

MidAmerica XXX

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

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In Honor of
Ronald Primeau

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PREFACE

The 33rd annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature was held from May 8-10, 2003, at Michigan State University. Among the panels were two unique offerings: a session on Mennonite poetry chaired by Ann Hostetler, (Goshen College), and a session on Paul Laurence Dunbar, chaired by Ronald Primeau (Central Michigan University), that featured a student film project. At the awards banquet, poet David Citino, (Ohio State University), won the Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern Literature, and Marcia Noe, (The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga), won the MidAmerica award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern literature. The Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Award was presented to Leonora Smith (Michigan State University) for "Purple"; Patricia Clark (Grand Valley State University), Martha Modena Vertreace-Doody (Kennedy-King College), and Ann Hostetler received honorable mentions. The Paul Somers Creative Prose Award was presented to David Diamond (Black Hills State University) for *The Elvis Jesus—Act I—"The Great Magician Dazzles the Badlands."* Carol Spelius (Lake Shore Publishing) received an honorable mention.

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WINTER WEAR

RANE R. ARROYO

They are, at first, scared of snowmen.
Of the snow and the white men
so easily born between the hands of

children veiled in breaths and winter wear.
The immigrants worry about bodies
built without concerns for their souls,

about this strange country in which food
is so plentiful that carrots are used
for noses. White pillars are made by

tall chimneys. No wonder that furry
Santa Claus has replaced Jesus of
the desert: boots needed, as are hats

and vague drinks like vodka or gin. Rum
is too allied with the sun and the sugar
of any rotting calendar. The freezing

is a funeral before there is a corpse.
Snowballs take on the shape of baby skulls.
Snow angels need no documentations.

Enough, it's over: back to thawing kitchens
full of chiles and recipes requiring all
that will not grow in this version of tundra.

Seal up the goddamn windows with
steam, says an old woman, this is no cruise,
there is nothing to see. Crows fly across

Winter Wear

the scars of ice ages, period marks desperate
for sentences. Language will be learned
and the unlearning is one storm at a time.

Nostalgia is seen as being ungrateful for
the blessings of the cold. Humans walk on
water, here, while it's thick ice, as can we.

Snowmen melt without proper funerals as
immigrants are robbed of years of light.
Amigos, say *snowflake*, *snowplow*, *snow-blind*.

University of Toledo

NORMAN ROCKWELL SLEPT HERE

JIM GORMAN

I

Norman Rockwell had come down to the State Line looking for Eve. The goddamn *Saturday Evening Post* Christmas deadline was upon him, but his hands were shaky and his head full of sloppy feelings, so he thought it was time for a drink and a visit to Eve. He rolled his car up to the old brick hotel. Inside, he asked for his usual, hot chocolate and a haircut, then winked at the barkeep. Just going through these secret signs made Norman feel a wee bit better.

The barkeep was dressed in white, a boy really, with a plump face that looked puzzled. He had very little hair and wore a gold ring in his ear, like a pirate, Norman thought. After coming closer, he just stood still.

Norman winked again and raised his voice. "I'm here to see Eve. Could I get hot chocolate and a hair cut?"

The barkeep stood back, then disappeared behind the bar's huge mirror. This mirror showed Norman a view of himself—his long head, horse's head with hair of white now—but also a view of the empty room behind. He tapped his fingers. Where was Eve? No sign of Eve. He called again, "Hot chocolate and a hair cut, please." He heard movement, but instead of Eve, out from behind the mirror came another young man.

Like the first young man, this one was dressed in white with short hair too, but rings in both ears. He spoke to Norman slowly, "Sir, we can get you the hot chocolate but not the haircut. There's another agency up the highway. That's where the barber is. We have a van leaving after lunch."

Norman sat back. Maybe Eve had moved? He would drive up there, but first he'd take the hot chocolate. It would warm him. "Hot chocolate," he said.

Quickly the first boy reappeared with the smallest of china teacups rattling against a tiny saucer. The cup was filled with steaming chocolate.

Norman said, "I asked for whiskey."

The boys looked at each other, their earrings glinting as their heads spun. Then they spoke in unison. "You asked for hot chocolate, sir?"

"Well, hot chocolate is whiskey."

"Not here it isn't. We don't serve whiskey here."

Were these two pirates crazy? Norman looked around. Eve's barroom hadn't changed, well just a bit, since the long table that stretched before the bar had been replaced with smaller ones, white cloths on these tables. Maybe a banquet later, party of some kind?

The second young man came around to sit next to Norman. He began chatting cheerfully. He was from the West Coast, San Francisco. This was his first autumn in the East. The weather in Vermont and especially the leaves were just beautiful, weren't they? Crowded roads and tourists didn't bother *him*. Such a delight to be here in New England for *leaf* season. All of his sentences seemed to end in exclamation points. When he was done chatting up the leaves, the boy said, "I don't believe I know you, sir. Could you tell me your name?"

Norman thought about putting him on, but he was feeling more and more grumpy and also thirsty, so he said just, "My name is Norman Rockwell."

The young man glanced at the other barkeep. He said, "The artist, sir? Yes, we've learned about him. I mean, you, during our orientation. Your cheerful illustrations for such magazines as *The Saturday Evening Post* supported the values of a theistic and heterosexual former culture."

Norman looked at the boy and said, "I suppose."

"Females, especially, clung to icons depicted by you such as Santa Claus, that manifestation of guilty recompense. Also you habitually depicted military personnel happy in their fratricidal duties." Without hardly moving, the boy reached for Norman's wrist.

With the boy's delicate fingers at his pulse, Norman felt fooled. This wasn't a boy, but a young woman. She had the kind of face Norman liked to put in his pictures, high cheekbones and a complexion like peaches and cream. And she smiled like a girl too, though her scruffy hair puzzled him. And that sparkle in her tongue—not

saliva or chewing gum, but something like a gem? He kept glancing at her chest too, which seemed flat for a girl of her age.

This young woman with no chest or this young man with no beard looked at Norman and said, "Your pulse is regular sir, but your statements indicate that we should make some observations. The doctors will be here after lunch."

Norman took his wrist back. He said, "I came down here looking for Eve."

"You came down here looking for a haircut, sir, but you don't need a haircut." The barkeep touched the sides of Norman's head, at the temples.

Norman said, "I hate to be vulgar, but you don't know what a hair cut is."

"No, I don't, sir. You'll have to tell me."

"You've never heard of Eve, either, I can see that now. She runs a place where a man can get a certain kind of pleasure."

The young woman straightened herself. She regretted touching his temples, Norman could tell. She said, "You are speaking of a brothel, sir. We have been informed about brothels too. In the old culture, brothels figured importantly in the maintenance of a hypocritical marital system. This facility is not a brothel. We serve meals and take care of people, but never in that way."

Norman and the young woman sat back from each other. They might have looked into each other's eyes indefinitely except that the room behind them became a center of activity. Several white-suited persons rolled out carts of steaming food. Then a door at the far end swung open, and a line of people started in. They were dressed in white too. Most of them walked but some came in wheel chairs. They were not talkative, not smiling. They were small and thin and their faces reminded Norman of his trips overseas after the war.

Norman Rockwell didn't feel like having lunch, but the young woman had him firmly by the wrist. She sat him at a table, then whispered, "If you want a relaxing meal, sir, I wouldn't say my name is Norman Rockwell. Can you remember some other name?"

Norman Rockwell said, "How about Robert Frost," and the woman let go of a small, sharp laugh as if someone had pinched or bitten her. She fanned the air in front of her face. "Excuse me. Oh, I get it, frost, like winter, New England, skiing, ha, ha, Mr. Frost."

Norman sat down before a plate no bigger than a saucer. He saw a tiny scoop of mashed potatoes, two or three shrunken green beans

and a gray square that might have been meat. The woman said, "They've lost their appetites. The small plates fool them. But I'm sure a healthy man like you will want seconds."

Norman was joined by three other diners. They looked like men, as their chëeks were stubbled. They looked shrunken or half-grown too. Norman thought of his friend Walt Disney and of their feuds about schmaltz and manipulation, but these dwarves were not jolly or pink-skinned like Walt's dwarves. These persons looked young but old too, lifeless, or, Norman realized with a flush, *medicated*. They stared, but not at him. They stared off toward the periphery, as if they were waiting for someone to enter. Some ignored their plates, others had difficulty cutting the gray square, as their hands shook or were restrained by intravenous tubes. But the white-suited barkeeps came by cheerfully with tiny knives. They also poured water into tiny cups.

Norman heard a man sniffing behind him. He heard silverware dropped and other troubling noises. But then the barkeeps were wheeling out TVs. The young woman had a microphone and was also holding a thin, black, metallic rectangle, a remote control unit, Norman remembered. He had seen one at the Sears store once. His wife had wanted it, but he had said what is this lazy world coming to.

The young woman said, "I want to welcome our guest, Mr. Frost. He's not from around here, but I hope he enjoys today's video. Perhaps some of you will talk to him afterwards. He has what formerly was called a sense of humor. Don't let him bite you with it."

Norman wondered if these words, *video* and *bite*, were the new code words. He was about to stand and call *video* when the young woman pressed a button on the remote control unit and the TV screens blinked and then brightened into service, surrounding the diners with a half-dozen versions of the same image.

Norman Rockwell forgot about code words, as he recognized the man on the screen, his oldest son, Jarvis, all growed up with gray hair too. He was wearing one of his father's smocks—or maybe it was his own smock, maybe Jarvis had become an artist too? Jarvis also had his father's voice, that hint of the King's English pressed upon him by his anglophile mother. This same proper tongue wagged in the head of Norman's oldest son, who was also an old man. Jarvis mentioned playing catch ("Father threw like a girl.") and swimming holes ("We swam bareass. Father sat on a rock, doodling."), and also Tomboys ("So many pictures of girls trying to be boys—what was that all about, Father?"). Jarvis said *Father* about every other sentence. He

said Father drew for hours on that toy called the Etch-A-Sketch, moving the knobs—horizontal, vertical—as if entranced. Jarvis also said Father was a perfect father, but often smelled of hot chocolate, and oh how he could be frosty when waking out of his naps, frosty and distant, his mind, not to mention his heart, somewhere else...

II

Norman Rockwell and his photographer, Mr. Frank Hall, were in a hurry. They were speeding down the slush-filled River Road in search of heroic faces. Mr. Frank Hall drove Norman's old car and talked incessantly about the injustice of the world they worked in, these goddamn editors down in New York or Philadelphia, with no idea of an artist's needs. Here they were on a Monday, usually their day off, their one goddamn day for a bit of fun, but no, a changed deadline had them hurrying down a rutted, frozen road in the worst goddamn storm of the century.

Norman smiled at the lilting, gravely voice of his friend and photographer, Mr. Frank Hall. He wished he could talk with such abandon. He especially envied the way Mr. Frank Hall growled the word *goddamn*.

Mr. Frank Hall talked on: The wives would have to hold supper, the wives would have to understand if they couldn't make it home at all tonight, what with this storm, goddamn I declare.

On any day but Monday, Mr. Frank Hall would be driving Norman Rockwell down to Shuffleton's Barber Shop in North Bennington, a gathering place for the kind of heroic faces that made Norman's pictures famous. But today was a Monday and barber shops were closed, so they were hurrying all the way south and west to the state line where their friend Eve and this new husband of hers, Dominick the boxer, were working to put that old brick hotel back into business. "If ever I saw a goddamn heroic face it belongs to Dominick Carelli, the boxer," said Mr. Frank Hall.

Norman Rockwell said, "You can't fake faces. You can fake composition, you can fake color, but not faces. The public knows."

Mr. Frank Hall nodded as they parked the car. They climbed the steps of the old brick hotel. Eve, a thin woman in paint-splattered clothes, greeted them. Her black hair was hidden beneath a red bandanna, and large gold hoops dangled at her ears. She said, "I've made myself up, Norman. I know how you like a costume." Norman smiled.

He did like a costume, yet no costume could disguise Eve's beauty. He looked into her eyes. Her face was not heroic—it was the next best thing, willing. As usual, seeing her made his throat itch. She had a remedy for that too, drink.

Mr. Frank Hall read Norman's mind. He said, "Could you get us some hot chocolate, Eve. The heater doesn't work in Norman's goddamn car, and since he's a Yankee he won't fix it."

Eve said, "I know Yankees, Mr. Hall, and Norman Rockwell is much too needy to be a Yankee." She led them to the long table that stretched in front of the bar. The table was Eve's most recent project. She had resurrected it from the hotel's cellar, she said, had stripped it of stubborn coats of paint, and had it placed so that it stretched from on state, Vermont, into another, New York.

"Soused in one state, ears lowered in another," said Mr. Frank Hall.

Eve said, "Not just booze and haircuts, Mr. Hall. We're opening a restaurant this time, with an Italian specialty. My husband, Dominick, as you know, is a chef."

On the long table were glasses and a large bottle of the honey-colored liquid that Norman thirsted for more and more this winter, his hands steadied by it, though only briefly, as he was learning. Eve poured the glasses full, then pulled at her paint-splattered shirt. "Looks like I've been the only one painting today." Then she said, "Your wife, Norman, your boys—how are they?"

Norman said, "The boys are at college, I think. Mary, as usual, is in her wintry phase, hibernation. Barely gets out."

"But I see her at bridge every Tuesday."

"Yes, what is it about four women and a goddamn card table," said Mr. Frank Hall.

Eve said, "*Talk*, Mr. Hall, that's what it is. Secrets and gossip. Plus, we kiss sometimes. Just like girls, we practice up, for our boyfriends."

Norman and Mr. Frank Hall laughed uncertainly, then sat down to a drink. After a second drink, Dominick, the boxer, lumbered out from behind the bar. Norman Rockwell forgot himself. He stood up. "That's the face I've been looking for, a *goddamn* heroic face if ever I saw one." Norman was taken back by the flatness of Dominick's face, but also by the color of his skin. His face was gray, his arms gray too, a color Norman could never have faked, gray that was also gray, shiny, feverish, dull, but inescapably gray.

Eve said, "This is my husband, Dominick Carelli. His face is about as heroic as people can stand. He has cancer, but more so his flat, gray face has to do with his former career as a punching bag."

The two men shook hands. Norman motioned to Mr. Frank Hall, who knelt with his camera. The camera clicked and a pouf of bright light blinded them.

Mr. Frank Hall said, "You are looking at the heavyweight champion of the 94th Infantry Division, European Theatre, WWII. You have here not just a heroic face, but a goddamn hero. Worked his way through factory school by posing as a ne'er do well, but that's only the beginning—"

Mr. Frank Hall's nonsense was new to Dominick, so he spoke out angrily: "He's not writing a book about me, Mr. Hall. He's just drawing my picture."

Dominick's irritation created a silence that was not broken until Eve said, "Like this table, I found Dominick in the cellar. He saw my leak from the highway. I heard this pounding in the cellar and there he was."

Dominick said, "Yes, like the table, I am one of Eve's projects. Wait until you meet her other current project." Dominick picked up the mostly empty whiskey bottle and this time feigned irritation. He raised his voice: "Where is that sissy of a boy with more hot chocolate?"

Eve said, "Darling, be nice," but she also called out, "Stevie, Stevie, come out here for your uncle."

As if he had been crouching in the shadows, a boy in his teens came running, a gangly boy with dark hair that stuck to his forehead. The boy had no chin, no cheekbones, a long, unmarked face, more like an elbow than a face, Norman thought as he watched the boy's eyes shift warily. Nothing heroic in that face, he thought.

The boy uncapped a new bottle and filled the glasses. Eve stood, then touched the boy's cheek, smoothing his skin, as if to calm him. Then she pronounced a toast. "To faces, heroic and otherwise." Norman looked at Dominick and then at the dough-faced boy.

Then the boy came round the table and grabbed Norman's sleeve. He thought the boy would ask to model for the picture, that's what all kids asked. Instead, out of the boy's mouth came a clamor of strange sentences. "You won't believe me, sir, but I must tell you something. You get what uncle has, you get it, cancer, from touching people. That's how it spreads, one person has it, then that person kisses someone else, kissing and love, that's what spreads it round."

Norman Rockwell looked at the boy's fingers on his sleeve. He said, "You must be speaking about the clap, son, venereal disease—"

Mr. Frank Hall broke in. "Apparently, the boy hasn't heard of penicillin? Hey, kid, penicillin cures the clap. Don't you go to school?"

The boy was not put off. "I mean a new kind of cancer, sir. It hurts so much, and after a long time it kills you, but worse, all that time you are dying, you just know that someone you love gave it to you."

Eve reached out and cuffed the boy's shoulder. "Enough, Stevie. I told you not to mention that nonsense again." She turned to the others. "You'll have to excuse Dominick's nephew. He says God tells him these weird things."

Mention of God sent the boy into feverish motion. He made the sign of the cross several times, his right hand moving in a blur, forehead to chest, shoulder to shoulder. Then he grabbed Norman's sleeve again. "You're the artist, sir. Please put this kind of cancer in one of your pictures, to warn people."

Norman Rockwell tried to pull back from this grabbing boy. He said, "Hard to warn people with a picture, kid."

"But you must, sir. It's an awful sickness."

"Even harder to paint a sickness," Norman said mechanically, the booze having hold of him now. He talked as if from a practiced speech: "Put the model in bed, feverish glow on the forehead. Sentimental. I often err in that direction, so my detractors say. Still, this cancer you get from kissing, never heard of it. Very tricky to work in a new idea, especially during the holiday season."

Mr. Frank Hall stood up, saying, "Especially on such short notice. We've had a deadline change, Eve."

Norman Rockwell felt relief, as he knew he was being rescued. Eve took her cue. She touched Dominick's hand and stood up, all the time staring hard at the boy. She reached for Norman's temples. "Will you be always needing a haircut on Monday, Norman, when all the barbershops are closed?"

The others laughed, but not the boy. Again he grabbed Norman's sleeve, but Eve pulled him away. "That's enough from you, Stevie. Go play or something. Or we'll send you back to where you came from."

III

Norman Rockwell sat down on the bed, feeling the high mattress, firm, not firm—Oh, Jesus, firm enough for this deed. He had been with other prostitutes, but how could he explain this misadventure: A man

starts out in the morning with his wife and son, their destination, the treatment facility ("She drinks. Her husband's fame has overtaken her.") Ten miles down the road, they get sucked into this rat hole of an old hotel, and two drinks later his wife is upstairs, asleep. His son Jarvis, a regular hothouse tomato, is romping in the snow with that absurd boy who was wearing a dress, a polka-dot dress that he wore even in the snow, a brown coat thrown over it. And the woman Eve—all his years in this area, yet had not seen her before. Her inviting face had drawn him on, seduced him. Go upstairs, the far room, she had said, but when he opened the door, there was his wife, belly down on the bed, snoring. The room for him, the empty one, was across the hall.

His shoes off, Norman unbuttoned his shirt, but then sat still. A funny picture composed itself inside his head: A man sits in what looks like a doctor's waiting room; a sign on the door says, *The whore is in...* He would have to sketch this one up, for Eve. She had liked his sense of humor. She'd like his funny drawings too.

He heard soft knocking at the door. "Come in," he said. It wasn't Eve. It was the boy in the polka-dot dress. He had taken off the dress, had taken off everything but his underpants, these white briefs that bagged at his bony hips. In front of him he clutched a sketch pad. The boy sat on the floor, legs crossed like an Indian.

"I brought my sketch pad, sir, because—well, I try to draw some too. I don't think I'm any good, but Eve does. She tries to bring out my talents."

Norman said, "Eve. Where *is* Eve?"

"Oh, she's with your wife. Since there were two of you today, and both so eager, we flipped a coin. Eve wanted you, since it was your first time, but *I* won. You look disappointed, sir, or angry."

"*I am* angry. A coin toss—this is not a football game. And Mary is snoring."

"Oh, that's just a cover, sir. Your wife never falls asleep, at least until after. Your son, *he's* the one sleeping. I got him tired out in the snow. We came in, drank up our hot chocolate, then he went right off."

Norman looked at this mostly naked boy. He crossed his own legs, folded his arms. An unhappy picture shot through his mind: a woman, two women on a bed. Suddenly he shouted out, making the boy jump. "Eve is *not* with Mary. What are you saying? You're lying."

"I am not a liar, sirs. We could peek in on them, if you need proof."

"That's disgusting. My wife with a woman. Disgusting."

"Oh, sir, *not* true. It's beautiful. Your wife is becoming more and more confident. Last week, she came in with a mustache penciled on her lip. She said the pencil was yours, a special one. It drew on paper, it drew on skin. I gave myself some spit curls—right here." The boy rubbed his temples, then let out a squeal. Recently, Norman had illustrated a text of Peter Pan. That's who was with him, Peter Pan, in his skivvies.

Norman said, "I've never slept with a boy, never will."

The boy smiled devilishly. "Never say never. Heck, I've never been with a man old enough to be my father. But really, I'm just the same as Eve—am I not?"

"Eve is a woman. You are a boy."

"Am I? I don't think I'm sure yet. Maybe you can help me? I can be a boy if you wish, but also, look"—the sketch pad came down—"I have these breasts. They are little, but they are growing. I think I am 18 years old. My breasts started late. I don't know why?"

This boy, or this girl, cupped her hands under two dollops of flesh. She held them up to Norman, the soft nipples inverted, barely distinguishable from the rest. Norman looked away, but then brought his eyes back. He had seen breasts of all kinds, had seen rear ends and genitals—he had been through art school, in New York, for God's sake. He looked at these breasts: they were the breasts of a 13-year-old girl, or of a fleshy 13-year-old boy. But if this were a boy, why so scrawny in all other places? Norman looked until the girl brought her knees back up, hiding her chest again. She looked away, her excitement gone.

Norman said, "You are not 18. You look 13."

"I must be at least 15, 16. I remember the war. I remember VJ Day and all that. And here it is, 1956. But who knows my age for sure? Sometimes it feels like I am going backwards, getting younger. But with no certificate, no relatives, who can say? Eve says just make it up. Even my name. For so long, they called me Andrew at the home, but Eve says, 'Try Andy.' Boy, girl, it works both ways."

Maybe, she was a girl, Norman thought. He looked at the backs of her hairless legs where they came out of her underpants. He felt a tickle of excitement: breasts drew his eye, but it was a woman's rear end that got him going. But then Norman lost his tickle—boy or girl, this person was too young. If anything, it seemed like one of his sons had wandered in on a cold morning, to snuggle.

Norman remembered he had brought in the whiskey bottle, so he moved up the bedside and poured his tumbler full. The girl rocked up

on her knees and put her fingers over the glass. "Don't avoid me. More booze will only make you sleepy."

Norman said, "I'll risk it. Everyone else has had a nap." He closed his eyes and threw back the whole glass, then felt his head burn as if it were being curry-combed both inside and out. When he opened his watery eyes, Andy was standing close to him, her breasts, her belly close enough to kiss.

She said, "You are hung up on this boy-girl thing. Why don't I just take off my undies? Or you could pull out my waist band and peek? Then we'd know"—Norman looked away—"or maybe not, sir. Maybe we'll just talk this time. You can see how I love to talk. I haven't told you anything about *me*. You know we come from the juvie place, the home up in Rutland. Don't think poorly of me. I wasn't in for prostitution, just had no family. I didn't know what a whore was until Eve came." Andy took a breath, then said, "It's mostly talk anyhow, that's what Eve says. Talk relaxes a man, then no one gets hurt."

Andy took up Norman's hand. "I want to draw pictures, but I don't know what to put in them. Norman, what are pictures all about? I can understand talk, I like to talk. But pictures, where do you start?"

Norman exhaled. The booze had hold of him. He said, "You start by looking at things—" He thought he had more to say, but the girl was quicker. She said, "But look at the two of us? Who would know from looking at us that you're an artist and that I am—well what am I?"

"You could put a paint brush in my hand—"

"And what would you put in my hand? You know those match books that say, 'Draw me.' They should put my face on one of those. I would be a hard one to draw, wouldn't I? Such a plain face." She took up her sketch pad, making quick marks with a pencil. She said, "You're no easier. You have a long head."

Norman heard himself say, "I've been compared to a horse."

Andy laughed. "That's funny. I'll draw a horse with your dreamy expression. *Oh* Norman, you are not! You are not getting sleepy—"

But he was, his eyes heavy, his mind heavy, so full of old notions—how he loved to use this cute trick in his pictures, the pig-tailed girl wearing her brother's baseball shirt, the pudgy toddler boy in his mother's high heels. But here it was, this cute trick—boy or girl?—right here in bed with him.

For Andy was in the bed now. They were both under the covers, Norman shoeless but still dressed, Andy still not dressed. Andy said, "I see your wrinkles now. Your hair's not gray, but you are getting old.

And you need a haircut, sir, and a shave too. Norman, do you draw a man with all his flaws—these hairs growing out of his ears, and your stubbled cheeks? Do you put those in? What do they call it, a 5 o'clock shadow. How do you pain shadows on a man's skin?"

Norman was about to explain the secret of under painting, but Andy went on: "Eve adopts us, but she never holds us. That's for the patrons, she says. If you want love, get it from them, she says. Such a cold morning, this one. Will you cuddle up with me, just for a time, before we..."

The girl, or the boy—Andy—talked on. The last words Norman heard were about his sleepiness, about how it must be his way of avoiding something scary. Then she whispered, "I am so sleepy too. What am I avoiding?"

Almost asleep, Norman felt Andy take up his hand. Down under the covers, he felt his hand stroked. He thought she was preparing to put it down her underpants, to dispel this mystery at last. But she did not. She—or he—stopped moving, stopped fidgeting, then whispered, "Draw me, Norman, draw me close."

Otterbein College

IN GOOD COMPANY: THE MIDWESTERN LITERARY COMMUNITY AND THE SHORT FICTION OF RUTH SUCKOW AND HAMLIN GARLAND

JEFFREY SWENSON

H. L. Mencken loved Ruth Suckow's work; his review of *Iowa Interiors* (1926), Suckow's first collection of short stories and third book, glows: "Who indeed, at home or abroad, has ever published a better first book of short stories than this one? Of the sixteen stories, not one is bad—and among them there are at least five masterpieces" (382). Mencken fails to mention, however, that several of Suckow's stories bear marked resemblance to Hamlin Garland's early work in *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891). For example, the plight of the tenant farmers in Suckow's "Renters" varies little from that of the tenants in Garland's "Under the Lion's Paw." In both stories, hard-luck farming families return from the Dakotas to relative success on rented land in Iowa, yet that success is taken from them because of their lack of land ownership. And as Ronald Weber and others have noted, the plot of Suckow's "A Rural Community" so closely resembles Garland's "Up the Coolly" that it seems doubtful Suckow did not look to it as a model (180).¹ Both "Community" and "Coolly" are stories about an urbane prodigal son's return to his native village and family.

These similarities point to something more than Suckow's nod to Garland, her regional literary predecessor. Suckow's stories reveal a literature in conversation with Garland's, one that does not simply spring from the regional landscape of the Midwest, but rather mediates between an actual reflection of Midwestern life and the standing literary portrayal of that life. Suckow's work shows that the literature of the Midwest is necessarily formed out of an ongoing textual conversation within its literary community, a conversation creating both benefit and burden to later authors. The coupling of Garland's "Lion's Paw" and Suckow's "Renters" aptly demonstrates the power and pervasiveness of Garland's Midwestern literary landscape.

Suckow's knowledge of that literary landscape and the readerly expectations that develop out of it allows her to play upon an established theme, adding richness to her text. The pairing of Garland's "Up the Coolly" and Suckow's "A Rural Community" shows the burden of that literary landscape in that Suckow must struggle to maintain the authenticity of an already created literary landscape. In "Rural Community," Suckow must satisfy her readers' desire to be both comfortable within their expected regional literary landscape and stimulated by the new, authentic and exotic within that landscape. In other words, Midwestern and other regionalist authors are always working to reconcile an authentic feel of Midwestern life with the literary landscape of Midwestern fiction and the expectations of the readers of that fiction.

When we examine Suckow's "Renters" and Garland's "Under the Lion's Paw," it becomes evident just how pervasive that literary landscape is. One example of the presence of this landscape is illustrated in a woodcut by J.J. Lankes that accompanied Suckow's "Renters" when it was originally published in *The Century Magazine* in August of 1923 (see fig. 1). The woodcut shows a weary, hunched man working a plow behind two horses. Lankes's image ushers the reader into

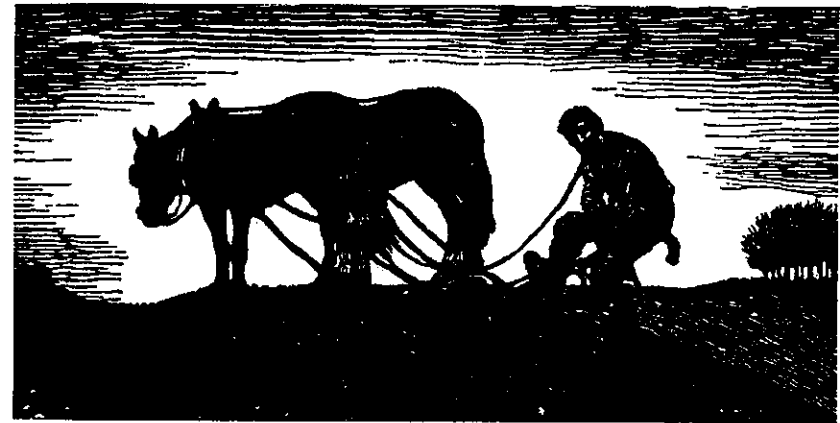


Figure 1. Woodcut illustration by J.J. Lankes for Ruth Suckow's "Renters," *The Century Magazine* 106.4 (August 1923): 599.

