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*Jim Tully*

*by members of*

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*guest editor*

JEFFREY SWENSON

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To the memory of  
Joseph J. Wydeven

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The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature  
congratulates

## **Robert Dunne**

Winner of the 2014 MidAmerica Award for  
distinguished contributions to the  
study of Midwestern literature

and

## **Naomi Long Madgett**

Winner of the 2014 Mark Twain Award for  
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These awards will be presented at noon on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2014 at the  
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Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan,  
May 8-10, 2014.

For registration information, go to the  
“annual symposium” link at [ssml.org](http://ssml.org)

**Call for papers** for a panel on Fashion in Midwestern Literature and Culture for the 2014 SSML symposium in May of 2014 and for possible publication in a fashion issue of *Midwestern Miscellany*: papers on fiction, film, drama, poetry, texts of any kind, and/or authors that deal with fashion in Midwestern literature and culture. Contact [Marcia-Noe@utc.edu](mailto:Marcia-Noe@utc.edu) with questions or ideas; send brief proposals for the 2014 Fashion in Midwestern Literature and Culture panel to Marcia Noe at the above email address or to 535 Elinor Street Chattanooga TN 37405 by January 15, 2014. Feel free to contact Marcia by phone at (423) 266-9316 if you want to discuss an idea for a paper.

## RECENT MIDWESTERN FICTION AND POETRY

### FICTION

- Airgood, Ellen. *South of Superior*. Riverhead Books, 2011. [Michigan]  
Attenberg, Jamie. *The Middlesteins*. Grand Central, 2012. [Chicagoland]  
Baker, Ellen. *I Gave My Heart to Know This*. Random House, 2011. [Wisconsin]  
Beard, Jo Ann. *In Zanesville*. Little, Brown, 2011. [Illinois]  
Berg, Elizabeth. *Tapestry of Fortunes*. Random House, 2013. [Minnesota]  
Campbell, Bonnie Jo. *Once Upon a River*. Norton, 2011. [Michigan]  
Coake, Christopher. *You Came Back*. Grand Central, 2012. [Ohio]  
Eugenides, Jeffrey. *The Marriage Plot*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. [Michigan]  
Franzen, Jonathan. *Freedom*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. [Minnesota]  
Gass, William H. *Middle C*. Knopf, 2013. [Ohio]  
Harbach, Chad. *The Art of Fielding*. Little, Brown, 2011. [Wisconsin]  
Harrison, Jim. *The River Swimmer*. Grove, 2013. [Michigan]  
Lasser, Scott. *Say Nice Things about Detroit*. Norton, 2012. [Michigan]  
Moore, Edward Kelsey. *The Supremes at Earl's All-You-Can-Eat*. Knopf, 2013 [Indiana]  
Rhodes, David. *Jewelweed*. Milkweed, 2013. [Wisconsin]  
Rieke, Ron. *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works*. Wayne State UP, 2013 [Michigan]  
Roy, Lori. *Until She Comes Home*. Dutton, 2013 [Detroit]  
Somerville, Patrick. *This Bright River*. Little, Brown, 2012. [Wisconsin]  
Thompson, Jean. *The Year We Left Home*. Simon & Schuster, 2011. [Iowa]

### POETRY

- Heller, Janet Ruth. *Folk Concert: Changing Times*. Anaphora 2012.  
Kloefkorn, William. *Swallowing the Soap*. U of Nebraska, 2010.  
Knoepfle, John. *Shadows and Starlight*. Indian Paintbrush Poets, 2012.  
Radavich, David. *The Countries We Live In*. Main Street Rag Publishing, 2013.  
Stillwell, Mary K. *Fallen Angels*. Finishing Line, 2013.

## PREFACE

While he is relatively unknown today, in the thirties Jim Tully (1886-1947) could count himself as a minor celebrity in Hollywood—he worked as a press agent for Charlie Chaplin and later as a celebrity reporter—and certainly as a successful novelist. A son of Irish immigrants, Tully was born in St. Marys, Ohio, near Wapakoneta in Auglaize County. After his mother died in 1892 when he was six, Tully was sent to an orphanage in Cincinnati because his father couldn't afford to take care of him. By the time he was twelve, Tully had left the orphanage to live on the road and rail. For a time, Tully took work as a chain maker, a travelling tree surgeon, and even as a boxer, but all the time he worked at becoming a writer, a dream that would come to fruition with the publication of *Emmett Lawler* in 1922. Tully would write for the next twenty years, pulling from his experiences of growing up poor and Irish in rural Ohio, or from his many adventures as a “road kid” or hobo, a boxer, a circus laborer, and his time working in Hollywood. Tully's terse prose seemed to pour forth from calloused, injured fingers, and his hard-boiled style suited his subject: the prisoner on a chain gang, the punch-drunk boxer, the prostitute, the hardscrabble drifter. H.L. Mencken once said, “If Tully were a Russian, read in translation, all the Professors would be hymning him. He has all of Gorky's capacity for making vivid the miseries of poor and helpless men, and in addition he has a humor that no Russian could conceivably have.”

For all his success in his lifetime, until recently Tully was remembered only by scholars well-versed in Midwestern regionalism; David D. Anderson wrote some of the little scholarship available on the Ohio author. The Tully renaissance began when a customer walked into Paul Bauer's used bookstore in Akron looking for a copy of Tully's boxing novel, *The Bruiser*. Bauer had never heard of the author who had once been a chain maker in Akron, and his quest with Mark Dawidziak to find out more about the one-time road kid turned into their excellent biography, *Jim Tully: American Writer, Irish Rover, Hollywood Brawler*, published by Kent State University Press in 2011. Thanks to their efforts, Tully's books are in print for the first time in years, as Kent State University Press has published handsome facsimile editions of four of Tully's best works: *Beggars of Life*, *Circus Parade*, *The Bruiser*, and *Shanty Irish*, all edited and introduced by Bauer and Dawidziak.

The critical essays in this issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* consider some of Tully's most evocative subjects: hobos, boxers, prostitutes and Hollywood directors. Paul Bauer and Mark Dawidziak have been kind enough to provide a short biographical introduction to Tully's life. In "Girls Gone Wrong: Whiteness and the Economy of Desire in Jim Tully's *Ladies in the Parlor*," Keith Wilhite considers how Tully's most controversial novel—one about prostitutes in a Chicago brothel—challenged conventional black-and-white dichotomies of virtue and vice in the '30s. In "The Polyphonic Boxcar: The Hobo in Jim Tully's *Beggars of Life*," John Lennon asks us to consider how Tully's hobo narratives contain an overtly political message in support of the underclass. Willard Greenwood, in "Jim Tully's *The Bruiser* as Boxing Americana," considers how Tully's *The Bruiser* skillfully captures boxing tropes that still resonate in American arts and culture, even as he develops a unique, almost philosophical boxing protagonist in Shane Rory. My own essay, "The Chosen and the Self-Made: The Conflicted American Dream in Jim Tully's *Jarnegan*," examines Tully's complex relationship with Hollywood and the American dream as presented in his lone Hollywood novel.



## AN INTRODUCTION TO JIM TULLY

PAUL J. BAUER AND MARK DAWIDZIAK

Asked by George Jean Nathan to summarize his literary philosophy, Jim Tully gave the celebrated critic and editor a typically direct and uncompromising response: “My belief is that anything that has been lived should be written about without equivocation.”<sup>1</sup> The fourteen books Tully saw published between 1922 and 1942 demonstrate how fiercely he lived up to this standard.

Although largely forgotten today, Tully was a literary star of the Roaring Twenties, focusing primarily on the American underclass. Readers were fascinated by his raw accounts of hobos, carnival workers, con artists, drifters, prostitutes, grifters, and boxers. “He constantly exposes us to those brutal realities and inconvenient truths often scrubbed clean by history, but what makes this a universal and transcendent experience is that he does this with an unerring eye for detail and with a great capacity for compassion,” Ken Burns observed in his foreword to the 2011 biography *Jim Tully: American Writer, Irish Rover, Hollywood Brawler*.

While his more controversial books like *Ladies in the Parlor* (1935) ran into censorship issues, Tully’s novels were both critically well-received and commercially successful. Author and journalist Frank Scully called Tully “the leader (and the founder) of the hard-boiled school of writing.”<sup>2</sup> It was H.L. Mencken, however, who would become Tully’s greatest champion. “If Tully were a Russian, read in translation, all the Professors would be hymning him,” Mencken wrote. “He has all of Gorky’s capacity for making vivid the miseries of poor and helpless men, and in addition he has a humor that no Russian could conceivably have.”<sup>3</sup>

The years of poverty and struggle Tully had to overcome to achieve this success may qualify him as the greatest long shot in

American literature. Writer-director John Sayles had Tully's early life in mind when, in his foreword to the Kent State University Press reprint of Tully's *Shanty Irish*, he declared: "That Jim Tully wrote at all was a miracle; that he wrote so well is a gift to the world" (xv).

Tully was born on June 3, 1886, near St. Marys, Ohio. He was the fifth child born to James Dennis and Bridget "Bidly" Marie Lawler Tully, an Irish immigrant ditchdigger and his wife. Tully enjoyed a relatively happy but impoverished childhood until the death of his mother in 1892. Unable to care for him, his father sent him to St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum in Cincinnati. He remained there for six years, learning to read and write. Years later he recalled first reading William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, and Oliver Goldsmith at the orphanage.

In 1901, at the age of fourteen, he hopped on a train and began six years of wandering the United States, sometimes leaving the road to work at chain factories or for small circuses in the South. What further education he acquired came in the hobo camps, boxcars, railroad yards, and public libraries scattered across the country. Frequenting libraries, he discovered such authors as Maxim Gorky, John Masefield, Honore de Balzac, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and significantly, the American writers Mark Twain and Jack London.

When he reluctantly concluded that the road was just another dead end, he made his way by freight car to Kent, Ohio, to work in a chain factory, later following this with stints as a professional boxer and arborist. He also began to write, his first articles appearing in 1910 in the *Davey Tree Surgeon's Bulletin*. There were failed attempts to become a reporter for the *Akron Press* and the *Akron Beacon Journal*, but several poems were published in the local newspapers (the first, "On Keats' Grave," published June 27, 1911, in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*). Eight months before this poem appeared, he had married Florence Bushnell of Kent. A son, Alton, was born on August 3, 1911. A daughter, Trilby Jeanne, was born on November 13, 1917.

Tully moved to Hollywood in 1912, where he began writing in earnest. *Emmett Lawler*, the semi-autobiographical novel he worked on for about ten years, was published by Harcourt, Brace in 1922. The book received generally positive reviews but did little to improve Tully's financial situation. In February 1924, he went to work for Charlie Chaplin, staying at the comedian's studio for a year and a half. During this time, he wrote what would be his second published book, *Beggars of Life*, a memoir of his six years as a road kid. A play version,

adapted by Maxwell Anderson, premiered in 1925. A young James Cagney got his first big acting break playing the character based on Tully. A film version, directed by William Wellman and starring Richard Arlen, Louise Brooks and Wallace Beery, appeared in 1928.

The success of *Beggars of Life* allowed Tully to leave Chaplin's studio and devote himself full time to writing. His literary career took two distinct paths. He became one of the first reporters to cover Hollywood. As a freelancer he was not constrained by the studios and wrote about Hollywood celebrities in ways that they did not always find agreeable. For these pieces, rather tame by current standards, he became known as the most-hated man in Hollywood—a title he relished.

Less lucrative but closer to his heart were the books he wrote about his life on the road and the American underclass. Among the grittiest of these works are *Beggars of Life*, *Circus Parade* (1927) and *Shadows of Men* (1930). With *Shanty Irish* (1928) and *Blood on the Moon* (1931), these works formed the five-book cycle that Tully hoped would be grouped as "the Underworld Edition." *Shanty Irish*, which puts the focus on the Tully and Lawler families, is considered the first book to address seriously the Irish-American immigrant experience. Tully said that each book in the cycle depicts "a dramatic phase of a man's life or family, an Irish family, the small prison, the road and the circus." *Blood on the Moon*, he said, deals "with my adjustment in the social scheme, via the ring and the road."<sup>4</sup>

Written between *Beggars of Life* and *Circus Parade*, *Jarnegan* (1926), is considered the first novel to target Hollywood hypocrisies, beginning a literary tradition that would grow to include Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* and Elmore Leonard's *Get Shorty*. While *Jarnegan* did not endear him to movie insiders, Tully was far from friendless in Hollywood. Close pals included W.C. Fields, Lon Chaney, Erich von Stroheim, and Frank Capra. Tully made headlines in February 1930 when he was attacked in the landmark Brown Derby restaurant by an angry John Gilbert, the fading matinee idol savaged in one of Tully's *Vanity Fair* profiles. Tully knocked him unconscious with one punch, then was recruited by MGM to co-star in Gilbert's next film, *Way for a Sailor*. Gilbert, Beery, and Tully played three seafaring buddies in the early talkie directed by Sam Wood (*A Night at the Opera*, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*).

While visiting Ireland and England, Tully collected material for his 1930 travel book, *Beggars Abroad* (1930), and was welcomed

into the homes of George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells. Crossing the English Channel, he visited James Joyce in Paris, discussing the Irish writer's *Work in Progress* (published as *Finnegan's Wake*).

Divorced from Florence in 1923, Tully married Margaret R. "Marna" Meyers in January of 1925. The marriage was a tempestuous one, and their separations and reconciliations made headlines around the US. Following his divorce in 1930, Tully met Myrtle Zwetow; the couple wed on June 26, 1933. Despite declining sales of his work and the anguish of seeing his son sent to prison, this marriage lasted until his death.

Hoping to revive his career, Tully wrote *Ladies in the Parlor*, a 1935 novel about prostitutes; the book was widely banned. *The Bruiser*, released the following year, despite being hailed by Jack Dempsey and others as one of the finest novels of the ring, also failed to reverse Tully's declining fortunes. Tully's next attempt at a comeback, *Biddy Brogan's Boy* (1942), was edited by the legendary Maxwell Perkins for Scribner's. The autobiographical novel sold poorly, and Tully's last years were marked by crippling health problems, financial concerns, and worries about Alton. The iron constitution that had carried him through so many difficult years began to break down. The last of his books, *A Dozen and One* (1943), was a collection of profiles (including Chaplin, Mencken, Dempsey, Clark Gable, and Diego Rivera). Tully looked much older than his sixty-one years when he died on June 22, 1947. By the 1960s, none of his books was in print.

Kent, Ohio, and Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jim Tully. Letter to George Derby. Feb. 11, 1930. George Jean Nathan Collection. Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Scully. "Jim Tully." *Scribner's Magazine*. (Aug. 1937): 51.

<sup>3</sup> H. L. Mencken, ii. Blurb opposite title page of *Shanty Irish*. New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1928.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Tully. Letter to H. L. Mencken. No date (about Oct., 1930). Henry Louis Mencken Papers. Manuscript and Archives Division. New York Public Library. New York, NY.

GIRLS GONE WRONG: WHITENESS AND THE  
ECONOMY OF DESIRE IN JIM TULLY'S  
*LADIES IN THE PARLOR*

KEITH WILHITE

*The economy of desire—of exchange—is man's business.*  
—Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market" (1985)

In 1911, reporter, novelist, and Hollywood writer Reginald Wright Kauffman published *The Girl That Goes Wrong*, a quasi-ethnographic study targeting the scourge of prostitution in American cities. Kauffman and his wife had spent time living among "public women" and documenting the abusive conditions they endured in working-class neighborhoods from New York and Boston to Chicago, Minneapolis, and Denver. Their research resulted in the fifteen "black biographies" presented in *The Girl That Goes Wrong*, a collection intended as both a deterrent and a call to action (1). In keeping with his socialist ideals, Kauffman casts blame on the economic systems and institutions that trap women within the sex trade, and his introduction impresses upon readers the scope and severity of the issue. "From the most conservative accounts attainable," he claims, "it is safe to say that, in all of our large American cities and most of our small ones, there is one prostitute to every one hundred and sixty of the population—men, women, and children" (1-2). For readers uninspired by numbers, he also paints a sinister portrait of the prowling "trader" who, "looking for slaves" among the hungry and impoverished, forces young women into the trade of prostitution (10). If statistics and the threat of "white slavery" seem too distant, Kauffman implores skeptical readers to remember that nothing less is at stake than "your own daughters and sons, . . . your own sister, your own sweethearts, your own body and soul" (2).

Despite Kauffman's earnest attempt to elucidate the social and economic contexts of prostitution, the stories in *Goes Wrong* typi-

cally turn on a character flaw or morally dubious decision that casts the young woman as the culpable party in her own fall from grace. To be sure, indulgent or indifferent parents, scoundrels, and traders often pave the way, but a perceived failing of feminine virtue expedites the girl's misfortune. Among Kauffman's "black biographies," one finds "The Girl That Was Bad," "The Girl That Studied Art," "The Girl That Was Romantic," and "The Girl That Was Weak." In the case of "The Girl That Went to See," the eponymous figure lives in San Francisco and is betrayed by her "inquiring mind and an adventurous heart" (100), which leads her "to see" Chinatown and to fall irrevocably into opium addiction and sexual slavery. Assuming the story is true, and Kauffman vouches for the authenticity of all the sketches, what lesson can readers deduce? Beware the "lure" of the East perhaps (98), but above all beware the hazards of a girl's "inquiring mind." In most of Kauffman's profiles, a troubled or ambitious woman makes a "weak" decision that confines her within an abusive relationship or a life of penury in which the trade of prostitution offers her the most viable option for survival.

