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To the Memory of
David Citino
(1947-2005)

PREFACE

This issue comprises a true miscellany of essays on the literature and culture of the Midwest, from pioneer days to contemporary times, covering both male and female authors, canonical, popular, and emerging, focusing on the genres of poetry, memoir, and fiction, and employing a variety of critical methodologies: historicist, New Critical, and eco-feminist.

However diverse these essays appear, they all concern themselves to some extent with an issue dealt with explicitly in Janet Ruth Heller's piece on Lisel Mueller: the unique character of Midwestern writing. While Heller relies on Mueller's own essay on the subject and Paul Solyn's critique of that essay, Mary K. Stillwell explores the Nebraska context of Hilda Raz's poetry, Mary DeJong Obuchowski notes the early Midwestern environmentalism of Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home—Who'll Follow?*, Kenneth Grant looks at the cultural conflict inherent in the East Coast editor-Midwestern novelist dynamic, and David McGuire traces the evolution of the American Dream to Sinclair Lewis's Midwest. It is certainly true, as Paul Solyn argues, that Midwestern poetry, and, implicitly, Midwestern literature may be difficult to define, but the essays gathered in this issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* suggest some parameters.

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THE ART OF ALCHEMY: TRANSFORMATION IN THE POETRY OF HILDA RAZ

MARY K. STILLWELL

Fortunately for us, poets and therapists have kept the art of alchemy alive through the ages, showing us how we might transform the joys and woes of everyday living into the gold of personal growth and unexpected wisdom. Rainer Maria Rilke, the German poet whose own life and work centered around transformation, cautioned in his *Letters to a Young Poet* that, "If your daily life seems poor, do not blame it; blame yourself, tell yourself that you are not poet enough to call forth its riches" (14).

Transformation has been at the heart of poet, editor, and essayist Hilda Raz's work from her earliest poems to her most recent volume, which uses Rilke's poem, "What Survives," as an epigraph. Working from and with what the poet calls "Junk . . . the mess of confusing details of our lives," Raz, like our earliest-known alchemical mother, first century (A.D.) Alexandrian chemist Miriam the Prophetess, has been calling forth riches, bringing to light processes and viewpoints that test and transform the way we view our lives and the world in which we live ("Junk" 350; Alic 37).

As Raz and Rilke before her suggest, turning life into art is a transformative act, as is the very act of seeing what is before us. Raz's poetry urges its readers to become conversant with transformation in their own lives, to read, to question, and to live in ways that allow us to discover the mystery and wonder of life itself. At the same time, Raz rescues art from the traditional male model, asking her readers to reexamine the role of the artist and the myths that govern the artist's role. Rather than Orpheus-as-poet, in Raz's transmutation, Eurydice claims the title for herself.

The following analysis provides an overview of the evolution of Raz's identity and quest narrative as it unfolds from the details of the poet's life. Consistent throughout Raz's work is the landscape of Nebraska, serving as the site of her engagement with the world—Merleau-Ponty's *interworld* of time, place, and human being—and safe-haven or *termenos* from which she writes.

Raz describes the impact of Nebraska landscape when she arrived during the summer of 1963:

The first evening of the first day that I was here, I drove out by myself to the edge of Lincoln, and I felt at home. There was a peacefulness in the uninterrupted landscape and the 360-degree view that reassured my spirit. . . . I think growing up in a place where you could never see very far reinforced the paranoia that came from the war [WWII]. . . . When you know that people like you are being killed, you believe there is something profoundly wrong with not who you are but what you are. And to grow up and to live in a place where you can't see very far reinforces that sense of imperilment. But I loved Nebraska the minute I got here, and I have always felt safe here, for these irrational reasons. And so landscape in Nebraska is part of my sense of comfort in the world. (Interview)

Like the first European explorers and early immigrants who followed them to settle the plains, Raz brought her own images and attitudes to the fields and open space that would serve as her alchemic cauldron for the next forty years. From this safe place, Raz began to settle into a reevaluation of familial and cultural inheritances that resulted in the transformations of self reflected in her first collection, *What is Good* (1988).

Raz's vision of human being seen within the context of nature to which it belongs is heightened and particularized in the books that follow. *The Bone Dish* (1989) serves as tribute to the home that Raz has made for herself, one that nourishes her life and work within the round of the plains horizon. Evicted by cancer from her safe worlds of place, of body, and of language, Raz, in *Divine Honors* (1997), documents and transforms her journey from diagnosis and treatment to recovery and celebration of life in Nebraska. Finally, *Trans* (2001) is Raz's meditation on life in place, the necessity of transformation, and the power of love that makes it possible.

What is Good

The 360-degree view of uninterrupted landscape that reassured Raz's spirit and comforted her soul when she arrived in Nebraska provided a safe haven in which she could bear witness to her life. Raz underscores the importance of Nebraska to her life and poetry in this volume's title poem, in part a catalog of "what is good":

The fields to the horizon.
The horizon like a bowl.
Clay we scrape up
and carry home and wedge.
The potter's wheel
Spinning. And its noise,
A ground in great music
We write. We write great music. (12-19).

Nebraska's horizon delineates the edges of Raz's alchemical cauldron where the poet gathers together the substance of daily life, past and present, from which she fashions her art. Grounded in physical place, Raz considers other grounds—body and gender, religion and family, culture and tradition—that have formed and inform her life. Frances W. Kaye suggests that Raz's first book, as the work of other Prairie-Plains women poets, is concerned with the naming of the self (239). To accomplish this task, Raz brings her own light of inquiry to her inheritance, reconsidering and revising as necessary. As the collection unfolds, Raz provides a radical alternative to traditional labeling and/or defining by difference that has so long been identified with the American West.

The phrase "what is good," is an inheritance from Raz's mother who advised her daughter, "Darling, make a *list*. . . . What is bad—this spasm, that stricture, the sound of our front door on its brass hinges—will stop only with your death. . . . Do it now. Death will wait" ("Junk" 353). "What is Good," the poem that concludes part one, catalogs and celebrates what is good, including the making of art, in Raz's life. The natural landscape of Nebraska is central to Raz's notion of "good":

The banks of rivers
and rivers
and river dells
and patches of shade

in trees we swing from.
The grasses in winter,
their colors and swirls. (1-12)

"What is Good" continues, rejoicing in fields, horizon, and clay from which grass, human being, and Raz's art spring. For this poet, the bowl of home, as her poems, are a repository of past and present, including: "shells we gather," "celluloid film we expose," whales, eddies, "our soft bodies and their phosphorescence," "The rising of the sun," human breath, and "The dead, / honeycombed with rot" (20, 29, 34, 39, 49). "The ground. The ground," Raz concludes the poem and part one, emphasizing and celebrating the land from and of which a "good" life and art are fashioned (51).

Life is neither trivialized nor sentimentalized; shadow exists alongside light. "Speak nothing but silence," Raz writes in "C3," reminding us of her determination to return to the source, to re-evaluate and speak from that place that pre-exists traditional definitions. "Divorce" includes the small beginnings of separation as well as the final destruction, again described in bodily terms, the "head opened by the bullet" and the "punch / Counterpunch" (9, 11-12). In "Pain," Raz gives the reader the physical sensation of the "emptied body" in distress following surgery as she calls our attention to the healing nature of human touch, "exactly pain-sized," that brings relief.

No matter what the subject matter, however, Raz rarely allows us to forget the importance of where she lives and writes, on the prairie where "hot air blows / down gullies" ("1 September 100 Degrees"). Being, for Raz, exists in place. "I am on my knees planting my garden," Raz opens "High Ground" midway through the collection, reminding readers of the spiritual quality of her relationship with the soil where she is putting down roots (1). "Late March" is a fervent love poem merging person within physical landscape: "Where you have come before me in the field / between the cedar windbreak and the sky" and the poleridge.pine "meets the horizon at the level where you flex / your beautiful, wide knees to crouch and examine / the minute particulars of stem and needle-leaf" (1-2, 7-9). By final stanza, both beloved and surroundings—earth, sky, air—become one: "I take you in, / hold you, / breathe and exhale you" (15-17). The safety and peacefulness that the poet felt at the edge of town has brought her fully home.

The Bone Dish

Meditative in tone, the twenty-one poems that comprise *The Bone Dish* (1989) are *Raz-en-place*, artifacts of the poet-in-place-in-time. Set within temporal bookmarks, geese lifting off and landing in Nebraska's Platte River Valley, the collection is dedicated to the poet's children, John and Sarah, and her husband, Dale.

"Feelings are bound up in place," Eudora Welty reminds us in her essay, "Place in Fiction," and "Location [place] is the crossroads of circumstance, the proving ground of 'What happened? Who's here? Who's coming?—and that is the heart's field'" (116, 118). The bone dish—a small, crescent-shaped dish placed above the dinner plate to collect the remnants of formal dining—is an apt metaphor for the bowl of the Nebraska horizon where Raz gathers past and present to capture the feast of life contained within her poems, each another sort of bone dish that holds the language of existence: snow geese, land, children, her own and those she teaches, all rendered in rich phenomenological detail. The bone dish also refers to the pelvic cradle, home of human creation within woman's body, where, according to Raz, all art begins, an association that the poet will develop in later poems.

Time, movement, change: these are the threads along which Raz travels to meet friends and relatives or drives to and from assignments as a visiting poet in the Nebraska Artists in the Schools Program. Seasons also come and go, the bear digs in for the winter, and deer browse as hunters advance.

Along Highway 14, under North America's central flyway in March, Raz writes in "That's Something," "the geese / at sunset make such a ruckus / as you can hear for miles" (3-5). "I'd never seen birds in flocks before," Raz says: "So the presence of many, which we take for granted here in Nebraska, is astonishing, a wonder of the world to me" (Interview). Descriptions are precise. Looking west across the "marshy lowlands" she observes the geese as, "wave on wave / funnel and circle down / and down" to land "on farm pond or lake, / hog wallow, or bathtub, / or corn stubble or milo field— / to sleep" (9-11, 15-18). "All this, mind you, / against a black dish / of fiery sky," Raz begins stanza two, keeping our attention squarely focused on the physical world around her (19-21).

The sky against which the geese rise is black, a color associated with creation, and the last bright coals along the horizon recall the

transformative fire of the creative act itself. Geese are also rich symbols, recalling the Egyptian goddess, Hathor, the Nile Goose, from another river valley, who gave birth to the sun, Ra, a generative and creative force, an allusion that Raz will take up in several of the poems that follow.

The setting sun, literally and figuratively, erasing
detail and depth and leaves
these cutouts in the air,
scarcely geese at all
except where the final light
flashes pure white on their bellies
almost, not quite yet,
touching the water. (22-28)

As an *ars poetica*, the initial poem, metonymic for the chapbook as a whole, places the artist as creator of the lived world, making meaning from what is discovered in the darkness of “no-thing,” and presenting a still life, the “some-thing” of the poem’s title, of land and life. Just as the light of the sun’s last rays “flashes pure white on their [the geese’s] bellies,” the light of the poet illuminates life through “flashes” of language as she writes (26). Fire, earth, air, and water: all four of Aristotle’s basic elements are found in the poem, conflating the local, along Highway 14, and the universal.

The interrelationship of language, the Nebraska landscape and its gift of health and safety, Raz’s family, and her art, form the heart of *The Bone Dish* poems. In “Birthday” Raz makes explicit the daughter-maker/mother-maker, bowl/womb/landscape, daily life/junk, artifact/art-work-as-container-of-life: themes ever present in her work in the “small grey dish of clay” she got from her daughter. Sarah had filled the gift “with minute bones, perfectly intact” that she’d salvaged

from an owl pellet: scapula, mandible,
four perfect teeth the size of seeds,
and pieces of a backbone ladder,
all pure matte white, “from a mouse,”
you said, pushing up your glasses. (4-19)

Raz links Sarah’s vision and creative ability, identifying her daughter as “preserver, maker, eyes,” emphasizing a matrilineal line of artists, both makers of bone dishes from the clay at hand.

Raz explores the role of inspiration and imagination in “My Daughter Home from College Tells Me about the Gods.” Sarah’s bread making, kneading the dough that will be transformed by the heat of the oven is seen by Raz as parallel to the task of fashioning art from the ingredients of daily life through the creative fire of the imagination (25). Mortality, which plays in the background in all of *The Bone Dish* poems, is brought to the fore as Sarah tells her mother of the Pharaohs’s desire for—and belief in—eternal life. She recalls Ra and Horus as she forms the bread into “long loaves,” shapes that suggest the “sun boat,” and sets them to rise “under a linen cloth” associated with burial (12, 8, 15).

Raz closely links, sometimes merges, human being with other life forms—trees, sky, animals, grasses, etc.—within the bowl of landscape as she does in “Restraint,” (originally published in *What is Good* as “Late March”). “September: Getting Married Again” is akin to harvest, prospective bride and groom are products of the land: “A butternut squash in the shape / of our bodies; onions / so rich a purple they are royal” (20-22). By poem’s end, Raz conflates apples and marital intimacy: “A perfect fullness of flesh / That taken hold of and opened, / Will make our eyes water” (30-32).

Raz’s knowledge of the relationship between community and landscape expands with her work in the Artists in the Schools program, a time she spent teaching in various Nebraska towns across the state. Place names appear throughout the collection like dots on Raz’s map of life: Springfield, Milligan, Gere, and Alma. Because Raz was older and “a little more settled,” she was “often sent to the farthest, most difficult communities, and that meant I often taught high school kids in rural areas. . . . Local families would put me up and were kind to me. . . . told me unbelievable stories I could never have heard. These people were making my life as a writer so much better” (Interview).

“What Happens” addresses sense of human-nature relationship and her own enrichment as poet-teacher, as Raz becomes student of place when a young doctor goes out at midnight “into a spring storm . . . / . . . to deliver the widow’s baby”(2-3). Raz sits

. . . in the parlor
with my new friend, our landlady,
who is painting my nails
what she calls a *good color*.

She paints her own and tells
the story of the widow.
Outside the window the rosy snow
comes down on the crocus. (1-12)

"I got tremendous amounts of work done," Raz says, describing her Artists's in the Schools experience:

[A]ll I had to do was sort of sit there and put into my notebooks or put onto the page what happened to me. It was amazing. I was taken to fields where migrating birds landed. . . every day I'd go for a walk . . . and I would walk on the perimeter of these tiny towns, and there would be song birds, larks migrating, and the air would be filled with them. Where would anybody, how could you ever hear these kinds of birds, never mind meeting the school teacher who brought her brand new infant from the hospital, two days old, and had three other children, and there I was a guest in their house for five days in charge of this infant. How magnificent, what an incredible experience when I wasn't teaching, to hold this tiny being, to feed her, and it just goes on and on and on and on. (Interview)

For Raz, as teacher and poet, language holds meaning analogous to the way place holds experience. "God is in the details," "Diction" begins as Raz offers a study of word choice, point of view, and the process of making meaning (9). She is interested in language, Raz says, "the way some people are interested in clay or in political systems" (Hachiya). If writing students learn about "chalcedony" and the importance of phenomenology in the fashioning of a poem, Raz learns about her students-in-place through their use of a diction that describes and supports everyday life in rural Nebraska.

Raz's 360-degree Nebraska bowl, however, contains no easy binary as "Town/Country" makes clear. Just as the slash in the poem's title holds the two words together so are they joined in Raz's life. Home, in the bowl of the Nebraska horizon, encompasses world:

The brown kettle steams on a Japanese stove.
Padouk coasters protect the teak surfaces.
A Siamese cat sits on our knees
And outside, the prairie stiffens for winter. (19-21)

Autumn prepares for winter. The bone dish, the palm of the hand that catches the baby during delivery, cups the cheek of a loved one on the death bed. It is diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis (DISH), the hardening of soft tissue into bone as we age that makes our backs

stiff and frequently gives us a pain in the back of the neck, as well as the final resting place, the grave in the "boneyard" ("DISH").

The world for all its beauty can also be threatening. In "Bear," for example, hunters stalk the fields, in "The Sandhills, Early Winter," a young student's eye is "bruised shut," and in "November Night Driving," a deer jumps in front of the car from the ditch. What holds us together also separates as suggested in "Town/Country" and again in "My Dream, Your Dream." Children have life-threatening accidents; they move away to go to college, or, as in "Photograph of a Child Sleeping," they simply grow up.