Suckow's story, which, like Garland's "Lion's Paw," begins with two sections of third-person narrative cataloging the hard-luck history of a family of hard-luck renting farmers. The plot and structural similarities between the two stories are striking. In these sections, we learn of the parallel histories of the Haskins, Garland's farm family,

and the Mulchers, Suckow's farm family. Both families start without land, both move to the Dakotas in search of better prospects, and both return defeated by treeless plains and grasshopper plagues. And as the narratives of the stories shift from past to present tense, both families have sick children, and both finally believe their luck may be changing because of their relentless work. The main difference between the stories is the narrative focus of each work. While Garland follows Mr. Haskins through his work in the fields, Suckow follows not Fred but Beth Mulcher, keeping the narrative focused on the farmhouse. Despite the image of the farmer gracing the title page of her story, Suckow never shows her characters behind a plow.

Because Garland has already described the toil in the fields for her, Suckow doesn't need to. "Lion's Paw" opens with an image much more suited to the woodcut: "All day long the ploughmen on their prairie farms had moved to and fro in their wide level fields through the falling snow which melted as it fell, wetting them to the skin—all day, notwithstanding the frequent squalls of snow, the dripping, desolate clouds, and the muck of the furrows, black and tenacious as tar."² Garland's toiling farmer, well known to Suckow, would have been well known to Suckow's readers as well. Perhaps too well known, as this 1926 review of *Iowa Interiors* shows: "When this book was sent to me in a package with other volumes, I came upon it and stared forlornly, with a sinking heart. . . . I knew in advance precisely what to expect: drab, as the cliché runs, realism. Unselective photography. Each plate filled with minute touches of entirely characteristic, and utterly boring, 'truth'" (Dodd 331). The reviewer eventually admits that once he forced himself to read them, he found the stories of *Iowa Interiors*, "whole strata above drab realism" (Dodd 332). But before the reader has begun "Renters," and before the critic has even cracked the book, expectations are set—expectations of a Midwestern landscape formed out of the furrows of Garland's fiction. This expectation allows Suckow to tell two stories at once, the one that is taking place in the fields—the one already in the reader's expectations of the literary landscape—and the untold story taking place in the domestic space of the farmstead.

Garland's established landscape allows Suckow to assume descriptions already in the reader's mind and gives her the ability to complicate those descriptions. Suckow, for example, need not emphasize the toil in the fields, for this is where Garland centers his story: "Clothing dripping with sweat, arms aching, filled with briers,

fingers raw and bleeding, backs broken with the weight of heavy bundles, Haskins and his man toiled on. . . . In this way they cut ten acres every day" ("Lion's" 137). In Suckow's story, we learn only that, "Often [Fred] got out of bed before four, when the sun had not yet tinted in the east, leaving Beth asleep."³ His toil is already established in Garland's landscape, so the reader need only know that Fred Mulcher leaves the house early to understand the depths of his labor. While Garland includes a paragraph-length lamentation on the Haskins boy's being made to "drive a team all through the spring, ploughing and seeding, . . . in most ways taking the place of a man" ("Lion's" 135), Suckow's narrator need only tell us, "[Fred] made the boys work, too" ("Renters" 114).

Garland sets the climax of "Lion's Paw" amid stacks of grain and a "well-filled barnyard,"—the fruits of Haskins's labor ("Lion's" 139). When Butler, the farm's owner, doubles the original price on the land because of the improvements Haskins has made, Haskins becomes enraged, threatening to kill Butler with a pitchfork. He holds off and agrees to Butler's terms for price and mortgage only after he hears the laughter of his baby daughter, "far away and dim" ("Lion's" 141). Garland's conflict centers in the field, allowing Haskins a moment of heroic bluster that Butler shrinks from before the "far away" responsibilities of family assert themselves. Suckow shifts focus away from the confrontation in the fields to the domestic intrusion in the home, creating a doubly wronged Beth Mulcher. Beth first puts up with a proprietary, impolite, and condescending visit and look into her home by the farm's owner, Old Lady Hunt, and her polite but brutal daughter-in-law, Cornilia Foster, for the sake of staying on good terms with them. Only after the embarrassing visit, when her husband returns from mending fences, does Beth learn from him that they will have to leave the farm the next year. Fred reenacts the confrontation for her, mimicking Cornilia's arrogant voice: "Dear Nephew Milton thinks 'he would like to try his hand at farming'" ("Renters" 127). Forced to experience the indignity of her eviction at second hand, Beth hears the condescending tone of the two women through Fred, losing the opportunity to express outrage at their ouster. Suckow's domestic setting allows her to tell two stories at once, layering the indignity and helplessness of Beth's forced inaction onto Garland's dramatization of the renting farmer's economic plight. Her narrative plays upon, complicates and enriches Garland's landscape, both stories working simultaneously in the reader's consciousness.

If Suckow gains the benefit of painting against the backdrop of Garland's literary landscape, the same landscape also acts as a burden, for while it allows for play within already known stories, the landscape itself needs maintenance to remain valid. Suckow manages to pull off the trick of revitalizing literary landscape in her "A Rural Community," a story clearly influenced by Garland's "Up the Coolly." Both stories follow the return of a worldly son to his rural home. Suckow manages to revitalize Garland's landscape through her understanding of just what readers expect from regional writing and how that expectation shapes how authors create, and reinvigorate, that landscape.

In her 1930 essay, "The Folk Idea in American Life," Suckow discusses the reader's expectations for a regional literature and culture. Urbane and sophisticated readers, she states, yearn for the authenticity of rural "folk" while often sentimentalizing them as "peasants" or "rustics" ("Folk" 253). Faced with the chaos and alienation of modern life, urban readers instinctively respond to an imagined simplicity and rootedness of rural life. A simpler, less harried folk experience acts as antidote to the complications of modernity, but, ironically, Suckow notes, the folk appeal is always balanced with repulsion from the actuality of the lives of these rural folk, from the poverty, provinciality, and narrowness that accompanies "simple" lives. Critics such as T.J. Jackson Lears reiterate that the appeal of regional writing is due, in part, to "weightlessness," a felt chaos and alienation within modern urban life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (45). Richard Brodhead posits that the middle class used regional literature as a means of escape, the rural being the "primitive made available as leisure outlet" (132). Stephanie Foote discusses both Lears's and Brodhead's ideas in the introduction to her *Regional Fictions* (2001), going on to complicate and question the idea of the authenticity of regional writing's representation of "folk" life, and linking the fascination with rural folk to a fear of a growing immigrant population. Whatever the underlying cause, urban readers desire not only the experience of what they see as a simpler lifestyle, but also the opportunity to retain the fidelity of their own perspective. Garland was well aware of this pull between urban and rural, and his stories—most notably "Up the Coolly"—rely on establishing a balance between these perspectives.

Noted critic Tom Lutz theorizes that this balance of perspective, what he calls a cosmopolitan vista, is a "representational strateg[y]

used by most regionalist artists" (87).⁴ Regional narratives, he posits, seek not only to represent the hinterland of the rural, but also to value the perspective of the urban, creating a third, cosmopolitan perspective that values both urban and rural. As Lutz explains:

What these narratives offer again and again is a third term, a vantage point from which these distinctions represented are erased in favor of a cosmopolitan ethic, which usually respects and disrespects both poles. These texts promote a superior cultural position that transcends all difference and dismisses difference as atavistic. (97-98)

The joy for the reader, or the literary experience of the text, emerges through his or her kinship with the author in recognition of a perspective wider than the play between poles. This play is essential to readers of regional texts because it is only through the development of a cosmopolitan perspective that readers believe in the authenticity of a literary landscape. For regionalism to work, the author must create a balance of the foreign and familiar in their landscape.

In Garland's "Up the Coolly," Lutz notes, neither the urban nor the rural perspective is privileged. The reader finds Howard McLane, an eastern actor returning home, repulsive, as he has forgotten his family, allowing them to sink into poverty while he "buys diamond stickpins and goes yachting" (Lutz 93). At the same time, the reader is unlikely to see Grant McLane, his poor farmer brother, only as a noble victim. As Grant himself admits, the failure of the farm is not Howard's fault. And while there is something solid in the simple, inexpensive clothes of the farmer brother next to the outrageously expensive "knockabout costume" ("Coolly" 56) of his actor brother, the reader is unlikely to want to change places with the farmer. As Lutz observes, our perspective is always changing: "We see through the eastern actor's eyes and feel his euphoria at the beautiful scene and the bracing air; and we see his moody depressive brother through his eyes; then we see the actor through the poor farmer's eyes, and see a selfish, small-minded fop" (94). Garland's Midwestern landscape, then, is not simply an accurate rendition of Iowan farms and furrows, hills and glades, but a more complex assemblage of urban and rural perspectives. Garland is able to establish that landscape not only because he creates a realistic description of a political and economic situation or of a man behind a plow, but rather because he sees and records both merits and shortcomings of rural and urban.

Suckow's problem, then, is to cope with this cosmopolitan literary heritage, one that is both expected, as we see from the illustration of the plowman, and tired, as we see from the dour expectations of the review. Suckow answers this challenge by complicating the already complex perspective that underlies Garland's literary Midwest. If the reader expects the comforting urban/rural dynamic, Suckow re-examines both the urban and rural perspectives, at the same time reaffirming and questioning the cosmopolitan perspective established in Garland's stories. Suckow's "A Rural Community" seems to follow the landscape of Garland's urban/rural dynamic closely. In the story, Ralph Chapin, a prodigal son—successful reporter and world wanderer—returns to visit the Hockadays, his adoptive parents who live in the small town of Walnut, Iowa. But while the returning brother in Garland's "Coolly" finds his mother and brother suffering in their rural environment, Ralph finds his parents retired and happy, living in a pleasant home in the village, his brothers all having become successful farmers. Critics who have examined "Community" often recognize the play between Suckow's rural and urban perspectives. Matts Västå notes, "The story points up clearly the contrast between Ralph's own hectic, restless, rootless life and the place of his childhood and adolescence, where...it is difficult to notice the almost imperceptible alternation of generations and the passage of time" (64). But unlike Garland, Suckow complicates both the simple rural perspective and Ralph's complex, urban perspective.

Like the reader, Ralph sees his visit to his hometown as a chance to bring balance to his chaotic lifelong wandering. But Suckow frustrates both his and the reader's expectations of a stable home and rural space. This play is most easily observed in Ralph's shifting self-image as he engages with the difference between his hometown of memory and its current actuality. From the time he steps off the train until he walks into his parents' home, Ralph is mainly interested in the changes in the town of Walnut, noting with satisfaction everything that has not changed and commenting when he does find a discrepancy between his memory and the current Walnut: "Changes—even here! You couldn't escape them" ("Rural" 158). Ralph attempts to place everything he sees in the context of how it was, static and unchanging, drastically different from Ralph's view of himself:

His life was a series of flashing journeys, a kind of animated weekly. He thought of himself as a man without a home, or rather a man

capable of making a home in any café where he might chance to find a cosy seat. But somehow, after being so long in far-off countries, through such dangers, and after an illness that he had had in Prague, something had urged him to see this little town again and the two old people whom he had always called Mother and Father. ("Rural" 164)

His sickness in Prague, or the fear of dying in an unfamiliar place, drives him back to Walnut and drives him to resist changes in the town and his family.

At the same time, Suckow questions Ralph's purely urbane self-conception. Ralph's parents comment on unchanged aspects of his appearance, and he is forced to laugh, "but he was not exactly pleased. He thought himself entirely transformed from that little raw country boy. He had studied, worked, traveled. He had thought there was not a trace of his old self left" ("Rural" 163). Ralph's attempts at balance are frustrated by his parents' revaluation of his lifestyle. He is upset that they are most interested in his love life and that they do not seem suitably impressed by his travels or achievements. His anecdotes of world affairs and changes are matched by his parents' anecdotes of local affairs, specifically the marriages of Ralph's childhood sweethearts. Ralph struggles to reconcile his and his parents' perceptions, of his life:

[I]t soothed some dissatisfaction of his to see that they were struck with naïve admiration at the ease with which he talked, and at the thought of his having seen so many places, he could see that they didn't really take it in. To their minds, it was Will and Ed and Jack who had achieved success. They admired Ralph, and yet they could not understand—how he lived, why he had no family, just what he was doing anyhow. ("Rural" 174)

Ralph is shocked to find that the Hockadays cannot and will not see the value of a wider perspective: "He felt the sudden shock of a different point of view. He had been easily sure of the superiority of his life—but how could he hope to explain it to them?" ("Rural" 171). Suckow stresses the difficulty of communication between Ralph and his family throughout the story. From the awkward silences with his father when they first meet to the extended silence with his brother Jack at the end of the story, the two perspectives lose something in the translation. Like the actor brother in Garland's "Up the Coolly," Ralph desires to live simultaneously in two perspectives, one viewing his hometown as a static place of comfort, the other viewing him-

self as a part of the shifting, cosmopolitan world. Neither perspective is as unified or as contained as Ralph would like, however, and he finds the two difficult to reconcile. Suckow's story questions both sides of his construction, the reader finding it difficult to track clearly what is urban and well-traveled, what is rural and rooted.

To frustrate the reader's attempt to find the rooted in domestic space, Suckow plays with Garland's plot of the moved homestead. In Garland's "Coolly," the actor's family has moved from their homestead to a farm they are renting. Garland's actor brother is able to compensate for this situation by buying the family farm for his brother and mother, a gesture that also allows him to experience its nostalgic feel. On the other hand, because his parents have moved from the family farm into a newer house in town, Suckow's Ralph is forced to explore an unfamiliar domestic space that demonstrates an interesting cosmopolitan flux in its representation of his mother and her perspective. In "Coolly," the eastern actor is the sole representation of worldliness, and he carries gifts representing that worldliness into his brother's home: silk, "all the way from Paris" for his mother, and an autobiography of President Grant for his brother ("Coolly" 67-68). Wholly wrapped up in the daily concerns of the farm, Grant shows no interest in the handsome book about his namesake or the national context the President represents.

In "A Rural Community," Suckow mediates and complicates this use of objects as signifiers of worldliness in her description of Ralph's mother's parlor. In examining his parents' new sitting room, Ralph first notices the provincial—a copy of *The Home Friend*, a serial containing farming news and "blood-and-thunder serials" that his mother still reads, just as she did when he was a child ("Rural" 166). But other objects Mother Hockaday has chosen to place about the room have a strange feel of the quasi-cosmopolitan. Her old stereoscope presents a three-dimensional, albeit miscolored, tour of the sights of the world: "Westminster Abbey, Mont Blanc, Unter den Linden, the Paris Opera house, the Arnold Arboretum, Forrest Hills, Massachusetts, with the azaleas tinted a hideous pink and the leaves a ghastly green" ("Rural" 166). After the stereoscope, Ralph gazes for a moment at family photos with an ache of remembrance, but then is back to "Mother Hockaday's treasures—. . . a blue plate and tea pot from England, a pink shell, some gray Spanish moss the Ed Woods' had sent up to from Florida, an agate—Oh, all those things!" ("Rural" 167). Mother Hockaday's domestic space is complicated by the interplay between

objects tied to roots, such as family photos and familiar furniture, and worldly—if kitschy—objects. Since the Hockaday house is so home-like, Suckow forces readers to reevaluate their expectations of a simple "rural" life within what they expect to be purely rooted space. The home is neither the pure rooted, domestic space Ralph envisions it to be nor a true cosmopolitan space.

Perhaps because of this cosmopolitan play in the depiction of the home, "A Rural Community" becomes almost a parody of the typical return story. Near the end of the story, Ralph looks at the graveyard and is somehow comforted by it, saying to his mother:

"[T]his wouldn't be such a bad place to sleep in, some day," he answered, half whimsically.

She replied quite seriously. "So ye can, my dear, but I hope it won't be for a long while yet. You're one of us, sure you are."

He arched his brows. He did not know whether or not there was anything serious in what he had said. In his theory, the cast-off body mattered nothing. "Oh, I fly about so much, mother, no telling where I'll end up. China or Van Dieman's Land—" ("Rural" 177-78)

While Ralph seems at first to be comforted by the ultimate rootedness of the grave, this comfort is repeatedly undercut. His belief that the "cast-off body"—reminiscent of Ralph's cast off lifestyle—"mattered nothing" shows the reader that his underlying commitment to his roots is tenuous at best, and that his comfort is naïve. Meanwhile, it seems Mother Hockaday protests too much with her, "'You're one of us, sure you are.'" A murky end in China or Van Dieman's Land seems to dovetail nicely with Ralph's murky beginnings—his adoption is mentioned throughout the story. Though Mary Rohrberger notes that Ralph is welcomed, "hugged, and patted, like one of their own" (152), Ralph himself feels unsure of his parents' affection: "They were the only parents he had ever known. They had been kind to him, but they had boys and girls of their own and he had always remembered that after all he was not one of theirs. That was partly what had sent him out into the world" ("Rural" 163). Whether it is because of his world-wandering lifestyle or his adoption, Ralph does not feel as "rooted" as the rest of the Hockadays, despite his attempt at reestablishing those connections.

Ronald Weber believes that Ralph finds in his return home, "a serene sense of belonging . . . a past that remains present" (180), and

Ralph indeed leaves town satisfied, believing he has successfully mediated himself a place within the cosmopolitan world while cultivating his roots. Despite Ralph's facile satisfaction, many cues in the text leave the reader uneasy with his happy compromise. Suckow renders her Midwestern literary landscape as no longer a simply provincial foil against the urban viewpoint of the reader. This complication satisfies both the reader's desire for a more complicated and overarching perspective, a more cosmopolitan viewpoint, and Suckow's desire for portraying a realistic Midwest in her fiction. In this story, Suckow expresses an even more cosmopolitan view than Garland does in his because she is able to use the dual perspectives in his story and add new perspectives of her own. And because this reexamination of the rural in Suckow's work allows for a closer look into the farm life of a woman, in "Renters," or results in a complex depiction of a rural home, in "A Rural Community," Suckow is able to inject the actual landscape into the literary landscape of the Midwest.

In his review of *Iowa Interiors*, H. L. Mencken anticipated the labeled provincialism of Suckow's characters: "All of these people are simple Iowa peasants. In other hands they would slide inevitably into stock types, ludicrous and artificial. But Miss Suckow differentiates them sharply, and into every one she breathes something of the eternal tragedy of man" (382). A close reading of Suckow's stories shows that this kind of "eternal tragedy" is neither organic of Suckow's Midwestern subject nor simplistically crafted. Suckow once said that the "one best, inalienable quality of the Middle West is its 'middlewestishness,'" a quality which she says belongs to the very "weave" of a true Midwestern writer ("Middle" 180). To belong to this tradition, it seems, a writer must both recognize the standing literary pattern of the Midwest and weave oneself into it, creating a design at once old and new to readers, comforting them with a literary landscape they know, yet making that landscape new, unexpected, full of new vistas. A comparative analysis of "Under the Lion's Paw" and "Renters," as well as of "Up the Coolly" and "A Rural Community" shows that Suckow knew the weave from which she came, and was unafraid to embellish as necessary.

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NOTES

- ¹Margaret Stuart Omrcanin notes the similarities not only between "Coolly" and "Rural," but also between "Under the Lion's Paw" and "Renters." *Ruth Suckow: A Critical Study of Her Fiction* (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Co., 1972) 31-33. The plot of Suckow's "Retired," also published in *Iowa Interiors*, is also remarkably similar to Garland's "The Fireplace," originally published in the December 1905 *Deliniator*, and included in the 1909 edition of *Main-Travelled Roads*. Both stories concern farmers retiring to small towns, showing their difficulty coping with their lack of purpose once removed from the farm.
- ²Hamlin Garland. "Under the Lion's Paw." *Main-Travelled Roads*. 1891. New York: Harper and Row, 1956. 127. Subsequent references to "Lion's Paw" and "Up the Coolly" cited in text.
- ³Suckow, Ruth. "Renters." *The Century Magazine* 106.4 (August 1923): 599-613. Later reprinted in *Iowa Interiors*, New York: Knopf, 1926., 114. Subsequent references from "Renters" and "A Rural Community" cited from *Iowa Interiors* text.
- ⁴For a more detailed and expansive discussion of Lutz's theories on the cosmopolitanism and literary value, see *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004).

DRAWING FROM MEMORY: JOHN T. MCCUTCHEON ON CHICAGO AND THE MIDWEST

GUY SZUBERLA

John T. McCutcheon (1870-1949) drew and wrote about a Midwest that, it's now safe to say, existed largely in his memory and imagination. Judging by the length of his career, and by the widespread popularity of cartoons like his "Injun Summer," that same Midwest lived as well in the imagination of his many readers. A cartoonist, book illustrator, reporter, and occasional novelist, he worked for Chicago newspapers from 1889 until his retirement in 1946. He started with the *Chicago Daily News* in 1889, and then joined the *Chicago Tribune* in 1903 where he produced, almost on a daily basis, front-page editorial cartoons, "serial cartoons," and, from time to time, wrote and illustrated his own novels. He also did some serious reporting, most notably on the Spanish-American War and during the early months of World War I.

It is, most of all, his ideas and his constructed images of the rural Midwest that hold a lasting interest. In his books and cartoons, and in the illustrations he did for his friend George Ade, he created an attractive and enduring picture of Midwestern farm life and the Midwest's small towns, especially when recreating the virtues and idiosyncrasies of the rural folk in his native Indiana. He preserved this fading world, its boyhood charms and pastoral tranquility, in his cartoons and fiction, even as he steadily heaped up the evidence of its disappearance before the coming of the city, factory, and automobile. McCutcheon often sketched the imagined peace and social harmony of the Midwestern small town by posing it, in asides and studied contrasts, against the strife and political corruption of Chicago or an archetypal big city. Such damning juxtapositions are frequently asserted through the moral conventions and schema of the genteel tradition. His novels and cartoons, with type-characters and transparent plots, open wide a window on the mythos of his

Midwest. This he did in figuring the big city and the farm in his novel of the jazz age, *The Restless Age* (1921). In his *Bird Center Cartoons*, he drew a seemingly comprehensive picture of small-town Illinois, giving his readers characters who were whimsical, endearingly comic, and generally happy together. His farmers and small-town folks, in this "cartoon series" and in other work, are well dressed and well educated. They enjoy the theatre, keep up on fashions and the latest novels; they regularly attend large social gatherings, and practice to near perfection the arts of graceful living. The Bird Center folks and his LaGrange, Illinois, farming community in *The Restless Age* seem to stand as a conscious rebuke to all those East Coast critics who would characterize the Midwest as a backwater peopled by "hicks" and "yokels."

Throughout his life he grounded his work in the memories and values of his early years back home in Indiana. Born near South Raub, not far from Lafayette, Indiana, he spent his first eighteen years or so close to home. He grew up on the family farm in fairly comfortable circumstances, attending a country school not more than a half mile from home. His father was a farmer, a drover, a Civil War veteran, and for two years the elected sheriff of Elston, Indiana, the small town where the McCutcheons briefly lived (*Drawn* 27-8). Until he graduated from Purdue in 1889 and traveled to Chicago in search of a newspaper job, he had never really left home. A hurried class trip to Chicago to see a Shakespeare play hardly seems to have loosened his home ties. It may have been his father's death that impelled him to leave home and set out, in the formula of the day, on "fortune's road."

His working career was a long and a varied one. He began in the art department of the *Chicago Daily News*, late in October 1889. There he pressed his half-formed talents to the daily grind of illustrating news stories. Within months, the nineteen-year-old was called upon to draw "campaign cartoons." "We Are the People," one such cartoon, covered the entire front page of the 13 December 1889 issue (*John McCutcheon's Book* 47). It won McCutcheon the favor of Victor Lawson, the reform-minded publisher of the *Daily News*. From this point forward, his rise was rapid and steady. Renting his first studio in the Fine Arts Building, he found himself near the artists, writers, and theater people who, in the 1890s and early 1900s, stood at the center of Chicago's Renaissance (*Drawn* 221-5). For two years, during the Spanish-American War, he was a war correspondent

in the Philippines. After a period of hesitation, he followed the lure of big money to the *Chicago Tribune*. In 1903, he negotiated a salary with the *Tribune* for several times more than the sum the tight-fisted Lawson could or would pay. McCutcheon published his first cartoon for the *Tribune* on July 1, 1903, and, through the next forty and more years, produced a large volume of drawings and writings for the paper. During a routine week, he turned out an editorial cartoon every day, sometimes adding travel letters or installments of his serialized novels, which he himself "pictured." On the side, he illustrated books for his friends George Ade and Finley Peter Dunne, placed cartoons in the *Saturday Evening Post* and in other large-circulation magazines. His editorial cartoons, his reporting from behind German lines in World War I, his book illustrations and magazine work—all won him national prominence. For many years, he was regarded as "one of the foremost American cartoonists," a position recognized when he won the Pulitzer Prize for cartoons in 1931 (*The National Cyclopedia* G162).

Though McCutcheon gets no mention in James Shortridge's book, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (1989), his cartoons and writings fit comfortably into the book's main arguments. Shortridge contends that "pastoral imagery had been associated with the label Middle West since [the name was first] coined in the 1880s" (92). He goes on to say that, even after the region was transformed by heavy industry in the 1890s and early 1900s, many rural sections "stuck firmly to the traditional pastoral view of society." On quite different grounds, Easterners tended to ignore the industrialization and urbanization of the region. Especially in the heyday of *The New Yorker*, they preferred to see the Midwest as "synonymous with agriculture" and "occupied by yokels" (Shortridge 49). The Midwest "business community," on the other hand, "... turned away from any rural identification." McCutcheon neither ignored the lingering pastoral dream nor wished away the increasingly dominant presence of Chicago, Detroit, and other industrial cities in the heartland. His work, straddling the urban and agrarian Midwest, exploited what Shortridge calls the "convenient vagueness" in the name and idea of the "Middle West" (93). For McCutcheon, that vagueness made for a kind of *tabula rasa*, a space and a place on which to draw, with a free hand, images of an ever-changing Midwest.

I. INNOCENTS IN THE CORNFIELDS

McCutcheon correctly judged himself to be a dues-paying member in "the good-natured school of cartoons." As he liked to say, he might use satire or ridicule against "existing evils and abuses," but it was done in "a good-natured way" that eliminated "the sting as much as possible" (*John McCutcheon's Book* 64). Though his editorial cartoons of Chicago's boodlers and ward heelers could needle with sharp and taunting satire, he was far more likely to draw cartoons that preached civic virtue and exhorted his readers through flattering images of reform and reformers. "Ald. Coughlin's New Lecture," a *Chicago Record* cartoon, shows the notorious political boss Bathhouse John Coughlin as fat, foolish, and all too gorgeously dressed. The "starving boys," his loyal ward heelers, are posed as demented goons (*John McCutcheon's Book* 47). "The Good Fellow in Politics" (*Tribune*, 6 November 1910) and "The Evolution of a Great Movement" (*Tribune*, 25 February 1914) seem more characteristic of the "good-natured" McCutcheon. The enemies of reform are given the back of his hand, but they are neither inflated into buffoons nor made up as evil-eyed monsters. Just as important, these editorial cartoons dramatize the triumph of justice and the good cause. The boodling "good fellow" goes to jail, and the cause of women's suffrage, in a happy march, wins over its erstwhile opponents (plate 1).

His humor and satire, in certain respects, resemble that of his good friend and Purdue classmate, George Ade. McCutcheon had happily illustrated Ade's "Stories of the Streets and Town" for the *Chicago Daily News* and the *Record* during the 1890s; later, he provided additional faux woodcuts and pen and ink drawings for Ade's serialized novels, among them *Artie* (1896), *Pink Marsh* (1897) and *Doc' Horne* (1899). It is Ade that biographers have dubbed "the gentle satirist," but McCutcheon's penchant for kind-hearted satire was almost always equal to his friend's and usually kinder by half.

Much more consistently than Ade, who sometimes flirted with dark musings, McCutcheon prized innocence and innocent characters. His cartoons of children, especially boys of a Tom Sawyer cast, held a special place in his imagination and, it appears, a particular appeal for his readers (plate 2). In 1902, while working for Lawson's *Record-Herald*, he created a series of cartoons about farm boys that he keyed to the passing seasons. In his posthumously published auto-

THE EVOLUTION OF A GREAT MOVEMENT



When it was in the Pioneering Stage.



When it reached the Successful Stage.

Plate 1

biography, *Drawn from Memory* (1950), he explained their instant popularity:

I reflected that next to a little dog, the most appealing thing in the world is a little boy, the barefooted kind with patches on his pants and a battered straw hat—the sort of boy that nearly every man in the Middle West used to be. . . . Perhaps ["A Boy in Springtime"] occasioned unusual comment because it was an unusual type of car-

A BOY IN SUMMER-TIME



Plate 2

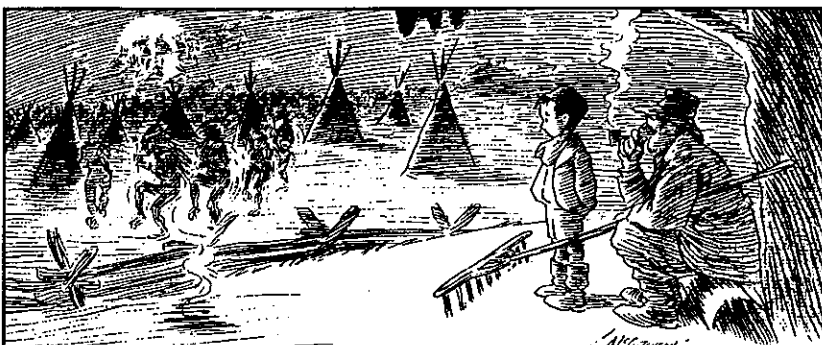
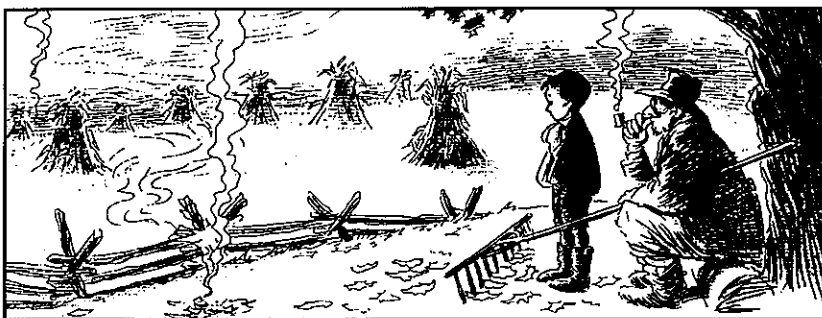
toon to appear on the front page—purely human interest rather than political or topical. (184)

The scenes in this series were necessarily rural and Midwestern. The innocent play and playful adventures of the boys take place against a background of barns, farmhouses, hay wagons, and cornfields. This imagined place, for McCutcheon, typified "the Middle West"; the farm work and healthy outdoor play represented the common experience of "nearly every man" who had once lived there.

