. It was a small matter, but exactly the way it was—the best in everything . . . I used to wonder how I got related to him. He could do well, anything he tried, and he tried anything."

Well, not exactly the way it was. Henry has problems of his own that remain uninterpreted by Ed throughout most of the novel. He returns from the war acting very unpredictably. His

marriage to Lou in the summer of '43 follows a courtship of just a week, and quickly deteriorates. They leave their daughter Susan with Ed's mother to raise, though she only makes her living by baby sitting around town. Ed points out, "Susan was cute, and it didn't make her less cute, but some in town shook their heads . . . because they usually did that in Mills after a baby was born and they'd count it off on their fingers and found they were several months short of nine."

The experiences of war and marriage turn Henry into a young alcoholic. Yet when it looks like the state will take Susan, Henry pulls himself together. He goes on the wagon and becomes president of the local Alcoholics Anonymous, sets up his electric shop and puts in contract bids with the state for new returning vet housing. He also resumes a very old romance with Stelle, a former homecoming queen turned waitress. As the school year regresses for Ed, things seem to look brighter for Henry. And even Ed gains a little confidence from Stelle's playful favors and encouragements.

Henry's real dream seems to be to marry Stelle and make a real home for Susan. But on their engagement trip to a lake near Bemidji, Minnesota, during Ed's spring vacation, the three drink heavily. And while Henry is away buying more beer and Ed rows Stelle across the cool night waters, she confesses her doubts. "I hope Hank returns. It wouldn't be the first time he's stranded me. I know I guess I just don't trust anybody. You ever feel that way? As if people are selfish deep down, and only out for themselves? . . . My mother said all men are dogs. She did honestly." It's then that Ed slowly begins to realize that Henry had run out on her before the war, and she'd had an abortion in high school. Later as they swim in the ice water she concedes, "It's not so bad, Ed," she said. She wasn't looking at me though, she was looking at the moon above the trees. "It's almost worth it, being alive."

As the school year ends however, things start to fall apart again for Henry, and the scales begin to slip from Ed's eyes. Henry's best friend, old Jord, commits suicide and Ed discovers the secret he's protected. "They don't drop a kid full weight two and a half months early," Henry tells him, "and I didn't meet Lou up to the week we got married." And as his marriage to Stelle approaches, Henry hits the bottle harder. On his way

to the prom, Ed finds Henry and another member polluted up in the A.A. hall scraping old paint off the walls. Henry tells him the good and bad news. The state has finally turned Susan over to him. But the electric contract has gone to a rich competitor who bribed his bid. As for Henry's offer, "I don't think they opened it."

After the prom, all alone and with nothing to do, Ed wanders down to the Ess and Ess, where he finds Stelle all dressed up. She asks if he's seen Henry, and when he tells her, she asks him to dance, and then to drive her in the country. They wind up at the golf course where Stelle has a key to the club house liquor cabinet. After getting drunk, they begin to return to the car, but instead end up on the grass entwined, "and somehow the light on the mill was in my head as a sound, too, blinking on and off and my ears were drumming with it and all at once this white star exploded . . . From the direction of town there was a pink tint to the sky. If it had been from the east you would have said the sun was starting to come up. The fire siren was blowing a few minutes ago, she said softly."

The fire in town was Henry's shop and the A.A. clubhouse, Ed discovers later that night, torched accidentally by its staggered members. By then Ed knows that Henry has stood Stelle up again and missed their secret wedding because he was drunk enough to forget. Henry is in the hospital but only slightly burned on the arms. Stelle refuses to speak to him, despite Ed's feeble effort, before she catches the bus out of town.

When Ed returns to the hospital to sneak in a bottle of whiskey, he informs Henry he won't be able to help out at the shop anymore. Ed's decided to head out for the Navy with his pals after graduation.

