

MidAmerica XXIX

*The Yearbook of the Society
for the Study of Midwestern Literature*

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

2002

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In Honor of
Dan Gerber

PREFACE

The 32nd annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature featured several informative panels, among them one chaired by Philip Greasley, General Editor of the *Dictionary of Midwestern Literature*, that provided a forum for discussing ideas regarding form and content for volume two of this work. A panel on creative nonfiction and a panel on publishing creative writing in the Midwest were also presented. As has been traditional in recent years, a reader's theatre production was given, this year by Sandra Seaton and students at Central Michigan University, who presented *At the Bottom of the Parlor Stairs*. At the Friday night banquet, Herbert Martin received the Mark Twain Award for Distinguished Contributions to Midwestern Literature and Ronald Primeau received the MidAmerica Award for Distinguished Contributions to the Study of Midwestern Literature. Patricia Clark won the Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Prize, Claire van Breemen Downes won the Paul Somers Award for Creative Prose, and Robert Dunne won the Midwest Heritage Essay Award.

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PURPLE

LEONORA SMITH

For my granddaughter, Jane-Marie

“The ancients’ ‘royal purple’ was not purple
but a dark wine red, the color of blood . . .”

—Barbara Walker, *The Women’s
Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*

From the swing above me,
her incandescent legs stretch from violet skirts

to pump toward though dusk toward v’s of geese,
cirrus streaks in the orchid black sky.

Hurry, her body says. Only a few days left
to master a whole summer’s skill: to pump

for altitude, drag feet to slow, to twist ropes
and trap velocity, so they untwine to fling her

into wild spin. She leaps from swing to magenta Big Wheel,
peddles three turns, then upends it.

I try to follow as she slips from pool to pool of shadow
in the darkening yard, flares in a dappled bruise of light.

She offers sticks for lances, and she and I make a tribe
of shaman playmates, us and our spindly moon shadows

looming on the screen of the garage, dressed
in the pattern of lace the nightshade makes
as it creeps in and out of the fence.

We thunk-a-thump our poles,

Purple

beating a chant against mauve
and lilac shapes we’d chalked before dusk

into fissures of driveway cement
with soft, fat colors that smeared our hands and clothes.

And at the gate, she drops her stick
and starts to spin—hands out

like double buckets in a test of centrifugal force—around
around around—tempting gravity and daring balance.

She flares her skirts all the long way up the drive,
past the upturned Big Wheel with its pedals

making a last slow turn, past the drained magenta
wading pool, past comatose Barbie

in her girlie-purple car, twirling away
any residue or stain that might remain of the pin-pricks

etched on her skin in spring,
spinning out any malformed cells,

or shattered bits of chromosome,
any pigment or hue that might mar her skin or shade

her eyes with plum. Oh, my cyclone, my dervish,
my little centrifuge! Whirl, whirl and spin.

THE ELVIS JESUS
CHAPTER ONE
THE GREAT MAGICIAN DAZZLES
THE BADLANDS
DAVID DIAMOND

Jigsaw lightning ripped the sky. Thunder boomed. The temperature dropped 20 degrees, and the Angels started singing.

Miner City is in the Guinness Book of Records for drastic climatic change. One day the mercury plummeted sixty-two degrees in ninety seconds. Storms here in the Badlands rage minutes, days, or weeks. It can be a brutish hell, like the mean mental blizzards that force us to whisper: "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned."

* * * * *

It was the Fourth of July, and the Big Sky Carnival Show had set up rides and sideshows on Main Street for the Badlands Rodeo.

This was years ago.

A Technicolor flashback from the 60s.

Candy Cooke and I had just turned eighteen. We were walking the midway when we saw flames dancing in front of a giant red tent on the vacant lot between the Odd Fellows Hall and the Piggly Wiggly Grocery.

A big blue banner, with bold, yellow script announced the main attraction:

The Elvis Jesus and the Angels
Magic and Healing Miracles
Featuring Mutt the Wonder Dog

* * * * *

The Angels, who looked in their twenties, were the Elvis Jesus back-up group. An all-girl stringband. Long hair, dressed in tight Wrangler jeans, white boots and white silk blouses. They were playing, "Keep the Torch Burning."

A gorgeous redhead strummed harp and sang lead. A beautiful blonde played violin and flute, and a short cute brunette fingerpicked a Martin guitar.

I played accordion and practiced whenever I wasn't racing barrels. It was easy to see the Elvis band was accomplished.

The flames licked at the redhead's thighs, then exploded into a waterfall that instantly flushed into a parting red curtain. The Elvis Jesus stepped out and announced, "God is sick."

His green eyes blazed through that carnival night like jade magnets, and his voice flowed pure as artesian water against the grinding crank and clang of the midway rides.

"Jeez!" Candy Cooke whispered. "Didya see how he made fire into water?"

My dad had taught me to be a skeptic. "Don't believe nobody, Vernalee. Everybody lies." (My dad, the moody drunk — and me the obedient daughter). So I said, "It's just magic."

Candy nudged me. "It's amazing, huh?"

I was still thinking about that God is sick line as Elvis shouted: "The worms of evil, habit, sloth and stupidity...make God sick!" He fanned his hands. Long, thick worms wiggled from his fingertips and plopped to the street.

Elvis snapped his fingers. His hand became a blue blowtorch, and he torqued the worms. He tossed the torch over his head. It exploded into a deck of cards that floated above a group of children waving sparklers.

The cards, symbols bright in the carnival light, fluttered in a frosted slow motion until Elvis held his hand out, as if begging. The cards flipped backwards and flew like a chain of mallard ducks into his palm. He shuffled, picked a card at random, and held up the ace of hearts. "Oh, oh," he said, "here's your soul...time to live or die."

He wiped his free hand over the ace. A white dove flew into the night. "My name is Elvis Trueblood," he said, "I fly free through the bright spaces of the universe."

* * * * *

He was tall, lean and wore black leather pants and a white silk shirt. He had exquisite bronze skin. His black hair curled over his shirt collar. A Mestizo — half Sioux, half French.

The rumor had it he'd hiked down out of the Black Hills at Bridal Veil Falls one day after spending years meditating in a cave high in Spearfish Canyon. He had an old black Lab with him called Mutt.

Gossip was he levitated the dog below the waterfall, healed a crippled lady, and started appearing at Mount Rushmore and other tourist attractions like Wind Cave, Reptile Gardens, Jewel Cave, Harney Peak, and Custer State Park.

Weekly newspapers across the state featured stories about feats of wonder that transcended reason or magic.

The redhead on harp spoke into her mic sweetly, "Get in line, show starts in a few minutes. Pay Cashayne at the entrance."

The brunette stationed herself at a table and shouted, "Hurry! We have limited seating!"

Elvis fixed a fireball stare into the crowd. I felt as if he'd claimed me with a branding iron. Then, fast as a bolt of Badlands' lightning, he disappeared in a puff of red smoke

* * * * *

Inside, we shoved our way toward the stage alongside planks on cinder blocks. The Angels introduced themselves: Imogene on harp. Bethany, the blonde, on bass, flute and fiddle. Cashayne picking the Martin guitar.

They played folk and gospel for fifteen minutes, ending with an amazing cover of "Amazing Grace," then Imogene did a strum roll on her harp and said, "You've heard and read about his great magic. Now, here he is...(another strum roll)...The Elvis Jesus."

* * * * *

A puff of red smoke and there stood Elvis, strong and confident, rugged but handsome, (you had to love him) eyes wild, hands waving circles of fire, which started gushing water that turned into a red cape. He draped the cape over Imogene's harp and snapped his fingers. The harp disappeared and the cape sailed to Elvis. He grabbed it and deadpanned the audience. "No harp!" he said. "That harp went to heaven. God needs a harp. God is sick. But, if we heal ourselves, we can heal God. No more war, sickness, sin, and death. No more lies."

"Do I have to pull a switchblade on you? Listen, this is the Truth!" Elvis was yelling now. "Heal your own sickness, and you'll heal God! We can heal the world!"

He yanked a pearl-handled knife from his back pocket and snapped a long, shiny blade from the belly. He stabbed his chest and withdrew the knife. He waved it around, made sure everyone saw the blood, then he swallowed the blade, tossed the cape over Imogene, and slowly pulled the knife from his mouth as the cape rolled away and revealed the harp.

He mugged the audience again and presented the knife. "See, no blood! And look, that harp flew back from heaven! It's a magic parable."

Imogene played a dramatic glissando that hummed like truth in the middle of a lie. Elvis wiggled his fingers. A spray of ugly kelp sprouted from one hand, and a bouquet of roses popped out of the other.

"For Pete's sake!" he said. "Why would you think weeds when you can have roses?" He looked puzzled and sad. "Our minds are like that fertile soil along the Bad River. Plant weeds, you get weeds. Plant roses, you get roses. It's the law of the Great Magician. So, don't be praying for weeds when you can have roses...and don't be praying to the Great Magician until you understand this."

Elvis tossed the bouquet. It exploded and single flowers floated into the audience, while the weeds tied Imogene to her harp.

Elvis pointed at her and yelled, "That's what wrong thinking does to you!"

The audience was mesmerized.

He waved the cape — another whoof of red smoke, then a beehive with hundreds of bees.

Imogene struggled against the weeds, which turned to rope. Cashayne, off at the side of the audience, focused a spotlight and Elvis said, "All that buzzing. Sounds like gossip. Hurt your neighbor, ruin your friends. Hateful humanimal behavior. Imogene, help me! Bees frighten me. They gossip!"

Elvis snapped his thumb and forefinger. The rope lashing Imogene lit up like a firecracker fuse and burned away. She grabbed the red cape and covered the bees, hurried back to the harp, and played a dazzling allegro as Elvis waved his hand like a magic wand: A big boom, a parachute of red smoke, and the beehive disappeared.

So did Elvis.

"Intermission," Imogene said. "Next, healing miracles."

Candy Cooke whispered, "Say, what the hell..."

Hell, heaven, magic? I didn't know. But a ping in my heart told me this night was more than cheap carnival tricks.

* * * * *

The Angels played for fifteen minutes. The lights dimmed, and Imogene performed a brilliant glissade. Cashayne and Bethany pulled a big table on stage and set the top with several red boxes, empty glasses, and clear bottles that resembled biblical jugs.

Bethany disappeared. I assumed she had somehow helped Elvis with the tricks during the last scene. Cashayne hurried back to the spotlight; and Imogene announced, "Now, The Elvis Jesus and Mutt the Wonder Dog."

A poof of red smoke and Elvis opened a box. Mutt flew out, his front paws flashing sparks. He landed and slid to the edge of the stage. The old Lab sat up, goofy smile, big black eyes glittering. "Mutt, tell everyone how happy you are to be in the Badlands tonight."

Mutt's mouth, his gray whiskers, moved as Elvis threw his voice like a ventriloquist and said, "Too rugged out here for me, dude."

The kids laughed, hollered, and waved their sparklers.

"Say hi to the children, Mutt," Elvis said. Then Elvis again as Mutt: "Hello, you little devils."

The kids howled.

"How about flying for the children, Mutt?" Elvis eyed the kids.

"I could hurt myself," Mutt growled.

"You'll be fine, the kids want to see your stuff."

The children cheered and Elvis said, "Jump, Mutt!"

Mutt spiraled like an Olympic skater. A twisting black flash. "Stop!" Elvis said. Mutt landed and sat up.

"Come on, Mutt," Elvis said, "You can do better than that. Let's fly."

"If you insist, Elvis," Mutt said, with Elvis doing the voice. "But don't forget to bring me down this time."

Mutt flew off the stage.

Elvis smiled and shouted, "Look at that dog fly! He's a speed demon. He's a flash of truth. He's on his way to heaven."

Mutt circled the audience like a wind-up toy.

The children screamed. I was amazed. Cashayne kept the spotlight on Mutt.

Then a thunderbolt of smoke.

Candy Cooke muttered, "The dog's gone."

"Oh, no!" Elvis said, "Mutt's missing."

The children stopped waving their sparklers. They were stunned into silent awe.

"I hope he doesn't get lost," Elvis said. "One night the Lutherans kidnapped him."

He opened another box and a loaf of bread popped out. "Nice and hot, just out of the oven," Elvis said. He held it up, as if praising it, then put it on a silver platter.

He tore off a piece and said, "Imogene, let's do a taste test."

She offered the bread to the little Larson boy in front of Candy. He stuck it in his mouth, chewed, and proclaimed it, "Yummy as all get out."

"Well, everyone will want a piece then," said Elvis, "but we need more. Don't we?"

The eager children agreed. They waved their sparklers and yelled, "More bread!"

Elvis clapped his hands and said, "Give us this day our daily bread."

The bread multiplied to twelve loaves.

Elvis dipped on one knee. "Bread from heaven," he said. "Here's bread of everlasting life. This bread won't rot. Take eat and never be hungry again."

Elvis pointed at Sparky Sorenson in the front row. "Come, sir. I need help."

Sparky climbed on stage as if hypnotized. Elvis poured a glass of water and said, "Drink, tell me what it is."

Sparky took a sip and said, "It's water — real tasty too."

Elvis touched the bottles and the water turned red. He said, "Now you've got wine."

He gave Sparky the once-over, as if divining his secrets. Then he said, "Is your name, Sparky?"

"Yup, that's what they call me."

Elvis poured some red liquid into a clear glass and said, "Have a sip."

Sparky knocked it back like he might be drinking a shot of Jim Beam at the Oasis Bar on Main Street. He took a deep breath and said, "This is good wine."

Elvis said, "It's the wine of truth." He snapped his fingers and waved his hands.

A red box opened and a shelf slid out with two fish on another silver platter. "Skillet-fried perch," Elvis said, "how 'bout a piece, Sparky?"

"Okay."

Elvis handed a chunk to the old, bowlegged rancher. Sparky tasted it.

"Well?" asked Elvis.

"Say, that's pretty tasty. Mmmm, yup that's good. Mmmm! You bet."

Elvis did a fast dance-turnaround and joked, "Now don't start talking like you're from North Dakota, Sparky."

Outside the storm had passed, leaving only distant thunder and the whoosh of the tilt-a-whirl.

"I'll have some more," Sparky said.

Elvis waved him off. "But we only have two fish." He walked stage front and peered at the children. "Elvis thinks we need more perch. How 'bout it, kids?"

They shook their sparklers and screeched, "More perch! More perch!"

Elvis whirled his hands in smoky circles, and the silver plate multiplied with fish. Sparky gasped. The kids cheered as if they had expected this miracle, this trick. I was astonished and Candy Cooke said, "Say, jeez."

Imogene guided Sparky back to his seat, then joined the other Angels behind Elvis humming, "Just as I Am."

Elvis blew on his fingers. They morphed into sparklers. He shouted, "Fish fry. Fish for all. Fish for minds. Fish for souls. Fish in the dark shadows of murky evil. Keep fishing, right kids?"

The children hollered, "Keep fishing!"

He punched open another drawer and grabbed several bottles. "Now," he said, "a very cool Elvis Electric Shake." He filled the jugs with water, stood back as sparks flew from his fingers, and the water turned to strawberry.

* * * * *

The Angels passed through the audience feeding the people — bread, fish, and wine. Strawberry smoothies for the kids.

Elvis stood alone on stage. Several times he lifted his head toward heaven and smiled. He also peeked into the audience with those cobalt green eyes that made me go weak and flash hot. I told Candy Cooke I might faint. She shrugged and said, "You been workin' too hard on the ranch."

The Angels finished serving communion and Imogene said, "Let the healing begin."

* * * * *

Ella Saylor wheeled her son Merle into the tent. Elvis jumped off the stage and met them in the aisle.

Merle was 14 years old. He'd been crippled at birth with a spinal defect. So, you can understand my shock when Elvis touched the boy's forehead and said, "It's not your fault. Close your eyes. See your spine strong as I do—see it sparkle. The lame shall be made

straight, no thanks to the God they preach in your stupid, heathen, pedophile churches, but you will walk, young man. Stand up. Walk. You are healed by The Great Magician."

Merle took a few tentative steps. A blade-thin silence sliced the audience as all heads turned and astonished eyes watched Merle gain strength and walk out of the tent. His mother followed him, sobbing and whispering.

Talk about a buzz. Buzz about talk. That tent became a beehive.

Candy Cooke cried, "Jesus!"

The kids shouted, "Cool!"

A man raised his hand for healing. Elvis pointed at him and said, "You'll never change. You have met the consequences of your evil thoughts and actions. Healings don't last if you revert to your bad habits. Listen to me. Turn away from your evil. Let that be the medicine to cure you."

An old lady limped from her seat into the aisle and said, "I saw the boy walk. I know who you are." Tears flowed down her face. "Please, please," she pleaded, "it's my foot. It's the constant pain."

I did not know her name, but I'd seen her around. I think all any of us in Miner City knew about her was that she had this grotesque clubfoot.

Elvis guided her to the edge of a bench and knelt before her. Tears flowed from his eyes and soaked her foot. He whispered, "Evil trapped you and won't let go. Now you must let evil go. Evil is self-destructed or it's self-destructive. Are you willing to fight?"

"Yes," the woman whispered.

Elvis sang in deep bass, "Oooh, Oooh, Oooh, sometimes it makes me tremble...tremble...tremble."

He massaged the poor woman's foot, and when he released it the bones were straight. The crowd was tense, amazed, astounded. The Angels hummed. Someone outside screamed from the top of the Ferris Wheel.

The lady stood up and Elvis said: "You will become a spiritual artist and overcome the weakness of this flesh. You will stay alive and healed with the continuous expansion of the Great Magician within. Walk now with no pain. Do as I say and Evil will flee you. Evil will fear you. Tell everyone the warrior Elvis Trueblood came down from the Black Hills to defeat sin, sickness, and death."

The woman walked away on her healed foot as Elvis stopped beside me. He looked drained, pale, dying. He whispered, "Wretched is the person who has no discipline or wisdom. The seeds of a filthy mind bring forth weeds of poison."

These words dropped from his mouth like planets from the sky. I knew he was referring to the sex carnival I'd been having with Delbert Smucker in his pig barn north of town.

Elvis leaned over. His bright, green eyes glowed as though they knew all the dirty details about Delbert and me.

"Evil and sex dance fulltime in most people's minds," he whispered. "Don't mess with the universe."

I nodded and said, "Where's Mutt?"

"Yeah, where's Mutt?" the children cried.

Elvis smiled and said, "That darn dog is trying to find a safe place in the universe."

The children waved their sparklers and chanted, "We want Mutt! We want Mutt!"

Elvis pointed at Candy. Mutt was sitting on her lap.

Candy gasped, "Holy Balls!"

Mutt barked.

Elvis said, "Come on, Mutt. Let's wrap it up."

Mutt jumped from Candy's lap and trotted down the aisle with Elvis.

Imogene stepped forward and said, "And that's tonight's show. Cashayne will be at the entrance if anyone wants to make a spiritual donation. We pray for the generous."

Elvis and Mutt bowed.

Elvis covered Mutt with the red cape and said, "Bye, bye." The cape exploded into flames, behind which he and Mutt melted away. I felt like that whore in the Bible, because if anyone in Miner City were to find out about Delbert Smucker and me, they would stone me, kill me, hide me in a bale of hay, load me on the morning train, and ship me to the Powder River Basin over in Wyoming.

FACT IN FICTION: HISTORICAL NOVELS SET IN PIONEER MINNESOTA

LESLIE CZECHOWSKI

It is deep winter in the farmlands due west of Stillwater, Minnesota, in the early 1850s. Karl Oskar walks the many miles to town to purchase a 100-pound sack of flour for his hungry family and walks home that dark and cold evening.

... it soon grew so dense that he could not see the marks of his steps from the morning . . . The wanderer struggled through the dark with the flour on his bent back . . . and the forest grew thicker around him At each step he hoped to see the forest come to an end As soon as this happened he would only have to follow a shore line until he reached a newly built log cabin where his wife and children were waiting for him. But instead he seemed to go deeper and deeper into the forest At last the stiff fingers inside the mittens lost their hold: Karl Oskar let his sack drop onto the snow and sat down on it. The truth had now been forced upon him: he was wandering aimlessly; he did not know in which direction home was—he was lost.¹

This selection from Wilhelm Moberg's *Unto a Good Land* represents the finest of historical fiction writing—it's engrossing, pulls the reader into the character and action, and gives a visceral understanding of a different time and place. Novelists present the inner thoughts, beliefs, and actions of their characters, something that historians cannot always do. But can we trust historical novelists to be accurate in their rendition of historical incidents and their interpretation of history?

This study focuses on Minnesota from 1850-1880, the pioneer period of intense settlement. After reading diaries and letters from pioneers and novels set in the same period and delving into the literature of historical fiction to examine the relationship between literature and history, I am convinced that most historical novelists *do* get history right. They may invent characters and locations, but they accurately convey the *sense* of time and place. They use the unique

elements of the novelist—plot and character—to illuminate history in ways that most historians cannot or do not.

Most scholarly discussions about historical fiction begin with Georg Lukács's seminal work in the field, *The Historical Novel*, purportedly a "theoretical examination of the interaction between the historical spirit and the great genres of literature which portray the totality of history."² Lukács was a Marxist scholar whose theoretical views are embedded in his analysis. Germane to our discussion is his analysis of the classical form of the historical novel and analysis of the work of the first historical novelist, Sir Walter Scott. Lukács views the historical novel as an outgrowth of the great proletariat revolutions of the eighteenth century, noting "the broad delineation of manners and circumstances attendant upon events, the dramatic character of action and, in close connection with this, the new and important role of dialogue in the novel."³ Lukács highlights elements that make the novel unique—it is the characters in the historical novel that are central to the story, not society and not the historical events; it is the main character in the novel who often represents social trends and historical forces. Lukács agrees with other critics that "the secrets of the human heart" are opened in a fictional narrative in ways neglected by historians: "What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality."⁴

The first historical novel, according to Lukács, was written by Sir Walter Scott in the early nineteenth century. The strength of Scott's writing is the way he presents popular life—not the life experienced by generals and dukes, but the life of the average person.⁵ We see these same elements in the writing of American historical novelist James Fenimore Cooper, who Lukács believes to be Scott's "only one worthy follower." Cooper created similar "middle-of-the-road" heroes, and put at the center of his works a theme important to Scott, the "downfall of gentile [*sic*] society."⁶ But perhaps more central in Cooper's novels is place. It may be the vastness of the American landscape, but Cooper seemed to make a character out of the prairie in his novel, *The Prairie*.

Of equal importance is the sense of national identity in the historical novel. Literary scholar George Dekker writes that because of their immense popularity, historical novels "have undoubtedly had a profound effect . . . on the way that Americans . . . have conceived of their past, present, and future."⁷ Lukács perhaps first noted the strong rela-

past, present, and future."⁷ Lukács perhaps first noted the strong relationship between a national identity and the historical novel:

The appeal to national independence and national character is necessarily connected with a re-awakening of national history, with memories of the past, of past greatness, of moments of national dishonour⁸

Dekker defines historical fiction: "For a fiction to qualify as 'historical,' what more can be required than that the leading or . . . determinative social and psychological traits it represents clearly belong to a period historically distinct from our own."⁹ Writers and theorists have different opinions as to what constitutes "historical." In his book about the American historical novel, Ernest Leisy cites Scott who said one-half of a century is the appropriate amount of time. However, Leisy believes that with changes in contemporary American society, "a generation appears sufficient to render a preceding period historical."¹⁰ Historian Dale Porter argues that what makes a novel historical is not just the passing of time, but the author's (and audience's) "sense of the otherness of the past, of discontinuity and qualitative change,"¹¹ suggesting a period before the author's conscious awareness of history. However, in the novels in this study, one generation was not enough to produce a good historical novel. The novelist needed more time for documentary sources to become available and to synthesize the historical era and events.

Like other fiction and unlike most nonfiction, historical fiction is a story with a beginning, middle, and end. It has—or should have—well-developed characters, a strong narrative, and a well-plotted story with a climax that engages us on an emotional level. Porter comments that historical fiction aims to "reveal a subjective or figurative truth inside or beyond the objective truth distilled from documents."¹² The emotional connection to an historical time through character is one of the defining elements of the genre and is what draws people to historical fiction rather than to historiography.

In the novels set in pioneer Minnesota, we will see many of the elements of the historical novel. The authors write about common people who take newly available land and make homes for themselves, a reaffirmation of the white American's belief in spreading American culture throughout the continent. The prairie landscape plays an important role in these novels. The novelists are concerned with everyday life: building homes, plowing the land, educating their

children. They touch upon historical events of the time—the Civil War, the 1862 Sioux Uprising—but often only in passing and always through the eyes of ordinary people, not presidents or generals. Many of the authors reflect not so much on a national identity as on a regional identity and they represent Minnesota as an ideal location for settlement.

