MIDWESTERN MISCELLANY XLIII

Spring/Fall 2015

being a collection of essays,

Writing Chicago,

by members of

The Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

guest editor
MARILYN JUDITH ATLAS

The Midwestern Press
The Center for the Study of
Midwestern Literature and Culture
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1033
2015

Midwestern Miscellany (ISSN 0885-4742) is a peer-reviewed journal published twice a year (Spring and Fall) by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.

This journal is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals

In memory of

Philip Levine

CONTENTS

PREFACE

The last Modern Language Association conference was held in Chicago, and the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature sponsored a panel—as we have for decades—this one entitled, "Dreaming the Actual: Chicago Literary Voices." I chaired it and am pleased to say that some form of each of the participants' fine essays is in this double issue, but I have been thinking about Chicago's literature for much of my academic life. David D. Anderson, SSML cofounder, with whom I conceived this project, wanted this issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* to bring scholars closer to the ethnic, sometimes metaphorical, often innovative, and always real city where so many artists, though sometimes ambivalent toward Chicago, found in it a place to create brilliant, innovative, and memorable literature. Though I was the Chicagoan, his love of the city and its language and possibilities was strong in him and his knowledge of Chicago literature and Chicago itself amazing. He believed and demonstrated in his own work that Chicago, particularly after the Chicago's World Fair in 1893, was an international city, a global one simultaneously regional and specific, but sometimes also narrow and parochial in the worst way. And while he loved the written word, he was also fascinated with performance and radio, with the power of orality and its relationship to the politics and aesthetics of reading and performing one's own work or the work of others at a specific time in a specific place.

The questions we now ask of Chicago literature are the same as those he and I asked in the 1980s when I first met him and that Chicago scholars are still asking now and in this volume: does Chicago and its artists/ literature foster dreams or squash them? Does this corrupt, gorgeous (go visit The Driehaus Museum, or the Water Tower, or Buckingham Fountain or take a walk around the Gold Coast or Lake Michigan) and central Midwestern city, a city of highways and waterways and railroads, encourage innovative thinking and writing, or do writers flee to less subaltern locales in order to be more easily successful national and global writers and artists? Is the Chicago Renaissance, both White and Black, a past phenomenon in a great and complex city's history, or is there an ebb and flow to this place, still as complex and seductive and false as Lake Michigan—like an ocean, but not an ocean, simultaneously micro and macro,

landlocked and varied? Who are our Chicago writers and why should we care about where they were born, where they live, if they leave the city, and how they use this place and space in their art?

You won't find absolute answers in this double issue of *Midwestern Miscellany*, "Writing Chicago," but you will find some provocative essays written by SSML members as they explore a few of the great writers of this major world city, a city from which some writers run and others manage to find solace, and still others cruelty; where some find home and others find mainly perversely evil dysfunction. Rich, poor, angry, exasperated, Black, White, Jewish, Chicana and Chicano, sexist, feminist, hybrid, ecologically minded—Chicago has been a place where writers have lived, explored, created as well as performed all sorts of high and popular art, and the images they have created of this place and in this place are worth a second and third glance.

David D. Anderson used to tell me recurrently, "All places are bad," and so this issue, "Writing Chicago," honors one major, sometimes bad yet always memorable city, not on a hill, but near a great lake, a part of America's past, present and future and a part of the world's transnational, politically and aesthetically minded literature. I want to thank my son David for reminding me that all generations dream and scream and try to create what they can and what they must; I want to thank the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature for its support on this project; and I would like to thank the artists and critics for helping me to see how place shapes art and how artists shape place. I hope this double issue demonstrates, again, that Chicago literature and performance are worth studying and endlessly fluid, and that one has to stop arbitrarily, somewhere if for no better reason than that if one stops, one can begin and see again new aspects of Chicago's literary voices and appreciate their contributions to world literature with renewed appreciation and understanding.

RECENT MIDWESTERN FICTION AND POETRY

Fiction

Baxter, Charles. *There's Something I'd Like You to Do*. Random House, 2015. [Minneapolis]

Berg, Elizabeth. *Tapestry of Fortunes*. Random House, 2013. [Minnesota]

Butler, Nikolas. *Shotgun Lovesongs*. St. Martin's, 2014. [Wisconsin]

Coake, Christopher. *You Came Back*. Grand Central, 2012. [Ohio]

Gass, William H. *Middle C*. Knopf, 2013. [Ohio]

Gloss, Susan. *Vintage*. William Morrow, 2014. [Wisconsin]

Harrison, Jim. *The Big Seven*. Grove, 2015. [Michigan, UP]

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]

Paretsky, Sara. *Critical Mass*. Dutton, 2013. [Chicagoland]

Rhodes, David. *Jewelweed*. Milkweed, 2013. [Wisconsin]

Robinson, Marilynne. *Lila*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014. [Iowa]

Roy, Lori. *Until She Comes Home*. Dutton, 2013. [Detroit]

Sandford, John. *Field of Prey*. Putnam, 2014. [Minnesota]

Somerville, Patrick. *This Bright River*. Little, Brown, 2012. [Wisconsin]

Smiley, Jane. *Some Luck*. Knopf, 2014. [Iowa]

Snyder, Rachel Louise. *What We've Lost Is Nothing*. Scribner, 2014. [Chicagoland]

Poetry

Etter, Dave. *Blue Rain*. Red Dragonfly, 2012.

Gerber, Dan. *Sailing through Cassiopeia*. Copper Canyon, 2012.

Heller, Janet Ruth. *Exodus*. Cincinnati: Wordtech Editions, 2014.

Knoepfle, John. *Shadows and Starlight*. Indian Paintbrush Poets, 2012.

Kooser, Ted. *The Wheeling Year*. U of Nebraska P, 2014

Radavich, David. *The Countries We Live In*. Main Street Rag Publishing, 2013.

Stillwell, Mary K. *Fallen Angels*. Finishing Line, 2013

"WALKING ROUND DOWNTOWN CHICAGO": THE POLITICS OF MIDWESTERN WOMEN IN JOHN DOS PASSOS'S *U. S. A.*

KATHERINE RYAN

John Dos Passos is as important a figure for literary modernism as he is for the study of Midwestern literature. Yet, he is often cast aside in considerations of both. In regard to canonical modernism, the *U. S. A.* trilogy has recently been described as "a kind of modernist black sheep, a disavowed central text, at once widely recognized and studiously neglected" (Moglen 93), and has been unfairly marginalized for being more political than psychological, more historically particular than universal, and more interested in promoting a dated strand of anticapitalist radicalism than exploring the human condition. Though scholars who do remain interested in Dos Passos continue to explore the nuances of his political thought, covering its relation to aspects of style, the city, and technology in his work,[1] the influence of regional politics on Dos Passos's political project is often neglected. Thus, along with recent efforts to recover Dos Passos as a major literary figure worthy of continued critical attention, this paper seeks to affirm the significance of the Midwest, and, specifically, Chicago, in Dos Passos's work, not only as the testing ground for radical politics, but as the very origin point for class consciousness in the early twentieth century. By further examining the politically motivated women of the trilogy (another forgotten, but nonetheless integral, part of Dos Passos's political landscape),[2] I argue that Dos Passos reveals disparate methods of political engagement emerging from the Midwest, which either call for the sacrifice of the personal for the political or which view the personal as an extension of the political, sustaining and furthering its objectives. Ultimately, an exploration of these strategies in the narratives of Mary French

and Eveline Hutchins reveals *U. S. A.*'s investment in personal connection as a means to political success and shows us not only that the radical politics espoused by Dos Passos were not necessarily fated to fail, but that the overlooked potentiality of female activism may have largely contributed to their demise.

Although John Dos Passos was born in a Chicago hotel on January 14th, 1896, his birth went unrecorded in Cook County.[3] Neither he nor his father were ever successful in finding a record of birth during their lifetimes, and Dos Passos would spend his formative years elsewhere—the East Coast and European capitals during his childhood in addition to Harvard Square, Spain, and the allied front of WWI during his college and early postcollege years. Yet Chicago remained an important place for his writing. In 1929, he spent a great deal of time at the Chicago Public Library, using the extensive newspaper morgue to fill the Newsreel sections of *U. S. A.*, arguably his most influential and important work. Expressing his admiration for the city, Dos Passos wrote to friend Dudley Poore, "Chicago is swell though—I bathe in the lake every afternoon and swelter in the library all day," and a month later, he echoes this praise of Chicago at New York's expense: "I enjoyed being in Chicago so much—excursion boats and people bathing on the lakeshore and toasting their backs and changing their clothes without being accosted by cops . . . New York is just a stuffy ghetto on a gigantic scale" (Ludington 392, 394). Already moving beyond Chicago's instrumental role in the composition of the trilogy, these scraps gesture towards the city's ideological importance for Dos Passos and specifically towards its embodiment of an American vitality and idealism not yet "accosted by cops" and the "ghetto"-producing structures of monopoly capitalism. Back in Chicago in 1932 to report on the Democratic National Convention for *The New Republic*, he wrote to his wife Katy that "Chicago is certainly the place to hear the great heart of America beat" (412).

Dos Passos was certainly not the first American writer to view the Midwest in such positive terms. During the war years, writers attempting to juxtapose the nihilism of Europe's No Man's Land with a life-affirming vision of America far from the concerns of war often chose the Midwest as their counterpoise and the Midwesterner as a powerful symbol of lost innocence.[4] Yet, in Dos Passos's writing, in particular, this symbol proceeded into the economic boom of the postwar years as other types of innocence were lost, suggesting that

some measure of Dos Passos's positive rendering of Chicago may also stem from the fact that rural radicals were, for the most part, "the backbone of the prewar anticapitalist movement" (Moglen 106)—a movement to which Dos Passos was still ardently committed throughout the '20s and early '30s as he began composing *U. S. A.* Thus, centrally concerned with "defining a viable American radicalism" (Corkin 593), the trilogy often articulates that definition through the grass roots of the rural Midwest, and Chicago reappears time and time again in connection with the rise of political consciousness and resistance in the working class. A brief survey of the text's fictional narratives reveals the ubiquity of the Midwest in male political involvement. Mac, the first character introduced in the trilogy, begins a lifelong affiliation with leftist politics in Chicago while printing I.W.W. pamphlets through his uncle's press. And while Uncle O'Hara admits that it "'ain't no paradise'" (21), he contends that "'great and growing city of Chicago'" is a far better place for workers than the looming metropolises of the East where Mac was born and bred (18). Though Chicago is especially associated with Mac's quest for socialist brotherhood,[5] the connection between the Midwest and radicalism bears strong throughout *U. S. A.* Lead characters Charley Anderson and Richard Ellsworth Savage both spend time in Chicago in socialist company before abandoning their progressive politics later in the trilogy, and Joe Williams is introduced to the I.W.W. theory of war propaganda by Chicagoans overseas.

In addition to the character narratives of *U. S. A.*, Dos Passos also chooses Midwestern socialists and inventors as the focus of the historical biographies interspersed throughout the text, and Chicago becomes a frequent origin point for political consciousness. Eugene Debs and Paxton Hibben from Indiana, "Fighting Bob" La Follette of Wisconsin, and the Wright Brothers from Ohio are some of the most obvious references to reform politics and idealism in the Midwest, but even the famous figures from farther west find their political strength in the heart of the country. Big Bill Haywood is chairman of the 1905 conference in Chicago that brings the I.W.W. into being, and, perhaps most importantly, Thorstein Veblen's lengthy biography features his first academic appointment at the University of Chicago, where he would go on to publish *The Theory of the Leisure Class*—a text referenced conspicuously throughout the trilogy in association with progressive politics. Most overtly, it is in "walking round downtown Chicago" that Frank Lloyd Wright will imagine "the great continent

stretching a thousand miles east and south and north, three thousand miles west" and "preach {} to the young men coming of age in the time of oppression" (1129, 30). Wright's vision of America (his "Usonia") calls for the breakdown of class partitions, and while his architecture is directly implicated in Dos Passos's progressive nation building, his blueprints are compared to Walt Whitman's words, which "stir the young men" into action (1132). Critics have oft noted the influence of Whitman's visionary, democratic idealism on Dos Passos's politics,[6] and here we might note that in aligning Whitman with Wright, Dos Passos inherently draws on Whitman's regional favoritism, specifically demonstrated in "Democratic Vistas" where Whitman looks towards a more positive future when "in a few years the dominion-heart of America will be far inland" and "the main social, political, spine-character of the States will probably run along the Ohio, Missouri and Mississippi rivers" (30). As the trilogy's final biography of a celebrated radical figure,[7] Wright's Whitmanesque re-wri(gh)ting of America from the country's center takes on crucial importance and ends *U. S. A.* with the same Chicago-bred political optimism that Mac's narrative introduced.

Still, despite the alignment of the regional Midwest with political hope, Dos Passos's positive rendering of Chicago as a centering life force, a place from which we can best hear America's "great heart . . . beat," may seem not only hyperbolic, but contradictory given the psychic distress and failed relationships characteristic of the trilogy. After all, *U. S. A.* remains famous for being "one of the saddest books ever written by an American" (Kazin 352) and is littered with despairing and suicidal figures.[8] However, Dos Passos's positive portrayal of the Heartland, and its contradiction by the mood of the text, become more understandable in light of Seth Moglen's claim that "while modernism seeks, at a cognitive level, to map vast socioeconomic structures, it struggles at an affective level to record the psychic injuries that accompanied this process of economic transformation," namely the shift to monopoly capitalism that Dos Passos's leftist radicals resisted (5). In Moglen's view, modernist writers in the US "seem to suggest that modernization had produced, above all, an affective crisis—a crisis in the possibility of love" (5). Tracking Dos Passos's attempts to work through the demise of the radical leftist movement epitomized by the ideals of the I.W.W., Moglen claims that *U. S. A.*'s character narratives tend towards a melancholic naturalization of the Left's fate. In these storylines, which form the bulk

of the trilogy, Dos Passos "seeks to convince us that the anticapitalist movement was doomed to failure not simply because of an imbalance of power (which might, conceivably, change), but because human beings are inherently incapable of realizing the libidinal impulses that American radicalism sought to fulfill" (188). In other words, because Dos Passos believed that the root of social change, or radicalism itself, is predicated on an individual's openness to connection with others—social bonds typically forged through experience—an inability to *a*ffectively engage with others denies the potential for reform and makes his characters vulnerable to the crippling demands of postwar capitalism.

While Moglen's argument aligns all of Dos Passos's characters within this schema of apathy and affective lack, and thus with political impotence, I would like to complicate this move by emphasizing the affective connectedness of female political involvement in the text. Though the thematic importance of women, like regional politics, is often obscured by the trilogy's dominant narrative of capitalist greed, it is by looking to women and, specifically, to political Midwestern women that Dos Passos unwittingly contests this masculine narrative of fated political failure and points us towards overlooked potentialities in female activism. For, like the men whose political defeats dominate the biographies and the fictional storylines of *U. S. A.*, Dos Passos's women also develop political consciousness in their association with the Midwest, and specifically with Chicago. More importantly, unlike the men, they markedly refuse one of the key tenets of radical political involvement—self-abnegation in regard to fostering and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Because Dos Passos believed that an inability to form lasting social bonds leads to political inefficacy, the (largely masculine) party rhetoric of sacrificing one's personal relations for "the cause" undermine the collective's ability to achieve its political goals from the very start.

In contrast, the female radicals almost never view personal and political life as mutually exclusive and, in the case of Mary French, particularly view personal bonds as extensions of the political that ultimately strengthen the power of the collective. Mary French is Dos Passos's one overtly political female character, and her direct political involvement sets her apart from the other women of *U. S. A.*, who are often aligned with the bourgeois ideals specifically rejected by the political radicals lauded throughout the text. In childhood, Mary

is inspired by her father's generosity when it comes to dispensing free medical care to the poor and follows his inclination toward leftist politics and, specifically, Eugene Debs. She leaves college at Vassar in order to work at Hull-House in Chicago, and it is here that Mary fully develops her burgeoning political consciousness. The work is difficult, but in contrast to her companion, Ada, who leaves work after suffering a nervous breakdown, Mary is tenacious: "It was so awful the way poor people lived and the cracked red knuckles of the women who took in washing and the scabby heads of the little children and the clatter and the gritty wind on South Halstead Street and the stench of the stockyards" (862). After all, "if she sacrifice[s] her life, like Daddy" and "like Miss Addams" (865), Mary truly believes she can make a difference. Conspicuously reading *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Dos Passos's textual signal for real political dedication, Mary has "to feel she [is] doing something real" (870).

As she becomes more involved in political reform, Mary likewise becomes embroiled in a series of relationships with fellow activists who repeatedly sacrifice the personal for the political, eventually sacrificing Mary herself to the cause. Mary learns about this rhetoric of self-abnegation early on when activist Gus Moscowski, her first real crush, tells her that "'A woikin' man ain't got no right to have a wife and family'" (884). G.H. Barrow will later convince Mary of the legitimacy of this claim while professing the necessity of a healthy sex life—the upshot of which is Mary's first abortion and harrowing suicide attempt. And Ben Compton, her next lover, will likewise encourage her to get an abortion, claiming "they had to sacrifice their personal feelings for the workingclass" (1144). Finally, Don Stevens will ruthlessly use Mary as his private secretary and lover before getting married abroad and discarding her to the party at large. In each instance, Mary pleads for the viability of the personal within the political and in each instance she is defeated. Her narrative of personal defeat follows the arc of the larger movement's demise, and, as she becomes increasingly isolated within the political network, the network itself falters under the weight of internecine strife and the failure of the Sacco and Vanzetti trial. Importantly, as Mary's narrative continues, the loss of personal contact is increasingly defined *as* political failure itself. Former lover Ben Compton, eventually "cut off from everything," tells Mary that he regrets not having their baby and staying in love (1222). Without any attachments, he has lost touch with the movement, haunting its fringes and unable to con-

tribute to furthering its goals: "'You see, often a young guy thinks, I'll sacrifice everything, and then when he is cut off all that side of his life, he's not as good as he was, do you see? For the first time in my life I have no contact'" (1222). George Barrow will likewise confess, "'I often wonder these days if I wouldn't have been a happier man if I'd just stayed all my life an express agent in South Chicago and married some nice working girl and had a flock of kids'" (1233).

Yet, while Mary French is often celebrated as the most heroic of Dos Passos's women, it is crucial to note that by the end of the trilogy she ultimately sides with the leftist rhetoric of the political over the personal, becoming entrenched in a male-dominated political system that recognizes her sexuality as a distraction and her desire for longstanding intimacy as a threat. In contrast, Eveline Hutchins, one of Dos Passos's least explored female characters and one who is certainly less political than Mary French, nonetheless offers an important alternative to the status quo leftist activism represented in the text. Providing one of the longest-sustained female narratives in a text which is often said to validate female experience through inclusion,[9] and achieving what I argue is the most successful political maneuver represented in the trilogy, I argue that Eveline necessitates more scrutiny. Not only does she begin in Chicago, at the heart of political potentiality, but her intense bonds represent a rare moment of positive female experience in Dos Passos's oeuvre—one that showcases the emergence of a different type of political consciousness and an alternative conceptualization of activism based in affect.

For, if the ability to connect—to affect and be affected by others—is a crucial tool against the demise of political movements, Eveline's friendships and romantic affairs align her with a radical potentiality denied to most characters within Dos Passos's fiction. Her ability to connect is revealed early on when Eveline meets her counterpart Eleanor at the Art Institute of Chicago and describes her as "the first girl she'd met who really seemed to *feel* painting, that she could *really* talk about things with. And then too she was *really* doing something, and so independent" (457). Though the text highlights Eveline's admiration of Eleanor's artistic sensibility, it is Eleanor's ability to be affected by art—to really "*feel* painting"—that draws Eveline's interest. In fact, it is because she is capable of affective connection both artistically and socially that Eleanor's ability to "*feel*" directly leads to the girl's ability to "*really* talk." An openness to experience and to others thus yields communication and empathy

in the social register, and in this passage, Eveline links Eleanor's empathy directly with her ability to be effectual in her personal life, to *"really* do{} something," which, as we shall see, Eveline strongly desires to do. Though her effusiveness and optimism have usually been dismissed as a "shallow dedication to art" (Casey 155), it is crucial to note that this passage is particularly unique in aligning affect with liberating action in Eveline's mind, and that the potentiality of this action is revealed in the narrative shortly thereafter.[10]

While this ability to *a*ffect change in one's personal life results from being receptive to affect and interpersonal connection, it is also crucial to note the text's suggestion that these qualities likewise promote the ability to effect change on a larger scale. They do so, specifically, by creating a social network through personal bonds, which, for Dos Passos, represents a key component of political reform. Sally Emerson tells Eveline that in Chicago "the social leaders [are] all vicious numbskulls and that it [is] up to the few people who cared about art to stick together and create the . . . milieu they need" (455). Here Sally specifically links aesthetic involvement to the creation of a "milieu" the political "leaders" are inherently incapable of forming and thereby connects Chicago art with social politics in a way that influences Eveline's later desire to cultivate *aesthetic*-political attachments throughout that narrative. Like the oft-lauded Mary French, Eveline first attempts to create Sally Emerson's idea of a "rich beautiful milieu" through activist work at Hull-House, which is the work "she liked best" (456), before dedicating herself to the creation of social bonds which allow the flourishing of leftist ideals.

Forever impacted by Sally's speech and the idea of a powerful collective, Eveline becomes more political throughout the trilogy, beginning various affairs with leftist artists and writers in an attempt to integrate aesthetic *and* social reform. Her first lover, José O'Riely, is a painter from Santa Fe who makes her think that "maybe she was an anarchist" (469), and although Eveline never completely adopts the movement, she is consistently influenced by it. In fact, it is her propensity for bringing antagonistic politicos around her friend Eleanor's military men that catalyzes their break overseas during the war years. Thus, while characters like Eleanor move farther right throughout the trilogy, Eveline is increasingly leftist, taking up with activist artists like Charles Edward Holden and purportedly unable to "live without her little group of reds" (1230). is littered with sexist complaints about the tendency of women to draw men's resources

away from the movement rather than advance it, such as when Nick Gigli declares to Ben Compton that "[women are] the main seduction of capitalist society" (722) and when Don Stevens complains, "there never was a woman living who could understand political ideals" (471). Yet, Eveline continues to side with those who represent progressive politics and does so based purely on pre-existing friendships or other forms of affective attachment. She is a proponent of the movement but not its dogma. And if she has little heart for the rigid party politics Don Stevens demands (and of which Dos Passos always remained wary), Eveline is nonetheless instrumental in saving his life when she harangues Mr. Barrow for not helping when Stevens is court-martialed for Bolshevik propaganda:

> She said Don Stevens was a newspaper man and although a radical not connected with any kind of propaganda and anyway it was horrible to shoot a man for wanting a better world. Mr. Barrow was very embarrassed and stuttered and hemmed and hawed and said that Stevens was a very silly young man who talked too much about things he didn't understand, but that he supposed he'd have to do the best he could to try to get him out but that after all, he hadn't shown the proper spirit . . . . That made Miss Hutchins very angry, "But they're going to shoot him . . . suppose it had happened to you . . ." she kept saying. "Can't you understand that we've got to save his life?" (708)

Here Eveline's ability to "embarrass" or *a*ffect a response in selfish and detached Barrow is crucial in spurring him to action; her "anger," her empathy ("suppose it had happened to you"), and her appeal for communal action ("Can't you understand that we've got to save his life?") represent Dos Passos's very ideal of coalition building in the name of political action and, more importantly, defense. Unlike Sacco and Vanzetti, whose deaths end the trilogy and represent the culmination of Dos Passos's (and Mary French's) sense of political defeat, Don Stevens is, as we find out later, saved. The text is unclear about what exactly leads to Stevens's rescue, yet it is crucial to note that, given this episode, Eveline is potentially responsible, effecting more with her personal appeals than do most of Dos Passos's male radicals.

Mary and Eveline are often depicted by critics as polar opposites, the former a heroine and the latter a "prototypical bitch" (Colley 57).[11] Yet their similarities are worth noting. Both women get their political start in Chicago, remain informal (or noncard-carrying)

members of their respective political organizations, and proceed through a series of unhappy love affairs with political men, desiring a personal connection that goes beyond sexual relations or friendship. In fact, their relationships with Barrow and Stevens show us that the main difference between them is not their political devotion, but their approach to political involvement. Mary, like Eveline, will scold George Barrow later in the trilogy, but rather than inciting his direct involvement through empathy and a call for collective action, Mary's anger does not effect the same result as Eveline's crucial intervention. Barrow refuses to get himself arrested in the name of the cause for Mary, though he complies, albeit half-heartedly, with Eveline's requests. While the men both women are mutually involved with create through lines between their narratives throughout the text, Mary and Eveline finally do cross paths—notably, in the very final pages of the trilogy. Despite Mary's obvious scorn, Eveline still professes political involvement, desiring to discuss the miners with Mary and insisting on using personal influence and friendship to enact social change (i.e., attempting to finance her artist-activist boyfriend's play through Eleanor). In contrast, Mary has been converted to the party values that deny affective bonds, concluding, "She'd never fall for a man again" (1147), and fails alongside the larger movement because she, like it, denies these crucial interpersonal connections. Though Mary's own mother admits that "maybe women in politics would have a better influence than she'd once thought" (1143), Eveline shows us that it is perhaps by working *outside* the established political system and *within* the sphere of affective personal activism that this influence is most effective.

While Eveline's suicide in the trilogy's final pages would seem to indicate her failure along the lines of the other misanthropic men and women of *U. S. A.*, I argue that her death is meant to be profoundly sympathetic. Like Dos Passos's eventual resignation from the leftist project due to its internecine strife, Eveline's final words reveal what may have been his own opinion, that "it does seem too silly to spend your life filling up rooms with ill-assorted people who really hate each other" (1236). Exhausted from a lifelong effort to forge social bonds between her leftist friends and lovers and the bourgeois, moneyed class epitomized by Eleanor, Eveline ultimately dies from an overdose of sleeping medication. Yet, rather than a symbol of the solipsism of women who lack social awareness (Casey 163), her demise can be read as an extension of Dos Passos's melancholia,

as a laying to rest of the affective possibilities and openness to connection that she embodies and that Dos Passos thought so crucial to political reform.

Nonetheless, Eveline's continued dedication to affective involvement and Mary's suppressed desire for the same showcase an important origin point for a new and different political project. Far from Hull-House and the Chicago streets that birthed their political aspirations, by the end of the novel both Mary and Eveline are as dominated by reformist male political systems as they are by status quo capitalist structures. Yet, their narratives reveal the empowering capacities of affect, which have been overlooked in Dos Passos's work and which are crucial to revising claims about Dos Passos's melancholic dismissal of any hope for future social change—by suggesting the revolutionary potential to be found in personal, rather than political, bonds and in the "heart" of the country rather than its more infamous urban centers. As Dos Passos says, "the great heart of America . . . sure is beating out something. Nobody knows the code" (Ludington 412). Eveline may remain another emblematic failure of the leftist project, but she also represents that other "something" even more powerful than the diehard commitment of those who adopt the standard rhetoric and practices of leftist politics. Rather than face the alternative of abandoning one's principles like Eleanor, being utterly destroyed by slavish political involvement like Mary, and forgoing real personal connection, as do both, there is an alternative path for Dos Passos's women in the figure of Eveline. Reconciling the strange metaphor of *U. S. A.*'s heart—the political potential Dos Passos aligns with the Midwest and the trilogy's subsequent fatalism—Eveline's political investment promotes an enabling commitment to aesthetics, affective involvement, and, ultimately, vulnerability, suggesting intrinsic, and as yet unexplored, possibilities rooted in the feminine political perspectives of modernist Chicago and the modernist Midwest.

University of California

NOTES

[1]For example, see Donald Pizer, *Toward a Modernist Style: John Dos Passos,* (2013).

[2]A notable exception is Janet Galligani Casey's *Dos Passos and the Ideology of the Feminine*.

[3]Details on Dos Passos's life are provided by Virginia Spencer Carr's *Dos Passos: A Life*.

[4]John Rohrkemper argues Chrisfield's importance in this regard in *Three Soldiers* and claims that the Midwest functions as an "American Eden" which offers "the starkest contrast to the political cynicism and violent destruction which the war revealed" (20-21).

[5]Mac meets influential I.W.W. leader Fred Hoff while hearing Upton Sinclair speak about the Chicago stockyards, and he meets his radical friend Ike Hall while tramping between the great cities of the Midwest. The city and region thus reappear frequently throughout his narrative—a pattern which holds in several other characters' lives.

[6]For example, Lois Hughson's "In Search of the True America: Dos Passos' Debt to Whitman in *U. S. A.*," (1973).

[7]There are two biographies after Frank Lloyd Wright's "Architect," but they are notably bitter, featuring capitalists William Randolph Hearst ("Poor Little Rich Boy") and Samuel Insull ("Power Superpower").

[8]Eveline, Daughter, and, arguably, Charlie Anderson commit suicide throughout the course of the narrative. Eleanor Stoddard, Richard Ellsworth Savage, Mary French, Margot Dowling, and Janey Williams are a few of the other major characters who encounter recurring suicidal thoughts, and there are several minor characters (e.g., Mr. Barrow, Tony, Emiscah, Dirty Gertie, and Eliza Felton) that also suffer from suicidal ideation or actually commit suicide (i.e., Mr. Piquot). Dos Passos is well aware of this negativity, writing to Hemingway during the composition of *The Big Money* that "[a] lot of characters are climbing out of windows already and I'm barely under way on the last tome" (Ludington 408).

[9]See Casey for a convincing argument about the ways Dos Passos contributes to the visibility of women in *U.S.A.*

[10]Here it is worth noting that a dedication to art need not be entirely *un*shallow to be esteemed by Dos Passos. According to Casey's own (highly convincing) argument, Dos Passos both satirizes (i.e., criticizes) and praises Isadora Duncan's commitment to aesthetics, but nonetheless admires her in the trilogy's only female biography. I believe that we can read Eveline along the same lines, as another well-rounded example of female subjectivity.

[11]The full quotation is as follows: "Ellen Thatcher is the prototypical bitch, later to be more completely realized as Eveline Hutchins in *USA*" (Colley 57).

WORKS CITED

Carr, Virginia Spencer. *Dos Passos: A Life*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2004.

Casey, Janet Galligani. *Dos Passos and the Ideology of the Feminine*. NY: Cambridge UP, 1998.

Colley, Iain. *Dos Passos and the Fiction of Despair.* London: Macmillan, 1978.

Corkin, Stanley. "John Dos Passos and the American Left: Recovering the Dialectic of History" *Criticism* 34.4 (Fall 1992): 591-611. Web.

Dos Passos, John. *U.S.A.* 1930. NY: The Library of America, 1996.

Kazin, Alfred. *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*. 1942. NY: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995.

Ludington, Townsend, ed. *The Fourteenth Chronicle: Letters and Diaries of John Dos Passos*. Boston: Gambit Incorporated, 1973.

Moglen, Seth. *Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2007.

Rohrkemper, John. "The Great War, the Midwest, and Modernism: Cather, Dos Passos, and Hemingway." *Midwestern Miscellany* 16 (1988): 19-29.

Whitman, Walt. *Democratic Vistas and Other Papers*. Ed. Carolyn Wells Houghton. London: Walter Scott Publishing Company, 1888. Web file provided by University of Michigan.

CHICAGO AS SALVATION IN THEODORE DREISER, WILLA CATHER, AND SAUL BELLOW

NANCY BUNGE

The 1971 convention of the Modern Language Association, held in Chicago, included a panel, Chicago as Metaphor; participants were the novelist James T. Farrell and various literary scholars. After the professors explained that literary renditions of Chicago represent it as a confluence of oppressive external influences that limit freedom, Farrell vehemently protested. He had two main objections: "Chicago is not a metaphor" and "Chicago isn't a terrible place. That little town Sister Carrie left, that's a terrible place." His fellow panelists and the audience laughed.