Almost a quarter century later, Jim Tully's *Ladies in the Parlor* (1935) hit bookstands—briefly—and it is, in short, the anti-*Girl That Goes Wrong*. Although nothing directly links these two contemporaries, Tully and Kauffman were both novelists and reporters who shared a working familiarity with Hollywood and film culture, and for a time each man, in his own way, was interested in the politics and economics of prostitution. Far removed from Kauffman's affluent beginnings and Harvard-educated intellectualism, however, Tully grew up poor, spent time on the road as a hobo and a boxer, and his writings reflect a political savvy honed by years of living at the margins and on the lower rungs of society. Tully writes in the idiom of the street, neither finessing its realities nor indicting its inhabitants for moralizing purposes, and so it is not surprising that his unvarnished account of brothels and prostitution ran afoul of the establishment. Shortly after its publication, *Ladies in the Parlor* was banned for obscenity and panned by critics.<sup>1</sup>

As reported in the *Times*, New York Special Sessions Magistrate Jonah Goldstein ruled that the novel violated decency laws by "emphasizing dirt in the raw," adding that he found the text "barren of any effort to treat [its] subject in a literary way" ("Tully Book 'Indecent'" L+ 17). Although by today's standards Tully's frank depictions of scheming, prostitution, and women's sexuality hardly

seem lascivious, the novel certainly would have presented a challenge to readers familiar with morality tales about “girls gone wrong.” *Ladies in the Parlor* tells the story of Leora Blair, a young, exquisitely beautiful, self-made woman whose discerning negotiations of her sexual exchange value facilitate her rise from poverty to relative prominence. In 1930, following her mother’s death and the successful swindling of two lovers, Leora abandons her railroad town along the Ohio River and moves to Chicago where, rechristened Leora La Rue, she becomes a willful prostitute—the bane of white slavery narratives—in the service of Mother Rosenbloom.

As the moniker implies, Mother Rosenbloom offers a subversive take on the matriarchal figure: she displays genuine care for Leora and the other women in her employ even as she peddles their services “to the elite of the city” (56). Leora is the protagonist, but Tully surrounds her story with sketches of Rosenbloom’s “ladies,” and while some of these vignettes draw on conventions of troubled or abusive pasts, collectively they challenge the figure of the morally compromised woman ensnared by traders. In other words, Tully’s novel provides a corrective to Progressive Era discourses about single women in urban spaces, sexual weakness, and the pervasive threat of white slavery. More to the point, Tully challenges the black-and-white delineations between vice and virtue that informed Kauffman’s “black biographies” and the morals crusade of the 1910s and 1920s.

This article will neither convince readers that *Ladies in the Parlor* is a great novel nor imply that there was a conspiracy afoot to sabotage Tully’s career in 1935, but I am suggesting that this moderately risqué narrative warrants a critical look as an occluded portrait of modern female subjectivity. Leora’s embrace of her sexual exchange value intersects with two interrelated issues in the Progressive and post-Progressive eras: the racial subtext of anti-prostitution crusades and the shifting status of women within consumer culture. I will read Tully’s novel in the context of Chicago’s racially segregated, “post-reform” urban geography and alongside changing theories regarding sexuality and the “commodified” body. Although Magistrate Goldstein banned the novel due to its unliterary focus on “dirt in the raw,” I argue that Leora Blair’s sexuality was both too racy and too “race-y” for 1930s readers.

*Ladies in the Parlor* offers a provocative, though ultimately incomplete, portrait of a woman’s sexual liberation that also subtly disrupts “the reassignment of the sexual stigma of prostitution to

African-American women” in the early twentieth century (Mumford 113). In effect, Tully writes a “white” version of Kauffman’s “black biographies,” muddling a line between virtue and vice that had become entrenched in the racial politics of urban geography. The novel’s radical potential lies in Tully’s willingness to blur boundaries of social respectability and in Leora’s ability, for a time, to capitalize on the “man’s business” of sexual “exchange” (Irigaray 188). Although the end of the novel re-inscribes Leora within a patriarchal “family economy,” her story also unsettles prevailing notions about race, class, and the contested commodity of women’s sexuality in ways that proved unfit for print.<sup>2</sup>

“WELL AND WHITE AGAIN:”  
THE RACIAL SUBTEXT OF VICE REFORM

Upon an initial reading, race may seem a remote concern for *Ladies in the Parlor*, but it serves as an essential adjunct and undercurrent to Tully’s overt interests in desire and the economics of exchange. Race surfaces through the recurring references to the health and implicit monetary value of Leora’s “white” body and in the way the narrative breaks down simplistic, black-and-white dichotomies of sexual morality. In addition, I would offer that the sometimes elusive or subtextual nature of race in the novel creates a more nuanced engagement with the repressed racial ideologies that informed social and political responses to prostitution and white slavery in the early 1900s. Congress passed the Mann Act, or the “White-Slave Traffic Act,” in 1910 to address a growing national concern “that large-scale rings of ‘white slavers’ were preying upon young women in the nation’s cities” (Langum 4). Although fears of widespread sexual slavery did not bear out—not in America at least—the Mann Act proved flexible in the hands of lawmakers.<sup>3</sup>

According to David Langum, the statute gave federal prosecutors wide latitude “to target specific defendants, such as gangsters and con men,” but the law was also wielded “as a club against blacks who dated white women and defendants who espoused unpopular political beliefs” (9). While the Mann Act focused on forced prostitution at the hands of “white slavers,” in practice the law most often concentrated its efforts on noncommercial sex acts between consensual lovers. As Brian Donovan explains, Progressive Era discourse about “white slavery reveals different racial ideologies that made complex



connections among whiteness, sexual morality, class, and citizenship” (56). In other words, reform legislation helped to establish a correspondence between virtue and whiteness, facilitating the class and racial coding of sexual immorality that Tully’s novel implicitly confronts and, at times, subverts.

In *Ladies in the Parlor*, Tully acknowledges the legal context of vice reform with a brief reference to the Mann Act as Leora travels from her hometown to Chicago. At this point in the novel, Leora is juggling affairs with Dr. Farway and Dr. Haley (though each assumes he is Leora’s only lover), and both doctors pay her money for services ranging from the clerical to the sexual. After catching her husband “caressing” Leora (40), Mrs. Haley gives her seven hundred dollars to leave town, expediting a move that Leora had already been contemplating. When she sees Farway later that day, Leora explains how she had been wrongfully dismissed—“as if I’d have anything to do with [Dr. Haley]” (44)—and, quickly calculating, she tells Farway that Mrs. Haley has also threatened to expose their affair. Fearful of a scandal, Farway promises to take his young mistress to Chicago the following night. Emboldened by her successful machinations, Leora makes one more call, to Haley, relaying how his wife had discovered their relationship and that, “for [his] sake,” she would leave town and preserve his reputation. This exchange earns her an additional three hundred dollars.

As their interstate “train rushed across the Indiana fields,” Farway encourages Leora to “forget who paid [her] fare to Chicago” (50). He explains, “It may cause trouble if you talk. You see there’s a law called the Mann Act. It makes it a penitentiary offense for a man to travel across a state line with a woman not his wife” (50-51). The doctor had reason to worry, as cases analogous to his own fill the historical ledger.<sup>4</sup> Similar allusions to the Mann Act also appear in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s 1920 novel *This Side of Paradise* (226), in Raymond Chandler’s 1939 novel *The Big Sleep* (49) and, perhaps most infamously, in Vladimir Nabokov’s 1958 novel *Lolita* (150).

Although unranked among these literary classics, *Ladies in the Parlor* similarly registers a popular awareness of the law while offering an ironic comment on its application. According to Langum, “Interstate transportations of prostitutes were also prosecuted during the morals crusade of 1917 to 1928, but noncommercial cases dominated the thoughts and activities of the federal morals police” (155). In the case of Leora and the adulterous Farway, either application of

the law could apply: they are consensual though unmarried lovers engaged in an ostensibly “noncommercial” affair across state lines, but Leora would not be with Farway were it not for the money she receives as a perk of their sexual relationship.

In the years following the passage of the Mann Act, newspaper “tracts and narratives,” along with more extensive works like Kauffman’s *The Girl That Goes Wrong*, helped “to create within the popular psyche a reality of white slavery” (de Young 96). Leora’s destination, Chicago, represented a primary battlefield in the war against forced prostitution. By 1910, its status as a major population center and rising economic power, coupled with “[t]he emergence of the Chicago School of sociology” and its influence on the Chicago Vice Commission, made the city a key site for “the progressive response to prostitution” (Connelly 94).

Although prostitution may have been the commission’s focus, it stood in for a diverse range of issues related to women’s sexuality, labor, and race. According to Kevin Mumford, from the mid-1910s through the 1920s, anti-prostitution crusades increasingly intersected with issues of segregation, especially in cities like Chicago where race was a determining factor of urban geography (20-21, 27). Citing the Great Migration as a pivotal if underexplored moment of the Progressive Era, Mumford argues that the early success of reform efforts contributed to the conjoined segregation of race and vice: “By the 1920s prostitution in Chicago also relocated to African-American neighborhoods” (26). Reform efforts and residential segregation equated “whiteness” and “sexual morality” (Donovan 56), simultaneously transforming the vice of prostitution into a “black” problem. In sum, we cannot properly discuss responses to prostitution during this era without acknowledging their racial undercurrents.

One of the overt references to race in *Ladies in the Parlor* highlights Chicago’s segregated neighborhoods. Tully locates Mother Rosenbloom’s brothel “in the center of the one-time ‘restricted district,’” an area of the city that “had once known a wealthier day” (55). We learn that “Mother Rosenbloom owned four houses on the street,” and though all remain well appointed, the surrounding neighborhood “was otherwise neglected, as though the citizens were concerned with greater problems than the beauty of a neighborhood” (55). Almost in passing, the narrator notes that “Negro families had moved within a few blocks of Mother Rosenbloom. She did not complain. All creeds and colors were alike to her” (55).

The location registers the intermingling of different races and classes within Chicago's transitional spaces, but the reference also indirectly reminds readers of Leora's whiteness. Although the only African Americans inside Rosenbloom's establishment are domestic workers, the neighborhood suggests the emergence in the Progressive Era of what Mumford calls urban "interzones": geographically marginalized "areas of cultural, sexual, and social interchange" among blacks and whites (20). By selling their services in this liminal space, Leora and Rosenbloom's ladies threaten to obscure racial lines inscribed on the urban landscape by vice reform.

Well before Leora arrives in Chicago, however—indeed, before the first chapter of the novel—Tully begins to chip away at the segregation of virtue and vice. He calls attention to the blurred boundaries of "good and evil" with the epigraph from Ernest Renan, the nineteenth-century French philologist and historian whose varied and, at times, nettled views on racial equality make him an intriguing choice for Tully from a contemporary perspective.<sup>5</sup> The quotation from Renan reads: "A philosophy undoubtedly perverse has induced me to believe that good and evil, pleasure and sorrow, beauty and ugliness, reason and folly, are blended, one into [the] other, by shades as indiscernible as those on the neck of a dove" (qtd. in Tully 7).

The passage anticipates how Leora will challenge the dichotomies that governed the morals crusade, but the language also insinuates a kind of miscegenation. The "perverse" promiscuity that has "blended" such inviolable categories as "good and evil" shifts metonymically to an image of "shades" in which we cannot discern one color from the next. Like the "creeds and colors" that were all "alike to [Rosenbloom]" (55), Tully's novel delights in this commingling, but such a sentiment would have certainly run contrary to a prevailing insistence upon discernible racial boundaries. To be certain, the reference is understated, but the subtlety attests that race and prostitution had gone "underground," so to speak, in segregated cities like Chicago where they could be "contained" and rendered invisible.<sup>6</sup>

When the narrative proper begins, Leora materializes as the embodiment of the epigraph's reconciled oppositions. As noted above, Leora's willful prostitution challenges the equivalence of whiteness and virtue by linking her narrative of the self-made woman to the fruits of sexual labor. Yet even prior to her departure from small-town Ohio, the novel insists we read her emerging agency as an economic exchange of her "well and white" body (22). The old-

est of nine children, prophetically named after the prostitute who helped deliver her, Leora stands in stark contrast to her impoverished surroundings. Her beauty bestows upon her a presumption of upward social mobility: “Leora might have been a society girl slumming, so out of place did she seem” (31).

At home, her parents share an antagonistic relationship, and the novel contrasts Leora’s refined appearance with Mrs. Blair’s haggard form and Mr. Blair’s volatile demeanor. “Beautiful early,” the narrator observes, “it was hard to imagine her the child of such parents” (9). Mr. Blair’s ire often centers upon his wife’s reproductive abundance, and his anger translates into a reign of terror “at home, over which he ruled with hate” (9). The children fear their father’s presence with good reason: after discovering Leora had been “lightly caressing a neighbor boy,” he beats her until her body turns black and blue (10).

The freight of information Tully lays out in the opening chapter coalesces into a concise portrait of Leora’s misplaced and troubled existence. But the physical abuse she suffers also opens the text to a broader reading of the natural body, women’s sexuality, and the family economy of reproduction. While tending to her bruises, Mrs. Blair becomes spellbound by Leora: “Stopping for a second in her rubbing, she gazed at the lovely body of her daughter, just beginning to bud” (11). Juxtaposing this youthful image against the “tired, flat-breasted” body of the mother, Tully introduces the tension between “budding” sexuality and the physical toll exacted on the maternal body (11). Just a few weeks hence, after learning she is pregnant yet again, Mrs. Blair will poison herself, and the tragedy brings into sharp focus the limits on female agency in this railroad town. In response to Dr. Farway’s assurances that her mother had “fulfilled her purpose in the world . . . to bring others into it like herself,” Leora replies that “it’s a hell of a purpose—she lived and died like a cow” (37-38).

Their postmortem conversation leads to a double awakening for Leora. Addressing “modern discourse” on “reproductive” and “un(re)productive” bodies, Shannon Bell argues, “Reproductive sexuality, which denied woman active sexual desire and pleasure, was the norm; prostitution was its inversion” (41). As Leora becomes more cognizant of her commodity value among men, and “[a]s she earned more [money] than her father” trading on that value (26), she shifts the gender dynamics of production and sexual exchange within her family. With Leora’s newfound capital, the narrator notes, “[her father’s] fear of her became apparent” (26). In other words, Leora

recognizes how a traditional family economy reduces women to the role of pleasureless, reproductive animals, as well as how her own sexual agency on the market translates into a kind of power.

In less obvious ways, though, the beating Leora suffers also conjoins her incipient sexuality to the whiteness of her body, and this connection materializes in the novel during her first visit to Farway's office. There is nothing subtle about Leora's intentions or her first sexual encounter with the doctor. She had spent the previous afternoon in the company of her aunt, Red Moll, the town's unofficial madam. Moll keeps a house of "young women known as 'boarders'" who were "visited often by men" (13). Leora admires her aunt, but Moll and the "boarders" also signify the dearth of employment opportunities available to women in this town, and Leora sees in her cousin Alice, Moll's daughter, the tantalizing possibilities available in Chicago, which at the moment "seem far away" (15). Later that night, sleepless and pondering "how to get out of [town]—and what to do" (15), Leora roams the empty streets and spies Farway through his window. From the obvious symbolism of the doctor's name—he will help Leora get "far away"—to the way "[h]er body tingled now as she watched him" (16), the writing lacks nuance, but Tully sketches an inchoate economy of desire in which Leora's attraction to the doctor is inextricable from her wish to escape the narrow confines of the town and the teeming claustrophobia at home.

When she arrives at his office, Leora confesses, "My body stings—I'm afraid it won't ever turn white again" (20). The remark, while oddly worded, is literal enough, as "turning white" would indicate restored health, but when considered in the novel's broader context of sexual exchange, we can read Leora's reference to the whiteness of her body as a marker of its economic value. As soon as Farway assures her that "[w]e can fix that," Leora says: "I don't want anyone to know I came to you—I want to pay you sometime" (20). Within minutes of this proposed exchange, Farway's examination escalates into a passionate embrace, at which point he recommends a remedy involving lemon and glycerine to "whiten [her skin]" (21). She returns the next morning, and after she "received his caresses willingly," the doctor mentions her increasing whiteness: "Just a few more days, Leora, and your body will be well and white again" (22). Tully does not specify how long this "whitening" process takes, but two weeks later, Farway "survey[s] her nude loveliness" before they consummate their relationship (24). "Her body glowed," the narrator

notes. “She forgot the slight hurt he had caused” (24). The “glowing” body announces once again Leora’s celestial beauty, but it also registers the first radiant, postcoital flush of her “whitened” skin.

While I would not categorize Tully’s writing and ideas as high minded, I would argue that he is perceptive about the political and racial themes of his work. His underclass background, his life as a vagabond, and his later work as a writer in Hollywood all suggest a well-earned road savvy that equates to a kind of political sensibility. His time on the road allows him to speak from a position of understanding racially and economically liminal spaces, like Chicago’s segregated neighborhoods, but his time in Hollywood would also have schooled him in the production and marketing of bodies and images. As I have suggested here, it seems clear from the outset of *Ladies in the Parlor* that the text will unsettle accepted categories of virtue and vice, categories that in the early twentieth century remained racially coded.

