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DAVID D. ANDERSON, FOUNDING EDITOR
MARCIA NOE, EDITOR

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In honor of
Liesl Olson

PREFACE

For the first time in fifty years, The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature did not hold its annual symposium. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we deferred our May conference; we'll see you next year in Chicago at the Newberry Library (May 20-22, 2021) to celebrate our 50th annual meeting. At our awards ceremony, we will honor our 2020 Mark Twain Award winner, Marilynne Robinson, and our 2020 MidAmerica Award winner, Liesl Olson, along with our 2021 winners, Rebecca Makkai (Mark Twain Award) and James R. Shortridge (MidAmerica Award). We have some great events planned, including a panel of Mark Twain Award winners at the American Writers Museum. So join us in Chicago. It's been a while. We miss you!

SSML is currently operating at a loss due to increased expenses in publishing its journals and convening its annual symposium. Major gifts from the late Jane S. Bakerman, David Diamond, and David D. Anderson have enabled us to continue our work while we seek to establish a more stable financial footing for the work ahead. SSML is also grateful to the following members and friends who have made contributions in addition to their dues. As more such contributions are received, and earlier ones are discovered in searching the archives, we will add more names to this Honor Roll: Walter Adams, Robert Beasecker, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ray B. Browne, Mary Ellen Caldwell, Louis J. Cantoni, G.B. Crump, Bernard F. Engel, Kenneth B. Grant, Philip. A. Greasley, Theodore Haddin, Donald Hassler, Janet Ruth Heller, Ted Kennedy, Jean Laming, Barbara Lindquist, Larry Lockridge, Loren Logsdon, Bud Narveson, Douglas Noverr, Marcia Noe, Mary Obuchowski, Tom Page, E. Elizabeth Raymond, Herbert K. Russell, James Seaton, Sandra Seaton, Guy Szuberla, Doug Wixson, Melody Zajdel, and the family and friends of Paul Somers.

CONTENTS

Preface 6

One House at a Time: Democratic Citizenship and Domestic Security in *Clybourne Park* — Keith Wilhite 8

From the Village to the Holler: The Midwestern Grotesque from Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* to Donald Ray Pollack's *Knockemstiff* — Michael J. Martin 21

The Triumph of the Egg: A Close Look at Sherwood Anderson's Mary Cochran — Michael J. Finnegan 38

Intersectional Traumas of Motherhood: Louise Erdich's *The Round House* and *Future Home of the Living God* — Megan E. Cannella 51

"Fertile and Quiescent": Midwestern Memory in Bonnie Jo Campbell's "Winter Life" — Ross K. Tangedal 65

"Tossed Aside like Garbage": The Plight of Married Women in Bonnie Jo Campbell's *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters* — Donald A. Daiker 77

Hemingway's "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" Redux — Charles J. Nolan Jr. 90

Defining the Midwest and the Midwestern: A Review Essay — Jeff Sears 103

Where Poetry Meets Reality: A Review Essay — Mary Catherine Harper 113

Who Lost Nelson Algren?: A Review Essay — James A. Lewin 122

Annual Bibliography of Midwestern Literature 2018 — Robert Beasecker 142

SSML Conference Information 191

Recent Midwestern Fiction and Poetry 192

Recipients of the Mark Twain Award 194

Recipients of the MidAmerica Award Back Cover

ONE HOUSE AT A TIME: DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND DOMESTIC SECURITY IN *CLYBOURNE PARK*

Keith Wilhite

Imagined as a "sequel" to *A Raisin in the Sun,* Bruce Norris's *Clybourne Park* begins where its predecessor ends, inviting the audience inside the single-family house that Lena "Mama" Younger has recently purchased. In Hansberry's play, the Youngers' impending move piques the interest of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, and their messenger, Karl Lindner, pays a visit to the South Side of Chicago to dissuade the family from relocating. Although the effort fails, Lindner's argument "that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way" gives voice to a pro-segregationist, communal-rights position on housing (117), and his presence highlights the insidious role that such "improvement associations" played in mid-century battles to maintain racially exclusive neighborhoods.[1] In *Clybourne Park*, Norris, in effect, co-opts Lindner as an envoi from *Raisin,* interlacing the two dramas around a core interest in race, citizenship, and residential rights. As we imagine the Younger family packing up their kitchenette apartment, Karl arrives on the scene in *Clybourne Park* to deliver the unwelcome news to his neighbors: a black family is moving into their all-white community.

This shrewd intertextual gambit is more than a gimmick for readers in the know. Norris's play takes its lead from the legal and extra-legal residential battles of the mid- to late-1950s that inform the politics of *A Raisin in the Sun*. Hansberry, of course, had firsthand experience with these residential battles, and she brought both an intimate and an intellectual history to the topic of residential segregation. From 1951-53, she worked in Harlem for Paul Robeson's leftist, multicultural newspaper, *Freedom,* writing articles about slum clearance policies, discriminatory lending practices, and the housing

crisis faced by people of color. Earlier in her life, as a young girl, her family was harassed by white neighbors who pursued legal options to remove them from the South Park community where they had purchased a home in 1937. The Supreme Court case *Hansberry v. Lee* (1940) bears her father's name, Carl Hansberry, the plaintiff in the lawsuit. In that case, the justices ruled that previous decisions upholding the legitimacy of restrictive covenants did not prevent future plaintiffs, who were not party to those initial cases, from contesting those restrictions.[2]

In the decade preceding this decision, according to Anita Hill, "eighty-five percent of Chicago's communities were off-limits to blacks" as a result of these legal constraints (58). Thus, *Hansberry* was an important milestone in the fight against such racist policies, and it paved the way for *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), the landmark Supreme Court decision that determined that restrictive covenants, when enforced by the state, violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.[3] Delivering the unanimous opinion of the Court, Chief Justice Fred Vinson "noted that freedom from discrimination by the States in the enjoyment of property rights was among the basic objectives sought to be effectuated by the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment. That such discrimination has occurred in these cases is clear. Because of the race or color of these petitioners, they have been denied rights of ownership or occupancy enjoyed as a matter of course by other citizens of different race or color" (US Supreme Court, *Shelley v. Kraemer)*.[4]

These cases played a critical role in ending the *de jure* system of residential segregation, but by 1959—the year *A Raisin in the Sun* premiered on Broadway and the setting for act one of *Clybourne Park*—the Supreme Court decision at the forefront of discussions about race in America would have been *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954). While the Court's decision explicitly pertained to the unconstitutionality of racial segregation in public schools, its effects rippled across other areas of social and political life in northern cities, amplifying concerns about the control of residential communities that the *Shelley* decision had raised six years earlier. "Pointedly," as Arnold Hirsch notes in his research on Trumbull Park, "the barroom conversation in the wake of the *Brown* decision revolved not around school desegregation or the South's Jim Crow system, but around Black penetration of white neighborhoods" (533). Hirsch describes 1954 as a "year of chronic violence" in

Chicago (540), and despite some easing of hostilities over the next two years, there was a "reescalation of racial tensions during the spring and summer of 1957" (547).[5] This post-*Brown* landscape seems most relevant to an understanding of the residential battle lines and the "interlocking, institutional arrangements of power" (Baker 104)—from negligent landlords and pestilent slums, to racist neighborhood associations and mob violence, to ownership rights and private property—at the center of both plays.[6]

For Hansberry and Norris, the fictional, racially exclusive suburb of Clybourne Park embodies one of these nodes of power, and the neighborhood allows the playwrights to explore the limits of residential choice and domestic security for African Americans. In *Raisin,* Mama Younger's search for "a nice house" and "a yard with a little patch of dirt" unfolds against a backdrop of racial hostility (92), and the prospect of violence looms over the entire drama, from newspaper reports about bombings to the Youngers' approaching move. The play explores how Mama's Southern conception of home influences the postwar era of "pioneering" by African Americans in the North. Summarizing this midcentury crucible of race and residential living, Andrew Wiese notes, "Combined with desires for better homes and neighborhoods, African Americans' willingness to challenge the status quo placed them on a collision course with whites in the suburban housing market" (95-96). At stake were the rights of equal citizenship and the prospect of economic advancement as homeowners. As Will Cooley explains, "Property and upward mobility were seen as ways to legitimize black claims to full citizenship. However, 'black pioneers'...were caught between a hostile white world and the declining conditions in the jam-packed ghetto" (486). By moving to Clybourne Park, the Younger family takes a stand against the dehumanizing conditions of the ghetto, but they also challenge the vision of ownership rights as the exclusive purview of white citizenship, and in this way, they join other postwar pioneers who threatened "the dominant suburban ethos" of "white supremacy" (Wiese 144).

Building on this essential historical and cultural context, this essay focuses on concepts of property rights, citizenship, and domestic security at two ends of a fifty-year timeline in Norris's *Clybourne Park*. From white backlash against black pioneers to the contemporary period of white gentrification, the play traces the shifting patterns of residential segregation and the evolving discourse of home-

ownership and communal interest. While the sought-after house in *Raisin* exists as an offstage, imaginary ideal—underscoring its prohibited status for African Americans—*Clybourne Park* situates the single-family home center stage, making it the primary object of inquiry in a half-century battle for democratic citizenship and residential rights. As noted above, act one, set in 1959, takes readers and viewers inside the house that Mama Younger has purchased; act two occupies the same domestic space but moves the drama forward to 2009, to the purportedly "post-racial" Obama era. I will argue that, given its historical scope, *Clybourne Park* offers an incisive, if somewhat troubled, account of the cultural discourse and residential practices that continue to frame domestic security and economic prosperity in terms of whiteness.

Like Hansberry, Norris has a keen ear both for the language of racist hostility and the sanitized discourse of "community control," and in *Clybourne Park*, Karl Lindner continues to speak the language of communal rights with an added emphasis on monetary value. The play opens with a description of the house in question and the threat its new owners pose to the community. According to a prefatory note, the set reveals "a modest three-bedroom bungalow," including "a sitting room . . . a fireplace with an oak mantelpiece, and a separate dining area with built-in cupboards" [x]. The house previously belonged to Bev and Russ, a white middle-aged couple who are in the midst of packing as the drama begins. Two-and-a-half years earlier, their son, Kenneth, hanged himself in his upstairs bedroom. A Korean War veteran, he suffered profound remorse for atrocities he committed against innocent women and children during the war. Unnerved by this tragedy and increasingly isolated from the community, the couple granted their real estate agent wide latitude to sell the property at whatever price it would garner. They know nothing about the Youngers, and they appear nonplussed when Karl arrives, on behalf of the Community Association, to express his dismay. Following a series of admonitions about "putting the community's interests ahead of [one's] own" (63), and the importance of "*fitting into* a community" and valuing "the needs of the people who *live* in a community," he informs his neighbors that the family is "*one hundred percent*" black (64). Norris's Lindner, like Hansberry's, reinforces the importance of social preference and communal belonging as a cover for sustaining racial exclusivity. Although Bev balks at this line of reasoning, she cannot quite muster a full-throated rebuttal: "I mean, in,

in, in, in *principle,* don't we *all* deserve to—shouldn't we *all* have the opportunity to, to, to—" (65). Karl's riposte names the contentious object that Bev fails to: "But you can't *live* in a principle, can you? Gotta live in a *house*" (65). Bev's tongue-tied objection may tumble toward democratic citizenship and freedom of residential choice, but it falls short of the mark.

Throughout act one, the argument against racial integration takes two primary tacks: the incompatibility of social differences and the communal interest in property value. As Karl becomes flustered, Jim, a local minister who attempts to counsel the family, offers his support. He recruits Francine, Russ and Bev's black housekeeper, to help clarify the social incompatibility claim. Presented with a hypothetical opportunity to move to Clybourne Park, Francine is expected to express the undesirability of such an offer and, in so doing, endorse her own unsuitability to the community. Francine initially rejects the premise of the exercise on financial terms since acquiring the necessary funds seems impossible to imagine. She goes on to acknowledge how "very nice" and "*very lovely*" the neighborhood is (70-71), and even cautiously agrees "[t]hat people *live* differently" (72), but she never capitulates to the segregationist conclusion. The social difference argument flickers out to comic effect as characters debate cultural food preferences—collards and pig feet versus lutefisk—and hits an absurdist dead end when Karl observes that he has never seen a black person on the slopes: "But you'll have to show me where to find the skiing Negroes!" (77).

The conversation turns more dire when the topic pivots to property values. Contending that Russ and Bev had been deceived by their realtor, Karl outlines a legal appeal for halting the sale in the name of the community's interests. His argument reiterates an infamous position taken by the real estate developer William Levitt regarding racial covenants in his Levittown suburbs. In an interview with the *Saturday Evening Post*, Levitt claimed that "if we sell one house to a Negro family, then ninety to ninety-five per cent of our white customers will not buy into the community. That is their attitude, not ours. We did not create it, and we cannot cure it. As a company, our position is simply this: we can solve a housing problem, or we can try to solve a racial problem. But we cannot combine the two" (qtd. in Thompson 72). That sentiment aptly reflects the prevailing logic of the real estate industry at the time. According to Carol Rose and Richard Brooks, support for racial covenants was a self-fulfilling

prophecy based on the premise "that segregation, however effected, would bring higher housing prices, particularly by satisfying the tastes of white purchasers, who would in any event not wish to purchase in minority or 'changing' neighborhoods" (168-69).

In the post-*Shelley*, post-*Brown* world of *Clybourne Park,* Karl cannot appeal to restrictive covenants, but he stakes out a similar economic position, citing the grim consequences to the neighborhood if the sale of the house goes through:

> I'm not here to solve society's problems. I'm simply telling you what will happen, and it will happen as follows: First one family will leave, then another, and another, and each time they do, the values of these properties will decline . . . and *some* of us, you see, those who *don't* have the opportunity to simply pick up and move at the drop of a hat, then *those* folks are left holding the bag, and it's a fairly *worthless* bag, at that point. (80)

Like Levitt, Karl Lindner expresses a sense of indifference—or at least helplessness—in the face of "society's problems," and he prioritizes the house and neighborhood as financial commodities. Admittedly, on a basic level, a house is a commodity, but *Clybourne Park*, like *A Raisin in the Sun*, questions why for people like Lindner (or Levitt) a citizen's property rights and equal protection remain mutually exclusive concerns. By flipping the frame and taking readers and viewers inside Clybourne Park, Norris not only gives a material reality to the house, but he also exposes the racist rationale informing the neighborhood violence and harassment that await the Younger family. The play demonstrates how black pioneers like the Youngers pose their own threat, as a challenge to the federal policies and cultural practices that have traditionally guaranteed the links among whiteness, property rights, wealth, and domestic security.

Act two examines how those policies and practices have evolved in the allegedly "post-racial" America of the Obama presidency. Discussions about social differences give way to a conflict between "historical" and "monetary" value (148-49). The second act takes place in September 2009, but Norris keeps the new set of characters in the same residential interior. (The cast continues on, adopting new roles.) Over the past half century, the house has fallen into disrepair, and an aura of "overall shabbiness" now characterizes the scene (101). The new owners are a young white couple, Steve and Lindsey, who plan to demolish the existing structure and build a mini-mansion

that will tower over the neighboring houses. The other central couple in this act, Kevin and Lena, are black residents of Clybourne Park who, along with other property owners in the neighborhood, have raised concerns about the proposed project. Each couple also has legal representation present. Fifty years on, the threats of gentrification and economic displacement have replaced the perils of racial integration, and a petition has been filed, temporarily putting the renovation on hold.

The conversation begins with well-intentioned appeals to zoning regulations, but Steve and Lindsey seem wholly perplexed by the concepts of "minimum recess of frontage" (103) and "total exterior volume" (131) cited in the petition, and the scene quickly devolves into a tetchy debate between the lawyers regarding easements and how properly to measure "the edge of the property" (104). Eventually the couples downshift into small talk and a more personal story about family alters the center of gravity in act two. Lena is the grandniece of Lena "Mama" Younger, and she fears that the proposed project will erase the historical value of pioneers like her great-aunt (149). Wary of saying anything offensive, Steve and Lindsey strain to articulate their respect for the neighborhood's past while placing their plans within broader demographic patterns. Following the departure of German- and Irish Americans in the 1960s, Clybourne Park became a predominantly black community. Steve cites a recent article that describes "how in the seventies, eighties, how that was followed by a period of – of – of – of – of rapid—" (152). Kathy, his lawyer (and the daughter of Karl and Betsy Lindner), offers the word "Decline," which she promptly walks back in favor of the apparently more race-neutral "trouble" (152). Lena's husband, Kevin, defuses the situation by noting that drugs and violence are "trouble," but Lindsey feels compelled to add the now-mandatory clarification: "violence as an *outgrowth of* the criminalization of those drugs" (153). The play clearly delights in Steve and Lindsey's false "wokeness," and throughout these uncomfortable scenes, Norris pokes fun at liberal guilt and the tortuous ways white people talk about race. Yet despite these moments of awkward, even dark humor, *Clybourne Park* is decidedly not a comedy, and, as the audience sees—and readers imagine—a home in a state of extreme disrepair, we might wonder what else Norris hopes us to understand about race and residential property in the twenty-first century.

The "house versus principle" dilemma resurfaces in act two, this time between Lena and Kevin. Trying to clarify her argument against the proposed renovations, Lena insists her objections are not based on her "personal *connection* to the house," but on "*principle*," and Kevin provides the expected retort: "But you can't live in a principle" (160). There is something both provocative and unseemly about the turn of events that, fifty years later, positions a black man to redeploy Lindner's pragmatic one-liner—defending a segregationist position in 1959—and leverage it against the grandniece of Mama Younger. The scene is made more fraught by the fact that Norris's Lena and her "principle" seem somewhat attenuated, and not just compared to her great-aunt's dogged determinism to secure a stable home for her family. Norris opts to make the younger Lena a more conflicted, less ideologically consistent figure. Although she had previously appealed to her personal connections and the historical value of race pioneers, she later reframes the issue, citing the economic interests served by gentrification and "the long-range political initiative to change the face of this neighborhood" (175).

As a fringe suburb close to downtown Chicago, Clybourne Park is once again considered a desirable location. A Whole Foods has replaced the corner market, and the housing stock is ripe for the kind of revitalization that will increase property values and initiate another era of population displacement. Lena asks those gathered to acknowledge that "there are certain economic interests that are being served by those changes and others that are not" (176). When Lindsey counters that they are talking about one house for one family, it is now Lena who sounds like Lindner: "It happens one house at a time" (177). These echoes across the play amplify the sense of dissonance: the principled stand against gentrification and its attendant displacements in 2009 repurposes the same language used to oppose racial integration in 1959, suggesting an endless if shifting pattern of residential succession and segregation. Moreover, by keeping us locked in the same domestic space across historical periods, *Clybourne Park* casts a suspicious eye on notions of progress. In terms of democratic citizenship and domestic security, advancements have stalled, despite the passage of time.[7]

As the play draws to a close, tasteless jokes proliferate, arguments intensify, and everyone's good nature wears thin. In a particularly heated exchange, Steve tells Lena, "The history of America *is* the history of private property" (185). Lena's rejoinder—"I rather doubt

your grandparents were *sold as* private property" (185)—deftly captures the more evocative, chilling notions of "property" for African Americans at the heart of the play, even as it reveals an intractable problem. Namely, it is difficult to elevate a petition about zoning ordinances to a soaring argument on behalf of race, citizenship, and residential rights. There is something inherently anti-climactic about a righteous stand against political and economic marginalization that must also invoke the landmark status of Clybourne Park and "its distinctive collection of *low-rise single-family homes*" (175)—especially when contrasted with the Younger family's powerful rejection of Lindner's racist bribe in *Raisin*. Not only does the play end without resolution, the final pages throw us back in time, to the day Bev and Russ's son commits suicide.[8] Through a kind of "split-screen" performance that overlays past and present, Kenneth, the Korean War veteran, appears in full military uniform, talking to his mother and writing his suicide note in 1957 as a character in 2009 rediscovers the letter and begins to read it.

In the end, one could argue that Norris offers a decidedly white perspective on the black experience, and critics have taken exception to what they see as the central "dialectic of the play: black characters trying to prevent the white characters' rebuilding of what black characters ruined" (Gohn 573). It is worth asking what precisely Norris gains by staging the Youngers' former home in a state of ruin. It is a cynical maneuver that both undercuts Lena's defense and retroactively validates Karl's "*worthless* bag" argument about neighborhood decline. As Jack Gohn contends, Lena's "vague speech evoking 'pride' never pinpoints anything truly valuable that is under threat, and seems irrational . . . She is defending incoherently against an attack on racial solidarity" (575). Yet, despite apparent inconsistencies in her position, I would suggest that Lena recognizes something larger at stake, an issue that hews more closely to the "long-range political initiative" she cites and that may also clarify the play's unexpected historical regression.

Closing with the image of a Korean War veteran on the day of his suicide initially appears to displace race and property rights as central concerns, but this move does obliquely juxtapose Cold War-era war crimes with a fifty-year history of residential segregation, suburbanization, and gentrification, a history that links *A Raisin in the Sun* to *Clybourne Park*. Although Kenneth's character represents the collateral damage of US foreign policy and Cold War imperialism,

his presence on stage, in full military attire, clearly evokes the links between wars abroad and residential battle lines at home. In January of 1944, in the midst of World War II, the magazine *House Beautiful* declared, "[Our soldiers] are fighting so that we may live with our loved ones, in surroundings as comfortable and beautiful as those shown on these six pages, in a society where the economic and political values make such a life possible" (Gordon 29). Such sentiments were backed by federal policies—including the GI Bill, which guaranteed and subsidized low-interest mortgages for white veterans—that worked hand-in-hand with prejudicial loan practices and "redlining," a rating system that favored "new, homogeneous neighborhoods" and "undervalued neighborhoods that were dense, mixed, or aging" (Jackson 197). Read in this context, the Korean War was simply the next battlefront to preserve the "comfortable" homes and "the economic and political values" of neighborhoods like Clybourne Park. Perhaps this is the play's central contribution: to position the economic and political interests of gentrification as an extension of, or heir to, New Deal policies and practices that kept African Americans trapped in deindustrialized urban centers and blighted neighborhoods while the government engaged in Cold War diplomacy abroad and subsidized a suburban nation-building project for white Americans at home.

Unfortunately, that legacy endures, and homeownership rates continue to differ drastically by race. According to 2016 data, 71.3% of white Americans owned homes compared to 41% of African Americans, a vestige of redlining, discriminatory lending practices, and restrictive covenants (Goodman, McCargo, and Zhu). In their bleak assessment of recent data, researchers at the nonprofit Urban Institute concluded that "[t]he overall decline in homeownership threatens to exacerbate racial inequality for decades to come" (Goodman, Zhu, and Pendall). Zoning policies that prohibit McMansion-style renovations, like the ones referenced in Norris's play, offer a potential race-blind solution to the deleterious effects of gentrification on lower- and middle-class populations, but more proactive steps are also necessary. Revising zoning ordinances to allow for a mixed market of single- and multi-family dwellings would help to diversify suburban neighborhoods both racially and economically. Interest-free loans for black home buyers could help to rectify "the persistent racism in the mortgage market" (Blackwell and McAfee), but to address the wealth gap created by generations

of slavery, Jim Crow, redlining, and racial covenants will require more aggressive federal action in the form of direct payments.[9]

Across half a century, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Clybourne Park* examine the consequences of this malignant inequality. Hansberry's play ends on a note of uncertainty: the Youngers are new homeowners, but undoubtedly they will be met with racist threats and physical harassment. The ending of *Clybourne Park* suggests that while gentrification has replaced mob violence, patterns of racial displacement and *de facto* segregation will continue, as Lena suggests, "to change the face of this neighborhood" (175). Until we as a nation can address the broader concepts of racial justice and economic inequality pertaining to homeownership, the unsettled endings of both plays remind us that the single-family home will remain a contested site in the pursuit of democratic citizenship and domestic security in the twenty-first century.

Siena College

NOTES

I would like to thank Marcia Noe and the anonymous reviewers at *MidAmerica* for their insightful comments and constructive criticism.

[1]Lindner's entreaty echoes an actual refrain used by the *South Deering Bulletin* in the 1950s to oppose racial integration: "White People Must Control Their Own Communities" (qtd. in Hirsch 548). Hirsch notes that the ieventually tempered its "hard line on race when it changed its slogan . . . to 'Boost Your Community, Preserve Your Community' in the early 1960s" (548).

[2]See U.S. Supreme Court, *Hansberry v. Lee, 311 U.S. 32* (1940). For a more complete discussion of Hansberry's encounters with racist harassment in South Park and her work at *Freedom,* see Smith, 284-89 and 293-304. For additional perspective on the mob violence endured by the family and Hansberry's writing on art, racial justice, and international politics at *Freedom,* see Perry, 12-13 and 46-49.

[3]While the Supreme Court agreed that private individuals may accept and voluntarily enter into racially restrictive agreements, the justices concluded that judicial action to uphold such covenants "bears the clear and unmistakable imprimatur of the State" and, therefore, represents a discriminatory act in defiance of the right to equal protection (US Supreme Court, *Shelley v. Kraemer*).

[4]*Shelley v. Kraemer* also included another challenge to racial covenants from Detroit, Michigan, but the case went by the title of the St. Louis challenge. It is worth noting that three justices recused themselves from the case, a fact that Rose and Brooks cite among the reasons "for thinking that *Shelley* would not stick. . . . Given the prevalence of racial restrictions at the time, it appeared that at least some of the other three recused themselves because their own homes had such restrictions" (167).

[5]Hirsch suggests that this "reescalation" extinguished any hope for a calming of racial tensions in the city: "When violence erupted in the nearby Calumet Park at the end of [July], Trumbull Park exploded as well. As white mobs roamed the south side of the city, South

Deeringites again gathered at the Wisconsin Steel works to attack Blacks . . . The riot of July 1957 shattered the optimistic illusions held earlier in the year" (548).

[6]In its full context, the quotation from Baker addresses the individual's right to exercise control of one's domestic and communal "boundaries" and the threatening, dehumanizing conditions of the ghetto: "Bereft of the determinative control of boundaries, the occupant of authorized boundaries would not be secure in his or her own eulogized world but maximally secured by another, a prisoner of interlocking, institutional arrangements of power" (104).

[7]In his review of Norris's *Clybourne Park* and Kwame Kwei-Armah's *Beneatha's Place*, Gohn makes a similar point about the shifting patterns and eternal recurrence of residential segregation. He writes that "regardless of the colors of the players' skins, the old turf battles and old rationalizations persist, generation to generation" (580).

[8]Rankine also comments on the play's lack of resolution, though she refers more specifically to the exchange of racist and sexist barbs. She writes, "The audience is not meant to laugh but rather to be shocked as the play ends. If the audience was looking for Aristotelian catharsis, it is not contained in the play itself. There is no resolution, and, if there is to be one, the audience members must find it for themselves" (223).

[9]The call for reparations is gaining momentum. For a recent account, see Hannah-Jones. She writes that "while black Americans were being systematically, generationally deprived of the ability to build wealth, while also being robbed of the little they had managed to gain, white Americans were not only free to earn money and accumulate wealth with exclusive access to the best jobs, best schools, best credit terms, but they were also getting substantial government help in doing so."

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FROM THE VILLAGE TO THE HOLLER: THE MIDWESTERN GROTESQUE FROM SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S *WINESBURG, OHIO* TO DONALD RAY POLLOCK'S *KNOCKEMSTIFF*

Michael J. Martin

Barely over a century ago, Sherwood Anderson employed the grotesque as a foundational lens through which readers could explore the human (Midwestern) character. Published in 1919, Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, with its salient opening, "The Book of the Grotesque," brought readers into a conversation concerning how the interiority of one's being finds expression through individual action and interpersonal interactions; in a manner of speaking, how the grotesque finds expression. Unfortunately, critical discussion focused on what can be understood about this Midwestern grotesque was either lost or staved off largely due to Carl Van Doren's 1921 "Contemporary American Novelists: Revolt from the Village: 1920" essay and hypothesis.

At the time of its publication, Van Doren's essay was regarded as a highly significant analysis of a series of Midwestern authors who brought to the "cult of the village" a view much less flattering than those traditional images which "[were] not to be discarded lightly, even by writers who saw that time was discarding many of them as industrialism went on planting ugly factories along the prettiest brooks" ("The Revolt from the Village: 1920" 407). This authorial grouping "had in common a lively critical temper" that included a "change in attitude toward the village" that was displayed in their fiction ("Revolt [1940]" 209).[1] When turning his critical eye to *Winesburg,* Van Doren directly calls on Anderson's employment of the grotesque as that which makes his work fall within the revolt hypothesis and offers the following analysis of Anderson's characters:

> They see visions in which some wider world might become wholesome realities or might be dispelled by the light but which in Winesburg must lurk about till they master and madden with the strength which the darkness gives them. Religion deprived in Winesburg of poetry, fritters its time away over Pharisaic ordinances or evaporates in cloudy dreams; sex, deprived of spontaneity, settles into fleshly habit or tortures its victim with the malice of a thwarted devil; heroism of deed or thought either withers into melancholy inaction or else protects itself with a sullen or ridiculous bravado. ("Contemporary" 409)

An accurate description and analysis, the trouble with Van Doren's comments is that such conclusions initially supported the critical commentary surrounding Anderson and his connection to the "revolt from the village" debate. Unfortunately, this limitation has led readers to see Anderson's work trapped in its moment and not participating in any greater possibility of a Midwestern aestheticism. What is important is extracting Anderson's work from this critical mire in order to explore more fully how it contributes to the development of Midwestern aestheticism, specifically a Midwestern grotesque that continues to be found in the writing of such contemporary authors as Donald Ray Pollock. In making this extraction and drawing out this connection, this essay will offer more literary evidence to support Sara Kosiba's spot-on advice to scholars to "move one step further away from those lingering perceptions of a bland, homogenized Midwest and closer to a clearer, more accurate discussion of the region's past, present, and future" ("Introduction" xvi).

As for the literary past, Van Doren's hypothesis continued to pass muster throughout much of the twentieth century, but it has more recently come under greater scrutiny. Jon K. Lauck's "The Myth of the Midwestern 'Revolt from the Village'" adeptly synthesizes the voices of those critics who "contributed to the entrenchment and institutionalization of Van Doren's original interpretation" and then moves to display why "[t]he 'village revolt' interpretation is simplistic and flawed and its 'institutionalization' within the annals of history clouds our vision of the Midwestern past" (42). Abigail Tilley pushes past Lauck's synthesis, recognizing that what is central to Anderson is the grotesque and that this aspect of his characters should not be overlooked. Concerned that "the universality of meaning that Anderson sought to convey may have been eclipsed by the narrowness of the 'revolt' classification" (48), Tilley encourages readers to

probe Anderson's characters and see that "Anderson's goal was not to erect more barriers of isolation by separating people of the city and village," but to have readers connect with and work to understand the character and his/her grotesque nature as opposed to simply dismissing or condemning them (49).

One way to achieve Tilley's call is to understand how Anderson has defined truth and its interconnection with the grotesque. Anderson's truths, according to Robert Dunne, begin as "things of beauty" that are then snatched up and "become perverted and have the effect of infecting those who tried to possess them" (180-81). For those who hold on to these truths and live by them, they come to find themselves "unable to break free from [them] . . . or forever scarred" for attempting but failing to break free (181). As Dunne makes clear, Anderson's point is not that the truths make the grotesque, but that the individual becomes the grotesque because of his/her fierce hold on the truth. These individuals then become the gnarled apples left on the ground. "The characters are distorted and misshapen by their stubborn involvement with their own lives," writes Hai-Young Lee (104). "Even when they try to escape this distortion, they are trapped by it" (104). These grotesques are only able to try to escape the distortion of their world because of the "enlightenment" that has come with truth. Unfortunately, while this enlightenment brings a self-awareness to one's own unhappy condition, the individual remains trapped in his/her inability to communicate this awareness to others. This failure to communicate regularly exists between characters within the work, but it does not necessarily carry over to the relationship between the reader and the grotesque. Instead, readers can see the surface and beneath; the truth as enlightenment and as trap. The reader is the companion to the grotesque, aware of his truth, his being trapped, and shares in the broader truth that comes with this knowledge. "By showing us the truth of these twisted people, the author also delivers the glimpse of a broader truth, showing the necessity of sympathy among human beings" (Lee 104).