"Inside the Geese," the concluding poem of *The Bone Dish*—published the year following Raz's diagnosis of breast cancer—reminds us all that "an alarm clock is ticking" (1). As Raz pauses in her car by the muddy spring field, the geese take off again, "line on line rushing to air / moving as if they are air" (11-12). Poet and teacher, mother and friend presses her foot "into the accelerator to drive / down this road to a new school" (15-16). The road is literally the Nebraska highway, figuratively the road of life always taking us to the next "school." "My time is up," Raz concludes, noting the transitory quality of life at the same time celebrating its continuance, the "heart ticking again and again and again" (22).

Divine Honors

Divine Honors, published eight years after *The Bone Dish*, provides a triptych of Raz's cancer diagnosis, her struggle to make sense of the disease as she faced treatment, and, once again turning to the earth for comfort and healing, her recovery. Although we have seen the centrality of nature in her earlier work, Raz's vision of human being within the context of nature to which it belongs is heightened and particularized. Raz, dialoging with, expanding, and transforming the western poetic tradition itself, takes on the task of all writers who "honor, serve, and work to understand and revise traditions of ritual and learning" ("Commentary" 136).

Raz's attitude towards the body as the sacred incarnate is derived, she explains, from her early experience and understanding of what it means to be a woman and a Jew. Cultural expectation led Raz's sense of the female body as "site of enactment for those of us who have married and have children" (Interview). Her religious training included no sense of afterlife, "so aesthetic is experiences always

located in the body, because after the body goes there is no continuance. The site of the soul, as I learned later to think of it, is the body. If there is a soul, it is the body; it's not contained in the body . . . there is no dichotomy" (Interview). Not only did cancer of the breast put her identity as a woman in jeopardy, it was an attack against her soul. "When a woman at work suggested I write about breast cancer because so many women have it," Raz writes, "a man I know said, 'Don't'" ("Junk" 353). Raz sees the consequences of the cultural injunction to "burn the notebook, its pages" and "move on," a form of erasure, "until what happens is only a measure of forgetting, detaching / distress, your upset, your dyspepsia from the air of the orchard" (27-30). Catherine A. Salmons writes that although *Divine Honors*, "is a book of loss," it is "not a book of tears" ("Ancient Healing"). Instead, Salmons continues, it is "the meat and bones of spiritual conquest," a record "of courage to fight and to speak" ("Ancient Healing"). Raz draws on juxtaposition, metonymy, fragmentation, and a whole host of phonetic devices—cacophony, onomatopoeia, euphony, and intensives—to express both the searing, tearing quality of the disease's ramifications and the ways she is soothed.

"We are afraid / Of pain but more afraid of silence," Auden writes in "Advent" and Raz demonstrates in "Terror: A Riddle," its threatening, hissing *s* sounds alternating with sorrowful *os* (65). Raz writes, "I learned silence was the place where terror lived" ("Writing" 122). She grew silent, and, because she lost her "own language," "I listen[ed] more carefully to others ['doctors, scientists, clinical writers on cancer, and books written from a 'survivor' or 'victim' perspective']". And I realized their language was trying to convince me of something I didn't believe" (Hachiya). Raz moved her computer into her living room where "many of the poems in *Divine Honors*" were written (Interview).

Raz's natural world is forgiving of human misuse; it holds, comforts, teaches, and heals. Nature is, Marilyn Krysl points out, Raz's "touchstone. Nearly every poem," she writes, "takes nature's sensuousness as its perceived context and reference point" (171). In "To Explain," for example, Raz's poet-in-garden merges with garden itself, allowing her to grieve: "I have been . . . pouring deep gutturals / into the stone edgings of the back garden, / down on my knees seeming to dig the impatiens" (3-5).

In "Mu," late at night before her surgery, the poet moves from home and private garden to public space, walking alone at midnight

onto the pineneedles of the park," seeking comfort where she had taken her children when they were young (7). Raz abandoned her "house in order to return to a play ground in the company of my ghost children now grown. . . . [and] also in the guise of a child (regressed) I went in search of my dead mother to find comfort, meaning, and order" ("Commentary"135). Raz continues, "mmmm through, the way mother / mmmm helps me move to. Umber attaches to shadows . . . / Feet mmmmmmmmm, hit-sounds like murder / stitched to the lips" (2-5).

Parks, built by public trust, also suggests a quest for trust—in the surgeon and in surgery itself—she will survive. The covered park slide that her children threw themselves down in glee reminds Raz of the dark tunnel of anesthesia that she will face in the morning. "There," Raz writes, "I made a conscious exchange of new terror for old" ("Commentary"135).

Raz's artistic identification with her daughter comes to full form in "Sarah Fledging," which speaks directly to the artist at work and to the illuminative quality of the process that transforms "junk"—in this case the feathers of blue jay, thrasher, meadowlark, finch, and many other birds we see each day out our kitchen windows—into art (32). The artist is also transformed and rises from the creative act, herself changed. The importance of the poem and the transformations it captures are not lost on Raz. "Sarah Fledging," she says, is:

a vision of a young woman making a cloak with a chamois backing for feathers, and at the end she reaches for the lamp and rises in the moment of light turning to dark, and I have goose bumps, a little shiver as I say it, because I had no idea as I was writing that poem what would happen in our lives. I had no idea it was a poem of Sarah's transformation. . . . I think it was a crux in my life as a writer. (Interview)

"Weathering/boundaries/what is good" opens as a hymn to those the poet loves and the larger fabric of Raz's domestic life which is experienced within nature: planting bulbs, eating, enlarging the patio, and standing with the cat on the driveway "to find Orion" (12). Slashes in the title balance words of unclear relationship suggesting the disparate emotional life of the speaker as does the disjuncture of narrative line. Sometimes, it is impossible to know for certain to whom a particular pronoun refers. Reason and logic are set aside. Past and present, prose and poetry intersect in ways that blur boundaries.

Raz traces her impulse to “pay attention” as well as her use of “dropped narrative”—reminiscent of Cather’s “the thing not named”—to her childhood where,

the subject of our looking and hearing and sensing were never addressed; narrative was always absent. For example, we had a Japanese detention camp about six blocks from our house. I had forgotten that because we never discussed it. The only thing that was ever said was, “Hilda, when you go to Cobb’s Hill Park to skate, don’t go near the camp. But, of course, I and my friends often went near the camp. So this was [a] dropped narrative, the subject around the subject [; it] has always fascinated me and my work, and only lately have I come to the reasons, the personal reasons, why. (Interview).

The purpose of the dropped narrative—a technique Raz employs in “Weather/boundaries/what is good” and other poems as well—is to, Raz says,

replicate for other people, my sense of losing a part of the body, the slash between the titles, the absence of narrative, the absence of causality, the several voices speaking, in loud voice or a soft voice, to make the reader experience in a new way what she or he might have expected a certain kind of suffering to be, which was pretty ordinary, but also deeply shocking. (Interview)

Raz’s alternative to reason is without binary. Soul is body, body soul; quest becomes love, love quest. Rather than seeing herself as a victim of disease or object of medical inquiry, Raz engages life, in sickness and in health, with a hunger for experiencing all that is, that “full basin” of art, work, garden, cat, and kin (“Ecstasies” 45). Six months after surgery “to the day,” Raz reenters public life (“Junk” 262). “Nuts / to success,” she writes, “The third day lucky / on the job and nothing’s changed. I work all day, / I worked all day” (“Nuts” 1-3).

“Lincoln, Nebraska,” a love poem to the place where Raz has fashioned a rich life since her arrival on the plains, opens with the single one-word line, “Here,” pointing to that place in which Raz celebrates the geography of her full return to health (87).

Trans

The impetus for Raz’s third full-length collection was a letter from her daughter, “some months” after “Sarah Fledging,” a vision of “Sarah transforming as she was engaged in the transformative act

of the artist, was composed” (“A Vision” 232). What Sarah’s letter explained—and Raz’s poem can be seen to anticipate—was that she herself “would be changing soon” beginning the process that would lead to rebirth as “Aaron” (“A Vision” 233). “I used to look in the mirror and it was blank,” says Aaron of Sarah (“Stone” 27). In a published essay of his own, Aaron describes his feelings of invisibility that preceded his transformation as well as his decision “to live and die on my own” (“Vision” 88).

During the months that followed, Raz writes, she and her daughter talked frequently on the telephone “and then she came home and we walked each morning to the lake to watch geese rise and land and rise again. I came to understand, as well as I am able to understand, a mother who loves her child, that Sarah is mine only on the page” (“A Vision” 233). “Aaron and I tromp out each freezing morning of his visit home,” she writes of their walks in a more recent essay, “Scars,” “He is teaching me his new name, Aaron” (96).

As Rilke’s poem, “What Survives,” and the four definitions of “trans” from the *Oxford English Dictionary* that serve as epigraphs and introduce each of the four sections suggest, *Trans* is a book about transformation and survival (Interview; *Trans* iv). Raz moves from avoidance to acceptance, the arc of emotion mirroring the landing and rising geese, a gesture of landscape that echoes the poet’s initial response to Nebraska and the transformative bowl of *The Bone Dish*.

Although part one carries the first definition of the prefix “trans” as its epigraph, “with the sense across, through, over, to or on the other side, beyond . . . from one person, state, or thing to another,” change does not come easy. “Child, what is good? Make a list”: Raz’s mother’s advice sounds in the background as she makes a list that while comprised of “good things,” takes her away from her daughter’s decision to undergo surgery to become physically male (“Junk” 353). Rather, Raz begins, “I’d like to write about epistemology,” and offers a sampling of the poet’s larger world, the “quarks, the habits of / the leech—so useful in medical treatment, a horror in the pond— / the growth and development of the precious embryo,” to name a few (“Avoidance” 1-3).

Raz, however, immediately acknowledges the integrity of “the thing as it is,” the phenomena ‘out there,’ recalling Merleau-Ponty, and begins the journey that will lead back to her child: “So consider the weight of the child in his mother’s arms, the reds / and yellows of the photos, the leisurely flow of language, no com-/pression, noth-

ing packed or forced, no attempt to move in, no microcosm/macrocosm, no abstractions tied into the concrete" (15-18).

Aaron offers his mother the tick as "useful as a figure for survival" in a gesture parallel to Sarah's gift of brussel sprouts as a pattern for understanding cancer. Although researchers attempt to crush the tick," Raz writes, "*in vises under tons of pressure, in sealed hermetic chambers devoid of air, pumped free of all essentials,*" Aaron reports, it "*scurries out, alive, cheerful, the size of a grape*" (22-25).

In the poem's final movement, Raz, placing herself within a community of women, "old friends all, colleagues," asks, "What to make of our profiles: age, religious preference, marital / history, hobbies, our experience with Hale-Bopp, did we see the / comet at all, not its tail as. . . what?" (26-30). As Maurice Merleau-Ponty posits, the world is "the *homeland* of our thoughts," and it is only through our bodies and senses—as we pick up patterns, colors, shapes, sizes—that we discover that place in which we exist and come to know our existence (*Phenomenology* 24). We make our meaning—cross to meaning—individually and in community, based on how we describe our world, our homeland, and our lives to ourselves, one of the lessons that will be played out in the collection. This crossing, from experience to understanding to poetry, is mirrored in the form of "Avoidance," a crossing of genres, the prose-poem which looks like prose on the page and reads like poetry. The prose-poem also erodes the binary, a theme throughout the collection, closing even the distance between poet and reader with the final question.

Raz turns to the place and fabric of everyday life to find both her subject and her truth; life is life-lived-in-place, where tornado, drought, death, and disease are "natural events." The "good" and "the" bad are to be taken in like the earth soaks up rain after a dry spell. "That's what a life's for," eighty-year-old Merce advises in "Drought: Teaching, Benedict, Nebraska" (27). Denial of shadow leads to "forgetting," to the loss of the experience, and the loss of the art that it can be transformed into as in "Fast Car on Nebraska I-80" and "Houses."

Raz also reminds us that place is an *active* force, modifying how we see our world and therefore make our meaning. "I noticed the horizon," she writes, "did a good job / on my heavy mind: what had seemed a knot / so snarled I couldn't get a nail in / began to unwind as I watched through the windscreen" ("Fast Car on Nebraska I-80: Visiting Teacher" 31-34). "Today, spring out the window," reminds

Raz that there's "flesh on my bones not clay," alive to and in the world where "They're setting fire to the spring prairie" ("Friday" 1, 2, 3).

"The world is not something to look at, it is something to be in," Raz borrows a line from Mark Rudman's *Rider* to summarize her new understanding. "I want to be in the world with you," she concludes, acknowledging acceptance of the whole of their existence, rather than avoidance, and that theirs is a common journey (12). "Let's walk," she continues, "footsteps no sound on the river bank. / Let the calm dark lead us along, every muddy step a poultice / for our journey, our inquiry" (13-15). "I kiss Aaron hello," Raz writes, as she kisses "Sarah goodbye," crossing over to acceptance as the first definition of "trans" affords ("Scars" 97).

"Trans" second definition, "as in *transboard, transearth, trans-fashion, transship, trans-shape, transtime,*" provides the focal point of part two where the importance of writing and the manner of persistent, sometimes painful, inquiry, never far from view in Raz's work, becomes central (21). "Secrets" launches this section with its definition of a poet and a teacher's work: "to [and to help others learn to] scald, bore hold steady / under light" (23-24). Raz elaborates on what she sees as the poet's task, "to reunderstand and reconfigure the experience as it's filtered through the scrim of culture, gender, class, race, ethnicities, habits of discourse, etc." (Interview).

As Wilner points out, Raz "seems to devise forms for every occasion, language grows supple and idiosyncratic in her experienced hands" (130). *Trans* is, Wilner continues, "utterly honest to complicated emotions and, at the same time, beautifully oblique, devoid of anything that might appeal to a sensationalist curiosity" (130). In "Footnotes," which Wilner describes as having "the potentially hottest material" relating to intimate details of the transgender experience, is "cooled down by using a mock version of that academic form, numbered prose entries replacing stanzas" (130). A love of epistemology does not necessarily make for an easy journey. As "Doing the Puzzle/Angry Voices" suggests, how we make meaning is a kind of piecing together of life's puzzle with objects/ideas/changes that sometimes don't seem to fit. For Raz, writing—as in "Piecing," from *What is Good*—enables her to make sense of the world. "Prelude," at a local coffee shop with a friend, Raz writes "we bring to our booth / pages packed full / of subject and verve / blood and tissue," and "the whole world opens up," past and present, as she puts pen to paper (1-4; 18). Like Alice falling through the rabbit hole, Raz leaves "the smells of

ripening toast" of the morning, conflating "Child-God," who plays with legos at a nearby table, with human beings arranging the building blocks of life, revealing levels of consciousness present at any one given moment, informing our lives and our decision-making process, and the poet decides to fly to her child's side for surgery, paying "the blood price / I signed to pay, and will, and will myself / onto the plane" (47-49). To be "transsexual—like life," Raz recognizes, is "not easy—in this century. / My kid. And me in the same boat with him, mine" ("Trans" 36-37).

"Stone," central to the collection, at once intimate and removed, articulates the mutual quest for identity and understanding as well as the mutual love of mother and child. Once more Raz examines the harm of labeling, and the poet mourns of loss even as she embraces change:

Men are? he asks. *Women are? Tell me the story I don't know,* says Aaron.

The story about women. Tell me the story I don't know says his mother.

The story of your transformation

How a girl child is male.

When I used to look in the mirror it was blank, says Aaron of Sarah.

And then Aaron says *Mom! I'm the same person.*

You're the one who had the sex change.

I've always been as I am. You bet. (24-30)

Raz is always "being in place," whether in memory with her young children at the Woods Park Pool, "all of us soaked and warmed by the late sunshine, / the heat of the plains in high summer," or in the present where it is "ninety-some degrees" and "*This breeze is delicious,* as my aunts would say" (49-50, 51, 53). Raz writes, "My job is to pass on, distribute, / and as always, to witness," and immediately draws on an analogy from the context of the natural world: "Someone sees the cat with the flapping bluejay in her jaws, says, *Leave her be. She's doing her job*" (111-112; 113-114). Poets, like the cat, deconstruct or destroy in order to create. "If they toss me like the stone," "Stone" continues, "I am content behind my

camera / learning to point the lens, to look at the body of the world. *Click*" (107-108).

That a healing has occurred is reiterated in "Before John and Maria's Wedding," Raz writes that her older son, whose grandmother wouldn't let her foot "touch German soil," is marrying a woman who springs from that soil (20). She asks time to "bless our children, two in front," and "the other holding my hand" (21, 22, 23). Time and light fall on the "blood—both sides—and the ancestors dead / on one side at the hands of the other" and on the garden they "move through / together," "this marriage / a healing you make for us" (16-17; 27-28; 24-25).