INJUN SUMMER

Yep, sonny, this is sure enough Injun summer. Don't know what that is, I reckon, do you?

Well, that's when all the homesick Injuns come back to play. You know, a long time ago, long afore yer granddaddy was born even, there used to be heaps of Injuns around here—thousnads—millions, I reckon, as far as that's concerned. Reg'lar sure 'nough Injuns—none o' yer cigar store Injuns, not much. They was all around here—right here where you're standin'. Don't be skeered—hain't none around here now, leastways no live ones. They been gone this many a year. They all went away and died, so they ain't no more left.



But every year, 'long about now, they all come back, leastways their sperrits do. They're here now. You can see 'em off across the fields. Look real hard. See that kind o' hazy, misty look out yonder? Well, them's Injuns—Injun sperrits marchin' along an' dancin' in the sunlight. That's what makes that kind o' haze that's everywhere—it's jest the sperrits of the Injuns all come back. They're all around us now. See off yonder; see them tepees? They kind o' look like corn shocks from here, but them's Injun tents, sure as you're a foot high. See 'em now? Sure I knowed you could smell that smoky sort o' smell in the air? That's the campfires a-burnin' and their pipes a-goin'. Lots o' people say it's just leaves burnin', but it ain't. It's the campfires, an' th' Injuns are hoppin' 'round 'em t' beat the old Harry.

You jest come out here tonight when the moon is hangin' over the hill off yonder an' the harvest fields is all swimmin' in th' moonlight, an' you can see the Injuns and the tepees jest as plain as kin be. You can, eh? I knowed you would after a little while.

Jever notice how the leaves turn red 'bout this time o' year? That's jest another sign o' redskins. That's when an old Injun sperrit gits tired dancin' an' goes up an' squats on a leaf t' rest. Why, I kin hear 'em rustlin' an' whisperin' an' creepin' round among the leaves all the time; an ever' once 'n a while a leaf gives way under some fat old Injun ghost and comes floatin' down to the ground. See—here's one now. See how red it is? That's the war paint rubbed off'n an Injun ghost, sure's you're born.

Purty soon all the INjuns'll go marchin' away again, back to the happy huntin' ground, but next year you'll see 'em troopin' back—th' sky jest hazy with 'em and their campfires smolderin' away jest like they are now.

First appearance in the CHICAGO TRIBUNE September 29, 1907,
from the original drawings at the Chicago Historical Society.

Illustration used by permission of the Chicago Historical Society

"Injun Summer" grew out of somewhat different sources and memories, though the setting might seem to be the same Midwestern landscape found in the "Boy" cartoons (plate 3). First published on September 29, 1907, in the *Chicago Tribune*, the paper has been reprinting it every fall for close to a hundred years. McCutcheon explained the creation of his most famous cartoon in these words:

There was, in fact, little on my young horizon in the middle seventies beyond corn and Indian traditions. Thirty years later, while groping in the early fall for an idea, it required only a small effort of imagination to see spears and tossing feathers in the tasselled stalks, tepees through the smoky haze, and I evolved "Injun Summer." Certainly the cartoon about which I have heard most goes back to my earliest childhood, long before I even knew what a cartoon was. (Drawn 16)

Just what fired McCutcheon's childhood imagination becomes clear in the opening pages of his autobiography where he describes his birthplace and the surrounding countryside. He names the "Indian tribe[s]" that once lived nearby, notes the presence of a "Shawnee mound," and, then, in the space of three lines, tells of the nearby "battlefield of Tippecanoe, where General Harrison defeated Tecumseh's warriors." As a child, he had listened to the "grownups" gathered around his parents' kitchen table, discussing the "Indian campaigns" taking place out "West" (15-6). All of these memories, it appears, worked their way into the imagery and the text of "Injun Summer."

Its appeal to the reader seems as simple and direct as a fore-shortened initiation story. All is compressed into two cartoons and three short passages, covering a half-dozen newspaper columns. An old man, grandfather to the boy, sits on a log, smokes his pipe, and tells his tale. Age and experience speak to innocence. The old man explains the mysteries of this place, elliptically recounts its history, and, in the slant poetry of his dialect tale, describes Nature, the passing of the seasons, and the presence of the past. He directs the boy to look out into the corn fields:

You can see 'em off across the fields. Look real hard. See that kind of hazy, misty look out yonder? Well, them's Injuns—Injun speerits marchin' along an' dancin' in the sunlight. That's what makes that kind of haze that's everywhere—it's just the speerits of Injuns all come back. They're all around us now. See off yonder; see them tepees? They kind o' look like corn shocks from here, but them's

Injun tents—sure as you're a foot high. See 'em now? Sure, I knowed you could.

The pleasure of the two drawings derives, in some part, from their fanciful juxtaposition. McCutcheon sets the most ordinary Midwestern corn field next to a moonlit field of dreams and ghosts. The flat and commonplace field holds, if only for this night of the year, the strange, the extraordinary, and the supernatural. We could say that such a transformation under the moonlight borrows from some old and, by 1907, outworn romantic conventions. Seeing this happen through the innocent eyes of the child and the vatic understanding of the old man takes a page or two from Wordsworth and Coleridge. At the same time, the foreground and the two figures in it remain relatively fixed, separated from the wispy, visionary scene that they witness by the sturdy split-rail fence. It should not be necessary to add that Robert Frost worked somewhere along this line in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1923). More pertinent, perhaps, is to recall that, in the end, "Injun Summer" is an elegy to a half-forgotten presence. Through McCutcheon's text and illustrations, we glimpse a Midwest that is vanishing or has vanished. This is a place that can still be imagined and remembered, but no longer entered.

II. INNOCENTS IN THE SMALL TOWN

McCutcheon created the "Bird Center Cartoons" while still working for the *Chicago Daily News*; he continued the weekly installments of this series after he moved to the *Tribune* in July of 1903. Bird Center, Illinois, was an imaginary Midwestern town, the name casually borrowed from a George Ade tale. Its large and eccentric cast of characters was drawn, not too surprisingly, from McCutcheon's memory of Elston and other small Indiana towns (*Drawn*: 185). The loose and episodic story line—as Sherwood Anderson was to say of *Winesburg, Ohio*—evolved "from individual tales, but all about lives in some way connected." Every Monday morning, "for a year or more," McCutcheon published a large cartoon, a plate crowded with the good and happy citizens of Bird Center. They are always busily engaged by the town's social affairs: "the baby show," "the harvest home party," "a literary evening," "the arrival of the automobile," and all manner of other happy events and get-togethers (plate 4). From the start McCutcheon accompanied the cartoons with mock newspaper stories by the editor of the *Bird*

Center Argosy. His comic characters and their doings inspired a popular play (by Glen McDonough), and, according to McCutcheon, "many amateur productions throughout the Middle West." The Little Room, a group of architects, artists, and writers at the heart of the Chicago Renaissance, performed its own play, "Cap. Fry's Party," George Ade's take on his friend's cartoon series. Bird Center also spawned a card game, "plates, sofa cushions, and leather goods all marked with characters" from the series (*Drawn* 188). In 1904, McCutcheon gathered the bulk of the cartoons and the accompanying texts, added an introduction, compiled a list of the thirty odd characters, and published *Bird Center Cartoons: A Chronicle of Social Happenings in Bird Center, Illinois*.

From this distance, it's hard to understand the popularity of Cap. Fry, Smiley Greene "the popular undertaker," and the rest of the wacky, wonderful Bird Center gang. McCutcheon believed the series succeeded because he had celebrated the "cheerful and optimistic life in . . . a small town" (*Drawn* 189). In his introduction to the book version, he described the town's social ethos and democratic values in this way:

The poor are as welcome as the rich, and the one who would share their pleasures is not required to show a luxuriant genealogical tree. There are no social feuds or jealousies, no false pretenses, and no striving to be more than one really is. No one feels himself to be better than his neighbor, and the impulse of generosity and kindness is common to all.

Perhaps no further explanation of the series' popularity is required. McCutcheon had, in an attractive and good-humored way, framed the image and ideal of the Midwestern small town, its genteel manners, social harmony, and self-conscious democracy. James Shortridge's book on the Midwest suggests that something more may also have been at work here. The "Bird Center" series appeared at a time often identified with the "ascendancy" of the Midwest. During the 1900-1920 period, especially in the prosperity of the pre-war years, many commentators pointed to the region's "progressivism and strength of character" (Shortridge 35). That prosperity and a growing sense of national importance translated, for McCutcheon and his readers, into the self-confidence and optimism that Bird Center so exuberantly represented.

BIRD CENTER CARTOON



Plate 4

III. INNOCENTS IN THE CITY

McCutcheon's representations of the city, by necessity and design, varied over the years. He was routinely using, without much regard for ideological consistency, the contradictory values in the popular culture of his day. Reworking the narrative formulas of Horatio Alger's books, he dramatized the city as a place of opportunity, a home for middle-class ambitions and dreams. That reading of the city emerges clearly in his novel, *Dawson '11: Fortune Hunter* (1912). When, on the other hand, it fit his story line and matched his comic designs, he slid comfortably into the anti-urban posture and

rhetoric of Midwestern agrarian populism. Two of his novels, *Congressman Pumphrey: The People's Friend* (1907) and *The Restless Age* (1921), take up the cause of the Midwest farmer, picturing the city as the seat of political corruption and as the center of an unholy alliance between money and power.

Whether the titular hero of *Congressman Pumphrey* should be read as a stand-in for William Jennings Bryan, the silver-tongued spokesman of populism, is a teasing question.¹ Congressman E. Joseph Pumphrey, in his fall from innocence into corruption, stands above all for political vanity. Pumphrey, a powerful orator and the newly elected congressman from Minerva Junction, does sound some of the characteristic notes and sentiments identified with Bryan's speechmaking. Bidding the farmers and small town folks of Minerva Junction good-bye, he vows to make it "hot" for "the thieves and corrupt politicians." He will take on "the moguls of finance . . . who now have you at their mercy—they shall hear from me, I promise you" (2). By the end of his first year in Congress, Senator Octopus and the elegant widow, Mrs. Hawkesworth, have him firmly in their power. The railroads, the trusts, and all the moneyed interests, the malignant powers he once fervently preached against, have made him their tool in a land grab. What's more, he's come to see the small-town folks and country people back home as "narrow," "prejudiced" and "hidebound yowpers" (18-9). He resents that to win votes he'll have to leave the city and live again "in the Tall Grass" (27). Now a man about town, he's succumbed to the city's seductions; he has shed his slouch hat and old-fashioned country clothes, employs a valet, and dresses in stylish white tie and tails.

Like *Congressman Pumphrey*, the novel *Dawson '11: Fortune Hunter* appeared by installments in the *Chicago Tribune*, and, once again, McCutcheon "pictured" and wrote his own story. *Dawson '11*, however, defines the city through a different moral and political calculus. In it, the young Charley Dawson plays out his ambitions against the backdrop of Chicago and an unnamed small Midwestern town. Much of the novel, most of the beginning chapters, comes to the reader as Charley's letters home, cheerful reports to his mother that barely disguise his struggling existence and persistent homesickness. These letters indicate, if nothing else did, that Charley is much unlike our classic, most representative Midwestern heroes and heroines. Unlike Carrie Meeber and James Gatz (*Gatsby*), that is,

he's tied tightly to his family and hometown, bound by unbreakable threads of sentiment and memory.

McCutcheon's first page illustration places Charley and the Dawson family in a processional composition, a type-scene of departure framed by a variety of conventions. It's likely, given his reporting at the Chicago World's Fair, that McCutcheon remembered and imitated details in Thomas Hovenden's popular painting, "Breaking Home Ties."² Charley's father snuffles in the background; his mother, bowed and bent, extracts some final pledges and promises of moral rectitude. Charley, his diploma half-stuffed into his pocket, stands stiffly in half-stride, his hand on a door that we can imagine is opened to his future. Before leaving, he tells his family that he's "off to make [his] fortune." His speech, however brave and good-spirited, sounds forced, rehearsed, and declamatory. Setting his foot on fortune's road, he still looks backwards, his sad face turned awkwardly towards his worrying mother (plate 5).

The template for Charley's adventures in the city, no doubt, derives from McCutcheon's childhood reading of Horatio Alger books and other dime novels (*Drawn* 29). Optimism and self-confidence, in the style and vocabulary of these boys' books, stiffen Charley's resolve as he seeks his fortune in Chicago. He must struggle upward against rejections, spells of homesickness, and "the gay seductions of the city" (88). (These "seductions" are never fleshed out with any detail.) When his money runs out, when temptations to dishonesty press down on him, he comforts himself with slogans and revives his will with copybook wisdom. Tempted to quit at one low point, he braces himself: "Henceforth the slogan should be 'Excelsior,' with Victory as his Goal" (89).

The formula urban novels of the late nineteenth century made remote, mysterious cities like Chicago seem familiar, attractive, and accessible. As Adrienne Siegel has shown, such popular fiction served as a kind of guidebook to the city. For an aspiring middle class, these stories of success revealed the city as a place of opportunity and potential wealth.³ In a few scattered scenes, McCutcheon implicitly offers guidance to the ambitious young man from a small Midwestern town. His novel lays out a strategy for a job hunt, gives some advice on rooming house bargaining, and, in one narrative sequence, illustrates the ethical complexities of office politics. Tracing Charley's rise in Chicago, he compiles a rough guide to the city and the necessary steps to success there.



DAWSON '11—FORTUNE HUNTER
Plate 5

McCutcheon's illustrations, on the other hand, comically soften the hard facts of city life. Except for one illustration, Charley walking alone in a Chicago train station, McCutcheon does not show us the crowded city or suggest its over-sized scale. In the city crowds, Charley may feel alienated, and, as he says to himself, "small and inconsequential," but McCutcheon's illustrations do not emphasize this or give us much sense of the city landscape (*Dawson* 86-7). Instead, we are frequently shown Charley in his boarding house room, daydreaming of his family and his hometown.⁴ The effect is a bit paradoxical. The city scene almost disappears, its reality blotted out of the illustrations by these daydreams and fantasies. Nell Courtright, the girl that Charley left behind, represents this fading past in other terms. She is the daughter of an old, "distinguished" family; she lives in an "old-fashioned home" that "seemed part of a long-gone and time-honored past." It's clear that her virtues, beauty, and warmth spring from this past and are, in Charley's imagination,

identified with “the venerable and faded glory of the Courtright home” (154-56). Marrying her, it appears, will preserve for Charley some part of his small-town past, a place and time fast disappearing into memory and dream. Charley and Nell will live, the last pages of the novel promise, happily ever after in an apartment in Chicago.

The Restless Age reworks the master plot of *Dawson '11*. Again, we watch a young man leave his small Midwestern town for the big city, see him struggle to make a living there, and, near the close of the novel, witness his passing success as a respectable white-collar office worker. In the final chapters, much as in *Dawson '11*, he goes back home to marry his childhood sweetheart. One large difference separates these two novels. *The Restless Age* was written after World War I and after Prohibition. (The *Tribune* serialized the novel in 1920-21, and it was published as a book in 1921.) McCutcheon, in his own genteel fashion, imparts the disillusionment of the “lost generation” to his hero, the army veteran Tom Wickham. According to McCutcheon, Tom and others like him belong to “the restless age.” No reader today would confuse Tom and his companions with the sad young men of Hemingway’s 1920s fiction, nor would they identify Lucille Morland, the bored socialite of this novel, with Fitzgerald’s flappers and *femmes fatales*. Still, McCutcheon’s brooding young men, Tom and some supporting characters, suffer from a malaise similar to that which affected the “lost generation.” If they have not come back from the war “to find all gods dead,” they have returned to question the old and settled ways of their parents, the simple and honest farming community of Grangefield, Illinois.

McCutcheon, in short, carries forward a second large purpose in this novel—he’s writing what he evidently considers to be a corrective to the popular “farm novel” and, in all likelihood, an answer to the characterizations of the Midwestern village represented by Lewis’s *Main Street* and Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*. Some fifteen years before, he had satirized “the popular novelist” in a four-panel cartoon, “The Farmer of Fiction and Reality” (*Mysterious Stranger* n.p.). Such novelists, the cartoon asserts, presented Midwestern farmers as hicks “with chin whiskers,” simpletons given to saying things like “‘B’gosh, I’ll just swan to Guiney” (plate 6). By way of contrast, his farmers and small-town folks, those in this cartoon and in *The Restless Age*, are generally well spoken, well dressed, interested in the arts, and current on social issues and fashions. The premiere examples in the novel are Tom’s father and Mr. Harbridge, a

neighbor and the father of Emily, Tom’s childhood sweetheart. They first appear in illustrations that show them at leisure, neatly dressed and outfitted as gentlemen farmers (*The Restless Age* 5, 9). They are sitting and reading in cozily furnished, heavily decorated living rooms. The walls of their homes are lined with framed pictures; in both, pianos are prominently placed. In Mr. Wickham’s house, we see a bookcase stuffed with books, and still more volumes on a large table next to his comfortable chair. To the far right in the Harbridge cartoon, it’s just possible to make out a college banner, half hidden by a vase of cut flowers. These are people with cultured lives and interests, and McCutcheon has filled the rooms with props that display their educated tastes.

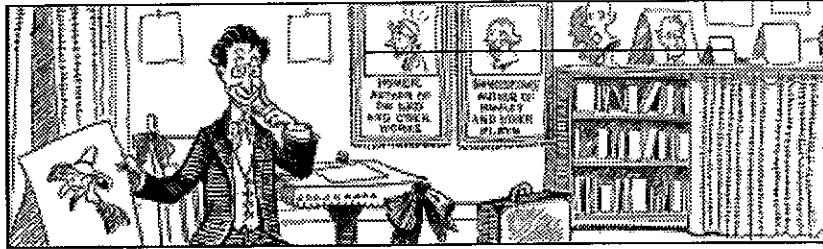
Tom’s decision to leave this clean, well-ordered, and satisfying way of life requires explanation. Tom himself puzzles over his discontents. Much of the first chapter sets down, through lines of quoted monologue, a running argument with himself:

“I’ve got to go,” he muttered. “If I stick around here much longer I’ll go crazy. I simply can’t stand it.” He brooded for a moment. “I guess the travel and excitement have spoiled me for this life. I used to like it here on the farm, but since I came back from the other side the place seems deadly monotonous.” (2)

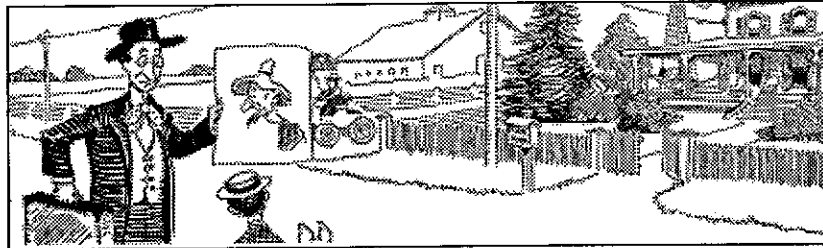
The opening illustration for the novel suggests that he’s already made up his mind to leave the farm. Standing next to the barn door, a cigarette clenched in his mouth, Tom stares across the farmyard to a distant horizon where a miniscule train, trailing a picturesque plume of smoke, streaks toward the city.

Unlike *Dawson '11*, *The Restless Age* represents the city as corrupt and corrupting. In *Dawson '11*, McCutcheon had, with one or two references to the city’s lonely crowd, characterized Chicago as a magnet for energy and a scene of opportunity, the perfect match for young, ambitious Charley and his wife-to-be. Here, McCutcheon, in his authorial voice and more often through his characters’ preachments, deploys some rather harsh populist rhetoric against the city and consumers. We get a small sample of this when Tom, on leaving home, finds himself riding into the city with his friend and messmate Brad Andrews. Hearing that Tom plans to live and work in the city, he accuses him of having succumbed to “jazzitis,” an affliction we later learn is peculiar to the city. Then, in a self-righteous speech, he warns of the city’s dangers and temptations: “Under present con-

THE FARMER OF FICTION AND REALITY



THE POPULAR NOVELIST— "Now I'm going to write a great novel on American farm life and I think I'll go out and find the real type—the kind with chin whiskers who says: 'B' gosh, I'll jest swan to Guiney!"



"Say, bub, I'm looking for a typical farmer like this. Do you know of any farmers around here?"
 "My Pa's a farmer, but he's gone over to town to get a new tire for his auto. You might ask Ma, over there. She's reading about the yacht races."



"Great Scott! is this the farmer of today? I haven't heard any of them say 'B' gosh, I'll swan to Guiney,' and none of them looks like the jay pictures."



Plate 6

ditions city life is like a madhouse. Everybody grabbing and nobody satisfied, no matter how much he makes" (22). For now, the warnings and insults have no power to deflect our hero, but they do coat his first night in the city with thick irony. At his hotel, a B-girl sizes him up for a "hick." Calling herself "Sister," pretending that she knew him in France, she lures him to a roadhouse where someone slips him a mickey. Hours later, he wakes up with his head throbbing and his money gone (21; 32-3).

Though the incident at the roadhouse confirms the rightness of Brad's sermon on the city's corruption, McCutcheon does not choose to interpret Tom's fall from grace through populist rhetoric or agrarian mythology. Such overt populist attacks on the city will come later, when he presents Tom's dalliance with the socialite Lucille Morland. For obvious reasons, but for reasons not always obvious to Tom, she proves to be a much more dangerous and cunning woman than Sister. The daughter of a war profiteer and commodity trader, she plainly represents the city, its sophistication, seductive arts, and predatory ways. She seems, with her expensive car and clothes, conspicuous enough a consumer to have earned herself a place in Thorstein Veblen's index and in populism's cabinet of horrors. McCutcheon constructs a kind of morality play in the opposition between Tom's farm-bred innocence and her knowing designs and dishonest actions. As part of this schematic drama, he develops a typology of character that implicitly contrasts her with Emily, the farmer's daughter that Tom has left behind:

Emily Harbridge was one of a type that is happily becoming more common in farming communities. Magazines, motorcars, telephones, phonographs, movies . . . kept her abreast of the times. . . . Her chief difference from her city sister was the fortunate absence of that fungus growth of sophistication which modern city life inflicts upon girls of her age.

By nature she was kindly and sincere. Duplicity was foreign to her nature . . . (*The Restless Age* 49).

As might be expected, when the novel nears its end point, Tom must choose between the "kindly" Emily and the selfish and city-bred Lucille. The reader cannot be surprised, even after some contrived twists in the plot, when he proposes to Emily, and, the next week, the *Grangefield Gazette* announces that "the young couple would reside in the old homestead on the Wickham farm" (211).

Tom's return to Grangefield, to Emily, and to the family farm follows his chance discovery that Lucille's father, Henry Morland, was a speculator, a commodity trader who during the war had made "vast . . . profits in foodstuffs." Since Tom has for some time been working in the Morland offices, the discovery seems improbably belated. And yet it leads Tom to an epiphany and some reverberating shocks of recognition:

There was something radically wrong, Tom decided, in the distribution of earned reward when the farmer who slaved long weeks and months, gambling with fickle weather while raising the grain, should receive so much less than the speculator who traded in it. . . .

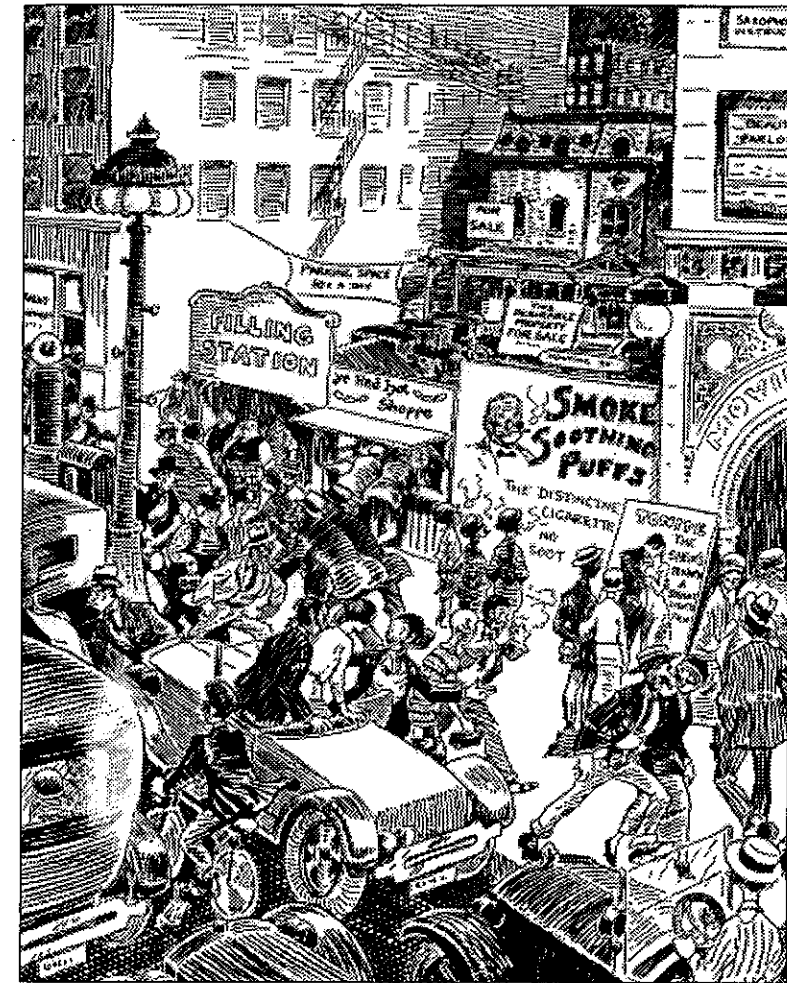
What a mess he had made of things in the city! And, beneath the tinsel of city gaiety, what disillusionments! Selfishness, greed, ostentation, duplicity, cutthroat business methods, crafty evasions of the law, crime flourishing in the face of official complacency or connivance! (*The Restless Age* 160-61)

Through several pages of such complaints, political jeremiads, and self-abnegation, Tom is remembering his father's struggles on the farm. He envisions his father "producing by the sweat of his brow" and then sees, in his imagination, "Mr. Morland garnering the fruits of these labors" (161). The populist rhetoric pitting the producer against the speculator and the middleman, the agrarian vision of the city's depravities and dishonesty—all this seems ordinary enough political speech making for McCutcheon who had, despite some differences, admired and befriended William Jennings Bryan (*Drawn* 88-9). What's startling to recall is that every line of this was being published in the *Chicago Tribune*, a staunchly Republican newspaper, reliably conservative in its politics, and, during this period, almost always a friend to big business.

IV. "CORN-FED PHILOSOPHY"

Perhaps it's unreasonable to complain that McCutcheon flattened the characters in his novels into types and fit his story lines into pre-fabricated forms. He was a cartoonist, not a novelist. He was, all too plainly, writing his fiction by installments for a newspaper audience. For his cartooning, he used what he called "stock characters" and broad caricatures, transforming "conventional types" like "Father Time, Cupid, Neptune, and the Grim Reaper" into "symbols" (*Drawn* 200-01). That he extended such habits into his fiction should not have surprised, but gratified his *Tribune* readers.

CORN-FED PHILOSOPHY



—AND NOW

And now look at the place! Gone is all the stately elegance. The old ancestral rooftop is nothing but a hitching post for telegraph wires. Where Letitia, the beautiful stone crane, used to spout sparkling water in the fountain, the ground is now sullied with grease and oil from the newest little Sportobus with four-wheel brakes. By way of the radio and the movie routes, Main Street gets the latest wrinkles from Broadway almost before they can turn Forty-second Street. Love finds its best inspiration not too near the exit lights at the movies, where a fellow can Valentino his girl into a bored affirmative. Speed is the dope of the day, and you gotta do your stuff and be your age.

From *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, August, 1914.

The myth of the Midwest was writ large in both his cartoons and his fiction. "Injun Summer" and other cartoon versions of the Midwest, particularly those from before World War I, drew on nostalgia or, as in the "Bird Center" series, turned on a cheerful, light-headed whimsy. These cartoons pictured the Midwest as a traditional pastoral landscape, its social, political, and familial harmony held together by what seemed a natural order. Farmers and small-town folks had their failings and faults, but when he pictured them erring, as he did in a series titled "Pictorial Sermonettes," he was content to apply gentle nudges of comic satire⁵. Whatever their faults or failings, they remain good-hearted folk, innocent of guile and duplicity.