Farrell's work clarifies why he would object to this one-dimensional description of Chicago's role in literature. He wrote fiction about two characters, Studs Lonigan and Danny O'Neill, who grew up at the same time in the same Chicago neighborhood, but while Studs conformed to the macho ethos of his gang and, as a result, died miserably at twenty-seven, Danny, whom Studs considered "goofy," trusted his own reactions and, as a result, had an emotionally and intellectually rich life. So in Farrell's fictional universe, Chicago can offer people opportunities to realize themselves, but only if they have the imagination and the integrity to grasp them.

The characterization of Chicago offered by Farrell's fellow panelists reflects a dominant stereotype of cities. Sidney H. Bremer certifies that this cliché persists: "The confrontation between the lone newcomer and the material, challenging city provides the basis for Americans' continuing Romantic antipathy toward urban artifice" (30). She specifically mentions Theodore Dreiser and Willa Cather as writers who perpetuate this vision of Chicago. But, in fact, key works of Chicago fiction by Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather and Saul

Bellow validate Farrell's point of view. Rather than oppressing people, Chicago offers them chances to realize new dimensions of themselves and thus fulfill their potential, if they have the wisdom to see them and the courage to seize them.

Carrie Meeber in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* comes from a small town, Columbia City, Wisconsin, that has such a weak hold on her affections that she instantly forgets it once she sees Chicago. According to the book's narrator, this makes perfect sense: the city lures everyone with a feeling that they can vastly improve their lives there: "What old illusion of hope is not here forever repeated! Says the soul of the toiler to itself, 'I shall soon be free. I shall be in the ways and the hosts of the merry. The streets, the lamps, the lighted chamber set for dining are for me. The theatre, the halls, the parties, the ways of rest and the paths of song,—these are mine in the night' . . . The dullest feel something which they may not always express or describe. It is the lifting of the burden of toil" (16). And Chicago begins its work on Carrie almost instantly. Seeing people beautifully dressed makes her want to array herself more attractively: "She realized in a dim way how much the city held—wealth, fashion, ease—every adornment for women, and she longed for dress and beauty with a whole heart" (27). When she gets a job, it makes her ecstatic. She has found a role for herself in this wonderful place: "She would live in Chicago, her mind kept saying to itself. She would have a better time than she had ever had before—she would be happy" (31). Although Bill Brown argues that Carrie tries "to satisfy what is in fact a metaphysical longing with physical objects," Robert Butler's analysis of Carrie's transformations seems more accurate; he claims she experiences "remarkable physical, emotional, and psychological growth." He sees her development as a direct result of her view of Chicago: "Carrie . . . eventually comes to see the city itself as an immense theater, a glittering protean universe which endows her with the imaginative energy she needs to create a new life" (278).

She starts inauspiciously. Her first job consists of factory work so brutal for such low pay that she gets sick from walking home in cold weather because she lacks car fare. As a result of her absence, she gets fired. So Dreiser sometimes depicts the city in a way that suggests it diminishes people, but he also indicates that people have choices. Carrie's brother-in-law works hard for little money, believing that someday his diligence will be rewarded, a philosophy shared by Carrie's sister. Carrie finds a way to evade this trap. When Charles

Drouet offers her good food, nice clothing, and a warm place to stay, she moves in with him. In Drouet's affection, Carrie sees freedom from the dreary round of factory work. Her unconventional choice gives Carrie some discomfort, but not as much as the thought of attempting to feed, clothe, and shelter herself.

Admittedly, at this point, even though she understands her circumstances more clearly than her sister and brother-in-law, Carrie's consciousness functions at a primitive level. She evaluates people, including herself, in terms of external characteristics like their clothes. According to this criterion, Drouet's attention seems miraculous, given her frumpy dresses, but Carrie soon develops enough intellectually to begin to understand his inferiority to her; as the narrator puts it, "In a dim way she was beginning to see where he lacked" (82). And although she has not the imagination to dream up Hurstwood, once she sees him standing next to Drouet, she intuitively understands Hurstwood's superiority, initially because of the way he dresses: "What he wore did not strike the eye so forcibly as that which Drouet had on, but Carrie could see the elegance of the material. Hurstwood's shoes were of soft, black calf, polished only to a dull shine. Drouet wore patent leather, but Carrie could not help feeling that there was a distinction in favour of the soft leather, where all else was so rich. She noticed these things almost unconsciously" (83). But Carrie's consciousness of externals, along with her understanding that she need not resign herself to factory work, shows that Carrie has the imagination to learn from her new environment and make choices based on her new awareness, however unsophisticated.

Carrie next develops an aesthetic sense. A neighbor's piano playing evokes both Carrie's love of music and new yearnings: "She was delicately molded in sentiment, and answered with vague ruminations to certain wistful chords. They awoke longings for those things she did not have" (87-88). Drouet returns home while she entertains these melancholy thoughts and tries to cheer her up by dancing with her: "It made clear to Carrie that he could not sympathize with her. She could not have framed thoughts which would have expressed his defect or made clear the difference between them, but she felt it" (88). On the other hand, when Hurstwood looks into her eyes, it awakens a depth of emotion "she had never before experienced" (93) and she concludes that Hurstwood "was stronger and higher, yet withal so simple . . . . She was sure that Drouet was only a kindly soul, but otherwise defective. He sank every moment in her estimation by the

strong comparison" (93). And when alone in Hurstwood's company, "she brightened under his influence until all her best side was exhibited" (98). So, influenced by Hurstwood, Carrie begins to develop a richer emotional life.

After an encounter with Hurstwood, Carrie, who has accepted whatever fate puts in her way, also discovers a capacity to evaluate her circumstances and consider changing them: "It was the first time her sympathies had ever been thoroughly aroused, and they threw a new light on her character. She had some power of initiative, latent before, which now began to exert itself" (109). Her capacity for empathy expands: the woman who never thought of her sister or her family in Wisconsin after abandoning both becomes enormously sympathetic when seeing poor people on the Chicago streets: "Sorrow in her was aroused by many a spectacle—an uncritical upswelling of grief for the weak and the helpless" (118). Those who remind her of the wretched working situation she has been fortunate enough to leave behind particularly move her: "Her sympathies were ever with that under-world of toil from which she had so recently sprung, and which she best understood" (118).

To persuade her to act in a play at his club, Drouet tells her he always thought she'd make a terrific actress, encouraging a talent for mimicry that Carrie has developed by imitating the impressive women she sees on the Chicago streets: "Carrie was possessed of that sympathetic, impressionable nature which, ever in the most developed form, has been the glory of the drama" (127). These natural abilities cause Carrie to triumph in her play, making her even more desirable to both Hurstwood and Drouet. This event thrills her by making her sharply aware of her ability to influence and shape events: "She was now experiencing the first shades of feeling of that subtle change which removes one out of the ranks of the suppliants into the lives of the dispensers of charity. She was . . . exceedingly happy" (155).

Carrie's move to Chicago and exposure to its possibilities have made her not only much better looking and more fashionably dressed, they have also enriched her aesthetic sense and her feeling for life, making her more compassionate and better able to enter into others' lives as an actress helping her not only to realize what she desires in a richer and more complex way, but also to choose to make her life a reflection of her values. Indeed, Chicago has transformed Carrie. No wonder she hesitates at leaving Chicago with Hurstwood until he promises to show her more cities: "Montreal and New York!

Even now she was speeding toward those great, strange lands, and could see them if she liked" (213), but they have little impact on Carrie compared to the transformation living in Chicago produces in her. Her Chicago experiences provide the foundation not only for her career, but also for her final discovery that only emotional richness, not fame or money, can redeem a life.

Willa Cather also shows Chicago improving people's lives. Two Cather novels, *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and *Lucy Gayheart* (1935), describe woman musicians from Colorado and Nebraska respectivelywho become fully themselves under the city's influence. The difference between these two books suggests that as Cather aged, she became more persuaded of Chicago's value as a positive molder of character. *The Song of the Lark* presents the career of Thea Kronberg, a young woman who leaves Colorado to study piano in Chicago. Her teacher, Andor Harsanyi, considers her both intelligent and ignorant; he believes she has "a richly gifted nature. But she had been given no direction and her ardour was unawakened. She had never heard a symphony orchestra. The literature of the piano was an undiscovered world to her. He wondered how she had been able to work so hard when she knew so little of what she was working toward" (152-53). Eventually, she does hear a symphony and the experience overwhelms her: "She would live for it, work for it, die for it; but she was going to have it, time after time, height after height. She could hear the crash of the orchestra again, and she rose on the basses" (176). Like Carrie, Thea has potential that exposure to the city's richness allows her to realize.

When her piano teacher learns that Thea sings at a Chicago church to make extra money, he asks her to sing for him and is overwhelmed. Although her voice lacks training, he recognizes that she has enormous natural talent and tells her, "In your voice I think Nature herself did for you what it would take you many years to do at the piano" (183) and turns her over to a great voice instructor. In Chicago, Thea not only learns of this gift but, through singing, discovers and realizes herself even more fully: "Her voice, more than any other part of her, had to do with that confidence, that sense of wholeness and inner well-being that she had felt at moments ever since she could remember" (188). Still, her training does not go easily for her: "Her two years in Chicago had not resulted in anything. She failed with Harsanyi, and she made no great progress with her voice" (256). And Chicago provides her with "almost nothing that

went into her subconscious self and took root there" (260). Chicago provides her with the necessary training to sing well, but what she learns there does not yet truly resonate with her. She needs a vacation in the west before her singing can catch fire.

Like Carrie Meeber, Thea Kronberg discovers her artistic potential in Chicago. But Thea also never forgets Colorado and believes that the opportunities available to her in Chicago allow her to cultivate talent she would not have possessed in the first place had she not grown up in Colorado. The book's narrator argues that honesty provides the only solid foundation for making art: "Artistic growth is, more than it is anything else, a refining of the sense of truthfulness" (398). And Thea believes she learned the importance of authenticity in Colorado. After she enjoys a triumphant career, she tells Dr. Archie, who originally accompanied her to Chicago, "'I carried with me the essentials of all I shall ever do. The point to which I could go was scratched in me then'" (384).

Although Chicago makes an essential contribution to Thea's career, her life there allows her to realize potentialities put there during her Colorado childhood. Her success as a singer depends upon her exposure to both environments. On the rare occasions when the novel turns away from discussing Thea's career and focuses on the city itself, Chicago does not look promising. Although she could never have heard the symphony anywhere except Chicago, when she leaves the concert, the city seems to assault her: "Why did these men torment her? A cloud of dust blew in her face and blinded her. There was some power abroad in the world bent upon taking away from her that feeling with which she had come out of the concert hall. Everything seems to sweep down on her to tear it out from under her cape. If one had that, the world became one's enemy; people, buildings, wagons, cars, rushed at one to crush it under, to make one let go of it" (176).

Later the narrator suggests that the city itself runs according to other, more corrupt laws than those that drive people like Thea who seek artistic achievement: "The rich, noisy city, fat with food and drink, is a spent thing; its chief concern is its digestion and its little game of hide-and-seek with the undertaker. Money and office and success are the consolations of impotence" (230). But had she never spent time in the city, Thea would not have become a singer at all, let alone a successful one. Her time in Chicago makes possible the development of Thea's talent.

By the time Cather published *Lucy Gayheart* in 1935, she apparently had more enthusiasm for Chicago as a place that can nourish those who move there from the country. Lucy, a pianist from Nebraska, goes to Chicago to cultivate her art. Like Thea, she excitedly anticipates her move to the city. But while Thea has some problems with Chicago, Lucy falls in love with it from the moment she arrives. Just running around the city, she repeatedly sees things that make her feel ecstatic: "In the round of her day's engagements, hurrying about Chicago from one place to another, Lucy often came upon spots which gave her a sudden lift of the heart, made her feel glad before she knew why" (21). For one thing, in the big city, she has complete freedom, or as Lucy puts it, "for the first time in her life she could come and go like a boy; no one fussing about, no one hovering over her" (22). Unlike Thea, she seeks out musical performances right away and they carry her away: "Lucy had never heard anything sung with such elevation of style. In its calmness and serenity there was a kind of a large enlightenment, like daybreak" (25). Lucy wakes up happy every day: "In the morning she awoke with such lightness of heart that it seemed to her she had been drifting on a golden cloud all night" (39). Even when the weather is bad, she enjoys the city because rather than assaulting her pleasure, as the city did Thea's, it enhances it: "The weather, which everyone grumbled about, had been exactly the right weather for her. The dark, stormy mornings made the warmth and quiet toward which she hurried seem all the richer" (63). And when she reaches the studio to play her piano, she achieves complete happiness: "Life was resolved into something simple and noble—yes, and joyous; a joyousness which seemed safe from time or change" (63-64). While the city seems to obstruct Thea and it takes her years of hard work and a vacation to make real progress, Lucy finds complete freedom there: "She has never loved the city so much; the city which gave one the freedom to spend one's youth as one pleased, to have one's secret, to choose one's master and serve him in one's own way" (72).

And, like Thea, Chicago does such a wonderful job of allowing Lucy to realize her potential that she becomes at once an entirely different person than she was when she left home: a more authentic, complete human being than ever: "She had changed so much in her thoughts, in her ways, even in her looks, that she might wonder she knew herself—except that the changes were all in the direction of becoming more and more herself. She was no longer afraid to like

or dislike anything too much. It was as if she had found some authority for taking what was hers and rejecting what seemed unimportant" (79). When Lucy has to go home, she feels trapped after the liberation she enjoyed in Chicago: "She could not draw a long breath or make a free movement in the world that was left. She could breathe only in the world she brought back through memory" (131-32). Lucy vows to return to "a world that strove after excellence" (153), but before she can act on this pledge, she falls through the ice and drowns, and even her friends in Nebraska realize, without articulating it, that her death was "like a bird being shot down when it rises in its morning flight towards the sun" (174-75). Chicago shapes both Thea and Lucy into themselves, but during the twenty years that passed between the publication of *The Song of the Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart*, Cather seems to have achieved a deeper appreciation of the city as a place that offers not just artistic possibilities, but also greater autonomy for its citizens than does the country.

Saul Bellow's Chicago novels, *The Adventures of Augie March, Herzog,* and *Humboldt's Gift,* also reveal a progression with the city playing an increasingly positive role in the development of the protagonists' integrity. Augie March, unlike the characters in *Sister Carrie, The Song of the Lark*, and *Lucy Gayheart*, grows up in Chicago, so while moving there gives all the other characters a sense of possibility, Augie always believes that life offers him and others multiple options. Escorting Grandma Lausch to get free glasses, he learns that one can manipulate the system to get what one wants. Helping Einhorn exposes him to even more ways to play established ways of doing things in order to achieve one's goals. His brother Simon's rise in the world through his wife's family proves to Augie that no matter how impoverished or troubled his own family, he can transcend it. And since people love to adopt Augie, he knows he can rely on others to help him find his way, whether as a stylish salesman, a robber of expensive books, or a union organizer. Augie can and does do just about anything. But the heart he inherited from his mother inhibits him from functioning independently. He cares about people and yearns for connection so deeply that he will sacrifice just about anything to please or take care of women. As a result, he abandons Chicago to go to Mexico with Thea, whose strange plans involve training an eagle, which, of course, flies away. Meanwhile, Thea has an affair with someone else, leaving behind a battered Augie.

Augie returns to Chicago where his friends warn him against allowing others to exploit him and failing to face reality. His friend Mimi explains that "the reason I didn't see things as they were was that I didn't want to; because I couldn't love them as they were. But the challenge was not to better them in your mind but to put every human weakness into the picture" (475). Augie responds with a vision of the axial lines, the resuscitation of a worldview he has held since childhood that "the man himself, finite and taped as he is, can still come where the axial lines are. He will be brought into focus. He will live with true joy. Even his pains will be joy if they are true" (494). He decides his own particular fulfillment of the axial lines will be a home for foster children and his slow brother Georgie. But, instead, he winds up married to Stella, a woman who first manipulated him into taking care of her in Mexico and whom he recognizes as a liar: "Even if I am not the honestest type in the world I don't want to lie more than is average. Stella does" (570). Augie makes a living by hustling in Europe rather than running a home for lost children, but he feels only proud of himself: "Look at me, going everywhere!" (586). The same possibilities of Chicago that liberate Carrie, Thea, and Lucy from the limitations of country life make it difficult for Augie to stop exploring options and build a life genuinely his own. He opens the book declaring, "Everybody knows there is no fineness or accuracy of suppression; if you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining" (1). And he never suppresses or controls or shapes anything, including his own life. Even though at the end of the book, he is being used and has violated his axial lines, he sees himself as heroic: "Why, I am a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand. . ." (586). In *The Adventures of Augie March*, the city remains a place of possibility. But the combination of all those alternatives and Augie's desperate need to attach himself to others coalesce to guarantee that he never achieves a life truly his own. All the same, the fault rests with Augie's lack of integrity, not Chicago's lack of options.

Herzog, like Augie March, lets the ladies lead him around by his nose, but by the end of his novel, he develops integrity—with Chicago's help. Obsessed with the betrayal of his ex-wife, Madeline, he feels enormous anger at her. He attempts to assert control over not only his own life, but the entire planet with global theorizing, which he sees as crucial to the success of the human race: "The revolutions of the twentieth century, the liberation of the masses by production, created private life but gave nothing to fill it with. This was where such

as he came in. The progress of civilization—indeed, the survival of civilization—depended on the successes of Moses E. Herzog" (156).

Herzog repeatedly realizes that on some deep level he assumes if he behaves well towards people, he will be rewarded. Because he learned this as a child, he associates this philosophy with a children's nursery rhyme: *"I love little pussy her coat is so warm, and I'll sit by the fire and give her some food, and pussy will love me because I am good"* (270). Although he understands the irrationality of this belief, still its betrayal in his dealings with his ex-wife and her new husband leaves him enraged: "So now his rage is so great and deep, so murderous, bloody, positively rapturous, that his arms and fingers ache to strangle them" (270).

He returns to Chicago intending to face Gersbach, the man now married to his ex-wife. Like Augie, Herzog follows his passions rather than shape his life: "Characteristically, he was determined to act without clearly knowing what to do, and even recognizing that he had no power over his impulses. He hoped that on the plane, in the clearer atmosphere, he would understand why he was flying" (295). He gets a gun and then sees Gersbach giving a bath to his child. Facing the facts begins to wake him from his tantrum: "As soon as Herzog saw the actual person giving an actual bath, the reality of it, the tenderness of such a buffoon to a little child, his intended violence turned into theater, into something ludicrous" (316). He winds up having an accident on the Outer Drive with his small daughter in the car and realizes the unfairness to her of his irrational behavior. When he loses his self-control, he abandons his responsibility to her as a parent: rather than saving his daughter, as he supposedly intended, he put her in danger. He realizes that he has consistently failed to take responsibility for his life and that his passivity must end now: "No, weakness, or sickness, with which he had copped a plea all his life (alternating with arrogance), his method of preserving equilibrium—the Herzog gyroscope—had no further utility" (347). Like Sister Carrie, Thea, and Lucy, when Herzog goes to Chicago, he awakens to a healthier self. He decides to stop feeling sorry for himself since it allows him to threaten his child's safety: "At the bottom of the whole disaster lies the human being's sense of a grievance, and with this I want nothing more to do" (354).

His Chicago experiences provide the foundation for the peaceful life Herzog enjoys in the Berkshires. Replacing his anger at Madeline with an acceptance of his own role in his problems releases him from

her: "[I]t was a delicious joy to have her removed from his flesh, like something that had stabbed his shoulders, his groin, made his arms and his neck lame and cumbersome" (381). He finds his own axial lines: "The silence sustained him, and the brilliant weather, the feeling that he was easily contained by everything about him *Within the hollowness of God*, as he noted, *and deaf to the final multiplicity of facts*, as well as, *blind to ultimate distances*" (396). Over the next few days, Herzog's essential self emerges: ". . . Herzog did nothing but send such messages, and write down songs, psalms, and utterances, putting into words what he had often thought but, for the sake of form, or something of the sort, had always suppressed" (398). But without facing the reality of what his rages were doing to his life and had the potential to do to his child's life in Chicago, he never would have achieved the joy he feels in the Berkshires. To understand the truth of his situation, he needs to return to Chicago and take an honest look at his wife, their child, and her new husband. Herzog's visit to a courtroom and his Outer Drive accident also help establish Chicago as a place that encourages him to acknowledge facts. Augie March never does this, but Herzog does.

Charles Citrine, the major character in Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*, has apparently never read *Herzog* or *The Adventures of Augie March*. He cannot imagine why he lives in Chicago. He finds the city's toughness and crudity trying. His ex-wife accuses him of staying there because he never grew up: "You wouldn't have London or Paris or New York, you had to come back to this—this deadly, ugly, vulgar, dangerous place. Because at heart you're a kid from the slums." (41). She complains that he never even spends time with Chicago's intellectuals, and he agrees. Citrine believes the kind of theorizing these people enjoy and propagate has made it difficult for others to follow their impulses. All their philosophizing has rendered the world dull: "The educated speak of the disenchanted (a boring) world . . . . For me, the self-conscious ego is the seat of boredom." (203). So Citrine skips Augie's dependence and Herzog's intellectualizing and decides to rely on his inner sense of spirituality, which brings him to a state resembling Augie's axial lines and the peace Herzog achieves in the Berkshires. His metaphysical yearnings lead Citrine into a vivid world: "I was by inclination the sort of person who needed . . . the belief that everything that takes place in man has world significance. Such a belief warmed the environment for me, and brought out the sweet glossy leaves, the hanging oranges of the

groves where the unpolluted self was virginal and gratefully communed with its Maker, and so on. It was possible that this was the only way for me to be my own true self" (257). He believes that this reflective orientation puts him at odds with Chicago.

But when Citrine runs into Menasha Klinger, whom he knew as a child, he realizes that the larger impulses that enrich his life result from his loving attachments and that no place evokes them more powerfully than Chicago. He comes to understand that Chicago holds so much import for him because he feels such intense affection for much of the city. In reconnecting with Klinger and other people from his youth, Citrine realizes that "[l]ife was a hell of a lot more bounteous than I had ever realized. It rushed over us with more than our senses and our judgment could take in. One life with its love affairs, its operatic ambitions, its dollars and horse races and marriage-designs and old people's homes is, after all, only a tin dipperful of this superabundance. It rushes up also from within" (331). So connection, not transcendence, most enriches life. And Chicago is a place more vivified by Citrine's love than any other. Leaving Chicago would deprive Citrine of those elements of his existence that most powerfully nourish his spiritual and emotional lives.

As *Humboldt's Gift* ends, Charlie admits that growing up in Chicago has left him ignorant about plants. When Menasha asks him to identify a flower, Citrine just reaches for a familiar label: "'Search me,' I said. 'I'm a city boy myself. They must be crocuses'" (487). But although Citrine did not grow up in the kind of bucolic atmosphere often featured in Romantic literature, he has a similar zest for life and sense of larger redeeming patterns largely based on the human connections that had enriched and continue to animate his life in Chicago. This brings him a sense of both peace and homecoming.

In the work of all these writers, Chicago provides an opportunity for characters to discover important truths about themselves. In the novels of Dreiser and Cather, people who travel to Chicago awaken to new dimensions of themselves. In Bellow's fiction, Chicago confronts his characters with reality and gives them a chance to live in terms of their inner lives; most of them take advantage of this. And so, James T. Farrell was right: in the work of some of its most important authors, Chicago functions as much as a symbol of opportunity as it does as a metaphor for urban blight. In the fiction of Dreiser, Cather and Bellow, Chicago offers people chances to enrich their

lives, but the characters must possess the integrity and courage to take advantage of them.

Michigan State University

WORKS CITED

Bellow, Saul. *The Adventures of Augie March*. 1953. NY: Penguin, 2003.

—. *Herzog*. NY: Fawcett Crest, 1964.

—. *Humboldt's Gift*. NY: Viking, 1975.

Bremer, Sidney H. *Urban Intersections: Meeting of Life and Literature in United States Cities*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1992.

—. "Lost Continuities: Alternative Urban Visions in Chicago Novels, 1890-1915." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 64.1 (Spring 1981): 29-51.

Brown, Bill. "The Matter of Dreiser's Modernity." *The Cambridge Companion to Theodore Dreiser*. Ed. Leonard Cassuto and Clare Virginia Eby. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004: 83-99. Web.

Butler, Robert. "Urban Frontiers, Neighborhoods, and Traps: The City in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Farrell's *Studs Lonigan*, and Wright's *Native Son*." *Theodore Dreiser and American Culture: New Readings*. Ed. Yoshinobu Hakutani. Newark, DE: U of Delaware P, 2000. 274-90.

Cather, Willa. *Lucy Gayheart*. 1935. NY: Vintage, 1995.

—. *The Song of the Lark*. 1915. NY: Signet, 1991.

Dreiser, Theodore. *Sister Carrie*.1900. NY: Airmont, 1967.

AT HOME ON THE SOUTH SIDE: CHICAGO IN GWENDOLYN BROOKS'S *MAUD MARTHA* AND *REPORT FROM PART ONE*

LYNN ORILLA SCOTT

Maud Martha (1953), Gwendolyn Brooks's only novel, has been read as a "Re-Wrighting" of Richard Wright's *Native Son* and *Black Boy*. Malin Walther, who coined the term "Re-Wrighting," as well as several subsequent critics, have focused on Brooks's refiguration of domestic space, her feminine vision and the privileging of the inner life over the prescriptions of social identities to distinguish her from the Wright School of social realism.[1] Little, however, has been said about the ways in which Brooks's prose, specifically *Maud Martha* and her memoir, *Report from Part One*, re-imagines Wright's black Chicago of the 1930s and 1940s. Reading Brooks's novel and memoir, one is immediately struck by the specificity of place, the naming of real streets, addresses, beauty shops, eateries, theaters and so forth. As Maria K. Mootry has stated, "a sense of place lies at the center of much of Brooks's poetry and fiction. Real place names evoke vividly, if at times impressionistically, Chicago's South Side topography . . . (5). I will argue that the most significant way in which Brooks revises Wright is not just by her focus on domestic space and individual consciousness, but by her aesthetic of place, more specifically the way in which her focus on individual consciousness allows her to re-inhabit both domestic and public spaces in order to deliver a more nuanced portrait of black Chicago than that associated with Richard Wright.

Gwendolyn Brooks had already won the Pulitzer Prize for her second volume of poetry, *Annie Allen* (1949), when she published *Maud Martha*, but she decided to write a novel, in large part because she hoped it would be more profitable than poetry and that its sales

would enable her to buy a home for herself, her husband, Henry Blakely, and her two children.[2] Brooks's parents had purchased a home on Chicago's South Side at 43rd Street and Champlain when she was four years old and had managed to keep it even through the worst years of the Depression.[3] However, Gwendolyn Brooks and her husband had come of age in an increasingly segregated Chicago marked by acute housing shortages, grossly inflated rents and restrictive covenants that worked to keep blacks out of the better areas and make home ownership a distant dream.[4] For more than a dozen years, they had lived in various rented rooms, kitchenettes, and a "damp garage apartment," in the overcrowded, over-priced, and deteriorating neighborhoods of Chicago's Black Belt (*Report* 59). When the *Chicago Sun-Times* came to cover the award of the Pulitzer Prize, Brooks's electricity had been cut off due to nonpayment, and she "sat, waiting in a sort of quiet terror for [the photographer] to put the plug into the socket."[5] *Maud Martha* was not a best seller and there "was no lump-sum payment from [its] sales" (Kent 111), but Brooks was able to make a down payment on a home with the help of friends, family, and the sale of a house she had inherited in Michigan. Gwendolyn Brooks and her family moved into 7428 South Evans Avenue on her son's birthday, October 10, 1953 (*Report* 106). This would be her home until her death in 2000. In his preface to *Report from Part One*, Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti) notes that Brooks "lives four blocks from the Black People's Topographical Center in Chicago, the first in the nation" (22).

Given Brooks's struggle to find adequate housing during the years that *Maud Martha* was conceived and written, it is not surprising that home is a central concern of the novel. As Jacqueline Imani Bryant has pointed out in her introduction to a collection of critical essays devoted to *Maud Martha*, there are "multiple themes of home" (8). Implied here is that "home" in the novel is more than domestic space, but also space in the community, the city, and even the nation; moreover, "home" is a feeling, the state of being at home in these places. The outward movement of the novel, beginning with the young Maud Martha contemplating the view from her back porch and ending with the grown Maud Martha contemplating the state of the world outside her kitchenette window and ending with the line, "the weather was bidding her bon voyage" (180), suggests that by the novel's end, Maud is poised not so much to leave home, but to more fully inhabit her world. That said, a core theme of home is, indeed,

the struggle to keep and find adequate domestic space, and that struggle comes to represent the character's relationship with home on all these levels. Early in the novel, Maud Martha and her sister are waiting for their father's return from the Home Owner's Loan Office, fearful they may lose their home. Later, Maud and her husband must settle for a tiny kitchenette apartment, infested by mice, with no private bathroom.

GerShun Avilez, who reads *Maud Martha* as a segregation narrative, argues that Maud is "'narratively' imprisoned within her domestic space . . . [because she] does not make it out of the Gappington Arms Kitchenette building by the novel's close" (Avilez 142). He reads Maud Martha's question in the last chapter, "'What, what, am I to do with all of this life'" (178) as "an articulated fear about the realities of the physical domestic space for the Black family" (Avilez 145). He concludes that *Maud Martha* is a novel of "no placedness" that connects the disillusionment of social racism with the disillusionment of [Maud's] home life" (Avilez 146). While the novel does expose the ways in which segregation devalues black spaces and black bodies, this reading is reductive because it ignores the narrator's (and the author's) insistence on inhabiting place through specific detail and character. Place names and addresses abound. For example, Maud is "in the lobby of the Regal Theatre on Forty-seventh and South Park" (19); Uncle Tim did the Charleston "in the middle of what was then Grand Boulevard and is now South Park" (24); Paul tells Maud, "at a store on Forty-third and Cottage they're selling four rooms of furniture for eighty-nine dollars" (57) and so forth. Through naming specific places and providing addresses, Maud makes Chicago hers, inviting the reader to inhabit what is clearly the narrator's beloved home and community, even as it bears the indignities of segregated space.

In addition to the use of detail, place is re-inhabited through a narrative voice that constantly resists the imposed "valuelessness" of segregated spaces. For example, chapter fifteen, "the kitchenette" that Avilez uses to make his point about Maud's "rising dissatisfaction with her domestic space" is followed by chapter twenty-three, "kitchenette folks," which comprises nine vignettes of the people in Maud's building. It is important to view these chapters together because they show Maud's process of transforming alienating spaces through attention to character. When Maud first moves into the kitch-

enette building, her dreams of home quickly sour. Not only is the building gray, but grayness takes over all life in the kitchenette:

> She was becoming aware of an oddness in color and sound and smell about her, the color and sound and smell of the kitchenette building. The color was gray, and the smell and sound had taken on a suggestion of the properties of color, and impressed one as gray, too. The sobbings, the frustrations, the small hates, the large and ugly hates, the little pushing through love, the boredom, that came to her from behind those walls . . . all these were gray . . . . There was a whole lot of grayness here. (63-4)

Contrast this description with chapter twenty-three, in which the kitchenette folks are rendered in exquisite and idiosyncratic detail from Otto, "a happy man" who loved his "dainty little Marie" even though her "domestic sins" are visible to everyone else, to Josephine Snow, "a Woman of Breeding," who "did the honors of the teacup" (124) and "had a tremendous impatience with other people's ideas" (126). The gray pall of Maud's vision that created an undifferentiated kitchenette life has lifted. The vignettes in chapter twenty-three make clear that no one type of person lives in a kitchenette and people's responses to their circumstances are varied and surprising.

Maud finds her neighbors amusing. Her vignettes of the people in the "Gappington Arms" (the residents have given the previously nameless building a name) illustrate the way in which Brooks re-inhabits "gray" and confining spaces through characterization. Maud has made the Gappington Arms a home. It is useful to think of "home" in *Maud Martha* as not just a theme, but a practice. Through detail, through character, through a lyrical voice and consciousness, Brooks insists on making Chicago's South Side home. She is a Chicago "homemaker."