The final sections of *Trans* meditate on the outcome of transformation, on loss and gain, adjustment to change, and a re-emersion into life with enthusiasm and a new understanding. "Trans," as "in adjectives with the sense across, crossing or on the other side of," epigraph to part three, heralds the regaining of equilibrium and opens with "Historical Documents," a transgeneration poem, in part a prayer for her daughter-in-law's safety and consciousness as she gives birth.

"Historical Documents" is also an attempt to rectify the distortion of male histories purporting to document women's lives that she and Oles address in "The Feminist Literary Movement." She returns to the birth of her older son, recorded in her diary years before as she awaits the birth of her first grandchild. The poet traces her family history as archeologists might trace our geologic past telling the story of an exposed face of rock, each layer supporting and making way for the next.

Raz reaffirms her commitment to writing and the comfort story brings, in "Volunteers," drawn out to her back yard by "a kid-robin on a branch," where "a blighted pine / shows a beige fringe in the emerald sumac," "big feeders, you've got to tend . . . / so everything else stays healthy" (1, 5-6, 7-8). Raz celebrates the heritage born of the list ("What is Good") as she reaffirms the creative act an act of nature:

Even though I don't believe this mess is worth saving,
writing is like digging in clay the sumac plays out of,
black letters, the sound of Mom's voice the crisp edge
of Papa's celluloid dresser set: buttonhook, shoehorn,
brush, mirror, comb, and what's that odd receptacle with the hole

for hair combings? To make jewelry? (29-34).

She observes the life around her, still preoccupied with epistemology, how past informs present, instinctual as well as cognitive, observing the possum, "laden, twentieth generation / of her family / in residence still in our yard," following her path under the clothesline ("Insomnia III" 29-31). And although life's journey may take us where "the tundra is something / strange like a sponge," it is, as Raz writes in "Letter from a Place I've Never Been," "golden" (25-26). Nothing is lost, Raz suggests, when life is lived with passion and wrested into art. Not only do lives inform other lives, but, to quote Hölderlin's "Remembrance," "poets establish / that which remains."

Rilke's question, "Who says that all must vanish?" which begins his poem, "What Survives" (229), resonates throughout the final section. Raz's answer may be found in the meaning of the word "trans," "with the sense beyond, surpassing, transcending," which speaks to passion *for* life and for transcendence *in* life, in memory, and even in death, through art. With affection and humor, Raz also celebrates the ways women mourn, learn, change, and grow to make survival possible.

"Address on a Map" is Mrs. Levi's address, 179 Rosemont Crescent, where she teaches what it means to be a woman, as she prepares the girls for their upcoming confirmation. Genesis's rib story as well as Selma Levi's—her "glasses with rhinestones," her convertible, her invitation to George, the handyman, to come in for an ice tea; "her pink mule hanging / from her painted big toe dripping feathers"—are all artifacts of Raz's rich education (12, 18-19). A series of Wonder Woman poems gently and persistently questions cultural gender roles past and present as they witness the strength of women—and Raz's own strength.

Even in celebration of Aaron's rebirth as a male, loss of Sarah is palpable. In "Aaron at Work / Rain," which can be read as a companion to "Sarah Fledging," the artist, Aaron—"a revolution: what he's about"—rises from his worktable as he continues his work. Raz asks, however, "Where is the child whose shoes I bought? Where is the bread / we kneaded? Where our kitchen? Our dead?" (21-22). In a fleeting dream, Raz catches a glance of Sarah "changed. / Yet she was the same" ("Sarah Returned to Me, Wearing the Poet's Gloves" 13-14). While returning from visiting Aaron, Raz finds a pink sponge alphabet letter, "S," a child has left under the airplane seat, both symbol of loss and talisman of what continues on, both in her memory

and in her art. Raz writes, "I won't forget Sarah," Raz writes in "A Vision," "Who could, who knew her" ("A Vision" 231).

Raz's perspective adjusts as she realizes that Aaron's birth "spirals" right out of Sarah as Sarah spiraled from Raz ("Company / 3 A.M."). Both carry the XX chromosomes that genetically link them. "Your garden voice deeper for sure," she allows in "The Storehouse," "but you, for all we've been through, / are identical genetically to the daughter you were / your locutions your steady fingers on the trowel" (8-11).

The ultimate crossing is faced directly in the final poem of the collection, "The Funeral of X, Who Was Y's Mother": The X chromosome is one we all share with both men and women; the Y represents, for women, the other. Identity and difference aside, all of us will die. Far from a poem of mourning, however, it celebrates the ecstasy of living:

This woman who died last night in her daughter's arms
saying thank you, to whom? God for the easy death
called The Kiss, which the Rabbi tells us is God's blessing,
the touch of His lips to forehead that withdraws the divine
spark, life, from the body? Or thank you to her daughter,
most blessed by this witness, who wonders aloud which
meaning, a question in my ear as I bend down to her. (1-7)

Both the persistence of human life through war and the feminine principle—Shakkinah, "the holy part of God that is Woman," and human woman—are honored here. What survives is each new generation carrying the last within them in community into the glory that is life:

We laugh and cry at once, which is seemly,
while the Mother of us all cries out and laughs, One
part at best, and holds me as I bend to myself to discover
not what I can't hope to understand—that which
we are enjoined not to worry—fondle, turn over
and over—but some small way into the magnificence,
abundant and every moving, of breathing and continuing flesh. (24-33)

As Raz suggests by her allusion to Chapter 12 of Daniel, we do not know what is written in God's "Book of Truth." What we *can* know, mindful of both our history as recorded in our art and our own certain death, is the abundance of our daily lives.

We live and write from this place of knowledge and of literal location, back to Raz's home, where,

Ashes in the grate sweeten
 the garden provender. Clay.
 Ripeness is all. The fool lives on,
 my left elbow's cartilage feather. ("Early Morning, Left Handed" 21-24)

In *Trans*, as with all her work, Raz has answered Rich's call for an exploration of "a whole new psychic geography" (91). Not only has Raz looked back to revision with fresh eyes—"entering an old text [life] from a new critical direction"—she challenges us with new ways to think about our life today and in the future, showing us how we can, to quote Rich again, "begin to see—and therefore live—afresh," the very essence of freedom (90). Maps will change, as Ursula K. Le Guin suggested, new mountains emerge.

Fortunately for us, Raz's poetry shows us how we might make our own gold, transforming the joys and woes of our own lives into growth, understanding, and wisdom. At the heart of transformation, her poems suggest, is love, "the word he [Aaron] said in closing" ("Trans" 35). As Rilke writes in *Letters to a Young Poet*, "For one human being to love another; that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation (54).

Raz shows us that there is, at heart, no contradiction between love and quest, that "fingers were made to touch fingers" ("First, Thus" 13). Love is quest, she asserts in poem after poem, book after book, urging us by example to live fully, perform our own alchemy, make our own maps no matter where we live. Raz, however, has chosen to remain in Nebraska for nearly forty years, to live and write from the place that, while reassuring her spirit, provides the landscape of and in her poetry.

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FRIENDSHIP, FINANCE, AND ART: CHARLES
SCRIBNER'S SONS' RELATIONSHIP WITH ERNEST
HEMINGWAY AND AUGUST DERLETH

KENNETH B. GRANT

Scribner's editor Maxwell Perkins was a legendary figure in the publishing business, even during his own lifetime. Not surprisingly, after his death, a number of competing literary saint's legends have sprung up surrounding his editorial activities. Let one regarding the publication of Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* stand for the various others. Perkins, a conservative man by nature, was deeply troubled by the obscenities he read in the manuscript of Hemingway's novel. In a meeting with the equally conservative Charles Scribner II, Perkins sought to bring the issue of what he perceived to be objectionable language to his boss. According to Malcolm Cowley, Perkins was unable to utter the offending words, moving Scribner to suggest that he write them down. Perkins wrote the first two words on his note pad, but only set down the third after Scribner insisted. According to Cowley, Scribner remarked, "Max...what would Hemingway think of you if he heard that you couldn't even write that word?" (Cowley 6). The legend is altered somewhat according to Perkins's biographer, A. Scott Berg. Berg writes that Perkins did pen all three words—*shit*, *fuck*, and *piss*—on his daily planner, which carried the unfortunate imprint, "Things to Do Today." This time, the elder Scribner tweaked Perkins that he was in decidedly bad shape if he needed a daily reminder for those basic functions (Berg 5). A third version, according to Matthew J. Bruccoli, has Scribner looking at the desk calendar and offering a suggestion to Perkins: "Don't you want to take the rest of the day off, Max? You must be exhausted" (Bruccoli 26-7). Though the brush strokes vary, each story paints a similar feature on the portrait of Maxwell Perkins's outlook and char-

acter. We are rightfully amused by the human side of a figure whose influence over the direction of the American novel during the first half of the twentieth century likely places him among the most influential people in American publishing history. This essay focuses on the character, temperament, and judgment of Maxwell Perkins, three Charles Scribners, and two writers with Midwestern roots.

From the beginning, American publishers were generally either printers who brought out books to keep their presses operating or booksellers who arranged for books to stock their shelves. In 1846, when the first Charles Scribner formed a partnership with Isaac D. Baker, their firm took a different direction; they chose to function foremost as publishers, discovering and bringing to press new talent, at that time, mostly theological texts. By the 1870s, after the death of the first Charles Scribner, Charles Scribner II, along with his brother, undertook to end the partnership and consolidate ownership within the family. The firm was named Charles Scribner's Sons, and it has remained a family-operated publishing house, even following the 1984 merger with Macmillan. There has always been at least one Charles Scribner and generally two at work in the firm. Charles Scribner II led the firm until 1928, when he turned control over to his son, Charles Scribner III, who managed the firm until his death in 1952. His son, who incidentally chose to be called Charles Scribner Jr. lest the family sound like a publishing monarchy, headed the firm until his death in 1995. The fifth Charles Scribner, renumbered Charles III, currently operates the firm. Thus, for over 130 years, Charles Scribner's Sons has worked to establish healthy relationships between writer and publisher. From 1914-1947, Maxwell Perkins led this effort. In one case, notably Ernest Hemingway's, the relationship was respectful, supportive and productive; in another, August Derleth's, the author/publisher relationship eventually collapsed over money and contractual disagreements. Perkins's editorial technique may be seen most productively, perhaps, by looking at beginnings and endings; hence, we will focus on the events of 1925 and 1926 which brought Hemingway and his novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, to Scribner's and the lengthy editorial work necessary to ready Wisconsin regional writer August Derleth's novel, *Still Is the Summer Night*, for publication in 1937. After reviewing the process that brought both Hemingway and Derleth into Scribner's house, we will look at a series of closing acts: Perkins' death,

Hemingway's death, and the severing of a relationship between Scribner's and Derleth after their publication of his seventh Scribner's book, *Shield of the Valiant*, in 1945.

The shenanigans surrounding Hemingway's arrival at Scribner's are widely known. Perkins was responsible for bringing out F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, and Fitzgerald, out of loyalty and respect, took upon himself to recommend other writers of distinction to Perkins and Scribner's. It was through Fitzgerald's offices that Ring Lardner came to the publishing house. Later, in 1924, Fitzgerald wrote Perkins about Hemingway. By the time Perkins reached Hemingway in Paris in 1925, the author had already signed a contract with Boni and Liveright to represent him. According to the terms of the contract, Boni and Liveright would publish *In Our Time* and could exercise an option on the next three Hemingway books, the option ending if they rejected any submission. Though he was finishing *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway sent Boni and Liveright *The Torrents of Spring*, his parody of Sherwood Anderson's recent novel, *Dark Laughter*. The slight, hastily prepared parody was amusing, but, at the same time, mean-spirited as Anderson had been a friend to Hemingway and supportive of his career. Hemingway must have known that Horace Liveright, who represented Sherwood Anderson and was a friend of that author, would reject *The Torrents of Spring*, thereby releasing Hemingway from any further obligation.

At the same time he was under contract to Boni and Liveright, Hemingway was in contact with both Scribner's and Harcourt Brace. Fitzgerald's enthusiastic intercession on Scribner's behalf tipped the balance. Fitzgerald cabled Perkins, "YOU CAN GET HEMINGWAYS FINISHED NOVEL PROVIDED YOU PUBLISH UNPROMISING SATIRE HARCOURT HAS MADE DEFINITE OFFER WIRE IMMEDIATELY WITHOUT QUALIFICATIONS"(Brucoli 36). Without reading a word of either *The Sun Also Rises* or *The Torrents of Spring*, Perkins agreed to accept and publish both works, as long as *Torrents* was not "OBJECTIONABLE OTHER THAN FINANCIALLY;" and he extended Hemingway a \$1500 advance for the two books. With Hemingway's unethical contract manipulation concluded, Perkins and Scribner's faced the tasks of bringing Hemingway's shocking bullfighting novel into print and securing the loyalty of a writer who would bend rules if he were dissatisfied with his publisher.

Hemingway mailed Perkins *The Sun Also Rises* from Paris on April 24, 1926, and Perkins sent his response with amazing rapidity from New York on May 18th:

“The Sun Also Rises” seems to me a most extraordinary performance. No one could conceive of a book with more life in it. All the scenes, and particularly those when they cross the Pyrenees and come into Spain, and when they fish in that cold river, and when the bulls are sent in with the steers, and when they are fought in the arena, are of such a quality as to be like actual experience....

The book as a work of art seems to me astonishing, and the more so because it involves such an extraordinary range of experience and emotion, all brought together in the most skillful manner—the subtle ways of which are beautifully concealed—to form a complete design. I could not express my admiration too strongly. (Brucoli 38)

These kind words crossed the Atlantic to Hemingway. Back in New York, Perkins’s letter to Charles Scribner II evinces a different position. “We took it, — with misgiving,” writes Perkins (Brucoli 38). The conservative publishing house had accepted a novel shocking in its language and its sexual situations as well as dangerous in its critical reference to identifiable people. Perkins would have the difficult task of negotiating changes in these areas with an artistically unyielding Hemingway.

To Fitzgerald, Perkins was enthusiastic in his praise of the novel, writing about Jake Barnes and Brett’s physical and psychological wounds that keep them from happiness. The subject matter was rough going for Perkins, but he told Fitzgerald, “You can guess that it presents a problem;—but the book is never erotic, +, in a true sense, it is always clean + healthy” (39). Still, Perkins expresses genuine concern for the reference to Henry James’s alleged impotency; he felt it uncharitable, even though James was ten years dead. In letters to Hemingway, Perkins suggested a few changes: among them, to adjust the James allusion, disguise the gay writer Roger Prescott so that the character could not be identified as Glenway Wescott, distort the reference to Joseph Hergesheimer and Hillaire Belloc, and clean up the Anglo-Saxon diction, particularly an implied “shitty,” and some explicit “bitches,” and “balls.” Hemingway was surprisingly compliant. He wrote Perkins:

If the Irony and pity ditty bothers there are a couple of things you could do—reduce the size of the dashes and omit periods after them.

Or just run it all in together. No dashes and no periods. Do whatever you like with it. I don’t care what happens to that as long as the words are not changed and nothing inserted.

The other things I believe are all fixed up. We’ve eliminated Belloc, changed Hergesheimer’s name, made Henry James Henry, made Roger Prescott into Roger Prentiss and unfitted the bulls for a reproductive function. (Brucoli 45)

In another letter Hemingway addresses the issue of profanity: “I’ve tried to reduce profanity but I reduced so much profanity when writing the book that I’m afraid not much could come out. Perhaps we will have to consider it simply as a profane book and hope that the next book will be less profane or perhaps more sacred” (44). Gauging by the opening triptych of anecdotes, *A Farewell to Arms* did not provide Perkins with a less profane or more sacred next novel.