In the context of the novel, this unsettling process subtly links Leora’s exchange value to Progressive and post-Progressive anxieties about race and sexual vice. Repeated references to her supernatural beauty, her misplacement within the small town, and the whiteness of her body all call to mind “the compulsory visibility of the prostitute” (Seltzer 98). That is to say, the novel consistently connects the radiant image of Leora’s visibly white and out-of-place body to her value within the economy of desire. Although any conscionable person would agree that we should eradicate the institutionalized slavery of sex trafficking and the unequal “economic and social structures” that confine women to “commercialized prostitution” (Donovan 71), historical evidence suggests that reform efforts in the United States exaggerated the reality of white slavery in order to curb women’s sexual liberation and “stigmatize” prostitution as an African-American issue (Mumford 113).<sup>7</sup> In *Ladies in the Parlor*, not only does Leora escape moral reproach—censure that might have mitigated legal sanctions against the novel—her sexual agency undermines the synonymy of whiteness and sexual morality, muddling the black-and-white delineations underwriting the segregation of vice.

#### CONTESTED COMMODITIES: WOMEN ON THE MARKET

While reading the novel’s racial subtext requires a working knowledge of Progressive Era reforms, identifying the commodification of women’s bodies is almost too easy. *Ladies in the Parlor* is

at home in the world of “market rhetoric”: “the discourse in which we conceive of and speak of something as if it were a commodity subject to market exchange” (Radin 6). Farway may be Leora’s first lover, but within a few months, not only is she negotiating affairs with both Farway and Haley, she is also casually accepting one hundred dollars to sleep with a stranger in Cincinnati. The man thinks he is stealing her virginity: “Leora received the money, and the man another illusion” (26).

Unlike her cousin Alice, who is described as “oversexed” (53), Leora seems almost disembodied—at least until she falls under the spell of Judge Slattery later in the novel—as if uninvolved in the sexual exchange. The narrator describes her “as casual and indifferent about sex relations” (25), whether trading with the town doctors or men in the city. As the story unfolds, readers confront commodified bodies at every turn. Within weeks of wandering around Chicago, Leora becomes bored and begins working at Mother Rosenbloom’s establishment (55). The narrator lingers for a time on the lives of Rosenbloom’s “ladies,” offering sketches of Mary Ellen, June, “Crying Marie,” Doris, and Selma. Some of the women recall troubled pasts, but not all: Doris reports that she was sexually abused by her father while the narrator describes Mary Ellen’s childhood as happy (113, 90). As *Ladies in the Parlor* draws to a close, the focus returns to Leora who is now Slattery’s kept woman and claiming for all the world that she wishes “to be just [his] slave” (140)—a proclamation as troubling as it seems out of character for Tully’s heroine.

Despite its obviousness, the novel’s commodification of the female body occupies a compelling middle ground between modern sexology and postmodern conceptions of the liberated prostitute. In the postmodern era, Bell writes, “Commodity society simultaneously produces and constrains the prostitute as an autonomous subject: it produces her as an active agent of exchange while constraining her sexual (inter)subjectivity. The prostitute negotiates sexuality only as a commercial exchange inside the male exchange economy; but she does negotiate it” (91).

For Bell, this power to negotiate the exchange is key, but Leora’s negotiations as an “agent of exchange” remain incomplete. For weeks before their first and only sexual encounter, Leora’s relationship with Judge Slattery proceeds as a casual, amorous but quite respectful affair; her expressed desire to enslave herself to Slattery, however, returns Leora to a subservient position within “the male exchange economy.” Seeming to embrace this surrender of agency, she tells the judge, “I’d wait on you all the time—I’d give you everything I had—everything” (140). The

sexual consummation of this pact and Slattery's untimely postcoital death initiate a series of events that short circuit Leora's liberation from the small-town life she had hoped to escape. Pregnant with Slattery's child, Leora decides to return to her hometown and marry the recently widowed Farway. In the end, Tully undercuts her radical agency by reinscribing Leora within a traditional, patriarchal family economy.

To understand the implications of this thwarted agency, we should consider how *Ladies in the Parlor* reflects interrelated historical trends: one, a transformation in sexual theory, and two, a dramatic increase in the presence of single women living and working in urban environments. Setting aside sexology for a moment, we can read Leora as representative of the modern migration of women from small towns to cities in search of better lives and economic opportunities. According to Joanne Meyerowitz, Chicago represented a particularly attractive destination: "From 1870 to 1930, the female labor force in Chicago grew from 18,300 to 407,600, or by over 2,000 percent" (152). Women's reasons for migrating to the city were diverse. Some women were leaving behind a lack of employment; others were attracted to the promise of "urban consumer pleasure." Many young women were fleeing abusive relationships or trying "to escape the restrictions routinely imposed upon daughters in the family economy," including surrendering wages to a "common family fund" and prohibitions on dating (see Meyerowitz 151-54).

Yet women often discovered that the available choices replicated the situations they were trying to escape. "At the turn of the century," Meyerowitz writes, "probably about half of the lone female migrants to Chicago chose to relinquish their independent status and reenter the family's boundaries as hired household workers" (158). Economic dependence on a man or "occasional prostitution" represented a more dubious extension of this family economy (Meyerowitz 158-59). Although an affront to Progressive Era values, such options highlight the double bind of women's autonomy: despite efforts to flee abusive relationships or poverty at home, women often confronted those same conditions in the city.

From one perspective, then, Leora's move to Chicago represents the historical fact of migration to the city and the concomitant changes in women's labor. Her embrace of willful prostitution, however, adds a perverse twist to the dynamic of the family economy and exposes the way "women's sexuality is incompletely commodified" across all strata of society (Radin 134).<sup>8</sup> As Barbara Meil Hobson argues, "Prostitution was an issue that underscored the interrelation-



ship between home life and street life [and] between the wages of sin and the low wages of women workers” (139). We do not know what, if any, low-wage work Leora may have sought in Chicago, but she quickly reenters a modified “family” by pledging her services to Mother Rosenbloom’s matriarchal economy. It is a clever turn on Tully’s part, merging the domestic and the urban. According to Bell, “The modern prostitute comes into being only when woman becomes a commodity, subject *en masse* to the wage relation, inserted into commodity production, massified on the urban landscape” (44).

Leora’s aunt, Red Moll, provides an illuminating contrast to this point. As previously suggested, she serves as her town’s unofficial madam: “Whenever traveling salesmen ‘wanted a woman,’ they were sent to Red Moll’s house. Often she would ‘furnish a girl’ who would call at the hotel” (15). For her trouble, Red Moll gets half the girl’s earnings, but she is a spendthrift and lives in constant “fear . . . of losing her home” (15). Only the combination of moving to the city and prostitution allows for Leora’s social mobility; had she stayed in her hometown, she would have remained a mistress, or perhaps traded on her value as a “furnished” girl, but she would remain subject to domestic concerns similar to Red Moll’s. The city and Rosenbloom’s brothel allow Leora to maximize her exchange value and advance her social and economic standing.

As a site of illicit exchange between women and “the elite of the city, or rather—men with money” (56), Mother Rosenbloom’s house also makes explicit the connection between domesticity and the “wages of sin” while indirectly calling to mind early twentieth-century debates about “normal” and “perverse” sexual labor. The Progressive Era produced a strange amalgam of more liberal attitudes about sexuality and pleasure alongside the re-entrenchment of Victorian morality. Mark Connelly contends that “during the progressive years a new sexual ethos emerged, which sanctioned limited premarital sexual experimentation and a more pleasure-oriented view of sexual relations” (18). Accompanying this “new sexual ethos,” however, was an interest in normalizing sexual practices. Bell writes that “[t]he years from 1890 to 1910 saw a major transformation in sexual theory . . . . Sexology and psychoanalysis sexualized a particular ‘normal’ female body and a particular ‘normal’ sexuality, pathologizing other bodies and sexualities” (64).

Prostitutes and single women living in urban spaces were often at the center of these debates precisely because they threatened

accepted mores concerning domesticity and “normal” procreative sexuality. Connelly adds, “In one sense the open and widespread discussion of prostitution was an important aspect of the breakdown of the conspiracy of silence that formerly surrounded the discussion of sexual matters. In a more important sense, however, it constituted a reaction against it” (19). Concerns about prostitution and, more broadly, female sexuality were inextricably tied to the evolving place of women in society. According to Mumford, “the rise of the New Woman was ideologically situated as the cross-current development of the backlash against the willful prostitute” (110). By freely embracing her status as a market commodity, Leora places herself on the wrong side of a segregated line between “normal” and “pathologized” sexualities.

Written in the wake of the new sexology and dramatic transformations to Chicago’s demographics, *Ladies in the Parlor* evokes a wide set of anxieties about class, race, and sexuality during the early 1900s. Readers may have bristled at the frank discussions of prostitution and venereal disease, but the novel also flirts with more daring depictions of homosexual desire and the suggestion that Rosenbloom’s house merely replicates the more pervasive prostitution of women in society. Leora’s shocking beauty makes her the object of affection among both men and women, and the narrator hints that her fellow prostitute, June, entertains amorous feelings toward her: “She was fond of Leora, who, at that time, was unaware that one woman could become overfond of another” (70). June “kisse[s] Leora on the mouth” and complains that she is “sick of sellin’ [her] body” (71). Although described as “slightly flustered,” Leora simply lets the incident drift away into a conversation about the ways women merely “loan” their bodies to men without “selling” anything essential (71).

In the novel, however, the marketplace of women’s bodies underscores the antagonistic and commercial aspect of all sexual relations. Rosenbloom sees herself as a tutor to her girls, counseling them how best to take care of themselves among men. “To her,” the narrator confides, “love for men was useless. She tried in every manner possible to crush it out of the hearts of her girls . . . Sex was an eternal war to her, covered by smiles and deceits—but a war in which a truce was always dangerous” (87). As a rebuke to Progressive Era ideals about “whiteness, sexual morality, class, and citizenship” (Donovan 56), *Ladies in the Parlor* portrays a leveling effect within the econ-

omy of desire. Rosenbloom's doctor points out that "[t]he multifarious restraints of millions of women have not helped society. They have merely made it more hypocritical and docile" (100).

After Leora spends a night as Slattery's escort, she returns home to find Mother Rosenbloom reading "the society page and look[ing]" at the pictures of several society women in riding costumes. "They're bigger whores than us," she growled" (135). Later, during a drunken exposition on political power, Slattery tells Leora, "'You're too young to know that all life's a whorehouse—the difference is only that it's not as public as this'" (142). In the final analysis, the novel's purported obscenity may have less to do with "dirt in the raw" than with Tully's sly suggestion that all sex is a negotiation of exchange values and that virtue is merely a prerogative of the upper class.

As the novel draws to a close, cynical social critique gives way to romance and sentimentality. Leora appears to experience her first orgasm during her only sexual encounter with Slattery. Having discovered her true love and already certain she is pregnant with his child, Leora wakes up to discover Slattery has died. Outside, it is a cold, rainy night, but Mother Rosenbloom insists on carrying the judge's body to his limousine. As a result, she catches cold and nine days later dies of pneumonia. Yet even these maudlin twists come back around to the topic of class and sexuality. The settling of Rosenbloom's estate leads to a heated exchange between the prostitutes and the housekeeper who tries to distinguish herself as a proper "lady" living and working among "whores." The distinction provokes an uncharacteristically sharp retort from Leora: "'The damned hypocrite—she feels better than us in her heart, and I don't like it'" (159). As Leora and her fellow ladies collect their inheritance from Rosenbloom, the novel leaves us with a final image of commodified bodies and an argument about social respectability that again connects "the wages of sin and the low wages of women workers" (Hobson 139).

#### CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS OF SEXUAL AUTONOMY

Early in her stay at Mother Rosenbloom's, Leora tries to settle on a "working name," and the suggested alias, Doreen Farway, elicits this dismissive response: "'It sounds like the wronged girl in a novel'" (64). Through the character of Leora, Tully subverts prevailing discourses about "the wronged girl" or, as Kauffman writes it,

“the girl that goes wrong.” From the epigraph to the conclusion, the novel delights in deconstructing Progressive Era ideals concerning virtue and vice, but by focusing on the figure of the prostitute, Tully also makes space for a more expansive consideration of women’s sexuality and the commodified body in consumer culture. According to Mark Seltzer the prostitute is a “scandalous” figure in realist literature precisely because she exemplifies “the mixed logic of physical capital: utterly artifactual and utterly physical at once, capital with a human face” (66).

This depiction reframes what Luce Irigaray identifies as a woman’s “two irreconcilable ‘bodies’: her ‘natural’ body and her socially valued, exchangeable body, which is a particularly mimetic expression of masculine values” (180, emphasis original). For a time, Leora does appear to reconcile these two bodies, adeptly capitalizing on her “well and white” body and dictating the terms of exchange within a masculine economy of desire. As Leora prepares to return to Ohio, however, we confront the limits of her perceived liberation as an agent of exchange, as well as the limits of Tully’s novel as a text that reflects the reality and political implications of prostitution without making a definitive statement about gender and agency.

Perhaps *Ladies in the Parlor* must face the same basic dilemma as any feminist discourse on freedom and autonomy: namely the extent to which “patriarchy and male domination have been instrumental in the social construction of women’s choices” (Hirschmann 200). Although Leora’s cynical and shrewd negotiations unsettle, at least temporarily, the gender dynamics of exchange, the available options all circle back to the patriarchal economy she had tried to outmaneuver. Tully had to conclude the novel somehow, and marrying Leora off to Farway provides the tidiest option, even as the final image of her gazing out the train window artfully resists closure (162). While this ending does indeed undercut Leora’s radical potential, silencing a provocative portrait of modern female agency before it was officially censored, the novel gestures toward a more profound critique of the various ways women’s sexuality remained circumscribed and commodified within post-Progressive society.<sup>9</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Reviews from the East Coast papers were uniformly bad, with the *New York Times* even refusing to accept advertising for the book” (Bauer and Dawidziak 250).

- <sup>2</sup> I am borrowing the concept “family economy” from Meyerowitz, which is addressed later in this essay, but I am also expanding it to include the demands of sexual reproduction within the patriarchal “economy of desire” (Irigaray 188).
- <sup>3</sup> Langum writes, “One theoretical problem concerning prostitution confronted the upholders of morality during the late teens and early 1920s. It was being discovered that the white slave gangs so feared during the white slavery hysteria of 1907 to 1914 had either never really existed or, alternatively, had been thoroughly suppressed” (156).
- <sup>4</sup> See Langum, 1-2, 142-47.
- <sup>5</sup> A hierarchical understanding of “superior” and “inferior” races appears to inform Renan’s views about civilization, nations, and languages. Citing passages from Renan’s *Intellectual and Moral Reform* (1871) on “the equality of races as fallacies,” Olender writes: “Renan’s aim here is to identify and to uphold the hierarchical, ‘Providential’ order of peoples, an order dictated by the ‘natural’ characteristics of the races” (62). See Olender (57-63) for a thorough discussion. Taking a more generous approach, Sand sees in Renan’s mature works “a significant retreat from the racist conceptions that had haunted some of his writings” (13). Nevertheless, he acknowledges the early writings do promote “Eurocentric Orientalism” and exhibit traces of a mid-nineteenth century European fervor for “scientific racism” (7).
- <sup>6</sup> Examining “surveillance [as] a technology of whiteness that racially zones city space (69), Fiske writes, “the wall, invisible but real, surrounds the ghetto, where the unseeable, the unknowable and the unthinkable can be contained and ignored” (73).
- <sup>7</sup> de Young argues that “despite all the hysterical certainty that disreputable procurers were enticing, threatening or ensnaring young girls into a life of depravity, precious few actual cases of white slavery were ever brought to the justice system for action” (96).
- <sup>8</sup> Radin explains, “Perhaps the best way to characterize the present situation is to say that women’s sexuality is incompletely commodified, perhaps both in the sense that it is a contested concept and in the sense that its meaning is internally plural” (134).
- My thanks to Jeffrey Swenson and to the anonymous peer reviewers of *Midwestern Miscellany* for their close reading and insightful suggestions for revision.

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THE POLYPHONIC BOXCAR:  
THE HOBO IN JIM TULLY'S *BEGGARS OF LIFE*

JOHN LENNON

All the while he was a road kid, dishwasher, cab starter, tree surgeon, chain maker, boxer, railroad laborer, and circus handyman, Jim Tully believed that he could also be a writer. The road, therefore, became a significant motif throughout his oeuvre, but especially in the five books that would eventually be a part of his Underworld series—*Beggars of Life*, *Circus Parade*, *Shanty Irish*, *Shadows of Men*, and *Blood on the Moon*. These books were published over the course of ten years and detail his early life and wanderings on the road, showcasing Tully's distinct style of short, hard-hitting sketches of working-class or lumpenproletarian individuals. At their best, these books reveal an underclass of forgotten wandering men at the beginning of the twentieth century. Moving away from the naturalist mode of Frank Norris, Tully is a hard-boiled realist writer who seemingly doesn't have an overt political agenda. Instead, a rumination—a brooding—pulses throughout these texts.

In this article, I argue that Tully's writing about his days as a train hopper should, in fact, be read as political. Specifically, his rejection of a monolithic individualist narrative and adoption of a polyphonic structure in *Beggars of Life* reveal Tully's specific political philosophy. Offering no "truth" or singular narrative focus, Tully situates the reader amongst the crowd as the train rolls down the track. With no one individual grabbing the attention of the reader for longer than a chapter or so, the result is a panoramic view of a class of itinerant poor people. Tully, however, is intent on not having the individual become lost within the group narrative. Instead, the author offers a networked view of individuals within this train-riding subculture: these hoboes have independent melodies; but when they are together,

they form a harmony. This triadic relationship among the individual, the hobo subculture and the train is the basis for what I term Tully's boxcar politics. To begin to define this term, let's first examine Tully's relationship to the hobo subculture.

