MIDAMERICA XIX

The Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Edited by
DAVID D. ANDERSON

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In memory of
Frederick C. Stern
1929-1992

PREFACE

The publication of *MidAmerica XIX*, the Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature for 1992, is the occasion for both pride and regret as it marks another milestone in the Society's history. The contents include an array of distinguished essays exploring many of the diverse dimensions of Midwestern literature, as well as the award-winning presentations at the Society's annual conference for 1992, The Midwest Poetry Festival Award poem, "Shrill Voices Counting," by Daniel James Sundahl, The Midwest Heritage Prize Essay, "Hemingway's Art of Self-Exculpation in Life and in *The Garden of Eden*," by Paul W. Miller, and the Midwest fiction Award story, "Garbage Day," by Etta C. Abrahams, all works in the traditions established by Gwendolyn Brooks in 1986.

This issue marks the last appearance of Donald Pady as co-editor of the Annual Bibliography of Midwestern Literature, a task that will be handled by co-editor Robert Beasecker as editor in the future. We're deeply grateful to Don for his years of service to the Society, which he will continue to serve in other ways.

We deeply regret the death of Frederick C. Stern at his home in Gary, Indiana, on October 18, 1992. Fred was a member of the Society from its inception and an active participant in the Society's activities, for which he was awarded the richly-deserved MidAmerica Award for 1992. This volume is inscribed in his memory.

November, 1993 DAVID D. ANDERSON

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Recipients of the Mark Twain Award Inside Back Cover

Recipients of the MidAmerica Award Back Cover

SHRILL VOICES COUNTING
—*c. 1958*

DANIEL JAMES SUNDAHL

Under the hanging stars, Benny Hooper
Looks to hide, ready or not.
Like a bird in the chimney flue,
Trapped thing, he drops down the shaft;
Corked in the well, he lies still.

One might imagine a soul on its way to hell.
A fall into a vortex so frequent an image
In our dreams, one, two, three.
All the saftey of a life of a sudden so changed!

At midnight townsmen establish themselves.
Caffeine wrecks their nerves, that and
Benny Hooper fallen down the well,
Navigating the center of the earth,
Flowing from dark to dark.

The sheriff arrives.

It is a good tale, this, one that makes old men
Fresh for death, old women's prayers run down.
Meanwhile it is not easy there in the well,
Where Benny Hooper remembers what the world
Looks like at dusk from above . . . .

His mother holds the family's great Bible,
Open to a page on suffering; it could be
Any page—"Lo, I have gone far off, flying away;
And I abide in the wilderness."

The morning sun rises and Benny Hooper's father
Sits on the running board of an old Ford;
He feels the summer heat and wonders of his grief.

So begins and ends this day
While men work, ready or not,
Tunnels and shafts into the earth.

Lord God, I saw one man hauled aloft,
Rope around his ankles, lowered head first
Down inside that shaft, a good strong man
With arms thick but shoulders too wide.
And then another, more slender but strong.

Lord God, it's close in there but there is
An intimation of luck, a force against
Benny's mother's despair.

Put your hands to your face now and pray;
He can't remain underground forever,
Feeling his lungs contract and his shoulders tire.

Lord God, it's early morning when Benny Hooper
Smells the freshening air high up from where he's been.
Lord God, we should insist on this, a grace
Won from all that seems infernal.
Resurrected at last free and purified,
Returning to the safety of the earth,
To humbleness and the biding of time.

Hillsdale College

GARBAGE DAY

Etta C. Abrahams

Bethany Morrison smoothed the blue chintz slipcovers that covered the old sectional sofa, moved the coffee table in front of it a quarter inch until the walnut legs filled the square impressions in the carpet, and straightened up, satisfied. She stopped and stood silently for a minute, absorbing the room's orderliness. Two more dead leaves on her philodendron had fallen on the ceramic kitchen counter. She plucked them, and the dried leaves pressed between her fingers, turned back to the door and quickly closed it behind her.

The fog had begun to lift, leaving dripping with dew the lumpy black plastic trash bag leaning against her car. She untwisted the tie from the bag, placed the crushed leaves inside, retied it, went into the small outbuilding that served as the tool storage shed and returned with a terry cloth hand towel. With a few strokes the sack was dry, and she turned her attention to the car's windows.

Bicycle wheels crunched down the drive, announcing that Harold was making one of his several daily trips to town. "Hello, there, you," he waved. "Where you off to today?" He took off the yellow hardhat he always wore and scratched at his head. Bethany shook out the towel and folded it. "The dump," she replied, nodding her head toward the sack. "Garbage."

"You wouldn't be tossing out any of that black bread again, now would you?" he asked, looking hopefully at the bag. One garbage day as she was about to consign to the trash two pieces of blackened toast, Harold had come upon her. "Don't throw that out," he'd said. "That's for cleaning your teeth." Bethany had handed him the two burnt slices and watched with a mixture of pity and disgust as he munched contentedly on one slice,

then tucked the other into his hat, "for my supper," he'd said, smugly. He'd placed the hat on his oily head and thanked her.

"No toast today," she said. "Just regular garbage."

"Well, I'll just give you a help up with that," and not waiting for her permission, he heaved the bag. The bag and Harold made a short, squat and lumpy pair, like matched dwarfs in a circus. "You want it in the back seat?" he asked, struggling to control the load.

"No!" Bethany almost shouted. "The trunk will do." She removed her car keys from her back pocket and opened the trunk. As Harold stood next to her and plunked the sack inside, she recoiled at his smell of stale beer and unwashed clothes. "That'll do her," he said proudly. She slammed the trunk shut and walked toward the driver's side. "Thank you," she called over her shoulder and got in and shut the door. She turned on the ignition, threw the car into reverse and guided it backwards. Grinning, Harold hopped out of the way, stumbled over his bicycle and sat down hard, and Bethany waved to him at the end of the drive, just to show she meant him no ill will—which of course she did.

Bethany hated garbage day, which took her away from the serenity of her cottage into a world of disorder and ugliness. Harold managed to find her home each time, no matter how often she changed the hours and even the day of her weekly trip. At first, she had given him a quarter for his efforts, but after he had dropped by one night at eleven o'clock, drunk and reeking and looking for conversation, she stopped, hoping to discourage him. But he kept coming, and her responses to him, which had become terser did nothing to keep him away. Next summer she would find a setting even more remote than Pearsport, but she'd make certain the town wasn't Mecca for the trailer world, that inbreeding hadn't occurred to the extent that Harold was merely one of many in the population who subsisted only by menial labor, like being lowered into a septic tank to fish for a ring that had worked its way past a trap. She'd make certain that the residents of the town used words like "broiled" and "fresh" when it came to fish and vegetables. In Pearsport they fried everything that didn't come in a can, boiled what did.

She gagged as garbage fumes seeped into the car from the trunk. One mile up, at the stop sign riddled with buckshot, she

turned left. A child of about four stood sucking its thumb in the middle of the road and waved at her lethargically with its free hand. She did not wave back. Like the adults, like the town proper she was approaching, there was nothing charming about Pearsport's children. By two, most of them had a dull look from being strapped in front of a television all day. No glimmer of light entered their eyes. Potato eaters, Bethany thought. Their brains were composed of starch. She slowed down and veered to the left to avoid the child, seeing no evidence that the child would move for her.

Bethany passed the well-tended Northern Michigan lawns of the fishing fleet owners, heavily planted with dahlias and lush purple ornamental cabbages. Homes with widows' walks proudly displayed historic date signs and many were having their paint freshened. Pearsport should have been a hamlet that attracted tourists for its quaintness, but it suffered from a poverty of spirit. On the infrequent occasions she left her cottage, she found nothing to do: no shops to visit other than the Surplus where sullen Jedra sat in back smoking foulsmelling cigarettes; the only restaurant was the Captain's Corner, a diner that served spaghetti and processed veal but no fresh fish. Its hours of operation were erratic: it closed at six (sometimes three) during the week and at five o'clock on weekends. There were eighteen churches, and many of them had "tag" sales, but their wares were pathetic. The first time Bethany attended one she saw a box of broken tools for sale.

Beside the flowered homes were trailers, their roofs topped with tires, and shacks inhabited by people like Barnaby and Rebecca, the town oddities, the degenerates' degenerates, who lived in a trailer sunken into a depression that was once supposed to be a landfill. Spray-painted across its side was "KEEP OUT! NO TRESPASSING!!!" Bethany ignored Barnaby's routine wave from the roadside where he sat chewing a plug of old tobacco. She turned onto the unmarked dirt road.

Alvin Ardley had just sailed another empty Stroh's can at a seagull from his pickup and reached for a Marlboro when he heard the crash. Actually, there was a squeal first, kind of like a trapped squirrel, then a dull thunk, then metal bending. He listened for more sounds, but none came. "Old Buster must've

got himself another one," he chuckled, and lit his cigarette and revved the engine. "Well, let's us have a look-see." He threw the truck into reverse, then bucked it forward over the plowed up earth.

Down the road Buster, the black Lab mutt, just stood there lifting his leg against an alder bush and panting. When he saw Alvin's truck, he made for it, chasing at the tires, but Alvin kept on going. "Scram, you crazy son of a bitch," he shouted out the window, and plunged the pedal to the floor, leaving Buster loping, confused, in the distance. Up ahead, just past the turn to the dump, he saw a woman standing next to a black Ciera whose right side was embedded in a tree trunk. He pulled alongside her and noticed her slightly edge away as he climbed out.

"Give you a bit of a jump, eh?" he asked.

"What *was* that?"

"Buster."

"Buster?" The woman was confused, and Alvin knew she had to be that odd one they talked about at the post office, come up here to keep to herself.

"Hound. Don't belong to nobody much. Dump dog," he chuckled. "But between the dump and a few scraps, he manages." He hauled out chains from his truck bed and began hooking them up.

"I see," said the woman vaguely. "But what am I to do with this?" She pushed two strands of hair back that had fallen over her eyes and tried to turn her attention to the car. Suddenly, she sat down on the ground and began to sob. "I hate this place."

When Alvin had finished unhooking the chains that linked his truck to her car, he offered her a cigarette, which of course she refused. "Your car will be all right. Just caught the corner of the bumper here in the wood and slid into the muck. You can drive her fine, if you've a mind to."

Bethany raised herself and stood up, brushing off her slacks. She reviewed the damage. "Oh, my God," she said, shaking her head.

"Oh, now, it's not so bad as some I've seen. You could drive her like this as long as you'd own her and it wouldn't matter," Alvin said. He pulled a wooden match from his pocket and lit it with his thumbnail. She was sharp and skinny around the edges, and moving now like a scared bird, but even tensed up like this

she had a softness to her mouth that Marla, his wife, never had, and her neck, long and proud with tiny strands of black hair sticking to it, looked good to kiss. He watched her in silence as she stared at the damaged car.

"It does matter," she said, finally, and got in her car. "Here." She held out a dollar bill. "For your help. Please."

Alvin shook his head. "Around here, it's just being friendly." On an impulse, he reached into the car and gently brushed away a bit of dirt that soiled her cheek. She turned quickly, and his fingers lightly grazed the lines of her jaws and neck, then drew away. The woman lurched into first gear and drove off as he stood watching. Buster came out of the woods and started after her, but Alvin picked up a rock and hurled it at him. "Get out of here, you son of a whore," he shouted, but when the dog ignored the abuse and instead slunk up to be petted, Alvin stooped down and stroked him gratefully.

After Bethany hosed the mud off the tires, sprayed the inside of the trunk with Lysol, and made certain that the damaged side of the car was not visible from the window, she went into her house, pulled down all the shades, and showered. She pulled on her terry cloth robe, made a cup of tea, and started a fire. Then she curled up on the chintz sofa and tried to read her Agatha Christie.

This was precisely how she'd wanted to spend the day: the house cleaned and cozied, the garbage out, an interesting book. But the damaged car nagged at her like a blemish; she found the insurance claims number, but delayed calling the adjustor.

Not for the first time she wondered why she removed herself from others, fled human contact. She'd overheard other teachers at her school talking about her. She knew that she wasn't one of those teachers requested by parents or children for her nurturing warmth. At the end of every day she quickly retreated from the building, drew a bath for herself when she arrived home, sat in it and soaked off the day's contacts. Even now she marveled that she had ever stuck it out so long—almost twenty years—until finally turning in her resignation in early June.

In the late 60s and early 70s she shared an apartment with several roommates in succession, and although she had always preferred order to chaos, she found she could put up with dirty

dishes, cigarette butts, and even soiled underwear left piled on the bathroom floor. She was no stranger to physical contact. Her lovers had been sufficient to the times, and student poverty kept her from laundering her only set of sheets between each one's occupancy. She even relished the sensations: the diluted chlorous taste of semen, the smell of clean sweat mingled with aftershave, the damp pelts of chest and leg hair that feverishly caressed her body.

Then they left. Not all at once certainly, and when she sent one away, another took his place for a short time. The years passed too quickly, and she stayed in Michigan, moving from one new apartment complex to the next, finding that dwelling in one longer than three years produced mild claustrophobia. She didn't mind moving; it was easier for her to leave than to tell her roommates she no longer wanted them there. Each time, she was able to toss more and more of her past away, to fine-tune her possessions, finally, into bare necessities. Her roommates married, divorced, and drifted away, and the only ones left were neurotic divorcées or single women whose life-styles began to grate.

The men moved too, or became boring or indifferent. It had been three years since she'd last had a lover—an old friend whom she had run into in the supermarket and impulsively offered dinner and later, herself. She had remembered him as a funky blue grass banjo picker who also wrote poems of the prairie and of women—not like her, he used to say—who strode scornfully through men's lives. Back then he'd worn a fringed buckskin jacket and blue workshirts, levis and dark oiled Red Wing work boots, and the first time he made love to her, which was the first night they met, she sobbed, then screamed with pleasure.

"Do you still write?" she asked him, as they lay in bed fourteen years later, sharing superficial intimacies.

"Budget cut proposals are the most I can handle now," he said, and laughed. "I guess I've gotten out of practice."

Was she, too, out of practice? Had she become, like him, nothing but her memory of herself? His lovemaking that night had been more tender, more sensitive than years ago. He checked in with her throughout, raising his head from between her thighs to ask her if she liked this or that, to tell her to tell *him* what it

was that pleased her; all she wanted to tell him was that it would please her, really please her, if he'd just shut up and get on with it, which she didn't say, and she managed to reach orgasm, finally, though in silence this time.

After he climbed into his toned-down gray plaid suit and told her, what a "great" time he'd had and how he hoped to run into her again in the supermarket, he left, and she went to her collection of old driver's licenses, the only pictures of herself she saved. The hairstyles were, of course, different, and the smile had become less knowing, more uncertain as the years passed, but aside from the gray streaks that began to appear three licenses ago, and the deepening lines on either side of her nose, there was little change that the snapshots revealed. She knew she was still attractive. Certainly, even in her anxiety today at the dump, that man who assisted her—Prince Valiant in a pickup—had been attracted to her. She could feel his eyes caressing, burning into her as she turned away from him, and she knew, too, that she had tried to give him the dollar to force him off, to make the separation between them more evident. The touch of his fingers on her face and neck had made her want to throw her head back against the headrest, to rip off her clothes and have him there, on the dump road.

She thought about herself falling to the ground, sobbing out, losing control. She hated to show vulnerability in public; aside from some bursts of carefully worded rational indignation, it had been years since she had let anyone know just how easily she felt pain. She imagined him now, hunched over the weak steaming coffee at the Captain's Corner, laughing her up, his stained Tigers cap tilted back over his sawdust curls, his hazel eyes squinting through cigarette smoke. "Yessir, that was one scared little bunny," he'd say. "Scared of the dog, scared of a tiny scratch on her car, scared of me." He'd wrap his work-hardened hands around the earthenware mug, cupping it to his lips, and sip loudly. "As if she'd be the type I'd give a rat's turd for." But he had touched her. And in that moment of playing out the scene in her imagination, Bethany knew with a pleasantly terrified certainty that he would be coming to her.

In fact, at the same time, Alvin was having another tired falling out with Marla, one of many on the same subject in their

eight years of married life. Her church group was meeting, and once again he had refused to go.

"You could use a bit of the Lord," Marla called to him from the bedroom, as he stood at the kitchen sink making himself a bologna sandwich. "The Lord is kind to sinners."

He turned on the water, hard, hoping he could pretend that he hadn't heard her, but she came out of the bedroom, snapping the elasticized waistband of her tan stretch slacks against her flowered blouse. "How do I look?" she asked.

"Fine," he mumbled through the sticky white bread. "Where are the kids?"

She waved vaguely. "Out there, somewhere. Playing." It always amazed him that she could be so pious, yet not keep track of the five children they had somehow allowed to wander into their lives. "They'll be okay."

Alvin went into the living room, stepping over comic books and fashion magazines and sank into the sofa. The t.v. was still on, as it had been at 5:30 a.m., when he went to fish, at nine o'clock when he went to bed, and as long as he could remember before that. This was their fourth t.v. He had begun to think of Northcountry Cable as another mouth to feed.

Marla followed him in and sat down. "Whatcha watching?" she asked.

"I thought you had a prayer meeting." Alvin stretched his legs out, prodding her off the sofa.

Marla pulled on the new green acrylic sweater she'd bought at the Surplus. "I'm going to the meeting with Lisa and Karyn and Corlin. We're going to Harrison for supper and then Bingo at their church. Mama will take the kids for supper and they can sleep over." Every Tuesday she ticked off the same list, the same friends, treating Harrison as if it were some fancy far-off city, instead of a town slightly larger than theirs, thirty miles away.

At three o'clock he quickly showered and shaved, removed laundry from the dryer, and put in another load, and went looking for his brood. They were in the woods and came straggling out at his call, covered with mud and mosquito bites. Well, he thought, let their grandma clean them, and helped them climb—all but the littlest who sat beside him, and whose grimy face he wiped gently with his pocket handkerchief—into the bed of the pickup. "Don't you none of you fool around," he said to the tangle of arms and legs already rolling wildly on the mattress he kept there. "You there, Bub," he called to the oldest boy. "Sit up straight now." Without waiting for him to obey, he climbed into the cab and took off, not stopping until he drew up in front of his mother-in-law's trailer, where he unloaded his family. "See you tomorrow," he called over his shoulder. "You mind now, hear?" But they had already tumbled inside, beyond range of admonition.

He didn't know what to do with himself. The Captain's was just starting to get supper on; it was too early to go there. He found himself by heading to the dump, stopping on the way to buy a six-pack and a bottle of white Zinfandel, which he'd save for this evening. The wind was blowing away from the trash, and the stench wasn't so bad as this morning. The late afternoon sun gave a tarnished glow to the bottles and cans and mounds of refuse piled high in the gullies. Not many people came here except old men who ate their lunches together at noon and swapped observations about the weather, the summer people, the passage of time. Most others who came did so in a hurry, jumping from their trucks and cars, furiously hurling their trash, jumping back in and hurtling back down the road, Buster frequently charging after them.