The growth of the cities and their increasing economic importance in the 1920s complicated and changed this pleasant picture. McCutcheon came to fear that Chicago and other cities would destroy the genteel way of life and the traditional economies of farming communities. Though his editorial cartoons did not, as a matter of course, pound these points home with the sledge-hammer rhetoric of *The Restless Age*, he regularly turned in this period toward sharper satire and a kind of cultural criticism of urban dominance. Those fears are evident in a pair of cartoons he created for *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in August of 1924. They ran, appropriately enough, under the heading of "Corn Fed Philosophy." What the two cartoons showed, in broad caricatures and comic exaggeration, was the radical transformation of Main Street. From the elegant, tree-lined avenue of the 1880s, it has devolved into an automobile-infested, oil-smearred mess (plate 7). The small town has changed from a decorous, happy community to a crowd of desperate pleasure seekers. Instead of a life lived to the leisurely pace of a croquet match, instead of quiet and genteel courtship rituals played out on wide front lawns, now the street's crowded with jazz-crazed sheiks and shebas frenetically strutting their stuff. We are told that young Valentinos corner and romance their girls in the darkened movie house. "Speed," McCutcheon warns in the appended narrative, "is now the dope of the day" (*John McCutcheon's Book* 206-7). The small Midwestern town, in the 1920s version of these two contrasting images, now looks no different from the city, and that, of course, is the sad moral. No matter that it's delivered with comic gusto and drawn with energy and a quick hand. The Midwest that McCutcheon knew and remem-

bered, like the corn fields and tepees of "Injun Summer," has all but vanished into the ghostly past.

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ENDNOTES

¹ McCutcheon states that, during the Bryan-McKinley presidential contest, his "cartoons favored the gold platform of McKinley." He does, at the same time, acknowledge that the night he heard Bryan give his "Cross of Gold" speech, he was moved: he fell under "the spell of the voice . . . and the splendid periods of the speech." He later came to know and regard Bryan as a friend, and sometimes made use of his suggestions for cartoons. See the extended recount of his response to the "Cross of Gold" speech in *Drawn from Memory* (88-9).

At several points in the novel, Mrs. Hawkesworth, flirting with the married Pumphrey, treats him as if he was a Bryanlike orator. She praises him, saying "it must be wonderful to rise before a vast audience, and feel the sudden, breathless hush, and then to sway them back and forth by the tremendous force of your personality" (63-4).

² Since McCutcheon had a year-long assignment reporting on the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, it's more than likely that he saw and studied Thomas Hovenden's life-sized painting, "Breaking Home Ties." The painting "was voted the most popular picture" at the fair, and is generally regarded as his "best remembered" work. For more on Hovenden, see his entry in *The Dictionary of Art*, 14, ed. Jane Turner (London: Macmillan, 1996).

³ Siegel argues this in her book, *The Image of the American City in Popular Literature, 1820-1870* (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1981). See, in particular, her chapter on "The American Dream Fulfilled: The Urban Cornucopia" (144-53).

⁴ Of the nine illustrations of Chicago scenes, six show Charley in his boarding-house room. The three other Chicago illustrations place him in solitary poses: alone in a greasy spoon café, at the train station, and in his office. At the café he's flanked by a pair of ragged, dissolute characters. To emphasize the dreariness of the place, coffee or soup makes a large puddle on the counter.

⁵ For one example, see "The Man Who Had No Right to Talk" in *Cartoons by John McCutcheon* (1903): n.p.

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THE MYSTERY OF IDENTITY: THE JOURNEY
FROM CONSTRUCTEDNESS TO ESSENCE IN
SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S *POOR WHITE*

MARK PETER BUECHSEL

In the postmodern debate on the nature of identity, past thinkers' voices can make a valuable contribution. Particularly those early-twentieth-century modernists at the cusp of postmodernity, seeking to find a way out of the modernist dilemma of the loss of all certainties, dissatisfied with the past and yet dreading an utterly faithless future, are likely to provide insights into the issues of identity relevant to postmoderns. Sherwood Anderson, a Midwestern small-town businessman suddenly cast into the heated modernist debates of Chicago intellectual circles and living in a nontraditional open marriage with sculptress Tennessee Mitchell, keenly felt the need to ground his identity in an epistemology that did not ignore the skepticism and doubt of modernism yet overcame modernism's all-or-nothing insistence on total verifiable truth or honest despair. He sought a truth that was mystery, thus a truth closely aligned with faith, yet not grounded in the traditional orthodoxies that had come into question.

While virtually any text by Anderson would bear testimony to his mystical conception of identity in the face of a largely scientifically driven modern culture, his third novel, *Poor White*, published in 1920, dramatizes more explicitly than virtually any other Anderson work the struggle of the spiritual against the age of hard science in which material knowledge abounds but truth seems out of reach. I hope to develop Anderson's critique in *Poor White* of the modernist epistemology in its relation to human identity.

In *Reclaiming Identity*, an important recent volume of essays concerning the postmodern debate on identity, Paula Moya, in her introduction, succinctly defines the postmodern critique of identity essentialism:

[M]eaning is never fully present because it is constituted by systems of differences purely internal to the languages through which humans interpret the world. Because meaning exists only in a shifting and unstable relationship to the webs of signification through which it comes into being and because humans have no access to anything meaningful outside these sometimes disparate webs, there can be no "objective" truth. (5)

Countering this postmodernist rejection of objectivity, Moya states the agenda of postmodern realism, a critical concept the volume seeks to develop. She criticizes the all-or-nothing dichotomy posed by the postmodernism vs. essentialism debate and finds it unfruitful for distinguishing between different kinds of identities with very different epistemic consequences and different levels of accuracy in relation to the social and natural structures of the world. She criticizes postmodernists for being "reluctant to admit that identities refer outward (with varying degrees of accuracy) to our shared world" (11) and that "it is possible to arrive at more accurate interpretations of [the world]" (13). Post-positivist objectivity is not defined as a "condition of absolute and achieved certainty" (12) but as an "ideal of inquiry" that is to guide us to increasingly accurate epistemologies and identities. Though no knowledge is context-transcendent, it nonetheless does refer to its context in a more or less accurate manner. In this paper, I do not intend to claim Sherwood Anderson for postpositivist realism—however, I seek to demonstrate how Anderson addresses the collapse of religious essentialism and its flipside, the triumph of scientific essentialism, in order to define human identity in terms that approach those of post-positivist realism but involve a mysticism that seems absent from this new realism.

At the outset of the novel, the reader finds the adolescent protagonist Hugh McVey in a dreamlike state that in its illusory haze of oneness and harmony seems to bear the hallmarks of an unreflective essentialism, a lived romanticism devoid of any subversive romantic irony. Growing up in rural Missouri, idling by the Mississippi River under the guardianship of a perpetually drunk father, Hugh is lost to all ambition or activity; his profound inertia and mental obtuseness lift him away from the earth into a boundless vacuum where the Self need not be defined in terms of difference but can rest in the illusion of self-identity since it effectually encounters no Other. Hugh's life is relatively devoid of human contact, and as a result of this lack of socialization, he can feel himself one with the larger cosmos while

the human world appears irrelevant. This experience of life is expressed in a vision of Hugh that comes to him just as he is about to move to the eastern Midwest, leaving behind his beloved Mississippi:

Hugh thought his mind had gone out of his body and up into the sky to join the clouds and the stars, to play with them. From the sky he thought he looked down on the earth and saw rolling fields, hills and forests. He had no part in the lives of the men and women of the earth, but was torn away from them, left to stand by himself. From his place in the sky above the earth he saw the great river going majestically along A great quiet prevailed and he looked abroad beyond the wide expanse of the river and saw fields and towns. They were all hushed and still. (28)

In this vision, Hugh's detached Self removes into the larger cosmos to play with the stars and from this lofty vantage point beholds a harmonious and silent world in which the clash of human Selves does not figure. In the fashion of the romantic tradition, Hugh's Self expands in its boundless solitude, merging with nature.

While Hugh himself may fall prey to the essentialist notion of a self existing in and of itself in self-reference apart from a social grammar of difference and existing as one with the cosmos, Anderson from the start undermines any such notion. In his article, "Sherwood Anderson and the Postmodern Novel," David Stouck recognizes that Anderson "deliberately draw[s] attention to the fictional nature of [his] narrative[s]" (313), placing Anderson within the tradition of "those nonrealist, postmodern fiction writers whose surest philosophical premise is that life is a fiction, a wholly contingent arrangement, and that accordingly the only realistic narrative is one which continually draws the reader's attention to the fact that everything is fictional" (307). Stouck sees Anderson achieving this end through a deployment of various postmodern narrative techniques, such as "unreal, far-fetched scenes, ludicrous symbolism, comic book characters, loose plot, and myriad author's notes discussing the progress of the book with the reader" (304). The vision cited above is an instance of Anderson's heavy-handed symbolism, which draws attention to the constructedness of the fictional reality he creates: his novel *Poor White*, like most of his other novels, abounds in visions and monologues that are rather blatant as to their artistic purpose. Furthermore, Anderson paints his protagonist in broad strokes, evad-

ing complex psychologizing and presenting Hugh in almost archetypal, mythical terms: he is a Huckleberry Finn figure, the orphaned child of nature that is virtually one with America's great mythical river. Rather than being a fully developed individual, such as the characters of much of traditional realist fiction, he appears to be the personification of an American myth as well as the representative of a particular cultural group in America, namely poor white Southerners—hence the very title of the novel. Anderson is very careful to define this culture and to define Hugh as a product of this culture:

Practically all of the people of Hugh's home town were of Southern origin. Living originally in a land where all physical labor was performed by slaves, they had come to have a deep aversion to physical labor. In the South their fathers, having no money to buy slaves of their own . . . had tried to live without labor. . . . Their food was meager and of an enervating sameness and their bodies degenerate. . . . Vague indefinite hungers took hold of them and they gave themselves over to dreams. . . . When in the years preceding the Civil War, a few of them pushed north along the rivers and settled in Southern Indiana and Illinois and in Eastern Missouri and Arkansas, they seemed to have exhausted their energy in making the voyage and slipped quickly back into their old slothful way of life. . . . In many of the Missouri and Arkansas river towns they have changed but little. A visitor to these parts may see them there today, long, gaunt, and lazy, sleeping their lives away and awakening out of their stupor only at long intervals and at the call of hunger. (18-19)

Virtually all the characteristics associated with Southern poor whites—an animalian obtuseness, a profound stupor and inertia, the givenness to dreams, the lack of definitiveness and a concurrent proclivity to vagueness, as well as vague spiritual hungers—are the very characteristics which in the opening sections of *Poor White* define Hugh McVey and his father John. The historical process by which poor Southern whites have acquired their typical characteristics is sketched out—Hugh thus appears to stand at the end of a long line of cultural and historical development. Far from being an autonomous, context-transcending, unified and self-identical subject, he is thus a product of cultural discourses and their historical evolution. Furthermore, as has been noted, the constructedness of his vision and his association with the American Huck Finn archetype present him as playing a culturally defined role and experiencing the world in a

culturally defined framework of American myth. His identity is essentially a cultural fiction rather than anything growing out of his unique individual or human essence.

And yet, as even Stouck briefly acknowledges as he seeks to align Anderson with postmodern anti-essentialism, there is an earnest quality in Anderson's writing that seems to indicate his dissatisfaction with anti-essentialist conclusions. Stouck notes that "Anderson's characters evoke a sense of the tragic rather than the comic absurd" and that he explicitly exposed his wish to "release [his characters] from their frustration and loneliness through his art" (311). In virtually all of his works, Anderson strongly thematizes the human need to overcome communication gaps and the alienation between selves—in other words, to overcome the grammar of difference which postmodernists see as an insurmountable barrier to objectivity, truth or any ultimate anchoring of identity. One might argue that this very essence-oriented desire is what ultimately drives most of Anderson's artistic endeavor; it is a desire that is strongly present throughout *Poor White*. This is evident, for instance, in the phrase of the "vague indefinite hungers" that inspire the poor whites' dreams—in the absence of definitive material ambitions and physical comforts, a spiritual hunger is aroused that yearns for nothing tangible but for an indefinite fulfillment that lies beyond the pale of easy description or conception because it transcends the linguistic grammar of difference where presence and truth are always deferred. Thus there is an indication that the culturally produced poor white population, including Hugh McVey, contains an essence that gives rise to a yearning for transcendence over alienation: it is a yearning for truth and thus for true identity. Freud, in his famous work *Civilization and Its Discontents*, has argued that aggression is the flipside of the sexual impulse—if unity between fragmentary Selves is not achieved, the annihilation of the Other must take place, for alienation is unbearable. Thus Anderson's note that "[the] more energetic among [the poor whites], sensing dimly the unfairness of their position in life, became vicious and dangerous" (18) seems to bespeak a strong current of frustrated love, of longing for the communion of Selves that may transcend the system of difference which socially and culturally gives birth and form to identities.

For Hugh, a first major shift in his identity occurs when a railroad pushes through town. Significantly, it is the advent of the machine age that first disrupts his Huck Finn existence with its detached illu-

sory dream of self-identity. He is employed by the new station-master, Henry Shepard, and his wife, Sarah, who was born in New England but grew up on a pioneer farm in Michigan. Sarah is very much defined as a cultural product, just as the poor whites of the Missouri town are:

The ambitious energetic little woman, who had taken the son of the indolent farm hand to her heart, constantly talked to him of her own people. . . . She worked upon the problem of rooting the stupidity and dullness out of his mind as her father had worked at the problem of rooting the stumps out of the Michigan land. (11)

Formed by a pioneer culture of ambition, frugality and effort, Sarah imparts to Hugh for the first time in his life an alternative model of identity. She provides him with a secularized Puritan discourse that defines work, self-discipline, effort and material success as the touchstone of identity achievement:

Sarah Shepard looked upon what she called Hugh's laziness as a thing of the spirit. "You have got to get over it," she declared. "Look at your own people—poor white trash—how lazy and shiftless they are. You can't be like them. It's a sin to be so dreamy and worthless." (12)

She keeps Hugh on his toes with myriad petty tasks that serve no purpose other than to keep him busy. Work in and of itself becomes a spiritual activity—it keeps intact a spiritual condition of alertness, the hopeful outcome of which will be material and social success, the crowning achievement of life. Hugh internalizes Sarah's values: after the Shepards move back to Michigan, Hugh vehemently resists his old dreamy mentality by engaging in constant physical activity:

All physical acts were to him dull but necessary parts of his training for a vague and glorious future that was to come to him some day in a brighter and more beautiful land that lay in the direction thought of rather indefinitely as the East. "If I do not move and keep moving I'll become like father, like all of the people about here," Hugh said to himself. (17)

Eventually, he decides to move East to find a place and a people where life is lived well and where he may fully realize his own identity rather than be subsumed in the slothful Missouri river town culture. Identity, to Hugh, has become something externally focused; no longer immersed in a detached self-identity, Hugh has entered

the system of difference in which competition with other Selves is vital for Self-realization and where mastery of the material world, of the land, of one's own body and one's physical environment is the desired aim. This aim, in other words, is power—Hugh rejects his father and his people because of the low level of control they exert over themselves and their environment. The Christian triumph of the spirit over the flesh has been corrupted into the secularized triumph of the Self over the Other. It is a Self that is conceived materialistically, as Energy, as Power.

It is because of this materialistically constituted identity formed within a New English postPuritan discourse that Hugh is able to become a successful inventor of farm machinery who enjoys significant status in the rapidly urbanizing Ohio town where he eventually settles. However, Hugh's material and social success goes hand in hand with social defeat. Something akin to a postpositivist realist perspective seems to inform the narrative, for Anderson, far from portraying the anchorless interplay of freewheeling discourses, makes definite evaluative judgments about Hugh's identity development and relation to the world around him. These judgments are not rooted in an essentialist conviction that would disregard the discursive production of identity or the reality of identity's production within symbolic systems of difference. Rather, Anderson, much like the postpositivist realists, asserts that within a shared context of certain social and natural structures, different identities and discourses can be evaluated according to their more or less accurate understanding of the relation to these structures as well as according to the constructive or destructive epistemic consequences these identities and discourses have on the Self as well as on the various manifestations of the Other. Where Anderson departs from postpositivist realism in his answer to the modernist dilemma that would later radicalize into the postmodern dilemma is in his emphasis of a spiritual, transcendent, unarticulated core at the center of Selfhood that exists despite the culturally constructed layers of our identity.

The inaccuracy of the materialistic power-relation to the world advocated by Sarah Shepard is demonstrated even before Hugh leaves his Missouri hometown. Sarah has preached the gospel of effort and eventual success not only to Hugh but also to her husband Henry. When she inherits her father's Michigan farm, the couple decides to return East because despite great effort, Henry has not advanced in the railroad business. As Sarah bids Hugh good-bye, she

wants to admonish him to be disciplined and ambitious, yet she hesitates—her experience has shown her that hard work can lead nowhere, and she realizes that her discourse of ambition has proven inaccurate in relation to the social structure of her world.

Hugh, however, needs to experience such disillusionment for himself. This disillusionment begins to gnaw at Hugh when material and social success leave him spiritually isolated and devoid of any real fulfillment. Hugh's deepest need, from beginning to end, is for communion with other Selves: he resists the solipsistic romanticism of his youth in order to integrate himself into a life that is wide-awake and authentic. To him, the northern Ohio town of Bidwell where he ends up is "a place where he could penetrate the wall that shut him from humanity," where he can "live and try to work out his problem" (41). Unable to discover any other means of integrating himself with others, Hugh chooses the only path he has learned—that of power and mastery. Crucial to this decision is Hugh's inability, within the American paradigm of success, to conceive of self-worth or lovable-ness—his awkward body becomes to him a symbol of his inability to win the love and respect of others as a mere person; he thus seeks to win it as a machine:

[H]e looked down at his long awkward body and could not conceive of himself as ever by any chance becoming the thing he wanted to be. . . . When the citizens of Bidwell would not take him into their town life . . . he decided to express himself wholly in work. (68-69)

As a mere instrument, as a work animal, Hugh is a roaring success, yet his deepest desires remain unfulfilled. The people of the town who have been hearing about "the new forward-pushing impulse in American life thought they saw in Hugh the instrument of its coming to Bidwell" (70). The people "[l]ike devotees before a shrine" gaze "with something like worship in their eyes" at the place where Hugh lives (119). No image expresses the paradox of Hugh's simultaneous celebrity and loneliness more pertinently than that of him walking the city streets alone, in isolation, and yet with all eyes upon him: "When Hugh walked alone in the streets during the evening and thought no one took account of his presence, hundreds of pairs of curious eyes followed him about" (70). Hugh jealously stalks happy lovers and fantasizes about the daughter of the family with whom he is boarding—yet to overcome the despair of his loneliness, he clings to his public identity and sublimates his spiritual yearnings into

mechanical problem solving; this mode of living continues until one day his eyes are opened to the darker aspects of his and the town's success in industry, when he overhears the abused workers complain about exploitation and saying that he had not done any good for them and ought to be tarred and feathered (257). This is the first blow to Hugh's externalized, culturally fabricated identity, which will eventually fall apart.

The second blow occurs upon Hugh's marriage to Clara Butterworth, the daughter of a wealthy local farmer turned industrialist. At first, Hugh and Clara's relationship involves highly iconic, flagrantly constructed notions of each other. Thus, Clara's view of Hugh is described in a way that makes the culturally determined, mythical nature of her perception of him obvious: Hugh is a "creative force," a "semi-mythical figure," a "hero" who has "tamed" the beast of industrialism and made it useful to his fellows (247). Hugh, on the other hand, sees Clara as the very personification of beauty, of all that he is not:

He could see the woman's small firm hands that lay on the railing of the bridge. They were, he thought, like everything else connected with her person, shapely and beautiful, just as everything connected with his own person was unshapely and ugly. (263)

Yet glimpses of what lies beneath such iconicity shine through even during their courtship—thus Clara notices a spiritual yearning in Hugh's eyes and feels that it humanizes him: "He was . . . an honest, powerful horse, a horse that was humanized by the mysterious, hungering thing that expressed itself through his eyes" (248). Inklings of a spiritual essence, of a soul, make Hugh seem more than an animal—and lead Clara behind the cultural icon she has constructed. Both spouses at first are afraid of sex and for days do not consummate their marriage: Hugh idealizes Clara as "a white pure thing—waiting—for what? for courage to come in to him in order that an assault be made upon her whiteness and purity" (316). Hugh views sex in terms of destruction: "The destruction of what was white and pure was a necessary thing in life. It was a thing men must do in order that life go on" (316). These negative terms are translatable into positive ones: the destruction, the penetration of cultural discourses, of ideals, icons and artificial notions is necessary to retrieve an authentic life that lies beneath them.

Hugh discovers Clara and experiences his first-ever moment of true communion when they are sexually united for the first time, when he moves beyond the ideal of Clara that he has constructed. This first sexual union with Clara provides an important key to Anderson's view of spiritual essence and the means by which we can access it. For instance, Hugh ceases to think—he lets go of the discourses that have been circulating in his head. This cessation of thought only implies the cessation of one particular mode of thought—another one emerges. It emerges not from the realm of ideas, but from a realm of experience that involves the need for communion and the trust in another Self. Hugh gives way to what he experientially recognizes as the social core of human nature: "In himself he did not exist. Within himself something new had been born or another something that had always lived within him had stirred to life" (318). Hugh is born again and thus has found back to an ordinary identity slumbering within him—this is the language of Christian theology and links Anderson, who was not a Christian, to a view of identity based on faith. Faith in Christian theology equals a relational knowing based on profound/existential experiences of trust—though no empirical proof exists, the social core of the human individual knows when it has been loved and can give itself in trust. This Christian conversion experience directed towards God is here secularly mirrored and directed toward a fellow human being. Anderson beautifully evokes the existential nature of this knowledge when he describes Hugh's newfound identity as "something that without the need of understanding he could understand as one understands the need of breath in a close place" (318). Hugh has emerged from his former close place—as his success as an inventor wanes, his marriage flourishes, and he breathes more freely, finally having penetrated the wall that shut him off from humanity.

It is clear that Anderson understands the deeply artificial nature of much of human identity, and throughout *Poor White*, he demonstrates very keen insight into the operations of cultural discourses in producing our identities. Yet he does not stop at these realizations, as postmodernism does: like today's postpositivist realists, Anderson investigates the epistemic consequences of different identity constructions and observes how accurately these reflect the shared social space we inhabit. Finally, he moves beyond such realism to an epistemology of faith—this spiritual climax seems predictable in light of the entire book's profound concern with true, authentic intimacy and

communion, an exchange between two Selves in which the symbols of sense reach beyond themselves to a plane of spiritual essence. Thus Hugh McVey's story presents us with the full spectrum of conceptions of identity and challenges us to consider at which point of the journey we mean to stop.

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FOR SHAKESPEARE, CHICAGO, AND
THE GHOST OF REFORM

JAMES A. LEWIN

During the scorching summer of '88, I lived around the corner from the largest Chevrolet dealer in the world. Driving to the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle Campus, I often found myself wondering when the crisis in Western Culture would reach the car dealers on Western Avenue. Passing beneath the menacing grin of a three-story-high inflatable gorilla bearing a giant placard proclaiming a Monster Sale, I noticed that the bright pennants, tinsel, and American flags remained, along with the hard-sell smiles of the salesmen, as if the Eisenhower Era had endured forever.

Merging onto the Kennedy Expressway, dodging the trailer trucks barreling into town, I always felt that I was taking my life in my hands. On that particular morning, some yokel suddenly zoomed up from the blind spot off my left fender as if to run me off the narrowing entry ramp. I slammed down on the gas pedal and pulled over to the fast lanes to get the demon behind me. Passing me on the right, behind the wheel of a shiny new black Cadillac with Ward 33 license plates, I glimpsed Alderman Dick Mell. I recognized him from the newspapers and television. And, as he disappeared in a cloud of exhaust, I found myself wondering which character in Shakespeare's history plays Alderman Mell would most closely resemble.

If a Shakespearean Chicago alderman seems like a strange association of thoughts, it should be explained that I was then a middle-aged teaching assistant bustling in hot pursuit of a Ph.D. in literature. My existence had been reduced to the effort to obtain what my advisor called a union card to teach college English. Actually, I did not choose to study Shakespeare. Shakespeare was just *there*, like an elephant in the dark. You could not get around him without groping for a handle on the powerful trunk, or the floppy ears, or the columnlike legs, or the massive sides, or the precious pointed tusks of this strange

legs, or the massive sides, or the precious pointed tusks of this strange gigantic being with so many different aspects.

The reason I latched on to Shakespeare studies was because I hoped, eventually, somebody somewhere would take me seriously enough to offer me a tenure-track job. Although I have heard gunfire as an all-night cab driver on the West Side of Chicago and as a freelance reporter in Beirut, nothing in my experience was as terrifying as the academic job market. Categorized as a so-called white male from a not-so-well known state university (not to mention the unmentionable fact that I was then already in my late forties), I knew I faced long odds against me. If I had been more of a gambler, I might have written a dissertation on Nelson Algren, author of *The Man with the Golden Arm* and other titles. Algren, the last great lost cause of Chicago realism, is still my literary hero. Considering what I was up against, however, I was afraid to attack the job market without more academic clout. So, I decided to do my doctorate on the Bard.

Then, after a long cold winter (and the worst case of cabin fever I ever suffered), I heard that the players of the English Shakespeare Company were arriving in Chicago. As if synchronized to my own scholarly pursuits, they performed the entire cycle of Shakespeare's history plays about the Wars of the Roses and the English power struggles from Richard II through the various Henries to the notorious Richard III in one mammoth marathon. Even after seeing the entire production, however, I was left with lingering question marks. According to poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a history play must be about the audience to whom it is addressed. Yet, I wondered, what would Shakespeare have thought about Chicago, Illinois? Would he have celebrated its crass commercialism with the local boosters? Or would he have laughed Chicago to scorn, in the manner of Nelson Algren, the greatest Shakespearean Fool the town ever manufactured?

With all this in mind, as the honorable Alderman Mell zipped by me that sweltering day during the drought of '88, I recalled not only the theater festival of the previous spring but also something I had read that morning in the *Chicago Sun-Times* about a big shake-up of the committee chairs at City Hall. Known for not backing losers, Alderman Mell seemed to have come out on top as usual. He was wearing a casual sports shirt open at the collar, with a cocky smile on his florid face, his flat killer eyes darting in all directions from a head shaped like a grayish-white lettuce.

Weaving in and out of the rumbling trucks, I pondered the drama of Chicago's own civil wars. Alderman Mell captured his fifteen seconds of national media fame in the previous fall of '87, when Mayor Harold Washington died not long after his election to a second full term in office. With that victory, the first black mayor of Chicago had finally defeated the white majority in the City Council, seeming to resolve the epic struggle that had inscribed an important chapter in the history of the city. For his part, after supporting the reactionary white bloc for most of Washington's first term, Mell had come to terms with the victorious popular champion known as "Harold." But could an Alderman Mell summon up the sheer *chutzpah* of Shakespeare's Duke of Suffolk and assert with disarming candor:

Faith, I have been truant to the law
And never yet could frame my will unto it
And therefore frame the law unto my will???

Damn straight he could! Yet, on second thought, perhaps Mell would fit more into the mold of a young son of York, before he became Richard III who, while still only the Duke of Gloucester soliloquizes:

I have no brother, I am like no brother;
And this word "love" which graybeards call divine,
Be resident in men like one another
And not in me. I am myself alone.

Then, suddenly, with the force of insight, I recalled Gloucester's nemesis, the psychopathic Young Clifford. If he could not have his way, Mell had proven he was ready to go ballistic, even if it brought down the Apocalypse.

The scene was set on the day that the first black mayor of Chicago was lowered into his grave. Immediately, an all-night free-for-all broke out. After years of infighting, the City Council had become a hall of feuding neighborhood dukes and earls. The general level of trustworthiness could be summed up in a single Shakespearean line: "I would break a thousand oaths to reign one year!" Outside in the streets, masses demonstrated in favor of Alderman Tim Evans as the people's choice to inherit the mantle of Reform. Inside, while television cameras rolled, the aldermen took turns at the microphones, giving passionate eulogies for the deceased mayor, sounding more genuinely Shakespearean than many of them may have realized.

Alderman Mell had been first to announce his candidacy for the post of Acting Mayor. When it became clear, however, that only a black candidate would be acceptable to the new majority, Mell fell in with "Kingmaker" Alderman Ed Burke in supporting a "safe" successor to protect the status quo. Smiling, sensitive Alderman Eugene Sawyer emerged as a black Henry VI-like front man. Commonly serving as a pawn of powerful knights, bishops and queens, the Henry-the-Sixth-type ruler lives in dread of offending anybody, promising anything and all to anyone and everyone—in Sawyer's case mainly shrewd fellow members of the extended Sawyer clan.

The hard-boiled Alderman Mell, with a trick he might have learned from Shakespeare's Richard of Gloucester, even led a prayer session at which he was reported to have shed tears of supplication to try to persuade Sawyer to accept the nomination. Perhaps Mell was crying because he was not himself in line for the crown. When Sawyer finally accepted, Mell celebrated by victoriously smashing an ashtray on his desk, cutting his own hand. Then, according to a report in *The Chicago Sun-Times*, he pointed at Tim Evans's supporters and shouted, "You're dead (expletives)!"

But the fight was not over. By 1:30 a.m., most of the protestors on the streets and in the galleries had trundled home to get up the next day for work. Even the main players in the City Council seemed physically and emotionally exhausted. The inexperienced Deputy Mayor David Orr (who was as close as Mayor Washington had come to indicating his own heir) seemed amenable to a motion to adjourn for the night. Suddenly, with an explosion of outrage, Alderman Mell jumped upright on top of his City Council desk and began screaming his head off. Orr had not only taken over Mell's job as Deputy Mayor but had also cut Mell's budget for bagels and coffee on Council meeting days. Mell was not about to let either Orr or his reform-minded friends slide by this time.