The grotesque and those specific sensibilities discussed above are not simply sensibilities attached to Anderson's work, but have been shown to be sensibilities attached to a Midwestern aesthetic. In "What Is Midwestern Modernism?" Sara Kosiba quickly highlights an intellectual conundrum, the fact that "[a] Midwestern modernist aesthetic often seems accepted without question, with no solid definition of what that distinction entails" (8). She discusses such mod-

ernist writers as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and McAlmon and concludes that while they may have left the region, their writing did not erase geographical influences (11). Specifically, for some, "[t]he Midwest functions here . . . providing a sense of contrast between the characteristic of firm convictions and values stemming from the region and the chaos and immorality of the rest of the world" and for others, such as McAlmon, there is a concern with "portraying the harsh realities of life in a Midwestern small town and yet show[ing] that life as functioning and evolving, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worst" (10). In all cases, this contributes to the building of a Midwestern aesthetic that pursues many of the most pertinent issues of the modernist moment—some of which continue to exist despite the "end" of modernism—as they are connected to the geographical region and attitudes of the Midwest. Thus, when one couples these aspects of the Midwestern aesthetic with our understanding of Anderson's grotesque, we come to what I would label the Midwestern grotesque.

One way to come to understand Anderson's grotesques and their place in a Midwestern aesthetic is to see how the tradition of the grotesque has continued to find a hold in Midwestern writing. To make this argument, I turn to Donald Ray Pollock's *Knockemstiff,* a work published nearly ninety years after Anderson and based on an Ohio town just one hundred and fifty some miles from the inspirational Clyde, Ohio. Pollock's work follows Anderson's in that it, too, is a short story cycle, yet as opposed to being located in the outwardly genteel village, Pollock's world is that of the more *Deliverance*-esque Midwestern holler.[2] Beyond these general connections, however, many reviewers thematically connect Pollock and his work to that of Anderson and *Winesburg, Ohio*, a connection Pollock regularly dismissed. In an interview with the *Sycamore Review*, Pollock is directly questioned about Anderson; when asked, "Is that [*Winesburg, Ohio]* something you read prior to writing these stories were you conscious of writing in a certain tradition?" (sic), he responded,

> I had read *Winesburg*. I have to say that *Winesburg*—I know people compare my book to that book that sort of thing, but I think really it's just that both towns are in Ohio. I wasn't thinking about *Winesburg* at all when I was writing my book. . . . You know, *Winesburg,* when it came out, it was . . . wow, a lot of people were scandalized by that book. I mean if you read it today it's like, what the hell were they thinking? ("Audio")

The movement in Pollock's thoughts is interesting. Though he acknowledges knowing of Anderson and of the initial response to *Winesburg*, he denies influence; in fact, in the full answer, the only author he credits as an influence is Denis Johnson and his work *Jesus' Son*. By denying authorial influence, Pollock thus also denies thematic influence, but does so by separating the works for the more general reason that Anderson's text and characters are quite "tame" compared to those found in *Knockemstiff*.

Pollock's reaction to the reviews and criticism that initially followed the publication of *Winesburg, Ohio* is justifiable, as is the reason that he scoffs at the notion that his holler folk are equivalent to Anderson's more genteel grotesques: in Pollock's stories, readers encounter child rapists and murderers, addicts and alcoholics, dimwitted outcasts and violent bullies. Describing the contrast between the two authors and their characters, Jonathan Miles writes, "But whereas Anderson tucked the grotesque beneath the staid and steady public lives of his characters, doctors and other professional types among them, Pollock's characters . . . wear their grotesqueness high up on their sleeve." Different on the surface, Pollock's and Anderson's grotesques remain the same based on the strength by which they hold on to their truths. Furthermore, each set of grotesques will find that these truths will not lead to an emancipating discovery. A final quality that connects these authors and their grotesques is that these characters can stand in for the average Midwesterner (or American). In fact, when speaking about how the violence of his characters and plot lines can turn off readers, Pollock stresses that it is geographically real: "But, as I said earlier, I can go out here and pick up the local newspaper and bring it in here, and I can show you things that are just as bad or worse, probably worse, than anything that's in my book. So what's the big deal? I mean, I am maybe exploring something that a lot of people don't want to think about, but people live like this" ("Audio").[3]

The question then becomes exactly what is it that Pollock is exploring that "a lot of people don't want to think about"? The answer, according to Layne Neeper, is that he is "articulating a bleaker vision of provincial life gone to hell" and that while evocative of such writers as Anderson and Flannery O'Connor, Pollock's stories embody a "deterministic nihilism" not found in those predecessors (45). Drawing an even greater distinction between Pollock and Anderson, Neeper argues that "[t]here is no normative perspective" in Pollock

and that while Anderson and Pollock employ the grotesques in their work, for Pollock's group "there is violence but no redemption" (48). The stories that Neeper chooses to focus on and analyze are strong evidence of such unexplainable violence and threat, but is this the case with all the grotesques of *Knockemstiff*? Is this the case for all of the holler? To answer yes, one chooses to separate Pollock from Anderson. However, Neeper's conclusion is too quick. There exists the prospect that Pollock's "something that a lot of people don't want to think about" is much closer to what scholars have found in Anderson's grotesques than in Neeper's conclusion: the notion that a "truth" can be enlightening yet not freeing or redemptive (in the traditional sense) nor expressible to others. In opening one's focus on Pollock's stories, one will discover that while the unredeemed aspects of humanity and the unquestioned violence of the holler cannot be escaped, there still exists, amidst this inhumanity, the discovery of sympathy for self and others.

Jonathan Miles highlights this exact possibility in his review in which he describes Pollock's world as a period when "Rome has fallen, and it's a Dark Ages free-for-all," yet maintains that certain stories have moments of O'Connorian grace. Miles pulls a quote about grace—"There is a moment in every great story in which the presence of grace can be felt as it waits to be accepted or rejected, even though the reader may not recognize this moment" (O'Connor 118)—from O'Connor and concludes that while grace, defined as such, does "flicker" across pages of the work, Pollock's grotesques ultimately choose to reject it. Placed alongside one another, Neeper agrees with Miles that these moments may exist, yet contends that Miles is wrong to conclude that the loss of grace is a choice, instead arguing that "[t]here is the illusion of choice, but in actuality, it is a non-choice" because the world of *Knockemstiff* is a "deterministic corner of America" where "[n]o one changes, not because they choose not to change, but because environment and acculturation have deprived them of that ability to change" (Neeper 52). It is because of reviews like those of Neeper and Miles and a reader's focus on the deterministic underpinnings of the stories and graphic violence that occur amongst the struggling class that I believe Pollock has been regularly attached to—and yet dismissed from—the school of Grit Lit.[4] However, if we turn from that debate and instead focus on critically probing the surface of the text, as Abigail Tilley suggests we do with *Winesburg, Ohio,* we discover greater moments in Pollock's text

where an acceptance of grace complicates his violence, sense of threat, and the supposed erasure of choice, thus bringing Pollock in line with Anderson. And the place for this critical probe lies with Pollock's character Bobby, first-person narrator and protagonist of three separate stories: "Real Life," "Pills," and "The Fights."[5]

The inaugural story of Pollock's cycle, "Real Life," opens with Bobby narrating, "My father showed me how to hurt a man one August night at the Torch Drive-in when I was seven years old. It was the only thing he was ever good at" (1). Vernon, Bobby's father, is drinking his whiskey from the car ashtray because his wife had forgotten the "old man's special cup" and he could not just drink from the bottle because if "[y]ou start that shit, you end up a goddamn wino" (3). As the movie begins, Vernon takes Bobby to use the restroom and while waiting for Bobby to finish, he says to a friend, "'I shit you not, Cappy,' my father was telling the man, 'this boy's scared of his own goddamn shadow. A fuckin' bug's got more balls'" (5). Vernon continues to berate Bobby—suggesting that he "'shoulda been a girl'"—until he is confronted by another patron who demands that Vernon watch his language as this other man does not want his son exposed to such filth (6). The scene continues with Vernon initially backing away and insisting that he wants no trouble as the man attempts to humiliate him by calling him a drunk and acting smug in front of the others. Vernon, then, steps back, plays possum, allows the other man to believe he has won, and then "he leaped forward and drove his fist against the temple of the big man's head" and watched as the man fell to the ground. Once he had the man on the ground, Vernon continued to kick and stomp on him (8).

Meanwhile, the man's son has come up and punched Bobby in the ear. Bobby automatically falls into a protective stance, but Vernon sees what is happening and yells, "'You back down, I'll blister your ass'" (9). Bobby does not back down but begins to beat the boy as Vernon yells, "'Fuck him up!'" (9). Bobby lands his final punch, watches the boy's nose spray blood, and then he and his father run off. As they hunt for their car in the lot, Vernon takes a moment to kneel in front of Bobby and, for the first time in the story, speaks to him positively, telling him that he "'did good . . . did real good'" (9). After finding their car, Vernon races home and, while driving, tells his wife about the fight and screams out the window, "'This is the best night of my fucking life!'" (10). Vernon is elated that his son has followed in his violent footsteps, but Bobby's mother does not share in his

excitement. Instead, she expresses her anger at her husband for what he has brought their son into, and her words are met with Vernon's forearm smashing into her head. That night at home, Bobby lays awake in his bed, listens to his parents have sex, and then narrates how I "stuck my fingers in my mouth. A sweet, salty taste stung my busted lip, ran over my tongue. It was the other boy's blood, still on my hands" (12). Bobby continues to lick all the blood off his fingers and hand and the story ends with him commenting, "Even after I'd swallowed all the blood, I kept licking my hands. I tore at the skin with my teeth. I wanted more. I would always want more" (12).

Holding directly to the surface and seeing this story as a standalone piece, Neeper's belief that "Bobby's [life] path is laid on iron rails . . . there's no future other than the one his father and mother bequeath to him" remains a justified conclusion (49). However, as even Neeper notes, this is one story in a cycle and Bobby will return—thus whether his path is truly on "iron rails" is not known. Furthermore, Neeper's analysis calls for certain complication. Throughout the story, as the piece is narrated from Bobby's perspective, we can see that he is not like his father, nor does he want to be like his father. There is no question that Bobby enjoys his father's adulations over his dismissal (he does comment that Vernon's response "was the only goddamn thing my old man ever said to me that I didn't try to forget" (11), but whether or not he likes the violence and fighting is unclear. Vernon's beating of the man is cold and calculated, thought out and methodical; on the other hand, Bobby's beating of the son is wild and crazed, reactionary and chaotic.

Furthermore, there is the complicated end image of Bobby and his fingers. Early in the story, readers discover that Bobby's tendency to put his fingers in his mouth and then suck them/lick them clean is an old habit. Before the movie begins, Vernon hears a sound coming from Bobby and tells him to stop biting his fingernails, but Bobby's mother tells Vernon that that is not what he is doing. Bobby narrates, "I pulled my fingers out of my mouth and sat on my hands. It was the only way I could keep away from them whenever the old man was around" (4). This early image of Bobby sucking on his fingers—something he should have outgrown as he is seven—suggests an innocence to Bobby which infuriates his father. In fact, Vernon had spent the summer "threatening to coat me clear to elbows with chicken shit to break me of the habit" (4). Bobby's mother, however, seems to accept and embrace the innocence of her son—thus her negative reaction later in

the story when Vernon tells her how he got Bobby to fight. At the end of the story, the innocent activity becomes violent as Bobby has now moved from sucking on his fingers to biting off the skin, but this change may not be a permanent move from innocence to violence.

The youthful Bobby of this story is awakening to a truth of the holler. He sees in and through his father that one deals with internal unhappiness through violence and victory, something that Bobby participates in at the drive-in. However, the dual interpretation of Bobby licking/biting his hands informs readers that he has not made a choice, but sees options. In the same essay in which Flannery O'Connor wrote of grace, she also wrote of violence. "With the serious writer," opines O'Connor, "violence is never an end in itself. It is the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially, and I believe these are the times when writers are more interested in what we are essentially than in the tenor of our daily lives" (113). The movement of Bobby between the innocence and violence highlights that Bobby is torn between an innocence that his father despises and a violence that his father embraces. At the end of this story, Bobby may have chosen the violence—"I wanted more. I would always want more" (12)—but that is just the tenor of his daily life, that single day. For as *Knockemstiff* is a cycle, readers will re-encounter Bobby.

In "Pills," Bobby is now sixteen years old, has not been home in a week, and, along with Frankie Johnson, is planning to flee Ohio for California. To financially support their plan, Bobby and Frankie break into Wanda Wipert's house, steal her cache of pharmaceutical speed, each take two pills, and make plans to sell the rest and then head West.[6] Instead, the two continue to drive around that night and swallow more pills to maintain their high, all the while Bobby still believing that "all the lousy, fucked-up things that kept happening in my life would never happen again" should he get to California (55). Three days later, they are still driving around the holler, having hit and killed a chicken (a chicken that Bobby oddly connects to and insists that he can save—though it is dead), and spend the night taking turns having sex with a girl they picked up at the grocery store. The two had worked out a deal with this young woman, giving her two pills for every engagement. While they spend the night continually switching between who is in the back seat having sex and who is driving, the girl's purchased milk spills on the floor, and she shares with Bobby the fact that she has a baby at home, a fact and now a worry that he cannot get out of his head for the rest of the night, even while he lies

with her. Later in the night, while Frankie is with the girl, Bobby believes that he hears Frankie tell the girl that he will take her to Nashville once he loses Bobby. Bobby looks over the back seat, sees Frankie on top of the girl, and asks him about California; Frankie's only response is, "Jesus Christ, Bobby, not now" (58). Of course, Frankie's statement can be read two ways. One, as he is in the middle of intercourse, Frankie has no desire to see Bobby, much less have a conversation with him. Or, two, Frankie is changing plans; the "not now" alludes to the fact that Frankie is no longer interested in escape.

Two days later, now five days after stealing the pills, Frankie and Bobby are still driving around the holler and taking pills. "It didn't matter how many miles we traveled by day," Bobby narrates, "we always ended up back in the holler at night" (59). Bobby finally grows angry enough to ask Frankie about leaving, and Frankie responds that he is not stopping Bobby from leaving; Frankie's earlier "not now" has evolved into a change in plans. They pull over and Frankie starts to build a tire fire and heads to the trunk of the car. He pulls out the dead chicken, which Bobby still thinks he might do something for, and skewers it. Growing paranoid, Bobby questions Frankie, "'You're not going to screw that, are you?'" (60). As Bobby watches the revolting scene of the three-day-old, skewered chicken be cooked over a tire fire, he takes one of the last two remaining bottles of pills, begins walking the two miles towards Route 50, and watches an airliner pass overhead, wondering if "they could see the glow of Frankie's fire from up there. I wondered what they would think of us" (61).

It is clear that in the nine years that have passed between "Real Life" and "Pills," Bobby has matured and begun to look for more in life. When readers leave him in "Real Life," he is a child lying in his bed, licking blood off his hands, and, eventually, chewing away at his own skin, aware of the truth of violence as embodied in his father. Now, at sixteen, Bobby is less the animal that emerged that night at the drive-in. Though he is still engaging in less than genteel activities—he and Frankie paying a young girl with pills to repeatedly take turns having sex with her while the milk she has bought for her baby has spilled all over the floorboards—Bobby's thought process has grown beyond the animal nature of the holler and his father. Bobby now wants to escape the violence of his home; Bobby wants to believe he can save a chicken that they killed with the car; Bobby is concerned with young girl's baby: "But I couldn't stop thinking about her baby, and wondering who was taking care of it while Frankie and me tried

to screw her brains out. I kept imagining all kinds of horrible, fucked-up things happening to it" (57). As a maturing grotesque, Bobby has now embraced a truth that his response to the holler life must be something beyond the violence and anger of Vernon, but he cannot express this truth even to Frankie. Unlike the seven-year-old Bobby who seemed to want more blood and pain and violence, the sixteen-year-old Bobby now worries about the violence and thus decides to begin his long walk away. Of course, a reading such as this would seem to fit more with Van Doren's early "revolt from the village" thesis to which he attached Anderson. With "Real Life" and "Pills," readers would be led to believe that the holler remains nothing but a depraved world filled with lost humanity, a place that must be abandoned and a people for whom we should hold no sympathy. However, just as readers are left questioning Bobby's next steps at the end of "Real Life," they are here again left questioning Bobby's next steps. At the end of "Real Life," Bobby is lost in blood and violence, yet here in "Pills," he is lost in contemplation of what others (those up in the plane) might think of holler folk (particularly Frankie and him), and thus what he thinks of himself. In his maturing grotesqueness, in his emerging hold to a truth beyond violence and inhumanity, Bobby is left questioning whether escape is possible and/or necessary. The story ends with Bobby walking toward Route 50, but not at Route 50; it ends with him hoping to express his truth and escape, yet staring at the sky.

The answer to Bobby's contemplation comes about in the final story of the cycle, "The Fights." Now an adult, Bobby has moved out of his childhood home (though he has not left the holler), is a recovering addict involved in AA, and is headed home for a "family visit." Hard-hitting Vernon from "Real Life" is now a much older man who has heart issues and is dependent on oxygen; interestingly, Bobby's sister suggests that the problem with Vernon's heart is "'too much scar tissue'" to which Bobby thinks, "He's not the only one" (193-94). From this opening point in the story, then, readers can see that the piece will work on the literal and figurative level—much like all of life in *Knockemstiff*. Bobby's acceptance of his truth that violence and anger were not the saving response to his life in the holler has not unchained him from that world. Though he has begun to separate himself from his past, his story was not like others imagined; there was nothing romantic or tragic about hitting rock bottom: "Once a detective picked me up for a rape, and I had to admit in the interrogation room that I couldn't remember one way or another. Thank God

he later determined that I wasn't the type of person they were looking for. I went bankrupt, and caught the crabs, and broke my nose on a sidewalk. I stalked my ex-wife and missed so much work at the paper mill that even the union got sick of fighting for me" (195).

Bobby's description of his past here tells readers all about those missing years between "Pills" and the present. In his mentioning of the paper mill (the main employer for those in the holler), we come to see that though he may have begun the walk away from the holler at the end of "Pills," he never got away. The years since our last encounter have remained tied to violence and failure, though there was always an internal hope for more as evinced by the fact that he did try marriage and, even when accused of rape, tried to be honest. In his continued development, Bobby acknowledged his new truths, and, though he was never exactly emancipated from his world by this acceptance, he never stopped in his attempt to remain truthful to himself and his world. Bobby has not escaped the *Knockemstiff* world; he has become the full embodiment of an Andersonian grotesque, choosing to adamantly hold to a truth that both enlightens and traps.

This becomes most clear when Bobby arrives for his visit with his parents and encounters his father and brother watching the fights on the television. "After he got sick, the only thing my old man enjoyed in life was watching men beat the shit out of each other. The worse somebody got hurt, the better he liked it" (196). Vernon, who had never made it past sixth grade, had worked the railroad lines, and had been an army boxer now could only sit at home in his graying skin and loose-hanging flesh. Though his body has weakened, his mean spirit has not; Vernon almost seems to show an interest in Bobby's life, asking if he is still clean and going to "those alcohol meetings" (199), but his interest quickly turns to a story of how he once knew a black man named Jim Woodfork, Bobby's current AA sponsor, who allowed Vernon to beat him up for a dollar. Vernon describes that as the best dollar he ever spent, and when Bobby says that Jim is doing good now, Vernon responds, "'He's still a nigger though, ain't he, Bobby?'" to which Bobby responds—turning his face away from his father when he does—"'Yeah, he's still a nigger'" (200). In this moment, we see the frayed yet maintained bond between Bobby and his father. Bobby can "agree" with his father to appease him, yet he cannot look him in the eyes, demonstrating his disgust in his father's words and in himself for repeating them.

While Bobby struggles to be, or pretends to be, like his father, his own brother comfortably sits with Vernon, watching the fights. The two jovially scream epithets at the TV and call for violence and Bobby realizes how far he has moved away from his violent and personally unaware family. This realization is distinctly clear in the Jim Woodfork conversation; Bobby has come to respect Jim and all the work that he has done to clean himself up and to help Bobby, but at home, this new world is threatened. Although Vernon is now weak and feigning strength by talking tough and insisting that Jim Woodfork is still "a nigger," Bobby cannot attempt to speak his acknowledged truth to his father; his only response can be to falsely agree with his father's statement and then disengage from the conversation. Bobby goes to the kitchen to speak with his mother, though it is clear that she remains traumatized by her life. She attempts to tell Bobby that his father is probably getting worse, but when Vernon demands to know what she is whispering about, she quickly lies and says that she was speaking about their daughter. Then, she stays quiet, sits at the table, and blankly stares at her little TV. Bobby can connect with no one in the house and steps outside for a cigarette, commenting that he realizes he and his father "would never really know each other before he passed" and follows this thought with the recognition that "[f]or the first time since I'd been sober, I began to crave a drink" (202).

In contemplating that drink, Bobby remembers that Jim asked him to reach out for help before taking a first drink, but Bobby thinks, "I'd called him a nigger behind his back, just to please my bitter old man, and I wasn't sure I could ask for anybody's help tonight" (202). Bobby won't have to ask for help, though, because the story ends with him getting in his car, suggesting he won't take that drink, and sharing his last thought: "The fight was nearly over" (203). This is Bobby's moment of grace: his acceptance of his grotesquerie that both connects him to and separates him from his father and thus all of the holler. Bobby has come to understand that, like any boxer, he would stay in the ring and continue the fight. This fight between choosing to move beyond his father or to maintain that connection (best seen in the Jim Woodfork discussion), displays Bobby's choice and his acceptance of his father. As Hai-Young Lee comments, the broader truth of Anderson's text is "showing the necessity of sympathy among human beings" (104). At this moment, Bobby and the reader have come to learn to sympathize with Vernon, even though

his total disconnect from life has made him merely an animal. More important, we sympathize with Pollock's own grotesque embodied in Bobby as we come to sympathize with Bobby's internal conflict: to embrace the truth that highlights his unhappiness and move past or remedy it (as evidenced in his attempt to clean his life up) or to bend to his father's will and outwardly embody the animal.

Without question, the above analyses of Bobby over the space of his three stories counters Layne Neeper's earlier discussed conclusion. Arguing that Pollock's collection turns on the direct illusion of choice, Neeper concludes that "while the best of these preterite souls are tortured like Tantalus by the prospect of something good just out of reach, that good thing is not actual redemption or a tangibly better life; it is the fantasy that such a choice is even possible that so torments" (53). However, Bobby's narrative, one that evolves throughout the entire cycle, is one that ends with a choice to be made and a redemption, though differently understood, to be gained. Central to Neeper's separation of Anderson and Pollock is that *Winesburg, Ohio* contains a "normative stasis" embodied in such characters as George Willard and that this is missing from Pollock's narrative (47). However, why can Bobby not be that perspective for the twenty-first-century holler cycle? Though Neeper suggests that George Willard is Anderson's normative perspective, Monika Fludernik complicates George's position, arguing that his life does "parallel the artist's position in society as part of, and apart from, his surroundings" (433); thus, George is both grotesque and beyond. Reading George in terms of Fludernik's argument allows one to read Bobby's story as much more normative; he is both part of and apart from the holler and has been all his life, and he chooses to exist as both. Unlike George, though, the contemporary Midwestern grotesque does not go "out of his town to meet the adventure of his life" (Anderson 138), but stays because he chooses to fight. In making this choice, Bobby has redefined redemption not as escape but as the achievement of sympathy for self and others; this is Bobby's, and thus the grotesque's, moment of grace.

Among others to deconstruct the "revolt from the village" argument is Sara Kosiba. In her own contribution to the collection *A Scattering Time*, "Breaking Binaries," Kosiba marches readers through a comprehensive analysis of Van Doren's thesis and how, missing its nuance, subsequent critics accepted and perpetuated the binary that one was either with or against the village. However, in her analysis, Kosiba shows that

Van Doren's own argument and the texts used as evidence were not so easily definable. Carrying this analysis outside of literature and into the world of other arts, Kosiba's end goal is to help readers and scholars discover "that midwestern literature and art [sic] is far richer and far more dynamic than it [sic] is often perceived" (84). Although Kosiba limits her discussion, in this essay, to the literature and art of the modernist moment, I believe that it can be carried forth to the present. The Midwestern art and literature of this moment spring forth from their predecessor and continue to be perceived in the same flat sense. In highlighting the development and evolution of this Midwestern grotesque from Anderson to Pollock and offering an alternative reading of Pollock's collection, this essay encourages current scholars and readers to continue to look for that richness and dynamism and add to a growing, enriching scholarship on midwestern art.

Stephen F. Austin State University

NOTES

[1]In this discussion of Van Doren's thesis, I move between two versions of his "Revolt" essay. In 1921, Van Doren published the essay "Contemporary American Novelists" in volume 113 of *The Nation*. It is here that we find his first statement of the revolt hypothesis. This essay was then republished in 1931 in Van Doren's *Contemporary American Novelists 1900-1920*. In this work the essay is titled "The Revolt from The Village" and included as a subsection within the work's fourth chapter entitled "New Style." Finally, it was again republished in 1940 in Van Doren's *The American Novel 1789-1939* under the title "Revolt from The Village." Unlike earlier reprints, this last version exists in an edited form. The central argument of the original publication has been excised, and the discussion of particular authors and texts is limited. I have chosen to move between the original publication and that from 1940 because I find Van Doren's initial phrasing important; yet I recognize that the 1940 version does include some incisive statements that share the same sentiment as the original but are more direct.

[2]Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* has been defined, in terms of genre, as both a novel and short story cycle. An excellent resource for the discussion of Anderson's work, how it has been defined, and its role in the study of the genre of the cycle is Jennifer J. Smith's 2018 work, *The American Short Story Cycle*, particularly the introduction and first two chapters. For the purposes of this essay, I will refer to the work as a short story cycle.

[3]In terms of Pollock being able to pick up the local paper and find something just as bad or worse, one can turn to the Pike County Murders committed in April of 2016. On the night of April 21 into the early morning hours of April 22, eight members of the Rhoden family were brutally murdered; the victims were found at four different murder sites. The victims ranged in age from 16 to 44; three children were found unharmed among the dead, ranging in age from three years to four days. In 2018, four members of the Wagner family (ranging in age from 26-48) were arrested and charged with the crime. The connection between the two families lay between Hanna May Rhoden and Edward "Jake" Wagner, who had a child together. This example alone shows that Pollock is not wrong about reality and fiction and the fact that such violence occurred in the geographical backyard of the real city of Knockemstiff, Ohio.

[4]Pollock's stories share many of the characteristics of the contemporary school of Grit Lit: "typically blue collar or working class, mostly small town, sometimes rural, occasionally but not always violent, usually but not necessarily southern" (Carpenter xxviii). Nevertheless, he is not always considered to be among this group. Interestingly, the editors of the anthology *Grit Lit: A Rough South Reader* do not seem to agree definitively on where to place Pollock; whereas Brian Carpenter refers to Pollock, though not southern, as among the "best Grit Lit writers in American" (xviii), his co-editor, Tom Franklin, in an interview in which he is asked about Grit Lit, comments that Pollock cannot be included because he is not Southern, but that he is "writing in the same vein" (Rea 84). So, he is too "Midwestern"—at least geographically—to be of the Grit Lit school.

[5]I turn to this set of stories, amongst other choices, because they form a sort of foundation to the cycle; Bobby's three stories are the first, fifth, and last story in the collection. As such, they allow for the emergence of a theme as tied to a single character that can be extrapolated and applied to other characters/residents of *Knockemstiff*.

[6]I have chosen to capitalize the direction here because Bobby's desire is to escape the holler and thus to escape his nightmare into a dream. Bobby and Frankie have decided to go to San Francisco, a city with a mythology of its own. Although Pollock does not capitalize west, denoting then only general direction, it is important to understand that Bobby is not just looking to leave, but is looking for an ideal, a concept.

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THE TRIUMPH OF THE EGG: A CLOSE LOOK AT SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S MARY COCHRAN

MICHAEL J. FINNEGAN

As we approach the centennial of the publication of Anderson's second book of tales, *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), we see this master craftsman of the short story develop his female characters with the same stylistic skill that he used to render the male characters of Enoch Robinson, Joe Welling and Elmer Cowley from *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919). The task here is to look closely at two carefully crafted tales which neither immediately excite nor disappoint the reader. By approaching his work in this manner, we can see precisely how Anderson compensated for his choice of vague characters. Despite his own statement in his *Memoirs* that he was nothing more than a "poor scribbler," Sherwood Anderson was a self-conscious stylist, and even in some of these less impressive tales, his ability to reveal character through the use of evocative images and thematic image patterns is quite apparent (3).

The title, *The Triumph of the Egg*, is taken directly from the final line of Anderson's story, "The Egg," and it clearly indicates the tone of the entire volume. Unlike *Winesburg, Ohio*, this book's tone is one of triumph, even though each character's triumphs are a matter of potential rather than observable fact. As the title suggests, the character who has the best chance to break out of her shell of inarticulateness and misunderstanding is the young woman, Mary Cochran. Anderson had a good deal of faith in womankind, as can be seen in his small book of essays, verse, and anecdotes entitled *Perhaps Women* (1931). Here he expresses his belief that women like Mary Cochran may be the only hope there is left to "save man from the dominance of the machine before his potence, his ability to save himself is quite gone" (7).

In *Chicago Renaissance*, Liesl Olson offers an observation that Anderson did suffer from a good deal of confusion over his belief in gender equality, which was in conflict with his "persistent desire for affirmation of masculine authority and visible success" (143). Olson is then able to resolve this inner conflict of Anderson's with her conclusion that "the confusion yielded greatness: works of art that exist far beyond the internal conflicts of Sherwood Anderson himself" (143). Seen in this light, then, *The Triumph of the Egg* could well be Anderson's earlier fictional statement of the triumph of art over his own confusion concerning gender roles.

In this volume Anderson's creative process was of a very different nature than that which he employed in the creation of the "grotesques" of *Winesburg, Ohio*. "The Book of the Grotesque" serves as an introduction to *Winesburg, Ohio*, and in it Anderson concludes that each character "became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood" (24). With the possible exception of George Willard and Helen White, all of the characters of *Winesburg, Ohio* suffer from this limitation, but the characters of *The Triumph of the Egg* are not paralyzed by this same debilitating liability. With the creation of Mary Cochran, Sherwood Anderson was able to use thematic images and evocative image clusters as he did in *Winesburg, Ohio* to reveal the essence of her character. However, of far greater significance, his crafting of this young woman character in two tales inspired him to go far beyond the confines of the "grotesque." As Olson observes, Anderson's confusion over gender roles is resolved in *The Triumph of the Egg*, and in this resolution we can see the creation of Mary Cochran's character as a true work of art.

We first meet Mary Cochran in "Unlighted Lamps" and later in "The Door of the Trap." As an eighteen-year-old girl, Mary's character posed a much more challenging problem for Anderson than did the adolescent male characters of "I Want to Know Why" and "The Egg." It is no wonder that those are two of his best tales, for "I Want to Know Why" reflects Anderson's own knowledge and love of the race track while "The Egg" reveals the ambivalent feelings of shame and respect that the young Anderson felt for the amateur showmanship of his own father, Irv Anderson. As with *Winesburg* stories like "Hands," "Adventure," and "Respectability," Anderson was able to capitalize on his reader's natural inclination to empathize with easily understood personalities. A teenage boy experiencing his initiation into manhood is a fortuitous character choice; he is as familiar

to us as a frustrated school teacher or a woman-hating drunkard. The thoughts and actions of these characters affect us emotionally because we recognize them from our own experience. Furthermore, Anderson wrote naturally and well, in the first person, about his own boyhood. But when it came to giving the reader a feeling for a character like Mary Cochran, whose thoughts are less definite and whose rather undramatic actions are not universally comprehended, he was forced to rely more on his ability as a self-conscious craftsman. Mary's character is much like that of Enoch Robinson of "Loneliness," Joe Welling of "A Man of Ideas," and Elmer Cowley of "Queer" from *Winesburg, Ohio* in that it is a fine example of what Ernest Hemingway meant when he said that Anderson "often takes a very banal idea of things and presents it with such craftsmanship that the person reading it believes it beautiful and does not see the craftsmanship at all" ("Lost Book Review" 177). By creating Mary Cochran's character using evocative images and image clusters, Anderson compels the reader to take an active role in empathizing with her and her plight. In short, the creation of Mary Cochran's character supports Hemingway's tribute to the subtlety of Sherwood Anderson's stylistic genius. As readers, we, too, believe in her beauty.