HISTORICAL NOVELS SET IN PIONEER MINNESOTA

Now we turn to the heart of this study: a close reading of historical novels and settlers' diaries and letters, focusing on four common areas of interest and concern: education, farming, social life, and the Indians. The novelists use fictional elements to make ordinary people into interesting characters who celebrate their successes and mourn their failures. Most of the novels are well plotted, giving the reader a sense of completeness, something generally lacking in diaries or collections of letters. In these ways, the historical novelist gives us what historians, letter writers, and diarists don't—a story with a beginning, middle, and end with characters about whom we care.

Letters and diaries are used in this study because they provide a view of history from ordinary people who lived in pioneer Minnesota. Diarists and letter writers do not necessarily intend that their writing will become objects of history. They write for themselves, for their family and friends. They tell about the events of their lives and sometimes reflect on their thoughts and feelings. But because they are the work of the average person, they document better than any historian what daily life was like.¹³

Of special value were the diaries of Minnesota farmers Mitchell Y. Jackson and William R. Brown¹⁴ and letters by Sophie and Theodore Bost. Both Jackson and Brown were educated men who had other careers in their lives besides farming and were excellent writers. Because of the length and complexity of their writing, they provide us with a thorough understanding of their lives, beliefs, and thoughts, much like a novelist would. Theodore Bost emigrated to the United States from France in 1853, engaged in a two-and-a-half-year courtship via correspondence with Sophie, and married her upon her arrival in St. Paul in June 1858. Their letters to family in Europe are especially valuable because they express their thoughts and feelings, going beyond the usual recitation of facts found in so many letters and journals. Their letters are detailed narratives that read almost like epistolary novels. Not only do we get details of their lives from

their letters, we also learn how they felt about their new home in Minnesota.

"EDUCATION WAS THE COMMON CONCERN NEAREST THE HEARTS OF THE YANKEE SETTLERS"¹⁵

Surprisingly, neither Theodore nor Sophie wrote anything about education for their children because for many settlers this was of primary concern. Farmer Mitchell Jackson notes in his diary in March 1855 that he was chosen to be a school trustee and had met with other district trustees to designate a site for the schoolhouse—this less than one year after settling on his claim. Diarist, farmer, and part-time teacher Francis M. Dyer interrupted his fall farming duties (after cutting the wheat and before digging the potatoes) to work on the schoolhouse and go to the "Teachers Examination."¹⁶

Roy Chaffee's novel *The Quitclaim* (based on reminiscences of his father, who moved to Minnesota just after the Civil War), conveys similar interests. Many of the settlers in their area were concerned about building a school soon after they settled there¹⁷ and in the spring the "school board" tested three local young women, one of whom would be chosen to be the first teacher. Susan Chapree, daughter of the main character in the novel, was hired.¹⁸

Teaching was often a means for young women to provide needed financial assistance for their families. Minnesota diarist Harriet Godfrey was also a teacher. She finished school at the end of July 1863 and noted in her diary, "Mother means for me to go to teaching my sisters now at home." A few years later she is teaching sixty-four "scholars" at a school in Dayton¹⁹ but returns home in August because the school treasurer didn't raise enough money for the school to continue.

Harriet Griswold was a settler in the 1850s who was raising her children alone (her husband may have died). She was eager for her children to be educated, writing to her brother Harry that because of the economy²⁰ there was less likelihood of getting a school built than there was the previous year, "and what am I to do with the children"—perhaps a plaintive cry from an overworked single parent or an ambitious mother who saw education as vital to her children's futures.²¹ Writers of diaries and letters make comments that suggest the importance of education, but novelists like Chaffee tell a more complete story about education in a small rural community.

Adults were also very interested in their own intellectual pursuits, noting titles of books, magazines, and newspapers they read. Not

many settlers or novelists discussed the reading of fiction; more common for settlers to note and novelists to report was the interest in newspapers and magazines. Harriet Griswold was not just interested in her children's education but in keeping up with the news, partly as a way of remaining in touch with her family back East but also as a means of learning about her new home. She writes to her brother²² that she has subscribed to their hometown newspaper for six months (although it's sometimes two-three weeks late in arriving) and plans to subscribe to a St. Paul paper soon.²³ The Bosts value reading so much that they sell grapes to be able to afford a subscription to *Harper's Monthly* because they "must have something to read during our long winters."

The most notable mention of books and reading in a fictional account of pioneer Minnesota occurs in Cornelia James Cannon's novel, *Red Rust*. The main character is Matts Swenson, son of a poor Swedish immigrant. Matts is a dreamer who reads instead of helping out on the farm. He subscribes to a Swedish-language newspaper in which he first reads about Charles Darwin and his theories regarding natural selection.²⁴ As the novel progresses, Matts becomes a young man who reads every word in a farming paper: poems, recipes, harness repair, and more on Darwin, this time on cross-fertilization.²⁵ It is Matts's desire for learning that gives him the knowledge he needs to cross-pollinate hearty Swedish wheat seeds with the common variety used in Minnesota, yielding a rust-resistant strain—the focus of this novel.

Matts spends all of his time reading and engaging in scientific experiments with seeds and has little social or intellectual life. Many other settlers, however, found great pleasure in local lyceums, self-study activities that featured lectures or debates and that afforded eager pioneers an active intellectual life. In 1856 Mitchell Jackson attended a lyceum in Lakeland one evening that included both men and women (perhaps a rarity since he makes a point of noting it). The question discussed was, "Is the Liquor dealer the biggest [sic] scoundrel in the world?" He notes that the "Affirmative carried."²⁶

In the fictional world created by Maud Hart Lovelace in *One Stayed at Welcome*, one of the newest settlers, the well-educated Lillie Torry, makes sure that the lyceum is established in their growing community as a way of bringing Eastern culture to the prairie. Lillie "remarked gaily that every town should have a Lyceum,"²⁷ so one was established and met monthly for lectures and debates. One

month's subject was "Resolved, that the Liquor Dealer is the Greatest Scoundrel in the Civilized World." [The phrasing of their topic and its similarity to Jackson's lyceum topic suggest that Lovelace may have done her research quite well indeed.]

These examples demonstrate how the characters created by these novelists experienced similar activities to settlers as they built schools and hired teachers. In addition, the fictional characters and actual settlers were active in the pursuit of lifelong education as seen in their reading habits and attendance at lectures and debates. But where the diarists and letter writers made brief mentions of educational issues, novelists create for the reader entire situations (such as describing a lyceum) that give a much fuller sense of what the activity was like.

"THE TOUGH PRAIRIE SOD WAS NOT EASILY BROKEN."²⁸

Another major concern of settlers was the farm and all that was part of the experience of finding land, breaking the soil, planting and harvesting crops, as well as the details of various crops and commodities farmers raised for their own use and for sale and exchange. The novels, diaries, and letters frequently mention details of those activities—the pioneer's first step toward creating a life in this new land.

Not many farmers, real or fictional, discussed the details of planting and tending their crops except for the main character in Cannon's *Red Rust*, Matts, who is cross-pollinating different strains of wheat. When the locusts come (as they did repeatedly in the 1870s),²⁹ Matts and his family take bed sheets into his special wheat field, fortunately a small plot, and cover the "treasured wheat."³⁰ They dig a trench around the field, weigh down the sheets with logs in the trench, and sew the sheets together at the top.

Matts's face was haggard with distress. "I do not know which is worse for the wheat, shading it from the sun this way or letting it take its chance with the grasshoppers." Then he added, as the winged insects began to fall about them like a dark hailstorm, "We can tell pretty soon. If any of the wheat lives we shall be lucky . . . All through that day the invasion continued. At first Matts stayed by the wheat plot, unable to tear himself away."³¹

But their efforts succeed. The wheat receives some sun through the cloth and it is able to self-pollinate.

None of the farmers' diaries or letters approached such details of farming nor such emotional concern for the success of their crops,

something I find particularly surprising given the vital nature of the farm to early rural settlers. All Theodore Bost wrote to his parents was the mere fact that the grasshoppers ate all their crops in 1857.³² However, Sophie did make note in 1871 about a hailstorm that destroyed most of their crops. She wrote that the "two older children couldn't stop looking on the dark side of things, worrying that we'll all die of hunger next winter."³³ The novelists certainly provided the reader with a richer emotional concern for the land and for farming.

The planting and care of fruit trees was a subject that surprised me because it seemed somewhat frivolous. But Theodore Bost and Dan Blodgett (in *One Stayed at Welcome*) were excited about fruit culture and determined to get an orchard established. Bost ordered his fruit trees from a Wisconsin nursery in 1862 (26 April) and within six years he announced to his parents that his apples took second place at the Carver County Fair.³⁴ Neither he nor Sophie mentions whether they use or sell their fruit.

Once again, the novelist describes personal and emotional concerns about growing apple trees, whereas for Bost it seemed as if fruit culture was just another activity. Blodgett and his partner Larry Kimbro speak frequently about the delicious apple pies they will make from Dan's fruit. At first he intends to domesticate wild trees: "he had marked the wild trees bearing the choicest fruit, had uprooted them and hedged them in for winter and he had broken land to receive them in the spring, had mulched it and left it to lie fallow." But Dan was able to purchase quality nursery trees from a departing neighbor to make a better orchard. Larry's response was, "When do the apple pies begin? Remember half of every pie is mine."³⁵

"THEY DEPENDED ON ONE ANOTHER . . . FOR A KINSHIP OF THE SPIRIT"³⁶

Novelist Edward Havill succinctly expresses the pioneer's beliefs: "the feeling that there were neighbors upon whom they could call for help, although actually they rarely did, was a kind of sustenance as needed in their daily struggle as bread."³⁷ Or, as Theodore Bost writes to his parents, "It's worth a great deal to have good neighbors." He certainly benefited early in his time in Minnesota because a neighbor came over and helped him repair his cabin roof and fill in space between the logs so the water in the cabin wasn't frozen solid each morning.³⁸

Edward Havill's novel, *Big Ember*, set in the Minnesota River valley in the 1860s, concerns the Norwegian immigrant family of Lars

and Guri Erikson. There is a strong sense of community around Big Ember Lake. One early winter night the Eriksons invite their neighbors to visit. Babies, children, and adults come. They drink coffee and eat Guri's cream mush (römegröt) and talk all evening.³⁹ Seamstress Abbie Griffin frequently notes social activities in her diary. She visits friends in her neighborhood, often getting rides from other friends. That evening she meets "Mr. Dike" for the first time (a gentleman perhaps destined to become her husband), and on July Fourth she and he "went down to the motor and took it to Calhoun."⁴⁰ They rowed a boat around the lake, went through the cemetery, and enjoyed the evening's fireworks.

Novelist Lovelace goes into greater detail about social activities in *Welcome*: "[T]he settlers had learned to manage snowshoes and glided sociably from claim to claim."⁴¹ The folks of *Welcome* have a grand Christmas party with strings of cranberries and a Christmas tree to decorate the plain wooden tavern. The children bob for apples, some adults present a shadow puppet show about The Founding of *Welcome*,⁴² and everyone dances to Michael's fiddle. Lovelace puts her reader in the midst of this lively holiday celebration in a way that diarists don't.

Examples of neighbors helping each other abound in letters, diaries, and novels. In fictional *Welcome* few of the settlers "troubled with cabins until autumn, but by then all were old friends, and the men went from claim to claim to raise logs while the women roasted meat at open fires and spread their best upon rude outdoor tables."⁴³ Farmer William Brown evokes a dizzying world of activity. In December 1845 friend Harrison and Brown helped another neighbor, Brissett, haul his hogs from the woods; then Brown lent his "match planes" to Davis so he could lay the floor in McHattie's house. Brown sold McKusick eighteen bushels of beans and then bought himself an axe in Stillwater with his profits. Women were engaged in similar barter. Sophie Bost knits for Mrs. Powers so she can use her sewing machine to make a suit for Theodore.⁴⁴

One recurring theme in many of the pioneer narratives, fictional and actual, is loneliness and longing for family back home. New neighbors provide needed assistance and support, but many newly arrived settlers mention how much they miss home and family. Mitchell Jackson writes in his diary as he sets off on the packet boat for Minnesota, "To make this permanent separation with my aged and venerated Father is indeed painful . . . [W]e cannot but be apprehensive that *this* farewell may be

'Farewell for ever.'" ⁴⁵ In our modern world in which communication with family on the other side of the continent can be almost instantaneous, we may forget that people in the mid-nineteenth century often did *not* see family again after they moved West.

Female fictional settlers express similar feelings of loneliness and homesickness, but the men are portrayed as eager pioneers excited by the challenges of building a life in this new land. In *The Quitclaim* Naomi Chapree says to her husband on first seeing the shanty on their claim: "I didn't mean to be so weak, Charles. I—I—well, I guess I had a sudden attack of homesickness, that's all. It makes us seem so small, Charles, when we can see for miles and miles in every direction like this. I feel—well, sorta lost I guess."⁴⁶

"LET THEM EAT GRASS OR THEIR OWN DUNG."⁴⁷

Settlers Nellie and Benjamin Brown were living in the north-central Minnesota town of Crow Wing in 1858, Chippewa territory. They wrote a joint letter in which Nellie mentions that they had Indian women as midwives and says that the women were "kind and affectionate as far as they can do." Benjamin expresses a contrary attitude: "I care so much for Indians as I do for Black birds."⁴⁸ Theodore Bost has a much more sympathetic view of the Winnabago Indians: "The poor Indians! It filled my heart with sadness to see them going away. They are headed for a region where there is a very little game and where the Sioux have threatened to kill them if they intrude, but the government is forcing them to go just the same."⁴⁹

These contrasting opinions about the Indians are mirrored in the novels. Huntington begins his novel *Nakoma* with the following attitude about Indians: "[I]ts picturesque barbarism, its grotesque heroism; its devotion to the chase, and its passion for that dramatic pastime called war."⁵⁰ Helen Weeks's novel *White and Red* concerns missionary activity among the Chippewa in north central Minnesota in the early 1860s, stating that the Indians are the "real American" who "gave place to the white man, some willingly, some fighting against it."⁵¹ She tells stories about the Prescott family and their work among the Indians: teaching English, learning the Indian language Ojibway, trying to convert them to Christianity and teach them civilized ways.

Edward Havill ends *Big Ember* with the effects of the 1862 Sioux uprising. Early in the novel, Havill informs his reader about his view

of the Indian situation. An Indian woman came to the Eriksons' house, silent, looking for food for her and her son. "She was not begging. She was just wanting what she plainly felt she had a right to. The earth had grown the wheat, not Guri."⁵² Havill skillfully builds tension in the first half of the novel by occasionally reporting another Indian encounter or unsettling incident. Havill obviously did extensive research for his novel because he presents accurate details of the events: the Indian's federal annuity arrived the day after the revolt began, and Sioux chief Little Crow chose death in battle rather than the indignity of a slow and miserable death on a reservation.⁵³ The end of the novel gives a chilling description of the Indian attacks on whites and the settlers' attempts to keep from being murdered.

Frederick Manfred was a Minnesota author whose *Buckskin Man* novels chronicle life in the nineteenth-century Midwest. His novel of the Sioux uprising, *Scarlet Plume*, is a fine example of historical fiction.⁵⁴ I was intrigued by the letter Manfred used to begin his novel, written by General Sibley, who had led the government troops that finally quelled the uprising. The letter begins: "One rather handsome woman among them had become so infatuated with the redskin who had taken her for a wife that, although her white husband was still living. . . she would not leave her red lover."⁵⁵ This is the genesis for the novel and general outline of it. Because I read so few actual accounts of settlers who were involved in the Sioux uprising, I will use Duane Schultz's re-creation of the events of 1862 against which to read Manfred's novel because much of Schultz's source material is from accounts written by whites and Indians after the war.

Scarlet Plume is told from the point of view of the white woman, Judith Raveling, who is visiting in fictional Skywater Lake in southwestern Minnesota. The details of the massacre are graphically described in the novel—rape, murder, dismemberment, and the most foul actions imaginable. Judith and a few other women and children are taken as hostages by the Yankton Dakota, some of whom had not participated in the massacre, notably the brave, Scarlet Plume. As Judith returns to the white people after her romantic interlude with her lover Scarlet Plume, she sees her sister's sons walking along the road, the older one carrying the younger, having escaped from the massacre and living in the wild for weeks. "Johnnie couldn't walk much . . . I had to carry him all the way mostly" says the older boy.⁵⁶ Historian Schultz documents eleven-year-old Merton who "hoisted

his brother on his back and started off" to take brother Johnnie to safety. Merton carried Johnnie on his back for more than fifty miles.⁵⁷

What makes the novel so moving is the characterization of Judith. We feel her anguish and numbness as she witnesses the massacre. We come to understand her passion for the Indian man whom she has come to love as her husband, feelings she never felt for her white husband, and feel her despair at the killing of the innocent Scarlet Plume. The techniques of the novelist make this time and place seem immediate and help the reader understand the emotions of the characters.

"ART MAY DO WHAT IT WISHES, WHEN IT WISHES, SO LONG AS IT GETS THE BIG PICTURE RIGHT"⁵⁸

Vilhelm Moberg "gets the big picture right" in *Unto a Good Land*, his 1952 novel that epitomizes the historical novel set in pioneer Minnesota. He brings together historical elements gleaned from thorough research in Sweden and America with a strong narrative and well-developed characters. Writing one hundred years after the events in the novel, Moberg had the distance from the period that enabled him to synthesize his sources and reflect on that time and what it means to twentieth-century readers. His view of America as a land of opportunity mirrors the nineteenth-century immigrant view. What differentiates the time in which Moberg was writing and the time about which he was writing is his depiction of the hope felt by the nineteenth-century immigrants—a powerful part of that era. It starkly contrasts with the feelings of many people after the events of the 1930s and 1940s and resonates powerfully for people devastated by war.

Because Moberg was not American, he did not write as did Scott or Cooper, extolling his country and its people. They wrote during an era of nation building when peoples and countries expressed great pride in their homelands. Moberg celebrates the potential for a good life in America, but it is tempered with a longing for home; there is a tension between the lure of the new land for Karl Oskar and his wife's yearning for home. This may reflect Moberg's split allegiance to Sweden and America, but may also reflect a more cynical sense of nationhood in the mid-twentieth century after the nationalist horrors of two world wars.

Moberg demonstrates similar concern for the common man as did fellow socialist, Georg Lukács. The members of the Nilsson family in this novel were much like other Swedes who immigrated to America seeking a better life for their family. Their concerns were

for building a house, planting a crop, and feeding their family. This novel is almost entirely focused on home and family life. We see very little of the outside world or how the actions of great men affect these Swedish immigrants.⁵⁹

The elements that make *Unto a Good Land* such an exemplary historical novel are plot and character development; Moberg skillfully uses these techniques of fiction to paint a detailed picture of daily life in 1850s Minnesota. Kristina and Karl Oskar Nilsson immigrate to eastern Minnesota. Karl is excited about their venture, Kristina less so. The time frame of the novel is only one year, a year in which they travel across the ocean and the American continent. They arrive in Minnesota in July—too late to claim land, break the soil, and plant a crop. They struggle through their first year in ways familiar from other novels and settlers' accounts. But neighbors help each other and they survive.

We read about Kristina unpacking the trunk they brought from Sweden during their first days after they move into their shanty. She pulls out woolen jackets and linen sheets.

She could have caressed the well-known pieces of clothing from home, in gratefulness that they had followed her out here, that they were ready for her now that she would need them The odor of the camphor and lavender that had kept the packed clothing in good condition filled the shanty as the lid of the chest was thrown open. It was pleasing to Kristina—it smelled like *home*.⁶⁰

In early spring Karl Oskar is busy making a wooden breaking plow that he must have ready "when the frost left the ground." He had a promise to borrow his neighbor's oxen and

he was anxious to begin the plowing It was the first time he had made a plow, the farmer's most important implement, and it required clever hands. He cut and carved, he chiseled and dug He would follow this plow in its furrow for a long time, he would follow it every day until the whole meadow was turned into a field. The new plow would give them the field for their bread to grow in.⁶¹

We see Kristina's care for her family through the clothing and linens she brought and which she protected so carefully, just as we learn about the vital need for a plow and Karl Oskar's equal concern for his family—in creating the tools needed to bring food to their table. These details of daily life paint a complete world for the reader of a different time and place.

One theme that is woven through the other novels, diaries, and letters and that is central to this book is concern for family and home. Their family in Sweden and the Swedish way of life are important to Kristina and Karl. They travel with other Swedes to America, settle in an area earlier populated by Swedish immigrants, and correspond with their family. The novel is bracketed with letters: one written by Karl to his parents on the day of their arrival in New York; the second written after their year of struggle. This letter ends: "I live far away but no day has come to its end without my thoughts on my dear Home and You my kind parents, your son never forgets his home."⁶² His poignant statement reflects the feelings expressed by men who settled in Minnesota in letters to their families—unlike the male settlers in the other historical novels. Moberg chose to represent Karl Oskar as a more complex character, one who expressed feeling for his home and family while still being excited about their venture in the new land.

In the penultimate chapter we see Kristina struggling with her feelings about Minnesota and her longing for home. She wants to be content in their new home but is unable to forget her real home in Sweden. Finally Karl reminds her that their children will be grateful to have been brought to America. Kristina contents herself with this thought:

The ones she had borne into the world, and the ones they in turn would bear, would from the beginning of their lives say what her own tongue was unable to say: At home here in America—back there in Sweden. With this thought, listening to her children's breathing, Kristina went to sleep.⁶³

I was drawn to Kristina's anguish and the carefully described difficulties she and her family faced during that long first winter in Minnesota. The writing seemed more emotionally true to me than Judith Raveling's experiences in *Scarlet Plume* and has a greater impact on me than any of the novels I read, due to Moberg's superb narrative skill.

The parallels between the fictional accounts and the documentary evidence of the settlers demonstrate that historical novelists writing about nineteenth-century Minnesota generally have created books with historical validity; their sense of time and place is accurate. Most novelists generally do careful research in order to "get things right." They may intentionally change facts and details, but they accurately reflect the historical era. This study illuminates the differences

between history and fiction—that fiction is more experientially immediate because of the tools of the novelist. In most of the novels I read, I responded in a more visceral, emotional way than when I read the diaries and letters because of the novelist's craft. The diarists and letter writers did not (probably) have a greater, future audience in mind when they set their words to paper. They were reflecting on their lives, chronicling everyday details of living in a new land, and trying to connect with family. But the novelists bring the reader into pioneer Minnesota and help us feel part of that world.

This study also demonstrates the evolving nature of the writing of history and fiction. Historical fiction was a popular form during the period when my novels were written—roughly the century between 1860 and 1960. This was a modernist world that allowed for the historical novelist's simple depiction of historical times and places. Now, in the postmodern twenty-first century, the genre of historical fiction may be evolving just as the writing of history is evolving. The boundaries between history and fiction are blurring as historians rediscover narrative as a useful form for telling history. All historical events are open to different interpretations, whether the work is written by an historian or novelist.

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NOTES

¹Vilhelm Moberg, *Unto a Good Land* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1995), 315-16.
²Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 13.

³Lukács, 31.

⁴Lukács, 42.

⁵Lukács, 56.

⁶Lukács, 64.

⁷George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 12.

⁸Lukács, 25.

⁹Dekker, 14.

¹⁰Ernest E. Leisy, *The American Historical Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 5.

¹¹Dale H. Porter, "The Gold in Fort Knox: Historical Fiction in the Context of Historiography," *Soundings*, 76 (1993), 330.

¹²Porter, 333.

¹³I recognize that diarists and letter writers may not always tell everything that occurred in their lives, that they may embellish accounts for various reasons and may not truly represent their feelings, but these documents are our best sources for knowing about daily life.

¹⁴*Minnesota Farmers' Diaries: William R. Brown, 1845-46; Mitchell Y. Jackson, 1852-63* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1939).