#### THE POLYPHONIC BOXCAR IN *BEGGARS OF LIFE*

The railroad—the reason for St. Marys early lumbering growth—was also Jim Tully's means of escape from his Ohio hometown. As he recounts in *Beggars of Life*, he would sit along the tracks in Auglaize County and listen to hoboes talk of their travels. After being abandoned by his father soon after his mother died, and “rescued” from an orphanage by his sister only to be placed in slavery-like conditions as a hired farmhand, Tully imagined the tracks as a way to lead him away from the “horror of the town and [my] life there” (21). Soon after absconding from the farm, he found himself working for three dollars a week (two dollars going for board) as an apprentice of an alcoholic chain maker in an oppressive factory. Fed up with his stultified life and feeling that hoboing was a resistance to the crushing drudgery of industrial life, Tully looked toward the tracks and simply left.

Tully's hoboing started with the romantic impulse of a young man who was excited to leave the harsh confines of the town that he had known while looking forward to the adventures that were soon to come his way. This initial experience as a hobo and the way in which Tully subsequently wrote about it underscore his relationship with this transient subculture. On his first hobo trip, the romance of the Iron Road disappears immediately. As a “scared” Tully (31) along with old “derelict” hoboes (25) warm themselves around a fire waiting on a train, they are arrested at gunpoint. After being questioned, the group is led to a flophouse where they are made to stay the night before being forced to catch the first train out of town the next morning.

Through the snores of these bone-weary hoboes, Tully hears moans coming from the next bed. Wanting to help, he sees blood trickling down the man's face; soon, other hoboes come to the bed and together they attempt to help the man as best as they can. Not long after they begin their vigil, though, the man dies. Soon after, two policemen carry the body out of the dormitory, but not before they rifle his pockets, finding eight cents that they give to the landlady. Quickly, and without discussion, the lights are put out and the hoboes sleep the few remaining hours before dawn.



This story of his first “real” hobo trip perfectly encapsulates the way that Tully views the world.<sup>1</sup> Tully begins his travels with the naïveté of a young man entering a subculture he knows little about, and the harsh reality of the situation confronts him quickly and without warning. There is no false bravado in his retelling. Most significantly, as in most of Tully’s Underworld cycle, he retreats from the center of the narrative, allowing the other hoboes to begin to take over the text *en masse*. There are memorable individuals throughout *Beggars of Life*—many of the chapters center on one particular rider—but the collective impression presented to the reader is one of a *group of individuals*.

In these conjoined scenes introducing Tully to the hobo subculture, a type of forced bonding exists among the men: first, as they attempt to stay warm around the stove as a storm rages and second, around the body of the dying hobo. In both scenes, a center holds the orbital men in place—the stove, the body—and Tully, with a cinematic eye, writes of the men in the way that a camera would slowly pan through a crowd scene. Readers see the individuals, but after Tully’s lens pans across that crowd, we are left with an overall impression of a collective as the individuals dissolve into the larger hobo subculture.

For Tully, he and all of his traveling companions are part of the disenfranchised lumpenproletariat. No individuals stand out for long periods of time; they either never separate themselves from the group in the first place, as is the case in these scenes, or, if they do, they mostly disappear after the chapter is done. The polyphonic form of *Beggars of Life*, then, allows for an impression of a loose communal hobo subculture. Although individual men are described throughout the text and their unique voices are heard, like the unknown man who dies as a light is shown in his face, we only see these men for a short time before the literary light is extinguished and they retreat into the darkness from which Tully narrates from the group’s perspective.

The stark difference between the 1926 William Wellman film version of *Beggars of Life* and the novel highlights Tully’s polyphonic writing style. In the cinematic version, Nancy (Louise Brooks) is a combination of a number of characters from the novel, becoming an embodiment of normative heterosexuality for Jim (Richard Arlen), the character loosely based on Tully. The important homosocial bonding present in Tully’s novel is absent and, instead, the film follows the two individuals attempting to flee the hobo sub-

culture, thereby “saving” themselves from the hobo gang led by Oklahoma Red (Wallace Beery). As in most Hollywood films, the main characters are the focus of the camera's eye, and Nancy's and Jim's “redemption” comes in the particular way that they are able to stand morally and physically apart from the hobo subculture, the members of which, in a “comic” Kangaroo court scene attempt to kill Jim in order to gang rape Nancy. The individual characters' moral purity allows them to transcend the mob of degenerate men and, in the case of Oklahoma Red, somewhat transform him.

The leering hoboes are seen as dangerous drunken louts who are slaves to their desires. Jim, although he is a hobo, is not part of this group. Instead, he risks his life to keep Nancy safe, making himself an outsider and target for the other hoboes. His loyalty and willingness to protect Nancy, who repays his help with quick-witted action that saves them both, eschew base desires and move them towards a moral righteousness that Wellman celebrates through multiple individual close-ups of the characters' faces. Although Wellman uses many of the same characters and situations that Tully writes about in *Beggars of Life*, the director plays the individuals against the group. In Tully's book, however, the individual, although allowed to keep his unique voice, is more fully immersed as a member of the hobo subculture.

The result is that in the book version of *Beggars of Life*, the group holds center stage. Readers witness and understand this communal-ity among the men. Due to a lack of an individualistic center, then, the text covertly begs the question about the state of a nation that allows large groups of men to live as communal transients. These Underworld novels, most of which were published in the 1920s, stand in stark contrast to the jazz-age stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Instead of bootleg gin and wild parties featuring flappers under elaborate chandeliers, there are stolen kegs, clusters of worn-out men in boxcars and the white lights of oncoming trains offering nonstructured, “invisible” mobility.

And while writers like Hemingway wrote stories of middle-class masculine men trying to act brave in a world that was quickly changing around them, Tully wrote about the underclass in the United States, refusing to single out anyone—himself included—as separate from the group. Tully is committed to this view. While cunning and strength may place someone in a more strategic position while on the road, the hobo is still ensconced within an unwanted and illegal sub-

culture. This symbiotic relationship allows for the individual hobo and the larger subculture to survive.

### BEING A PARASITE

*Beggars of Life* is not a clarion call to action to help the poor people of the United States. This lack of a recognizable political agenda allowed Tully's work to be read by contemporary reviewers as distinctly nonpolitical, a view that has continued to the present.<sup>2</sup> Negatively comparing Tully to Michael Gold, the left-leaning *New Masses* editor whose autobiography, *Jews Without Money*, is one of the most widely read works of proletarian fiction, *The New Republic* stated that Tully's hoboes are "simple" and "merely garnish his philosophy of weary misanthropy" (qtd. in Bauer and Dawidziak 203). On the surface of these texts, this may seem to be true, but a more complicated analysis contradicts this view.

In *Beggars of Life*, the only scene of overt politics can be found in the chapter "An Election Victory," in which Tully recounts his participation in a rigged election. He describes how he was paid to travel across a district, get fitted with a false name in each locale and vote for a particular candidate. In his retelling, Tully does not question the morality or the ramifications of vote fixing; it is simply a way for him and other traveling men to make money. He writes of his communal crime: "This weighty matter settled [choosing a candidate], neglected future citizens of America, we walked in and voted" (170). Although the scene deals with national politics, through this sentence, Tully announces his own personal politics. As a member of a loose group of traveling men, Tully enters a town and makes a few dollars while having free drinks, exploiting an election scam. Even still, in his rhetorical mode he moves from thinking individualistically to collectively: from Jim Tully to "neglected future citizens of America."

These dispossessed men, who will be ignored by the politicians they illegally helped get elected, are part of the vast hobo subculture who must hide in the recesses of boxcars to remain safe. And since their poor bodies are subjected to the numerous vagrancy laws that could easily place them in jails or work camps, this line shows Tully's view of himself as a noncitizen—citizenship is imagined to be in the future.<sup>3</sup> Just as in *Circus Parade*, where the "carnies" think of themselves as an insular subculture apart from the townfolk "rubes," Tully

here thinks of himself as part of the "imagined community" of the hobo subculture, apart from the "citizens."

Tully's cynical view of politics leads him to believe that even citizens are as neglected as hoboes. Tully works for the politicians that will rob him and everyone else of her/his voice because that is the way national politics works, and he understands that when he does become a "citizen," he will be as "neglected" as he is as a hobo. He has no interest in combating the political system head-on, or, in his view, ineffectually pointing out its inconsistencies. Unlike Mac from John Dos Passos's *USA* trilogy, who attempts to use his mobility as a hobo for revolutionary purposes by joining the International Workers of the World,<sup>4</sup> or Jack London, who creates his own system of law within the hierarchy of homeless travelers for purely individualistic gain as recounted in *The Road*, Tully rides squarely in the ideological middle, knowing that as a member of a mobile hobo subculture, he needs to look for spaces that he can exploit. This nature of the hobo is forged to face the daily violence of living the life of a marginalized outcast traveling through a society that considers him a member of an army of tramps. Tully embraces this parasitic role, manipulating the train to leech off a system that is rigged.

But unlike some parasites that destroy anything in their path, Tully's hobo ethos is more discriminating, complicating the notion that a hobo is purely individualistic. As seen in his first hobo trip, as well as in numerous trips throughout the text, the narrative focus is placed on the communal interactions among the members of the hobo subculture. In fact, toward the end of *Beggars of Life*, Tully pulls back from the narrative to underscore his realistic and parasitic philosophy of life on the road. The hobo's existence is violent: death can at any time come in the form of a train, a bull, or a vigilante mob. Scoffing at idealists who have no "knowledge of life" or sociologists who offer their views on the state of the homeless population, Tully has a great disrespect for those who can only think in the "abstract" and whose visionary dream "blurs their eyes when they look at the viciousness of it all . . . They cannot see life around them, their eyes being fastened on the great dream ahead, a few million years after they are rotten" (334). In other words, a dream of "One Big Union" happening in his lifetime or the next is not on Tully's political radar, and, as he states adamantly, he is "no reformer" (336).

Interestingly, this attack on idealists also sketches out his political framework: "Some idealists are selfish as individuals, but lovers

of the mob. And who can really love a mob? Evolution helps the mob. One can only help the individual” (334). Tully is not an individualist who only cares about himself, nor does he believe in the potential for immediate revolution; evolutionary change is a prolonged organic transition that takes place over a vast amount of time. Still, Tully never loses sight of the idea that the individual is part of a larger subculture and suggests that it is in the day-to-day exchanges *within* the immediate subculture that the individual can be helped—and help—other hobo. It is this nuanced idea that forms the basis of his boxcar politics. This slippery interaction between the individual and the group did not concern only Tully; it was also an important ongoing political discussion taking place at the beginning of twentieth century. To specify Tully’s boxcar politics, then, it is beneficial to contextualize Tully’s hobo politics within the larger macro-political theoretical discussions involving the interactions between the individual and the group.

#### THE PEOPLE, THE MOB, AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Although Tully saw the individual as existing independently while simultaneously being a part of a hobo subculture, social scientists studying the behavior of groups and their effect on the body politic of American citizenry at the turn of the twentieth century were not sure this was possible. Whitman’s exceptionalist view of “the people” as having “measureless wealth of latent power and capacity” (326) was a beautiful democratic nation-building idea in the aftermath of the Civil War, but as strikes abounded in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era, there was much to fear from a collectivized polarity. The Preamble to the Constitution implies that “The People” signifies a normalized idea of American citizenship. But although it purported to be inclusive, as the threat of miscegenation and “dark” immigrants from Europe evolved, the term “People” was revealed in practice to be always exclusionary.

When a white propertied class came together, the people participated in rational democratic politics; when those on the margins of society gathered together, they were a mob. Nicolas Mills, in *The Crowd in American Literature*, shows how these collective purposes had very conflicting agendas; while the people “devotes itself to leveling whatever or whomever is exceptional,” the mob “challenges . . . the social and economic structure of the country” (12). The people

were therefore identified with the law and the mob was identified as extra-institutional and an embodiment of irrationality and emotionalism. For the nation to be unified, the people, as the political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri state, “synthesizes or reduces these social differences [of a population] into one identity” (99). The mob, on the other hand, represents “man, the animal, left off his leash” (Sennett 299). Describing how the individual loses her/his identity when brought into the group, Gustave Le Bon, a prominent social scientist at the turn of the twentieth century, described rationale beings morphing into a “collective mind that makes them feel, think and act in ways that are very different from how each individual would have felt, thought or acted had he been alone” (qtd. in Frezza 55).

While the fear of socialism and radical unionization that the “collective mind” represents is obvious, a primary underlying fear of collectivity is a loss of liberal individualism. According to the adherents of this view, the rational individual is subsumed into the group, easily manipulated and the potentiality of (revolutionary) violence always present. Although Le Bon’s work was criticized as hyperfearful of the collective by some of his contemporaries, there was an overriding view among social scientists and policy makers that “enlightened leaders” embodying the “social intellect” of the cultural elite were needed to control the mob.<sup>5</sup>

This view, based on a distinctly racialized Social Darwinism and an exceptionalist view of republican virtues, found its champion in the white Anglo-Saxon technocratic elite.<sup>6</sup> As the nation awkwardly transitioned from the consequences wrought by industrialization, these powerful men were charged with helping to control the mob and deliver the people to the promised land of American democracy. As members of an illegal subculture slipping into the recesses of train cars to avoid the law, Tully’s hoboes, looking upward from the substrate position, do not fit into a normalized view of the people. But while it seems obvious that Tully would distrust “the people” and all they represent, in his texts, he also consistently holds up for contempt the mob.

While this may seem inconsistent on Tully’s part, when looked at from the position of the hobo subculture, it fits with his political philosophy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the mob is coded as “working class.” If considered along strict Marxist lines that make a distinction between productive and unproductive labor, Tully,

as he chronicles in *Beggars of Life*, is not working class. The hobo's mobility, habitual unemployment and cultural differences resulted in a split between this subculture and most working class organizing efforts. Seen as part of the lumpenproletariat that was "the industrial reserve army," a reactionary group of would-be strike breakers who kept Labor tied to its slave wages, the hobo was mostly excluded from the social and imagined working-class community, including full participation in union life.

Unlike his connection to the hobo subculture, Tully had a fluid relationship with organized labor. He did receive a union card from the chain makers union, the members of which he describes as "the gypsies of manual labor" after he left the road, and he even found himself ghost writing for his brother's union's journal. Tully, however, was never a dynamic force in union politics. The most vocal he seems to have been was when he published in the *Kent Courier* a poem entitled "Samuel Gompers," in which he (nonironically) compares the leader of the American Federation of Labor to both Jesus and George Washington. Even this praise seems to be self-serving, as he mailed the piece to Gompers himself in the hopes of receiving a job (Bauer and Dawidziak 75-79,103).

Tully was more enthusiastic about radical unionization and the International Workers of the World, who were the most accommodating to itinerant workers, even having a specific recruiting wing dedicated to them.<sup>7</sup> But though his heart went out to the "head-battered and bloody" Wobblies, he "would join no lodge or anything else" because they are a mob; he states succinctly, "I do not like the mob" and had "contempt for them" when on the road ("A Declaration" 105). Tully, too, feared for a loss of liberal individualism. As someone who, when he was employed as a boxer or carnie, worked on the societal margins beyond the reach of most unionization efforts, Tully distrusted the mob, demonstrating the tensions that existed along the fault lines of the hobo subculture and the normative working class. Tully's boxcar politics was therefore shaped not in these proletarian organizations but through his relationship with the hobo subculture. His politics rejects the connotations associated with the mob and, instead, advocates a fluidity of identity that allows him to keep his

individuality as he shares boxcars with other members of the subculture.

### THE MULTITUDE AND THE HOBO SUBCULTURE

While Tully's rejection of "the people" and "the mob" helps us know what his boxcar politics is not, the "post-Marxist" scholars Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's term "multitude" is a good initial place to begin to define what it is. As opposed to the terms "the people" and "the mob," "multitude" is plural and "composed of a set of singularities—and by singularity here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different . . . The plural singularities of the multitude thus stand in contrast to the undifferentiated unity of the people" (99). According to their definition, the multitude are not just passive subjects led by ruling parties (or the "technocratic elite"). Nor have they formed one singular identity. Contrasting the views of political philosophers who state that the polity needs a singular head (be it monarch, president, party, or ruling elite), Hardt and Negri believe that the multitude is "the living flesh that rules itself" (100) rejecting "the organic unity of the body" (162). The key to understanding their term is that the multitude is "singularities that act in common" where "there is no conceptual or actual contradiction between singularity and commonality" (105).

Hardt and Negri see the multitude as "the becoming common of labor in all of its generality—economically, politically and socially" (137) that unlike rigid Marxist distinctions is not exclusionary but inherently inclusive and celebratory of differences, including "the poor, the unemployed and the underemployed" (131) as part of their radical project examining potential global responses to Empire. This expansive view of Labor is a significant change from, for example, the "golden days" of subculture studies as exemplified by the British Cultural Studies model (CCCS) that viewed the working class as a (mostly) monolithic identity. Hardt and Negri's idea of the multitude is also significantly different from recent "postsubcultural" models that have removed "class" as an essential defining component and see subcultural practitioners as embodying a unique "choice" that individuals freely make for themselves. Contrary to the traditional Marxist-influenced CCCS and the hybridity of recent subculture theorists, Hardt and



Negri celebrate the polymorphous nature of multitude while clearly categorizing the multitude as “a class concept” (103).

