MIDWESTERN MISCELLANY XXI

being a variety of essays on Midwestern writers and writing by members of

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in honor of
Mona Van Duyn

PREFACE

When *Midwestern Miscellany I* appeared in 1973, a mimeographed occasional publication of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, I commented at the time that the six lively essays it contained were too long for the *Newsletter* and too good for me to miss the opportunity of publishing. Further, *MidAmerica I* was still a year in the future. In the two decades that followed, the *Miscellany,* as it has come to be called, is firmly established as an annual publication that has developed an identity and taken on a life of its own.

In its purest form it includes essays that range widely across the Midwestern literary, cultural, geographical, and historical landscape. Although we have published special issues on Sherwood Anderson and Andrew Greeley and will publish special issues in the future, we do like to demonstrate the wide-ranging interests of a lively membership that reflects the diversity of both the region and the literature that it has produced.

Suitably, this issue is dedicated to Mona Van Duyn, poet, native Midwesterner, Poet Laureate of the United States, and winner of the Mark Twain Award for 1993 for her distinguished contributions to Midwestern Literature.

November, 1993 DAVID D. ANDERSON

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PROVINCIALISM AND COSMOPOLITANISM: A RE-ASSESSMENT OF EARLY MIDWESTERN REALISM

RONALD M. GROSH

To claim that much early Middle Western fiction was consistently or maturely realistic would be a disservice to scholarship. Anxious for Eastern readers, Timothy Flint and James Hall created fictions in the 1820's and 1830's laden with the contemporaneous trappings of romanticism, even when they happened to utilize Middle-Western settings or characters. Between these authors and Hamlin Garland, though, other writers produced fiction, especially in the 1870's and 1880's, which laid claim to fidelity to Middle-Western factuality and experience. Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871) and *The Circuit Rider* (1873), Mark Twain's *The Gilded Age* (1873), David Ross Locke's *A Paper City (1873) and The Demagogue* (pre-1885), Edgar Watson Howe's *The Story of a Country Town* (1882), and Joseph Kirkland's *Zury: The Meanest Meanest Man in Spring County* (1887) and *The McVeys* (1886), as well as lesser fictions by these authors and others, all spring from the soil and culture of the Old Northwest.

The manifest literary sins and shortcomings, in the novels of these Middle Western realists, as well as the consequences for their subsequent careers, have probably been more than adequately illuminated by critics over the years. With the exception of Twain, their authors did not produce the quantity of mature literary realism that historians associate with James, Howells, and others. At another time and place I have suggested a number of factors that constrained them. Briefly, 1) their narratives often convey a limiting sense of being regional apologists, struggling almost as much to express a patriotism of provincial geography and assuage a cultural paranoia as to consciously participate in

a national and international literary movement. 2) Their fiction and its successes were usually ancillary to the busy careers of these late-bloomers—careers that sapped time, interest, and energy needed to nourish conscientiously their subsequent art. Part of the very freshness of their narratives has its roots in an inexperience that eventually betrays them. 3) While nostalgic of their region's immediate past, they often seem as much or more driven to achieve a cathartic expose of their regional subjects as they do to produce literature designed to woo an audience. 4) Their actual subject matter frequently lends itself more to treatment that was realistic than romantic, i.e., the harshness of living and a failed vision of Jeffersonian agrarianism made them realists by necessity or reflex rather than by artistic commitment. 5) A particularly Midwestern technique of deflating romanticism by the overt use of transparent irony or bald humor as well as related authorial intrusions into the narrative "broke character" and violated the canons of realism's accepted style. 6) Though inexperience plays a part in the inconsistency of their realism, so does their ambivalence concerning their fictional agenda: to romantically reconstruct myth or realistically destroy it, as Jay Martin suggests in *Harvests of Change*. To this catalogue I would add that 7) after producing memorable golden moments and chapters, even whole books, of literary realism, many of the early Middle Western realists lost some of their literary credibility with relapses into romantic fiction if they continued writing long. (Even Garland, as well as Chicago's Henry Blake Fuller, lapsed. So did New York's Harold Frederick not long after the nine years it took to produce *Seth's Brother's Wife* (1887) and *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896)). Despite its literary shortcomings, though, early fiction from the Middle West deserves more attention than it has thus far received: both the fictions and their authors collectively exhibit less provincialism and greater cosmopolitanism, and their literary creations and techniques sprang from an art more cognitive, than that for which they have been given credit.

Most historians of post-Civil War American literature readily catalogue a few virtues of these writers as Midwestern primitives, acknowledge their role in offering a new American vista to the writer's eye, profile their limitations, and dismiss them to go on to major realists such as Twain, Howells, James (to a

lesser degree Garland, Adams, and Frederick) associated with America's Eastern literary establishment. Early New England and Southern regionalists of comparable quality and productivity have tended to receive more attention than those of the Middle West. By implication, if not always by word, the literary output of writers such as Edward Eggleston, Edgar Watson Howe, Joseph Kirkland, and other post-war heartland writers is represented as an isolated, ephemeral event of little lasting consequence. Quasi-educated writers wrote in a fortuitous convergence of time, geography, and topicality more instinctively than cognitively in process. And to a degree, this conclusion is accurate.

No overstatement of their merits, however, is needed to recognize that several factors have obscured a more balanced assessment of the quality of the early realism of the American Middle West, particularly that of Eggleston, Howe, and Kirkland. First, as quickly becomes clear from a review of the rise of European literary realism and its subsequent migration to the United States after the Civil War, the division of America's realism into sub-categories of local color, regionalism, and naturalism was unprecedented. To a nineteenth-century European, literary realism generally meant a realistic naturalism that included and subsumed what America came to delineate as local color, regionalism, realism and naturalism. Though not totally without practical merit, this four-part stratification or continuum, a double-edged sword, wounds both the art and the criticism which tries to classify a late nineteenth century work with only one of the labels. Not only do most of the realists and naturalists of America, including such as Howells and James, exhibit local color and regionalism, but the significant so-called local colorists and regionalists stand out precisely because of the realism in their works of literature. Authors or works associated with local color and regionalism often suffer a distortion of assessment by the reductionist quality of the labels. Twain's and Warner's *The Gilded Age* exhibits no better realism than does David R. Locke's *A Paper City*, both published in 1873. And the regionalist Joseph Kirkland's narratives betray extensive realism and naturalism, as does Edgar Watson Howe, with pessimistic determinism to spare. In any case, the down-grading of early realism by the subcategories local color and regionalism tends to under-value its merit, particularly in the case of the "frontier" realists.

A second factor that inhibits a more considered appraisal of the quality of realism in Middle Western narrative is a sort of two-fold "guilt by association." Much is made of Twain's use of the vernacular in *Huckleberry Finn,* and it is accepted as innovatively realistic. Thirteen years earlier, though, Eggleston's *Schoolmaster* had opened the vernacular door, and then Kirkland's Zury and Locke's Caleb Mason further contributed to the movement toward a colloquial dialogue in American literature with a significant degree of sophistication. But because the Middle Western society and people pictured in the narratives are so accurately portrayed as primitive and illiterate, both Eggleston and Kirkland found themselves needing to defend the verisimilitude of their fiction, including the colloquial dialogue. In Eggleston's "Introduction" to the 1871 *Schoolmaster* the author praises what he calls Lowell's "admirable and erudite preface to the Biglow Papers" and its philological discussion of dialect. Referring to Lowell as the sole "eminent" author and scholar of American dialect, Eggleston professes that he has been "careful to preserve the true *usus loquendi*" of each provincialism. In an 1887 letter among the Kirkland papers in the Newberry Library, the author of *Zury* writes to Hamlin Garland:

> I recognize the justice of your criticism of my dialect; *but*—if this lingo—now spoken by some ten millions of people—is to be crystalized; it must be done by taking an average and *sticking to it.* It is a composit photograph, establishing a type. I took it (modified, of course,) from the country district in Central Illinois where I spent ten years and where I drew my subject.

Further substantiating his realistic objectivity, his considered moderation, and his conscientious effort toward verisimilitude, he reveals his rejection of vernacular extreme, telling Garland,

> Another experimenter (H. W. Taylor of Terre Haute, Indiana,) has tried a much more outrageous [sic] display of lingual deformity. His is so bad as to be nearly incomprehensible. . . . Much of his grotesquery I do not recognize as at all generally characteristic: probably local to the lower Wabash. He writes me that he is preparing a dictionary of this dialect! Poor fellow! Deluded with a hobby making it an end instead of a means.

This other type of guilt-by-association lies implicit in the subject matter and material at the heart of the early Middle

Western narrative—the rough backwoods life beyond the Western-most boundaries of Eastern civilization. Eggleston, Howe, Kirkland, Locke, and Garland, Adams and Frederick as well, won success by virtue of close observation of their unadorned portraits of often unattractive subjects among whom the authors had spent their everyday lives. Precisely because the culture, the people, and the physical environment were often crude, the authors themselves have acquired a sort of stigma as incapable of producing a sophisticated work of art. Perhaps in part because they arrived rather suddenly on the national American literary scene and without having served any more literary apprenticeship than in some cases the popular press, some who minimize their contributions do so almost as if they were idiots savant of literary realism, or successful primarily because they knew no other society to mirror.

Perhaps underlying all that has been so far said concerning underestimation of the quality of realism in early Middle Western narratives rests the assumption of a degree of heedlessness or aesthetic ignorance on the part of the novelists in the creation of their fiction. The letters and papers as well as the prefaces to the novels of Eggleston and Kirkland in particular, however, suggest the opposite of heedlessness. Though almost all of the early Middle Western realists openly profess the instincts of the historian, which alone would have been enough reason for them to create the narratives they did, they also aggressively and consciously pursue specific narrative techniques associated with literary realism. A reading of an early translation of Taine's *Art in the Netherlands* first led Eggleston to claim and apply the tenets of realism to his geography and culture for his short stories and the one that grew into *The Hoosier Schoolmaster.* His art-historian mentor's fascination with the commonplace pervades all of this early realist's sometimes rough-hewn fiction, even that which lapses into romanticism's excesses. In the preface to *The Circuit Rider,* his third novel and much better than its predecessors, Eggleston avows, "Whatever is incredible in this story is true. The tale I have to tell will seem strange to those who know little of the social life of the West at the beginning of this century. . . . But the books of biography and reminiscence which preserve the memory of that time more than justify what is marvelous in these pages."

However imperfectly or inconsistently he might apply them, Joseph Kirkland, too, left more-than-sufficient evidence of just how conscious he was of a realist's techniques. While writing his sequel to *Zury,* in another letter among the Newberry's holdings, the author again mentors Hamlin Garland on realism:

> And if as I fear, your study of the subject is perceptible in your *treatment* of it, you must write it all over again to eliminate self and make your characters seem to act and talk with perfect spontaneity. The "art to conceal art" is the one indispensible thing in realism. Of course you have to throw light in your theme, but you must fool the reader with the idea that the light shines from within it, outward.

Throughout *The Hoosier Schoolmaster,* which itself contains an appreciable residue of romanticism's trappings, Eggleston also reveals an awareness both of contemporary literature and of the contrast between a realist's techniques and those of contemporaneous romantic literature. In an authorial intrusion intended to deflate romanticism's posturings, at the opening of Chapter V, "The Walk Home," he writes,

> You expect me to describe that walk. . . . of how the silvery moonbeams came down in a shower—to use Whittier's favorite metaphor—through maple boughs, flecking the frozen ground with light and shadow. You would have me tell of the evening star, not yet gone down, which shed its benediction on them. But I shall do no such thing. For the moon was not shining, neither did the stars give their light. . . . Novelists always make lovers walk in moonlight. . . . You, Miss Amelia, wish me to repeat all their love talk. I am afraid you'd find it dull. Love can pipe through any kind of a reed. Ralph talked love to Hannah when he spoke of the weather, of the crops, of the spelling school. Weather, crops, and spelling-school—these were what his words would say if reported. . . . these commonplaces. . . .

Throughout *A Hoosier Schoolmaster* the author makes allusions to English, American, and classical literature, the reading of which led him as he tells later to buy the slowest horse he could in order to have more time to read between his itinerant pulpits. And he takes a number of jabs at critics and their shibboleths.

Kirkland and his family, too, read avidly, devouring quantities of English realism and translations of recent French and Russian

novels, Tolstoy's in particular. His many reviews and articles, some specifically on realism, published in *Dial, Century,* the *Chicago Tribune,* and elsewhere, indicate a remarkable awareness of and insight into current American literature as well. In yet other letters Kirkland writes to endorse Harold Frederick's recent *Seth's Brother's Wife,* which he thought to be "great" in some ways and to condemn Brete Harte as "an Eastern man essentially, telling lies about the West." On another occasion he writes discriminatingly of the fiction of a fellow Middle Westerner, Edgar Watson Howe, saying of *Story of A Country Town,* "I used Howe's 'Annals' of a Country Town [sic] as an example—and a warning." Perhaps more significant in illustrating Kirkland's admiration for realism and his conscious pursuit of it is a statement in the "Preface" to *Zury,* which reads,

> If a critic shall say—"This novel is a palpable imitation of Thomas Hardy's "Far From the Mading Crowd;" an attempt to reproduce on American soil, the unflinching realism of the picture given by that remarkable work, of English low life down in actual contact with the soil itself,"—Then the writer will be satisfied. He will know that he has hit his mark, or at least come near enough to it to make his aim evident.