Now it should be remembered that when Shakespeare was a small boy growing up in Stratford-on-Avon, his father served as high bailiff, the equivalent of the town's mayor. That may explain how Shakespeare learned the unofficial side of politics. For only one aspect of any reigning administration comes out at its annual parade for St. Patrick's (or St. George's) Day. As long as a given dynasty is in place, its myth of legitimacy becomes almost invisible while citizens go about their business. When a new regime supplants one that has fallen, however, history may reveal a glimpse into the abyss. In

the aftermath, it is not uncommon for death threats to be left hanging in the air. Every effort must be made to cover the truth with the conventional ideological comforter, whether the rights of primogeniture or the secret ballot or some hybrid combination of both. For that one moment, however, as in the tale of the emperor's new clothes, everybody with eyes to see catches what might be called the Four A.M. Face of naked power.

Confronted with the prospect of a new round of Council Wars between the Old Guard Machine Men and New Guard Reformers, Alderman Mell decided to stop the clock. Yelling and waving his arms in his own version of a vengeance-crazed wild man, Mell made it simply impossible for Evans's supporters to delay with parliamentary maneuvers:

O, let the vile world end
 And the promised flames of the last day
 Knit earth and heaven together!
 Now let the general trumpet blow his blast
 Particulars and petty sounds
 To cease!

Finally, at exactly one minute after four a.m., the deal was done. Nice-Guy Gene Sawyer became Acting Mayor. The Reform Party was dead in the water. Chicagoans could go back to business as usual. And the whole country could chuckle at clips on the evening news of Alderman Mell blustering, bullying, and buffaloing the City Council until they installed a custodian government for a bright new Democratic Party Machine.

Shakespeare's plays about the Wars of the Roses portray the historical break with feudalism. That makes them especially relevant to the recent history of Chicago, a city still ruled by the medieval paradigm. Just as the memory of Edward the Third represented the archetype of a strong ruler to Shakespeare's audience, so Mayor Daley the First remains a nostalgic symbol of an omnipotent one-man party for many Chicagoans. "Old Daley," as he is called in true Shakespearean parlance, was a smart, tough and sincerely devoted Irishman from the neighborhood of Bridgeport. When followers of Martin Luther King campaigned for open housing in Chicago, Daley resisted with all his guile and force. Daley also ordered the police to shoot to kill looters (and maim rioters) in the upheaval following the 1968 assassination of Dr. King. But after the civil rights leader was safely buried with

honors, "Da Mare" deigned to have the City Council officially change the name of South Parkway to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive.

Following the death of Old Daley, just before Christmas of 1976, an incompetent caretaker regime inherited the mayoral crown but could not hold it for long. Peevish and over-privileged, Mayor Michael Bilandic specialized at wallowing in self-pity. Two weeks before the 1979 Democratic primary, Bilandic startled the local press by blaming politicians who had defected from his hapless campaign, comparing his fate to the martyrdom of Jesus. Standing in the ballroom of the old Bismark Hotel under a huge banner reading "Keep Chicago Strong," Bilandic paraphrased the histrionics of Shakespeare's King Richard the Second:

Yet well I remember
The favors of these men. Were they not mine?
Did they not sometime cry "All hail!" to me?
So Judas did to Christ. But he, in twelve,
Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand, none.

I can imagine the disgusted reactions of the old-time Machine regulars. Alderman Mell, for one, had thrown his support to Bilandic's opponent, "Mad Jane" Byrne. Later known as the Snow Queen, Byrne won the election by blaming Bilandic for letting city streets become impassible during the blizzards of January 1979. In the City That Works, alleged corruption may be tolerated as long as people are able to get to their jobs.

For her part, candidate Byrne virtuously promised to root out an "evil cabal" of insiders, headed by "Fast Eddy" Vrdolyak. Yet, after the election, it seems to have taken Fast Eddy no more than one phone call to win over the new mayor. Whatever Vrdolyak promised, Mayor Byrne, like Shakespeare's domineering and headstrong Queen Margaret at the height of her power, was ready and willing to switch loyalties with her former foes:

Vrdolyak these words have turned my hate to love
And I forgive and quite forget old faults.

The greatest achievement of the Byrne regime was to initiate a variety of lakefront festivals celebrating good food and music. After she left office, the unpaid bills for the festivals were found stacked in the back of the mayor's desk. The city's first woman mayor wound up

under the El tracks, begging for votes. And, long after her official departure, she continued to haunt local politics as the old witch who curses the new incumbent, again like Queen Margaret as she appears after her fall in *Richard III*.

"Fast Eddy" Vrdolyak, meanwhile, played a perfect Duke of York, out to create his *own* dynasty. "Let them obey that know not how to rule," had always been the motto of Vrdolyak as well as York. Both Vrdolyak and York sincerely believed themselves suited to sovereignty. Yet neither was fated to wear the crown. Erstwhile chieftain of the Democratic Party of Cook County, Vrdolyak fatally defined himself as a professional turncoat by flipping to the Republican Party—no more than a few months before the death of his arch-rival, Mayor Harold Washington.

Equal parts Falstaff and Bolingbroke, Harold Washington may perhaps be best compared to Shakespeare's Prince Hal who defeats the rebel Hotspur and goes on to become Henry the Fifth, hero of Agincourt. After his death, he was mourned as a latter-day prophet:

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night.
Comets, importing change of time and states
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars
That have consented unto Harold's death.
Mayor Harold Washington, too famous to live long!
Chicago never lost a politician of so much worth!

Legendary Reformer Washington was widely believed to have slain the bad old dragon of the Democratic Machine once and for all. Yet the spirit of "Boss" Richard J. Daley continues to haunt Chicago, not so much as the phantom of the old king in Hamlet but rather in the solid flesh and living form of a young Fortinbras, ready, willing, and able to crank up the old jalopy once again. The English Shakespeare Company proved to be prescient in their 1988 presentation of Shakespeare's cycle of history plays, concluding their theatrical epic with the latest talking head on a television news bulletin spouting words aimed to soothe the public nervous system.

The elections of 1989 and the triumphant accession of Mayor Daley the Second demonstrated that, in a pinch, primogeniture can still carry considerable clout. But that should surprise nobody in a town where Alderman Burke, son of Alderman Burke, seems to have been born with a full head of white hair and a guaranteed safe seat on

the City Council. Young Daley's only problem has been the unfortunate fact that he is almost wholly inarticulate—which does not imply that he is stupid in any way that really counts. Old Daley shrewdly used his “dese and dose” Chicagoese accent and a dumb-sounding vocabulary to his own political advantage. Like his father, Young Daley also finds it difficult to use whole sentences without stumbling, unless he has been thoroughly rehearsed by his handlers. The most hopeful quality that Mayor Daley the Second brought to office, however, has been a strong commitment to keeping the civil peace. Of that, Shakespeare would certainly have approved.

By grace of the Eternal, I finished my dissertation, lucked out, and landed a job at Shepherd College in West Virginia. Still, a question keeps nagging at the back of my mind. The lack of an overt “ideology” in Shakespeare might lead to the conclusion that his agenda was simply to make his own fortune while enhancing the status quo. Subversive characters and situations appear constantly in Shakespeare's drama, but usually only to be laughed at or wondered over before being safely resolved in the end. Yet Shakespeare portrays the natural nobility of the individual coming from deep within the personal conscience, generally expressed in a spirit of defiance. In this, he has more than a little in common with the Bard of Shakespeare Avenue Precinct, Nelson Algren, who defined literature in his preface to *Chicago: City on the Make* as that which is made when “a challenge is put to the legal apparatus by a conscience in touch with humanity.”

If the Ghost of Reform still haunts Chicago, it would take a Shakespearean with Nelson Algren's knowledge of the night shadows where the street lamps never reach to explain why. Even now, that angry and ironic ghost of Algren, who is the Ghost of Reform, lingers in the midst of the crowds milling around the Triangle made by the intersection of Division Street with Milwaukee and Ashland Avenues, home turf for Frankie Machine in *The Man with the Golden Arm*. I swear I have seen the ghost of Algren, loitering on an early evening under the breathless steel gray sky, contemplating the shades of gray in the faces of the people, the pavement, and the bizarre pseudo-classical façade of the Manufacturer's Bank building across the street. He stands there still, relaxed, grinning slyly, an old bus transfer clutched in his hand. Yet he never boards the bus.

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LOUIS BROMFIELD AND THE IDEA OF THE MIDDLE

JAYNE WATERMAN

As a so-called middle-ranking author, literary critics often overlook Louis Bromfield's texts. Bromfield touches on the implications of occupying such a literary middle ground in “On Pleasing the Public,” an incomplete manuscript composed in the 1930s: “It is difficult for us [writers] to tread a middle path...standards are either black or white. There are never any soft grays.”¹ This study aims to challenge dominant literary ideals and, from the perspective of a “soft-gray” middle usually ignored in critical analysis, engage with the contours of Bromfield's diverse literary career and question texts usually discounted. As a middle-class, middle-ranking Midwestern author, this “middling” viewpoint provides an appropriate place upon which to center analysis of Bromfield's middlebrow texts. The middle does not destabilize black and white standards, nor is it necessarily a sign of dull mediocrity; rather, it can be used to color and enrich our understanding of American literary history and Bromfield's place in it.

At a fundamental level, “the middle” is a central point between two ends. Conventionally, it is considered a largely innocuous term without any particular significance or impact on literary and cultural debates. The term also conveys pejorative associations epitomized by words like “mediocre” or “middlebrow” and phrases such as “middle-of-the-road” or “middle rank.” At the same time, however, “the middle” signifies an evocative and pluralistic notion. As a concept it represents an interdependent, intermediate formulation in which boundaries are constantly intersected and blurred. This bridging function resists clear-cut distinctions and static delineations and instead highlights a multifaceted borderland. In short, the nuances and tensions embedded in “the idea of middle” generate extensive and complex issues that challenge the term's derogatory and simplistic connotations.

Repositioned outside “black and white” literary standards, alternate parameters of research illuminate the “gray” areas occupied by neglected authors and texts. By deliberately focusing on Bromfield’s “middling” literary and cultural classifications as a middlebrow and, concomitantly, Midwestern novelist, a rarely discussed text, *Twenty-Four Hours* (1930), is opened up to more meaningful analysis. Alison Light’s general observation on the middlebrow, “whose apparent artlessness and insistence on its own ordinariness has made it peculiarly resistant to analysis” (11) indicates some of the reasons for the middlebrow’s critical neglect. Yet it is with this “middle” starting point that the possibilities of more artful and less ordinary interpretations of Bromfield’s work can develop.

Before turning to an analysis of *Twenty-Four Hours* it is first necessary to explore the idea of the middlebrow and map the taxonomic development of the tripartite cultural divisions and taste discriminations—highbrow, lowbrow, middlebrow—that dominated Anglo-American thinking from the late 1920s. The culturally evaluative terms “highbrow” (c. 1908) and “lowbrow” (c. 1909) are derived from nineteenth-century phrenological terminology and are of American origin. “Middlebrow,” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, has a later British etymology. In December 1925 *Punch* announced: “The BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] claim to have discovered a new type, the ‘middlebrow.’” It consists of people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like” (741).

Distaste and cultural contempt are clearly pronounced in the disparaging tones of the BBC’s humorous remark. But before “middlebrow’s” development as a newly constituted term, the *idea* of a “middlebrow” was evolving with specific and more positive resonance in the United States. In his often-quoted discussion of the “bifurcation of highbrow and lowbrow” that “divides American life” and literature, Van Wyck Brooks calls for “a genial middle ground” (83) in *America’s Coming-of-Age* (1915). Susan Hegeman’s *Patterns of America* (1999) notes that most scholars have assumed Brooks sought an intermediate but separate category between highbrow and lowbrow: “some third position midway between the two, a mediocre site of ‘middlebrow’ culture.” In fact, Hegeman claims, “Brooks lamented the absence of a ‘genial middle ground’ between the two strains of American culture, which would, in any case, have been for him a kind of synthesis between the two tendencies, and a repair of

the fragmentation of the whole” (75). In its origins, this American middle ground was not a divided hierarchical process; it was, as Brooks writes, “something far more deeply interfused” (127) that was able “to mitigate, combine, or harmonize” (84). Moreover, as Hegeman adds, “his ‘middle ground’ was less a gray mediocrity, than a mystical, impossible *Arnoldian* fusion” (76).

With a very different *Arnoldian* interpretation, the British critic Q. D. Leavis and the American cultural commentator Clement Greenberg addressed the conceptual implications of the middlebrow term in the early 1930s. Leavis and Greenberg condemned what they saw as the middlebrow’s parasitic qualities rather than its mediating potential. Virginia Woolf’s 1930s “letter” entitled “Middlebrow” illustrated the most significant and pugilistic denouncement of middlebrow writing: “it is not well written; nor is it badly written. It is not proper, nor is it improper—in short it is betwixt and between” (200). This compelling Woolfian notion of “betwixt and between” characterizes Bromfield’s *Twenty-Four Hours*: a fiction that occupies a middle ground between self-conscious experimentation and the best-seller formula. *Twenty-Four Hours*’s middlebrow aesthetics functions as a dynamic point of mediation and interaction between aesthetic value and the demands of a mass market. The text’s ambiguities are salient, simultaneously signifying superficiality and depth, mediocrity and multifariousness, the inauthentic and the legitimate. It is the intersection—the middle ground—of these attributes that provides the best vantage point from which to understand textual variations and equivocations in a more comprehensive, rather than dismissive, analysis.

Such a sense of “in-betweenness” also characterizes Bromfield’s wide-ranging literary *oeuvre*. Having won the Pulitzer Prize in 1927 for *Early Autumn* (1926), Bromfield appeared to be at the beginning of what would be an illustrious literary career. His authorial acclaim and popularity were extended further when he was nominated for *Vanity Fair*’s “Hall of Fame” in 1928. As a then mass-circulating publication that straddled the line between serious journal of the arts and celebrity gossip magazine, *Vanity Fair*’s accolade illustrated Bromfield’s wide reach. Significantly, it was a nomination that he shared with figures such as Thomas Mann and Ernest Hemingway. Indeed, two years later, and in the year of *Twenty-Four Hours*’s publication, Sinclair Lewis, in his Noble Prize lecture, listed Bromfield, among other writers such as Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, Ring

Larder, Fannie Hurst, Edna Ferber, and Upton Sinclair, as an author missing from, and yet worthy of inclusion in, the American Academy of Arts and Letters (283).

In *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (1988), Lawrence Levine explains that until the 1920s, many art forms, including fiction, enjoyed both high cultural status and popularity. With the onset of the 1930s and the Great Depression this cultural space became more sharply defined and less flexible. The increasing professionalization of academia, particularly of American literature, during the 1930s and 1940s also made cultural categories progressively more rigid and artificially separated. Eugene Löhrke's review of *Twenty-Four Hours* in *The Nation*, which portrayed Bromfield's new text with pejoratively middlebrow connotations, demonstrates this increasingly rigid critical agenda:

Mr. Bromfield's new novel is an incoherent critique of American manners and values in the guise of a best-seller...in cutting his cloth to fit the more glittering magazine, and possibly Hollywood, he has left it full of holes....He has been to Hollywood, he has lectured to women's clubs, he has condescended to be well paid. (503)

"Best-seller," "magazine," "Hollywood," "women's clubs," and "well paid" all became synonymous and encoded middlebrow terms. These middling features of Bromfield's work were, it seems, deemed too traditional and too inimical to modernist experimentation. Increasingly, as Lisa Botshon and Meredith Goldsmith note in *Middlebrow Moderns* (2003), American criticism was unable to accommodate the "commercially successful serious artist" (7). Within this critical climate the publication of *Twenty-Four Hours* marked the beginning of Bromfield's critical demise. Nonetheless, it is a pivotal text made all the more revealing by its contemporary critical hostility and later neglect.

By 1944, Edmund Wilson's damning review for *The New Yorker*, "What Became of Louis Bromfield," solidified Bromfield's middlebrow classification. Wilson charts Bromfield's decline: he was "one of the younger writers of promise," but "[b]y the time he brought out *Twenty-Four Hours*. . . he was definitely second-rate" (80). In February 1949, Russell Lynes offered a counterpoint to this damning chorus of brow bashing with "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow: Which Are You?" for *Harper's* magazine. This tongue-in-cheek essay was abridged and adapted in *Life* magazine two months later.

Alongside playful jabs at each of the brow levels it mocked bitter intellectualism. Illustrations accompanying the article depicted a chart of caricature brows alongside the stereotyped "Everyday Tastes" of each brow in categories such as furniture, salads, and sculpture (100-101). As an additional satirizing pastiche the tripartite brow divisions were refined to include an "upper-middle" and "lower-middle" classification. Ironic, comic, and arbitrary, Lynes's take on America's cultural tastes provided an alternative commentary to prevailing cultural dictates. Lynes's work was immensely successful, ridiculing prescribed hierarchies and fixing the vocabulary of the brows firmly in the popular vernacular.

The critical accusation of middlebrow illegitimacy prevailed, however, including MacDonald's "A Theory of Mass Culture" (1953) and his claims of middlebrow's "bogus 'intellectuality'" (64). It is only recently that groundbreaking publications like Joan Shelley Rubin's *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (1992) and Janice Radway's *A Feeling for Books* (1997) have viewed the middlebrow in a more balanced and positive fashion, endowing middlebrow art with its own substance and intellectual coherence. The perceived "scandal" of the middlebrow, Radway argues, was in fact "its failure to maintain the fences cordoning off culture from commerce, the sacred from the profane, and the low from the high" (152). Thus, its own inherent mimetic capacity, which blurred the distinction between the pseudo and the real, created a permeable, traversable, and threatening cultural space.

Perceived middlebrow threats bring into question the notion of artistic authenticity. If, in these borderline converging spaces, a middlebrow text appropriates or mimics the traits of highbrow art, should an inauthentic middlebrow be disregarded as artistically uninteresting? After all, the implication of mimicry is as much about similarities as it is differences. In *The Fields of Cultural Production* (1993), Pierre Bourdieu tackles these questions of "illegitimacy," arguing that the middlebrow is a culture of pastiche because the middle class is always reverential to "legitimate" highbrow culture which, in its anxiety, it misreads. In his analysis, Bourdieu works from the assumption that this misreading is anxious rather than willful and discounts the power of the copy as a legitimate form that self-consciously redeploys its own middlebrow parodies (128-9). Yet, Rubin notes the celebrated "middleness of middlebrow culture" (xvi) and, overall, Radway observes determined middlebrow identifications in many of

Radway observes determined middlebrow identifications in many of the Book-of-the-Month-Club selections.

A celebrated and determined middle ground marks the literary scope of *Twenty-Four Hours*. In theme and form *Twenty-Four Hours* is both traditional and modern: a novel, epic in style, that fragments to describe the struggles of a disparate cross section of characters connected by conventional plots and story lines alongside juxtaposed and interlinking stories and events. It is, like *The Strange Case of Miss Annie Spragg* (the novel preceding *Twenty-Four Hours*), a hybrid text of experimental and conventional styles. *Twenty-Four Hours*'s basic affinities with and appropriations of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), with events unfolding within twenty-four hours, capture the dynamics of its "middle way" pastiche imitations. Modernist techniques underpin the narrative but these techniques do not define the text. Instead, the novel works within a modernist sphere while simultaneously developing writing strategies that appropriate different textual forms and aesthetic experiences.

The opening pages of *Twenty-Four Hours* illustrate, stylistically and thematically, a text of merging contrasts. The fragility of a genteel aristocratic dinner party is quickly made apparent by the penetration of modernity, symbolized with the arrival of the "blue and white envelope of a radiogram" (15) that is quietly delivered by a valet on a silver platter. A crystal wine glass is also symbolically shattered as the host, Hector Champion, opens the telegram. As the dinner quickly draws to a close the guests disappear into the apartment elevator, plunging down into a harsh 1920s New York City. The text is framed by this "breaking up" (324) of existing order: the disrupted rituals of the opening dinner party and Savina Jerrold's agitated tea party at the end of the novel. Each occasion is symptomatic of the unsettling change in modern public life that quickly shatters and fragments. As Jerrold observes in the closing pages of *Twenty-Four Hours*: "Life was altogether too complex and violent and mechanical" (325). This sense of multiplicity and transition impels the narrative and informs the transgressions of the text itself. Although it reads as a somewhat traditional novel of epic length and Dickensian style, underlying the surface of convention is a rupturing of the modern. This conceptualization of surface and depth allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the text's middlebrow aesthetics that intersect with modernist tendencies.

New York City acts as the backdrop to these diverging and converging aesthetics. With its "great skyscrapers and whirring factories" (4) that are first admired by Hector, it rapidly becomes "a strange city, adventurous, hostile, and barbaric, in which there was no place for the old" (187). At the same time, the city is transcribed through the nineteenth-century *flâneur* figure. Nancy Champion and Jim Towner express versions of the *flâneur* experience, revising their relationship with New York and all that it symbolizes. Nancy's return to New York harbor after twenty-five years in Europe is fraught and exhilarating: "This is not New York. It was not the city she had left. It was something unreal and dramatic....But somewhere far down at the base of those shining towers there must be left something of the city she remembered" (241). It is a homecoming reminiscent of Henry James in *The American Scene* (1907). Appalled and in awe at "the multitudinous sky-scrappers standing up to the view, from the water, like extravagant pins in a cushion already overplanted" James searches the skyline for familiar sights from his past. In *Twenty-Four Hours* Nancy finally discovers the aquarium of her childhood past "dark against the white of the city" (242). In James's return there is also a "bitterness of history" when he finally picks out his childhood vision of "the ancient rotunda of Castle Garden": it "lurked there as a vague nonentity....Shabby, shrunken, barely discernible to-day, the ancient rotunda, [had] adjusted to other uses" (79).

The streets of New York continue to map this sense of adventure and disengagement in *Twenty-Four Hours*. Related through interior monologue, a distraught middle-aged Jim Towner walks through the city reflecting on his feelings of emptiness and alienation that Nancy can only begin to sense. His observations mirror James's perambulations and meditations along Fifth Avenue, as he looks on the "flaws and defacements" despite the "appearance of decency" (87). A blizzard blasts Jim through Fifty-Seventh Street; just past Lexington Avenue he encounters a homeless woman bent over a heap of garbage; and taking in the view of Fifth Avenue he finds "something strange and lonely in the spectacle" (35-7). In comparison with the New York portrayed through the eyes of Nick Carraway in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), *Twenty-Four Hours* present a muted and disorientated engagement. To Carraway, the city is vibrant with adventure:

I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye. I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd. (54)

Michael North's *Reading 1922* (1999) interprets the flicker that excites Carraway as Fitzgerald's disparaging reference to the movies: the way the constant motion of the New York crowd resembles the oscillations between the actual and the filmic (172). In *Twenty-Four Hours*, the flicker of modernity is embodied by "X-ray cinema" (338). Roentgen's 1895 X-ray machine becomes a culturally determined aesthetic of modernity and a symbol of concomitant "disease." Determined by this modern technology, new modes of representation simultaneously augment and fragment the reconceived body. At the beginning of the novel Hector Champion, failing to live up to his "champion" name, is presented as a redundant icon of the older aristocratic world, a sick man who thinks he is dying of stomach cancer, fixated with the idea of the X-ray images of his tumor. After the disastrous dinner party Hector retires to bed. He strips naked—but deliberately turns away from his bedroom mirror so that he does not have to look upon his body—and contemplates with morbid delight: To-morrow they would have the X-ray picture of his stomach. He could see his stomach at work, moving, digesting, in a kind of cinema they had taken of it. He could watch the thing that was killing him at work" (185).

The juxtaposition of Hector's naked body and the imagined X-ray image exposes a brutal truth, but it is a brittle, unstable truth. Hector's tumor is simply an imagined manifestation; his real "cancer" is psychological and modern: the growing fear of nameless anxiety. Truth is now sought in the imitative replications of "self": Hector requires a disconnected X-ray picture to "see." The "flicker" of Dr. Ronnie McClellan's X-rays or "obscene cinema entertainments" (338), as Jerrold describes them, is not the source of "satisfaction" and excitement perceived by Carraway. As Jerrold quickly realizes, there is no substance to this fragmentation because men like Dr. McClellan "failed to take account of the soul" (292), instead, in his "cinema you dealt with bare truths, all stripped clean" (339). With images that recall the giant advertisement-eyes of Fitzgerald's Doctor T. J. Eckleberg, Jerrold adds, "it was the vision of life which gave Ronnie's clear blue eyes that astonishing frank look of certainty and power" (339). In this

moment of fragmentation and insight, Jerrold, as a symbol of nineteenth-century values, perceives the encroaching and brutal force of the modern. This extended point of comparison with *The Great Gatsby* is not to draw direct analogies, but to help locate the complexity and diversity of *Twenty-Four Hours*'s textual engagement with the modern and the pre-modern. The text is not necessarily a mediocre re-working of modernist issues but instead illustrates a delineation of its own middle ground treatment.

In an attempt to fill the middle void and find meaning, many of the characters in *Twenty-Four Hours* surround themselves with a refuge of precocities and precious objects. Hector "was a snob of family and tradition" (6), but as a collector of "taste" he soon realizes "there was nothing behind that style" (186). The twentieth-century self-made man, David Melbourn, comes to the same realization during his affair with the pretentious Fanny Towner. Fanny's predilection for snobbish literary parties epitomizes Melbourn's feelings of ambivalence and emptiness:

He saw suddenly that she was without dignity, and so quite without balance. He knew that she fancied that she was having a brilliant conversation...quite suddenly she seemed to him hopelessly silly and foolish, and his distaste for her became so strong...he became a symbol of all the uneasiness and the dull mistrust of himself and all the world that had attacked him more and more often of late. For the first time in all his existence he felt that he was as aimless as Fanny, and that his life was moving slowly towards a vast emptiness. (106-7)

The representation of insubstantiality and "distaste" of the aesthetic, snobbish, modern world also recalls the irony of the highbrow satire in *Annie Spragg*. To Melbourn, the achievements of modernity—"the new speedboat which was to make the voyage from Port Jefferson to Sutton Place in forty minutes"; "the new Picasso (which he had determined during the night to buy)"; "the New Symphony Orchestra"—were simply for "amusement and cultivation" (294). Irony permeates the novel, delineating an awareness of the discrepancy between words, objects, and the meaning of their "cold value" (55). Melbourn is a representation of dynamic modern man but this is quickly mocked by the artifice and dissatisfaction of his modern collections. For Bromfield, middlebrow modernity is tempered with irony.

The characterization of David Melbourn, the modern American type, also brings to this paradigmatic analysis of "the middle" the

idea of the Middle West. The Middle West underlies this New York novel. Melbourn's Midwestern heritage is relayed and emphasized on several occasions: "born in the middle west, in a town in Ohio, and my parents were just good Americans of New England blood with a good deal that was Scotch in them" (155). This Midwestern projection outlines a distinct ideology that was also the ideology of a modern and middlebrow America. In 1918 Randolph Bourne declared that the Middle West was "the apotheosis of American civilization" (265). Bourne also added that germane to this identification of the Midwest as the heartland of the nation was the associated "middling" quality: that which was representative of all was without its own distinction. Such a sentiment prevailed. "It is so typical," Walter Havighurst writes of Ohio and the Midwest in a 1945 edition of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, "that its people have little awareness of particularity" (5). He goes on to expand this theme of a region as "no region":

its sentiments are scattered... There can be nothing single or singular about the culture of so eclectic a society... it is a middle ground. The facts of geography and the currents of commerce have made it a crossroads. (5)

Such notions of a spatially ordained Middle West intersection illuminate and echo the idea of a nondistinct sense of distinction, much like the ideological and fictional implications of the middlebrow with its "apparent artlessness and...ordinariness."

Hegeman's *Pattern for America* also explores these regional connotations and, specifically, the Midwest's strong associations with the middlebrow. She examines this notion as a complex contour of culture, "in which 'culture' eventually became associated with a static social fiction known as 'Middle America'" (13). This linkage authorized those who identified with Middle America to turn around negative stereotypes and embrace the middlebrow as a "sign of its antielitist American authenticity" (134). The criticism of Eastern intellectuals like Bourne was, Hegeman argues, undercut by a middlebrow canon of "oppositional middlebrow aesthetic" (138) that allowed for the formation of a "positively conceived category of taste" (158). Again, like the pattern of middlebrow legitimacy in *Twenty-Four Hours*, the Midwestern portrayal is authenticated through similar middling representations.

"The middle" is a distinct and evocative place upon which to base an analysis of a novel such as Bromfield's *Twenty-Four Hours*. From a middling perspective, the textual reading of *Twenty-Four Hours* becomes dynamic and flexible, making it a text worth "reading." Such texts are not homogenous; they are complex, pluralistic, and versatile entities that explore the possibilities of dialogic simultaneity. This study pushes for greater recognition of the middle, particularly in its middlebrow and Midwestern complexity. In a sense, rather than perpetuating highbrow fears of "faked" mimicry and "in-betweenness" this project reconsiders the implications and potential of Van Wyck Brooks's idea of an interfused middle ground. Through the synthesis and permeability of the highbrow and lowbrow, a valid middlebrow aesthetic emerges with democratic impulses that bridge so-called divides.

The questions invoked by this "middling" analysis refer not only to the implications of a disregarded author, text, and middlebrow paradigm, but also to the implications of American literary history. To use only authors, texts, and ideologies pronounced canonical and to fail to include the substantial body of work by "middling" writers in the formation of American literary history is not to know the full story. This observation brings the discussion back to Sinclair Lewis's list of American authors in his Noble Prize address:

I should not expect any Academy to be so fortunate as to contain all these writers, but one which fails to contain any of them, which thus cuts itself off from so much of what is living and vigorous and original in American letters, can have no relationship whatever to our life and aspirations. It does not represent the literary America of today. (283-4)

To establish a more comprehensive representation of American letters, academic discourse should include "the middle," an often underrated and overlooked theoretical stance that locates and examines those "betwixt and between." And as, precisely, an author "in-between," Bromfield represents an active and vital presence in American literary history.