Alvin enjoyed the masses of screaming seagulls scavenging here, as they did on the beaches. He popped a can of beer and tried not to think about her and Marla and the children he'd committed himself to at nineteen. "I didn't think you two'd last *this* long," his mother said when he told her Marla was pregnant. Teen pregnancies in Pearsport were nothing unusual; his mother had been sixteen when he was born. "Just don't be running around getting other girls that way."

Marla was thrilled. She was seventeen and told him she was beginning to feel like an old maid, because most of her friends already had babies. "Won't it be cute," she said. "Me and Lisa and Imajean all wheeling our strollers down to the Captain's for coffee?" She and her girlfriends made cartonsful of pastel Kleenex carnations to decorate the wedding reception and worried over wedding dress and bridesmaid patterns and planned, with their mothers, the food that would be served. He was excluded from everything. Even the decision to get married was taken out of his hands; it was the way things were supposed to be.

They rarely used the stroller for Bubba, and it rusted in the barn behind their trailer; Marla preferred the car on those rare occasions when she would take the kids anywhere; Lisa and Imajean already were divorced. He quickly found out that he and Marla had little in common, if they ever did. Their adolescent hot passion, which the hygiene teacher, Mr. Marks, had told the snickering sophomores was just hormones, had been cooled by the necessities of a cramped existence, too much t.v., and too much religion. He wanted something more, but didn't know what, until today.

Alvin finally zeroed in on the woman on the road. He tossed an empty can out the window, opened another, and took a long swig. He tried to focus on this morning's event, knowing it wasn't much. The woman was some years older, and interesting because she was so strange—an unknown. Pearsport drew many summer people, but she was the first woman he'd had reason to talk to. He thought of her fright at the sight of him, and felt both excited and angry. Women like her had nothing to do with men like him. She'd wanted to pay him off, like a chore boy, to be rid of him as soon as possible, to go home to her pretty house by the beach and call her friends in the city to tell them about the character she'd met on the road today, how scared she'd been at first, then how harmless he really was.

Alvin felt a rage surfacing. He pulled out a cigarette and inhaled deeply, pushing his anger down with the smoke. He felt dizzy, and knew he was being unfair. Probably she didn't have many friends to call or write; he didn't remember ever seeing her or her car at the post office, and he passed by the building many times each day. He thought about being with her, picking her up and carrying her to her bedroom, gently, like a small child who's fallen asleep on the sofa, placing her on the bed and her turning to him as he tucked her in, placing her slender hands on either side of his face and drawing him down as he took her, the two of them delighted at discovering each other. She probably had forgotten about him by now, he thought, then remembered her cheek against his fingers. He took another beer, flipped his cigarette out the window, settled and waited for darkness.

Impatiently, Bethany ejected Bach from her cassette player. Usually when she wanted to bring order to her life she played

Bach's ordered progressions, his precise scales. Now she found him tedious. She turned to her cassette case and hunted through it, finally selecting *Sergeant Pepper.* She waited for the crash of their familiar voices to sweep her back, and gasped at the intensity with which they did. An Agatha Christie novel lay beside her, holding between its pages a world enclosed and serene that for a moment had been interrupted by a murderous intruder. In the end, the world would return to what it had been before, a locked room within a locked society. She wished she had one of those gritty, plot-twisted Elmore Leonard novels, on whose pages one could almost see the flyspecks and coffee stains, and smell the all-night cigarette smoke, sex, and sour beer.

The room grew cold and she moved to the wood stove to tend the fire. A glass of wine would be comforting and she went to the refrigerator to pour herself the last of the chablis. She wished now that she had gone grocery shopping, but she dreaded the Pearsport IGA with its limited selection and local neighborliness. If she went for wine now, she knew she'd be the subject of tomorrow's gossip.

Alvin turned off his lights and coasted down the last hundred yards of the road, almost hitting Harold, who was on his way back to his shack. Harold's bike wobbled off the shoulder, but to Alvin's relief he recovered his balance and got back on the black top. "That's just what I'd need," Alvin thought to himself, and pulled up a few feet past the drive to the woman's house.

He'd often roamed this beach nights for driftwood. Nobody recognizing his truck would question his business. He tucked the wine in the inside pocket of his jacket and began to walk down the drive.

Bethany stood beside the door and waited for his knock. She was both thrilled and calmly in control at this moment, alert with anticipation. She felt as if she were in a closet playing hide-and-seek and listening to the seeker's footsteps growing louder as he moved in her direction, waiting for him to fling open the door and shout, "I found you, you're It!" Yet when the rap finally came, she jumped to unlock the door. "I heard you—something," she said, fumbling, looking up at him.

He held out a bottle of wine to her. "Just wanted to see if you were all right," he said. "Oh, wine," Bethany said, gratefully.

Please. Come in." She whirled about, not waiting for an answer, knowing he would follow her.

Alvin closed the door and inhaled the smell of wood and perfume and cleanliness. The room was startlingly ordered. The counter held only a kettle on the stove and a large plant. The carpet was freshly vacuumed, the woodstove gleamed black from stove polish. He had found sanctuary from dirty diapers and cat piss. "It's nice," he said, nodding at everything. He didn't know what to do with himself, what to touch or not touch, and waited for her lead.

"You know," Bethany said, competently working a corkscrew into the bottle, "I don't know your name. I'm Bethany Morrison."

"Alvin Ardley." he said, and blurted something he'd forgotten for years. "Like the chipmunk." He laughed loudly.

Bethany glanced up quickly, and held his eyes. "Here," she held her arms straight out across the counter, and handed him the bottle and a wine glass. its stem so fragile he thought it would snap between his fingers. She came around the counter, pausing to tighten the belt of her robe, and though the gesture was natural and familiar, Alvin noted how different she was from the women he knew. Marla wore robes only to get up and make breakfast, and if anyone had come to the door, she would have giggled and pardoned herself and run to change. This woman, Bethany, wore her ice cream-pink robe like a party dress. "Let's sit down."

He sat beside her on the sofa, placed the bottle and glass on the coffee table and poured. A single drop fell on the table, and she reached past him to blot it dry. Her scent lingered on the air, made him light-headed.

She leaned back and sipped at the wine. "This is very good," she said. Close up, in the soft light of the fire and the one lighted lamp, he looked to her like a man of hidden passions, who didn't laugh easily. She saw in his eyes a hunger like her own, for something to happen—anything—to give momentary meaning to existence.

"You made it home all right," he stated, staring straight ahead.

"Yes. I'm fine. About what happened. I mean the money. It was," she sought the proper word, "insulting. I'm sorry."

"Forget it," he said. "People from cities are used to paying, I guess. Not like around—"

"But not about you touching me," she interrupted. She turned to him, took the glass from between his fingers and placed it on the table. She took his empty hand between her own and moved it to her cheek. "This is why you came here," she said, pressing his open palm against her face and neck. "Isn't it?" She kissed the tips of his fingers, tasting nicotine, then brushed her lips across them and looked up at him, her eyes liquid. He caught her stare and slowly nodded.

"Yes," he said, and taking her to him, drew open her robe, pushed the top down from her shoulders, and buried his face in the hollow of her neck. "Incredible." He meant it to be about everything: her breasts, her softness, his good fortune.

Bethany allowed him to nuzzle her, then gently pushed him away. "Come," she said, rising. She reached down and took his hand and led him into her bedroom.

It had been nothing like he'd expected. Their lovemaking had been no child's play, no innocent discovery. She reached to him out of her longing and hunger, her mouth devouring him with licks of flame, firing and consuming his body. He thought of the early times of lust with Marla, the rough gropings on the baseball field in summers and in the warmed cab of the pickup in the winter. Sex had been furtive and guilt-ridden, interrupted by imagined noises. Even today, in the relative comfort of their own bed, where it was supposed to be safe, Marla listened with one ear for noises from the children's bedrooms, poised to cease at the slightest cough.

He'd expected Bethany to be shy, self-conscious. She was neither. In everything she took the lead, guiding his hands, his body into her, opening herself, her very being, he felt sure, and admitting him. He loved relinquishing control, had never experienced such release. The years of responsibility for someone else's pleasure and needs dropped, and for the first time in his life, he felt in someone else's care. He moved to her again, brushed his lips across her shoulder.

"That was wonderful," Bethany lied, sitting up and drawing the comforter to her chin, "but I'm afraid you'll have to go now." She was trying very hard to be polite, but she felt the whole room spinning.

Alvin sat up, confused. "I don't understand," he said. He looked at his watch. It's not even nine o'clock." He reached for

her again, but she had slipped out of bed and was standing beside it, pulling on her robe.

"It's not the time, it's not you," she answered. "Do you know Harold?" Oh, thank heaven for Harold, she thought. "He gets drunk and he stops here and has coffee with me. It's sort of a ritual for him."

"Harold? Here?" She nodded, and Alvin was amazed at the generous capacity of this woman. A rush of love swept over him. "Well, you must be the only one around who's let him through their door in years." He pulled on his pants and shirt while she stood silent across the room, then moved to her and took her shoulders. "When will I see you again?" he asked, wondering if he could endure the rest of this night out of her sight, already planning ways to be out of his house, maybe even forever.

Bethany lightly kissed his cheek. "Tomorrow," she said, quickly. "I'll see you when I see you." She led him through the living room and to the door.

"Goodnight, love," he said, and as he stepped out, he heard the door being locked behind him, then only the lapping of the beach waves.

Harold was sitting on the hood of the truck when Alvin came down the drive. He was drunk, as Bethany said, and for a quick second Alvin wanted to push him off, to see him stagger around, like they sometimes did in town. But he thought of Bethany's compassion and the feeling went away. "Evening, Harold," he said, startling Harold out of his mumblings. "Beautiful evening, eh?"

Harold slid off the hood and began to rub it with his elbow, pulling his sleeve down over his wrist to make his shirt into a polishing cloth. "Just catching my breath," he said. Sorry about this."

Alvin saw that he was scared of him. "No trouble, Harold." He reached into the truck, and pulled out his last beer. "Here. Go ahead and take it."

Harold hesitated, but Alvin kept holding it out, and finally, giggling, he accepted it. "A man needs his friend to keep him going." He took a pull on the beer, spilling some of it down the front of his shirt, and became bolder. "Got a cigarette?" Alvin pulled out two, lit them and passed one to Harold, who drew in, coughed and wheezed. He climbed into the truck and started

the engine. He leaned out the window. "You take care now, Harold, you hear?"

"Yes Sir," Harold tried to salute. "And if I can't take care, I'll take precautions." He sat down in the road, and in the headlights he looked to Alvin like a bundle of rags waiting to be taken to the dump. Alvin headed back to town, his thoughts on Bethany, her scent that clung to him, and he wondered if Marla would smell it too, if he didn't wash if off, and what he was going to do.

Bethany stood in the shower, water steaming around her, and tried to rub him off. She'd have to leave, she knew, because he would come back. It had all been a terrible mistake: his crude lovemaking—the touches tentative until she told him what to do, then finally gave up and just did to him—his total lack of imagination or concern for *her* needs. He had fumbled in his eagerness to please, been too gentle with her. She should have realized how inexperienced he would be: Pearsporters might be good at procreating, but they did it dull as mashed potatoes. She knew he thought he was in love with her. "Alvin. My God, what a name." She poured shampoo into her palm and soaped her hair, then scrubbed the washcloth down over her body.

She waited at the door for his footsteps to fade, then randomly began to clean up, tossed the empty wine bottle into a brown paper bag. She stripped the bed, folded the comforter carefully and placed it at the foot, took the sheets and pillow cases and pillows, all her own, and finally her robe, and stuffed them into a plastic trash bag. She placed the brown paper bag on top, scanned the room for anything else and, deciding that nobody would water the philodendron, added it to the pile, regretfully, because she was burying a living thing, then twisted the bag shut and dragged it to a corner.

When she dried herself and came out of the bathroom, she pulled on clean clothes and packed the rest with her toiletries and books and cassette tapes into the only suitcase she'd brought. "I must not think until I get out of here," she said, knowing that if she did she would be violently sick.

She stepped into the silent night, the country air piercing her lightweight sweater, and slowly, quietly, unlocked the car trunk. The smell of Lysol, clean and purifying, was still in the trunk

from morning, and she carefully laid the suitcase inside and gently pressed down on the trunk lid until it locked.

Back inside, she shut down the damper on the woodstove and moved the thermostat until it shut. She placed the keys on the counter, turned off the lights and set the door to lock behind her automatically. Then she picked up her purse and the trash bag and lugged it outside, pausing only to close the door behind her.

"Evening there, You," a voice spoke out, and Bethany jumped, startled, then saw it was only Harold.

"Oh no. What are you doing here?" she asked roughly.

"You need help?" he said, and staggered toward the bundle. "Garbage day," he sang out drunkenly.

"You're drunk," she said pointedly. "Stinking drunk. Drunk and stinking." She began to laugh.

"Not a't'all," Harold replied. He drew himself up with dignity and grabbed at the trash bag. "In the trunk, right? Not the car. Too dirty for the car. You see," he pulled off his hardhat and proudly pointed to his head, "I remember." He picked up the bag, staggered and sat down hard. The bag slipped open, spilling forth the bedclothes and her robe, the plant and the paper bag, littering the driveway. Harold looked confused. "Nice things," he said, touching the cloth of her robe. He looked up at her. "Why'd you want to throw away such pretty things?"

Bethany didn't answer. She ran to her car and got in, blindly hunting the ignition with her key, inserting it at last, then backing down the driveway in a rush. As she swung around, the car went over something hard, and for a moment she thought it was Harold, but as she pulled away, she saw the twisted frame of his bicycle. "He can get a new one," she told herself, "or find a used one at the dump." She thought of her car with its dented and scraped fender. "Or maybe he could drive it the way it is. In Pearsport, nobody would notice."

Harold watched the taillights until they were only pinpoints in the distance, then pawed through the spilled contents of the trash bag. He set the philodendron in the middle of the drive and tried urinating into it, spattering its leaves and his shoes. Then he carefully spread the sheet in front of Bethany's door, gently brushed the plant dirt off the pillows, plumped them and stretched out. He shivered and reached for the pretty pink robe, pulled it up around him, and snuggled in.

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HEMINGWAY'S ART OF SELF-EXCULPATION IN LIFE AND IN *THE GARDEN OF EDEN*

PAUL W. MILLER

Though Hemingway was a professing Catholic for about a decade (1926-37), his recent biographies have understandably spent little time documenting his going to confession, or to mass, except on the occasion of his wedding to Pauline Pfeiffer, May 10, 1927. About a year earlier, in a letter from Madrid calculated to outrage his strict Congregationalist father, he did admit to attending mass, but hardly as the highlight of his Sabbath observance: "Having been to mass this morning I am now due at the bull fight this afternoon. Wish you were along" (Baker 207). And although he made occasional attempts to pray, in and out of cathedrals, his efforts seem generally to have provided him no relief from the burden of guilt he felt, especially over his infidelity to his first wife Hadley, and his subsequent marriage to Pauline. Moreover, his acts of marital treachery must have been compounded in his mind by his collusion with the church in the fiction that his Methodist marriage to Hadley had been invalid and that by implication his dearly beloved son Bumby was a bastard.

Some exploration of the cause of his guilt feelings about Hadley, and of the way he dealt with these feelings in his life, letters, memoirs and in his autobiographical fiction entitled *The Garden of Eden*, proves instructive. Over the years he moved from simple to more complex explanations of what went wrong with his marriage. In the much revised manuscript passages of his *Moveable Feast* memoir, he was torn between blaming others, "the rich," for what happened, and blaming himself. But whether he blamed "the rich," as in the early, apparently abandoned version of events published by Mary Welsh Hemingway after his death, or whether, as in a version of events apparently written

later and carefully corrected for publication, he blamed himself, in either case he nobly, and perhaps sincerely, exonerated Hadley from all blame (Brenner 536). However, in his autobiographical *The Garden of Eden,* written and revised about the same period as *A Moveable Feast,* it is primarily the wives, not the husbands, who are blamed for the disintegrating marriages portrayed—a discrepancy which cries out for explanation.

Besides being an example of the relentless power of a Puritan conscience to torment Hemingway, his four decades of struggle with guilt illustrate his small town Midwesterner's sense, probably acquired growing up in Oak Park, Illinois, that the neighbors were constantly watching and judging him, and that he might finally be damned as much by what they knew or suspected he did, as by what he actually did. In *The Garden of Eden,* for example, as well as in the manuscript of *A Moveable Feast,* the author grapples with the question of whether the marriages of his protagonists were undermined by their violation of marital taboos, or by the identical hairstyles they wore as a public manifestation of their secret sexual practices. Thus Oak Park, Illinois,' claim in 1900 to be the largest village in the United States, with its unstated corollary being that everybody in Oak Park knew what everyone else was doing, may have been no idle boast. Throughout his life, Hemingway, the man from Oak Park, seems to have been convinced that the neighbors were watching and judging him as assiduously in Paris or Cannes as they could ever have done in Oak Park itself (Isabella 22). He seems also to have been convinced that they were watching him with narrowly censorious, puritanical eyes, particularly where his sexual behavior was concerned.

The intensity of Hemingway's guilt feelings about his doomed marriage to Hadley was first evident in a letter written to F. Scott Fitzgerald at Christmas time, 1925, while Ernest and Hadley were waiting for Pauline to celebrate the holidays with them. This letter invoked Christ's name in language that teetered between devotion and blasphemy: "Christ nose," "for Christ's sake," and "seem to be in a mood of Christ like bitterness" (Baker 181).

Clearly, Hemingway's bad conscience about falling in love with Pauline, a process then going on, would give him no rest, tormented as he was by the extreme sensitivity that recent critics

have associated with the soft or androgynous side of his nature. Rejecting the means of grace offered by the church, he tried unsuccessfully to deal with guilt in a variety of other ways, sometimes by plunging feverishly into manuscript revision and into the composition of new stories that reflect his tormented state ("A Canary For One" and "In Another Country"), but more often by apportioning blame to himself or others (Lynn 349-55). Perhaps he felt that his admission of guilt would relieve or exorcize it, or that blaming someone else would exculpate him. Thus on September 7, 1926 in a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, he manfully accepted the whole blame for his separation from Hadley:

> Our life is all gone to hell which seems to be the one thing you can count on a good life to do. Needless to say Hadley has been grand and everything has been completely my fault in every way. That's the truth, not a polite gesture. Still having been in hell now since around last Christmas with plenty of insomnia to light the way around so I could study the terrain I get sort of used to it and even fond of it. . . . As we make our hell we certainly should like it. (Baker 217)

As the years passed, his attempts to apportion blame for his infidelity, divorce and remarriage became ever more complex, for example in *A Moveable Feast,* the manuscript he worked on at intervals from 1946 to 1958, and which he finally abandoned to the mercies of Mary Welsh Hemingway's posthumous editing and publication in 1964.