- ¹⁵Benson, Ramsey. *Hill Country; The Story of J.J. Hill and the Awakening West* (n.p.: Grosset & Dunlap, 1928), 49.
- ¹⁶Francis M. Dyer diary, 14-15 October 1867, Minnesota Historical Society, Minneapolis.
- ¹⁷Roy L. Chaffee, *The Quitclaim: Pioneers on the Minnesota Prairie* (n.p.: Lone Oak Press, 2000), 32-33.
- ¹⁸Chaffee, 48.
- ¹⁹Harriet Godfrey diaries, 31 May 1866, Minnesota Historical Society, Minneapolis.
- ²⁰The United States was in the midst of a prolonged economic depression that began in 1857.
- ²¹Harriet Griswold letters, 29 April 1858, Minnesota Historical Society, Minneapolis.
- ²²Griswold, January 1858?
- ²³Griswold, 30 March 1858?
- ²⁴Cornelia James Cannon, *Red Rust* (Boston: Little Brown, 1928), 26.
- ²⁵Cannon, 120.
- ²⁶*Minnesota Farmers*, 24 Feb. 1856.
- ²⁷Maud Hart Lovelace, *One Stayed at Welcome* (New York: Day, 1934), 204.
- ²⁸*Minnesota Farmers* 15.
- ²⁹Historian William Lass describes how in 1877 Governor Pillsbury proclaimed a day of fasting and prayers to lift the grasshopper plague. *Minnesota: A History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1998), 166.
- ³⁰Cannon, 230.
- ³¹Cannon, 230-231.
- ³²Bost, 24 May 1857.
- ³³Bost, 13 July 1871.
- ³⁴Bost, 25 Oct. 1868.
- ³⁵Lovelace, 121.
- ³⁶Edward Havill, *Big Ember* (New York: Harper, 1947), 56.
- ³⁷Havill, 56-57.
- ³⁸Bost, 78.
- ³⁹Havill, 59.
- ⁴⁰I presume she means they took the trolley car to Lake Calhoun, now located in Minneapolis.
- ⁴¹Lovelace, 183.
- ⁴²Lovelace, 211.
- ⁴³Lovelace, 88.
- ⁴⁴Bost, 23 Oct. 1869.
- ⁴⁵*Minnesota Farmers*, 120.
- ⁴⁶Chaffee, 22.
- ⁴⁷Duane Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come: The Great Sioux Uprising of 1862* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), 28.
- ⁴⁸Brown, 26 April 1858.
- ⁴⁹Bost, 26 May 1855. He is living in St. Paul at the time this letter was written.
- ⁵⁰Rev. George Huntington, *Nakoma: A Story of Frontier Life* (Chicago: Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing Society, 1892), 5.
- ⁵¹Helen C. Weeks, *White and Red: A Narrative of Life Among the Northwest Indians* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1869), 75.
- ⁵²Havill, 3.
- ⁵³Although Little Crow didn't die during the uprising in actuality, he was killed by a settler a year later.
- ⁵⁴Manfred however didn't call his work historical fiction. He said he doesn't let facts get in his way when he's writing. "If I feel like it, I'll rearrange the facts to make the book more truthful" (Daley, 2). He also stands firmly on the side of fiction as the superior historical narrative: "it's my theory that if you want to know something about a time and place you

- don't go to historians particularly, necessarily, and you don't have to go to the law courts for the cases they have there, and to the newspapers, for the truth. If you really want to soak yourself up and find out what happened in a given time, go to the novelist" (Conversations 105, 107).
- ⁵⁵Frederick Manfred, *Scarlet Plume* (New York: Trident, 1964), n.p.
- ⁵⁶Manfred, 316-7.
- ⁵⁷Schultz, 114, 163.
- ⁵⁸Carlin, Romano, "Accuracy: A Novel Notion in Historical Novels?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 13 April 2001, B13.
- ⁵⁹The fact that they didn't speak English could account for some of this as well as the fact that they settle in a remote area between Stillwater and Taylor's Falls along the St. Croix River.
- ⁶⁰Moberg, 213.
- ⁶¹Moberg, 342, 343.
- ⁶²Moberg, 371.
- ⁶³Moberg, 370.

THE ALIENATED SOULS OF JOSEPHINE W. JOHNSON

MARK GRAVES

In all her fiction, Pulitzer Prize winner Josephine Johnson could be best considered a novelist of character and mood rather than plot, action, or manners. In the novels and series of short stories that solidified her position as an important Midwestern voice, Johnson continually returned to the plight of the disenfranchised and marginalized, individuals often oppressed by race, social class, and political philosophy, but more likely by temperament or sensibility. In particular, it is in her depiction of the orphaned, the abandoned, and the forgotten where Johnson best explores the alienation of the individual from the human community. Extending beyond the human subject, in her later nonfiction, Johnson even argues against the increased marginalization of the dwindling wilderness itself, a trend she saw as aligned with the destructiveness of the Vietnam War. In three of her novels published over a thirty-year period—*Now in November* (1934), *Wildwood* (1945) and *The Dark Traveler* (1963)—she best explores the social and emotional forces she saw as resulting in the increased alienation of the oppressed, the artistic, and the impressionable, including herself. Reviewers considered her works pessimistic or moody at the time of their publication, but the passage of time has revealed them to be something more, a significant examination of human frailty at its core.

Under the mildest scrutiny, Johnson's work is starkly realistic if not altogether pessimistic, falling into the vein of American writing now identified as Naturalism, if it is classifiable at all. In musical terms, Johnson seems to hit the same dark chord until it pounds in the head of the readers. But in her defense, when she began developing some notoriety on the national stage for her serious writing, her works had good reason to be imbued with hardship and struggle. The Great Depression had engulfed the nation, and the geographic region that inspired so much of Johnson's writing, the Midwest, had been particularly hard hit.

While Johnson's own family weathered the crisis better than most, the suffering of so many had a tremendous impact on the young writer beginning to establish an artistic identity at the age of nineteen when the stock market crashed. Johnson's fiction that appeared in the 1930s—her Pulitzer Prize-winning first novel, *Now in November* (1934), her collection of short stories, *Winter Orchard and Other Stories* (1935), and a proletarian novel, *Jordanstown* (1937)—are rife with the tales of economic desperation, social injustice, racial bigotry, and political oppression. As records of a particular era in America's history and literary development, they serve as important guidebooks to coping with psychological hardship in the face of little hope.

Johnson's best fictional work functions therapeutically because it enables us to discover the world beneath the trying surface of our own. Most of her characters suffer in one degree or another from some sort of maladjustment, but what distinguishes her characters from one another is how they react to their malady. Some retreat, some do something desperate, and some allow acts to be done to them, for rarely does Johnson enable them to respond assertively. In this lack of options, Johnson expresses the sense of alienation and restriction she sees often as manifest in human experience itself. Sometimes, she literally represents this disorientation on the page as stream-of-consciousness narration in a mixture of typesets, as in "The County Fair" in the *Winter Orchard* collection, in which a young girl's desperate search for a boy she has a crush on leads to bitter disappointment when her parents whisk her away, or "Off the Luke Road," in which a young black man in southern Missouri encounters the body of a local white farmer in a ditch, his throat cut. Given attitudes toward race at this time and place, the man knows he will be scape-goated for the crime. With every shallow breath he draws, Johnson forces readers to experience his panic and desperation as his mind races for an answer to his dilemma: Should he report the crime and bring closure to the farmer's wife who has always treated him kindly, or should he ignore the body in the ditch in hopes that no one saw him come upon it?

As these examples suggest, Johnson's short stories offer glimpses of a world many of her characters see as alien, but her novel *Now in November* provides a more complete exploration of the alienated, disenfranchised, and marginalized. The story of a family returning to the family farm in Missouri during the Depression won first-time novelist Johnson the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1935. Critical reviewers

of the first-time effort offered mixed praise for the novel itself, but they agreed Johnson herself was a chronicler of unique vision and rare perception.¹ Indeed, part of what enables Johnson to help readers enter the world of the Haldmarne farm is first-person narrator Marget Haldmarne who paints the world with clarity, helping readers to understand the family's ten-year struggle beneath the surface. What emerges, then, is a world-weary voice, but not a vanquished one, best epitomized by the conclusion of the novel, where Marget admits:

Love and old faith are gone But there is the need and the desire left, and out of these hills they may come again. I cannot believe this is the end. Nor can I believe that death is more than the blindness of those living. And if this is only the consolation of a heart in its necessity, or that easy faith born of despair, it does not matter, since it gives us courage somehow to face the mornings. Which is as much as the heart can ask at times. (231)

Although Johnson's novel ends on a note of hope in adversity, Marget and her family have not accepted the demons with which they must continually wrestle. She remarks at one point that "[t]o trust so much in anything—even in one's own sight—may be a form of blindness itself; but there is a driving force in blindness. It's the only way to achieve anything . . . to put great blinkers on the mind and see only the road ahead" (93-94). Marget endures, then, despite her alienation and frustration while others fail because she finds in the beauty and freedom of the natural world an adequate (although not ample) compensation for life's struggles. Temperamentally, the forces that cause her the greatest hardships, an attention to detail and nuance and a highly honed emotional sensitivity, also offer her the greatest source of comfort.

Other characters fare differently, such as their father Arnold and oldest sister Kerrin, who Marget envies for an unchangeable savage beauty that should she have possessed it herself would have, in her mind, prevented worry and fear (55-56). One gets the sense that Marget would have been alienated somewhat, no matter what the family circumstances. Economic comfort would have brought more stability to the family and provided a more peaceful emotional life for one of such emotional perceptivity, but Kerrin falls into the category of Johnson characters who are alienated and marginalized *because* they were born into the wrong time and place with no hope for escape. Based almost certainly upon Johnson's older sister, Mary Elizabeth, whose contentious relationship with their own father disrupted the

peace of her own childhood, resulted in "Mary Lib's" flight from home with a trail of broken marriages and young children in her wake, and culminated in the older Johnson sister's premature death, Johnson reenacted this relationship in the struggle between oldest daughter Kerrin and Arnold Haldmarne, a father already brought to the edge of an emotional precipice by years of economic and personal failure. Desperate to be the son Arnold never had—in fact, Marget remarks on how alike her father and sister are—Kerrin strives for his approval, plowing fields like a grown man in the summer despite his contempt for a woman working in the fields and contributing to the resources of the family by teaching school in the winter. The pitfalls for Kerrin of relying on her father for any relief from her own alienation are best recognized in what should have been a welcome break for the family from the monotony of failed growing season after growing season. During one April when the sisters plan to celebrate their father's birthday to infuse optimism into the new growing season, Kerrin purchases a pocketknife as a gift to contribute to the festivities. Already compelled to defend the source of the money to purchase the knife against charges she might have stolen it, Kerrin's display of the knife's quality by attempts to embed its blade in the wall end in disaster: her father deflects her throw, bringing the blade across the family dog's snout and resulting in its death from blood loss.

Unaware that their father's rage stems more from personal frustration and personal failure than disappointments within his own family, the despair around her exacerbates Kerrin's innate sense of restlessness and anxiety. Marget writes of her father, "I think sometimes that he would have been a milder and more patient man had there been some sons instead of nothing but girls' talk all the time and women-voices. Life's lonely enough and isolated enough without the thick wall of kind to make it go even darker" (36). While the circumstances of their existence living on a farm during the Depression wear on all members of the family—the mother eventually dies from burns sustained in a prairie fire, Marget and sister Merle live on an awareness of "the masterpiece of a maggot" or "the shadow of a leaf" (36), and their father subsists on sheer stubbornness alone—when it begins, Kerrin's fragile threads of sanity unravel quickly. The arrival of farmhand Grant Koven, the only adult male of their own age the sisters have ever known, would appear to offer Kerrin the possibility of romantic escape, but his affections turn toward the more steadfast and sunnier disposition of younger daughter Merle. Kerrin herself

realizes that “his clear seeing of things . . . would not always excuse the restless and clever cruelty in her that attracted him sometimes” (94-95). The start of the school year usually means a release of sorts for Kerrin and the rest of the family from the weight of her distress and dis-ease, but instead, it precipitates knowledge of Kerrin’s decreasing mental state, eventually leeching outside the family circle when a visit by Marget to notify a pupil of his uncle’s death reveals Kerrin slumped over her desk at the head of the classroom barking out answers to the paralyzed pupils before her. Kerrin’s accusations about her sister’s involvement in her certain dismissal are swift, harsh, and paranoid, and they reveal clear indications of Kerrin’s sense of displacement and an indictment of Marget’s coping strategies: “What’ve you ever done that’s hard? What’ve you ever known but your everlasting baking and books?” Knowing “. . . that we’d have to take all blame in the end . . .,” Marget speaks for the family when she explains “the way things were.” True to her prophecy, the school board president “. . . got angry in a quick and blind way, having all of men’s instinctive dread and revolt against the strange He treated [Marget] as if [she] too were tainted” (183). Despite the humiliation, to Marget, however, Kerrin’s dismissal meant day after day of coping with her sister’s suppressed rage ready to erupt and her father’s bitterness at the loss of Kerrin’s salary.

The final link between Kerrin and what passes for sanity in the maelstrom of their Depression-era Missouri farm is severed in an exchange with Grant after both largely succeed in saving the Haldmarne farm from a raging prairie fire. Symbolic of Kerrin’s struggle with romantic feelings for Grant tied up in knots, Grant and Kerrin become pressed close together as he attempts to wrestle a knife from her hands before she can hurt herself or ruin a perfectly good knotted rope by cutting it. In the struggle, he thrusts her away, symbolic of his repudiation of her affections, and Arnold intervenes to investigate. In an act that encompasses years and years of pent-up rage, Kerrin hurls the knife in her father’s direction and Arnold lunges toward her but is thrown back by Grant. Prompted by Grant’s caution to get away immediately, Kerrin scoops up the knife, running away “not because she was afraid of Father, being beyond fear, and . . . swallowed up by hate—but because of the sound—the cold, fierce ring of Grant’s voice” (198). The family finds her later behind the sheep barn lying up against the wall with her arm trailing in a water trough, “. . . the blood from her wrist staining the water” (200).

What started, then, as an act of revenge or rage against the people and circumstances she found herself in, eventually becomes an act of mercy for Kerrin. “Kerrin was sick,” Marget explained to the coroner, “—sick in her head. She’d been that way a long time. It was the fire and Mother’s being burned and her thinking that Mother was going to die that made her do it” (202). While that explanation would seem to assuage some of the guilt of the family and offer some face-saving in the community, Johnson makes it clear that Kerrin’s death means something more. In an admission uncharacteristic of a sister in mourning, Marget acknowledges:

I was glad this had happened when it did, and I knew after all that her death was the one good thing God did. There was no place for her. If we had had money, we might have sent her away. She never belonged with us, and maybe there is no place on earth for people like her. (199-200)

For some, then, born into circumstances with no chance for change, growth, or release, drastic alternatives are the only options.

Kerrin Haldmarne quickly acts once the demons of her own alienation take hold. Her sister Marget, however, languishes, with the largeness of nature serving as a buffer against their poverty and hopelessness. With the stigma of economic insecurity removed, Edith Pierre in Johnson’s 1945 novel *Wildwood* seems no better adjusted to life’s emotional hardships than characters saddled with external challenges such as poverty. As an orphan sent to live in the care of her mother’s childless cousin and her ornithologist husband, Edith finds little spiritual comfort in the care of two individuals accustomed to nursing their own alienation in the privacy of the walled residence and garden which lends its name to the novel’s title. As a character, Edith becomes another in a long line of childless waifs in Western literature and popular culture, from *Oliver Twist* to *Jane Eyre* to *Little Orphan Annie*, characters who persevere as a result of personal will, if they possess it, or who are defeated emotionally if they don’t.

Although we know little of the first twelve years of her life spent partly nursing an ailing mother through the last months of a debilitating illness, her family status does provide some explanation for Edith’s tentativeness and alienation throughout the novel. Matthew and Valerie Pierre are well into their fifties by the time Matthew picks up a shivering twelve-year-old who spent five hours on a train in an ice storm with the “perverse poison” of “unbearable gratitude” at finding a home making her physically ill (6). The February ice storm fore-

shadows the chilly reception and emotional home life she will endure as the child of a fragile beauty wasting away and a misanthropic intellectual. Although both Valerie and Matthew are ill equipped to undertake parental responsibilities, their offer of a home to Edith is genuine. Each found other compensations for the unexpected turns their lives have taken, impressionable Valerie who mourns the loss of sparrows frozen at their birdfeeders but surrenders to an uncertain belief in God's will, and Matthew, whose sense of propriety and decency, coupled with "... an emptiness which the thin pale honey of Valerie merely irritated..." made fostering Edith "... inevitable and sane" (9). With their hopes invested in a child they have assumed to be an unformed, "small... gold and pretty... tiny goldfinch" in whose love they could find what they did not discover in one another, their first response to her is anything but welcoming (9-10). Johnson writes,

From the library had come Valerie's pale penetrating voice: "—And I did not realize she would be this old. She is much older than we thought!"

"Yes," Matthew said. His voice was empty and far-off. "She is much older than we thought." (16)

Unlike the sparrows, blue jays, and finches he observes frolicking in the walled garden at Wildwood, Edith spends nine years with the Pierres in a metaphorical gilded cage. Their financial position offers Edith the best education the local Valley Springs private school can provide and opportunities to associate with people her own age, but the household is far from welcoming of youth and vitality. "Alone she was happy living in [the] chimerical limitless world [of the garden], content—sometimes ecstatic—with its ever-changing, hourly, seasonal beauty," Johnson writes of Edith's response to her surroundings. "But entering the house from the spring twilight required such an act of courage, such nerve-racking adjustment..." (18). Desperate "to attach herself quickly to some large and normal group" at school, she instead becomes the heroine of the feeble-minded girls and the object of concern among teachers who speak privately and furtively of her lack of development. What might have helped her develop more normally and become less estranged from her more vital classmates is denied her, as Matthew and Valerie both anticipate the complications surrounding her involvement in extracurricular activities. "Once you start, there would be no ending," Matthew asserts (23). Similarly, Valerie imagines nights of dis-

rupted evening meals and awkward social situations she cannot negotiate. Even an offer of a simple after-school visit to Wildwood from the most innocuous of her classmates, a plump, awkward nearsighted younger classmate with a better-than-average mind, causes Edith to experience a terror that would surely result in the loss of what few friendships she enjoys and gossip among her classmates.

Throughout much of her growing up, then, Edith "... lived minutely from agony to agony, having neither the wisdom nor experience to measure its proportion" (27-28). Aware that Edith must be experiencing some of the same despair he has endured married to Valerie, Matthew offers Edith a trip to Montreal, providing Edith a respite from self-consciousness and alienation, as she reads about and imagines not only a visit to a foreign country, but also indulgence in a foreign state of mind, lightheartedness and potential for the future, possibly with an accidental meeting with a "Young Man of all virtues" (33). Matthew himself enjoys watching Edith's anticipation, which his wife believes only sets her up for disappointment, as she experienced in her own long-ago childhood. Edith reads Valerie's disapproval as resulting from a certain belief in "something else," or something otherworldly, and when Valerie's illness forces the trip to be canceled, Edith cannot help but see Valerie's entire reaction as "... the same wild, lost feeling of rejection, the door softly and inexorably closed in the face.... But this time the sense of another door now slowly closing: You are not wanted here, you shall not leave here either..." (37-38). Matthew's reaction is equally as troubling:

The trip had been a gesture, the gesture remained. The image of himself—conceived by himself—as father and patron was not crumbled. He thought dutifully for a moment or two that Edith must be confused and suffering; but the world, he believed was a confused and suffering place.... And one might as well begin early to know this and find the peace within. (39)

With little perspective to fall back on, Edith can only conclude that she is somehow to blame for the disappointments she is experiencing. She concludes "... [T]he soul that sinneth, it shall surely die; and in her own life was the failure, the sin hers..." (41).

Clearly, Edith, as a young woman of unique and delicate nature, exhibits remarkable strength as she has adult responsibilities thrust upon her early. Positive relationships with young men, a source of validation that could make up for what her parenting omitted, elude her. Valerie's one concession to Edith's growth into a young woman, a

dancing party, produces more anguish because she has never been permitted to stay after school to learn to dance. Leading up to the event, Edith finds herself on her knees, serious in her request from God to allow her to dance and enjoy the one opportunity for social approval her parents have accorded her. The attention of a son of Matthew's friend causes Edith to wish for escape, and the resulting embarrassment of the occasion results in a mysterious illness Edith suffers from for many months afterward. When his pursuits result in a chaste kiss and embrace, Edith is certain her behavior has been a betrayal of Matthew and Valerie, no matter how much she longs to have both repeated. After his interest in her wanes, she is certain he never enjoyed her company; instead, he only sought the gratitude of her guardians.

Her next opportunity for close emotional contact and male intimacy occurs in the context of Valerie's last lingering illness that brings Dr. Michael Young to Wildwood. Months of almost daily contact with the young doctor considered a radical by many result in a bond forming between the two based upon mutual loneliness and concern for the less fortunate in the community. Although married, Michael's relationship with his wife has become strained, made worse by his growing commitment to peace at any cost in the European war and her diminished hopes for his financial advancement in the small community. To Edith, "Michael Young was not a man of Matthew Pierre's world, but a young man of her own" (96). Although certain of her love for a married man and hopeful of his attachment to her, still, Edith "could not face the terrifying facts of her own life, and come to some conclusion" (130).

Valerie's death and Michael's divorce provide no resolution to her romantic dilemma, nor do they ease the loneliness and alienation she has experienced within the four walls of Wildwood. If anything, perhaps these events guarantee her efforts to connect with others will fail, for Edith's destiny, Johnson points out, is inextricably linked with the Pierre residence. Matthew's almost immediate deification of Valerie, his "weav[ing] [her] lily crown from straw," and his admonition to Edith, "I hope you will be like her," could not have placed more of a burden on his twenty-one-year-old ward. "If he had put a knife on her throat," Johnson writes, "she might have felt less fear" (139). Even Michael, who admits he loves her even though he feels no responsibility toward her, has noticed "that away from Wildwood she was like something curiously misplaced—a bit of lichen, a rock with quartz, that one picks up in a forest walk and leaves on the desk,

separated from its leaves, its earth—an odd and alien thing" (143). When he offers her a position working at a children's home where her help is desperately needed, words she thirstily drinks in after years of isolation and loneliness, the insidious influences of Wildwood rear their ugly head. Matthew forces her to choose between Michael's offer, a man who has offered her nothing tangible by way of commitment for the future, or her obligations to him. Even when Matthew dies and she is left completely free to live life as she chooses, she is numb.

Without question, Johnson's vision for someone like Edith Pierre is certainly not positive, although she seems unable to assign blame or responsibility for the suffering her characters must endure. In reference to her guardians, Johnson writes:

The Pierres were not harsh. The word applied to them was absurd, meaningless as a stone thrown at the moon, and as beside the mark. All that they did was good, judged by the strait and pallid standards of their lives, the amorphous mistlike quality of goodness stoppered inside the bottles. (43)

If their efforts were deliberately intended to alienate her from the human community, they could not have been more successful. For by the end of the novel, Edith waits for a moment of resurrection in the arms of Michael that never comes. He seeks solace for his own alienation in humanitarian work elsewhere. "To love her is to exchange one madness for another," he concludes. On the eve of his departure, he entreats her, "Be good to yourself. Take care of yourself!"—As I can never take care of you" (158). She remains, then, trying to coax a familiar neighborhood girl into a house the child had been curious to see inside. The girl refuses, however, for "Miss Edith" has become, even at her young age, a neighborhood eccentricity, worthy of fear rather than acquaintanceship.

At one point in *Wildwood*, Johnson writes, "Most of the world's pain is unplanned, unintentional, conceived in ignorance and born in lethargy. To thrive like a weed" (43). For Paul Moore, though, the protagonist in Johnson's 1963 novel, *The Dark Traveler*, the damage inflicted by his father Angus has penetrated his psyche as deeply as weeds in a crag. Partially victimized by his brother's bitterness and cruelty himself, Douglass, Paul's clergyman uncle, brings his troubled twenty-eight-year-old nephew to live with his own family rather than ship him off to an institution where he would surely die. In the process of bringing Paul into their household, the family learns important lessons about their own priorities and their own futures.

Undoubtedly, Paul is more sensitive than the typical human being. In characteristic Johnson fashion, his sensitivity manifests itself in a highly honed emotional perceptivity. Even to his most sympathetic observers, his Aunt Lisa and Uncle Douglass, Paul

had been an odd, quick child, shy, even then, but gave no signs of the dark retreat that began in the years after Douglass and Lisa had moved away. He had been a brilliant student and even Angus used to believe that [he] was going to be somebody some day and make them all famous. But there was an oddness about him, an inability to stand up for himself, that baffled and angered [his father] When people came to the house he went off into the woods or up to his room. (17-18)

As with other Johnson characters, these highly developed emotional powers prove to be a double-edged sword for Paul. They at once enable him to carve out a private emotional life in the ramshackle family hotel in which he was brought up, but they also make him vulnerable to his father's negative energies.

Families in Johnson's novels are often the source of long-term self-doubt and indecision for their members. Indeed, Paul's life had been spent in the shadow of an older brother whose unwavering masculine capability made his father proud. But after Lieutenant Andrew Moore dies in the war, rather than bringing Angus closer to his wife and remaining child, his oldest son's demise forces a wedge between them. Angus asks his brother Douglass at one point, "Why does God do stuff like this? Why does he kill the beautiful boy and leave me Paul? You're a religious man. You answer me that!" (24). Any attempts Paul has made in his life to please his father, then, either go unnoticed or become additional ammunition the embittered Angus can use against his already emotionally damaged child. Paul's mother can offer him little protection either, for she, too, has been crushed under her husband's domineering presence. Johnson writes:

Virginia was completely cowed by Angus, behaving toward him as though he held some secret and final power over her [She] seemed to move through the final years as though she were the one who had something to hide, some secret and almost forgotten crime, the judgment for which must follow her down to the final day. (19)

Her death, after years of wasting away, leaves Paul to his father's mercy entirely.