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NOTE

¹Bromfield, Louis. "On Pleasing the Public." MS box 39 fol. 540. Louis Bromfield Collection, Ohio State University Archives.

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JOSEPHINE W. JOHNSON: THE SECOND SHORT STORY COLLECTION AND BEYOND

MARK GRAVES

By the time Missourian Josephine Johnson published her second short fiction collection, *The Sorcerer's Son and Other Stories*, she had already enjoyed an illustrious career as a novelist, short story writer, poet, and naturalist. Winner of the 1935 Pulitzer Prize for fiction with her first novel, *Now in November*, Johnson also authored *The Inland Island*, an extended natural essay now receiving renewed critical attention over thirty years after its original publication. While these works brought her some critical acclaim and established her reputation, Johnson's short stories make her most emotionally varied statements about the human condition. Capitalizing on her first novel's success, her first short story collection, *Winter Orchard and Other Stories* (1935), presents richly textured portraits indicative of their times, depicting characters boldly attempting to shake off racial, political, and class prejudice while finding solace in nature itself. In her second collection, as the title story suggests, Johnson enchants through the creation of a multi-colored tapestry of individuals reacting to life's joys and hardships with a mixture of humor and despair. As her last in a series of important published fictional statements, Johnson's later short fiction fittingly resolves her lifelong search for truth, understanding, and connection, often with nature as the catalyst.

When published in 1965, Johnson's last short story collection barely rated a mention in critical discussions of literature that year, a far cry from the attention her work had received in the intermittent thirty years. From the awarding of the Pulitzer for her first novel until the publication of her last volume, a memoir, most reviewers recognized Johnson's lyricism, her talents as a miniaturist, and her unique gifts as a visionary, but they always detected a lack of balance in her writing which made it less than completely satisfying. In reviewing her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, for example, Alvah Bessie noted,

Miss Johnson's short stories have attracted considerable attention to a talent that is new, fresh, and individual; her novel should attract more, although it is far from a work of art. . . . [I]t is a fragment; an expanded short-story that loses, in the expansion, the intensity it might have possessed in more concise form. (109)

Jon Cheever, writing in *The New Republic*, also noted that the very facility for detail which makes Johnson's texts so illuminating also reveals the limitations of her craft. While calling the novel "the most composed book that has ever come out of Missouri," he also admitted, "In order to achieve such composure, Miss Johnson has necessarily sacrificed a degree of reality" (191). Later, in reference to the other important work bookending her career, *The Inland Island*, Granville Hicks noted that "*The Inland Island* is a sad and sometimes bitter book but a desperately honest one" (40). Moreover, Pamela Marsh in *The Christian Science Monitor* remarked, "Once in awhile *The Inland Island* [. . .] grows embarrassingly self-conscious. But on the whole Miss Johnson handles her introspection with grace" (15). Reviewers of her fiction which appeared between these two significant efforts—her novels *Jordanstown* (1937), *Wildwood* (1945), and *The Dark Traveler* (1963)—either expressed the same critical ambivalence her best-known work received or they resisted Johnson's vision and craft altogether. Louis Konenberger, writing in *The New Republic*, called *Jordanstown* an outright failure (394), and one reviewer wrote of *Wildwood*, "In elaborate, subtle, beautifully rhythmic and suggestive prose it sings a mournful lament over the body of a dead book" (Prescott 576).

While Johnson's extended works often received less than uniformly positive critical assessments, her short stories offered readers more, even if critics didn't always agree on their merits. Some reviewers detected in her *Winter Orchard* stories the same lapses apparent in her first novel, while others acknowledged their remarkable emotional appeal. Lewis Gannett, observing that "Hers is a beautiful world, but a November one," commented, "*Winter Orchard* is a book of distinction and Josephine Johnson is a girl to watch. Yet I hope that as she grows older she will grow younger" (15). Similarly, in a review highlighting the major achievements in short fiction for 1935, including a collection by Thomas Wolfe, Edith Weigle offered, "Miss Johnson's art is simple, gentle, soft, 'a lovely voice speaking in a quiet room'" (16).

Thirty years later, reviewers again expressed a love-hate relationship with the world Johnson created in the short fiction she published over a twenty-year period and collected as *The Sorcerer's Son and Other Stories*. In one of the harshest notices Johnson's work ever received, Webster Schott, writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, recognized the polished, "glassy smoothness" of the stories and the success of a few, but he noted that Johnson's "flights of poetic prose crash under the weight of rhetorical lead" (5). Echoing Schott somewhat, Sandra Schmidt of *The Christian Science Monitor* contended that Johnson's "spasmodic" stories showed little growth over their twenty-year germination period, but a few "simple, effective" fantasies succeeded admirably (7).

If a reader digests and analyzes the work of an author and finds merit in the experience, then he or she might discount professional criticisms of the writing as differences in taste and opinion. To some degree, however, critics correctly identified how Johnson's prose lyricism sometimes overburdens her plots and how the subdued, even melancholy effect she achieves is influenced by naturalistic principles and the attitudes of the eras in which she is writing. For example, consider these two passages from the title entry in the 1965 collection, the story of the artistic but disturbed brother of a happily married Indiana mother whose profligate behavior results in his own death in a car crash and the severe injury of a young woman. Both passages are part of an extended description of the protagonist's two nieces and his puppets respectively: "There was no trace of evil in their faces, no buried sorrow, no shadow of original sin. Even the great gold glittering dragons reeked with triumph and not terror, and his wild and well-fed witches came from kindlier kingdoms of the night" (11). The second passage reads: "The hand-carved wooden figures from all the myths of the world, which he now called perversely the Old Crowd, peered out steadily behind a sheet of glass, a wild bright league of fairy nations, clustered irrelevantly under the banner of St. George" (12).

All criticisms of such passages aside, however, Sandra Schmidt in her review of the collection offered a method for deciphering the fourteen stories in the volume: "The short story at its best can be a mood, an instant and intensely private world, a shard that pricks the mind out of all proportion to its size [. . .] It imitates in fiction those flashes of insight by which we see our real lives" (7). For Johnson, part of that insight into real life comes from the perceptiveness of

children, or at least through the experiences of adults refamiliarized with the fears, frustrations, and anxieties of childhood.

Indeed, none of the stories in the collection goes untouched by the presence of children or a reminder of childhood. Because of their rich, enigmatic quality, the fourteen stories might be categorized in several ways, but none of them resonate more than the group exploring the intuitiveness of children, or better phrased, what children instinctively realize that adults no longer can, or refuse, to grasp. In "Fever Flower," for example, a story appearing in *The Best Short Stories of 1945*, an eight-year-old child accepts the outcome of her torturous battle with tuberculosis. When the adults around her—her parents, hospital workers, and a priest even—physically or spiritually abandon her because her suffering makes no sense, she embraces life's simplest gifts like an ice cream cone. Shaming by example adult onlookers, a childhood friend offers her exactly what she needs, not philosophizing about her condition or wrenching of hands, but basic companionship untouched by the scourge of her illness. Despite her youth, she expresses the most elemental longings of life in two simple expressions throughout the story, "I wish—" and "I want." In comparison, Johnson describes the adult complication of her death scene as follows, in this case through the reaction of the intern caring for her:

In the silence before the weary routine and the clinical report he felt strangely as though this were not the hour of death but the hour of exorcism. The terrible spirit, tormented and tormenting released, and he held in his arms something empty and fragile, as the sea leaves a ghostly crab shell or a sea fern drying on the sand. He contemplated curiously, as he had pondered often in the now-dead year, on the great gulf that separated him from this child; time, more wide and final than the finality of death. (128)

Similarly, in a related story entitled "Christmas Morning in May," the narrator remarks on the flexibility and trusting nature of children, as a young girl and a shy neighbor child enjoy the Yuletide season months in advance: "How this calm dumping of the calendar came to Annie is part of the magnificent mystery of the four-year-old mind—free, seasonless, and uncorrupted by the clock" (50). Later on, Johnson comments on childhood resilience,

In the sum of things children are patient little beings. Far more patient in proportion to the greatness of their visions and desires than

those who move about above their heads. Only a very good magician would be a wholly satisfactory parent; but the child accepts with patience the Iwilltry, the wewillseeabout it tomorrow [. . .]. (51)

Children may be resilient and trusting, Johnson demonstrates, but they also keenly recognize adult subterfuge, which she explores in "The Story With No End," where a father temporarily diverts his two squabbling children by telling an impromptu tale about a boy carrying a mysterious bag through a perilous kingdom in the dead of winter. When he cannot explain the contents of the bag as quickly as his daughter Josie can unravel the story, he ends it abruptly, leaving both father and daughter empty and hollow. "'He didn't know,' she said, 'He didn't know what was in there at all.'" (78)

While all of her short fiction creates a mood, Johnson's most evocative stories, her idylls, reveal worlds of truth in a short span. Although published sixteen years later, Johnson's story, "Penelope's Web," parallels "The Quiet Day" included in her earlier *Winter Orchard* collection. Both chronicle housewives discovering a kernel of philosophical truth as they perform their household routines. Johnson writes of the one woman's questioning,

. . . In the nature of life there was no finishing. None of the unknown and vanished wives before her in this house had ever "gotten done" [. . .] Could it be, she pondered, that part of this restlessness, this at times almost wild frustration, was because she had actually expected all the multiplicity of problems to disappear someday? Because she had never accepted the wholly obvious and blinding fact that no matter how well you washed a dish, it had to get used and dirty again tomorrow. Nor had she accepted the fact that there was nothing really wrong about this. (66-67)

Pregnant, the protagonist in "Coney Island in November" experiences the similar haunting of the unfinished, as one day while walking the beach, she imagines she sees the figure of her now-dead father writing his stern maxims about wastefulness and gratitude in the sand. When she hears of the polar bear club swimming in the nearby freezing waters off Coney Island, she questions such initiative and its futile outcome: "Does it give them a sense of fleshly well-being, she wondered—a something, a sensation that we have never even remotely known? Or is it just one of the curious goals and hurdles that man sets himself to make life, already a mass of goals and hurdles, satisfy some devious but definable pattern of his own?" (157).

Moreover, in "The Garden," a tangled, weedy garden plot symbolizes for Johnson's protagonist everything out of control in his life. Knowing that the snarled soil bitterly disappoints his wife annually, Norman hacks away at the undergrowth and uproots the corn plants he wishes to save. "As the tall, succulent stalk fell slowly sideways [. . .]" Johnson writes, "His heart [was] absolutely still, in preparation for a coming rage quite too terrible to be borne. It was [. . .] to encompass all the years of his life since childhood [. . .] his whole life, which for some inexplicable reason he regarded as a failure" (33). When his rage passes, the intricacy of the weed shapes cause him to realize, "It's all how you look at things. That's all" (34). The pleasure his daughter gains from lining up seeds and building insect nests in combination with the part of himself he sees in her eyes finally assures him of his own success.

As her writing attests, Johnson never hesitated to examine human fragility in the worst of situations, even the stresses of war. In *The Sorcerer's Son*, Johnson provides three unique stories about war's ravages. The first, "Night Flight," is perhaps Johnson's best-known and most widely anthologized tale, included in *The Best Short Stories of World War II*, among other collections. With reference to the title, the story might best be called a "flight of fancy," as a small group of soldiers during World War II embark on a series of impromptu nighttime air voyages without airplanes. Josef, the "flight instructor" of the others, wings to his home in Czechoslovakia nightly. Thinking that besides himself, only Josef and their sergeant have learned to defy gravity and the laws of physics, Johnson's protagonist, Joe, witnesses their major burst into song and liftoff by flapping his arms. Once aloft himself, however, Joe discovers a veritable highway of men on nightly patrol. On his own voyages, he covers vast open spaces to rendezvous in Kansas with his wife, who nightly shuts out the lights and whispers his name in anticipation of his arrival. Either symbolic of soldiers' longing for the comfort of home or the depiction of the souls of dead combatants set free from their bodies, the story's narrative technique places the tale, then, somewhere between the surreal or fantastic and possibly the magically real.

Besides "Night Flight," Johnson's story "The Heirs" also blurs the line between the real and the unreal. Possibly an allegory of war's legacy, the story opens when an officer sitting on a stump in a snow-covered forest witnesses two children wearing well-made but outdated clothing perform a funeral rite. Johnson writes, "The man

thought they must be six or seven years old, but their faces seemed unchildlike and their eyes moved continuously from side to side like those of forest animals. They reminded him of the lost children of Europe and seemed strangely out of place in these familiar hills. . ." (141). A chill overtakes the man's heart the more he watches them bury a box and listens to their bitter funeral incantations about the corruption of human nature. When he finally encourages them to walk with him to the nearest town, another armed soldier arising from the blowing snow accosts them. The children scurry into the trees as a single shot rings out. When they return to the clearing, they begin the same funeral ritual, this time over the officer's bloodstained body. "This will be far better than the box," the brother said, "This seems more real" (148). The corruption of the children compared to war orphans and the repetitiveness of the events narrated suggest that the seeds of war when planted in uncultivated but fertile soil often grow into the next self-perpetuating conflict.

In the final war story in the collection, entitled "The Rented Room," the struggles of a young army wife to be both mother and father are all too real. With her husband on base all but the occasional weekend, the days waiting for the birth of their second child drag on for Elizabeth Welles. Her life as a military wife has become a series of nondescript apartments with their naked light bulbs, blaring radios, and cooking odors trapped in the hallways. The women's fiction she reads about the courtship of a soldier and his bride and his rescue from the missing-in-action list does nothing to palliate her hopelessness and futility. Although comforted by "the solid reality" of her son (96), she sees herself failing as a mother, "afraid of her own lethargy and lack of imagination" (98). Listening for the ringing telephone with a call that never comes, "[s]he thought of the thousands of other women waiting for that same shrill, nerve-shattering sound, and the thousands of interminable conversations, inane and comforting" (97). A sermon on the radio preaching ways to prevent human suffering causes her to ponder

the vast, barren barracks of the army field, the acres of men in uniform swarming like ants between those barracks, the great invisible mechanism of Death, and somewhere a General speaking: 'We must hate with every fiber of our being. . . Our object in life must be to kill. We need have no pangs of conscience. . . (102).

Time spent as a family on the occasional weekend forces her to consider how her husband has changed. When she is told by another tenant "You're lucky. At least you have a good husband," she realizes how hollow her response is, "I know. . . I know I am" (116), especially when the completion of her husband's training brings on the inevitable conversation about their future. Johnson ends the story by emphasizing the transitory nature of wartime life for most women:

Elizabeth opened the little mailbox and took out her name. MRS. PAUL WELLES. She looked at it with tenderness and then crumpled it in her pocket. Who comes next? And after them? And after them? The little slips sliding in and out until the last apartment house had crumbled fine and thin like its strawy flowers, or blown its strange disharmony into ashes under some blind bomb. (119)

An early story in the collection provides a fitting way of ending any discussion of Johnson's later short fiction, for it explores all the desperation and emotional disconnection indicative of Johnson's naturalism. Entitled "The Glass Pigeon," the tale places a grandfather named John, a man of considerable physical size, in the enclosed space of his former daughter-in-law's mother's parlor, with its small Victorian chairs and fragile bric-a-brac. It provides his only conduit for contact with the child of his own dead son. Johnson writes ". . . Nothing in his long, violent, Gargantuan life had prepared him for this room, this glass pigeon, this fluttering silence" (39-40). Johnson parallels the literal physical restriction of the portly older man with the psychological restriction his grandson experiences living in such an environment. The actual interview with his grandson Jeff is interrupted continually by "Watch out," "Be careful," "Sit down" accompanied by the nervous gestures of both the child's mother and grandmother. When his grandson spills his ice cream down the front of his good shirt, tears actually fill his grandmother's eyes. When he launches into a cowboy song to impress his grandson, John notices how the boy leans against his leg and mouths the words along with him. Memories of similar moments with his dead son come rushing back, his reverie disturbed by Jeff's pantomime of shooting the glass pigeon on the mantle with an imaginary arrow and the harsh rebuke of both his mother and grandmother. Ironically, in making one grand sweeping gesture of good-bye with his hat, John himself sends the glass pigeon crashing to the floor. Hoping to see a look of quiet if not jubilant satisfaction on the face of his grandson, he realizes "the child's round pink face was only a mirror of

maiden horror" (49). The spirit has been squeezed out of the boy by the oppressive environment he has been placed in. At that moment ". . . a great sadness crept through [John's] enormous flesh. All the bitterness in his life, all the contempt and grief, rose in his mouth: 'You poor little joe!' he said" (49).

In her review of *The Sorcerer's Son and Other Stories*, Sandra Schmidt wrote, "For taking in and turning over, for rolling on the tongue, a short story can be very like a poem, with perhaps less melody but a more immediate humanity" (7). As this story demonstrates so masterfully, Johnson often brings characters whose "immediate humanity" clashes with their environment to the point of a crisis, which, while it offers new knowledge, never permanently diminishes the individual's self-doubt or anxiety. The seeds of their alienation planted early in childhood, her characters struggle life long to understand their nature in a world of continuously shifting agendas. And who is to blame, she asks, for as she writes in her novel, *Wildwood*, published in proximity to many stories in the collection, "Most of the world's pain is unplanned, unintentional, conceived in ignorance and born in lethargy. To thrive like a weed" (43). Through her short fiction, then, Johnson models how to, if not flourish like some succulent flower, at least beat back the weeds and clear a path for future action.

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*THE VIRGIN OF BENNINGTON:
EASTERN OR MIDWESTERN?*

MARY DEJONG OBUCHOWSKI

Kathleen Norris's memoir of her college and early post-college years, *The Virgin of Bennington* (2001), takes place mainly in Vermont and New York City. At first glance, it seems to have little to do with the Midwestern countryside, rural way of life, or religious orientation of *Dakota: A Spiritual Landscape* (1993) and her other works. What it does record, however, are the formative years of the person who wrote those books, from the point of view of one who became an adopted Midwesterner, and it has as a subtext some of the reasons she made the transitions that she did.

First, however, I have to indicate that the title is misleading. Although she reports that she entered college as a virgin and acquired the nickname "The Virgin of Bennington" there, Norris did not leave as one. She describes experimentation with lesbianism and later an unfortunate and demeaning affair with a professor while she was a senior. The latter seems to have damaged her confidence in herself both as a woman and as a poet; he certainly belittled her literary output. Once in New York, the sexual relationships she had with men seem, by their generally unsatisfactory nature, to prepare her for the fulfillment she seems to have reached with her husband. Sex, however, is not the real topic of *The Virgin of Bennington*.

Actually, the majority of this memoir focuses on her work with Elizabeth Kray, and I suspect that Norris began it as a biography of that extraordinary woman. Betty Kray ran the Academy of American Poets, an organization in New York City that had as its mission to bring poetry to students of all ages. Norris's primary responsibilities at first involved basic office work: typing, filing, and some writing. She acted as liaison between the Academy and Marie Bullock, who had founded it, and became acquainted with some of the pleasant aspects of patronage. Betty Kray had established programs in New

York City's parks, libraries, and schools, sponsoring readings and awards and bringing poets to a public which might not have read or heard of them. When Norris began working for the Academy, in 1969, Kray was about to expand her poets-in-schools series by sending poets on tours of several universities at a time. Those schools would share expenses for the writers and pool funds for their honoraria. Norris quotes Donald Hall as describing Kray as "'a little-credited source of the growth of the poetry reading, which has been the most astonishing change in American poetry in my lifetime'" (53). Many of us benefited from the Academy, listening to and meeting poets on tour in the sixties and seventies. As they passed through the Academy office and presented readings in New York, Norris often had the responsibility of shepherding them about and, as a result, heard and came to know many of the active writers of the time: James Tate, Denise Levertov, Louise Bogan, and many, many more. Some of them, such as James Wright, became good friends.

Norris began writing poetry while she was in college, and in 1971 her first book, *Falling Off*, came out. However, her timid nature and lack of confidence acted as blocks to further publication, and even, for a while, to writing. She said she "had become far too preoccupied with the trappings of literary success. In the hamlet that constitutes literary New York, I was tempted by careerism" (102). She found New York stimulating and her work rewarding, and her writing as we have it would not be the same had she not spent the six years there that she did. For one thing, some of the poets that she knew, such as James Tate, helped her through her letdown after the release of *Falling Off*. Betty Kray also commented on her poems. Norris calls her "an honest and perceptive reader," and indicates that "if, on reading a poem, [Kray] said, 'I begin to lose you here,' I would know she had found a weak spot, lines that needed work." Norris adds, "I couldn't have asked for a better mentor" (85).

Nevertheless, even during those years, Norris had misgivings. She states:

New York was an improbable place for me; my shyness and trepidation put me at odds with Manhattan's brash atmosphere. Like many young writers Betty had known, I had been attracted to the city for its prodigious energies, so wonderful and terrible, only to find that I had to struggle against myself to survive there. The daimon of the city, like the genius of poetry itself, could be both nurturing and

destructive. It seemed all wrong, yet I chose to come to terms with my life and art there. (68)

She adds later in the book,

Whatever the field of endeavor, from poetry to medicine, there are always so many somebodies in New York that the pressure to succeed is relentless. The danger is that in constantly measuring one's work against that of others, one may lose sight of what it means to be true to oneself. (85)

Indeed, she gave her first book the title *Falling Off*, she said, "to capture my uneasiness in New York, my sense of the city as a place where one might indeed fall off the world and disappear" (63).

The beginnings of her eventual transition appear subtly. At unexpected moments, she said, thoughts about the nature of sin, or of goodness, would visit her (96). In addition, she felt tugs she identified only later as coming from her roots, her Midwestern heritage. In "Leaving New York and Staying: How Much of a New Yorker Am I?" an essay she wrote for a book she edited by the same title, she tells us,

One day when I was alone in my apartment in New York I heard the unmistakable, tinkly laughter of my South Dakota grandmother. Pressed to define the experience, I'd say that it was my conscience speaking, but in my grandmother's light, high voice, asking me pointed questions that left my newfound literary pretensions in a shambles. Her language—plain English, gloriously inflected with the King James idiom of a late-19th century girlhood in Virginia—reminded me who I was, and eventually called me back to South Dakota. (30-31)

This offers part of an answer to why Norris left the rich excitement of New York City for the plains of South Dakota. The most immediate event was that because of the death of her grandmother, the family farm in South Dakota needed to be either sold or inhabited. The extended family wanted to keep it, but someone needed to live there, and Norris and her husband, the poet David Dwyer, decided to do so. A biographical note appended to the same essay, "Leaving New York and Staying: How Much of a New Yorker Am I?" says of Norris, "There in the 'humbling . . . largeness of earth and sky,' she confronts her heritage, religion, language and landscape" (37).

How they managed such a transition, what changes occurred in their lives, and in their life together, are matters for another, longer

paper. Norris deals with these issues in considerable detail in *Dakota*. My concern is to explore how *The Virgin of Bennington* fits into the pattern of the books Norris wrote both before and after the move to the Midwest. One answer might lie in her developing sense of the spiritual, another in her love of language, a third in her need for solitude, a fourth in her seemingly paradoxical sense of closeness with her family. Perhaps a part of all of her developing oeuvre may be simply her growing from adolescence to stability (159-60).

Norris's 1999 volume of collected poetry, *Journey*, has a revealing headnote to its first section from the Song of Solomon (3:1-2):

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth:
I sought him, but I found him not.
I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets,
And in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth,
But I found him not.

This quotation suggests two things: first, and most obviously, a realization that the city was not the place for her. She had met her husband in the city, so he could not be the object of her search. Therefore, I propose that "him whom my soul loveth" refers to the part of her that loves writing, a part that she needed to search for elsewhere than in New York.

Second, because of its source, the passage marks a return to Biblical religion. At college, Norris had decided the Christian religion to be "useless baggage, having no place in my sophisticated life" (123). During her last year in New York, she retreated from the frenetic social life she had developed—reading, studying, undergoing therapy, and attempting to write during her time off from work. Some of her friends had left New York. For example, the poet Jim Carroll found the spiritual strength to escape the cultural events, the drugs, and the parties for a clean life elsewhere (132-9). Her own full spiritual reawakening did not evolve until later. In *The Virgin of Bennington*, she refers to "the early 1980s, when [she] was experiencing the first, thrilling wave of a religious conversion," (246) but does not record it in detail. It comes out more clearly in *Dakota*, where she explains, "Growing up and discovering who I was meant not going near a church again for nearly twenty years." She adds,

During that time I became a writer. I used to think that writing had substituted for religion in my life, but I've come to see that it has

acted as a spiritual discipline, giving me the tools I needed to rediscover my religious heritage. (93)

This rediscovery occurs first in the church of her grandparents, and then in the awakening she undergoes in the retreats to monasteries and cloisters. Nevertheless, I see the connection between the sound of her grandmother's voice in New York and her religious development in South Dakota as a strong one. So is the connection between religion and language, for Norris. She explains:

In my relatively sheltered, lower-middle class life, — my parents (musicians and teachers) had more books and music on hand than money—it had never occurred to me that one might have to leave home in order to find people who knew that one might live by music, or by words. I didn't know that exile from ones roots might be the cost of finding a language that might save you. (*Leaving New York* 30)

She felt that the rural Midwest was “a rich environment for the gestation of poetry,” and wrote to Betty Kray about “trying to convey my feeling that the old house was listening to us” and about “discovering that I loved hearing Scripture being read aloud” (*Virgin* 206). Hymns at the nearby Presbyterian church sent her back to Emily Dickinson (*Virgin* 207). She appreciated, she tells us, “the widening focus I experienced in a place where I no longer felt pressured to compete with other poets” (*Virgin* 208) and adds:

I settled happily among neighbors who were ranchers, truck drivers, tavern owners, contractors, and merchants, and in their presence, my poems, like my life, could not help becoming less cerebral. . . . I wrote poems about the landscape that surrounded me, and sent them to magazines. (*Virgin* 209)

Norris found that at least one of her editors, Gregory Orr of *The Virginia Quarterly*, preferred her new poems (*Virgin* 209). Furthermore, Norris and her husband established ties with nearby writers by going to local conferences and reading poetry in schools as members of the South Dakota Arts Council (*Virgin* 210).

A reader of *Dakota* can easily see how the solitude she experienced in the South Dakota landscape allows time and thought for her writing, and the isolation provides a kind of template for thinking about the monastic Desert Fathers, giving her an opportunity to emulate them. Spiritual and other kinds of retreats exist in every part of the country, but the dry plains and harsh but beautiful vistas of the Dakotas resem-

ble the arid regions where those ancient monks could meditate, pray, study, and write. This is the setting that not only appealed to Norris but nourished her spiritual and intellectual creativity.

The final chapters of *The Virgin of Bennington* develop a contrast between Norris and Betty Kray, much of which depends on information Norris acquired after Kray's death. Kray shared a Midwestern heritage with Norris, but it was one she acknowledged only reluctantly and discussed little. Her past was filled with painful memories, and so Kray not only reveled in life in New York, but urged Norris against moving to South Dakota and watched her departure with deep concern. In a way, *The Virgin of Bennington* is a tribute to Kray's rich life and generous accomplishments, but it also explains why Norris's move away from her beloved mentor was a positive one. For Norris, New York was a place for her talent to hibernate until she was ready to return to a life of writing, reborn and stimulated in the Midwest.

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THOMAS MCGRATH:
ANOTHER AGRARIAN REVOLT

GLENN SHELDON

Thomas McGrath's *Selected Poems* offers a table of contents that is rich with poems entitled "Vision of Three Angels Viewing the Progress of Socialism" (43), "Ode for the American Dead in Asia" (56-7), "Proletarian in Abstract Light" (82), "Reading the Names of the Vietnam War Dead" (83), "Political Song for the Year's End" (85-6), "Fresco: Departure for an Imperialist War" (133), "The Poet of the Prison Isle: Ritsos against the Colonels" (136), "Blues for the Old Revolutionary Woman" (155) and "War Resisters' Song" (167). From such titles, it is easy to deduce that McGrath's canvas is a political one, that questioning is central to this work by an important twentieth-century American poet who has been often overlooked by readers seeking an easy lyricism. "Politics . . . is an all-pervasive element of McGrath's work, a presence in his thought and in his feeling-states, a source for mood and for emotion, as well as for language" (Stern 15). McGrath's work is permeated by political consciousness and not just merely a sounding board for a jeremiad.

In *Modern American Poetry: An Online Journal and Multimedia Companion to Anthology of Modern American Poetry*, editor Cary Nelson reveals much about how McGrath is perceived and has been received by critics and readers. The following entries, among other more general ones, characterize this poet's journey through the world of letters:

McGrath's Statement to the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC)
McGrath's Radicalism
About World War II
About McCarthyism
About the Vietnam War

(www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/mcgrath).

For us, as academics, "McGrath's Statement to the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC)"—at the same site—is particularly interesting. He refused to cooperate; his initial justification reads:

In the first place, as a teacher, my first responsibility is to my students. To cooperate with this committee would be to set for them an example of accommodation to forces which can only have, as their end effect, the destruction of education itself. . . . In a certain sense, I have no choice in the matter—the students would not want me back in the classroom if I were to take any course of action other than the one I am pursuing.

Secondly, as a teacher, I have a responsibility to the profession itself. We teachers have no professional oath of the sort that doctors take, but there is a kind of unwritten oath which we follow to teach as honestly, fairly and fully as we can. The effect of the committee is destructive of such an ideal, destructive of academic freedom. . . . A teacher who will tack and turn with every shift of the political wind cannot be a good teacher. I have never done this myself, nor will I ever.