In "Unlighted Lamps" the interplay of images of darkness and light are of primary significance. Mary's father is a doctor in Huntersburg, Illinois, a small town at the turn of the twentieth century, a town very much like Winesburg. Mary is eighteen and is beginning to feel the need to reach out beyond her sheltered experience when her father tells her that he has a heart condition and may die at any moment. Their Saturday night conversation takes place in the darkness of the doctor's second-floor office. Father and daughter stand by the window and, in a typical Andersonian moment of frustrated communication, the doctor tells Mary of his impending death, turns, and walks quickly out of the office: "He had wanted to put his arm about his daughter's shoulder as he talked to her, but never having shown any feeling in his relations with her could not sufficiently release some tight thing within himself" (37). Scenes of life abound in the street below, and, at the moment of his revelation, a young rough named Duke Yetter tries to attract Mary's attention by loudly telling a story to a group of townsmen gathered by the light of the barn door. As her father walks out of the office, Mary shivers and puts her hand over her eyes. The young rough mistakes this fearful action as a sign of recognition and, with hand and head gestures, tries to

beckon her down into the street. Mary, however, doesn't notice him. When, on the following evening, Mary decides to take a walk to do some thinking, Yetter follows her.

In these early moments of the tale Anderson establishes his main thematic contrast between youth/sexuality and old age/death. Mary walks through the section of town where the factory workers live and feels the "hubbub of life" (39). This is a sensual and rather exotic experience for Mary; she is drawn to the rough assertive lives of these workers and she likes the sound of their strong voices. In contrast to the "habitual silence" of her father, she feels strangely alive among these people (39). In this new mood Mary walks on to one of her favorite spots for contemplation, an old orchard that lies between the ruins of an abandoned farmhouse and barn. Here Anderson's use of thematic imagery works effectively to paint a moving portrait of adolescent emotional conflict: "Pushing her way in among the weeds, many of which were covered with blossoms, Mary found herself a seat on a rock that had been rolled against the trunk of an old apple tree. The weeds had concealed her and from the road only her head was visible. Buried away thus in the weeds she looked like a quail that runs in the tall grass and that on hearing some unusual sound, stops, throws up its head and looks sharply about" (40).

Mary is sheltered by the blossoms blooming amidst the decay of the old orchard. An orchard much like her own home, it contains both the decay of her father's barren existence and the potential for beauty and rebirth. She is yet "half-concealed" in the weeds that threaten to choke her, but, like the quail, she is constantly stopping to notice the forces of life surrounding her (40). In this one brief moment Anderson captures the essence of Mary's emerging character: her transition from an early life of emotional drabness to a new life of promised growth and flowering.

This dawning awareness of life forces is further supported by the appearance of the young Duke Yetter who, unknown to Mary, has followed her. Mary has been contemplating the strange disappearance of her mother when Mary was a baby, the town's low opinion of her family, and the release that the death of her father will grant her when the young man disturbs her thoughts. She reacts furiously by slapping his face and telling him that her father wants to kill someone like him because of the lies that the townspeople have told about her mother. Mary's anger is explained by the town rumor that her mother had run off with a young town rough much like the man following

her. However, a more thematically consistent way to see the blow and threat is to view her violent reaction as a very normal fear of the very life forces that have drawn her out on her walk through the factory district and on to the decayed orchard. Once a real life force confronts Mary, in the person of Duke Yetter, she strikes out, threatens, and retreats, more out of an ambivalent, yet understandable, feeling of repulsion and attraction toward the young man than out of anger at the town's opinion of her.

The remainder of the tale is controlled by a very evenly balanced diagram of the separate actions of Mary and her father as they begin to move toward each other both physically and emotionally. After rejecting Yetter, Mary begins to walk again and, stopping on a bridge, watches two boys fishing. The father of the boys recognizes her as the doctor's daughter and stops to speak. He explains that her father had sewed up his boy's head after an accident the previous winter. Because the man was ill and had no money, the doctor had not only taken care of his family for free, but had given the man's wife money for groceries and medicine. Mary is moved by the knowledge of her silent father's act of kindness and generosity, and, as she looks into the stream, she muses on the doctor's life:

> It was almost black in the shadows under the bridge and she thought that it was thus her father's life had been lived. "It has been like a stream running always in shadows and never coming out into the sunlight," she thought, and fear that her own life would run on in darkness gripped her. A great new love for her father swept over her and in fancy she felt his arms about her. As a child she had continually dreamed of caresses received at her father's hands and now the dream came back. For a long time she stood looking at the stream and she resolved that the night should not pass without an effort on her part to make the old dream come true. (44)

The knowledge of his sensitivity and the analogy to the stream, with the imagistic interplay of the dark shadows and sunlight, serve to help both Mary and the reader understand and empathize with the doctor. Mary is at a crucial stage in her development. Her desperate need to break out of the darkness of her youth into the light of her own emerging womanhood leads to her resolution that she will not let another night pass without trying "to make the old dream come true"; she needs to feel the caresses that had been denied her as a child (44).

The doctor's actions closely parallel Mary's experience in terms of both action and theme. After Mary leaves on her walk, the doctor sits in his office reflecting on his life of inarticulateness and misunderstanding. He reminds us of some of the most memorable of the Winesburg grotesques: he feels that something has kept him from expressing himself to his wife and daughter: "When my Ellen was here living with me I let her think me cold and unfeeling while something within me was straining trying to wrench itself loose" (45). This straining force is trying to wrench itself loose out of the body of the dying old man at the same moment that his daughter is beginning her evening walk; in the doctor's dream-troubled musings, he imagines a white girlish figure that is a confused combination of his wife and his daughter coming toward him.

Prior to this dream, we discover the true story of the doctor's wife. She had been an actress with a touring company, and after she became ill, the young Doctor Cochran had taken care of her. Her life had been difficult, so she agreed to marry the doctor and settle in Huntersburg. However, she soon became unhappy, and after the birth of their daughter, Lester Cochran took her to Chicago, found her work with another touring company, gave her money, and walked away from her without so much as a farewell kiss. Now, in his state of sad contemplation, the white girlish figure approaches him, and, though a young farmer comes into the dark office and strikes a match, the doctor continues to dream. The flickering match light on the wall reminds the doctor of other dancing lights from his past. In the first year of their marriage the doctor and his wife had taken a drive in the country in search of furnishings for their home. A country woman had given them an old mirror of unusual design, and on the way home the doctor held the mirror as his wife drove. It was then that she told him of her pregnancy:

> How deeply etched, that scene in the sick man's mind! The sun was going down over the young corn and oat fields beside the road. The prairie land was black and occasionally the road ran through short lanes of trees that also looked black in the waning light. The mirror on his knees caught the rays of the departing sun and sent a great ball of golden light dancing across the fields and among the branches of the trees. Now as he stood in the presence of the farmer and as the little light from the burning match on the floor recalled that other evening of dancing lights, he thought he understood the failure of his marriage and of his life. On that evening long ago when Ellen

> had told him of the coming of the great adventure of their marriage he had remained silent because he had thought no words he could utter would express what he felt. There had been a defense for himself built up. (47)

The repeated reference to the dancing lights intensifies as the tale concludes. The doctor's ironic resolution to talk to his daughter that night, even if it kills him, closely parallels Mary's similar promise. As the tale ends, the image of the dancing lights draws them closer to each other.

The young farmer had come to summon the doctor to his wife in childbirth. Later, when the doctor returns from his successful duty, he pauses in the street below his office as the figures of his wife, his daughter, and the woman he had just aided become confused in his mind. We are told that Duke Yetter and the other men are quarrelling beside the wall of the barn and that the lantern threw dancing shadows over their faces and forms. Here the dancing lights of the doctor's hopeful dream of communication and understanding are nicely contrasted to the dancing shadows of the meaningless and empty talk of the quarrelling men. Quite appropriately, Mary is at that moment sitting by the window in the doctor's office, so absorbed in her own thoughts that she doesn't even notice Duke and the quarrelling men below.

Mary, too, is in a reflective mood. She thinks only of her father as a scene from her childhood returns to haunt her memory. When Mary was fifteen her father asked her to ride with him in the country to visit a sick woman. That night the doctor had made two attempts to reach out to his daughter. First, he asked her about her future and almost touched her as the two sat on the dark porch of the farmhouse. However, the doctor jumped up, returned to the house and left Mary alone in the darkness. Thoughts of the fishing boys and their father return to Mary as she quickly decides that it is her fault that she and her father have not known each other, and she reaffirms her resolution to break through the wall that has separated them. Mary then recalls her father's second attempt at communication on the night of their summer drive in the country:

> The heavy rains had swollen the streams they had to cross and when they had almost reached town he had stopped the horse on the wooden bridge. The horse danced nervously about and her father held the reins firmly and occasionally spoke to him. Beneath the bridge the swollen stream made a great roaring sound and beside the

> road in a long flat field there was a lake of flood water. At that moment the moon had come out from behind the clouds and the wind that blew across the water made little waves. The lake of flood water was covered with dancing lights. "I'm going to tell you about your mother and myself," her father said huskily, but at that moment the timbers of the bridge began to crack dangerously and the horse plunged forward. When her father had regained control of the frightened beast they were in the streets of the town and his diffident silent nature had reasserted itself. (50)

The wind and the stream combine to function naturally as a second mirror that reflects the moon's dancing lights, and another touching moment of promised communication and enlightenment is beautifully rendered. However, as is the case with so many of the *Winesburg* scenes, this hopeful mood is quickly broken by a coincidence that is beyond the control of the characters. The rising of the flood water drowned out this rare opportunity that the doctor had to tell his daughter of himself and her mother, and as we return to the present scene, both Mary and her father seem to be suspended in the darkness as they try desperately to draw closer to each other.

Mary waits in the darkness by the window of the second-floor office while the doctor lingers in the dark street below near the quarrelling men. He has gone through a transformation in spirit, and as he reaches the foot of the stairway, he startles Mary by calling a cheerful "good night" to the men. He had never done this before and Mary becomes half-convinced that a new man is coming up the stairway. As the doctor reaches the doorway he is still in his cheerful mood, but the figures of his wife, his daughter and the woman in childbirth once again cause a confused riot in his mind: "Who did it happen to? Was it Ellen or that other woman or my little Mary?" (51). The doctor is about to die and he knows it; he also knows that the cycle of life continues: "It's strange eh, that my hands should have helped a baby be born while all the time death stood at my elbow?" (51). However, it is the doctor's final comment that clearly shows Anderson's ability to create character with appropriate thematic imagery. We are reminded of Mary's earlier thought that her father's life had been like a stream running always in the shadows and never coming out into sunlight by the doctor's reflection that "[m]y feet are cold and numb from waiting for life to come out of life . . . The woman struggled and now I must struggle" (51). This coldness and numbness that have resulted from his shadowed existence are strongly felt as the doctor falls back-

ward down the stairs at the very moment that he and his daughter were closer than they had ever been to giving spiritual birth to their relationship. Yet, the tale does not end here; the cycle is not complete.

The young rough, Duke Yetter, carries the old man's body up the stairs to Mary, and the light from the forgotten cigarette of another man following Duke "danced up and down in the darkness" (52). The image of the dancing lights supports the notion of life's cyclical nature. In the character of Duke Yetter lies the potential for Mary's own rebirth. Ironically, through his death the father has given the daughter what he had struggled to give her all of their lives. It is a small triumph, but the dancing light of the cigarette suggests that Mary may finally be released from the frustrations of the past and experience true understanding and fulfillment through another human being.

Thus, "Unlighted Lamps" is a tale that is crafted much in the same careful way of "Loneliness" from *Winesburg, Ohio*. With the use of evocative images and thematic image patterns like the dancing lights and dark shadows, Anderson has given his reader another intense intellectual and emotional experience. However, unlike the end of "Loneliness," the conclusion of this tale promises that there may be some hope for Mary. As the title of the volume suggests, the character of Mary Cochran may, indeed, represent what Anderson felt could be the eventual triumph of the egg.

Apparently, Sherwood Anderson had big plans for the character of Mary Cochran. In *The American Short Story Cycle*, Jennifer Smith notes that for many years after the publication of *The Triumph of the Egg*, Anderson was obsessed with giving Mary Cochran her own book, a book of short tales much like *Winesburg, Ohio* with Mary assuming the role of George Willard as the central character. Sadly, the book was never finished and, as readers, we all may be considered poorer for its absence (33). However, there may be another reason for Anderson's failure to write Mary's book. In "Unlighted Lamps" Mary's character is more fully rounded than that of George Willard, and, as such, she would not be able to fill Willard's role of confidant. George is a device of Anderson's creation, and, despite the fact that he is not a first-person narrator, his role is to give us a portrait of each grotesque. Mary Cochran's role is not that in either of her tales; she is a fully conceived young female character coming of age in the early twentieth century, and, as such, she stands as a satisfying character who could not be conceived as merely a vehicle for Anderson's crafting of other characters.

Although Anderson never finished Mary's book, he did craft her reappearance in this volume's story, "The Door of the Trap." Mary is not the main character in this tale, but her role is of major significance; she unknowingly helps her new father figure, Hugh Walker, make a short-lived escape from his own barriers of inarticulateness and misunderstanding. Hugh is a math professor at a small college in Union Valley, Illinois, who feels trapped by his wife and children. The image of the egg dominates this tale: "He thought of himself as a living thing inside of a shell, trying to break out" (67). As is the case with Doctor Cochran, Hugh is a man who cannot force himself to break out of this shell, and in his imagination, too, there is some vague notion that the answer to meaningful communication lies in the person of his young student, Mary Cochran.

Before Mary arrives on the scene, her character is foreshadowed by a farm woman that Hugh remembers seeing on one of his walks as a young man. The woman was going to a barn to milk a cow, and in the semi-darkness Hugh saw her stop and look toward him: "She was dressed in white and he could see her but dimly against the blackish green of the trees of an orchard behind her" (68). This passage reminds us of Mary's walk to the old orchard in "Unlighted Lamps," and it has a similar function. Hugh and Mary will meet; the white dress and the blackish green trees of the orchard suggest that Hugh's hope for spiritual rebirth may be in the hands of a virgin who promises fertility, an emerging earth mother. Hugh is described as having "a queer sensation of her having been lifted by an unseen hand and brought to him" (68-69). When Hugh does meet Mary a short time after his musings about the woman in the white dress, he asks her to come to his home and we are told that "[a] new life began in Hugh Walker's house" (70).

Whereas Anderson uses dancing lights as the repeated central image of "Unlighted Lamps," he employs images of trees in this tale for the same purpose. Hugh's wife, Winifred, is like a dead tree; her baglike form slumps in the chair as she reads Robert Louis Stevenson's novels over and over again. The black nanny for the children is like an old sturdy tree who gives Hugh unspoken sympathy and understanding. Mary, however, has the power to inspire Hugh's own spiritual growth; her figure is "like a young tree that has not borne fruit" (71). Here the character of Mary has a function similar to that of her role in her father's imagination. She is once again a member of a three-part figure that combines the notions of wife, mother and child, yet she is free from the prison of Hugh's existence,

and therein lies the powerful attraction that he feels for her. The problem is that, rather than trying to break out of his trap on his own, Hugh wants to draw Mary into his prison and use her inspirational power to aid in his escape, even at the risk of her destruction.

It is at this point, however, that this promising tale loses its impact. From the story's opening, it appears that Anderson was attempting to balance the characters of Mary and Hugh equally through a careful interplay of thematic images. He sustains this technique with tight control in "Unlighted Lamps," but in "The Door of the Trap" he abandons the balanced focus. Hugh's character dominates the entire conclusion of the tale, while Mary's role is diminished; it becomes no more important than that of Winifred or the nanny.

Mary takes a great deal of interest in the Walker household and children; for three years, she acts as an unofficial governess. Hugh seems to take a perverse pleasure in his plan, and his scheme begins to work as "quite suddenly and unexpectedly Hugh's silence that had lasted all through his married life, was broken up" (73). In very uncharacteristic moments Hugh engages in a violent argument with a colleague, whistles and sings while he putters in the garden, and explodes at Mary one evening when he comes home to find her reading a book. He snatches the book from Mary's hands and, with an oath, throws it into the fire: "A flood of words ran from him. He cursed books and people and schools. 'Damn it all,' he said. 'What makes you want to read about life? What makes people want to think about life? Why don't they live? Why don't they leave books and thoughts and schools alone?'" (73). This outburst can be explained simply by Hugh's fear that Mary will become like his own worn-out wife who derives all of her pleasure from life vicariously, yet there is something happening here of far greater thematic significance. Hugh is disgusted with his own life of books, schools and thoughts, and the fact that the books are made out of dead trees serves to strengthen the theme of entrapment.

Hugh feels that his prison is made of wood and paper. He thinks of himself as a house whose shutters are loose. To avoid distracting conversation he pretends to read books; his entire conception of himself is summed up by his conviction that he is one who walks in the darkness of the hallway of a home until he comes to a blank wall. In sharp contrast to these images of spiritual death and entrapment are images of spiritual rebirth and escape. He sees the black nanny as a tree whose voice carries him away into forests and swamps. The

image of Mary as a young tree who has not borne fruit gives him hope, but he still finds it impossible to break out of the trap. As a result, he must capture Mary and bring her in with him. Hugh coaxes Mary back to his house after his angry outburst and concludes, with a hard smile, that "[s]he isn't like a young tree any more. She is almost like Winifred. She is almost like a person who belongs here, who belongs to me and my life" (74). He derives a rather sadistic pleasure from the idea that he and Mary are now cell mates.

In the final climactic scene of the tale, Hugh confronts Mary in the hall and kisses her upon the cheeks and lips. Mary had just come from the boys' room where she had been "suddenly overtaken with a hunger to kiss Hugh's oldest boy"; after Hugh's advance, "she was so weak with fright and with new strange trembling desires" that she had difficulty making her way down the stairs and into Winifred's presence. Mary tells Winifred that she has a headache, and, as she leaves, Hugh closes the back door and repeats his feeling that Mary is no longer like a young tree. He is glad and proud of what he had done; a strong light has come into his eyes as he thinks, with a grim pleasure, that "she will be imprisoned, but I will have nothing to do with it. She will never belong to me. My hands will never build a prison for her" (75).

Hugh feels that, like him, everyone must be imprisoned eventually in a passionless and spiritually dead existence with no hope of escape; he fails to grasp the concepts of fertility and rebirth. Hugh sees his action of kissing as some kind of seal of doom, perhaps even a symbolic violation of her virginity, that will guarantee her future entrapment. However, what he fails to comprehend is that in turning from a young tree into a mature one, Mary has the potential to give birth to and nurture other young saplings. This potential is evidenced by her need to kiss Hugh's son and her strong trembling desire after Hugh's kiss. Mary may, indeed, find maturity a bit of a trap, but it is Anderson's revelation of the depth of Hugh's self-deception that is more thematically significant. Hugh could not break out of his trap, and, by leaning on Mary as a sacrificial limb, he ignores the potential for rebirth that lies within himself. He has become old and, like his wife, "bag-like"; he sees his children as lifeless appendages rather than newly sprouted branches. As a result, he closes the door of his own trap. Hugh's prison is one of his own making; he is his own jailor, and, as was the case with Mary's father, he can't quite bring himself to break through the walls of inarticulateness and misunderstanding that surround him.

"The Door of the Trap" finally must go down as an ambitious attempt by Anderson to develop Mary Cochran's character in a sequel to "Unlighted Lamps." However, this story doesn't work nearly as well as the first because Anderson abandons Mary's imagistic development midway in a one-sided effort to portray Hugh's character and plight. Though the image of Mary as a young tree as contrasted to that of Hugh as a deadwood trap is crucial for our understanding of and involvement with Hugh's character, it adds little to our perception and appreciation of Mary's role. In short, this tale is a representative illustration of Anderson's shortcomings as a craftsman.

When compared to such stories as "I Want to Know Why" and "The Egg," these two tales are not as gripping emotionally, nor are they as impressive stylistically, but they do illustrate Anderson's ambition and his dedication to the painstaking work necessary to select images and create thematic image patterns. "I Want to Know Why" and "The Egg" are two of his best because of his fortuitous choice of familiar characters, his skill with first-person narration, and his knowledge and love of the subject matter. However, "Unlighted Lamps" and "The Door of the Trap" are better examples of his desire and ability to combine theme and image in an attempt to reveal character. Embodied in Mary Cochran's character is Anderson's hope for the eventual triumph of the forces of light and life over the forces of darkness and death. In these tales, Sherwood Anderson, the self-conscious craftsman, achieves a triumph of a different nature.

Florida Institute of Technology

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INTERSECTIONAL TRAUMAS OF MOTHERHOOD: LOUISE ERDRICH'S *THE ROUND HOUSE* AND *FUTURE HOME OF THE LIVING GOD*

MEGAN E. CANNELLA

I acknowledge that the original version of this paper was presented at the SSML symposium, held on the traditional territories of the Peoria, Anishinabewaki, Odawa, and Sauk peoples. This paper, in all its iterations, was written on the traditional territory of the Washoe peoples. (Native Land)

Because of the pervasive and unrelenting nature of colonial traumas, such realities become transgenerational wounds. In some of Louise Erdrich's most recent fiction, specifically *The Round House* (2012) and *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), the cost of such ever-present, arguably hereditary wounds becomes apparent. Erdrich's narrativization of these traumas also doubles as a social critique as she explores different genres to best mirror the chaos, uncertainty, and threat of the stories she is telling. In this essay, I explore the ways in which Erdrich uses the mother-child bond to critique the colonial violence that continues to be inflicted upon Native communities, as well as the way she tracks the generational implications of this trauma. I argue that by understanding traumatic transgenerational Native narratives, we can better identify and critique the ways in which reproductive autonomy has been and continues to be a key site of colonization.

Understanding Native transgenerational maternal trauma opens up an important dialogue within Midwestern literature. The Midwest is stereotypically characterized and, in turn, dismissed as an overly simplistic, wholesome place. These are also characteristics that are too often applied to mothers. It is assumed that mothers are nurturing and pure in an unimpeachable, incorruptible way. The image of

the all-American, wholesome, allegedly unproblematic, hegemonically accepted Midwestern mother is destabilized when work such as Erdrich's—or SSML's 2019 Mark Twain Award winner, Bonnie Jo Campbell's *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters* (2015)—seeks to represent the multi-faceted, nuanced, achingly complex dynamics inherent to both motherhood and the Midwest. By exploring texts that do this work, scholars are able to expand understandings of both motherhood and the Midwest to appreciate a myriad of interventions and experiences. These analyses pave the way for more inclusive and innovative representations and, thus, the sharing of more diverse maternal experiences.

Understanding violence against maternal bodies in this multifaceted way is imperative to narrativizing Native motherhood accurately in the twenty-first century. Erdrich's novels discuss growing threats facing maternal bodies—not just in terms of reproductive health broadly but also in terms of the reproductive autonomy of Native women more specifically. There is a long history of colonizing forces brutally violating Native women and their reproductive autonomy, with forced, nonconsensual sterilization being one of the most heinous examples (Blakemore). However, there are many instances of violence against Native mothers that were far more public and socially acceptable. For example, Native baby shows—which put Native mothers and children on display, in order to chastise and critique their non-Eurocentric methods and traditions—are one example of the hegemonic, settler-colonialist agenda to undermine and destabilize the mother-child structure (Klann). Boarding schools and any number of other assimilationist attempts to "kill the Indian and keep the man" similarly challenge the supposed sanctity of the mother-child bond ("History and Culture"). This violence is critically assessed in Erdrich's novels, where the relationships between mothers and their children are continually threatened and traumatized by settler-colonial privilege, laws, and entitlement.

What Erdrich accomplishes in *The Round House* and *Future Home of the Living God* not only diversifies contemporary understandings of unrelenting violence against maternal bodies, but also forces us to understand maternal bodies and bonds in increasingly nuanced, intersectional ways. Erdrich's novels have long asked us to interrogate family structures and Native realities. This legacy continues in her recent novels. Laura Roldán Sevillano argues, "In Erdrich's novels, the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism are

illustrated through different characters' actions and discourses which reveal the latent racism within North American society" (151). This is certainly true across Erdrich's oeuvre, but in her most recent novels, the assumption that racism in North America might be latent is completely obviated. Erdrich pushes her audience and narratives further by confronting the ever-changing and, by most accounts, devolving rights associated with reproduction and maternity. This emphasis is important for myriad reasons, not least of all the fact that motherhood, especially for minoritized, marginalized communities, is one of the most consistently threatened, attacked, and ignored institutions in the United States.

Motherhood is hailed as a cornerstone of our society and democracy. After the American Revolution, concepts of republican motherhood and the cult of domesticity relied on the fact that mothers should be idealized because they are entrusted with educating and training the next generation to be patriots and to serve the republic, its ideals, and its agenda. However, this idealized view only speaks to white mothers. Never once did the cult of domesticity idolize or valorize women of color (Samuels). Instead, these women were experimented on, abused, and sterilized, all in the name of the republic, its ideals, and its agenda. Throughout her work and specifically in the novels discussed here, Erdrich is inviting readers to engage with a different version of American motherhood—a motherhood that is traumatic and often overlooked.

The Round House (2012) tells the complicated story of Geraldine Coutts's rape and her family and community's struggle to survive the aftermath of her attack. The novel is told from the perspective of Joe, Geraldine's son. It is set on an Ojibwe reservation in North Dakota where Geraldine works in the tribal registry office and her husband, Bazil, is a tribal judge. Her rape and attack take place in contested space where the jurisdiction of the crimes is unclear. This geographical uncertainty augments the trauma of Geraldine's rape because it means her attacker may never be brought to legal justice. Geraldine's trauma exists in a liminal space, as a direct result of the colonization of tribal lands, which established the boundaries of these jurisdictions in the first place. Throughout this novel, Erdrich provides incisive discussion and criticism of tribal laws and how they have been manipulated and limited by the imposition of settler colonialism.

Geraldine's rape is representative of the ways marginalized, specifically Native, mothers endeavor to shield their children from

the horrors of colonialism, even going so far as to sacrifice their own bodies. In "Erdrich's Crusade: Sexual Violence in *The Round House*," Julie Tharp explains, "The scope of the problem is developed through Mayla Wolfskin's story, the events that actually motivate the attack on Geraldine" (34). Mayla is seeking Geraldine's help with the tribal enrollment process for her child. Tharp synthesizes the events that ultimately put Geraldine at risk: Mayla, a high school student, was impregnated by the South Dakota governor Curtis Yeltow while she was interning for him; after Mayla gives birth and takes Yeltow's hush money, she returns to the reservation to enroll her baby in the tribe, naming Yeltow as the father. All this jeopardizes Geraldine because "as tribal record keeper, Geraldine now has access to powerful information" (34). This power, however, does not protect Geraldine as Yeltow's power protects him.

In fact, the duality of Geraldine's power and risk in documenting Mayla's abuse and story by way of her child's tribal enrollment is used to highlight the ways in which "individuals from the very ordinary all the way to the governor's office carry racist and sexist attitudes and practices that essentially institutionalize abuse" (Tharp 34). Mayla is murdered and Geraldine is left to deal with the ongoing trauma of her rape because both mothers knew the potential risk facing Mayla's child and sacrificed themselves in efforts to protect the child. These mothers were not exalted as part of the cult of domesticity. Because Geraldine and Mayla are attacked before the child's enrollment could be completed, "the tribal background of this child hasn't been established," and Yeltow attempts to adopt Mayla's child in an effort to conceal the scandal of their affair (Erdrich, *The Round House* 157). Yeltow "of course is well known for his bigoted treatment of Indians—an image he is trying in his own way to mitigate" (157). Ultimately, Yeltow's "adoption scheme blew up in his face," but it is news of his adoption attempt that prompts Geraldine to share some of the details of her attack with her husband (158). Until then, she had remained silent, in part, as an attempt to protect Mayla and her child from further harm at the threat of Lark (162).

Similarly, through Geraldine's silence and depression after her rape, she attempts to shield her son from her trauma, though this effort ultimately leaves him to attempt to fill in the unknown details of his mother's attack himself, resulting in a different type of trauma. At the time of Geraldine's attack, Joe "is thirteen years old, on the cusp between childhood and manhood" (Tharp 29). As a result,

Geraldine's attack and resulting traumatization shape Joe's view of the world, women's bodies, and his own masculinity. The effects of this trauma become heartbreakingly obvious as "Joe is telling the story in the present, looking back at events that took place in 1988. This provides an adult perspective, distance, and reflection, but it also provides a sense of continuity over time" (Tharp 29). Whatever chronological or narrative continuity Tharp identifies in this novel is tinged (at the very least) by the continuity of the trauma from which Geraldine and, by extension, Joe can never truly be free. To that end, Tharp argues, "[b]y choosing Joe as narrator, Erdrich gestures to that future. She asks the reader to think generationally, not just in the sense that these laws affect generations of people but also that it may take generations to change them" (31). Much of the novel deals with Joe's inability to cope with the fact that his mother is physically and psychologically broken. Something that neither Joe nor Geraldine had control over shifted their mother-child relationship irreparably. Joe struggles to come to terms with this shift, what it has made of his parents, and what it has done for his world view. The fundamental, nurturing, bonded mother-child relationship Geraldine and Joe once shared is forever changed by the brutal actions of a third party, Lark, who serves as one representation of the insidious violence of settler colonialism.

Not only is Joe's relationship with his mother irreparably altered, his relationship with his father is similarly impacted. In part, this is because Joe's father, Bazil, is a judge who has spent his life trying to help bring justice to Native communities, yet he finds himself limited in his ability to help his own wife: "There was a state trooper, an officer local to the town of Hoopdance, and Vince Madwesin, from the tribal police. My father has insisted that they each take a statement from my mother because it wasn't clear where the crime had been committed—on state or tribal land—or who has committed it—an Indian or a non-Indian" (Erdrich, *The Round House* 12). While Bazil is trying to cover all possibilities, it is also clear he understands just how difficult it will be to secure justice for his wife. As Tharp explains, "Geraldine's inability to say exactly on which piece of ground she was raped makes it impossible to assign jurisdiction" (Tharp 36). That is, Geraldine is trapped by the systemic colonization of both Native lands and Native women. The system is demanding that she save herself but has been set up specifically to prevent her from doing exactly that.

On a bit of a parallel journey, Cedar, the protagonist of Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*, must protect her unborn child from puritanical forces that are turning a near-future, dystopian United States into a religious police state, increasingly concerned with controlling reproduction, as evolution seems to be reversing. Women are increasingly giving birth to children who seem to be evolutionarily regressing. Cedar's story involves not only critique of the increasingly panoptic surveillance of gestating bodies but also interrogation of how such surveillance impacts Native mothers and children.

The novel begins as Cedar introduces herself both to her future child and the reader by beginning to explain the colonization of her personal history, "When I tell you my white name is Cedar Hawk Songmaker and that I am the adopted child of Minneapolis liberals, and that when I went looking for my Ojibwe parents and found that I was Mary Potts I hid that knowledge, maybe you'll understand. Or not" (Erdrich, *Future Home* 3). From the very beginning of the novel, Cedar is grappling with her understanding of identity and how all her assumptions about her Native heritage are suddenly revealed to her to be unfounded. Cedar arrives at this crossroads of identity after her "ethnicity was celebrated in the sheltered enclave of [her] adoptive Songmaker family," but when she went to college, she confesses, "I became ordinary, then. Even worse, I had no clan, no culture, no language, no relatives" (3, 4). The sense of ordinariness that Cedar struggles with comes to a head when she learns about her biological mother.