A balanced assessment of these early authors may be obscurred by yet another factor, the very crudeness of the rustic subject matter itself necessary to Middle Western realism's accurate sketch of the previous generation's frontier life and people. Ludwig Lewisohn years ago noted the "genuine courage, genuine independence of mind" of these authors "to give literary treatment to the rude peasantry that peopled the Mississippi Valley. And it is from the treatment of this peasantry that our modern literature takes its rise." Eggleston and Howe, he says, "made the collective life of the American people the subject of serious literature." This issue of crudeness necessary to true American literary realism consciously concerned both Kirkland and, thirty years later, Sherwood Anderson, another Middle Western writer. Ecstatic over the multitude of positive reviews *Zury* was earning, he exclaims by another 1887 letter to Garland, "How well it pays to write *the truth,* unadorned and undisguised! I was very uncertain as to the possibility of making my homely subject interesting—so sordid, unhandsome, unromantic, even malodor-

ous to the cultivated and refined olfactories—and lo! from Italy to California come welcome recognitions of the "touch of nature." Anderson, writing in an article for *Dial* in 1917, muses, "For a long time I have believed that crudity is an inevitable quality in the production of a really significant present-day literature. . . . If we are a crude and childlike people how can our literature hope to escape the influence of that fact?" Speaking of America, he goes on: "It is a marvelous story and we have not yet begun to tell the half of it. A little, I think I know why. It is because we who write have drawn ourselves away. . . . If we are crude and childlike, that is our story and our writing men must learn to dare to come among us until they know the story."

Kirkland in particular, may have discerned the necessity for this crudeness with greater clarity than William Dean Howells. Vernon Parrington writes of Howells that "If he failed to depict [the homely American reality] in all its sprawling veracity, if much of its crude robustness never got into his pages, the lack was due . . . to the temperament of the artist and the defined discretions of his environment," to "his dislike of looking ugly facts in the face." In early 1888 Kirkland admits to Garland, "Howells' 'April Hopes' [sic] I only began to read. The admission that I did not feel compelled to finish it is of itself a criticism. With my more rugged and grim standards, that good society rippling stream seems—well a little trivial," adding, "(I would not like to have Howells know what I say; for he is great and I am small.)" In the words of Rebecca Harding Davis, Kirkland, also, wished "to dig into this commonplace, this vulgar American life, and see what is in it."

Eggleston, Howe, and Kirkland (even Garland) have never received full recognition for their realism for perhaps other reasons as well. With the discipline of sociology at work in the Middle West (Carol Kennicott of *Main Street*?), a future founder of the American Historical Association such as Eggleston, could not resist presenting himself as both social-historian and novelist. He, Locke, Kirkland, and almost all of the early realists, offered history and sociology as *apologia* for writing their novels and thus unwittingly contributed to obscuring their own artistic merit for future generations of critics. Writing cogently of the nexus between history and literature, Kirkland again mentored Garland

that "Our fiction *is* a social study, but we must conceal the study part. [Otherwise] you might as well call [the novel]an essay and so damn it at once."

The strongly naturalistic theme in Middle Western realism also confuses the neat realism-to-naturalism progression of literary chronology. To label these writers local colorists or regionalists tends toward obscuring just how "precocious" they were, to use Carl Van Doren's term. Environmental and pessimistic determinism, directly or indirectly rooted in the same Darwinian theories that were wracking the religious communities, drive character and plot development to varied degrees in many of their novels. The subjects of free love, political corruption, economic opportunism, the plight of women, educational issues, psychology of depression, religious hypocrisy, divorce, the realities of war and other topics provide very matter-of-fact grist for their mills. They, along with the New Yorker Harold Frederick, also anticipate Willa Cather's fascination with the dynamic between man and land in the shaping of personality and character. Kirkland's commitment to realism required inclusion of the unrepentant heroine Anne Sparrow's questionable past, and her illegitimate children by Zury Prouder brought reader reaction sufficient to require muting of the text's more candid phrasing between the 1886 and the 1887 editions of *Zury*. In the *McVeys*, the sequel to *Zury*, a baby is fathered by one of the protagonists in an adulterous relationship in the first draft of the novel but was apparently not approved by the eastern publisher.

Perhaps a final reason full recognition of the literary realism of these novelists has been underestimated rests upon something akin to literary politics or "connections." The classical American realists from the West went East, nearer the society, periodicals, and publishers that nurtured and gave more direct outlet for their art and careers, thus more sustained publicity and momentum. Twain and Howells settled in the Eastern regions. Garland's career likely might never have begun without his Eastern residence, experiences, and apprenticeships. Bret Harte, too, eventually sought to advance his career in New England, and though all of these authors lapsed at times into literary romanticism, their careers throve. Their articles and short stories found quicker reception or were solicited. This probably would have been

true even of Eggleston's fiction, as others have implied and inferred, had he not turned to writing history. The sheer volume of their literary productivity helped establish the supremacy of particular identities as the leading realists, though Lewisohn takes note that the sales of even Howells' novels were "absurdly small." (*The Story of a Country Town,* on the other hand, went through twenty-five editions or printings in the two years after its first publication.) Howe, Locke, Kirkland, and other Middle Western realists, for the most part, had no interest in changing geographies; they had satisfying careers and settled maturity and responsibilities. Homage has been paid to their role as catalysts within the movement toward a national literary realism. Their disengagement from further major literary productivity, like other conclusions underestimating Middle Western realists and their work, should not be permitted to inhibit a fuller recognition of the strengths of their art as well as the quality of the rather sophisticated minds that produced it as a consequence of being actively cognizant of the new winds blowing in the culture and literatures of the western nations.

Springfield, Ohio

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With appreciation to The Newberry Library for access to the papers of Joseph Kirkland.

THE VIOLATION OF HOSPITALITY AND THE DEMORALIZATION OF THE FRONTIER

DAVID L. NEWQUIST

William Least Heat Moon's circular journey through America as chronicled in *Blue Highways* partakes of two traditions. One is the tradition of the Euro-American whose life has a reached an impasse and who traverses America in search of the stuff out of which new possibilities can be constructed. The other is the tradition of the American Indian who walks the earth in the rite of "making relatives" out of all things in the living universe, *Hunkapi* the Lakota call it. Least Heat Moon, of Osage and English descent, carries with him Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and *Black Elk Speaks,* authors representative of the two traditions, but in whom the two traditions also find a meeting of minds. Whitman has the American Indian's reverence for a transcendent earth:

> The workmanship of souls is by those inaudible words of the earth,
> The masters know the earth's words and use them more audible words. (161)

Black Elk, who converted to Catholicism in 1904 and became a catechist for the Jesuit missions, has the European's appreciation for the systematic record of liturgies which express sacred relationships. As Least Heat Moon explores America, he relies on Whitman and Black Elk as the touchstones by which he assesses his experiences.

During his journey, Least Heat Moon runs into situations where the climate turns dangerous and annoying and the people aloof or testy, but on only two occasions does he feel menaced. In Selma, Alabama, he tries to find out from the people if the march led by Martin Luther King a decade earlier had made any difference in the lives of the blacks. It hadn't, he finds out,

but his visit to the black area of town draws the attention of the Selma police, and a black acquaintance warns him that he could become the target of a framed drug bust. Least Heat Moon leaves town. The nastiest experience comes at Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant.

Least Heat Moon has found people in the northern Midwest taciturn and cold. Attempts at small talk are pre-empted with businesslike smiles or curt answers. Still, he finds helpfulness if not hospitality as he travels. Throughout his circuit of the U.S., he finds some people generous, but most are friendly and helpful. The landscape of North Dakota is austere, but he has a water pump, which has been making noises of impending failure since the beginning of the journey, replaced in Grand Forks in an hour for $37.50. A man opens up a closed museum so that Least Heat Moon can fill his water jugs, and the man informs him that the mosquitoes, leeches, and water which tastes like sulphurous, rusted iron filings are what keep the riffraff out of God's country.

The trip through Wisconsin is made in the company of a teen-age girl running away from a father whose self-disappointment has twisted him into a mean, abusive personality. This part of the journey is accompanied by an atmosphere of suspicion and lurking malice. At first, Least Heat Moon fears that the girl is part of some teenybopper extortion plot. Then he fears the charges which could be filed against him for helping the child to run away. The episode ends when he drops her off at her grandmother's house in Green Bay. But the episode is a fitting prelude for what happens at Central Michigan University.

Once in Michigan, Least Heat Moon feels in need of a hot shower. He goes to a dormitory on the University campus to see if he can buy one. It turns out to be a women's dormitory, but is shut down for the summer and being rented out for a business conference. The student offers Least Heat Moon the use of a vacant room for the night. Once asleep, Least Heat Moon is awakened by a man attending some conference on the campus. The man keeps turning on the light as he bustles back and forth to the shower. Least Heat Moon keeps turning it off. Finally, Least Heat Moon is awakened by a night watchman summoned by the man and is ejected from the dormitory. A nasty exchange of words takes place, and Least Heat Moon

later posts a satiric autopsy report on the door of the man's room, a note which would undoubtedly be lost on the man.

The essential premise of *Blue Highways* is the assumption that one can make a circuit of backroad America with a Ford van and $428 in cash and some credit cards. Hostility and menace are not anticipated. Honesty and goodness are. And honesty and goodness are largely what Least Heat Moon finds, except for the aggressive malevolence in Mount Pleasant, where the erstwhile roommate refers to Least Heat Moon as Tonto. That brief but angry exchange is ostensibly a social slight, but in the context of long custom it is a violation of a moral code so serious that it one time could justify retaliation by death. It is a violation of the code of hospitality, a code which requires giving comfort and sharing provisions with travelers, and which requires of the travelers a reciprocal observance of protocol to cause no discomfiture to extenders of hospitality. The code worked to establish trust and cooperation at a time when hospitality was depended upon to enable travel.

The code of hospitality is not peculiar to America, certainly, but America gave it a peculiar distinction. In the American West, folklorists have identified hospitality and taciturnity as part of the Cowboy Code or the Code of the West (Dorson 150). A traveler could expect to be invited to spend the night at someone else's campfire or cabin, and little would be asked or volunteered about his business because of "the frontier sentiment that a man's past was nobody's business but his own (Dorson 150)." Conversely, he would not probe much into the business of his hosts.

During his travels, Least Heat Moon is taking advantage of a code that both his English and American Indian forebears practiced with meticulous observance of the protocols involved. As a universal code of human business, it is a classic theme in literature. Odysseus and Telemachus depend on gracious hospitality to carry out their adventures in *The Odyssey*. When Odysseus returns to his home, he approaches his swineherd disguised as a beggar and receives full hospitality because, as the swineherd says, "strangers and beggars all come in Zeus' name" (Rieu 216). Hospitality has the sanction of the gods. The swineherd says he provides a place for Odysseus because "of the respect I have for the laws of hospitality and the pity I feel . . ."

(225). When the swineherd does not believe Odysseus's predictions of his master's return, Odysseus says the swineherd might have him "thrown down from a precipice, just to teach the next beggar a lesson" (225). Eumaeus says, "and what a fine name I should win for myself in the world . . . if the first thing I did after taking you into my cabin and showing you hospitality was to rob you of your precious life." The swineherd is a stickler for the rules of hospitality, and is used to contrast with the suitors who are abusing the custom with their profligate consumption of Odysseus's goods and their insulting demeanor.

Odysseus never questions the rightness of killing the young noblemen and the handmaidens who collaborated with them. The laws of hospitality reflected in *The Odyssey* have much to do with defining who is truly noble and heroic and with how subordinates in the social order are to behave. However, the rules of hospitality are the bonds that define the human community. The Old Testament makes hospitality a moral imperative more than a characteristic of social order. As in the Odyssey, hospitality is mandated and has precise rules. One of the lowest acts, as Odysseus's swineherd points out, is to provide the comfort of hospitality but then to menace a guest. Such a breach of trust is inherent in the story of Sodom. While aggressive sexual inversion is generally interpreted as the sin which produces the destruction of Sodom, a structuralist interpretation is that the violation of hospitality is what triggers the demolition. Leland Ryken points out that the writer of Genesis wished to stress also the materialism and callousness of the citizens (84).