(www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/mcgrath/huac.htm).

McGrath goes on to list "esthetic grounds" but makes it clear that "none of [these reasons] is acceptable to the committee," so he also cites "the fourth amendment," "the first amendment," and the "fifth amendment," explaining "the fifth amendment was inserted in the Constitution to bulwark the first amendment against the activities of committees such as this one" (www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/mcgrath/huac.htm). When he states that a teacher cannot "tack and turn with every shift of the political wind," he is also implying that a poet, especially an American poet in the 1950s, must remain steadfast and certain of his or her positions and ideas.

In 1988, Frederick C. Stern published an anthology of critical material on McGrath, *The Revolutionary Poet in the United States: The Poetry of Thomas McGrath*. Finally, there was a volume of work, some in-depth and some slim, that would spark interest in this poet who is often overlooked in terms of twentieth-century word workers. Interest in McGrath critically goes at a slow but steady pace, but there has been little significant work published since Stern's volume, which is unfortunate.

What we can find of interest in the essays in Stern's edited book are essays that attempt to place McGrath into some context, to name

him within certain ideologies so we can begin to study him against the landscape in which we place him as a poet. As complex and problematic as naming or labeling can be, in the critical volume I believe it functions as a sincere gesture to reclaim McGrath from the dismissive category of "the poet of the proles" (41), as Stern summarizes some poets' sarcastic identification of McGrath. Thus, throughout the volume, we have individuals who appreciate McGrath and attempt to place him more appropriately, and more kindly, into the American literary landscape: "the preeminent poet . . . of the end of the agrarian myth and the domination of the urban in American life" (Stern 15); a "prairie populis[t]" and an "American anarcho-socialis[t]" (Carruth 47); the "Orphic Poet of the Midwest" (Wakoski 59); an "elegiac poet" (Butwin 69); "a poet of alienation" (Thompson 104); and, finally, "the grand poet of place" (Schuler 78). I suggest that the term "agrarian" can be used in a sense of the rural life so linked to farming and as an oppositional to the urban centers that are enmeshed with ideological and financial powers over the greater nation, and thus, the planet.

The sense of alienation and place that is textualized in his work may be traced back as far as McGrath's childhood, growing up in the Red River Valley in rural North Dakota. The lack of critical attention up until late into the 1980s, and the subsequent slow, steady pace of contemporary scholarship, however, are attributable to "lingering political ideas redolent of the . . . McCarthy era" (Stern 41). Stern goes on to characterize McGrath in subsequent decades as "a poet wearing the wrong ideological clothes to meet the moment's modes" (41). Certainly the 1950s had little tolerance for anyone too vocal about the dangers of hegemony. "When Eisenhower conservatism held sway in the nation, McGrath was out of fashion in one way; when 'new left' and 'hippie' ideologies held sway, McGrath was out of fashion in another" (Stern 41). Elsewhere Stern explains: "McGrath's politics are not favorably disposed toward the relatively 'soft' radicalism of the 1960s, which he sees more as show than as substance, more as a game than as struggle, and he especially notes its lack of attention to class issues" (Stern 16). There was something anticipatory about McGrath's oeuvre that may have contributed to some of his critics' reluctance to become his literary advocate.

Around 1958, McGrath began an epic poem in four parts, *Letter to an Imaginary Friend*. Part One was published in 1962. Other parts were published over the years, but it was not until 1997 that Copper

Canyon published *Letter to an Imaginary Friend* in its entirety. Consequently, we have been waiting a very long time to consider both his shorter poems and his epic poem contextually. Now, presumably, we can breathe easier; we have the whole sweeping work before us. But is the anticipation over? Critically speaking, we have seen little significant work published on McGrath since then, so evidently the wait is not over.

As important as it is to look at *Letter to an Imaginary Friend* as well as McGrath's shorter works, here in the space of this paper I have chosen just a few of the shorter works. Thus, I begin my analysis of McGrath's poems with three of those nine works I pointed out earlier from his *Selected Poems*. I consider "Vision of Three Angels Viewing the Progress of Socialism" (43), "Proletarian in Abstract Light" (82) and "Political Song for the Year's End" (85-6) as case analyses for McGrath's poetic oeuvre, his politics, and the meta-structure of his notion of revolt and/or revolution, particularly as he focuses on agrarianism as a metaphor for change (in all its incarnations) and "McGrath's particular agrarian 'midwesternism'" (Stern 11). In subsequent study, I hope to view the epic poem alongside the shorter works.

Firstly, "Vision of Three Angels Viewing the Progress of Socialism" (43) is a three-stanza poem about three angels, obviously, who apparently descend from a capitalist-driven heaven, of some sort, to visit a commune (on earth?); each one, in turn, comments upon his or her observation. We know that the heaven from which they have descended is more like mainstream American society than any idyllic vision of paradise because the first angel—a former banker (while alive, evidently) is wearing "a money belt for a truss" (l. 1); the second angel "had been a soldier in civilian life" (l. 5); and, the third angel wears "the teamster's cap and callouses on his wing" (l. 9).

The first angel looks "into the Commune" (l. 2) and is surprised to see its citizens, whom the angel describes as "burrowing beggars" (l. 3) living "without mortgages or rents and with no help from us" (l. 4). The progress of socialism, prominent in the poem's title, has quite clearly reduced or eradicated the need for profit-based loans and mortgages by institutional lenders. The second angel, also viewing the commune, mentions that "the boys in the squad-room" will "never believe me" (l. 6), because "no one down there says sir" (l. 7). More unbelievably, what's harder to conceive of, is "[t]hat even bug-house nuts don't want to be Julius Caesar" (l. 8). Equity, among its

citizens, has evidently taken the place of a manager-laborer stylized caste, as well as military-style tyranny.

Now with the third angel, the reader expects to have a different reaction because he epitomizes a laborer with "the teamster's cap and callouses on his wing" (l. 9). Interestingly, McGrath describes the angel as possibly having only one wing, and that one, as it is, calloused. Possibly this angel lost a "limb" in an industrial accident, probably while human, and thus ended up with only one calloused wing (l. 9). In any case, this angel immediately pronounces that he must have fallen "into the hands of heaven" (l. 10) and observes that "the working stiffs down there are finally getting even" (l. 43). Obviously, this angel's viewpoint is from the perspective of a laborer suddenly finding no need for managers, generals and bankers. This particular angel finds this socialist-style commune so attractive that he or she decides to "stick around until Judgment" (l. 12). "Heaven is a sometime thing," (l. 12) is the last statement put forward in the poem. This last angelic vision is of heaven on earth, in the form of a socialism that is an ideal, free from managers, generals, bankers and other typical exploiters. It is as if the future, here on earth, has collapsed into idyllic socialism; heaven, on the other hand, has gone the way of a capitalist economy and a first-world war-machine. We know that McGrath "sees life in the United States, and indeed in the Western world, as profoundly flawed, as desperately in need of revolutionary change" (Stern 5); McGrath often presents us with a poem that sings of "an eventual socialist world" (Stern 33).

In many ways, the "Vision of Three Angels Viewing the Progress of Socialism" is very similar to one later poem in McGrath's *Selected Poems*, "Proletarian in Abstract Light" (82). In line three, an individual "enters, singing, the muffled shape of a future"; evidently, the reader is to assume this is the proletarian of the title. McGrath describes him: "He has no face; his hands are bloody; / He is for himself; he is not to please you" (ll. 4-5). This "muffled shape of a future" has a "barbarous tongue" (l. 10) and signs a song in the second and fourth strophes, which is italicized in the text:

*You have stolen my labor
You have stolen my name
You have stolen my mystery
You have stolen the moon* (ll. 6-9)

But who is this "you" that McGrath, as well as the singer of this song, puts forward in this poem? Right before the second strophe, the proletarian's song, begins; McGrath states: "He is for himself; he is not to please you" (l. 5). In the third strophe, McGrath delineates between the proletarian and the "you," with the latter being someone, or something, in opposition to the proletarian. Likely we should assume our position as a reader is either as an eavesdropper or as a participant in the anti-proletariat, presumably the *bourgeoisie* or the ruling class. The "coldness of [the proletarian's] song goes on" (l. 10):

*I do not want your clocks
I do not want your God
I do not want your statues
I do not want your love* (ll. 15-18)

Here the things being rejected seem to echo the earlier poem and the things the three angels observe in the commune. If the commune is, indeed, socialist, as the earlier poem's title suggests, then there has been a rejection of God. "*You have stolen my labor / You have stolen my name*" (ll. 6-7) could just as easily be applied to the rejection of managers and bankers. "*I do not want your statues*" (l. 17) could be interpreted as being a rejection of the military and its war-machine. Certainly the fifteenth line, "*I do not want your clocks,*" refers to labor and its constituent issues.

What's interesting about the song, broken into two strophes (the second and the fourth), is that the first four lines are accusatory, each starting with "*You have stolen. . .*" However, the last four lines (ll. 15-18), which also conclude the poem, are rejections: "*I do not want your. . .*" Clearly, here, rejection is more powerful than accusation, because rejection more actively places agency in the hands of the proletarian in the poem. The agrarian community has the agency to reject ways of life imposed upon it; the clocks are, of course, inferior to seasons and the slower rhythms that require no statues built for them. McGrath is less interested in "mystery" than in a "sacredness" that is ordinary and that is accessible to the worker; "labor" must not be stolen, not without dire consequences for the greater society.

The poet-narrator of "Proletarian in Abstract Light" characterizes the individual's song as dreamlike and heavy, containing the potential to shatter something. "The marble weight / Of his dream, like a heavy cloud, leans on your glass houses" (ll. 11-12). Something's got to give, and if it's the capitalist system or more simply exploita-

tive labor situations, then the opposite becomes a potential: the socialism in the three-angels poem, perhaps. With his "Western agrarian themes and a Wobbly vocabulary" (Thompson 108), McGrath presents us with the notion of individual resistance leading to revolution, no matter how local or universal it may be.

If we return to the proletarian's song, solely, we are left with three lines that do not fit neatly into the categorization of a "barbarous" anti-capitalist sentiment. Those lines are the last two in strophe two: "You have stolen my mystery / You have stolen the moon" (ll. 8-9), and the last line of the poem: "I do not want your love" (l. 18). Not simply the theft of "my labor" (l. 6), "my name" (l. 7), or the rejection of "your clocks" (l. 15), "your God" (l. 16) or "your statues" (l. 17). "Mystery," "moon" and "love" go in the opposite direction of the quotidian. These word choices seem to defy the bodily and move the thefts and rejections to the level of the emotional, the psyche. This kind of theft goes far beyond stealing time, upon which this poem clearly expounds. Thus, thefts and rejections are examined at the level of the soul, that which exploiters should not be able to touch, but, as is clear, they do . . . touch . . . very much.

In the context of this poem, the proletarian does not seem merely to decry his situation. The poet-narrator goes so far as to suggest triumph, of some sort. As "hours condense like snow," (l. 11), the narrator characterizes the poem's central individual as being "[e]xpropriated of time" (l. 13). Both in the sense of something being taken away, officially, without consent, and in the sense of using another's labor as one's own, this picture seems bleak for the proletarian. However, the full poetic line reads: "Expropriated of time, he begins himself in *his name*" (l. 13), which clearly is an empowerment. After this "beginning," McGrath writes: "He stamps his null on your day; the future collapses toward him" (l. 14). The expropriation of time is denied; it is valueless. Thus, something must be substituted.

Is that something a rejection of everything that can be expropriated, or is it something else? Clearly, "the future" which "collapses toward him" (l. 14) rests on the side of the proletarian within the context of this poem. Consequently, it must be some other system, perhaps which is the substitution: socialism, possibly, as in the three-angels poem, or another alternative. But an alternative that the proletarian clearly intends to shape through his rejection of "your clocks" (l. 15), "your God" (l. 16), "your statues" (l. 17), and, most importantly, "your love" (l. 18). The substitution, apparently, sub-

sumes "*his name*" (l. 13); it becomes his vision (however abstract?), his system, his cosmos that returns his "mystery" (l. 8) and "the moon" (l. 9) to either their rightful places or new, appropriate places. Thus, we can conclude, the proletarian's song is a political one. It is one full of claims that are both deserved and have never been abandoned by this worker.

In many ways, the proletarian's song is similar to a refrain that emerges just a few poems later in the *Selected Poems*, "Political Song for the Year's End" (85-6). This 36-line poem, divided into four equal parts, numerated, provides a refrain at the end of every ninth line; interestingly, like our last example, the refrain is songlike and refers to the moon. The refrains are: "*Sing to the moon, for every change must come*" (l. 9), "*Sing to the moon, for every change is known*" (l. 18), "*Sing to the moon; for every change must pass*" (l. 27) and "*Sing to the moon, for every change is known*" (l. 36). Clearly, the second and fourth (final) refrain is exactly alike, and each refrain refers to change. Change "must come" (l. 9); "change is known," (l. 18); "change must pass" (l. 27); and, again, "change is known" (l. 36). By now it should be clear that change is key to McGrath's poetic *oeuvre*. Change, it seems, can be personal or political; or, more likely, personal and political. In the third stanza of "Political Song for the Year's End," McGrath gives us other clues to change, or at least, the change being discussed within the context of this poem:

Each role must change. Each change must come.
Turning, we make the great Wheel turn
In a rage of impotence, forth and back
Through the stations of history's zodiac
Caught in the trap of our daily bread,
A hopeful, stumbling multitude,
We surrender and struggle, save and slay,
Turning the wheel in the ancient way.
Sing to the moon; for every change must pass. (ll. 19-27)

The individual we encountered, as readers, in "Proletarian in Abstract Light" here becomes a "hopeful, stumbling multitude" (l. 24), an expansion that suggests the winning of the hearts and minds of American citizens and, eventually, world citizens. This multitude, which includes the narrator, is "[c]aught in the trap of our daily bread" (l. 23). The use of "our" here, and later the use of "we" makes

it clear the narrator is among the multitude, either in his role as "Worker" (l. 14) or as "Poet" (l. 14). And it is here, in the poem's third stanza, that the multitude and labor struggle to survive. But there is also hope, but not as an abstract notion, but one with practical rewards and immediate consequences towards change.

Those who are "[c]aught in the trap of our daily bread" (l. 23) also "surrender and struggle, save and slay, / Turning the Wheel in the ancient way" (ll. 25-26). This, I believe, is a straightforward representation of labor, particularly physical labor, as presented in all of McGrath's works. However, McGrath does not simply present the bleakness of the task; he offers the idea that change has the potential to be beneficial for those who have long been without power or political influence. However, in this stanza's refrain, McGrath writes: "*Sing to the moon; for every change must pass*" (l. 27). Since the stanza begins—"Each role must change. Each change must come" (l. 19), it seems here that McGrath offers us multiple changes, some positive, perhaps, others negative. So this "change" here is one that "*must pass*" (l. 27), offering us some glimmer of hope that the next change will turn "the great Wheel" (l. 20) into a different station "of history's zodiac" (l. 22), one where the multitude are not turning in "a rage of impotence, forth and back" (l. 21).

Yet this poem, "Political Song for the Year's End," is about more than change, or anticipatory change. With McGrath, elements of time, particularly the cyclical (arguably an agrarian perspective, among other perspectives), become animated and help guide the poem's overall structure. McGrath's poetry "refuses the placing of a closed moment of experiences with its rehearsed response, and seeks to extend the past forward through the present into a round dance of the future" (Thompson 108). Note that the poem is a political song "for the Year's End." Yet the first two lines of the first stanza read: "The darkness of the year begins / In which we hunt the summer kings." Could this darkness be the same sense of "change" that we saw in the third stanza? The last line, particularly the sense of a "hunt" suggests that the multitude are hunting someone, quite logically rulers or leaders. To the workers, it is obviously a manager or owner, some generic-style postmodern robber baron, or perhaps any "ordinary" capitalist venturer.

In the first stanza, when the "starry, hunted hero dies" (l. 6), McGrath tells us that the "redemptive rain of his golden blood / Quickens the barley of the Good" (ll. 7-8). This stanza's "change,"

which the refrain reminds us "*must come*" (l. 9) is, at least metaphorically, an agrarian revolt of some order. The industrialism so prominent in the third stanza is, here, preceded by an uprising of some sort that leads to a renewal of the land, particularly its bounty, which is of benefit to "the Good." The "Good" then must be a multitude similar to those mentioned in stanza three. If so, then how are we to read the poem in terms of this multitudinous "Good"? For it sounds as if the agrarian revolt of stanza one has given way to another change, one of industrial bleakness (in stanza three). To say that revolution from exploitation can someday lead to a revolution that brings back exploitation might be enough here. However, it would be rare for McGrath to leave this message so stark.

So what is going on here? Part of the clue may lie in the fourth and final stanza, as well as in the poem's title. Here again we have a hunt, an apparent hunt for "our savior," perhaps (l. 29). The savior here, although arguably surrounded by metaphoric allusions to religion, is in all likelihood being used as sarcastically as McGrath used the phrase "starry, hunted hero" (l. 6) in the first stanza. The hunting going on in both stanzas must have some relationship, because we know that for McGrath "the end is a beginning" (Hamill unpaginated; italics mine). In McGrath's poems, a reader can easily identify an "ending" (metaphoric or a poem's physical conclusion) that becomes linked back to the "beginning" in some manner. In this poem, stanza four of this poem is linked to stanza one. Given this and the similar huntings underway in each of these stanzas, I have to believe that the "savior" (l. 29) is a personage similar to the earlier "hero" (l. 6) whose death brings "redemptive rain" (l. 7). In the last stanza we have redemption appear again. McGrath writes: "We see our savior hunted by, / Into that furious dark of time / His only death may all redeem" (ll. 29-31). (Incidentally, the capitalization of "His" could be misleading here, as it refers to its antecedent "savior"; importantly, McGrath capitalizes the first word of every line in the poem; and, importantly, he chose *not* to capitalize the word "savior," which I think would have been a logical choice if McGrath wanted us to take the savior here less sarcastically or as operating within traditional religious structures.)

Thus, stanza four leaves us with a "death" (l. 31) that redeems. That death—not incidental but intentional so therefore a murder—comes about by the multitude, assumably, pursuing this figure into "that furious dark of time" (l. 30). How, then, can we conclude that

this murderous act is presented here as possessing something positive? As in the first stanza, McGrath in the concluding stanza once again brings in the notion of the agrarian. At this point in the poem, he equates time with agriculture: "time is grown" (l. 32). Yet, at the poem's conclusion, "the darkness of the year" (l. 35) arrives. And in the concluding line, "for every change is known" (l. 36). Here, then, there is change, albeit a known change. The murderous act was, then, inevitable. As inevitable as the ending of a year, perhaps? In stanza one, the "darkness of the year begins" (l. 1); in stanza four, the "darkness of the year is come" (l. 35). Thus, the poem's title points to the fourth stanza as being pivotal to this "Political Song. . ." The hunting and killing of the figure in the last stanza seems to bring about both darkness and redemption. However, the hunting and killing of the figure in the first stanza brings about a redemption that returns the multitude to the realm of "the Good" (l. 8). Hope, then, remains with inevitable change, seasonal renewal. The poem does not so much conclude with the last stanza as it functions to lead us back into the first stanza, where the most hope remains for both worker and poet alike.

In short, to do a deep reading of any McGrath poem, the reader should approach the work anticipating that a cyclical sense of time is at play, that kinetic energy is similar to the movement of one season ending and one season beginning. Stasis may prove to be the ultimate tool of oppression. These insights require us to read a poem like this one with less of a linear expectation. Although the words, the stanzas and their numbers all lead to a linear conclusion, it would be a mistake to assume that McGrath wants us to end at the end. His mastery is that endings, agrarian or industrial or revolutionary or otherwise, are often beginnings for McGrath, keeping in mind that "he makes the connection—carefully, deliberately, and with skill—between his political ideas and their sources in his life's experience, which is rooted first of all in the North Dakota farm experience, in the land, in the landscape" (Stern 5). Importantly, Stern reminds us:

McGrath is far too enmeshed in the hard work of poor farmers, in the need to keep body and soul together while working land that has to be wrestled into yielding cash crops in a commodity-based economy, to grow misty-eyed over it. However, the oneness with the land, the camaraderie of labor, and, most important, the comforts of the united and loving family are, for him, first of all found in North Dakota. (12)

So after all the naming and labeling, and serious critiquing, we are left with the realization that "McGrath is also deeply aware of the end of the agrarian mythology Mathiessen discusses, and he seeks to substitute for it another, what we call a 'post-agrarian' mythology" (Stern 7). But beyond the naming and labeling, we are left with the meta-structure of McGrath's poems, which animate time beyond a linear sense of the four seasons and into the realm of agrarian notions of time, as being both cyclical and endless. And of course, inherent in McGrath's notion of change—or changeless change—is a hope for personal and/or societal revolt, indeed "old-fashioned" revolution.

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G. K. CHESTERTON'S MIDWESTERN LEGACY

RUSS BODI

"I had always felt life first as a story; and if there is a story there is a story-teller"

Orthodoxy, G. K. Chesterton

In 1930, British author G. K. Chesterton visited Notre Dame University where he lectured on English letters and English history. Today, tourists attest that he carved his name on a dormitory window ledge, a small testimony to his being there. At the lectures, Chesterton entertained nearly twenty thousand people. The man himself, nearly 300 pounds, often convulsed in laughter and surprised his audiences with a voice described as a "thin trickle of sound."¹

According to Arthur Hope, Chesterton later told of his lectures at Notre Dame that they had been

inflicted on people who had never done me any harm. . . . An agonizing effort to be fair to the subtleties of the evolutionary controversy in addressing the students of Notre Dame . . . of which no record remains except that one student wrote in the middle of his notebook: "Darwin did a lot of harm."²

In the same way that Chesterton's diminutive vocalizations contrast his enormous physical stature, Chesterton's understated sense of personal effectiveness contrasts the profound impact he has had on Midwestern literature. Like his legendary, engraved signature on a windowsill in South Bend, Indiana, G. K. Chesterton's mark on detective fiction is still evident, surfacing in the works of recent Midwestern mystery writers.

Chesterton's famous character, Father Brown, is clearly the model for Andrew Greeley's Bishop Blackwell "Blackie" Ryan as well as for Ralph McInerney's Father Roger Dowling. There is a rational essence in all of our fictive priests' worldviews, which together with their priestly calling helps them to comprehend the

darkest aspects of human nature. Moreover, when Ralph McInerney uses Chesterton himself as the model for the character, Professor Roger Knight, who solves mysteries set at Notre Dame University, he creates a character, which also achieves priestlike transcendence and *percéption*.

Father Brown is fashioned in part after Chesterton's friend, Father John O'Connor of Bradford who has, according to Chesterton, none of the external qualities of Father Brown (*Autobiography* 334).³ For one thing, like Bishop Ryan and Father Dowling, O'Connor is Irish. Father Brown, however, is from East Anglia, a "Suffolk dumpling," so nationalities of the fictional successors to Father Brown more closely align with O'Connor. But O'Connor's inner qualities, Chesterton claims, mirror his literary protagonist. It is the contrast between the outward and the inward that fascinates Chesterton. He tells about an early encounter with O'Connor, who surprised him with his certain knowledge of what Chesterton calls "perverted practices" (*Auto* 337). Chesterton admits that he himself was no innocent when it came to his youth, but, he explains, "it was a curious experience to find that this quiet and pleasant celibate had plumbed those abysses far deeper than I" (337-8). Part of Father Brown's effect comes via the surprise he creates by understanding the depths of the criminal mind.

To illustrate this understanding, Chesterton tells the story of two Cambridge undergraduates who accused O'Connor of not knowing much about the "real evil in the world" (338), demonstrating their contempt for "the fugitive and cloistered virtue of a parish priest" (340).⁴ Further details regarding the challenge are not included in Chesterton's narrative, but the upshot is clear: The students were abashed. Chesterton explains:

I knew perfectly well that, as regards all the solid Satanism which the priest knew and warred against with all his life, these two Cambridge gentlemen (luckily for them) knew about as much of real evil as two babies in the same perambulator. (339)

Therein lies the comedic/ironic purpose of the Father Brown mysteries: The priest, who appears so innocent of the evil in the criminal mind and heart, actually understands it better than the criminal (339). Besides the irony of the priest having intimate knowledge of evil, he must not look intelligent or prepossessing, thus creating what I will call Chesterton's "cross purposes."

In short, I permitted myself the grave liberty of taking my friend [O'Connor] and knocking him about; beating his hat and umbrella shapeless, untidying his clothes, punching his intelligent countenance into a condition of pudding-faced fatuity, and generally disguising Father O'Connor as Father Brown. (339)

Chesterton exaggerates this ironic contrast by creating a bumbling, Columbo-like, unassuming, yet completely disarming sleuth. And that is the point of Chesterton's comedy: He acknowledges, "That the Catholic Church knew more about good than I did was easy to believe. That she knew more about evil than I did seemed incredible" (340). Chesterton centers most of his detective fiction on this seemingly impossible maxim: How can a priest penetrate the nature of evil more effectively than police science? Arguably, a man who spends a lifetime battling vice must certainly understand his enemy. But how can he surpass the criminal mind?

Within his Father Brown mysteries, Chesterton provides the critical apparatus whereby a virtuous priest can encompass intimate knowledge of evil: In "The Secret of Father Brown," the little priest says,

No man's really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be; till he's realized exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talking about 'criminals,' as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away; till he's got rid of all the dirty self-deception of talking about low types and deficient skulls; till he's squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat. (7)⁵

Disregarding his "fugitive and cloistered virtue," Chesterton's hero is often found conversing with criminal "dust and heat" in an effort to comprehend their nature. Thus, criminal minds are little match for Brown's perceptivity, especially because his seemingly innocent profession belies this kind of comprehension. Perhaps that is why the priest's appearance is not only disheveled, but downright muddy.

In "Hammer of God," one criminal is taken aback, "How do you know all this? Are you the devil?" Brown explains:

I am a man and therefore have all devils in my heart. Listen to me . . . I know what you did—at least, I can guess the great part of it. (*Best* 93)

Brown, possessed of exceptional inductive powers, relies heavily on his knowledge of human nature, his ability to anticipate what the

criminal mind will think. To accomplish this, Brown makes it clear that he has not gained wisdom through participation, but rather through observation. In "The Purple Wig," the Chestertonian cross-purposes surface characteristically when the sleuth uncovers a mystery before his audience and discloses how he has come to understand the evil mind of the criminal.

"I know the Unknown God," said the little priest, with an unconscious grandeur of certitude that stood up like a granite tower. "I know his name; it is Satan. The true God was made flesh and dwelt among us. And I say to you, wherever you find men ruled merely by mystery, it is the mystery of iniquity. If the devil tells you something is too fearful to look at, look at it. If he says something is too terrible to hear, hear it. If you think some truth unbearable, bear it." (*Wisdom* 118)⁶

In this manner, Father Brown's interiority emerges incrementally with the solution to each mystery. Readers are also able to acknowledge another Miltonic paradigm of rationality, that the secrets of God are accessible to men, that mystery is not always opaque to the alert mind. Brown is like an artist who can depict a life he has not lived, but has courageously witnessed. Thus, readers are beginning to view Chesterton's own view of how moral rationality overrides scientific certainty. More of this discussion will appear later in this essay.

First, it is important to see how Father Brown's influence delights audiences in postmodern Midwestern America. More than a cursory homage to Chesterton prompts Andrew Greeley and Ralph McInerny to develop similar priestly characters. Worldly knowledge mysteriously gleaned, perhaps through the confessional, less likely through personal indulgence, is a common ingredient in the characters of both Blackie Ryan and Roger Dowling. In both cases, Chesterton's cross-purposes work. First of all, both Ralph McInerny's Father Dowling and Andrew Greeley's Blackie Ryan bear a striking resemblance to Father Brown. All three priests essentially move about unnoticed. Blackie Ryan cherishes his invisibility. It helps to be anonymous when investigating crimes. Father Dowling possesses the same quality. He is often unobserved in his movements, a fact that helps him foster trust. After all, he is a clergyman, a quiet, angelic personage given to spiritual contemplation. Brown, Ryan and Dowling suddenly appear without ceremony. Perhaps their priestly garb also separates them because, like their real-life counterpart, Father O'Connor, they appear unintimidating. Blackie Ryan repeatedly, not

to mention sarcastically, refers to himself as perfectly "harmless." It logically follows that the fictional character must be small of stature, like Father Brown. It also helps if his vision is poor, requiring thick glasses, behind which his eyes are inscrutable. It adds to the sense of irony if the visionary appears to have difficulty seeing. All three priests wear glasses.

There must also be something in the partaking of tobacco, because, like Father Brown, Father Dowling smokes prodigiously. While lost in thought, both priestly sleuths are lost at least to our view in a cloud of smoke. Such clouds as those that gather around Mount Olympus provide evidence of stunning cogitation. The image of accumulating clouds around the heads of great thinkers pervades the literary pantheon. Bishop Blackie, on the other hand, never smokes. He drinks whiskey, overeats, but never gains weight. A different overindulgence must substitute for his counterparts' smoking. Ryan frequently claims, perhaps out of the darkness in his heart, that the leprechauns have stolen the cookies, usually oatmeal, or the whiskey, always Irish, which are often set before him.