Perkins insulated Hemingway from his own genuine concerns that the subject matter and language of *The Sun Also Rises* would be offensive to critics, a large segment of the reading public, or both. He discreetly moved Hemingway away from dangerous areas without making the artist feel he needed to make a stand on principle. In November of 1926, Hemingway did write Perkins about his reluctance to compromise his art for commercial success:

You see I would like, if you wanted, to write books for Scribner’s to publish, for many years and would like them to be good books—better all the time—sometimes they might not be so good—but as well as I could write and perhaps with luck learning to write better all the time—and learning how things work and what the whole thing is about—and not getting bitter—So if this one doesn’t sell maybe sometime one will—I’m very sure one will if they really are good—and if I learn to make them a lot better—but I’ll never be able to do that and will just get caught in the machine if I start worrying about that—or considering it the selling. (Brucoli 48)

Perkins did not attempt to rewrite Hemingway or, as we will see later, Derleth; he offered his assessment of the work, its strengths, his concerns, and suggestions for revision. He was not an editor interested in tidying a manuscript for publication. His strength was in assessing the artistic integrity of the work and motivating a writer to undertake significant revisions. On the financial side, Perkins simplified money issues for his authors whenever he could. Hemingway, for example, had agreed to turn over the royalties for *The Sun Also Rises*

as part of his divorce settlement with Hadley. Under Perkins, that transaction and most others were handled expeditiously without troubling Hemingway. Years later, Charles Scribner Jr. describes Hemingway's idiosyncratic behavior regarding advances. Hemingway was reluctant to ask for advances; rather, he would write Scribner's and request a loan. Without fail, Scribner's provided Hemingway loans, and without fail, Hemingway would repay the loan by deducting it against the royalties of his next book. Other writers might negotiate for advances; Hemingway prided himself on achieving the stature that Scribner's was willing to finance him through loans (Scribner 66).

When Perkins died of pneumonia at the age of sixty-two on June 17, 1947, Charles Scribner III wrote Hemingway to assure him that there would be continuity at Scribner's:

I have not seen you or written to you as much as I would like to have because I knew how close you were to Max and that you would rather hear from and see him which I could very well understand. You are not an author who needs inspiration from an editor or editorial work done on your books and if you entrust us with your novel, I believe your friend, Wallace Meyer [another Scribner's editor] can see it through the press as well as any man I know of. (Brucoli 343)

In his response, Hemingway told Scribner not to worry about him. He did not intend for them to "talk wet about Max to each other." Hemingway expressed relief that Perkins would no longer be involved in settling "Tom Wolfe's chickenshit estate" or suffer the indignities that his work with women writers caused him. Hemingway expressed his commitment to Scribner's and the Scribner family in characteristically Hemingwayesque fashion, "I want to be able to see your alcohol ravaged face when I come in the office for at least the next twenty two years to help me feel someone in N.Y. has a worse hangover than I have" (Brucoli 344). Scribner's maintained a trusting relationship with Hemingway as it transferred from Maxwell Perkins, to Wallace Meyer and Charles Scribner III, to his son Charles Scribner, Jr.

Late in his career, Hemingway would dedicate *The Old Man and the Sea*, a work mentioned in the Nobel Prize citation by title, to both Charlie Scribner and Max Perkins. The firm had worked in Hemingway's interests for over a quarter of a century and he knew it. Hemingway trusted the firm to the extent that he asked Charles

Jr. to safeguard a valise containing his will and other valuable documents in an office filing cabinet. Even after Hemingway's death, Scribner's represented the estate, published eleven of his works posthumously, and arranged for the authorized autobiography by Carlos Baker to be written and published. Perhaps more than at any other time, Scribner's editorial talents were called upon to ready for publication Hemingway's fragmentary and unfinished manuscripts. In his reflections on publishing, *In the Company of Writers*, Charles Scribner Jr. summarizes the experience of representing Hemingway succinctly: "Looking back, I am bound to say that working with Hemingway was rather like being strapped in an electric chair" (Scribner 87). August Derleth proved to be no easier a writer to work with for Scribner's, but the association would prove less successful for both the publishing house and the artist.

Fitzgerald and Hemingway arrived in print through Scribner's as novelists; then, moved into *Scribner's Magazine* as short story writers. August Derleth chose the opposite approach—initially sending *Scribner's Magazine* a raft of short stories, without success. In a brash move, perhaps a combination of his youthful enthusiasm—he was twenty-three—and an unshaken confidence in his abilities, Derleth enclosed the manuscript of his novelette, *Farway House*, and wrote Alfred Dashiell, *Scribner's Magazine's* editor:

I should not ordinarily plague you with a letter, but I am extremely curious about your method of selecting stories for publication in Scribner's. I've been bombarding your office for a period of two years with short stories, largely mediocre perhaps, some good, a very few excellent. By all rights, I ought to be greeted by a different rejection slip, just to vary the stream....

I have the temerity to ask instead of your customary rejection slip, a constructive reason for the rejection of FARWAY HOUSE, with one reservation — if the story's rotten, say so, and don't spare the expletives. (Derleth to Dashiell, 29 November 1932)

About a week later, Dashiell returned the manuscript, rejecting it due to space limitations, but offering the promise that future submissions by Derleth would receive "careful attention" (Dashiell to Derleth, 9 December 1932). Over the next year, Derleth continued to submit regional stories to Dashiell, who, it seems likely, shared them with Maxwell Perkins.

On September 28, 1935, Derleth wrote Perkins, enclosing about a third of the first draft of *Still Is the Summer Night* and requesting an advance of \$400-500 with an additional \$250 on its satisfactory completion. The novel, set in the 1880s, presents a love triangle between two brothers over the older brother's wife, content almost as shocking at that time as Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Set on a farm on the outskirts of Derleth's Sac Prairie, the growth of the affair takes place in parallel to the rhythm of the seasons and is set against an historical backdrop of local, state and national events. Derleth hoped to negotiate enough money to write three novels, part of his planned Sac Prairie Saga, a collection of novels, short stories, poetry, essays, and journals that would trace the history of the twin villages of Sauk City and Prairie du Sac from their European settlement to contemporary times (Derleth to Perkins, 28 September 1935). If Scribner's was not interested, Derleth requested that the manuscript be expressed back to him collect as he had also promised another publisher a chance at his project.

The fragmentary draft arrived when Perkins was on vacation, but he responded to Derleth on his return on October 17, 1935, expressing his appreciation for Derleth's abilities at the same time as his reluctance to advance so substantial an amount for an unfinished novel. Perkins felt that Derleth was too ambitious in promising to spend about six months on each of the three novels. Writers of quality fiction engaged in time-consuming "soul-searchings and self-criticism" which brought about fine work. "The only criticism one can offer of 'Still Is the Summer Night' as far as you have gone is that the story does not yet seem fused with its material, but rather to be superimposed on its background. If the criticism is valid, only more time in the gestation and writing will cure the defect" (Perkins to Derleth, 17 October 1935). Also, Perkins informed Derleth that a publishing house normally brought out only one novel by an author each year and that he should consider a more leisurely pace. Scribner's could offer Derleth an advance of \$400, but Derleth would be required to return it if the novel were not acceptable or could not be revised into a publishable work. If rejected by Scribner's, on the return of the advance, the work could be sent to other publishers.

Derleth's letter of acceptance was written in Sauk City two days after Perkins's offer was mailed from New York. He assured Perkins that he meant that he would write the novels in first draft only in six months and that he fully intended to take his time in preparing his

quality fiction. Derleth asked about a contract, and Perkins responded with a check for \$400 and the assurance that the letters exchanged between them would serve as all the contract they should need. "I have been interested in your work for a long time," Perkins wrote to Derleth. "I did feel as if perhaps you were inclined to write too rapidly, and to think of writing in those terms. You are not that kind of a writer, and I see that you realize it,—that you know what you are going, and must take time over it, and not write it out of the head alone" (Perkins to Derleth, 21 October 1935). Though he agreed to follow Perkins's advice to go slowly, Derleth sent the manuscript of *Still Is the Summer Night* to Scribner's about a month early, on December 9, 1935. Derleth was not pleased with Perkins's response.

On January 10, 1936, Perkins wrote Derleth: "It is hard to be obliged to tell you that 'Still Is the Summer Night' does not seem to us acceptable for publication by us. The fact that we also feel that it is now unlikely that it can be made acceptable compels us to speak plainly about it" (Perkins to Derleth, 10 January 1936). Perkins's objections were numerous: the novel showed signs of being written hurriedly, the plot was "deficient in dramatic effect"; the ending was "theatrical and unconvincing"; the story was "superimposed upon its background" sometimes "awkwardly." Perkins suggested that Derleth share it with another publisher; if he got the same result, he should put it away and turn to one of the other projects he had earlier mentioned. Perkins affirmed that Derleth had real talent and that the novel contained much good writing, but Derleth had yet to demonstrate that he possessed a critical eye.

Derleth's response showed that he was stung by Perkins's assessment, particularly by the assertion that Perkins felt that the novel could not be made acceptable to Scribner's. His letter acknowledged the validity of Perkins's criticism but reminded Perkins that the manuscript was simply a completed first draft, not the more polished version Perkins anticipated. "I sincerely believe," wrote Derleth, "that a very fine work can be made out of this husk, and I confess to dismay at your disbelief, not so much because I hold the opposite view, but because I have a healthy belief in your judgment — I have plenty of evidence of its worth in the many Scribner volumes on my shelves" (Derleth to Perkins, 13 January 1936). Perkins's response indicated that he had been mistaken: he had thought Derleth had sent a completed manuscript, not a completed first draft. He reassured Derleth that there need be no rush returning the advance. In the

exchange of letters over *Still Is the Summer Night*, Derleth promised to revise more slowly and set aside the novel to work on a draft of another historical novel, *Wind Over Wisconsin*.

Five months later, Derleth wrote Perkins that he had taken up *Still Is the Summer Night* once again, and in October, 1936, Derleth sent the revised manuscript to Perkins. Derleth listened to Perkins's advice. The new manuscript fused the historical background to the plot more effectively and presented an effective climactic confrontation and resolution. This time Perkins found the manuscript acceptable and the publishing process began. Derleth and Perkins exchanged a series of letters regarding the minutia of galley corrections (Derleth's involvement extended to the spelling of moustache with an *o.*), and on its release in early 1937, *Still Is the Summer Night* received generally positive reviews. Fellow Wisconsin writer Zona Gale found that "Mr. Derleth tells a tale, absorbing enough in itself, and knit with the land. He has Hardy's sense of the soil, the 'roll and wheel' of stars, of the seasons, of live things and growing things. These are as vivid to him as are human emotions, and noble" (8), and even Edith H. Walton of the *New York Times*, who found the book predictable herself, forecast that Derleth would certainly do better (18).

By August, Perkins reported a disappointing sale of 1014 copies—less than 800 additional copies were sold over the next seven years. Though the level of commercial success was strikingly different, Perkins employed the same editorial approach with Derleth that he did with Hemingway, focusing on the artistic integrity of the work itself rather than line editing. The brash and headstrong young Derleth bent to Perkins's will and received the same supportive advice that Hemingway did. For the next nine years, Derleth was a member of Scribner's circle of writers. What caused Derleth's parting with Scribner's was a conflict over contracts and money—issues about which Hemingway for all his electric chair antics felt far more confidence in his publishing house than Derleth.

Derleth and Perkins had a sharp disagreement over royalties in 1944, Derleth complaining about a 5% assessment on money due him from a royalty report. "It does not seem quite cricket to me," he wrote (Derleth to Perkins, 20 April 1944). Perkins's response was quick and blunt:

The \$142.55 you refer to as due you, is *not* due. It will be due in June, and will be paid. The account we have just paid you was not due you. Nothing we do is dubious, or ever will be dubious. It will always be cricket. I do not know exactly what you mean by holding over payments four months after the royalty report. It is simply a matter of contract. If you do not like the contract, don't sign it, but I believe that you will find that it is regular publishing practice." (Perkins to Derleth, 21 April 1944)

A week later, Derleth's temper had calmed enough for him to write: "Dear Max, I herewith apologize to you and Scribner's for casting doubt on Scribner's methods. Conjure up, if you will, a picture of me sitting in sackcloth and ashes, and pray overlook my outburst" (Derleth to Perkins, 29 April 1944). Though Derleth apologized, the issues of money and contracts were now in the open. The abrupt and uncharacteristically sharp response by Perkins must have troubled Derleth, particularly as Perkins did not respond to any of Derleth's subsequent letters for over four months.

Interestingly, the issue of inexpensive paperback reprint rights would serve as the catalyst in Derleth's ending his relationship with Scribner's. In the 1950s, Charles Scribner, Jr. systematically canceled the reprint rights on Hemingway's novels as a way to increase royalties by offering only quality Scribner's editions; in 1946, Derleth broke with Scribner's over the fact that they had not aggressively sold reprint rights for his novels or pursued the sale of foreign rights actively. When Derleth took on an agent to market his earlier material, Scribner's objected, citing their contract restrictions. That infuriated Derleth:

It is not, either, that I have become impatient at the drop of a hat. Not at all. I waited eight years and more before I even entertained the thought of an agent to sell rights to my books which Scribner's ought to have been selling. If Scribner's are going to insist on any such stand as yours, in the face of their record with my books, then it becomes imperative for me to insist upon contractual changes in any future books of mine Scribner's may want to publish. (Derleth to Whitney Darrow, 11 July 1946)

The response to Derleth's letter is not in the Scribner's archive at Princeton, but it was clearly unsatisfactory to the writer. In a July 29, 1946 letter, Derleth accuses Scribner's of errors in marketing his latest novel, *Shield of the Valiant*, of promoting it with a half dozen other

novels rather than "judicious spot advertising." When Derleth pressed for the right to have his agent authorized to sell reprint rights of novels that had not been placed by Scribner's a year after their initial publication, Scribner's refused.

In early August, Derleth sent a letter to Scribner's editor Bill Weber letting him know that he planned to sever his connection with the firm. Whitney Darrow, a Scribner's executive and a person Hemingway particularly disliked, sent Derleth a letter that increased his anger. Darrow once again brought up the sensitive subject of Derleth's speed of composition, suggesting he was writing too much, and perhaps, more painfully, that what he did write was not that good. In another letter to Bill Weber, Derleth regretted that his *Sac Prairie Saga* had never been promoted as a series, which he felt would have strengthened sales; he felt betrayed by the firm. Derleth's relationship with Perkins and Weber was not ruined; the letters continue to be cordial, but his relationship with Scribner's was over. He never published another of his over one hundred books with the house.

When the final conflict over the reprint rights erupted, Bill Weber penned a note on one of Derleth's letters, presumably to Maxwell Perkins: "I don't know whether to cheer or cry." Neither tears nor cheers were appropriate. Perkins had less than a year to live when Derleth left Scribner's, clearly insufficient time for him to help Derleth finally gain a national reputation. Still, Scribner's was a force to be reckoned with in American letters, and whether Derleth would have received the critical and readership recognition he hoped for had he stayed on with Scribner's is unclear. However, that result would like as not have been the case.

After World War II, the regionalist movement lost the attention of the nation as the United States turned to its international responsibilities. What is clear is that Maxwell Perkins served both Hemingway and Derleth well, reading and responding to both authors intelligently and supporting them in their craft. Neither author was a particularly easy one to work with, yet Hemingway never lost his faith that Scribner's was laboring in his interests while Derleth, perhaps because of his lackluster sales, lost his trust in the firm. At its core, Scribner's relationships with Hemingway and Derleth were personal ones: the letters reveal the essential humanity of the writers, their commitment to their craft. In a letter from Key West, Hemingway talked about writing honestly and without phony-ness as he had in the past, authentic writing that he called the "old

stuff?" "There's no feeling, Max, like knowing you can do the old stuff, even though it makes you fairly insufferable at the time to your publisher. On the other hand, I've never shot worse at birds in my life so I suppose what you make in Boston you lose in Chicago and after all I'm just a God-damned writer" (Brucoli 214).

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THE THEME OF ISOLATION IN
RECENT POEMS BY LISEL MUELLER

JANET RUTH HELLER

Lisel Mueller's *Alive Together: New and Selected Poems* (1996), which won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, begins with a section called "New Poems." A dominant theme in these thirty poems is an individual's isolation from his or her original culture, language, city, childhood, or past. Mueller has empathy for people who are isolated because her own life history brought her from Germany to the United States when she was fifteen.

Born in Hamburg in 1924, Lisel Neumann immigrated to the US in 1939 with her mother and sister. Her father, a historian and political dissident, had left Germany for the US in 1933 after being arrested by the Gestapo ("Return: A Memoir" 38-39). Her parents, both teachers, settled in Evansville, Indiana. When she was in high school, Mueller discovered the work of Carl Sandburg. She enjoyed Sandburg's "unadorned, muscular, straightforward diction," which was her "first encounter with a modern idiom in poetry." She liked the "literal yet evocative" texture of his verse ("Learning to Play by Ear" 34). These traits have clearly influenced her own poetry.