The term “hobo” is equally a fluid “class concept.” In *Beggars of Life*, Tully’s description of hoboes throughout his Underworld series comprises the singularities (individual hoboes) that cannot be reduced to a sameness (a generic, traditional group). As they warm themselves by the fire, hoboes are part of a loose subculture of networked individuals that share similar socio-economic positions; their mobility as a transient workforce and their relationship to the train are the connecting bonds among the subculture.

Do Tully’s hoboes, then, anticipate Hardt and Negri’s “multitude”? Is Tully’s boxcar politics a politics that anticipates a twenty-first century radical political philosophy? In a word, no. While all of the requirements for Tully’s hoboes to be part of the multitude exist, they lack one key ingredient: a political project (212). Tully and his fellow riders, while they are singular subjects riding in a shared existence, never share a cohesive, acknowledged political project. While each act of hopping a train offers a small bodily resistance to the capitalistic system embodied by the train, they do not attempt to gather these resistances together. While they are collectivized within a boxcar or around a jungle fire and work together in small moments of banding together, they cannot see the shared political project and therefore, at times, are splintered, fractured and at odds with one another.

For example, as Tully and a companion, Bill, are riding together in a boxcar, an officer gets on and handcuffs the two together, informing them that they are heading to jail for a long stretch. Instead, as the train gained speed, “Bill held tightly to the rung of the iron ladder with his free hand, and kicked the majesty of railroad law in the south as he looked North” (*Beggars of Life* 50). Thus, they are able to get away but the town of Clinton through which they were traveling becomes “hostile” to other tramps. When Tully expresses remorse for his fellow hoboes who would get caught, Bill says, “‘It’s all’n the game, Red. When you’re on the bum long enough someone’ll stick you up for somethin’ some other guy done. The big trick’s don’t let ’em ketch you’” (53).

The result of being successful “in the game” and not being caught—this time—was that other unlucky hoboes traveling unawares through the town of Clinton are made to “run the ga’ntlet” (129) and are subjected to a terrible beating by a vigilante mob. The communality of the hobo group does have its limits. While large, the

hobo subculture did not have a political platform and dues-paying members but was a free-flowing, amorphous group where the personal body was often placed in greater importance to that of the group body. And although Tully expresses remorse that others would pay through broken bones and bloody lips the check that he and his companion wrote, he does not believe in any greater political movement that could alleviate the suffering of these traveling men.

### A MATERIALIST POLITICS

If Tully's boxcar politics is not congruent with the term "the mob" nor with Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude, how do we define it? Tully's boxcar politics is a materialist politics based on the relationship among the individual hobo, the subculture and the train. This subcultural connection is literal and symbolic. Expanding on the view of the cultural theorist Ginette Verstraete, who states that "systems of transportation and communication have been the site of fierce struggles for power among the nation-builders" (145), the awesome technology that the train represents is also a site of struggle among those who have been excluded from true citizenship. By hopping a train, a hobo materially offers his/her body as resistance to the progress of an expanding capitalistic society that the transcontinental railroad promises in its billowing smoke and roaring wheels. The train is a powerful symbol and example of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century unchecked capitalism, and, by physically stealing a ride, the hobo is parasitic as s/he attempts to get to the next town, state, or national border. This materiality of resistance—of living the body politic—is crucial to understanding the hobo subculture and Tully's boxcar politics. By hopping trains and disappearing into boxcars in one place and entering a new one the next day, the hobo offers resistance, literally and symbolically, to the "progress" of the country underwritten by "hothouse" capitalism and embodied by the train. By stealing rides, hoboes are parasitic to the life force of the train (and to the profit margins of the owner of these railroads), sometimes going unnoticed, sometimes causing minor ailments and sometimes causing serious illness.

While Eugene Debs stood on top of a train in 1894 urging his fellow workers to take capital head-on and strike against Pullman Palace Car Manufacturing Company,<sup>8</sup> across the country, hoboes, *en masse*, slipped onto trains and, using their mobility, resourcefulness,

and malleable visibility, took on the train in a smaller, more bodily way. But both were symbolically taming the Iron Beast and showing that their desire and humanity as (non)working people were stronger than the power of the machine and the men who financially backed those machines. Resistance is much more than just a symbolic abstraction; indeed, it is a lived experience, with life-and-death ramifications, fought in the everyday realm of train yards and jungles in towns and cities throughout the United States.

Tully's hoboes are what Frederic M. Thrasher, a sociologist and Tully's contemporary, calls "interstitial groups," or a subculture situated within, but not restricted to, the culture that they border. In the jungles, boxcars or "nonplaces" that are purposely forgotten or ignored, hoboes meet and gather. As Nels Anderson writes in *The Hobo*, a ground-breaking sociological study of the hobo that was released five years before *Beggars of Life*, hoboes were marginalized to areas around the railroad tracks and cut off from normalized social networks including members of the (stable) working class. Within these cracks in society, the subculture formed a collective behavior that evolved its own traditions, group awareness, and loosely based solidarity. The boxcar was the conduit that allowed the singularity of the individual rides to coexist with the commonality of the hobo subculture.

Tully's hoboes meet in particular places and share stories, food, and information. Within these jungles and boxcars, there are rules to follow. These lessons are taught in physical locations that are reinforced in the daily contacts among themselves as they ride across the United States. The rules are somewhat fluid but an imagined hobo community forms. As Anderson states, "Absolute democracy reigns in the jungle . . . [where] the hobo enters into this life as he does no other. Here he turns his back on the world and faces his fellows, and is at ease" (19). Ken Gelder, in *Subcultures*, accurately points out that Anderson's view of "Hoboemia" is utopian tinged, and Tully's own retelling of his experiences in *Beggars of Life* shows how racially abhorrent the subculture could be. However, while the sites of the hoboes gathering spaces are fraught with inconsistencies, Tully's hoboes are part of the imagined community of riders. Their mobility and their identity are intertwined with their ability to inhabit a space on the train, harnessing its power to get them where they want to go. This usage is outside the intended functionality of the train, but hoboes appropriate it for their own purposes.

A good example of the way that these multiple voices are joined together through the train itself is found in a small scene towards the end of *Beggars of Life*. Once again, Tully finds himself in a boxcar with other men. He notices one hobo carving his moniker into the train, and Tully states that these monikers “form a crude directory for other tramps who might be interested in the itinerary of their comrades (283).”<sup>9</sup> Here we see a symbolic communication system that uses the actual train itself to send and receive messages. Only those who are within the subculture can read—or even think to look at—these systems that are embodied within the train. Learning to read graffiti is something that one hobo teaches another as new riders become acquainted with more seasoned riders. It is not a formal education, but, like any language system, it takes practice and time to learn it. This graffiti is a way to connect individuals, even though these people have no prior knowledge of each other and may not have even met. These markings or monikers reflect the individuality of the person, yet they are part of the shared language that connects the hobo subculture.

These markings on the train represent a physical reminder of the illegal relationship that individuals shared with the subculture through their contact with the train. The railroad, as Verstraete states, was much more than a technology of transportation; it was also a technology of representation that “was about figuratively emplacing a specific citizenry” at the cost of others (150). But what this graffiti shows is that the displacement is never fully complete and individual hoboes are (literally) leaving their marks on the train to be read by other members of a subculture who are parasitically appropriating the train. This tripartite relationship is Tully’s boxcar politics.

At the end of *Beggars of Life*, Tully states that, “The road writes with heavy hand its lines of degeneracy, brutality, and all-around wretchedness on their faces and bodies.” His Underworld series show these lines in great detail. Perhaps this is why the *New Republic* described his work as “weary misanthropy” instead of political discourse. But, as shown above, Tully was fiercely interested in writing about the individual among a maligned subculture, and this fluidity between the singular and the polarity does, in fact, produce a political framework: Tully shows how the individual and the group share the same political space on the train whose connection is real and viable.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Jim Tully had made three shorter train-hopping trips but this was his first sustained hobo experience.
- <sup>2</sup> While some of his contemporaries might have seen him as apolitical, the FBI was interested in the political allegiances of Jim Tully and kept a thick file of his interactions and writings. Tully was involved in political causes, including being a sponsor for the “Committee to Defend America by Keeping Out of the War,” as well as writing beautifully and passionately about the horrors of the death penalty. See Bauer and Dawidziak’s *Jim Tully* for a discussion of Tully’s complicated relationship to political causes, especially 157-165; 197-201; 219-227; 272-282.
- <sup>3</sup> There are numerous texts that discuss the historical lives of hoboes from the late nineteenth century through the Great Depression. For a discussion of the draconian “tramp laws,” see Tim Creswell’s *The Tramp in America*. For a discussion of the fluid status of the hobo that constantly shifted from “worker” to “unemployed” throughout a year, see Todd DePastino’s *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America*.
- <sup>4</sup> There are plenty of “real-life” accounts of radical union members who used their hobo skills to function as front-line agitators against capitalism: Henry E. McGuckin’s *Memoirs of a Wobbly* and William Herrick’s *Jumping the Line: The Adventures and Misadventures of an American Radical* are just two excellent monographs of many.
- <sup>5</sup> There were many adherents of this view: “Scientists of the Gilded Age, such as Small, Giddings, and Ward, and those of the next generation, such as Colley, Ross, and Park, all shared a faith in the ability of the new, white and Anglo-Saxon middle class to be the engine of the new social order.” See Daria Frezza’s *The Leader and the Crowd: Democracy in American Public Discourse, 1880-1941*, 32.
- <sup>6</sup> The owners of the railroad companies would be a perfect example of the “technocratic elite.” *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* by Richard White details the social and political power held by railroad companies and their owners around the turn of the twentieth century.
- <sup>7</sup> For a thorough examination of the IWW, see Melvyn Dubofsky’s, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*. For a personal account of a hobo/wobbly, see *Memoirs of a Wobbly* by Henry. E. McGuckin.
- <sup>8</sup> See Nick Salvatore’s *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* for a well-researched discussion of this complicated labor leader, including his organizing effort against the Pullman Palace Car Manufacturing Company.
- <sup>9</sup> See Jeff Ferrell’s article in *Justice Quarterly*, “Freight train graffiti: Subculture, crime, dislocation,” for an excellent article on the freight train graffiti subculture.

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## JIM TULLY'S *THE BRUISER* AS BOXING AMERICANA

WILLARD GREENWOOD

Written and published during the 1930s, an era whose fights still inspire discussions among boxing fans and historians, Jim Tully's *The Bruiser* (1936) is a compelling novel about a journeyman fighter who becomes a heavyweight champion. Because of Tully's experience as a boxer and a writer, the novel has a singular historical and literary aesthetic; *The Bruiser* was well-received upon publication and its sparse prose style still sounds authentic to the modern reader. Tully's varied and exciting life story—especially his brief career as a featherweight boxer—itself justifies interest in the novel, but *The Bruiser* deserves serious consideration as a seminal part of America's storied boxing genre because of how well the novel anticipates the tropes that would typify the boxing narrative in American popular culture in the years to follow.

While *The Bruiser* is in some ways a “genre” novel, it evokes themes that would become central to memorable boxing movies, the best of which hold up over time: Tully's novel contains an aesthetic of spectacle that confronts the violence and trauma inherent in boxing, and the book lays bare the conflicts of race, ethnicity and class intrinsic to American boxing narratives. Tully's fictional account of Shane Rory's compromised and punishing path to the heavyweight championship, however, is perhaps most important for the way it gives readers a sense of the moral and psychological complexity that defines many great boxing works.

Tully's prose in *The Bruiser* embraces the gritty and violent spectacle of the ring. Because of the large crowds that attended boxing matches in the early twentieth century, Tully had a first-hand sense of American audiences. His prose reflects an awareness of that mass aesthetic. Spectacle was an inherent aspect to heavyweight fights, whose audiences were massive—much larger than most modern sporting events. And while Tully can be charged with hyperbole in

stating that Shane Rory's heavyweight championship fight was seen by 300,000 people (229), an unrealistic number considering that over 100,000 people attended a real fight between Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney, his prose showed that he well understood the drama that such large audiences provide. Bauer and Dawidziak link Tully's terse verbiage to "Ernest Hemingway's muscular prose" (4), but it also can be seen as connected to American Modernism, in that it evokes how the combination of art and violence exerts a powerful force on spectators.

While not an avant-garde work, there is a connection between Tully's novel and the innovative New York style of painting known as the "Ashcan School," which advocated experimentation with shape and color but also tried to capture the realism of urban life. In particular George Bellows's painting, "A Stag at Sharkey's," which was completed in 1909 captures the violence that characterized boxing at Sharkey's club. Bellows's earlier painting, "Dempsey and Firpo," is a more realistic representation of boxing than his later work, "A Stag at Sharkey's," which shows his development from a realistic to a more experimental style. "A Stag at Sharkey's" also captures the modern aspect of fighting in that era and how fighters threw themselves at each other and did not use as much defense as modern fighters do. In fact, Peter Schjeldahl says that "The fighters in Sharkey's collide in no way that I've ever seen in the ring: each with a leg lifted far from the floor, as one man jams a forearm into the bloody face of the other." Bellows claimed not to know anything about boxing, yet he was still fascinated by the spectacle of the struggle. Indeed, boxing was becoming quite popular in America at this time and would only become more so in the decades leading up to Tully's time in the ring.

To practitioners, boxing is a technical art form; to the average spectator it can only be a violent struggle, which is how Tully presents boxing. Shane often refers to other fighters as being "slug-nutty." Several days after a loss to Sully, we see Shane still in a concussed postfight state where he wanders a city and is robbed by a front desk clerk in his sleep (106). Shane Rory, like many fighters of his era, subjects himself to punishment in order to deliver more punishment. In fact, Jack Dempsey, to whom the book is dedicated, was one of the originators of this modern style. Shane Rory trains hard, running five miles in the morning when most fighters do not run as far. His training allows him to absorb and deliver punishment. Jack



Dempsey pioneered this hard-charging boxing style that influenced many fighters in the 1930s. Tully's realistic emphasis on these parts of a boxer's regimen makes Shane's fall and rise quite probable. He earns his title with hard work and a willingness to subject himself to rigors that will separate him from other fighters.

If Rory's fictional hard-training narrative echoes Dempsey's real-life regimen, the same trope emerges in accounts of extreme training in the career of Mike Tyson. In James Toback's documentary *Tyson*, the boxer as a young man is portrayed as gifted but troubled; in the film, Tyson cites several traumatic instances that sparked his boxing career and served to make him a violent, dangerous and accomplished fighter. He discusses how when he was in prison, he had been a street fighter but knew nothing about boxing. Wanting to learn the sweet science, he decided to fight a small Irish-American guy. He describes being hit in the stomach and being barely able to breathe.

Tyson asked the fighter to teach him how to fight like that, and the fighter said, "everyone always says that." Just like in the movies and Tully's novel, however, Tyson showed up and did what he was told and thus began his ascent to being the youngest heavyweight champion in the history of boxing. He was twenty. Shane Rory began fighting around the age of eighteen, and Jack Dempsey started fighting illegally in bars at the age of sixteen. Jim Tully began his boxing career in 1907 at the age of twenty-one. In these real and fictional stories, we see the merging of technique and violence and its connection to the development of physical and mental skill.

What are the sources for fighters' willingness to subject themselves to such physical punishment? A partial answer might be that this trauma of class or a desire to shed one's ethnicity and working or underclass origins results in deeming one's self expendable but in a much more heroic way than being a day laborer, which is what Tully himself experienced. A cursory look at the history of boxing shows that it was a way for the lower classes of immigrant males to make a living and, in a broader way, gain respectability for their ethnic group in relation to white protestant America. In fact, Tully experienced life at all levels of society much like his protagonist. Shane Rory also works odd jobs, fights, loses money, travels, and is a homeless "road kid."

This social aspect of boxing in which Italian, Irish, Black, Hispanic, and Jewish fighters each gain prominence is an essential

part of the sport's history. Tully's novel emphasizes the Irish-American aspect of this phenomenon of assimilation. As an unemployed and uneducated American of Irish descent, Shane Rory experiences the alienation of being a hobo and the drudgery of manual labor, both of which initiate his start and subsequent return to the ring. It makes sense, then, that the next large minority, women, would have their turn in the ring and in the popular culture of boxing. Shane's struggles anticipate the trials of the female protagonist, Maggie Fitzgerald, in Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby*. She experiences poverty and the grind of working in a diner. Pocketing the leftovers from her customers' meals motivates her to escape the working class and enter the brutal world of boxing.

A fondness for Irish-American boxers is clearly evident in the novel. Supposedly the best fighter ever was a fictional fighter whom Tully refers to as the "Dublin Slasher." Despite the valorization of Irish-American culture, Tully's work is transcendent in that what matters most happens in the ring. I mention the technique of boxing because there are numerous occasions in the book where seemingly odd body parts—the liver, the top of the head and the heart—are struck. This understanding of boxing and anatomy is a crucial and realistic part of Tully's narrative, which builds toward Rory's championship bout.