In a fascinating 19 page fragment (MS item 256 in the Hemingway collection) that was intended to be part of the *Feast* manuscript but then rejected, G. Gerald Kennedy has found a passage, probably written in 1957 or 1958, which reveals Hemingway's attempt to trace the cause of his disintegrating relationship with Hadley back to 1924. In this fragment Hemingway agreed to let his hair grow long like Hadley's, a project which would be "fun" but slow, like growing a garden, and possibly dangerous as well, since it might hint at secrets damning in themselves or damning if revealed to outsiders. He ruminates over these arcane matters in riddling language that glances at Einstein's theory of relativity, with its vast potential for creation or destruction:

> They [meddlesome outsiders, conformists] knew nothing of our pleasures, nor how much fun it was to be damned to out siders and never would know nor could know. Our pleasures, which were those of being in love, were as simple and still as mysterious and complicated as a simple mathematical formula that can mean all happiness or can mean the end of the world. ("Hemingway's Gender Trouble" 199)

Though the nature of these presumably sexual pleasures is not specified, some notion of their distance from the norms of Oak Park, Illinois, may be gauged from a confession Hemingway made in the same fragment about the couple's relationship on their return from Toronto to Paris in 1924: "We lived like savages and kept our own tribal rules and had our own customs and our own standards, secrets, taboos, and delights" (Kennedy 196). Probably these secrets, like the "devil things" referred to in the manuscript of *The Garden of Eden,* included experiments in gender crossing and merging, signified in the novel, as in this fragment, by the couples' wearing identical hairstyles that, together with their unisex costumes, made them look like members of the same sex.

In the published version of his *Feast* manuscript, unlike the fragment from which I have quoted, Hemingway blamed the breakup of his marriage on "the rich," but Gerry Brenner has pointed out that the manuscript of *A Moveable Feast* also contains a fair-handed, carefully corrected treatment of the rich which probably should have replaced the vicious attack on them which appears in Mary Welsh Hemingway's published version of the manuscript. By way of explaining this violation of Mrs. Hemingway's stated editorial policy of following Hemingway's intentions, so far as revealed by his unfinished manuscript, Brenner notes that Mary Hemingway seems to have been "intent on striking from the record any impression that Hemingway suffered either guilt or remorse for his conduct" (540). Brenner also notes that Hemingway's attack on the rich contained such fine writing that it would be hard for any editor *not* to add it "somehow, somewhere" (539).

Be that as it may, in the published version of *A Moveable Feast* Hemingway blamed the collapse of his marriage on "the understanding rich who have no bad qualities and who give each day the quality of a festival and who, when they have passed and taken the nourishment they needed, leave everything deader than the roots of any grass Attila's horses' hooves have ever scoured" (206). Before he finished this account of the exploitive rich who leave only destruction in their path, he blamed without actually naming the novelist John Dos Passos, Gerald and Sara Murphy (the wealthy Americans with whom the Hemingways and Pauline became friendly in the summer of 1926), and Pauline herself. Dos Passos, "the pilot fish," is blamed for introducing Ernest and Hadley to the other rich; Gerald and Sara are blamed for distracting Ernest from his work and flattering him to the point where he lost all professional perspective on his talent; and Pauline is blamed for being "another rich," using the oldest trick there is, of becoming "the temporary best friend of a young woman who is married, [living] with the husband and wife and then unknowingly, innocently and unrelentingly [setting] out to marry the husband" (*Moveable Feast* 207).

In the corrected copy that Mary Hemingway excised, Hemingway admits that his decisions regarding the breakup turned out badly not because of the rich but because of his own character flaws, especially his habit of lying to people. Although the rich supported him in his bad decisions, they could not be blamed for not knowing his decisions were bad. Their only fault was in meddling with other people's business when they should have been tending their own (Brenner 541). In this passage we see Hemingway moving toward acceptance of his fair share of responsibility for the breakup.

A very different apportionment of blame for the demise of his first marriage is found in *The Garden of Eden,* the autobiographical novel on which Hemingway worked in the same period as *The Moveable Feast,* and which he also apparently abandoned, or at least shelved, about 1958. *The Garden,* published in 1986, was edited by Tom Jenks for Scribner's in a severely cut version that portrayed Catherine and David Bourne, a recently married, well-to-do American couple living in the south of France, but omitted the story of Barbara and Nick Sheldon, a somewhat younger American couple living in Paris. David is a writer with a wife who tries to assist in his vocation to the point of controlling what he writes. Barbara and Nick are painters. Just as Catherine and David are veiled representations

of Ernest and Pauline beginning married life on their honeymoon at Le Grau du Roi at the mouth of the Rhone river, so Barbara and Nick recall Hadley and Ernest several years earlier, living a life of comparative poverty in their small Paris apartment.

In the Garden manuscript, Hemingway has projected much of his guilt for infidelity onto the two wives, Catherine and Barbara, for initiating the androgynous, lesbian, and adulterous experiments that began for each couple independently, before the two couples had even met, after visits to the Rodin museum in Paris, where they saw a deeply moving, bronze sculpture of two lesbians making love. Though very different from the tree in the biblical Garden of Eden, this sculpture is the central symbol of the fall in Hemingway's manuscript. As in the biblical Garden of Eden, woman is portrayed as the cause of man's fall. But whereas the biblical Adam says "the woman beguiled me and I did eat," in Hemingway's *Garden* Catherine says, as she encourages David to commit adultery with her lesbian lover, "You aren't very hard to corrupt and you're an awful lot of fun to corrupt" (150). Later in the novel, after he submits for the second time to having his hair cut and dyed to look exactly like hers, she says: "We're damned now. I was and now you are. Look at me and see how much you like it" (178). Not for nothing does David nickname Catherine "Devil" in the novel. Catherine is not merely the agent of Satan, like Eve in the Bible, but is herself the very fountainhead of evil.

The outward sign of these two couples' sexual experiments, portrayed as possibly innocent in the beginning but potentially damning, is the flaunting of each couple's identical hairstyle, with David having his cut short to look like Catherine's, and Nick letting his grow to the same length as Barbara's, like a girl's. By such apparently harmless devices, the couples publicly allude to their private merging or exchanging of sexual identities, and to their lesbian and adulterous liaisons, Catherine and David with Marita, a rich girl they'd met at a cafe in Cannes, and Barbara, sexually attracted to Catherine as well as to Andy Murray, a mutual friend of the Bournes and Sheldons, whom she seduces. One can imagine that these two couples with their carefully calculated appearance as two boys, or two girls, would have been more closely scrutinized for signs of degeneracy in Oak Park, Illinois, than in France, but one cannot be sure from published text.

Beginning simply and apparently innocently with trips to the museum and experiments with sexual role reversal and matching hair styles, the temptation and fall of both couples leads at last to Catherine's madness, Nick's death in an auto accident, and Barbara's suicide. In one, probably early ending of his manuscript that Hemingway labeled "provisional," an ending consistent with his originally lugubrious theme of "the happiness of the Garden that a man must lose," David becomes a constant nursemaid to Catherine after she goes mad, burns his manuscripts, and is returned to him from the insane asylum with only one strong desire—to get him to make a suicide pact with her if she again goes mad, a compact he reluctantly makes, having lost his creative powers, and his capacity to do anything but take care of her.

The alternative ending, which Jenks used in the published version, is quite different, perhaps reflecting Hemingway's decision in the 1950s to change his theme from tragedy to "the recuperation of manly powers through artistic resistance to the hazards of androgyny," to use Spilka's words (3). In this ending Catherine has left for Biarritz and thus is at least temporarily out of the picture (233). Replacing her is the new girl Marita, who has apparently abandoned her androgynous, lesbian propensities for straight, heterosexual sex. As she devotes herself wholeheartedly to David's personal, sexual, and creative needs, his capacity to write is renewed, so that he can recreate almost word for word the stories that Catherine had destroyed, stories which he had assumed were gone forever. The one cloud on the horizon, as Spilka noted, is that Marita in the manuscript (but not in the published version) wants to replace her long African hairdo with a short cut that may signify the beginning of a process of disintegrating relationships all over again (290).

Given the blame attached to the wives in the Garden manuscript, it is surprising to find that David, the central male figure, should be made to suffer as much as he does in the provisional ending, where he is robbed of his happiness, creativity, and potentially his life, as he is drawn into a suicide pact with Catherine. But because he has been a compliant, easily aroused participant in evil, who says no when he means yes, he must

pay the price of involvement in consequences he could not begin to foresee. Recognizing the insidious tendency of evil to spread like a stain through the fabric of society, Hemingway is not content in *The Garden of Eden* to point the finger of blame in just one direction. There is plenty of guilt to go all around, and plenty of suffering for all to share.

By publishing the second ending, probably composed later than the "provisional" ending but which may still not have been satisfactory to Hemingway, Jenks has in effect made the novelist reaffirm his "masculinist prose" of the 1930s, from which, according to Spilka, he gradually moved toward more androgynous expression in the 1940s and 1950s (10-13). In this ending, David represses whatever guilt he may have felt concerning his replacement of Catherine by the new girl Marita. With her assistance, he is able to return to artistic productivity, the justification of his existence. If David is suffering following expulsion from the Garden, he is doing so in the pleasantest possible way, supported in his writing by a beautiful, sexually responsive and submissive female who would have done an oriental harem proud. In addition, she is wealthy and generous.

In retrospect, then, one notes that Hemingway seems to have gradually moved away from manfully shouldering all the blame for his infidelity, or dumping all the blame on "the rich," toward a more traditional, mythic apportioning of guilt. But whereas in the biblical myth of the fall, the woman is beguiled by Satan before she beguiles Adam, in Hemingway's version of the myth, woman herself is the archetypal beguiler, hence the mortal equivalent of Satan himself. And whereas in the Bible the ultimate sin is disobedience to God, in Hemingway's Garden it is Catherine and David's breaking of marital taboos. To use a phrase reiterated in the Garden manuscript, Catherine and David are guilty of living "outside all tribal law" (Spilka 352). For this they are expelled from the Garden.

In trying to explain the discrepancy between Hemingway's blaming himself or the rich for his troubles in his letters and memoirs, and blaming the women in his life in *The Garden of Eden,* one must appeal to a sharp distinction between his perception of the outer and the inner world. In the outer world a man must play the masculine role of being wiser and stronger than women, hence more responsible when things go wrong.

But in the inner world of his imaginative experience, Hemingway perceived himself as being the passive but admittedly compliant victim of a first wife leading him down the primrose path of androgyny, and a second woman seducing him, aided and abetted by her good friend, the first wife. Given his abiding notion that an artistic genius like himself deserves special privileges that go along with his heavy responsibilities, it is perhaps not too surprising to find him, in the published ending of *The Garden of Eden,* reverting to the comforting if misguided view that Hadley, or Pauline, or indeed any woman is expendable at the point where she no longer ministers to his personal, creative needs. If such be the significance of the published ending of *The Garden of Eden,* one must conclude that the novel ends not with expulsion from the Garden, as originally projected, but with the artist's renewal, in which he suppresses or casts off his guilt so that he can better pursue the task of artistic creation for which he has been called into the world. Unfortunately for his peace of mind, Hemingway could never integrate this high-flown, romantic vision of the artist's role in society with his vestigial belief in a Christian conscience and its attendant obligations, including, in his case, the keeping of his marriage vows.

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ORIGINS OF THE MIDWESTERN LANDSCAPE: SURVEY AND SETTLEMENT

WILLIAM BARILLAS

> Mobility of population is death to localism, and the western frontier worked irresistibly in unsettling population.
>
> —Frederick Jackson Turner
> (Turner, 30)

> The government surveys of public lands [have] formed the only basis of division, the only guide in laying out country roads, or the streets of proposed towns. . . . Every western traveller is familiar with the monotonous character . . . resulting from the endless repetition of the dreary uniformity of rectangles which they present.
>
> —Horace Cleveland
> (Jackson, 75)

In his poem "The Gift Outright," which he recited at John F. Kennedy's inauguration, Robert Frost said of the United States that "The land was ours before we were the land's" (Frost, 348). Nowhere was this truer than in the American Midwest, a region that was acquired by treaties and conquest and generally surveyed before actual settlement occurred. The landscape that Midwesterners know today was shaped by a series of federal Land Acts which provided for the division of the Northwest Territory (today's Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota) and lands west of the Mississippi River into states which were further divided into counties, townships, sections, and parts of sections for farming. The outstanding characteristic of this survey system was (and is) its rectangularity; following Thomas Jefferson's suggestion, successive Land Acts provided for the sale of lands in orderly geometric fashion. This method reflected not only the kind of eighteenth century

Cartesian rationalism that Jefferson abided by, but his democratic faith that "the small landholders are the most precious part of a state" (Jackson, 39). Jefferson hoped that small farms would predominate in the newly settled territories. By following the development of the Land Acts, keeping in mind the contributions made to frontier history by Turner and other historians like Walter Prescott Webb, we may accurately perceive how settlement according to the rectangular survey shaped Midwestern society and landscape into the form we know and continue to transform to this day.

Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis" is the basis for modern historiography of the American westering experience. Though his ideas, first given form in the 1893 essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," have since been modified by historians with less singular and monocausal emphases, his assertion that "American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier" (Turner, 2-3) still provides an essential stimulus for discussion of how settlement set the tone for regional and national development. Certainly his emphasis on the *newness* of the frontier experience rings true to readers today: when he speaks of "the traits of the frontier" he means expressions of "individualism, working for good and for evil" (Turner, 37). The Midwest was settled largely by individual farmers on small parcels of land, people from the East and from Europe who had both the skills and the minimum financial means necessary to make a go at independence. Their success depended of course on environmental conditions and the vagaries of land policy and economics, but faith in material progress coupled with democratic and spiritual development ran high among those who came to the Midwest to transform the wilderness.

Criticism of Turner's thesis is generally leveled against the simplicity and assurance with which he made his claim for the democratizing influence of the frontier experience. In terms of the general pattern of Midwestern land survey and settlement, it is possible to modify Turner's vision of the frontier as a line of progress, a series of "successive terminal moraines," (Turner, 4) by reminding ourselves that the Midwest was the first truly planned settlement of a large region in history, a collective project as much as the adventure of thousands of individual emi-

grants. Though with important exceptions such as earlier French, English, and Spanish settlements, the configuration of the Midwestern American landscape can be traced largely to the Federal system of land survey and sale begun by Thomas Jefferson and others in the years of the Confederation government.

Hildegard Binder Johnson's study *Order on the Land: The U.S. Rectangular Survey and the Upper Mississippi Country* (1976) succinctly outlines the influences on those who prepared the Northwest Territory (the present states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota) for the expected influx of settlers. Jefferson and his Congressional peers can be characterized in two ways: first, by Jefferson's democratic vision of a pastoral America, a nation of independent small farmers whose agrarian life in the middle ground between (and away from) the corrupting influences of the city and the wilderness would best ensure the future of the republic. In Jefferson's view, democracy was not the product of the frontier, but of the society of successful farmers that *followed* the first wave of explorers. Johnson prominently quotes Jefferson's famous statement about small-land holders and the need Jefferson perceived for the federal government "to provide by every possible means that as few as possible shall be without a little portion of land" (Johnson, 39). Johnson would appear to be in agreement with Graham Hutton, author of *Midwest at Noon* (1946), who avers that Jefferson

> deliberately fostered Midwest settlement to offset the dominance of commercial New England . . . [he] saw in the new Midwest the basis of a free peasant-farmers' society which would never (he thought) be run by city mobs and a city proletariat[8]

A further incentive for the early republic to establish a land policy was to lessen the national debt: because lands acquired after the Revolution were the Federal Government's only solid financial asset, the sale of small farms made sense from both an economic as well as a politically idealist standpoint. The problem was how to organize westward expansion so that claims to ownership were clear and that communities and states would grow in an orderly fashion.

Johnson rightly characterizes Jefferson and his contemporaries as "men of the eighteenth century, the century of 'rationalism and enlightenment' " (Johnson, 20). Given their proclivity for geometry and Cartesian models of thought their inclination to a rectangular survey was inevitable. Previous to the last two decades of the eighteenth-century, American settlements were based (as Johnson lists) on accessibility to water (as in the French long lot system), clustered villages with homes separate from farm fields, the occasional rectangular planned community, and most commonly, the irregular patchwork of "metes and bounds." In this system, land holdings were legally described in natural, topographical terms: streams, lakes, ridges, even individual trees and rocks were noted as borders between properties. As Johnson notes, the metes and bounds system "resulted in a pleasant blend of the uncertain rectangularity of properties and fields and the adjustment of roads to topography" (Johnson, 25). But in terms of western settlement in the large scale of the Northwest Territory, a more systematic and predictable system was needed if clear and undisputable title to land was to be granted to large numbers of emigrants before most of them had settled or even seen their land.

It was for that reason in 1784 that Jefferson was appointed chair of a Congressional Committee to provide for the temporary organization of the Territory. Jefferson's rationalist bent of mind was evident in his plan to measure the land by "hundreds": just as he supported the currency reform which established a dollar with one hundred cents, so he called for townships of one hundred square miles—ten miles to the side, with square mile parcels of 1000 acres for sale, the legal size of an acre to be adjusted to the decimal system. Though these changes were resisted, and the Ordinance which resulted not put into practice, two concepts were established, which in Johnson's words "became basic to American land management"—a "non-varying grid and square subdivisions" (Johnson, 42).

The 1784 Ordinance was subsumed by the Ordinance of 1785, which provided for townships with six mile sides, thirty-six square mile sections, with the sixteenth section reserved for public schooling. The thirty-six square township harkened back to England, where it had been traditionally judged the limit for easy horse and wagon transportation; the size corresponded with Jefferson's ideal of small yeoman communities. The Ordinance also provided for the surveying of towships to be paid

by the purchasers, and for the survey to begin in what was to become the state of Ohio.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provided for the government of the lands being surveyed, and Land Acts in 1796, 1804, 1833 established, successively, the standard section numbering system, the sale of the quarter section of 160 acres, and the sale of the quarter quarter section, or the "forty," which has become the essential measure of land area in the well-watered Eastern part of the Midwest, and indeed, has long been an important term in the vernacular, as in references to "the back forty." The general effect of the survey system (with exceptions noted below) was akin to pressing a giant window screen, with wires meeting every mile or every sixth mile, onto a landscape which of course was anything but rectangular. If nature abhors a vacuum it detests a right angle; it has since been acknowledged that adjusting roads to topography and allowing streams to meander rather than straightening them is vastly better for a region's ecology. In the history of settlement subsequent to the Ordinance of 1785, significant objections to the strict rectangular survey were raised, but first on economic and then aesthetic grounds, ecological concerns being a later scientific development which owed a debt to the earlier aesthetic concerns of landscape architects and fine artists—poets and painters. These objections can be described as problems with the survey system as its ideals of "equality of opportunity, and . . . the possession of land as one of the bases of citizenship" (Jackson, 25) were put into practice across widely varying terrain that was not entirely cooperative.