Although Johnson also often experiences doubts about family, by the end of the novel, the security and warmth of his aunt and uncle's

house enable Paul to trust for the first time in his life. Paul adopts nature photography as a means of expression and a potential way to prove his worthiness to his father, at least monetarily. In his journal, Paul writes, "*I believe I know how to make some money myself. I think I can really carry it out for anybody and nobody will yell at me*" (142). His photographs also offer outlets for connecting with the family members so integral to his recovery, principally his cousin Norah. And most important, Paul's zest for something outside of himself provides a clear indication that he is beginning to heal, although his passion manifests itself in a characteristic extreme zeal that often frightens people.

In Johnson's work, rather than obscuring vision, crises often bring great clarity, and the same occurs for the Moore family as a surprise visit from Paul's father coincides with the development of Paul's first roll of film. When his first photographs earmarked for a book to be presented to his aunt and uncle turn out blurred, he experiences anew a loss of confidence that almost makes him give up on living altogether. A particularly distorted photo of cousin Norah, the particular object of his admirations, causes Paul to question the hopes he has placed in photography to combat his father's disappointment in him. Johnson describes his reactions:

She looked homely and a little insane and not like Norah at all For a moment to his sick mind it seemed that *this* was the real Norah that was revealed to him, and the beloved and beautiful cousin was the masquerade. For a moment he was shaken by agonizing pain suspicion, by dreadful thoughts of her disloyalty and the possibility of blaming all this waste and botchery on some plot and trick of this sly creature. (172)

His panicked reaction results in a physical blow from his father, who strikes him as punishment for his hysterics and disrespect. Out of the act of violence, however, comes startling realizations for each family member: Lisa recognizes her wariness of Paul's presence in her family has turned to genuine love and a sense of belonging, Norah sees her fiancé's consistent indifference and rapidly escalating brutality to Paul as a sign of a greater malady she will not accept in a husband, and Douglass undergoes a renewed and overpowering belief in his faith. "Give us time, [Douglass] prayed—give us courage—give us patience," Johnson offers. "He did not pray . . . give us also the *meaning* of these gifts, because he knew beyond all doubting that he loved life and was bound by some exalted and frequently terrifying covenant" (190).

In characteristic fashion, Johnson ends the novel on a note of hope in adversity, a philosophy she adopted almost thirty years before in her Pulitzer-winning novel *Now in November*. In the decades from the publication of her first novel to the publication of her last one, *The Dark Traveler*, she produced novels and short stories of remarkable vision and insight into the psyche, works that often examined the struggles of a perceptive mind awash in the chaos of the twentieth century. Despite a childhood spent in a family whose members, like those of her characters, did not seem to understand her, she found peace in a happy marriage that she described as the beginning of her life, and she bore three children in whose growing up she delighted. Perhaps, then, the secret and value of Johnson's somber exploration of heartache, loneliness, and resignation may be best summed up by one reviewer of *Wildwood*, who wrote that while the story of Edith Pierre may be an extreme tale of a neurotic child who suffers from misguided parents, it is really more universal:

the story of every outsider who yearns to be one of the elect, of every girl who feels herself surrounded by intangible walls, tries with puny wiles to break through them, and then, after every failure, guiltily condemns herself to acceptance of defeat as her just deserts. (Frank 8)

Although in our advanced world, readers may refuse to accept that our lives may not be in our control and that limiting ways of thinking are often not surmountable, Johnson reminds us without guilt that life can exist quite satisfactorily at the margins. Alienation need not mean annihilation, and adversity may be the source of other valuable compensations.

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NOTE

¹Edith Walton, writing in *The New York Times* considered the novel "[f]irmly wrought, poetic in the best sense . . . [and] complete and self sustaining . . ." (6). Similarly, Jon Cheever writing in *The New Republic* went so far as to call it "surely the most composed book that has ever come out of Missouri" (191).

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MAGIC IN AN AIRSTREAM TRAILER: NARRATIVE VOICE IN *PEACE LIKE A RIVER*

JILL BARNUM

Even before *Peace like a River* hit bookstores in a printing of 125,000 around Labor Day 2001, this first novel by forty-one-year-old Leif Enger was lauded as a classic akin to Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* and Cormac McCarthy's *Cities of the Plain*. With allusions to *Huck Finn*, *Moby-Dick*, *The Odyssey*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Zane Grey, and Robert Louis Stevenson (one of Enger's literary heroes), the book is a thorough celebration of family, faith, and America's pioneering spirit. It is mythical tale that sneaks up like a whisper and warms like a quilt in a Midwestern winter.

A born-and-bred Minnesotan who formerly worked as a reporter for Minnesota Public Radio, Leif Enger has crafted an engrossing story about the Land family's cross-country quest in an Airstream trailer, searching for their sixteen-year-old fugitive son Davy, who is eluding legal justice. Told by Davy's brother Reuben, an asthmatic eleven-year-old, the book is rich with the feel and flavor of the plains, a family odyssey of endurance, reclamation, love, and faith. Reuben, precariously ill at birth, is living proof that the world is full of miracles; and he has the sneaking hunch that his pious father can overturn the laws of nature. The impassioned honesty of Reuben's quiet, measured narrative voice gives weight and truth to the fantastic elements of this engrossing tale. Set in the Minnesota countryside of 1962, the poetic work was declared by *Publishers' Weekly* the biggest "buzz book" in years at the American Book Expo. For sale in eleven countries, *Peace like a River* was named a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and was chosen for the *Talking Volumes* book series sponsored by Minnesota Public Radio, the Loft Literary Center, and the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*. Amazon.com designated the book its No. 1 pick for 2001, and it has been optioned by Hollywood.

Despite such promise, it was inevitable that the events of September 11, 2001, would compromise the book's reputation. The

Sunday before that calamitous Tuesday, *Peace like a River* had hit No. 16 on the *New York Times*' bestseller list (which reports only the top 15 in its Book Review; you have to go online to find the next 15), but failed to achieve the momentum that would have really launched it. Suddenly, if people were going to bookstores at all in the wake of international devastation, they were snapping up books about Islam, terrorism, and biological warfare. Media coverage was disappointing; curtailed flight schedules and heightened security jeopardized plans for Enger's book tour. Enger, however, envisioned his own cross-country family odyssey. Renting a Ford Explorer for a 31-day 10,000-mile road trip, the Engers left their Aikin, Minnesota, farmstead on a highway adventure resembling that of his novel's characters. The Engers bought a video camera, and their home-schooled sons (aged 10 and 14) became movie directors, taping footage of seals on the Oregon coast, dolphins in Santa Cruz. Enger's wife read aloud from Jim Heyen's new collection of stories about Minnesota farmboys. Like Heyen's tales, Enger's novel is intentionally rooted in the Minnesota landscape, a landscape that the nonMidwestern fans whom Enger encountered on the tour were quick to appropriate. "In Canada, people said [the novel] had a Canadian feel to it," Enger recalls. "In Mississippi, somebody said, 'This has a real Southern sensibility.' In Colorado, they said, 'This is a western'" (Habich 1E).

In the words of Jim Harrison:

Once you begin Leif Enger's *Peace like a River*, you are carried away by the elemental surge of its story, the sheer eagerness to see what happens to the engrossing characters who exist far from the intrusions of the media in the timeless arena of family love and anguish over a lost member.

Frank McCourt is equally endorsing:

I'm urging this book on you because it is written in prose tart and crisp as a Minnesota autumn . . . seductive and chatty and deliciously American and there are passages so wondrous and wise you'll want to claw yourself with pleasure. (Habich 10E)

Inevitably, Enger's authorial voice was compared to that of Garrison Keillor: both men are veterans of Minnesota Public Radio; both use quiet, observant voices that capture the beauty of simple things; both create thoughtful and pious characters who are wiser than they know.

That the story is set in the 1960s in rural Minnesota gives it an archetypal feel, evoking a time when the possibility of getting lost in

the country still existed. Enger's world is a world of signs, where dead crows fall in a snowstorm and vagrants lie curled up in fields, where everything is significant, everything has weight, and comprehension is usually fleeting.

Miracles and biblical allusions crowd the novel's pages. One curious scene features a pot of soup that replenishes itself in loaves-and-fishes fashion when a traveling salesman arrives at suppertime. In another, Reuben Land witnesses his father Jeremiah in prayer, walking off the back end of a flatbed truck on sheer air; in another Jeremiah is whisked unharmed in the eye of a tornado four miles away from home. The family is bequeathed an Airstream trailer on Christmas Day when they are down to their last dime, a miraculous gift from an unlikely source, a traveling salesman grateful for their hospitality. Jeremiah is providentially fired from his high school janitorial job, a setback that frees the family to travel in search of their lost son. At the moment he is sacked, Jeremiah reaches a hand to the face of his boss, the despicable superintendent, whose rough, red, pockmarked skin is made suddenly smooth by this touch. The Airstream passes through swarms of state troopers on the lookout for the family at Mandan, North Dakota, gas stations "like Moses . . . going through the Red Sea" (167). Reuben is at first troubled when he realizes the point at which the miracles stop happening: when they stop for gas, food, and lodging at Rosanna Crawley's establishment in Grassy Butte, Montana, they stay a while. Rosanna is a miracle in her own right, a tender-tough ranch woman who slips easy as sunlight into the hearts and lives of wifeless Jeremiah, motherless Reuben, and Reuben's younger sister Swede.

The story turns on two town bullies from the wrong side of the tracks with a grudge against Jeremiah, who had caught them in the girls' locker room after hours. When they briefly kidnap nine-year-old Swede and tar the Lands' front door, Davy vows revenge and hassles them with his Winchester. They sneak into the upstairs of the Land house one night with baseball bats and Davy shoots them dead. Reuben voices this eulogy:

And now, because a story is told for all, an admonition to the mind-sick:

Be careful whom you choose to hate.

The small and the vulnerable own a protection great enough, if you could but see it, to melt you into jelly.

Beware those who reside beneath the shadow of the Wings. (36)

Davy is convicted of the double murder but breaks jail the very night Swede and Reuben had plotted to free him; instead, they have fallen asleep clutching stolen butcher knives. Davy lights out for the West with no word to his family for months. In their Airstream trailer, Reuben, Jeremiah, and Swede trail Davy across the Badlands in a January odyssey that feels like a ballad. Enger alludes to the Old West, chiefly through the rhymed outlaw-romances Swede is writing about a hero called Sunny Sundown and a bandit king named Valdez. The FBI is trailing Davy as well, and the dramatic denouement ends with Jeremiah shot dead, Reuben shot but surviving, and Davy lighting out for a Canadian prairie town in a stolen car.

All the illusions, the miraculous surprises, and the shocking violence are told in language as precise and accurate as it is playful and serendipitous. Simple simile and personification are a part of Reuben's narration: as Davy is polishing a saddle for Swede's birthday, "the smell of soaped leather, which is like that of good health, rose around us" (39). And, "Once in my life I knew a grief so hard I could actually hear it inside, scraping at the lining of my stomach, an audible ache, dredging with hooks as rivers are dredged when someone's been missing too long" (54).

Reuben's narrative is carried forward by recalled conversations, and the variety and color in the characters are stunning. There's Tim Lurvey, the "purple-faced, futile, tragically sociable traveling [World Book encyclopedia] salesman" (40), who imposes himself at the family dinner table, grabbing napkins for under his chin as he says, "'Better wash your hands, kids. No dirty fingers at this table' . . . without rising to wash his own" (45). As they warm to each other, Swede and Rosanna Crawley, whose great-uncle was a friend of Butch Cassidy, fence with words that describe an ornery billy goat: "'Ruffian,' Swede said. 'Thug. Miscreant.'

'Knave,' Rosanna said.

'Scapegrace,' my sister replied—oh, she was beaming. . . 'Brigand,' she sang out." (179).

Reuben and his sister toss words around, too, though he's no match for her and he knows it: "'Afraid we're being impertinent?'" she asks. "'Presumptuous? Arrogant? Blasphemous?'" This still happens with Swede and me. I'll lack a word, and she'll dump out a bushel of them" (168). And Reuben, whose mother abandoned the family when his father gave up medical studies to become a janitor, is blissed out to be "mothered" by Rosanna during a fever. "'Better,

darling?'" she inquires when she's darkened his room. "I nodded . . . The easy way she'd asked that—*Better, darling?*—I don't know why, but I could hardly answer her" (240). When Rosanna and Jeremiah fall, inevitably, in love, Reuben notices how she begins to use his father's language: "'We have to be steadfast,' she said now. 'We have to have faith, you two, that's all'" (242).

Rosanna's linguistic grace is countered by the calculating calm of Jape Waltzer, the murdering outlaw with whom Davy hides out in Montana for a time. Waltzer, missing two fingers from his left hand that he cut off himself in a silent rage,

was of unimposing height, under six feet. A practical build, big up top, one of those men you realize why it's called a chest—you had the feeling he had all the tools he needed in there and all in working order . . . His hair was dark and tied back in a short bob, and he had a high forehead and two rascallion eyebrows—upswept, pointed, and mobile . . . Those brows of his scared me—they were like flipped goatees. (227)

One night, Reuben warily shares supper with Davy at Waltzer's shack and, oddly egged on by Waltzer, waxes eloquent describing the boiled pork they are eating:

'It's—stiff . . . A little dry . . . dull. Blunt.'

'Yes, yes.' Waltzer liked this. A strange thing occurred: adjectives, generally standoffish around me, began tossing themselves at my feet.

'It's fibrous. Rough. Ropy. . . Dispirited, stagnant. Mortified. Vapid.' I wasn't sure what that last one meant . . . but it had a ring.

'Well said,' Waltzer declared—the only time I recall that compliment being applied to myself. (267)

Peace like a River, in fact, is a tribute to the power of language. Plotting to break Davy out of jail, Swede asks Reuben,

'What would you give, to get Davy home?' . . . 'You still want him to come home if he has to be in jail?'

How's that for a rotten question?

'Come on, Reuben. You can say yes if it's true.'

But I couldn't answer. I feared the outcome of honest speech—that it might reach forward in time and arrange events to come. If I told Swede I wanted Davy back, even at the cost of his freedom, might that not happen? And if I said what I sensed was the noble thing—better not to see him at all than pale and dumb during visiting hours—might that not bring despair on this whole crusade of ours? (152)

Enger's linguistic power *literally* grabs us and won't let us go: Reuben's narration is sprinkled throughout with the second person and with first person plural. We're there with the characters through thick and thin; we don't have a choice. For example, Reuben asks, "[That's t]he last thing you expected, right? Me too" (216); "Call me craven—you weren't there" (233); "What would you have said? Would you have spoken up undaunted?" (234); "[W]e're fearful people, the best of us. We see a newborn moth unwrapping itself and announce, Look, children, a miracle! But let an irreversible wound be knit back to seamlessness? We won't even see it, though we look at it every day" (174). When everyone's closing in on Davy, and Reuben has been conned into bringing the FBI to Davy's hideout at Jape's, the thrust of brotherly betrayal weighs heavily on Reuben:

It seemed necessary just then to touch base with the Lord. Shutting my eyes, I . . . prayed in words for a little while—for Davy, of course. . . and for my own future, which seemed a boarded-up window—and then language went away and I prayed in a soft high-pitched lament any human listener would've termed a whine . . . I began to weep . . . —weeping seems to accompany repentance most times. No wonder. Could you reach deep in yourself to locate that organ containing delusions about your general size in the world—could you lay hold of this and dredge it from your chest and look it over in daylight—well, it's no wonder people would rather not. (285-6)

Enger reserves language at its most philosophical, reverent, and mythical for his penultimate chapter, "Be Jubilant, My Feet," which tells of Reuben meeting his father in the next world. The chapter opens with Reuben's admonishing us, "I waded ashore with measureless relief. Stay with me now" (300) as he is on a bank of a wide river hearing the meadow hum magnetically as he runs among butterflies, curly horn antelope, and fruit trees in "an orchard of immense and archaic beauty" (301): "The pulse of the country worked through my body until I recognized it as music. As language. And the language ran everywhere inside me, like blood; and for feeling, it was as if through time I had been made of earth or mud or other insensate matter" (302). As in the film *Field of Dreams*, a son is suddenly in the presence of his beloved, deceased father:

[H]istory entered me—my own and all the rest of it, more than I could hold, history like heavy rain—so I knew the man coming along was my father, Jeremiah Land . . . beside me, stretching out

his hands. What cabled strength! . . . Dad was laughing—at my arms, which were similarly strong! He sang out, You're as big as me! How had I not noticed? We were like two friends, and I saw he was proud of me, that he knew me better than he'd ever thought to and was not dismayed by the knowledge . . . even as I wondered at his ageless face, so clear and at home . . . *Let's run*, he said . . . Dad held my hand, and I felt . . . music growing in his fingers. (302-4)

Birth, death, and transfiguration are within the book's sacred circle. At birth, the doctor had declared Reuben legally dead for ten minutes before his father, knocking the doctor to the floor, ordered his son, *in the name of the living God*, to breathe. When Reuben enters the land of the dead at the end of the novel, his father sends him back to life with, besides a spiritual blessing and instructions—"Take care of Swede . . . Work for Rosanna . . . Tell Davy" (304)—a restored set of lungs.

Margaret Atwood's poem "Spelling" includes these lines:

A word after a word
after a word is power.
At the point where language falls away
from the hot bones, at the point
where the rock breaks open and darkness
flows out of it like blood, at
the melting point of granite
when the bones know
they are hollow & the word
splits & doubles & speaks
the truth . . . the body
itself becomes a mouth.

Leif Enger's novel harbors deep within its sinews just that empowering sense of the word, one that is truly made flesh and blood.

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GWENDOLYN BROOKS'S DRAMATIC
MONOLOGUES IN *A STREET IN BRONZEVILLE*

JANET RUTH HELLER

A central aspect of Gwendolyn Brooks's poetic talent is her ability to capture a fascinating individual by quickly sketching his or her most essential attributes. Although her characters are usually ordinary black men and women, she makes them unique and unforgettable. Brooks uses the dramatic monologue to convey her empathy for the realistic characters that she creates. I will focus on monologues in *A Street in Bronzeville*, Brooks's first book of poetry, which sketches characters in Chicago's African-American neighborhoods. I will also show how Brooks defines her role as a writer in this sequence of poems.

When she published *A Street in Bronzeville* in 1945, Brooks was twenty-eight years old, had been married to Henry Blakely for six years, and had a five-year-old son, Henry Jr. In 1941, she had taken a creative writing class with Inez Cunningham Star; two years later, she won the Midwestern Writers' Conference poetry award in Chicago, and seven years after that, she won the Pulitzer Prize for *Annie Allen*. In 1968 she was chosen to be Poet Laureate of the State of Illinois.

One might think that a well-educated poet and successful parent like Brooks would feel superior to black Americans who had trouble sustaining lasting relationships and made different life choices. However, Brooks's strong empathy for "the other," whether male or female, enables her to avoid the trap of superciliousness and condescension. Instead, she exercises what the British romantic writers termed "the sympathetic imagination" to explore the many different lives around her in Chicago's South Side.

"Bronzeville," according to Brooks, was a term used by the *Chicago Defender* to refer to the neighborhoods on the South Side running north and south from 29th to 69th Streets and east and west from Cottage Grove to State Street (Melhem 19). The area has tended to be a black ghetto.

Contrasting the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning with those of Gwendolyn Brooks makes clear her commitment to and

empathy for common people. Browning usually focuses his monologues on an upper-class white male (a duke, a bishop) with substantial power in his society. As the poem unfolds, Browning undercuts the pretensions of the speaker and exposes his vices. However, Brooks usually chooses a working-class black persona, and she often focuses on the lives of women. Though we may begin the poems with little respect for the speakers, Brooks uses carefully selected details to develop her characters and create sympathy and respect for the common men or women.

A good example of her empathy is "the mother," which is about a woman who comes to terms with her abortions. This lyric poem begins with a stanza in the second person: "Abortions will not let you forget" (line 1, p. 5). The ambiguity of the "you" draws the reader in: is the "you" the persona, the reader, or all women? The paradox of "getting" children yet not getting them (line 2) also intrigues the reader.

The second and third stanzas shift to first-person pronouns, making the poem more intimate and confessional: "I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children" (line 11). Brooks also shifts her writing style at the beginning of stanza 2. While the poem opens with rhymed couplets, the last two stanzas use a more complex pattern. The rhyme scheme can be diagrammed in this way:

stanza one: aabccdde

stanza two: fghghijjkkllmmnnoonpp

stanza three: qrr

The poem concludes with another paradox. Even though the persona decided to abort her fetuses, she insists, "I loved you all" (line 31, p. 6). Note that the title of this piece is also a paradox because the woman is called "the mother," but she has not raised any children. Brooks creates sympathy for the speaker's position: unable to bring up the children properly, she has chosen to abort them and takes full responsibility for her decision. In its own paradoxical way, this is an act of love. The woman saves her children from poverty and degradation.

The persona of "hunchback girl: she thinks of heaven" also has a difficult life. Brooks presents the girl praying to one day achieve a place in heaven, which she imagines as "straight" (lines 2, 9) and "proper" (lines 9-10). Like the mother in the previous poem, the speaker here emphasizes her ability to love. The hunchback stresses that despite her deformed body, her love "runs without crookedness"

(line 5, p. 11). She fantasizes a heaven where she can be her true self, without the constant "guards" (line 4) that handicapped people must resort to. Thus, heaven will enable the hunchbacked girl to be "Out of coils, / Unscrewed, released, no more to be marvelous" (lines 7-8, p. 11). While this poem focuses on a handicapped individual, Brooks clearly intends the message of the work to apply to the lives of black people as well because white society treats those of different races as if they were handicapped. Just as the hunchbacked girl needs a place to feel at home, so do black people.

Brooks explores a child's perspective again in the monologue "a song in the front yard." The speaker is a young girl who is being brought up primarily "in the front yard" but longs to experience "the back / Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows" (lines 1-3, p. 12). Despite her mother's warnings, the girl yearns to share the lives of lower-class black people. She even fantasizes about being a prostitute, which she calls "a bad woman" (lines 14, 18). The child is fascinated by the prostitute's make-up and "brave stockings of night-black lace" (lines 19-20). The poem is ironic because Brooks portrays the child as being too innocent to really understand all of the implications of life "in the back yard" and "down the alley" (lines 5-6). However, the child's desire to share the experiences of those less privileged resembles Brooks's own stance as a writer.

Perhaps the ultimate exercise of the sympathetic imagination is a poet's attempt to speculate about God's life. Brooks does just that in "the preacher: ruminates behind the sermon." The persona of this monologue is a black minister who believes that God is "lonely" (line 1, p. 15) and compares God to a white master served by slaves. God has power and importance, but "Nobody loves a master" (line 2). Brooks uses rhetorical questions to focus the reader's attention on God's solitude and isolation:

But who walks with Him?—dares to take His arm,
To slap Him on the shoulder, tweak His ear,
Buy Him a Coca-Cola or a beer,
Pooh-pooh His politics, call Him a fool? (lines 9-12)

The preacher imagines that God "tires of looking down" and never having "a hand to hold" (lines 13, 16).

This poem implies that God is a metaphor for both white people and writers. Whites may gain status and power from their domination of black people; however, they isolate themselves from true friend-

ships with African Americans, which Brooks portrays as more valuable than mere self-importance. At the same time, she warns writers not to put on airs and elevate themselves above the common people, whom Brooks considers the most appropriate subject for poetry.

Brooks devotes five short poems to depict the life of cleaning woman Hattie Scott. Scott works so hard indoors that she rarely gets to see the sun. Even at sunset, she cannot go outside "Cause I'm gettin' the dishes done" ("the end of the day," line 4, p. 35). Yet Scott feels a kinship with the sun: both work hard, finish their jobs, and then exit to enjoy themselves. And both must return to work early the next day. Brooks personifies the sun here, comparing the sunset to a man "Pullin' off his clothes and callin' it a day" (line 3).

In "the date," Hattie Scott thinks aloud, expressing her annoyance with her white mistress who "Keeps pilin' up stuff for me to do" (line 2) when Scott has a date. At eight o'clock, Scott refuses to work any longer: "I'm leavin'. Got somethin' interestin' on my mind./ Don't mean night school" (lines 7-8, p. 36). This concise poem combines humor, irony, and social criticism. Brooks implies that whites take advantage of blacks, over working them and ignoring black people's personal lives.