In *Maud Martha*, Brooks re-imagines the relationship between place and character associated with the work of Richard Wright and the school of social realism of the 1930s and '40s. For Wright "the kitchenette is the funnel through which our pulverized lives flow to ruin and death" (11). In contrast to Brooks's insistence on specific documentary style representations of city places, Wright's Chicago is symbolic of the overpowering forces of modern life and, as such, becomes a character in its own right: an impersonal, mechanical god, who has the power to crush the many and make heroes of a few. Two examples of Wright's symbolic representations of Chicago can be

found in the second part of his autobiography, posthumously published as *American Hunger* (1977), and in his 1945 introduction to St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton's sociological study of Chicago's black belt, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*:

> My first glimpse of the flat black stretches of Chicago depressed and dismayed me, mocked all my fantasies. Chicago seemed an unreal city whose mythical houses were built of slabs of black coal wreathed in palls of gray smoke, houses whose foundations were sinking slowly into the dark prairie. Flashes of steam showed intermittently on the wide horizon, gleaming translucently in the winter sun. The din of the city entered my consciousness, entered to remain for years to come. (*American Hunger* 1)

> And there in that great iron city, that impersonal, mechanical city, amid the steam, the smoke, the snowy winds, the blistering suns; there in that self-conscious city, that city so deadly dramatic and stimulating, we caught whispers of the meanings that life could have, and we were pushed and pounded by facts much too big for us. Many migrants like us were driven and pursued, in the manner of characters in a Greek play, down the paths of defeat; but luck must have been with us, for we somehow survived; and for those of us who did not come through, we are trying to do the bidding of Hamlet who admonished Horatio: . . . "To tell my story." (*Black Metropolis* xvii)

For Wright, place shapes the individual; the gray, "unreal city" "enter[s] [his] consciousness" and "remains." In the second passage the city is personified as "self-conscious," which contrasts with his self-description later in that passage as "half hungry . . . afraid . . . with a dumb yearning to write" (xvii). The writer is in battle with the city, a battle of heroic proportions. The modern city offers "stimulation" and "meanings of life," but it is "deadly" and can only be conquered by a few who then live to tell the tale of the many who perished and by doing so reveal the true meaning of the city. Chicago, in essence, is symbolic of modern life for Wright and remains in that sense an "unreal" city full of "mythical" places.

Wright's vision of Chicago was influenced by his close ties with the Chicago sociologists who did much to support black intellectuals and writers of the 1930s and '40s, as evidenced by Wright's introduction to the important, now classic, sociological study of Chicago's South Side, Drake and Cayton's, *Black Metropolis*.[6] Wright acknowl-

edges this influence at one point in his introduction to *Black Metropolis* when he uses it to authenticate the "truth" of his novel, *Native Son* and his autobiography, *Black Boy*:

> If, in reading my novel, *Native Son*, you doubted the reality of Bigger Thomas, then examine the delinquency rates cited in this book; if, in reading my autobiography, *Black Boy*, you doubted the picture of family life shown there, then study the figures on family disorganization given here. *Black Metropolis* describes the processes that mold Negro life as we know it today . . . . The imposed conditions under which Negroes live detail the structure of their lives like an engineer outlining the blue-prints for the production of machines. (xx)

That Wright felt he needed to cite a sociological study to validate his autobiography, as well as his novel, says as much about Wright's readers, whom he understood to be in the throes of deep denial about black life in America, as it says about Wright's intentions. Yet, prose that is authenticated by sociology involves a certain type of relationship between place and character. Place becomes more than a physical location, also comprising the historical, social and political forces that are imposed in a physical location. Place for Wright, in this sense, becomes dominant and "engineers" characters who fulfill their "blue-print" destiny.

Barbara Christian described black fiction of the fifties as a response to one of the unwanted effects of the Wright school, which seemed to promulgate a view of blacks as almost completely determined by their environment, a philosophical attitude that diminished black humanity "as much as the previous attitude that [blacks] were genetically inferior" (241-242). The new approaches of the fifties "attempted to break the image of the black person as an essentially controlled and tragic individual as well as to dramatize the variety of his or her experiences" (242). In his essay on the Chicago Renaissance in *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing*, Craig Werner makes a similar point but also argues that Brooks and other black women writers have been marginalized because "the sociological premises established during the Renaissance continue to dominate discussions of African-American culture, reducing complex attempts to negotiate situations that are both personal and communal to 'representative' expressions of social unrest" (166-7).

That Gwendolyn Brooks saw herself as revising Richard Wright's picture of life on Chicago's South Side is supported by a review she wrote of Wright's *Lawd Today* for the *Chicago Sun Times*. *Lawd Today*, based on Wright's experience working in the central post office in Chicago, was published posthumously in 1963. While crediting the novel's sometimes "beautiful prose," "sharp dialogue," "authentic comedy," and "chilling horror," she is careful to place it in perspective as "an achingly straight representation of *a* kind of life" (*Report* 74-75). Concerned to set the record straight for readers who might conclude "so that is the way Negroes live," she goes on to insist that Wright's narrative suggests one truth about the way some people act when oppressed but certainly not the only or most common truth. "People like Jake are not in the black majority but they do exist" (74). The fact that Brooks decided to include this review in her 1972 autobiography, published at the height of the Black Arts Movement, suggests she believed her qualification of Wright's vision was a point still worth making.

While Wright argues that conditions of poverty and racism "engineer" a character's story, Brooks, without sentimentalizing or minimizing the reality of segregation, racism, and poverty, suggests a more complex relationship between place and character. Throughout *Maud Martha*, the city is not personified. It is not "unreal," "mythical," "impersonal," or "self-conscious." Rather, it emerges through the perception of its people. As one critic has stated, "the city conditions, but never controls, [Brooks's] vision" (Williams 67). Interestingly, the word "Chicago" doesn't appear in *Maud Martha*, nor does the word "Bronzeville," a common name during the period for the black South Side. While ever present in the novel, "Chicago" only exists through its particular locales, which, as previously mentioned, are named often; and not all of those locales are in the segregated South Side as we see Maud move in and out of segregated spaces. Unlike the characters of *Native Son* or the persona of *Black Boy,* the central character of *Maud Martha* is neither tragic nor heroic. Paradoxically, Maud Martha gains stature not through a confrontation with overwhelming forces, but through her vision of everyday life, her ability to perceive others as responding in various ways to their environment, and her determination to create form and meaning in her own life. While Wright points to *Black Metropolis* to authenticate both his autobiography and his novel, Brooks makes a subtle autobiographical move to authenticate hers. The epigraph to *Maud Martha* reads: "Maud

Martha was born in 1917. She is still alive." Thus, Brooks bestows upon the title character the same birth year as her own and tells her readers that Maud exists outside the text. Such a move allows us to keep the "fiction" of Maud while associating Maud with Brooks, her creator, an appropriate move for a novel that presents a character intent on self-authoring her life through a depiction of specific moments in real places.

One of these self-creating moments occurs early in the novel when sixteen-year-old Maud attends the Regal Theatre "on Forty-seventh and South Park" (19). Located in the heart of the black community, the Regal (similar to Harlem's Apollo theater) was the main venue for black performers in Chicago for many years.[7] The "foolish" performance of Howie Jones makes Maud determined to create a "solid" and "private" identity of her own. The world "would not make plans to raise a hard monument" to the Howie Joneses of the world, thinks Maud. She "had never understood how people could parade themselves on a stage like that, exhibit their precious private identities; shake themselves about; be very foolish for a thousand eyes" (21). By contrast, Maud would "keep herself to herself. She did not want fame. She did not want to be a 'star.' To create—a role, a poem, picture, music, a rapture in stone: great. But not for her. What she wanted was to donate to the world a good Maud Martha. That was the offering, the bit of art that could not come from any other. She would polish and hone that" (22). This chapter establishes Maud's quest for a dignified and "solid" identity in a racialized world that offered success and wealth to black performers for the price of their dignity.

Brooks uses particular Chicago theaters to map Maud's struggle against racial shame and poverty as she pursues this "solid" identity, the creation of a "good Maud Martha." In a later chapter titled, "we're the only colored people here," Maud persuades her husband, Paul, to take her downtown to the World Playhouse to see a movie, rather than go to the "Owl"—a South Side movie theater. In the white theater there is technicolor, a sweet love story and classical music (77). As Maud sits in the darkened theater, she can imagine herself "going home to a sweet-smelling apartment with flowers on little gleaming tables . . . she pressed back, smiling beautifully to herself in the darkness" (77-8). Yet "when the picture was over and the lights revealed them for what they were, the Negroes stood up among the furs and good cloth and faint perfume, looked about them eagerly. They hoped

they would meet no cruel eyes. They hoped no one would look intruded upon" (78). The World Playhouse is the site of Maud Martha's painful double-consciousness, where she sees herself through white eyes that deny her the right to the beautiful and dignified life she desires. As many critics have argued, *Maud Martha* is a novel about private and domestic identity formation, but Maud's identity is imagined and struggled over in public places. Theaters are places where identities are performed and private identities made public. Chicago theaters map the physical and imaginative boundaries Maud Martha must negotiate to polish and hone a solid identity.

The physical boundaries of Chicago's segregated neighborhoods are established early in the novel through frequent references to Cottage Grove, the long north/south street that has historically divided black neighborhoods from the white middle-class neighborhoods surrounding the University of Chicago. In the chapter "love and gorillas," Maud Martha's first awareness of racial segregation occurs when she walks east of Cottage Grove and sees that all of the faces are white. This "night hike" into white territory with her mother and siblings follows an undescribed argument between her parents, which is happily resolved by the end of the evening. For the young child, "over there [in white territory] that matter of mystery and hunchedness was thicker, a hundred fold" (9-10). No racial confrontation takes place, yet the reader comes to understand the "night hike" as the cause of this chapter's main event, which is a description of Maud's nightmare about a caged gorilla and frightened people on a train who wonder if the gorilla will escape. The chapter links the geography of segregation, the simple crossing of an unmarked boundary on Cottage Grove, with young Maud's imagination and fear. The rage of the caged gorilla and the "hunchedness" of the small child represent the dangerous emotional territory imposed by racial segregation that Maud must negotiate. Maud, however, wakes from her dream knowing that although the gorilla had, in fact, escaped, she had not been eaten, even though she continues to wonder if others had been. The chapter subtly suggests Maud's ability to survive psychologically the crossing of racial boundaries, through acts of dream and imagination, without sacrificing love and identity.

By contrast, the novel presents us with David McKemster, Maud's second beau, whose alienation from black life and from the neighborhood where he grew up is portrayed as a visceral reaction to specific places on the South Side.

> Whenever he left the Midway, said David McKemster, he was instantly depressed. East of Cottage Grove, people were clean, going somewhere that mattered, not talking unless they had something to say. West of the Midway, they leaned against buildings and their mouths were opening and closing very fast but nothing important was coming out. What did they know about Aristotle? The unhappiness he felt over there was physical. He wanted to throw up. There was a fence on Forty-seventh and—Champlain? Langley? Forestville?—he forgot what; broken, rotten, trying to lie down; and passing it on a windy night or on a night when it was drizzling, he felt lost, lapsed, negative, untended, extinguished, broken and lying down too—unappeasable. And looking up in those kitchenette windows, where the lights were dirty through glass—they could wash the windows—was not all "interesting" to him as it probably was to those guys at the university who had—who had—
>
> Made a football out of Parrington.
>
> Because he knew what it was. He knew it was a mess! He knew it wasn't "colorful," "exotic," "fascinating." (45)

David, like Maud, wants respectability, a nice apartment and appreciates high culture, but, unlike Maud's, David's identity is an imitation. He is represented as a caricature of a pretentious black intellectual whose identity rests on a complete rejection of black life. He is ashamed of his family's poverty and lack of education; his mother had sent him to school "clean but patched up . . . [and] she had said 'ain't'" (44). David, "a picture of the English country gentleman" who only needs a dog and a pipe to complete the picture (42), creates an artificial identity based on an imitation of "those guys" the white university students who had grown up with all the material and intellectual advantages he hadn't had. Yet the passage suggests not only the desperate frustration behind David's pretentiousness, but also the shallow naïveté of the educated whites that McKemster imitates who view life on the black South Side as "exotic" and "fascinating." His "Anglophilia" and his "thick hunks of the most rational, particularistic, critical, and intellectually aloof discourse" (130) all serve to distance him from the white stereotypes of blackness that have shamed him. The irony is multi-directional and helps frame the challenges Maud faces in her effort to establish a "solid" sense of self and value in a segregated world.

Maud's consciousness emerges from within the geographical locations—the streets, the kitchenettes—that David McKemster

holds in such disdain. Maud's love for her childhood home and her desire to be cherished provide a vantage point from which she reads the larger environment with a great deal more affection and nuance than McKemster. The first chapter, "description of Maud Martha," contains no physical description of Maud. Rather, her character is described through what she likes. The sources of her romantic and poetic sensibility are grounded in the everyday view from her back porch. She loves the west sky and the dandelions. Identifying with the "everydayness" of dandelions, she finds them beautiful, cherishing them just as she wants, more than anything else, to be cherished: "She would have liked a lotus or China asters or the Japanese iris, or meadow lilies, because the very word meadow made her breathe more deeply, and either fling her arms or want to fling her arms, depending on who was by, rapturously up to whatever was watching in the sky. But dandelions were what she chiefly saw. Yellow jewels for everyday . . ." (1-2).

The phrase "fling her arms" echoes Langston Hughes' poem, "Dream Variation," about the desire for racial acceptance. The poem begins: "To fling my arms wide / In some place of the sun," and ends: "Rest at pale evening . . . / A tall, slim tree / Night coming tenderly / Black like me." Maud is frequently not able to find comfort in her blackness, her ordinariness, especially when she compares herself to her elder sister, Helen, "still the ranking queen" (35), who is petite, graceful, light skinned and who seems to be favored by the family. Yet Maud wants to fling her arms; her instincts are to embrace the life around her, to find her place in the sun. Thus, without romanticizing the home as a haven from racialized social values, Brooks is able to suggest that the view from a home space can be sustaining for one who knows how to cherish the ordinary (even if the ordinary is not always cherished by others).

The second chapter, "spring landscape: detail," follows Maud from her back yard to school, the first public space a child encounters. Brooks builds continuity with the first chapter by associating the school children with flowers and contrasting them with their bleak surroundings. The brownish-red brick school with the dirty trim and massive chimney "looked solid" and the weather is cloudy and windy, feeling more like November than June. Yet even on this day and in this place there are "little promises, just under cover" (4). The "little promises" are the children who are "mixed in the wind" and being blown to school. The image captures not only the children's

colorful clothing, but the varied hues of the "black" children attending the segregated school: "It was wonderful. Bits of pink, of blue, white, yellow, green, purple, brown, black, carried by jerky little stems of brown or yellow or brown-black, blew by the unhandsome gray and decay of the double-apartment buildings . . . . Past the tiny lives the children blew. Cramp, inhibition, choke—they did not trouble themselves about these" (5).

It remains an open question what will become of these children, these "little promises." Like the hidden promises behind the gray sky, "whether they will fulfill themselves was anybody's guess" (4). The flower as metaphor for resilient humanity is one of the organizing images of the entire narrative. It is repeated in the chapter, "on Thirty-fourth Street," when the narrator describes people on their porches and sidewalks as "blooms, in their undershirts, sundresses and diapers" (164). The metaphor is repeated again at the end of the novel when Maud Martha meditates on the destruction of the Second World War and the lynchings in Georgia and Mississippi. Doubting that man would ever succeed in destroying the world, Maud asks rhetorically whether or not "the least and commonest flower" would come up again in the spring, and "if necessary, [come up] among, between or out of—beastly inconvenient!—the smashed corpses lying in strict composure, in that hush infallible and sincere" (179). The first two chapters establish Maud Martha's vision of poetic resilience, a vision that begins at home on the back porch and expands outward from home, making a home in the world.

While Maud's vision of poetic resilience runs from beginning to end, Maud remains, for much of the novel, more observer than actor. There is little direct dialogue between Maud and the other characters. Her persona of dignified restraint, established in the scene at the Regal Theatre, is reinforced in her response to several difficult situations, including her husband's behavior at the Annual Foxy Cats Dawn Ball and the white saleswoman's racist remark at the beauty parlor. Mary Helen Washington describes Maud as "conceal[ing] her feelings behind a mask of gentility" (454). *Maud Martha*, says Washington, is a novel about "bitterness, rage, self-hatred and the silence that results from suppressed anger" (453). Yet the novel is about more than that: it is about how Maud Martha avoids being eaten by that "gorilla" of rage and fear figured in her childhood nightmare by waking up to the reassuring sights of her room, by embracing home. Maud moves from silence to voice midway through the novel

when she gives birth to her daughter. We hear her speak out to husband, mother, and neighbor. She says to Paul, "'DON'T YOU GO OUT OF HERE AND LEAVE ME ALONE! Damn. DAMN!'" (92); to her mother, "'Listen. If you're going to make a fuss, go on out. I'm having enough trouble without you making a fuss over everything'" (95); and to her neighbor, "'Hello, Mrs. Barksdale! . . . Did you hear the news? I just had a baby, and I feel strong enough to go out and shovel coal! Having a baby is *nothing,* Mrs. Barksdale. Nothing at all'" (98). Maud Martha's voice is liberated in the "confinement" of a kitchenette apartment where she gives birth. Brooks "re-Wrights" domestic space, asserting its potential even in an impoverished ghetto to sustain creativity and produce "bright delight" (99).

In Report from Part One, written almost twenty years after *Maud Martha*, Brooks makes clear how much of her novel was autobiographical in spirit as well as detail:

> It is not true that the poor are never "happy." I believe a giggle or two may escape into the upper air of a Dachau, of a Buchenwald. I remember feeling bleak when I was taken to my honeymoon home, the kitchenette apartment in the Tyson on 43rd and South Park, after the very nice little wedding in my parents' living room. (The living room was the second room in the old 43rd and Champlain house, while the first was called always "the front room.") After the beautiful high wedding cake, and the other cakes, and the fancy ice cream, and the flowers, and the presents, and the singing, and Harriet Cass playing O Promise Me! But soon, even in the cramped dreariness of the Tyson there was fun, there was company, there was reading, mutual reading. This was true in the room at Mrs. Sapp's and in the kitchenette at 6424 Champlain, where our son was suddenly born, and in the damp garage apartment at 5412 Indiana, where our son contracted broncho-pneumonia, and in the kitchenette at 623 East 63rd Street (where, when the mice came out of the front radiator "in droves," my husband, then a National Guardsman, was able to intone "HUP two three four, HUP two three four," while I stood, perilously, shrieking on a chair of a very skimpy make). (59)

Many of the events briefly mentioned in this passage—the wedding, the disappointment over her married home, and the mice have their fictionalized treatment in *Maud Martha*. All of these events occur in specific places, and there is even greater specificity of place in the memoir than in the novel. In the above paragraph she provides the exact addresses of the first four kitchenette apartments she and her

husband lived in, as well as the location of her childhood home. If these places were only cramped, dreary, rodent-infested buildings, they would hardly be worth locating so precisely. But place is imbued with spirit, the spirit of a life lived in all its joys and sorrows. Places worth remembering and naming.

Report from Part One is less a narrative than a memory book. In addition to her own reminiscences of family life, it includes a section written by her mother, writing as if she were Gwendolyn; notes from unpublished projects; her daughter's childhood writing; fragments from a trip to Kenya; pictures of family and friends; transcripts of interviews; notes on her published work; an account of her honorary degrees and awards; reflections on public presentations and teaching; tributes to friends and colleagues; and even an obituary for the family dog. One of the most striking elements of this collage is the detailed representations of place that occur throughout the various modes of presentation. Brooks includes a picture of her grandmother's home in Topeka, Kansas, with a caption that reads: "1311 North Kansas Avenue. I was born in the dining room" (98). There is a picture of Gwendolyn and family members in front of the home that she bought the year *Maud Martha* was published. The caption reads: "A pleasant afternoon on the porch at 7428 South Evans Avenue. We moved here October 10, 1953, Henry Jr.'s birthday. In this picture Nora is nine" (106). She also includes more than one picture of the house she grew up in. "The house at 4332 Champlain Avenue. Home, from my fourth year until the day I was married" (103). In the section written by Brooks's mother, we are given the locations of the first two apartments that Gwendolyn lived in as an infant: the first in Hyde Park and the second at 56th and Lake Park Avenue (47). Brooks relates the exact location where she first saw her future husband, "in the door, there at the YWCA on 46th and (then) South Park," and where she announces to her friend, "There is the man I am going to marry" (58). She mentions attending a small neighborhood theater, the Harmony, before the Regal was built on 47th and South Park (now King Drive) (47-8), and attending the Carter Temple Church where, coached by her mother, she delivered recitations during her preschool years (49). She also names Forrestville, the elementary school she attended; the Sexton School, where she would wait for her kindergartener to come out "on the 61st Street side of Washington Park" (191); and Henry Jr.'s graduation from Paul Cornell Elementary School (60). In addition to providing the addresses of every place she

lived in on Chicago's South Side, she also gives the addresses of her relatively well-to-do aunt at 9248 South Wabash in undeveloped Lilydale and of her poor aunt who lived "on Garfield Boulevard, right off Washington Park" (54). A friend who gave costly parties "bought a three-story house on 42nd and Drexel Boulevard," which made her a "pioneer . . . one of the first black invaders" (68). Even in Kenya (the section titled "African Fragments"), Brooks finds herself "surprised by sharply illustrated memories of dandelions in [her] parents' Champlain Avenue back yard" (92). In her memoir Brooks creates a map of her life and in the process a map of Black Chicago. She tells us, I was here, my family was here, we were here.

What is the significance of this emphasis on home and neighborhood places in Brooks's writing? Patricia and Vernon Lattin are surely correct when they say that "Brooks seems to imply that these elements [love and the sense of place] are not only necessary for the development of our 'precious private identities' but also for the survival of Blacks as a people"(186). The persistent documentation of place may be understood as a response to the very precariousness of the author's relationship to places, including her parents' struggle to hold on to their home, and her and her husband's struggle to find an adequate and affordable place to live. Brooks's emphasis on place, especially domestic places, should be read as a counter narrative to the narratives of migration, displacement, and placelessness that have been identified with the Chicago Renaissance writers. As Kevin Quashie states, "Though Maud Martha may be displaced in the world, she does not react as if she is displaced or as if displacement is her subjectivity. Because it is not" (72). When read in this way Brooks's "domestic" places extend outward. They become the vantage point from which the poet domesticates Wright's "unreal city," making it home, the place and source of the poet's creativity and identity. Brooks made this point herself when she told an interviewer that Chicago "nourishes" the poet because it is a "place to observe man en masse and in his infinite variety" (*Report* 135).

Michigan State University

NOTES

[1]Malin Walther contrasts the chapter, "Maud Martha Spares the Mouse," where Maud releases a mouse caught in a trap in her kitchenette apartment with the first chapter of *Native Son*, where Bigger kills a rat. Walther claims that Brooks is re-scripting the "wholly negative domestic scene" in Wright and "revealing a revisionary motif that affirms nonviolence and

re-centers human and aesthetic value in nurturing relationships and traditionally maternal domesticity" (143). In her essay, "Domestic Epic Warfare in *Maud Martha*," Valerie Frazier cites Walther and adds, "saving the mouse asserts [Maud's] will and her ability to affect the external world" (137). Also following Walther, Carol Henderson argues that "Brooks's vision of family life reshapes the intimacy of Wright's bleak allegorical representations in ways that underscore America's failure to acknowledge this humanity. In Brooks's novel, domesticity is staged as a site of resistance in and of itself that recoups the feminine ideal. In reaffirming nonviolence as a human value in this space, Brooks reclaims the maternal as a cultivator of the spirit, thereby recouping the domestic space of African American people" (62).

A number of critics, including Hortense Spillers, the Lattins, and Kevin Quashie, stress the domestic and feminine aspects of Brooks's vision in *Maud Martha*. Patricia and Vernon Lattin contrast *Maud Martha* with the "powerful urban novels" of Wright and Ellison, arguing that "Brooks deflated the mystique of heroism and grand defeat by illuminating the commonplace and thus created a new type of black woman character" (180-181). Hortense Spillers writes, "I would argue the central artistic purpose of *Maud Martha* is to express the essentially heroic character of the unheroic by altering our opinion of 'heroism' in the first place" (233). Kevin Quashie argues that Maud Martha's refusal to kill the mouse shows her "awareness of the ubiquity of power and violence, as well as her capacity to enact or be subjected to both" (59). Quashie regards *Maud Martha* as an existentialist novel in which the main character gains agency through her "wild perceptions and attentiveness" (48). While I agree with the general thrust of this criticism, I would also caution drawing the conclusion that the novel is only about domestic space or that it poses a division between domestic and public space. Many of the chapters show Maud outside her home. I wish to argue that the representation of particular places (not only homes, but theaters, streets, beauty parlors, etc.)—through Maud's discerning consciousness—transforms the relationship between character and place, re-writing Wright's depiction of Chicago's South Side.

[2]For biographical information on Brooks see George Kent, *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*. He discusses her hope that the novel would help her make a down payment on a home on pages 104 and 111. D. H. Melhem, in *Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice,* provides a history of the initial conception to the final publication of *Maud Martha*; see pages 80-84. Initially conceived in the mid-forties as a series of poems and titled *American Family Brown, Maud Martha* underwent a number of changes before its publication in 1953.

[3]Her parents' struggle to hold on to their home is represented in *Maud Martha* in "home." In her notes on *Maud Martha* in *Report from Part One*, Brooks says "'home' is indeed fact bound. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation was a sickening reality" (191).

[4]*The Third Coast*, Thomas Dyja's recent history of twentieth-century Chicago, emphasizes the impact of segregation and racism in the Chicago real estate industry on the city's development. Dyja uses Gwendolyn Brooks's life as illustrative of the experiences of "new" and "old" black settlers. As Dyja points out, Brooks's parents were "Old Settlers" who had arrived before 1910 when Chicago had been integrated (5), but Gwendolyn, who came of age during the 1930s, grew up in a rapidly changing city of housing shortages, restrictive covenants and violent white backlash to the influx of southern blacks into the city. See especially, chapter two, "We Were Part of Them." Also see Cayton and Drake's *Black Metropolis* for a description of the expansion of the Black Belt between 1920 and 1930. Realtors who made huge profits by doubling rents after whites left often encouraged white panic and flight. "The expansion of the Black Belt developed so much friction that in the invaded neighborhoods bombs were occasionally thrown at Negro homes and those of real-estate men, white and colored, who sold or rented property to the newcomers" (62-63). According to the map included, a cluster of these bombings occurred north of 43rd and east of Cottage Grove. Gwendolyn Brooks's home was about three blocks west of Cottage Grove and 43rd St.

[5]See the 1967 interview with Roy Newquist. The story has an unexpected ending: "Then came that horrible moment when he put it in, and strangely enough, the lights came on. I still

don't know how this happened. My husband said he had done something about the light situation but that they couldn't have turned them on that quickly. So that's the story of the Pulitzer Prize. Light in darkness." (33).

[6]Also see Carla Cappetti's *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel*. Cappetti argues that the "theoretical and methodological tools" that Wright "borrowed from Chicago Sociology" in his autobiographical works, *Black Boy* and *American Hunger* are key to interpreting the text (182).

[7]South Park is now Martin Luther King Drive. In 1945, Cayton and Drake wrote that "47th and South Park' is the urban equivalent of a village square. In fact, *Black Metropolis* has a saying, 'If you're trying to find a certain Negro in Chicago, stand on the corner of 47th and South Park long enough and you're bound to see him'" (379-380).

WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED

Avilez, GerShun. "Housing the Black Body: Value, Domestic Space, and Segregation Narratives." *African American Review* 42:1 (Spring 2008): 135-47.

Bone, Robert. "Richard Wright and the Chicago Renaissance." *Callaloo* 9.3 (Summer 1986): 446-68.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Maud Martha: A Novel*. 1953. Chicago: Third World P, 1993.

—. *Report from Part One*. Detroit: Broadside P, 1972.

Bryant, Jacqueline, ed. *Gwendolyn Brooks' Maud Martha: A Critical Collection*. Chicago: Third World P, 2002.

Cappetti, Carla. *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel*. NY: Columbia UP, 1993.

Christian, Barbara. "Nuance and Novella: A Study of Gwendolyn Brooks's *Maud Martha*" Mootry and Smith 239-53.

Drake, St. Clair, and Horace R. Cayton. *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City.* 1945. Harper Torchbook ed. Vol. I. NY: Harper and Row, 1962.

Dworkin, Ira. "'The Evading Eye': The Transgeneric Prose of Gwendolyn Brooks." *CLA Journal* 47.1 (Sept. 2003): 32-54.

Dyja, Thomas. *The Third Coast: When Chicago Built the American Dream*. NY: Penguin, 2013.

Frazier, Valerie. "Domestic Epic Warfare in *Maud Martha*." *African American Review* 39.1-2 (2005): 133-141.

Henderson, Carol E. "Notes of a Native Daughter." *Richard Wright's Native Son*. Ed. Ana Maria Fraile. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 55-72. Internet Resource 9789042022973.

Kent, George E. *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*. UP of Kentucky, 1990.

Lattin, Patricia H., and Vernon E. Lattin. "Dual Vision in Gwendolyn Brooks's *Maud Martha*."
Critique 25.4 (Summer 1984): 180-88.

Melhem, D. H. *Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1987.

Mootry, Maria K. "'Down the Whirlwind of Good Rage': An Introduction to Gwendolyn Brooks." Mootry and Smith 1-17.

—. and Gary Smith, eds. *A Life Distilled: Gwendolyn Brooks, Her Poetry and Fiction*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1987.

Mullen, Bill V. *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1999.

Newquist, Roy. "Gwendolyn Brooks." 1967. *Conversations with Gwendolyn Brooks*. Ed. Gloria Wade Gayles. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2003. 26-36.

Quashie, Kevin. *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2012.

Spillers, Hortense J. "'An Order of Constancy': Notes on Brooks and the Feminine." *The Centennial Review* 29.2 (Spring 1985): 223-248.

Walther, Malin Lavon. "Re-Wrighting *Native Son*: Gwendolyn Brooks's Domestic Aesthetic in *Maud Martha*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 13.1 (Spring 1994): 143-45.

Washington, Mary Helen. "'Taming All That Anger Down': Rage and Silence in Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha*." *The Massachusetts Review* 24.2 (Summer 1983): 453-66.

Werner, Craig. "Chicago Renaissance." *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*. Ed. Cathy N. Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin. NY: Oxford UP, 1995. 165-67.

Williams, Kenny J. "The World of Satin-Legs, Mrs. Sallie, and the Blackstone Rangers: The Restricted Chicago of Gwendolyn Brooks." Mootry and Smith 47-70.

Wright, Richard. *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States*. NY: Viking P, 1941.

—. *American Hunger*. 1977. Harper Colophon ed. NY: Harper and Row, 1983.

—. Introduction. Drake and Cayton xvii-xxxiv.

—. *Native Son*. 1940. NY: Harper and Row, 2008.

ALGREN'S CHICAGO: CITY OF THE RUSTED HEART

JAMES A. LEWIN

Born in Detroit, Michigan, and buried in Sag Harbor, New York, Nelson Algren wrote about many of the places he knew first hand, including Texas, New Orleans, Paris, Barcelona, Istanbul, various ports in the Far East, and New Jersey, among others. But it is no more possible to discuss Algren without Chicago than it is to study Chicago writers without Nelson Algren. Chicago was his hometown. More precisely, Algren earned his reputation as the Bard of the Shakespeare Avenue Police Precinct, writing about a particular slice of the Near Northwest Side. His literary turf was "The Triangle," delineated by the hypotenuse of Milwaukee Avenue running on a diagonal from the intersection of Division Street and Ashland Avenue to the six-corners of Milwaukee, North Avenue and Damen. Beginning with his first novel, *Somebody in Boots* (1935), to *Never Come Morning* (1941); the collection of stories in *The Neon Wilderness* (1947); and his masterpiece, *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1949), Algren focuses his best work on this urban stomping ground. Algren summed up his disillusioned attachment for the city in *Chicago: City on the Make* (1951). Republished in 2011, this jeweled necklace of poetic prose is, perhaps, the best introduction to Algren. Later, even as he ventured into the wide world in *Who Lost an American?* (1963), Algren remained anchored in his hometown. He dug beneath the industrial wasteland, collected a sample of sludge, put the specimen under a microscope, and diagnosed the city's "rusty iron heart" (*City* 77). "By nights when the moon is an only child above the measured thunder of the cars, you may know Chicago's heart at last," he concluded, as "the place built out of Man's ceaseless failure to overcome himself" (*City* 73).