"I just wanted to tell you—about Stelle . . . I'm sorry I couldn't do any good." "What the hell, it's okay. Forget it . . . It's me, Ed. I got my wires crossed someplace. That's the truth. I should have known better . . ." "Okay Hank," I answered and then I walked out. I don't know though, thinking back on it now, the whole thing—the whole year even—it's like something sad happening and yet you don't really feel too sad about it. On top of feeling sad, you feel good.

Ed is no longer a hobbledehoy, Henry no longer his hero.

And likewise, after the reception received by *Hobbledehoy's Hero*, Johnson could not realistically hold many illusions about what awaited him as a writer in contemporary America. His kind of fiction would rarely receive praise or an audience, nor would many publishers and reviewers be willing to support him. With his developing skills, he might have chosen to alter his style and purpose away from the tradition of the early Garland, Dreiser, Farrell, Wright, Algren, and other Midwestern naturalists in whom he had been schooled and with whom his fiction had so much natural affinity, or he might have sought to choose topics, characters, and plots more in keeping with the commercial trends of current writing.

Instead, he chose to write fiction that has culminated in a darker vision such as found in *Song For Three Voices*, fiction that has as its justification the simple, direct, and difficult telling of a story that is disturbingly true to the common Midwestern people and circumstances it explores. In so doing, he has been relegated to America's literary underground, yet at the same time freed to write as he is compelled to write, in a fiercely probing gut-level way that is often tempered with anger, and bitterness, and pain, and sometimes humor, but that is always radically honest and uncompromising, and in search of what is true and worthy in our human experience.

DePaul University

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MIDWESTERN LITERATURE AS THE GROUND
FOR PARODY IN WILLIAM GASS'S
"IN THE HEART OF THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY"

LAUREL BUSH

A perennial problem in many discussions of Midwestern literature is the problem of "what is Midwestern literature?" In fact, this paper arises directly as a response to just such a question raised in the discussion that followed a paper delivered by David Anderson last August at the Nordic Conference of American Studies in Reykjavik, a paper titled "What's Midwestern about Midwestern Literature?" (David's interesting suggestion for a definition of Midwestern literature was that a dominant theme of Midwestern literature is the myth of the search.) So, what I would like to address today are the following questions: Is there really such a thing as Midwestern literature? Can we define it? Can we talk about Midwestern literature with as much confidence as some critics talk about Southern literature? What characteristics does a literary work have to exhibit to be called Midwestern?

As one looks through some of the critical literature describing particular writers or works as Midwestern, one begins to notice that certain parameters of definition assert themselves. One of these is that a literary work stands a good chance of being labeled Midwestern if its writer lives or has lived in the Midwest (however one might define "the Midwest"). Thus, Carl Sandberg, Gwendolyn Brooks, Saul Bellow, and Eugene Izzie are Midwestern writers, if for no other reason than that they come from Chicago. Toni Morrison is a Midwestern writer because, according to Marilyn Atlas, psychologically she can never escape Lorain, Ohio.

An even stronger and perhaps more important defining parameter is that a writer is Midwestern if what he or she writes about

is the Midwest: Midwestern settings, Midwestern characters, Midwestern themes. Thus, Willa Cather is a Midwestern writer, because of the Nebraska settings and frontier themes of *My Antonia*, *A Lost Lady* and other works, though Cather herself lived most of her adult and writing life on the east coast. (A similar case could be made for Samuel Clemens.) Sherwood Anderson is a Midwestern writer because of his fascinating portraits of Midwestern small-town characters in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Garrison Keillor is, I would like to suggest, a Midwestern writer par excellence not only because of his own location at the time of his writing the Lake Wobegon stories, but also because of their setting, characters and themes.

So far, so good. Midwestern literature seems to be definable. Perhaps. However, the more one thinks about these defining parameters, the more one is troubled by examples that should fit, but don't. For example, is T.S. Eliot a Midwestern writer? He was born in St. Louis. And, I suppose it could be argued, albeit facetiously, that the title of "The Wasteland" derives from a Midwestern setting. But I think most readers would be uncomfortable with this. The "defining" parameters are not completely reliable.