In Ezekiel, the sin of Sodom is defined this way: "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them, when I saw it (16:49, 50)." Providing for the poor is always linked in the Old Testament with entertaining sojourners and the people are admonished from mistreating them: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong . . . for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Lev. 33, 34). In the context of a strict moral code governing the rules of hospitality, the story of Lot and Sodom has broad cultural dimensions.

The story actually begins when three men approach the tent of Abraham, who offers them the courtesies of hospitality. Emissaries from the Lord, they inform Abraham that they are going to see if all the bad things they have heard about Sodom are true. The story then focuses on Lot who is sitting at the gate of Sodom, a duty performed by a leader of the community, when two angels approach. Lot invites them to his home, but they say that they will stay on the streets. He persuades them so strongly that they assent to his invitation. While they are in Lot's house, every male in the town gathers outside and tells Lot to bring them out so that the crowd can "know them." Lot protects them and offers his daughters instead. The observance of sacred rules of hospitality are what gives the story coherence. In the New Testament, in a clear reference to this story, the letter to the Hebrews admonishes: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:1).

Hospitality was also considered a necessary virtue by the American Indians. Writers such as Roger Williams, William Penn, and Benjamin Franklin were struck by the meticulous observance of hospitality. The literature of exploration and settlement contain an abundance of accounts of how American Indians saw to the welfare of Europeans in the New World. The betrayal of Indian hospitality by the whites is often commented upon in the recorded speeches of Indian orators. While hospitality was misunderstood and betrayed by European enterprisers, it eventually was absorbed into the Euro-American way of life. To travel and survive in America, one had to use the custom of hospitality. The Indian tribes maintained guest lodges in their encampments and individuals were designated to see to the entertainment of visitors. However, protocols were observed. The custom required that visitors "call up" the camp or village from some distance. Then appointed representatives would greet them, escort them to the village, and see that the people gave them necessary food and accommodations. Even traditional enemies would be given hospitality as long as they followed the protocol. The custom required a strenuous trustworthiness and became modified among white frontierspeople, who never doubted that they would find accommodations at whatever cabins they stopped when they traveled. It was hospitality that,

in the perception of American Indians, provided the means for their dispossession. Gertrude Bonin, a Lakota writer, says: "The barbaric rule of might from which the paleface has fled hither for refuge caught up with him again, and in the melee the hospitable native suffered 'legal disability'" (185-86).

The sanctions against violations of hospitality are made clear in the oral literature of American Indians. A familiar theme in various trickster cycles is the offering and acceptance of hospitality, with the trickster often violating the custom. The Mesquakie (Fox) Indians of the Great Lakes area attribute an 80-year campaign against them and eventual defeat by the French to a violation of the code of hospitality. White Robe, a leader, killed a stranger who came to treat in his village. When the French sent more diplomats, White Robe would kill a few, maim a few and send them back with a message. In the Mesquakie way of thinking, White Robe's violations of moral custom caused the people's problems. The mytho-history clearly places blame on the irresponsible and evil actions of White Robe. His disregard of humane values causes a destructive retribution against his people. The mytho-history, however, also acknowledges the power of his destructive actions as something to be acknowledged in the universe.

Certainly the white settlers of America did not emigrate to undertake a semiotic adventure inspired by John Locke. But the idea of American democracy as a state of human worth inherent in nature found its grammar on the American frontier. The empirical nature of language allowed the American land to displace the Calvinist dogma: a vision of an accommodating, hospitable creation displaced the perception of America as the wild bastion of the devil. Anne Bradstreet found her mental and verbal power not in her imitations of Puritan meditations but in her examination of domestic life. Edward Taylor's minute examinations of natural facts, notably insects, did not provide adequate conceits for his metaphysical probings of spirit; they provided natural facts which challenged his theology at times. Even Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards in their attempts to reinvigorate Puritanism write of scientific and enlightened subjects in ways that nudge the American mentality toward a grammar of human possibility grounded in empiricism and rigorous

tests of logic. What Locke proposed, America substantiated with referents for the grammar of a new social order.

As the vestigial custom of Old World hospitality met the New World practice of it, hospitality took on a definition that made it a state in nature, not just a refined human grace. On the frontier the code of hospitality was essential to the transaction of human business; it also was the act which demonstrated the state of one's regard for human life. The Mesquakie White Robe was feared because of his disregard for human life. Hospitality allowed life even of enemies to go forward.

The Mesquakies had incurred the wrath of the French by refusing to be pulled into an empire of American Indian nations presided over by the French. They had alienated many of their tribal neighbors who allied with the French in fighting them. Their closest linguistic relatives, the Sauks, were even persuaded to fight against them until the French at one battle besieged the Mesquakies and refused to honor a call for truce. The Sauks, outraged at this breach of protocol, assisted the Mesquakies in an escape and became their allies against the French. When the British took over the Great Lakes region and drove the French out of Michilimakinac, the French fled south to join their Illini allies but were stopped by ice on the rivers which blocked their canoes. They invoked the rules of hospitality and wintered over at a Sauk village on the Rock River with those very people against whom they campaigned (D'Abodie 221).

The punishment of those who violated the code of hospitality was severe. James Audubon saw a hearth fire one night when he was roaming the Illinois frontier. He sought hospitality in the cabin from an old woman. An Indian, who had been injured in the eye while hunting, was already by the hearth. When Audubon took out his watch to check the time, the old woman developed an inordinate interest in it. When her two sons returned to the cabin, the family gathered in a corner talking in low voices and gesturing toward Audubon. Both he and the Indian grabbed their weapons in case of a fight. At that point, two more hunters showed up looking for hospitality. Audubon told them what took place and the guests bound the woman and her son to chairs and got their rest. In the morning, they gave the Indian the woman's possessions and burned down the cabin while its owners watched. Audubon comments that in all his years of

traveling, he had never encountered such menacing inhospitality. He concludes that the woman and her sons must not have been Americans (Audubon 601-3).

The murder of Colonel George Davenport, for whom Davenport, Iowa, is named, is told in an account, *The Banditti of the Prairies,* by Edward Bonney, the bounty hunter hired by outraged citizens of Rock Island, Illinois. Three men were hung for the crime in Rock Island, while others who had separate trials received various sentences. One of those hung, Granville Young, was never connected directly to the crime. Bonney knew Young had knowledge of the gang which committed the crime and of their intentions to rob Davenport (215-16). Testimony presented at the trial consists of a vague suspicion (226). On its face the execution of Young seems like a lynching given the sanction of a jury trial. However, the banditti had developed a *modus operandi* of having a gang member seek hospitality on the pretext of needing a place to stay overnight. Then the member would report back to the gang members who would return and rob the house at some later time.

The robbery and murder of Colonel Davenport was planned with the help of a John Baxter who had been an employee and later visited Davenport as a friend. When Bonney finds this out, he states that the betrayer of hospitality was more villainous than those who actually committed the murder (Bonney 93). When Baxter is sentenced to death (his sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment), the judge stresses the violation of hospitality in giving him the death penalty: "And in your case ingratitude and the ties of friendship severed and confidence betrayed have tinged your guilt with a deeper and darker stain . . . and but a short period of time before 'the murdered man's' melancholy and tragical end, you had enjoyed the hospitality of his house . . ." (Bonney 239).

Writers like Hamlin Garland, Mari Sandoz, and Willa Cather replay the code of hospitality as a pragmatic essential and a moral virtue. Observing hospitality and keeping the word, the trustworthiness of language, are interdependent acts. The observance of hospitality by both parties creates the context for the exchange of language; it also provides the grammar of human possibility which made itself manifest on the American frontier. The meaning of language dwells in the life history of

the word, but it is enforced only by human will. Without the will to agree on meaning, no transaction of language can take place. Hospitality is both the act and the metaphor for the human understanding of language. It establishes the moral referent for the goodwill required in a free society; it provides the definition of human integrity.

Whitman sees language as the basis for human possibility: "My voice goes after what my eye cannot see" (43). But Black Elk warns of a time when every individual follows his own "little vision" and his own rules (37). "It is in the darkness of their eyes that men get lost," he says (2). As Least Heat Moon travels America with his mentors, Black Elk and Whitman, he relocates an essential hospitality and reconnects the words of their texts with human experience. That's what makes the episode in the Central Michigan University dormitory so ominous. Humane possibility is destroyed by an act of inhospitality. The betrayal of hospitality and the breaking of the word demoralize people and create impossibility.

Black Elk Speaks, like many books of American Indian autobiography, ends when the people are sent to reservations. Life on the reservation is not a life; therefore, it is not a story. For Black Elk, his people's vision ended in the pile of bodies at Wounded Knee. The American Indian reservations are landscapes of demoralization. Our literature explains why. They are the result of repeated betrayals of hospitality and a constant breaking of the word. The word is kept in our regional literature through the human transactions and perceptions they contain. It defines the moral landscape and the choices between making aliens and making relatives. And it records both the best and worst of the multicultural tradition of the Midwest.

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A HISTORIAN'S FICTION: USES OF STEREOTYPE IN MARI SANDOZ'S *SON OF THE GAMBLIN' MAN*

MARY JEAN DEMARR

HENRI, Robert, artist; b. Cincinnati, 1865; s. John and Theresa H.; lived in far west; ed. in schs. in New York, Cincinnati, Denver and elsewhere; student Pa. Acad. Fine Arts, Phila., 1886-88, in academie Julian and Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris, and studied without instr. for yrs. in France, Spain and Italy; m. Linda Craige, 1898 (died 1905); m. 2nd, Marjorie Organ, 1908. . . .
(*Who Was Who in America,* vol. I [1897-1942])

Robert Henri was regarded by many of his contemporaries as the most influential single force affecting the development of American art in the generation preceding the Armory Show of 1913. He was a prolific painter, teacher, and author; he organized exhibitions of progressive art; and he was the leader of the group of painters known as "the Eight." But a mere listing of his activities cannot convey the extent of his influence upon the young avant-garde artists of his time. . . . Because Henri gave himself so completely to the advancement of the arts in America, his self-appointed mission as crusader was brilliantly successful.
(Homer vii)

Henri had emerged in Philadelphia out of a Bret Harte story of the West, where his father, a land-speculator, was also a professional gambler. Henri's actual original name had been Robert Henry Cozad, and, dropping the patronymic, he had altered the Henry, while his father, after whom the town of Cozad, Nebraska, was named, now lived at Atlantic City under the name of Lee. He had become there a prosperous real estate broker, and his melodramatic Far Western past, as a faro-player who had killed his man and fled from the scene with his wife, was buried and forgotten. During the old cattle-grazing days, he had killed this man in self-defence and he had been acquitted in a trial; but he

still went to Saratoga, when the family funds were low, to 'clean up' at the gambling tables there. Henri made no secret of this,—in fact, he was rather proud of it; but one might have found here a reason for his reserve, for no one felt really intimate with him and he had an air of mystery. . . .

(Brooks 17)

At the age of twelve John Cozad decided to be a gamblin' man. He became one of the handsomest, most elegant, and violent, of his kind. . . . [H]e was also a very lucky father, and lived to see one of his sons grow into greatness as an artist, and a teacher and leader of artists, a son he condemned to live and die under a fictitious name and biography.

More than twenty years ago Dr. Robert Gatewood, . . . the closest remaining relative of the gambler and his artist son, approached me to write the story of the two men. By 1942 I had completed enough research to go to the Cozad region to interview the old-timers. Several there must have known the town's connection with the world-famous artist but they studiously avoided any mention of this. . . . I put the book aside until the story began to leaf out. Van Wyck Brooks revealed the gist of it in his *John Sloan* in 1955 and the next year Harry B. Allen gave a brief account of it to the Cozad *Local.* So I felt free to tell the story that John Cozad, in letters to my father in 1903, characterized as "a most unusual one, and yearns for a Romantic Pen." Unfortunately he left his trail too shadowed and confused for the complete clarification demanded by non-fiction. I have kept to the facts available and only filled in the few holes necessary to reconstruct something of the crucible in which the dross of the son's youth was burned away and the gold of it freed to find itself.

(Sandoz ix-x)

The story of Robert Henri, famous and influential artist, born Robert Henry Cozad, son of a flamboyant gambler, town builder, and, in self-defense, killer, seems made to order for the pen of Mari Sandoz. A writer of both fiction and non-fiction whose works were based in her native Nebraska and strove to explain its history and life, she saw in Henri's early experience many of those motifs which most clearly represented the complex history and culture of her region. It had everything: contrast of the civilized east (Cincinnati) and the raw western plains (the hundredth meridian in Nebraska); such stereotyped figures

as a 'gamblin' man' and his artistically talented son; Indians and their desperate struggle to retain their lands; outlaws (Doc Middleton, the horse thief) and Print Olive (murderous leader of those trying to retain the illegal use of the range for cattle grazing); the struggle between cattlemen and settlers; the rapid change of both nature and human life in an area being newly cleared and settled by homesteaders. The locale is the hundredth meridian, marked by a big sign, about which Sandoz, speaking in John Cozad's point of view, comments, "Here the West began" (10). At this border area the gambling man's goal is to turn a Western landscape, still inhabited by Indians but beginning to be grazed by cattle, into a Middle Western farming and trading community—only better and purer than those he had known in the Middle West and the East. Inherent in the story is the theme of the artist and society, a theme memorably developed also by Willa Cather, Sandoz's more famous fellow Nebraskan (though Cather set her story in Kansas), in "The Sculptor's Funeral."