The last poem in the Hattie Scott sequence concerns wife abuse. In the first stanza, Brooks describes a violent fight between Moe Belle Jackson and her husband in which he "Whipped her good" (line 2, p. 39). In the second stanza, feisty Scott imagines herself killing such an abusive husband with a knife. In contrast, the third stanza portrays Moe Belle's passivity following the attack. Scott fantasizes what the hours after the fight would be like: Moe Belle first cries and then prepares breakfast for her husband as if nothing had happened. Again, Brooks combines humor and social criticism in the ending of the poem. Moe Belle offers her husband, "More grits, dear?" (line 12).

Many of Brooks's poems concern sexual mores. The characters she creates often take extreme positions, reflecting the general confusion about sex in American society. Brooks examines one extreme in "obituary for a living lady." The speaker is a friend of the repressed main character in the poem, who won't let the man she loves "touch her breasts" (line 7, p. 18). As a result, she loses her boyfriend to "a woman who dressed in red" (line 11) and presumably is more comfortable with her sexuality. To console herself, the main character turns to religion and "thinks not the thinnest thought of any type of romance" (line 16). The speaker of the poem reveals to the readers that the preacher of the woman's church has fallen in love with her

and desires to "put his hand on her knee" (line 22, p. 19). However, Brooks implies that the woman will never allow this to happen, thus condemning herself to a life of celibacy. The title of the poem indicates that such a restricted, repressed life is a form of living death.

Brooks juxtaposes "obituary for a living lady" with a poem about a very different woman, "when you have forgotten Sunday: the love story." The persona of this dramatic monologue speaks to her estranged lover, recalling their days together. She wonders how he can possibly forget the many special shared experiences, especially the times when they made love:

... We finally undressed and whipped out the light and flowed into bed,
And lay loose-limbed for a moment in the week-end
Bright bedclothes,
Then gently folded into each other. (lines 22-25, pp. 20-21)

If he can manage to forget this moment of intimacy, "Then I may believe/ You have forgotten me well" (lines 28-29). The poem is one long sentence that builds up to this climax. It emphasizes the strong bond between people that intercourse can help create.

"Ballad of Pearl May Lee" expresses the frustration of black women when black men turn away to pursue white women.

You grew up with bright skins on the brain,
And me in your black folks bed.
Often and often you cut me cold,
And often I wished you dead. (45)

Pearl May Lee's lover Sammy finally has sex with a white woman, but she falsely accuses him of rape and he gets lynched by a mob of white men. Pearl May Lee claims in stanza one that when Sammy was taken to jail, "I cut my lungs with my laughter" (lines 4, 7, p. 44). However, the ending of the poem is more sober. She realizes that Sammy "paid with your hide and my heart" (p. 47). This alienation of black men and black women threatens the survival of black society.

Another theme of *A Street in Bronzeville* is the effect of World War II on the lives of black Americans. "Negro Hero" is an ironic poem that emphasizes that black servicemen fought two wars: one against the enemy and one against the racism of their own army. This poem is based on the life of Dorie Miller, who saved the lives of whites despite their prejudice against him. D. H. Melhem summarizes Miller's short life:

As messman, . . . he was confined to the galley on the rigidly segregated ship. When it was attacked [at Pearl Harbor], he rushed topside and took command of a machine gun in the chaos. In shooting down the [four] Japanese planes, Miller was technically violating the regulations which confined blacks to menial and noncombative duties.

He died in action two years later at age twenty-four (Melhem 34-35). In Brooks's poem, the soldier portrays American democracy as a hypocritical "white-gowned . . . fair lady. / With her knife lying cold, straight, in the softness of her sweet-flowing sleeve" (33). Despite the promises of democracy, the knife of racism denies blacks the full exercise of their rights. Brooks paraphrases the words of a Southern racist who proclaims,

Indeed, I'd rather be dead;
Indeed, I'd rather be shot in the head
Or ridden to waste on the back of a flood
Than saved by the drop of a black man's blood. (33)

Such attitudes make the black war hero ask himself sarcastically, "Am I clean enough to kill for them?" (33). His picture appears in both black and white newspapers (32), but he questions the depth of white appreciation for black war sacrifices.

"Gay Chaps at the Bar" is a sequence of twelve sonnets that focus on black servicemen returning from World War II. Many soldiers are obsessed with the carnage that they saw around them. We would now call this post-traumatic stress syndrome. One of the best of these sonnets is "piano after war," which portrays a former soldier watching his girlfriend play the piano in the evening. But just as he feels warmth and "proud delight" (line 10, p. 52), his memories of the war intrude and prevent him from enjoying a love relationship: "Then my thawed eye will go again to ice. / And stone will shove the softness from my face" (lines 13-14). Although he has survived and returned home, his survivor's guilt spoils what should be a moment of happiness and fulfillment.

Even more extreme is "love note I: surely." In this sonnet, the returning soldier is so skeptical that he doubts everything, even his girlfriend's fidelity. Brooks uses the word "surely" six times, emphasizing it by placing "surely" at the beginning of four of the sonnet's fourteen lines and in the title. The word is clearly ironic here because the soldier can be certain of nothing. The poem ends, "And I doubt all. You. Or a violet" (line 14, p. 57). As in the previous poem, war

has left the soldier so obsessed with death that he is unable to appreciate any aspect of life. His alienation from other human beings and his inability to love link him to the persona of "obituary for a living lady": both characters suffer a living death.

A more optimistic poem about the effect of World War II on the lives of black people is "my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell." On the surface, this Shakespearean sonnet appears to be about hunger and preserving and storing food. However, the foods "honey" and "bread" that are mentioned in the first and last lines of the poem represent special qualities of black people that are not appreciated by white society. The speaker has to "store" his/her honey and bread because these black talents cannot be acclaimed until after the war, at some time in the future. The persona is "hungry" and "incomplete" (line 5, p. 50) because white society will not let him/her fulfill dreams and desires. Like Martin Luther King and Langston Hughes, Brooks complains in line 7 that white society keeps telling minority people to "Wait" for their dreams to come true. The speaker hopes that the oppressive society will not turn black people against their unique culture and their special gifts (see lines 13-14). Note that this poem can be read as applying to both men and women who must suspend their dreams during a time of crisis. The poem also reflects the aspirations of a young writer like Brooks who wants to maintain her connection to the black community despite pressure to choose more conventional topics for her art.

Through the dramatic monologue form, Brooks conveys her empathy for black people of all ages and sexes. She uses vivid images and details to bring her characters to life for the reader and to involve the reader in the lives of these "others." Brooks hopes that readers will open themselves up to and care about common black Americans. As a writer, she models this concern.

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EUGENE FIELD AND THE WORLD'S BIGGEST LITERARY FUNERAL

THOMAS PRIBEK

Eugene Field was never robust; still, his death at forty-five, in 1895, was a shock to faithful readers of his collections of poetry and stories and of the *Chicago Record*, which published "Sharps and Flats," his regular column, for more than a decade. As a newspaper humorist, his devotion to the ordinary-folks Midwestern setting and sentimental tone, thick with pathos, was pre-eminent, although the *Chicago Tribune* credited Field's column for "excoriating satire on public men." He sometimes took the rube pose, but was always closer to James Whitcomb Riley than Bill Nye (during the last Nye-Riley lecture tour, Field posed for a publicity portrait with the pair, hand on Riley's shoulder); but we hardly need reminder that his best-remembered works are "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod" and "Little Boy Blue."

After watching Ken Burns's Mark Twain film, I may be willing to believe that Clemens had more people at his funeral, but I'm still impressed by what I've found of public commemoration and tribute at Field's passing; and I propose that Field, like Clemens, received substantial emotion for the romanticized setting that his audience often sought. (Clemens officiated at a plaque dedication of Field's presumed birthplace in St. Louis in 1902. Field's brother arrived late to inform people that the site was wrong and the actual house was gone; Clemens remarked that it didn't matter—if people wanted this home as Field's, then it was).

For a mild dose of the sentimentality, read "The Mighty West." ("West" was the contemporary regional term for our "Midwest"). For what it's worth, contemporary biographers assert that Field's real working-class sympathies were much stronger than his politically cautious editors would print. (Remember, even Field's more balanced view of the Haymarket Riot was dangerous).

The item that stimulated this inquiry and paper, an accidental find in a used book I acquired a few years ago was a program for a benefit for the Field family held shortly after the poet's death. Look at the names on the program: if you know only half of them, as I did, that's still an impressive cast. So I also reviewed newspaper accounts for Field's death and several months afterwards to confirm my speculation that this particular commemoration was not just the project of his literary friends. This is a roster of "The Little Room," those Chicago literary society meetings that included Field and his wife (the sort of reception Garland loved and portrayed in *Rose of Dutcher's Coulee*).

Some notes on the lesser-known literary personages:

Catherwood - historical/romance novelist

Cheney - poet & librarian, Newberry

Bell - novelist

Bates - "mr" was a travel writer

Fuller

Monroe

Read

Wynne - story-writer, who provided "The Little Room" from a title

Chatfield-Taylor - novelist

A year before Field's death, Garland had tried to do a reading with him with Franklin Head as the moderator. The "patronesses" were a Who's Who of Chicago wealth and society. The biographies I consulted, by the way, suggest no family poverty because of Field's death: the benefit was for the participants and audience more than the family, which did consist of five children and his widow. Several children preceded him in death. The reading list is not Field's work, with the exception of Garland's readings. Now, let me go back to the occasion of Field's death and return chronologically to this event.

His death was significant enough for the *New York Times* to publish a two-column biography on November 5, complete with illustration and several samples of poetry. Its headline proclaimed, "His Verses Endearred Him to the Multitude," and the tributes include one from Sarah Bernhardt. The *Times* story designates Field a "versifier," rather appropriately for someone who may have admired and translated Horace but whose own poetic ambitions were usually less lofty.

The Chicago *Tribune*, his paper's principal rival, also published two full columns to announce the death, with a complete text of "Little Boy Blue" and an additional section of illustrations of Field

from child to middle-age. According to the *Tribune*, "The news of his death spread with great rapidity through the city, and it has seldom happened that the death of a citizen of Chicago in a private station has occasioned such sincere and universal sorrow." The paper reported flags lowered to half-mast and hundreds of friends visiting the Fields's new home.

Of course, the Chicago *Record* surpassed all competition in attention given to one of its own. Ray Stannard Baker wrote the accounts of Field's death and its immediate aftermath, in appropriate pathos: "While he slept early yesterday morning death crept in and touched Eugene Field gently . . . He has passed away as gently as he lived. He has gone to meet his Little Boy Blue." No further quotation is required for the tone. The story took a full column on page 1 of the November 5 *Record*, and five of six columns on page 2. The story included illustrations of Field, his birthplace, and his study; it contained nearly a dozen testimonials solicited by the paper, including the observation that the reporter actually informed Hamlin Garland of the death. Other testimonials came from friends, business people, politicians, actors and actresses, booksellers, and James Whitcomb Riley.

The Chicago Press Club, of which Fields was not a member, had met immediately on November 5 and appointed a committee to express tribute; the committee included Melville Stone, George Ade, and Opie Read. The Press Club's memorial service was held later that day and included a speech by Mayor George Swift. The next day, the *Tribune* offered its newspaper's equivalent of highest praise by printing transcripts of the speeches. Its headline was "All Love Eugene Field." The *Record* of November 6 devoted equal length to the memorial, two columns, also published transcripts, and added, "From morning to night yesterday sorrowing ones called at the Field residence . . . Telegrams of sorrow and condolence came from sea and over land, showing that the loss of Chicago was the loss of London and Paris as well."

The funeral was November 6 and drew another full column in the *Tribune*. According to the *Tribune*, "The church was filled with sorrowing friends and acquaintances." Franklin Head, a banker and art patron, was an honorary pallbearer, and the officiators were the Reverends Frank Gunsaulus and Frank Bristol, two of the city's most prominent ministers. Again, the *Tribune* printed a transcript of Dr. Bristol's eulogy; remember, a transcript means sincere praise. The *Record* once again surpassed the *Tribune* with four columns on the

funeral, with transcripts. And as before, the pathos was more prominent in the *Record*: The eulogies "were received with hushed attention. In the pauses the slow drip of the rain could be heard outside. It was a dark overcast and gloomy day. The sorrowfulness of the day found its way into the church."

The *Record* also reported a packed house: "All who could find room had come into the building," and there was "a crush of people about the doors The crowds did not cease coming and filled the side aisles, then the doorways, then the vestibule." People were allowed to view the open casket: "It seemed like an endless stream, this passing of the throng," reported the paper. The *Record* added a report of floral contributions, some from Edward Bok and Sol Smith Russell. In a separate editorial, the paper observed, "It is doubtful if the people of this city, or of the west, have ever before paid to the memory of a man not occupying purely public place such a tribute as was given to the memory of Eugene Field yesterday."

On November 6, the Board of Education also memorialized Field. The *Tribune* stated, "The place of love and honor the poet held in the homes and schools of Chicago was freely dilated upon." In its November 15 edition, the *Tribune* printed Field's death mask. Field remained in the news consistently until the benefit seemed to provide a climax of the month-long observances.

The *Record* continued to re-publish his poetry, and the particular specialty of its coverage was publishing stories of events in other places, because the *Record* initiated a campaign to build a public memorial. Beginning November 9, the paper printed testimonials and recorded contributions. The first promotional story featured the Reverend Bristol and Jane Addams, both personal friends. A memorial meeting and fund-raiser on November 10 was so packed that it provoked a near riot; at least, that's how the paper reported it. An hour before the start of services, "the hall could not contain them all." People went through side doors and windows. Because of crowds in the street, the police were called. The Reverend Gunsaulus was the principal speaker, and, once again, the speeches were transcribed and published.

While the paper continued to solicit contributions, it published accounts of memorials, readings and fund-raisers, including those held at Knox College in Galesburg, Gambier Seminary in Ohio, Omaha, and Salt Lake City. Personal contributions came from the Waterbury family of Connecticut, and Eugene Debs, another friend, for whom Field had offered some support during the Pullman strike.

The *Record* endorsed a project by Field's brother, Roswell Martin, to publish personal testimonials; that book never appeared, but a friend from Milwaukee staying at the Field home when he died did publish a small volume. The monument, too, was delinquent, not actually constructed till nearly thirty years after Field's death, but finally set in Lincoln Park in 1922.

Both the Chicago *Tribune* and the *Record* promoted the benefit event for November 26. The *Tribune's* rationale calls his financial situation "unfortunate," but acknowledges that the debt of his new home "was not large." I have inferred that the event was more for honor than relief. The *Tribune* provides more information about the status of the event in Chicago literary society: Alice French and Whitcomb Riley were to participate but "were prevented by other engagements." Henry Fuller was doing his first public reading.

Hamlin Garland's reminiscence of Field in *Roadside Meetings* was published in 1930; regrettably, by then, Garland did not mention the benefit specifically or the status it conferred on Field. However, Garland did describe his "serio-comic" rivalry with Alice French and Mary Hartwell Catherwood, and observed of Field's passing, "Extravagant claims were made for him at the time. He represents a phase of Chicago journalism which Henry Fuller knew and despised." In this later year, Garland eulogized Field by observing, "only the best of him is remembered by those of us who knew him in those simpler days." However, put this up against Garland's later dismissal of Field as a writer: the only title reported that Garland read was "Krinken" (216).

The *Tribune* has the only newspaper report of the benefit; the *Record* did not write its own story. The benefit apparently was a near sell-out, though the paper says attendance was smaller than hoped because of weather:

[H]undreds of people who read or croon his child songs to their own little tots were there, and hundreds of others who could not be present bought tickets and allowed their seats to be given or sold to those who could. It was an undertaking of love, and those who directed it had the satisfaction of knowing that it netted a little over \$1,300.

I have often observed that newspaper reviewing was given to superlatives, but as the *Tribune* was not praising one of its own, let us assume sincerity in this case. "The various numbers throughout the program

were received with the heartiest of applause The entertainment was declared to be one of the "most successful benefits given of late years" (my emphasis).

I haven't proposed anything original in re-evaluating Field's popularity and his audience's grief; his passing also reflected the mortality—or fragility—of his literary setting, the down-home, family-centered, "Just Plain Folks" home of Whitcomb Riley, Edgar Guest, and all their readers who wanted to preserve an idealized small-town America and American character in the Midwest.

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THE HAWK, THE RAVEN, AND THE BABY LARK: AUGUST DERLETH'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EDGAR LEE MASTERS FAMILY

KENNETH B. GRANT

*I gave my heart to the hawks, and never
called it back—August Derleth*

*I am nothing but a baby lark, I know, fathered by a raven, but the
wings are there.—Marcia Lee Masters*

Early in his literary career, August Derleth expected to achieve national prominence, and perhaps to facilitate the process, he worked to bring himself to the attention of those established literary figures he admired, particularly the Midwestern regionalists in whose footsteps he planned to follow. As a young graduate, committed to earning a living by his writing and making a place for himself as a regionalist, Derleth initiated exchanges of letters with Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Hamlin Garland, Carl Sandburg, Zona Gale, and Edgar Lee Masters. With the support and encouragement of these writers along with the advice of his editor, Scribner's Maxwell Perkins, Derleth looked forward to a level of commercial success that would free him from the bondage of the pulp markets and slick magazines for which he produced salable, but inferior, short stories and novellas.

Of all the established regional writers with whom he corresponded, his relationship with Edgar Lee Masters was warmest. They had corresponded for some time before Derleth visited Masters at the Hotel Chelsea on his first trip to New York in September 1938. Masters turned seventy a month before this meeting, long after the 1915 publication of the *Spoon River Anthology* that had fixed his reputation as both poet and regionalist. Masters had written Derleth asking for a copy of his first volume of poems, *Hawk on the Wind*, which

he also arranged for Derleth to send to Theodore Dreiser. In his biographical reminiscence of his father, Master's son Hardin remembers that Masters recommended "Hawk on the Wind" to him as a fine poem from a "bright young star on the horizon."¹ Derleth, then twenty-nine, was thrilled by Masters's support of his work, and the visit, as recounted by Derleth years later in *Three Literary Men*, appears almost as a pilgrimage to a master.

Over the next few years, the regular exchange of letters between Masters and Derleth touched on a number of topics often in answer to Derleth's questions: Masters's antipathy to critics, his particular rejection of Carl Van Doren's "revolt from the village," Derleth's role as a possible biographer, the Sangamon River area and the influence of the natural world on their writing. They discussed Derleth's poetry which Masters appreciated so strongly that he urged Derleth to give up prose fiction entirely, an impossibility for Derleth, who intended to live by his writing. In 1940, Derleth visited Masters again at the Chelsea, and this time Masters asked Derleth to send him the manuscript for his *Selected Poems*, for which he wished to write an introduction. According to Derleth, Masters's Introduction arrived less than a week after he sent the manuscript to New York; it praised Derleth and his eye for natural detail, concluding:

The great office of poetry is to give delight; that may be its greatest office. Any lesson, any uplifting can come through delight, and perhaps not so well through anything else. These poems of August Derleth will bring delight, and by that fact win forgetfulness from a troubled world for troubled hearts. In reading these poems, you will walk through a beautiful country with its beauties pointed out and sung by a poet who has an eye for woods and their tenants, for rivers and for hills, for that eternal quiet which settles over pastoral places and fills the heart with vision and with hope.

Derleth knew that just as he turned the conversations with Masters to the theories swirling around the writers of village life hoping for an assertion of his own beliefs and values, that here Masters was writing about Derleth's *Sac Prairie* motivated by his own love of the Sangamon. These two men had easily slipped into a father-son relationship that soon would be complicated by the romantic relationship Derleth would pursue with Masters's daughter.

At the end of July 1943, Derleth traveled down to Chicago to attend a writers' conference where he met Marcia Lee Masters for the

first time. A few days later on his return to Wisconsin, Derleth wrote Masters, praising the daughter to the father:

I am not exaggerating when I tell you that our table was the liveliest at the Conference, nor when I add that Marcia's presence saved not only the Conference but the weekend for me. Despite her insistence that she is not like her father or her mother, I found in her traces of something I like very much indeed in her father. I am looking forward to seeing her again.²

On August 5, 1943, writing from the Chelsea, Masters responded: "Marcia is a kind of flaring flame that has not yet concentrated into its individual intensity, and melting power. Some of her recent verse gives promise that she will do so . . . She is more like me than you had time to verify in her, and she looks like me some."³ Shortly after this exchange of letters, Marcia boarded the train to Sauk City for a weeklong visit with Derleth. He took her on his daily walks along the Wisconsin River, into town on his routine stop at the post office, and to the harness shop to visit Hugo Schwenker. Walking arm in arm along River Road, they exchanged kisses under the streetlamps in the late summer evenings. Having known Marcia for only three weeks, Derleth proposed, allowing her a month to make her decision. Derleth wrote Edgar Lee Masters after seeing Marcia off on the train back to Chicago:

It was probably obvious to you that I was much taken with her at our initial meeting, and every moment with her this past week has deepened my affection for her. We are surprisingly alike in a great many ways—and she is, as you pointed out, even more like you than I had at first thought. Moreover, she has a genuine Masters independence, and I want an independent spirit. I have asked Marcia to become my wife, and the idea does not seem at all averse to her, I am delighted to say.⁴

Unconcerned with the pace of the relationship, Masters was pleased, telling Derleth that as soon as it was settled, he would give both of them his blessing. His letter to Derleth was prophetic in one sense: "I shall be glad," wrote Masters, "to have her lifted from that cistern of serpents known as Chicago to the fields and the hills. The matter of temperament is very important, but both of you are of an age where things of that sort can be smoothed out by wisdom, where earlier daily living and amalgamating would have done it, if at all."⁵ Obviously, Masters felt that between Derleth and his daughter there was a differ-

ence of temperament which would need "smoothing" by the wisdom of their age—they were both 34; Marcia, one month older.

Derleth insisted that they both began talking of marriage—that there was no proposal, but a mutual assumption that they were meant to be married. Nothing in Marcia's letters contradicts this, and Marcia did not take a month to make her decision. Before the middle of September she wrote Derleth:

I am Mrs. Derleth, the Mrs. Derleth, wife of the man with the wonderful curly hair and the keen blue eyes. Imagine what! I'm going to sleep in his bed! And I used to sleep slim and narrow and haughty in a room with pewter lamps, and white book cases, and white rugs in it, and listen to the symphony in the dark. In my new home I am sometime going to be very perverse and have an all-white bedroom, virginal as an April day—austere and olympian. But did you think I would occupy that room after sundown? Did you think the room was not designed to distract, enchant, and tease Mr. Derleth?

The delight in her reverie as Mrs. Derleth will last only a few days, and the difference in temperament Edgar Lee Masters observed will come to the surface as they begin to discuss their wedding date. However briefly, they were both enjoying the infatuation stage of a romantic relationship.

Derleth planned for the wedding to take place in October while Marcia preferred April of 1944. A September 17, 1943, letter from Edgar Lee indicates that Marcia announced her engagement to Derleth on that day. The formal announcement of the engagement would become an issue in a few months when Marcia would claim that Derleth unilaterally announced their engagement. Derleth, in a letter written the next day, mentioned to Edgar Lee that a notice of the engagement was carried in the *Chicago Herald-American* and the *Capital Times*, as well as on national radio.

In the early stage of their engagement, they exchanged romantic letters on an almost daily basis, but during a two-day visit following their formal announcement, Marcia expressed some doubts arising from the speed of the courtship and the control Derleth exercised over the future of both their lives. Derleth would attribute her concerns to the malign influence of Chicago, "that serpent infested city." To her father he wrote:

My dear friend, Marcia has for so long been exposed to Chicago that she no longer trusts her instincts and is prey to all manner of spuri-

ous instincts. Now she is afraid that her spirit will be submerged in mine, and she does not understand that if this were indeed true, she would emerge from that submergence stronger and more sure of herself than before. It is amazing that she should feel this way, but it is natural enough on the other hand. She is much troubled in mind, though she is sure in her heart, and she speaks of deferring the wedding for a long time, which I think would be unwise, for the nebulous doubts and hesitations she has concerning her creative spark are spurious and arise out of all the complexes and phobias to which she has been prey since that unfortunate first marriage.⁶

Derleth believed that he could help Marcia overcome these feelings as her husband, but as a fiancée he felt powerless. He was convinced that when she was with him, she was happy; when she was away, her doubts about the relationship grew. Edgar Lee wrote Derleth that he did not believe in long engagements; when people decide they should marry, they should marry. On a second page headed AFTER THOUGHT, Masters wrote:

The woman that I was involved with at the time of my divorce was beautiful, fascinating and rich But for the sake of my career I turned away from her, I crushed my heart to do it, and I have been glad ever since. All this is for your private meditation. A poet must be a hero, or be no poet, He must live by the example of Ulysses, and forsake the Calypsos. Read my poem Ulysses in Selected Poems.⁷

Derleth must not have liked hearing his friend advise him to subordinate his love to his career. Had Marcia read the letter, how much more hurtful it would have been.