Or, it could be argued that a writer must exhibit at least two of the defining parameters to be considered Midwestern. Thus, Samuel Clemens's Missouri childhood and his Midwestern settings, characters and themes are enough to guarantee his place in the canon of Midwestern literature.

But yet, these parameters, no matter how carefully controlled, do not seem to lead to a satisfying "definition" of Midwestern literature, at least not without some tinkering and compromise.

So what I would like to do today is suggest that we might, just possibly, stand a better chance of "defining" Midwestern literature, or perhaps understanding the impossibility of its definition if we approach the problem from a slightly different direction. What I would like to do is suggest that even if Midwestern literature cannot be rigorously defined, a certain type of it does potentially exist as a unified concept, even an "essentialist" concept, if for no other reason than that William Gass has successfully parodied it in his postmodern short story "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country." Before I present Gass's story though, I need to clarify how I am using the term "parody."

Basically I am building on Linda Hutcheon's definition of postmodern parody, introduced in her 1985 work, *A Theory of Parody* and developed in her later and better known *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1991). Hutcheon's purpose in her critical work is to define postmodernism in a way that tightens the popular definition of postmodern art forms as self-reflexive. The strategy Hutcheon chooses is to fashion a definition of parody that sets up a balanced relationship between an earlier text or concept and the postmodern text or concept that uses it as a ground. For Hutcheon, the parodic relationship between the earlier and later versions is supremely symbiotic: both are simultaneously depleted and enriched by the relationship, both are seen more complexly and more clearly because of the relationship. As she puts it at one point early in her argument: "Parody . . . is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text." (6) It is this fundamentally double and divided ambivalence of Hutcheon's definition of parody that is important for my task.

The ambivalence that Hutcheon notes stems from parody's dual drives of revolutionary and conservative forces. At the same time that a postmodern parody ironically thumbs its nose at its "other" in the parodic relationship, it also pays it respectful homage. As Hutcheon puts it:

Even in mocking, parody reinforces: in formal terms it inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence. It is in this sense that parody is the custodian of the artistic legacy, defining not only where art is, but where it has come from. (75)

So, parody recognizes, acknowledges, and sometimes even defines the thing it parodies.

Thus, if William Gass's short story "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country" mocks the basic conventions of a certain type of Midwestern literature (as I am going to argue it does), then those conventions and the genre must exist, and moreover, given Hutcheon's definition of parody, Gass's story should begin to reveal them to us.

Before I develop that argument, however, I should briefly mention how William Gass himself fits the traditional parameters of a Midwestern writer. First of all, he was born in Fargo, North

Dakota (in 1924), taught philosophy at Purdue in Lafayette, Indiana from 1955-1971, and currently lives in St. Louis, Missouri, where he teaches in the philosophy department at Washington University and associates with other St. Louis writers like Stanley Elkin, Howard Nemorov and Mona Van Duyn. In addition to the story I will be discussing very shortly, another of Gass's stories, "The Pedersen Kid," also has a distinctly Midwestern setting and characters, as does his most highly acclaimed novel, *Omensetter's Luck* (1966). However, it is fair to say that "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country" is the most prototypically Midwestern of Gass's works to date. Every critical commentary on this story notices its Midwestern features immediately.

And, Gass's story is in fact, I would like to argue, a paradigm of a certain type of Midwestern literature, the literature about rural, small-town America, and seems at least at one level of reading to flaunt its paradigmatic quality. The sections of the story bear such headings as: "A Place," "Weather," "People," "The Church," "Vital Data," and "Politics." The defining quality of these label-like headings is impossible to ignore. And it is of course part of Gass's purpose that we do not ignore that quality.