And yet, *Son of the Gamblin' Man: The Youth of an Artist* (1960) was among the most difficult to write of all Sandoz's works. She struggled with it for years, finding the materials intractable, as Stauffer shows in her important study of Sandoz's life and career (212). In addition to the artistic problems, ethical questions discouraged Sandoz from finishing the manuscript until the basic facts of Henri's story were revealed by others (Sandoz x). And when published, the novel was unsuccessful, selling poorly and being dismissed by critics as lacking action, seeming incomplete, and being stiffly written (Stauffer 229-30).

In retrospect, however, the novel has much to recommend it. The portrayals of gambling father and artistic son and the complexities of their relationship are effectively handled, and the presentation of locale, as always in Sandoz, is lucid and evocative. The juxtaposition of many stereotyped figures, here based firmly in reality, reminds the reader of the truth behind the stereotyped images. Style, as always in Sandoz, is vivid, full of colorful and appropriate metaphors.

A hybrid somewhere between historical writing and fiction, this book is, as Sandoz said in her "Preface," as accurate as possible, resting on thorough research into primary sources, sometimes footnoting particular items of historical importance, such as provisions of the Nebraska Herd Law of 1871 (30), and

occasionally quoting from newspaper accounts of events of the period. Sandoz indicated that she used the names that "the characters were reported as using in life" ([vii]). Her comment, quoted above, that she "kept to the facts available and only filled in the few holes necessary," may be reassuring to the reader desirous of understanding the time and place depicted, but the lack of documentation must leave that reader uncertain about the historical accuracy or the existence of reliable sources for many of the events depicted, especially those within the Cozad family.

One potential problem with the novel, perhaps one of the reasons for its poor critical reception, is the blurring of focus between the two central characters. The reader might be forgiven for being confused as to who is the protagonist, John Jackson Cozad, the gambling man and colonizer, or his son, Robert, the future artist. And yet the splitting of emphasis between these two figures seems to be one of the points of this telling of their story. Each is interesting and important in his own right, and each represents a familiar type of character, yet each is complex and contradictory, showing that the truth behind the stereotype may contain surprising intricacies and ironies.

John Jackson Cozad, for example, is in many ways a stereotypical gambler of the type variously portrayed in fiction and film. Wearing a diamond stickpin and ring, carrying a gold-headed cane, toying skillfully with a deck of cards in idle moments, and known for his skill at faro, he seems the very epitome of his type. Yet when first we see him, in the novel's opening lines, wearing his "frock coat and tall silk hat," he is "striding westward across the prairie" on his first visit to the site of his future settlement. While the setting and action introduce his aspect as colonizer, Sandoz's opening exposition stresses his skill as a gambler and his history of good luck; quickly, however, she juxtaposes information about his family and his past attempts at building an ideal community.

> He would start one more community, one of many thousands of people, in a vast region fresh and new as an unbroken deck of cards. And clean, clean as the meadowlark watching him from thistle. . . . Yes, he would build a strong, a spreading and prosperous settlement centered by a city of wide, tree-lined streets, an open and happy city, with a fine home for his family, a home finer than anything his wife could have dreamed even in the romantic fancy of her Southern girlhood back before the [Civil] war. He would display her like a diamond set by Tiffany's, and it would be somewhere along the railroad running past his feet here, on the forty thousand acres he had arranged to buy. (7)

Like Stephen Crane's gambler in "The Blue Hotel," then, John J. Cozad combines apparently contradictory traits: a life of gambling, inhabiting what is by its nature a violent world, along with a family life of domestic tranquility. But, also like Crane's gambler, he is fated to be destroyed by the adventurous side of him that had made possible the existence of the family life.

The greatest ironies in Sandoz's portrayal of John J. Cozad lie in his attitudes toward violence. Making his living as a gambler, a life stereotypically connected implicitly to violence, he yet hates all violence with a passion explained by a traumatic incident from his youth. Sandoz describes this crucial event in flashback, in the novel's opening pages:

> . . . He had been lucky right from the start, from the days when a rope at a bridge or perhaps a waterfront gin pole might stop an overly successful gambler. He had seen a mob grab the man who had befriended him, back when he was a frightened boy of twelve on his first trip down the Ohio, and started him in faro. He had to hear the dark murmur of the gathering crowd, listen to the anger rise into a roar.
>
> Hang the jack leg! String him up!
>
> He had tried to stand against them with his bare hands and was knocked off into the water as the mob dragged the man away to a pole and jerked him up, to dance the air. Even now, after more than twenty-five years, the apologetic, forward-tilted head of a hanging man anywhere . . . always brought back that first time to John J. Cozad, made him want to run, run as he did at the sight of his friend, so long ago. (5-6)

And yet this same man, impelled to hate all violence by this disturbing experience of his youth, has a stormy temper and always carries a pistol and is able to use it well, when the need arises. Yet he tries to instill his hatred for bloodshed and killing into his sons and strives to avert it, as we see in several incidents of the novel. Ironically, however, his downfall is brought about by his own violent act, though that act is performed in self-defense.

John J. Cozad contains other contradictions. A professional gambler, he refuses to allow gambling in his ideal community. A tender and loving family man, devoted to his wife and deeply proud of his sons, he is also a womanizer, whose repeated infidelities, discreetly occurring only when he is away from his family on the gambling forays that support his town-building activities, bring pain to his wife and disillusionment to his younger son. The idealism of his dream of building a perfect community seems undercut by the self-aggrandizement of his ambitions to become a senator and by his naming his communities after himself (Cozaddale in Ohio, near Cincinnati, and Cozad, in Nebraska, a name still on the map). Thus his gambling is only one of a number of fatal flaws, which in Sandoz's treatment lead inexorably to his destruction.

The gambling man's violent tendencies are mirrored by the violence of the land to which he has brought his gently reared wife and sons. Though the hundredth meridian seems empty when the settlement is first planted, Indian wars give young Robert his first initiation into the violence of this country. Soon after erupts the enmity of the cattlemen for the settlers who are invading the range which the cattlemen have illegally been using as their own private domain. And always there are outlaws of varying stripes, who live and die by the gun. Atrocities committed against the settlers are graphically described, and the growing violence caused by the struggle over the uses to which this land shall be put forms a major motif within the novel. It is paralleled by growing hostility against the colonizer, from settlers he has brought to Cozad as well as from the cattlemen he stands up against.

Another of the ironies is that John J. Cozad, hated for his arrogance and power, becomes, in his attempts to keep his settlement going through bad times, a precursor of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "make-work" policies. When drought, a plague of grasshoppers, and fire within the settlement seem to bring any hopes of success to an end, he immediately envisions a bridge over the Platte, bringing trade to the small community and, in the meantime, creating work—for which he pays out of his own pocket, presumably from his gambling proceeds. Work on the sod bridge continues off and on through much of the

novel, and it becomes a symbol of the town's—and its creator's—stubborn refusal to give up.

And yet this very dedication by the gambling man also creates the enmity that eventually contributes to his destruction. The pile of money from which he pays the workers at the bridge is but one indication of how he is seen to "big-bug it," of the arrogance which he never recognizes in himself and which causes him to alienate even some of those who had been closest to him. The threats to his endeavor come from both within and without, and they form a steadily repeated pattern throughout the novel, presaging the animosity that leads Alf Pearson to attack him.

When the climax comes, well prepared for by threats against John J. Cozad, it is instigated by a quarrel with a man who has been hostile for some time over real or imagined injuries. Pearson's resentments are both personal and financial, and it is Cozad's intimation that he lies about one of them that impels him to attack.

> Pearson drew his fist back and struck out. Cozad, clumsy in his heavy overcoat, ducked back and stumbled . . . . Pearson pounced upon him, pounding him in the face, kicking him as he struggled to get up. Finally the colonizer managed to stick a foot out. Pearson half tripped, and when he came up there was the flash of a naked knife in his hands. John Cozad saw it, grabbed under his greatcoat, and as the knife was raised against him he fired without aim. The bullet struck the man's head as with a blow, jerking it back. (291)

The gambling man, then, like Crane's gambler in "The Blue Hotel," is in some respects an innocent drawn into his fight. This is no shoot-out of brave men facing each other at high noon; it is a sordid scuffle which destroys a man of idealistic dreams and cynical means of fulfilling those dreams. The wounded victim, moreover, is not immediately killed but anticlimactically lingers on for some days—enabling his killer to escape, fleeing furtively on foot because of his awareness that the general animosity against him in the county seat, largely under the control of the cattlemen he had fought, would make it impossible for him to receive a fair trial. And thus is created Richard H. Lee, the name he adopts and under which he will live for the rest of his life.

The years from 1872 to 1882, the period of the gambling man's involvement in his attempts to build Cozad, Nebraska, his long-dreamed-of ideal community, give the novel its form. These years are formative years in young Robert Henry Cozad's life, from the age of seven through seventeen. He is a child when the novel begins and a man, responsible and even wise, when it ends. We see the future artist first as the family greets the colonizer on his return from the visit westward that opens the novel, and significantly his boyish artistic attempts are prominently mentioned. Using the point of view of his mother, Sandoz tells us that

> [t]he younger boy, the seven-year-old Robert, resembled his father more each time—the same thin temples, the dark glossy hair, the short chin, and the same intensity of eye. He had some of the Cozad excitability. Now he hugged his present, moccasins crusted in white and blue Sioux beading, and ran to fetch a drawing he made, showing his father sticking his head out of the train to watch a great herd of buffaloes streaming past the smoking engine, buffaloes that looked like humpbacked milk cows. (14)

The first years of colonization at Cozad are interspersed for young Robert and his mother and elder brother Johnny by periods of return to Cincinnati, so that the boys may continue in school. The novel, however, passes over these periods in silence, except for the indications of hiatus. From the time the family moves westward, we see them only in Cozad and its environs. Robert's initiation into Nebraska frontier life comes slowly in some respects, because of his parents' insistence that their sons retain a veneer of eastern civilization, "From the start," Sandoz writes, "the Cozad boys were set off from [other settler children], not only by what they had to learn but by their city ways and manners, their neatly cut hair instead of shaggy manes, sunburnt and unkempt, hanging to the shoulder. Although they wore shoes and stockings, they washed their feet every night, which seemed an excessive scrubbing, even for beds with sheets" (24-25).

But young Robert proceeds to invent his own initiation, copying Sioux rites; in his attempts to become "brave like the Pawnees" he "put sun flower seeds to smoldering in a fire and then set them on [his] wrist with a stick and let them burn out"

(27). Turning it from an experiment in stoicism to a lesson in personal identity, his mother uses this experience to reinforce a familiar lesson whose principles she had referred to as the "Three B's": "Be kind, be thoughtful, and be myself" (29). A truer initiation comes through observation: after a battle between Sioux and Pawnees, the boys find a wounded Pawnee and help care for him, admiring his stoic acceptance of pain, and help him escape (41-3).

As the town grows, its progress punctuated by such natural disasters as drought, flood, fire, and plagues of grasshoppers as well as malice, thievery, and murder, so does Robert grow—in responsibility, in courage, in steady acceptance of the reality of his harsh land and enigmatic father. His artistic and literary endeavors—for he both wrote and illustrated stories—occupied as much time as he could manage, and his parents, especially his mother, encouraged these attempts. His growth in character is shown by the reliance his father early placed on this teenager to direct work on the bridge and to manage willful and resentful workers.

Robert's beginning maturation as an artist is subtly traced through the novel. Early we see him submitting his stories and drawings to his mother, who encourages his gift, though she seems to worry more about his spelling and the straightness of his lines than about his imagination and flair for capturing a scene. Some of his work he keeps private to himself, for already by the age of eleven, he has learned the value of art as therapy:

> Several times he had started a diary and usually kept up the decorations, the little pictures, longer than the words, perhaps because there were so many things that it was not nice to speak about. (145)

Friends and townspeople are aware of his talent and there is no evidence of anyone trying to discourage him from using his gifts; unlike Cather, Sandoz does not see the area as intrinsically hostile to the efforts of the artist. His artistic education however, comes largely through his own efforts, and there are moments of sudden understanding, such as in June, on his fourteenth birthday, when he suddenly comprehends the similarity of the "lovely pink with a tinge of apricot" that he sees in the "curlew's wing, the roses in the grass, sunset on the ice of winter, and

now, from beneath the black earth, these young mushrooms" (197). Nature has been training his eye without his even being aware of it.