Derleth believed Marcia was scarred by her first marriage, a union that lasted scarcely two months, but was convinced he could heal her psychological wounds when they were married. In early October, Derleth agreed reluctantly to Marcia traveling out West for the winter—to California—while he would remain in Wisconsin. This trip was in the planning stage before Derleth had met Marcia, but Derleth must have sensed that the separation of half a continent would strain their relationship and foster second thoughts in Marcia. Despite his efforts, he could not control Marcia's determination to enjoy an extended visit to the coast. At her insistence, they would marry in the spring of 1944.

On October 12, 1943, Derleth was still optimistic; Marcia, however, was concerned. Derleth did not live alone at Place of Hawks;

his mother and father, along with his sister Hildred and her daughter, were in residence, and it was becoming clear that Hildred and Marcia did not get along. Marcia was unwilling to live with his family, who could not move back to their own house in town until the first of April. She was equally opposed to Derleth taking a house in town until his family moved out. Worse, there were rumblings in the village that Marcia was an unsuitable wife for Derleth, hints that she would be snubbed. Gossip had it that the parish priest would refuse to speak to her. All this Derleth conveyed to Marcia, he assured her, for her own good. Marcia did not understand how the news could make her relocation to Wisconsin easier. Consulted by Derleth, Edgar Lee suggested that even living in a boarding house would be better than their living with his family: "The weave can catch threads that never unravel."⁸ Still optimistic, however, in mid-October, Derleth wrote Edgar Lee that he hoped he could induce her to reduce her six-month planned stay to four months, to return to marry him on his thirty-fifth birthday in February. Masters still wanted them married sooner—Marcia was, he said, full of plans that never mature.

Marcia arrived on October 18, 1943, for her last weeklong visit in Sauk City before traveling to California, a visit that signaled a change in mind on Marcia's part. From Marcia's perspective, the traditional impediments to marriage had appeared—money, in-laws, and the prospect of a change in role. "My battle," she writes:

is the conflict between my love and trust of the inner you, and my terror of the outward you, who flaunts your control over me in photographic incidents, and thus shames me in my own eyes, and belittles me in the eyes of others While my mind and spirit represent things you love and respect, your flesh would like to convert me to a doughnut-frying, ever-pregnant woman.⁹

Apparently, at a restaurant, Marcia watched in horror as Derleth bullied a hostess—a behavior he engaged in routinely decades after his relationship with Marcia—she understood that potentially she, too, might be the target of that crude behavior, that controlling superiority. Added to all this was the realization that the marriage would mean another move for her daughter—the child of her brief marriage—who would be obliged to attend three schools during one academic year. To Edgar Lee, Derleth dismissed the accusation of crudeness as a contrast between his lifestyle and the Chicago lifestyle Marcia lived. Derleth was convinced her objections must have been

the result of her background and the psychological insecurities resulting from her failed marriage:

You see my dear friend, despite her wonderful free spirit, Marcia has already divided me into lover and prospective husband on the one hand, and a psychiatrist ready to take clinical notes for a case history on the other. There are such signs of early scars, post divorce scars, that I know Marcia is dynamite to handle in a domestic-romantic relationship. I am confident that I can handle it, if she will give me the chance.¹⁰

In a willful act of line drawing, Derleth warned Edgar Lee that if Marcia refused to consent to the February 24, 1944, wedding date, there might very well be no wedding at all. "My feeling," Edgar Lee told Derleth, "is that Marcia should be proud to marry you, and to marry now—more I cannot say." Edgar Lee Masters' correspondence with Derleth demonstrates a distrust of women, a conviction that they are a hindrance to a creative career. That Edgar Lee seemed more fatherly in his letters to Derleth than protective of his daughter might have contributed to Derleth's conviction that he understood what Marcia needed even if she did not. When Derleth showed Marcia her father's letter, she felt that not only was Derleth's family against her, so was her own father.

The next week, Marcia was off by train to California, writing Derleth passionate, loving letters and mailing them at stops along the way. As the train rolled across the western United States, Derleth felt confident in his dominant role and that once married, he could guide Marcia without her feeling that she would be submerged in him. When Marcia finally arrived in California, Derleth discovered his confidence and optimism evaporating; he gave way to depression. She wavered, he felt, from commitment to distrust. Shortly after arriving in California, Marcia wrote:

You have attacked my looks, which seem to have been engaging enough to other men, who though, perhaps, were only sweet liars nevertheless had the grace to lie; you have criticized my methods of work; you have taunted my clothes; you have prepared to take over culinary duties from one who has cooked dishes you have never heard of. Now, my dear, what is this on your part? A display of egotism, or an attempt to put me in my place? At any rate, it has aroused an antagonism in me which is very much to your disadvantage, and which seems to be kept constantly alive by repeated efforts of yours

which seems to be kept constantly alive by repeated efforts of yours to refuel it.¹¹

Certainly, Derleth must have felt the distance straining the relationship.

Marcia wrote to her father giving her side of the story, a story that directly contradicts Derleth's version of their engagement. "I had nothing at all to do with the announcement of my engagement to August, and I assure you Mother was far too busy with packing up her things at the house to run around newspaper offices." Marcia referred to her mother as "stunned" by the speed of the engagement, and Marcia wrote that she "was in no frame of mind either to announce anything. I had all I could do to get out of the house; I had known August only six weeks; I was not ready to say yes or no."¹² What a stark contrast to the delighted reverie of being Mrs. Derleth. The engagement photographs were taken at Derleth's insistence and against her resistance. The release regarding their engagement was the result of Derleth leaking news of his relationship to Marcia to a friend of his at the *Capital Times*; since the news was to be out, Derleth—says Marcia—wanted it to be out to all the papers.

As Thanksgiving approached, Marcia demanded that Derleth return the letters she had written on the train. She did not want her personal correspondence made a public record at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin—Derleth had negotiated a contribution of manuscripts, letters, and other materials to the Society. She would not be bullied and wanted nothing of the "pressure of your ego." To Marcia, Derleth wrote:

The thought of your asking for them back is shocking in itself; but the additional knowledge that you are actually presuming to judge the quality of my love for you on whether or not I return them is something of so gauche a nature that it seems to me wholly and completely alien to the woman I love. No real woman, no thoroughbred would do such a thing. It is simply barbaric. I never had any intention of putting your letters to me on record anywhere; they are for me alone, thank you.¹³

That Marcia Lee Masters's original letters are the property of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin gives truth to Marcia's suspicions. That Derleth attached carbon copies of his responses to a number of her California letters suggests that he was writing personal and, at the same time, future public responses to Marcia. To her father, he wrote that Marcia was a lovely, creative woman, but one conflicted

with "a compound of frightful vanity and pride, concealing a feeling of inferiority and an unsureness of self."¹⁴ Derleth was afraid she was too vain and proud to give in to him, that she saw him as the dominating member of the relationship who would destroy her. Derleth knew he certainly would not concede, and neither seemed willing to exercise Edgar Lee Masters's wisdom of age to smooth out their differing temperaments.

The painful exchange of charges continued until Christmas, when Derleth suggested that they hold off writing each other to reduce the pressure. By February 1, 1944, Derleth acknowledged the "ever-widening cleavage between us," and on February 4th, Marcia ended their relationship:

I am so sorry to have to tell you that our engagement must be broken, and the sooner the better—for both of us. There is no use going into reasons, for they would be beyond your comprehension, anyway. I wish the best of Luck and love to you and to your family, and shall return your Xmas and birthday presents. Sincerely, Marcia P.S. So dreadfully sorry to have to notify the papers. I did not want to, but you said a public announcement would have to be made. I do hope you will be happy: I know you will realize, if you haven't already, that you were not in love with me, but with an idea. Will you please return my manuscripts.¹⁵

The letter ending the engagement arrived the day after the notice appeared in the newspapers. The short notice in the *Chicago Tribune* was picked up by the Associated Press, which contacted Derleth and placed the story on the wires. The resulting news stories looked as if Derleth were responsible for publicizing the end of their relationship.

About a week later, Derleth invited Edgar Lee to stay at Place of Hawks and revealed his account of the failure of the relationship. For Derleth, money and integrity accounted for the breakup. He complained to Masters that Marcia claimed to require \$20 a month for cosmetics and expected that Derleth could finance a lifestyle including a maid and, given their mutual desire for children, a nurse. Derleth continues:

I realized that Marcia's "love" was rooted in passion and egotism, and not in genuine affection. I found my own love at long last withering into a kind of terrible pity for her under the merciless and needlessly cruel blasts from the west coast, and, though I understand her defensive gestures, I discovered though the medium of her letters

alone that she wanted not love and honesty, but security and ease, at no matter what cost to me.¹⁶

Masters was sympathetic to Derleth, assuring him that the dissolution of the relationship was for the best; Marcia had stopped writing her father.

During Derleth's last visit with Edgar Lee Masters, the father pronounced his daughter "a strange girl." For years, to his confidants, Derleth referred to Marcia as "a perfect bitch." Marcia, against the pressures of the time and the man, chose not to be Mrs. Derleth. The broken engagement left permanent scars in the relationships of all three writers. Edgar Lee Masters kept poetic silence. Derleth included a handful of works written to Marcia in his *Collected Poems*. In 1986, fifteen years after Derleth's death, Marcia Lee Masters published *Wind Around the Moon*, a collection of poems including a series of twenty-seven sonnets entitled "Flight to a Haunted Palace," chronicling her relationship with Derleth. After more than forty years, love and hate, anger and forgiveness remain mingled:

Day after day I thought of him I left
 Back in a prairie village, tameless snows,
 My tyrant-genius, furious, bereft,
 Recounting all my faults and his own woes,
 While I was busy with a play, or rose,
 Dragging hoses round that mountain-side,
 While all his native wrath, in silver prose
 And poetry too lovely to describe
 In letters of five-thousand words arrived.

Still, had she not been a "poet's child . . . I should have loved your country eaves, /And spent my life beneath your golden leaves." "But," Marcia writes, "you are dead. It is too late to mend/ My foolish ways or yours."¹⁷

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NOTES

¹Hardin Wallace Masters. *Edgar Lee Masters: A Biographical Sketchbook about a Famous American Author*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson, 1979. p. 131.

²AD to E. Lee Masters 3 August 1943, The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ranson Humanities Research Center

³E. Lee Masters to AD, 5 August 1943, August Derleth Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

⁴AD to E. Lee Masters, 23 August 1943, The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ranson Humanities Research Center.

⁵E. Lee Masters to AD, 26 August 1943, August Derleth Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

⁶AD to E. Lee Masters, 20 September 1943, The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ranson Humanities Research Center.

⁷EL Masters to AD, 6 October 1943, August Derleth Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

⁸EL Masters to AD, 14 October 1943, August Derleth Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

⁹ML Masters to AD, [October, 1943], August Derleth Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

¹⁰AD to E. L. Masters, 21 October 1943, The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ranson Humanities Research Center.

¹¹Marcia Lee Masters to AD, August Derleth Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

¹²Marcia Lee Masters to EL Masters, [21 October 1943?], The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ranson Humanities Research Center.

¹³AD to Marcia Lee Masters, [November, 1943], August Derleth Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

¹⁴AD to E. L. Masters, 26 November 1943, The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ranson Humanities Research Center.

¹⁵Marcia Lee Masters to AD, 4 February 1944, August Derleth Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

¹⁶AD to E. L. Masters, 14 February 1944, The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ranson Humanities Research Center.

¹⁷Marcia Lee Masters, *Wind Around the Moon: New and Collected Poems*. Georgetown, CA: Dragon Teeth Press, 1986. Pp. 74, 79.

A REREADING OF BLACK HAWK'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

DAVID L. NEWQUIST

All of the seven houses where I lived in Moline, Illinois, were situated within a few minutes walk of ravines whose forming creeks led to one of the two rivers that bound the city. In fact, for five of the houses the backyards bordered ravines. These ravines were my playground as a child, the path to knowledge and adventure, and the objects of contemplation, concern, and actions as an adult.

I owned two of those houses myself. I purchased them because they were on ravine lots, and I could satisfy the powerful attraction these ravines exerted on me. When I lived in my first house, I was a journalist, and I had a couple of metal lawn chairs behind the garage right at the top of the ravine where I sat and read and wrote articles and observed the wildlife. When I lived in my second house, I also had lawn chairs in the back yard facing the ravine where I read, wrote, and evaluated a good portion of those interminable student papers that are part of the expiation that professors of English, which I was at the time, assume for choosing a profession that is regarded largely as an affectation among their colleagues. My students learned that I did much of my paper reading in my back yard when the weather permitted, and they claimed that they could discern between the comments I wrote while looking over the ravine and the ones I wrote in the gloomy hours by the light of my study lamp. Some also believed that the grades I put on their papers reflected a certain benignity when they originated in my back yard, and the students talked about some structure that could be built in my back yard that would permit paper-reading at all hours during all seasons.

Those ravines were much more, however, than an attractive environment in which to concentrate and do demanding, tedious work. They were a vantage point through which one could perceive the presences that lived on the landscape over time, places

where one was crucially aware that history is not obscure events that have washed away in a river of time, but the convergence of forces and events that shape the present moment. As children we roamed through the ravines and encountered wildlife and artifacts left there by centuries of American Indians who passed through them. We found stone points, outcroppings of chert from which the points were made, harness hardware, pottery shards from different ages, and we followed paths that had been worn into the soft alluvial soils by American Indians walking between villages or hunting for game.

The ramblings of us children who gravitated to those ravines were informed by names and words from Indians, words that attested to their presence on the land. The dominant name was Black Hawk; this name was blazoned in neon from a hotel, was the brand of a local beer for a time, and, more sedately, was the name of a junior college. When people of that region mentioned going to Black Hawk, however, they were referring to a state park named for the Sauk leader that marked the location of the Sauks' major village, Saukenuk. The village was located on the plains at the confluence of the Rock and Mississippi Rivers; the park was situated on bluffs that overlooked the village. Its deep ravines offered displays of wildflowers, birds and other wildlife, and trails that wound under aged elms, oaks, and walnuts along Rock River. The exquisite beauty of the place forced one to think of the people for whom it was home, but were forced to leave during the war that also bears Black Hawk's name.

Each Labor Day weekend, Sauk and Meskwaki people held a powwow at Black Hawk State Park under the sponsorship of a service club. The powwow dancers camped in the woods a hundred yards or so from the dance amphitheater. As the time for the powwow approached, the audience gathered in the arena could hear a few booms on a drum and then the jangle of leg bells as the dancer procession wound its way to the amphitheater. The crowd always grew silent while the procession entered the dance grounds. Before the dancing, an elder offered up smoke from a sacred pipe and prayed in the Algonquin language. Years later in archives of British military records, as I read accounts by British officers of processions of Sauks entering meeting sites to negotiate treaties, I could call those powwow processions to mind and see exactly the dignified and solemn ceremony being described.

After the Black Hawk War of 1832, the Sauks were permanently removed from Saukenuk, but the Sauk identity of the place was important to the people responsible for their removal. The American Indian words they retain and use seem to fulfill that need for a native identity. Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan explains this importance: "What they (Euro-Americans and Europeans) want is their own life, their own love of the earth, but when they speak their own words about it, they don't believe them, so they look to Indians . . ." (quoted in Norris 129-130). As children, we ravine roamers seemed to understand implicitly that the natural settings we gravitated to were part of a way of thought and life markedly different from those our families embraced. To us, the words from native America were beams of light that directed us to knowledge of that culture that had so revered this river country. Our fathers worked in the grimy factories that lined the banks of the Mississippi, and we needed no consciousness raising to note the difference between the bleak squalor of the factory districts and the verdant lushness of the ravines. When I read Black Hawk's autobiography and the reasons he gave for resisting removal from Saukenuk, I recognized that my own attachment to the land paralleled his:

It was here, that I was born—and here lie the bones of many friends and relations. For this spot I felt a sacred reverence, and never could consent to leave it, without being forced therefrom.

When I called to mind the scenes of my youth, and those of later days—and reflected that the theatre on which these were acted, had been so long the home of my fathers, who now slept on the hills around it, I could not bring my mind to consent to leave this country to the whites, for any earthly consideration. (107)

The presence of Sauk life was apparent where nature was left as it was during their occupation of the land. In opening his essay on Black Hawk's autobiography, William Boelhower states, "If you went looking for traces of the Sauk village where Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak (or Black Sparrow Hawk) was born . . . you would not find much . . . no archaeological evidence . . . that the village ever existed" (333). As time and the schemes of real estate developers go forward, that statement becomes increasingly accurate, but it is not true. Physical reminders of the Sauk presence remain. One can find segments of the Great Sauk Trail that went from Saukenuk to Fort Michilimackinac if one follows Interstate 80 out of Rock Island and continues on Interstate 94 to Detroit. Back yards near Black Hawk

Historic Site still have mounds where corn and squash hills were planted. And some landmarks have been preserved, such as the watchtower at the state historic site; Credit Island, where the Sauks presided over trade rendezvous; and Fort Armstrong on Rock Island itself in the middle of the Mississippi. Rock Island's broadcasting station still bears the call letters WHBF, which stand for Where Historic Black Hawk Fought. In fact, one cannot spend much time in the area without bumping into some kind of reminder that the Sauks once lived there, particularly the verbal signs, which Boelhower does acknowledge. However, there is the matter of that first book to originate from that region of the country. With a publishing history of 170 years, *The Autobiography of Black Hawk* perpetuates the identity of the Saukenuk community that became Rock Island and the Quad-Cities of Illinois and Iowa.

In 1833, Black Hawk dictated his story to interpreter Antoine LeClaire, who knew twelve Indian languages and English, and whose primary tongue was French. He provided his translation of Black Hawk's words to newspaperman J. B. Patterson, who edited the account and published it in what, to a young journalist back then seemed to be the literary language of the time. Although the authenticity and reliability of the book have been challenged many times on many grounds because of its convolutions between utterance and publication, it asserts itself as an original account that has no contradictions of fact. While sparing in ethnographic description and brief in historic details, the autobiography is in concordance with other sources of information. In presenting mythic, historical, and cultural perspectives in narrative form, the book coheres. It is a reference work on the landscape that defines what was the land of the Sauks.

When I read Black Hawk's autobiography as a young man, I began to explore the landscape with the assistance of historians and archaeologists. I visited sites frequented by the Sauks, traced their seasonal migrations, and traveled Black Hawk's battle route of 1832. I consulted the book to understand the landscape, and I consulted the landscape to understand the book.

This interest led to writing about Sauk history, working with museums and historical groups, digging with archaeologists, and eventually to teaching courses, and it was a big factor in my decision to leave journalism to obtain graduate degrees that would involve the study of American Indian literature. At that time, when I expressed

the desire to study Native American literature, the usual answer was, "I didn't know they had literature." A professor suggested to me and to another man, who had taught on the Navajo reservation, that we put together a syllabus for a course on American Indian literature. We had to hunt and stretch to come up with enough books in print to make a semester course—when I took my graduate coursework, no courses were offered on the subject. When it came time to work on a dissertation, my professor strongly urged me to make use of the extensive work I had done relevant to Black Hawk's autobiography and the Sauks, although I preferred to do something with more imaginative American Indian literature. My eventual decision to work on Black Hawk's autobiography came not from the urging of my professors but from what I finally realized were vague warnings from Meskwaki people with whom I had become closely acquainted.

By that time, people throughout the country were studying American Indian literature and were researching on reservations and Indian settlements. I had become acquainted with Sauk and Meskwaki people who lived and worked in the Quad-City area. A Sauk friend from Kansas, an engineer at the Rock Island Arsenal who knew very little about Black Hawk and Saukenuk, asked me to fill him in. The Meskwaki people were helpful when they could be, but the information they possessed on Black Hawk and Sauks, even though Meskwakis participated in the Black Hawk War, was cursory, and while they encouraged my interest in their stories, viewpoints, and explanations, they were reserved and reluctant to talk about such things.

I got to know two sisters whose father was the translator for many materials collected from Meskwaki people and printed in scholarly publications. They introduced me to their father. One day when we were visiting I mentioned that I enjoyed reading the stories of the Meskwaki trickster, Wisaca, the mention of whose name brought immediate smiles to their faces. Then I talked about accounts of sacred packs I read, including *The White Owl Sacred Pack*. The father then informed me that the pack and the stories about it were falsehoods. The Meskwaki people were besieged over the years by academics and other researchers wanting collections of materials and explanations of Meskwaki stories, and they found that the academics refused to take polite declinations to provide such materials. Although the academics argued about the importance of preserving and making known such materials, resentment was growing among the Meskwaki people about the attitudes displayed toward their texts

and cultural items on display in museums. The materials were treated as mere curiosities, as expressions of the primitive, as ignorant folk superstitions and beliefs. Attitudes of presumption and superiority reflected by researchers in their discussions of the materials left the Meskwakis with feelings of disrespect and betrayed trust.

When Truman Michelson, a Smithsonian ethnologist who did extensive collecting at the Meskwaki settlement, pushed too hard to obtain materials, people gathered some cow bones and other items together and made up stories and rituals to go with them, and called the collection *The White Owl Sacred Pack*. Although challenged by another prominent ethnologist, the sacred pack was put on display, the texts that went with it were published, and the Meskwakis have laughed over the matter ever since. The father of the two women told me something I have heard from American Indians numerous times since: when the white people do not listen, native Americans eventually tell them what they want to hear.

After World War II, as a renewed interest in native American culture brought more researchers into the field, native Americans became increasingly reticent to cooperate. Graduate students and professors often competed with each other in claiming privileged contacts and special knowledge in generating information. The fact is that very little was produced beside those claims during this period. The reaction to intrusions by white academics into the tribal cultures took on a more aggressive hostility. The polite evasions of tribal elders were displaced by a militant contempt as younger people in the American Indian Movement became more vocal on tribal matters.

One day the women's father talked with unusual directness about the white handling of Native American materials. He said that over the years Indian people recognized that it was probably a mistake to entrust their cultural materials and knowledge to white academics. He pointed out that to his people Black Hawk was not considered any more important than any other Sauk or Meskwaki personage, although he attempted brave things in order to save his people's land. However, the elder thought it was important work to convey and explain Black Hawk's story. True knowledge, he said, is reached by many paths, and one should choose the paths that one knows how to follow the best. This conversation led to my decision to write my dissertation on Black Hawk's autobiography and to use traditional scholarly resources rather than try to assess it through living Sauks and Meskwakis.

I wrote the dissertation and it was accepted. I delivered one scholarly paper based upon its production, but put it away. Aside from using the bibliography, I did not look at it for more than twenty years. I was saturated with the material and needed to concentrate on other matters. Then came the age of poststructuralist, postmodern literary theory. Initially, the fascination with literary theory seemed to offer some new possibilities for working with texts, but texts received little attention in the modish discussions of theory. For scholars of Native American literature, the theories were often irreconcilable with concepts of the word and the creation of word constructs that American Indians regard as essential premises for their literature. Native American sources regard stories as having essential cognitive and didactic purposes, but, as Robert Scholes says, the critical trend was to "offer a literary aesthetic based upon the absence of those ambitions" (26). Native Americans insist that life cannot be parceled out among the academic disciplines, but recent literary theory insists upon according literature a "special mystical privilege" (Scholes 36). Academic colleagues in other disciplines were showing resentment and contempt for literary scholars, partly out of their own disciplinary bigotries and partly out of a justified offense at the exclusionist posturing of the literary scholars. As university administrations adopted corporate techniques for managing their faculty, what disciplinary coherence English departments could claim gave way to petty but vicious rivalries in the quest for promotion, tenure, merit pay, and reputation. The situation led Robert Scholes to say, "It would be nice if [students] learned from us a lesson about the university that did not emphasize its fraudulence and artificiality" (68).

One had to be wary about where one invested one's scholarly effort and interest. I attended one professional session on Native American literature in which one presenter extemporized a paper and another clearly had not read the literary works about which she offered critical analysis. Some scholars tried to refute structuralist theory about Native American texts that exhibited cultural structures, and deconstructionists tried to deny a referential possibility for words that originated as references to the human landscape. Fundamental premises of a larger Native American ethic were dismissed in the theory frenzy. An essential premise of Native American literature is that the meaning of words and the equality of people and other living things are matters of human will. In most Native American cultures,

words are considered to have meaning as a matter of consensus and collective agreement. The sacredness of language is in its ability to transcend human contentiousness. And while people are endowed with vastly differing characteristics and talents, none are worth any more or less than any other, because equality is insisted upon as a matter of human will, although the ability to perceive and reason the case for equality is a matter of spiritual revelation.