A critical element of Rory's achievement is physical trauma, a consequence of many boxers' victories and defeats. In a beating that derails his boxing career, Shane has his jaw broken and is beaten terribly by Bangor Lang. The great champions of boxing have suffered such setbacks. The Academy Award-winning documentary *When We Were Kings* explores the difficulties that Muhammad Ali faced in regaining his heavyweight title. Before Ali improbably reclaimed the heavyweight title from George Foreman in 1974 in the now famous rumble-in-the-jungle, he had his jaw broken by Joe Frazier. Foreman was also considered unbeatable when Ali defeated him. Similarly, Sully, who had beaten Shane Rory twice, was also unconquerable when Rory defeats him in their third fight, giving Rory the heavyweight championship (242).

The fact that some beatings and losses can be instructive is an unpleasant aspect of boxing that Tully replicates quite well. Shane's depression after losing to Bangor Lang is similar to George Foreman's depression after losing the Ali fight. Of greater relevance to Shane's story is the real-life whipping that Harry Greb gave to the

great Gene Tunney, who lost almost two quarts of blood in the fight. Although Greb's tactics were illegal, such things happened regularly and as a matter of course in many boxing matches, some of which were fixed and some were not. In terms of violence, Tully's novel has plenty, especially when Shane has his head "cut to the bone" in his championship fight (230).

This brutality may seem sensational until we consider the facts of a particular fight between Gene Tunney and Harry "the human windmill" Greb. Gene Tunney lost only one fight in a thirteen-year career, and it was a savage and illicit bout with the notorious and flamboyant Greb. Tunney says that in this fight Greb head-butted, elbowed, and hit him with low blows and scraped glove laces across his eyes. By the end of the fight, Tunney had "lost an astonishing two quarts of blood during the fifteen round fight" (Oates 22). Tunney, just like Shane, learns how to take the physical pain of defeat and transform that into the energy needed to be victorious. In fact, he claims that the punishment from this fight enabled him to defeat Jack Dempsey at a time when no one thought that could be done. He goes on to say that in modern times the fight would have been stopped and that he never would have been heard from again (qtd. in Oates 23). Tunney said that undergoing such a physical beating made him realize what he could take. Had he been prevented from realizing the depths of his endurance, he believes, he would have had his confidence permanently diminished.

Tunney not only read *The Bruiser*, he liked it. Consequently, we begin to see this novel not only as a tale of the fighting working class but as a book that was respected and enjoyed by not only some of the greatest fighters of the '30s but by what many consider to be some of the best fighters ever: Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney. Bert Sugar, notable boxing historian, places both Dempsey and Tunney as two of the best pound-for-pound boxers of all time. He ranks Dempsey ninth and Tunney thirteenth. For the record, Harry Greb is fifth on this list. Tunney learned from this physical defeat, but Shane suffers a psychological setback. He has no heart to fight and again and leaves for farm work in North Dakota. We know that Tully performed all kinds of manual labor as did Dempsey. In fact, Roger Kahn notes that Jack Dempsey could unload "twelve tons of sugar beets" in a single day (189). Dempsey's rugged background, like Rory's fictional one, prepares him for the trials of the ring.

Class aspiration, psychological struggle and physical violence are essential stages of a fighter's journey. Shane Rory is no different

from Rocky Balboa of the *Rocky* series or Mike Tyson, who was living homeless on the streets of Brooklyn by the age of twelve. The career of Jake LaMotta (on whom the movie *Raging Bull* was based) also has its roots in psychological trauma that contributes to his ability and desire to take punishment. Early in his life, LaMotta “mistakenly believed that he had murdered a man in a robbery” (Oates 85). The resulting guilt tormented him to such a degree that he subjected himself to tremendous punishment in the ring. He also delivered tremendous punishment in the process. Later he would find out that the person had not been killed.

Shane Rory's traumatic experience as a “road kid” begins a few years before he turns eighteen, which is when the novel begins. While there is a certain bourgeois romantic undercurrent to the successful narrative of class aspiration in boxing stories, Shane is energized by the threat of losing his place on the ladder to success. Lyndal, Shane's love interest, inspires Shane to return to the ring because their unfulfilled relationship works in concert with Shane's fear of losing his place in the world of boxing. Losing that fame and the possibility of love with Lyndal makes him human and transcendent. Shane's struggles would become the heroic and tragic tropes of many boxing narratives. They are all the more so because Tully presents those themes to us without sentimentality. Like many other fighters, Shane uses his fear of defeat to his advantage.

If Shane's fear—and ultimate transcendence of—failure and defeat prefigure the stories of boxing Americana that would follow, so too does Tully's recognition of racial tensions that were intrinsic to American boxing in the '30s and beyond. Racism is part of the fictional backdrop for Tully's novel and a very real dynamic of boxing in America in the 1930s. This paradox of whites' fear of Blacks and Blacks' fear of white control can be seen in the destructive nature of boxing itself. Oates claims that boxing “consumes the very excellence that it displays” (Oates 16). Shane articulates this paradoxical aspect of boxing when he says to Berniece: “If you win. You lose” (Tully 248).

While Tully's novel shows a desire to overcome racism, it's worthwhile to note that the Irish immigrants both embraced racism against Black Americans and at the same time were subjected to racism by the established white Protestants in America. Thus in Tully we see an emerging middle-class desire to defeat and to transcend racism that was foisted on the Irish by those of Anglo descent in

America. As Ignatiev notes, “in the early years Irish were frequently referred to as ‘niggers turned inside out’” (41). This history of racism adds to the context in which Shane befriends Torpedo Jones and then also advocates giving Jones a shot at the heavyweight title.

Two fictional examples illuminate the darkness that awaits less accomplished fighters. In this abyss is the appetite of decadent masochism for witnessing a spectacle regardless of a boxer’s talent or drive. The first one is from William Faulkner’s novel, *Absalom, Absalom!*, which Oates also references in her treatise *On Boxing*. Thomas Sutpen, a slave owner in the antebellum South, stages fights with his slaves in order to prove that he is tougher than they are. He invites his neighbors and tacitly allows his children to witness him fighting his slaves.

While Faulkner’s novel takes place roughly between the years 1840 and 1908, what these fighting scenes tap into is the racial anxiety prevalent in America at the time. Coincidentally, Tully’s book was published in the same year as Faulkner’s, 1936. Furthermore, Tully’s Black heavyweight champion, Torpedo Jones, only loses to Shane Rory. Such an episode is quite interesting because at this time most white fighters would not fight Jack Johnson, a Black heavyweight. Tully mentions the real Jack Johnson in the novel in conjunction with the notion that civilization itself would be at risk if a white fighter were to lose to a Black fighter.

The second literary example of underground fighting is the “Battle Royal” scene in *Invisible Man*, in which Ralph Ellison shows Blacks fighting Blacks for white entertainment. While not true boxing, the battle royal—many fighters in a ring with no discernible rules—is also referenced by Shane. Without the Marquis of Queensberry’s rules, boxing’s rule-based ritual gets perverted into a war of all against all that satisfies the fickle and racist whims of the audience. The white organizers of the fight parade a white woman around the ring for the Black men to see and threaten them for looking at her.

While Faulkner and Tully give voice to white anxiety about Black ascendant power in America, Ellison’s protagonist feels, quite intensely, the nihilism of absolute white power to orchestrate and then enjoy Black on Black violence, thus confirming whites’ stereotypical view of Blacks as savages. Tully exploits this attitude with Shane’s respect and slight befriendings of Torpedo Jones—an act of racial harmony that gets fully amplified in *Rocky III*, when Rocky

Balboa becomes friends (and training partners) with Apollo Creed in order to become the heavyweight champion.

Similarly, *The Bruiser* opens with a story of racial openness: almost as soon as Shane Rory meets Torpedo Jones, Shane defends Torpedo against the racism of a bartender (5). In their ensuing discussion, Torpedo mentions, "I wuz in a battle royal fough nights ago—I done had to lick seben otheh Niggahs for five dollahs . . . I'se goin' to be a prize-fighteh" (7). Torpedo's hopes for social and economic advancement are directly tied to his chances as a fighter, but those chances are inherently hindered by a society that would rather see Black men in battle royal than boxing white men in the ring.

Tully mentions this anxiety about civilization failing, but he does so in relation to the final fight in the novel, the bout between Sully and Shane for the heavyweight championship. Tully describes the title between two white fighters as "the epic struggle of young giants in the twilight of a weakened civilization" (236). We can read this both as a critique of America's decadent need for violence and also as a critique of racism in boxing.

Tully's interest in transcending race is particularly compelling given the fact that he dedicates the book to Jack Dempsey, who, like many white fighters, refused to fight Black boxers. Not only does Shane Rory befriend Torpedo Jones at the beginning of the novel, but he fights and defeats him on his way to the championship (156-63). Clearly, there is a message of political and cultural equality here, but in terms of boxing aesthetics, the willingness to take on any fighter at any time fits with the character of Shane Rory. It's not that his character is blind to color, but his experiences have taught him not to shy away from a challenge that would diminish him. That fearlessness is a universal characteristic of the boxing narratives. Shane's quitting boxing at the end of the novel allows Torpedo to challenge for the new heavyweight crown.

In its violent aesthetic, focus on struggle, and recognition of racial strife, *The Bruiser* clearly taps into the mainstream of the American boxing narrative. But Shane's story is quite personal as well, especially in relation to being mentored and having a love interest, which is only partially realized. These narrative aspects are conventional, yet Tully keeps Shane from developing a real friendship with the mentor figure (his trainer, Silent Tim) or any of the women whom he befriends. Tully handles these conventions of the sports narrative in ways that are not stereotypical. For example, Shane sees

corruption and is tempted to throw fights, but he maintains his character throughout the novel without being sentimental. We do see his manager, Silent Tim, trying to arrange fights to set up Shane for the championship fight. Shane has no knowledge of these arrangements, and one fighter fights savagely until the eleventh round instead of going down in the sixth. His erstwhile trainer and several other male figures serve as mentors, but essentially Shane is an isolated figure throughout the novel.

Beyond its seminal evocation of later cultural aspects of boxing, part of the novel's appeal lies in Shane's psychology and his character. Talented and quietly charismatic, Shane is an exceptional everyman, one with the aristocratic bearing of many tragic figures. Tully describes Rory as not bragging outside the ring but being completely confident inside the ring. One of Shane's first opponents tells him that "the other fellow's scared as you" (13). In a similar manner Mike Tyson once stated that he is always terrified before a fight but that he takes all of his fear and anxiety and projects onto the other fighter. Shane Rory not only has control of his emotions in the ring; he also has control of his feelings toward alcohol, tobacco, and women. Shane also respects women, which we see in his admiration of Hellen Keller's biography.

While men pose the most danger to Shane inside and out of the ring, women do as well. Shane is drawn to Dilly Dally, Lyndal and Berniece Burue and they to him, each for varying reasons. With all three women, Shane is chivalrous but coolly distant. In the world of boxing everything (even genuine friendship or romance) is a potential obstacle for Shane. His relationship with Lyndal, the farmer's daughter, is the most complex. Shane meets her while doing seasonal work in Nebraska when he has left the ring, depressed after losing to Bangor Lang, and has disappeared from the world of boxing.

Shane resists temptations from women who want to share his fame and money. One woman in particular inspires him to return to boxing. Lyndal seems to be the standard woman as love interest/muse, but Tully shies away from the inevitable conclusion that we expect from the deployment of this trope. For example, there are well-developed female characters in *The Fighter* (Charlene Fleming played by Amy Adams) and Adrian (played by Talia Shire) in *Rocky*. Lyndal, the most significant love interest in *The Bruiser*, is an intelligent woman who admires Shane for his physique and his mind. There is a genuine romantic feeling between them, but Shane's

return to the ring and her parents' expectations thwart any development of love.

The fame-seeking Berniece Burue replaces Lyndal as the main female character in the story, but she ends up unattached to Shane as well. In fact, she has the last line of the novel, and she is the person to whom Shane speaks last, emphasizing the fact that Shane Rory does not get to share his life (i.e. his success or failure) with anyone, male or female. Concluding the novel with isolation is an interesting move. Boxing narratives typically begin with isolation in order to emphasize the beginning of the boxer's struggle: picture Rocky drinking raw eggs in his slummy apartment or Shane Rory wandering alone in a rainy rail yard.

Shane's isolation is not the usual variety of male anxiety with an undercurrent of fear and misogyny that Leslie Fiedler says is typical of male protagonists in American literature (24-26). Shane's solitude hints at a philosophical structure of the novel in which the intellect must be subordinated to the physical realities of the world, a dynamic that both Plato and Nietzsche explore. This is not to imply that the novel is a philosophical one, but that boxing itself stands apart from other sports in that it is not a game. Joyce Carol Oates states that we "play" other sports such as football, but "one does not play boxing" (19).

This aspect of serious struggle is central to Nietzsche's interpretation of human existence, particularly his concept of "asceticism" in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Human culture, to paraphrase Nietzsche, blocks out distasteful aspects of reality in order to come to terms with the inherent unfairness and cruelty of the world. Plato's concept of human perception as flawed is articulated in his allegory of the cave. Because people cannot perceive true reality, they "would in every way believe that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts" (1133). Shane wills himself "to see" himself, others and the fickle world of boxing clearly. In Plato and Nietzsche, we see a profound skepticism of intelligence and thought. In *The Bruiser*, Tully articulates a philosophy that minimizes intellect. Too much thinking would lead Shane into debilitating values such as cooperation, friendship and love.

Consider the newspaperman's brief monologue to Shane: "Tell me, Shane—have you been doin' much thinkin' lately? You know a fighter's like a newspaperman—he shouldn't think—pimps of the emotions, that's what I call us fellows. Now you've got everything—but for God's sake don't develop brains. That's what kills people.



Never let 'em tell you different.” (103). Thus we see Nietzsche’s favoring of strong feeling over the capacity to reason so that the hero is able to stand outside of traditional morals.

While generally hostile to Christianity, Nietzsche does say that the Old Testament has “great men, a heroic landscape, and one of the rarest things on earth, naïveté of a strong heart” (281). Nietzsche’s particular brand of nihilism and Plato’s idealist philosophy complement Tully’s vision of Shane Rory as a lapsed Catholic who seems to be sublimely naïve and immune to God’s love and judgment. Even Rocky makes the sign of the cross before his first fight with Apollo Creed. Shane’s Catholicism is completely repressed before his championship fight. In short, Shane Rory is both idealistic and nihilistic—he is moral outside the ring and brutal inside the ring. As a true boxing ascetic, he ends up alone.

Shane’s solitude is emblematic of the melancholy associated with any prodigy—like Tyson, a heavyweight champion at the age of twenty. The biographical connection here is obviously with Tully, who seems to have been a polymath with autodidactic tendencies like other successful writers (William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy come to mind). It seems that wherever Tully went, he achieved success. Whether it was as a freelance writer in Hollywood or as a boxer, Tully not only showed that he could survive but that he could learn and adapt as well.

It is at this point that boxing transcends the Darwinian aspect of life, mere survival, and morphs into a more complicated kind of Darwinism. Brian Boyd claims that “Art as cognitive play augments our capacities so that we can, at least in the domain on which each art focuses, efficiently produce ideas or actions: sounds, movements visualizations, or representations, and, in the case of story, scenarios for reasoning about our own and others’ plans and actions” (95). In boxing stories, we continually see this dynamic presented. A character’s struggle and survival contribute to culture and to an understanding of human action, which is what the art of boxing does.

Shane Rory’s narrative is notable and tragic in this context because his desire to leave the ring outweighs his desire to reign as heavyweight champion. This conclusion, which disregards fame for life, is mythical. This transcendent moment, which also ends with Shane alone, recalls the famous bronze statue, *The Boxer*. The rugged physique of the statue recalls the many descriptions of Shane Rory in the novel. Women admire his strength but also, by implication, the

self-control and discipline needed to transform his body from that of a regular man into that of a boxer.

Adding depth and detail to the conclusion's connection to this statue is the implication in the novel that Shane's final fight against Sully was compromised because Sully may or may not have had "iron" in his gloves (226). Such an unfair advantage is an outrage to the reader and a danger to Shane, whose head is cut to the bone in the first round. Yet, a closer look at the statue shows the ancient and brutal metal equipment, "the caestus," which was used by some boxers in the Classical era (Poliakoff 74). Thus, we can see Sully's cheating and Shane's survival of it as transcending the nostalgic notion that men were tougher and better in the past. For example, several times throughout the book, fighters are described as not being worthy of those who fought before them. Even in the *Iliad*, Homer uses the epithet "weak as men are now" to invoke a nostalgia that serves to inspire the Greek soldiers to compete with their military forebears.

Consequently, we can see that fondness for the past is natural and inevitable. Shane, able to stand up to the iron in Sully's gloves, shows that he exists in and outside of time, a mythic modern boxer who could beat anyone at any time. Yet, boxing is ultimately tragic. The paradox of victory is that Shane will be out of boxing and alone, but happiness in some form that we cannot see seems to be possible for Shane. Shane is able to live without boxing, friends or love.

Shane has achieved part of the American Dream at the end of the novel. With his winning comes prize money, which equals freedom and an ability to enjoy his fame. Happiness remains elusive. Boxing history is full of fighters who have squandered their winnings. What Tully's novel does not anticipate is boxing's current underground status—it is not nearly as popular as current forms of fighting entertainment such as Mixed Martial Arts and Ultimate Fighting Championship. Boxing's current state resembles the shady underground aesthetic that we see in the beginning of *The Bruiser*, where cheating is a way of life and *dementia pugilistica* is the inevitable end to a "road kid's" career. Finally, we have these two possibilities of heroic nostalgia: one that hearkens back to the glory days of boxing in this country and another in which Shane finds happiness outside the ring. We will see neither of those endings, yet Tully subtly allows us to sense their melancholy.