Moreover, as we turn to the story itself, "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country" openly, self-reflexively declares its allegiance to the Midwest. The first "Weather" section begins: "In the Midwest, around the lower Lakes, the sky in the winter is heavy and close . . ." (173). A section headed "Place" begins: "Many small Midwestern towns are nothing more than rural slums, and this community could easily become one." (181) A section bearing the label "Politics" contains the often quoted lines: "This Midwest. A dissonance of parts and people, we are a consonance of Towns." (186)

The narrator of Gass's story is a nameless someone whose present existence is defined by the small Midwestern town to which he has retreated, being, as he puts it, "in retirement from love" (173). (As the story unfolds, we become aware that it is addressed to the narrator's former beloved, an unnamed "you," who at first seems to be a woman.)

The story's setting is emphatically Midwestern. "In the spring the lawns are green, the forsythia is singing, and even the railroad that guts the town has straight bright rails which hum when the train is coming . . ." (172) Among other details: "Down

the back streets the asphalt crumbles into gravel." (172) In the narrator's immediate neighborhood, there are vacant lots that fill with hollyhocks as the weather improves. (174) As Philip Stevick notes in his 1991 essay on the story, most of us have seen this town, or versions of it.

The people who occupy this town "fastened to a field in Indiana" include "young mothers, fattish in trousers" who wear their hair in curlers as they "loung[e] about in the speedwash, smoking cigarettes, eating candy, drinking pop, thumbing magazines, and screaming at their children above the whirl and rumble of the machines." (176) Other residents are introduced like this:

At the bank a young man freshly pressed is letting himself in with a key. Along the street, delicately teetering, many grandfathers move in a dream. During the murderous heat of summer, they perch on window ledges, their feet dangling just inside the narrow shelf of shade the store has made, staring steadily into the street. . . . Near the corner there are several large overalled men employed in standing. (176)

Again, those of us who have grown up in or lived in Midwestern small towns know these people. Along with these, the narrator, and a character who is most likely a third-person version of the narrator, Billy Holsclaw, are types, in fact to a great degree reminiscences of Sherwood Anderson's isolated misfits—updated.

The actions of the story revolve around themes that cry out for recognition as rural, small-town Midwestern topoi. As the narrator tells us in one of the sections on "Politics": "Sports, politics, and religion are [its] three passions. . . . Appalling quantities of money, time, and energy are wasted on them. The rural mind is narrow, passionate, and reckless on these matters." (197)

All in all, Gass's story is the very essence of a certain type of Midwestern life and its literature—as the title of the story indeed proclaims. Yet at the same time that we seem to have arrived at the heart of the Midwest, and what it means to be the Midwest, that "heart" is declared bankrupt. It is "vacant and barren and loveless . . . in the heart of the country." (180) Gass's nameless narrator has not found the promised renewal of a pastoral retreat to the country he had hoped for. Amid the clichés of Midwestern, small town America, the narrator is a poet, someone who cannot participate in those everyday, small town, Midwestern rituals

and clichés, because he is too much aware that they are clichés, and moreover, clichés that he, the poet, is constructing as we read. In fact, our first clue to the "impossibility" of the existence of the town, the people and the actions so vividly described in this story comes in its very first sentence: "So I have sailed the seas and come . . . to B . . . a small town fastened to a field in Indiana." As pointed out by so many critics, this story's intertextual relationship with Yeats' poem "Sailing to Byzantium" defines not only many of its thematic interests, but also places it and all its details firmly in the realm of the artificial, the imaginary. Gass himself, as a critic of his own work and of literature in general, continually emphasizes the disjunction between literature and reality. For example, in a 1976 panel discussion with Donald Barthelme and Grace Paley, Gass commented: "Language is . . . more powerful as an experience of things than the experience of things." Or as he declares in his important, early critical work *Fiction and Figures of Life* (1971): ". . . literature is language, [the] stories and the places and the people in them are merely made of words." (27)

Early in "The Heart of the Heart of the Country" Gass's narrator finds his view of nature disrupted, and eventually "blocked" by wires, initially electrical wires that pass behind his house. Later though, the wires are redefined as "words wound in cables." These "word wires" should be "bars of connection," but they do not in fact connect to anything except themselves.