As Cedar ventures out to meet her biological mother and family, she bemoans that "they have destroyed the romantic imaginary Native parents I've invented from earliest childhood. . . " (Erdrich, *Future Home* 6). Throughout the novel, Cedar's crisis of identity and journey through pregnancy play out through her exploration of different juxtapositions of motherhood: her biological mother and her adoptive mother; her imagined version of her biological mother and the reality of her biological mother; her imagined version of her adoptive mother and the reality of her adoptive mother; and, ultimately, her imagined self as a mother and the realities of her pregnancy and journey to motherhood. As Cedar negotiates these juxtapositions time and time again, she must confront the fact she was separated from her biological mother under seemingly dubious—if not illegal—circumstances, since her adoptive parents are white, and that would violate the "Indian Child Welfare Act, which makes it almost impossible to adopt a Native child into a non-Native family"

(4). She also must confront the ways in which colonialism shaped her life, generations before she was even born, as evidenced by the Mary Potts lineage she was born into and continues:

> *Biological Family*? *Potts*? How about *Immense Disappointment*? How about *FUCK YOU*? . . . It was a shock to realize that on the reservation I was even more ordinary than I'd felt myself to be in college. My family had no special powers or connections with healing spirits or sacred animals. We weren't even poor. We were bourgeois. We owned a Superpumper. I was Mary Potts, daughter and granddaughter of Mary Potts, big sister to another Mary Potts, in short, just another of many Mary Potts reaching back to the colonization of this region, many of whom now worked at the Superpumper franchise first stop before the casino. (5)

Cedar's separation from her birth mother under seemingly illegal circumstances and what Cedar perceives as an erasure of Native culture, despite her biological mother living on a reservation, speak to the United States' long tradition of separating Native mothers from their children. From Cedar's perspective, she has a generic American name—Mary Potts—and lives in a generic American place—Minnesota. While what she seems to be expecting is probably best described as a colonizer's characterization of Native life, this experience of unmet expectations and confused identity is itself a kind of typical American experience, as it results from the continued history of violence against Native mothers.

One of the most explicit examples of surveillance and violence in the novel is Mother, the anonymous, seemingly omnipresent figure who recruits Womb Volunteers. Mother speaks to Cedar, unsolicited, by way of Cedar's computer screen. Instantly identifying the obvious threat to her autonomy that Mother represents, Cedar destroys her computer. However, as is true in so many dystopian novels, explicit, superficial destruction is not enough: "One pre-dawn, we see the image of Mother fading in and out. She looks haggard, much older, tinged with green like the head of the Wizard of Oz. 'I'm back,' she says, glaring exhaustedly up from under her eyebrows. 'They failed to destroy Mother. I will always be here for you'" (Erdrich, *Future Home* 90). This scene becomes emblematic of Erdrich's interrogation of the mother-child bond and the issues of autonomy and associated traumas that are inherent in this bond. This ominous omnipresence of Mother juxtaposes the unwavering mater-

nal fortitude and dedication of Cedar and her two mothers (both biological and adopted) as they fight to preserve the safety of their respective children. Mother's recruiting efforts to imprison "womb volunteers" in the Future Home Reception Centers are indefatigable as she preys on the precariousness of life in this dystopian theocracy, which is regulating reproductive autonomy through increasingly oppressive means: pregnant women are snatched off the street and imprisoned in these centers.

As the protagonist, Cedar is continually saved from what we understand to be the worst-case scenarios. Even from an early ultrasound, when her doctor is supposed to detain her so she can be taken into custody because of the abnormal measurements of her fetus and her Ojibwe heritage, he helps her to escape (Erdrich, *Future Home* 51). Erdrich builds from this moment during Cedar's ultrasound to the haunting presence of Mother, to Cedar's escape from a birthing center, each oppressive violation meant to seem barbaric and unthinkable to the reader. However, Erdrich is not only responding to the long history of violence against Native women and children, she is commenting on the contemporary violence that was taking place at the time these novels were published and that continues today. One of the most recent examples of this existing, contemporary violence is documented in Bryant Furlow's reporting—which is contemporaneous with my revising of this essay—about "a prominent women's hospital [Albuquerque's Lovelace Women's Hospital] [that] has separated some Native American women from their newly born babies, the result of a practice designed to stop the spread of COVID-19 that clinicians and health care ethicists described as racial profiling" ("A Hospital's Secret").[1]

Narratives that privilege and center settler-colonialist voices often contextualize trauma and violence against Native mothers and children as historical and not of our time. However, contemporary Native authors, critics, and current events tell a radically different story. Elizabeth Rule explores and exposes the ways in which historical acts of violence against Native mothers persist and continue to utilize the same strategies as she discusses the harassment Inuk throat singer Tanya Tagaq was subjected to. Setting Tagaq's story within the context of a long history of transgenerational trauma, it becomes clear that "historical and ongoing violence targeting Indigenous motherhood must also be considered in any analysis, theorization, or state initiative focused on violence against Indigenous women" (Rule

750). The writings of authors like Erdrich and Rule highlight this issue:

> Attacks on Indigenous motherhood—such as those against Tagaq—remain underanalyzed in terms of how they connect to both historical efforts to eradicate Indigenous nations through forced assimilation and sterilization and contemporary violence against Native women. The success of these efforts—residential schools, sterilizations, foster care schemes, and adoption abuse—relied on the delegitimization of Indigenous motherhood as a precursor to remove Indigenous children from their cultures and nations and raise them instead within EuroCanadian families, or to prevent those children from existing in the first place. In this way, attacks on Indigenous motherhood functioned as a form of gendered violence in service of settler colonialism. (750)

The autonomy of Native mothers is continually compromised in favor of colonial assumptions about how Native mothers should be allowed to interact with their bodies and, by extension, their children.

In her narrative explorations of trauma and post-trauma in these novels, Erdrich continues to problematize assumptions and entitlements regarding choice. When interviewed by Bethanne Patrick of the *Los Angeles Times* about *Future Home*, Erdrich explains, "I wanted to explore what a public creature you become when you're pregnant, how everybody puts their hands on you, you're vulnerable to an extreme degree when you're pregnant" (Patrick). As Erdrich explores this entitlement to pregnant bodies in *Future Home* and women's bodies more broadly in *The Round House*, she deliberately engages the rhetoric of choice as it applies to bodily autonomy. While abortion is not the choice being discussed—as is commonly the case when choice is discussed in terms of women's bodies—as Mayla and Cedar both desperately want their babies, Erdrich goes on to explain, "Anti-choice is about controlling women's bodies period. It's about seizing control of young women" (Patrick). Because this fight for bodily autonomy seems to reach its peak when said body is or could potentially reproduce, this fight becomes a point of transgenerational trauma, recurring necessarily as each new generation comes to fruition. Seen continually throughout both novels, the more mothers, particularly Geraldine and Cedar, fight to protect their children, the more established and irreversible the transgenerational traumas become. This dynamic is largely due to the ways in which the traumas shape Geraldine and Cedar, subsequently forcing their identities and

capacities as mothers to transform and evolve in specific, often deliberate ways. Even if these women attempt to return to "normal" routines and practices of mothering, they can't. They have been changed. Thus, their ability and capacity for motherwork has changed.[2]

Despite their similarities, the narratives of these two mothers are vastly different, because Geraldine is well aware of the colonial traumas visited upon Native communities. She has lived it her whole life, and now she and her husband dedicate their lives to protecting their tribal community from these injustices, trying to find justice and reparations when possible. On the other hand, Cedar questions the validity of her adoption and then the resulting relationship with her adoptive mother. This interrogation positions Cedar's entire upbringing and understanding of family and maternity as contrary to the protective, preservationist laws meant to protect and maintain tribal community and lands, despite ever-present threats of domination and assimilation.

The omnipresent, panoptic Mother figure embodies (figuratively, since she is a disembodied head) the ways in which pregnant bodies are consistently and largely relentlessly surveilled and threatened. Motherhood is often characterized as idyllic, natural, and beautiful in a way that is similar to the ways in which the Midwest is characterized as idyllic, natural, and unthreatening. However, just as the Midwest is linked to Americana, so is violence against maternal bodies—both emotional and physical—as is displayed especially poignantly and unflinchingly in these recent Erdrich novels. Given the nuanced, diverse, and complicated ways that Erdrich depicts violence against maternal bodies, she effectively establishes the pervasive nature of such violence.

An important way that Erdrich crafts these complicated, nuanced narratives of motherhood and transgenerational trauma is through her use of genre. No stranger to working across genres, it is her use of suspense in *The Round House* and her engagement in the dystopian speculative in *Future Home of the Living God* that lay the groundwork for the complexity of the narratives she develops. Tharp asserts that "Erdrich consciously uses the suspense novel format to empower her crusade" (29). Erdrich accomplishes this generic effect, in part, through the fact that Geraldine, ostensibly the novel's primary victim, does not narrate her own story. Narration of this novel is grounded in her son Joe's experiences. Additionally, Erdrich positions the reader as witness, "implicitly challeng[ing] the reader to

walk away from the extensive damage seen and do nothing about it. Geraldine's silence also fuels the suspense in the novel, forcing the other characters and reader to piece together scant clues" (30). Though Tharp is specifically discussing the reader's role as witness in terms of *The Round House*, I argue that Erdrich similarly situates readers of *Future Home of the Living God*. However, in *Future Home*, the reader is not witnessing the aftereffects of a very specific, for all intents and purposes, fairly well-defined traumatic event; instead, the reader is witnessing a slow insidious rollback of rights and bodily autonomy. I argue that this is a similar challenge to her readers—when you see the rights of others being stripped away, what do you do? Where and when is your point of action? *Future Home* poses these questions within the context of a near-future, speculative United States. In this way, as the novel draws on histories of violence, showing how they can continue to be enacted, it also urges readers to consider how they would respond should they be confronted with events and tactics they understand as historical.

However, lest she be thought too passive an activist, Erdrich feels a call to action and reaction similar to that which she is trying to produce in her readers. In a 2017 *New York Times* review of *Future Home*, Ruth Franklin writes:

> In a note to readers that accompanied advance copies of the book, Erdrich writes that she began the novel in 2002, a year after her youngest daughter was born, when she felt things seemed to be "moving backward" with the war in Iraq and the global gag rule. Six years later, she put the manuscript aside and wrote "The Round House" (2012) and "LaRose" (2016), both brilliant novels that deal—in very different ways—with some similar questions: the relationship between sex and violence, the clash of cultures between Native Americans and whites, the myths surrounding birth and adoption. Returning to her abandoned novel toward the end of 2016, she found it newly urgent, for all the obvious reasons, and reworked it, cutting about 200 pages in the process. Erdrich says she feels "shock" at the speed with which it was rushed into print, but, she writes, "I only have to look at photographs of white men in dark suits deciding crucial issues of women's health to know the timing is right."

Franklin goes on to draw comparisons between Erdrich's recent works and their narrativization of motherhood and reproductive autonomy and the renewed interest in Margaret Atwood's *The*

Handmaid's Tale, as well as her *Maddaddam* trilogy. This begins to signal larger literary trends regarding maternal bodily autonomy. The idea that narrative, genre, and current cultural anxieties can intersect to precipitate change is ripe for further exploration. Similarly, the roles, limitations, and strengths of masculine allies in these narratives warrant continued discussion, to understand more holistically the realities of reproductive bodily autonomy in twenty-first-century maternity narratives.

Interrogating the ways in which narratives like Erdrich's add to and influence our conversations regarding Midwestern literature is necessary because it provides opportunities to more critically engage with the ways in which large cultural moments impact life in the Midwest and the narratives that result. In this time of increased, or at least more blatant, explicit nationalism and white supremacy, normalizing narratives of color is imperative. Such action establishes a more comprehensive, accurate depiction of what it means to be an American and, more specifically, a Midwesterner. Oftentimes, narratives of color get tokenized but not fully incorporated into the Midwestern narrative experience. Such othering prevents the establishment of accurate representations of the narratives of Midwestern literature. Such othering reifies a history of monovocal narratives characterizing the region. Much of what gets discussed at SSML conferences is grounded in the questions: What counts as Midwestern? To what extent? Under what circumstances? Erdrich's novels push readers and scholars to reconsider their definitions of the region—including its priorities and values—as well as its definitions of motherhood—including reproductive autonomy, motherwork, family dynamics broadly, and mother-child bonds specifically. In all of the instances I have laid out in this essay, what is at stake is the defining of fundamental elements of everyday life. Nevertheless, when novels such as Erdrich's are positioned as contemporary critiques, the reader is at least implicitly recruited to join in the efforts to disrupt patterns of transgenerational trauma, which is why a more inclusive understanding of "Midwestern" becomes imperative. If we cannot identify the issues at hand, we squander the opportunity to act.

University of Nevada-Reno

NOTES

[1]Furlow's reporting of this story, as of the submission of this essay, ranges from June 13-August 22, 2020.

[2]Patricia Hill Collins coins the term "motherwork" to "soften the existing dichotomies in feminist theorizing about motherhood that posit rigid distinctions between private and public, family and work, the individual and the collective, identity as individual autonomy and identity growing from the collective self-determination of one's group" (47-48). Collins notes that the maternity and work of women of color are especially subject to these border areas between the domestic and the public, with motherwork as "work for the day to come," whether that is work specifically focused on one's children or children of one's community (48).

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“FERTILE AND QUIESCENT”: MIDWESTERN MEMORY IN BONNIE JO CAMPBELL’S “WINTER LIFE”

Ross K. Tangedal

The old fireplace was bricked up and plastered—
the fireplace beside which, in the far-off days,
he had lain on winter nights, to hear his uncles
tell tales of hunting, or to hear them play the violin,
great dreaming giants that they were.”
–Hamlin Garland, “Up the Coolly”[1]

In the opening of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “Winter Dreams,” Dexter Green of Black Bear, Minnesota, skis along the hidden fairways of his summers, the country giving him “a feeling of profound melancholy—it offended him that the links should lie in enforced fallowness, haunted by ragged sparrows for the long season” (“Winter Dreams” 217). He longs for the thaw, for the time when colors reappear. Ernest Hemingway’s Nick Adams, along with his girlfriend Marjorie, rows past the broken-down foundation of the old mill at Hortons Bay, Michigan, at the beginning of “The End of Something.” Ten years earlier, a large schooner taking the remnants of the mill lumbered down the river: “Its open hold covered with canvas and lashed tight, the sails of the schooner filled and it moved out into the open lake, carrying with it everything that had made the mill a mill and Hortons Bay a town” (31). A once vibrant community lies dormant, memorialized in the white limestone foundation, the deserted company store, and the mill that will not fall down.

Sherwood Anderson’s George Willard, upon leaving the eponymous Winesburg, Ohio, sees the town as a “background upon which to paint the dreams of his manhood,” given his “growing passion for dreams” (231), while Michael Martone believes that an Iowa windmill “crosses over to the realm of the abstract. It is no longer just

standing out in a field pumping water. It begins to stand for something else. The vines of meaning and metaphor overgrow and encase the other, a kind of topiary, and then replace it altogether" (45). One draws obvious parallels to Willa Cather's plough from *My Ántonia,* illuminated by sunset until it rests in its own littleness somewhere in the plains of Nebraska (237). The Midwest lives in memory, in ends and beginnings, and it lives in dreams, some shaped by great dreaming giants in the forms of uncles, aunts, fathers, mothers, grandmothers, and grandfathers. From Minnesota and Wisconsin, to Michigan, Ohio, and Iowa, the Midwest is canvas, topiary, melancholy, metaphor, and memory. Somewhere underneath all of that is love, and certainly a mind of winter.

Nick Carraway associates the Midwest with winter more than anything else near the end of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, where he remembers the "thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow." He is a part of *that,* he writes, rather than "the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns" (176). In recalling what version of the Middle West is not his, Carraway charts our Midwest in its entirety. It is Chicago and De Pere; it is Hammond and Indianapolis; it is memory, and it is real. It is this solemnity, this courage, and this melancholy that Michigander Bonnie Jo Campbell mines in "Winter Life," a nonlinear short story about love and memory in the middle of a Midwestern winter.

Campbell, like the previously mentioned writers, relies on a combination of landscape, memory, and time to realize her vision of a more complex Midwest. The Midwest, according to David D. Anderson, is a region of "variety, of unpredictability, of paradox, of a rejection of orthodoxy, that the reality is alive, dynamic, and perverse; that in all its variety it is its own best and most eloquent refutation of whatever stereotypes have been imposed on it"…(16). Well-worn tropes are essential; we cannot break them down unless they present themselves. *My Ántonia*'s Jim Burden has a longing in his heart, as does *In Our Time*'s Nick Adams and *Winesburg*'s George Willard. What makes them unique is how their creators represent their desires. Like Anderson suggests, they are alive, dynamic, and perverse rather than static or simple. George and Nick grow up with a sense of difference wrung from interactions with complex communities, one in Ohio and the other in upper Michigan, while Jim struggles to fuse his unfulfilling present with a past that was (in his mind)

"precious and incommunicable" (360). But in his struggle he still communicates that past in a series of nostalgic recollections, none more powerful than his memory of the heroic plough mentioned earlier: "The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disc . . . black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun" (237).

The plough is a clear symbol of prosperity, the breaking of the land to make new life from the old. But it also symbolizes modernization, with its unnatural silhouette becoming as natural a vision to Jim as the sun setting behind its handles. Richard Dillman contends that Cather's vision represents "the task of taming the land, and the struggles to develop prosperous farmsteads and communities from raw land" (230). "The journey from wild to tame, cultivated country, the development of rich farms from wild prairie," Dillman concludes, "is the rigorous journey to prosperity, paved with hard work, privation, isolation, and sometimes tragedy" (236-37). It is cultivation that leads to success, and patience that results in reward, but the partial focus on isolation shows another side of the landscape, where construction of memory holds greater sway.

Narratives about the complexity of memory shape more than individual characters. For Ryan Wander, time plays an important role in the development of regional writing of the West. In his examination of Bret Harte's Western writing, Wander argues that "Harte's West emerges as a space where time's multiplicity and variable effects open up a number of possible futures and disrupt the narratives of progress, unity, and identity formation associated with the region and regional writing" (147). While not espousing the opposite of representations like Cather's, Wander sees Harte breaking linearity in order to reform the myth of the West and, in tow, the Midwest. Though one can argue that Cather's novel is more than a retreat to the past, her choice of Jim Burden as storyteller puts forth the expectation of order amidst existential threat. Our reading of Jim determines whether or not we see beyond his nostalgia; we should not read Jim as a conduit for Cather, but his dedication to a simpler past obviates her more complex intentions. While the buried futures in Cather are harder to extract, the possible futures in Harte's writings are there in Campbell, as they are in many Midwestern writers. With "Winter Life," her nonlinear time structure (what Wander refers to as "temporal multiplicity" in Harte's writing) calls for more complication

and fewer sure things, even if we want a clearer resolution to the conflicts imbedded in her narrative. Campbell, Cather, and Harte focus on the unpredictable nature of time to craft narratives of complex Western and Midwestern memory, which aligns with David D. Anderson's notion of the paradox that regional expression embodies.

A primary early example of Midwestern memory and landscape, Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* features tales awash with subtle complexities buried beneath the veneer of pioneer mythos. "Mainly it is long and wearyful," Garland writes in his preface about the region, "and has a dull little town at one end and a home of toil at the other. Like the main-travelled road of life it is traversed by many classes of people, but the poor and the weary predominate" (viii). Jonathan Berliner examines the ways in which Garland's harsh realism actually forecasts the possibility of new growth and prosperity. He notes that "in Garland's vision of the main-travelled road . . . sorrow is defiantly mixed with beauty," and "the landscape has a beauty beyond tragedy, and this is the basis of Garland's hope for the future . . . these scenes rely on a dual vision of nature, alternatively tragic and the embodiment of hope" (222; 224). The possibility of such a world may be enough, even as characters struggle to make sense of loss and regret. The sorrow, the beauty, and the tragedy of hope live not only in characters but also in the land, the space that becomes a metaphor for defiance and resolve. Christian Knoeller reminds us that environmental ethics in our time is "a lament for natural abundance lost tempered by a recognition of nature's capacity for regeneration" (143). Campbell's characters, like Garland's homes of toil, represent the regenerative power of hope in sorrow, maybe because that's the way Midwesterners have been conditioned to deal with tragedy.

David Pichaske distills what he calls "Midwestern style" down to very particular elements: "realism bordering on naturalism, with elements of humanism and social critique. Plain, colloquial speech, with elements of self-conscious doubt. Guarded experimentation. Limited theory" (111). While limited and not necessarily true across the more diverse visions of the American Midwest, Pichaske's more traditional viewpoint allows for the possibility of complication. He concedes that, even with his prescriptive list, "geography finds expression in ideas" (111). Landscapes live in memory as much as they live on maps, and when we marry the hope that Berliner sees in writers of harsh landscapes like Garland's with the style forwarded by

Pichaske, writers like Campbell emerge as champions of Garland’s “poor and weary” (viii). William Dean Howells, in his introduction to the 1899 edition of *Main-Travelled Roads*, lauds Garland for his treatment of Will and Agnes in “A Branch Road”: “He knows that his business was with those two people, their passions and their probabilities” (6). Garland sticks with his people, and, over one hundred years later, Bonnie Jo Campbell continues the practice of examining the passions and probabilities, the tragedy and the regeneration, and the sorrow and beauty of the American Midwest.

In a 2008 interview, in reference to her collection, *American Salvage*, Campbell told the *Kenyon Review* that “whenever possible I do like to see marriages remain intact, in stories as in real life, if only because the complications of staying together seem more interesting than the possibilities afforded by separation. Or maybe it’s because I’ve been married twenty-one years.” Jerry and Natalie in “The Yardman” provide a template for Campbell’s complex view of middle-class marriage: a disenchanted wife and simple husband, one trying to understand the other; one sacrificing the future (or their own future) for the consistency—no matter how unnerving—they truly long for. Campbell shows women in control, or at least in more control than the men in their lives. Jerry does what he can for Natalie, knowing full well that her wants and needs will never align with his. He wishes, instead, for things to be just as they are: “if only they could remain together forever like this, he being the yard man with his wife and the kids, and Holroyd stopping by to visit. And snakes and bees and deer and ground birds and nighthawks could all stay here with them, and those snakes would stay out of his wife’s line of sight, and she would relax and start to love this place the way he did” (26).

In “Boar Taint,” Jill struggles with her life as it is and her life as it could have been: “Ernie didn’t swat at the mosquitoes, but let them draw out what blood they would from his exposed face and neck and arms. He lifted Jill’s hand off of the edge of the window to hold it, and that sent energy through her arm, down into her belly and her legs—only she didn’t want to desire him now.” She wants to check out “and head south until she was far enough away that she could look back and see it all in miniature, see all her farm schemes as comic failures” (163). She reconsiders, watching her husband speak to the boar in back: “Ernie had a way of doing things; he made hooking up a cow to a milking machine or rebuilding a tractor carburetor seem as natural as letting water flow down a hill” (164). In the end,

the boar (and Ernie) are promising: "the boar had turned out to be exactly what she needed, a creature even bullets could not stop" (167). Campbell's characters love, and the complications of that love are real rather than contrived; full-bodied rather than cheapened.

Campbell's marriage stories seek to establish characters as more than types, though she uses archetypes to set up more nuanced readings of love and memory. "Winter Life" is a story about a community of Midwesterners living through yet another difficult winter. The quiet one, Harold, is married to the drunken Trisha, and he loves gardening and mulch more than dealing with his marital issues. Campbell introduces a variety of other characters (drunks, single mothers, leather-jacketed boyfriends, and plain Janes) who move in and out of the narrative, all related (either biologically or socially) to Harold and Trisha. The complex interplay between Campbell's Midwestern characters buoys a story built on a memory, a single memory experienced mainly by Pauline, the plain sister of the aggressive, violent Stuart and daughter of the maternal (yet naïve) Mary Beth. But unlike "The Yardman" and "Boar Taint," "Winter Life" features a daunting time structure, with characters remembering specific details about their pasts, all in the present past, while the story pushes forward. Most importantly, Campbell's devotion to Midwestern memory disabuses readers of the specious notion that the Midwest is a place of simpletons and backwardness. Campbell's story is told in such a way that her characters are elevated beyond their regional trappings into a more universal space—a space where the complexities of love and memory are real, not imagined.

While the story begins *in media res* in the bedroom of Harold and Trisha, the story isn't about the present at all. The opening of the story, "Harold had been happily married to Trisha four years," suggests immediately the probability of a one-way devotion in the marriage (84). Trisha's body language, as well as the way she speaks about her husband on the phone to Mary Beth, elides any real love for her husband. She appears to tolerate him, and Harold stares with purpose at his gardening magazine, the metaphor of growth hidden beneath the tense atmosphere of the bedroom. But Trisha asks Mary Beth, "'But sometimes I look at Harold and wonder, what was I thinking?'" Trisha used to date Stuart (Mary Beth's son and Pauline's brother), a time when she admits her life was "more exciting" (87), and Pauline breaks up with her fiancé Nick the same evening that Stuart's new wife calls Trisha to berate her for confiding in Stuart when times are tough.

Harold used to live with Mary Beth, Stuart, and Pauline when he was younger due to domestic discord with his parents and conflict with his father, who tried to burn down Mary Beth's house. Mary Beth taught Harold how to garden, the hobby he spends his life perfecting. He is obsessed with mulch, cold frames, and lettuce, while his wife is an alcoholic yearning for the violent dynamism of Stuart rather than the passive plainness of her husband. Trisha's intentions suggest an emotional adultery, if not a physical one, though one can assume that Trisha longs for Stuart, who abused her physically and verbally. In keeping with her other relationship stories, Campbell describes Harold's devotion to his unfaithful wife: "Before he'd married her he'd been lonesome, but back then he'd focused on growing his vegetables and herbs, and he'd managed to forget for long stretches of time that the whole world was a place of bone-aching loneliness. Looking at her face now reminded him that people were in pain a lot of the time, reminded him he would never leave his wife no matter what, never would create more pain that way" (86).

There is an abiding sympathy for the quiet gardener devoted to a wife who doesn't love him. He prefers knowing that he can love her, and that he can avoid knowing "for long stretches of time" that the alternative to loving Trisha is being alone. Harold's devotion, magnified by his resistance to aggression or violence toward his wife, doubles with his devotion to growing herbs and vegetables. He works at what he loves, with patience and duty. That Trisha appears not to reciprocate is no matter. Her love for him will regenerate, if only he provides her with the stability of a quiet man, rather than the terror of a violent one.

Since readers are initially swayed by Harold's quiet devotion, they are somewhat misdirected (and the meaning dislocated) before allowing Campbell to finish the story. All told, Campbell uses approximately twenty different time cues to cross between past, present, and future.[2] For an eight-page story, twenty time cues dislocate the reader at several points. In fact, one cannot discern the story's central meaning until reaching the last page, but unlike a twist ending, the end of "Winter Life" recasts the intentions of all characters by offering readers the nexus point for illumination, not just a revealing plot point.

At first reading, these cues are of little consequence. They may be read as quirks of Campbell's style or even as showcases of her Midwestern-ness. Constant references to the past may alert us to nos-

talgia, but Campbell embeds her time cues carefully. Her characters discuss these moments like they've done it a thousand times, probably because they have. But there is one memory that remains buried—and Campbell unearths the central engine of her story slowly rather than abruptly. Pauline's love for Harold is not known until three-quarters of the way through the story. And even then, it is not known to her mother, her brother, Trisha, or Harold. Harold becomes aware when she kisses him passionately in the Farm N Garden, and readers are left in judgment of their initial impressions of Harold, the man they thought they knew. Everything rests on a memory, and how two characters navigate that memory.

When they were children, Pauline and Harold, who were living under the same roof, skated in a blizzard much like the one hitting town in the present. Cold, they huddle into the mudroom of the house, where Harold helps Pauline take her skates off: "The first ice skate had come off easily, but the second one was stuck. Harold removed his gloves, worked his frozen fingers under her snow-sodden laces. She felt the cold tiles under her. Then Harold tugged and the skate came off, and her sock slipped off, too, exposing her bare pink foot to the cold air. He'd squeezed her bare foot and breathed warm air on her toes like a kiss. Or had she imagined that?" (91). Immediately after this scene, Campbell jumps to Pauline, still in her mother's driveway, asking her mother if anyone skates on the pond anymore. Finally, Campbell leads readers back to the Farm N Garden. Earlier in the story, Pauline, having just met Harold at the Farm N Garden, asks Harold, "'Do you remember when we used to go skating on the pond? Remember how once we skated in a blizzard?'" "'I do remember,'" Harold says, and Campbell notes that "he nodded, seemed surprised to remember" (89).

Harold's moment of surprising remembrance leads to Pauline's decision to kiss him, after laughing about skating in that blizzard when they were teenagers:

> At the Farm N Garden yesterday, as the snowstorm blotted out the sun, Pauline grabbed the collar of Harold's parka and pulled his face to hers. Beneath the fluorescent lights in that aisle full of salt and shovels, she'd stood on tiptoe in her boots and kissed Harold the way she'd wanted to kiss him in that mudroom, the way she'd always wanted to kiss him, even on the day he married Trisha. He had accepted her kiss quietly at first, and she was about to pull away and apologize, but then he wrapped both arms around her, pulled her as

> close as their jackets allowed. He continued to kiss her, stepped backward and then pressed her against the snow shovels. When three aluminum shovels clattered to the ground, Pauline had to pull away to keep her balance. (91)

Campbell employs no further time jumps once this moment unfolds. We remain with Harold as he leaves the store, Pauline hugging herself behind him. Whether Harold is ashamed or just overcome with adrenaline, Campbell chooses to watch him rather than leave him. Pauline's love for Harold has been made real, and her central memory of Harold—the boy who blew warm air on her freezing foot in the mudroom—appears to have driven her entire life.[3] She breaks up with her fiancé, Nick, that night because she is certain of Harold's reciprocation. After all, he did kiss her back, causing those pesky shovels to clatter all over the floor. She is ready to tell her mother that she loves Harold and has always loved him, if only to get her attention. Though she has drawn the ire of Trisha, who thinks her plain and time-consuming, and her brother Stuart, who refers to her as "that sullen bitch" (85), Harold kissed her back. She hadn't imagined that.

Likewise, Harold hadn't imagined that he would return the advances of a woman he paid little attention to since marrying his wife. Where had this come from? We are given no evidence that the two of them had ever engaged in anything other than small talk and pleasantries since growing up and away from Mary Beth's house. Aldo Leopold remarks that "like people, my animals frequently disclose by their actions what they decline to divulge in words. It is difficult to predict when and how one of these disclosures will come to light" (78). Pauline's simple act of love in midwinter completes—rather than charts—her journey toward happiness, the reification of the desire begun in that mudroom when she was a girl. She willed the relationship into being with her action, and it will blossom like Harold's garden once the snow thaws. She is complete.

But like most of Campbell's stories, characters have expectations that are rarely, if ever, met. Harold drives home from the Farm N Garden slowly, "then sat in his driveway with the windshield wipers on, looking out over his frozen garden, assuring himself it was still there beneath the snow, fertile and quiescent. Only when Trisha's headlights lit up his rearview mirror did he finally get out of the car" (91). At this moment, we may believe that Harold will leave Trisha for Pauline, since he looks out over his snow-covered garden certain

that courage withstands snow, like sturdy plants and good soil. But we are remiss if we believe that, and Campbell's time structure negates what may have been an ideal ending for Pauline (and for readers). There is little doubt that we want Harold and Pauline to get together. They are a match, examples of the "very common people" that George Willard finds in Winesburg (6), with each offering the other a respite from the chaos of modern life.

However, Campbell challenges us to look beyond our idealistic preconceptions of relationships, since we should already know that Harold will never leave Trisha. Earlier in the story (yet later in the timeline), Harold sits on his bed and declares to himself that "he would never leave his wife no matter what, never would create more pain that way" (86). We initially read this as Harold's declaration of love, the protagonist choosing devotion over his wife's transgressions. Yet by the end of the story, we now must read Harold's devotion as a reaction to his own transgression—his kiss with Pauline. Readers cannot know this when they first encounter Harold's character, though it occurs after the kiss at the Farm N Garden.

Aldo Leopold, writing of a Wisconsin December in *A Sand County Almanac*, testifies that "it is in midwinter that I sometimes glean from my pines something more important than woodlot politics, and the news of the wind and weather. This is especially likely to happen on some gloomy evening when the snow has buried all irrelevant detail, and the hush of elemental sadness lies heavy upon every living thing." But his trees persist: "Nevertheless, my pines, each with his burden of snow, are standing ramrod-straight, rank upon rank, and in the dusk beyond I sense the presence of hundreds more. At such times I feel a curious transfusion of courage" (87). Leopold sees through the wintered landscape, he sees the future, and he knows the courage of surviving through the changing seasons. After the thaw there will be new life, a life that was always there. Michael Martone concludes that Iowa windmills are not symbols in themselves: "I think the windmill does not symbolize the farms as much as it symbolizes in a precise way what we want the farm to symbolize" (49). A warm mudroom is Pauline's windmill, and Harold the symbol of her desire. She needs that memory to flower for her, regardless of the passage of time. Her courage breaks through the monotony of her Midwestern life, as she performs a part of herself she always knew was there, buried beneath the burden of her present. But Harold will suppress that memory, instead giving his efforts to

healing Trisha, regardless of her devotion to him. He will spend his time, to paraphrase Dillman, developing a rich farm from wild prairie (236). Time, like memory, is complex, and Bonnie Jo Campbell remains committed to representing Midwesterners as real people, with wants, desires, and memories that shape who they want to become. Pauline's winter life is a matter of futures, built on a memory as real as a pumping windmill, but as abstract as what a windmill means.