In 1944, Mueller graduated from the University of Evansville, where she studied the poetry of John Keats, Conrad Aiken, John Gould Fletcher, and Robinson Jeffers. She admired Aiken's "sensuous sound" and his "long, rhythmic lines" ("Learning to Play by Ear" 34). She also enjoyed the work of Wallace Stevens (Mueller, "The Steady Interior Hum" 68; Kitchen, "Lisel Mueller" 183-84). Mueller did graduate work in folklore at Indiana University from 1950 to 1953, becoming a serious poet after her mother's death that year, writing in both traditional forms and free verse. In an interview, Mueller explained, "I was twenty-nine when my mother died. I felt

a great need to express my grief in a poem; it seemed the only way to get some relief. It was at that moment that I really wanted to be a poet" ("The Steady Interior Hum" 67). She began to study modern poetry seriously and to read essays and books by modernists and New Critics like T. S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, I. A. Richards, Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden, William Empson, R. P. Blackmur, and John Crowe Ransom ("Learning to Play by Ear" 35). Her poetry began to appear in literary magazines during the 1950s.

Her first book of poems, *Dependencies*, was published in 1965. Her second book, *The Private Life*, won the Lamont Poetry Prize in 1975, and her book *The Need to Hold Still* won the 1981 National Book Award for poetry. In addition to writing poetry, Mueller also reviewed books, including poetry, for the *Chicago Daily News*, wrote literary criticism for *Poetry*, and translated some works by German writers. She has taught creative writing at Goddard College and Elmhurst College and has been a Poet-in-the-Schools in Illinois. She currently lives in Lake Forest, Illinois.

Mueller's poems combine "vivid imagery with a minimalistic style. . . . Critics frequently praise Mueller for precise, balanced imagery and her ability to evoke emotion without resorting to sentimentality" ("Lisel Mueller," *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 51, 279). Reviewing *Alive Together*, Alison Townsend points out, "The trajectory of the individual life journey, and how it intersects with both history and the journeys of others, lies at the heart of Mueller's aesthetic, and makes for a poetry of interconnectedness . . ." ("Naming the Unnamable" 18). Similarly, Judith Kitchen argues, "Her sense of history gives her poems a rare philosophical intensity. Combining the private and the public, Mueller's work demonstrates how each affects the other: no life is unimportant . . ." ("Lisel Mueller" 183). Although Mueller considers herself "a loner" ("Learning to Play by Ear" 33), her poems often imaginatively link her experiences to the lives of other people and yield new insight about universal human problems.

Mueller told interviewers Stan Sanvel Rubin and William Heyen that "the Vietnam War . . . affected me deeply. It made me think about the interdependency, certainly in our age, of the private and the public life. There's no way anymore for the individual to escape from History, the public life we all share" ("The Steady Interior Hum" 69). She became angry about the Vietnam War and felt that she shared "the shame and guilt and wrongness of this country" ("An

Interview with Lisel Mueller" 67). Mueller also views history as determining the fate of her parents ("The Steady Interior Hum" 69).

Alive Together opens with the prose-poem "Curriculum Vitae" (1992). In contrast to a formal C.V., which stresses work history and publications, this piece emphasizes important experiences that have shaped Mueller's life. The paragraphs in the center of the prose-poem concentrate on Mueller's memories of Germany in the 1930s when "My country was struck by history more deadly than earthquakes or hurricanes" (line 7). During her dangerous adolescence in Germany, Mueller "learned the burden of secrets" (line 8). Finally, leaving her grandparents behind, her family left for the United States. In the new country, "everyone spoke too fast. Eventually I caught up with them" (line 11). After the deaths of her parents, Mueller writes, "I tried to go home again. I stood at the door to my childhood, but it was closed to the public" (line 18). Despite this isolation from her past, the poet has tried to live what she calls an "Ordinary life" (line 14) with her husband and children.

In "Curriculum Vitae" and other poems about her life, Mueller avoids the hysteria and exhibitionism of some confessional poets whom she criticizes in "The Fall of the Muse" (from *The Private Life*, 1976). She finds much American poetry and American popular culture obsessed with the artist's tragic life, but this merely "betrays art with life" ("The Fall of the Muse," line 18, *Alive Together* 79; "An Interview with Lisel Mueller" 68). Although Mueller herself faced tragedy in being uprooted from her homeland, isolated from her grandparents, and separated from her mother by an early death, Mueller values restraint and writes about her experiences without narcissism.

However, she feels the losses keenly and closely identifies with other people who have also suffered isolation from part of their lives. For example, in "Place and Time," the second poem in *Alive Together*, Mueller empathizes with a young man from North Dakota interviewed on the radio about his own loss: "the business district/ of his hometown had been plowed under" (lines 2-3). Mueller compares the town's demolition with "a buried Mayan temple/ or a Roman aqueduct beneath/ a remote sheep pasture/ in the British Isles" (lines 19-22). She views the twentieth century as "an age of mass destruction" (line 27). Although survivors may try to "walk away" from the "graves" (line 32) of our childhood, this kind of escape is really impossible: "We're all/ pillars of salt" (lines 33-34).

Mueller develops this idea by explaining that some of her earliest childhood memories are of her mother playing the family's "shiny Bechstein" piano back in Germany. Now, although her mother is dead and the piano burned during World War II, "it's still her black Bechstein/ each concert pianist plays for me" and even stereo recordings are "giving me back/ my prewar childhood city/ intact and real" (lines 54-55, 58-60). In this sense, the past can never be completely erased.

Similarly, in "An Unanswered Question," Mueller identifies with "the lone survivor" (line 1) of a Tasmanian tribe, a woman who is the only person alive who speaks her language. The Tasmanian woman gets captured and "shipped/ to London, to be exhibited/ in a cage" (lines 9-11). Mueller speculates about what "indispensable word" (line 21) the woman would share with a sympathetic person in the crowds. The captive and isolated person wants to preserve a piece of her language, her heritage, to save it from death and destruction. Likewise, Mueller writes about her own losses and those of other people to preserve them for readers and to raise readers' awareness of the importance of this struggle to save the past.

The poet returns to the Biblical story of Lot's wife in "Pillar of Salt." Mueller sees herself as resembling Lot's wife because both witnessed the destruction of their home cities and both "have become/ a storage tower of memory" (lines 6-7). Both women feel "stunned by history's genius/ for punishing the guiltless" (lines 14-15). In particular, Mueller recalls her grandparents, whom she views as "guardian angels" (line 23) of her childhood. When she thinks about them, she can "reprieve from their deaths" (line 20) these special people. Mueller compares the effects of memory to the ability of water to make a beautiful flower out of bits of Japanese paper. A key word in this poem is "transformed" (line 30). Memory can transform the dead into living people. Mueller even tries to "change the ending,/ stop it short of hell,/ give them a bearable old age,/ a decent death" (lines 39-42). But she cannot change German history. In "Return: A Memoir," Mueller explains that her widowed paternal grandmother survived the firebombing of her apartment building to "live through the postwar years without food or heat" and alone (43). Her maternal grandparents "had gone east to be with their youngest daughter in a small town on the Baltic Sea and were later caught in a long, terrible flight from the advancing Russian army" (44). Mueller remembers her grandparents as loving, "civilized in mind and heart,

... gentle as well as genteel," in contrast to the "barbarism of the modern totalitarian state" (44-45). Mueller worries about what will happen if she loses her memories or dies:

Soon I will betray them.
Think of it as the solid pillar
dissolving, all that salt
seeping back into the sea. ("Pillar of Salt," lines 48-51)

Thus, the preservation of these memories and the people who inspired them is only temporary. Alison Townsend has observed that the poems in *Alive Together* are "embracing both memory and the insubstantial nature of time. . . . This stance makes for an overall elegiac tone . . ." ("Naming the Unnamable" 18).

"Silence and Dancing" concerns the responses of older people to aging. Mueller contrasts the silence of the senior citizens with the television announcers: "fatuous voices on the screen/ . . . gabbling about another/ war they cannot do without" (lines 8-10). Just as Mueller's own memories keep her past alive, the older people in "Silence and Dancing" remember dancing in their youth. These memories reinstate their passion. The poet focuses on one woman's recollection of dancing:

she danced like a devil, she'll tell you,
recalling a dress the color of sunrise,
hair fluffed to sea-foam,
some man's, some boy's
damp hand on her back
under the music's sweet, hot assault

and wildness erupting inside her
like a suppressed language,
insisting on speaking itself
through her eloquent body. (15-24)

Mueller contrasts this wild, passionate dancing with "the well-groomed words on her lips" (line 26). The memories enable the senior citizens to cope with their current physical ailments and the threat of death, war, and chaos.

Mueller had made a similar point about passion and wildness in the poem "Joy," originally published in her 1989 book, *Waving from Shore*, and reprinted in *Alive Together*. This poem celebrates moments in life when, paradoxically, we weep for joy. Mueller uses

the examples of weeping due to beautiful soprano voices, weeping when spring comes, and weeping after making love. She connects human sensuality to the wild realm. After making love, we feel a strange sadness that has elements of joy:

It's not about loss. It's about
two seemingly parallel lines
suddenly coming together
inside us, in some place
that is still wilderness. ("Joy," lines 17-21, *Alive Together*, p. 199)

Our ability to respond intensely to aesthetic beauty and passion is primitive and essential to the human experience.

The theme and variations poem, "The Late-Born Daughters," portrays the youngest daughters of famous fathers trying to recover the past, to understand the fathers whom the girls dimly remember. The daughters read their parents' letters, do research at the library, collect "stories told by neighbors and lovers/ and servants and hang-ers-on" (lines 20-21). The daughters' lives are warped by their fathers: the women "keep their desperate secrets,/ they sit up all night with their fathers" (lines 27-28). In their attempts to recover lost memories, the daughters become haunted by the past.

In "Happy and Unhappy Families II," Mueller explores the gap that crimes like murder create between a seemingly ideal past and the horrific present. Using the analogy of Electra and Agamemnon's family, the poet imagines

Agamemnon's daughters
batting balloons across the lawn,
while Orestes shouts
joyfully from his rocking horse
and the soon-to-be murdered parents
smile fondly over their summer drinks. (lines 4-9)

We like to recall "the good times" (line 17) and thus have trouble understanding "the latest/ double murder and suicide" (13-14). When we watch Greek plays or operas like *Elektra* based on ancient myths, we can anticipate the ending and "call it tragedy" (line 25). However, contemporary family homicide in our own communities stuns us so much that "we have no name for it" (line 27). The gap between the family's superficial normalcy and happiness and the actual inner corruption and rot is too wide to breach.

The prose-poem "Reader" concerns another kind of isolation, the reader's frustrated attempts to involve herself in the lives of a novel's characters. While engaged in reading Mary Elsie Robertson's *Family Life*, Mueller feels as though she can "live with them." However, she is invisible to the characters and cannot warn them about their impending doom. When she finishes the novel, the seemingly alive characters "disappear. Closing the book I feel abandoned. I have lost them, my dear friends. I want to write them, wish them well, assure each one of my affection. If only they would have let me say goodbye" (*Alive Together* 36). Robertson has created a novel so powerful that readers bond to the characters and feel pain when the novel's ending severs this connection.

In "Animals Are Entering Our Lives," Mueller traces the legendary history of human-animal relations. She begins with "the old stories" that portray animals as "Enchanted" or as "guides and rescuers of the lost" (lines 1-3). Then people and animals "all had a common language" (line 7). However, human exploitation of the environment alienated people from animals, and the different species no longer shared the same language. Mueller sees evidence in the news that animals are attempting to re-establish the old connection, giving as examples "the squatter monkeys" (line 18) of Hong Kong, the gulls and Canada geese of Illinois. In the last twenty-one lines of the poem, Mueller focuses on "the silent deer who come/ and eat each night from our garden" (lines 36-37). She compares them to "refugees" who are "defying guns and fences/ and risking death on the road/ to reach us, their dispossessors,/ who have become their last chance" (lines 47-51). This passage emphasizes the irony of the deer's dependency on human spoilers of the natural environment. The poet asks, "Shall we accept them again?/ Shall we fit them with precious collars" like the girl in a folktale (lines 52-53)? People need to decide whether to live in harmony with nature again or to continue the centuries of hostility and mutual distrust. As in her other poems about the possibility of recovering the past, Mueller implies that humans should commit themselves to restoring the previous harmony, even if sacrifices are necessary.

The final poem in the section of "New Poems" is the long poem "Captivity," which reflects on the experiences of Patty Hearst with the Symbionese Liberation Army in 1974 and 1975. Clearly, Hearst's abduction and transformation into Tania, the urban guerrilla, remind Mueller of her own transplantation to America after growing up in

Germany. The SLA kept Hearst blindfolded in a dark closet for fifty-seven days, "So she became/ a child again, curled up/ or hunched against the dirty wall" (lines 8-10). During her captivity, she was not allowed outside, so when she heard a birdsong, the concept of spring and the word "green" seemed "another language,/ devoid of meaning" (lines 19-24).

Mueller emphasizes the reaction of the American public as Patty Hearst changed into a member of the SLA team. At first, the public viewed Hearst sympathetically, as if she were

the girl in the fairy tale.
 . . . The decent girl
 cast out to be cruelly tested
 in the dark forest. (part 3, lines 41-44)

However, Tania's hostile tapes and actions shocked conservative Americans, and "we turned against her" (part 3, line 53). Ultimately, the public

abandoned her
 in the dark forest, saying,
If you want to be Tania,
this is where you belong. (part 3, lines 57-60)

In section four of the poem, Mueller compares Patty Hearst to Beauty in "Beauty and the Beast." Due to her captivity and the Stockholm Syndrome, Beauty starts to perceive the Beast as "someone beautiful" because he spares her life.

. . . So Beauty
 stopped weeping and started hoarding
 his commands like tokens of love
 and asked to be taught his language,
 to be given a home. (lines 70, 74-78)

Clearly, Mueller's study of folklore illuminates this section of the poem. Judith Kitchen has pointed out, "She examines fairy tales to see what can be applied to contemporary life; in the process, contemporary life is also examined as the source of new legends" ("Lisel Mueller" 186). In this poem, Mueller uses the tale of "Beauty and the Beast" to create sympathy for Hearst's cooperation with her captors and her adoption of their values.

The final section of "Captivity" criticizes the American public for rejecting Hearst because of the complexity of her tale. The masses

wanted "the easy split into black and white/ a story in which the heroine,/ bruised but pure, throws off/ the Tania skin" (lines 81-84). Mueller interprets the trial of Hearst as the public's refusal to "cope with the huge/ complexities of the heart,/ that melting pot of selves" (lines 87-89). However, after President Carter pardoned her in 1979, Hearst "made up/ her own story" and

gave us the slip
 by receding into the dappled
 indistinct tapestry
 of the common crowd
 and passing into the ever-after
 of the free, anonymous life. (lines 94-101)

According to Mueller, Hearst defied public pressure and resumed control over her own life.

Ann Louise Hentz has suggested that Mueller's poems explore "the dialectic" of opposites, including sound and silence, surface and depth, "affirmation and negation, violence and forgiveness, darkness and light" (24, 30). Similarly, Judith Kitchen finds in Mueller's poetry "a delicate balance between public and private, lyric and narrative, and silence and speech" ("Lisel Mueller" 191). To these dialectics, I would like to add the exploration of loss and memory, isolation and empathy. Mueller has experienced great losses, such as the death of close relatives and isolation from her native land, but her poems use memories and sympathy for other people to understand her experiences and to connect her own suffering and growth to those of her public. The result is a universal theme that should have resonance for all readers.

To what extent is Mueller a Midwestern writer? In a 1981 interview, she told Stan Sanvel Rubin and William Heyen,

I'm often asked if I consider myself a Midwestern poet, and my answer is yes and no. I dislike categorization of this kind, and I trust my poetry has scope and meaning beyond such restrictive boundaries. Still, there is the fact that when landscape appears in my poems it is a Midwestern landscape; I have lived almost continuously in the Midwest since my arrival, and my children were born and raised here. Let me say what countless other displaced persons must have said: I am more at home here than anywhere. At the same time I am not a native; I see the culture and myself in it, through a scrim, with European eyes, and my poetry accommodates a bias toward histori-

cal determinism, no doubt the burdensome heritage of a twentieth-century native German. ("The Steady Interior Hum" 65)

Mueller published an essay in 1971 that attempts to define Midwestern poetry, "Midwestern Poetry: Goodbye to All That." This essay predicts that Midwestern poetry is "passing out of existence" (*Voyages to the Inland Sea* 1) due to the disappearance of regional differences in America. However, Paul Solyn has disputed Mueller's theory in his essay "Lisel Mueller and the Idea of Midwestern Poetry." Solyn argues, ". . . This homogenization has not proceeded as fast as Mueller expected. . . . Furthermore, the past two decades have seen poets throughout the country assume a posture of resistance to national culture" (*Regionalism and the Female Imagination: A Collection of Essays* 69). In addition, Solyn criticizes Mueller's emphasis in her essay on rural and small-town themes and her exclusion of urban writers and women writers like Gwendolyn Brooks. He believes that Midwestern large cities are distinct from large cities in other regions; furthermore, Midwestern cities also share experiences and values, such as practical realism and humanism, of the hinterlands (74, 76).