Algren wrote about Chicago from street level. Dwelling in a third-floor walkup apartment at 1958 West Evergreen Avenue (more comfortable than his previous flat on Wabansia Avenue, where he had to haul coal on the stairs each night of the long Chicago winter), Algren wandered around the blocks of his neighborhood with a keen eye for the sights of the healthy and the lame, an ear attuned to the sounds of shouting that could not drown out whispers of despair, a developed taste for the flavors of pierogi, sausage, sauerkraut, and lukewarm beer, as well as an intimate nose for the smells of fresh bread at the bakery and vile refuse in the gutter. A writer's career, he observed, could be devoted to describing one street. Yet, limiting his subject matter within narrow borders did not mean that Algren missed the bigger picture. Not only did he see through the bumptious boosters of the Windy City, he also shared Chicago's dream of greatness and understood its betrayal.

With the publicity surrounding his National Book Award for *The Man with the Golden Arm* in 1950, Algren gained the attention of mainstream publications. *Life* magazine planned a photo essay celebrating his perspective. The *Life* spread never made it past galley proofs, but photographer Art Shay's pictures can be seen in his *Algren's Chicago*. With Shay's help, the author also received a $2,000 commission to write an essay for *Holiday,* "a glossy oversized travel magazine, which was planning a special Chicago issue" (Drew 225). When it appeared in print, however, the essay had suffered so many cuts that the author could hardly recognize his own writing (Drew 233). The uncensored and augmented version of Algren's text appeared as *Chicago: City on the Make* in 1951.

In this dense, allusive word-hoard, the author provides an overview of Chicago as a "microcosm" of post-World War II America (Horvath 88). In what Brooke Horvath has called the "marginalized form" of a prose-poem, Algren could express a marginalized perspective, "free from both readerly expectations and writerly conventions" (91). A lament of unrequited love by a writer for his hometown, this poetical history of a metropolis argues that it is not the big shots in their high-class offices, restaurants, and exclusive clubs but, rather, the anonymous urban wanderers and lost souls on the street who embody "the great city's troubled heart" (*City* 68).

Chicago, Algren says, bought a Faustian bargain. Rising like a phoenix from the devastating Chicago Fire of 1871 through the Prohibition Era of the 1920s, the great city could boast of great writ-

ers, jazz musicians, boxing champions, and social reformers (*City* 54). Yet the town that once flowered with the Chicago Renaissance never became more than "a drafty hustler's junction in which to hustle awhile and move on out of the draft" (*City* 46). The sprawling, brawling metropolis Algren describes "had its big chance, and fluffed it" (55). Algren dedicated *Chicago: City on the Make* to Carl Sandburg, the "white-haired poet" who, following the 1919 Chicago race wars, had posited that "'the slums take their revenge'" (qtd. in *City* 67). Sandburg's jeremiad became Algren's thesis.

Though he is known for writing about the down-and-out, the misfits, and the dispossessed, it is a critical mistake to think that Algren glorified bums and small-time criminals to create kitschy stereotypes of thieves with a social conscience and prostitutes with hearts of blessed compassion. On the contrary, he shows the venal, bigoted, ignorant selfishness and cruelty of his characters in vivid detail, challenging our sense of complacency and complicity with the status quo. By exposing the hypocrisy of respectable authorities, Algren reminds us that the poor in spirit are integral to cultural excellence. If we shut the door on the lowest of the low, Algren warns, we bar the gate on our highest potential. Then, *we* become poor in spirit.

Affirming the basic tenets of American values, Algren defies the powers that be for refusing to take their own platitudes seriously. Algren insists that a celebration of Chicago must include both the Gold Coast and Skid Row which, he contends, are "mutually necessary for the survival of each other: there would be no ivory towers without Chicago's grime covered slums" (Gottschalk-Druschke 121). His point is that the oh-so-proud citizens of Chicago may, in the end, be defined by those whom they choose *not* to see.

It is also a scholarly misconception to categorize Algren as a naturalist or realist. Unlike the literary naturalism of Emile Zola, Frank Norris, and their followers, Algren did not view the inner city as an urban jungle of exotic savages but, instead, as a reflection of the collective sense of conscience, or lack of it, in the privileged perspective of the intended audience. As James R. Giles has shown, Algren "was not concerned with an anthropological exploration of internal colonies" but, rather, with inspiring middle-class readers to acknowledge their shared humanity with the denizens of the lower depths (23). Neither should Algren be limited to the school of "stenographic" realism that Algren associated with fellow Chicago writers James T. Farrell and Willard Motley. While he shares with these

social realists a dedicated concern with "urban violence and oppression," Algren looks beneath the surface, where a stenographic approach cannot reach, into the heart of "internal dread and anguish" (Giles 71). The divided soul of his Chicago embodies the existential contest of humanity: "Algren's art creates strife between the guilt of the World and the indifference of Earth" (Brevda 397).

Algren portrays Chicago history as a baseball game, typified by the 1919 White Sox, who became the Black Sox after gamblers allegedly induced eight players to throw the World Series. In this allegorical morality drama, Hustlers and Do-Gooders compete for the city's soul. Reformers like Jane Addams, founder of Hull-House, and Eugene V. Debs, who ran for president from a prison cell, keep trying to score for their team. But they are up against the Insiders, "marked down derelicts with dollar signs for eyes" a.k.a. Chicago's "Founding Fathers" (10, 12). From these "pioneers" descended a long line of power brokers, from the First Ward fixers Hinky-Dink Kenna and Bathhouse John Coughlin up to the Depression-era sluggers Mayor Big Bill Thompson, his "fellow gangster" Al Capone, and beyond. Sadly, Algren notes, in Chicago, the Do-Gooders "get only two outs to the inning while the hustlers are taking four." "Yet the Do-Gooders still go doggedly forward, making the hustlers struggle for their gold week in and week out, year after year, once or twice a decade tossing an unholy fright into the boys. And since it's a ninth inning town, the ball game never being over till the last man is out, it remains Jane Addams's town as well as Big Bill's. The ball game isn't over yet. But it's a rigged ball game." (*City* 14)

HOW ALGREN DEFINED CHICAGO

According to Carlo Rotella, Algren stands as "the last of the old-style Chicago realists trapped in the collapse of the industrial city's literary order" (10). Algren chronicled the demise of the interlocking ethnic neighborhoods, each a self-contained urban village, encircling a downtown walled city of political and economic power, which gave way to "the postindustrial metropolis of inner city and suburbs." Moreover, Algren "understood the decline of industrial Chicago to mean the end not only of the neighborhood order but also of the literary tradition in which he worked." Algren's Chicago had become a "cultural desert" through the pervasive greed for cash and clout, aided and abetted by its artists who abandoned their mission to stand

up for "'neighborhood' people" against the juggernaut of the status quo (Rotella 23, 25, 35).

The most effective parts of Algren's first novel, *Somebody in Boots,* take place in Chicago. In this crude tale written in crude prose, the author has already found his central theme: the humanity of every individual, however disadvantaged and degenerate. The protagonist, Cass McKay, is a callow, cowardly criminal without redeeming noble qualities except for his vulnerable heart. Under the deformed arm of "Judge" Nubby O'Neill, Cass learns the tricks of the burglar's trade and the tactics of armed robbery, along with the swaggering racism and contempt for women that Nubby extols as the birthright of a "real" white man. Yet Cass never learns how to hate or how to stop seeking love. In his devotion to Norah Egan, former shop attendant turned hay-bag whore, Cass is pathetic and undeniably human. In 1932, during the darkest days of the Great Depression, Cass and Norah share one golden summer living on stolen loot. But when Cass, inevitably, winds up in Cook County Jail, he loses more than his freedom for ten months. He also loses Norah.

Released from incarceration, Cass meanders through the anonymous masses until "new street sounds struck his ears" and he finds himself in the midst of the 1933 World's Fair (219). Representing the distilled essence of false values, the so-called Century of Progress is not about progress as much as it is about wearing "a painted grin and a World's Fair smile" for the loudly proclaimed ulterior purpose to "Boost our city!" and "Buy!" whatever the newspapers and radios advertised (219). The main attraction is not any of the marvels of technological innovation but Sally Rand, with flowing blonde tresses, seemingly nude, riding a horse through the streets.

Typical of the diversions offered is the "concession where three Negroes were perched in cages; for ten cents anyone could hurl a baseball at them. If the ball struck the proper mark the Negro was automatically dumped into a tub of water beneath the perch" (*Somebody* 241). As an appeal to nonchalant racism, this carnival sport endured long past the 1933 World's Fair and is remembered by Chicagoans who visited Riverview amusement park "until the late 1950s" (Jim Crow Museum). Indeed, Riverview hovers over the characters in Algren's next novel.

Never Come Morning (1941), the first book Algren devoted wholly to Chicago, is a gem of sociological fiction, portraying a neighborhood where second-generation Polish immigrants struggle

for survival in the land of the free. In outraged reaction, the Chicago-Polish establishment persuaded Chicago's Mayor Kelly to have the book banned from the shelves of the Chicago Public Library. Excluded from the canon of literature, Algren's second novel seemed all but forgotten, like the forgotten people who dwell within its covers. Recently, however, critics such as Carla Cappetti, William Savage, and Robert Ward have found it worth re-reading.

Carla Cappetti has demonstrated how Algren, in *Never Come Morning*, developed a "poetry of facts" that melds empirical sociology with imaginative fiction and mixes hard-edged journalism with dreamwork (157). Borrowing from the methodology of the Chicago school of sociological investigation, based on first-person accounts and individual case studies, Algren could "show his readers that *their* cozy and protected world is 'unreal'" (159). The author portrays the urban street gang as "the organized product of social disorganization" (161). Furthermore, Chicago itself "takes on the role of an invisible yet active presence . . . . dominated by an urban geometry . . . . ever-present, impossible to forget or shut off" (172-3). Thus, Algren could portray "the city and the slum as the estranged consciousness of society" (174).

At the same time, Algren develops what Robert Ward has called an "aesthetic of imprisonment" (60). Confined within the world of his own daydreams, the protagonist Lefty Bicek creates the mental scenario in which he wins a boxing match for the world championship. Through inner resistance, Lefty transforms the reality of imprisonment into a "narrative of rejuvenation and empowerment" (Ward 64). Ironically, paperback publishers marketed *Never Come Morning* as pulp fiction with a cover that portrayed "a young woman sitting on a single bed, clad in a night gown contemplating her fate" (Savage 153). Thus, the polite reading public could distance themselves from Algren's challenge to their respectable self-certainty.

The central episode of the plot turns on the peer pressure applied to Lefty Bicek after a visit to Riverview, leading to a gang rape of his girlfriend, Steffie Rostenkowski. In a graphic and shocking description that Cappetti rightly calls "one of the most horrifying scenes recorded in literature" (175), Algren traces the evil of the urban underworld. The rest of the novel involves the incomplete struggle for redemption, leading Lefty to a boxing ring where he double-double-crosses the hoodlums who have rigged the fight. Lefty wins the bout in the last round, and yet he winds up led off in handcuffs on a

charge of murder. In this novel, Algren creates an alternative to the sociological separation of a criminal underclass from the privileged security of the academic and literary point of view. As "an indictment of the pathology of capitalist society," Cappetti concludes, the book forces the reader to see the world of the slums as both the repressed subconscious, kept at the margins of awareness, and, paradoxically, as the heart of the city (181).

Although his work was not part of June Howard's benchmark study of literary naturalism, Algren confirms the insight "that both determinism and reformism" can exist in dynamic tension within an historical dialectic between human fate and human hope (Howard 38-9). Knowing that "moralism is revealed as an entirely inadequate response to events," Algren demonstrates that "human will exists as a distinct entity" unvanquished by "the impersonal forces that sweep through the self as well as the external universe." Algren refused to accept the fate to which materialistic commercialism condemns us, insisting on a spark of hope buried within the bosom of suppressed humanity. Understanding that characters of naturalistic fiction often represent mere "assemblages of meanings given proper names that provide them an illusion of unity," Algren anticipated "an intellectual climate in which identity itself is increasingly seen as a construct" (Howard 39). Algren never gave up on the "chance that the personality can hold itself intact . . . that free will is sometimes effective and should eventually prevail" (Howard 46).

Algren's point of view crystallized in the short stories of *The Neon Wilderness* (1947). "A Bottle of Milk for Mother" condenses the drama of Lefty Bicek into one police interrogation, concluding with the protagonist saying, "I knew I'd never get to be twenty-one anyhow" (91). "How the Devil Came down Division Street" marks the seemingly effortless ease with which Algren turns serious problems such as alcoholism and dysfunctional families into grist for black humor in the tale of living ghost Roman Orlov, who has been "drunk so long," the narrator observes, "that when we remember living men we almost forget poor Roman" (35). Similarly, in "The Captain Has Bad Dreams," Algren's outrage at the injustice of life in the big city evolves into dark irony and comedy of the grotesque. From behind the two-way mirror at the precinct station lineup, the captain entertains his audience of witnesses by bantering with the usual suspects arrested and forced to stand, exposed, under the glare

of the police spotlight "in an unpossessed twilight land, a neon wilderness" (22):

> "You ever been arrested before?"
> "No, sir. This is my first time."
> "The first time this week, you mean."
> "Oh, I been arrested in Michigan. I thought you meant in Illinois. I never been arrested in Illinois. I never did no wrong in Illinois."
> "What good does that do you?"
> "It don't. It's just that I love my state so much I go to Michigan to steal," he explained with an expression almost beatific. (29)

Through his offbeat sense of humor, Algren transformed the narrative distance in which middle-class readers exalt their own humanity above the down-and-out simply by making his "urban 'grotesques' absurd instead of menacing" (Giles, "Narrative Perspectives" 104).

The opening of *The Man with the Golden Arm* introduces Frankie Machine, a "smashnosed vet . . . with buffalo-colored eyes," the Dealer in a back-room poker game, and Solly "Sparrow" Saltskin with "tortoise-shell glasses separating the outthrust ears," the Steerer who guards the door (6). Frankie and Sparrow feel "about as sharp as the next pair of hustlers":

> "It's all in the wrist 'n I got the touch," Frankie was fond of boasting of his nerveless hands and steady eye . . . "I'm a little offbalanced," Sparrow would tip the wink in that rasping whisper you could hear for half a city block, "but oney on one side. So don't try offsteerin' me, you might be tryin' my good-balanced side. In which case I'd have to have the ward super deport you wit' your top teet' kicked out." (7)

Conceived as a novel about a backroom Division Street card sharp, the theme of heroin addiction entered *The Man with the Golden Arm* as an "afterthought" (Cox and Chatterton 112). Algren introduced the phrase "a monkey on his back" to general usage (Cox and Chatterton 128). Yet Nifty Louie, the pusher, a former addict who broke his own habit only to addict others, observes: "'the monkey never dies. When you kick him off he just hops onto somebody else's back'" (*Man* 60). The monkey on Frankie Machine's shoulders symbolizes the unfulfilled yearnings of people caught in the daily tedium of poverty and ignorance. The central themes of the novel are love, friendship, and alienation. The dependence of the addict is portrayed as a consequence of Frankie Machine's crippling sense of personal

guilt and tenuous hope for redemption. As George Bluestone has pointed out, Algren's underlying message is the loss of identity following the betrayal of love, "the living death that follows love's destruction" (39). James R. Giles suggests that Algren's masterpiece should be read as an "existentialist revolt" against "man's entrapment within time, the medium of materiality" (57). Essential to Algren's break with the social and biological determinism associated with naturalism is the elusive hope of Frankie Machine to "transcend nothingness" and actualize an "authentic Self" that could integrate "being-in-itself" as the automaton dealing cards in an all-night poker game, with the realization of "being-for-itself," in his frustrated ambition to become a jazz drummer (Giles 29).

Unfortunately, the movie version of the book excised the subtlety and depth of the text. The producer brazenly marketed his film as "Otto Preminger's *Man with the Golden Arm*," making no note of the author, who received $15,000 for a box-office smash that earned millions. Algren "would never overcome" his bitterness that so many people knew of the film starring Frank Sinatra but knew nothing of his novel about Frankie Machine (Drew 329).

Algren's Chicago is the city at night, which envelops its inhabitants in a vast loneliness that, like the truth, "resists comprehension" (Leming 168). Invoking the *Inferno* of Dante, Algren's Chicago at night is "a place of carefully differentiated light and shadow" (Anania 24-5). Indeed, Algren describes a world where the daylight reveals only the ultimate horror, cited in the line from Kuprin, which Algren uses as his epigraph: "that all the horror is in just this— that there is no horror" (*Man* 2). Thus, the slums take their revenge on the middle class, not just in tax dollars spent to keep the inner city apart from respectable neighborhoods, but in a social order in which hoodlums at the bottom of the hierarchy are the mirror image of the politicians and businessmen at the top.

The characters in *The Man with the Golden Arm* live in a sordid underworld of petty crime controlled by an invisible higher world of big-time crime:

> Neither God, war, nor the ward super work any deep changes on West Division Street. For here God and the ward super work hand in hand and neither moves without the other's assent. God loans the super cunning and the super forwards a percentage of the grift on Sunday mornings. The super puts in the fix for all right-thinking hustlers and the Lord, in turn, puts in the fix for the super. (7)

Frankie Machine cannot be cured of his addiction to illicit drugs until society is "cured of deceit, greed and indifference" ("Outcasts" 107). But that hope is only a distant glimmer Frankie glimpses from his fire escape: "the unseen lights of the Loop . . . reflected in the sky like light from some gigantic forge beating in the pit of the city's enormous heart . . . (277). Beneath the omnipresent El or locked up behind jailhouse bars, Algren's characters finally all fade into the "unfingered, unprinted, unbetrayed and unbefriended Chicago night" (*Man* 283).

HOW CHICAGO DEFINED ALGREN

In *Chicago: City on the Make*, Algren inscribed an elegy for Sandburg's "city of the big shoulders" which had been undermined and reduced to a "punch-drunk bar fighter too dumb to fall down, a victim of capitalism who went to work too young" (McMahon). In subsequent years, the author, feeling "increasing disenchantment" with Chicago, often traveled to distant places and by the 1960s "was already thinking of leaving town" (Drew 334). His first-person travel memoir, published in 1963, posed the rhetorical question, *Who Lost an American?* This volume, which includes some of Algren's finest writing, introduced the persona of "Nelson Algren" the world-weary innocent abroad who cannot, finally, escape returning to Chicago in the volume's vivid last four chapters. Exhausted by his love-hate relationship with his hometown, Algren describes a Chicago where outspoken protest in the name of the unrepresented has been erased by a mass culture lacking any sense of the community that had existed in the old neighborhoods. The result is a new and dreadful alienation of the individual, "[a]n isolation common enough to justify calling it The American Disease." This diagnosis, he concludes, "is directly related to the lack of creativity in this city that was once America's creative center" (280). Rather than a home for humanity, Chicago has become a capital of internal exile where anyone could "become an expatriate without leaving town" (*Who?* 98).

Algren envisions an apocalyptic postindustrial Chicago of commuters leading impersonal lives for the glory of technology and progress. But, the author notes wryly, on the day that the ultimate skyscraper runs "a mile hope-high into the air out of a foundation a mile dream-deep in stone," his own name will *not* "be among those carved on the cornerstone . . . . But just in case anyone asks how I spelled it, look on the doorbell in the hall" (*Who?* 284-5):

> I'll be alright on that great day if only, in some woman's court, a judge who is about to pass sentence on a girl with needlemarks on her arm without giving her legal defense is told he can't do that, it isn't legal anymore . . . . I'll be alright on that great day though you look on the doorbell in the hall and find my name isn't there anymore, I'll be alright so long as it has been written on some cornerstone of a human heart. On the heart it don't matter how you spell it. (285)

In 1981 Nelson Algren was, belatedly, elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He died eleven days before the induction ceremony.

LONG GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

In February of 1988, the Chicago Public Library opened a three-month exhibition, "Writing in the First Person: Nelson Algren 1909-1981," that the curator of the exhibit, Dr. Catherine Ingraham, suggested might signal "the beginning of an Algren renaissance" (5). Slowly, sometimes imperceptibly, academic criticism has rediscovered Algren. A full-length study of his work by James R. Giles was published in 1989, the same year that a biography by Bettina Drew appeared. Also in 1989, a group of his close friends and enthusiastic readers of his work organized the Nelson Algren Committee, which has sponsored annual celebrations of the author's birthday each March 28th. In 1995, the Modern Language Association presented a special session devoted to Algren. In 2000, an international conference at Leeds, England, was dedicated to his work. His major works, previously out of print for years, have been re-published.

In Chicago, Algren's legacy has remained somewhat ambivalent. When Mike Royko, uncrowned king of Chicago journalism, wrote a 1982 column proposing that Evergreen Avenue be renamed Algren Street, Mayor Jane Byrne favored the notion but the City Council voted flatly thumbs down (Schmidt). After further controversy, in 1998, an official Nelson Algren Fountain at the Polish Triangle was erected on "the tiny, tree-lined plaza formed by the crossroads of Division, Ashland and Milwaukee" (Huebner 26). No longer predominantly Polish, the neighborhood had become largely Latino after Algren moved away until it was gentrified into an artsy-bohemian community that might have bemused Algren. The inscription on the Nelson Algren Fountain cites his words: "For the masses who do the city's labor also keep the city's heart." Passers-by may not know the preceding passage from *Chicago: City on the Make*:

> "The slums take their revenge" the white-haired poet warned us . . . . And you can take your pick of the avengers among the fast international set at any district-station lockup on any Saturday night . . . . and where they all come from nobody knows and where they'll go from here nobody cares . . . . The useless, helpless nobodies nobody knows: that go as the snow goes, where the wind blows, there and there and there, down any old cat-and-ashcan alley at all. There, unloved and lost forever, lost and unloved for keeps and a day . . . . there where they sleep the all-night movies through and wait for rain or peace or snow: there, there beats Chicago's heart. (68)

P.S.: Chicago is *still* Algren's Chicago. The slums still take their revenge. A *Chicago Tribune* article published in 2011 notes that the South Side neighborhood of Englewood has reverted to "[w]eed choked and trash littered urban prairies" where whole blocks have been abandoned to drug dealers and prostitutes "leading to a descent that threatens the rest of the city." Neighborhood activist, Emily Dunn, seventy-nine, is quoted in an echo of the old warning: "'People in the north Loop should care about what's going on here because eventually it all seeps through . . . . into the fabric of the city'" ("Crime Moved In").Why are murders up thirty-eight percent in Chicago? "'We've got a gang issue, specific to parts of the city . . . .' Mayor Emanuel, visibly vexed, said" in a 2012 interview with the *New York Times*. In one of those gang-issue parts of the West Side, Tawaila Medley, who works in an all-night laundry, offers her rebuttal: "'We've lost our way'" ("38 Percent"). Most recently, with more than five hundred homicides in 2012 and gang violence grabbing headlines, the retired general who led the military response to Hurricane Katrina has suggested calling up the National Guard to help pacify Chicago streets (Bowean). Long gone but not forgotten, Nelson Algren still haunts the corners of the city at night. In his nostalgia for an ideal metropolis that never was, he defined literature as a "challenge to the legal apparatus by a conscience in touch with humanity" (*City* 81). Looking sideways, the Ghost of Algren shuffles along, reminding us of what Chicago never lost:

> The city's rusty heart, that holds both the hustler and the square.
> Takes them both and holds them there.
> For keeps and a single day. (*City* 77)

Shepherd University

WORKS CITED

Algren, Nelson. *Chicago: City on the Make*. 1951. Sixtieth Anniversary Ed. Annotated by David Schmittgens and Bill Savage. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011.

—. *The Neon Wilderness*.1941. NY: Seven Stories P, 1986.

—. *Never Come Morning*.1937. NY: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1987.

—. *Somebody in Boots*.1935. NY: Thunder's Mouth P, 1987.

—. *The Man with the Golden Arm*. 1949. Fiftieth Anniversary Critical Ed. Ed. William J. Savage Jr. and Daniel Simon. NY: Seven Stories P, 1999.

—. *Who Lost an American?* NY: Macmillan, 1963.

Anania, Michael. "Nelson Algren and the City." *Writing in the First Person: Nelson Algren, 1980-81*. The Chicago Public Library Cultural Center Catalog, Feb. 20-May 21,1988.17-25.

Bluestone, George. "Nelson Algren." *Western Review* 22.1 (Autumn 1957): 27-44.

Bowean, Lolly. "Retired general says National Guard could help curb Chicago violence." *The Chicago Tribune*. 21 Feb. 2013. <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-02-21/news/ct-met-chicago-violence-honore-20130222_1_honors-student-chicago-violence-chicago-homicides> Web.

Brevda, William. "The Rainbow Sign of Nelson Algren." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44.4 (Winter 2002): 392-413. http://www.utexas.edu/utpress. Web.

Cappetti, Carla. *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography and the Novel*. NY: Columbia UP, 1993.

Cox, Martha Heasley, and Wayne Chatterton. *Nelson Algren*. Boston: Twayne, 1975.

Davey, Monica. "Rate of Killings rises 38 Percent in Chicago in 2012." *New York Times* 25 June 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/26/us/rate-of-killings-rises-38-percent-in-chicago-in-12.html.Web.

Drew, Bettina. *Nelson Algren: A Life on the Wild Side*. NY: Putnam, 1989.

Giles, James R. *Confronting the Horror: The Novels of Nelson Algren*. Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1989.

—. "Making Nakedness Visible: Narrative Perspective in Nelson Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm*." Ward 95-105.

Gottschalk-Druschke, Caroline."The City that Turned the White Sox Black." Ward 115-25.

Horvath, Brooke. *Understanding Nelson Algren*. Columbia, U of South Carolina P, 2005.

Howard, June. *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1985.

Huebner, Jeff. "Full Nelson." *The Reader*. 20 Nov.1998. 1, 26, 28, 30, 32-35.

Ingraham, Catherine. Introduction. *Writing in the First Person: Nelson Algren 1909-1981*. The Chicago Public Library Cultural Center Catalog. Feb. 20-May 21, 1988. 5-7.

Jim Crow Museum. http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/news/jimcrow/question/feb07.htm. Web.

Leming, Warren. "Hanging with Nelson Algren." Ward 162-72.

Lewin, James. "Algren's Outcasts: Shakespearean Fools and the Prophet in a Neon Wilderness" *MidAmerica* 18 (1991): 97-114.

McMahon, Jeff. "The Secret Faces of Inscrutable Poets in Nelson Algren's *Chicago: City on the Make*." Thesis. U of Chicago, 2002. http://home.uchicago.edu/~jmcmahon/algren/Algren.pdf Web.

Olivo, Antonio, William Mullen and Dahleen Glanton. "How crime has moved in: As vacancies multiply, vandalism and violence." *The Chicago Tribune* 24 June 2011. 6-8.

Rotella, Carlo. *October Cities: The Redevelopment of Urban Literature*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998.

Savage, William J. "'It Was Dope!': The Paperback Revolution and the Literary Reputation of Nelson Algren." Ward 141-61.

Schmidt, John R. "The short, unhappy life of Algren Street." http://www.wbez.org/blogs/john-r-schmidt/2012-10/short-unhappy-life-algren-street-103434. 12 Nov., 2012. 23 June 2014. Web.

Shay, Art. N*elson Algren's Chicago: Photographs by Art Shay*. Visions of Illinois. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1988.

Ward, Robert, ed. *Nelson Algren: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2007.

—. "Spatial Enclosures in *Never Come Morning*." Ward 59.71.

WRITING THE REGION IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION: CHICAGO AND ITS COSMOPOLITAN SUBJECT(S) IN JOSHUA FERRIS'S *THEN WE CAME TO THE END*

SADEK KESSOUS

In the conclusion to his "Conjectures on World Literature," Franco Moretti states that "[t]here is no other justification for the study of world literature (and for the existence of departments of comparative literature) but this: to be a thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures—especially local literature" (68). Written in 2000, what might seem to be a puckish challenge to the norms of national historiographic analysis is assuredly not; in the same piece, Moretti stresses that "there will always be a point where the study of world literature must yield to the specialist of the national literature" (66). Rather, his image of a thorn as an intellectual challenge suggests that, in 2000, we should see world literary comparativism as a critical interloper, a necessary disrupting logic that gets at truths that are inaccessible to regional and national criticism. Since the publication of Moretti's claims, however, it seems the pendulum has swung the other way: no longer the alternative logic, globality has increasingly been placed at the centre of culture, politics and academic scholarship.

The past fifteen years have seen an array of critical formulations that foreground transnationalism, globalization, geopolitics, and the world novel and its variants, such as David Damrosch's "What Is World Literature?"; James Annesley's *Fictions of Globalizatio*n (2006); Berthold Schoene's *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (2009); Bruce Robbins's "The Worlding of the American Novel;" and Caren Irr's *Toward the Geopolitical Novel* (2013), to name just a few. Such a trend is unsurprising in light of the continued intensification of

processes bound up in the increasingly overdetermined term "globalization." A brief laundry list (in the American context) of these phenomena could include the post-9/11 securitization of the US state from international threat; its military engagements in the Middle East; the looming spectre of ecological crisis; the continued operation of global chains of labor, distribution, and consumption; the global financial crisis and concomitant spike in foreign debt; and the digitization of everyday life through the rise of the social network and the complexity of Web 2.0-era international relations after Wikileaks.

In such a cultural and political context it seems possible, if not probable, that writers of regional fiction and their critics might be deemed inattentive, even negligent of the material factors of modern life. The influential model Benedict Anderson offered in 1983 of the nation as "an imagined political community" (6) has gradually given way to heirs that emphasize the plurality of conjunctures wherein this imagining takes place: diasporic peoples, migrants, expatriates, and others who daily pass over or live on geographic borderlines and who are situated within particular cultural, ethnic, technological, and class loci.[1] The cybernetic globe and our relative position within it have become crucial factors in cultural analysis; thus, it seems that regional writing is at risk of being seen as something limited, narrow, even *hokey*. As Schoene claims, "[n]othing less, in fact, than the world as a whole will do as the imaginative reference point, catchment area and addressee of the cosmopolitan novel . . . There is nothing that ought to prevent us imagining the world as one community or capturing it inside the vision of a single narrative"(13). For Schoene, the necessity of this globalizing scope is supplemented by a detachment from national writing, something that in his view of the American context is seen to be impracticable:

> I would like as far as possible to disentangle my investigation from US politics, literature and theory, and what I see as their traditional burden of utopianist emplotments, missionary zeal and hyperbolic universalism . . . US American academia's cosmopolitan engagement with the cultures and living conditions of the whole of "the rest of the world" is virtually non-existent. (10-11)

While this claim, given its regrettable generalization about American culture, is far from representative of the value of Schoene's study, it illustrates a growing critical wariness about attending to particularism at the risk of neglecting global contexts.