More crucial, however, is the lesson learned from a traveling photographer, who teaches him to look at people's eyes, giving Robert what he thinks of as a "special way of seeing people now" (216).

> Robert found himself looking at people, even horses, in this new way, starting with the eyes, but now seeing much more besides. Even Tabby blinking in the spring sun . . . had a new fire. . . . He caught a sort of inner burning in the eyes of his father, and a cool remoteness in the far-focused ones of the older, the hard-working cowboys stopping by, or perhaps a wavering and a weeping if they were real old-timers and had faced too many years of wind. (217)

Robert's consciousness of people's eyes in moments of crisis is repeatedly remarked upon in the rest of the novel; this new artist's awareness also makes him a more sensitive observer of the feelings of others and relates to his growing maturity in the social and moral arena.

There is little evidence of his father's attitude toward Robert's art until late in the novel, unless the absence of evidence of Robert submitting his work to his father for criticism be taken as such evidence. It is always his mother to whom he shows his stories and sketches, as it is his father who gives him his lessons in business and building. But just as there is no evidence of his father's interest in his son's art, there is also no evidence of his trying to discourage it. Finally, however, as opportunities for continued education for the boys become problematic, Sandoz has John J. Cozad both indicate his approval of his son's talent and connect that gift with his growing maturation in other areas. Rejecting a former plan to send his now fifteen-year-old younger son away to look after Cozad interests elsewhere, the father says,

> "I don't plan to station you at Leadville after all. . . . But if there is a good school in Denver, I may send you there. I want a school that will develop your talents for writing and painting as you have developed into a manager of work and men."

Episodes throughout the novel indicating Robert's gradual but steady growth into manhood could also easily be multiplied and parallel his growth into his art. But testing and disillusionment accompany that growth. When Robert is nine years old, he and Johnny are enticed into a hayloft where some men are gambling and there he discovers the seduction of cards, especially of faro, the game at which his father is a famous master. Robert is tempted into rationalizing his acceptance of some money to gamble with, but then the game is discovered and broken up by his horrified father (103-8). The episode seems to have been an attempt to trap the boys' father, to use the youngsters in order to get at the colonizer, ironically making use of the game for which the father had a great gift and corrupting the town—as well as the boys—by bringing that game into it. Though Robert is uncomfortable throughout the episode, aware that something is wrong, the ease with which he accepts the offered rationalization that the money really is owed to his father reveals his immaturity. And his father's anger—he beats the boy with a buggy whip (108)—both teaches young Robert a brutal lesson and serves as an instance of the violence lurking within the father.

Despite such scenes and despite his growing awareness of his father's inconsistencies and contradictions, what seems Robert's greatest disillusionment with his father relates to the gambling man's sexual infidelities. When Robert is fifteen, a mysterious woman appears in Cozad, asking for "a man called John Cozad" (256); when she learns that he is away, she buys a ticket for Cincinnati, presumably hoping to find her quarry there. Her identity is never revealed, but Robert begins to put together remarks and bits and pieces of memories, not previously understood. He begins to understand his father's behavior, and he meditates on its effects on his mother:

> . . . somewhere far back in Robert's mind there seemed to be a memory of a similar occurrence. . . . He was small then, but suddenly now he connected his mother's illness in bed for a week or even longer with the appearance of that earlier woman. And since—there could have been a dozen other times, times he missed, or did not understand.
>
> . . . Robert had the sudden suspicion that she knew, that this had been a recurring circumstance of her life with their father.

> The possibility of this shocked the son's whole web of affection, his whole neat pattern of values that he had thought so final and finished. (257)

The novel is punctuated by other tests and ordeals which young Robert successfully undergoes. That he has become a strong and resourceful as well as loyal man is evident after the climactic fight in which Alf Pearson is shot. It is Robert who immediately takes charge, recognizing the precise nature of the dangers confronting his father—immediately, of lynching, and more distantly of being unable to get a fair trial and thus being condemned legally to the hangman's noose if he escapes it this night at the hands of the mob. Robert plans the stratagem by which his father will seem to be traveling to the county seat to give himself up but actually flees on foot while his mother and sons remain to cover his trail, convert their holdings to cash, and finally escape to join him.

At this point, Robert's maturity is clearly greater than his father's, a point Sandoz makes quite explicit. The father, even while facing the danger of lynching, a danger that had haunted and horrified him since his youth, responds with a gambler's thrill to the excitement of the moment, and the son reacts with a wise sadness.

> To Robert, the father was a man giving up a dream, yet now, at this last moment, John Cozad did not seem defeated at all. Instead he was almost exultant, his red lips smiling slyly, his eyes burning as with reflected sunlight, no, not the sun but a sort of inner flame blazing through. . . .
>
> Suddenly the seventeen-year-old son felt a great pity well up within him, like a flood filling in all the bridge. It was not ever his father's necessity to go, to leave, even his necessity to kill in order to live. . . . No, this was something deeper, something that made the son feel protective, fatherly, wanting to shield this man who was never so precious, so beloved as at this moment.

This is the moment of Robert's emergence into adulthood. And Sandoz skillfully links his maturity as a man with his growth as an artist. After his father has fled and while his elder brother is imprisoned in the county seat and is threatened with lynching, Robert suffers deeply as he can only wait for what is to come. After a sleepless night, we are told,

> Suddenly the son could not stand the waiting with his hands idle and empty. He tiptoed down to his den and laid out a pad of thick paper and began to work with his paint box and colored pencils, taking up this one and that, throwing the pencils down one after another and then wetting up the color pans to bring up depth and highlights to the pictures here and there. When he was done he had half a dozen sketches—his mother, Traber, Johnny, his father, all with the sudden appalling realization of what had happened to them all, the horror of it in the dark depths of their eyes.
>
> . . . Suddenly an excitement rose in his arms, ran through his veins like a cloudburst roaring down the Platte. He could scarcely believe that he had made these sketches, they seemed so much the work of an artist, the artist the man gested that he might become. (309-10)

Thus Robert's moment of deepest fear for his family turns into a moment of triumph as he realizes his true vocation and the possibility of achieving success as an artist.

After that painful and victorious experience for Robert, Sandoz speeds up the tempo, taking us rapidly through Johnny's release on bail and his immediate flight, the death of Alf Pearson, and finally the flight of Robert and his mother (their worldly goods having been converted into cash which is secreted upon their persons) to join the new Richard H. Lee in Chicago—to "[face] eastward and a new life" (315). These events, though potentially full of drama and high suspense, are not directly germane to Sandoz's central themes and thus are quickly passed over. The gambling man has been brought low, almost in the manner of Greek tragedy, and his son's maturation, both moral and artistic, has been assured. Further action, however suspenseful, would merely distract readers from the novel's main themes. All that remains is for an epilogue to tie things together and reinforce those major themes.

The novel's final brief chapter occurs twenty-one years later, as Richard H. Lee sits for a portrait by his son, now Robert Henri. Flashbacks tell of the lives of both father and son in the intervening years, and they talk, in the intimacy of the relationship of painter and subject. The father, we learn, has no understanding of his son's radical political leanings but treasures his artistic gifts and has supported him in his extensive travel and

study. The influence of the boyhood experiences in Cozad on Henri's art is alluded to:

> he was the true son of his father and of pioneer America. He had chafed under the academic rigidity and dryness [of European art schools], feeling as tightly restricted as the hay that came through the press out on the Platte, the bales safe and salable for money that way, but with no life possible inside. . . . [T]he boy with all the broad sweep of the Platte valley in his breast could not endure the narrow confines of Europe. (317-18)

The final paragraphs of the novel circle back to its beginnings and to its sources. We learn that the father has been in correspondence with a "sandhill locator" named Sandoz (the author's father, best known as "Old Jules" from her biography of him, the correspondence referred to in the preface of this novel). But more significantly, Sandoz picks up the theme of regret for a life compelled to be lived under false pretenses because of the actions of the gambling man, also introduced in that preface. Apparently sensing unhappiness in his very successful son, the father asks him what he wants. And in the son's unspoken reply comes a partial summary for this story of violence and love, of art and cruelty:

> The son did not lift his head for a long time. He had the reply ready, one he had thought over for himself a hundred, a thousand times the last few years. What did he want? He wanted most of all to live his life as himself, not only as the final of the Three B's his mother taught her sons years ago: "Be yourself," but he wanted to live the truth, live it as Robert Henry Cozad, the son of John J. and Theresa Cozad. Be what he was; yes, live his life as himself.
>
> But this could not be, not in the face of that curious mixture of pride and fear that seemed at the bottom of the father's long persistence in his assumed name. That curious romanticism, perhaps inseparable from the gambler. . . . "I want the truth, as near to it as possible. I want to grasp that essence of everything which is its final truth." (331)

His dissembling answer, kindly in its evasion of his resentment over having sacrificed his own personal identity to his father's needs, nevertheless expresses much of what young Robert had learned as a boy on the plains and which he had practiced in his adult life as student of art, as teacher of artists, and as a man.

And the novel's last lines reemphasize the love of the two for each other and the son's willing sacrifice of his identity for his enigmatic father: as the father first looks at the portrait for which he has been sitting, he simply murmurs, "My son, my beloved son," and the artist carefully signs the painting: "He did it firmly, as always: Robert Henri, dotting the *i* very carefully" (333).

Sandoz's telling of this story might seem too dramatic, too filled with ironies, too enigmatic to be believable did we not know it to be true. Perhaps the fabulous quality of the plot is one reason for the novel's failure when first published. Perhaps readers were not ready for a gambling man who was also a builder, for a killer who was a non-violent man, for an artist who came from a loving family and did not suffer and starve in garrets. It is indeed a pity that the novel did not receive a more favorable reception, for its vivid depiction of its locale in that crucial moment when it was changing from Wild West to settled Midwest is evocative and effective. And Sandoz's uses of stereotype as she created fully rounded, complex, even enigmatic characters are complex and compelling.

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"STARTING OUT IN CHICAGO": SAUL BELLOW'S LITERARY APPRENTICESHIP

DAVID D. ANDERSON

In the Winter 1974/75 issue of *The American Scholar,* in a remarkable essay entitled "Starting Out in Chicago," Saul Bellow poses to himself, his reading audience, and the young people and parents of the Brandeis University graduating class of 1974, for whom the remarks were originally written, a question at once rhetorical, suitable for such circumstances, and yet demanding of himself an acceptable answer. "What was it," Bellow asks, "in the thirties, that drew an adolescent in Chicago to the writing of books?" Further, he asks, "How did a young American of the depression period decide he was, of all things, a literary artist?" (71), a term he immediately decries as pretentious and yet does not reject.

Bellow, then 59, the author of six novels, a respected novella, an unsuccessful full-length play, and a collection of short stories, was two years away from his recipience of the Nobel Prize in Literature; he had already been three times given the National Book Award for fiction, and he was a respected and admired if not popular or loved writer; he was considered to be cerebral rather than clever, and, as a "Jewish writer," he was loosely linked by some critics and reviewers to Bernard Malamud and Philip Roth as members of a postwar "Jewish" school, a designation Bellow resented.

In the essay and in the graduation address that preceded it, Bellow attempts an answer in terms of the unlikeliness of the ambition given the time and place. Particularly important, he recalls, was the emergence of his identity as a Midwesterner, a fact of his life which Bellow had nine years earlier, in an interview in *Paris Review,* described as being "lucky" (57), rather than as a Jew, a Midwesterner who, as a youngster, "did not go

to the public library to read the Talmud but the novels and poems of Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay" (73). But the bulk of "Starting Out in Chicago" is an essay on the wonder of what happened as the imigrant experience—Bellow was Canadian-born, one generation out of Russia—and the American experience—the young intellectual in the depression-ridden city of the big shoulders—met face to face, forcing not confrontation but a search for a mutual understanding.

Important in the essay is what Bellow says about those early years when he discovered not merely an identity—later, in *The Adventures of Augie March,* his protagonist was to proclaim "I am an American, Chicago born. . . ." (3)—but also a literary tradition that, although it had already largely run its course, was that which he, as Midwesterner, as embryonic literary artist, however pretentious the term might be, could intuitively understand. It taught him, he recalled, that ". . . life lived in great manufacturing, shipping, and banking centers, with their slaughter stink, their great slums, prisons, hospitals, and schools, was also a human life" (73), and he wanted to put it into words. It was also a tradition with which he could identify, and it had produced an attitude, a technique, and a subject matter from which he could learn.

The tradition that he discovered, and the attitude, the technique, and the subject matter of which it consisted, was that which, as William Faulkner had earlier insisted, had begun with Mark Twain and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and had come to provide a living language, a Midwestern American vernacular, a Midwestern American character type, and an enduring Midwestern American myth, that of movement, of escape, of a search. In beginning the tradition, Faulkner insisted, Mark Twain directed the course of Midwestern and American literature in the works of Sherwood Anderson and Theodore Deiser, and through them the course of modern American literature in our day. Neither the influence nor the identity was escapable or deniable for a young Chicago writer coming of literary age in the third decade of this century, nor did Bellow experience any desire to do so.