However, Solyn agrees with Mueller that Midwestern writing has tended to be realistic, that it uses simple diction, and that free verse predominates. Mueller and Solyn contend that the plain language and free verse result from "the informal, egalitarian heritage" of the region (Solyn 71-72). Mueller writes, ". . . Free verse, Midwest style, was not a European import, but rather an introduction of everyday common speech patterns into the province of poetry" (7). For similar reasons, Midwestern poets are "not . . . especially interested in poetic technique" (Solyn 72). Mueller writes, "Verbal innovation has never made real headway here, and elegance of style has neither been a goal nor a fact. In the old battle between virtuosity and integrity of feeling. . . Midwestern poets believe that the exposed grain of experience is far more beautiful than any glossy finish" (7).

Commenting on her own poetic style in an interview with Nancy Bunge, Mueller emphasizes, ". . . I usually use strong, short words and not many latinates because they sound weaker to me." Because she prefers to discuss essential issues, what she terms "the elementary," Mueller chooses "strongly accented, strongly sounded Germanic words" ("An Interview with Lisel Mueller" 66). Thus, her

own diction reflects the influence of the Midwestern ethos and her early reading of Midwestern poets like Carl Sandburg.

Solyn and Mueller also agree that Midwestern writers emphasize individual people. Mueller insists, "This deeply ingrained humanism, this attention and respect accorded the individual person, may well be the special contribution of Midwestern poets to American poetry" ("Midwestern Poetry" 7). Edgar Lee Masters is a good example. Yet Midwestern writers also emphasize people situated in a particular landscape (Solyn 74; Mueller 6).

Solyn argues forcefully that Mueller's work is typical of Midwestern poetry (78). Her own poetry has the plain language, free verse, realism, and humanism that she sees as characteristic of the Midwest.

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AN EMPTY VISION: THE AMERICAN DREAM ON MAIN STREET

DAVID MCGUIRE

In 1920 Sinclair Lewis published *Main Street*, a novel that met with enormous commercial success in the United States and acclaim around the world. The novel shattered the image of the American small town as a place where one could live out the American Dream, depicting not only the failure of the American Dream, but also the failings of the primary components of the Dream, those people who embark on a quest for its promise while wearing blinders to their own misguided reconceptions. Carol Kennicott, the novel's protagonist, is as much a failure as is the town of Gopher Prairie and is representative of the shortcomings of the American Dream itself. She represents the blundering human factor of every endeavor; her faults are the inflated ideal traits of the pioneer: ambition, confidence, sensitivity and aggressiveness. Carol, by nature, adds the prefix "over" to each of these traits, and she heads into Gopher Prairie, not to carve out her own niche, but to carve the town into the totem pole of her ideology. In Carol's clash with Gopher Prairie, Sinclair Lewis "follows the tawdry glitter of the corrupted American Dream" (Marshall 540), pitting the adulterated idealism of the pioneer against the self-importance of the newly educated romantic bent on conforming the world to her vision. He uses as his arena the very area in which the dream took form and where it first, and perhaps most fully, faltered: the American Middle West.

From the opening pages of the novel Lewis sets Carol and Gopher Prairie at odds, favoring neither but bestowing on each monumental badges of self-worth. He introduces Gopher Prairie in the prologue, referring to its Main Street as both "the continuation of Main Streets everywhere" and as "the climax of civilization." In so doing, Lewis targets the entire Midwest, spreading Gopher Prairie's

egoism across the region as a whole. The town sees itself as the center of the universe and Lewis closes the prologue with a question that foreshadows the conflict to come. "Would he not betray himself an alien cynic who should otherwise portray Main Street, or distress the citizens by speculating whether there may not be other faiths?" This "alien cynic" waits just around the bend in the form of Carol Milford, who is soon to enter the town as the wife of its doctor, Will Kennicott. Lewis is quick to point out that Carol floats in the same stratosphere of overvalued self-worth as Gopher Prairie and it is, in part, her aspiration that carries her to town.

Unlike the other women in her graduating class, who have resigned themselves to a mundane existence as grade school teachers and housewives, Carol rises to dizzying heights of expectation. That she would be not in question, but "how she was to conquer the world—almost entirely for the world's own good—she did not see" (19). Her flaw in thinking, not uncommon to newly graduated students of any age, is that the world will bend to her whim, gladly, without resistance and with full knowledge that her way is indeed best for the common good. Carol reads an article on village improvement and her life's calling becomes apparent to her. "That's what I'll do after college! I'll get my hands on one of these prairie towns and make it beautiful. Be an inspiration" (21). Though she possesses the spirit of the pioneer, she mistakes the populated town for the open prairie. She intends not to inhabit an area and make a life for herself, but rather to make a life for an inhabited area. Even in her thoughts the project contains the echo of an inquisition. "I'll make 'em put in a village green, and darling cottages, and a quaint Main Street" (21). Her language implies force used to provide not what the people need, but what Carol feels they should be.

Carol chooses as her approach a career in professional library work. Her naiveté shines through as she contemplates the vast promise of such a career. She envisions herself "the light of the library, an authority on books, invited to dinners with poets and explorers, reading a paper to an association of distinguished scholars" (24). Her vision of library life is grandiose, based entirely in misconception and she quickly discovers that it does not provide the life she imagined. It is a failure to be amplified in her next project, the redeeming of Gopher Prairie.

Will Kennicott's proposal to Carol is as much a pitch for Gopher Prairie as it is for himself, and he ultimately sells her on marriage and a move to the town. He does so by offering Gopher Prairie as a sacrifice to her desire. "Come to Gopher Prairie. Show us. Make the

town . . . artistic Make us change!" (32). Carol is wary of the small town and its limitations, and Will's initial description of the town, highlighted by the fact that Gopher Prairie has "seven miles of cement walks already, and building more every day," holds little promise, but her doubts are soothed by the possibility of living out her fantasy (29). She agrees to move to Gopher Prairie and in the ensuing clash of culture and ideals, Lewis examines the failings of two American myths: the myth of the American Dream and the myth of the small town. He uses Carol as a representation of the shortcomings of the American Dream, both those inherent in the Dream itself and those that arise from the faults of the individual. He uses Gopher Prairie to dispel the commonly held belief that the American small town is an idyllic, virtuous, innocent and culturally rich place to spend a life, far removed from the chaos and confusion of the city.

Carol's move to Gopher Prairie represents her quest for the American Dream as historian James Truslow Adams defined it in 1931. Carol recognizes but cannot quite articulate her yearning for what Adams defines as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement" (404). Since college Carol has dreamed of changing the world, but her life is unfulfilling. Her meeting Will Kennicott rekindles a dream she felt had passed. But her dream stumbles early on, for she wants too much and has neither the ability nor the achievement to meet what she imagines. The fact that she dreams is not wrong, nor is it wrong that she has desires, but rather, she desires nothing short of "everything in the world" (25). When the pioneers initially moved West, they sought to make something of nothing, whereas Carol aspires to make something of something else. Carol faces another problem that is inherent in the American Dream itself, a problem that Adams recognizes. "Once the frontier stage is passed . . . the American dream itself opens all sorts of questions as to values. It is easy to say a better and richer life for all men, but what *is* better and what *is* richer?" (407). As Carol is to discover, this variety of ideals cannot always exist in a town as small as Gopher Prairie, a town where a majority mentality is bound to rule.

The real Gopher Prairie begins to emerge from Doc Kennicott's overzealous description as soon as the newlyweds arrive in town. Will describes the town as a parent describes a newborn, ignoring the wrinkled ugliness of the child, focusing only on the potential and the beauty that one sees in what is a part of him. He had created a myth for Carol,

who willingly allowed him to do so because her dream was dependent on the existence of such a place. Will's description of Gopher Prairie echoes the very belief of the American populace that Sinclair Lewis is trying to dispel in *Main Street*, "the belief that the American small town is a place characterized by sweet innocence, an environment in which the best in human nature could flower serenely, a rural paradise exempt from the vices, complexities, and irremediable tragedies of the city" (Hilfer 3). Will's initial description of the town is as a place full of promise. "I never saw a town that had such up-and-coming people as Gopher Prairie," he states. "And it's a darn pretty town" (29). Lewis quickly begins to undermine the promise of the small town, both in the reader's mind and in Carol's, as his protagonist pulls into a Gopher Prairie far different from Will's description.

Lewis masterfully uses Carol as a window for the reader into a world formed from conceptions of what it ought to be. During Carol's train ride to Gopher Prairie, many of her expectations are burned away as she begins to realize what she is up against. The train itself represents the hope and promise of expansion, of being able to start anew in a previously uncharted land. But Lewis even smudges the romantic notion of the railway, filling the train not with eager pioneers, wide-eyed with hope, but rather with an "old woman whose toothless mouth shuts like a mud-turtle's," and a "soiled man and woman [who] munch sandwiches and throw the crusts on the floor" (36). Carol is not repulsed by these people because of their plight but because, through her endeavor, "they had become her own people, to bathe and encourage and adorn, she had an acute and uncomfortable interest in them. They distressed her" (37). Lewis, through Carol, is inviting the reader to take a closer look at what this idealized region actually comprises. He prods the audience forward, using Will to challenge them to enter without inhibition. "Look here Carrie. You want to get over your city idea that because a man's pants aren't pressed, he's a fool. These farmers are might keen and up-and-coming" (37).

Arrogance and ignorance are equally dominant traits in Carol's character and form her tragic flaw: her desire to change what she does not understand. "Tragic flaw" is a term perhaps too grandiose to describe Carol's failings, for she is not a heroine in the traditional sense, but rather a vehicle to get to the heart of the matter. If Carol were a fully sympathetic character, *Main Street* would lose much of its effectiveness. She carries with her a haughty nature, forged by the city. That she ultimately submits to the pressure of the town is not a

victory for Gopher Prairie, but rather a double failure. Carol's failure highlights the failures of the village, "emphasizing its moral repressiveness and stultifying conformity, and protesting its standardized dullness" (Hilfer 3). Carol, arriving in Gopher Prairie, realizes it is a place that has already failed and fails again to meet even her meager expectations. Her dream is alive to the very end of her initial journey and she reflects on the prairie, Lewis allowing a final glimpse of the myth he is to shatter:

Here—she meditated—is the newest empire of the world; the Northern Middlewest; a land of dairy herds and exquisite lakes, of new automobiles and tar-paper shanties and silos like red towers, of clumsy speech and a hope that is boundless. An empire which feeds a quarter of the world—yet its work is merely begun. They are pioneers, these sweaty wayfarers, for all their telephones and bank-accounts and automatic pianos and co-operative leagues. And for all its fat richness, theirs is a pioneer land. What is its future? (39-40)

Like the landscape drifting past the window of a train goes the idealism of the pioneer and the romanticism of the frontier outpost.

To fully understand Carol's letdown it is important to understand what Sinclair Lewis is trying to rally against. Soon after its publication, *Main Street* was hailed as the main literary vehicle of "the revolt from the village," a term coined by Carl Van Doren to describe the literary undermining of the myth of the small town as a haven of innocence and moral fortitude, as alive in every aspect of American culture as any city, without the chaos and confusion. According to Anthony Hilfer, "the myth of the small town served as a mental escape from the complexities, insecurities, and continual changes of a society in rapid transition from a dominantly rural to a dominantly urban and industrialized civilization" (5). As the American Dream began to fizzle in the big cities, replaced by overwhelming poverty, crime, and the gnawing realization that perhaps there was not room for everyone to prosper, people began to look towards the rural village for evidence with which to rekindle the Dream. The village became the symbol of contrast to the failings of the city and the myth of the American Dream began to transform into the myth of the small town, a myth created to quell the fears about the failure of the original dream. As Hilfer explains, the small town became a pacifier for a nation full of doubts:

Whenever the immense problems . . . were cited, the business propaganda mill would respond with question-begging evocations of a vanished (indeed, never existent), idyllic, individualistic, small-town civilization wherein such controls were entirely unnecessary. To problems of urban crime and chaos, the propaganda responded by a self-righteous recommendation of small-town virtues, virtues that the small town doubtfully possessed and that were thoroughly inappropriate to national problems. Praise of the small town was a covert way of denying the need to think, a method of evading the admission that old formulas no longer served the new conditions. (30)

The small town, which had for so long functioned synecdochally for what was right in America, was upended by *Main Street*, which forcefully depicts what is wrong with the small town. As Hilfer says, "*Main Street* is a sociological caricature unmasking the small town" (160).

This unmasking is a gradual process, though it begins immediately upon Carol's arrival, when "she saw that Gopher Prairie was merely an enlargement of all the hamlets which they had been passing. Only to the eyes of a Kennicott was it exceptional" (42). Again Lewis makes clear that his target is not a single town, but the very nature of all towns. After exploring Gopher Prairie, Carol realizes that her expectations were far too great, impossible to realize. "Her dreams of creating a beautiful town were ludicrous. Oozing out from every drab wall, she felt a forbidding spirit which she could never conquer" (49). Her dream already is sinking, weighted by a town that has so quickly failed her, providing not even the potential to fulfill her dreams. "It was not only the unsparing unapologetic ugliness and the rigid straightness which overwhelmed her. It was the planlessness, the flimsy temporariness of the buildings, their faded unpleasant colors" (53). In the entire town, only the bank is appealing in appearance to Carol, an item that will prove of some significance in Lewis's deconstruction of the idealized village.

That the bank should be such a prominent fixture in Gopher Prairie points to perhaps the harshest indictment Lewis brings against the town. While he spends a large portion of the novel portraying the individual people as narrow minded and shallow, Lewis uses brief flashes to illuminate a more savage, though less obvious truth. While Carol connects the small prairie town with the pioneer ideal, Lewis exposes the town as a leech, growing fat on the lifeblood of the true pioneer, the American farmer. "Lewis makes it clear that Gopher

Prairie lives off the farmers whom the town despises, overcharges, and cheats" (Hilfer 162). That Will Kennicott, the most fully developed representative of Gopher Prairie, values material wealth is apparent from the very first. During his initial talk with Carol he proudly points out that Percy Bresnahan, "you know—the famous auto manufacturer," is from Gopher Prairie (29). During a brief stopover in the town of Schoenstrom, Will exults in a sighting of Rauskulke, who "owns about half the town . . . owns a lot of mortgages, and he gambles in farm-lands" (39). This last, it turns out, is also a pastime of Will's. Rauskulke's accumulated wealth is a source of pride to Will, who rattles off the figures as though they were his own. When Carol implies that a man worth so much could certainly put some of the wealth back into the town, helping the farmers and townspeople, Will shoots back that Rauskulke is deserving of the wealth, because "when it comes to picking good farming land, he's a regular wiz!" (39). It is Carol's first lesson in how foreign the principle of charity is to Gopher Prairie.

Rauskulke stands in stark opposition to the American myth of the yeoman farmer who works the land, living modestly off of its yield. The townspeople in *Main Street* are sucking life from the honest, hard-working farmers. Lewis's meticulous yet subtle exposure of this small-town trait was sure to have a two-fold effect on his audience. It would awaken a recognition of the antiromantic reality of the swindled farmer and place the consequent resentment on the welcome mat of the lecherous small town. It would not be the plight of the individual farmer that would inspire rage, but rather the desecration of the myth of the yeoman farmer, "one of the most tangible things we mean when we speak of the development of democratic ideas in the United States" (Smith 154). Lewis's admiration for the true pioneer is first shown through Carol, during her trip into the wilderness with Will. Having traveled out to the Erdstrom's farm on a medical visit, Carol recognizes, "the courageous venture which had lured her to Gopher Prairie: the cleared fields, furrows among stumps, a log cabin chinked with mud and roofed with dry hay" (205). On the same journey she witnesses Will performing an amputation in its most primitive form and she again recognizes the romance of the rugged pioneer life, transferring those attributes to Will. "He speaks a vulgar, common, incorrect German of life and death and birth and the soil. I read the French and German of sentimental lovers and Christmas garlands. And I thought that it was I

who had the culture!' she worshiped as she returned to her place" (210).