University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point

NOTES

I would like to thank Jeff Swenson for his suggestions on earlier drafts of this article.

[1]*Main-Travelled Roads*. 1891. NY: Macmillan, 1899. 97.

[2]The following are time cues that Campbell employs throughout her story.

1. "Harold had been happily married to Trisha four years."
2. "Late evening, on the day a blizzard dropped nine inches. . . . "
3. "She had dated Harold's best friend Stuart for two years before she'd made the switch to Harold."
4. "He said that his little sister, Pauline, 'that sullen bitch,' had dumped her fiancé tonight for no apparent reason."
5. "He hadn't mentioned to his wife that he'd run into Pauline today at the Farm N Garden, during the blizzard."
6. "The next morning, at Mary Beth's farm, Mary Beth was talking to her daughter Pauline in the driveway."
7. "In all the years Pauline had known Trisha, she'd never once seen her on an even keel."
8. "'Talking to her got me remembering one night six or seven years ago, when she was staying here with your brother.'"
9. "'I met a nice fellow there that night.'"
10. "'He'd been out of work all that winter and ended up fixing the trouble I'd been having with my electric ever since your brother Stuart jammed a penny into the fuse box so his space heater wouldn't blow fuses. You remember how that penny melted?'"
11. "Yesterday afternoon at the Farm N Garden. . . . "
12. "'Do you remember when we used to go skating on the pond? Remember how once we skated in a blizzard?'"
13. "Three hours later, after the snow had stopped. . . . "
14. "Pauline was still standing in the driveway waiting for her mother to finish her story."
15. "'Stuart called me last night at about ten, asked me if you were having a ner vous breakdown or something.'"
16. "'I was thinking, Ma, about when Harold lived here. That was nice of you to let him stay with us while his parents were divorcing. You didn't even have money for fuel oil that year.'"
17. "'Did I ever tell you about the time Harold's dad threatened to burn my house down?'"

18. "At the Farm N Garden yesterday afternoon, Pauline and Harold had laughed about skating in that blizzard all those years ago—Pauline had been thirteen, so Harold must have been sixteen."
19. "'Hey, Ma, does anyone skate on the pond anymore?' Pauline asked. . . . "
20. "At the Farm N Garden yesterday. . . ."

[3]The memory of the first time Dexter Green sees Judy Jones determines the remainder of his life in Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams," while Jim Burden has the metaphorical burden of carrying his youthful memories into adulthood in Cather's *My Ántonia*. Campbell's choice of Pauline (rather than Harold) to deliver the trope is striking, and in keeping with her examination of Midwestern women.

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"TOSSED ASIDE LIKE GARBAGE": THE PLIGHT OF MARRIED WOMEN IN BONNIE JO CAMPBELL'S *MOTHERS, TELL YOUR DAUGHTERS*

DONALD A. DAIKER

One of the truths that mothers might well tell their daughters in *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters*, Bonnie Jo Campbell's third and most accomplished collection of short stories, is that marriage is something you cannot and should not count on for love, happiness, stability, or even companionship.

In most Campbell stories, one of the marital partners—almost always the man—is simply gone, either vanished into the distance or shacked up with another woman. "Sleepover," the opening story of *Mothers,* early establishes this pattern because there is a "Mom" but no "Pop." In "Tell Yourself," we find a mother and three kids but no father anywhere. The unnamed central character of the poignant "To You, as a Woman" is struggling to raise two children by herself; no husband or father is in sight. In the volume's eponymous central story, a tour de force of truth telling by a tough-as-nails woman slowly dying from cancer, the husband is not only gone but dead, murdered. He had "wrenched" the narrator's "arms from around his waist and tossed me aside like garbage" before traveling from Michigan "to Texas just to get shot and killed by somebody else's husband" (86). She had futilely chased her husband's truck as he drove out their driveway for the final time. "Every man I loved left me," she laments (87).

Sherry, the overly affectionate central character of "Somewhere Warm," has been twice deserted by men. Despite her "unwavering love" (156) for her husband, who hated "the cold hell of Michigan winter" (155), he left her for a woman he met in a cancer survivor workshop and moved to New Mexico. Because Sherry has a steady job and he has lost his, he had complained, "'You make me feel damned inadequate every day of my life, woman.'" Three years later

Sherry's live-in lover, a young truck driver who seems "an all-around reliable person, deserving of her overflowing affections" (156), drives away from her with her pregnant sixteen-year-old daughter, Izzy, in tow. Sherry learns what other married women in *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters* are forced to acknowledge: "Some people could return your love, and others could only absorb it, the way a black hole took in all the light and gave nothing back. . ." (171). In "The Fruit of the Paw Paw Tree," the volume's concluding story, Susanna's husband abandoned her ten years ago for "that gal at the bottle gas company" and moved to "their new place, thirty miles south of here, halfway to Indiana" (248). Although Susanna concludes that all men are "cheating, troubling sons of bitches" (248)—in "Playhouse," Steve tells his sister Janie, "'All men are dicks . . . Trust me, I am one'" (25)—she nevertheless hooks up with Wendell, whose second wife kicked him out because "she couldn't stand to look at [him] ever again" (254).

Just because a husband stays with his wife does not necessarily mean that she's any better off. In "A Multitude of Sins," the eighth story in the collection but the first with a lasting marriage, the wife seems even worse off than her deserted compeers. Carl Betcher, the husband and perpetrator of a multitude of sins, has mistreated his forgiving wife, Mary, throughout forty miserable years of marriage. Even when she tends to him as he slowly dies from incurable cancer, he hits her and throws things at her: "she had covered her own bruises over the years" (109). Once he "grabbed her breast and squeezed" (109) until she stabbed his leg with a spoon until he let go. Carl's words are as abusive as his physical assaults. He tells her to "'shut up like [she] was a dog'" (120), and his curses often become a "constant stream" (108). He calls her hurtful names like "'dumb cunt'" (109), "'Whore of Babylon'" (114), and "'Nigger bitch'" (110). Carl is no kinder to their son Junior, whom he had "whipped . . . hard enough to raise welts for wetting the bed" (115) and "kicked . . . out for good when he was still a teenager" (108), prompting Junior to respond with, "'Call me for the funeral, Ma, so I can come home and spit on his grave'" (110).

Obviously a racist, misogynist, and sadist, Carl does not improve during his dying days and, at story's end, Mary is delighted to be rid of him. Carl had been understandably worried about going to hell (111), but Mary is headed in the opposite direction. Skilled in fabrics and upholstery, she had been complimented as "incredible" (111) and appealed to as "our savior" (113) by community theater people who

beg her to repair a badly damaged but irreplaceable velvet theater curtain. In the last paragraph of the story, with Carl thankfully gone for good and Mary now in what has finally become "*her* house" with "*her* refrigerator" (123), "she pulled the velvet all around herself and over her head like a cloak." Significantly, Mary resists attempts from a church pastor, another large male authority figure who behaves "like a landowner" (124), to impinge upon her incipient selfhood. She locks her door against his entrance and hunkers down: "The old velvet curtain, so heavy, so hard to handle, so difficult to repair, felt fine against her skin." Even more, in the final word of the story, it felt "[h]eavenly" (125).[1]

Since even husbands who stay without cheating may not make for a happy marriage, women—Campbell lightly suggests—should perhaps look beyond the human sphere for a mate. In the fanciful, one-paragraph piece of flash fiction ironically titled "My Bliss," the unnamed narrator tries marrying things—the TV, the car, the truck, the breakfast cereal, even "a plate of meatloaf"—and creatures like birds, squirrels, and cats before finding something or someone who is "going to last," "a slim-hipped quiet confidence [who] leaned against the wall of the Lamplighter Lounge, chalking a pool cue, and I said, 'Lordy, this is for real'" (174). But, predictably, "it did not last. He wasn't from the Midwest, and, besides, tied to a barstool across the room, some drunk's seeing-eye dog was already starting to chew the fishnet stockings off a lady's artificial leg" (174).

Perhaps the best way to handle inevitable marital failure is to joke about it—to imagine grotesque scenarios more likely to make us laugh than cry. That's certainly the approach in the delightfully humorous "My Dog Roscoe," in which the narrator, Sarah, is married to Pete, a solid, steady, and faithful electrician, but loves her lying and cheating dead ex-fiancé Oscar "with a blindness and durable intensity" (67) that she cannot muster for dependable Pete. When the security of living with a "safe and sensible" husband makes Sarah "a little restless" (76), she begins to believe that a stray dog named Roscoe that appears one day at her back door incarnates her dead, philandering Oscar—note the similarity of names. At story's end, Sarah has everything she wants: a castrated Roscoe/Oscar who would be "kept . . . in his place, as a dog," "devoted and companionable," as well as safety and security with Pete the electrician. "There was nothing wrong with a woman having it all, was there?" (83).

But Campbell's married women have "it all" only in humorous fables like "My Dog Roscoe." In the real world there is no "end to the powers a man has over his woman" (89), one reason why there is not a wholly positive portrayal of marriage in any of the sixteen stories that comprise *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters*, not even in the few stories that focus on college-educated women rather than dropouts. Janie of "Playhouse" may never get her "'damned GED'" (24), but Barb of "Natural Disasters," who holds a master's degree, sports honor society pins, and teaches high school English, is unhappy despite her marriage and pregnancy. Barb is so depressed—she is off her anti-depressants because of her pregnancy—that she dresses in black for her own baby shower. She is so fearful, even paranoid, that she dreams of bomb shelters, basement bunkers, and survivalist pods. She hears outlets "hissing with vipers of electricity," believes "the oven is a crematorium" and views the basement as "a suffocation chamber" (236). A natural disaster herself, Barb is alone and crying as the story ends with her husband David "conveniently out of town" (230) and their marriage, like her sanity, in peril.

Jill of "Daughters of the Animal Kingdom," an absolutely brilliant exploration of attraction and sexuality, is working on her PhD in zoology. But higher education—Jill's husband Gregory is an entomologist and a full professor—does not necessarily conduce to marital bliss. In fact, Jill has moved out of her husband's upscale house on the hill to live in a camping trailer on the family farm, apparently provoked by his latest instance of infidelity: she "spotted his Audi outside a café in Texas Corners, miles from campus," and surprised him and "the girl beside him in the booth" (138). Although Jill intends to wreak no physical violence upon Gregory, the story is filled with images of violence from the natural world. A slug, for instance, is able to shoot needle-sharp love darts into the head of the object of its desire. Black widow female spiders "'really do devour their mates'" (147): "It is not just black widow spiders that kill their mates. The female praying mantis often bites off the head of the fellow who has just impregnated her, and some snails, too, get so furious they lash out, albeit slowly. In the honeybee population, the male can't even be trusted to be a member of the hive, and if one should survive the breeding season, he is kicked out in autumn to freeze to death" (150-51).

Nevertheless, husband Gregory—"slender" (138), "charming" (138) and "handsome" (148)—avoids the fate of males in the natural world. The donkey Jack is castrated before he can mount and impreg-

nate his own mother—Jill holds "Jack's balls in [her] open hand"—but squeamish Gregory avoids even a "discussion of his having a vasectomy" (150). By the end of the story, among the funniest in the volume because of Jill's lovely sense of humor, pregnant Jill has just about forgiven Gregory his indiscretions and waits for him to join her in the henhouse. There she sees cobwebs hanging from the ceiling, and, in an act of reconciliation and love, she imagines herself brushing them away from Gregory's face and hair when he arrives. When Jill describes the cobwebs as "astounding creations, falling upon themselves like layers of ghostly theater curtains" (153), Campbell subtly evokes the earlier positive image from "A Multitude of Sins" of Mary's pulling the "[h]eavenly" velvet theater curtains "all around herself" (125).

But if you're not fortunate enough to have an abusive husband catch cancer and die or to have a charming husband who promises to stray no more, how is it that a woman "tossed aside like garbage" in Campbell's world survives? One way is just by keeping busy, and if you have a teenage daughter, that will be easy because "men mess with girls in this life, they always have, always will" (89). Jill of "Daughters of the Animal Kingdom" remembers dragging her fourteen-year-old daughter out of her boyfriend's car and making her "sit and talk . . . at the kitchen table" (143), an intrusion for which she's never been forgiven. In "Sleepover," the two teenage girls elude the mother's vigilance by turning their sleepover into a make-out session with guys who, when the mother returned home, "scurried out the screen door into the back yard and hopped the fence" (13). The divorced narrator of "Tell Yourself," who, like her current boyfriend, has had a "rough go" in marriage (41), spends much of her time worried about her thirteen-year-old daughter's virginity. "Calm yourself down, woman," she tells herself. "Not all men will try to screw your daughter, however she dresses. There are men who will not even fantasize about touching her darling new breasts. Some men are distracted, for instance, or gay, while a few may actually prefer mature women" (38). But the mother's worries are not soothed by her own recollections of being seduced by a neighbor when she was fourteen or being molested by her mother's boyfriend. She also remembers a high school science teacher "whose attentions flattered you so much you never would have said no" (46).

Sherry, the central character of "Somewhere Warm," is more concerned with her fifteen-year-old-daughter Izzy's schoolwork than her

virginity, and so on her sixteenth birthday, a pregnant Izzy leaves home with Sherry's truckdriver lover for "somewhere warm" (164). When Izzy returns home nine months later with Baby Violet, Sherry will again be able to keep busy even without a husband or lover. Who needs either when you "felt electricity move through yourself and the baby, an audacious surge of love, like a zipper closing a warm soft jacket around them" (171). For other women cast aside by husbands, the only alternative is to take it, to endure, to suffer as in "My Sister Is in Pain."

And no one in *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters* suffers more than the unnamed mother of "To You, as a Woman," for me the most touching and painful story in the collection. After my first reading, I had written "I want to cry" in the margin. She is the unemployed single parent of two young children, a seven-year-old son and a younger daughter. She wakes one night suffering from a "crippling toothache," one that is "like a scream that wakes you from a dead sleep" (132), and she has no choice. Since she lacks dental insurance and has "no money, not even food stamps to trade for twenty cents on the dollar" (129)—she offers her body to men in exchange for "the aluminum foil packet" (130) of drugs that will temporarily relieve the pain of an infected tooth. Unlike the mothers in "Sleepover" and "Tell Yourself," she need not try to shield a virginal teenager, but she worries about her kids "in . . . danger from guns or molestation" (134) even though she has no viable means of protecting them now or in the future. The story is a plea for understanding from a bright, sensitive, caring young woman with little chance of a happy future for herself or her children. Her life is like a "nightmare" in which "you're trying to run away from someplace where you've been held prisoner, but then you discover your legs don't work" (127-28). But she will hang in there—at least for now anyway—hoping for understanding and compassion that, like any solution to her dilemma, seem far, far away. [2]

For Campbell's women, not marrying provides no satisfactory alternative. Janie of "Playhouse," arguably the richest story in the volume, has never married, but that does not prevent her from being raped at her brother Steve's Summer Solstice party after she drinks too much. Steve refuses to believe that his friend Roger could have raped his sister because Roger is, after all, "'a decent guy'" (31).[3] Janie's boyfriend, JC, who "'bosses [Janie] around like [she's] one of his kids'" (25), is no help. Janie knows that "[h]e'd just yell at me" (30) if she ever told him. By story's end, Janie "can't stand for JC to touch me" (15), so she takes solace in thinking of her three-

year-old niece, Pinky, "safe in her bed in her room with the pink rabbit night-light, smelling of baby powder, surrounded by stuffed animals." But that's only "for now" (36). When Janie imagines Pinky as a teenager, she knows that "[s]he'll sneak out her bedroom window on summer nights the way any girl would . . . All the precautions in the world might not be enough for a girl who loves fun" (35-36). Like Janie, who is literally screwed when Steve inadvertently drills a corkscrew into her arm, girls and women can expect to be screwed over by men. Unmarried Buckeye, the point-of-view character of "The Greatest Show on Earth, 1982: What There Was," has been "knocked . . . around" by men, and her mother "had been beat up by every man she ever went with" (52). Unmarried Marika of "Blood Work, 1999" stayed with her high school boyfriend Anthony for two full years of his treatment for testicular cancer, including "dates" for radiation therapy (184), but "[a]fter he was cured, he broke up with her" (177). The problem is that some men, even as boys, seem always to want more, a pattern established in the volume's first spoken words when Ed tells his pretty but "flat chested" girlfriend that "'[w]e were wishing your head could be on Pammy's body . . . You two together would make the perfect girl'" (13).

Nevertheless, Campbell suggests, the unmarried state offers at least the possibility of happiness for women. In two of the last three stories in the collection, both among the most affirmative and outside the scope of Laura Fine's informative study of *noir* elements in Campbell's fiction, an unmarried woman achieves at least temporary happiness by forming a new relationship with a man she has no intention of marrying. In the antepenultimate "Children of Transylvania, 1983," the longest story in the collection, the central character, Joannah, has spent her years since graduating from college living in a "senior housing apartment" (198) and caring for a seriously ill mother while occasionally sleeping with a friend of her mother's, a man twice her age. Joannah spends much of her time "reading vampire romance stories and sitting in a chair wrapped in blankets" (198). Only twenty-five years old, Joannah is stuck in the past and fearful of change: "she'd always preferred the company of people her mother's age, preferred an evening at home with Mom to going out anywhere" (202). Urged to take a bicycle tour of Romania by her older sisters, who "acted as though they were saving her soul" (198), Joannah crosses more than the "Hungarian/Romanian border" (207); she has a life-changing experience. She deliberately allows herself

to fall behind her cycling sisters, discovering that the "first few hours of biking alone were heavenly, despite the heat, and Joannah found herself sighing a lot, releasing old breath she must've been holding inside for a long time" (201). Her transformation is metaphorically signaled by all that she leaves behind—not just her sisters but objects as well: first her camera in a hotel room, then her helmet and gloves at a café—"going back was out of the question" (208)—then her water bottle, and then her bra, which she gives to a young, pregnant Romanian bride.

For the first time in years Joannah "felt alive as she pedaled away, fueled by adrenaline" (206), reaching a point on her first mountain pass where she is "on the other side of the world from her poor lost mother" (208). Along the way Joannah exchanges safety and domesticity for danger and adventure. She plays with barefoot Romanian children even though "back home she hardly interacted with them" (206), and she attempts speaking Romanian for the first time, "feeling as joyful as she ever had in her life" (207). About her old, safe American lover, "she knew she would never sleep with him again" (218). She accepts a wedding invitation from a pair of young women "full of life" despite road signs warning of "white skulls and cross bones" (208) and though her tour guide, a young man named Bogdan, cautions her against it. "'Don't worry so much,'" she twice tells him (217).

At home, Joannah "was practically a vegetarian," but now "her belly was telling her she needed meat"—even a bloody rare steak (210). At the wedding reception deep into the forest, Joannah dances and drinks strange cloudy brown wine that turns out to be "'the best wine I ever tasted'" (226). Soon after she is kissed on the mouth by a violinist "as though they were lovers" (219). Then excited as never before, with "the whole forest . . . inhaling and exhaling like some root-bound leviathan regaining its strength after a fierce battle" (225), Joannah and Bogdan become lovers, she howling so loudly that she "reached up and covered his ears with her hand" (227). By story's end Joannah has been reborn. She vows that she will never again sleep with her old, infecund lover, instead imagining herself conceiving "children of drunkenness and raucous joy," children "who could run like deer and hide deep in the woods, until it would be safe and wise to emerge" (228). Safe or not, Joannah has emerged.

If "Children of Transylvania, 1983" is Campbell's most spirited and audacious story, "The Fruit of the Pawpaw Tree," the collection's final story, is her most joyous and exuberant. Both are affirmative

stories of renewal for an unmarried woman. But Susanna, the central character of "The Fruit of the Pawpaw Tree," is not an unmarried twenty-five-year-old college graduate but a divorced sixty-three-year-old, formally uneducated farm woman who works during the school year as a junior high school cafeteria lady. It's also the funniest story in the collection, with dialogue that would make even Ernest Hemingway envious. And it may be the volume's most autobiographical story since Susanna, to whom the volume is dedicated, is the name of Bonnie Jo Campbell's mother.

Susanna O'Leary begins, like Joannah, as a woman of habit and routine. Indeed, she had survived for years "by sticking to her routines" (248). She starts every morning by cursing the "[d]amn noisy ducks" that wake her up. "[S]he'd gotten the habit of lying in bed cursing them this way; though her husband had been gone ten years, she was a woman of habits" (246-47). But she longs for change. When her skinny-legged boarder, Larry, walks through her bedroom, "she felt like tripping him just to make something happen" (240). And when a big pine tree in her driveway literally explodes during a heat wave, Susanna welcomes the event: "'Well, that's something different . . . Something I've never seen before'" (245). Her tarot-reading daughter-in-law Lydia takes it as a sign, and she is right. When the following morning itself also "exploded" (246), it's a sign that Susanna's old routine world is being blown apart.

But life gets really different when this woman of habits wakes up that morning to find Wendell Wagner, a neighbor, sleeping on the other side of her bed. Like Susanna, Wendell, twice married, is divorced from a spouse who rejected him: "'His [second] wife divorced him last year, and now he's sleeping in a tent over by Old Douglas Road,'" Wendell's nephew Larry tells Susanna. "'He cooks his food on a campfire'" (241). From this surprising start, the unlikely relationship between Susanna and Wendell grows incrementally. Wendell's second wife had kicked him out, claiming that she couldn't stand his snoring any longer, but Susanna's noisy farm is alive with donkeys hee-hawing, ducks quacking, coyotes howling, and kids quarreling. "'Well, I didn't hear you snoring,'" (254) Susanna says. When Wendell says he does not want to move to California to live near his two daughters, preferring to stay in the area, he makes Susanna "blush as she hadn't in years" (256). Because of Wendell's attention, Susanna now feels "cheerfully liberated . . . like the ladies who burned their bras in the old days" (257). Remembering that she

had once met Wendell in the past, "she couldn't stop smiling" (257). At the end of the story, Susanna asks Wendell if he is serious about staying around to look over her broken tractor. "'As serious as the day is long,'" he answers, suggesting that their relationship will continue for some time (262).

Wendell's courtship of Susanna centers on their trip to his pawpaw patch. For three days, they live nearby in Wendell's tent waiting for the first pawpaw of the season to ripen on the tree and fall. The pawpaw is "'fine tasting and they're a mystery, too, a tropical fruit growing right here in Michigan, tropical as your banana'" (253). But you can never tell when pawpaws ripen—sometimes as early as August, sometimes as late as November. Not only that, but you can't pick a pawpaw from the tree. "'That's sacrilege. You've got to wait for just the right moment. When it's ripe, it'll fall'" (260). When it does fall and Susanna savors its sweet, dense flesh and mellow flavor, she says, "'Thank you for this,'" to Wendell:

> Her sixty-third year had started with her doctor telling her that she had high blood pressure and high cholesterol and was at risk for osteoporosis. Susanna had not been expecting that she would wake up one day and find life had gotten easier, that coffee would smell better, that tomatoes would peel with less effort, that she'd feel like jogging to the barnyard with the bottle of mare's milk instead of walking, that she'd want to sleep in a tent and cook on a campfire. She noticed how intently Wendell was watching her, and she said in a measured way, "This is something new all right, something different. I've never tasted anything like this before." (261-62)

It's become clear that the pawpaw experience is a metaphor for the development of a satisfying and even loving relationship. Like love, pawpaws are mysterious and unpredictable; they require patience, understanding, sensitivity, and good timing. Susanna had been without love in the ten years since her husband abandoned her, but once she has tasted a pawpaw she "wondered how on earth she had lived without this fruit all these years" (262).

In a key passage from "A Multitude of Sins" that anticipates both "Children of Transylvania, 1983" and "The Fruit of the Pawpaw Tree" and constitutes a central metaphor for all of *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters*, Mary Betcher remembers a teen-age scene:

> . . . she and her sister had attended an outdoor party where she'd been served a slice of Neapolitan ice cream on a paper plate. Under the

> ice cream was an elegant sheet of gold-and-white paper. She ate the chocolate and vanilla, and was letting the strawberry melt a little in the sunlight, intending to savor it. She was perched on a plastic stool, looking at a row of giant pink peonies in perfect bloom. And then a naked little boy ran through the party . . . and he'd knocked her plate out of her hands, sent her strawberry ice cream into the air. Joan, three years older, was right behind him . . . and she stepped on the ice cream, smashed it into the grass, and kept going. All her life Mary had felt the hurt of the incident, held onto her anger, but now she saw the plain truth: she should have eaten the pink first. (123-24)

Like Sarah in the whimsical "My Dog Roscoe," Joannah and Susanna, in the more serious concluding stories of *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters*,[4] have learned and begun to live Mary's truth: to go for the pink. The once-tame Joannah imagines herself giving birth to "wild creatures who drank wolves' milk and grew stronger than dictators" (228). Susanna, in her sixty-third year, embarks on a fresh adventure that starts with an exploding pine tree and culminates with a mysterious plant and a new life partner.

In their excellent analysis of fairy tale elements in Campbell's fiction, Marcia Noe, Mollee Shannon, and Laura Duncan have asserted that Campbell's characters tend to be "damaged people, misfits and outcasts . . . They are life's losers" (33). Maybe so. But Mary and Joannah and Susanna—one recently widowed, one never married and never intending to be, the third having tried the institution and found it wanting—are misfits no longer. If it's true, as Anna Solomon has written, that, in *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters*, "Campbell trains her unsparing eye on women and girls whose lives are marked by rape, molestation, and physical abuse," and if, as Emily Eakin has written, Campbell's fiction is "a place of unremitting struggle," the volume's concluding stories offer the possibility of hope and redemption outside of marriage. Mary's postmarriage achievement of independence, selfhood, and happiness anticipates the triumphs of Joannah and Susanna, both now unmarried women who have successfully overcome earlier struggles to become life's winners, providing an affirmative, heartening ending[5] to a collection of otherwise heart-breaking stories.

Miami University [Ohio]

NOTES

[1]In *Q Road*, Campbell's first novel, the young and pretty Nicole Hoekstra, in her second year of marriage to Steve, dreams of "driving over her husband's body on the concrete floor of their two-car garage, of then backing up and running over him a second time" (11). For Nicole, "[t]he day she killed Steve would be remarkable in a way different from her wedding day, but the two days would be like a pair of bookends around her marriage" (72). In "A Multitude of Sins," the death of her cruel husband Carl, especially seeing his "lifeless gray body," feels for wife Mary "like a bookend to the joy she'd she felt forty years ago on her wedding day" (122-23). In both stories the happiness of the wedding day leads unerringly to marital unhappiness and then to happiness over the husband's imagined or literal death. Campbell said in an interview that she "had fun" writing "A Multitude of Sins" (Nance 4).

[2]Campbell has said that, "The young woman in 'To You, as a Woman' has dug her own deep hole, and now she's in the hole, and there's nobody to help her—that story is a call for help from her fellow human beings." Campbell continued, "If a reader had a little more sympathy for such folks after reading my stories, I would be very happy" (Rice n.p.).

[3]See Douglas Sheldon below for a penetrating discussion of gender relationships and victimization in "Playhouse." For an excellent analysis of "Mothers, Tell Your Daughters," a story of "a working-class mother who is figuratively voiceless, stubbornly trying to reclaim the narrative of her own life until it exhausts her," see Sarah Harshbarger.

[4]It's apparently not accidental that *Mothers, Tell Your Daughters* ends on an emphatically positive note. Campbell seems to have planned it that way. Like Ernest Hemingway, who wrote to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, that "[i]n making a book of short stories readable there is a hell of a lot to having them placed properly in relation to each other" (Bruccoli 268), Campbell did not simply place her stories in order of composition. In fact, the eponymous "Mothers, Tell Your Daughters," the sixth story in the volume, was one of the last of the sixteen stories written. Some were written even before the stories in *American Salvage* (2009), her second short story collection. Campbell said that she had "to write a couple more stories in order to make the collection come together" (Nance 3) because she "was creating bodies of work that belonged together" (Rice n.p.).

[5]*American Salvage*, Campbell's second short story collection, ends in affirmation as well. Like Susanna in "The Fruit of the Pawpaw Tree," Jill of "Boar Taint," the volume's concluding story, looks forward to the future with realistic optimism: "With six breeding females, each birthing ten piglets per litter, two litters a year, and with these men to help her, this plan was once again looking very promising. This boar had turned out to be exactly what she needed, a creature even bullets could not stop" (167). Like Superman, who is faster than a speeding bullet, the boar—here elevated to mythic status—has become the unlikely savior of Jill's farm. Positioned as the final story in *American Salvage*, "Boar Taint" concludes the volume on a triumphant note of hope.

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HEMINGWAY'S "MR. AND MRS. ELLIOT" REDUX

CHARLES J. NOLAN JR.

At first glance, "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" seems a thoroughly untypical Hemingway story—no dialogue; no wounded hero; all telling, no showing. A second look, however, reveals a not unfamiliar nasty streak in its satiric mode and a Hemingway with whom we would later become familiar in his attacks on other writers and, sometimes, earlier wives. Early scholars like Carlos Baker and Charles Fenton were unimpressed, though Joseph DeFalco gave the story a serious reading, and some, like Richard Peterson and Sheldon Grebstein, used the story to get at other issues (Paul Smith, *Guide* 78). It took until the late 1980s and 1990s for another group of critics—Paul Smith, Marjorie Perloff, Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes—to give the story a more nuanced reading, and, in more contemporary times, Matthew Stewart, Chikako Tanimoto, Teodora Domotor, and Babett Rubóczki have focused, not surprisingly perhaps, on the story's sexuality. Of course, Hemingway biographers—Baker, Reynolds, Lynn, Meyers, and Mellows, among others—have touched on the story in their reading of Hemingway's life and works, too.

Yet the story is not completely satisfying—principally because of Hemingway's nastiness toward the object of his satire, Chard Powers Smith and his spouse, Olive C. Macdonald, and their difficulties in getting pregnant (Baker, *Writer* 27) as well as their alleged sexuality.[1] Though Chard and Olive were ultimately unlucky, Smith himself had an early privileged life. A Yale BA (1916), he did graduate work at Oxford and then earned a law degree from Harvard (1921), followed by more graduate work there; many years later he earned an MA in history from Columbia (1949). In addition, Chard had enough money to make his own way in life and the flexibility to follow his interests. Early on, he gave up the law to become a writer and man of letters, eventually achieving measurable success; over the course of his life, he would write sixteen books. Starting as a poet, he published four books of poetry, a handful of novels, two plays, an

analytical book on poetry, and a biography of Edwin Arlington Robinson. A year after his graduation from Yale, Chard became an officer in the Army Field Artillery Reserve, serving until 1920. In September of the next year, he married Olive, and, for a while, the two were part of the literary set in Paris, which included, among others, Ernest Hemingway and his wife, Hadley. About Olive less is known. Born in Montgomery, Alabama, in either 1886 (tombstone) or 1887 (death certificate), she was a nurse during World War I (Chard P Smith's papers at Yale) but died in Italy in 1924 of pneumonia and heart failure (death certificate) in the throes of labor with twins. She was thirty-seven (eight years older than her husband)—important to a story in which Cornelia is fifteen years older than Hubert in a marriage that seems to satisfy neither partner. Ultimately, she appears to have been buried next to her husband if the headstones in the Brookside Cemetery in Watertown, New York, are accurate.[2]

Given Chard's educational background and wealth and Hemingway's more humble resume and money, it is not surprising that Hemingway seems to have developed a certain envy of Smith; "contempt" is the word Hemingway used (*Letters* vol. 3, 197) in a response to Smith that he may not, however, have mailed (Reynolds, *Homecoming* 103). Reynolds makes the point nicely: "Smith epitomized much about Left Bank intellectuals that Hemingway both despised and resented: Ivy League education, a substantial income allowing him to rent a chateau, literary pretensions, nice clothes and a genteel background" (*Paris Years* 192).