The impact of that tradition, emphasizing as it did the determination and the isolation of the artist in a material world, and

compounded of the nature of the human being twisted by circumstance into something oddly grotesque and oddly wonderful, the struggle, regardless of outcome, that is itself the only meaning one can know, and the confrontation of impersonal place with the face seeking self awareness gave form and feeling to the fiction that he would later write. But there was much, too, that had happened in those years in Chicago, experiences that had made him a writer, that he had already used as part of the substance of some of the fiction that he had written but that he had neglected—deliberately, I suspect—to recall in the essay.

At least part of Bellow's self-styled arrogance in deciding to be "of all things, a literary artist" may be a reflection of the time and place in which he grew up. After all, in 1933, the year in which Bellow graduated from Tuly High School and went on to the University of Chicago, the city observed, in celebration and defiance in the midst of the depression, the centennial of its incorporation. That celebration was hailed as "A Century of Progress" and was marked by a world's fair, just as forty years earlier, in equal celebration and defiance in the face of another depression it had held "The World's Columbian Exposition" to mark the four hundred years that had passed since Columbus's voyage to the Western Hemisphere. In a city in which Al Capone was named by students of the Medill School of Journalism at the University of Chicago as one of "1930's outstanding personages of the world," in a city that refused to think small about anything, a city simultaneously loved and hated by its people, it was perhaps inevitable that Bellow, born Solomon "Solly" Bellows, would think in terms that reflected a time and place that refused to acknowledge limitations.

The seeds of Bellow's ambition were surely planted at Tuly High School, among the literary set, as his friends Dave Peltz and Sam Friedfeld recalled, but they flourished in his relationship with friends Isaac Rosenfeld and Oscar Tarcov, the three of whom, under the tutelage of Nathan Gould, a youth leader of the anti-Stalinist left, declared their allegiance to Leon Trotsky and to Trotskyism. As committed leftists dedicated to literature, the group belonged to the Spartacus Youth League, the Trotskyite youth organization, the Young Peoples Socialist League during a flirtation with the Socialist Party, and the Young Peoples Socialist League (Fourth International), the youth arm of the Trotskyite

Socialist Workers Party. Each of the three young men left the Trotskyite movement early, and each became a writer of fiction. Rosenfeld's *Passage From Home* (1946) and Tarcov's *Bravo My Monster* (1950), like Bellow's *Dangling Man* (1944), reflect the disillusionment and perhaps maturity that drove them out of the movement.

Bellow and Rosenfeld remained close after their high school graduation, enrolling together at the University of Chicago in 1933 to study literature and philosophy. There they participated in the Socialist Club, a Trotskyite group; they organized what they called "Cell Number Five," and they worked on "Soapbox," the club magazine. But increasingly they were seen by serious members as clowns and kibitzers rather than dedicated revolutionaries as they recited Swinburne in Swedish, Jewish, Polish, and Italian accents at Party gatheringss. In 1935, dissatisfied with Chicago's literature program, Bellow transferred to Northwestern. Rosenfeld stayed at Chicago, but they remained close, both eventually moving to New York in the early 1940s to carry on their literary careers. Bellow graduated from Northwestern in 1937 with honors in anthropology. Nineteen years later, after Rosenfeld's early death, Bellow memoralized their youth in an essay, "Isaac Rosenfeld," in *Partisan Review*, Fall, 1956; in "Zetland: By a Character Witness" (*Modern Occasion*, Port Washington, N.Y., 1970) he recreated their youth and young manhood.

Apparently Bellow's literary study at Northwestern was as unsatisfactory as it had been at Chicago. According to Ruth Miller, Bellow's former student and confidant, when Bellow applied for graduate study in English, he was told by the then chairman of English at Northwestern that as an immigrant, the son of Russian Jews, he would not have the appropriate feel for English literary and language traditions. Indignantly, Bellow turned again to anthropology, which he had studied under Melville J. Herskovitz, who arranged a graduate fellowship in anthropology for him at Wisconsin.

Nevertheless, Bellow experienced his first literary success at Northwestern, publishing a short story, "The Hell It Can't," in the student newspaper *The Daily Northwestern*, in February, 1936. The title of the story is drawn from Sinclair Lewis's novel *It Can't Happen Here*, published in 1935. Apparently missing

the irony of Lewis's title, perhaps not having read the novel, Bellow describes in the two-page story the beating of a union organizer by a fascist thug. The story won third prize in a contest run by the paper.

However, Bellow's stay at Wisconsin and his study of anthropology were short-lived, largely because, as he later recalled, "Every time I worked on my thesis, it turned out to be a story;" in December he returned to Chicago, where, on December 31, 1937, he married Anita Goshkin, a social worker, and began the routine described in "Starting Out in Chicago," where he lived with his in-laws:

> So I sat at a bridge table in a back room of the apartment while all rational, serious, dutiful people were at their jobs or trying to find jobs, writing something. My table faced three cement steps that rose from the cellar into the brick gloom of a passageway. Only my mother-in-law was home. . . .
>
> Lunch occurred at half past twelve. The cooking was good. The meal was followed by an interval of stone. My mother-in-law took a nap. I went into the street. Ravenswood was utterly empty. I often turned into Lawrence Avenue and stood on the bridge looking into the drainage canal. If I had been a dog I would have howled. But I was not here to howl. I was here to interpret the world (its American version) as brilliantly as possible. Still I would have been far happier selling newspapers at Union Station or practicing my shots in a poolroom. But I had a discipline to learn at the bridge table in the bedroom (74).
>
> I am glad to say that I can't remember what I was writing in Ravenswood. It must have been terrible. The writing itself, however, was of no importance. The important thing was that American society and S. Bellow came face to face . . . (75).

But neither the situation nor his bridge-table confrontation with America, with Chicago, and with himself could continue. He and Anita move to a one-bedroom flat on Fifty-seventh Street and Harper, and he began a series of jobs. From 1938 to 1942 he worked as a temporary instructor of English, paid by the hour, at Pestalozzi-Froebel Teachers College, where Ruth Miller, one of his first students, preserved his English Composition reading list: *Crime and Punishment, Madame Bovary, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Sons and Lovers, Chrome Yellow, Winesburg, Ohio, Sister Carrie, Manhattan Transfer,* and

A Farewell to Arms. Miller recalled that each student had to write a book report a week, and in class Bellow read one or two aloud, and then went on to talk about the assigned novel. It was, she remembered, heady stuff for Illinois girls who aspired to be teachers in the 1930s. Ruth Miller remembered, too, perhaps inaccurately, that at student conferences, he occasionally read from the manuscript that was ultimately to become *Dangling Man.*

In the early 1940s he visited Mexico for a short stay at about the time of Trotsky's assassination. This venture was to provide material for "The Mexican General," a substantial part of *The Adventures of Augie March,* and other stories. During these years, Bellow worked, too, at other temporary jobs, especially with the Illinois Writers Project of the WPA, which gave work and direction to a good many of his contemporary aspiring writers. The Illinois project was directed by John T. Frederick, who had founded *The Midland,* one of the most important of Midwestern regional journals, in 1915, only to have it become an early casualty of the Depression. Other writers who worked on the project at one time or another were Nelson Algren, Jack Conroy, Isaac Rosenfeld, Lionel Abel, Studs Terkel, Richard Wright, Arna Bontemps, Willard Motley, and Frank Yerby, all of whom, like Bellow, later became more or less successful. Katherine Dunham, who became a successful choreographer, also worked there.

The Writers Project died in 1943, a casualty of the war and wartime prosperity, but before that Bellow worked for the *Encyclopedia Brittanica* and the "Great Books" project of the University of Chicago. As the war closed in on him, as it did for most of the young men of his generation, he went to New York. In 1944 he joined the Merchant Marine, where, after his boot camp training at Sheepshead Bay, he was stationed at the Maritime Commission offices in New York. He never served at sea, and when he was released in 1946, he, his wife, and his year-old-son, Gregory, moved to a flat on Pineapple St. in Brooklyn Heights which would become his base for his assault on the literary establishment. But he came to New York as a sojourner; Chicago remained the reality of which he knew he was a part.

The published credentials he brought with him from Chicago were modest but impressive. As a Marxist, however fleeting, and

an intellectual, an aspiring member of the *literati,* however pretentious that ambition might be, he had read the *Partisan Review,* later called by Edmund Wilson "the only first-rate literary magazine in America," almost from its inception. Founded by Philip Rahv and William Phillips in 1933, the journal had become independent, Marxist, anti-Stalinist, and avowedly literary. In the May-June issue of 1941 Bellow had published a six-and-a-half page story entitled "Two Morning Monologues"; a year later, in May-June 1942, he published his more ambitious "The Mexican General." In 1944, as Bellow became a temporary New Yorker, Vanguard Press published *Dangling Man,* the novel that had been six years in gestation, part of which had been published in *Partisan Review,* September-October 1943 and reprinted in *Best American Short Stories,* 1944, edited by Martha Foley.

Not only had Bellow brought impressive if modest credentials to the New York literary circles which he was to be in but not of for most of the next two decades—until his more or less permanent return to Chicago in 1962—but with him he carried a conception of the modern American male that was to provide the narrator/persona that would dominate his best work for three decades. That concept emerges for the first time, tentatively but clearly, in "Two Morning Monologues."

Probably but not certainly the product of those days spent at the card table in the bedroom in Ravenswood or the one-bedroom flat near the University where he learned his discipline, the story has two parts, each focusing on a single character at a crucial morning moment. The story is not only Bellow's first but his most durable perception of the human condition as his protagonists, each caught between two realities, can do nothing but wait. One character is a young man no longer a student but not yet a dues-paying, job-holding member of society; the second is a professional gambler.

The first monologue, "Without Work," is the 9:00 A.M. pondering of a young man with five years of college who cannot find work in depression-era Chicago. Caught between two demands, his father's that he actively seek work every day and his own that he find some way to fill each day out of the house, and between two realities, that of college and that of the working world, with the end of the depression and the onset of the draft a vague shadow in the background, the young man is the

first of a long line of Bellow's male characters who dangle, caught between demands and realities but not by any of them, free to ponder, to wander, to wonder in ostensible search through an identifiable reality that is modern America.

> I wait for the car, the Cottage Grove car, on the corner near Poland's grocery store. The Polands know me well. They have been on the corner for many years. Mr. Poland waves at me from behind the counter withdrawing one hand from the breast of his apron, and smiles at me with his big, broad teeth whose discoloration makes a little flare in the early morning grocery light. . . .
>
> It's a long ride. Often, when there's no special hurry, I get off and walk. In this way I have covered the whole distance on foot and I know every part of it—garages, laundries, resale stores, house foundations, autoparts, weeds—all in two colors, sand and gray. There are no others: seasonal colors, I mean. Near Twenty-second Street there are several new factories with sleek fronts and neon piping in the office windows. And then, when the line turns down Wabash Avenue, past the movie distribution houses, you see huge tableaux of kiss and thrill and murder. But usually I read a book and pay little attention, while the car wobbles toward the Loop, except to see what the sun is doing. I watch it occasionally. Just before we creep under the elevated lines it appears for a moment. Not much hope for it, I remark to myself. If it outlives me, it won't be for long. This morning it makes me think of nothing more important than a paper seal on a breakfast-food box. Yank it and the box opens. You will find a toy prize on top; a toy plane, crossed snow shoes, a tiny loving cup. (232-33).

Once he had pursued a rumor of employment and spent the day in a huge room with hundreds of others, swapping newspapers and waiting; now he could only ask himself "What'll it be today, the library? museum? the courthouse? a convention?" (234) He remains in his father's eyes, "'A good boy, a smart boy, American, as good as anybody else—but he hasn't got a job'" (230).

The second monologue, that of "The Gambler," takes place at 10:30 A.M. in what is for him early morning despair, caught between the choice and the "sour loss" that inevitably follows, between the tout's cinch, the walk on the edge, the occasional "long shots breaking like controlled pitches" (236). "Like getting a pay envelope, he remembers." "But lose, too. More often than

not. That's how it turns out. Money owing, rent postponed, hole in your glove, one egg, cheap tobacco. Then you hear the swishing in the heart like a deck ruffled, and the stains grow under the arm" (236). In the brief sketch is evident the prototype of Einhorn, of Tamkin, of Tommy Wilhelm, of all Bellow's later sad losers who cannot point the way to the solidity of earth and reality and success.

This story, like much of Bellow's fiction to follow, is compounded of time, mood, place, rumination, and hesitation, with the shadow of a much larger, more uncertain world in the shadows beyond.