I put off revisiting Black Hawk out of a kind of loyalty to the man whose book informed my meandering in the ravines that lace the area around Saukenuk. It was a guide to the landscape and Indian people who once lived on it, and it opened a pathway to other literary works by Native Americans. Black Hawk's story seemed to deserve better than the judgmental exercises about literature that illuminated nothing about literary works, but gave detailed and often unpleasant revelations of their authors' minds.

Black Hawk was never a chief; he was a Sauk who was a warrior leader. He had successes in battle and he had failures. He wavered in his opinions about what to do about the encroaching Americans. He was not always gracious or noble in his rivalry with Keokuk, who was named Chief by the Americans, or in his responses to slights by American officials. His biography makes a case for his actions and for the Sauk people, but it is made out of a tradition for forthrightness that is consistent with the way warriors told their stories of battle and accomplishment before peers who could verify or deny their accuracy.

Although Black Hawk at first seemed to accept the American demand that the Sauks remove themselves from Illinois into Iowa in the events that led up to the Black Hawk War, he was approached by the women who had charge of the 800-some acres under cultivation between the Rock and Mississippi Rivers. They pointed out that the Sauks would not find a village site so developed and so productive and that moving from Saukenuk would cause severe hardship among the people. They sought out the warrior Black Hawk at the age of sixty-seven to lead a resistance and reclaim the land they had occupied for so many generations. Black Hawk had always insisted that the treaty of 1804 which ceded Saukenuk to American control was not validly negotiated. His contention was verified by the Indian Claims Commission in 1953.

Eventually, I had occasion to return to the accounts of Saukenuk and the contentions about its significance. Finally, after teaching a course on American autobiography and having to cover some of the

cultural precepts that Black Hawk followed in presenting his case and his story, I read the scholarship done on him in the intervening twenty years since I had written my dissertation.

In light of this scholarship, my dissertation held up better than I thought it would. The dissertation first tried to lay out a literary aesthetic drawn from American functionalism as an approach that can be applied to Native American texts. Then the dissertation discussed the image of Black Hawk held by Americans. It examined the historical and cultural contexts of the autobiography, and then examined the narrative itself in terms of known Sauk oral conventions. Finally, the dissertation examined how fiction writers portrayed him in novels. The dissertation focused on pretexts, contexts, the text itself, and the after-texts. In other words, it dealt with how and why such a story was occasioned and what literary responses it triggered.

In recent scholarship on Native American autobiographies that involve oral dictation by the subject to translators who, in turn, provide a translated text to a writer, the question of authenticity lingers. Early contentions that the autobiography might be the contrivance of LeClaire or Patterson or both are generally countered by pointing out that the authors would have to be literary virtuosos to pull off a work that is so accurate in historical and ethnological details as can be verified from diverse, independent sources. More recent concern over authenticity takes up issues of the multi-voiced aspects of the author-translator-writer process. Arnold Krupat contends that Black Hawk's autobiography, necessarily a dialogic work, is forced into the European form of the genre. In that rendering, Black Hawk's voice must speak in contention with a rhetorical voice preaching the Manifest Destiny concept that emanates from Patterson's translation. Krupat's argument is weakened when he applies this matter of contending cultural voices to N. Scott Momaday. Krupat accuses Momaday of passing off as original Kiowa accounts materials taken from ethnologist James Mooney and that Momaday subverts any Kiowa authenticity with "western art speech" (Krupat 182). The vehemence of this discussion calls into question how considered Krupat's treatment of Black Hawk is. In a 1981 reassessment of Black Hawk, John Hallwas warns against the tendency to give reductive readings of Black Hawk's story (603). Hallwas calls into question the habit of making assumptions from the European tradition about Black Hawk's Sauk purposes in telling his story.

The most recent biography of Black Hawk, *Black Hawk and the Warrior's Path* by Roger L. Nichols, 1992, is a reiteration of old facts about Black Hawk's life delivered with reductive judgments. Nichols talks of Black Hawk's "willful self-destructiveness—a long-demonstrated trait of the Sauk people" and concludes that the actions of the Sauks and Meskwakis were "short-sighted, even ruinous" (3). The Nichols biography makes judgments about what Black Hawk should have been like and should have done according to some general western standard of heroic protagonist. Hallwas counters this kind of reading by saying, "If he fell short of being a great leader, we may still come to respect him as a man" (602).

However, I cannot think of a work in Native American literature, whether historical biographical account or contemporary fiction, where a Native American character is portrayed as being greater than others in human stature. There are no stories of literary or real heroes that fit the western definition. The most extensive cycles of culture-hero stories present characters often defeated and humiliated by human impulses. The White Robe story of the Meskwakis presents a person of extra-ordinary powers who fails to observe the imperatives of hospitality and reasonable conduct and brings about the near destruction of his people. All the contemporary fictional protagonists have more than a tinge of the trickster in their personalities. Gerald Vizenour discusses the trickster aspect of the Native American protagonist. He writes, "Native American Indian literatures are tribal discourse, more discourse" (*Introduction* 4). "Native American Indian literatures are unstudied landscapes, wild and comic rather than tragic and representational, storied with narrative wisps and tribal discourse," he writes (5). He sees the trickster as a "liberator and healer in a narrative, a comic sign, communal signification and a discourse with imagination" ("Trickster Discourse" 187). The idea of a hero or leader who is greater than others is anathemic to the tribal concept of democratic status, certainly to the Sauks. Black Hawk explains that the Sauk concept of personhood is a matter of constant striving: "We must continue throughout our lives to do what we conceive to be good" (*Autobiography* 87). Every person is to be a model of constructive behavior; no one is held up as a role model, but each person is in a state of becoming. "Every man must make his own path," says Black Hawk (93).

Timothy Sweet approaches the autobiography as a gender study. Although Sweet casts much of his discussion in terms of masculinity and interprets conflicts encountered in the story as acts of emasculation, he does see that the form of Black Hawk's story is rooted in oral conventions of the Sauks. William Boelhower looks at Black Hawk's autobiography from a semiotic perspective. He sees Black Hawk as designing a map of Saukenuk as a way to save it in consciousness if not in fact. Neil Schmitz deals more incisively with the text of Black Hawk's narrative. He concedes Krupat's point that the work presents two contending voices—Patterson's voice, which accepts Sauk defeat, and Black Hawk's, which is "defiant, litigious, maledictory" (2). The particular aspect of the text he cites is where Black Hawk is clearly speaking and Patterson's Victorian prose cannot obscure the image, the thought, the message, which are in the Sauk tradition.

The autobiography has seven major movements which can be identified as traditional forms of Sauk discourse. The book opens with a mytho-history of the Sauk people. The second is a counting of coups by Black Hawk that identifies his role and achievements as a warrior. At that point the narrative goes into an oratorical mode that is part of the treaty protocol. French, British, and American officials came to recognize and follow the Native American protocols for treaty negotiating. Consistent with that protocol, the third part of Black Hawk's autobiography is a very careful narrative of events that have led up to the situation that needs to be resolved in treaty discussion. Black Hawk gives a recounting of events as Americans moved into the upper Mississippi Valley and of the Sauk nation during this time.

The fourth movement is a pleasant, image-filled account of the Sauk way of life that is being disrupted and changed by the intrusion of the Americans. The fifth movement deals with coming of the Americans and the specific grievances they inflicted upon the Sauks. In the tradition of Indian treaty oratory, this section is not accusatory and confrontive, but clearly recounts the violations against the Sauk people. This merges into the sixth movement, which relates the specific incidents and circumstances that led to the War. The seventh and final movement is Black Hawk's account of his life after he was captured. He is resigned to the circumstance, but defiant. He never concedes that the whites were right.

While early defenders of the book pointed out that the Sauk viewpoint presented in it was too powerful to have been contrived by the book's translator and writer, they based their argument on comparative sources containing ethnographic details. John Hallwas sees the published speeches of Black Hawk, the verified accounts of Black Hawk's public utterances, as invaluable sources for examining the authorial characteristics and talents of Black Hawk. The consistency of argument and point-of-view between the book and the speeches makes apparent that Black Hawk's authorship is the essential narrative force in the autobiography. Appended to my dissertation is an exchange Black Hawk had with British authorities at Drummond Island 7 August 1817. As was the custom, two transcribers took down the words of the translators, so two copies of the speeches were made. Although the photocopies of the original transcriptions were faded and had minor variations, I was able to make a coherent and stylistically consistent reconstruction of the speech. Black Hawk had led a delegation to ask the British for supplies and military assistance that had been promised during the War of 1812. In the exchange, he is disturbed that peace has been made between the British and the Americans, and he thinks that the British still owe the Sauks and their allies assistance in driving and keeping the Americans away from their lands. Black Hawk gives the compliments and laudatory salutations that are part of diplomacy, but when it is clear the British will not come and drive the Americans away, he becomes angry and tearful, so "insolent" that the British commander ends the meeting.

When Black Hawk led his people on the campaign of 1832, he did so because he believed advisors who assured him that the British would come down from Canada to join up with him. The Drummond speech shows how desperately the Sauks and their allies wanted the Americans driven out and the lands restored to their use without interference. The passion with which Black Hawk tried to retain his land is more apparent in the speech than in the autobiography, but the motive is in the land itself.

As he said, he could not bring himself to leave that land for any earthly consideration. His identity with the landscape and with the story of the Sauks that it signifies is an essential literary dimension of his account. To understand Black Hawk's autobiography or his speeches, some time spent among the river island in a canoe or on a walk through the ravines that remain near Saukenuk will open up the

power of his words and reveal his importance as a Sauk, not someone looking to be renowned as a leader. To the Sauks, the land is scripture; it invokes a recognition of the Great Spirit and his gifts. Scott Pratt argues that to Black Hawk, meaning is a matter of place, and the land is what gives coherent meaning to things and events. Black Hawk demonstrates this when he says, "I never take a drink of water from a spring without being mindful of his goodness" (94). The way to the Native American Indian literary dimensions of Black Hawk's autobiography is through the landscape.

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THE RED RIVER VALLEY AND THE POETRY OF PLACE

LAWRENCE MOE

A pleasantly curious volume is *Topographical Poetry in XVIII-Century England*, by Robert Arnold Aubin. Published in 1936 by the MLA, the Preface opens a bit self-deprecatingly: "This book neither traces a current of ideas nor interprets some writer and accordingly may be slightly old-fashioned. It conducts the reader through country already somewhat explored...". Staying with that geographical metaphor of "country," the author says, "I have sought to isolate it as a definite if not very important literary province, to map its boundaries, classify its members, unravel its constitution, take a census, and outline its history in the eighteenth century." Fittingly, then, his epigraph on the title page is "A *hortus siccus* of withered pedantries."

Yet such modesty, if that's what it is, may not be justified by the book's contents, which begin with the sentence "Topographical poetry is present even in the lower strata of what Thomas Nashe called 'the dust-heaps of tenebrous eld,'" and which end with a seemingly endless bibliography of nearly two thousand separately published examples from the long eighteenth century, subdivided into hill-poems, mine- (and cave-) poems, sea-poems, estate-poems, town-poems, building-poems, region-poems, river-poems, and journey-poems. Beginning before the sixth century BC with Aristeas of Proconnesus ("who is said to have travelled widely among the Arimaspians, the Cimmerians, the Hyperboreans, and other outlandish peoples, and to have composed a poem embodying his observations"), Aubin's historical survey of practitioners ranges from the familiar (Ovid, Virgil) to the obscure (no examples needed), reminding one along the way of stand-outs like Petrarch, or Drayton, whose immense *Poly-Olbion* is characterized as "a museum of topics proper to topographical poetry of all ages" (20).

I recently snooped around my library's database and found nearly 300 entries for topological poetry, a.k.a., the poetry of place, e.g.: *Rhymes of the Rockies, The River Niagara, Poems of New Mexico, I Am Mississippi, Ballads of the Black Hills, Ballads of Old New York, The Road to Texas, Lake Superior Magic, The Morning Dawn, Bar Harbor, Maine, Florida the Beautiful*. Care to go a little further afield? How about *The Forests of Lithuania, Panama Patchwork, The Lake of Geneva, Spring in Tuscany*? Or perhaps more native: *Ravenna Poeti per una città, Sanger og viser fra Rogaland, Paris et ses poètes, Mein jelibtes Berlin, or Canto a Montevideo*?

It would seem that the impulse to produce and publish topographical poetry is widespread in time and space. Why? In his introduction to Seamus Heaney's *The Place of Writing*, Ronald Schuchard has offered a compact account of causal relationships between places and poets:

The aura of place imposes itself on one poet's imagination; another poet imposes his singular vision on a plural place; places become havens or heavens; they drive the poet into spiritual or physical exile; they provide poetry with its nourishment and its distraction; they liberate imagination and darken consciousness. (4)

Although in one of Schuchard's clauses just quoted a poet imposes a vision on a place, in the rest of the statement it is *place* that takes action. Is "The aura of place imposes itself" or "places become . . . drive . . . provide . . . liberate . . . darken" merely a manner of speaking?

In *The Place of Writing*, Seamus Heaney also addresses relationships between places and poets, placing somewhat less agency in *place*, using passive voice to speak of a text's infusion with atmosphere, and mentioning the reader's sensation of distinctive atmosphere as a thing unto itself:

The usual assumption, when we speak of writers and place, is that the writer stands in some directly expressive or interpretative relationship to the milieu. He or she becomes a voice of the spirit of the region. The writing is infused with the atmosphere, physical and emotional, of a certain landscape or seascape, and while the writer's immediate purpose may not have any direct bearing upon the regional or national background, the background is sensed as a distinctive element in the work. (20-21)

But this is Heaney's point of departure, the "usual assumption." He is moving towards the mature Yeats of *The Tower*—a book of poems, a structure in the Barony of Kiltartan, and a state of mind:

But in this lecture I am concerned with the poet from the age of fifty onward, establishing an outpost of poetic reality in the shape of a physical landmark, a poet with a domineering rather than a grateful relation to place, one whose poems have created a country of the mind rather than the other way around, (and the more usual way) where the country has created the mind which in turn creates the poems. (21)

That "grateful relation to place" is what one might expect from a book like *Florida the Beautiful*. The "domineering relation to place" implies such a powerful visionary internalization of place that the external world finally becomes optional, whether outposts of poetic reality are left there or not. Speaking of the times after 1928 when Yeats stopped visiting his tower, Heaney comments, "The tower had now entered so deeply into the prophetic strains of his voice that it could be invoked without being inhabited. He no longer needed to live in it since he had attained a state in which he lived by it" (24).

But whether grateful or domineering, the internal will be in complex yet broadly correlative relations to place. So argues environmental psychologist Winifred Gallagher in *The Power of Place: How Our Surroundings Shape Our Thoughts, Emotions, and Actions*. The thesis: "Throughout history, people of all cultures have assumed that environment influences behavior. Now modern science is confirming that our actions, thoughts, and feelings are indeed shaped not just by our genes and neurochemistry, history and relationship, but also by our surroundings" (12). Consider human exposure to light, for instance, as varied by latitude:

For large numbers of Americans living north of the fortieth or fiftieth parallels...the short dark days between November and April add up to a long nightmare. Their annual immersion in a black pit of melancholy and inertia is aggravated by difficulties with appetite, sleep, libido, and cognition: their minds don't work right, and neither do their bodies.... A collaborative survey conducted in four different latitudes within the United States, each with its different length of day and angles of winter sun, showed that while only 2 percent of Florida residents had severe seasonal mood problems, the figure jumped to 6 percent in Maryland and New York, and 10 percent in New Hampshire.... [Another study showed that in Fairbanks,] a whopping 50 percent underwent spells of low energy, overeating, and poor sleep. (32-33)

Is that what makes Florida beautiful, at least for those with seasonal affective disorder (SAD)? The point is not so simple as that one should move south to be happy, because light-mood sensitivities differ from person to person and there are obviously many other variables.

Gallagher draws out similar discussions across a matrix of direct and indirect, interacting environmental factors affecting the human mind, for example air pollution, air pressure, altitude sickness, cabin fever, circadian rhythms, climate, colors, crowding, electromagnetic fields, extreme environments, fauna, flora, *feng shui*, geomagnetic fields, global warming, hay fever, hibernation, humidity, isolation, lunar cycles, microorganisms, mountains, negative ions, noise, seasons, sleep, tectonic strains, temperature, trees, wilderness, and wind. Those who create grateful celebrations—or domineer recreations—of poetic landscapes of place, successfully encoding site-specific sensations or moods, may indeed produce writing, as Heaney put it above, “infused with the atmosphere, physical and emotional, of a certain landscape or seascape.” And I speculate that there is an aesthetic appreciation index keyed to an individual’s experience with and sensitivity to such infusions, helping to explain why someone like me might pay less attention to, say, the poetry of Florida than to the poetry of North Dakota.

*

The North Dakota poetry to which I have been paying the most attention comes from the Red River Valley of the North. Its folk poetry has never been collected or studied before, as far as I can tell, and in fact it was once authoritatively suggested to me that there wasn’t any. Yet I have learned that over 300,000 people living on some 15,000 square miles for more than a century is indeed a critical mass sufficient to generate a regional verse tradition; my collection now includes thousands of poems with at least some connection to that place, and I am limiting myself to pre-1940 verse because I’ve got to draw a line somewhere and I am most interested in Settlement and post-Settlement sensibilities. There is relatively little verse to be found in the three decades before 1900, owing I think to the survival-first imperative of homesteading combined with an early lack of social and educational structures to promote and publish local verse in English. But with the first native-born generation, more secure

economically, educated in English, exposed to literary models, and encouraged by the development of local presses and even a poetry club, there was a blossoming of production, especially between the world wars.

“Interesting project,” someone will say to me before asking, “But is this poetry any good?” Implied in that, of course, are notions about literary goodness in the abstract, with perhaps a suspicion that this particular time and place presents an unlikely provenance for literary achievement. What I am suggesting is that it is probably just as good as Aristeas of Proconnesus on the Hyperboreans, or *Florida the Beautiful*—to the extent that that poetry is good, if it is good—by virtue of infusions of the place’s atmosphere into the work. I am also suggesting that experience with and/or sensitivity to those atmospherics may be an element in the aesthetic appreciation of such poetry.

In some examples from this corpus of folk poetry, the Valley forms a relatively light backdrop or setting, a visible context within which other things are ostensibly treated. Augusta Gray Joslyn of the rural Valley, for instance, published a little poem in 1936 called “Home” about the bonds of warm love among lifelong friends, which opens like this:

A prairie town, gray evening sky,
With sunset, gold and red
Lazy smokes from supper fires,
Flocks of geese over head. (Putnam 109)

We will return to sunset images, but I note first that geese fly through a number of these poems. The fact is that the Red River Valley is situated on major continental flyways and has always been a center of upland game hunting, both for need and sport. The cover of the regional poetry magazine *Prairie Wings* (1936-48) features a “V” of geese passing over a prairie landscape. Old friends in small towns are general, but “Home” to some extent feels to be set in the small Valley town from which it actually came. Another example would be a patterned poem called “Wild Geese” in *Songs from the Red River Valley* by Lillian Savoie Hahn:

In fine formation, pointing north,
Wild geese are flying overhead.
With honk and clatter as they pass
They spread the news that spring is near,
Though earth is drab and days are drear.
With honk and clatter as they pass,

Wild geese are flying overhead,
In fine formation, pointing north. (6)

My own childhood memories of the Valley certainly include vivid images of my elders out shooting birds. As a visiting city boy used to seeing food obtained in packages from grocery stores, I did notice the violence of the hunt, and thus feel momentary recognition when Valley poet Stella Lavina Olson writes of the poor duck: "But some sunset will bring / Menace unguessed; Leaden pellets will sting, / Then—just a poor, / Limp, inanimate thing, / Lacking but what? / Life!" (Putnam 158). My dad's and grandfather's storytelling about hunting as a necessity in the old days was quite as memorable, particularly their tales of the once-abundant prairie chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido* or *T. pallidicinctus*), prized as a mighty tasty example of nature's bounty. Again, a Valley sensibility may be felt in lines like these, which open Wahpeton poet F. H. McMahon's "October Twilight":

Out of the east a dimness grows and thickens,
From dull gray skies that swiftly bring the night;
The suddenness of hunted prairie chickens
Startles the field no more with whirring flight.

No more along the south our vision follows
The wild-goose wedge that sweeps as one great wing
To seek its rest in watered, sedgy hollows
Ere morn awakes that eager journeying. (Putnam 140)

The Red River Valley was settled relatively quickly, with this process commencing shortly after 1871 when railroads reached the Red River and opened the Valley's rich soil for wheat, the ideal crop for the land and climate once the railway's bulk storage and transportation infrastructure was in place, and pointing straight down to Minneapolis, the "Mill City." One of the first early Valley poems I found begins with this quatrain:

So you like this country, stranger? Well, I wish you could have seen it
In the nineties when the land was new and we were raising wheat;
When the Valley of the Red was one vast sea of life and bluestem,
Raising grain enough to furnish bread for all the world to eat.
(Anglesburg 8)

Alice Sinclair Page personified the Valley's founding crop as "King Wheat" in a poem of that title in her book *Wisp of Smoke*. She sings, "Hail to the oceans of bright golden wheat / Strewing its wealth in the land of the West," speaking of "Vast fertile prairies" and repeating "For today is Wheat's Kingdom..." (22). In a poem by Oscar Johan Hanson of Fargo, wheat supplies the metaphor of a recommendation for the literary life, the effort through writing to leave "some kernels with the chaff"; indeed his poem is called "Chaff" (Putnam 81-82). Richard Beck of Grand Forks entitled his book *A Sheaf of Verses*. Likewise in her *Songs from the Red River Valley*, Lillian Savoie Hahn opens a poem with

The harvest of your years is gathered in;
Stored deep, like precious wheat, in laden bin! (3)

It is not difficult to find literal celebrations of the crop as well in early Red River Valley verse, poems with titles like "Harvest Noon," "Land of Plenty," "Acres," "The Sower," "Burning Strawpiles," "Grain Elevator," or simply "Wheat." Hahn's title page bears verse that includes the following lines, typical of the tone in many of these poems:

The waving wheat . . . the waving wheat;
The splendor of the waving wheat! . . .
It undulates across the plain
Until it merges with the sky,
Gold glory sweeping up from earth.

Is it special pleading for me to acknowledge that my maternal grandfather managed grain elevators for the Peavey Company? That as a boy I would occasionally be treated with a visit to him at his majestic elevator with its Goldbergian chutes and pulleys and fans and grates, with exhausted but relieved farmers dumping harvest loads spared this year from drought or hail, with the deadly bins in which a man—or boy!—could drown in sixty feet of grain? That I knew these megaliths were obviously of serious importance, seeing that road and rail throughout the prairie were laid out to serve them, towering as they did over every hamlet and also where there was no hamlet? That when a Valley poet writes of "the blower's eerie moaning / And the giant drive-belt's humming and the rich warm smell of grain" (Anglesburg 9), a node in my brain fires with unmistakable electrochemical recognition of a fondly remembered tangible sensory experience integral to the atmosphere of a place?

The physical or geologic Red River Valley was formed by the southern arm of glacial Lake Agassiz. Because it was for thousands of years the basin of a huge lake, the Valley floor is remarkably flat, the result of a hundred and more feet of accumulating sediment settling over all forms of bedrock and smoothing out. I wish to linger on this feature for just a moment, because while many Midwestern places are flat or relatively so, the Valley is very flat. Northbound on I-29 near Wahpeton, one could set the cruise control and travel for three truly straight hours to the Canadian border some two hundred miles away without seeing much in the way of a rise, hill, or undulation in the land approaching the height of an overpass. The entire Valley floor does tilt downwards to the north, but at a rate below the range of untutored perception, about one foot per mile. Moreover, at no point in that drive would one see indications of the Valley's eastern or western limits, since the gentle rises to archaic beach lines are beyond the horizon on either side. This scope by itself intensifies experience through what is known as the "diminutive effect," which Gallagher observes "has been deliberately cultivated by the architects of Gothic cathedrals and Nazi stadiums alike ..." (23).

Further intensifying human experience in the Valley would be the extraordinary temperature extremes—particularly otherworldly in winter—with persistent winds and endlessly open, unsheltered space all around, the seemingly curled, mirage-bearing horizons visible for all 360 degrees under an expansive hemisphere of variously patterned and colored sky. About half of those who tried to homestead here simply gave up after a few years. But for many of those who stayed, especially through several generations, a regional identity developed that includes pride in the overall success of the Settlement, and a perception that the Valley is a sublimely beautiful place. I found that the poets of this corpus just do not complain much about the flat prairie or the cold windy weather. Painfully harsh, dangerous, or unpleasant natural conditions ususally are described in the context of challenges successfully overcome by the pioneer parent generation, a testament to their fortitude and love.