Originally, the story was called "Mr. and Mrs. Smith," but Hemingway lined out "Smith" on the typescript that he sent Jane Heap at the *Little Review* and substituted "Elliot"—with two "l"s and one "t"—in the title and throughout (TS. 109-15). The scuttlebutt at the time attributed the Smiths' inability to have a child to their sexual inadequacies. But, to make Hemingway's satire even more unappealing, Fate intervened: Olive Smith, though she eventually became pregnant with twins, died in childbirth in March of 1924 (Chard Powers Smith), shortly before Hemingway wrote the story that spring. As a result, the satire has always seemed, to some, mean-spirited and puerile, even "malicious" (Reynolds, *Paris Years* 192), though Hemingway was unaware of Olive's death at the time (Reynolds, *Homecoming*, 238, footnote 48). It was also, some believed, not very funny. Yet Paul Smith liked the story, calling it "one of [Hemingway's] best and most sophisticated satires . . . [one]

that transcends its seminal gossip to reveal the social and literary pretensions among the elite expatriates . . ." (127).[3] Whatever the case, three parts of the work are particularly intriguing, demanding further critical attention: the beginning (problematic for Horace Liveright), the couple's wedding night with those erotic shoes, and the final paragraph. The story also contains a meanness that will reappear from time to time in other Hemingway works and is too often an aspect of his satiric method.

The story was first published in the Autumn-Winter issue of the *Little Review* in 1924-25 with the opening paragraph as Hemingway wanted it, except for one phrase ("in a railroad carriage") that he later deleted:

> Mr. and Mrs. Elliot tried very hard to have a baby. They tried as often as Mrs. Elliot could stand it. They tried in Boston after they were married and they tried coming over on the boat. They did not try very often on the boat because Mrs. Elliot was quite sick. She was sick and when she was sick she was sick as Southern women are sick. That is women from the Southern part of the United States. Like all Southern women Mrs. Elliot disintegrated very quickly under sea sickness, travelling at night in a railroad carriage and getting up too early in the morning. Many of the people on the boat took her for Elliot's mother. Other people who knew they were married believed she was going to have a baby. In reality she was forty years old. Her years had been precipitated suddenly when she started travelling. (9-10)

When Horace Liveright agreed to publish *In Our Time*, he had, however, some reservations. Most problematic was "Up in Michigan," which, because of its sexual frankness, would have to be cut, so Hemingway would need to provide another story (Baker, *Life* 141). That new work, of course, was "The Battler." "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" would also need to be changed to avoid an obscene passage in the first paragraph (141). The difficulty was the copulation referred to in the phrase "tried very hard to have a baby" that appeared in the first sentence and was then repeated three times in the next few sentences.

Hemingway set to work, rewriting the offending material and making other changes—some small, some larger—along the way. The most important of these involved the opening of the story so that it now read: "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot tried very hard to have a baby. They were married in Boston and sailed for Europe on a boat. It was a very expensive boat and was supposed to get to Europe in six days. But on the boat Mrs. Elliot was quite sick" (*IOT* [1925] 109). From that

point on, the rest of the paragraph is the same as that in the original in the *Little Review*.

In his letter to Liveright returning the galley proofs with the revised story in them, Hemingway bemoaned the loss of impact in the work. "It is a shame it had to be changed," he wrote, noting that "[a]s the whole story hung again and again on the repetition of the words 'they tried very hard to have a baby,' I have inserted some stuff about the boat and Paris to pick up the old rhythm and keep it funny. It has to have the repe[ti]tions to hold it together" (*Letters* vol. 2 338). Though these new opening sentences were not as effective as those in the original version, Hemingway was able to keep the repetition of the word "sick" to emphasize Mrs. Elliot's fragility and Southernness as part of the satire, presumably because those qualities were not thought of as obscene.

Another quite interesting section of the story is the passage on the Elliots' wedding night:

> They spent the night of the day they were married in a Boston hotel. They were both disappointed but finally Cornelia went to sleep. Hubert could not sleep and several times went out and walked up and down the corridor of the hotel in his new Jaeger bathrobe that he had bought for his wedding trip. As he walked he saw all the pairs of shoes, small shoes and big shoes, outside the doors of the hotel rooms. This set his heart to pounding and he hurried back to his own room but Cornelia was asleep. He did not like to waken her and soon everything was quite all right and he slept peacefully. (*CSS* 124)

Again the satiric mode is fully evident here. Hubert is disappointed—and disappointing—in their honeymoon lovemaking and thus, from Hemingway's point of view, sexually inadequate. He must rely on a fetish—those mysterious shoes—to get an erection and on masturbation to ease his sexual tension (Scholes 48) since Cornelia is asleep. As Marjorie Perloff has observed, Hemingway here "presents Hubert as [a] voyeur, his heart pounding as he surveys [the paired shoes of] the 'promiscuous' couples outside the bedroom doors and engages in masturbatory fantasies about the sexual life inside those hidden rooms" (682). As support for her reading of the passage, Perloff refers us to Robert Scholes, who notes that "the big shoes and small shoes together suggest couples coupling in those rooms. But the erotic effect of these shoes also suggests, in Freudian code, a strange and fetishistic element in Hubert's sexual make-up" (47-48).

We know that Hemingway was reading the psychologists and psychiatrists of the time—Krafft-Ebing, Jung, and, no doubt, Freud among them—and used the various theories of the unconscious in his own work. We see such awareness in the symbolic ending of "Big Two-Hearted River: Part II," for example, in which Nick Adams would save fishing in the swamp for another day, save, that is, an exploration of his unconscious wounds, needs, and drives for a time when the inner terrain would be as restored as the outer burned-over land would eventually be: "In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure . . . He did not want to go down the stream any further today" (*CSS* 180). For example, in a story like "The Sea Change" and in other stories that deal with homosexuality, what lies beneath the level of consciousness is powerful and often threatening, as it is for Phil, whose lover is leaving him for a time, not for another man, but for another woman (*CSS* 303). Here, in "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," Hubert finally becomes aroused on his wedding night. Earlier in the evening he had failed to make love to his wife, but now he is moved unconsciously when he sees all those pairs of shoes in the hallway and what they suggest is going on behind those closed doors, so he rushes back to Cornelia to consummate their marriage. But finding her asleep and not wanting to awaken her, he relieves himself so that "soon everything was quite all right and he slept peacefully" (*CSS* 124).

Some have seen the humor in the scene, but there is also much sadness as we recognize what lies ahead for the Elliots. Perhaps Hubert is not yet fully aware of just how empty his marriage to Cornelia is going to be, but the rest of the story sees him supplanted in the bedroom as Cornelia and her friend take over the marital couch and he scribbles away much of the night writing his poetry. The portrayal of Hubert here points us to the depth of Hemingway's understanding of the psychological theories of the times and to his artistry in illuminating powerful aspects of human behavior.

Though the passage on the shoes points us quite naturally to Freud and his various writings on fetishism,[4] we no longer need to rely solely on a psychological explanation for foot festishism. The neuroscientist V. S. Ramachandran has more recently offered a physiological perspective on this phenomenon.[5] In treating his patients with phantom limbs after amputation, Dr. Ramachandran discovered a surprising result: some of his clients experienced sexual pleasure in their phantom foot when they had sex. The explanation is compelling, relying as it does on the fact that the brain maps our entire

body surface "with each half of the body mapped onto the opposite side of the brain" (27). Interestingly, in the Penfield map of the brain, "the foot is beside the genitals. Therefore, if a person loses a leg and is then stimulated in the genitals, she [or he] will experience sensations in the phantom leg. This is what you'd expect if input from the genital area were to invade the territory vacated by the foot" (35-36).

Because of his experience, Dr. Ramachandran began to speculate on foot fetishes in "normal" people: "The traditional explanation for foot fetishes comes, not surprisingly, from Freud. The penis resembles the foot, he [Freud] argues, hence the fetish. But if that's the case, why not some other elongated body part?[6] . . . I suggest that the reason is quite simply that in the brain the foot lies right next to the genitalia. Maybe even many of us so-called normal people have a bit of cross-wiring, which would explain why we like to have our toes sucked" (36-37). Though he seems to oversimplify Freud's discussion of fetishism, Dr. Ramachandran provides an insightful alternative. In a footnote later in the book, Dr. Ramachandran summarizes: "If the hypothesis [that 'the remapping . . . of referred sensations'] is correct, then one would also expect to see referral from the genitals to the foot after leg amputation, since these two body parts are adjacent on the Penfield map" (Note 8, 268). As applied to the story, this explanation suggests that Hubert Elliot suffers from some "cross-wiring" (37).

A final fascinating section of the story is the ending. In the typescript, in the *Little Review* version, and in the Boni and Liveright edition of *In Our Time* (1925), the story concludes with one big paragraph. But in that Liveright version, Hemingway had to change the second sentence, which in the original typescript had indicated that the couple, on their firm mattress, was very determined in their lovemaking to become pregnant (5), in order to harmonize the ending with the changes he had made in the beginning. That second sentence now reads, "He and Mrs. Elliot slept in a big, hot bedroom on a big, hard bed," and the sentence is followed by a new one that is also consistent with the earlier changes: "And they still wanted very much to have a baby" (*IOT* [1925] 114). In the Scribner's *In Our Time* (1930), however, that concluding paragraph is broken into two, and the language of the story returns to the way Hemingway had first published it in the *Little Review*.[7]

The fascinating part of the ending, though, has to do with its sexual aspects. Indeed, Hemingway was surprised that no objection had

been raised to the way he finished the story (Reynolds, *Paris Years* 293) because that final paragraph of the 1925 *IOT* was filled with sexual material. Though in that Boni and Liveright version, the offending statement that "They tried very hard to have a baby" had been removed, there were still other items subject to sexual interpretation. Take, for example, the fact that the Elliots "slept in a big, hot bedroom on a big, hard bed" (*IOT* [1925] 114). Aren't "big" and "hard" in this context sexually suggestive? And what about other things, such as Mrs. Elliot's "learning the touch system," surely a possible reference to what Cornelia might do for her husband. Hubert's plentiful poetry composing, which leaves him so exhausted in the morning, is another suggestive act (115). As Comley and Scholes observe, "In this wasteland [of the story] the writing of poetry has become equivalent to masturbation" ("Tribal Things" 276). And the fact that "Mrs. Elliot and the girl friend now slept together in the big mediaeval bed" is clearly sexual, as is the fact that "[t]hey had many a good cry together" (*IOT* [1925] 115). That crying together is, in Comley and Scholes's terms, "equivalent to lesbian sexuality" ("Tribal Things" 276).[8] What, too, are we to make of the girlfriend's taking over "practically all" of Hubert's typing from Cornelia (*IOT* [1925] 114)? In a perceptive reading of the story's ending, Joseph DeFalco, one of Hemingway's early critics, directs us to a possible answer: "The complete reversal of normal roles [of husband and wife] becomes the point here, for the action has come full cycle from the opening line. There Mr. and Mrs. Elliot are said to be trying to have a baby; here . . . Mrs. Elliot . . . has got her baby—Mr. Elliot . . . [And] the girl friend has become a surrogate husband. Now the controlling figure of the complex, she has usurped Elliot's marital bed" (157). As husband of this new family, she has also taken on part of the labor—typing Hubert's poems—that will provide for the trio's sustenance.

Ultimately, however, the story's complexity and achievement are marred by a mean-spiritedness that also appears from time to time in other Hemingway works, of which *The Torrents of Spring* is an early example.[9] A satiric parody of Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter*, which Carlos Baker observed was "a rather silly book that deserved the lampoon" (*Life* 159), *Torrents* had as a major motive to free Hemingway from his contractual arrangement with Boni and Liveright, which had published the earliest version of *In Our Time* (1925) and which had first rights to the next two books. Since Anderson was a major figure for Boni and Liveright, a parody of his

writing was truly not an option for the firm, so Liveright wrote to Hemingway declining the book. The mere fact of the book is more important than the details of the parody in it because of its effect in freeing Hemingway to go elsewhere for a publisher. But the sense of betrayal that Anderson must have felt would have been especially painful because he had helped Hemingway get the contract with Liveright for *In Our Time*.

Another early friend, Harold Loeb, who had also helped Hemingway place the book, got similar treatment. Hemingway's portrait of Loeb as Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises* (Baker, *Life Story* 179) was particularly nasty. In a comment tinged with the anti-Semitism of the time, Jake says of Cohn that his infatuation with W. H. Hudson's *The Purple Land* was foolish: "For a man to take it at thirty-four as a guide-book to what life holds is about as safe as it would be for a man of the same age to enter Wall Street direct from a French convent, equipped with a complete set of the more practical Alger books. Cohn, I believe, took every word of *The Purple Land* as literally as though it had been an R. G. Dun Report" (*Sun* 17). Cohn's naivete, his mooning over Brett, his romanticism, and his general emotional messiness made him in Jake's mind what another character calls "a case of arrested development" (51). This is a good example of how Hemingway sometimes treated his friends.

In *The Fifth Column*, Hemingway moves his focus from friends to lovers, but the result is much the same as before. The unflattering portrait of Dorothy Bridges is loosely based on Martha Gellhorn (Baker, *Life* 321), who, like Hemingway, was a war correspondent, a writer of fiction, and, ultimately, his third wife. In the play Philip Rawlings poses as an unserious correspondent and playboy who is in reality an undercover agent for the Spanish republic; he is looking to root out Franco's secret agents—Fifth Columnists—who are trying to subvert the Republican cause. Dorothy Bridges, also a correspondent but one whose seriousness seems initially in doubt and whose superficiality is reflected in her upper-class lifestyle, is attracted to Philip but wants to reform him, while he, aware of Dorothy's beauty and charms, also finds her appealing. Though he recognizes that a relationship with Dorothy may interfere with his undercover work, he begins an affair with her. Anita, "a Mooish tart" (1.2.7) who is also in love with Philip, warns him about her: "Listen, that big blonde make you crazy already. [Then] soon you can't think good. Is no more the same as you as blood and paint" (2.2.43). But at this early

point in the play, Philip defends Dorothy: "she's very beautiful, very friendly, and very charming and rather innocent—and quite brave," though in detailing her positive qualities, he also acknowledges her flaws: "she's lazy and spoiled, and rather stupid, and enormously on the make" (2.2.44). The satiric analysis here is pointed and sets us up for the play's ending, in which Philip rejects Dorothy entirely.

In this big final scene, Philip tells her directly why they can't go on together: "where I go now I go alone or with others who go there for the same reason I go" (3.4.83). And when she asks why she can't go along, he tells her bluntly, "Because you're useless really. You're uneducated, you're useless, you're a fool and you're lazy." When she acknowledges that "Maybe the others. But I'm not useless," suggesting her love-making ability, Philip responds, "That's a commodity you shouldn't pay too high a price for." Insulted, she asks, "So I'm a commodity?" (83) to which he replies, "Yes, a very handsome commodity. The most beautiful I've ever had" (84). Having been completely eviscerated, she explodes: "Now get out of here. You conceited, *conceited* drunkard. You ridiculous, puffed-up, posing braggart. You commodity, you" (3.4.83-84). They then go back and forth for a while, ending ultimately with Dorothy in tears, admitting to her maid that she still loves Philip, and he in his room calling for Anita with whom he had had an earlier sexual relationship (84). Given the satiric portrayal of Martha Gellhorn in the play, one wonders why Hemingway depicts so severely the woman he was in love with and ultimately why Gellhorn ever chose to marry him.

As is clear from the discussion above, the satiric mode begun in "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" appears in other works in the Hemingway canon but not always with the importance it has in *Torrents, Sun,* and *The Fifth Column*. Sometimes, as in *Death in the Afternoon*, for example, there are small segments in which Hemingway uses satire for variation of tone and content. These frequently result from a question by the Old lady, a character that Hemingway uses in chapters seven to sixteen to deal with issues or people he wants to talk about. Untutored in the book's subject matter, she is open to learning and honest about her feelings. Unlike others, for instance, who find the bullfight "terrible, awful, horrible" (63), she notes that she "liked it very much" (64). And she is interested in the bullfighters' love life, too (120-21). When Hemingway the narrator talks to her about devoting himself to his writing now that he is getting older, he thanks Faulkner for the fact that publishers "now will publish anything

rather than try to get you to delete the better portions of your works" and "look[s] forward to writing of those days of [his] youth which were spent in the finest whorehouses in the land" (173). The Old lady then wants to know if Faulkner has "written well of these places," to which Hemingway replies, "Madame, you can't go wrong on Faulkner. He's prolific too. By the time you get [his books] ordered there will be a new one out" (173). Though other places in the book that deal with subjects besides bullfighting have gotten more attention than these small satirical moments—items like Hemingway's theory of omission (192), for instance—the wit and humor of the satire provide a good balance to the longer discussion of bulls and matadors and other aspects of the *corrida*. Of course, short satiric sections in other books—like Bill's screed in *Sun* against the Catholic pilgrims who have bought up all the early dinner tickets before other passengers have had a chance to do so, or the humor in the passages of male camaraderie on irony and pity, on expatriates, and on Henry's bicycle—perform a similar function.

As seminal in many ways as "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" is, it remains, it seems to me, a story that says more about the young Hemingway's biases and nastiness than about the artistry that in other stories in *In Our Time* marks him as a truly major writer, one who within the space of a decade would write two great novels and other works that we return to with pleasure again and again. It is Hemingway in his satiric mode, certainly, but when we think of what he did to Chard Powers Smith and his spouse, it's hard to applaud his achievement here. For Hemingway aficionados, the story's appeal is in helping us to complete the picture we have of this multifarious but flawed human being who went on to become the undeniably great writer the Nobel Prize for Literature committee and generations of scholars have recognized as central to twentieth-century American literature.

United States Naval Academy

NOTES

[1]In an interesting letter (16 May 1969) that Chard Powers Smith sent Carlos Baker, Smith noted that his and his spouse's marital relationship was normal, unlike that of Mr. and Mrs. Elliot in the story. See Baker, *Writer* 27, note 4.

[2]Biographical data for Chard Powers Smith and Olive Cary Macdonald Smith are drawn from readily available sources like Ancestry.com, the 1910 US census, American Consular Services Death Certificates, the *New York Times* obituaries, *American National Biography Online*, *Find a Grave*, and *Gale Literature: Contemporary Authors*.

[3]Among other things, Smith extends his argument about the story as a satire of the "elite expatriates" with T. S. Eliot as Hemingway's target in "From the Wasteland to the Garden with the Elliots" in Beegel 123-29. Others have argued effectively for Eliot's centrality in the story and in Hemingway's work. In addition to Smith, see especially Joost and Brown as well as Flora, though he notes that "[t]he two writers never met (73)." Comely and Scholes ("Tribal Things" 276) also suggest a link between Hemingway and Eliot in an interesting comment on the story.

[4] See *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth P, 1953, 1964), vols. 7 (123-243), 21 (147-57), and 23 (271-78).

[5]I am indebted to Natalie Wolchover's "Why Do People Have Foot Fetishes?" for pointing me to Ramachandran's work. See livescience.com/33525-foot-fetishes-toe-suck-fairy.html.

[6]Ramachandran seems to oversimplify Freud's discussion of the foot fetish. See note 4 above.

[7]In the typescript, the final part of the last sentence noted that the three people—the couple and Mrs. Elliot's female friend—were now content (5), but in subsequent versions Hemingway dropped the word "three."

[8]Though in the story Cornelia is either bisexual or lesbian (Stewart 85-88) and her girlfriend is a lesbian, the real-life model for that girlfriend, Janet Hurter, was heterosexual (Baker, *Writer* 27 note 4). Baker also remarks that she was "only Olive's best friend" and that she lived with the Smiths twice—once for a short time in 1921-22 and once in 1924 at Chard's request when Olive's health was in decline (note 4). Lynn notes that Hurter was in love with Chard, which created the tension that Hemingway saw in the couple's marital relationship, a tension that he intensified by making Olive and Janet lovers (244).

[9]I rely on the many excellent Hemingway biographies, beginning with Baker's *Life Story*, for the commonly accepted and now well-known identification of the targets of Hemingway's satire.

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DEFINING THE MIDWEST AND THE MIDWESTERN: A REVIEW ESSAY

JEFF SEARS

Christman, Phil. *Midwest Futures*. Cleveland, OH: Belt Publishing, 2020. 154 pp.

Heyman, Stephen. *The Planter of Modern Life: Louis Bromfield and the Food Revolution*. NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 2020. 340 pp.

Lauck, Jon K., ed. *The Interior Borderlands: Regional Identity in the Midwest and Great Plains*. Sioux Falls. SD: The Center for Western Studies, Augustana University, 2019. 327 pp.

Ochonicky, Adam R. *The American Midwest in Film and Literature: Nostalgia, Violence, and Regionalism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020. 256 pp.

In Midwestern studies, we often default to the US Census Bureau's familiar twelve-state definition of the Midwest. We assume that the region's boundaries coincide with state lines. We describe any creative work set within the twelve states as Midwestern. We list any author who grew up in the twelve states as a Midwestern author. Drawing the Midwest's boundaries should take a more nuanced approach. Classifying creative works and their creators as Midwestern should require that being in the Midwest or being Midwestern is a prominent theme.

The fallacy of state lines as regional boundary is blown up in *The Interior Borderlands: Regional Identity in the Midwest and Great Plains*. The twelve-state definition of the Midwest includes Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota. By analyzing an impressive variety of data, from aerial photography to community cookbooks, the twenty well-written essays in this collection point out how these states are divided roughly in half east to west between the Midwest and the Great Plains. The dividing line is approximately the 98th meridian. This is the famous line of aridity to the west where

average annual precipitation falls below twenty inches. In the simplest terms, to the east of this line there is farming; to the west, ranching.

The essays address the more specific questions: 1) where exactly is the dividing line, and 2) is this line a transition from Midwest to West, or do these four states make up a distinct subregion, the interior borderlands of the title? The value of this collection does not lie in attempting to resolve these questions, but in the many angles from which it comes at them. The first essay alone shows us how to differentiate the geographies of the Midwest and the Great Plains by climate, topography (and its underlying causes such as glaciation), hydrology, soil and vegetation, wildlife, and population density, in addition to precipitation boundaries and land use.

Historical topics range across the time line of the regions. Nineteenth-century land speculation and land development in the Great Plains are illustrated. Twentieth-century attempts to form a coherent policy for the use of the Missouri River and its tributaries are described. A contemporary topic with broad social implications is the shifting patterns of evangelical/Southern Protestant vs. traditional (Northern) Protestant/Catholic church membership over recent decades at the southwest border of the Midwest.

The Native American experience in the Midwest and Great Plains is an indispensable topic, treated effectively in an essay that uses two famous works of nineteenth-century American literature, Longfellow's *Hiawatha* and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie*, to show how the American public imagined Native Americans in contrast to their actual circumstances. An unexpected bonus is an essay on the Jewish experience in the Midwest and Great Plains, describing distinct waves of Jewish immigration with significant differences among groups of immigrants. Literary topics span time and genres. One essay discusses Hamlin Garland's lesser-known novel, *The Moccasin Ranch* (1909), which presents his homesteading experiences in the Dakota Territory very near to the dividing line between Midwest and Great Plains. Another focuses on late twentieth-century Southwest Minnesota writers, the best known of whom is poet Robert Bly. A third analyzes the memoirs of contemporary women writers from the regions.

How the Midwest and the Great Plains are conflated into "flyover country" in the minds of those Americans living on the East and West Coasts is a staple in discussions of American politics and popular culture. This topic is handled nicely in an essay that covers films from

The Wizard of Oz (1939) to Alexander Payne's 2013 film, *Nebraska*. Dr. Lauck also mentions "flyover country" in his introduction, where he expresses the hope that this collection will "help to transcend 'middle of nowhere' and 'flyover country' stereotypes and draw the coastal gaze to the Center Line" (xlii-xliii). This hope may be in vain. But for those who live in the Midwest or the Great Plains, and particularly for those who study the regions, this collection will be a valuable and enjoyable resource.

In *The American Midwest in Film and Literature: Nostalgia, Violence, and Regionalism*, Adam Ochonicky asserts that works set in the twelve states present characters preoccupied with or limited by the past and often unable to progress emotionally or otherwise. In his concept of "nostalgic spatiality," the landscape (or cityscape) is treated as a metaphor for this condition, with "a sense of spatial constriction or untraversable boundaries" (29). He traces how this preoccupation can lead to the extremes of either physical violence toward others, which he terms "nostalgic violence"; or efforts to make amends, which he terms "nostalgic atonement." He analyzes a variety of films over time and a smaller sampling of literature and television shows. After following his lengthy argument and numerous examples, one still has to question his thesis that nostalgia, "nostalgic violence" "nostalgic atonement," and "nostalgic spatiality" constitute a newly identified genre of Midwestern regionalism.

Ochonicky cites Frederick Jackson Turner and James R. Shortridge to establish that nostalgia is strongly associated with the Midwest. In these contexts, Midwestern nostalgia has as its objects the often-glorified pioneer homesteader experience and the often idealized village culture that followed. It is a leap to infer that nostalgia in any form is distinctly or characteristically Midwestern. Ochonicky makes much of a passage from Turner's *The Frontier in American History* (1920): "This, then, is the real situation: a people composed of heterogeneous materials, with diverse and conflicting social ideals and interests, having passed from the task of filling up the vacant spaces of the continent, is now thrown back upon itself, and is seeking an equilibrium. The diverse elements are being fused into national unity. The forces of reorganization are turbulent and the nation seems like a witches' kettle" (32). In context, this is how Turner explained the social turmoil in America at the time around the issue of immigration. Turner's comments were not regionally specific and not meant to describe anyone's psychology. Ochonicky associates Turner's metaphor with the Midwest and "nos-

talgic spatiality" by superimposing his own metaphor of a rolled-up map onto Turner's text and recasting Turner's metaphor as "the nostalgic turn inward":

> A cartographic visualization of the nation being "thrown back upon itself" would involve rolling the left edge of a map of the United States toward its center. Such a motion situates the Midwest as the fulcrum of this nostalgic turn inward—that is, the point at which the nation begins to coil back into itself. This imaginary map's compression neatly reflects how Turner brings the Midwest into contact with his nostalgic conception of the frontier. By spatializing the nostalgic turn inward, Turner locates what is typically an abstract aspect of nostalgia—the temporal period for which the nostalgic subject belongs—within a precise physical space: the Midwest. As a result of the nostalgic spatiality that permeates Turner's work, the geographic territory of the Midwest is reimagined as a nostalgia-infused ideological construct. (33)

Several of Ochonicky's analyses appear to stretch the meaning of a book or film to be about the Midwest or to include nostalgia or "nostalgic spatiality." *Sister Carrie*, for example, is presented as an example of "twentieth-century narratives of nostalgia and the Midwest" (27). Its connections both to nostalgia and to the Midwest are tenuous. While some of the story takes place in Chicago, most of it is set in New York City. The theme of nostalgia is attributed to a point near the end of the story when the main male character, Hurstwood, has a mental breakdown leading up to his suicide. One of his symptoms is the occasional delusion that he is back in Chicago and all of his setbacks in New York City haven't happened. Interestingly, though, in a climactic passage cited by Ochonicky, Hurstwood seems fully aware of his present failed circumstances. Encountering a billboard with Carrie's likeness, he thinks out loud, "'That's you . . . Wasn't good enough for you, was I? Huh!'" Ochonicky calls this moment an example of "nostalgic derangement" (40). It seems instead to be an example of angry resentment by someone who is all too aware of the reality that he has been rejected.

David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* (2005) is discussed, as the title suggests, under the topic of "nostalgic violence." This concept is described as the use of violence "to restore or relive an idealized (potentially invented) version of the past" (139). But the version of himself that the main character wants to restore when it comes into question is his present, though long running, life as a model citizen.

He wants to cover up the gangster life of his past. That the setting of the film, in the fictional town of Millbrook, Indiana, is in the Midwest is coincidental. As the filmmaker's commentary cited by Ochonicky indicates, the setting was created to be a stereotypically American place, with no reference to the Midwest in particular: "This town is maybe too perfect. And that's part of the playing with mythology of Americana that America itself wants to believe. There's a lot of that in this movie" (138). The setting could have been any American town where the veneer of respectability hides secrets. Peyton Place, after all, was in New England.

David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (1999) is offered is an example of "nostalgic atonement." This description does apply. When seventy-three-year-old Alvin Straight is confronted with the news that he is ill and that his estranged brother has had a stroke, he decides to make the two-hundred-mile trip from his home in Iowa to his brother's home in Wisconsin to restore their relationship. What makes the trip challenging and therefore an act of atonement is that his only means of transportation is a riding lawn mower. (The film is based on a true story. No one could invent it.) The film is a straightforward account of his journey through the cornfields of northern Iowa, across the Mississippi River, to the bluff country of southwestern Wisconsin. In this film nostalgia and "nostalgic atonement" do exist in a distinctly Midwestern setting. But Ochonicky describes the story as "superficially simplistic" and "deceptively linear" (192-93), reading into the film a kind of "nostalgic spatiality" in which Straight's journey in space is also a journey back in time to an idealized past vision of the region. Ochonicky refers to an interpretation offered by fellow film scholar Todd McGowan: "Audiences perceive 'the physical beauty of Iowa fields . . . not because [this beauty] actually exists but because, as viewers of the film, we are looking through the lens of Alvin's fantasy.' McGowan suggests that Alvin transforms the physical space upon which his journey takes place—the very Midwestern landscape that viewers might recognize as a realistic environment—into 'the world of fantasy'" (193).

Ochonicky acknowledges that "there are almost no formal elements indicating the regional space onscreen is distorted in some way" (194). The one formal element that he cites, the dissolve effect, common in films to indicate the long passage of time, is appropriate to emphasize the length and difficulty of Alvin's trek. Ochonicky's interpretation that "the repeated use of dissolves disrupts the appar-

ent linear trajectory of Alvin's journey" seems forced and unconvincing (194). Despite overreaching, *The American Midwest in Film and Literature* does make a contribution. It correctly posits that a character's relationship with the past can be a significant theme, and it gives a name to the symbolic use of space to convey that theme: "nostalgic spatiality."

Louis Bromfield was an author who grew up in Ohio, one of the twelve states. He also qualifies as a Midwestern author in the stricter sense because one of his novels, *The Farm*, is a semi-autobiographical account of his boyhood in Mansfield. Stephen Heyman chronicles Bromfield's adventures from his time as an American expatriate writer in France in the early twentieth century to his return to Mansfield to found Malabar Farm, a model of sustainable agricultural methods in his book, *The Planter of Modern Life: Louis Bromfield and the Seeds of a Food Revolution*. Today Bromfield could be the subject of a newspaper panel (or Internet click bait): an American named Louis Bromfield, who lived from 1896 to 1956, won the Pulitzer Prize and was once known as the most famous farmer in America. Believe it or not!

As Heyman notes, Bromfield's literary reputation did not survive World War II, and nowadays Malabar Farm is a relatively obscure state park. Heyman's book is an extended personality piece, acquainting readers with this colorful but largely forgotten figure. Bromfield was a celebrity in his day and enjoyed playing the part, famously hosting parties attended by other celebrities. Malabar Farm became well known mainly because Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall were married there. Like fellow American expatriate author Ernest Hemingway, Bromfield volunteered to drive an ambulance in World War I. His novels outsold those of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and his books were made into popular movies. At one time critics considered him to be America's most promising young writer. In 1936, he made the surprising decision to move his family to Ohio, where he poured his considerable fortune from writing into building Malabar Farm. He used his celebrity to speak out on American farm policy and at one time was considered a serious candidate for Secretary of Agriculture. An outspoken conservationist, he is credited by Heyman for influencing later conservationists such as Kentucky farmer-poet Wendell Berry.

Heyman paints a sympathetic but not altogether attractive picture of Bromfield. Bromfield's love of nature and of farming is portrayed

as deep and sincere. His work ethic in writing, farming, and public speaking is highlighted. But Bromfield is also shown to be a pretentious character. Hemingway, who admittedly envied Bromfield's success, pointedly mocked him and his writing in a 1927 letter to Fitzgerald:

> Bloomfield's next novel is about a preacher. Bloomfield will probably make him a decayed old new england preacher named Cabot Cabot Cabot and naturally he talks only with God—to rhyme with Cod. But sooner or later I can see that the decayed French aristocracy will come into the book and they will be named the Marquis Deidre de Chanel and will be people whom Louis Bromfield [—] the most brilliant and utterly master of his craft of all the younger generation of decayed French aristocracy novelists [—] will have studied first-hand himself at the Ritz. . . . (36)

Later in his life, Bromfield led his tours of Malabar Farm to the top of a hill and gave long-winded talks. Bromfield's assistant, George Hawkins, named the hill "Mount Jeez" to commemorate Bromfield's sermonizing.