Neil Lazarus's theorization of cosmopolitanism offers an escape from this dilemma for the regional critic by emphasising that "[w]hat is being celebrated here is the writer's ability to show us what it *feels* like to live on a given ground—to show us how a certain *local* socio-natural order (a physical world, a mode of production, a specific set of social relationships, forms of belonging, customs and obligations) is encountered, experienced, lived" (italics in original 133). In Lazarus's words, there are "*only* local universalisms . . . which it becomes our task as readers to situate as completely as we can." (italics in original 134). This theorization of world literature, however, aligns the work of the reader to the universal and the work of the writer to the particular. Where the author extends his/her narrative beyond the limits of a "given ground," as in *The Cosmopolitan Novel*'s central study of David Mitchell, an author whose narratives impossibly span continents, lifetimes and genres, the theory runs aground because in our age of reterritorialization and deterritorialization[2] a pure autochthony is increasingly unviable; material and political reality, rather than springing from the soil beneath out feet, arise from global networks. A war in East Africa might limit the supply of minerals used in the Chinese manufacture of consumer electronics that are due for shipment to schools in the US. Furthermore, much of the labor that factors into these networks is not rooted in its locality (for example, a generic office space is eminently transplantable for its lack particular specificity), and similarly this labor often does not deal with physical production but rather the manipulation of information and data that can be undertaken anywhere in the world and fed into a digital network.

With this problematic in mind, I propose that we reverse Moretti's reading of world literature as the necessary intellectual challenge to the regional critic and attend to *place* (the regionally/locally particular) and *space* (the culturally/socially particular) as that which is integrated into the global whole in the context of globalization. In so doing, I seek to present an example of regional criticism that is cognizant of the recent turn to the global, both materialistically and in terms of the work of the reader, but that can also be accurately termed regional (or particular) as an articulation of a given experience. It is to this end that turning to Joshua Ferris's novel, *Then We Came to the End* (2007), a text marked by both an unwavering focus on labor, class and regional particularisms *and* a commitment to locating its narrative in specific networks of economic-world history, proves produc-

tive. Indeed, it is through this novel that never strays from the city limits of Chicago that we see both the Midwestern city's position as a node within a global network and, through its distinctive singular-plural narration, the literary figuration of this vying tension between the universal and the particular, registered in various ways as individual/collective, Chicago/Midwest and local/global.

The aim throughout this study is to ground the novel in the recent history that it tacitly addresses, particularly its oblique engagement with post-9/11 geopolitics. By reading the novel in light of its chronological historical periods, we will see that the text's literary form, as well as the smaller episodes that the larger narrative comprises, offers a commentary on these tensions between forms of universalism and particularism. Indeed, as we will come to see by the conclusion, literary form and artistic expression come to represent a key aspect of Ferris's navigation of this issue through his deliberate inclusion of an embedded fictive text that gestures towards fiction bearing the burden of short-circuiting this collision of local and global.

Ferris's novel is pointedly structured to reflect the world-economic and geopolitical shifts of the early twenty-first century. Spanning the period from the dot-com bubble of the late 1990s to the eve of 9/11 before skipping to an epilogue set in 2006, Ferris describes the boom and eventual liquidation of a Chicago advertising agency. In this narrative, the world political economy is key to the novel's representation of Chicago as a node in a global network, the conditions of which are reflected in the literary features the text exploits. Its prologue overtly signals the frenzy of the dot-com boom:

> At the national level things had worked out pretty well in our favor and entrepreneurial cash was easy to come by. Cars available for domestic purchase, cars that could barely fit in our driveways, had a martial appeal, a promise that, once inside them, no harm would come to our children. It was IPO this and IPO that. Everyone knew a banker, too . . . Crime was at an all-time low and we heard accounts of former welfare recipients holding steady jobs . . . Our portfolios were stuffed with NASDAQ offerings . . . The world was flush with Internet cash and we got our fair share of it. (7-12)

We are shown an economy bolstered by new communication technologies that extend the purview of any company to global scale in what has been termed "global informational capitalism, and its social structure, the network society" (Castells, Caraça and Cardoso 2). This

"network society," however, as represented in Ferris's novel by a first-person-plural narration, bears none of the optimism of these economic indicators but rather is marked by paradoxes, malaise and disconnect.

With a sociopathic even keel, Ferris's narrators present their discomfort with social imbrication (it is quickly made clear that this "we" refers to co-workers, who are, as such, members of a shared professional class) through a schizophrenic switching between subject/object and internal/external positions. In one case, we hear that "[m]ost of us liked most everyone, a few of us hated specific individuals, one or two people loved everyone and everything. Those who loved everyone were unanimously reviled. We loved free bagels in the morning. They happened all too infrequently" (3). What is a wholly intelligible depiction of office personality clashes is framed in consciously paradoxical terms: the subject-narrators occupy an impossibly universal position of both "lov[ing] everyone" as subjects but also containing constituent members who are "unanimously reviled."

This slippage between actor and acted upon evokes Fredric Jameson's theorization of postmodernism as marked by "the end of the bourgeois ego or monad," after which "feelings—which it may be better and more accurate to call 'intensities'—are now free floating and impersonal." (64). In a practically literal instantiation of what Jameson describes, Ferris depicts a group of co-workers who exist as a hive-mind collective that share not only belongings: "How we hated our coffee mugs! our mouse pads, our desk clocks, our daily calendars, the contents of our desk drawers" (7) but also psychic space: "we had visceral, rich memories of dull, interminable hours" (9). Furthermore, not only is Jameson's postulate valuable in that we have a clear representation of just such an end to hermetically individualist subjectivity but also that its claims rest on economic conditions identical to those Ferris describes. This is because for Jameson late capitalism is coloured by its "expansion . . . into hitherto uncommodified areas" thereby "[eliminating] the enclaves of precapitalist organization it had hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way"(78). The elimination of these enclaves, both in the Third World and former-socialist states, gives rise to a global capitalism that instates "the incapacity of our minds . . . to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (84).

Ferris's invocation of Jameson, however, is overstated throughout this prologue. Not only is individual subjectivity supplanted by these "free-floating intensities" but similarly geographic specificity is obfuscated: Ferris makes only one oblique reference to the topography of his novel in this prologue by describing a character's brothers as "South Side pipe-ends" (6) but carefully crafts a vision of the rootless office work space. His description of office music tastes echoes Jameson's claim that under late-capital historicism, "the random cannibalization of all styles of the past" (Jameson 65) has become the fate of "real history": "In the morning, our favorite DJs were back on, playing our favourite oldies. Most of us ate the crumb toppings first and then ate the rest of the muffin. They were the same songs that would play throughout a nuclear winter" (9).

Classic radio—the endless looping of bygone aesthetic styles unmoored from their historical reality—neutralizes the real historical present, even where it might be seismic or apocalyptic. In this negative space, where unspecified past (oldies) supplants real history, all the narrative voice can concern itself with is how best to eat a muffin. These threads, all found within the prologue, might draw us to the tentative conclusion that Ferris, who embarked on a BA in the mid-1990s (not long after Jameson's influential article became a book), is caricaturing Jameson's theory.[3] However, rather than miring ourselves in questions of intention, what becomes clear from the rest of the novel is that Ferris clearly seeks to transcend the economic-cultural conditions of his prologue (which echoes Jamesonian postmodernism) by shifting the narrative to the bursting of the dot-com bubble. Three markers indicate this rupture: the prologue ends with an ominous allusion to Mayan civilisation that declares that "We, too, thought it would never end" (12) and a new section begins, "Enter a New Century," that announces in its first sentence that "[l]ayoffs were upon us" (15).

G. Thomas Goodnight and Sandy Green note that the dot-com crash "wiped out $5 trillion in market value from March 2000 to October 2002" (131). This liminal period between boom and bust, during the two-year popping of a five trillion dollar bubble, represents the narrative's central historical period, in which both technological and fiscal networks falter. This crisis is figured in the novel as a form of particularization: as the global techno-communicational and market networks outlined in the prologue falter, we see this locally manifest as redundancy within the Chicago workforce.

Furthermore, the crisis particularizes the individual. The moment any of the characters lose their jobs—as a consequence of the crash—he or she no longer can no longer exist as part of the singular-plural collective. They are each individuated. Establishing this early in the text, Ferris presents us with Chris Yop, a copywriter for the agency, who speculates that his termination has been brought about as a result of a clash with the office administrator. Assured by Lynn Mason, an agency partner and managing superior of the narrators, that this conflict had nothing to do with his termination and that "'it's nothing personal . . . it's just business'" (42), Yop still resists his isolation from the office-collective: in denial after his firing, he attends an input meeting with ex-colleagues, chaired by Mason. It is clear, however, that he has been thoroughly excluded from the singular-plural subjective space: after every termination the narrators state that "we all had the same thought: *thank god it wasn't me*" (35, italics in original) in a gesture that restates the shared psychic space. There is no exception in Yop's case. When imploring his former colleagues that "'you guys don't think I should have to *leave* leave?'" they remain silent but share the same thought: "no one replied—meaning, well, yeah, Yop. You should probably leave"(43).

This process of particularization is matched by a newfound focus on the geographic specificity of Chicago and the Midwest. As the characters face the threat of being unplugged from the various professional, technological and subjective networks, local particularism becomes a vehicle for the narrators to map their crisis. The city's structure takes on a crude Manichean aspect between their working lives, totemically tied to their building "on the Magnificent Mile, in downtown Chicago, on a corner a few blocks from Lake Michigan" (17) and their fear of "ending up on Lower Wacker Drive" (17) used as topographic byword for homelessness. The narrators' schema does not, however, offer an accurate account of Chicagoan particularism as Ferris ironizes the narrative voice's emphasis on putting the city to use rather than representing it. For instance, writing about the prospect of unemployment on Lower Wacker, Ferris passes his characters' narration through the prism of fantasy:

> Instead of scrabbling for the addition of "Senior" to our current titles, we would search the alleyways for smokable butts. It was fun, imagining our eventual despair. It was also despairing. We didn't really believe we would be honked at from the Lexuses of our former col-

> leagues as they drove down Lower Wacker on their way home for the suburbs . . . . But that we might have to fill out an employment form over the Internet was not out of the question. That we might struggle to make rent or a mortgage payment was a real and frightening prospect. (17)

The split in the imaginary between "fun" and "despair" blurs the lines between wish fulfilment, dream/nightmare, and reality. The clichés of vagrancy offer a certain cold comfort but are registered as delusion, thereby bathetically undercutting the force of their plight; what might have been postindustrial social realism—a sort of white-collar, twenty-first-century inheritor to Steinbeck—becomes tragicomic irony.

To this effect, consider the narrators' statement that "we believed that downturns had been rendered obsolete by the ingenious technology of the new economy" (18). This claim and others like it are voiced in the past perfect, a gesture that forces the reader to recognise an inherently repentant tone: the narrators no longer have faith in the "technology of the new economy" but are representing their own misguided beliefs through a self-flagellating retrospective narration, apparent in the workforce's consideration of industrial life in the Midwest generally:

> We thought ourselves immune from things like plant closings in Iowa and Nebraska, where remote Americans struggled against falling-in roofs and credit card debt. We watched these blue-collar workers being interviewed on TV. For the length of the segment, it was impossible not to feel the sadness and anxiety they must have felt for themselves and their families. But soon we moved on to weather and sports and by the time we thought about them again, it was a different plant in a different city, and the state was offering dislocated worker programs, readjustment and retraining services, and skills workshops. They'd be fine. Thank god we didn't have to worry about a misfortune like that. We were corporate citizens buttressed by advanced degrees and padded by corporate fat. We were above the fickle market forces of overproduction and mismanaged inventory.
>
> What we didn't consider was that in a downturn, *we* were the mismanaged inventory, and we were about to be dumped like a glut of imported circuit boards. (italics in original, 18-19)

The characters' detachment from the actual, existing geographic implications of the crisis is made manifest through the television set, which serves as the metonym of their disavowal, the circuitry facili-

tating its reception of "network signals." The self-impeachment comes as the characters reverse this disavowal by positioning themselves as the very circuitry that is emblematic of the present crisis in a gesture that at once underlines their misguided faith in "ingenious new technology" but fails to recognise social solidarity with blue-collar, Midwestern workers. Towards the end of the novel, it becomes clear that this ironic aspect of the narrative voice is bound up with 9/11, as the historical phase in this narrative runs from the start of the new millennium to September 10, 2001. At the precipice of the 9/11, a gulf opens up in the narrative that is only closed by a final section in 2006. It is from that post-9/11 moment that the retrospective narration emerges (as will come to be discussed later on). However, in addition to the self-criticism of the narrators' inability to respond to regional particularism and their desire to secure themselves via universalizing discourses, Ferris presents key episodes in which precisely this willed disavowal of the local clashes with new forms of particularism that arise out of failing global impetuses. In one such episode, an agency worker, Benny Shassburger, inherits from his colleague, Frank "Brizz" Brizzerola, a Native American totem pole found in the yard of Brizz's South Side home. This seemingly innocuous gesture, however, becomes a site of cultural friction between the universalizing bad faith of the narrative voice and the particularizing aspect of the historical moment.

The totem pole exists in terms that are radically distinct from the logic of the office. Seeing it for the first time, Shassburger looks at its carvings of "eagle's heads, scary heads, heads of hybrid creatures" and then pushes it. "It had been driven into the ground so firmly that when Benny gave it a push . . . he felt no give whatsoever" (79). It has sprung from the Midwestern earth—its material, its manufacture, and its cultural purpose are native to this place—so much so that it is fixed firmly in the ground, evoking a rootedness that is anathema to the deterritorialization seen in the office. Furthermore, its position in the South Side suburbs fixes the artifact as a contextualising contrast to the ahistorical suburbs: "The one he had just inherited, with its rich scarlet luster and deep browns, contained an authentic and magical power that left him in awe. Because of its size and complicated carvings, but also because it was standing in a backyard in an old Irish neighborhood among the telephone wires, the lawnchairs and bird feeders, even a trampoline in the yard across the way"(80). For young neighborhood girls bouncing on trampolines, the totem pole "stood

impervious and resolute" and, for men in white tank tops, mowing their lawns, it is a "mute and primitive object that refused to vacate the corners of their eyes" (80).

This particularized conjunction of both old and new worlds jars with the office-collective's desire for a universal culture. Therefore, as Benny's individual fascination with the totem pole deepens, he is drawn away from the office collective, an act that weakens the authority of their totalizing outlook. They respond by questioning why Benny would "[brave] traffic to go visit the thing" and deride his appreciation of it as "the stupidest thing they ever heard" (169). Soon they propose means of alleviating both the financial burden it represents for Benny (he owns the pole but not the land it is on and faces the problem of rehousing the sizeable object) and the threat it poses to the cultural logic upon which their worldview relies. They suggest the totem pole fall upon the whims of the market: they suggest he "leave it for the future owners of Brizz's house to deal with" or "find a collector" (166). One character wants to see it dematerialized and repurposed by "a stump-grinding company" who could turn it "into multicolored wood chips" (166). Others say it should be deracinated: "Tom Mota liked the idea of sawing it into pieces and giving each one of us a head to decorate our offices with in remembrance of Brizz" (166). Its existence is permitted only if it can be subordinated to the cultural logic of the office, where it can be cannibalized by the deterritorializing aspect of capital and, once spat out, made into an ornament, unmoored from its fixed relationship with the region. Similarly, characters can tolerate its existence if it is taken out of the public-social sphere and relegated to acceptable, neutral spaces such as museums. For instance, Karen Woo deflects Jim Jacker's frisson to the totem pole by saying, "'The Art Institute has things in it that'll give you goose-bumps, too'" (168).

By engaging with a historically rooted, particularistic specificity, Benny absents himself from the office collective and the edifice of the connected, digital new economy. This is underscored by the "we" voice's various complaints of nonunderstanding. We see this repeat throughout this episode in various forms, from the palindromic "'Why, Benny? Why? Benny, why?'" (173) to the petulant "'We didn't understand, that was the big deal'" (168). The result for Benny is that he is ridiculed:

> We took up squawking at him. We did mockeries of ceremonial dances in his doorway. The worst thing we did was take scissors to this old toupee Chris Yop had in his basement, and put the mangled thing on Benny's desk, which Karen Woo doused with a bottle of fake blood she kept in her office, so that what lay on the desk looked like a fresh scalping. Someone suggested we find a yarmulke to put on top, but we all sort of agreed to marry those two atrocities together would be stepping over a line. (173)

Echoing the ideas of the disintegration and dispersal of the totem pole in the office space, these acts allow the narrative voice to appease its desire to co-opt the totem pole's power by bringing it to the workplace as a weapon to use against Benny and the shroud of particularistic identity in which it cloaks him. The irony that Ferris highlights is that these characters are happy to invoke their own American colonial legacy of violence but not the European heritage of anti-Semitism. In so doing, he draws to our attention the incommensurable mobilization of universal and particular cultural histories. That Benny is Jewish represents an element of his particular identity but one that is tied to a universal discourse, both due to the consensus that the Holocaust represents a universal moral wrong and also to the global range of the Jewish diaspora. Consequently, it represents a moral limit that cannot be crossed by the universalizing "we" voice. By contrast, Benny's acutely particularistic appreciation of the Native American artifacit, which is entirely based on personal taste, represents a threat to this universalizing discourse. Consequently, the place represented by the totem pole has to be effaced. The irony that Ferris creates is that this universalizing impulse is almost fascist[4] in its intolerance to particularism. Responding to a hypothetical question of whether they knew about Brizz's totem pole while he was still alive, they say they would have "'hound[ed] him, threaten[ed] him, torture[d] him, kill[ed] him. Whatever it took'"(172).

Through another narrative thread that deals with the bereavement of one of the office workers, Ferris positions place as a source of disquiet for the "we" collective. First thought missing, the agency employees help in the search for their colleague's daughter, Jessica Gorjanc, by making a flyer to put up around the city. This pro-bono service, however, only reflects the immateriality of the office space. We see the office workers dispassionately doctor an image of the young girl with Photoshop, thereby losing sight of her as a real, missing child.

Having obtained a photograph of Janine's daughter, the agency workers dispassionately doctor the image. Loading their speech with brand names (indeed, some of the very brands that bolster the dot-com bubble), Ferris portrays their work as an abstraction: "'Let's work on her,' said Joe Pope. 'Drop her into Photoshop.' We worked on Macs . . . . We made layouts in QuarkXPress; all our image manipulation we did in Photoshop" (25). The essence of Janine's daughter becomes the planar image, no different to an advertisement. As such, they reify her. She is no longer Jessica Gorjanc but "the girl," a signifier in the lexicon of advertising. They "[play] up the girl's hair and freckles" but worry that "she was still getting washed out" and also that raising the contrast makes her look "sunburned" (25). Despite one colleague's protestation that they were "'losing sight of what [their] ultimate goal is here,'" the characters are still committed to speaking the language of advertising: "But we feared that if she was washed out, people would look right past the flyer . . . . 'Pump MISSING up a little,' said Jim Jackers. 'And play up the $10,000 reward,' suggested Tom. 'I don't know how, just . . . use a different font or something. And you have some kerning issues'" (25). This incident concretizes around place as the flyer is made into a billboard poster, which remains up long after "she was found in an empty lot wrapped in plastic sheeting" (26).

Ferris grounds the problematic billboard in its very specific economic geography: "It was an unpopular place, that was the problem. Far out on I-88, west of the Fox River, metropolitan Chicago effectively came to an end, yielding its industrial parks and suburban tract housing to fields of alfalfa and small towns with single gas stations"(99). The girl's image—now circulating through the flows of commercial culture—comes to a blockage where market apparatuses falter in the downturn. The advertising space cannot be sold but the image cannot be stripped due to the cost involved. Redolent of Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997) and its final chapter where the apparition of a dead girl appears in a billboard, the energies of reifying advertising are negatively charged. The site of this billboard is no longer one node in a network— it is no longer *incorporated*—but rather becomes the locus of particularized experience, born out of the failing universalizing impetus of the dot-com bubble. As such, the death of Jessica Gorjanc short-circuits a simplistic division between homogenized and particularized space. So too, however, does her mother, Janine's mourning.

Following patterns similar to the torment of Benny, once the narrators learn that Janine Gorjanc has been spending her lunch breaks sitting dolefully in a McDonald's ball pit, their morbid curiosity is piqued and they voyeuristically observe her trips to McDonald's. Again, the unassailable particular experience becomes a site of friction that the "we" voice cannot accept. The unlikely aspect of this is that Ferris reverses the cultural stereotype of "McWorld," positioning it as the site of particularized experience, while the instigator who facilitates the collective's harassment of Gorjanc is resolutely anti-McDonald's, stressing that she "'never [goes] to McDonald's'" and that she "'probably [hasn't] been to a McDonald's since college'" (127). Of course, this does not necessarily imply that these corporate spaces are not eroding cultural specificity; it rather shows a desire to complicate discourses that see only the homogeneity of universalizing globalization and not the particularism of lived experience in a given place at a given historical conjuncture. This is made clear by Ferris through the rationale he has Gorjanc provide once she discovers her grief has been a spectator sport: "'I know it's odd. But it was one of her *places*. She was only nine, you know. She had her *places*. I still go to Toys 'R'Us, and the Gymboree. They think I'm crazy there, too. The McDonald's people think I'm nuts. But those are my *places* now, too. They became my *places*. I was with her when she was in those *places*. And I just don't know how to give them up yet'" (my italics,135).

Through the totem pole, the billboard and the McDonald's, place is given a new significance in the crash; they are made by forces tied to the world economy but also remade by the downturn of those systems. It is in this clash that the possibility of a global particularism arises. However, the two forms of engagement with the particularism are limited. At its most aware, the narrative voice only manages to critique its own failure to engage with its particularism. In contrast to that, the instances of individuation, like Benny's reverence for the totem pole and Janine's mourning, are mystified so that we, too, are at a remove from their personal experience; we have no access to their interiority in these particular places and find ourselves accessing knowledge of them only through the intrusive "we" voice. As such, we might be led to read the novel as an evocation of the frail and tentative aspect of these forms of identity. Ferris, however, has something more robust in mind and within his final chapter, set in the

post-9/11 world, he explicitly implicates fiction into the cosmopolitan work of these forms of regional identity.

Throughout Ferris's novel the onus of resistance is placed squarely on individualism. Its epigraph quotes Emerson's "The American Scholar," a speech that excoriates the loss of self in the collective: "Is it not the chief disgrace in the world, not to be a unit;—not to be reckoned one character;—not to yield that peculiar fruit which man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred or the thousand, of the party, the section, to which we belong . . .". This indictment, bearing a clear thematic continuity to the attitude displayed toward the singular-plural narrators, finds its mouthpiece in the anarchistic Tom Mota, a dissident employee of the agency who unnerves his colleagues by quoting Marx and Emerson at them and is, unsurprisingly, first to be fired. Mota, however, finds a foil to his strain of disruptive, anarchistic individualism in Joe Pope. Pope embodies a drastic form of conformist individualism; like his religious namesake, he practices a belief that he exists in the world but is not of the world; he conforms to whatever professional demands are asked of him, but he will never relinquish his interior agency to any sort of collective. We learn that, as an adolescent, Pope was in a gang that attacked a boy and, caught up in peer pressure, was unable to stop the violence. Vowing to never join a group again, Pope rationalizes his individualist philosophy: "'Joining the club, losing control. Losing my convictions. That's what I'm guilty of, Genevieve. Believing I'm better than the group. No better than anyone individually. Worse, because I stood by . . . . There's no word for me. Someone better, smarter, more humane than any group. The opposite of an elitist, in a way'" (261).

As such, Pope views labor as distinct from his spirit: he can come to work, participate as part of the workforce, but necessitates that this have no psycho-social investment. Mota, by contrast, distinguishes his philosophy as "'[t]hat to conform is to lose your soul. So I dissented every chance I got and I told them fuck you and eventually they fired me for it, but I thought, Ralph Waldo Emerson would be proud of Tom Mota'" (343). Established early in the text, this antagonism between these two extremes of individualism becomes the plot's centrepiece, culminating in Mota's returning to the agency dressed as a clown, shooting up the office (with, as we later learn, a paintball gun), and confronting Pope.

The absurdity of this gesture consciously undercuts the force of individualism as a form of resistance to the threat of universalizing homogeneity. As the events of the attack on the office and its aftermath are relayed, we hear that Mota confronted Pope about his individualist convictions: "'I thought *I* was up there, but no, that whole time, I was down *here,* with everybody else—churning, spinning, talking, lying, circling, whipping myself up into a frenzy. I was doing everything they were doing, just in my own way.' 'But you,' he said, 'you stay here, Joe. You're up here.'" (italics in original, 344). By reconciling his position with Pope, Mota capitulates to conformism and expresses the futility of an oppositional dissidence. It is here that we see the consequence of resolute individualism, hidden in the reverse of this surname—*atom*ization. Yet, in spite of this, Pope is not vindicated by the text: as the narrative voice states, "he was one of us whether he liked it or not. He came in at the same time every morning, he was expected at the same meetings, he had the same deadlines as the rest of us" (261). Pope cannot extricate himself from the social bonds of work by will alone. His claim to a transcendent moral authority is underpinned by its singularity but therefore derives its authority from its relation to the group it estranges. After the gulf opened up in the narrative by 9/11, we return to a narrative free of both characters: Mota, we learn, enlisted and "had been killed by friendly fire in Afghanistan" (381); by contrast, Pope vanishes from the text. No character has seen him in the intervening five years and no one can track him down. Both philosophies disintegrate, with seemingly no place in the post-9/11 context Ferris describes.

The events of 9/11 are signalled subtly by Ferris with the benign parting paragraph that functions as a disjuncture in the text: "In the last week of August 2001, and in the first ten days of that September, there were more layoffs than in all the months preceding them. But by the grace of god, the rest of us hung on, hating each other more than we ever thought possible. Then we came to the end of another bright and tranquil summer"(357). Splitting the narrative into distinct pre- and post-9/11 sections, Ferris stresses disconnection in his networked text. The terrorist attacks are implicitly shown to precipitate the collapse of the agency and the dissolution of the office collective and in parallel to this, the attacks' world-political ramifications mark a nadir for global markets and international relations. Read together, these aspects present 9/11 as an epistemological limit of universalizing discourses: the point where world events spiral beyond the lim-

its of representation and where global connectivity is momentarily severed. Ferris reconstitutes his narrative after 9/11 with the enterprise of fiction at its center by bringing two distinctly cosmopolitan characters to the fore, Lynn Mason and Hank Neary.

The novel's prologue stresses to us that "Lynn Mason was dying" (4) but her diagnosis and treatment are topics of the same prying scrutiny that Janine and Benny suffer. Rather than maintain the same singular-plural narrative voice, however, Ferris makes an exception by including a chapter written in free-indirect third person. Here, we access the details of Lynn's life—her cancer, her fear of treatment, and her love life—that would satisfy the intrusive desire of the office collective. Yet, when we return to the singular-plural narrative, it is clear that the narrative voice has not been privy to this information. Rather, the reader has been granted a view of a distinctly cosmopolitan subject. In contradistinction to the "we" voice that remains tethered to the office and projects itself psychically onto the city, we see Lynn Mason move about Chicago: she and her partner visit the viewing deck of the John Hancock building and the Jazz Record Mart on East Illinois; they also "[spend] an hour guiding themselves through all the highlights of the Art Institute" (217) where she sees Georges Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grand Jatte*. Unlike the collective narrative voice, Lynn Mason's free movement around Chicago reveals her capacity to use the city's cultural resources as a point of entry into a broader global cultural context. Read alongside her coping mantra that "'here is a good place to be'"(197), Ferris presents a restatement of cosmopolitanism as being at "home in the world" in which the world is registered culturally as place ("here").

By the final chapter, we learn that this formal break is part of a reflexive, metafictional gesture. The Lynn Mason section is, in fact, an extract from a novel that former agency employee Hank Neary has written about her life and death during the five-year narrative intermission. This is made clear as Neary draws the figures from the now-defunct workplace back together for a public reading "in a bookstore on the campus of the University of Chicago" (371). By grounding the characters' social interaction around fiction and shifting the narrative locus from an office space to a university campus, Ferris posits fiction as tool for bridging inter-subjective gaps, and, by doing so, proposes a form of universalism that is founded on distinct particularisms.

Earlier in the novel, we learn that Neary was writing a "small and angry . . . failed novel" about work (72) that we now learn "was put down like an ailing dog" (374). Instead of claiming that "anyone who believed in the merits of capitalism, and soul-destroying corporations, and work work work—all that—naturally that person wasn't deserving of sympathy" (377), Neary's resolutely sympathetic novel about Lynn Mason posits fiction, through its interaction with its regional particularism, as a form of associative identity. It is clear that here the text takes on a tone of apology for the excesses of capital but, by hinging this vision on fiction, Ferris accentuates the role that both reader and writer can play in moderating these excesses. For instance, in contrast to the ghostly image of Jessica Gorjanc, Neary's novel signals the capacity of the fictitious subject to move more freely than permitted by the flows of commercial culture. That Ferris locates this exchange at a reading and, later, a bar, where the former colleagues have met to reminisce, similarly stresses artistic-oral-social exchange as distinct from processes of value-productive labor. We may well want to question this utopian vision for the work of regional writing in the new century but Ferris seems resolute in his registration of it in his novel's ending. As his characters each leave the bar, we once again see the "we" collective dissolve: "And with that, we'd get in our cars and open the windows and drive off, tapping the horn a final time. But for the moment, it was nice just to sit there together. We were the only two left. Just the two of us, you and me" (385). This final division of the "we" voice to "you and me" is an optimistic note to end on. No longer imposing a collective will to the detriment of the individual, Ferris tentatively offers something more mutual. Separated but connected, this ending suggests a shared dialogue, a mutual exchange—one that can exist between employee and manager, visitor and host, and, most significantly, shown as it is in this moment of narration, the reader and writer.

Newcastle University, England

NOTES

[1]A notable example of this approach can be seen in Arjun Appadurai's argument for a series of disjunctive "global cultural flows" or "-scapes" through which the actor's relational perspective "imaginatively" constructs global cultural relations. ("Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" in *Modernity at Large*, 1996, 27-47).

[2]My use of these terms is drawn from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000), in particular their discussion of "Network Production." ("Network Production" in *Empire,* 2000, 294-297).

[3]Jameson's influence on American writers who entered the academy in the 1980s and '90s should not be understated. He is named in Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001;106) and is the subject of a chapter ("Fredric Jameson on Third-World Literature") in Lazarus's *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011) that deals in part with the cause célèbre around third-world allegory in the late-1980s. After McGurl's *The Program Era* (2009) it seems all the more pressing for us to account for the influence of university culture on writers.

[4]I use this term not only because it connects to the anti-Semitism inherent in this image but also because the etymology of the word "fascist" is drawn from the Latin fasces ("a bundle of rods bound up with an axe in the middle and its blade projecting" [*OED*], an image that neatly connects to the collective uniformity espoused by Ferris's narrative voices, not to mention its inherent violence.

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. 2nd ed. London: Verso, 2006.

Annesley, James. *Fictions of Globalization*. London: Continuum, 2006.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996

Castells, Manuel, João Caraça and Gustavo Cardoso, eds. *Aftermath: The Cultures of the Economic Crisis*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.

Castells, Manuel, and Gustavo Cardoso. Introduction. Castells, Caraça, and Cardoso 1-14.

Damrosch, David. "What is World Literature?" *World Literature Today* 77.1 (Apr/June 2003): 9-14.

DeLillo, Don. *Underworld*. London: Picador, 1998.

Ferris, Joshua. *Then We Came To The End*. London: Penguin Books, 2007.

Franzen, Jonathan. *The Corrections*. London: Harper, 2001.

Goodnight, G. Thomas, and Sandy Green. "Rhetoric, Risk, and Markets: The Dot-Com Bubble." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96.2 (May 2010): 115-140.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard UP, 2000.

Irr, Caren. *Toward the Geopolitical Novel*. NY: Columbia UP, 2013.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* 146.1 (July-Aug. 1984): 53-92.

Lazarus, Neil. "Cosmopolitanism and the Specificity of the Local in World Literature" *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46.1 (Mar. 2011): 119-137.

—. *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.

Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature." *New Left Review* 1 (Jan/Feb2000): 54-68.

McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.

Robbins, Bruce. "The Worlding of the American Novel. *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*. Ed. Leonard Cassuto. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. 1096-1106.

Schoene, Berthold. *The Cosmopolitan Novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009.