There are also many windows in the story, but they are not windows that the narrator can see through, they are windows that only reflect back a mirrored image, never the thing itself. As the narrator puts it: "We meet on this window, the world and I, inelegantly, swimmers of the glass; and swung wrong way round to one another, the world seems in." (196) The story's narrator clearly keeps company with a certain philosophy professor from St. Louis, whose favorite thinker is Wittgenstein.

Going back once more to the clue of the story's opening sentence, and our recognition that Gass's story is an echo of Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," the lack of connection between the physical world and words becomes even clearer. The poet narrators in both texts are "out of nature," away from its "sensual music," consumed by their need to construct "monuments of unaging intellect." Once we recognize this, we also realize that

the "woman" the narrator has left behind but whom he can never forget, is not an actual physical woman, but his former muse: the world of sensual things. In the terms laid down by Gass's literary aesthetic, the narrator of "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country" is in retirement from the literature of representation. And though he cannot escape representation entirely, as both Philip Stevick and Reginald Dyck argue, the Midwest the story does represent is fading fast. "The sides of the building, the roofs, the limbs of the trees are gray. Streets, sidewalks, faces, feelings—they are gray. Speech is gray . . ." and later, "these houses are now dying like the bereaved who inhabit them." (181) And finally, "these images are stones, they are memorial." (195) In Gass's story, the narrator who weaves a "true" and detailed Midwest with one hand, simultaneously unravels it with the other. Like the America that so many characters go looking for in another postmodern text, Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America*, the Midwest of "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country" is "often only a place in the mind."

In fact, the settings, characters and themes of Gass's story, if they are representative, are representative of earlier literature about the Midwest rather than "the thing itself." Like Baudrillard's simulacra, Gass's "representations" are cut off from their "originals." Gass's story abounds in references to, borrowings from much more literature than just Yeats's poem. The dying houses of B. will soon be occupied by "some kind of Northern Snopes" (181) The narrator's beloved was never really his: "she was a fiction, always a golden tomgirl, barefoot, with an adolescent's slouch and a boy's taste for sports and fishing, a figure out of Twain, or worse, in Riley." (179) The daughter of the narrator's neighbor, Mrs. Desmond, lives in Delphi. (184) The narrator at one point describes himself as: "not a poet who puts Paris to his temple in his youth to blow himself from Idaho, or—fancy that—Missouri." (185) And there is much, much more. In addition to Faulkner, Mark Twain, Whitcomb Riley, Sophocles, Ernest Hemingway (and possibly T.S. Eliot), there is also Stephen Crane, August Strindberg, William Wordsworth and other writers who occupy Gass's story and its Midwest. The critic Fredrick Busch finds parallels with Malcolm Lowrey's *Under the Volcano* as well as references to *Moby Dick* in the story. To trace all the

echoes and allusions to American and world literature contained in this story is the task of a paper yet to be written.

At a symposium on Midwestern Literature held at Michigan State University this past May, David Anderson in another paper, this one on Ross Lockridge's *Raintree County*, said that the Midwestern literary tradition seeks the spiritual in the imaginary as a revolt against an increasingly materialistic world. William Gass, I would argue, has retreated into the imaginary because the material world he is imagining has or will soon cease to exist.

So, if we go back one last time to the story's opening sentence: "So I have sailed the seas and come . . . to B . . . a small town fastened to a field in Indiana," we notice this time that there is a significant multiple pun on "B." Not only is it a reference to Yeats's artificially preserved Byzantium, it is a complex pun on the verbal infinitive "to be." Gass's narrator has come to the Midwest to "be," to exist, to take on existence. Additionally, he has come to be-come the vehicle through which the town that we the readers see exists; he has, in fact, come "to be a small town fastened to a field in Indiana." And so, as appropriate to the rules of parody that I outlined earlier, Gass's small town, its setting, characters and actions *do* exist, even if only ironically, because their narrator exists. Though he can no longer participate directly in the sensual music of his Midwestern small town, Gass's narrator, seated on top of a headless maple, rather than on a golden bough, *is* able to sing into existence "what is past, or passing, or to come."

University of Helsinki

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