Fargo poet Stella Halsten Hohncke waxes exuberant in her "The Prairies Speak to the Men of the West"; I will quote just the first of three stanzas:

Sing, Chorus sing!

Sing of the prairies' soul,
Of icy winds and green of spring,
Pink roses and the joy of growing things,
Of grain fields swaying on their acres wide,
Sing of your heritage! Sing out with pride!
Sing, Chorus sing! (Putnam 96)

Alice Sinclair Page, who lived in Grand Forks for a time, opened a poem called "Dakota Prairies" thus:

I love the prairies' vast expanse
Their vision broad and clear
Their power to lift our minds
From each day's doubt and fear.... (22)

Sometimes prairie praise is tempered with a sort of acknowledgment that the subtlety of flat emptiness as deep beauty could be an acquired taste, not for everyone. For instance in addition to "Dakota Prairies," Page wrote a poem called "North Dakota Prairies" where we read,

Oh, the glory of the prairies
None may know, but those who love them.... (Putnam 169)

The same poem compares "the wideness of the prairies" to "the wideness of God's love"; ascribes to both "treasures / Bounties, rapture, beauty, rest"; and concludes,

Oh, the grandeur of the prairies
No words can half express,
But their beauty we behold
As we render praise and homage
For the pulsing joy of living
In this great land of the west— (Putnam 169)

Similarly, Lillian Savoie Hahn wrote a three-stanza poem called "Habitat," including these lines:

The plains speak in a language of their own
Best understood by those who know them well.
It takes a lifetime to interpret all
The stories that these open spaces tell.
To feel the earth-heart beat through new turned sod.
And know the stillness of the prairie night:
The scream of winds around a snowbound door,
A summer storm cloud, slashed with fitful light
To know the West, you must have lived in it

And loved it . . . Not a spreading flat or field
Sweeps out in beauty to the skyline's edge
But holds profounder beauty, deep concealed. (9)

Perhaps early Red River Valley folk poetry is one of few traditions within which screaming blizzard winds penetrating a snowbound door would be admired like this. And there are other poems in the corpus that glory in deadly, subzero, white-out, blizzard environments.

Wind and sky can be regarded as prominent concomitant features of the flat Valley prairie. Using titles like "The Singing Wind," "The Wailing Wind," "Stay Wind," "The Song of the Wind," or just "Wind," these poets cast the breeze into all sorts of roles from lusty bridegroom in a poem called "The Willow and the West Wind" to the singer of requiem in heartfelt elegies for Carl Ben Eielson, a Valley aviation hero who died young in 1929. I found not one poem complaining about that pesky, never-ending wind. Sky poems also abound, with titles like "A Trip to the Sky," "Boatmen of the Sky," or just "Sky," and of course many poems deal in clouds and stars. In 1929, Eva K. Anglesburg explains why Eielson took up aviation:

Since he was born where nearly all
The scenery is sky,
It isn't so astonishing
That he should love to fly. (author's collection)

Sunsets are in a class by themselves. The Valley's prairie dust kicked up by the never-ending wind makes for refractive plays of light on a colossal scale; this combined with the unobstructed horizon in all directions—and frankly the absence of distracting features—creates an arena for sunset observation like few other. For Stella Halsten Hohncke in "A Dakota Sun-Set," "Twould seem some mighty Painter's Art / Had set His canvas in the heart, / Of these fair plains, to signify / The regal splendor of thy sky..." (Putnam 101). For Lydia Jackson in "Sunset," "God's own color-chart unfolds" (n.p.). Alice Sinclair Page has a two-liner called "A North Dakota Sunset":

As the glory of the sunset dies across the plain
The artist plies his futile brush in vain! (17)

Paul Southworth Bliss takes an interesting twist in his 1934 "Prairie Sunset." This sunset is not only glorious, but omnidirectionally so, as the speaker proudly insists to those not so lucky as to live in such a place:

A sunset in a prairie sky—
You have not seen one, then? . . .
Where coursing colors flame and die,
And leap up yet again . . .

The sun from out his treasure chest,
Brings heaps of amber gold,
And spreads them out upon the west
With lavishness untold.

He adds flame-red, and tints emerge,
The spectrum never knew;
Like billows in the sky they surge,
And all alone stand you—

Stand you, upon your lips a seal,
Too much a single word;
And what it is within you feel,
Feels every beast and bird.

Then when the color-strife is drawn,
The sun brings out the rose
That he has gathered from the dawn;
And now the whole sky glows.

You hill men! You in cities bound,
You seek the sunset, west;
The prairie men look all around,
Oft eastward see it best . . .

So may the ranking gods be kind,
And bring you 'ere life's done,
To see a prairie sunset bind
The east and west in one.

Out on the floor of the Red River Valley, I have indeed marveled at the impact on the imagination of the open flatness, with all these characteristic features of wind and sky and sun, of fields sweeping out "to the skyline's edge," the weather enacted monumentally all around. And it is now more clear than ever that I will need my whole "lifetime to interpret all / The stories that these open spaces tell" about the generations of my parents' families who lived and now rest there, in "the stillness of the prairie night." As a reader of Red River Valley folk poetry, my grateful relation to this place means that infusions into verse of the physical and emotional atmosphere of place

can be felt as discrete and significant, independent of other considerations. My domineering relation to this place means that the poems, my experiences and memories, and my inherited and/or coincidental complex of sensitivities to relevant environmental factors combine to create within me a Red River Valley of the mind. That is the location where if I am lucky I might hear "the earth-heart beat" or feel "the pulsing joy of living," and in this I am a microcosm for much of the world's poetry of place.

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BELLOW REMEMBERS IN "SOMETHING TO REMEMBER ME BY"

GUY SZUBERLA

"Something to Remember Me By" and certain essays Saul Bellow collected in *It All Adds Up* defy our common-sense beliefs about hard times in the 1930s. He remembers the Depression years, the hard and hopeless conditions, as a time that opened up a satisfying freedom and liberation. For him, and for many of his generation, the future burned strangely bright. This paradox turns out, in Bellow's hands, to be neither as forced nor as difficult to understand as might first appear. Let me try to explain.

Bellow, the elusive "Drumlin Woodchuck" of Mark Harris's study, has never been easy to pin down, let alone tie to a simple dogma or a single political opinion. His essay and remembrance, "In the Days of Mr. Roosevelt," offers ample illustration. Whether he intends this to be a calculated provocation or a painfully sincere act of witness is a question that, from the essay's beginning to end, remains unanswerable. He asserts, among other things, that the economic dislocations of the Depression made it possible for him and his generation to "escape from family and routine" (*It All Adds Up* 20). This "escape," he goes on to suggest, had liberating consequences. Because his generation could not find regular employment, because they had little hope of finding or securing a place in a profession, they felt no obligation to live by the established rules for an ordinary and routine existence. During the Depression years, the young had a chance to experience a perilous, transient kind of freedom.

Though nowhere in this essay does he name his old Tuley High classmate and friend Studs Terkel, he's openly invading the territory of memory and nostalgia that Terkel staked out in *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (1970). It's possible that Bellow finds that in rewriting the standard narratives and turning

over the accepted history of the Depression, he's recovering his own personal history.

For Bellow, the political and social upheavals of the Depression coincided with the disintegration of his family. With the death of his mother in 1932, and the subsequent remarriage of his father, the conditions of his life changed radically: "I was turned loose—freed, in a sense, free but also stunned, like someone who survives an explosion, but hasn't yet grasped what has happened" (*It All Adds Up* 24).

Directly and indirectly, Bellow reprises and refracts these emotions, beliefs, and narrative formulations in "Something to Remember Me By," a story set in the Depression years.¹ Louie, our first-person narrator, gives this paradox special force and point, since, in his telling, he couples the idea to a story of a writer's vocation and self-making. Early in his "intimate memoir," he recalls that in the Depression "You were...free to make something extraordinary of yourself" (200). The myths of the self-made man, our twice-told tales of conversion and rebirth, are writ so large in American culture and scattered through so much of our literature that reading these words, with something other than an automatic response, requires steady attention to their specific context and particular meaning.

Louie's feisty eloquence and raunchy tale build a plot complicated enough to forestall most automatic responses. He delivers his story in the deadpan tones of a good standup comedian, dropping in, without a single exclamation point, comic turns, surprising incidents, pathos, disguised self-pity, and solemn philosophy. This is the performance of a virtuoso. As in the essay, "In the Days of Mr. Roosevelt," Bellow plays up the paradox of freedom found in the Depression years. Louie discovers his "special destiny," and does so while living through his "full hour of shame" (213). What makes these implausible juxtapositions of high and mighty mystical thoughts and shameful behavior plausible, in the end, is Bellow's imaginative reconstruction of his character's family. Their reflections in the mirror of this story invoke, at one and the same moment, the peculiar shapes of a funhouse and the ghostly presence of the dead (222).

I.

Bellow was seventeen in 1932. He opens his essay, "In the Days of Mr. Roosevelt," by remembering this as the year in which Roosevelt was nominated in Chicago, an event that marked "a change" that, as he later says, "was as much imaginative as it was

economic" (20). For many young people, this was a time when "it was bliss . . . to be alive." He makes this rather astounding statement, even as he enumerates the hardships and "humiliations" older citizens suffered in this "grim time" (19-20). Some filtering of memories, perhaps some softening of the old pains, should be expected in Bellow's accounts. After all, he wrote his essay on "the days of Mr. Roosevelt" some fifty years after he had lived and struggled through the days of the Depression. The essay was written for *Esquire* and published there in 1983; the story, "Something to Remember Me By," also written for *Esquire*, appeared in 1990. Perhaps these circumstances of composition, the simple passage of time and the selective workings of memory can explain why, after noting "the humiliations and defeats of the Depression," he takes a perspective on these times that, deliberately and provocatively, runs contrary to many popular and accepted views (23).

In this essay and some others, if not directly in his short story, Bellow recalls certain sectarian leftist political disputes and the worshipful attitude that American intellectuals, like Edmund Wilson, adopted toward Lenin and Stalin. Bellow's own scornful critiques of Coolidge, Hoover, and "big business"—along with some fond recollections of first reading Marx, Trotsky, Lenin, Wilson and Max Eastman—can still make him sound a little like the Trotskyite he once was. The section where this and other essays on the thirties appear, fittingly enough, is titled "Riding Off in All Directions." He remembers the star-struck feeling he had in meeting Edmund Wilson on Fifty-seventh Street near the University of Chicago. By 1936 when he met Wilson, young Bellow had already read with fascination *Axel's Castle* and *Travels between Two Democracies*. But, much as he admired this literary star, he could not bring himself to follow Wilson's lead in admiring Lenin and Stalin. By way of explanation, he casts himself as a son of "Russian Jews," as someone who, better than many American intellectuals, knew about Czarist and Soviet Russia and the tangled webs of ideology woven into their history.² He then charges that Wilson and other American radicals believed that Harvard and Princeton graduates "were going to abduct Marxism from the Marxists and save the U.S.A." (25-6). Bellow believed no such nonsense.

What he believed was that "America and I, both exceptional, would elude prediction and determinism" (26). Whether he possessed such prophetic powers in 1936, whether he then exercised so

stubborn and independent a political will, are questions I choose not to tackle here. For now, it seems enough to note the implications that this identification with America entails. His strong, if playful, sense of an identity with America and its exceptionalism—underlined by his stance against the scions of New England—places him somewhere outside his own family. Such a construction of identity can be associated with the behavior and attitudes of the “second generation,” the opposition of sons and daughters to their immigrant parents. The historian Marcus Lee Hansen contends that the sons and daughters of immigrants choose “to forget everything”: their parents’ language, religion, family customs, and, among other things, “all physical reminders of early days” (Sollors 214-5). Both Bellow’s rhetoric and Louie’s cultural construction of descent are, in the end, more complicated than the protest against assimilationist tendencies inscribed and assumed in what’s come to be known as “Hansen’s law.” Yet Hansen’s schema may be useful in charting what Bellow calls “an escape from family” and, through his character Louie, “a special destiny” (213).

What’s certain is that in telling his own stories of the Depression, he never falls into the narrative formulations that framed “proletariat literature” and many 1930s stories of working-class heroes. Far from it. Chicago in 1933 may have been a cold, hard, and oppressive place for Louie, the sensitive and intellectual adolescent at the center of “Something to Remember Me By.” It does not follow, though, that Bellow feels a need to surrender to the typology of character that was then dictated by Michael Gold or *The New Masses*. A large cast of working-class characters enter his story and people the run-down apartments Louie wanders through: a scheming prostitute, a muscle-bound bouncer named Moose, a Greek barkeeper who looks like a boxing kangaroo, a drunken father too drunk to speak, and “Depression hunters” bagging pigeons on city streets (188). His Chicago and its people bear the weight and heavy sadness infusing Dreiser’s dense fictions. But no dialectic oppositions between predatory landlords and their poor tenants, no revolutionary lessons in the fall of the “cockroach capitalists,” animate his scenes of working-class struggles.³

Nor do those Chicago pols and the money-men who pulled the strings in the twenties—men like the financier Samuel Insull and Mayor Big Bill Thompson—get the back of Louie’s or Bellow’s hand. Recalling such figures in his essay on Roosevelt, Bellow

acknowledges that they “were very sharp, certainly, but on the whole were probably O.K.” (20-1). The complacent judgment and understatement are probably meant to be provocative. For the “high-minded” Louie, their conniving existence and the political reality they represent hardly matter. His eyes and thoughts were, as he himself insists, absorbed in a “craze for further worlds” (213, 193). Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea*, not Michael Gold’s Marx, Lenin, or party propaganda, rules Louie’s imagination.

II.

As several readers have noted, “Something to Remember Me By” is “a story of memory,” a tale framed by a narrator who wants to remember and be remembered.⁴ Louie, now an old man and facing his own death, tells of the winter days in 1933 when his mother was dying. He “tells” his story to his “only child,” though the dedication on the page just before this declaration—“to my children and grandchildren”—seems to conflate and fuse this with still other intentions toward posterity. Louie’s announced purpose, within the context of the story and in his epilogue-like last paragraph, seems clear enough. To his “only child,” he says, telling this story provides a “sort of addition to your legacy” (222). He presents himself as a father who wants to instruct and guide his child: he wants “to speak of death and dying” in a time that’s silent about them. He will speak aloud the truth that others will not speak in “these low and devious days” (222). His story and the guidance it offers, along with a small estate, constitute his legacy, “something to remember me by.”

Despite this recital of noble intentions, the story he tells somewhat surprisingly mixes low comedy and bedroom farce with the promised meditations about death and dying. He also engages in some high and mighty philosophizing about his “first knowledge of the hidden works of uneventful days...” (187). Somber, cynical, and giddy by turns, Louie tells of the days—or, rather, about one day and night in February 1933—when his mother was dying. Before he recounts his actions on that day, he utters a line, fitted into a poetic syntax and suffused with incantatory rhythms. It’s set as a single paragraph and reads like a stanza of verse: “Chicago in winter, armored in gray ice, the sky low, the going heavy” (188). This sense of the city’s weight and cold, the allusive recall of Richard III’s “winter of discontent,” never quite recedes or melts away. This arctic atmosphere represents or suggests the heavy burden Louie carries

atmosphere represents or suggests the heavy burden Louie carries inside him.

At the time of these events, Louie is seventeen, a high school senior, an intellectual, Jewish but self-consciously irreligious, bubbling with sexual energy and perhaps too full of himself. His mother is dying at home, though she's so heavily sedated that she "rarely says anything" (189). His father, too, is a silent presence, never speaking a word in the story, though, through Louie, we feel his Old Testament anger and authority. Louie works after school—like Augie March, he delivers flowers, carrying the bulky kite-like packages on crowded trolley cars to different parts of Chicago. On this day, having delivered flowers to a wake on the North Side, he has finished his rounds early. "Not ready to go home," unwilling or afraid to return, he decides to visit his brother-in-law, the dentist Philip Haddis (194). But Louie does not find him in his office. Wandering through the suite of offices, he discovers "a naked young woman" lying on an examining table, strapped and wired-up. She turns out to be a paid participant in a phony sexual experiment conducted by the doctor, Marshek, who shares the office suite. She persuades the now "strongly excited" Louie, who needs no persuasion, to unstrap her and, then, to walk her home (196-7).

Spurred on by his expectations of a sexual encounter, Louie walks with her to a once "deluxe" but now rundown apartment house on Winona across Sheridan Road. He remarks: "The woman knew my expectations. She was, in the flesh, those expectations" (199). In the front room of the large apartment that she's taken him to, there's a crap game; and, in the next room, a speakeasy with a crowd of drinkers. She leads him through a narrow hallway, into a kitchen (where there "were no signs of cooking"), and at last to an almost empty back bedroom where she bids him to "undress and lie down in bed." She will "get ready" in the adjoining "private bathroom" (203-4).

After he's stripped and is lying naked in bed, she emerges fully dressed from the bathroom; quickly opens the window, and tosses all his clothes, including the sheepskin jacket his mother had bought him, to a confederate waiting in the alley below. Answering not a word to his shouts, she runs away "without looking at me." Now, except for his boots and socks, he has no clothes; he has no money, no carfare, no keys. Outside the city remains frozen in an arctic cold, and he is stranded many miles from home (204-5).

Through a series of comic adventures and further humiliations, and after the exercise of some native wit, this prodigal son makes his way home late that night. His father meets him in the kitchen, rises from his chair, and—after Louie has taken off a woman's borrowed tam—hits him "on the head" with "a blow that filled [Louie] with gratitude" (222). To young Louie, his father's angry blow signaled that his mother was still alive. Had she died, he explains, his father would have embraced him.

Though this story has been read as an initiation story—Joan Sutherland, among the earliest commentators, calls it a "(hilarious) sexual initiation story"—from Louie's perspective, this is a tale told about the meaning and significance of "death and dying" (187). In introducing his story, he asserts that "nowadays" there's plenty of talk, too many stories, about sex. The promised and much-expected sexual encounter yields a few frustrating minutes in an empty bedroom. As a consequence of following this "glamorous, sexual girl," he spends a long, cold night wandering the city streets half-naked, for a time, in a soiled castoff dress. Such experiences may or may not be read as an initiation. But it's hard to see that in this adventure the young Louie has been initiated into sexual knowledge or experience he did not already possess. Early in the story, he recounts that he and his girlfriend Stephanie had "necked" and "petted" in the park (189). True, he recognizes, in various ways, that his story underlines both his innocence and gullibility. As he tries to figure out how to get home, he anticipates that his brother-in-law, on learning of this failed encounter, will gently ridicule him: "Did you get in? Then, you're not going to get the clap" (206).

Another critic, Brigitte Scheer-Schaezler, suggests that this story returns us to "the essential conflict of Bellow's male characters, the struggle between fathers and sons" (Bach 350). As she rather persuasively contends, in the act of telling this story, Louie breaks "the pattern that had ruled the relationship between his old father and himself" (Bach 351). It's important that he tells his story to his child "with gentleness and kindness." She builds her reading of the father-son relationship in Louie's story through cross-comparisons with other Bellow fathers and sons, beginning with Joseph of the *Dangling Man* and Tommy Wilhelm of *Seize the Day*. Given her mode of analysis, she need not define too closely why Louie is moved to tell the story that breaks "the pattern." She speculates that his reading of idealistic philosophy and a "change of heart" may account for the break.

Louie may well write out of a change of heart and that, in turn, may have grown out of some sympathetic response to the idealistic philosophies of Schopenhauer, Von Hugel, and another unnamed author. But his spiritual quest for "further worlds," strangely enough, begins with an escape from his home and parental authority. That freedom, in turn, derives from the dislocations brought on by the Depression. As he and the prostitute are about to cross Sheridan Road, she notices the pages of a torn book in his pocket and questions him: "What are you going to be—have you picked a profession?" To her question, he gives no answer. That is, he thinks to himself:

I had no use for professions. Utterly none. There were accountants and engineers in the soup lines. In the world slump, professions were useless. You were free, therefore, to make something extraordinary of yourself. I might have said, if I hadn't been excited to the point of sickness, that I didn't ride around the city on the cars to make a buck, or to be useful to the family, but to take a reading of this boring, depressed, ugly, endless, rotting city. I couldn't have thought it then, but I now understand that my purpose was to interpret the place. Its power was tremendous. But so was mine, potentially. I refused absolutely to believe for a moment that people here were doing what they thought they were doing. Beneath the apparent life was their real life, beneath each face the real face, beneath each voice and its words the true tone and the real message. (200)

What liberates and lifts Louie above the ordinary, or makes it possible for him to think of making "something extraordinary" of himself, is the freedom that, paradoxically, the "hard times" of the Depression have created. Though neither here nor later does he say explicitly that he was freed to become a writer, we can assume that since he has written this "intimate memoir" and continued his search for "further worlds" that writing is the vocation he chooses to follow. He finds, in this moment, that it is his "purpose to interpret this place." He has become someone who, freed from the necessity and the usual routines of making a living, can interpret the lives and the routine existences of those who do. The "world slump," as he calls the Great Depression, created the conditions that free and animate him.

The moment that dramatizes and enfolds these high-minded thoughts is, of course, bathed in typical Bellowian comic irony. As Louie thinks of the freedom "to make something extraordinary of himself" and contemplates these grand metaphysical beliefs, he is "in tow . . . being led" by a "glamorous, sexual girl." He cannot say where

this muse or "floozy" is leading him. At one point, he asks: "where are we headed?" She answers with a teasing and indefinite line: "the other side of Sheridan Road" (200-1). He is on the city streets and far from his own neighborhood; there, he feels free from parental authority and the religious and traditional rules that it represents. As he puts it elsewhere: "At home, inside the house, an archaic rule; outside, the facts of life" (215). "Family" binds him to the routine and the ordinary—his father puts him to work after school, and it's clear from his monologue on freedom that his father and family rule will enlist him, like his older brothers and sister, in downtown jobs and a profession. The Depression makes it possible to free himself from his father's "archaic rule" and the burdens of family and ethnicity.

It is often said, still more often believed, that the rhetoric of ethnic identity in American literature inevitably turns upon a sense of loss. The final scene in this story, however ambiguously, builds upon such a rhetoric. The young Louie's ties to his mother represent his last ties to home, family, and religion. Her death, we are to understand from Louie's telling, will bring about their destruction and a loss of this identity. With some force, he has said that his "special destiny," his work and vocation as a writer, were to be found somewhere outside the house, beyond the "archaic rule" of his father's world and laws.

Bellow makes a somewhat similar point in his 1974 essay, "Starting Out in Chicago," in which he says that, in the 1930s, "I did not go the public library to read the Talmud, but the novels and poems of Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay." It's now too late for me to double back, to point out that Anderson and Dreiser, in particular, help frame the plot, characters, and setting of "Something to Remember Me By." For many readers the intertextual connections to Anderson's and Dreiser's fiction will already be plain. It may be enough to say that Bellow's suffering, gullible Louie is stripped as naked as the narrator in Anderson's "The Man Who Became a Woman," and is as stunned by the shocks of experience as the innocent telling his confused story in "I Want to Know Why." Dreiser's example, Bellow has said with considerable admiration, showed him that "the life lived in great manufacturing, shipping, and banking centers, with their great slums, prisons, hospitals, and schools, was a human life." Like Dreiser, he felt he was born to be the interpreter of this life. So, of course, is Louie, the narrator of this story.

Bellow, in short, remembered these modern authors in "Something to Remember Me By" without naming them, even as he remembered and stated his father's "archaic rule," while denying its final authority.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹Bellow's "The Silver Dish" and "Looking for Mr. Green" also dramatized the way that the forces of the Depression set the story's hero free "from family and routine."
²Bellow makes a similar claim in "Writers, Intellectuals, Politics, Mainly Reminiscences," a 1993 essay. His father told him, when he first began to read Marx and Lenin: "Don't you forget what happened to Lyova—and I haven't heard from my sisters in years—I don't want any part of your Russia and your Lenin" (*It All Adds Up* 98).
³See Gold's *Jews without Money* (1930): "The Soul of a Landlord" [reprinted in Heath 1602-09].
⁴See, for example, Peter Hyland's short note, "Something to Remember Him By?" in Gerhard Bach, *Critical Responses to Saul Bellow* (Greenwood P, 1995). Hyland says that "like most Bellow novels it is a story of memory" (346). Brigitte Scheer-Schaezler, "Choosing to Read the Text: Saul Bellow's 'Something to Remember Me By,'" makes a similar point: Louie "renders his memories in order that he may be remembered..." (Bach 353).
⁵For example, Richard Sennett presents this argument persuasively in "The Rhetoric of Ethnic Identity," reprinted in *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. John Bender and David E. Wellbery. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990): 206.

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