RESISTING CHICAGO (JEWISHLY) IN PETER ORNER'S *LOVE AND SHAME AND LOVE*

MARILYN JUDITH ATLAS

How do Chicago writers use and resist Chicago in their art? Does something additional happen when writers are self-consciously ethnic? What does it mean to be a Jewish kid raised in Chicago, one who is more or less on the sad side, who knows enough to know that he is different, unique, a writer, and that while nothing stays, nothing disappears either? This boy, Alex Popper, is the main character in Peter Orner's novel, *Love and Shame and Love* (2011): he will fall in love with Kat, a half-Jewish woman (Irish on her mother's side), who will choose not to marry him, and he will become the loving father of a girl named Ella. His bar mitzvah visit to a crooked Chicago judge and his reminiscences in front of Lake Michigan will frame this novel filled with fragments of Chicago images ranging from the 1930s through the end of the twentieth century.

Seymour (Sy) and Bernice (Beanie), Alex's paternal grandparents, also frame the novel. Beanie wished to be a ballerina. Like so many other Depression-era dreamers, she is inspired by the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition (36) but marries Sy because he is also a dreamer (85-86) or because she can't make it in New York (401). The war separates them and she grows impatient with a marriage to a man whose aspirations exceed his successes.[1]

In this novel, Chicago represents world cities: it is anti-Semitic but only mildly so: Jews in Chicago may not work in the slaughterhouse, and they meet with quotas: not too many Jews in office simultaneously is the law of Chicago's political machine (82). Some Popper relatives, like Uncle Mose, sell raincoats and disappear—almost; some, like Seymour's son, Philip, have heart attacks in Brooks Brothers, channeling their forgotten uncles; some, like Alex,

get thrown into the water by their misguided fathers and told to sink or swim like Pip in *Moby-Dick*; and some characters, like Philip's Llasa Apso, named Sir Edmond Hillary after the great mountain climber, simply dig, (unlike his namesake who climbed) headed in the wrong direction while bacon curdles in Philip and Miriam's suburban kitchen. Theirs is no kosher kitchen, but that doesn't make it one ounce less Jewish. *Love and Shame and Love* is ironic and funny, and in it Chicago is represented as no more evil than the rest of the world: sink or swim; one can get out, but out is not better than in. For Jews like Alex Popper, this is the best of all possible worlds, and he and his daughter must cultivate what they have and where they are. As Jews, they come with extra baggage, and after World War II, this baggage is multiplied. In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* and *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, Marianne Hirsch explains that there is "familial" postmemory, but there is also "affiliative" postmemory. Transmission of traumatic experience, she posits, occurs across a very wide social field (3-6; 4-5). And so as the reader gets to know Alex Popper's relatives, the reader understands that loss, geographical and emotional, colors Alex's life in ways that he cannot even begin to fathom, but that the reader, thanks to Peter Orner's skill as a writer, may begin to glimpse.

The reader, like the characters, is flipped around in this pretty brilliant and beautifully written novel where sadness and humor by turns are generously sprinkled across the pages: In 1961, Miriam loses her first-born son, Alex's eldest sibling. Alex's older brother, Leo, is born in 1963, after the tragedy, and there are other tragedies that get major, often symbolic, coverage: in 1968 Bobby Kennedy is assassinated and the Poppers cry and Miriam wants the safety of the suburbs, a safety that just isn't there for anyone anywhere and definitely not for Jews, even in the Midwest.

One gets the flavor of Jewish Chicago during different eras: in the 1940s, Sy explores being a Jew in the army; in 1961, he and his cronies consider whether Sammy Davis is a real Jew; in the 1970s, Miriam, calling from Spain, explains to her father that Philip, whom she plans on marrying, *is* a real Jew; and in the 1980s and 1990s, Alex is conscious that his love, Kat, comes from a family in which only the father is Jewish—and this works for him.

The 1933 Chicago World's Fair represents a "century of progress"—and Peter Orner creates for his reader a century of

progress and regress in Chicago, where Jews, as Sy notes, are not as plentiful as they are in New York and form no "Schnorrer's Club" (2); where Jews are not as desperate as they are in Puerto Rico and choose something consistently more significant than Christmas trees with Jewish stars, actually bonding around Jewish ritual and prayer. Chicago is a better place for Jews. Maybe. Nothing lasts and nothing disappears completely in this postmodern Jewish novel. One can try not to remember, but, like Uncle Mose, one cannot erase; one tries to hold on, but, like Beanie's or Miriam's or Kat's love, it can't be forced.

"Ash," "elders," just names of trees, remind the reader of the Holocaust and of the generations that inevitably leave their unique, sometimes traumatic and ugly mark. Europe, world history, is part of Chicago's fabric, too. The old Jewish joke comes to mind: don't tell a man who has someone hung in his family to go hang up his coat. Post-traumatic stress is alive and well in this novel of suburban safety: even with good schools, wealth, water, talent, beauty, and culture, life—whether in the city or the suburbs—can be pretty twisted.

Love and Shame and Love was not always or only a novel. Like Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, sections of this book were published in various venues: *The Believer, Bomb, Canteen, Conjunctions, Granta*, Jewishfiction.net, *McSweeney's, New American Writing, Ploughshares,* and *A Public Space*. It is dedicated to Lorraine Spinner Orner (1915-2011), who, like Alexander Popper's grandmother, danced. Not coincidentally, Anderson's *Winesburg* was written in a Chicago boardinghouse and its characters were later re-placed in small-city Ohio. Perhaps Orner, like Anderson, is trying to explain to the reader that all places are "bad" and are in their own unique way hard on humans.

There are gnats and love, fission and painterly prose. Orner likes to use his version of ekphrasis, referring to pleasure domes and Lincoln portraits, and he seems to be able to channel Alexander Archipenko's work of sculpture depicting a woman combing her hair. Frequently the reader is asked to focus on what is missing and what came before. There are high and low culture, puppet shows and books galore. There are those with high I.Q.s and those with few survival skills. Micro and macro merge: alewives can be as devastating as whales.

There are many ways to be lost and found. Kat may hate Alex's using the word "quotidian" in his everyday speech—but it is the perfect word for this novel: ordinary, daily, yet at the same time extraordinary and anything but consistently colloquial. The word is an

oxymoron, aggravating and comforting. Stendhal, Nazi rallies in Skokie, William Blake and Simone Weil: we are thrown into the world of literature and absurdity, snobbism and corruption. The reader and characters question exclusive clubs and exclusive suburbs with touches of Kierkegaard and Picasso (16), and we long for the biblical Moses to set foot on Israel's land, even though the reader is expected to know the biblical story and to accept—though with excruciating anguish—that Moses will not enter Israel nor be allowed this much-earned closure and satisfaction because he made God angry, as all humans do, as all humans must.

But lest the novel get too heavy, for Peter Orner's readers there are the jokes sprinkled generously through the novel: the temple (forehead) and the temple (synagogue) and the irony of the Jewish Chicago judge named Abe Lincoln Marovitz, and Abe's mother, Mrs. Marovitz, who simply cannot be convinced that the original Abraham Lincoln wasn't Jewish. The world rejects the Jews and the Jews refuse recurrently this rejection, finding new and ridiculous ways to connect to world history, to take what they want and what they need for sustenance and at least momentary connection.

In terms of form, just as in terms of story, this novel is a collage of thirteen chapters, a number that evokes the traditional bar mitzvah age, thirteen, the age at which one takes on the mantle of an adult with moral obligations. Many small sections reside within each chapter, some of them building the story and others resisting it; none of the chapter headings contains the word "Jew." The power of the sections is the power of enjambment: generation next to generation; land next to lake; city next to suburb; Moby Dick next to alewives; ideal next to ironic; love next to cheating; talk next to space: a family album, one not arranged particularly chronologically though it moves forward like a glacier and sometimes melts. The times are vulnerable but no more vulnerable than all times—there is an ebb and flow to safety, but the precariousness is never nonexistent.

This novel is many things: it is a Chicago story, an American story, a twentieth-century story, a transnational and global story, and a unique rendition of the Jewish immigrant story. We know Miriam's father is an immigrant who cares about names, collects phone books, and calls his daughter not after the simple good character, Hilda, in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* but after the character who had an affair with Donatello, the count, the castle's master (no need to hide from vulnerability, culture or nature).[2] Miriam's father is taking back

the name, Miriam, biblical and American, and hoping for the best. The biblical Miriam did not do too much better than her brother Moses: she was cursed with leprosy during the days when illness was a metaphor.

For the Poppers and their ancestors, as for many readers, Jewish and non-Jewish, the issue of freedom versus obedience is never resolved. Ambivalence and double messages abound and are passed on from parents to children. Jewish families come to America in search of the American Dream and they marry, up and down, for love or power, and their children aren't particularly happy, and their grandchildren are also often sad or lost or just Midwestern Americans at the end of the twentieth century, or part of the Chicago Machine, or not. They are sometimes do-gooders, or lawyers, educated or anxious or both; like Alex they may be readers of A. J. Leibling, who coined the term "Second City," or, like Kat, students of Hannah Arendt, a political theorist less concerned with the individual than with how group power manifests itself; Arendt is more interested in understanding the banality of evil than in making the Holocaust victims feel vindicated because someone who tortured them has been labeled not banal, but Evil with a capital "E." Arendt wanted to demonstrate how individuals in a bureaucracy can further evil without guilt or remorse, as in the case of Eichmann, and so she was vilified and called cold. So it is appropriate that Kat—who chooses not to wed Alex, even though she is having a child with him—like Arendt, refuses to think with the majority or the minority; she just wants the happiness of thinking and doing as she sees fit.

Miriam's father can't believe it when his daughter calls from Spain to tell him that she is marrying Philip, a lawyer, a man from Chicago. Miriam's family is from Massachusetts, and to her father, Chicago is a place one visits, maybe, not where one lives. If the Jews escaped Europe, why would Miriam settle in a place like Chicago? Miriam has heard the stories but has come up with scenarios her father hadn't meant to happen. She'll make her own errors. So goes life. Fragment by fragment, extended metaphor by extended metaphor, the Nazis and their racial hatred are part of the back story and the not-so-back story, too.

And survivors, like Mr. Pomerantz, exist only to gas themselves in sports cars and to remind us that all is not well for Jews—or anyone else like Hollis, the Poppers' nanny, in America. Outsiders view Chicago as small, insignificant, invisible and Jews as subaltern; but

outside views are just that—outsiders' views—and they are problematized by Peter Orner in this Chicago novel where Chicago is no more or less than any other space or place.

No joke, no individual trauma can make life a simple story and Philip and Miriam question in their own way, as do all the interesting characters: is this why the Jews escaped the Pharaoh, to build three-car garages in the suburbs of Chicago? To be massacred for this? That question is never answered, but it hangs in the novel as do so many other questions: Jewish, regional, American, and global.

This American saga becomes the story of a city, a city that is the home of many Jews, suburban, nonaffiliated, competitive, insecure, hungry like the seventeen-year locusts (111) for a place to call home, ambivalent about talk and stories and relationships. Poland is displaced, dissed by Beanie's relatives (though ironically they are themselves Polish) and replaced, half-drowned but still chasing the whale or alewives and/or whatever is available to chase through Alex, the father and grandson and writer, the main character of this novel.

It is not an accident that the novel starts with the protagonist's non-bar mitzvah: Alex Popper, second surviving son of Philip and Miriam Popper, lawyer and primary political Jewish beauty, demonstrates what the novel's epigraph tells us with a quotation from Saul Bellow's *The Actual*: "In Chicago I had unfinished emotional business." More than anyone else's, this is Alex Popper's history of love and shame and love: we start the novel with him becoming a "man" and we end it with him as a good man who explores love and shame because he wishes to be an even better one.

Here in Chicago, before the first chapter of *Love and Shame and Love*, Orner lets the reader know it is 1984 and subliminally encourages the reader to think of George Orwell and to push *1984,* published in 1949, aside because this is America and not Europe, and the American dream is still alive and perhaps still possible; this is not George Orwell's dystopian novel warning of doom, but a funny, deadly serious suburban Chicago novel, the first lines of which gather the reader up and in: "This is how it was for certain boys in Chicago, the sons of lawyers. In some families, Alexander Popper's included, forget the bar mitzvah. To leave boyhood behind, you went to see Judge Abraham Lincoln Marovitz for a chat" (1). Here in *Love and Shame and Love* the dream is just troubled; it is modernized and it is not over.

So the reader is asked to forget a funny, crazy, nonreligious bar mitzvah that the reader won't forget, one that never actually takes place and simply morphs into a chat, a Bible story, an American story, about Moses and Mount Nebo and an angry God. Talking is an issue; silence is an issue; worshipping in an issue; viewing the Promised Land but not being able to enter it is an issue; home and homelessness are issues; utopia and dystopia are all issues in this very moving, complex, Jewish and funny novel. All are important and like a cubist painting they are all presented on a space that dismisses hierarchy as dangerous because it is so often false.

Peter Orner frames his novel with this pre-first chapter that takes place in 1984 and with this first talk: Alex Popper, a thirteen-year-old, is stationed with a man, a crooked Chicago politician, Jewish, named for our great emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, and from a family clearly Jewish, "Marovitz" and from Alex's father's view, powerful enough.

The narrator tells the reader that Marovitz is a great man, learned, connected to the mayor, a "machine judge," and, even more, the machine's favorite judge. Anyone who knows 1980s Chicago knows that Chicago is and was a "machine" city, and on the West Side, a precinct captain had declared about Marovitz, "'The yid really classed up the joint'" (1). Of course the reader sees "outsider," "ethnicity," anything but Puritan blue blood, anything but Henry James or Henry Adams, echoing ironically in these lines and the reader laughs—a little. This is nonbluestocking Midwestern urban America at its most absurd. The irony and complexity color each new bit of information. The author and the narrator want the reader to be as uncomfortable as the thirteen-year-old Alex.

Philip Popper tells his thirteen-year-old son to mark the occasion of this "talk": "'A federal judge! Think son, of the heights to which you yourself might one day rise!'"(1), and the reader Jewish, or Jewish identified, or just middle class, upwardly mobile and human, cringes. Most of the anti-Semitism in this novel will be in the form of internalized self-hate, the worst and most insidious kind. What Jews in America, in Chicago, inherit is a complex "outsider" form of the American dream, a parallel, parallax journey, to use James Joyce's phrase, which will not lead us to the exact same lake as other Chicagoans. But it is a lake and it is Alex's and his family's lake as much as anyone else's.

There is a family history to this talk. Leo, Alex's older brother had it, too, and brought to it a drawing of Marovitz and Lincoln sitting on a bench talking politics. The caption beneath their feet reads "Just a Couple of Abes" (in italics). Marovitz, the narrator tells the reader, "got a big kick" out of that drawing and roared, "'Just,'" twice: Marovitz appreciates his own sense of humor enormously (1). He is a crook and has no insight into himself, can never improve, and he is Chicago's and the Poppers. As an adult, Alex, researching the background of his childhood experiences, notes that Mike Royko, iconic Chicago journalist, lists the Honorable Abraham Marovitz's "credentials" in the index of his biography of Mayor Richard J. Daley, *Boss*. From that index he finds that Marovitz is connected to the Mafia, is an amateur boxer, (this "credential" does not actually appear in the index of *Boss*), associates with underworld figures, is influenced by friendship (and not in a legal way), is friends with Mayor Daley, has a preoccupation with Abraham Lincoln, and, in sum, is not particularly "honorable" (1). Thus, on the first page of this novel, Alex is reflecting with a jaundiced eye on his "weird? bar mitzvah and his father's questionable choice: the ceremony that is supposed to mark a boy becoming a man and being responsible for his own moral behavior is, in Alex's case, officiated by a crooked judge rather than a rabbi. The narrator tells us that Popper was okay with Royko's insinuations: "He remains a loyal, if wayward, stalwart. And hey, if Judge Marovitz was crooked, he wasn't that crooked, which in Chicago, as everywhere, if everywhere was as honest about being dishonest, means something." (2).

So the reader is introduced to a number of the novel's poignant back stories. Everything is connected: nothing is lost, and nothing perfect. If we have seen it or not, we'll see it again in some morphed form. We might as well contemplate the phenomena and we might as well accept the variations on themes. In this novel there are echoes of the third-person narrator that pops up in *Moby-Dick* and forces detachment and intimacy. The narrator of *Love and Shame and Love* suggests at least a double vision:

> But take a step back—before he listened, Popper waited, and in that waiting was a silence so absolute it was like drowning in the lake, out past that point where the sandbar gives way to blue emptiness. Him in there alone, his father in the judge's anteroom, pacing. And the judge staring at him. His face and ears and bald pate were ruddy, as befitted a man who kept his chambers heartily cold. His single thick eyebrow

> was like a centipede crawling across the top of his face. And his eyes beneath that thicket of brow were full of motion, and to meet them straight on (as Popper had been told by his father to do) caused a churn in Popper's stomach. Above him, as if to enforce the power of the judge's gaze a hundredfold, an armada of images of Lincoln. (2)

Alex Popper is becoming a bar mitzvah. And he is afraid of drowning and of being nothing. He is told to be impressed with a man whose eyebrows were like a moving centipede, but Alex is a good son and he outwardly does what is expected of him to do. But, as a bar mitzvah, he will be responsible for how he interprets this judge's stories told to him in this nontraditional setting: after hours and on the fourteenth floor of the Federal Building. It is February and the judge is wheezing. And Alex Popper, like all adults, must carefully consider what he ought to do and what he ought to take away from the judge's tale. If Alex Popper is the hero who has the chance of inheriting the kingdom, this judge, for better or for worse, has put on the mantle of being his guide.

One of the things Alex takes away is listed in the last section of chapter thirteen: *Les Fleurs du Mal* is quoted and the scene takes place at Lake Michigan: "You'll not find another place, you'll not find another sea" (439). Baudelaire, in this work, is exploring the relationship between free men and the sea. This is it: Lake Michigan, for our hero, Alex Popper. He is uncertain, but the novel is constructed so that the reader realizes it is insinuating in our minds that Alex, regardless of its flaws, needs to embrace his place, his space, his choices, his chances, his Chicago and his Lake Michigan. So though Chicago is anything but perfect, it is Alex Popper's city. No exit.

The novel goes full circle. It begins in winter and ends in winter with a one-page chapter entitled "Cary Avenue Beach." But the novel also begins indoors and ends outdoors, though wherever Alex is, water is not far off: in this last scene the "lake heaves ice" slowly up the beach. The anthropomorphic lake is groaning and gloveless and Alex Popper listens to the lake groan. He is not talking and he is focused on the "broken teeth" of the "jagged breakers" as they rise out of the water. The cement sandbags at the bluff's bottom do not stop the erosion and, the reader is definitively told, never will. The lake is always east, toward Jerusalem and toward the Jewish God. Alex Popper knows where he is and he knows the jagged breakers are not broken teeth, only rise out of the water like broken teeth.

Snow falls like "paint chips." Chunks of ice ride the "bloated waves." The lake is contained, circumscribed, smaller, and deadlier in winter. If you fall in, the narrator notes, "you're a goner" (439). One or two smelt fishermen drown each year. But the narrator surprises us in the last part of the novel's final image: a smelt fisherman is pulled down by the "welcome weight of his clothes." This fisherman is home in death; he does not want to float. The implication here is that humans want a place, so we make peace with our lot—dead and alive—until we drown. We are not far from Abraham Lincoln Marovitz, and we are no more comfortable than Alex is at the substitute bar mitzvah that introduces Peter Orner's novel.

The section before the one that ends the novel is dated March 5, 1946, and it is an alleged note written by the grandfather, Seymour Popper, when he is almost done with his tour of duty and has been promoted, if only briefly, to the rank of captain (438). In charge of his company, en route from Ponape Island to Yokohama, Seymour Popper writes out six "night orders" for the individual who will take charge: 1) "Be prepared for emergency breakdown signals" 2) "Check watertight integrity throughout the night" 3) "Report every hour and log it" 4) "Water the prisoners" 5) "Wake me if in doubt" 6) "Do not stop for man overboard. No exceptions" (438).

These orders are clear and clearly an ironic and extended metaphor that will be echoed in the final section of the novel, "Cary Avenue Beach," and that will find a way into Seymour Popper's home life throughout and decades after World War II. Narrative and form dance with one another: nothing is lost and nothing stable. Seymour and his family will never be particularly prepared for emergency breakdowns, their integrity will often be questioned and/or questionable, and regardless of attempting to make reports and logs, errors will be made and gaps will be persistent and obvious. So the difficulties of war, the impossibility of being totally effective seep into the day-to-day postwar world of the Poppers. This is a novel that is riddled with the reverberations of World War II, a novel about Jews and the diaspora, Jews and annihilation, Jews and service, Jews and failed dreams of control, safety, creativity, and possibility. Seymour Popper's sixth and last "night order" is "Do not stop for man overboard. No exceptions." Each man or woman as he or she may: a philosophical echo of Jewish, radical, modernist, and experimental Gertrude Stein's epigraph to "Melanctha," the central novella of *Three Lives*. Alex, thankfully, like his grandfather Seymour, is a sur-

vivor, but he must be careful: each person must save himself. Those, according to Captain Seymour Popper, the flawed patriarch of this novel, are the rules, in the form of night orders of war, and the implication in *Love and Shame and Love* is that these are also the "night orders" of peace.

And if the reader continues to go backward through the novel, he or she will find that the third-to-last section belongs to Miriam, Seymour Popper's daughter-in-law, Philip Popper's wife—who failed to make a happy home in the suburbs of Chicago's Highland Park, who married Seymour's son, Philip, an unhappy lawyer, lost in America, left out of politics, who could not make his wife happy because he wasn't really there. The section is dated 1979 and the reader is listening with Miriam to the sounds and visions of an anthropomorphic world—to a refrigerator growling and a day that begins to rise over the "lip" of the window (437) and again we are reminded of Alex's nonbar mitzvah and how as adults we are responsible for the good and evil that we do and say—and don't say: victims and victimizers all.

This is no tragic Jewish story; it is an American story, a Midwestern story, a Chicago story. *Love and Shame and Love* is a novel that suggests that in dreams begin responsibilities. Delmore Schwartz, a brilliant Jewish experimental author, a suicide, is not far away. Bernice, Seymour's wife, is the daughter of immigrants, a mother with some *yichis* (some illusions of status), who married down. Bernice's mother's family arrived earlier, so her mom marrying her father, a more recent Polish immigrant, was a devolutionary step because the longer one was in America the more American, i.e., the less Jewish, one appeared—all better in an anti-Semitic, anti-difference, anti-immigrant world. Bernice dances, but perhaps not quite well enough, and teaching, she reminds her grandson Alex, is not dancing: "'You know, I always say I gave up dancing because I married Seymour. Then the children, then the war, and how could anybody dance seriously during the war? Maybe this is even true. After I became afraid of dancing it didn't matter what I did'" (401). In her own eyes she has failed, but not so much in the reader's eyes. But her unhappiness with her choices is apparent and the fact that her fate, like all human fates, is overdetermined is clear to both character and reader.

Near its end, the novel again becomes a biblical parable about generations and beginnings and hope: "'Go forth, kid,'" Alex Popper says to his daughter Ella, using the language of the Old Testament

(434). Alex and Ella cannot metaphorically "own" the Lincoln Park Zoo, even if they play statue for two years at the otter pond. Neither waiting nor going forth works perfectly. But to go forth does not have to mean go out of Chicago—"go forth" is a stance, not necessarily connected to a new place. There is always transcendence and the pleasure of finding a way to connect not with the new but with the old.

There is poignant human longing everywhere in this touching but never sentimental novel as generation after generation tries for happiness, fulfillment, and belonging. Seymour writes to his wife Bernice during the war: "We are going to have so much happiness in the future it's going to feel like exquisite torture:—We'll never want to go to sleep—"(435). Dreaming is bittersweet and the characters we meet in this novel are not in control though they are responsible. Alex asks his daughter, "'Did you know that the land we are sitting on was formed by the recession of the Wisconsin Glacial Episode?'" (432). Knowledge is not power, but it does not hurt to have as much knowledge as possible, just in case.

Love isn't enough. Seymour's love isn't enough, nor is Philip's, nor is Alex's. Bernice, after Seymour goes to war, sleeps with Sid Kaufman, an unworthy "player" who is dead by the end of the novel. Snow looks like sugar and wind is capable of acting like someone with a paintbrush—beautiful and cruel, as Bernice notes, in its ability to deceive (429). Great-grandmothers ogle busboys and the beat goes on, a Jewish beat, with the diaspora adding flavor to home ownership and the desire to communicate, and perhaps the novel is just a tad more poignant, desperate, because the characters are always outsiders and because the Holocaust and World War II are never far away. And language, in this novel, confuses us and saves us. Ella is born of talking. In 1995, when Alex and Kat were together, a Chicago heat wave that killed hundreds also led to Ella's conception and possibly, as Alex and Kat whisper only to one another, in that moment of conception, a soul released during that murderous heat wave might have found its way into this brand-new life. Alex tells his daughter:

> "We used to talk, your mom and I, and this was just one small thing out of the thousands of other things we said. I tell you this only so you know that you were born out of that talking. One other thing, I remember looking at you when you were still only a blur of tissue on a computer screen. The lab technician pointed out the pumping of your aorta. It looked like a yapping mouth in a tiny skull." (426)

So out of talking, out of an attempt to touch, to communicate, possibly out of tragedy, come children and some listening and some distortions and some remembering and the children are talking, telling their versions of the dreams and the stories. So when people like Alex's parents, Philip and Miriam, tell tales of their hopes to be in a pleasure dome, they are just passing on a version of the American dream. Even for Kubla Khan, in this version of the poem handed down from Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Leo, Alex's older brother, the pleasure dome that contained sunshine and ice where even the rocks dance must be built fast, because there is war coming. Ironically, too, slaves who will never derive pleasure from it built the pleasure dome. Even if Kubla Khan did not sense the irony of a pleasure dome built by slaves, he seemed to know that the excellent times were temporary—before all "hell breaks loose in the kingdom" (425). Every story here becomes a Jewish story, even Coleridge's Kubla Kahn. Leo knows that nothing is permanent: Seymour becomes senile; his son Philip has a heart attack at Brooks Brothers (424). Leo is a lawyer, gay, at a time when it is not easy to be gay in the Jewish community or in the world at large, and Alex, a single father, a creative writer, passing on to his daughter Ella the wish to leave—and the wish to stay—the ambivalence of being a Midwesterner and a Jew in Chicago.

Human beings just don't get exactly what we want or what we plan. As Marovitz reminds Alex during that fateful nonbar mitzvah day at the beginning of the novel, Moses didn't get into the Promised Land. Don't make God angry, Marovitz reminds Alex. But we do, and like Moses we, too, may look at the Promised Land from the heights of Mount Nebo and not be able or allowed to enter it. Seymour doesn't. Philip doesn't. Uncle Mose doesn't. Miriam doesn't. Bernice doesn't. Alex doesn't, yet.

Some wear hats, some bonnets (and hats are a metaphor); some steal theirs like the crooked machine politicians, but the comedy here is just a piece and the tragedy, just a fragment of this life-affirming story of Jews in Chicago who mainly don't want to drown. Whether they enter the Promised Land is another story, not told here. Chicago is more or less as much the "promised land" as anywhere, maybe.

At four, thrown into Lake Michigan by his father, Alex Popper was told to sink or swim. And he swam. The cold may have made him feel as if he were "nothing" (75), but he is something; he is no mad Pip who even in his madness was "something" and when the novel ends, the reader is quite convinced that Alex is far from done

with being a Jew and with being a Chicagoan. He is on land, in Chicago, and he is not drowned. Chicago as place is good—enough.

Ohio University

NOTES

[1]Citations in this sentence are from Peter Orner's *Love and Shame and Love* (NY: Little, Brown, and Company, 2011), hereafter referred to parenthetically by page number only.

[2]In 1956, when Miriam was still a child, she asked her father why he collected phone books, since all of the books were the same. He responded, "'All the same? Every year the dead are gone, and every year the born are added. God's math in its most fundamental form in these books. Same? Whose kid are you? Was there a mix-up at the hospital? Names, Squeezeface, don't you know, all those names, name after name after name, constitute the hope of all of us fools'" (52-53). Miriam then asked why she was called Miriam, and he explained that the history of names mark us. If Miriam had been named Susan she would not be herself, and then her father would be someone else as well—someone he can't even imagine. Each name in each of the phone books "contains multitudes, a life, an inexplicable, never-knowable life" (54).

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Sherwood. *Winesburg, Ohio*. 1919. NY: Penguin, 1996.

Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. 1963. NY: Penguin, 2006.

Baudelaire, Charles. *Les Fleurs Du Mal* (English and French). 1857. Trans. Richard Howard. Boston: Godine, 1985.

Bellow, Saul. *The Actual*. NY: Penguin. 1997.

Charles, Ron. "Peter Orner's 'Love and Shame and Love' follows 3 generations of a politically connected Chicago family." Rev. of *Love and Shame and Love*, by Peter Orner. *Washington Post* 29 Nov. 2011. 2 pages. Web.

Comninos, Susan. "Desperate Husbands: The Men in Peter Orner's Masterful Stories Are Afflicted by Their Inability to Connect." Rev. of *Last Car Over the Sagamore Bridge*, by Peter Orner. *Forward*. 4 October 2013. Section B: 12.

Dyja, Thomas. *The Third Coast: When Chicago Built the American Dream*. NY: Penguin, 2013.

Granta: The Magazine of New Writing. *Chicago* 108.3 (Autumn 2009): 5-288. [This citation is to the entirety of this journal's issue, which is focused on Chicago writers]

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. NY: Columbia UP, 2012.

—. *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*. NY: Columbia UP, 2011.

Hofer, Jen. "Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives." *Theory In Action* 4.2 (April 2011): 71-76. *Humanities International Complete*. Web.

Keating, Ann Durkin. *Rising Up From Indian Country: The Battle of Fort Dearborn and the Birth of Chicago*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2012.

Langer, Adam. Rev. of *Love and Shame and Love,* by Peter Orner. Arts and Entertainment. *Chicago Tribune*. 11 Nov. 2011. One Page. Web.

Lauck, Jon K. *The Lost Region: Toward A Revival of Midwestern History*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2013.

Livesey, Margot. "The Past in Another Small Town." Rev. of *Esther Stories,* by Peter Orner. *New York Times Book Review*. 4 Nov. 2001. 3 pages. Web.

Olidort, Shoshana. "Chicago's Love and Shame." Rev. of *Love and Shame and Love,* by Peter Orner. *Forward*. 6 Jan. 2012. 9-10.

Orner, Peter. *Esther Stories*. 2001 NY: Little Brown and Company, 2013.

—. Interview by Ted Hodgkinson. *Granta* 13 Dec. 2011. Web.

—. *Last Car Over the Sagamore Bridge*. NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2013.

—. *Love and Shame and Love*. NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2011.

—. "The Raft." *The Best American Short Stories*. Ed. Barbara Kingsolver. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001. 201-204.

—. *The Second Coming of Mavala Shikongo*. NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2006.

—., ed. *Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives*. Voices of Witness Series, San Francisco: McSweeney's Books, 2008.

Royko, Mike. Index. *Boss: Richard J. Daley of Chicago*. NY: E.P. Dutton, 1971.

Russo, Maria. "Searching for Love in the Windy City." Review of *Love and Shame and Love,* by Peter Orner. *New York Times Book Review*. 9 Dec. 2011. 4 pages. Web

Schwartz, Delmore. *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories*. NY: New Directions, 1978.

Stein, Gertrude. "Melanctha." *3 Lives*. NY: Random House, 2011.