Heyman's prose is smart and entertaining. He describes Bromfield's wife's bedroom at Malabar Farm as "the lair of an aged Easter bunny in pastel shades of blue and yellow, with powder-blue carpet, turquoise chintz draperies, and a yellow marble fireplace" (166). Heyman often draws the reader in with a familiar and gossipy tone. He gives this description of Bromfield's novel *The Rains Came*: "Yes, it was overdone. Yes, it was overly romantic It was, after all, a Louis Bromfield novel" (145). *The Planter of Modern Life* is a good read.

That being said, the title oversells Bromfield's importance. Malabar Farm did plant a seed, metaphorically, as an early example of farming practices that have been adopted much more widely in later decades. But to say he led a revolution is overstated, as is the implication that he changed the way people live. Also, though the book is generally well researched, Heyman is not a literary scholar and certainly not a student of Midwestern literature. It may be a small point, but there is a bothersome spelling error; Heyman refers to the author "Hamlin Garlin" (109). It would have been very interesting to have an assessment of Bromfield's proper place in American literature and among Midwestern authors, although, granted, this was not Heyman's purpose. Such an assessment would be particularly

interesting because of Bromfield's great rise and precipitous fall in literary reputation. Perhaps now would be a good time to reprint David D. Anderson's Twayne book on Louis Bromfield.

In *Midwest Futures*, Phil Christman's historical and autobiographical meditation on the Midwest, he acknowledges the problem of the twelve-state definition: "The region is a conceptual magpie's nest, made from scraps of everything" (13). This comment sets the tone for the rest of his book in which he dispels any familiar notions of the Midwest's past, present, or future. The theme that weaves through Christman's musings is that the Midwest has been exploited by outside interests since the Land Ordinances of 1784 and 1785. Quoting the journal of General Richard Butler, "a Revolutionary war veteran who like many such veterans hoped to claim some long-overdue backpay in the form of Western plats," Christman introduces the idea that the Midwest is "[n]ot a place—[but] a fund": "Butler . . . describ[ed] the survey team [sent to map the territory west of the Ohio River] as 'a set of gentlemen who are the first at work on a fund which will eventually . . . extinguish the debt of the United States' . . . Big Eastern land speculators already eyed these plats" (11).

Christman extends this idea to the state of creative arts in the Midwest: "[T]his lingering sense of hidden riches, of a cultural vitality not yet fully exploited or appreciated, brings to mind again that feeling that the Midwest is a thing appraised from elsewhere, a fund externally managed" (25). The first to be victimized, of course, were Native Americans, "because [a] place can have history; a fund cannot" (33). Fast forward two hundred years, and Christman sees the "financialization of the economy," whereby Wall Street decides the unfortunate fate of Midwestern industry and agriculture:

> The economy of the U.S. became, once again, a matter of Eastern speculators viewing the vast fund to the west with bemusement and some contempt, trying to figure out what to do with it. The cities, certainly, were too large, too full of old plants; there was altogether too much countryside, which needed to be consolidated into a few large farms . . . In the late 1990s, someone looked at a spreadsheet and decided that it made economic sense to close the refinery that employed 300 people in my hometown . . . Town after town lost the concentration of small and midsized farms that anchored the place's economy. (102-06)

In the meantime, according to Christman, a series of bad choices led to problems that plague us today. He notes that it was the infant nation's choice to have a standing army, used first to "clear all this [Native] life away" from the Midwest before bringing in the homesteaders (34). He sees a straight line from this choice to America's role in the contemporary world: "[N]o one can count all our military bases; worldwide dominion is the most fundamental fact of our common life, and its most fundamental distortion. American imperialism wastes money while lowering import prices; it deters enemies and creates them . . . [I]t poisons our relationship to democracy itself. (36)

Following historian Richard White's analysis, Christman describes the transcontinental railroads, which joined the Midwest to the West Coast in the mid-nineteenth century, as a choice "that didn't actually *need* to happen when or how they did": "The transcontinentals . . . were a vision willed into reality by speculators, a massive, unwieldy idea made profitable by a combination of old-fashioned corruption and a dreamlike conviction of their eventual profitability" (55-56). Christman observes that the transcontinental railroads are to blame for an ecological disaster: "[P]rairie farmers . . . standardized their treatment of the land . . . raising only those plants that sold reasonably well in any market . . . The rich variety of prairie life thinned out into the endless rows of identical strains of corn and wheat that we see today . . . Railroads made logging on a massive scale possible [to the point of] deforestation . . . [And] they made possible the near-extermination of the Plains buffalo" (57-59). Continuing the ecological theme, Christman concludes that global warming is inevitable, so the choice now is what to make of the Midwest "if . . . we want some version of civilization to exist in this region in the hot year 2120" (129). He offers several examples of how people can make things better by tending their gardens like Candide, but the tenor of his narrative doesn't inspire hope.

At times Christman's book reads like a manifesto, but he is more a contrarian than a radical. He cites Midwesterners' cherished beliefs in their egalitarianism and their normalcy as both false and destructive. According to Christman, Midwesterners, ignorant of the racism of their history, don't recognize the need to act now to overcome its effects; and by clinging to the standard of normalcy, they promote dangerous emotional repression. But Christman seems comfortable with industrial capitalism when balanced by strong labor unions. To Christman, the order of things immediately after World War II rep-

resents an ideal: "In time, labor militancy led the way to the solution of the problem . . . of how to . . . make . . . mass production—which frees us by giving us many cheap and useful goods while imprisoning us with its inflexible routines and demands—our servant rather than our master . . . From this emerged an uneasy but effective *rapprochement* between labor, management, government, and consumers, a more-or-less coherent, full-fledged economic planning system that became a model for the world" (70).

Christman's tone is brash and provocative. His humor has the vulgarity and fun of a night out with drinking buddies, as when he tells the story of Chief Black Hawk: "When, in the early 1830s, the U.S. government decided to enforce a stipulation in an illegal 1804 treaty that required Natives to live on the west bank of the Mississippi River, he called bullshit" (47). Or when he rejects the cliché "America's heartland" and offers the phrase "America's genitals" instead (19). Christman's knowledge of the Midwest is broad and deep, and he delivers a challenging and stimulating reading experience. *Midwest Futures* will be a great ride for anyone interested in the history, economics, sociology, or arts and literature of the Midwest.

McFarland, Wisconsin

WHERE POETRY MEETS REALITY: A REVIEW ESSAY

MARY CATHERINE HARPER

Beall, John. *Self-Portraits*. Georgetown, KY: Finishing Line P, 2019. 67 pp.

Essinger, Cathryn. *The Apricot and the Moon*. Loveland, OH: Dos Madres P, 2020. 79 pp.

Hamilton, Mark B. *OYO, The Beautiful River: An Environmental Narrative in Two Parts*. Brunswick, ME: Shanti Arts Publishing, 2020. 96 pp.

Osayande, Deonte. *Civilian*. Three Fires Confederacy, Waawiiyaatanong; Windsor, ON: Urban Farmhouse P, 2019. Crossroads Poetry Series. 179 pp.

Priest, Kimberly Ann. *Still Life*. Houghton, MI: [PANK] P, 2020. 33 pp.

Mark B. Hamilton reminds us in *OYO, The Beautiful River* that the Ohio River's Iroquois name means "beautiful river." In the title of his poetry collection Hamilton honors the indigenous Iroquois- and Algonquin-speaking peoples—including Shawnee, Delaware, Ottawa, Miami, and Seneca-Cayuga tribes—of the lands called the Northwest Territory by the colonizers of the 1700s. But Hamilton's poems never fall into romantic appropriations of indigenous peoples, nor do they fall into naive nostalgia for a simpler colonial time before the encroachments of industrial and technological enterprises and resultant polluters, including coal-burning smokestacks, each one "coloring-in the sky with its big gray crayon" ("At Boggs Run" 16). As the speaker of the collection says, "I row out in rhythms through flotsam, / through chunks of wood and Styrofoam . . . I stop beneath maples hiding bird song / along a river widening into everywhere. // Nothing is wasted. Nothing is denied" ("Flotsam & History" 12).

The speaker, one willing to suffer the bite of flies at cattle crossings, summer heat, scenes of dead fish, pelting rain and nearby light-

ning strikes, sees in a visionary way the beauty of the Oyo, as it existed in pre-colonial times, but, also, as it continues to exist today. He says, I have a lantern “attuned / to the flickers in the cave” (“An Empty City” 74) and I am attuned to the “Voices close to paradise in the wilderness of the mind” (“A Final Flower” 75). He also wryly declares, “I am the smile of Mona Lisa on Humphreys Creek” (“A Strong Cup of Tea” 72). However, the Oyo might elicit yearning for the past, this “metallic mirage,” this “serrated river cuts / at the bleeding of the world” (“100 Miles of Heat” 66-67). It is a river of contrasts, a powerful, destructive force even as it is a thing of enduring beauty. The speaker celebrates the beauty, but he also faces the facts of today’s reality: “no sights or sounds of birds any more / in Audubon country, just the immense concrete walls / of Alcoa and Southern Gas & Electric / rising into a near cathedral under a continual heft of heat” (60).

A resistance to nostalgia is prominent in *OYO, The Beautiful River*. Hamilton asserts that resistance in the speaker’s description of the formidable power of the river: It “will heighten and widen to become shaggy / like an animal with teeth and claws that leaps against its chain” (“In Contrast” 26). We will never master the river, not even in our collective imagination, as symbolized by the paddlewheel *American Dream* in the disturbing poem, “The American Dream, and a Man.” The speaker sees the symbolic ship “hard aground on a bar near Troy” (51). Likewise, the frailty of the human body is starkly noted, the river having had its way with a man who has “wandered away from his nursing home” (52) and drowned. The sight of the man’s body in the water is a shock to the speaker:

> I glimpse a rock, or a strange stump that widens
> into conflicting angles and colors unusual to see, . . .
> I start to imagine, or think that this
> might be a body in the water, in the shade, a bit bulging
> into an arc of back, the hump of a male possibly
> in the smudge of spine, the head shaven to pinpoints
> or buzz-cut to a butch.
> I cannot make sense of it. (51)

However incomprehensible the thought of human frailty—the frail bodies of both man and ship serving as metaphors for the idea of the American Dream—the river will have its way with us. Nature will

always win out, and Hamilton knows to let nature take his poetry where it will.

But what does it mean to let poetry take you where it will when it is a poetry of anger? When the only reality in the head is a set of memories that "crumble" (Osayande 13), when "there is nothing left / of the joyous little boy // you used to be / your agony spread out // across a lifespan" (Osayande, "Clouds" 20), when the poetry in you is a protest against what is wrong in the world when the world has gone so wrong?

Deonte Osayande's collection, *Civilian,* is such poetry, a poetry of the reality of social injustice. He shows us the "indifference that is the true evil / shadow haunting us all" ("Going Home" 65). The speaker of "Going Home" declares indifference even for himself when he says, "I will not / glorify the names // of all those / who hate me // for the color of my skin, / because I don't know them / enough to care about their / issues and problems with me" (66-67). Of course, the speaker's indifference is a kind apart from the indifference of white privilege. And Osayande splits that difference with great subtlety, relying on the reader to understand the demeaning indifference of white privilege vs. the black speaker's counter-indifference.

Such poems are hard to read, not just because of the expressions of anger, for example, the anger at being pulled over and jailed ostensibly for a car with "injuries" ("Arrest" 99) but actually for merely being a black man. Anger rumbles as the speaker reports thanking guards "for horrible / meals served" and seeing that "they were shocked, / having forgotten / all along, that we / are humans after all" ("Dehumanizing" 102). This is good, empowering anger, never disguised. But the speaker also feels helpless, abject. One of the sad result of racism is the difficulty of defining the self as something beyond an abject object, an Other identity already inscribed before birth. *Civilian* challenges us readers to face the process of abjection. "Jurassic Park" says it in a way no reader can miss—exposing the specter of dehumanization lurking in one of the most familiar of cultural icons—when the speaker says, "the funny thing // about Frankenstein, how the name / of the scientist becomes associated / with the monster, as if the scientist // wasn't always the monster all along" (48).

Civilian exposes the effects of the privilege that keeps racism alive. With cutting candor, Osayande slices into Frankenstein's face, revealing the abject face of the Other, the face of fully internalized

cultural hegemony. He readily admits a monster was created. He lets the monster speak through the personae of the poems, as in "Neanderthal," in which the speaker describes a scene at a party where there have been "one two many / drinks, and here lies // another man, trying / to impress his friends // and my hands / are the weapons, / guilty of using" (60). Even the syntax of the poem suggests the twisting of a man into a monstrous Other.

Osayande pulls the reader into that culturally-twisted Other, that twisted mind, that twisted soul, in a section of *Civilian* called "Casualties." In these ten poems especially, the speakers lament their inability to feel love, their inability to balance the give and take of love. One of them admits in a poem about watching pornography, "I've grown / so much / so detached // from everything / that I don't even / recognize the man / in the mirror" ("Porn" 79-80). He asks where the fault lies: "the fault / goes / where. // this / curse, // to want / embraces, / harvests // during drought / takes over / my life" (79). Another voice contemplates suicide at a stop light, thinks of driving off a bridge but then despairs even of despair "because this is your life / now. moving from one light to the next" ("Casualties" 81). What a relief for the reader that Osayande does not leave the poem "Casualties" at that line. He gives the speaker two more lines: "there are red times, yellow times, and green, / but your life continues, the beast doesn't win" (81).

In the collection's final sections—"Connection" and "Chronology"—Osayande situates the troubled realities of the earlier seven sections, with their narratives of police brutality and bipolar depression, in relation to events that convey a sense of willful endurance. This is especially true for a long poem named "Teachers" (136-45), about the life lessons learned from teachers. *Civilian* reminds us of something good in reality, something that the earlier poems of the collection foreshadow, a strength born of struggle: "isn't it odd how the universe works / in mysterious ways, how / tested we become. / isn't that a miracle?" (34). Miracle, indeed, to survive such tests, to be able to sing of the body in chains, the body ever unchaining itself.

Another collection of poems that addresses what might be considered much-too-much reality is Kimberly Ann Priest's *Still Life*, a chapbook-length collection with titles like "my pedophile has a discerning palette" and "my pedophile dates all of my future partners." Each of the poems' twenty-one titles begins with "my pedophile," and each is styled in the Midwestern Grotesque literary style. The

poems are something of a performance of obsessive-compulsive behavior, for example, a pedophile—simply called "he" in the poems—commenting on "the towels in the closet and how they were not folded in thirds but were folded in halves / overextending the limits of their allowable girth" ("my pedophile seeks a cozier space" 5). It is as if the criticism of towels is really criticism of the child the pedophile has abused. The abuse is never addressed directly but ever present in symbolic details.

Priest's symbolism slips into meta-poetry at times, especially evident in the poem, "my pedophile prefers my childhood," in which the pedophile asks "*what sort of woman likes flannel / sharp pencils / and strawberry lemonade*" (9). The question, depicted in italic face to indicate a shift to the pedophile's voice, is immediately followed by the speaker's commentary: "the form of the question being merely symbolic // not attempting to gain information or trust" (9). The symbology is noted, acknowledged by the speaker. Ah, but it is never interpreted, only named.

Naming is prominent in the collection, for the poems are a clutter of named items, symbolic of monstrous events too disturbing to be named. And the details of such events are highlighted to the level of literary burlesque: the lowly, insignificant wine glass and wasp nest and clock face and watermark on a knife serve as focal points in a series of still life scenes. They are stand-ins for narratives that one would dread to read . . . horrific, unspeakable narratives.

The depiction of the pedophile slips in and out of the surreal, for example, when "he stands upright // places his eyes on two platters // immerses them in dishwater / white frothy bubbles / small pieces of leftover meat" ("my pedophile remains objective" 11). The image of eyes on platters reminds the reader of a Dali painting. Interpretation is thwarted, and that is as it must be, for it is the reader's emotional response that matters. Phrases like "half-moon of bone spooning ocular tweeze // as he sets all the silver pinheads on a cushion / only to pull them one little limb at a time" ("my pedophile celebrates his limbs" 10) pull the reader into eerie, unnerving, spine-chilling emotional space, beyond narrative, even beyond symbolic meaning.

Priest's disjointed phrasing—the incoherence between syntax and semantics—reminds us that some experiences of reality are beyond representation. They cannot be adequately depicted, only apprehended. We are left with a grotesque performance, as in "my

pedophile produces a cinematic frame": "*breakfast* / it is me // the whole white surface / bright and bulbing / undercooked / tight as egg // how much he loves salt / to lick it from the surface / butter rolled over his tongue" (17). The reader feels, but never understands, the pedophile engaging in a dance that "bothers the sight of plastic fruit," that "makes the comments stammer," that wraps him in "yards of cellophane," all this being "too much to juggle // too much to jugular / gesticulate / ejaculate / believe // so porcupines are freed and this seems to satisfy the audience / disinterested" ("my pedophile feels the need to dance" 21). Is the reader disinterested? No. Never. Are we uncomfortable, disconcerted? Yes, as we should be.

Poetry may shake us up as it meets reality, asking us to contemplate relationships of abuse, social offenses, and the reality of degraded nature, as we see in the works of Priest, Osayande, and Hamilton. But poetry may also offer consolation and beauty, as in Cathryn Essinger's *The Apricot and the Moon*, an unashamedly romantic collection that reminds us just how wondrous the natural world is. Look beyond yourself, Essinger's poems say, for "there is no substitute for the world itself, / for the immediacy // of sunlight, the nightly plunge into darkness / the motion of stars, ("Reading Basho by Fern Light" 25).

Though romantic, Essinger's poems never leave us with the clichés of sentimental verse. The poem quoted above, "Reading Basho by Fern Light," directs us to see night as a *plunge* into darkness, not a gentle slide. And the poem's conclusion is no placid gaze at stars but "the motion of stars, the little grief / at the end of every day" (25). Set against the dependability of stars is the tension of each day's death. Such tension pulses in the poems. The pulse of nature, which drives us to give birth and to begin again and again the whole messy and uncertain process of living, is our remedy for death, so the poems of *The Apricot and the Moon* seem to say.

The speaker in "Of Course . . ." says it most poignantly as she holds the sonogram of her soon-to-be-born grandson "up to the light where / it resembles the map of an unknown country." She calls him a "Little traveler" with "Mickey Mouse fingers," one whom she will meet soon enough. But in the meantime, as she puts it, "I would not hurry this bliss" (62). She reminds herself that though "still unformed, a landscape in progress," her grandson is already himself, already "complete, even now before your eyes / have opened." She knows the child is already a separate being, nothing of her. But she's still invested

in connection with the child, saying, "And when you are my age, / with the texture of a full life behind you, // remember me, please. Remember that I knew / you in this picture before I knew your name" ("Of Course . . ." 62). Supported by the biblical allusion in the last line of the poem, the speaker assures herself that her knowledge of the future generation will sustain her, keep her among the living.

Cycles of life and death, creation and destruction: these are presented in language full of quiet chaos. With the delicacy one would use in handling a flower, Essinger arranges the unsettling motions of reality together with stillness. In "Missing Wakayama" she first offers a still life: "The petals are almost as beautiful / on the ground as they are in the tree." Then she puts the reader in motion, viewing both tree and ground: "First we look up; then we look down" (19). These simple haiku-like lines frame the process of a tree budding and then losing its blossoms. They remind us to appreciate the enriching decay of petals in the soil below.

Themes of appreciation for all elements of natural cycles and acceptance of death's reality are offered in *The Apricot and the Moon*, and we are reminded by the speaker of "The Hourglass" to "Haunt the attics, let the ghosts be counted. / Memory cannot ignore this rhyme" (31). On the other hand, memories of those ghosts, those traumas and troubles of reality, are sometimes too much to face. And this is the concern of the title poem. The speaker describes to a child how "something small can eclipse the view // of something much larger than itself," something like an apricot eclipsing a grapefruit on a table or even the moon "here at / the edge of our galaxy" ("The Apricot and the Moon" 58). The speaker's sense of vulnerability—she has no control over the spin of the galaxy, the power of nature—is palpable, but she is calmed by her analogy. She tells the child "I am afraid for you, until I remember that you / have an apricot to protect you from the things // you do not want to see" ("The Apricot and the Moon" 59).

Poetry with contemplative overtones like Essinger's filters out the glaring light of reality by not naming distressing events, whereas Hamilton's and Osayande's poems turn the spotlight on those very things one might not want to see. And Osayande details particularities in a way that draws on contemporary memoir without crossing over into that genre. There is always a measure of distance between the poet and the personae he creates.

But there is that other kind of poetry that closes the distance. John Beall's *Self-Portraits* is a richly detailed collection that seems as much memoir as poetic verse. Like true memoir, Beall positions his private life in relation to historical events and slips in a portrait of himself in the process. In "Great-Grandfather" we are given a description of Edmond Beall, a "thin, young Union soldier. / Not yet sixteen, his doe eyes / Form a dark top of a T above / The vertical line of silver buttons / And two silver buckles" (6). Then we are given a scene in which the now sixteen-year-old Edmond is "a carpenter, / Rounded up in May 1865 / To drape the Lincoln house with black crepe, / In Springfield, Illinois" (6). Using a journalistic approach for this biography-styled poem, Beall gives highlights of his great-grandfather's life: Mississippi River pilot, chicken farmer, mayor, senator. Only in the last line of the poem are we given any hint of Beall's perspective. He ends the poem with one simple statement comparing himself to his great-grandfather: "I have his eyes" (8).

In this understated manner, biography becomes self-portrait, becomes memoir. And Beall's subtle way of blending poetry and memoir continues throughout the collection, as he sketches childhood summers of looking out over Lake Michigan, playing "capture the flag," eating "Chicken and dumplings at the Red Fox Inn," and sleeping in an attic ("Charlevoix" 19), and then in the very next poem shifts from an idyll of childhood to a full and very graphic account of being arrested while hitchhiking to Austin. The account reveals Beall's wit:

> My mug was shot, and I was taken to
> a room with clean, white walls, and two cops inside.
> "Pull down your pants, and spread your cheeks," one said.
> I pulled down my pants and, placing my hands on each side
> Of my mouth, spread my cheeks. ("Austin City Jail, 1971" 20)

In the following stanzas Beall quotes the foul language of a guard and gives more details of the event, but he never comments on how he feels about the indignities involved. What a contrast to the approach in Osayande's "Dehumanizing," which lets the anger flow through the stanzas.

Beall's focus on the minutiae of events keeps the reader asking what is really going on, like in the poem about Beall's father expecting him to attend law school, then dying just as Beall decides against it, having visited a law school and sat in on classes "where stalag-

mites of students froze me" ("Last Talk with my Father" 27). The tension between father and son is subtle. Beall never reflects on his own emotional state past saying he was in shock at the funeral and "Married that summer in shock" (28). The closest he comes to emotional expression is to say he "never regretted / Choosing the path my father / Did not choose for me" (28).

Self-Portraits offers the surface of such emotional times, not the distress; for example, on September 11, 2001, Beall stands before his class at Collegiate School in New York City, "Trying to block students' access to TV" ("William" 51). In contrast with the other four collections in this review, collections that expose fear of death and loss, despair in the face of powerlessness, and the need for control over the events of our lives, Beall stuns the reader with the very lack of emotional references. What a daring move to throw the reader into "November 22, 1963: *The Dallas Morning News*" by saying "President Kennedy will get / A thick, juicy steak / When he visits Dallas Friday" (15). What a way to begin a poem—or memoir—of JFK's assassination. What a powerful, sure, poetic voice.

What powerful voices in all five of the collections reviewed here, each one of them pulling, pushing, sometimes gentling the reader, sometimes dragging the reader into realities so often left in the shadows of reality.

Defiance College

WHO LOST NELSON ALGREN? A REVIEW ESSAY

James A. Lewin

Asher, Colin. *Never A Lovely So Real: The Life and Work of Nelson Algren*. NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 2019. 543 pp.

Drew, Bettina. *Nelson Algren: A Life on the Wild Side*. NY: Putnam, 1989. 416 pp.

Wisniewski, Mary. *Algren: A Life*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2017. 362 pp.

Nelson Algren was a complicated cat. He lived fully his allotted nine cat-lives. Yet, except for bad luck, he might have had no luck at all. Although he received the first National Book Award in 1950 for *The Man with the Golden Arm*, Hollywood adapted his novel into a film that unintentionally parodied the text and intentionally deleted Algren. Paid off in chump change, he was down-sized to an item of cultural trivia. The literary cognoscenti ignored him for so long that his "trans-Atlantic romance with Simone de Beauvoir . . . seems to be one of the few things otherwise well-read people know about Algren today" (Jacoby). Few aspects of his life brought him more heartbreak than this infamous affair with a world-famous feminist. Meanwhile, the FBI stalked Algren, as in a story by Kafka. Admittedly, he did not help himself by gambling money away faster than he made it. Now, luckily, a trifecta of biographies have chronicled Algren's multiple incarnations. All three books are excellent, each in a special way. Perusing them together provides a composite portrait of a forgotten progenitor of the Millennium.

We still can relate to *The Man with the Golden Arm* as a primer in Existentialism. Protagonist Frankie Machine is a back-room card dealer who dreams of becoming a jazz drummer as he struggles with both his heroin addiction and a deep inner guilt, condemning himself for his failure to actualize an "'authentic' 'Self'" (Giles 63). In the apocalyptic glare of a routine police line-up at the Saloon Street

Station, *The Man with the Golden Arm* reveals Judgment Day, as naked souls stand in blinding light, before wisecracking Police Captain, "Record Head," Bednar, who knows "the great, secret and special American guilt of owning nothing, nothing at all, in the one land where ownership and virtue are one" (*Man* 17). Algren unmasked respectability from the viewpoint of those who have never known respect. The credo of the book comes through the mumbled alibi of "some gaunt wreck in a smudged clerical collar," explaining why he was defrocked: "'Because I believe we are members of one another'" (*Man* 198).

Writing in the 1970s, Ralph Gleason appreciated how Algren "combined a poetic gift for words and a vision of the truth about the textbook democracy." Algren saw the "fantasy/reality, inside/outside paradoxical view of the inversion of the American Dream." For Algren, the exception determines the rule; the outsider defines the values on which society is based. Gleason also predicted that Algren could turn out to be "a late-blooming hit parader, 'bubbling under' as they say on the Billboard chart" (Gleason). Sadly, Algren's grand revival was a horse that did not come in. These three biographies, however, indicate a glimmer of hope that Gleason's prophecy may yet prove true.

Yet any biography of Algren must consider the question of why Algren "came up fast and couldn't be beat" and "[t]hen went down slow and finally didn't fight anymore" (*Who Lost an American*? 116). In 1950, Algren was catapulted to the top, with *Time* magazine calling *The Man with the Golden Arm* "a true novelist's triumph" (qtd. in Drew 209). But by 1956, with critics stomping on his second-best novel, *A Walk on the Wild Side*, Algren wound up barely clinging onto the bottom of Fortune's wheel, with little hope of for a return trip. At that point, he renounced Literature and did not care who knew it. Henceforth, he identified himself as a "free-lance journalist" (Drew 374). This transformation resembled the downfall of a contender for the championship who becomes a strongman in a travelling carnival. The degree to which others sand-bagged him relative to how badly Algren undercut himself remains an enigma. Perhaps, as Algren's protagonist Frankie Machine would say, "'Some cats just swing like that'" (*Man* 85).

Bettina Drew published the first full-length accounting of Algren's life story in 1989, when the literary establishment thought Algren's Ghost had been safely forgotten. Drew was the pioneer, dig-

ging into his Ohio State University archive and tracking down key people for personal interviews. Trying not to be judgmental, she can sound like a cranky social worker. Yet, she delivers the dates, places, names, and empirical events.

Building on that legacy, Mary Wisniewski shines a reporter's light on Algren. With intimate awareness of the Chicago neighborhood demarcated by the triangle of Milwaukee Avenue slanting from West Division Street to North and Damen Avenues, Wisniewski has the best sense of Algren's home turf. She is also a most astute reader of Algren and offers fresh insights into his work.

Colin Asher performs a Promethean task, bringing to light repressed information about Algren's litany of trouble with the FBI. Using the Freedom of Information Act, previous researchers obtained an FBI file on Algren of 400 censored pages. In 2013, Asher submitted a new FOIA request and received 886 "very, very lightly redacted" pages (Asher 35). Asher demonstrates how pervasive FBI surveillance of Algren was for many years. The fact that Asher's book was published by the pre-eminently academic W. W. Norton press hints at Algren's renewed momentum. As a bonus, Asher identifies a Mystery Woman in Algren's life—who was *not* Simone de Beauvoir.

The key sources for each of these three biographies are Algren's own biased autobiographical writings, published in the later phase of his career, and interviews, especially *Conversations with Nelson Algren*. Each biographer meticulously annotates facts with multiple sources, separate interviews and archives. The collective saga is roughly congruent with what Algren's readers may already know, although the context was not always known even to Algren himself.

Born 28 March 1909, Nelson Algren Abraham was named for his grandfather, a Swede who converted to Judaism and then simultaneously to all religions and to none. Algren identified with his namesake, whom he never met, later wondering aloud whether "pseudo-intellectualism can be inherited" (Cox and Chatterton 18). His parents, Gerson and Goldie (Kalisher) Abraham were both second-generation Chicagoans. In his early years, the family lived in Detroit, but Algren grew up and attended public schools in Chicago. With his older sister's encouragement, he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in journalism from the University of Illinois in 1931. He had a card from the Illinois Press Association that qualified him to work as an "editor, columnist, foreign correspondent . . . et cetera." He bought a dark suit for job interviews and gradually realized that the

official card was "a gimmick the school got out to protect itself" (*Conversations* 30).

After weeks of frustration, he showed up at the *Minneapolis Journal* where an editor tasked him with writing headlines. Two weeks later, he inquired about a paycheck. There was no paycheck, the editor informed him. He was just being given the chance to gain experience. And experience was all he earned, as he explained:

> "Everything I'd been told was wrong . . . I'd been told, I'd been assured that it was a strive and succeed world. What you did: you got yourself an education and a degree and then you went to work for a family newspaper and then you married a nice girl and raised children and this was what America was. But this is not what America was. America was not socialized and I resented very deeply that I'd been lied to." (*Conversations* 56)

He hoboed down to Texas and back, gathering experience he used in his first short story, published by *Story* magazine in 1933. Soon after, he received a letter from Vanguard Press asking if he were working on a novel. So, Algren hitchhiked to New York City and called on the president of Vanguard. Algren asked for and received $100 ($1,696 in 2020 dollars) to be paid over a period of three months. Both writer and publisher believed they had driven a fantastic bargain (Drew 54).

Traveling by freight train and hitchhiking, Algren returned to Texas and jumped off in Alpine, Texas. There, at the Sul Russ Teachers College, he discovered "an empty classroom that had thirty desks equipped with typewriters." Having become attached to an "old upright Royal," Algren went to a hardware store, bought a box to pack the typewriter in, addressed the crate to himself in Chicago and sent it through the post office, without concealing his actions. Then he hopped on a boxcar. At the train's first stop, the sheriff was waiting with the self-addressed box. Algren went directly to jail until a circuit-riding judge could hear his case (*Conversations* 37).

As described in *Somebody in Boots*, the jail's function was to support the jailers. If the cells were not filled, "the officials felt that they were losing money with every passing day," causing a further reduction in rations of oatmeal and turnip greens (*SB* 144). In the two days before the court session, prisoners suddenly receive meals of meat, milk and potatoes, and do not utter a peep of protest when the foreman of the grand jury asks if they have any complaints (*SB* 146). Justice in

the jail is administered by a one-handed barn boss according to "rules of the kangaroo court" punishing anyone "found gilty [sic] of braking [sic] into this jailhouse without consent of the inmates" (*SB* 137).