An initial difficulty was encountered by surveyors in Ohio, particularly in the eastern "Seven Ranges" area which Johnson calls "the cradle of the rectangular survey" (Johnson, 48). Not only was the surveying work poorly executed (surveyors being released from correcting their north-south lines to match true meridians), but previous surveys and settlements had already established some property lines. The result, according to Johnson, is that Ohio "exhibits a peculiar regionalism resulting from a variety of cadestral surveys found nowhere else" (Johnson, 48), including areas surveyed by the Virginia Military District according to metes and bounds. Ohio was particularly costly to survey because adjustments had to be made to the exact rec-

tangularity of the township grid system being imposed. In the long run, however, parts of Ohio benefited from having a spatial character slightly more individual than normally allowed by the straight roads and property lines that are the general rule for the Midwest.

Other Midwestern states, including Missouri, had similar adjustments to make because of earlier private claims; some states, like Indiana and Michigan were more uniformly surveyed not only because such claims were fewer in number and lesser in extent (Vincennes and Detroit being notable examples of adjustment to the French long lot system), but because in these cases one baseline and one meridian served as the references for surveying. In the states of the Old Northwest, the rectangular system generally worked quite well. How fairly the land was distributed, and to what extent speculators took advantage both of the government and of settlers is another issue, the point here being that in these humid states the Jeffersonian model of a small farm, of 160 or even of forty acres was a workable basis for the systematic sale of land for the agrarian society which was developing in the nineteenth century. As settlement progressed westward new problems developed, and new adjustments to survey and settlement methods had to be considered.

Walter Prescott Webb, who exemplified the generation of frontier historians that followed Turner, wrote the classic study of the western settlement which followed the populating of the Northwest Territory, in his volume *The Great Plains* (1931). Though it deals greatly with territories outside of those considered "Midwestern" and therefore of central interest here, Webb's book is essential in understanding how the rectangular survey, which was meant for the Old Northwest, was attempted in the West. Webb's "great plains" consist of two general subregions, the "Prairie Plains" which border the wooded regions to the east, and the "dry" plains farther west, which extend to the Rocky Mountains. These two subregions converge someplace between the 95th and the 100th meridian; Webb's preferred reference is the 98th, which runs through North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas, among states commonly discussed as Midwestern. At about that longitude falls the line of twenty inches average rainfall—the farther west, the less the precipitation, and agricultural practices that are successful in the more

humid east become useless. Webb's thesis is that settlers from the East did not immediately comprehend that essential fact of nature. According to Webb, when the pioneers "crossed over into the Plains their technique of pioneering broke down and they were compelled to make a radical readjustment in their way of life." Webb therefore modifies Turner's frontier thesis by asserting that "the salient truth, the essential truth, is that the West cannot be understood as a mere extension of things Eastern . . . the contrast begins in geology and topography" (Webb 507). The frontier experience, the development of regional character in society and the landscape, differs greatly in different terrains, whatever it means in terms of democracy, Americanization and individualism.

Webb posits three characteristics of the western plains: they were level in terrain, unforested, and farther west, sub-humid or arid. According to Webb, the Plains acted initially as a barrier to the frontiering experience. For example, he asserts that the line of aridity in Texas posed an insurmountable barrier to cotton cultivation, and therefore to slavery and the Southern social system. In the prairie Midwest, Easterners, whose experience was in a forested terrain and whose European ancestors were of forest cultures, at first thought that the prairies, even those in Indiana, were incapable of producing crops. After all, they reasoned, land that couldn't grow trees was obviously barren. Settlement paused at the prairie before moving west; as Webb wrote:

> the early settlers in the prairie or semi-prairie region tell that when people first moved into the country they avoided the open land, notwithstanding the fact that it was often the most fertile, and sought the wooded land, where they could procure wood and rails. (Webb, 280)

A central concern of the prairie settlers was their ability to define their property with fencing, which indeed became a crisis because cattle ranchers wanted open range for their herds. The eastern tradition was for farmers to fence their crops; it was understood that cattle could roam at large in search of graze. The ready availability of wood for rail fences was an essential factor in the appearance of the eastern landscape; different types of rail fences, and of field stone walls, contributed much to the character of eastern regions. Once farming had

begun on the prairie, farmers had to think twice about their assumptions concerning fencing. Cattlemen wanted farmers to bear the cost of fencing, but since farmers resented the intrusion of cattle on croplands, they came to demand that cattlemen bear the expense. Webb states that this crisis was perhaps the central social issue on the plains, that "in the middle and later years of the decade 1870-1880 the questions pertaining to fencing occupied more space in the public prints in the prairie and Plains states than any other issue . . ." (Webb, 282).

A second problem having to do with perceptions of landscape was the gradual decrease in annual precipitation as the eastern tall grass prairie gave way westward to the short grass prairie. Federal policies that encouraged settlement by transferring public land to individuals were based on the eastern model of homesteading that had been first institutionalized in the Land Survey Act of 1785. Though the one hundred and sixty acre homestead was unworkable in the arid west, it remained the standard acreage for sale to settlers. Perhaps the greatest expression of Jeffersonian agrarian idealism, the Homestead Act of 1862, was also its greatest failure. The Act was intended to continue the tradition of small, independent farms, but it faced the chicanery of speculators, the acquisition of large tracts by railroads, and the natural fact of western aridity. Despite such absurd notions as "Rain follows the plow," the small farm did not succeed in the West, and those who attempted to farm the short grass region with eastern woodland techniques suffered disillusionment and failure. As Webb points out, the frontier movement in the West became a question of technology. It was not Jeffersonian democracy which made the Plains fruitfull, but the invention of practical windmills and large scale irrigation projects, which solved the aridity problem, and the invention of barbed wire, which eventually ended the fencing crisis by making it relatively inexpensive for farmers to enclose their land. The rigid rectangular survey was reformed, largely through the efforts of critics like federal surveyor John Wesley Powell, who convinced the Federal government to allow for larger and more topographically surveyed homesteads in the arid west, where water, not land, was the basis of wealth.

According to John Brinckerhoff Jackson, author of *American Space* (1972), despite the fact that the Homestead Act "was far

from a success in the frontier territories . . . in Minnesota and Nebraska and Kansas, where the climate favored the small farmer, the Act left an indelible mark on the landscape." The process of land sale at $1.25 an acre had already established large areas dominated by the "square homestead farm in the square section which in turn was part of the square township of thirty-six sections." During the years following the Civil War these regions and the Old Northwest fully "received the imprint of the traditional American organization of space . . . that it is still discernible today" (Jackson, 28). In certain areas the Homestead Act accelerated this process of rectilinear arrangement, by providing for the great numbers of immigrants from Europe, as well as the continuing influx of eastern Americans. The grid system is still the main element of spatial arrangement in urban as well as rural areas in the Midwest.

Among nineteenth century critics of the rectangular survey in the Midwest, one influential voice was Horace Cleveland, the landscape architect among whose projects was the designing of Chicago's parks after the Great Fire of 1871. Cleveland promoted the planting of trees in the prairie for aesthetic and economic reasons, and, according to Jackson, his "enthusiasm for tree planting, and his conviction that trees were an essential element in all kinds of environmental design, were matched by his detestation of the grid system and his efforts to modify it where he could." Cleveland called attention to the grid's incompatibility with topography, and how it imposed a "hideous sameness on every town and city" (Jackson, 75) He wrote articles encouraging small towns to plan variety into their streets, and designed a system of tree-lined boulevards for Chicago to improve crosstown traffic and provide green space. Jackson asserts that "it was Cleveland, perhaps more than any other designer, who recognized the new role of the street and sought to give it artistic form" (Jackson, 79).

While acknowledging its serviceability, Jackson notes that "the grid system of land subdivision is unpopular with many contemporary Americans, chiefly for esthetic reasons" (Jackson, 25). Hildegard Binder Johnson suggests that this dislike can be traced back to the increasing popularity of nonrectangular English landscape gardening, evident in the thinking of nineteenth century park designers Cleveland, Frederick Law Olmsted, and

Calver Vaux, but especially to the back-to-nature or preservationist movement, in which "ideas of nature and wilderness became linked to the desire for deliverance from the discipline imposed by straight lines" (Johnson, 227). "Too much rectilinearity," Johnson states, "tied to efficiency, in our daily environment has been an American misfortune."

> Functionalism has become inflated through mass production and cheapened by economic, not aesthetic, standards. It is convenient to produce standardized forms, and easiest to work from blueprints made up of circles and straight lines. Ruler and compass are components of a determining system. [Quoting D. Pye. *The Nature of Design* (1967)]: "The flatness, straightness, and squareness which more than any other characteristic distinguish man's constructions from the works of God, derive from economy." (Johnson, 233)

In most cultures, the circle is the symbol of sacred space—special locations like temples and parks feature a degree of curvilinear arrangement to reflect their status as "works of God." The square is a secular form, and the rigid rectangularity of roads and properties in the Midwest was a development of the Western perception of land as a commodity that lacked sacred qualities, which were granted only to certain locations. Midwestern linear roads reflect a peculiarly nineteenth century concern with motion through space, through the landscape, rather than with nature's beauty or a sense of dwelling within topographically varying locales. In her classic novel of the Midwestern pioneer experience on the Nebraska prairie, *My Antonia* (1918), Willa Cather characterizes the change from frontier to a developed rural landscape partly by her description of roads. Her narrator, Jim Burden, contrasts the early, presurvey road, which "ran about like a wild thing, avoiding the deep draws, crossing them where they were wide and shallow," to its later, straightened form (Cather 19). One incident in particular illustrates the possibility of reducing the monotony of straight roads and thereby retaining the character of places. When the family of a Bohemian immigrant who commits suicide buries him, according to their tradition, at the very corner of their land, directly underneath the survey stake, they accept the fact that perpendicular roads will cross at that point when the land is fenced and roads run on section lines. But when the roads do

arrive, a curious thing happens: "The road from the north curved a little to the east just there, and the road from the west swung out a little to the south; so that the grave, with its tall red grass that was never mowed, was like a little island." The sacred circle has been preserved by a willingness to vary from the standard. As Jim Burden says of this spot, his favorite in all the country of his youth:

> I loved the dim superstition, the propititory intent, that had put the grave there; and still more I loved the spirit that could not carry out the sentence—the error from the surveyed lines, the clemency of the soft earth roads along which the home-coming wagons rattled after sunset (Cather 119).

A perception of all land being "sacred" in this sense has been expressed by twentieth century ecologists, among them the influential Aldo Leopold, whose years spent restoring an eroded, abused Wisconsin farm provided him with illustrations of what he considered the need for a new "land ethic" which would "change the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it" (Leopold 240). In the essays comprising *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), Leopold does not directly discuss the rectangular survey, but does stress nature's roundness and cyclicality, for which he finds a symbolic image in the Midwestern Paul Bunyan myth which features the Round River of Wisconsin, "a river that flowed into itself, and thus sped around and around in a never-ending circuit" (Leopold 188). An acceptance of nature's cycle is "incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" (Leopold xviii-xix).

The effects of the 1785 Land Survey law will forever remain upon the Midwestern landscape. In time, some localities, like Cather's crossroads, have had their sharp defining angles softened by adjustment of road grades and by the recovery, in places, of native plant communities. Modern landscape design may not be dominated by ecological models, but there is a clearer recognition, since the days of Horace Cleveland, of the benefits offered by topographically sensitive planning not only to nature but to the human eye and spirit. Jefferson, the other

contributors to the 1785 Act, and subsequent political figures who realized the survey in the settlement of the Midwest, were driven not only by material, economic motives, but by their hopes for a democratic, land-based society. The work of their descendants in the region is to observe Leopold's land ethic in extending their forebears' democratic idealism to include the land, which forever resents regimentation, in their sense of community, democracy and ethical responsibility.

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A SPLENDID LITTLE IMPERIALIST WAR

Bernard F. Engel

The opposition to the Spanish American War and American takeover of the Philippines constituted the first outspoken campaign of important writers against the expansionist tradition that had taken America 3000 miles west from the shores of the Atlantic. It severely challenged the Puritan dream, a dream already questioned by most major writers—as in *The Gilded Age* (1873) by Twain and C. D. Warner, and in *Democracy* (1880) by Henry Adams. Many of the thoughtful now began to believe that dream to be unattainable. The Civil War could be seen as a righteous crusade against slavery, and the national conscience found it possible to ignore the Mexican and Indian campaigns. But the war with Spain showed clearly that this nation could lust for conquest as heartily as any emperor: as the historian Henry Steele Commager later put it, the war "satisfied the American pride rather than the American conscience" (40).

For most literary writers, the war gave the *coup de grace* to the moribund myth of the Great Circle. Already to Whitman the myth had had only loose ties to mundane reality: it meant to the poet a "passage to more than India." By 1930 Hart Crane in *The Bridge* would see the journey as purely transcendental. The war was an expression of strenuosity often shrill in tone and bloodthirsty in vaunt; its military triumph confirmed for the thoughtful that neither Christianity nor morality nor political idealism kept the U.S. from behaving as badly as other imperialists. The division between the literary and the popular is rarely clearcut, but in their reactions to the war Midwestern popular poets clearly valued national pride; the literary, including Moody, Howells, Garland, Twain, Masters, Fuller, and others, valued conscience.

Both the warlike and their opponents argued on moral grounds. Looking to the ideal of an America superior in virtue

rather than in force, the opponents insisted that the militant were seeking only economic domination and a fatuous prestige. But the militant prevailed. They often argued for the views of Josiah Strong, who in *Our Country* (1885) had written that "Anglo-Saxon" Americans have "two great ideals," civil liberty and a "pure *spiritual* Christianity" (159-60). It follows, he argued, that the Anglo-Saxon is "divinely commissioned to be, in a peculiar sense, his brother's keeper" (161). Similar urgings came from Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana, who in 1900 declared that God has been preparing "the English-speaking and Teutonic" nations so that they might better govern "savage and senile peoples" (Blume et al. 504). Most readers missed the irony in Kipling's wildly popular poem "The White Man's Burden," subtitled "The United States and the Philippines" (1899) and addressed to Roosevelt. There is as much pessimism as enthusiasm in the opening lines:

> Take up the White Man's burden—
>   Send forth the best ye breed—
> Go bind your sons to exile
>   To serve your captive's need,

But "binding" the nation's sons to "exile," and alluding to the citizens of the conquered territories as captives, did not strike the average reader as near-sarcasm: he or she saw, to paraphrase the historian E. Berkeley Tomkins (238), the exhortation but not the admonition. Most American readers were ready to be told to assume the supposed obligation of the strong to be parent to the weak; they were quite unable to see the ethical questions and the political snares that the assumption would bring.

Through the period of the Philippine "Insurrection" (1898-1901), prestigious literary writers and intellectuals moved from dismay at the casualties in the Philippines to rage as it became apparent that the makers of foreign policy intended not only to "liberate" but also to retain possession of the islands. Their anger led to the typical response of the intellectual in a middle class democracy, formation of a committee. The Anti-Imperialist League was too weak to cope with the noisy ambitions of such authorities as Senator Beveridge and the bullying boy "Teddy" Roosevelt. But the league had illustrious members. Among its hundreds (!) of vice presidents were Grover Cleveland, Samuel

Gompers, Andrew Carnegie, Charles Francis Adams and William Dean Howells. Its literary figures included, in addition to Howells, Garland, Henry B. Fuller, Moody, and Twain; among other members were William James and William Graham Sumner.

Minor writers, however, including most Midwest poets, spoke for the apparent majority, ardently favoring retention of all possible territory. It was the onetime poet from Indiana serving as McKinley's secretary of state, John Hay, who famously termed the Spanish-American conflict "a splendid little war." Still entranced by the fantasy of splendor, the minor poets carried on the old argument that America has a special mission to serve as moral example (often meaning drill instructor) to those who march to a beat other than the quickstep of what we now style the developed world.

Typical of the enthusiasts was William Henry Venable (1836-1920), the Ohio poet and editor, whose "National Song," dated May 1899, preached that America is God's designated hitter, a taskmaster ordained to bat away at error. In 40 lines that did not let either sense or aptness of diction interfere with formalities of syllable count and end rhyme, and of course did not recognize the identity of war with ritualized murder, Venable had his preacher move from celebration of the size and prosperity of the U.S. to proud assertion that the races of the world look to the American flag for inspiration. The speaker recites the roll of imperial domain—from the Caribbean islands and Alaska to Guam, Hawaii, and the Philippines. The flag, he says, with no sense of irony, has a "right divine"

> Of Power, to do Good:
> For aye and everywhere,
> On continent and wave.

When the battleship *Maine* blew up in Havana on February 15, 1898, with the loss of 266 lives, the ship's captain asked that judgment be suspended until an official investigation could determine the cause. But for Venable, the Maine called up the allegedly dark record of Spanish history. In the poem "El Emplazado" ("one brought up for trial") he pictured Spain as a doomed petitioner before international judges, declared her heroes to have been "Pillared on bigotry, pride, and extortion," went back four centuries to cry shame for the banishing of the

Jews and the wars against the Moors, and triumphantly announced that "retributive justice" has brought "God's Inquisition." America, it seemed, was to set right not only the wrongs of the present, but even those of Ferdinand and Isabella.

Among the scores of other Midwestern poets who remembered the Maine by rushing into print with warnings and imprecations was Edith Thomas (1854 1925) of Ohio, whose speaker in "To Spain—A Last Word" instructed the "Iberian" to "palter no more" because "By thine own hand, thine alone, they were slain!" Only by giving freedom to Cuba, she declared, could "the great debt be paid." Thomas later became doubtful, at least (Kramer 294). There were no doubts in the mind of Will Carleton (1845-1912), the Michigan rhymester. In "Cuba to Columbia" (1896) Carleton represented Cuba calling on the U.S., one of Freedom's "fairest daughters," to come to her aid. To the objection that Cuba does not belong to the U.S., the island speaker replies that it is nevertheless "at your very door"—a reply placing Carleton in the long tradition of those who have informed God tartly that if he did not intend for Cuba to belong to the U.S. he should not have placed it so temptingly close to Miami Beach. Reminding the U.S. that it had itself once felt "the oppressor's hand," the island calls for its own Lafayette. Continuing to give powers of speech to the inanimate, Carleton in "The Victory-Wreck" (dated June 3, 1898) had the ship *Merrimac* declare itself ready to "fight for God and right" as it sailed into the harbor of Santiago, Cuba, where it was to be scuttled by a crew of volunteers (assisted, as it turned out, by Spanish fire) on the night of June 2, 1898, in hopes of preventing the escape of a Spanish fleet.