The second story, "The Mexican General," is a coda both to Bellow's youthful Trotskyism and to his brief Mexican sojourn. It is the story of two interwoven interludes in the life of a Mexican general of police, a potentially erotic weekend in Patzcuara and the just-concluded, perfunctory investigation of Trotsky's assassination. The characters are General Felipe, his two aides, Paco and Citron, and the general's three "nieces," three women of the *Zona Rosa*, called Eulalia, Gloria, and Maria. The general, who had earlier been in charge of Trotsky's protection, is officious and corrupt; Paco is stupid and indolent; the women are lascivious, but they share the general in a crude commune; Citron is the intelligent observer. In the background American tourists talk and laugh loudly The general is exhausted by the demands of his just-concluded investigation; as the six of them tour the sights of the town, Citron relates to Paco the details of the investigation that had just taken place. The General, *el Jefe*, Citron tells Paco, is a certified great man; he has "already been recognized by history, two weeks ago in Coyoacan" (186); he is, Citron asserts, since his triumph there, "now beside the brave caciques who resisted Cortes there" (187). As the group wanders through an old church, Citron tells Paco the story:

> "It didn't all happen in Coyoacan; it merely began there; the rest took place at the *Cruz Verde* hospital and at the mortician's at Tacuba 4 and elsewhere. The main event you know; the rest is a kind of garnish that the world must imagine for itself. Everyone knows about the chief figures, the old man and the assassins. Then among the lesser—his guards, the old woman, the assassin's mistress, friends of all kinds—enters Felipe in the role of the State and myself, assistant and messenger, which function I share with the telephone . . ." (187).

Felipe, the general, observes, investigates, interprets, and uses the occasion; Citron records and reports; and the event becomes a melange of horror, hasty conclusion, and Roman circus. Through Citron's eyes the event at Coyoacan becomes an act at once outrageous and meaningless, its aftermath even more outrageous as it becomes a media event set in mass confusion as the state, in the person of the general, becomes self-serving, officious, and inept, but always in the center of whatever photos are taken. The conclusions drawn, rightly or wrongly, are inevitable, although, as Citron observes, Trotsky deserved "a more manly antagonist" (192). Citron might have said, and the implication is clear, that Citron, too, had deserved a better investigating officer.

As the general and the girls tour the ancient church, interrupting the tale they don't hear with occasional inane questions and comments, Citron continues to recount the series of events to Paco: ". . . Felipe came to get a brief look . . . [at the assassin], as he was blindly crying, and then returned to the secretaries who were making their depositions and where, by the way, most of the reporters were to be found. His picture was taken in both assemblies" (188). Later, at the hospital, he recounts,

> "Oh, yes. It was about nine when we got there. We were told the old man had lost consciousness. Felipe went in to see him. That chap from *La Piensa* was there . . . and he wanted me to slip him in for a picture. I told him not yet, he'd have to see the boss 'He'll let you in by and by,' I said, 'You know he appreciates the value of a lively press.' Sure enough when *el Jefe* came out and they had taken him before the door he gave his permission. 'But no noise,' he said. 'Please respect the presence of the senora.' We passed in, Felipe going immediately to the head of the bed, and they took the ones which were later called *'El gran lider en su lecho de muerte'* . . . (189).

As the tour of the church ends, in Citron's retelling to Paco, *el Jefe* announces dramatically to the assemblage that the old man is dead; as the group goes on to the Zocala, he recounts the aftermath: "'After they had exhibited the old man in the rooms

at Tacuba 4 in a few hours they held a post mortem and let in the crowds of medical students, the press and the just curious. The photographers had them turn him every way like a slab of beef and shunted him around . . .'" (193).

As they walk through the Zocala and back to the car, buying "a few trifles, shiny little pots of Michoccan and a straw horseman such as tourists buy . . ." (192), and pause to consider and reject a tour of the museum, Paco continues:

> "But where he did come out badly . . . was in the ceremonies, Paco, he didn't miss one. He went to all of them in uniform until I got tired of seeing him and stopped buying the paper. . . ."
>
> "Until . . ."
>
> "Until he tired himself out so he had to have a rest," said Citron (193).

The group returns to the hotel for a *siesta*, the girls to their room, the general to his in the middle, Citron and Paco to theirs. The two aides listen:

> "Shsh! Do you hear that?"
>
> "What?" Paco whispered.
>
> "Just listen."
>
> The General tapped once, twice, three times at the girls' wall adjoining and called in a low voice.
>
> "I wonder who'll come," whispered Paco. . . .
>
> "Gloria? Eulalia? I don't know. Perhaps we can tell if we watch during dinner.
>
> "No, do you think so?"
>
> They listened to the soft steps at the General's door; it opened and closed, and they remained upright in their beds, smiling at each other through the gathering darkness (194).

"The Mexican General" was perhaps a story that was necessary for Bellow to write at this point as it reduces Trotsky and his death to a photo event for an opportunist, and it remains one of the most fully developed of his stories until recent years, but Citron is clearly in the context of the unnamed protagonists in "Two Morning Monologues" and the ambiguous "Joseph" of "Notes of a Dangling Man," published a year later, and of the novel *Dangling Man* that was published in 1944. Citron is both observer and recorder, but, like Bellow's earlier protagonists and those to follow, he is in but not of the affairs he records; detached but aware, he attempts to find some measure of significance. Somehow, he senses that there is, but it becomes elusive as he approaches it, until finally, as in "Notes of a Dangling Man" and its successor he is completely alienated. Here, caught between two realities, civilian life and military service, between the comensurate two identities, and beyond all certainty, the protagonist—nameless, Citron, or Joseph—is the innocent who believes that purpose and meaning and fulfillment can be had if only he can find the path—the twentieth-century equivalent of Huck Finn's river—that will take him to that nameless place where it can be found.

Bellow's protagonists in these first three stories and in the novels to follow, whether Augie March, Henderson, Herzog, Tommy Wilhelm, Dean Corde, or the others to follow, are drawn in the image of the nineteenth century innocent who hasn't yet learned that rivers must end, that isolation is not fulfillment, that social appearance is not reality. As Bellow turns to a determined literary career at the end of the war his work was clearly out of Mark Twain's river and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, by way of Theodore Dreiser's Chicago: his people, grotesques, innocents, victims, victimizers, are the background against which the central character is projected, even as he seeks, futilely, to learn through observation more than through interaction. A the end each protagonist's life is marked by the ambiguity of *Huckleberry Finn* and of *Winesburg, Ohio* rather than by Deiser's finality.

From these early stories it is evident that Bellow had learned another lesson from his Midwestern mentors: each of the stories, like most of the works to follow, is, like *Huckleberry Finn*, like *Winesburg, Ohio*, like *Sister Carrie*, a story of movement, of the restless journey from place to place and point to point, whether on the Cottage Grove street car or through the Mexican countryside and townscapes or through the neighborhood, and in each of them is heard echoes of the raft, of the trains that travel to Chicago and beyond in Anderson, to Chicago and the East in Dreiser, and to the East and back again and again in Fitzgerald. And echoed, too, is the search that had, by Bellow's time, peopled his region and his city and provided the substance of the literature of Chicago and the Midwest and the American mainstream.

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"COMING TO WRITING" THROUGH THE IMPRESSIONIST FICTION OF TILLIE OLSEN

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Trying to define Tillie Olsen's "place" in the history of the short story is difficult, not only because of her comparatively small output, but also because she is "known and admired much more because of what she represents than because of what she has written" (Pearlman ix). Olsen is best known for her insights (chronicled in *Silences*) into the difficulties—such as poverty, illness, family responsibilities, etc.—that block the way to success, especially in writing (and especially concerning women). She speaks of, and to, "the gifted among women *(and men)* [who] have remained mute, or have never attained full capacity . . . because of circumstances, inner or outer, which oppose the needs of creation" (Martin 12).

Olsen herself experienced such circumstances, both first hand and through her family. She was born in Eastern Nebraska in either 1912 or 1913 to Ida and Samuel Lerner, Russian Jewish immigrants who came to America to escape punishment for their involvement in the failed 1905 uprising against the Czar.[1] Her father worked several blue-collar jobs—packinghouse worker, farm laborer, painter, paperhanger—to support the family, and served for several years as the state secretary for the Nebraska Socialist Party. Tillie, who left high school to take a factory job, belonged to the Young Communist League and, later, the Communist Party; she was devoted to helping the working class, as is evidenced by her two stints in jail for involvement in the organization of labor strikes.

To illustrate the plight of workers and their families during the Depression, Olsen began in 1934 to write her novel *Yonnondio*, which has been called "well deserving to be put aside John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* as testimony to the suffering

and the dreams and the disasters of the time" (Martin 18). However, increased financial pressure on Olsen and her husband, Jack, and the heightened scrutiny of Communist Party members by the Dies Committee (which contributed to that financial pressure) forced the writer to abandon the novel in 1937 and concentrate her efforts on working various jobs and raising her children (she had four daughters in all).

Due to these responsibilities and time constraints, Olsen was kept from any productive writing until the early 1950's, when she began writing the four short stories that, in 1961, were collected as *Tell Me a Riddle*. Following this, she again had to return to work, and published almost nothing until the short story *Requa,* and an article in *College English,*[2] in 1971-2. The *Yonnondio* manuscript was found and finally published, still unfinished, in 1974. *Silences* (a collection of essays and quotations) followed in 1978, and since then Tillie Olsen, now 80, has been in great demand as a public speaker and visiting instructor.

Though Olsen is no longer "silenced," she has experienced the circumstances that keep people from realizing their full potential; she had, as she says, "lost consciousness. A time of anesthesia . . . as if writing had never been" (*Silences* 20). Though she still feels that she lacked the opportunity to write to the best of her creative ability, she did manage to largely overcome her difficult circumstances, and it is that kernel of hope in her own life that extends to become central to her stories, surrounded though that kernel may be by apparent despair. This is most evident in the stories which make up *Tell Me a Riddle;* in Abigail Martin's words,

> Each simply tells of lives caught in frustration and pain—caught, but not, in the end, overcome. She [Olson] shows that humanity can never be stifled. Dreams remain, and remnants of beauty—even hope (23).

In the refusal of Olsen's characters to be utterly determined by the seemingly insurmountable obstacles in their lives, her fiction is, I believe, lifted out of the mire of naturalism and into impressionism.[3] To illustrate this, I've chosen to examine the first and second stories in *Tell Me a Riddle,* which I believe are the most and least familiar, respectively. "I Stand Here Ironing" has been anthologized over fifty times, and illustrates Olsen's

particular concern with the difficulties faced by women. On the other hand, "Hey Sailor, What Ship?" is seldom examined, and is the one story in the collection whose focal character is not a woman. While Olsen is best known for portrayals of women in stifling circumstances, her themes of hope are not intended to apply solely to the female gender; my examination of these two stories will focus on the universal nature of that hope instead of differentiating it between the sexes. As Pearlman states,

> Tillie Olsen is interested in the silences shared by all people, and not in what she sees as the current overemphasis on . . . sub-definitions of human experience, which, in her opinion, serve only to divide us further (2).

In not being strictly bound by the tenets of naturalism, Olsen somewhat resembles Sherwood Anderson, who is described by Danforth Ross as "influenced by naturalism because it was in the air he breathed, but there was also a good deal of the romantic in him. . . . [he] poignantly suggest[s] the contrast between ideal and actuality" (30). Olsen, in illustrating similar contrasts, utilizes the "typical themes" of impressionism as put forth by Ferguson)—alienation, isolation, the quest for identity—and her writing style, including that in "I Stand Here Ironing" and "Hey Sailor, What Ship?" is largely representative of characteristics of that movement.

The first, and most important, of these is the emphasis put on presenting the inner experiences of the characters, while playing down physical action; the "action" in an impressionistic story is comprised chiefly of the evolving thoughts and emotions of the characters. Weaver states that

> Olsen's technique is an innovative combination of third-person narrative, dialogue, and interior monologue that reveals her characters' thoughts, memories, and perceptions . . . Olsen's [stories] move from dialogue inward, focusing on individual instants of experience (46-7).

The movement of "I Stand Here Ironing" is related almost wholly as interior monologue, the most immediate and, I think, dramatic way in which to focus on the inner life of a character. The mother, as she carries out the careful yet drudging chore

of ironing, also carries on the story of her oldest daughter's neglected childhood, periodically asking questions of the non-existent (and unspoken) school official who wishes to "help" the girl:

> Even if I came, what good would it do? You think because I am her mother I have a key, or that in some way you could use me as a key? She has lived for nineteen years. There is all that life that has happened outside of me, beyond me (1).

There is brief dialogue toward the end of the story, when the daughter enters the room; the short exchange shifts the emphasis partially away from the introspective mother, and gives the reader a very fleeting firsthand glimpse of the inner life of the girl which the mother has been remembering for us: "Aren't you ever going to finish ironing, Mother? Whistler painted his mother in a rocker. I'd have to paint mine standing over an ironing board" (11).