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THE CHOSEN AND THE SELF-MADE:  
THE CONFLICTED AMERICAN DREAM IN JIM  
TULLY'S *JARNEGAN*

JEFFREY SWENSON

Jim Tully—a man who grew up in an orphanage and spent years as a hobo before becoming a successful novelist and Hollywood reporter—seems to be the perfect person to write about the American dream. *Jarnegan* (1926), Tully's third novel, exhibits all of the characteristics of the dream mythos, the novel's eponymous main character progressing from convict serving time for murder to successful movie director in Hollywood. But Tully's depiction of the American dream is far from simple, as *Jarnegan* succeeds not so much because he pulls himself up by his bootstraps but rather because he has a great soul—he's a shining, chosen man among men. *Jarnegan*, set in the land of mythmaking—the dream factory of Hollywood—exposes the complex construction of and inherent contradictions within the American dream mythos.

Critics in the 1920s reveled in the hard-boiled reality of Jim Tully's second book, *Beggars of Life* (1924), an autobiographical tale of Tully's time as a hobo and in and out of prison. The book also enjoyed Hollywood success; it was adapted into an early sound film of the same title starring Wallace Berry and Louise Brooks in 1928. In contrast, *Jarnegan* was regarded as a sometimes enjoyable failure. In the *American Mercury*, H.L. Mencken accused Tully of "succumbing to the charms of a movie-picture ending" (382). Clayton Hamilton claimed that the novel had "no plot, no structure" and that it "begins as a picaresque romance, and ends as an analytic study of an egomaniac mind" (191). More recently, H. Bruce Franklin has called *Jarnegan* "a supermasculine figure, something of a self-fantasy" (157). Tully's plot structure in *Jarnegan* is jarring, as the book

reads like four roughly connected stories: a series of scenes following Muldoon's murderous fight and subsequent jail time; a narrative of his time on the road as the newly minted Jarnegan; a single chapter cataloging his meteoric rise in the movie industry; and the final third of the novel that becomes a character study of a bombastic, sometimes lecherous and anti-Semitic Jarnegan in his tenure as movie director. But the critics' dismissal of *Jarnegan* as egomaniacal or fantastically superhuman misses the point—Tully's adroit portrayal of the conflicted components of the American dream. *Jarnegan* explores the distinctions between the individualistic success mythos of the chosen and the egalitarian mythos of self-making.

The novel opens on a scene of the young Jack Muldoon, an Irish bill poster, confronting Jappers, a strikebreaker. The two go to an empty warehouse to fight, Muldoon kills Jappers in the bloody scuffle, and he is convicted of manslaughter and sent to jail. Released after two and a half years, Muldoon leaves his wife, his child and his poor Ohio childhood to invent himself anew. Taking the name Jarnegan, he wanders west as a hawker for a snake-oil salesman and eventually settles in Hollywood where he rises in the film industry to become a powerful director. Tully's novel comes across as disconnected and disjointed, a novel of contradictions and larger-than-life personalities, but *Jarnegan* ultimately exposes Tully's cynical vision of the American dream. The novel mimics the standard narrative of self-making, but ultimately Tully undercuts and devalues that version of the mythos. Instead, Jarnegan succeeds primarily due to his "great soul," an in-born but ill-defined characteristic of potential greatness that Tully's supporting characters regularly recognize in his hero. Jarnegan's great soul is reminiscent of another permutation of the American dream mythos—the chosen.

#### THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

In *Jarnegan*, Tully explores the American dream myth by invoking two related but distinct archetypes of the successful American—the chosen and the self-made. The term "American dream" was coined in 1931—only a few years after Tully's novel—by popular historian James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* (Samuel 13). While the term was new, the cultural mythos has a much longer history. As Richard Weiss and others have noted, the "chosen" aspect of the American success myth owes at least part of its cultural

origin to the Puritan settlements of New England and their Calvinist principles that form the basis for what Max Weber famously termed the Protestant Work Ethic.<sup>1</sup> According to Weber, because the Calvinist doctrine of predestination presupposes that all events are willed by God, some people are condemned to hell while others are destined for heaven through “Irresistible Grace” despite their acts in their lifetime. While it might seem that this doctrine would not prompt virtuous action from an individual, Irresistible Grace is made manifest within a person’s lifetime: as the chosen are predestined to go to heaven, they prove successful in daily life. Thus, individuals often wished to assure or assert their chosen status by providing evidence of material success, Weber argues, making for a great economic and productive motivation within Protestant sects.

In the early days of the American republic, this success archetype of the chosen was overwritten by the mythos of the self-made man, an up-by-your-bootstraps narrative like those told by Benjamin Franklin and Frederick Douglass. These narratives proposed that any American—whether born without an inheritance like Franklin or as slave like Douglass—could achieve economic success through hard work and thrift. Because the early American republic lacked the rigid English social and government structures that inhibited economic mobility, a mythos of economic self-improvement arose. Early Americans sought to fill the structure vacuum caused by fluid land ownership, rapidly growing cities and a shifting social landscape. As Tom Lutz notes: “The work ethic Franklin . . . described in his autobiography was more than anything a program for making one’s way in a world devoid of authority” (58). Whereas the mythos of the chosen predicted that only those chosen by God would succeed, the self-made mythos allowed for success for every individual, and that success was predicated on hard work, not inherent goodness. In Gilded Age America, Horatio Alger perfected the self-made archetype in his popular boys’ novels; Alger’s young heroes often progressed steadily from street urchins to successful businessmen.<sup>2</sup> Alger so captured the self-made narrative that the Horatio Alger myth has become all but synonymous with the American dream.

While Tully’s own story resembled that of the characters from Alger’s novels in terms of a rise from street urchin to success, *Jarnegan* demonstrates Tully’s cognizance of both the chosen and self-made elements of the American dream. *Jarnegan* appears to embrace both elements of the American success myth—on the sur-

face Jarnegan looks both chosen and self-made. However, while Jarnegan's rise from prison to Hollywood success appears on the surface to be a self-made man story, his success is actually more attributable to his exceptional soul, not his thrift or hard work. When Jarnegan makes his quick leap from set construction to acting to assistant directing—all within fifteen pages—the narrator describes him as being like “Arbuckle, Chaplin and their ilk,” or even greater: “The ex-convict was their superior in this—his soul was large enough for chaos.”<sup>3</sup> Jarnegan doesn't work for his success: he is repeatedly described as moving into his natural place as a great man due to the greatness of his soul.

Tully's depiction of Jarnegan reveals the inherent contradictions between the two seemingly related elements of the American dream. In his seminal work on the American success myth, Weiss discusses how the American ideal of success has always been fraught: “Pursuit of material self-interest might become the hallmark of the American, but the continued assertion of the values of the Protestant ethic indicate that this quest was never free of a certain amount of guilt and ambivalence” (27). In other words, the specter of the chosen has always lain behind the image of the self-made man in the American dream ethos. In *Jarnegan*, Tully lays bare the tension between the two elements, ultimately offering only a parody of the self-made man myth and investing instead in the mythos of the great soul—the chosen individual. His belief in the theory of the great man was itself fraught, however, as Tully suggests that the great man is only palatable on his way up, not once he is successful.

#### THE LITTLE TRAMP, THE GREAT MASTER, AND THE *ÜBERMENSCH*

Tully's conflicted attitude toward these varied visions of greatness can be seen in a story he told about working for Charlie Chaplin as a press agent and slush-pile reader. While Tully was initially happy to be a member of the star's entourage, Paul Bauer and Mark Dawidziak note that he was not impressed with Chaplin's knowledge:

Chaplin was given to making sweeping statements about art and artists, but unlike most members of the inner circle, Tully would not always let them go unchallenged. “A great artist must have a great

audience,” the comedian told Tully during his first week at the studio. “How about Whitman and Nietzsche?” the new employee countered. Chaplin looked at him, puzzled by the question. “They might have been members of a vaudeville team” to Chaplin, Tully later remarked. “He made no comment.” (139)

In telling the anecdote Tully clearly means to make Chaplin look foolish, but the story also reveals Tully musing on greatness. When considering great men, Tully offers an odd pairing: Whitman and Nietzsche. In *Jarnegan*, Tully plays with both Whitman’s vision of the great master poet and Nietzsche’s darker vision of the *Übermensch*.

A close look at the novel’s epigraph reveals that Tully was interested in preordained greatness. *Jarnegan* begins with an epigraph from the 1855 preface to Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, one that provides an essential celebration of the plain folk of the earth: “Men and women and the earth and all upon it are simply to be taken as they are, and the investigation of their past and present and future shall be done with perfect candor . . . . As soon as histories are properly told, there is no more need of Romances.”<sup>4</sup> The epigraph celebrates the common man and woman, embraces candor and rejects romance. Tully celebrated the common man in his fiction, writing of the hobo, the boxer and even the criminal, so this nod to Whitman fits, at least until we look more closely at what Tully leaves out in his ellipses.

Instead of dropping a few of Whitman’s lines, Tully skips almost 1,400 words between “candor” and “histories.” In these missing paragraphs, Whitman posits the character of the “great master,” a great poet who “has nothing to do with miracles. He sees health for himself in being one of the mass . . . . he sees the hiatus in singular eminence” (16, ellipsis Whitman’s).<sup>5</sup> Whitman contradicts himself here as he often does, the master poet being “one of the mass” even while he claims a moment of “hiatus” in his “eminence,” as if the master needs to break sometimes from being “one of the mass.” Whitman’s master “knows that he is unspeakably great” even as he maintains “that all are unspeakably great” (16), but the tension between the master poet simultaneously being great and being one of the masses is palpable in these lines. A great master who is also one of the common men connects with the way Tully deals with his eponymous hero: Jarnegan rises from the masses, working-class born and union bred, even as he rises to be an exceptional man, a brilliant Hollywood director and power broker. But in leaving this complex vision of the master out of



the epigraph—in leaving Whitman’s complex vision of the “great master” in the ellipses—Tully reveals his predilection for a darker vision of greatness: Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* or Overman.

If Whitman’s great master is a man of the masses, Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* or Overman—often translated as the “Superman”—stands apart, a man above the rest of humanity. Nietzsche’s formulation of the Overman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* stresses this distance: “I have the overman at heart, *that* is my first and only concern—and *not* man: not the neighbor, not the poorest, not the most ailing, not the best” (399). As Werner Stegmeier has pointed out, “According to Nietzsche’s doctrine of the Overman, strong individuals ought to rule the mass of weak ones. This doctrine particularly recommended Nietzsche’s philosophy to racism, and remains politically dangerous” (20).<sup>6</sup>

While Tully may begin the novel by quoting Whitman, Jarnegan’s sentiments near the end of the novel are more akin to Nietzsche’s. Asked about his frequent disparaging comments toward Jewish movie producers, Jarnegan reacts by rejecting—and pitying—most everyone: “I hate anybody’s who’s in power. I don’t want any one to have the least string on me. Some Jews have a lot of feeling—a devil of a lot of it. I hate the Irish worse than the Jews. I hate the world at times—but I don’t hate it nearly as much as I pity it.” (156). Jarnegan’s egomaniacal self-worth, Tully’s revision of Whitman’s epigraph, and Tully’s anecdote about Chaplin and greatness reveal his ambivalence about the chosen, about the success of those with a great soul.

Tully wrote much of *Jarnegan* while in Chaplin’s employ; their relationship soured soon after its publication.<sup>7</sup> Tully and Chaplin had similar histories: Chaplin grew up in poverty in London, his family living at the workhouse while he attended a school for orphans and destitute children at age seven (McCabe 7-8). Tully’s troubled relationship with Chaplin and his doubts about the director’s greatness may have to do with the distinctly different take Chaplin had on what a great man is, at least in the characteristics of the Tramp. Chaplin’s Little Tramp follows Whitman’s inclusive vision of the great master in that he cares more for other people than he does for material wealth or at least working hard to attain that wealth. Audiences identified with the Tramp because he mocked authority figures, but his avoidance of work leaves him destitute, not a great man set apart from the masses. Chaplin’s filmography, as Julie Levinson suggests, presents

a “glorification of unemployment and the concomitant ambivalence toward work,” a recurring rejection of the up-by-your-bootstraps version of the American dream:

Since his entry into film, Chaplin had used the tramp character to cast light on the follies of work, ambition, and conformity. The titles among many of his two-reelers betray an ongoing meditation on work: *Making a Living* (1914), *His New Profession* (1914), *His New Job* (1915), *Work* (1915), *Easy Street* (1917), *The Idle Class* (1921), *Pay Day* (1922) . . . Typically, in his movies, the tramp is by definition unemployed and by temperament unemployable. On the rare occasion when Charlie does have a job, work is not depicted as productive labor. Rather, work is a necessary evil: a self-perpetuating and pointless exercise. (155)

In his films, Chaplin rejects the narrative of financial success that the director himself had lived, celebrating an idyllic vision of poverty trumped by individualism—a very Whitmanian construct. The tramp’s calm acceptance of poverty stands in distinct contrast to the harsh realities of Tully’s hobo experiences. While Tully questioned the self-making trope of the American dream, he did not reject financial success, as Chaplin did in his films. In contrast to Tully’s Jarnegan, the Tramp embodies the great soul of the everyman, one who stands against financial self-improvement and with the masses.

In contrast, Tully’s protagonists, as David D. Anderson has argued, are consumed with the “determination to escape and survive in an environment that denies both” (“Painful” 10). Because Tully was proud of his experiences as a road kid, he doubtless shuddered at Chaplin’s saccharine portrayal of poverty. The erasure in ellipses of Whitman’s complicated vision of greatness in epigraph and his evocation of Nietzsche in anecdote point to Tully’s articulation of himself as distinct from Chaplin. Tully celebrates a vision of the great men who, as Thomas Newhouse has argued, were “tough vagabonds with a hostility to the bourgeois values of work and family, who take to the road and cultivate a manly stoicism as hard-boiled and emotionally controlled as any Hemingway hero” (16). Despite the epigraph, Jarnegan is less like Whitman’s great master than Nietzsche’s Overman, as Nietzsche’s philosophy incorporates a great soul willing to forgo bonds of family and past to pursue a great, individual destiny. As Jarnegan pursues that destiny, Tully’s narrative seems to follow an arc of self-making, but at best *Jarnegan* is a twisted par-

ody of self-making. Seen in the light of Tully's views of the chosen, the narrative of self-making in the novel is revealed as a con game, where financial self-improvement is not like Franklin's vision of hard work and reward but rather more of an inevitable march to greatness of a man set apart from the masses.

### SELF-NAMING AND THE CON GAME OF SELF-MAKING

On its face, *Jarnegan* follows one of the core tenets of self-making: the opportunity to remake yourself anew through hard work. In *Jarnegan*, Tully pursues reinvention at its most extreme, following a convicted murderer as he takes a new name and sheds his past only to emerge anew in the West. However, Tully's depiction of Jarnegan's rise from Midwestern felon to Hollywood director is more one of caricature than of celebration. While Tully uses many of the tropes of self-making, including reinvention and climbing the social and financial ladder, these tropes are always exaggerated to the point of nonsense. Alternately, Jarnegan's lot improves simply because he is recognized as great—a kind of Overman. For example, when Jarnegan—still named Muldoon—is standing trial for murder, his lawyer argues that in killing a strike breaker he has fulfilled a higher purpose: “There are invisible laws, gentlemen, which are bigger than man-made laws” (18).

Jarnegan's actions place him beyond and above the mores of common men. And imprisonment proves a path for the expression of soon-to-be Jarnegan's exceptionality: “On the way to the penitentiary Muldoon's head ached with a dull throb. That journey laid the foundation of the wall he since built around himself. The papers mentioned his indifference” (19). Jarnegan's innate greatness asserts itself at this time of need, as he builds a “wall” that separates him from the rabble of humanity, allowing his greatness to assert itself. What the courts and newspapers read as “indifference,” and what might be generally considered signs of sociopathic tendencies in a murderer, are here rather a reflection of Jarnegan-to-be's inherent greatness giving him strength. Even in this nascent moment of reinvention, Tully focuses on his protagonist's greatness, not on some sort of rock-bottom moment of self-reflection.

As Jarnegan-to-be enters prison and loses the name Muldoon, his greatness proves to be the true driving force of his rise. Tully's narrative of self-making becomes an exaggerated parody, one that serves

to cover for the rise of a Nietzschean Overman. Tully takes laborious care in stripping his protagonist to nothing before beginning his rise, taking even his name in prison, leaving him *tabula rasa*. A “clerk—a trusty in uniform” puts his name down in “an immense book,” and that name is “taken” only to be replaced: “Once the name was taken a number was given—44733” (23-24). As a simple prisoner, one among many, Jarnegan-to-be wonders if he is “the forty-fourth thousand prisoner” (28). Instead of fracturing his identity, this loss of a name becomes the platform for his self-invention. His lawyer, Jerry Brannigan, gives him advice after he is sprung from prison:

“Now, the first thing is—change your name. You’re through with the Muldoons and everything Muldooney. You don’t belong to them—they were merely the carts that dumped you in the parade. You’ve got it in ye, Jack—I don’t know where you got it, but you have—and I don’t know where in the hell you’ll go—but you’re goin’—God—and it’s all a mystery—a kid from a gang of Irish ragpickers—ye took your beatin’ like a sport. Japper’s better off dead—he had a black heart with red scabs on it.” (41)

After he takes the name Jarnegan, the protagonist begins with a clean slate, but Tully makes sure the reader knows that the loss of the name Muldoon actually frees his protagonist to express his innate greatness. Instead of building upon his birthright and natural talent, Jarnegan is simply being christened as the man that he always was on the inside, an *Übermensch* who naturally overshadows the men among whom he was born.