U.S. history was invoked by George Edward Woodberry—onetime resident of Nebraska—whose sophistication as a leading genteel poet and famed Harvard critic should, one might think, have placed him with the anti expansionists. In "Essex Regiment March" Woodberry celebrated the Massachusetts infantry, which was being readied to fight the Spaniard, as living up to the tradition that had made them victorious for, he wrote, three hundred years. Woodberry persisted in his intoxication with the imperial. In "The Islands of the Sea," written after the signing of the peace treaty of December 10, 1898, his speaker declares that God had shaped the outcome, turning back the "haughty"

in favor of the "youngest of the nations." He boasts of the ability of the American fleet to fight in either the Atlantic or the Pacific, celebrates the downing of "The Inquisition priesthood and the dungeon-making crown," and in a pompous assumption of humility preaches to his fellow Americans that they must not let grief over the slain keep them from duty because their mission is not for themselves:

> The Star of Christian Ages is shining on Thy brow.
> Rejoice, O mighty Mother, that God hath chosen Thee
> To be the western warder of the Islands of the Sea;

The message contrasts with that of Kipling's "Recessional." Though Kipling's national pride was apparent in his poem, his note of warning was genuine: the English had been bloodied in too many wars to feel simple-minded confidence.

Two Indiana poets employing the romantic-sentimental mode also expressed flag-waving patriotism. Maurice Thompson (1844-1901) had an overflowing ardor for military power despite his own long service as a Confederate soldier. He not only shared the moralistic urge to "liberate" what in the poem "For Cuba" (1895) he called "Poor Drowning Cuba" but also sought to make manifest in verse the destiny of Americans as God-driven empire builders, heirs, as his poem "The Lion's Cub" (1898) put it, of mother England's "imperial strain" and possessors of a racial right to mastery over others. God, he reminded readers in "A Ballad of Harvest Time" (1899), "did lead his host of old through battle-din and death"; the poem urged on the farm boys who made up much of the American army with such lines as "Hail! reapers of the reeking swath, God has His eye on you." James Whitcomb Riley (1849-1916) also sought to cut a swath with his pen, writing in "The Name of Old Glory" (1898) that the patriot has an "aching" that drives him to fight for the flag, to live for it always "or die, / If, dying we still keep you waving on high." In the name of morality, the minor poet accepted bloodshed as a legitimate means of establishing that even if right does not make right, it makes victory the bawd of the mightily armed.

Anti-imperialists were often equally moralistic, equally inclined to argue that U.S. tradition supported their cause. But they were opposed to playing keeper to one's brothers and sisters when they'd rather keep themselves. Of the five best

known Midwestern poets, two wrote no verse on the war. Hamlin Garland was active in the Chicago section of the Anti-Imperialist League but, perhaps because of friendship with President Roosevelt, did not put his views in print. Howells's correspondence shows strong feeling. He wrote to Henry James on April 17, 1898, that "I am distracted by the noises of the most stupid and causeless war that was ever imagined by a kindly and sensible nation. If there could be anything worse than the Zola trial it would be our behavior to Spain" (M. Howells II 89-90). Only the press and politicians, he said, wanted war. Two weeks earlier, he had written to his sister Aurelia that if war broke out the result would be "the piling up of big fortunes again. . . . We shall have an era of blood bought prosperity, and the chains of capitalism will be welded on the nation more firmly than ever" (M. Howells II 90). And on July 31, 1898, he showed disgust in writing to James that "Our war for humanity has unmasked itself as a war for coaling stations" (M. Howells II 94-95). Howells did not limit his remarks to private letters, publishing a number of essays attacking imperial policy with argument, satire, and scorn, and, as noted, becoming a vice president in the New York section of the Anti-Imperialist League. His short story "Editha" (1905) made clear that Howells saw some supporters of the war as cloud-brained idealists mired in such "vulgar" notions as "My country, right or wrong." Like Garland, however, Howells published no verse on the matter.

The strongest Midwestern poetic reflections to appear in print were those in William Vaughn Moody's "Ode in Time of Hesitation," a troubled meditation on American ideals and imperial politics. Moody (1868-1910), of Indiana, presented a speaker who, in the tradition of the sentimental realist, holds that "the people" are well intentioned but misled. The fault lies not in themselves, but in the stars of their political firmament. As an emblem of what America at its best stands for, the speaker chooses the Robert Gould Shaw statue in Boston (an idea that, as the Glasheens observed [121-22], had been expressed by William James in 1897). He senses that the ghosts of Colonel Shaw and his "negro band" suffer "pangs" roused by reports of America's acquisitive intentions in the Philippines. The time being early March, the speaker dwells for a few lines on the coming of spring across the continent. But when imagination

brings him to America's farthest reach, the newly annexed Hawaiian islands, he is jolted back to reality and declares-no doubt with a nod to Kipling-that "East and West are twain," and asserts "The Lord hath sundered them; let them be sundered yet." The heavily sarcastic fifth section of the ode continues the contrast between "our loftiest heritage" and the sordid "scramble" to build an overseas empire. The American response to "sick Cuba's cry" was the formation of "beautiful armies" that fought with "chivalry" on San Juan hill. But the move to the far Pacific is only for gain and conquest; unless we "let the island men go free," the ghosts of the Union heroes will righteously haunt us. The ode ends in a warning to political leaders. The public may mistakenly follow them now, but sooner or later will understand that they have been led away from their ideals and will develop an "intolerable self-disdain" that will cause them to demand a bitter vengeance.

As poetry, the "Ode" is heartfelt but wordy and somewhat inconsistent in attitude, focus, and diction. Few writers, indeed, were able to maintain artistic discipline in this debate. The ode's thoughtful content elevates it above the merely popular, however. Moody's other clearly anti-imperialist poem, "On a Soldier Fallen in the Philippines," is so obvious as to seem a versified newspaper editorial. In a letter to Moody, E. A. Robinson criticized it as "near popular rot" (Kramer 322). Moody's intention, however, was more political than esthetic. He was deliberately using the mode of popular patriotic verse to attack the creed of most such writing, the sloganeering of the expansionist. The speaker sentimentalizes a dead soldier as a pathetic, unwitting instrument of national policy who has no moral responsibility for his own actions. The evil days of national guilt are coming, the speaker says, when the country will busy itself in self-reproach for its failure to live up to the ideals of its past; the soldier's bullet will prove to have injured not "its island mark" but the guilty heart of the homeland.

A related poem, "The Quarry," also seems to have been intended to voice anti-imperialism, here protesting the rush of Western countries to obtain fiefdoms in China. The poem pictures an elaborately ornamented elephant bearing a gorgeous throne occupied by a figure "stiff with gems" who has the "frozen gesture" and "unfocused eyes" of a "buried king." The

purpose in having the rider virtually inaccessible to the speaker was perhaps to suggest the traditional view that the culture of the East is closed to the eyes of the West. The elephant and its rider (China?) are menaced by beasts of prey (imperialists?) which suddenly become "doubtful" as they notice an enormous shadow (the U.S. eagle?) circling in the sky, a presence who causes the speaker to cry out "What dost *thou* here?" Though known to the speaker, the flier is not identified for the reader, who could take it to be, if not the national eagle, an angel sent from God, an imp from the devil, or, perhaps, an ace from nature's own Royal Pterodactyl Corps. (Moody, indeed, was fond of suggesting in his verse the existence of a judgmental or retributive "shade." In "Ode," this figure is the spirit of Colonel Shaw. In the poem "The Brute," a similar figure sits by God's throne). Whatever its provenance, the flier seizes the leading beast, and disappears. Looking askance, the other animals then slip away. Perhaps the poem is meant to warn that some transcendent power will save Asia from despoliation.

The speakers of Moody's two clearly political poems are members of the educated middle class who look despairingly yet sympathetically at their less refined countrymen, in whom they think they perceive innocence. Mark Twain spoke rather as one of "the people" himself, but one conscious of guilt, capable of writing in *Following the Equator* (1897) "There are many humorous things in the world; among them the white man's notion that he is less savage than the other savages" (213). In numerous prose statements, many of them left unpublished, Twain mocked, satirized, and scorned with the bitter sarcasm of the aggrieved who feels that he shares the guilt of his targets. Though his dissent was well known, his prestige was sufficient to protect him from charges of treachery; indeed, according to Louis J. Budd, his opposition to official policy "helped vitally to keep the unpopular side respectable a while longer" (177). Twain's best known prose responses, such as "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901), sarcastically repudiate the imperialist assertions of American moral superiority. For his own sensibility, one deduces, the forcible acquisition of overseas territory was another shock, a reinforcement of the disenchantment he had known as early as the 1870s and of the gloom that financial and familial distresses of the 1890s had brought.

Twain left his poems of protest, like most of his verse, unpublished; perhaps he judged them too unpolished to suit editors or to support his reputation. Two of these poems show that, like Moody, he had thought the U.S. right to aid Cuba, but despised the intention to hold the Philippines. In "Battle Hymn of the Republic," a satire subtitled "Brought down to date," written about 1901, he used the manner of the famous Civil War song to picture Greed "marching on" to obtain wealth for the "faithless son of Freedom," the American who disregards ideals:

> In a sordid slime harmonious, Greed was born in yonder ditch,
> With a longing in his bosom—and for others' goods an itch—
> As Christ died to make men holy, let men die to make us rich—
> Our god is marching on.

In the longer "My Last Thought," a piece dated May 1901, Twain's voice was not constrained by the need to parallel a previous poem. His speaker is an ex-president of the United States who is regretting that while in office he listened to "sordid" counsels and his own ambitions, thereby letting himself be led to put on the "tin crown" of the imperialist. He says that his actions were well intentioned, and he still feels proud that he set free the "Pearl of the Antilles" (Cuba), thereby raising "My country's honor to the skies." But his further overseas ventures affixed the skull and crossbones to the national flag: let him, he begs, be forgiven and, since his actions provide no worthy model, let him now be forgotten.

Also not published at the time was "The War Prayer," an unrhymed piece that has been printed, in the Definitive Edition of 1923, as prose but has also been presented as verse. Either pigeonhole may be used. As verse, it was printed in 379 lines. The rhythms are those of prose argument, but there is sufficient heightening of expression to satisfy those who might prefer to see it as a poem. The speaker tells how in the midst of a stirring wartime church service the minister leads the people in prayer calling for blessings on the nation's troops and destruction of the enemy. As the eloquence waxes, a messenger who says that he comes from "the Throne" of heaven walks up the aisle to stand by the preacher and explain to the congregation that they can have what they wish. He informs them that what they have prayed for has been to tear the opposing soldiers to shreds, ruin homes, and make thousands of widows and orphans, all "in the spirit of love." Capping the irony, we are told that the congregation thought the man a lunatic. Dan Beard reported that Twain was told by his family not to publish this piece, and that when asked what he would do with it he replied that it could appear only after his death (Paine 27). The censorship is regrettable, but it is in line with other repressions Twain made at the request of his family and in response to his own promptings. (The fears appear to have been groundless: the public had not risen up in anger at Twain's prose statements, and it had lynched none of the other authors and intellectuals whose protests it had already heard).

Quite well known to the public at the time were the equally bitter satirical thrusts of Edgar Lee Masters. Disgust at the war sent him, Masters wrote, into a paroxysm of reading. In the effort to understand, he studied Montesquieu, More, Plato, Aristotle, Gibbon, Motley, Macaulay, and many others. One result was a series of newspaper articles, "bitter philippics against McKinley and the men who were steering our country into colonialism" (*Across* 255). A particular target was John Marshall, whose villainy, as Masters saw it, was that he had "expounded the implied powers of the Constitution" and "thus paved the way for America to seize the Philippines or a part of China if it chose to do so." The articles touched off a round of debate in newspapers all over the country. In addition to articles and essays, some of them reprinted in *The New Star Chamber* (1904), Masters wrote the poetic drama *Maximilian* (1902), attacking imperialism by telling the story of the Austrian's failure as emperor of Mexico.

Masters's direct attacks in verse appeared in *The Blood of the Prophets* (1905), a book of 20 poems published under the pseudonym Dexter Wallace. In these pieces the war serves as an example of the greed and corruption that Masters believed was killing the moral idealism he wanted America to exemplify. The collection opens with the 41-page "Ballad of Jesus of Nazareth," 126 rhyming six-line stanzas reviewing the treatment Christ received from other men and declaring that America's overseas adventuring demonstrates that if Christ were to return today he would be greeted with equal savagery. This theme, the realization that the U.S. and its people are not superior to

other civilizations, appears throughout the book. "Ballad of Dead Republics" imitates Francois Villon's "Ballad of the Dead Ladies" to declare that greed has undone all great civilizations of the past; the implication is that colonialism will kill what is good about the U.S. An occasional faint note of hope appears. The book's ending poem, "Supplication," is a plea to God, setting forth humanity's error and sins but using the refrain "Have mercy, Lord!"

Masters continued to see the war as evidence of American failure. The blank verse tragedy "Manila" (*Gettysburg, Manila, Acoma,* 1930) presents a Filipino speaker who, awaiting the arrival of Admiral Dewey, wishes to be hopeful. But, he reflects, Christianity and Spain had combined to violate his homeland; he fears that the American occupation will do no better. He recalls that the U.S. overran Mexico and, in his view, ruined hopes for the republic by imposing Union domination on the South.

The protests in verse of the Chicago novelist Henry Blake Fuller (1857-1929) were so hysterical that they sank into doggerel. Fuller had written a bit of verse juvenilia, and in 1917 would publish a book of free verse, *Lines Long and Short.* But he was not by habit a poet. Nevertheless, apparently inspired by rhetoric at two "liberty meetings," in 1899 he brought out at his own expense the 60-page pamphlet of poems *The New Flag: Satires.* Outspoken attacks by a satirist are sometimes forgiven for inaccuracy if the lines have wit, but Fuller's fulminations struck readers as merely scurrilous. Of President McKinley, who had moved fatuously though at first reluctantly to military action, he wrote:

> Thou sweating chattel slave to swine!
> Who dost befoul the holy shrine
> Of liberty with murder!

And he overstated too baldly the tactics of American troops:

> Impaled on rows of sharpened sticks,
> (One of the old Imperial tricks),
> The Filipino babes and wives
> Yield up in agony their lives,
> Smeared and alight with burning tar . . .

The pamphlet, now rare, shows how even an ordinarily mild-mannered writer of conservative temper could become enraged over what struck him as a violation of the moral order America supposedly stood for (Bowron 178-82).

Surveying the literary response to America's first ventures in overseas imperialism, Fred H. Harrington in 1937 concluded that few opponents of these moves took their successive defeats "to heart," that their protests "left no permanent impress on American character" (667). Aaron Kramer, writing in 1968, took an opposing view: many poets of the time, he declared, "blended the resonance of inspired truth and a craftsmanship worthy of that truth"; they were, he wrote, "alive to the iniquity of their age" and they "sometimes achieved noble utterance" (330). Obviously attitudes toward the work of the poets will be shaped by the importance one gives to use of the sociopolitical for themes and topics.

The Spanish American War itself is now forgotten by most Americans. It takes no wisdom to be aware that the hyper-patriotism of the popular poets is still dominant in the public mind. The accomplishment of the literary anti-imperialists was both to give renewed expression to hopes that this nation could build a City upon a Hill, and to perceive that the rise of imperialism was strong evidence that such idealism was weak, that Americans were too easily tempted by the desire to obtain supposed status as world dominators and were thereby showing that they and their country were no better than the people and governments of other nation-states. Nevertheless, in its contribution to the rise of modernism, and in its widening of the split between the literary and the popular, the war left a permanent impress on our literature. Within a decade after the war Pound was abjuring a "botched" civilization and Eliot's Prufrock was moving in a yellow fog of indecision. The attitudes these writers were expressing had more profound roots, but the war's exposure of American error surely contributed its drop of acid to their disillusion. And the opposition to the war with Spain was a harbinger, at least, of the antiwar feeling that in the twentieth century was most fervently vocal and demonstrative during the war in Viet Nam.

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SEXUAL STEREOTYPES IN RUTH SUCKOW'S *THE KRAMER GIRLS*

MARY JEAN DEMARR

During her lifetime, Ruth Suckow was generally referred to as a regional writer distinguished by her delineation of lonely lives in drab Iowa towns. Her realism and her restrained treatment of shallow characters and grim existences were favorably received. Today, over thirty years after her 1960 death and almost sixty years after the publication of her finest and most ambitious novel, *The Folks* (1934), she seems more appropriately recognized for her sensitive depiction of the dilemmas of intelligent if weak women trying to make their ways in the patriarchal Iowa society of the early twentieth century.

A group of four relatively short novels, all treating young women and their families, preceded *The Folks* and may be seen as studies preparing Suckow to compose that complex and moving fiction. *The Odyssey of a Nice Girl* (1925) and *Cora* (1929) study the maturing of talented young women who face, neither completely successfully, the dilemma of attempting to balance the demands of personal and public lives; the protagonist of *Odyssey* is a cosseted middle-class girl, while Cora comes from an impoverished working-class background. *The Bonney Family* (1928) and *The Kramer Girls* (1930) form another pair and are as nicely balanced against each other as are the previously mentioned books. The Bonneys, an intact family consisting of parents and children, are a middle-class family who strive mightily to give all possible opportunities to their children, while the Kramers, three sisters with an absent father and an incapacitated mother, must struggle for what they achieve. These four novels, in treating Iowa small-town families and their children, especially their daughters, anticipate *The Folks* in its lengthy and complex analysis of both parents and children:

parents who attempt to open up possibilities for their children even while failing to understand much of what the children yearn for, and children who ultimately disappoint their parents—and themselves—by settling for much less than their dreams or their parents' hopes. *The Folks,* in using the middle-class milieu of *The Odyssey of a Nice Girl* and *The Bonney Family,* returns Suckow to her own origins as the daughter of a small-town Congregational minister, after her experiments in examining working-class lives in *Cora* and *The Kramer Girls*; nevertheless, those two novels have much in common with the later and more ambitious novel, and thematically they are of a piece with all the other works mentioned here.

The Kramer Girls is notable among Suckow's novels in its symbolic use of characters and, especially, in relying upon readers' familiarity with certain character types and stereotypes. It should be stressed that Suckow does not simply accept these stereotypes; rather she uses and embellishes them, revealing the truths they contain even as she demonstrates that life is much more complicated than is suggested by the simplistic view which they represent.