Algren's trial was surprisingly long-winded. Most surprising, his public defender turned out to be articulate, if not entirely sober. White-haired "Judge" Wigfall Van Sickle refuted the prosecutor's description of Algren as a "militant, defiant man" by referring to him as "the youth with the mysterious brain" (Drew 73). Van Sickle appealed to English common law that held a craftsman should be entitled to the tools of his trade. He compared the defendant to the hero of *Les Miserables*. Slyly, he concluded that it could look bad for the court if the defendant became a successful novelist (Drew 73). Algren was ordered to get out of Texas in twenty-four hours. If he had been black, Algren noted, he would have been sent to the state pea farm in Huntsville (Drew 73-4). Algren often described his time in jail as "four or five months rather than the three and a half weeks he was really there," not just to brag, but "because the experience so stirred his imagination and assumed such proportions in his mind" (Drew 74). The time that he served in the Brewster County Jail formed his radical perspective on American society.

Algren's first novel, published in 1935, was well reviewed. It sold 762 copies. Algren owed his publisher money on the advance he had received. He had no job and no clue what to do next. Not for the last time, his mind snapped. An unidentified woman with whom he was living found him "barely conscious, lying on the floor with the gas pipe in his mouth" (Drew 88). She called the one person Algren said he would trust, Lawrence Lipton, who did his best to help. By late April, somehow, Algren made his way to New York City's Mecca Temple, where he was called on to address an audience of thousands, assembled for the first League of American Writers Congress. His knees shook visibly as he spoke "about how his book had failed– haltingly, quietly—as if he were pleading with the audience to buy it" (qtd. in Drew 91).

Worried he might try suicide again, friends used their influence to have Algren invited to the Yaddo writer's colony. Unable to process this "schizophrenic transition from the revolutionary atmosphere of the Writers' Congress to the moneyed untroubled elegance of Yaddo," he left without breakfast, "hitchhiked to Albany and caught a bus to Chicago," where his parents were losing the building in which they had spent their lives. Not for the last time, Algren sur-

rendered to an undocumented stay in a "small private hospital where there were bars on the windows." He emerged determined to write "as if his life depended on it" (Drew 91-3). He did not publish another novel for seven years.

Algren grabbed on to the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Illinois Writers' Project as a lifeline. On assignment, he interviewed Davey Day, middleweight contender, wrote a guide to Galena, Illinois, as well as *America Eats*, published in 1992, "written by someone who loved a party with good food and company and knew what it meant to be hungry" (Wisniewski 82). When funding for the Writers' Project ran out, he found employment as a contact tracer for the Venereal Disease Control Program of the Chicago Board of Health, a.k.a. the "Syph Patrol" (Wisniewski 92-3).

Out of the oral histories Algren recorded, he developed his own style of ethnographic writing, a "poetry of facts" (Cappetti 157). From his interview notes, he collected material for his second novel, *Never Come Morning*, in which Algren conveys the despair of young people, whatever their ethnic or racial origin, who are trapped in doomed neighborhoods. Trigger warning: Algren's description of a gang rape is as shocking as anything in print. As an epigraph to the book, Algren quotes Walt Whitman:

> I feel I am one of them –
> I belong to those convicts and prostitutes myself –
> And henceforth I will not deny them –
> For how can I deny myself?

Published in 1942, *Never Come Morning* received enthusiastic praise in the *New York Times* and the *Saturday Review of Literature*. Critics Philip Rahv and Clifton Fadiman wrote glowing reviews. But Chicago's Polish daily newspaper, *Zgoda,* denounced the book as "Nazi propaganda" designed to discredit all people of Polish descent and accused Algren of being a paid agent of "Herr Goebbels." The furor resulted in Algren's book being removed from the Chicago Public Library (Drew 143-6).

Algren was drafted into the US Army during World War II; he served in Wales, Germany, and France, never rising above the rank of private. He changed his name legally to Nelson Algren to avoid possible anti-Semitic prejudice (Asher 194-5). In 1947, he produced a collection of short stories, *The Neon Wilderness*, perhaps the best introduction to Algren. In 1951, he published *Chicago City on the*

Make, providing a poetical and "historical concordance" to *The Man with the Golden Arm* (Rotella 88). Chicago's Founding Fathers, according to Algren, "were all of a single breed. They all had hustler's blood." In Chicago, reformers had to play in a rigged ball game: Do-Gooders like Jane Addams were given "only two outs an inning" while Hustlers like Hinky Dink and Bathhouse John "were taking four" (14). When the book was reprinted, Algren wrote a forward in which he first formulates his definition of literature as a challenge to "the legal apparatus by a conscience in touch with humanity." Algren praises the "city clerk of Terre Haute," i.e., Eugene V. Debs who, in his first public office, as Terre Haute's city clerk "refused to issue warrants for arrest of streetwalkers" demanding that police "tackle higher levels of corruption" (81). Like Debs, Algren believed that "[w]hile there is a soul in prison, I am not free" (95). Expanding beyond Chicago, Algren also wrote a literary manifesto against the Cold War cultural status quo. This book-length essay was commissioned and paid for, yet rejected. Belatedly titled *Nonconformity*, it was not published until 1996. Unconfirmed rumors claimed the folks at Doubleday were "unwilling to be known as a 'Red' publishing house" (Drew 252). Perhaps they knew something that Algren did not.

Hounded by the Fbi

Bettina Drew recounts how the FBI picked up Algren's scent from a *New York Times Book Review* that reported on the objections by the Polish American Council against *Never Come Morning*. In 1952, Algren became the "honorary chairman of the Chicago Committee to Secure Justice in the Rosenberg Case" (Drew 237). His stance was based on concern about the kind of America that enforced patriotism with the electric chair. "'I'm not saying the Rosenbergs weren't spies,'" he later confessed. "'All I'm saying is that we shouldn't have burned them'" (qtd. in "Innocence" 286). Following his outspoken support of the Rosenbergs, the Feds began to stick to Algren like lint on a velvet jacket, aiming to prove him a card-carrying member of the Communist Party. His application for a passport was repeatedly denied (Drew 312). Colin Asher further clarifies how the FBI. built their case against Algren based on a passage in *The Man with the Golden Arm* describing Frankie Machine, while kicking his heroin addiction cold turkey in Cook County Jail, gazing absently beyond the outer walls where he sees a building with a "two story high legend":

> "BUDINTZ COAL
> *One Price to All*"

Then, on the opposite wall, Frankie spies the advertisement of "that company's chief competitor" offering its own appeal:

> "RUSHMOORE COAL
> Fastest Delivery
> Cheapest in Years" (*Arm* 219)

Asher may be the first reader—except for the ex-Communist FBI informants named Budenz and Rushmore—to get Algren's inside joke. Algren "considered them traitors, so he mocked them" (Asher xiv). The informants decided to pay Algren back.

On 4 April 1950, Louis Budenz alleged to the FBI that Algren had been "reported" to be a "loyal member of the Communist Party." At that point, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover "personally requested" more information for Algren's file (Asher 313-4). In the spring of 1953, Howard Rushmore handed over a letter, allegedly written in 1937, in which Algren appears to refer to himself as "a party member"–enough evidence to trap him if and when he applied for a passport. If Algren falsely denied ever being a Communist, he could be sentenced to prison for perjury. Asher portrays a swarm of FBI informants pursuing Algren from Chicago to Paris to the Writers Workshop in Iowa City, where his landlady spied on him and reported what she observed to federal agents. After his landlady's sixth and final call, in August 1969, the FBI finally suspended their case against Algren for lack of evidence. After getting the FBI off his back, Algren had trouble getting them off his mind. Asher argues that because he was "largely ignorant" of how the FBI "operated in secret," Algren "blamed himself when his life began falling apart" (Asher xv). If publishers distanced themselves from him, he assumed his work simply wasn't wanted or wasn't good enough" although the reality was "far more complicated" (Asher 365).

Mary Wisniewski focuses on the "Keystone Cop quality" of FBI agents combing through 1940 primary voting records (listing 38,000 New Yorkers who voted Communist!), as well as the records of the state's motor vehicle department, and almost giving up when they could not find Algren's name in the New York telephone directory, even though the jacket of his first novel said he lived in Chicago. Unable to find his address in Manhattan, the minions of J. Edgar Hoover concluded that "Algren, who didn't live in New York, could

not be found" (Drew 147). Finally, after looking him up in a Chicago phone book, an agent from the New York office reported that Algren "'has slight accent but speaks very good English.'" Wisniewski surmises that the agent's informant may have been "flummoxed by Chicagoese" (95-96).

So far, nobody has come up with an American Communist Party membership card bearing Algren's signature. We do know, though, that Algren mocked the head of the League of American Writers, who sent him a letter of disapproval for behavior unbecoming to a politically correct author. Algren defended his right to be drunk and disorderly. The cops had a right to arrest him, Algren allowed. He afforded no tolerance, however, for a bureaucrat who reprimanded bohemian behavior based on reports from anonymous sources (Drew quoting *Conversations* 107).

The Hollywood Hustle

As the FBI hounded him for his politics, Algren made his first foray into Hollywood. Wary of the movie biz, Algren stipulated that he be allowed to bring a recovering addict who had worked as a card dealer and first introduced Algren to the world of heroin, the real-life Frankie Machine, as a technical adviser for the movie. Algren's friend stayed in California, where he eventually turned his life around.

Algren, however, fell into the clutches of one Bob Roberts, a film noir producer who dangled the possibility of John Garfield starring in a film version of *The Man with the Golden Arm*. For a brief spell, Algren hoped his book could be made into a serious film. Roberts offered Algren $15,000 (almost $160,000 in 2020 currency). Algren was also promised half of any surplus resale value, plus five percent of the film's profits. But all that never happened. Threatened by accusations from the House Un-American Activities Committee, John Garfield died of a heart attack. HUAC kept investigating. Roberts sold the film to unnamed investors. Without telling Algren. The details remain vague but the price seems to have been about $100,000. Algren was owed at least around $42,500, (equivalent to more than $450,000 in 2020 dollars). Algren could only file a lawsuit, which ultimately he would drop because he could not pay the lawyers' fees.

When the news broke that *The Man with the Golden Arm* would receive the first National Book Award, Algren left Hollywood

abruptly. His book was a best seller with super reviews, subscription services, and an abridged version in the *Readers Digest*. In the post-war horse race of American literature, Algren had burst forth as a long shot from the back alleys looking like a winner for sure. With $4,000 ($39,000 today) of his Hollywood payoff, Algren bought a house in Miller Beach, Indiana. The place reminded him of his sister's beach house on the Indiana Dunes, since torn down by the steel mills. His backyard ran down to a natural lagoon where trouble lurked.

In January 1955, he again took a train to Los Angeles—riding in style on the Super Chief—only to be sucker-punched by movie mogul Otto Preminger. The problem seems to have been the old canard about the larcenous greed in the heart of every chump. The bait was a $1,000 per week, all expenses paid, to scribble scripts for the silver screen. The encounter became an obsession for Algren, who wrote several versions of it. In retrospect, his Hollywood agent defined Algren's flaw: "He was a wise guy, a con man, street smart . . . and for this reason he was a patsy" (qtd. in Drew 263).

Preminger and Algren interacted like a pedigreed poodle meeting a back-alley cat. At first, Preminger tried to impress his hired scribe with a complimentary case of Scotch, delivered to Algren's complimentary suite. The compliments ended, however, when Preminger asked Algren: "'Why you write about such people you write about?'" Algren replied that such people live in his neighborhood. The dialogue further devolved: "'I see you are not success-oriented. I'm very success-oriented myself,'" Preminger observed, concluding with a curt "'I hire the writers. They work for me. I take the blame. I get the credit. But I am pleased to have met such an *interesting* person'" (*Carousel* 21-25). The next day, one bill arrived for the booze and a second for the luxury suite: clearly, the deal was off. Algren had already relocated to a less glamorous address.

Released as "A Film by Otto Preminger," the movie made millions for the producer, who boasted of breaking the Hollywood taboo against films about drugs. Frank Sinatra ignited his acting career and earned $100,000 plus 10 percent of the net profits (Drew 262). But Algren was erased from the film both in letter and in spirit. The damage he suffered was deeper than financial. As much as he needed the money everyone assumed would come his way, Algren was most hurt by the revelation that he had been reduced to an extraneous curiosity, without artistic standing or added value.

L'AFFAIRE DE BEAUVOIR

The first time that Simone de Beauvoir called him, Algren slammed down the phone without finding out who was on the line. In his own words: "'I was fussing around the stove, trying to cook something, and the telephone rang, and . . . somebody hollered into the phone, screeching something, and I hung up. I said, "Wrong number". . . and I did this three times'" (*Conversations* 180). On the fourth ring, somebody speaking in a clear voice requested that Algren wait "'just a minute, there's a party here would like to speak to you'": "'So then I listened and next a heavily accented French voice was saying that her name was, ah, ah, something. I didn't quite catch it. I said, "Where are you at, I'll come down." "Leetle Café," she told me, "in Palmer House." I'd never heard of it'" (*Conversations* 181).

Arriving at the Palmer House, Algren discovered "Le Petite Café" on the lower level and realized that "'[s]he wasn't taking any chances on my understanding French.'" Warily, he watched a woman holding a copy of *The Partisan Review* go in and out the door four times "'before I decided in her favor'" (*Conversations* 181). Thus began, in late February 1947, "one of the great literary romances of the twentieth century" (Wisniewski 132). He was nearly thirty-nine and she had just turned forty. Following this Meet-Cute Made-for-Hollywood introduction, Algren guided Beauvoir on his patented underworld Chicago tour featuring the Cook County Jail, the electric chair, Skid Row dives along West Madison Street, and a brief visit to a SAVE YOUR SOUL midnight mission. Over the next three days, he showed her the "cheap burlesques, Maxwell Street, a police line-up, and the zoo" while discussing "the Loeb-Leopold case, the Heirans case, the Haymarket riots" (*Conversations* 183).

As a couple, they sparked each other's intellectual and physical passion. They invented nicknames for each other. She was his "crazy frog" and he was her "crocodile" (Wisniewski 136). In April 1947, Beauvoir revised her itinerary and returned to him in Chicago (Wisniewski 137). In May 1947, they both travelled to New York City. It was Algren's first trip in an airplane. They had not yet discussed where Algren fit into Beauvoir's relationship with Jean Paul Sartre: "There was only so much reality these famous realists could take at one time" (Wisniewski 139).

In September 1947, Beauvoir flew from Paris to spend more time with Algren "sometimes laughing, sometimes frowning uncomprehendingly at his slang and his jokes, listening to jazz records, drink-

ing Southern Comfort and eating rum cake." Beauvoir discussed her idea for what would become her best known work, *The Second Sex*, and Algren helped her develop her arguments with parallels to American race relations. When speaking to others, Algren referred to Beauvoir as "Frenchy," yet never addressed her as "Castor," the nickname used by her other friends; he called her "always 'Simone' or 'Simone, baby,' spoken softly, as if he were shy about saying it" (Wisniewski 144-45).

They were both in love, but they were not playing by the same rules. Algren held to the troubadour tradition that love conquers all. For him it was all or nothing. Beauvoir had a different philosophy. She used her relationship with Algren to put her life-long partnership with Jean Paul Sartre in perspective as a writer, a philosopher, and a woman. She evolved her identity through Algren, while reserving her soul for Sartre. Between visits they exchanged billets doux. Hers have been published. But "Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, Simone de Beauvoir's executor and adopted daughter . . . has possession of Algren's letters to Simone, access to which she has denied" ("Love Letters"). Refusing to publish them implies something to hide (Asher 237).

In May 1948, they took a riverboat down the Mississippi and through parts of Mexico. While on the trip, Beauvoir confessed apologetically that she would not be staying as long as originally planned because Sartre needed her to rush back to Paris. Algren tried to play it cool when she asked, "'Don't you care for me as much as you did?' 'No, it's not the same anymore' . . . 'I can leave tomorrow,' Simone told him. 'I'm ready to marry you this moment,' he responded" (qtd. in Wisniewski 159).

In 1949, Algren popped up in Paris. Among luminaries of the Left Bank, he absorbed existentialism through café conversations rather than academic seminars. Beauvoir was a far greater celebrity than he would ever be, yet "[a]s a writer, Algren felt no competition . . . He simply considered himself better" (Drew 205). In July 1950 Beauvoir visited him at Miller Beach. Algren tried to establish boundaries in the relationship, but "though the old passion was gone, and each had a separate room for sleep and work, they began to make love again" (Drew 221). Out of the blue, however, after Beauvoir departed, Algren's ex-wife Amanda arrived.

That summer, a woman Algren writes of as "Margo" also visited Miller Beach and claimed a place of her own in his heart. "Margo" had grown up on a farm until she was "seduced by a carnival barker"

who brought her to the city and forced her into drugs and prostitution, a life that Algren wanted to help her escape (Drew 212-13). Asher reveals the real name of "Margo" as Paula Bays (243). Beauvoir was puzzled by the intensity of Algren's feelings for the "'little whore'": "'Why don't you marry a real clean American girl, who will make you a real good American man, with nice cute American babies? I don't get it'" (qtd. in Drew 241). Yet, viewed from another perspective, "Margo" could have been Algren's "true muse . . . She was raggedy, a stray cat, and so was he. She corresponded to all the sad and lonely things that were Algren" (qtd. in Drew 285).

By October 1951, when Beauvoir made her last visit, the relationship was strained. "She slept in the bedroom, while he slept on his lumpy couch." On their last day, they fall into each other's arms as if for the first and last time (Wisniewski 196-97). In August 1952, Algren found out that Beauvoir had begun another "contingent love" affair with film maker Claude Lanzmann. Later that summer, Amanda returned to Miller Beach, catching Algren on the rebound. Looking for a more exclusive love than Beauvoir could offer, Algren began thinking of getting remarried to the woman he had divorced (Wisniewski 205). He planned to take Amanda on a honeymoon to Paris. Beauvoir promised a welcoming party. Just days before their scheduled departure, the State Department turned down Algren's application for a passport. The Paris honeymoon was off. In March 1953, Algren did remarry Amanda but "couldn't hide the anger born of forcing himself to go through with what he didn't want." At supper following the civil ritual he "kept looking at Margo until he finally kissed her" (Drew 245).

He continued spinning downwards. In October 1955, he met his publisher to discuss his completed manuscript for *A Walk on the Wild Side*. During a three-martini New York lunch, Algren was informed that the publisher feared a possible law suit over the bawdy content of his book. Unmentioned, the problem of his politics hung in the air because Algren had recently asked Doubleday to quash a subpoena that HUAC held over him (Asher 342; 364-65). Algren concluded that "he was dealing with people who just wouldn't stand up to censorship" and, besides "'[T]here was no reason for my having written the book, therefore nobody wanted to buy it'" (qtd. in Drew 269).

Discouraged by this rejection, Algren left the manuscript with his agent and departed with some shady underworld friends for a road

trip from Baltimore to East Saint Louis and back, leading to a hide-out at the Playland Estates in Hollywood, Florida. On an impulse, he took a boat from Miami to Havana, which did not require a passport. On Christmas Eve of 1955, Algren called Hemingway, who was recuperating from consecutive airplane crashes. Among a multilingual group of other guests, Algren felt "just where he belonged . . . knowing he was accepted and respected for his writing, for what he was" (Drew 272). The warm feeling did not extend into the new year.

Mugged by the Critics

In 1956, Algren's *A Walk on the Wild Side* made the best seller lists. Then a gang of New York critics stomped both the book and the author. More than his other injuries and indignities, the critics hurt him where it hurt most—among potential readers. Algren's biggest obstacle has always been the revenge of mediocrity. In the fifties, every serious anthology of American literature included Algren's "A Bottle of Milk for Mother," or "How the Devil Came down Division Street," or another of his short stories, but recent anthologies by Norton and others seem never to have heard of him. Algren fell victim to a campaign that "exiled the whole urban-sociological tradition from the hall of fame of American letters" (Cappetti 149). Less talented writers who had compromised with the witch hunts of the Cold War made him their scapegoat. As a result, he was excluded from study for subsequent generations of American readers.

Algren disturbed critics who believe that there are some people worthy of compassion and others who are not. He disturbed Norman Podhoretz, reviewing *A Walk on the Wild Side* for *The New Yorker,* who felt a personal affront in the impression that Algren found "bums and tramps" more interesting than "preachers and politicians and the otherwise respectable" (132). The disgust Podhoretz expresses for Algren is the fear that the invisible wall between the "otherwise respectable" and the underclass may turn out to be an illusion. Algren similarly disturbed the equanimity of Alfred Kazin. In his critique of *A Walk on the Wild Side* for the *New York Times Book Review,* Kazin sniffed in solemn distaste at Algren's "surrealist" predilection for "freaks" and "grotesques" (4).

The disturbance caused by Algren was put to rest, seemingly for keeps, in a piece for *The Reporter* by Leslie Fiedler, who skewered Algren with the sneering sobriquet, "the Bard of the Stumblebum." The establishment could now safely ignore this writer as well as any

lurching drunk who was not otherwise respectable. Algren's fatal flaw was to proclaim humanity for the Poor in Spirit living on the dark side of the American Dream. Algren took seriously the Sermon on the Mount. If not stopped by brute force, he might invite the Poor in Spirit home for dinner.

For himself, however, hope seemed long gone. He proceeded with a slow-motion breakdown that mirrored his 1935 crack up. In the summer of 1956, a psychiatrist diagnosed him as suffering from "a depression under the depression, under the depression" (Wisniewski 242). Algren refused psychotherapy, worried that it would interrupt his inspiration since all his "creativity lay in his unconscious" (Drew 280). Resisting to the last minute, he grudgingly let friends drive him to the North Shore Health Resort, "a private psychiatric facility in wealthy, north suburban Winnetka." He received about twelve days of sketchy treatment in the "stately brick mansion surrounded by mature trees that looked a little like Yaddo," the writers' colony he had fled in 1935. It was déjà vu all over again; Algren crawled "through a window down a fire escape onto the manicured green grounds" (Wisniewski 242).

In an ironic double whammy, Asher points out that when Algren reapplied for a passport in 1956, claiming never to have been a member of the American Communist Party, the FBI trap was about to snap shut. But before he could keep an appointment for a follow-up interview, Algren signed himself into the facility in Winnetka. The State Department reviewed the evidence and his case was put on hold (Asher 363-64). Yet he had no place to hide from himself: "[T]here was no money in his bank account, and no one waiting for him at home, and he no longer believed his writing had changed the world, or ever could" (Asher 367). Early in the day of 31 December 1956, taking a short cut from the grocery store, he fell through thin ice on the lagoon behind his house and nearly drowned. He may have been flirting with a second attempt at suicide, although there is no proof (Drew 286). Later that night he went to a New Year's Eve party. He did not die. But something in him died.

Henceforth, Algren withdrew from the ego-obsessed world of Serious Literature. He did not want to write a novel about a novelist writing a novel. He did not want to chop daily life into a goulash of literary allusions, á la Saul Bellow's *Herzog*. Algren rarely wrote fiction in the first person, and yet he put all of himself into the characters he had identified with in compassion and horror. With words he

could have applied to himself, he projected harsh self-judgment: "It wasn't gas he ran out of and it surely wasn't brass. It was belief" (qtd. in Drew 320). He lost his faith that readers could be shocked into recognition of a common humanity with outcasts of American life. Yet there was a troubling spite in his defiance, for his abdication was also a subversive rebellion against the literary establishment. Algren wrote new journalism before there was New Journalism, which makes his kind of journalism the oldest journalism of all, for "[t]rue news of Man never comes but from below" (*Who Lost an American?* 149).

A Compulsive Gambler

Algren's indignation did not protect him, however, from self-destructive habits. To understand Algren's eclipse in mid-career, Drew focuses on Algren's gambling. "Certainly," she writes, "he would have had to answer yes to a lot of the questions that Gamblers Anonymous poses for prospective members" (258). Typical of habitual gamblers, he would lose everything he had, suffer bouts of remorse, take out advances for future work and put that money on wagers, increase betting in times of stress, use gambling as an escape, and try to solve all his financial problems with one solid score. Since Gamblers Anonymous was founded in 1957, Algren could have been one of the first on the bandwagon. But he did not join groups, except for poker games. While at the Iowa Writers Workshop, he devoted more energy to weekly poker games than to his teaching, dropped as much as $10,000, and rejected well-intended advice that he was being played for a sucker (Drew 331-32). He did not want to quit.

Asher contends that Algren drew inspiration from the underworld of gambling. For example, Algren told about "a dice player in the army" who refused to pass the dice because he had a "golden arm" (Donohue 137, qtd. in Asher 202). Asher seems to take seriously Algren's fantasy of supplementing his income with a side gig as a professional card player (315). Even if he bluffed like a fish in a barrel of sharks, at least he "played more recklessly than anyone else—and enjoyed himself more" (427).

Wisniewski ponders whether Algren's "gambling was a crippling addiction or just an expensive way to relax." Although his habitual gambling meant "that he was constantly broke, constantly avoiding the tab, though he picked it up for everybody when he did have money to spend," perhaps, simply because of the way Algren's "brain

was constructed," he compulsively "seemed to relish taking big personal and creative risks, living on the ragged edge, and hanging out with a dramatic group of people," which contributed to the "personal alchemy" of his literary inspiration (214-15). Betty Jones, who was married to Algren while he was dropping his Writers Workshop earnings on the poker table in Iowa City, was less tolerant, however, calling him not just a bad gambler but a "'compulsive loser'" (qtd. in Wisniewski 277).

For Algren, Existentialism implied a willingness to go beyond normative conventions, betting on oneself, all or nothing, a spiritual gamble rooted in "the ancient biblical warning that to gain the world is to lose oneself, and to give oneself to the world is to gain oneself" (*Who Lost an American?* 101). The refusal to take that chance, he contended, is the root of a collective cowardice that would repress passion, pain, fear, anger and genius. Perhaps that was a rationalization. Or, perhaps, Algren "could no more have stopped gambling than he could have stopped the circulation of his blood" (*Carousel* 278).

In 1960, after the travel ban against him was lifted, Algren finally managed to return to Paris, where Beauvoir promptly gave him the keys to her apartment and announced that she had to accompany Sartre on a trip to Cuba (Drew 309). When she came back, Algren wore "a stickpin in his tie that had a battery-operated light," and when Beauvoir fans recognized her, "Algren would light up his stickpin with a control in his pocket" (Wisniewski 262). Algren and Beauvoir remained friends until she published a two-part essay using her affair with him to demonstrate her theory of "contingent loves." Algren wrote a furious riposte, asking rhetorically: On what is love contingent? Nevertheless, Beauvoir was buried with the ring he gave her (Drew 377).

If it was difficult to be Algren, it could also be difficult to be Algren's friend. "[A]fter exiling himself from the world of serious literature," he could blow off individuals who had known him for years without apologies. Ending friendships became an "Algren trademark." Most friends remained loyal, nevertheless, knowing he was "essentially alone and terribly vulnerable." Studs Terkel was the one close friend who avoided Algren's excommunication because he wisely "kept his distance" (Drew 324). In 1965, Algren published *Notes from a Sea Diary: Hemingway All the Way* based on a tour of Korea, Bombay, Calcutta, and the Philippines, interwoven with an

exaltation of Hemingway as an antidote to the literary world that had rejected Algren and that he condemned. *The Last Carousel*, published in 1973, includes revisions of short pieces which had appeared previously in various books and periodicals. It reflects his essence.

A Happy Ending?

Having left Chicago in 1975, Algren suffered years of neglect while researching the case of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, a middleweight contender convicted of murder. This nonfiction project evolved into his last novel, published posthumously as *The Devil's Stocking*. A far cry from his best writing, the book is still relevant in terms of the cultural, legal, and personal dynamics of racism and sexism in a winner-take-all society. Wonderfully, in his final year on earth, Algren's luck changed. The turnaround began with a crisis of absurd proportions. By June of 1980, he had started to move from New Jersey into a rental house on Long Island, but before he could unpack his belongings, the landlady decided to throw him out. He was desperate enough to rely on the mercy of strangers. As if on cue, Joe Pintauro, a younger writer who had not had an easy introduction to Algren, showed up. He knew a real estate agent who found Algren the home in Sag Harbor where Algren merrily lived out his days. He had finally found the home where he belonged, ensconced in a bohemian community of writers and admirers.

Suddenly, in the spring of 1981, Algren was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, an important if belated recognition. Algren planned a private celebration. Early on the day scheduled for the party, his heart stopped. Algren held that the artist's mission was to take risks by which if one fails, one fails alone, but "'if one succeeds, one succeeds for all'" (Drew 295). He insisted that "'the role of the writer is to stand against the culture he is in'" (qtd. in Cox and Chatterton 132). Algren deconstructed the cultural establishment's hypocrisy. His Midwestern nonconformity still makes authorities uneasy because he did not merely mouth platitudes about the universality of the spirit and the dignity of humanity; he lived them. Precisely because he wrote about outcasts, Algren was able to expose the values lacking among the gatekeepers of literary officialdom.

In his 1961 preface for *Chicago City on the Make*, Algren diagnoses "The American Disease of Isolation" as "directly related to the lack of creativity," particularly in societies like 1950s Chicago—

unequally divided between suburbs and slums—where "the class which is economically empowered becomes emotionally hollowed" (*City* 104). Algren's words resonate with a recent finding published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that, just as in 2019, even before the global pandemic of 2020, social isolation caused 162,000 deaths (qtd. in Goldberg). Algren inoculates us against the ideology of the self-righteous, self-made individual in a mass culture of spiritual solitude. An isolated individual who denies the interconnectedness of humanity, Algren warns, is a person without love. He knew how easily you could "become an expatriate without leaving home" (*City* 95).

At his funeral, the agent who had helped him most, Candida Donadio, recited aloud from one of Algren's often reprinted poems, "Tricks out of Times Long Gone":

Again that hour when taxies start deadheading home
Before the trolley-buses start to run
And snowdreams in a lace of mist drift down
When from asylum, barrack, cell and cheap hotel
All those whose lives were lived by someone else
Come once again with palms outstretched to claim
What was never rightly their own . . .
Upon the just-before-day bus I saw a woman
The only one who rode
Look wanly out at streets she used to know
"And here I went" – "and there I slept" – "and there I rose"
Again by evening in a billboard's cold blue glow
She came forever toward me
Walking slow
Saying za za-zaza-za zaza-za-zaza
Walking slow
All day today old dreams like snow dreams drifting down
Faces once known now nameless in a mist
Return from hospital, prison and parole
Mouths that once the mouth of summer sweetly pressed
Saying zaza-za-zaza-za-zaza-za-zaza
Within a rain that lightly rains regret (Who 336-37).

Shepherd College

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ANNUAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MIDWESTERN LITERATURE, 2018

ROBERT BEASECKER, EDITOR
Grand Valley State University

This bibliography includes primary and secondary sources of Midwestern literary genres published, for the most part, during 2018. Criteria for inclusion of authors are birth or residence within the twelve-state area that defines the Midwest. Fiction and poetry using Midwestern locales are included irrespective of their authors' ties with this region. Primary sources are listed alphabetically by author, including (if applicable) designations of locale within square brackets at the end of each citation. However, because of space constraints, primary source materials are limited to separately-published works; those appearing in literary journals and magazines are generally not included. Secondary sources, usually journal articles, books, or doctoral dissertations, are listed by subject; critical editions of Midwestern authors will be found here as well.

The third section lists *Library of America* editions of Midwestern authors issued in 2018; and periodicals published for the first time in 2018 that relate in some way to Midwestern literature, either in subject, content, or locale, are listed alphabetically by title in the fourth and final section of this bibliography.

Not included in this bibliography are the following types of material: works only published in electronic format; reprints or reissues of earlier works, except for some new or revised editions; baccalaureate or masters theses; entries in reference books; separate contents of collected essays or Festschriften; audio or video recordings; electronic databases; and internet websites which have the tendency to be unstable or ephemeral.

Abbreviations used in the citations denoting genre and publication types are as follows:

A	Anthology	jrnl	Journalism
bibl	Bibliography	juv	Juvenile fiction
biog	Biography	lang	Language; linguistics
corr	Correspondence	M	Memoir
crit	Criticism	N	Novel
D	Drama	P	Poetry
gen	General studies	pub	Publishing; printing
hist	History	rev	Review essay
I	Interview(s)	S	Short fiction

Citations for novels, poetry, short stories, memoirs, and other types of literature about the Midwest, as well as those written by Midwestern authors, are continually sought by the editor for inclusion in this annual bibliography. Please send them to Robert Beasecker, Director of Special Collections, Grand Valley State University Libraries, 1 Campus Drive, Allendale, Michigan 49401.

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