THEIR KIND OF TOWN: THE CHICAGO OF ANA CASTILLO AND SANDRA CISNEROS

MELODY M. ZAJDEL

Although Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros are among the most well-known contemporary Chicana writers, what is less often noted is that they are Midwestern writers. All too often, popular constructions of Chicano life, identity, and politics are restricted in literature to a narrow set of stereotypes: Chicanos live in the Southwest; Chicanos are recent immigrants; Chicanos are rural migrant workers. In other words, they are cast as a stereotyped *otros* to our Midwestern *nosotros*. But both Castillo and Cisneros defy this simplistic view. Their biographies and their use of place in their writings, particularly their use of Chicago, complicate and destabilize both identity makers, Midwestern and Chicano. Both writers use Chicago as the physical space and the psychologically projected terrain that exemplify Gloria Anzaldua's concept of *la frontera*. *La frontera* denotes a typography of displacement and alienation: a place of constantly shifting, multiple identities; and a space that allows for fluidity (sometimes abolition) of paradigms of dominance and hierarchy. The Chicago depicted in their writings is a distinctive Midwestern *frontera norte*.

Both Castillo and Cisneros were born, raised, and educated in Chicago. Castillo went to Chicago public schools before attending Chicago City College for two years. She then transferred to Northwestern University, graduating in 1975 with a BA in art. Between 1975 and 1979, she moved back and forth between California and Chicago, teaching first at Santa Rosa Junior College, then serving as writer-in-residence for the Illinois Arts Council before pursuing an MA in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the University of Chicago. Similarly, Cisneros attended parochial

schools in Chicago (St. Callitus elementary and Josephinum Academy, an all-girls high school in Wicker Park). She attended Loyola University in 1972 and earned a degree in English, then went to the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop (1976-78) for her MA. Both women were active throughout their college and postcollege years in Latino and Chicano groups in Chicago. Castillo helped organize the Association of Latino Brotherhood of Arts. Cisneros worked for the literary group MARCH (Movimiento Artistico Chicano). For much of the mid-to-late 1980s and early 1990s, both women lived in the Southwest and traveled. In the mid-'90s, Castillo returned to Chicago to teach at DePaul University, while Cisneros settled in San Antonio. Obviously, their Chicago and Midwestern roots are strong.[1]

But as their works show, their Midwestern experiences are complex. They and their characters are simultaneously rooted in and dislocated from this geographic place. Although they belong to the Midwest by birthright and residence, it is here they most often are made to feel their Otherness.

In her essay, "A Countryless Woman," in *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays in Xicanisma* (hereafter noted as *Massacre*), Ana Castillo provides demographic context for her autobiographical experience of the Midwest: "I was born, raised and spent most of my life in one of the largest cities in the United States. Despite its distance from Mexico, Chicago has a population of a quarter of a million people of Mexican background. It is also the third most frequent U.S. destination of Mexican migrants after El Paso and Los Angeles" (25). With this in mind, Castillo asserts in the essay her claim to "Chicago obrero roots" (1). At the same time she emphasizes her deeply embedded feelings of alienation: "As a mestizo born to the lower strata I am treated at best as a second-class citizen, at worst, as a non-entity" (21). Castillo and her characters live within the liminal spaces that are the purview of those with multiple identity markers: brown woman, Chicana activist, urban blue-collar worker, and struggling artist.

Castillo credits her feelings of otherness in part to the political and social structure of Chicago itself. As the narrator in *Sapagonia* notes, "In Chicago one would never say one was simply Chicagoan, much less American, but hyphenated and belonging to a particular ethnic origin" (307). Castillo notes that assimilation into a homogenous unit is not the aim of ethnic groups in Chicago. She asserts that the segregation of races, classes, and cultures is "reinforced by the tough political patronage system in Chicago, which was dependent

upon ethnically and racially divisive strategies to maintain its power" (*Massacre* 24). Politically and economically enforced ghettoization was part of the political reality of Chicago and part of what made Castillo grow up "perceiving myself to be Mexican despite the fact that I was born in the United States and did not visit Mexico until the age of ten" (*Massacre* 24). The degree to which separation from the dominant white culture was felt by Castillo is clear in her description of traveling out of her neighborhood:

> When one had occasion to venture away from her insulated community to say, downtown, impressive and intimidating with its tremendous skyscrapers and evidently successful (white) people bustling about, she felt as if she were leaving her village to go into town on official matters. Once there she went about her business with a certain sense of invisibility, and even hoped for it, feeling so out of place and disoriented in the presence of the U.S. Anglo, profit-based interests, which we had nothing to do with except as mass-production workers. (*Massacre* 25)

For Castillo and her characters, the ethnic and economic boundaries are perceived as sharply drawn and are keenly felt.

Sandra Cisneros also represents the tensions between cultures and between national and personal identities in her characters Esperanza Cordero in *The House on Mango Street* and Lala Reyes in *Caramelo*. Their identities straddle two cultures and two places. In *Caramelo,* Cisneros recounts the annual migration of the Reyes family, with winters in Chicago and summers in Mexico City with her paternal grandmother. She sees her family as "halfway between here and there, in the middle of nowhere" (381). She describes herself as "All parts from Mexico. Assembled in the U.S.A." (231). Less overtly political than Castillo, Cisneros's characters live in continual motion, looking to create their home and identity without oversimplification or amputation of either of their individual or cultural histories.

In their writings, both Castillo and Cisneros use the concrete descriptions of Chicago, particularly its winter and cold, to demonstrate their sense of alienation and oppression. They both explore through these images what it means to be out in the cold, to be an outsider, to be made the Other. At the same time, they use negative elements of the city to help articulate their desire for a better, more inclusive space they can comfortably call "my own country" (Castillo) or a "home in the heart" (Cisneros). The two writers take the experien-

tial place that is their Chicago and, through their critiques, highlight what a space of belonging might be like.

Castillo notes in her introduction to *My Father Was a Toltec and Selected Poems, 1973-1988* that her first experience of writing poetry (of being creative) occurred in "the biting late winter of Chicago" (xv), immediately following an occasion of loss, her grandmother's funeral. Over and over in Castillo, physical discomfort mirrors psychological estrangement, as seen most compellingly in the ending of her poem, "Cold": "Feet lose feeling for weeks. / joints stiffen, backs create / New places to ache. A constant / Quiver inhabits the body. / Windows rattle and call out / Demons. The cracked one / covered with cardboard and tape. / Cold / is not nostalgic. / Winter emits no fond memories" (76). The Midwestern cold of the prairies contains none of the idealized scenery and play alluded to in the first stanza. Cold is not rare and it isn't a fond memory. Rats and mucus and aching joints are the reality set against the romanticized picture postcard of sleighing, glistening afternoons, and rosy-cheeked children. The heaven of the first stanza is literally demonized in the second via the more realistic recollection of winter in urban Chicago.

For Castillo's and Cisneros's characters, Chicago in winter becomes the emblem of all that is never gotten used to, all the poverty, pain, and harshness that is intolerable. In *Sapagonia,* Castillo reiterates this sense of dehumanizing cold, a cold felt literally as well as psychologically by those not included in the middle-class, Anglo community. Maximo's uncle tells him that "it was said that the cold up north was inhuman. Maximo told him that it had been plenty cold in New York City too, but his uncle guaranteed that it could not compare to Chicago's cold" (112). Maximo's life on Rush Street and on Milwaukee Street, where he is poor, illegal, hungry, and unable to get support for his art, proves just how cold the city and its inhabitants can be. Winter's cold is the physical manifestation of ethnic difference and societal indifference that Chicano characters are forced to endure. They feel dehumanized by it. Many of the same images and feelings are evoked in Cisneros's Awful Grandmother's description of her move to Chicago:

> But nothing, nothing in Grandmother's imagination prepared her for the horrors of a Chicago winter. It was not the picturesque season of Christmas, but the endless tundra of January, February, March . . . . It was a cold like you can't imagine, a barbarous thing, a knife in the

> bone . . . A nuisance, a deadly thing, an exaggerated, long, drawn out ordeal that made me feel like dying, that killed one slowly, a torture. (*Caramelo* 243)

Again and again, in both Castillo's and Cisneros's works, the dominant culture is associated with coldness, both literally as well as in the lack of community and home it offers to the Chicano characters. Chicago is a wintry milieu, horrible, barbarous, and deadly. It is not capriciousness that has Castillo state in her poem, "In My Country," that, in her imaginary and idealized alternative world, "I do not stand/ for the cold" (*My Father Was a Toltec* 90). This poem becomes a sharp critique as she not only describes a cold psychological world, but attributes its cause to real physical events like gas hikes (economic policies and resource abuse), taxes (government imposition), and racial/ethnic prejudice, all of which need to be changed.

Beyond temperature as a reflection of alienation is an awareness by both women's characters that they are always out in the cold relative to status and power. They are forcefully made cognizant of being the Other in the dominant culture's paradigms. Soledad, Lala's Awful Grandmother, recognizes this keenly and ironically after her move to Chicago:

> Something happened when they crossed the border. Instead of being treated like the royalty they were, they were after all Mexicans, they were treated like Mexicans, which was something that altogether startled the Grandmother. In the neighborhoods she could afford, she couldn't stand being associated with these low-class Mexicans, but in the neighborhoods she couldn't, her neighbors couldn't stand being associated with her . . . And as the weeks and months passed, and as she was still without a house, the rainy, cold autumn weather began and only made her feel worse. There was the Chicago winter coming that everyone had warned her about, and she was already so cold and miserable she didn't feel much like leaving her room, let alone the building. (*Caramelo* 289-90)

Her awareness of her undesirability as a neighbor, of her second-class status, creeps up on the Awful Grandmother just as the rainy autumn moves into the frozen winter. She is forced to acknowledge her identity as an outsider.

Similarly, in poems like Castillo's "Red Wagon c. 1958," the unheated home and poverty of the poem's persona are juxtaposed with the sunny days and middle-class values of the elementary school

primer's Father, Sally and Tim. While the school primer's Father comes home to see Sally playfully pulling Tim in the front yard, the poem's persona notes that her father "when he was home / and if there was money"—two very conditional stipulations to begin with—would use their wagon not for play, but to get kerosene at the gas station to heat the house (*Toltec* 5). Poverty is linked to the cold physical place which is home to these characters. Such images reinforce their feelings of difference and alienation.

For both Castillo and Cisneros, part of their characters' alienation comes from their awareness that they are being denied a sense of belonging to a place they feel should belong to them by birthright. Teresa in Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters* talks of this when she describes Chicago as "the city I'd been brought up in where dark skin and a humble background had subjected me to atrocities" and vows that any children she might have would not suffer the same way but "would have a sense of belonging" (67-68). Race and economics are once again evoked as Castillo and her characters lay claim to *obrero,* or *indio,* roots often. This leads Castillo's narrator in "Ghost Talk" to point out the historically ironic displacement that she feels in the United States, which she sees as having belonged first to the Native Americans (the *indio* of some Chicanos' ancestry): "A country belongs to one exclusively. It is synonymous with home. One says I am going back to 'my country.' Bigoted North Americans who forget where their grandparents came from say, why don't you go back to *your* country. I'd be very happy to, thank you, but *your* people have occupied it" (*Loverboys* 47). Both Castillo and Cisneros make clear that their native-born characters feel as displaced as any immigrants, perhaps more so since they are denied by virtue of their race, ethnicity, and class the right to assimilate or lay claim to privileged positions within their legitimate nation.

In discussions of finding a country (or a home), Castillo and Cisneros articulate the fear generated as a result of the racial isolation and social exclusion practiced in Chicago. Fear of the Other is always a part of constructions of power paradigms. Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street* says, "Those who don't know better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives . . . . watch us drive through a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight" (28). Each group fears the other. In Castillo's "Ghost Talk,"

the narrator confronts her previously unmet father, who represents one side of the polarities that struggle within her identity. He is the white man to her mother's brown woman; the Euro-American to her mother's Mexican-Indio heritage; the foreman to her mother's assembly drone. When the narrator confronts him, she feels the whole spectrum of emotions generated by these opposites, "from feeling nothing to intense hate" (*Loverboys* 57). The dichotomies reveal her socially coded disadvantages, yet at the same time she recognizes his reaction to her appearance at his "little bungalow in the white/Polish/Lithuanian part of town": "[H]ow he hated me, had started out with just tolerance of my presence in his house and now hated me, not because I was his daughter, or that I reminded him of a woman he had abused in another time of his life, but just because I was there . . ." (51).

The characters of Castillo and Cisneros continually struggle not to internalize this privileging of one half of their identities. They refuse to live in that house or country, in that Midwest or Chicago. The authors and their characters strive to create somewhere else, a place of belonging not yet brought into reality: Esperanza's home in the heart, Lala's stories ("these things, that song, that time, that place, are all bound together in a country I am homesick for, that doesn't exist anymore. That never existed. A country I invented") (*Caramelo* 434). Castillo's *Sapagonia* and "my country" are both imaginative creations which stand in stark opposition to the real Midwest, the concrete and experiential Chicago in which Castillo and Cisneros were born and raised and in which their characters live. The texts of Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros recognize and illuminate the alienation that lies at the heart of their Chicana Midwestern experience. Their Chicago is painfully real and intolerably cold to them, but ultimately it becomes the catalyst for future personal and societal transformation.

Montana State University

NOTE

[1]The best sources of biographical information remain the interviews both authors have given throughout their careers, Castillo's "Introduction" and "A Countryless Woman" in *Massacre of the Dreamers* (1994), and Carmen Haydee Rivera's *Border Crossings and Beyond: The Life and Works of Sandra Cisneros*. These sources are especially useful because they clearly delineate these authors' educations, show how their various employments and

socio-political engagements have shaped them, and underscore their community activism and politicization.

WORKS CITED

Castillo, Ana. *Loverboys*. NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996.
—. *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays in Xicanisma*. NY: Plume/Penguin, 1995.
—. *The Mixquiahuala Letters*. NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1992.
—. *My Father Was A Toltec and Selected Poems, 1973-1988*. NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995.
—. "An Interview with Ana Castillo." Interview by Bryce Milligan. *South Central Review* 16.1 (Spring 1999): 19-29.
—. *Sapagonia: An Anti-Romance in 3/8 Meter*. NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1994.
Cisneros, Sandra. *Caramelo*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.
—. *The House on Mango Street*. 1984. NY: Vintage Books, 1991.
—. "An Interview with Sandra Cisneros." Interview by Elliott Gayle. *Missouri Review* 25.1 (2002): 93-109.
Rivera, Carmen Haydee. *Border Crossings and Beyond: The Life and Works of Sandra Cisneros*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009.

ECOLITERATURE, SARA PARETSKY, SANDRA STEINGRABER AND WRITING CHICAGO, THE ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE AND THE WORLD

MARY DEJONG OBUCHOWSKI

When two fine but very different writers reach a point of convergence, especially in regard to social issues, it is worth paying attention. Sara Paretsky, in her lively mysteries, explores a range of injustices, corruption, and just plain criminal behavior with Chicago as her setting. A feminist, her targets include what the critic Elizabeth Trembley calls "patriarchal institution[s]with a history of oppressing the marginal elements of society including women, the poor, non-whites, and the elderly" (267).. By this term she means political structures (*Blood Shot*, 1988), manufacturing corporations (*Deadlock*, 1984), insurance companies (*Indemnity Only*, 1982), and religious organizations (*Killing Orders*, 1986) that actively or passively contribute, for example, to social problems such as homelessness and abuse of women and children (all in *Tunnel Vision*, 1994). She reaches into injustices of the past, including Nazism (*Total Recall*, 2001 and *Breakdown*, 2012) and the civil rights abuses highlighted in the 1960s (*Hardball*, 2009). She tackles appalling work and prison conditions (*Hard Time*, 1999), wage inequalities and adverse working conditions for the poor (*Fire Sale*, 2005), discrimination against minorities (*Blacklist*, 2003), and pollution of the environment. It is, in fact, the effects of toxic substances produced by a factory that dominate *Blood Shot*.

In her fiction, through the perspective of an outraged, volatile investigator named V. I. Warshawski, Paretsky shows the origins of some of the kinds of environmental harm that originate in Chicago, although surely they are not exclusive to that city. She is equally vocal in her nonfiction, particularly in the introduction to *Windy City Blues*

(1995), which she opens by describing a South Side marsh called Dead Stick Pond, saying it "has been filled in with everything from cyanide to slag, with a lot of garbage to give it body"(1). She goes on to tell us that nearby, "conflicting signs tacked to the trees proclaim the area both a clean water project and warn trespassers of hazardous wastes. Despite the warning signs, on a good day you can find anything from a pair of boots to a bedstead dumped in" the pond (7). (See also *Writing in an Age of Silence*, 2007: 44-45.) She continues with a passage that she repeats in part in *Blood Shot* on page 116:

> Fish have been returning to the Calumet River and its tributaries since passage of the Clean Water Act in the seventies, but the ones that make their way into the pond show up with massive tumors and rotted fins. The phosphates in the water further cut the amount of oxygen that can penetrate the surface . . . . And Chicagoans so poor they live in shanties without running water catch their dinners in the marsh. Their shacks dot unmarked trails in the swamps. The inhabitants have a high mortality rate from esophageal and stomach cancers because of the pollutants in their well water. (7)

Illinois-born poet and ecologist Sandra Steingraber has written nonfiction on social and environmental issues such as cutting South American rain forests (*Brazil's Debt and Deforestation—A Global Warning*, 1990) and ecological devastation in Ethiopia (*The Spoils of Famine: Ethiopian Famine Policy and Peasant Agriculture* 1988). In *Living Downstream: A Scientist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environmen*t (1997), Steingraber discusses her own detective work on the movement and effects of cancer-causing contaminants as they leave the manufacturing centers and travel through water, air, and the ecosystem to damage animals and human beings. Steingraber and Paretsky, who may not even be acquainted, together make a powerful argument for an awareness of the consequences of our way of life. In the prologue to *Living Downstream*, Sandra Steingraber relates "a fable about a village along a river. The residents who live here, according to parable, began noticing increasing numbers of drowning people caught in the river's swift current and so went to work inventing ever more elaborate technologies to resuscitate them. So preoccupied were these heroic villagers with rescue and treatment that they never thought to look upstream to see who was pushing the victims in" (xxii). So begins her chronicle of research into the possible causes of the cancer that appeared in her bladder when she was

in college. With painstaking detail, expressed in the metaphors of a poet, she explains the mechanisms of cancer and the environmental toxins that stimulate it; their sources and the routes that the poisons follow through air, water, and land; and the effects on plants and animals in their paths. She ends with a kind of handbook on how to inform oneself about environmental carcinogens and ways to lobby against their dissemination.

The detection involved in this process covers history, including the role of World War II in the development of plastics, and the effects of DDT on birds as well as on humans that led to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. It utilizes scientific research that shows how pesticides and emissions from plastics factories influence cell growth and hence the production of malignant tumors. Steingraber combines anecdotes with chemistry, using clear analogies that show how carcinogens are created and how they work. Further, she provides example after example of how agricultural chemicals, industrial wastes, and day-to-day disposal of household products produce substances that are toxic to the environment. In a particularly moving passage, she tackles the mystery of why Beluga whales in the St. Lawrence estuary have high rates of bladder cancer when the carcinogens responsible for it are not present there. She tracks those substances back to manufacturing plants and their discharge into Lake Ontario, where eels breed. She follows the eels' migration to their spawning grounds in the Sargasso Sea and then along their return trip up the St. Lawrence, where they are a favorite, but deadly, food of Belugas.

In other passages in the book, Steingraber builds an indictment of perchloroethylene, a primary chemical used in dry cleaning, found to be present in "breast milk, cow's milk, meat, oil, fruit, fish, shellfish, and algae . . . . rainwater, seawater, river water, groundwater, and tap water" (117); it belongs to a class of solvents that "are readily absorbed across the membranes of our lungs" and accumulate in tissues that contain fat such as the breasts, liver, bone marrow, and brain (92-93). Toxins like these were indicated as major culprits in a large study of the causes of certain cancers (82). Many such poisons are also present in the air and water in heavily industrial and agricultural Tazewell County, Illinois, where she grew up. Others in her family had cancer; she was told that it must be genetic, but she was adopted.

In *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood* (2001), she describes her experiences of pregnancy and motherhood in the

context of environmental toxins that make their way to the fetus and into breast milk. Steingraber followed *Having Faith* with *Raising Elijah* (2011), which explores the twin ecological threats to children: poisons in the ecosystem and global warming. Most recently, she has lent her efforts to preventing hydraulic fracturing, called "fracking," a process which injects water and chemicals, many of them toxic, into shale to produce natural gas; she explores the dangers of this process in a series of articles in *Orion* magazine.

Like *Windy City Blues*, Paretsky's *Blood Shot* starts with an odor, a whiff of "a pungent mix of chemicals" that blows "in through the engine vents" of Warshawski's car as she drives through south Chicago (1). Paretsky's detective tackles the matter of toxic pollutants by making an unlikely beginning: Warshawski's childhood neighbor, Caroline Djiak, asks Warshawski to find her birth father; Caroline's mother, Louisa, is dying of renal failure. In her quest to find Caroline's father, Warshawski confronts Louisa's parents, who still cannot deal with the shame that their daughter was an unwed single mother and will not answer her questions. Frustrated, Warshawski begins to track down some of Louisa's male friends from her early working years. At about the same time, Caroline's coworker in a South Chicago cleanup organization, Nancy Cleghorn, asks Warshawski's advice on how to approach local politicians for permission to build a plant to recycle solvents. Then Nancy's body turns up in Dead Stick Pond (95). Warshawski continues her hunt for Caroline's father by trying to contact two men who had been her coworkers at the Xerxes chemical company. Almost immediately, Gustav Humboldt, the owner of the company, calls Warshawski to his home to explain that the two men Warshawski is tracing as potential candidates for Caroline's birth father had been fired for attempted sabotage and had sued for wrongful dismissal. Both are dead.

It turns out that the men who sued Xerxes died of illnesses caused by Xerxine, a product of the Xerxes Company. Their attorney tells Warshawski that Xerxine "is a chlorinated hydrocarbon—they add chlorine to ethylene gas usually and get a solvent. You know, the kind of thing you might clean oil from sheet metal with, or paint, or anything." Xerxine is probably not a real substance, but it is constituted like and has similar effects as the solvents that Steingraber lists as carcinogens. The lawyer adds, "if you breathe the vapors while they're manufacturing it, it doesn't do you a whole lot of good. Affects the liver and kidneys and central nervous system . . ." (132).

The men had actually sued for medical expenses but lost their case because they smoked and couldn't prove that Xerxine and not tobacco caused their illnesses. Their attorney reveals to Warshawski that before he could appeal the verdict, he had received an anonymous, intimidating phone call (136). Nancy Cleghorn also had such a call before her death. Caroline receives one threatening the life of her mother; Warshawski receives still another call threatening her own life. Both Louisa and Warshawski barely survive. Men connected to Xerxes, its insurance company, and the Mob kidnap Louisa; Warshawski barely prevents them from giving her a fatal injection. Warshawski takes her turn being dumped in Dead Stick Pond and nearly drowns. On the way to the water, she feels asphyxiated by the odor, describing it as "[t]he rank stench of putrifying grasses, mixed with the chemicals that drained into the marsh." While her would-be murderers carry her along, she continues, "I tried not to choke, tried not to think of the fish with their rotting fins, tried to suppress the well of nausea that grew with the pounding in my head as it bounced against my bearer's back" (198).

Having been rescued, Warshawski recovers and, using her detecting skills, ultimately discovers that Nancy Cleghorn's killers and her attempted murderers work for organized crime figures involved in waste disposal; they are connected to Xerxes and its cover-up of illness caused by its toxic products; and both the Mob and Xerxes are linked to the corrupt politician, Art Jurshak, whose agency provided the insurance for Xerxes. Jurshak also turns out to be Louisa Djiak's uncle and the father of her child; though he would not acknowledge his incest with his niece, he has seen to it that she received the medical coverage that other employees, such as the men who sued unsuccessfully, have not.

Steingraber did not emerge from her detection without at least one swipe of criticism from a corporate source. Although activists on behalf of the environment and cancer research have hailed *Living Downstream* as groundbreaking, a single negative review, by Jerry Berke, MD, MPH, appeared in *The New England Journal of Medicine,* calling it "an environmental polemic." When a reader (Frumkin) pointed out that Berke worked for the Grace Chemical Company, the primary source of pollution in Woburn, Massachusetts (setting of *A Civil Action*), the *Journal*'s book review editor apologized (Schwartz).

Steingraber has deep attachment to her roots in central Illinois. She begins and ends *Living Downstream* with references to the prairie that it once was. She records that her husband, an artist, is impressed by its beauty, as she is, too, but she also sees how it has been profoundly changed not only by the agriculture that replaced the native grasses, but by the chemicals that have "trespassed into our air, food, water and soil" (2). At the end, she cherishes the remnants that once covered it, even the "nonnative invading species" that include "Queen Anne's lace, ox-eye daisy, chicory, foxtail, goat's beard, teasel," and says, "I keep a few stalks [of teasel] near my desk to remind me of home." She ends the first edition, "I look at the brown, spiny flowers and then out the window at the city I live in. Dust. Soil. Air. What I see are the contours of home" (272). As she meditates on the charm of the nonnative species, she reminds us of parallel circumstances, that is, of how our lifestyles have been improved by substances—herbicides, pesticides, plastics, and solvents, that in their manufacture and use also endanger our health.

Paretsky's feelings about Chicago are ambivalent, as well. She hates the corruption and pollution symbolized by Dead Stick Pond that damage the city. If she didn't love Chicago for its richness of art (*Killing Orders* 52) and "its efforts at civic improvement" (Bakerman 121) in which she has taken part since her initial stay in 1966, she wouldn't tackle its enemies with such vigor. Like Steingraber, she delights in the details of the place where she lives: its architecture, restaurants, neighborhood scenes, odd characters, and acts of everyday heroism that characterize Warshawski and her friends.

Both writers, via separate paths, show that certain solvents produced by chemical companies, improperly or illegally dumped into the environment, are associated with a variety of serious illnesses, including cancer. Responsibility lies not only with the manufacturers, but also with political and other organizations, as Paretsky points out, and with consumers, as Steingraber makes clear. Steingraber directs her readers to find or lobby for different, safer substances than the toxic solvents. Paretsky, less overtly but with equal effect, shows how various elements of society encourage each other in corrupt and dangerous processes. Together they illuminate issues that need environmental action in the city, in the country, and in the world.

Central Michigan University

WORKS CITED

Bakerman, Jane S. "Living 'Openly and with Dignity': Sara Paretsky's New-Boiled Feminist Fiction." *MidAmerica* 12 (1985): 120-35.

Berke, Jerry H. Rev. of *Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment,* by Sandra Steingraber. *The New England Journal of Medicine* 337.21 (20 Nov. 1997): 1562.

Clay, Jason W., Sandra Steingraber, and Peter Niggli. *The Spoils of Famine: Ethiopian Famine Policy and Peasant Agriculture*. Cultural Survival Report 25. Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, 1988.

Dayton, Tim. "New Maps of Chicago: Sara Paretsky's *Blood Shot*." *Clues: A Journal of Detection* 25.2 (Winter 2007): 65-77.

Dempsey, Peter. "Sara Paretsky." *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Mystery and Detective Writers*. Vol. 306. 2005.

Frumkin, Howard. Letter. *The New England Journal of Medicine* 338.4 (22 Jan. 1998): 268.

Kinsman, Margaret. "A Question of Visibility: Paretsky and Chicago." *Women Times Three*. Ed. Kathleen Gregory Klein. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State UP, 1995. 15-27.

Paretsky, Sara. *Blacklist*. NY: Putnam, 2003.

—. *Blood Shot*. NY: Delacourte, 1988.

—. *Breakdown*. NY: Putnam, 2012.

—. *Fire Sale*. NY: Signet, 2005.

—. *Guardian Angel*. NY: 1992.

—. *Hard Time*. NY: Dell, 1999.

—. *Indemnity Only*. NY: Dell, 1982, 1990.

—. *Killing Orders*. NY: Morrow, 1985.

—. *Tunnel Vision*. NY: Dell, 1994.

—. *Windy City Blues*. NY: Dell, 1995.

—. *Writing in an Age of Silence*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2007.

—. "Paretsky, Sara." Interview by Jean W. Ross. *Contemporary Authors*. Vol. 129. 1990. 334-38.

Stasio, Marilyn. "The Firebrand Grits Her Teeth." Rev. of *Blood Shot*, by Sara Paretsky. *The New York Times Book Review* 9 Oct. 1988: 22.

Steingraber, Sandra, and Judith Hurley. *Brazil's Debt and Deforestation—A Global Warning*. Oakland, CA: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1990.

Steingraber, Sandra. "The Fracking of Rachel Carson." *Orion Magazine* 31.5 (Sept/Oct. 2012): 14-23.

—. *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2001.

—. *Living Downstream: A Scientist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment*. 1997. Second ed. NY: Random House Vintage, 1998.

—. *Post-Diagnosis*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1995.

—. *Raising Elijah: Protecting our Children in an Age of Environmental Crisis*. Philadelphia: Perseus, 2011.

—. "The Whole Fracking Enchilada." *Orion Magazine* 29.5 (Sept/Oct. 2010): 14-15.

Schwartz, Robert S. Letter. *The New England Journal of Medicine* 338.4 (22 Jan. 1998): 268.

Trembley, Elizabeth A. "Sara Paretsky (1947-)." *Great Women Mystery Writers: Classic to Contemporary*. Ed. Kathleen Gregory Klein. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1994. 266-69.

CHICAGO'S RED ROVER AND ABSINTHE AND ZYGOTE: URBAN SPACE AND THE POLITICS OF THE READING SERIES

TOBY ALTMAN

INTRODUCTION

"I am proposing that we look at the poetry reading not as a secondary extension of 'prior' written texts but as its own medium. What, then, are the characteristics specific to this medium and what can it do that other live performance media—instrumental music, song and opera, theater—cannot?" (Bernstein 10). Since Charles Bernstein posed this question in his introduction to *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (1988), a subfield of poetics has developed that is dedicated to describing the dynamics of poetry in performance. Peter Middleton, for instance, attempts to develop an aesthetics of the poetry reading, detailing the complicated interactions which occur between audience, performer, and the tenuous, unstable spaces in which poetry is read.[1]

Daniel Kane takes a historical approach, tracing the pre-eminence of the poetry reading in contemporary poetry to a foundational set of readings in New York during the 1960s, while Lorenzo Thomas emphasizes the dependence of the contemporary poetry reading on African American oral traditions from the nineteenth century.[2] Johanna Drucker applies the vocabularies of performance to visual texts, naturalizing performance as an element of textuality itself.[3] Eric Baus incubates tools for describing the technologies with which such performances are recorded, studied, and archived on the internet.[4] Lesley Wheeler calls attention to the competing varieties of oral performance within contemporary poetry, contrasting the aesthetics of "academic" and "slam" readings.[5]

By treating oral performance as an element of a poem's aesthetics and politics—rather than an appendix to its life on the page—these critics implicitly expand what counts as a poem. No longer simply a chunk of text, marked by recognizable rhetorical tropes, the poem expands to include the mechanisms of circulation through which it reaches and interacts with its audience—whether of readers or listeners. As Peter Middleton argues,

> Within small communities of readers, the specially controlled environment of the classroom, or a network of devoted scholars, the reading of a poem can . . . appear . . . to be a singular artifice out of which meaning can be distilled by patient exegesis, relying on the elucidation of reference, the analysis of rhetoric, and the investigation of its contingent biography and history. For many purposes this idealized model of reception works fine. It doesn't work so well for the study of contemporary poetry. These poems produce their meanings across networks of readers, performance, intertexts, and visual presentation, meanings that are not usually locatable in a singular, solitary encounter between one printed manifestation of the text and one sensitive reader (Middleton xii).

A stable, hierarchical relationship between author, text, and reader can be produced only through an act of mystification—a studied reduction of the poem to its textual form. In such a reduction, we lose the poem's diverse ecology, the rich array of environments through which it circulates. Despite the rich variety of approaches which have been developed to address the oral distribution of poetry, critics have neglected a central fact of poetry's oral performance in contemporary American literature. Poetry readings occur largely in the context of established reading series. These regularly scheduled events are curated by a small group, located in a regular venue, and attended by a regular audience. Such series become institutions within their poetic communities, offering regular sites for poets—and their ideas—to meet. As David Buuck argues,

> Face-to-face sociality is often the locus of poetic activity (as against the romantic model of the solitary genius) and, it could be argued, the site of (often booze-soaked) laboratories of the new(s). *Perhaps* this is in part because, at least in the US, poetry does not really have a visible and healthy habitus among non-writers in our culture (outside of the academy); it thrives best in the (socialized/specialized) spaces between its believers, who compose not only the 'poems' themselves

> but also the collectively . . . built contexts in which the work can live . . . . (Buuck "A Performative Turn?")