A quick summary of the central characters, their situation, and the plot of the novel will show how central certain stereotypes are. Three sisters, two adults and one still in high school, live with and care for their helpless mother (she had suffered a stroke while the youngest daughter was little more than an infant, and she is in an almost vegetative state); the father has deserted the family. The eldest sister, Georgie, is strong, brusque, iron-willed, the real backbone of the family. Annie is weaker, less assertive, less able to make decisions; she demurs to Georgie. Rose, the youngest sister, is the protagonist of the novel; she is charming, sometimes headstrong and sometimes confused, a tomboy with girlish dreams. The novel, which consists of a series of vignettes or episodes occurring over a period of perhaps fifteen years, dramatizes scenes from Rose's high school days, from her college career, from her single year of teaching and coaching girls' basketball in a high school, through her attempts at a career which she discards in order to marry, and finally to her return to work when her husband fails in business. Meanwhile, Georgie and Annie, who have sacrificed everything to give Rose her chance, continue to care for their mother until her death. When that merciful release frees them finally to lead their own lives, Georgie becomes a chiropractor and then builds a successful if not especially lucrative practice among simple country people. Annie goes to work in a department store, where she finds fulfillment in living vicariously through the people she works with and serves. Ironically, Georgie succumbs to cancer not long after achieving her belated success—but not before she has begun to doubt the real effectiveness of chiropractic and to realize that she came to healing too late to learn enough to be a truly effective practitioner. Of them all, only Annie, the least realized of the characters, appears to have no doubts about the sacrifices the elder sisters accepted so willingly in order to give Rose the opportunity which she seems to have thrown away—or about her own bleak life.

As the names and brief histories of the elder sisters suggest, Georgie is often perceived as hard and masculine and Annie as soft and feminine. Georgie's toughness and her scorn of women who bask in their stature as married women set her somewhat apart from others. Her independence and sense of being the strong center of the family lead her to constrict her horizons even more than necessary. She always insists that Annie be the one to go with Rose to church and other social functions, while she remains at home with the invalid mother. Thus it is Annie who has the great joy of visiting Rose at college and seeing the younger girl inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, a visit readers learn of through Annie's delighted recounting of its details to Georgie after her return home. Annie had been courted in her youth, an experience apparently never accorded Georgie. Her dreams throughout the novel seem to be romantic, but she never appears to apply these dreams seriously in connection with herself. Her sense of the possibilities of life is much smaller than that of either Georgie or Rose.

A major theme in Suckow's fiction is that of the question of choices for women. Sometimes even the opportunity to choose is denied: Georgie and Annie remain single in order to care for their invalid mother. Neither marriage nor career is an option for either of them until their mother's death frees them, but by this time it is too late. While Georgie, the mannish one presumably psychologically suited to devote her life to work, manages a career, it is on a lesser level than would have been possible

had she begun years earlier, and even this success is cut off by her early illness and death. The conventionally feminine Annie, on the other hand, would have seemed fitted for marriage and had flirted and been courted in her youth, but as one critic puts it, "By the time she is free, she has settled into gentle spinsterhood, lavishing affection on her cat, watching avidly the affairs of the high school set, and gossiping with other maiden ladies" (Kissane 81-2). Her work in Hofthaler's drygoods store is a job, never a career, and her dedication to it is clearly connected to the people there, not to the work; it is social rather than professional. Neither of the elder sisters ever really has a true choice, and the one who ultimately seems to feel most fulfilled, most happy in her life, is Annie, who, ironically, has tried to do—and has done—the least.

For Rose, the question of choices is more complex, for she does indeed have options. Or at least, she seems to, for it could be argued that her direction is controlled first by Georgie's ambitions for her and then by her own weakness. She succeeds at college, as indicated by her election to Phi Beta Kappa and by her wide and affectionate circle of friends there. She also succeeds at teaching and coaching, and she loves that work and does it well. But an incipient love affair with an entirely appropriate young man, the boys' basketball coach, is broken off almost accidentally when she proudly does not respond to the young man's overture after a disagreement. In a pattern to be repeated later, a disappointed Rose gives up the teaching position at which she has been so successful and returns home.

Her next step is to go to Chicago with Jane, a college friend and an aspiring actress, to work there. Again she seems to be successful but this time she does not enjoy clerical work and she is unhappy living in the city. Coincidentally, as she is called home by a crisis in her mother's condition, Jane determines to go to New York, to Rose's mind deserting her. By chance, at just this moment, Rose meets Archie Carpenter, an attractive young builder, and almost impulsively she marries him. Thus she seems to have made a choice, rejecting career for marriage, but there was certainly little thought, apparently no conscious decision, in her action. And while she ultimately achieves greater fulfillment than does Georgie, this fortunate conclusion is hard won over the course of some years. What she learns, in brief, is that the choice of marriage and domesticity may bring the joys of love and physical passion with a husband and the fulfillment of children, but it also leads to dependence and to weakness and is thus a great risk. Work, on the other hand, brings self-reliance and loneliness. Alone among Suckow's female characters, Rose wins through to a balance of personal and professional life.

One critic has observed that "disturbingly, from a survey of the whole body of Ruth Suckow's fiction, a single impression stands out: she invariably sees women as victims. They are not necessarily victims of society or of men. Often, indeed, they are conquered by their own biology. To put the matter crudely—simply because they are female they crave a mate, not only to satisfy a physical hunger, but also for emotional security. By virtue of being *women,* they must suffer" (Hamblen 20). Hamblen overstates, I think, the degree to which this theme is presented as a kind of biological determinism; social determinism resulting from being nurtured as a female in a patriarchal society would seem at least an equally compelling explanation.[1] This motif of female destiny can obviously be seen in *The Kramer Girls,* and each of the three sisters exemplifies it, though I will argue that Rose is to some extent an exception.

In examining the choices—or lack of choices—of women in early twentieth-century small-town Iowa, *The Kramer Girls* is more schematic than Suckow's other novels. The use of three sisters of different types and the employment of readily understandable stereotypes is crucial here. Georgie and Annie, both recognizable types, differ from each other, demonstrating the pervasiveness of the patriarchal assumptions that oppress them. And Rose is quite different from either of her sisters, who serve as opposite extremes, even as contrasting role models, between which she is pulled. But Suckow was too good an artist to accept the stereotypes as true in themselves; from the beginning of the novel they are undercut by the very complexity of her characters, who refuse to be types rather than individuals. And Rose is more like the complaisant Annie in personality but more like the gifted Georgie in abilities; what she must learn finally is to join the best qualities of the two.

The novel, so reliant on conventional stereotypes of female character, opens with Georgie behaving in a non-stereotypical way: she is baking a cake, and the scene which ensues shows

her behaving in a brusque and almost masculine way at times and nurturing Rose by embracing her at others. Throughout the novel she is presented as a mixture of traits identifiable with the stereotype of the man-hating yet mannish old maid and of characteristics at variance with those traits. Her distaste for men (40) and her feminist views on the situation of women in the world are expectable but are nevertheless so presented as to help characterize Georgie as an individual. Early in the novel, when Rose is distinguishing herself in high school, Georgie goes to see one of Rose's teachers in order to discuss her dreams of college for Rose. Fumbling for words, this spinster whose life is spent at home caring for an invalid mother, says:

> "I don't know, Miss Alexander, maybe I'm talking foolishness, but I've always thought if women kind of made more of themselves, and didn't just—well, weren't just kind of around—they wouldn't get themselves into such scrapes. Now you're a teacher. . . . You *are* something. You aren't at anybody's mercy. You've always got something you can do—and *want* to do." (51)

Ironically, Georgie is not aware that the object of her admiration is herself considering giving up teaching in order to marry (51)—a typical example of Suckow's depiction of the universality of this dilemma. While Georgie's lack of any options leads her to wish to push Rose toward the independence of a career, the apparently independent Miss Alexander is contemplating a choice which would place her in exactly the position that Georgie wishes to avoid for Rose—and indeed this foreshadows the choice that Rose herself will eventually make.

Georgie's feminism leads to a sense of isolation in this patriarchal community.

> At times she felt almost ashamed, because no other women seemed to look at things the way she did—they both respected her and looked down upon her for her earnestness and her ability. Maybe she didn't belong with 'em. When she heard them talk about their husbands and lay their little schemes—Mrs. Pick and all the rest—she had one satisfaction. She could despise the lot of 'em.
>
> That thought pleased Georgie. Old visions of her own stirred in her mind. She thought of herself as a doctor, or the manager of some big business—she hadn't quite given up these crazy dreams. But all her conscious plans were centered on Rose. Georgie had always taken it for granted that she couldn't get away. (54)

Georgie is the strong one, the one who makes decisions, who frees Annie to have her few moments of fun, and who undertakes the unpleasant task of wringing necessary money out of their absent father. All this requires forcefulness, an assertiveness that sets her apart from other women in the community. But these qualities go along with her strong sense of family, of responsibility, and her love for her sisters and even for the mother who is little more than a blank presence in the household. Love and nurturance are as strong in her as ambition, and combined with her sense of responsibility, these qualities are more powerful than her longing for autonomy. She will not even allow herself to think of the eventuality of her mother's death which will free her to follow some of her "crazy dreams."

Having displaced her ambitions onto Rose's chubby shoulders, Georgie is of course several times deeply disappointed by Rose's repeated failures to live up to her dreams. When Rose retreats from her teaching job, when she gives up her secretarial work in Chicago, and finally and most tellingly when she marries Archie Carpenter, Georgie is angry. Her own discarded dreams have become her dreams for Rose—but in the way of children rejecting the goals of parents trying to live through their offspring, Rose doesn't want those dreams.

The strength and generosity of spirit which make Georgie the center of the family are also, ironically, her weakness. She sees these qualities as allowing others to take advantage of her. A neighbor observes, "She insists on taking all the responsibility, and then she gets sore because they let her" (68). Georgie is more self-aware than either of her sisters; she is conscious of this contradiction within herself, and, paradoxically, she sometimes yearns to be able to yield to greater strength, a quintessentially stereotypical feminine trait, that of the strong woman who yearns to be dominated:

> She was always feeling the drawbacks of her own generosity. But she was ashamed that she felt them. Georgie wanted to give freely, with a big open hand. She wrestled savagely with what she thought her own base, selfish instincts. . . . What really hurt

> her was that Annie should always give in to her insistence. She wanted someone to override her, to care enough. But there was never anyone strong enough to do it. It was her own strength, partly, that had always got in the way of her happiness. (68)

But finally Georgie is freed to try to follow her own dreams, and it is significant that her nurturing qualities, so strong in her relationships with her sisters and her invalid mother, lead her to a healing occupation. The pathos of her plight is that after her initial enthusiasm for chiropractic as a panacea and her success in building a loyal following, she becomes troubled about her own inadequacy and about the inadequacy of the discipline she has chosen. In a black mood, she tells Rose,

> "You know, kid, sometimes I'd like to give up this business altogether. What's the use? The little bit you can do for folks! If I'd started in at the beginning, I might have done something. I see that now. I see lots of things I didn't see when I began this business. I'd like to have started in at the very beginning of medicine. I tell you, kid, it's a big subject. And nobody knows very much about it, not even the ones that think they do. I'd like to have started in years ago and made a real study of the human critter. What good does this little tinkering do?" (198-9)

This outburst, an echo of the black moods she had sometimes suffered while the mother was still alive, comes as she is beginning to suffer from the cancer which will kill her, a disease neither the chiropractic she now doubts nor the medicine she wishes she could have studied will be able to palliate. The gloomiest assessment of women's plight in the novel is given to Georgie in her disappointment: "Sometimes I think women are fools to take things into their hands. Those that get along best are the ones that let somebody else do the work for them" (202)—a description which might be applied to Annie. Rose sees it as "apostasy" (202), and it certainly denies everything on which Georgie had built her life.

The sadness of Georgie's life is underlined at the end of the book. In the novel's last lines, a picture of Georgie, hanging on Rose's wall, is described: "it hung in a poor light—and it was such a poor photograph, anyway, doing no justice to Georgie, and taken by a provincial photographer who didn't really know his business" (272-3). Omrcanin sees this conclusion as characterizing "the pathos of her misspent, misunderstood, and unrewarding existence" (115). But surely this is too strong; surely this is primarily an indictment of Rose, who allows the picture to hang in poor light. The point is that Rose, despite loving Georgie, does not value her sister as she should, not that Georgie's life of loving sacrifice and nurturance of others has been wasted. A truer conclusion is Rose's when she realizes that Georgie, who enabled Rose to have opportunities, would herself have been better prepared to seize and make the most of those chances (268).

While Rose is the protagonist of the novel and Georgie the most interesting and complex character, Annie's contributions are also important. The least fully characterized of these women, her function as the stereotypically feminine woman denied her natural role as wife and mother is important for its contrast with her sisters. She is loving and caring but weak; Georgie always overrides her and, in fact, she rarely attempts to assert herself in any way. Her greatest moment in the novel comes when she recounts to Georgie her experiences visiting Rose at college—a visit which she had made because of Georgie's usual insistence on giving pleasure to others at her own expense. Annie summarizes in detail what she saw and did and describes how Rose is admired and loved at college, giving Georgie almost as much pleasure in the hearing as Annie takes in telling.

Annie's wants and pleasures generally are simple—and social. She apparently treasures throughout her life the memory of having been courted in her youth by Carl Finch. Toward the conclusion of the novel, her life centers around her job in the drygoods store and Rose's family. Always her interest is in people. As Rose and Annie walk in the cemetery, Rose concludes about Annie that

> So little contented her. The intimacies of the life at Hofthaler's; the feeling of belonging and being appreciated and reliable; and perhaps, too, a shy perennial interest in that one man clerk. . . . Not that Annie expected anything. . . . But Rose noticed how, when the two women stopped it was near the [cemetery] lot marked with an oldfashioned stone: "FINCH." (268)

Narrowing her horizons and taking pleasure in her sister's family and her own sense of being helpful, Annie finds satisfaction in

her bleak life. As a character, however, she is less fully realized than either Georgie or Rose; her importance in the novel resides more in her symbolic contrast with them than in her appeal as a personage in her own right.

Rose, the protagonist of the novel, is a charming if sometimes shallow character, much in the vein of Marjorie in *The Odyssey of a Nice Girl;* indeed, that title could equally well have been used to describe Rose's journey through her life, a journey parallel to Marjorie's in a number of ways. Through the course of the novel, she grows from a chubby, popular, bright, tom-boyish, basketball-mad high school girl, to a mature wife, mother, and career woman. Along the way, however, she reveals both her talents and her weaknesses. For a long time uncertain of who she is or what she wants from life, she vacillates, sometimes following the non-traditional and independent path Georgie wants for her and at other times falling back into the mold of the conventional woman's life and attitudes. High school valedictorian and member of Phi Beta Kappa, she succeeds well as a high school teacher and coach, appearing in that year to unite her love for basketball, her academic abilities, and a gift for working with young people. She even finds an eminently suitable young man, to whom she is attracted. But she is resentful of the gossip about them and ambivalent about marrying, so after a disagreement she impulsively refuses to make up with him, a decision she later appears to regret—at least fleetingly. She avoids the decision that would have been forced on her had she continued that relationship—the choice between marriage and a teaching career which was of course universally enforced until a much later period. She allows the relationship to end and then—in one of the oddest actions of the novel—leaves that career. She gives up work which she loves and at which she is good to go to Chicago with a college friend, Jane, to seek secretarial work while Jane follows her theatrical dreams. This is her first act of betrayal of Georgie's sacrifices for her. As it turns out, she is successful in Chicago but hates both her job and city life. Dreaming of marriage as an escape, she meets Archie Carpenter and marriage to him rapidly follows. And thus Georgie is once again disappointed.

Rose finds the early days of marriage idyllic; in physical passion, domesticity, and being cherished, she seems to have

found her niche. Marriage appears to have brought her independence of a different sort than that which Georgie had wished for her. She seems to have found a stereotypically romantic fulfillment:

> For the first time, her life was really her own . . . except that she had given it to Archie—and that was better than having it herself. (169)

And that sense of separateness creates in her a sense of distance from her sisters:

> It was as if they had deceived her, kept her away from this. She had to break the old childish tie. She felt, oh so much more experienced than they were, and she regarded the girls with pity from the secure vantage ground of her matronhood.

But this is a young woman, a new bride, and immediately following this description of Rose's joyous complacency, an auctorial remark undercuts it:

> Outside, the endless stream of cars sped and sped past the little house, that told nothing, its curtains veiling its bright windows, that was so much like all the others no one bothered to look at it. (169)

Not surprisingly it is economic pressures that cause Rose's disillusionment, her discovery that the Eden of feminine domesticity relies on the competence of its Adam. And her Archie, apparently a prosperous building contractor when they marry, is flawed: a good worker and honest man, he does not have the abilities required to run a business. He eventually becomes what his family name suggests, simply a carpenter hired by others, but in the meantime there is a series of failed ventures which teach Rose about dependency. To Georgie she says,

> "I'm getting awfully tired of just taking things as they come. I want to do something. . . I'd like to take up my old work again. Or it seems as if I would. I get awfully dissatisfied, Georgie. Do you suppose I've been out of it too long?" (201-2)

And when she does return to secretarial work, she again succeeds, and she brings security to her husband and two children as well as a sense of autonomy and freedom to herself. The line that is several times repeated is that "she had her own life" now

(246), and in this awareness of being someone and doing something on her own, she appears to find a satisfaction earlier out of her grasp.

The improvement in the family's financial situation caused by Rose's return to work parallels a mending of strains in the marriage itself. While totally dependent on Archie, she had grown angry, had resented his inability to support the family. But with financial insecurity removed and with a feeling of power of her own, she is able to value Archie for his good qualities, which are many, and to become once again contented in her marriage. Thus, finally, she is able to join success in work and in marriage. Alone among Suckow's young women, she overcomes the handicaps of being a bright woman in patriarchal small-town Iowa in the early twentieth century. She comes through troubles and experiences similar to those of other Suckow women, but she ultimately refuses to be victimized by her sex and situation.

What Suckow does not point out—and what reinforces my contention that she is depicting social, not biological victimization—is that teaching and coaching, her true vocation, was impossible in a patriarchal society which reserved that work for unmarried women. Had she decided to marry the boys' basketball coach early on, she would have had to quit her own job, thus losing that vocation. When as a married woman she decides to return to work, teaching and coaching are not even options to be considered. Only clerical work—which she had disliked when living in Chicago—is available to her. Secretarial work becomes satisfying for Rose but it is never her first choice; nevertheless, it is what is available to her.

A pleasant young woman, Rose is typical of many Suckow protagonists. She is shallow, lacking in force and direction, talented, uncertain of what she wants in life, and troubled by a "hurt reluctance, that inarticulate aching" (240). Her maturation experience is more successful than that of the other Suckow protagonists whom she most resembles, Marjorie in *The Odyssey of a Nice Girl* (for whom marriage is clearly a retreat and a giving up of the professional goals she had been unwilling to fight for) and Cora (whose husband had deserted her and who thus is left a child and the necessity to work). Thus Suckow would seem to be implying that while neither marriage alone

nor career alone may be ultimately satisfying for a woman, it is possible to find peace in the self-sufficiency of a career (as does Cora), and a successful marriage is most possible for a woman like Rose when she is not dependent upon her husband.