There is more of a combination of techniques in "Hey Sailor, What Ship?" As the story begins, we hear Whitey's inebriated interior thoughts, which return periodically throughout the story amid the third-person narrative and dialogue. As the degenerating seafarer sits at the bar, those thoughts are revealed with little intrusion from the narrator:

> "Gotta something. Stand watch? No, din't show last night, ain't gonna show tonight, gonna sign off. Out loud: Hell with ship. You got any friends, ship? Then hell with your friends" (13).

Even the sensory details of the setting in the story are chosen to reflect the state of mind of the character who is perceiving those details; at the outset of the story, we see Whitey's surroundings through his eyes:

> The grimy light; the congealing smell of cigarettes that had been smoked long ago and of liquor that had been drunk long ago; the boasting, cursing, wheedling, cringing voices, and the greasy feel of the bar as he gropes for his glass (13).

The reality in each of these stories is necessarily subjective; In "Ironing," we see everything as though we are inside the mother's mind, and in "Hey Sailor" nearly all of the story's atmosphere is revealed thoroughly through Whitey, who trembles with alcoholism and has a fresh scar on his face but can't

comprehend how awful he appears. He doesn't recognize his own deterioration, and is shocked to see the age in the face of Lennie's wife: "(Helen? so . . . grayed?)" (16).

This illustrates a paradox which Olsen frequently discusses as an obstacle to understanding, and changing, one's own life; that "immersion in life means loss of perspective, or vision" (Rose 8). Olsen, as the narrator, uses what she terms "trespass vision" in order to gain for her readers that perspective. This is not readily apparent in "Ironing;" due to the internal nature of the narrative, readers are as immersed in the mother's overwhelming exhaustion as the mother is herself. The mountains of memories she must tunnel through to try and explain her daughter are recalled by the pile of ironing she must methodically deal with, chasing the iron back and forth.

Olsen's "trespass vision" is more easily ascertained in the second story. Whitey is so mired in his drunkenness that he does not consciously articulate the choice he must make between his two lives; the knowledge manifests itself indirectly as two refrains which continually counterpoint in his mind: "Hey sailor, what ship? and "Lennie and Helen and the kids."

Olsen's emphasis on this repeating pattern in both the mother's life (her repeated dredging up of memories to try and smooth them, as she does with clothing in her continuous ironing) and in Whitey's life (his seesawing between debauchery and domesticity) represents, in part, what Ellen Cronan Rose sees as "Olsen's definition of the creative act" and the artist's relationship to her material; "Fidelity to fact, but essential fact. Form and pattern, but exposed, not imposed" (6). I don't entirely agree. However subjective the realities of the mother's and Whitey's characters may be, no matter how immersed they are in them—Olsen, in *ex*posing that, necessarily *im*poses some part of her *own* subjective reality upon those of her characters. I don't believe it's possible to expose without simultaneously imposing, either deliberately or unconsciously. For instance, the ironing the mother is doing may be linked to the flat, repressed quality of Emily's childhood. Similarly, the undulating quality of Whitey's life connects very smoothly (too smoothly for coincidence) with the water imagery and wave metaphors that Olsen plants throughout the story.

The use of metaphor (and metonymy) is another hallmark of impressionism. Reminders of ironing are found throughout the first story, such as the overwhelming, neverending pile of memories that the mother relates; just as a chore like ironing is never completely done, she can't articulate all of the things that have affected her daughter, she "will never total it all" (12). Emily is explicitly compared to the flattened, ironed clothes themselves: "Only help her to know . . . that she is more than this dress on the ironing board" (12). Though the mother may stand there and attempt to smooth out the wrinkles in Emily (the result of her unavoidable neglect), she knows that they will never completely or permanently disappear.

Constantly present in "Hey Sailor" are images of water; apropos of Whitey's occupation, water and waves permeate the story. For example, the bottles behind the bar "glisten in the depths;" the rain-wet street is "clogged" with traffic; and Helen remarks that she is "keeping [her] head above water" (15, 20). The very way that Whitey's life has moved back and forth between life at sea and life with Lennie's family, and up and down from a height of youth and pride to a low of age and alcoholism is suggestive of the movement of the waves on which Whitey has lived; the "watery shifting: many faces, many places" (36). And at the end, he sees Lennie and Helen's house atop a "crest" of the waves of the city buildings, and while it remains at the top, "he goes down" (38). Whitey rides the waves of his existence while he drowns within "the bottle" metonymically, the object is suggestive of the unspecified drink. It could be whiskey or cheap wine; it doesn't matter what's in the bottle, only that Whitey is a prisoner inside it.

Readers of these stories are also prisoners, as we've seen; chiefly of the mother's and Whitey's points of view. Even our perceptions of time are necessarily their perceptions; while the pieces of Emily's life are related in order in "Ironing," the events in "Hey Sailor" do not always happen chronologically, but rather are related as they occur to Whitey's troubled memory. William Van O'Connor praises Olsen for "set[ting] a scene quickly and then let[ting] the characters take over" (25), and this limitation of point of view lends economy to Olsen's style. As the narrator, she does not indulge in lengthy explanations of events, but instead allows the reader to glean information from the characters.

That is, until the fourth and final section of "Hey Sailor," in which Whitey returns drunk to Lennie's house after being admonished not to leave. Lennie and Helen are angry at Whitey's behavior around the children, and hurt in their imminent realization that he is beyond help, and older daughter Jeannie is embarrassed by Whitey and cannot understand the relationship between this man and her parents; "He's just a Howard Street wino now—why don't you and Daddy kick him out of the house? He doesn't belong here" (33-4). The characters aren't communicating anymore; they cannot articulate the heightened tension between them, the various memories flooding their minds so Olsen steps in and articulates it for them.

It begins with a sentence, explaining Whitey's unconscious probing of his own facial features; "Tracing the scars, the pits and lines, the battered nose, seeking to find" (31). After Jeannie's outburst to Helen, the explanation grows to two paragraphs, ending with ". . . there were memories to forget, dreams to be stifled, hopes to be murdered" (34). A page later, three paragraphs are needed; "Understand. The death of the brotherhood . . . Remember too much, too goddam much" (35-6). Finally, just as Lennie poignantly comments "Jesus, man, you're a chunk of our lives," an entire page of narrator intrusion is required to handle the rush of memory and emotion that is triggered in Whitey, ending yet again with the refrain "the memories to forget, the dreams to be stifled, the hopeless hopes to be murdered" (37).

Although Whitey ultimately, and abruptly, leaves for good—"I'm goin' now . . . Go own steam. Send you a card" (38)—Lennie *had* gotten to him, as evidenced by the conflated history of their friendship that crashes through his mind. Amid the tension, there is a moment of connection.

> Looked at one way, "Hey Sailor, What Ship?" is a cheerless story; but examined in a different light its beauty of almost perfect devotion shows forth. Lennie and Helen and Whitey rise above surface things . . . Poverty and trouble exist, but they cannot touch the core of love deep within these people (Martin 26).

The moments of communication in these two stories may be rare, but shared experiences permeate the relationships between Emily and her mother and between Whitey and Lennie and

Helen; and this very communion, coupled with the perseverence each main character musters at the end of each story, is central to Olsen's writing. Though her characters are so often stifled by circumstance, something of their lives is eventually illuminated in them, and gives them some kind of hope; that illumination is part of what Olsen terms "Come to writing:"

> "Come to writing" . . . expresses [Olsen's] vitalistic conception of the creative process. It means the inarticulate finding words, the dumbly sensed becoming sensible, the incipient meaning finding form. For the writer, it is breaking silence. For the actor in an Olsen fiction, it is a moment of perceiving, of knowing that there is shape and direction in the ceaseless flow of what must be (Rose 13).

In "I Stand Here Ironing," the mother's cumulative remembrance of the encouragement that was lacking in Emily's upbringing culminates in the arrival of Emily herself, who "runs up the stairs two at a time with her light graceful step" (11). It is "one of her communicative nights" (11), and she converses lightly with her mother. Though the mother's melancholy reminiscing has exhausted her enough that even this banter seems oppressive ("because I have been dredging the past, and all that compounds a human being is so heavy and meaningful in me, I cannot endure it tonight" (11-12)), the fact that her daughter is capable of it at all gives her hope to hang on to. She realizes that the circumstances of her early parenting have made it difficult for Emily to ever reach her full potential; but what is most important is her further realization that Emily may rise above that, at least a little, despite being "a child of her age, of depression, of war, of fear"(12). While this perception is anything but jubilant, "There is still enough left to live by" (12).

This story is almost certainly autobiographical; in the mother we see Tillie Olsen, who had herself been stifled between *Yonnondio* and this writing, and whose first daughter endured many of the same hardships that Emily has endured. We can assume that the mother here, due to her responsibilities in the home, will never find out what creative capacity she possesses, so she hopes for this in her daughter instead, who has shown a talent for performing. Olsen may have felt that way herself, but refused to give up; as the mother in "Ironing" (and, potentially,

the daughter) discovers hope, Olsen illustrates the moment of "coming [back] to writing" in her own life.

The events in "Hey Sailor" build toward Whitey's own pinnacle of perception. He is confused when he first arrives at Lennie and Helen's house; he has "imaged and entered it over and over again, in a thousand various places a thousand various times" (16), and the memory has sustained him during his long jaunts at sea. But this time he isn't bursting in with gifts, feeling on top of the world. He's sick, has trouble climbing the front steps, and is too weakened to gracefully endure the children's enthusiastic greetings; "Whitey's just gonna sit here . . . (17).

Later in the night, when Allie climbs onto his lap after a bad dream (she was "losted"), Whitey welcomes her, but his protection is bittersweet because he knows deep inside him that he will never get to play this father role; "He starts as if he has been burned . . . It is destroying, dissolving him utterly, this helpless warmth against him, this feel of a child-lost country to him and unattainable" (20). Finally the unaccustomed distraction and attention of the family overwhelms Whitey—he needs solitude, much as Olsen's silenced writers need uninterrupted solitude in which to devote their efforts to their creativity. So he "endures" their good-night affections and is left alone (23).

When he wakes, however, the complete silence of the empty house troubles Whitey; he is used to hearing the sounds of people, the ship, the sea. Being apart from his usual life does offer Whitey some perspective on that life—he realizes that he misses the accustomed sounds of shared mornings. He wanders through the house, noting the work that needs to be done, and remembers how useful he formerly was to the family. While that makes him proud, he knows that he's no longer up to it, and that knowledge "hurts in his stomach" (25).

It is when Whitey returns again, drunk, and the atmosphere in the house is so raucous and tense, that he—and, perhaps, Lennie and Helen—finally realize at a conscious level that he has chosen to devote whatever time remains to him to his seafaring life, that he is returning for good to this room where he can yell or sing or pound and Deeck will look on without reproach or pity or anguish" (38). This recognition of Whitey's direction arrives at the moment he answers Lennie roughly, "Shove it . . . So you're a chunk of my life. So?" (36).

This is not a happy ending, by any means; Whitey is beyond help and headed for death, and will never experience the family life that Lennie has found. But he is not without a certain dignity; as he recites "Crown 'n' Deep" for the children, its words connect him with the hero of the poem; "I shall be speech in thy ears, fragrance and color/Light and shout and loved song . . . /O crown and deep of my sorrows, I am leaving all with thee, my friends" (32-3). Whitey asserts his independence, and while his approaching end may be a sad one, he has displayed a kind of strength in taking a measure of control over his life and that instant of perception, and the taking of control, represents a "coming to writing" for his character.

Tillie Olsen believes that the potential to "come to writing" exists in every person:

> Unlike many of her modern and contemporary peers who espouse individualism and the cult of self, Olsen believes in Matthew Arnold's communal "human struggle bursting the thick wall of self" (Pearlman 32).

Her fiction reveals a deep understanding of stifling circumstances,[4] but offers a glimmer of hope. If, as a colleague has asserted to me, Joyce Carol Oates is a "postmodern romantic, then perhaps Tillie Olsen is her immediate precursor—a modern romantic whose work is ultimately a "celebration of human beings," containing a belief that "there is so much more to people than their lives permit them to be" (qtd. in Pearlman).

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NOTES

1. Olsen dedicated her story "Tell Me a Riddle" as follows: "For my mother, my father/ and/Two of that generation/Seevya and Genya/Infinite, dauntless, incorruptible// Death deepens the wonder."
2. "Women Who Are Writers in Our Century: One Out of Twelve." *CE* 34 (Oct. 1972): 6-17. Given as a talk at 1971 MLA Convention and reprinted in *Silences*.
3. See Ferguson (in Works Consulted) for a more extensive treatment of the characteristics of impressionist fiction.
4. As Pearlman and Werlock state, "Olsen believes her Jewish socialist background provided her with two important insights: "knowledge and experience of injustice" and "an absolute belief in the potentiality of human beings" (10, qtd. in Lyons 91).

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