The construction of such socialized/specialized spaces through the iterative staging of poetry readings has, so far, been ignored. Critics treat the reading series as an organizational principle, a matter of logistics, rather than aesthetics or politics. But what happens to the complicated, and often collaborative, relationships between poet, audience and space when they are regularized, repeated on a monthly basis, and naturalized as a normal form of poetic circulation? This essay attempts an initial inquiry into the politics and the aesthetics of the reading series. I will begin by presenting a brief and partial history of the reading series. My aim is not to exhaustively document the rise of the reading series as a major form of poetic circulation—a much larger labor than I intend here. Rather, I wish to relate the aesthetics of the reading series as it is now routinely practiced to its history. If the reading series emerges historically as a radical response to the hierarchal structures of mid-century American writing, its domestication, its naturalization as a form of poetic circulation, betrays that radical potential. The reading series has become, I will argue, a blank and natural frame for the circulation of poetry. In the closing section of this paper, I will examine two Chicago-based reading series, the Red Rover and Absinthe and Zygote series, which strive to break with the aesthetics of the reading series—and, in so doing, to critique and reformulate the hierarchical structures which its current configurations both produce and conceal.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE READING SERIES

In late 2012, the popular literary blog LitBridge released a list of the "Ten Best Reading Series in the Midwest." The editors note in their introduction to the list that " . . . we love to hear writers read. We think participating in readings is an integral part of the writing experience that is irreplaceable. We also think that we should reward and celebrate those writing series that are consistently introducing dynamic voices to their communities" (LitBridge). Despite their apparent zeal for classification, the editors do not provide further evidence of their editorial procedures; nor do they define what constitutes a reading series. Instead, they provide a bare itinerary: the names of ten series, their home cities, and a few poets who've read there. For example: "The Big Big Mess Reading Series Akron, OH;

Past Readers: Nick Courtright—Punchline; Leslie McIlroy—Rare Space; James Tadd Adcox—The Map of the System of Human Knowledge" (http://bigbigmess.tumblr.com/). Of course, the editors do not aim to produce a theoretical elaboration of what constitutes a reading series—their imperatives are frankly empirical. But this empiricism relies on the assumption that the reading series does not require theoretical investigation: that it is a set form, routine and relatively fixed, that its customs and principles are already legible. These customs will be familiar to anyone who has sat through a poetry reading: a group of three or four poets, reading in a space—whether recreational or academic—temporarily converted for the purpose but used regularly (say, every month) for a reading. Lesley Wheeler describes these conventions:

> The audience is typically seated in orderly rows and behaves quietly. The ritual also prescribes a podium, a glass or bottle of water, and a microphone. The room is lit as a classroom would be, and in fact it may be a classroom. The speaker's costume is some variation on the humanist professor's—dark or neutral colors, probably rumpled. The men have open collars and the women wear interesting jewelry. The hair might be a little longer or weirder than what one sees at a suburban office park, but not by much. (Wheeler 128)

The gradual drift of Wheeler's attention away from the rituals of the poetry reading and toward the bodies of the performers and the audience is paradigmatic and instructive. The most interesting thing about a poetry reading is often the poets' bodies—their style, their habits and mannerisms—rather than the tenuous relationship which the reading establishes between poetry and physical space. Peter Middleton argues that "audience and poet collaborate in the performance of the poem"— a collaboration which, he argues, regularizes the relationship between the poetry reading and the space in which it occurs (Middleton 91-2). The distractions introduced by reading in space, such as the sounds of traffic or noise at the bar "are stage villains representing the resistant conditions of the contemporary culture in the drama of poetry's tentative appearance and overcoming of inertia and opposition, when space, time, and poetry collude to produce a temporary dream of triumph for the power of poetry over the noise, routine, and intrusions of everyday life each time a poetry reading is held" (Middleton 31).

The aesthetic experience of a poetry reading is not confined to the sounds of the language. It includes the distractions of the space, the difficult and uncertain conditions under which poetry is performed. The "meaning" of the performance is a collaborative and aleatoric production. Neither the author nor the space nor the audience dominates; rather, the friction and collision of all three produce a contingent and fleeting unity. However, Middleton does not consider the effect of regularly staging poetry readings in the same spaces. This iterative staging gradually neutralizes the role of space in the poetry reading: no longer an active and unpredictable force with which audience and poet must wrestle, the space of the reading becomes regular, natural, and uninteresting. The audience's attention is gradually directed elsewhere—away from the bare settings, the podium and water bottle, and toward the poet's body with a specular, voyeuristic intensity.

Over the course of the last half century, such readings have become central to the communal life of American poetry: they offer intimate opportunity for poets to circulate their work. However, as the reading series has become more and more central to American poetry, it has also become more and more natural: casually legible and therefore casually untheorized. The relations between an audience and a poet's body, a reading and the space it occupies, are regularly and uncritically reproduced. How did the reading series become such a natural form of poetic circulation? Public readings have been integral to North American literary culture since the mid-nineteenth century, when major figures such as Charles Dickens and Walt Whitman began to give extended reading tours.[6] As Peter Middleton notes, such reading tours were an exception to the ordinary regimes of literary production and circulation: "Famous poets of the premodernist era, like other well-known writers, did in a few cases go on speaking tours in the past (Dickens and Whitman are familiar examples), but these have been reasonably exceptional, and even the major English language poets of the early part of the twentieth century did not spend their time on reading tours . . ." (Middleton 63). These readings may be said to establish a system in which the act of reading is a privilege, acquired through literary fame and success. They also frame the act of public reading as an isolated, occasional event. By the mid-1950s, this mode of organizing public readings had become widespread—and a mechanism through which

the dominant literary culture asserted its dominance. As John Ashbery writes,

> In 1963, when I returned from Paris where I had been living for five years, I wasn't aware that anyone was reading my poetry. When I left, poetry readings were solemn and official events given by elder statespersons of poetry, like Auden or Eliot and Marianne Moore. Then the 'Beat revolution' happened to take place while I was away, and when I got back—although I wasn't aware of it—everyone was giving poetry readings everywhere. I was astonished at being asked to give one, until I realized I was one of about a hundred poets one could have heard that night in New York. (quoted in Kane xcvii)[7]

Prior to the Beat revolution, the poetry reading was an "official event": licensed, limited to a select group, and usually hosted in a decorous university setting. These readings tended to emphasize the distinction between audience and poet by elevating the poet and sequestering him or her behind a lectern. These readings thus served to express and reinforce hierarchies within poetry: restricted to the most accomplished poets, the privilege to give a reading was itself an expression of substantial privilege.

Ashbery's letter documents a pronounced shift in the organization of public readings that occurred during his Parisian absence. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the poetry reading becomes ubiquitous, routine, and democratically open to poets of all skill and accomplishment. Peter Middleton argues, with Ashbery, that this newly democratic spirit derives from the early readings staged by the Beat poets in New York and San Francisco (and spread through their wide peregrinations across the continent).[8] In particular, he notes, the first reading of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl,* on October 13, 1955, at Six Gallery, a recently converted garage in San Francisco, "seems to have unintentionally played an inaugural role in the proliferation of contemporary poetry readings"—a foundational moment which provides a blueprint for future readings (Middleton 63):

> How, if at all, was [the poetry reading] transformed by Ginsberg's reading? To begin with, the semantic repertoire of the written text was extended by its performance . . . : by the location of the poem in a particular place within a defined ritual, by the force of the poet's presence as he read, by the addition of sound to the act of reception, and by the enfolding intersubjective drama generated as the lines were spoken. The author read aloud work conceived and written else-

> where, giving special salience to the sound of the language, in surroundings temporarily borrowed as a performance space for poetry, to an audience who experienced some common purposes partially articulated through the poetry itself. (Middleton 63-4)

Much of Ginsberg's reading would've been familiar from—and analogous to—the academic readings of his day: the central presence of the poet's voice and body; the dramatic fiction that the poet's lines are the spontaneous eruption of powerful feeling. However, if previous readings emphasized and reinforced the distinction between author and audience, Ginsberg's reading folds the two together in a common intersubjective drama, each party co-constituting the poem. Ginsberg's reading inaugurates the poetry reading as a form of collaborative subjectivity.

This collaborative subjectivity is partially produced through the force of Ginsberg's reading, but it also owes a great deal to the curation of the reading. Located in a converted garage, rather than a university library or lecture hall, the very inappropriateness of the space demands of the audience an act of imaginative generosity, a willingness to mentally reframe the space as a space for art. As Peter Middleton argues, "When a poem is read aloud at a poetry reading, an intersubjective network arises that can become an intrinsic element of the meaning of the poem" (Middleton 93). The precise character of this intersubjective network—of the collaborative relation between poet and audience—will depend on the circumstances of their encounter: that is, the character and configuration of the space. If the hierarchical, academic readings of the mid-1950s attempted to prescribe certain relations between reader and poet by policing the spaces in which they occur, Ginsberg's reading breaks politically and aesthetically from this model by restaging the poetry reading in a temporary and inappropriate space, polemically distant from the academic lecture hall.

In this foundational moment, space is therefore not merely the frame of the poetry reading, but also a mechanism for producing aesthetic and political dissent. What happens, however, when this relation to space is regularized? When readings are staged serially in the same gallery or café? The New York School poets, a large and aesthetically irregular group of poets working in the early 1960s on New York's Lower East Side, adopted and extended the radical approach of the Beat poets, developing a serial form of the poetry reading.

They staged open readings, inviting a wide range of poets—few with major publications or institutional recognition. Unlike the isolated and ad hoc events staged by the Beats, however, these readings were staged in regular and recognizable locations and became the anchors for the community of poets working and living in the neighborhood. The names of these early series are themselves indicative of their priorities: Les Deux Mégots; Le Metro. The New York School poets named their series after the coffee shops and baskethouses where the readings were located: an expression of neighborhood solidarity and, more importantly, an assertion of a relatively stable relation between the poetry reading, its immediate setting, and its position within urban space. As Daniel Kane argues in his history of these early New York School readings, this relationship between reading and neighborhood allowed the reading to participate in the reconstruction of the space that surrounded it:

> Increasing inroads into the neighborhood were being made by predominantly white bohemians, helping to transform the area both culturally and semantically . . . . Le Metro played a role in the transformation of what had formerly been a working-class neighborhood with an artistic underground. As Le Metro . . . promoted its poets on a far larger scale than the earlier Deux Mégots series had, so the counterculture as a whole began to make its presence felt in the Lower East Side much more overtly than it had previously . . . . Le Metro served as a kind of community center where poets attached to this scene could trade information crucial to disseminating news about their subculture within a subculture . . . . (Kane 44)

The organization of the poetry reading into a serial form, with a relatively stable relation to neighborhood space, allows the reading series to become a nexus of communal life, a point of contact for poets, poems, and ideas. However, it also gives the reading power to reshape the urban space around it, a process which we might call now gentrification. If the poetry reading, as inaugurated by Ginsburg, thrives in the unstable relation between the art and its spaces, the serialization characteristic of the reading series acts to domesticate and discipline space. Here, the reading series acts *as* urban space: an all-too-faithful mirror of urban racial and economic transformations. The poetry presented at such events may attempt to critique and reshape the politics of race, class, and gentrification. But, the fact and

method of its distribution reinforces and contributes to the redistribution of urban spaces.

THE READING SERIES IN/AS/AGAINST SPACE

Since the mid-1960s, the model developed by the New York School has come to dominate the logistics of the poetry reading: disciplining and limiting the routine and acceptable forms of the reading series itself. In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, similar series spread across the country, and series started by the New York School poets developed within New York into respected and longstanding institutions, like the Poetry Project.[9] Alternate traditions also sprang up—for instance, the feminist salons of the 1970s and the poetry slams of the late 1980s and 1990s.[10] However, even these alternatives largely follow the regularity and ritual of the poetry reading—for instance, the Uptown Poetry Slam has been hosted by Marc Smith weekly at the Green Mill in Chicago since the mid-1980s, and has become a tourist attraction in an otherwise gritty neighborhood. As it becomes the dominant, routine model for organizing readings, this style of reading series loses its disruptive novelty and radical force. No longer a break with the hierarchical prerogatives of the poetry community, the reading series has become part of that community's business, and an expression of its hierarchies: giving a reading at the Poetry Project, for example, is now a symbol of substantial cachet and success.

As the form of the reading series is regularized, so, too, its relation to space ossifies, limiting the intersubjective network between poet and audience and freezing it in a particular form. However, as Lorenzo Thomas notes,

> The poetry reading has a long history as a social occasion for *aficionados* and has often been considered a marginalized activity by those who participate. Thousands of people may, in fact, participate in reading circles or in poetry workshops that meet weekly at branch libraries or in members' homes, but none of them thinks that their chosen leisure activity carries the same level of societal acceptance as, say, bowling. Most of these people, of course, would be disappointed if it did. (Thomas 189)

Despite the ossification of its form, the poetry reading remains for poets and audiences alike a protected space for aesthetic play and political resistance. The challenge, for scholars and curators alike, will be to expand and disrupt the logistics of the reading series as it

currently stands—for the sake of poetry reading's status as a space of aesthetic and political play. Here I turn to an extended consideration of two experimental reading series based in Chicago—the Red Rover series and the Absinthe and Zygote series. Both attempt to critique and reformulate the routines and aesthetics of the reading series. Such interventions allow the curators of these series to use the reading series *against* the space of the reading series, re-aestheticizing it in order to politicize it. I examine their practices as case studies, preliminary inquiries into reformulating and radicalizing the politics of circulating poetry.

Founded in 2005 by Amina Cain and Jennifer Karmin, the Red Rover series advertizes itself as "readings that play with reading." Each Red Rover reading is collaboratively curated with the featured poets, a method designed to calibrate the reading to their aesthetics and politics—and to resist radically the routines of the reading series. As Laura Goldstein, one of the current curators, argues in an interview with *Poets and Writers*, "I really think that our series looks at all the elements of a typical series and tries to experiment with them in order to engage an audience with being as aware as possible about what they are experiencing. How are the words presented? How do I relate to the other readers tonight? How can I incorporate the space? How can I incorporate the audience?" ("Jennifer Karmin on Collaborative Process").

This curatorial playfulness can be wielded as an ironic form of institutional critique. For example, as part of the 2012 AWP conference, the premiere professional conference for poets working in the academy, Red Rover staged a reading with sixty poets reading simultaneously in the same space. Cacophony was, of course, the result—and a splintering of the audience. Little groups of friends gathered around each poet, while the majority of the audience slumped exhausted against the wall. The reading recapitulated the cliqueishness of the conference itself and its exhausting polyphony of readings and voices. As it recapitulated the form and affect of the conference, it also aestheticized it, making it available for reflection and critique. Here the reading series acts not only as a mechanism for the institutionalized distribution of poetry, but also as a critique of the professionalized mechanisms of that distribution.

The success of Red Rover's intervention into the manic and exhausting networking of AWP relied, of course, on the varied participation of its audience. The character and substance of the event

differed radically for each audience member, depending on which poets she chose to hear and how she positioned herself within the physical space of the reading. The reading may be described as collaborative in a structural sense. Poets and audience did not produce a shared experience, a collective, intersubjective web; rather, they produced a space together, a space within which islands of shared experience became possible. As David Emanuel writes, in a critical appraisal of an early Red Rover experiment, Red Rover demands that its audience produce the reading: "The best Red Rover experiments happen when the artists involved approach ready not only to push limits of what a reading is but also to collaborate with the curators in a situation where the work presented will be available to response, and that response in turn will form part of the performance, which is the reading . . ." (Emanuel, "Reading is (Not) Performance"). Emanuel has in mind here an explicit form of collaboration, in which the audience is unexpectedly swept into the performance. However innovative and exciting, these moments of explicit collaboration are underwritten by a quieter and more fundamental collaborative act: the contingent and unsteady construction of a space for poetry. By sharing the responsibility for constructing that space with the poets, rather than relying on a preceding set of spatial logistics and procedures, Red Rover makes itself contingent and unreliable, a space of possibilities that must be coordinated and construed in a labor shared by curators, poets, and audience.

But is this kind of ironic, aesthetic play capable of critiquing the imbrication of the reading series in the inequities of urban space? Red Rover currently hosts its readings in the Outer Space Gallery in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood—an area that gentrified heavily in the 1990s and is now becoming a hip but firmly upper-middle class neighborhood. As a public space within this tidal wave of redevelopment, as a communal gathering place within an increasingly corporate and privatized urban area, Red Rover acts as a counterweight, a commons, a space of retreat and resistance. Importantly, the series is not held in a commercial space, like a coffee shop or bar, but rather in a communal studio, which opens itself regularly to dancers, poets and actors. The series does not act as an advertisement, either for a business or a neighborhood; rather, it works as a reminder of the possibility of noncommercial communal acts. The collaborative, democratic character of these communal acts further serves as a reminder of the power both audience and poets possess over their

environment, within and without the reading. By giving its audience the power to collaboratively shape and construct a political space within the reading, Red Rover encourages them to imagine similar participatory acts outside of it.

Red Rover is firmly rooted within Wicker Park; indeed, its tension with its surroundings is the source of some of its political potential. In this, Red Rover may be said to resemble less adventurous reading series, with their uncritical confinement to a single space; the crucial difference, however, is that Red Rover maintains a politicized and critical relation to its space. Absinthe and Zygote, however, attempts to free the reading series from this regular relation to space, by staging each of its events in unique and often unsuitable spaces. Full disclosure: I am one of the founders and curators of the Absinthe and Zygote series, along with the poet Anne Shaw, and I designed several of the interventions discussed below. This essay, therefore, occupies a space between an artist talk and an academic paper. I am treating it as an opportunity to theorize practices that are otherwise ephemeral—intentionally so. By interrogating and disrupting the routines of the reading series, our events are designed to produce chance encounters, strange coincidence, and improvisatory possibility by interrogating and disrupting the routines of the reading series. For instance, we held a reading in total darkness: the poets read through night-vision goggles. In April of 2013, we held a reading in a bank of elevators, with four poets reading simultaneously in separate elevators; and in October of 2013, a reading where poets were asked not to use their voices. Absinthe and Zygote is rhizomatic and protean: each time we convene the series, the format and the location radically shift. Consequently, the aesthetics of the series are also consistently in flux—our events do not mark the iteration of a definite idea, but the strategic and disruptive exploration of possibility.

The question remains whether such aesthetic play manages to reformulate the politics of the reading series or simply recapitulates them under an aestheticized veil. However, because of the provisional nature of the series, it is impossible to generalize about its politics. Some events are more successfully political than others, and no event stages the same political intervention. Here, I will focus on a reading staged in the fall of 2012 on the El, Chicago's vast system of light-rail trains. Both affordable and relatively accessible, the El is one of the few truly public spaces in the city: a place where diverse populations regularly interact, observe and, for the most part, ignore

each other. The El is thus an implicitly political space, where race, gender, and class differences are negotiated. However, the dominant mode of interaction on the El is polite indifference—an indifference often fostered through textuality. On a packed El car, a book (of poems) can serve as a screen, a shield against difference. The aim of the Absinthe and Zygote reading was to disrupt this polite indifference, to transform the El from an implicitly to an explicitly political space, through the anarchic and unannounced entrance of poetry. We boarded a south-bound Red Line train at the Loyola stop in Rogers Park and travelled across the city to the Logan Square Blue Line stop with three poets—Matthias Regan, Adam Weg, and Jennifer Karmin—reading through the journey.[11]

The event shifted several key parameters of the reading series: instead of being located *in* a space, it was located *across* a space. Instead of reinforcing the boundaries of neighborhoods and solidifying their particular character as artistic hot spots, the reading used poetry as a way to violate and transgress the boundaries of neighborhoods. (Here the reading situated itself *against* urban space, defying the imperatives and divisions which organize urban space). Finally, the train reading violated the boundary between artist and audience, which most reading series enforce. Instead of being isolated behind a microphone or a lectern, the poets stood in a knot of other passengers. The poets contended with the dull chatter of train travel, the commentary and confusion of people who found themselves in the middle of the performance, and the noise of the train—at times shouting to make themselves heard, at times inaudible. If the reading is, in general, a collaborative negotiation between audience, poet, and space, this reading added a dynamic instability to the negotiation. As the poets read, the audience and the space shifted around them. The collaborative process of building a space for poetry was both perpetually in motion and perpetually undergoing renewal as people got off and on the train, as we descended into the tunnels that run beneath the loop, and as we changed to the Blue Line.

The poets responded to this pressure by developing a set of improvisatory reading strategies. Matthias Regan, for instance, began the reading by announcing to the car, "We're here as part of a new city program. The mayor thought it would be a good idea to have poetry on the El on Friday nights as a way to bring culture into the city"—a lie which brilliantly diagnosed the peculiar character of the El as a public space: at once open to all and yet policed and deter-

mined in its uses by structures of governmental power. Regan's lie staged his reading (and the reading in general) as a contest with that power: the production of collaborative space through poetry became an experiment in the viability of communal, nongovernmental organizations of the space. During Jennifer Karmin's performance of *4000 Words, 4000 Dead*—a conceptual poem which collates and appropriates language about the Iraq War from a wide group of Karmin's peers—the newly experimental space of the El car opened into political discord (Karmin 2012). During her performance, a drunk man on the other side of the car began interrupting Karmin's performance, heckling her with questions like, "Do you have a college degree?" and demanding, "Tell us a cowboy story!" Karmin turned to the man and began reading exclusively to him, answering his questions with lines from her poem. If her poem, fully assembled from other people's language, is implicitly dialogic in its construction, performance threatens that dialogism, reducing the play of languages to a single voice and a single body.[12] The irruption of the drunk man's voice into her poem acted to restore and accentuate the dialogism—and hence the politics—of her poem. The frame supplied by the reading provided an opportunity for a poem with political content to become political, dialogic, and debated in its moment of circulation. Both of these improvisatory interventions were unplanned and unorchestrated by the curators. Indeed, we imagine our role as that of promoting unexpected political eventualities such as the two described above. We approach our readings without a clear agenda, trusting instead in the contingent and improvisatory brilliance produced by audiences and poets in uncertain (and often unfriendly) circumstances.

By reconfiguring the reading series's stable relation with space, we sought to produce a space of political possibility and to contest the relation between poetry reading and urban space—a relation, as we saw in the case of the New York School poets, that often contributes to gentrification and its attendant injustices. This is not to say that Absinthe and Zygote has perfected aesthetic responses to urban racial injustice. As the writer James Tadd Adcox pointed out after a recent guerrilla reading we staged in a laundromat, the possibility of staging (and getting away with) such interventions in public space depends on a measure of class and race privilege. Our readings are, in a sense, an expression of the unjust ability of middle-class white people to misbehave in public without consequence. However, just

as this critique may be, Absinthe and Zygote's interventions into public space also act as an incitement to argument. They push poets to consider their place in urban racial and economic hierarchies, to consider their art in terms of those hierarchies, and most importantly, to engage critically with the reading series as an aesthetically and ideologically pliable form which can be shaped—and reshaped—according to their needs. Absinthe and Zygote (and Red Rover too) thus present a renewed model of the reading series, open to both critique and emulation. Explicitly collaborative and richly in negotiation with space, both imagine the reading series as a space of play and of critique rather than a fossilized form.

The formally disruptive practices of Absinthe and Zygote and Red Rover should also act as an incitement to scholars of poetics—a challenge to fully and richly theorize the aesthetics and politics of the reading series. I have focused here on the reading series's disciplinary relation to urban space: the way it participates in the gentrification of neighborhoods. But this focus on space forecloses a serious engagement with, for instance, the gender politics of the reading series. What structures of gendered power are implicit in the reading series's insistence on displaying the bodies of poets? How do imperatives of class, race, and sexuality act on the bodies of poets as they present their work? How does the regularization of space that occurs at most reading series contribute to the fetishization of poets' bodies? A full theory of the reading series must be intersectional, capaciously engaged with the logistics of body, space, sound, light, and language. Further, a full theory of the reading series must recognize the equivocal power the reading series possesses. Although the reading series emerged as an aesthetic and political intervention in the hierarchical and sterilized academic readings of the 1940s and '50s, it has become itself sterile and academic: a set of recognizable routines which seem natural, so much so that they obscure their own aesthetics and politics. These aesthetics and politics should be thoroughly investigated. Where they prove to be reactionary and oppressive, they should be interrogated, satirized, and contravened.

Northwestern University

NOTES

[1]See Peter Middleton. *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry*. 28-59. I will address Middleton's arguments in greater detail below. In addition, see Nick Moudry's critique of Middleton in *Jacket2*, "Book History and the

Poetry Reading," in which he argues, "Critics like Middleton rarely analyze actual poetry readings, and they even less frequently include the experience of audience members to provide a glimpse of what the experience means to them."

[2]See Daniel Kane. *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, 27-59. Also see Lorenzo Thomas. *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, 191-4.

[3]See Johanna Drucker. "Visual Performance of the Poetic Text" in *Close Listening*, 131-162.

[4]See Eric Baus. "Granular Vocabularies: Poetics and Recorded Sound." Indeed, Baus may be said to develop language for reading the digitality of the poetry reading, in its recirculation as recorded sound. He attends not only to the language on the recordings—the readings themselves, the poet's banter with the audience—but to the conditions of the recordings themselves: tape hiss, digital hiccups, etc.

[5] See Lesley Wheeler. "Voice Activated: Contemporary Academic Poetry Readings and the National Poetry Slam" in *Voicing American Poetry*, 127-164. This list of recent developments is necessarily partial—for instance, it excludes a substantial body of criticism which calls into question the value of the poetry reading. See, for instance, David Groff. "The Peril of the Poetry Reading: The Page versus the Performance." This debate about the merits of the poetry reading largely misses the point. The poetry reading is a major form of poetic circulation, and it will continue to be for the foreseeable future. The question should be how to adapt and appropriate the form for innovative and disruptive uses.

[6]Lorenzo Thomas has documented the central role that the public reading played in the development of African American literary culture—particularly, the development of popular verse. A fuller account of the history of the public reading would excavate the role African American culture played in the development of the reading series. Thomas's article is itself an important contribution to this question; he argues that the close proximity between Beat poets and African American culture led to the development of an oral poetics within the Beat movement: "Although journalists described the movement as apolitical, demanding the freedom to pursue interracial relationships (including romances) was clearly part of Beat nonconformity . . . The Beats were also interested in restructuring the poetry reading as something other than a genteel diversion" (Thomas 197-8).

[7]The quotation is from a personal correspondence between Ashbery and Kane.

[8]However, Lesley Wheeler notes that, at the same time, establishment organization like the Poetry Center at San Francisco State University, the Academy of American Poets and the Poetry Center of the Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association in New York began encouraging and curating poetry readings. This suggests that the late 1950s witnessed a groundswell of interest in and support for a broadened access to the poetry reading across the period's aesthetic divides. The connections between such establishment initiatives and the provocations of the Beat poets have not been adequately investigated (see Wheeler 131-33).

[9]To my knowledge a general history of the spread of the reading series out of New York (and San Francisco) and into the rest of the country has yet to be written. It seems relatively clear, however, that the form inaugurated by the Beats and the New York School has been widely imitated throughout the country. The precise dynamics of this imitation, and the chains of influence in late twentieth century poetic culture should be more thoroughly studied.

[10]For a fuller account of these phenomena, see (Wheeler 127-63) and (Hoffman 199-229).

[11]During a panel discussion of an earlier version of this paper at the Midwest Modern Language Association's 2013 annual conference in Milwaukee, an audience member argued that the particular geography of the city traversed during the reading maintained the racial contours of Chicago's urban space: why not travel south on the red line into the predominantly black South Side? Why remain on the largely white and gentrified North Side? The point is well taken—and Anne and I have begun considering a repeat event which would

travel to 95th Street, the southern terminus on the red line. However, the objection partially misses the original and framing intention of the reading. Anne and I observed that a large number, perhaps a majority, of the poets in Chicago lived on the far North Side, commuting up to an hour to attend readings in Wicker Park and Logan Square, where the vast majority of the city's reading series are held. Our reading attempted to reclaim this movement, staging it as a space for poetry, rather than a space antecedent to poetry—and, in so doing, to both critique and consider the dynamics of that movement.

[12]Karmin regularly employs strategies adapted from performance art to address this challenge—for instance, requesting multiple poets to read from the poem (often simultaneously). At the Absinthe and Zygote reading, however, she was reading alone.

WORKS CITED

Baus, Eric. "Granular Vocabularies: Poetics and Recorded Sound." *SWP Talk Blog*. 3 Jan. 2014. Web.

Bernstein, Charles, ed. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. NY: Oxford UP, 1998.

Buuck, David. "A Performative Turn?" *Jacket2*. 14 Feb. 2013. 3 January 2014. Web.

Drucker, Johanna. "Visual Performance of the Poetic Text." in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed* Word. Ed. Charles Bernstein. NY: Oxford UP, 1998.

Emanuel, David. "Reading is (Not) Performance." *How2*. 3.3. 3 Jan. 2014. Web.

Groff, David. "The Peril of the Poetry Reading: The Page versus the Performance." *poets.org*. The Academy of American Poets. 3 July 2014. Web.

Hoffman, Tyler. *American Poetry in Performance: from Walt Whitman to Hip Hop*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2011.

Jackson, Virginia. *Dickinson's Misery*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.

Kane, Daniel. *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003.

Karmin, Jennifer. *4000 Words, 4000 Dead & Revolutionary Optimism, An American Elegy: 2006-2012*. Chicago: Sona Books, 2012.

"Jennifer Karmin on Collaborative Process: Red Rover Series & Black Took Collective." *Readings and Workshops Blog*. Poets and Writers. 8 Mar. 2013. 3 Jan. 2014. Web.

Middleton, Peter. *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2005.

Moudry, Nick. "Book History and the Poetry Reading." *Jacket2*. 19 Feb. 2013. 3 Jan. 2014. Web.

"Ten Best Reading Series in the Midwest." *LitBridge*. 27 Nov. 2012. 3 Jan. 2014. Web.

Thomas, Lorenzo. "Neon Griot: The Functional Role of Poetry Readings." *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2000.

Wheeler, Lesely. *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2008.

Dictionary of Midwestern Literature Volume 2

Dimensions of the Midwestern Literary Imagination
Edited by Philip A. Greasley

A project of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

The Midwest is often thought of as the most American of the nation's regions. Its literature and culture reflect its locales, landforms, and history while remaining vibrant, evolving entities that partake fully of national and international trends. Midwestern literature and culture are sophisticated, complex amalgams marked by diversity, egalitarian values, and emphasis on education.

Volume Two of the *Dictionary of Midwestern Literature* delineates the Midwestern literary imagination through multiple entries in each of the following categories:

»» Thirty-five pivotal Midwestern literary texts

»» Literatures of the twelve Midwestern states and leading cities

»» Literatures of the Midwest's many diverse population groups

»» Historical and cultural developments, like the introduction of printing and publishing as agents of civilization, evolving views of Native Americans, and shifting perspectives on business, technology, religion, and philosophy

»» Social movements and cultural change, from small towns, immigration, and migration to urban life, protest, radicalism, and progressivism

»» Literary genres from the age of exploration to comic strips, film,science fiction, environmental writing, poetry slams, and graphic novels

»» Literary periodicals

»» Regional studies

PHILIP A. GREASLEY is a retired Associate Professor of English, Dean, University Extension, and Associate Provost for University Engagement at the University of Kentucky. He has served as General Editor of the *Dictionary of Midwestern Literature* and has published widely on Midwestern writers, the Chicago Renaissance, and modern poetics.

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS
OFFICE OF SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

iupress.indiana.edu