These novels, then, so embedded in the middle-class patriarchal attitudes of the early twentieth-century Midwest, at first seem to deny women any possibility of moving beyond those limitations. But examined carefully, novels like *The Kramer Girls* indicate a view that women have abilities which are stunted by those patriarchal attitudes and that even within that society it is possible for women to find some autonomy. Using stereotypes inculcated by the culture, Suckow demonstrates both the power of these images and the possibility of rising above them. The emotional bleakness of Suckow's world is far from complete, and perhaps only now, when there are many more possibilities for women, is it possible to understand quite how accurate her analysis of the pathos of their situation was. Mannish, assertive, repressed yet nurturing Georgie; gentle and ineffectual Annie; and charming, talented, yet directionless Rose—in their contrasts with one another, these characters reveal unexpected potentialities. Rose's experience demonstrates that autonomy and balance are possible. And lacking that balance, Georgie is yet able to live a meaningful life of service to others, and Annie can find a degree of personal fulfillment by living through relationships with friends. Limited possibilities, perhaps, but nevertheless possibilities.

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NOTE

[1]It might be noted that although the three major critics of Suckow's work all published their studies between 1969 and 1978, none wrote from an overtly feminist perspective. This important chronicler of women's lives awaits an analysis of her work by a feminist critic.

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MARY WILKINS FREEMAN AND SHERWOOD ANDERSON: CONFLUENCE OR INFLUENCE?

JOHN GETZ

At first Mary Wilkins Freeman and Sherwood Anderson may seem unlikely subjects for a comparative study. Neither Freeman nor Anderson mentions the other in any of their published collections of letters, nor does Freeman's name appear in any of Anderson's published memoirs when he recalls the authors he read. Further, Freeman wrote about what the proud Midwesterner Anderson called "that old-maid civilization" of New England (*Story Teller's Story* 61), which he consistently denounced as trivial, repressed, and unduly influential on American society and literature. And Freeman published regularly in *Harper's*, which Anderson scorned in his *Memoirs* as controlled by Howellsian timidity, especially about sex (334-35). She seems to be exactly the kind of writer Anderson was reacting against.

But are these two authors, whose careers overlapped in the 1910s, so opposite? Both studied the American small town before and during industrialization. In the final volume of *Main Currents in American Thought*, published in 1930, the year Freeman died, Vernon Parrington observed that she and Anderson shared an interest in grotesque characters (63); but neither Parrington nor Perry D. Westbrook, who again reported this similarity in 1967 (96), developed it. Certainly grotesques in both authors' stories struggle against puritanical consciences and aristocratic pretensions in themselves and others. A particular grotesque appears in many works by each author: the ineffectual man, often a father.

One especially fruitful subject for comparison is the motif of escape in their work. Anderson acknowledged his fascination with this topic: "My own tales, told and untold, are full of escapes—by water in the dark and in a leaky boat, escapes from situations, escapes from dullness, from pretense, from the

heavy handed seriousness of the half artists. What writer of tales does not dote upon escapes? They are the very breath in our nostrils" (*A Story Teller's Story* 47).

Freeman had been breathing the same air in such early works as "A New England Nun" and "The Revolt of 'Mother,' " collected in 1891, as well as stories she continued to publish in *Harper's* through 1916. In stories such as "The Slip of the Leash," "The Selfishness of Amelia Lamkin," "Dear Annie," "The Balking of Christopher," and "Criss-cross," characters discover new visions for themselves or provoke changes in the characters around them by their escapes. Most of these escapes are as modest as moving into the house across the street or up to a nearby mountain, and most of the stories end with an apparently happy return. The most uncharacteristic of them is "The Slip of the Leash," published in *Harper's* in 1904. In this story Freeman abandons her customary New England setting for the American West. In her main character, Adam Andersen, Freeman almost seems to have created a model for Sherwood himself and some of his characters. Adam is over forty, a prosperous, happily married farmer and father of four children, who leaves his family for a freer life in the wilderness. After enjoying several years of freedom and trying various stratagems to help his family without rejoining them, Adam realizes they need him. His return home produces one of Freeman's most ambivalent conclusions. Significantly, Andersen announces his return to harness by plowing his field:

> . . . and he turned from his ploughing and clasped his wife and then his children in his arms, and his face was beaming, and his heart aching with excess of joy, and his leash was upon him again.
>
> But he still had the sense of blessing which had come to him from his wrestling with that which was the holiest and best of earth and humanity, but which had come between himself and the best of himself. (675)

The complex of desire fulfilled and frustrated is at least as tangled here as at the conclusion of Sherwood Anderson's first published novel, *Windy McPherson's Son*, written some time between 1907 and late 1912 (Sutton 350) and published in 1916. In that ending Sam McPherson returns to the wife he left in order to wander in search of "truth." With him he brings three

children for the couple to adopt and raise. But Sam—probably together with his creator—remains uncertain that his new life will provide the meaning he seeks. Freeman's Andersen finds fulfillment in the wilderness but gives it up for his family; Sam McPherson fails to find it in business or on the road and may not find it at home either.

* * *

So far I have been pointing out common ground between Freeman and Anderson. Should we go further and hypothesize that her work influenced his? The remainder of my paper explores this question.

First, it is worth remembering that Freeman was much more widely read and critically acclaimed in her own time than ours. From 1887 on, Howells praised her fiction. In 1897 when *Critic* conducted a public opinion poll to select the best American short stories, Freeman's titles finished among the winners along with those of Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, and Twain (Kendrick 2). A photograph shows her seated next to Twain at his seventieth birthday party at Delmonico's in 1905—quite an honor in that nearly 200 guests attended the celebration (Kendrick photo N and p. 280). Although she published no fiction after 1918, in 1926 Freeman received the William Dean Howells Medal for Fiction from the American Academy of Letters and was one of the first women writers elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

We should also keep in mind something Anderson himself said repeatedly: his memoirs are impressionistic and freely embellished rather than factual. If he had read Freeman and particularly if he had been influenced by her, it seems likely that, in light of his frequent attacks on Howells and the New England writers, he would have either forgotten the connection or chosen not to include it. Anderson was not above attempting to distance himself from Edgar Lee Masters and *Spoon River Anthology*, which almost surely influenced *Winesburg, Ohio* (Sutton 299-300). Of Anderson's assertion that he had never heard of Dreiser or Dostoevski when he wrote *Windy McPherson's Son*, William A. Sutton writes: "In view of all that is known of his active reading and discussing of writers, this statement may perhaps most agreeably be thought of as a minor prevarication. Anderson seems at times to have wished to present an impression of knowing less than he did about other writers and their writings" (181).

When might Anderson have encountered Freeman's work? In recollections of his youth, Anderson repeatedly describes himself as a voracious reader of any books he got his hands on. Freeman's first two collections of short stories, *A Humble Romance and Other Stories* and *A New England Nun and Other Stories*, were published by Harper and Brothers in 1887 and 1891 respectively.

Someone who might have introduced Anderson to Freeman was Trillena White, his mentor during Anderson's year at Wittenberg Academy when he returned from the Spanish-American War. According to Anderson, "She was a great friend of mine when I was little more than a kid and the first person to really introduce me to literature, for which she had a very fine feeling" (quoted in Sutton 94). The two corresponded, sometimes on literary topics, until they died in 1941. In 1939 Anderson visited her in Springfield, Ohio, where she was dying of cancer.

White visited Anderson during his years in Elyria, Ohio (1907-12), and, according to one recent book, seems to have lived for a while with Anderson and his wife there (Townsend 68). According to his *Memoirs*, he wrote his first published story, "The Rabbit Pen," in response to a conversation with White during one of these visits (334-35). In Anderson's report of the conversation we learn of White's admiration for Howells, who at that time was writing "The Editor's Easy Chair" column for *Harper's*. Naturally, Anderson began denouncing Howells as timid; he then boasted that he could write a story *Harper's* would publish. Anderson demeans the result, which he calls, "not the kind of story I was already feeling my way toward. Its publication had merely been a sort of triumph over my friend" (*Memoirs* 335).

It is difficult to believe that any aspiring writer's first published short story would mean so little to him, and this is particularly true for Anderson. Perhaps he felt the need to downgrade *Harper's* in favor of the avant-garde publications that soon began to accept his work. However, in *Windy McPherson's Son*, also written in Elyria, Anderson suggests a more generous attitude toward White's literary taste. The schoolteacher in this book,

Mary Underwood, is generally thought to be based on White (Sutton 364; Townsend 68). Young Sam McPherson loses faith in her taste when his male mentor John Telfer objects to a scene in one of the books she has lent the boy. In the scene a poetic man sits in his tent on a hillside in the rain writing a letter to his sweetheart. Telfer calls the scene sentimental: "The story lies. A man could not write love letters under the circumstances and he was a fool to pitch his tent on a hillside. A man in a tent on a hillside in a storm would be cold and wet and getting the rheumatism. To be writing letters he would need to be an unspeakable ass. He had better be out digging a trench to keep the water from running through his tent" (52). Sam accepts this judgment too easily, the outside narrator suggests: ". . . if later in life he learned that there are men who could write love letters on a piece of housetop in a flood, he did not know it then and the least suggestion of windiness or pretence lay heavy in his stomach" (52). Mary's actions the night Sam's mother dies later convince Telfer that he has not given her the respect she deserves.

Even in his *Memoirs* Anderson recalls feeling some pride in the publication of "The Rabbit Pen": "I had got into a certain position. I was a little known as a writer. There had been a story of mine in *Harper's*. Word had been whispered about" (418). In the next paragraph Anderson tells us that he started letting his hair grow and wearing flamboyant ties (*Memoirs* 418). Apparently the attention to his story encouraged him to start acting the part of a writer.

Although "The Rabbit Pen" is not one of Anderson's more memorable stories, its strong sexual undertone belies his criticism of *Harper's* as timid about sexuality. At least his recollection of the origin of the story tells us that he knew *Harper's* well enough to criticize it and write a story it accepted. It should also be noted that during the first two decades of the twentieth century the magazine regularly published works by and about at least one writer Anderson clearly admired, Mark Twain.

* * *

Of course, none of this proves that Anderson read Freeman in *Harper's* or anywhere else. Without the literary counterpart of the smoking gun, the case for influence remains dependent on internal evidence and finally speculative. However, I believe that juxtaposing some key passages by Freeman and Anderson suggests the strong possibility of a direct connection. In any event it should illuminate some important intersections of desire and reality in their work.

There are several similarities between Freeman's famous short story "A New England Nun," reprinted as the title story in a collection of her work in 1891, and Anderson's "Hands," first published in 1916 and later included as the first story in the body of *Winesburg* (1919), following the introductory "The Book of the Grotesque." An influence on "Hands" would be significant, since Anderson called this story "my first authentic tale" (*Memoirs* 237) and credited its writing with revealing his vocation as an author (*Memoirs* 352-53).

Both "Nun" and "Hands" have solitary, even reclusive main characters; and the narratives use flashbacks and little external action in the present. Both authors also use enveloping structure, presenting their main characters in the same places—their homes—and involved in some of the same activities at the ends of the stories as at the beginnings.

The passages that link Freeman and Anderson most closely are the closing lines of these stories. The final sentences of "New England Nun" describe the main character, Louisa Ellis, seated at her window sewing, the day after breaking off her engagement of about fifteen years to Joe Daggett:

> She gazed ahead through a long reach of future days strung together like pearls in a rosary, every one like the others, and all smooth and flawless and innocent, and her heart went up in thankfulness. Outside was the fervid summer afternoon; and the air was filled with the sounds of the busy harvest of men and birds and bees; there were halloos, metallic clatterings, sweet calls, and long hummings. Louisa sat, prayerfully numbering her days, like an uncloistered nun. (17)

In the conclusion of "Hands" the main character, Wing Biddlebaum, is alone in his house on a summer evening after waiting futilely for a visit from young newspaper reporter George Willard, who is Wing's only friend and the recurring character throughout *Winesburg*. As evening falls, Wing hears a train carry off "the day's harvest of berries" and calms down, his hunger

for George's presence becoming "again a part of his loneliness and waiting" (*Winesburg* 33). The story closes with this scene:

> Lighting a lamp, Wing Biddlebaum washed the few dishes soiled by his simple meal and, setting up a folding cot by the screen door that led to the porch, prepared to undress for the night. A few stray white bread crumbs lay on the cleanly washed floor by the table; putting the lamp upon a low stool he began to pick up the crumbs, carrying them to his mouth one by one with unbelievable rapidity. In the dense blotch of light beneath the table, the kneeling figure looked like a priest engaged in some service of his church. The nervous expressive fingers, flashing in and out of the light, might well have been mistaken for the fingers of the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary. (*Winesburg* 34)

Similarities between these endings are numerous. Each takes place late in a summer day: "Nun" in afternoon, "Hands" at night. Their isolation confirmed during the stories, both Louisa and Wing, alone in their houses, hear sounds of the harvest outside but remain cut off from it. Anderson heightens this irony for Wing by making him a marvelously quick strawberry picker. Both Louisa and Wing are fastidious housekeepers and, as their stories end, are shown in characteristic activities that underscore their isolation: Louisa sews, and Wing picks up something. Earlier in the story we learned that "Louisa dearly loved to sew a linen seam, not always for use, but for the simple, mild pleasure which she took in it. She would have been loath to confess how more than once she had ripped a seam for the mere delight of sewing it together again" (9)—an ironic echo of Penelope in *The Odyssey* as Louisa waits for Joe's return from his travels.

The most striking similarity between the two conclusions is the religious imagery, with Catholic overtones particularly unexpected from two writers with Protestant backgrounds. Louisa is compared to a nun and Wing to a priest, and both are described as if praying a rosary. Kim Townsend speculates that the religious imagery may have been suggested to Anderson by a Catholic church and school across Cass Street from the rooming house where he lived in Chicago (105). Perhaps, but the resemblance to the ending of "Nun" is more than superficial.

The religious imagery has evoked a similar spectrum of responses in both stories. Until the 1980s, critics tended to see

Freeman's as emphasizing repression and sterility in the solitary life Louisa has chosen. Recently feminist critics have argued that this reading betrays a male bias against the "spinsters" in so many of Freeman's stories. Marjorie Pryse reads the conclusion very positively:

> Freeman's choice of concluding image—that Louisa is both nun-like in her solitude yet "uncloistered" by her decision not to marry Joe Daggett—documents the author's perception that in marriage Louisa would have sacrificed more than she would have gained. If the ending of "A New England Nun" is ironic, it is only so in the sense that Louisa, in choosing to keep herself chained to her hut, has thrown off society's fetters. The enthusiasm with which Louisa has transformed "graceful" if "half-needless" activity into vision and with which she now "numbers" her days—with an aural pun on poetic meter by which Freeman metaphorically expands Louisa's art—would have been proscribed for her after her marriage. Such vision is more than compensatory for Louisa's celibacy. (295)

In a later story, "The Secret," Freeman herself seems to warn against a simplistically negative interpretation of Louisa's decision. "The Secret" is a kind of "New England Nun" in reverse, in which the main character's marriage is successful because her husband has learned to respect her privacy. The author returns to the nun imagery to explain why the heroine of this story chooses marriage over celibacy: "There was nothing of the nun about her. She was religious, but she was not ascetic. It would have been different if she had never loved any man at all [like Louisa]. Then she might have been satisfied and quite content. . ." (405).

The closing lines of "Hands" have also seemed completely negative to some readers. Noting the pun on "decades," Jim Elledge describes Wing as a futile penitent, plagued by guilt but without sin or forgiveness, "so he devours the crumbs of a wasted life in an act of penance, suffering decade after decade in his self-created hell" (15). But like "Nun," "Hands" has also been interpreted as ending positively, even in "a moment of transfiguration." "By way of the strange, ritualized hand motions, Anderson creates a being whose very awkwardness ennobles him. Like Gogol's clerk or the biblical Jesus, he is a man whose differentness makes him peculiar and alien, while at the same time it suggests the quiet suffering, strength, and innocence of

martyrdom" (Kimbel 65-66). Again too the author of the story points to something positive in the main character, whom Anderson calls "a poor little man beaten, pounded, frightened by the world in which he lived into something oddly beautiful" (*Memoirs* 352).

For Pryse, Freeman's ending confirms Louisa's identity as an artist, and thus, I would add, some kinship between Louisa and Freeman herself. A similar claim can be made for Anderson's ending, at least when "Hands" is read alongside the account of its writing in his *Memoirs*. There Anderson, perhaps unconsciously, describes himself in two of Wing's characteristic positions. As soon as he finished the story, Anderson "walked up and down in that little narrow room," (352), like Wing, who paces throughout the story. Realizing what he had accomplished in "Hands," Anderson then "knelt in the darkness and muttered words of gratitude to God" (353). We should remember that Wing's final kneeling posture in the story recalls the position he probably uses for the strawberry picking at which he is so adept.

How do we deal with the range of interpretions of the conclusions of these stories? Elizabeth A. Meese sees Freeman's ending as one of the author's "signs of undecidability": "undecidable or purposefully 'unreadable' images that both affirm and negate, sometimes alternately and at other times simultaneously, but always resisting a determination of the text's meaning" (22). Meese argues that by presenting "the impossibility of fixing the text according to prescribed gender role," Freeman "gives us an allegory for reading new possibilities for women" (23). And Louisa, of course, remains unknowable.

We can apply Meese's analysis to Anderson's portrayal of a subject even more taboo than contented spinsterhood: Wing's homosexuality. Anderson too undermines a stereotype, and his final image leaves us aware of our inability to know Wing, demonstrated over the years by disputes over Wing's homosexuality and the extent of his consciousness of it (e.g., Ciancio 998). Earlier in the story Anderson reminds us of the limits of his picture of Wing when he wishes for "the poet who will tell the hidden wonder story of the influence for which the hands were but fluttering pennants of promise" (31). Despite this hope that some day Wing's story may be fully told, Anderson distances us from him even further than Freeman does from Louisa at the

end. Freeman's narrator takes us inside Louisa's house and has us looking out the window with her, while Anderson has us looking in at Wing from outside his house.

Of course, there is another important contrast between Louisa and Wing. She gets what she wants: the private world of her home and routine remains secure. Wing does not fulfill his desire: being a mentor to young boys in school or, years later, to George Willard. But both characters are alike in their ambiguity. We wonder if Louisa's world is enough, and we glimpse Wing's rich sensibility despite its confinement. The desire that is finally frustrated in both stories is, as Meese says of "Nun," the reader's desire to thematize, to reduce a story to a single meaning or statement and so "substitute our own desire for narrative authority for the author's persistent denials and evasions and for the text's own essential subversiveness" (37).