Greeley, thus, complicates the image of Brown, asserting that "Blackie is something like Brown but also different because he is a person in his own right. Brown would never become a bishop for example."⁷ Greeley's playful characterizing of his beloved Blackie somehow confirms while subverting the model of Father Brown. In his novel, *The Bishop and the Beggar Girl of St. Germain*, the narrator Blackie rhetorically inquires:

[H]ow is it that babies, infants, children, dogs, and young people know that I am a priest? I am wearing blue jeans, a Chicago Millennium tee shirt, and my Bulls memorial jacket. I am covered with dust. I never look prepossessing and especially not today. Yet she [the beggar girl] unerringly smelled priest. How can this be? Do we really have a special smell. Moreover, she had the effrontery to label me as a curate, the lowest possible form of clerical life, ranked . . . by the housekeeper . . . the director of religious education . . . and, should there be one, the pastor's dog. (48-9)⁸

Here Greeley points to a phenomenon that opens for his readers the kind of intuition that links all three priestly detectives to something transcendent and only possessed of dogs, children and other virtuous personages.

Chesterton's Brown, while fading into the surrounding environment, especially in outdoor situations, has a muddy, disheveled appearance. However, as I demonstrated in earlier illustrations, he dominates the scene during the denouement, much as Greeley's Bishop does when he deliberately dons his ecclesiastical garb. Brown intuits the culpability of others, understands their evil nature and opens himself to a kind of divine inspiration. Likewise, Bishop Ryan reveals mystery solutions, particularly locked room mysteries, after a series of inductive efforts followed by patient cogitation whereby he waits for the pieces of the puzzle to come together. Narrator Ryan frequently describes this process as resembling the brief opening and closing of an elevator door. He catches a glimpse of the solution, but must patiently await the full revelation while continuing to investigate. Greeley once explained this phenomenon to me: "In Blackie's case God works through the little bishop's preconscious."⁹ Amazingly, the bishop can predict accurately when he will solve the mystery with statements like, "I will have the solution in thirty-six hours," or that he is twelve hours from a solution. Patiently he waits.

Father Dowling is rarely the central focus of McInerney's novels. Like Father Brown, he is present at just the right time and place when criminal activity occurs, usually on his parish grounds. He discusses the crime with his friend Phil Keegan of the police department, who closely parallels Father Brown's Flambeau. Dowling's role in the mystery solution is largely understated, often tangential to the case itself. For one thing, Dowling, like Brown, is not the narrative voice. McInerney chooses either an omniscient narrator or, in more recent stories, a divided viewpoint that focuses on various characters in the story, so he provides an intricate non-linear plot. As a result, Dowling's effect on the story's outcome is subtle. For instance, a common occurrence in the Dowling mystery is the priest's construction of a time line wherein he charts important events, a device often useful for the edification of the reader. Dowling often refrains from actual investigations, unlike his other priestly counterparts. But, like Bishop Ryan, he waits for information to come to him. Nevertheless, his dialogues with Keegan and sometimes with inspector Cy Horvath provide a forum wherein several solutions are proposed and discussed, a team effort. Often absent in McInerney's mysteries is the moment of climactic inspiration, which allows the priestly protagonist to show off his intellectual prowess. Sometimes the culprit exposes his own guilt as a result of external pressure.

Though not a priest, Ralph McInerny's Roger Knight is equally important to our discussion of Chestertonian figures in Midwestern literature. Knight is a licensed detective and scholar, who occupies the "Huneker Chair" at Notre Dame University. His Flambeau is his private detective older brother and confidante Phil Knight. Roger Knight qualifies for the newly formed chairmanship because of his expertise in Catholic literature and philosophy, his major field of study. His physical resemblance to G. K. Chesterton, however, is striking. Here is Chesterton described:

Students used to gather at the west door of Washington Hall before the lecture just to see Chesterton unloaded from Johnny Mangan's limousine. It was an operation that took no little time and effort. The door would open, and a great black mass of broadcloth cape would begin to wiggle and then back forth from the door of the car. There were long moments of silent suspense, after which one would not have been surprised to hear the kind of cheer that rises at the successful launching of a battleship.¹⁰

Roger Knight carries similar bulk with the attendant problematic logistics. He travels the campus via golf cart and often requires special means to accommodate his bulk. One fan of Chesterton is described thusly in *Irish Tenure*:

In her study at home she had a blowup of a photograph of [G. K. Chesterton]. He was disheveled and fat and wore a cape and a slouch hat. The first time she saw Roger Knight she had the crazy notion that he was Chesterton redivivus. (28)¹¹

The physical resemblance to Chesterton is of course just one measure of the inner man.

Like Brown, Roger Knight's active intellect sounds the depths of the human heart in order to solve cases, but for obvious reasons he delegates the more mundane investigative measures for his foot-soldier brother Phil. Nevertheless, like Father Brown and Bishop Blackie, Roger Knight is highly instrumental in solving crimes, often undertaking the performative aspect we associate with the theatrical Brown and Ryan. Though Knight is not a priest, he represents several aspects of priestly life, both in intellect and quotidian lifestyle. For example, it is crucial to acknowledge that Roger Knight lives a celibate lifestyle. That important distinction encapsulates the Chestertonian rationality that characterizes the Midwestern priestly detective novel.

Priestly sleuths, in spite of an ascribed predilection to divine inspiration, must not fall to the unforgivable sin of any mystery, the *Deus ex machina* ending. While not engaging in scientific investigation, they must derive, not divine, meaning from material clues and psychological evidence. So, we return to the question of how a parish priest, an auxiliary bishop, and a professor of Catholic literature are so well suited for solving crimes. Chesterton suggests it might be because the parish priest has little else to do. There is certainly some evidence of that in both Ryan and Dowling mysteries, but more arguably, these religious men are discrete from more secular detective counterparts. Donald B. Cozzens, priest and author of the book, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood: A Reflection of the Priest's Crisis of Soul*, identifies this special phenomenon as transcendence, particularly meaningful because of the Catholic priest's adherence to the vow of celibacy. Additionally, however, celibacy is linked to a kind of intimacy, which allows the priest to achieve moments of ecstasy. According to Cozzens, "The experience of transcendence is always ecstatic; whether encountered in quiet moments of solitude or communal celebrations of liturgy" (33-4).¹² Cozzens explains that the transcendence he finds in sacramental ministry may leave the priest with little vitality for life itself (33). Celibacy, roundly criticized today as the cause of much of the sexual problems in the priesthood, is precisely the characteristic a priest requires if he wishes to transcend worldly complications. The tension that exists between a celibate relationship and an intimate relationship creates what Cozzens and others describe as "a gift." Cozzens explains:

In moments of authentic, celibate intimacy, one is, at the same time, one with God and all of creation. When caught up in the wonder and mystery of transcendent ecstasy, the soul delights in intimate communion with God's creation and at the same time embraces all of humanity. (36)

Cozzens argues that many priests fall short of the goal with tragic results, often confusing intimacy with sexual fulfillment. He also explains that others leave the priesthood believing that the transcendence they cannot obtain can only be found outside the priesthood. Cozzens acknowledges that loving celibate relationships would be easier for today's priests to understand if there were abundant positive models for priests to observe.

Clearly, Chesterton, Greeley and McInerny provide the kind of model Cozzens idealizes. One of Andrew Greeley's young priests,

Hugo Hoffman, explains why he would prefer celibacy even if marriage were allowed for priests. Quite simply, "I don't care what people say, it's an enormous help in working with people. I have the time and the energy to be more to them. They fill my life with joy that I would lose if I had a wife of my own."¹³

Priests are central in the conflict between modern criminology and genuine wisdom. The priestly detective is more at odds with natural phenomena than supernatural. In his study, "The Rationalism of Father Brown," Timothy Burns acknowledges that Father Brown's "attack on modern rationalism is in the name of a genuine rationalism."¹⁴ Burns acknowledges the priest's questioning of scientific rationality: "Brown's approach to crime is, therefore, the very opposite of the scientific criminologist, who gets outside a man and studies him 'as if he were a giant insect.' In doing so, the scientist forgets himself, the one person who can afford him access to the criminal" (39). Thus, the priest sees a different kind of evidence in the moral fabric of the criminal. Likewise, Michael Mack recognizes the polarizing role of ethical concerns in what he calls "the non-committed intellect"

The contrast between detective and priest resembles the opposition between an absolutized legality and an ethical kind of law, which avoids becoming an instrument of bloodshedding violence precisely by being the opposite of the autonomous: by being always put into question through a transcending secret, . . . which keeps the meaning of law in flux.¹⁵ (400)

Thus, scientific law oftentimes precludes human intellect in perceiving truth and replaces questioning of "ethical validity" of such conclusions (401). Both Mack and Burns acknowledge Chesterton's critique of modern society and the relevance of a philosophical-theological approach to crime, which is both transcendent and intimately aware of free will.¹⁶

Chesterton himself locates this kind of a rational model in English Renaissance literature, particularly in one of literature's earliest mystery stories, *Hamlet*. In "The Queer Feet," Chesterton easily links Father Brown to the tragic Dane. Father Brown explains,

Thus, in *Hamlet*, let us say, the grotesqueness of the grave-digger, the flowers of the mad girl, the fantastic finery of Osric, the pallor of the ghost and the grin of the skull are all oddities in a sort of tangled wreath round one plain tragic figure of a man in black. (42)

Father Brown's "man in black" image is clearly identifiable as a priest, especially a plain looking one. In many ways, Brown's reference to *Hamlet* explains the centrality of Roman Catholic priests in our discussion of ethical rationality. The character Hamlet may not fit Cozzen's model of celibate, transcendent intimacy, but someone close to Hamlet clearly does, and he carries with him a priest's objectivity and trust—Horatio. Horatio, important for his "wounded name," performs much the same role as many of our priestly protagonists: He is often the unnoticed confidante, the spiritual mediator, the unattached observer, and for these reasons, he is transcendent above other characters in the drama. Hamlet breathes his dying words to Horatio, who lives to report Hamlet and his "cause aright/To the unsatisfied" (5. 2. 281-2).¹⁷ Horatio's perception of events is steadfast and clear because he understands the evil in Denmark, but does not participate in it. Hamlet declares his trust in Horatio:

[T]hou hast been
As one in suff'ring all that suffers nothing,
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Hath ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those
Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee. (3. 2. 58-67)

That description of Horatio could well apply to any of our priestly protagonists who dispassionately plumb the heart's core, by knowing yet not indulging. At this point in the drama, Hamlet asks Horatio to be a detective, to observe Claudius. Since Hamlet's own vision is clouded by vengeful passion, he depends on his confidante to be his eyes and ears. Horatio more closely fits the prototype for the modern priestly sleuth.

Horatio's line to the priesthood is drawn even further when he declares himself to be "more an Antique Roman" (284), like the traditional Roman Catholic priest. Though in a moment of weakness he tries to consummate death with Hamlet, he is not permitted this most earthly indulgence, but he must obtain a kind of celibate removal, absenting himself "from felicity" and living on to tell a story, a mystery. Horatio sets the standard for the objective, unassuming snoop,

who does not disrupt the flow of action, but rather waits patiently for the plot to unfold. Now he can inform Fortinbras, our would-be chief of detectives, how to prosecute the case.

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NOTES

- ¹Arthur Hope, "G. K. Chesterton at Notre Dame." *Notre Dame—One Hundred Years*. Online: (University of Notre Dame Archives, <http://www.archives.nd.edu/episodes/visitors/gkc/gkc.htm> 7 March 2005).
- ²Cf. "G. K. Chesterton at Notre Dame."
- ³G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography: G. K. Chesterton* (London: Hutchinson, 1969).
- ⁴Note the obvious reference to John Milton's "Areopagitica": "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."
- ⁵G. K. Chesterton, "The Secret of Father Brown," *The Best of Father Brown* (London: Everyman, 1987).
- ⁶—. "The Purple Wig," *The Wisdom of Father Brown*, (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1970).
- ⁷E-mail from Andrew Greeley, 29 April 2002.
- ⁸Andrew Greeley, *The Bishop and the Beggar Girl of St. Germaine* (New York: Tom Doherty and Associates, 2001).
- ⁹E-mail from Andrew Greeley, 13 March 2002.
- ¹⁰Cf. "G. K. Chesterton at Notre Dame."
- ¹¹Ralph McInerny, *Irish Tenure: A Mystery Set At the University of Notre Dame*. (New York: St. Martins Press, 1999).
- ¹²Donald B. Cozzens. *The Changing Face of the Priesthood: A Reflection of the Priest's Crisis of Soul*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000).
- ¹³*The Priestly Sins*. (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2004) 267.
- ¹⁴"The Rationalism of Father Brown." *Perspectives on Political Science* 34.1: (2005) 39.
- ¹⁵Literature and Theory: Siegfried Kracauer's Law, Walter Benjamin's Allegory and G. K. Chesterton's *The Innocence of Father Brown*. *Orbis Litterarum* 54: (1999) 399-423.
- ¹⁶Mack explains: "The biblical background of such a contrast between an idolatrous self-glorifying human rationality, and a constant questioning of the ethical validity of such rationality out of the consciousness of human frailty unites these two differing criticisms of modern society" (401).
- ¹⁷William Shakespeare. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. The Norton Shakespeare*, ed Stephen Greenblatt. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997).

LAW AND LITERATURE: THE CASE OF
ANATOMY OF A MURDER

JAMES SEATON

In recent years theorists influential in departments of literature have succeeded in persuading themselves and a few others that literary works have nothing to teach beyond alerting us to the inability of human discourse in general to convey any truths about anything. In the law schools, however, a counter-trend has arisen. Under the aegis of the law and literature movement, poetry, plays, novels, and short stories are being credited with the ability to illuminate questions of law, morality and justice. Richard Weisberg considers the founding notion of law and literature the thesis that "literature provides unique insights into the underpinnings of law" (3). Martha Nussbaum asserts that the "literary imagination" engenders "a certain sort of moral/political vision" particularly valuable in judges and all those concerned with the law, a vision that is "democratic, compassionate, committed to complexity, choice, and qualitative differences" (36). James Boyd White, the founder of the law and literature movement, contends that works as seemingly remote from legal concerns as Jane Austen's *Emma*, Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* and the *Iliad* all illuminate "[t]he central idea of justice" (283).

James Boyd White, Richard Weisberg and Martha Nussbaum, however, do not go so far as to argue that all novels, plays and poetry provide valuable insight into questions of justice and morality. The three, like most scholars in law and literature, focus on works that claim high literary merit. But what about works of popular fiction that deal with legal matters but make no great claim to literary merit? What about, for example, *Anatomy of a Murder*, the 1958 best-selling novel based on a murder case in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan? Although the novel has never been considered a literary masterpiece, John Voelker, who used the pen name Robert Traver, certainly knew his law; he served for fourteen years as a prosecuting

attorney and for several years as a Justice on the Michigan Supreme Court. Yet humanistic critics from Aristotle through Matthew Arnold, Virginia Woolf and Lionel Trilling have insisted that literary merit is the indispensable vehicle for whatever deeper insights about human life literature may provide. That this view, though itself unfashionable at the moment, remains true may be verified by a consideration of Justice Voelker's first novel. The literary limitations of *Anatomy of a Murder*, which do not exclude certain virtues, are closely related to its failure to explore in any sustained way the questions it raises about the relations between justice and the American legal system as exemplified in a 1950s murder trial in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The novel itself, it should be noted, implies clearly if indirectly that critics are likely to underestimate the true literary stature of *Anatomy of a Murder* for reasons that have more to do with critical fashions than with literary merit rightly understood. Paul Biegler, the lawyer protagonist, is disappointed to find his secretary, Maida, with "her nose buried in one of her inevitable mystery thrillers" when the case that he is working on has "more real mystery about it than a dozen contrived thrillers," since it concerns "the stuff of real mystery," not sensational events but "the deepening tangle of dark impulses and mixed motives of real men and women" (133). And only a few pages later Maida herself is forced to agree, admitting with wonder that "Even Mickey Spillane has nothing on this—and we've only got *one* murder. . . . It doesn't seem possible—*only one murder!*" (140) Having distinguished the plot of *Anatomy* from those of mere "thrillers," Paul Biegler, apparently speaking for the author as well as for himself, later "morosely" observes that a novel with a plot based on this case would not, on the other hand, have a fair chance to be taken seriously as high literature simply because it does indeed have a plot:

Plot these days is anti-intellectual and verboten, the mark of the Philistine, the huckster with a pen. There mustn't be too much story and that should be fog-bound and shrouded in heavy symbolism, including the phallic, like a sort of convoluted literary charade. Symbolism now carries the day, it's the one true ladder to literary heaven. (174-5)

The implication seems to be that if only critics would drop their prejudices against plot and in favor of "heavy symbolism," they might recognize the true literary quality of *Anatomy of a Murder*. Voelker wrote in the introduction to the 25th anniversary edition that one of

his goals in writing was to counter the "too many books and plays about trials that were almost comically phoney and overdone, mostly in their extravagant efforts to overdramatize an already dramatic human situation" (unpaged). Critics, however, while giving the author credit for avoiding melodrama and not objecting to the novel's lack of symbolism, have called attention to what John Hepler, an admirer of John Voelker, admits are "pages of tedious talk, awkward dialogue, and a bland love affair" (136).

The novel concludes with a literary flourish that seems an entirely gratuitous example of exactly the kind of pretension that Paul Biegler—and presumably the author—condemn in other writers. Biegler and his old friend and now partner Parnell McCarthy are driving away from the trailer park where they had expected to find their client, the defendant in the murder case, ready to sign a promissory note for their successful defense. They discover instead that Lieutenant Manion and his wife have left in the middle of the night for parts unknown, leaving only the message that the Lieutenant had felt "an irresistible impulse to get the hell out of here" (434). Since the defense worked out by the two lawyers had been based on the claim that Lieutenant Manion had been rendered temporarily insane by an "irresistible impulse" and thus should not be held guilty for shooting and killing the man who had raped his wife, the Lieutenant's cynical use of the phrase throws suspicion on the belief that his acquittal has been a triumph of justice. Parnell McCarthy explains to Biegler that there is at least a sort of "poetic justice" here—"the Lieutenant used you and you used him. He got his freedom and you got whatever it is you've got" (435)—which, the reader knows, includes a vindication of Biegler's stature as a "real lawyer" because of his successful defense in this sensational case. The moral significance of this version of "poetic justice" is ambiguous at best.

As the two lawyers drive away, McCarthy announces that they will be having dinner with Mary Pilant, whose tentative relationship with Paul Biegler constitutes the love interest of the novel. In response Biegler glances at Lake Superior and, gazing at "the tremendous expanse of the big lake" quotes to himself from William Blake in the last words of the novel: "The pure soul shall mount on native wings, disdain little sport, and cut a path into the heaven of glory, leaving a track of light for men to wonder at" (437). What this conclusion has to do with the rest of the novel is hard to tell; the only reference to "heaven" earlier was the "literary heaven" mentioned disparag-

ingly—and yet the only purpose of this conclusion seems to be an attempt to gain entrance to it by a quotation whose significance, whatever it might be in its original context, disappears when the passage is relocated to the last words of a novel whose straightforward realism has no place for any sort of mysticism. The passage once again illustrates the affinity amounting to identity between author and protagonist. Paul Biegler, believing that “most jurors expect and thirst for a final flight of purple prose” in a concluding argument, “soared into the wild blue yonder” (407) finishing his summation; the author apparently felt that most readers similarly expect some “purple prose” in the last words of a novel, and he, like Biegler, was happy to oblige.

The passage ending the novel constitutes, then, a literary blemish all the worse because it seems an instance of the very pretension the novel itself asks readers to deplore. But what difference does this make to the quality of any insights about law and justice *Anatomy* might offer? If the last passage is indeed irrelevant, doesn't that mean that it at least causes no harm, creates no confusion? Perhaps, but the author's decision to end the novel in this fashion means that he neglects an opportunity to respond to the ways in which the reader's view of the justice of the verdict of innocence might be affected by the cynicism with which the defendant apparently regards his defense. Was his claim of temporary insanity false all along? Is Paul Biegler culpable for using his talent on behalf of a client whose defense was a lie? Or is the cynicism of Lieutenant Manion merely a personal trait, unrelated to the justice of his acquittal? Or should we take it that the system has worked even though in this particular case a guilty man was acquitted? These are difficult and important issues that the novel might have explored. Instead, the author simply takes a pass and quotes William Blake, whose eloquence is presumably supposed to induce the reader forget about the issues the rest of the novel has been raising.

Anatomy of a Murder is narrated in the first person by the main character, defense attorney and former prosecutor Paul Biegler. As the passages already discussed suggest, the author manages little if any aesthetic distance between himself and his protagonist. The novel encourages readers to like and identify with Paul Biegler in a variety of ways. His friend Parnell McCarthy praises him for his refusal to ask for a continuance which, though convenient for the lawyers, would leave the defendant in jail: “I say I'm proud of you, damn it. You wouldn't let the poor bastard lay in jail for another three

or four months.” Paul Biegler is indeed a “good man,” as Mary Pilant whispers to him (282), even though he defends the man who killed her boss, but what makes him likable is that he refuses to admit it. “Please, Parn, please—don't try to build me up into a bleeding liberal. Now please lay off” (106), he says in response to McCarthy's praise. When he tells his secretary Maida that, no, he has not discussed any fee with his client because “I only take cases out of my sheer love for an oppressed Humanity. My heart bleedeth for the under dog. I'm just an incorrigible old Liberal who toils solely for blind Justice and the battered Bill of Rights” (28), the exaggerated language is meant to be humorous, but the reader suspects that underneath the comic exaggeration is an accurate description of Biegler's real feelings. If Paul Biegler is cynical, it is with the philosophical, humorous cynicism of a would-be idealist.

Paul Biegler's way of viewing life is captured most clearly in his appraisal of Judge Weaver, the downstate jurist appointed for the murder case, in whom Biegler discovers “a strong and possibly kindred vein of wry cynicism” (195). The kinship between Judge Weaver and Biegler is confirmed at the end of the trial not only when the judge congratulates and compliments both Parnell McCarthy and Paul Biegler, but also when the judge orders the photographers out of the room not forcefully or angrily but “wryly” (429). The adjective “wry” and the adverb “wryly” are repeatedly used by the narrator to describe his own thoughts and reactions. (Another sign of the affinity, amounting to virtual identification, between the author and his narrator-protagonist is the author's reference in the novel's “Prologue” to his own historical outline of the way in which the Upper Peninsula became part of the state of Michigan as a “wry political fairy tale” [emphasis added here and throughout this paragraph]) (unpaged). When Paul Biegler first meets, and immediately dislikes, his client Lieutenant Manion, he has the “wry thought” that when strangers are encountered, “we either like or dislike them on sight” (21). He remembers that he spoke “wryly” (74) to Laura Manion when he told her that he had gotten out and walked around the parked car where they had been discussing the case because of leg cramps rather than admit to her his true motive—that he had wanted to see if her husband was indeed watching them from his cell. After taking the case he feels troubled, an emotion he describes as “a wry sensation of inadequacy and doubt” (96). When Paul Biegler first meets the opposing attorney from downstate, Claude Dancer, Biegler notes, “with a kind of wry malice” that

Dancer is "much balder" (204) than himself. When a juror is excused because of his evident dislike for Barney Quill, thus becoming what Paul Biegler calls "really our first witness," Biegler characterizes the episode to himself as "one of the wry imponderables of jury trials" (214). A doctor's use of medical terminology stimulates Biegler to the "wry thought" that "all of us would have had to take advanced Latin if the good doctor had chosen to give us the full treatment" (223). When a psychiatrist comments that Lieutenant Manion "was no complex self-searching character out of Henry James," Biegler wonders "wryly how many students of Henry James we had on the jury" (365). When a spectator faints as Paul Biegler concludes his summation, he speculates "wryly whether she was overcome by Biegler's eloquence or rather by boredom" (408), and when Claude Dancer scores a point in his summation, Biegler glances "wryly over at Parnell" (412). Paul Biegler's characteristic "wryness" seems to signal both an acceptance that people, including him, are unlikely to live up to the high standards he would like to uphold and a decision to accept the inevitable disappointments with good humor and relaxed detachment. The novel commends the "wry cynicism" shared by Judge Weaver and Paul Biegler as the mature, realistic point of view from which to judge questions of law and justice, and perhaps human affairs in general.

Not only is the reader encouraged to appreciate and identify with Paul Biegler, he or she is also expected to appreciate Parnell McCarthy, since Paul likes and respects him so much, calling him "[s]hrewd old Parnell" (139), "good old shrewd old kindly old Parnell McCarthy" (104), and "good old Parnell" (165). To Paul Biegler, Parnell McCarthy is "the smartest lawyer I ever knew," (14) "one of the world's obscure great men" (18), "a born detective" (142), "the loveliest lawyer I ever knew" (203), a "gallant old man" and "a whale of a man" (273). In turn, both Biegler and McCarthy come to admire Judge Weaver, who himself congratulates Paul for his "oddly brilliant" (431) courtroom strategy and calls Parnell "a real lawyer" (432). Paul Biegler, Judge Weaver and Parnell McCarthy are all exponents of what might be called "soft" cynicism. Biegler and Weaver are wry cynics; Parnell McCarthy, the reader is told when first introduced to him, makes a "show of cynicism" but underneath possesses "the sense of wonder and soaring innocence of a small boy flying a kite" (14).

The central issue of the trial is not who killed Barney Quill; everybody knows Lieutenant Frederic Manion shot Barney Quill

about an hour after his wife told him that Quill had beaten and raped her. The key question is whether Paul Biegler will be able to persuade the jury to acquit Manion on the grounds of temporary insanity. He succeeds in arranging for Lieutenant Manion to be examined by an army psychiatrist only to be told that, while Lieutenant Manion was indeed under an "irresistible impulse" when he shot Barney Quill, he might very well have known that the killing was illegal and morally wrong. Biegler remembers from his days in law school that "irresistible impulse" was not recognized as a defense "by the vast majority of the courts in the land" (180). The big break in the case comes when McCarthy and Biegler simultaneously discover an 1886 ruling of the Michigan Supreme Court establishing Michigan as one of the few states, and apparently the only Northern state, to accept irresistible impulse as a defense for murder. If Lieutenant Manion had shot Barney Quill some miles to the west in Wisconsin, he would not have been able to claim temporary insanity as a defense and would have most likely been found guilty of murder. The same would have been true in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio or Iowa. But because the killing occurred in Michigan, Lieutenant Manion may be acquitted. In one state the killing is a murder; in the other the killer goes free, a situation that raises obvious questions, since surely justice does not change from one locality to another. No doubt the rule of precedents derived from the rulings of a state supreme court might be justified or explained on the basis of federalism, the usefulness of precedents in legal systems, or in some other way. The point is that nobody in the novel even worries about the issue. The discovery of the obscure precedent demonstrates the legal prowess of Paul Biegler and Parnell McCarthy, and that is apparently enough.

In his closing speech to the jury, Paul Biegler asserts that the trial is finally about "big things like truth and justice and fair play" (396). He tells the jury that the trial has somehow "degenerated from a search for truth into an inquisition," that the tactics of the prosecution has left "all of us . . . gliding helplessly downward, mired and sinking in the bottomless ooze and slime of the Big Lie" (404). If the book is successful, the sympathetic identification the reader feels for Paul Biegler makes it impossible to believe that he is hypocritically lying as he claims to speak on behalf of truth. On the other hand, an attentive reader finds it difficult to believe that the attorney for the defense is accurately describing the events of the trial he has been narrating. On his own showing, the prosecution's conduct seems to be in the

ration society, which in a novel is the dramatic equivalent of begging the question. If the main characters had been allowed to differ among themselves in philosophy or point of view, the ensuing debate might well have brought out the moral and legal implications of a system that allows for widely differing views on the nature of individual responsibility and the meaning of insanity. But then the author would have had to imagine characters whose differing temperaments and philosophies each deserved to be taken seriously. This identification, however, is purchased at the price of failing to explore the important issues of law and justice that the novel raises but fails to address in a sustained way. The literary flaw of inadequate aesthetic distance between the writer and the main character is allowed to vitiate the book's ability to illuminate the relations between law, the American legal system, and justice, despite the author's intimate knowledge of the law both as a prosecutor and a judge.

The example of *Anatomy of a Murder* suggests in law and literature, as elsewhere, that literary quality is indeed directly related to the quality of insight available from a work of literature, just as the humanistic critics have always supposed. To say so much, however, is not to say that the novel is not worth reading. If *Anatomy of a Murder* does not make available the kind of insights great literature affords, it certainly has a good deal more substance than the "contrived thrillers" (133) to which Maida was addicted. If the "wry cynicism" that it promotes makes it all too easy to ignore difficult questions and to excuse oneself as well as others, it is also true that there are many worse ways, and ones more dangerous to oneself and others, to view the world. If Paul Biegler never finally resolves any of the legal and moral dilemmas he faces, the novel at least makes us aware of a number of such dilemmas, including those arising from the difficulties of representing a client one suspects might be guilty and those involved in reconciling medical and legal conceptions of insanity. And if the novel fails to sustain its exploration of the degree and quality of justice manifested in a representative murder trial, it at least manages to convey something of the unhurried pace of life in Michigan's Upper Peninsula of the 1950s. Even if *Anatomy of a Murder* is not a great work of literature, it remains worth reading and worth discussing.

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ANNUAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MIDWESTERN LITERATURE: 2001

ROBERT BEASECKER, EDITOR

Contributors: Jill Barnum, *University of Minnesota, Twin Cities*; and Michael D. Butler, *University of Kansas*.

This bibliography includes primary and secondary sources of Midwestern literary genres published during the year 2001. Criteria for inclusion of authors are birth or residence in the Midwest; fiction using Midwestern locales are included irrespective of their authors' ties with this region. Primary sources are listed alphabetically by author, including locale designations within square brackets where applicable at the end of each citation. Secondary sources are listed by subject. "See" references are of two kinds: those so designated within square brackets are to be found in the *Secondary Sources* section; those without are to be found in the *Primary Sources* section.

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