With a clever touch, Lewis has Carol recognize the heroic beauty of this savage pioneer scene as she is "returned to her place." Her own egoism subsides during this brief retreat in time but quickly returns in the face of Gopher Prairie, where on Christmas day she finds herself returned to her misery. "In the not very romantic solitude of the locked bathroom she sat on the slippery edge of the tub and wept" (213). She is crying for times past, most directly for Christmas with her father, but also, perhaps, for the lost time of the wild, romantic frontier which has become the dullness of Gopher Prairie. This dullness is epitomized by the townspeople, Will included, who neatly categorize all people. "There's just three classes of people: folks that haven't got any ideas at all; and cranks that kick about everything; and Regular Guys, the fellow with sticktuitiveness, that boost and get the world's work done" (217). Will, like most of the town, sees only a part of the picture, the part that exists in Gopher Prairie and expands that part into universal truth.

During her initial stay in Gopher Prairie, Carol exposes two truths about the people of the town. The first is that they are dull and unimaginative. The second, and more important, is that even in the brief instances when they recognize the first truth, they are unwilling to change. Carol is the ideal person to unveil these truths because she "brings to Gopher Prairie a romantic model of what a village should be and a fantasy of her role in life" (Light 62). Carol does not expect Gopher Prairie to be an exciting place, but she expects to make it one. What she fails to realize is that the town has expectations of its own, which serve as guidelines for how people are to act and what sorts of entertainment are permissible. At Carol's welcoming party she quickly realizes that "conversation did not exist in Gopher Prairie. Even at this affair, which brought out the young smart set, the hunting squire set, the respectable intellectual set, and the solid financial set, they sat up with gaiety as with a corpse" (62). The lack of culture and entertainment has left the town barren of conversation, limiting topics to motor cars and the various illnesses of the population. The only relief from the conversation are the half dozen party "stunts" performed by the more talented of the partygoers. These jokes and songs are repeated at every occasion and although Carol quickly tires of them, she becomes "as disappointed as the others

when the stunts were finished, and the party instantly sank back into coma" (63).

When Carol gives her house warming party she tries to give it life, proclaiming, "I want my party to be noisy and undignified" (91). She realizes that these are people set in their ways, who will not succumb easily to changes in their pattern. Carol becomes "reconvinced that in their debauches of respectability they had lost the power of play as well as the power of interpersonal thought. Even the dancers were gradually crushed by the invisible force of fifty perfectly pure and well-behaved and negative minds; and they sat down, two by two. In twenty minutes the party was again elevated to the decorum of a prayer meeting" (91). Carol is getting her first glimpse at the "invisible force" of Gopher Prairie's herd mentality and is beginning to recognize how much effort will be required to break it. Though her party is a success, engaging people in games and activities the likes of which they have never seen, the process of involvement wears her out. "She had carried them on her thin shoulders. She could not keep it up" (96). The force of moving the town for even one evening proves too much for her, foreshadowing her ultimate failure at permanent change. The party is a symbol of what is to come and represents the greatest fault of the townspeople: the ability to recognize their shortcomings without attempting to improve them. Will applauds Carol's efforts and the *Weekly Dauntless* has a write-up on "[o]ne of the most delightful social events of recent months," but all too soon entertainment returns to normal. "The week after, the Chet Dashaways gave a party. The circle of mourners kept its place all evening, and Dave Dyer did the 'stunt' of the Norwegian and the hen" (97). Lewis consistently uses images of funerals and death to describe the parties and illustrate his view of small-town entertainment.

Finding safety in the comforts of familiar "stunts" and resisting the urge to learn new tricks is not a damning condemnation of the people of Gopher Prairie, nor does it illuminate some gross malfunction in the mechanics of the American Dream. It is simply the first and most readily apparent indication that there may be a dark underbelly beneath the town's glowing exterior. It also brings to Carol's attention that these are people who prefer not to think, who find comfort in the familiar, and who are willing to learn new things only if they are neatly packaged and agree with what is already known. Carol encounters this learning philosophy through her meet-

ings with the Thanatopsis club, a group of townswomen who aspire to learn all of the English poets in a single meeting and reduce *The Merchant of Venice* to a play "having a beautiful love story and a fine appreciation of a woman's brains, which a woman's club, even those who did not care to commit themselves on the question of suffrage, ought to appreciate" (142). When Carol suggests that the group might be well served to spend another day on the English poets and the ladies agree, Carol's "campaign against village sloth was actually begun!" (145).

Carol begins her mission of reform without comprehending the true dangers of Gopher Prairie's particular brand of ignorance. Their steadfast resistance to cultural change is little more than petty annoyance when applied to games and studies, but these same traits became savage and dangerous when applied to people. Carol does not understand this when she begins her campaign. "Her values are as naïve as her methods are blundering. Her dreams of culture on the Prairie are both conventional and artificial. . . . And the surrender of her dreams is hasty and complete" (Geismar 86). Carol fails to recognize that the proclaimed desires for change, when they are issued, most notably by Will in his proposal and by Vida Sherwin, are empty proclamations. This misunderstanding is at the heart of the conflict, for Carol "soon finds that what Will and the townspeople have in mind by town-improvement is cosmetic rather than surgical" (Love 565). Carol wants to change what the town is, while the town, if it will tolerate any change at all, wants to alter its appearance.

Carol's campaign for change takes place on two levels: the aesthetic and the spiritual. She tries to change the town's appearance while changing the way it thinks. Both her attempts to get a new city hall and to introduce new topics for the Thanatopsis discussions fail; the former acknowledged as a good idea before being shoved aside and the latter being voted away. But the true nature of the town, the dangerous side that Lewis always exposes carefully, while freely pointing out the less harmful simple-mindedness, comes across when dealing with the less fortunate and people not firmly planted in the close-knit core of the town. When Carol suggests that the Thanatopsis could help the poor of the town, not as charity, but as self-help, she encounters the truly grotesque aspects of town thinking. Mrs. Warren, the pastor's wife, while agreeing in principle with Carol's proposal, states: "[I]t seems to me we should lose the whole point of this thing by not regarding it as charity" (159). Without

recognition, Mrs. Warren feels, an action is worthless and unnecessary.

More shocking than Mrs. Warren's self-serving inclinations is the full-fledged ignorance of Ella Stowbody, daughter of the banker, who warns, "they've been fooling you, Mrs. Kennicott. There isn't any real poverty here . . . Papa says these folks are fakers. Especially all these tenant farmers that pretend they have so much trouble getting seed and machinery. Papa says they simply won't pay their debts. He says he's sure he hates to foreclose mortgages, but it's the only way to make them respect the law" (159). These sentiments stand in stark opposition to the idealized image of the small town, raised on the principles of the pioneer. Ella Stowbody further separates herself from the philosophy of hard work that initially populated the prairie by staunchly declaring, "I know I'm not going to sit and sew for that lazy Mrs. Vopni, with all I've got to do" (160). In reality, of course, Ella does very little, and Carol reflects "that Mrs. Vopni, whose husband had been killed by a train, had ten children" (160). While Carol has tried to elevate the role of the club, it quickly becomes apparent that its primary purpose will remain frivolous, occupied "with tree-planting and the anti-fly campaign and the responsibility for the restroom" (160).

By focusing on the townspeople's preoccupation with trivial matters while ignoring the grander issues surrounding them, Lewis erodes the mythic vision of the small town. Carol "had tripped into the meadow to teach the lambs a pretty educational dance and found that the lambs were wolves. There was no way out between their pressing gray shoulders. She was surrounded by fangs and sneering eyes" (116). Like wolves, the people of Gopher Prairie stay in a pack, preying on the less fortunate and quickly devouring, or at least chasing away, any dissenters. They hold the farmers in hock and underpay their maids, those "Scandahoofian clodhoppers demanding every cent you can save, and so ignorant and impertinent" (106). The townspeople even create divisions among themselves, trying to horde every last penny by forming loose-knit business alliances. Will instructs Carol to shop at the inferior markets of Jenson or Ludelmeyer instead of going to the cleaner, better-stocked market of Howland and Gould, "who go to Dr. Gould every last time, and the whole tribe of 'em the same way. I don't see why I should be paying out my good money for groceries and having them pass it on to Terry Gould!" (115).

Carol's own ignorance of the workings of the small town is shared with the reader, for Lewis is unhinging the door of 1920s idealism, fully displaying the failings of the small town. While the village was often upheld as a pillar of moral fortitude, existing on Jeffersonian idealism long ago lost in the city, Lewis is exposing the illusion, showing, as Hilfer states, that "the town is a frontier outpost that has lost its vigor and its contact with nature without gaining culture" (161). The decline of the small town is symbolic of the stalling out of the American Dream. Instead of continuing the work of the pioneer, moving forward towards a better life, the town has stopped completely. Worse, having stopped, it has failed to turn its expansionist energy into a spiritual growth, but rather stagnates, turning on the representatives of the ideology that brought it to its current state.

This stalling is brought to life by the Champ Perrys, pioneers in the purest sense, as described by Mrs. Perry: "When Champ and I came here we teamed-it with an ox-cart from Sauk Center to Gopher Prairie, and there was nothing here then but a stockade and a few soldiers and some log cabins" (152). She provides details without glorifying the hard life of the pioneer. "In my day the boys learned to farm by honest sweating, and every gal could cook, or her ma learned her how across her knee!" (153). But those days are gone, as is the initiative of the Champ Perrys. Champ now trudges through jobs of diminishing importance and his wife is no longer open to change. "I don't see any need for dance-halls. Dancing isn't what it was, anyway. We used to dance modest, and we had just as much fun as all these young folks do now with their terrible Turkey Trots and hugging and all" (153). Mrs. Perry is evoking the same sense of nostalgia that led to the idealized misconception of the small town.

While Lewis is showing how the village has failed to maintain, if indeed it ever possessed, the noble, idyllic lifestyle of the pioneer, he is also dispelling the myth that the small town enjoys a way of life somehow more satisfying than that of the city. It was commonly thought that village life was a wholesome alternative to life in the corrupted city. As Hilfer points out, Lewis is showing how "[t]he 1920 small town differs from the city mostly in negative terms: it has the same standardized products but with less a variety, the same social and political orthodoxies but with less dissent" (161). And it has the power to snuff out any dissent, as Carol discovers when her brief alliances with village outsiders meet with abrupt and often unpleasant ends.

Carol's short-lived alliances with members of the town are few, often extinguished because the people turn out to be different from the way that Carol initially perceived them. Such is the case with Vida Sherwin and Guy Pollock, who appear to make up the artistic populace of Gopher Prairie. Vida is the cheerleader to Carol's reform efforts, but her true nature conforms to the town. Similarly, Guy Pollock, who is certainly one of the town's more literate citizens, has little interest in actual reform, as Carol soon discovers. "She realized that he was not a mystery, as she had excitedly believed; not a romantic messenger from the world outside on whom she could count for escape. He belonged to Gopher Prairie, absolutely" (220). Carol's only true ally in wanting real reform is Miles Bjornstam, "that damn lazy big-mouthed calamity-howler that ain't satisfied with the way we run things" (133). It is Miles alone who shares Carol's view of Gopher Prairie and he is quick to set her straight on how things stand. "Miss Sherwin's trying to repair the holes in this barnacle-covered ship of a town by keeping busy bailing out the water. And Pollock tries to repair it by reading poetry to the crew! Me, I want to yank it up on the ways, and fire the poor bum of a shoemaker that built it so it sails crooked, and have it rebuilt right, from the keel up!" (134). Miles is the most important of Carol's connections, for as we will see, he represents the last link to the natural frontier and the only true resistance to what the town has made of that ideal.

Carol has two other acquaintances of importance, though they both lack the strength and conviction of Miles. The first is Fern Mullins, a schoolteacher new to town who displays an even larger dose of innocence than Carol. She is quickly run out of town by a lynch mob led by Widow Bogart for corrupting Bogart's son Cy. It is universally acknowledged in Gopher Prairie that Cy is the worst kid in town, but Widow Bogart represents the solid wall of Puritanism in Gopher Prairie, a wall no one is willing to scale for an outsider. Carol realizes the extent of the town's united front; she also realizes that the issue is not as much a matter of right and wrong as it is a matter of who can uphold the appearance of being right and righteous. Carol notes that there is "not one man in town to carry out their pioneer tradition of superb and contemptuous cursing . . . not one dramatic frontiersman to thunder, with fantastic and fictional oaths, 'What are you hinting at? What are you snickering at? What facts have you? What are these unheard-of sins you condemn so much—and like so well?'" (401). There is no one to make a case

for Fern, and if there were he or she would not be heard above the howling of the wolves, circling for the kill. Carol slowly and uneasily realizes that she is only spared Fern's fate by her town citizenship-through-marriage and may in fact be responsible for the expulsion of Fern. "Wasn't it because they had been prevented by her caste from bounding on her own trail that they were howling at Fern?" (402).

Carol also is somewhat responsible for the expulsion of Erik Valborg, her most intimate acquaintance, though of less significance to the novel than Miles. Erik is an effeminate youth who works in the tailor shop, arriving in town almost immediately after Miles's departure. Carol and Erik have a brief romance, though more in spirit than in physical reality. Carol is drawn to Erik not because of his own attributes, but because he is the opposite of the average town male. He is gentle, effeminate and artistic in appearance and seems immune to the town's scorn. And, most important, he reads. But ultimately he is just a hollow shell of what Carol has been searching for and she represents to him a teacher who will guide him to the correct path of learning. Their relationship is based on their respective quests for something concrete and on the absence of the real prize. "I don't want to play," says Erik. "I want to make something beautiful" (362).

In Erik's dream Carol recognizes her own quest and she urges him forward before he makes the same mistakes she did, explaining to him the empty promise of the prairie. "It's one of our favorite American myths that broad plains necessarily make broad minds, and high mountains make high purpose. I thought that myself, when I first came to the prairie" (363). She tries to convey to Erik the need for escape, an escape she too will attempt when she flees to Washington. "Young man, go East and grow up with the revolution! Then perhaps you may come back and tell Sam and Nat and me what to do with the land we've been clearing" (363). But Carol knows at this point, has an inkling for what will later be confirmed for her, that the dream does not exist in the East or on the prairie, but only, truly, in the hearts and imagination of the people. Carol and Erik are weak characters with overinflated dreams and their failures are, if not automatic, then sealed by their own character flaws. Erik is young and still has a chance to carve his own path, but for Carol time is up and she is soon to settle into the bath of her decomposed dreams.

Of all Lewis's characters, it is Miles Bjornstam alone who represents the strong will and independence of the pioneer, and Lewis's most biting indictment against the small town rests in his failure. Miles resists Gopher Prairie, separating himself from its small-town politics and social climate. He maintains a visage of the pioneer intellect, traveling west to round up horses, sleeping amidst the pines, remaining free of ties until he marries Bea, an action which exposes him to the town's thrusts. As Marshall points out, "[t]he romance of Miles's direct association with the open landscape of the West . . . further suggest his democratic freedom. Like Daniel Boone, an archetype of the frontiersman, Miles becomes a guide to fulfilling beauty and freedom by remaining the village model of independence. He represents the ideal of personal and social 'pursuit of happiness' which Carol seeks" (537). Miles's journeys into the frontier represent a freedom that is lost on Carol, who can only experience faint hints of this freedom on her own walks outside of the village. "Walking, usually alone, is a source of refreshment in the countryside beyond Main Street and thus seems an element of Lewis' allegory of recovering the pioneer spirit of freedom" (Marshall 533).

While Marshall is correct in equating Carol with Miles, he fails to recognize the primary difference in their searches, a difference that dooms Carol to failure while allowing Miles to escape, though not unscathed. "Appropriately, Carol meets Lewis' pioneer and immigrant Miles Bjornstam while walking the open land beyond Main Street. Both seek independence" (533). Their place of meeting is appropriate, but Carol and Miles are seeking something very different. Miles is independent. He therefore has no need to seek that out. He seems to be searching for a place to settle that will allow him to maintain his freedom. He eventually finds that in Bea and their son, and they seem content in their lives as outcasts from Gopher Prairie. But, by reveling in their shunned state and by maintaining a distance that is too great, or perhaps not great enough, Miles inadvertently destroys his family. When Bea and the baby contract typhoid, Miles is hesitant to reach out to the town for help. By the time Will is able to treat them it is too late. The final scene of Miles in town shows him trudging behind the funeral wagon, alone, forever the outcast.