The false construction of Jarnegan’s story of self-making becomes more apparent in the novel as he takes his first job after prison, one where he sees the rest of humanity not as equals but as targets, marks to con. After his release, Jarnegan takes to the road for a few weeks and flirts with becoming a bill poster again before meeting Brother Jonathon, a quasi-mystic and snake-oil salesman. While Jonathon makes little effort to convince Jarnegan of the validity of his mystic powers, he is driven to introduce his system to his new acquaintance. Brother Jonathon’s “religion” revolves around a belief in reincarnation and a twisted Calvinist vision of calling: “I believe that the Great Sorter gives ’em to people who can take care of ’em best—loans ’em out like . . . to some he sends the soul of a butterfly—to others—the soul of a lion” (71).

Jonathon thinks that Jarnegan has been given a good one of “em”—a good soul. Thus, he befriends him despite determining—

likely through reading clues in Jarnegan's demeanor—that Jarnegan is a murderer. Jonathon offers Jarnegan a job as a “shillaber,” an “Assistant Healer” who sells medicine to the crowd while the Brother preaches (78). Unlike lawyer Jimmy Brannigan's confidence in Jarnegan, one based on a shared Irish ethnicity and a knowledge of his client and crime, Brother Jonathon judges Jarnegan based on his great soul. And while this job is a step up from prison, becoming a con man and manipulating crowds of common men to make a buck hardly seems an appropriate form of self-improvement. Tully does place Jarnegan on the ladder to success, but he twists and perverts the standard American success story in doing so.

In his sermons, Jonathon preaches a bastardization of Whitman's ideal of the great master. He speaks both as if he is one of the masses and one above them: “I am with you—for I am not as one who sells medicine but am a healer of the people—I am the prophet” (78). While Jonathon gives his speech, Jarnegan sells the tonic in the crowd, using a slight of hand to shortchange buyers. When Jarnegan addresses Brother Jonathon during his sermon, he calls him “Great Master” (78). Tully's reference to Whitman's great master here draws distinction between the true figure of the great master that Whitman posits and the more troubling figure of Brother Jonathon, a false prophet.

Whitman's preface itself addresses this kind of hucksterism, decrying “that which distorts honest shapes or which creates unearthly beings or places or contingencies” as “a nuisance and revolt . . . Great genius and the people of these states must never be demeaned to romances” (19). Tully simultaneously allows Jarnegan to recognize the false master in Jonathon even as he sees the necessity of story, of the demand of the masses for an image of greatness. Tully's story itself is a kind of con, providing the façade of Jarnegan's self-making even as it is clear that the protagonist's innate greatness drives him, not his hard work. Jarnegan steals enough money as a shill for Jonathon that he is able to spend his leisure hours in the movie theater, wherein he begins to “think about pictures. He conceived ideas for the most fantastic melodrama” (81).

The thin veneer of Jonathon's “Great Master” status and the “melodrama” he imagines on screen provoke actual inspiration: Jarnegan sees in his employer the emptiness of one who claims greatness but who is ultimately empty, and he sees in the films he watches the simplicity and emptiness of the screen melodrama. Tully seems

to say that when the *Übermensch* is freed from concern for the masses—freed from a Whitmanian conception of a great master who is also one with the common man—success is inevitable and rapid. Thus inspired, Jarnegan leaves Jonathon without a word and moves to Hollywood, where his rise from vagabond to set laborer to actor to famous director is managed in one chapter, as if destiny is ordained, not earned.

#### THE DARK SIDE OF SUCCESS FOR THE CHOSEN

Despite the fact that his twisted rise mocks the classic narrative of the self-made man, Jarnegan on the rise does at least engage the reader. Jarnegan's rise to power in Hollywood makes sense, especially as Tully owed his own financial success to the growth of the film industry, and because that industry was itself burgeoning in the '20s, beginning its golden age in earnest in 1927 with the origin of talkies and Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*. More surprising is the degree to which Tully strips away the façade of a happy film ending in his novel.

While *Jarnegan* was not the first novel about Hollywood, as Bauer and Dawidziak note, it was the first novel to be neither melodrama nor comedy, "the first novel aimed at Hollywood's hollow heart" (171). Tully spent much of his magazine-writing career after *Jarnegan* exposing the dirty underbelly of Hollywood, as David D. Anderson explains: "He saw its people as either genuine, like the freaks, the tramps, the roustabouts of his past . . . or as phonies, like Chaplin, too often believers in their own projected images, and childish, imperious, and scornful as a result" ("Hollywood" 8-9). Jarnegan's grating bombast reveals the final complication within Tully's dissection of the American dream: while adhering to the idea that greatness or being chosen is the true reason for financial progress, Tully suggests that while the chosen inevitably rise to success, that success also ruins them—or at least makes an ass of them. Tully fuses the "tramps and roustabouts" with the "phonies," creating in Jarnegan a character whose greatness we admire as he rises, but whose excesses as a success make him insufferable.

When Jarnegan works, his greatness shines. In the first scene, where we see Jarnegan portrayed as a successful veteran director shooting a ballroom dance scene, he works flawlessly. Motivating his actors and actresses through a combination of bullying and sheer

will, Jarnegan controls the set with an inspired brilliance. He shoots with such precision that his films require little editing; his vision of the shoot is inspired: “like all great artists, Jarnegan had no rules. Had he ever considered them he would have left the description of his work to the lesser gifted people. He was guided from within” (131). But while his vital energies are used only to produce art—now a natural aspect of his greatness—Jarnegan becomes a man of dissipation in all other aspects of his life. As a Hollywood success, Jarnegan is bombast incarnate. A successful director, Jarnegan disdains those who surround him, especially the women who star in and the Jewish men who produce his films.

Jarnegan’s treatment of women in the novel becomes increasingly problematic as he becomes more successful. His wife conveniently leaves Jarnegan while he is in prison, so the powerful director is not bothered with any traces of his past life, but once he becomes a powerful director, he begins to run through a long string of starlets like Cherry, a “lovely little damsel” and “hit of the Follies” whom Jarnegan himself admits he “used” and to whom he “broke his word” (182). Jarnegan later becomes enamored of Dale, a young woman recently arrived from Ohio. He conceives of Dale as a toy-like sexual object, and he plans to manipulate her to such a degree that he finds even his own behavior repugnant: “Damn it to hell—I no sooner get through with one than I meet another I like. But this one’s a doll—how those eyes and that dress match” (145). When he arranges to meet with Dale, his plans show his disdain for her predictability and the Ohio town and life from which she comes:

“I’ve got to impress this little girl—great God, how beautiful—let’s see—Portsmouth—a lousy town—who do I know there?—I’ll draw her out—I’ve heard of people . . . she’s probably Catholic—she’ll fall for the one faith stuff—tell her how I used to serve the buck at the altar . . . I’ll tell her about my loneliness—they love that—tell her I’m still in search of the ideal woman—she’ll think she’s it—oh hell—I’ll make out all right—I’ve never flopped yet.” (187-88)

Jarnegan’s machinations with Dale show how his success precludes him from connections with common people, even those who know of him from his time in Ohio, as it turns out Dale does. Dale is the closest thing Jarnegan has to a true love interest, and even she is reduced to a minor body in his orbit, one of the predictable “they” to be manipulated for the great man who has “never flopped,” suggest-

ing that his greatness expands beyond filmmaking to the bedroom. Jarnegan is hardly a character to be fully bound by morality, but the way he holds himself separate from and above women reveals that he believes his greatness permits him to abuse the masses.

Similarly, while Jarnegan is working his way up in the film industry, it's easy enough to gloss over calling one of his producers "a white Jew"; part of Jarnegan's strength and charm, after all, lies in his hardscrabble sentiment, his road terminology—a language that includes "Chinks" and "nigger gin" (156, 164). Once he becomes successful, however, Jarnegan's racist comments and anti-Semitism become more repugnant. Late in the novel, Jarnegan's primary conflict is an attempt by Edward Bernard, a rival director, to frame him within a sex scandal. Bernard himself has gotten Daisy, a fourteen-year-old starlet, pregnant, and she has either miscarried or sought an illegal abortion, throwing her, as Jarnegan says, "into galloping consumption" (163). When Daisy dies, Bernard bribes or coerces people into spreading rumors that place blame for her pregnancy and death on Jarnegan, enough for producers to exercise the morality clause in his contract and oust him from his current picture. Jarnegan's indignant rant against the producers reads more like the tantrum of a child than the words of a self-made man:

"Can you beat that?" he thundered. "Bernard gets my picture to direct. I'll sue those Jews—the Christ-killers! Can you beat it? By God! And the Jews make me the goat. They know I'm innocent. I never touched the kid . . . Somebody slipped that nurse—it was either the Jews or Bernard—they eat out of the same plate." (245)

To Jarnegan, the primary affront is that his picture—his right as a great man—has been taken from him by those that are lesser. In affront to this greatness, the lesser men—"the Jews or Bernard"—claim what is rightfully his. His maniacal response crackles with spite and venom: "A streak of hysterical laughter came over Jarnegan—'I'll get Bernard—I'll get Leedman, too—I'll hold their heads together and crack them like Easter eggs'" (245). In an ego-maniacal frenzy, Jarnegan goes on to list the films he will make: "I'll make a picture in the White House. They'll play extras . . . I'll make a picture of the Pope givin' birth to triplets. I'll show the Blessed Virgin conceivin' of the Holy Ghost . . . I'll show the bums who I am an' what I can do" (245). While Jarnegan's revenge fantasy is hyperbolic, its grandiose nature shows the degree of his affront at any



challenge to his greatness. Despite their sacrilegious content, the invocation of biblical themes in his fantastic films betrays Jarnegan's assurance of being one of God's chosen. Ironically, the result of being successful and being chosen makes Jarnegan believe that he is owed success and that rules and social norms do not apply to him.

It is not success that causes this repugnance *per se*; when Jarnegan is a common working man or even a prisoner, his racist comments reflect his surroundings and his bombast reflects his determination to survive. These same qualities become reprehensible in Jarnegan the success. The only respect Jarnegan offers anyone once he becomes successful comes in his reaction to other great souls. His lament for the pregnant and ailing Daisy has more to do with her potential for greatness—based on the chosen status he sees within her—rather than in her situation: “That kid’ll get somewhere as an actress if she lives. She’s one of the few who’s got a great soul burning up—schools don’t give it to you—by God, you’re born with it—it bounces out of the centuries and hits you in the nose” (164).

Jarnegan's issue with Bernard has less to do with Bernard's affair with the underage actress and her subsequent illness than it does with how Bernard has managed to waste a great soul, a chosen person who has the ability to make great art. For this, Jarnegan wants to smash Bernard in the jaw, dealing with the director much as he dealt with Jappers early in the novel. Jarnegan doesn't solve his problems this directly, as a murdering director would be clearly in violation of a morality clause. In comparing the reaction of the bar-fighting Muldoon with the scandal-fighting Jarnegan, Tully reveals the painful differences in the way greatness can express itself between the rising and the successful. In a way, success distorts the proper display and expression of greatness.

#### THE FALSE EXPECTATIONS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

In the final scene, Jarnegan visits revenge upon the corrupt and unsoulful “Bernard”—the man who made Daisy pregnant and deserted her—and the rest of the Hollywood elite who have been plotting Jarnegan's demise. Jarnegan bursts into a party where they have been conveniently gathered and captures them in their own scandal, and in this action he is again strong, his quality of being both chosen and acting upon that choice shining through. If the ending feels contrived, it has partly to do with how Tully parodies the self-

made man narrative and critiques the ideal of the chosen great man. Tully invokes Whitman, calls upon the image of Nietzsche's Overman and undercuts Chaplin in pursuit of laying bare the falseness of the American dream. Jarnegan does not rise because of hard work, thrift, and an even chance at success, but only because of his innate great soul. Once that great soul allows him to achieve greatness, Jarnegan disdains and mistreats those beneath him. Tully's novel succeeds precisely because it so well critiques the American dream, and much of readers' and critics' dissatisfaction with the novel can be attributed to Tully's rejection of the narrative of that flawed dream.

Anderson argues that Tully retold his own story of life as a hobo because it held the core of the American dream for him:

[T]o Tully, the eight years of his wandering were not only the path away from poverty in the Rabbit-Patch area of St. Marys, Ohio, to adult success, but the means by which he contributed to the American dream. To Tully those years were revelatory of a significant dimension of American life that we overlook or ignore because it denies what we prefer to believe about our country, our values, ourselves. ("Hollywood" 4)

Tully's best and best-known autobiographies and novels, including *Beggars of Life*, *Shanty Irish* (1928), *Circus Parade* (1927), and *Blood on the Moon* (1931), all take as their subject the dark and difficult days of Tully's life on the road. These road novels contain the narrative of a young man with a great soul struggling to survive, and Tully did believe in at least that fragment of the American dream. When he turned to write a novel about success, however, Tully's mistrust of power and greed splinters the American dream. *Jarnegan* reflects Tully's discomfort with the core tenets of that dream—the narratives of self-making and the chosen.

*Jarnegan* disquiets readers because Tully successfully paints the summation of a fractured and contradictory American dream narrative. Jarnegan, in his successes and subsequent excesses, calls into question the very values we invest in that dream. While Tully's own life story evoked the archetype of the American dream and the myth of the self-made man, Tully perhaps saw too much of the underside of American society to believe in the up-by-the-bootstraps self-made man, only in the great soul who survives and thrives. Tully writes the story of a man who is both chosen and self-made, but the self-mak-

ing comes across as false, a story that only saps could believe in, and the end product of the great man succeeding proves to be repugnant.

Mencken keyed into the absurdity of Jarnegan's greatness: "Is Mr. Tully's bombastic movie director preposterous—a figure out of the Middle Ages, set down in Hollywood to prey upon the pie-faced gals and thrill and terrify honest Ashkenazim? . . . [T]he answer is that the fellow somehow lives and breathes" (382). Mencken attributes Jarnegan's life to "Tully's belief in him," one "so complete that the reader is bound to pick up some of it" (382). But it is not only Tully's faith in Jarnegan that makes us believe in him, bombast and all. It is our faith in the tropes and stories of the American dream, our belief in a mythology both conflicted and self-contradictory. Tully had seen enough of the underside of the American dream to not be able to write about that dream with a straight face.<sup>8</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For more comprehensive overviews of the cultural history of the American dream, see Jillson, especially chapters 2 and 3; and Cullen, especially chapters 1 and 3. See also Hearn 5-17; and Samuel 5-11.

<sup>2</sup> For more complex explanations of the self-made man mythos in Horatio Alger's novels, see Nackenoff's "Of Factories and Failures" and Hendler's "Pandering in the Public Sphere."

<sup>3</sup> Jim Tully, *Jarnegan* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, Inc. 1926): 95-96. Subsequent references cited in text.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Tully, 4. Tully—or his editor—incorrectly states that these lines come from the "Preface to the 1885 Edition of *Leaves of Grass*." Whitman's "Preface" only accompanied his 1855 edition of *Leaves*, though Whitman would later lift whole sections of the "Preface" to use in verse for later editions of his ever-evolving collection. For more on Whitman's use of his "Preface" in later poetry, see Willie Whethers.

<sup>5</sup> Walt Whitman, "Preface" to *Leaves of Grass*, 1855. In *Walt Whitman: Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1996): 16. Print. Ellipsis Whitman's. Subsequent references cited in text.

<sup>6</sup> Stegmeier's reading of the Overman belies the complexity of Nietzsche's philosophy and the long debates over the meaning of the *Übermensch*. Keith Ansell-Pearson has argued that "The notion of the *Übermensch* poses major problems for anyone who wishes to come to grips with the paradoxes and tensions of Nietzsche's thought" (310). Bernd Magus perhaps stated it best:

Anyone who has read very much Nietzsche commentary is surely struck by the failure of any semblance of agreement about what Nietzsche's philosophy is, whether he really had one, whether he intended to have one, and if so in what sense, or—indeed—whether he wished to show that no one ought to have one. To be sure, disagreement surrounds all philosophical commentary . . . but it does seem to me that disagreement is more basic and more acute in the Nietzsche case than in any other case with which I am well acquainted. (79)

While it is difficult to know how well Tully understood the complexities of Nietzsche's philosophy, the influence of philosopher on poet was clear even to early reviewers. In 1929, Merritt Hughes noted that, "Tully is, on one side of his nature, an anarchist with a spirit vaguely tuned to Blake and Nietzsche" (390). For additional information on Nietzsche and the concept of the *Übermensch*, see Walter Kaufmann 310-320; or Kathleen Higgins 53-78.

<sup>7</sup> For more on Tully and Chaplin's relationship, see Bauer and Dawidziak, 160-178.

<sup>8</sup> My thanks to Kirsten Parkinson, Erin Lamb, and Keith Wilhite who all provided great insights and suggestions for this essay, and to Laura Duncan for timely research assistance.

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