It is equally incorrect to state that Carol's search is for independence. Independence, in this sense, implies a freedom from others, but Carol's dream requires other people to conform to her way of thinking. Her plan all along is to convert Gopher Prairie

into a cultural Mecca. Carol is similar to many Lewis protagonists as they are defined by Glen Love. "The fundamental Lewis hero hopes thus, through the produce of his creative endeavors . . . to assert not only his own individuality but also his participation in the social order and his commitment to the shaping of the emerging new society" (577). This is certainly true of Carol, whose dream rests on her confidence in swaying people to her point of view. Before Carol has ever heard of Gopher Prairie, she imagines the power she will be able to wield over simple-minded townsfolk. "She had found one man in the prairie village who did not appreciate her picture of winding streets and arcades, but she had assembled the town council and dramatically defeated him" (22). Ironically, her vision is painfully accurate, only her role is that of the dissident, not the great reformer.

Carol finally does escape Gopher Prairie, the only way possible: she leaves for Washington D.C. under the pretense of helping the war effort. She exists in Washington, fulfilling a small part of the dream she once had. She finds freedom there, becoming just a part of the system, lost amid and indecipherable from the many faces in the city. But the contentment is not to last and she soon realizes that her place is with her husband, back in Gopher Prairie. Carol's one true victory is that she recognizes her failure and that it is something, perhaps, upon which to build. "She had fancied that her life might make a story. She knew that there was nothing heroic or obviously dramatic in it . . . but it seemed to her that she was of some significance because she was commonplaceness, the ordinary life of the age, made articulate and protesting" (460). Her realization, much like her failure, is two fold. She had wanted too much, and perhaps it is not a crime to settle in, for within Carol there would always be some fight.

"I will go back! I will go on asking questions. I've always done it, and always failed at it, and it's all I can do. I'm going to ask Ezra Stowbody why he's opposed to the nationalization of railroads, and ask Dave Dyer why a druggist always is pleased when he's called 'doctor,' and maybe ask Mrs. Bogart why she wears a widow's veil that looks like a dead crow" (462).

The city has restored some of her resolve and she now, in a strange, nearly unrecognizable way, longs to return to Gopher Prairie, if only to resume her struggle.

Carol's return can best be explained through the dual nature of Margaret Stuhr's "Safe Middle West." Stuhr views the Middle West as a safe paradox, in which isafei has both positive and negative connotations. Interestingly, Carol falls into both definitions and her return can be evaluated from both sides. According to Stuhr, on the good side "the Middle West is 'safe' as is a comforting asylum to which one eagerly returns from chaos, secure as home, family, and inherited values are to a child" (19). While much of the turmoil in Carol's life is a direct result of her failings in Gopher Prairie, she is, finally, accepted there and her family is there. While Gopher Prairie may never represent "home" to her, it does represent a home, a place in which a family resides. The dark side of the Middle West, according to Stuhr, is that "one might also choose to remain there as a cowardly retreat from the unknown and the challenging" (19). Although Carol is not one to shy away from challenge, Gopher Prairie is an emblem of her rebellion, and it is safe in that her resistance and her failure have already existed there and the fear of a new failure is absent. She is accepted in the town and is able to view it in a new light. "The prairie was no longer empty land in the sun-glare, it was the living tawny beast which she had fought and made beautiful by fighting; and in the village streets were shadows of her desires and the sound of her marching and the seeds of mystery and greatness" (463).

In 1924, Sinclair Lewis published a sequel to *Main Street* in *The Nation*. The piece, entitled "Main Street's Been Paved!" focuses on Will Kennicott, but briefly exhibits Carol in the light of her final and total failure. Lewis has reduced Carol to "a smallish woman with horn-rimmed spectacles which made her little face seem childish, though it was a childish dubious and tired and almost timid . . . she was growing dumpy and static, and about her was an air of having lost her bloom" (255). Carol gives her opinion of the upcoming election, the real focus of the piece, stating that "she did admire La Follette . . . but just this year, with so many bank failures and all, it wasn't safe to experiment, and she thought she would vote for Coolidge; then some other time we could try change" (259). Her transformation is complete in appearance and ideology. Her dream is dead, buried so deeply that even the idea of change should be put off.

This final vision of Carol extinguishes the last vestige of hope that Carol, in her true form, could survive Gopher Prairie. Carl Van Doren, writing of her fall in *Main Street*, summed up Carol's failure: "Carol was barely superior to the village level in her gifts, except for her virtue of discontent. At the last she yielded like any classic heroine struggling against her environment. But she held, and Mr. Lewis agreed with her, that her discontent had been virtue, not crime or folly. The villain of the piece had been the dullness of Gopher Prairie" (23). Lewis does leave hope at the end of *Main Street*. Carol has fallen into a trap, led there by her own ignorance and arrogance, but she is aware of her situation and will struggle forever against it. "Main Street's Been Paved!" shows that her struggle is over; she has been devoured in the web. The true Carol is gone and with her has vanished the pioneer vision of the Middle West. The myth of the small town has been exposed and in the dust where once it stood is another broken brick on the path of the American Dream.

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"MURDERED BANQUOS OF THE FOREST": CAROLINE KIRKLAND'S ENVIRONMENTALISM

MARY DEJONG OBUCHOWSKI

Although Caroline Kirkland began and ended her life in New York, and was a well-known literary figure there, we know her best as the writer of *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* (1839), written about her experiences on the Michigan frontier in the mid-nineteenth century. This, her most important book, along with two more: *Forest Life* (1842) and *Western Clearings* (1845), established her as an early Prairie Realist as well as a keen satirist. These three books, as well as many of her magazine columns and other works, also reveal her keen appreciation of nature, and show her to be an advocate for sane and practical preservation of the forests that blanketed Michigan.

Born in 1801, Caroline Matilda Stansbury had more education than was usual for a girl of her time.¹ She went on to become a teacher and met and married William Kirkland, who was a tutor in classics at Hamilton College in New York. Together they founded a girls' school, but, infected by the prospects of the land boom in the West, they moved to Michigan, where they worked at the Detroit Female Seminary while William started acquiring acreage in Livingston County. They moved there in 1839, to found the village of Pinckney. Caroline's reading about pioneer life had left her unprepared for the primitive conditions, lack of culture among their neighbors, and general hardships of life on the frontier. Her writing from this period suggests that she approached these challenges with humor and high spirits; in fact, the recipients of her letters home found them so entertaining that they encouraged her to incorporate them into a book, which she did. The result was *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* published in 1839.

Her Eastern audiences loved the satire that targeted corrupt land speculators and politicians, oddities in the personalities and manners

of rural Michiganians, poverty and laziness among some of them, casual attitudes toward other people's property, and problems with health and sanitation. Although Kirkland wrote under the name Mrs. Mary Clavers and changed the names of her characters, the residents of Pinckney (who probably had not read the book) did not take kindly to the idea that she had made fun of them. In her second book, *Forest Life*, she announces that she is not dealing with actual people, but with types, and although her satire is no less pointed, it appears less personal and more directed at class attitudes. Whether or not her neighbors fully forgave her is open to question, but what sent the Kirklands back to New York in 1843 was bankruptcy, at least partly because of dishonest land speculators.

There, William began editing magazines, and Caroline resumed teaching and writing. Her final Michigan book, *Western Clearings*, appeared in 1845. In 1846, William drowned unexpectedly. He had suffered from impaired vision and hearing and probably stepped off from a dock while attempting to board a ferry. Caroline was devastated, not only emotionally but financially. She took over one of his editorships but left it for another, at the *Union Magazine of Literature and Art*. Not only did she solicit and edit fiction, nonfiction, art, and music, but she contributed an article, book reviews, and an editorial column to every issue for two years. The *Union* sent her to Europe to write a series of travel columns, and when she returned, she found that she had been made co-editor, and her colleague essentially had taken over her responsibilities. She continued to work for the magazine for a while, but then turned elsewhere, contributing to other periodicals and to annual Gift Books and writing more books of her own, including two volumes of her European travel columns, gatherings of essays, and a biography of George Washington.

In all of her writing we see a distinct appreciation of nature. Almost all of her editorial columns in the *Union* mention the season and either its weather or its outdoor beauties or both. Her reviews of poetry and books on art frequently contain references to the accuracy or sensitivity of the author regarding his depictions of nature. *Holidays Abroad: or, Europe from the West* (1849), the record of her travels, contains abundant descriptions of the countryside, mountains, oceans, and other natural settings. There she compares some of the more spectacular natural wonders, such as waterfalls, unfavorably to those on this side of the Atlantic. Other late books, such as *The Evening Book; or, Fireside Talk on Morals and Manners*, with

Sketches of Western Life (1852), *Autumn Hours and Fireside Reading* (1854), and *Personal Memoirs of Washington* (1857) are also characterized by passages on natural phenomena, for example, the seasons, landscapes, and weather. Such praise was not uncommon in mid-nineteenth century prose, particularly among Romantic writers such as James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. However, the Michigan books contain not only her greatest admiration for the environment but also her vehement advocacy for it.

In *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* Kirkland records the experiences of the Clavers family as they first explore and then move to the town she calls Montacute (in reality, Pinckney, Michigan). Their adventures turn out to be very different from what they had anticipated in terms of comfortable lodgings for travelers, suitable housing for settlers, socially adept neighbors, educational offerings for their children. The differences between expectation and reality supply abundant material for satire. One matter about which she remains straightforward is her appreciation of the rural landscape, though she does not neglect to poke fun at herself for her city habits. In this book and in *Forest Life*, she often states her happiness, even ecstasy, at the sight and scent of Michigan flora. In *A New Home*, she recounts that on her first trip to Montacute, she "picked upwards of twenty varieties of wild-flowers—some of them of rare and delicate beauty;—and sure I am, that if I had succeeded in inspiring my companion with one spark of my own floral enthusiasm, one hundred miles of travel would have occupied a week's time" (5). She saves the passage from sentimentality by adding details of becoming stuck in a mud hole.

She leaves another enthusiastic passage that describes her drive through the country on a business errand: she sees "three lovely lakes, each a lonely gem set deep in masses of emerald green, which shut it in completely from all but its own bright beauty." She leaves the wagon to pick some flowers, but then being dressed like an urban person, she says, "I began to sink most inconveniently. Silly thin shoes again. Nobody should ever go one mile from home in thin shoes in this country, but old Broadway habits are *so* hard to forget." She loses one shoe, to the delight of men mowing fields nearby (73). Nevertheless, she finds the trip salutary for the family, saying that the children "were in raptures with the beautiful flowers, and the lake" (74). She regards travel even as a healthful exercise. In chapter ten of *Forest Life* she

records a trip which Mrs. Clavers takes to restore her strength following a bout of the "ague" (I, 82).

Not all of her experiences were aesthetically pleasing. She qualifies her statement that "One may observe, *en passant*, that ours is a rare region for the study of entomology," by noting the quantities of flies, midges, and mosquitoes that plague them (I, 143-4). She admits to terror at snakes and toads (*A New Life* 60). Early in their stay, when Mr. Clavers was required to be away on business, she decided to move into a new dwelling on a warm evening. There, with three children to superintend, she would not put out the fire, but left both doors open to abate the heat. Thus vulnerable to whatever lurked outside, she was terror-stricken, and says,

If I could live a century, I think, that night will never fade from my memory. Excessive fatigue made it impossible to avoid falling asleep, yet the fear of being devoured by wild beasts, or poisoned by rattlesnakes, caused me to start up after every nap with sensations of horror and alarm, which could hardly have been increased by the actual occurrence of all I dreaded. Many wretched hours passed in this manner. At length sleep fairly overcame fear, and we were awakened only by a wild storm of wind and rain which drove in upon us and completely wetted every thing within reach. (43)

Still, she felt strongly about the preservation of landscape and particularly of trees, and she records early in *A New Home* an episode in which she and a speculator discuss ideas for planning the new town. She says,

The public square, the water lots, the value *per foot* of this undulating surface, clothed as it then was with burr-oaks, and haunted by the red deer; these were almost too much for my gravity. I gave my views, however, as to the location of the grand esplanade, and particularly requested that the fine oaks which now graced it might be spared when the clearing process commenced.

The "land-shark" appeared to concur, but later she reports with regret, "I believe these very trees were the first 'Banquos' of Montacute" (11).

Few writers of this period extended their love of nature to the point of criticizing the frontier settlers for their lack of appreciation of its beauties and for viewing the landscape as simply a means to material gain. Exceptions include the Easterners Lydia H. Sigourney and Margaret Fuller.² Fuller's travels to the Midwest provoked her to comments similar to those of Kirkland on the single-minded focus of pioneers on accu-

mulating land and money.³ Further, she refers to *Macbeth* as Kirkland does, although in a slightly different context, comparing the development of the land to "warlike invasion," and saying that in the future,

. . . I trust by reverent faith to woo the mighty meaning of the scene, perhaps to foresee the law by which a new order, a new poetry, is to be evoked from this chaos, and with a curiosity as ardent, but not so selfish, as that of *Macbeth*, to call up the apparitions of future kings from the strange ingredients of the witch's cauldron. Thus I will not grieve that all the noble trees are gone already from this island [Manitou Island] to feed this cauldron. . . .⁴

In *Forest Life*, Kirkland takes the theme of advocacy of environmental preservation further. Although she applauds the settling of the wilderness, she deplors those who clear cut the forests for farmland and then sell the property and move west yet again, saying:

These have indeed the true spirit of pioneers, and their peculiarity of taste has done much to expedite the rapid settlement of the wilds. They purchase a lot or two of "government land;" build a log-house, fence a dozen acres or so, plough half of them, girdle the trees, and then sell out to a new comer; one whose less resolute spirit has perhaps quailed a little before the difficulties of the untouched forest. The pioneer is then ready for a new purchase, a new clearing, and a new sale. (I, 27-28)

The process in girdling involves cutting a strip of bark that circles the trunk of a tree, thus killing it. Kirkland mourns the destruction of entire forests by this means. Although she sympathizes with the necessity of clearing farmland, she deplors the apparent need to clear cut a whole area, exclaiming,

Would I could hope that the fine remnants of the original forest that still remain to us, were to be allowed foothold on this roomy earth. They too must fall ere long before the "irresistible influence of public opinion." The Western settler looks upon these earth-born columns and the verdant roofs and towers which they support, as "heavy timber;" nothing more. He sees in them only obstacles which must be removed, at whatever sacrifice, to make way for mills, stores, blacksmiths' shops,—perhaps churches,—certainly taverns. "Clearing" is his daily thought and nightly dream; and so literally does he act upon this guiding idea, that not one tree, not so much as a bush, of natural growth, must be suffered to cumber the ground, or he fancies his work incomplete. The very

notion of advancement, of civilization, of prosperity, seems inseparably connected with the total extirpation of the forest. (I, 43)

When the good-hearted Claverses loaned neighbors a piece of their property, the tenants unnecessarily cut down a shade tree that Mary Clavers particularly loved (I, 46).

Kirkland also fails to understand the impulse to make roads straight, pushing without regard through undulations of the landscape and lovely vistas (I, 127-8). In this book, she praises the "oak-openings," the sunny areas among clusters of oaks that became so famous in descriptions of nineteenth-century southern Michigan. She offers the idea that soil conditions determine the nature of flora in a particular area. Similarly, she comments on the virtues of the marshes around Pinckney, explaining, "The other 'feature' to which I alluded—a very wide and flat one—the prodigious amount of wet prairie or 'marsh'—the produce of millions of springs which percolate in every direction this diluvial mass—is said to promise magnificent resources for—our great-grandchildren" (132). Here, in her satirical manner, she indicates her awareness that such advantages as these environmental characteristics offer are vulnerable to the ravages of progress.

There are many more passages in which Kirkland renders nature as beautiful, benign as well as hostile, and beneficent, an American treasure about which she could boast. Such praise was not unusual in nineteenth-century prose. However, in her awareness of its vulnerability, of the human tendency to consume without concern for the future, of the need to preserve some of its advantages for our children and grandchildren, she establishes herself clearly as an environmentalist, an unusual stance among mid-nineteenth-century writers in the Midwest.

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NOTES

¹Biographical material here and elsewhere comes mainly from William S. Osborne's *Caroline M. Kirkland* (NY: Twayne, 1972). He, like other biographers of Kirkland, acknowledges a doctoral dissertation by Langley C. Keyes, "Caroline M. Kirkland: A Pioneer in American Realism" (Harvard, 1935), and a master's thesis by Mrs. Louise N. Knudsen, "Caroline Kirkland, Pioneer" (Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science, 1934).

²Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 7.

³Margaret Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes in 1843*, rpt., ed. Susan Belasco Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 12.

⁴*Summer*, 18.

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