Besides "Nun" and "Hands," there are other intriguing possible connections between Freeman's fiction and *Winesburg*. Anderson's "The Rabbit Pen" appeared in *Harper's* in July, 1914. In the following months the magazine published two stories by Freeman that may have contributed to *Winesburg*. The timing is right. Critics believe that Anderson wrote most of the Winesburg stories from autumn, 1915, through winter, 1915-16, or later in 1916 (Sutton 430; Townsend 109). The first ones published were "The Book of the Grotesque" in February, 1916, and "Hands" that March.

Freeman's "The Outside of the House," published in the November, 1914, *Harper's*, may have supplied the name Willard for the New Willard House and the main character's family in *Winesburg*. "The Outside of the House" centers on an old couple who love the seaside home of a wealthy family named Willard. The home is sometimes called "the Willard house" (935, 938).

A more substantive contribution may have come from Freeman's "Sour Sweetings" in the January, 1915, issue. In this story a young wife tells her snobbish, stubborn, and mother-dominated husband that she is leaving him. "Go," he tells her, and, looking at the tree in the yard, adds coldly: "When that sweet-apple tree has sour apples under it, then I will ask you to come back" (208). Nelly moves back to her childhood home next door, where her mother still lives. On a fall night over a year later, Nelly looks out a window toward her husband's house. In the moon-

light she sees him gathering up the windfall apples under the tree and replacing them with others. When he finishes, she creeps into the yard between the houses, snatches one of the apples, and takes it back to her room: "She locked herself in; she tested the apple. It was sour, with an intense sourness, but it seemed to Nelly to have the sweetness of the whole world, and life itself, typifying, as it did, the surrender of a human soul to love" (210). In the morning, with a beautiful frost covering everything outside, Nelly dons her white-satin wedding dress and marches to a joyous reunion with her husband under the apple tree.

Freeman invites readers to share the improbable happiness of this conclusion; but again other elements in the story complicate our reaction, suggesting that although Nelly is getting what she wants, she is also surrendering to a situation that is far from ideal. Although "Sour Sweetings" establishes limits beyond which women should not allow themselves to be pushed in marriage, statements by Nelly and her parents suggest that wives should put up with quite a bit. Perhaps revealing her own misgivings about the reform of Nelly's husband, Freeman makes it less convincing by presenting it only indirectly. For example, although Nelly overhears him arguing on her behalf with his mother, she cannot distinguish their words. Even at the end he is described as having "the foolishness of a man, the childish foolishness which she loved" (210). Perhaps most important, when Nelly puts on her satin wedding dress at the end, we recall that the quarrel with her husband started when she refused to gratify his and especially his mother's snobbery by wearing this gown to a party. We should not forget that the apples Nelly's husband offers her really are sour; they only seem sweet to Nelly because of their symbolism.

Whatever their implications for "Sour Sweetings, the apples in this story may have suggested to Anderson one of the most memorable metaphors in *Winesburg* and, according to critics such as Ralph Ciancio, one of the most thematically unifying: "the sweetness of the twisted apples" (*Winesburg* 38). This metaphor appears in "Paper Pills," which was first published as "The Philosopher" in *The Little Review*, 1916, and which immediately follows "Hands" in *Winesburg*." "Paper Pills" is the story of Doctor Reefy and his brief but loving marriage to a much younger woman. As Anderson tells this story, he describes it as

> delicious, like the twisted little apples that grow in the orchards of Winesburg. In the fall one walks in the orchards and the ground is hard with frost underfoot. The apples have been taken from the trees by the pickers. They have been put in barrels and shipped to the cities where they will be eaten in apartments that are filled with books, magazines, furniture, and people. On the trees are only a few gnarled apples which the pickers have rejected. They look like the knuckles of Doctor Reefy's hands. One nibbles at them and they are delicious. Into a little round place at the side of the apple has been gathered all of its sweetness. One runs from tree to tree over the frosted ground picking the gnarled, twisted apples and filling his pockets with them. Only the few know the sweetness of the twisted apples. (*Winesburg* 36)

Although Freeman's apples are sour and Anderson's are twisted, the frosty autumn setting and especially the unexpected sweetness link them. Anderson is actually more explicit in his handling of this metaphor, since his apples, like Doctor Reefy, really are sweet, while Freeman's only taste that way to Nelly.

The lonely Doctor Reefy is saved from bitterness and despair by his willingness to accept life's limits or, to use one of Freeman's earlier metaphors, "the leash." Reefy resists the temptation to assemble his fragmentary insights into a fixed, all-encompassing vision of life: "Little pyramids of truth he erected and after erecting knocked them down again that he might have the truths to erect other pyramids" (*Winesburg* 35). By the end of "Sour Sweetings," Nelly fulfills her desire to return to marriage, but she also accepts the leash of her husband's limited personality and an institution that burdens women. As in "Nun," we find ourselves asking if what Freeman's main character desires is enough. For both authors the leash is always present even when less apparent as in "Sweetings."

* * *

Is Freeman's work itself a leash that tugs on some of Anderson's early stories? We may never have the definitive answer, but we can say this much: At a time of profound change in American history and literature, a nineteenth century realist who continued to write until 1918 and a modernist with roots in

nineteenth-century realism used some strikingly similar metaphors with comparable implications for their characters' conflicts between desire and reality.

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PLAINER SPEAKING: SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S NON-FICTION AND THE "NEW AGE"

ROBERT DUNNE

Throughout his career as a creative artist, Sherwood Anderson grappled with the myth of the American Dream. In his early writing career he re-evaluated the myth in his fiction, poetry, and autobiographical works. In the latter half of the Twenties, however, he withdrew from the literary havens in Chicago, New York, and New Orleans, and settled down in Virginia as a country newspaper editor. But this retirement did not last for long. Prompted by severe national crises in the Thirties, Anderson renewed his focus on the still contagious influence of the American Dream. The Depression was one of the crises, an event that rapidly brought about economic and social hardships in the country: the other crisis was the pervasiveness of industrial factory work. Because the economic and social foundations of the country were becoming so deteriorated by these crises and because, to Anderson, these foundations were so near to crumbling during the Thirties, Anderson attempted to re-evaluate the myth this time in plainer words than he did when he resorted to the aesthetic scaffolding of fiction. Although he did publish two novels and a collection of short stories in this period, Anderson was preoccupied for the most part with traveling across the country and reporting how Americans were coping. These observations from his travels were published in *Perhaps Women*, *Puzzled America*, and *Home Town*, all non-fictional works which have received little critical attention but which will be examined here as Anderson's most bare-boned assessment of the American Dream myth.

Early in the decade, Anderson addressed the pervasiveness of industrial factory work. At one point late in *Perhaps Women* (1931), Anderson details the complaints of a woman—identified

by Kim Townsend to be Anderson's wife Eleanor (258)—that American writers were avoiding the problems brought on by America's over reliance on factory work. Such writers, as Anderson paraphrases Eleanor, had "gone the smart way . . . had thrown overboard human life . . . thought it didn't matter" (115). Anderson implicates himself, in fact, as being such a writer:

> Time and again I had told the story of the American man crushed and puzzled by the age of the machine. I had told the story until I was tired of telling it. I had retreated from the city to the town, from the town to the farm. (112-13)

But, driven by this new-found awareness, Anderson confronts head on in *Perhaps Women* the conflict between the modern worker and the machine. In this book he both acutely describes some of the reasons why fast-paced factory work was so prevalent and analyzes the dehumanizing effects of such machine work. At the same time, he repeatedly acknowledges the wonders and beauty of machines throughout the book.

To Anderson, the nation's wholesale belief that material acquisition represented success explained why mechanized factory work was in such demand. This popular belief had become the status quo by this time in the nation's history, a belief deemed unchallengeable because, as Anderson suggests, one risked being labeled "un-American" or even a Bolshevik if it were challenged (70). Anderson characterizes this desire for material success as an animal-like greed: "thinking of money and success as a bitch, my fellow Americans . . . [have] got scent of her long since, . . . trotting at her heels" (77). Anderson implies that yearning for success is not by itself a problem for Americans; but, however, both greed and the recent yoking of modern technology to it *are* problems, because, Anderson observes, the country was not prepared for the changes that would come with modern technology. He observes that the people with power did not foresee the rapid changes that machine work would cause: "We had come into a new age in American life, had been swept up into a new age by the machine and the men in power in American life had no program made for the new age" (83-84). This unpreparedness has some serious consequences, Anderson concludes, the most important of which is the utter neglect of the factory workers who have to operate the machines.

For Anderson, greed and the unguided proliferation of machine production emasculate the men who work the machines: "if money and the machine continue to rule men's lives, then we shall have to surrender maleness" (58). Anderson makes this peculiar observation because he was convinced that machine work all but removes a man's dignity and pride in his work. As a result, a man's natural inclination to create things with his hands is suppressed: "The machine has taken from us the work of our hands. Work kept men healthy and strong. It was good to feel things being done by our hands" (41). But, he goes on to say, "The modern man is drowned in a flood of things he did not make" (42). This feeling of inadequacy creates, in Anderson's mind, a spiritual impotence. It is natural for a man to have hands-on participation in the creation of things; such a participation, Anderson suggests, is but a mirror image of God's own creative powers. Anderson reasons that men were once in tune with this mysterious relationship, and that at one time they could believe that "there's something superhuman at the core of all this" (24). However, with machines now performing all the creative work, this relationship is sundered: *machines* now perform these god-like acts and become, in fact, gods themselves. While watching the operation of machine work in a South Carolina factory, Anderson himself recognizes the machine's new power: "*It was a moment of pure machine worship. I was on my knees before the new god, the American god*" (125).

It is worth noting that Anderson is explicit in exonerating the machines themselves from contributing to the problem: "But wait! the factories are themselves all right. The big complicated beautiful machines in the factories are in no way to blame. They are gorgeous things" (44-45). Anderson implies that the problem rests with those who design and build the machines: they implement them too hastily into the workforce and make them too complex and beyond the understanding of most men. "After all, the machine is only a tool, but for the present, at least, it is too big, too efficient for us" (46).

But regardless of the causes of their emasculation, the men who work in the factories become physically powerless and spiritually exhausted when pitted against the machine, because, as Anderson notes, "the spirit of the machine doesn't get tired—it hasn't any" (46). Women, though, also work in the factories, and,

as Anderson's title for the book indicates, perhaps women can be the force that brings about a change in the system. The change they can bring is not necessarily for their own good (because women are not spiritually affected by the machines [142]); rather women can help restore manhood in the modern man.

Up to this point in his argument, Anderson successfully critiques the causes and effects of modern man's predicament in the machine age. I interpret his critique to be an indictment of the popular formula of the American Dream myth: Americans have too hastily and too completely embraced the notion that material possessions are a sign of success, and that success consequently signifies happiness. To Anderson this is not the case. Rather than pursuing "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," Americans have been pursuing "the twin bitches, money and success" (85). Anderson's premises in *Perhaps Women* are thus very clear and also, I think, very persuasive. But his conclusions produce confusion because they are not drawn from his premises and are not at all that clear, either. They are, nevertheless, spelled out in the book in the form of a request:

> I am asking for a statement of the inner strength, of the living potence of the present-day American women, of their hunger, the potentiality of new strength in them, that may save American civilization in the very face of the machine. (97)

The means of putting this strength to use remain nebulously stated in the book. But what can be inferred from this mystical solution is that Anderson's embrace of a clear-cut solution—perhaps women—is akin, it seems, to the embrace of so many truths by the very grotesques of his fiction. That such a solution is realistically untenable is underscored by Anderson's own assessment of *Perhaps Women* found in a letter to Theodore Dreiser a few years after the book's publication: "It fell flat" (340).

In *Puzzled America* (1935), Anderson expands his treatment of factory workers to include all Americans who have been affected by the machine age and the Depression. His emphasis in this work is not to dwell on the causes and effects of the Depression but rather to *describe,* not prescribe, the various ways that Americans were then coping with this national crisis. The general nature of these descriptions, as David Anderson has identified, is characterized by "faith and humility instead of

bluster and pride" (143). Once again, Anderson sets out to re evaluate the popular strains of the American Dream myth; only this time, I think, he succeeds in outlining viable alternatives to the materialistic goals of the myth.

Anderson has no doubt that these goals have been superficial. In the Introduction he states matter-of-factly:

> It is a bit odd . . . that the American cry, "Make good! Make good!" that we all heard when we were boys—that I dare say boys are still hearing—that it so often leads to a kind of blindness. (xiii)

Later on he is even more explicit in his views:

> This American theory of life . . . that a man must make good at something, justify his existence, make two blades of grass grow where but one grew before—there is a side to me, as to most men, that has always cried out, "It's nonsense." (25)

Anderson goes on to characterize this theory of making good as a secular creed, saying that Americans have been taught from childhood that it is a "moral obligation . . . to get up in the world" (161). To Anderson, this notion becomes problematic because the value of "getting up in the world" is placed solely on appearances, not on any inner worth. Consequently, Americans are taught that being poor is disgraceful and that making a splashy impression is laudatory:

> You had to have money to rise in the world, to be a bigger, showier man than others in order to respect yourself. . . . Money was the outward sign of inner merit. Men are still judged that way in America. (162)

But, Anderson wants to emphasize, this secular creed has betrayed Americans, because all those who answered the call to buy lots of material possessions are now broke or in debt (158-59). He regards the Depression as a sign that the system must therefore change, because the system currently in place simply has not worked. This prospect is admittedly discomforting, because Americans do not like admitting changes into their lives (275-76). The prospect of needed changes is also discomforting to Anderson himself, because he realizes that he risks going against the American grain.

By attacking the American notion of "making it big" in life, Anderson no doubt felt compelled to explain that he was not out to undermine America's democratic system or to replace it with a communist system. Perhaps he has in mind his warning in *Perhaps Women* of wanting to avoid being labeled "un-American" or a Bolshevik, because in *Puzzled America* he is adamant in stressing that he is no communist. He states in the Introduction:

> What is wrong? Why can't we do it? The capitalists? Is it not true that there will always be strong men? What is the real difference between Stalin of Russia and, let us say, the elder Morgan? If we really got a new set-up here, would not exactly the same sort of men be in power? (xii)

It is true that Anderson did dabble in communism, but he always maintained ambivalent feelings for any communist system. This ambivalence is clearly seen, for example, in a letter Anderson wrote in 1936: "When I talk to most radicals, I'm strong for capitalism and individualism; but when I talk to most capitalists, I'm hot for the radicals" ("Fuller" 341-42).

By 1933, as Walter Rideout has noted, Anderson's politics had become firmly rooted in Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies (198). And it is precisely this belief in FDR that inspires Anderson to urge his fellow Americans towards finding a new belief in their lives.

Again, Anderson is convinced that the Depression has made the time ripe for a change in America's beliefs. From his travels across the country, Anderson tells us he hears a cry going up from the American people: " 'I want belief, some ground to stand on. I do not want government to go on just being a meaningless thing' " (xv). Anderson's description of this new belief incorporates elements of an earlier belief; in fact, I would argue, it hearkens back to earlier forms of the American Dream myth and is now updated in context of FDR's New Deal. Anderson seems convinced now that the State must take over the conglomerates, mills, factories, even the land now held by capitalists, before such changes can take full effect, because with the State at the controls, some of these earlier forms of belief can be renewed, such as belief in fellowship, working for the community rather than for one's self, and pride in hard work as opposed to pride in the material rewards of work. This

is no idealized proposal like that described in *Perhaps Women,* for Anderson finds such renewed beliefs *actualized* in the people he has met in his travels. In the TVA, for example, he finds Americans feeling alive, "alive in spite of greed, chiseling, desire for fake money, bigness. The . . . desire to some day work for others" (65). This concentration on *others* rather than self is actualized also in labor meetings, which Anderson depicts using the jargon of religious revivals, calling all such meetings a "kind of religion of brotherhood" (153). These are some of the alternatives Anderson proposes to the present system, alternatives which emerge from the present circumstances brought about by the New Deal and which also are informed by pre-Gilded Age versions of the American Dream myth that are not purely self oriented or greed-oriented. And so, after Anderson details how Americans are coping with the immediate crisis of the Depression in *Puzzled America,* what remains for him to address is the question of how Americans can live their lives after the crisis.

In *Home Town,* published in 1940 and prompted by a New Deal agency, Anderson attempts to answer such a question. David Anderson has argued perhaps too harshly that this work is "an elegy for a time and place that Anderson knows no longer exists" (155). Contrary to David Anderson, I would suggest that in *Home Town* Sherwood Anderson does not lament the loss of a way of life but instead argues that the best *elements* from that way of life can endure even in a modern, urbanized environment. These elements can endure because they are values which Anderson has again drawn from the American mythic past, and which he has refashioned at the same time for modern times. Anderson does not call for the reversal of industrial and urban progress; instead, he prefers to adapt past beliefs to the present.

In the book, Anderson fleshes out such a notion in the form of a response to an angry letter he recently received:

> I had somewhere said something about the necessity nowadays of staying put. In saying that, I had in mind staying closer home in our *thoughts and feelings.* The big world outside now is so filled with confusion. It seemed to me that our only hope, in the present muddle, was to try *thinking small.* (4; emphasis added)

Anderson suggests that in place of nostalgically recapturing the small-town atmosphere, one should try to *think small* and be

cautious about taking on the larger world, because, as he says, "the world is full now of false bigness . . . ; there's a trickiness in that approach to others—through applause, feeling a false power and importance" (5). Anderson's advice is for one to be more concerned about one's immediate world than about the world at large, a sentiment that resonates from some of the earliest versions of the American Dream myth, such as in Jeffersonian agrarianism, as well as in earlier puritan versions of the myth. This sentiment allows for both community and communication, both of which, Anderson implies, are essentials in either a small town or a metropolis. What Anderson ultimately is conceding, it seems, is that modern Americans will invariably try to take on the world. But before they do, he advises, they had better get to know the people and places immediately surrounding them first, because the immediacy of the small town becomes

> a test of man's ability to adjust himself. It tells the story of his skill in living with others, his ability to go out to others and to let others be a part of his own life. You have to go on living with your neighbors. (95)

Seen from this perspective, Anderson shows us that even a city can be regarded as "made up also of an infinite number of small towns" (22), thus allowing for the perpetuation of the small-town way of life in an urbanized environment of the future.

Because of the pressing urgency of the Depression and because of the rampant growth of mechanical factory work, Sherwood Anderson gave the public three works of non-fiction in the 1930s, in which he *speaks directly* to Americans about these crises. When considered as a kind of triptych, each of these three works addresses different aspects of the crises. *Perhaps Women* succeeds in defining their causes and effects; *Puzzled America* elaborates some of the ways that Americans were presently coping with them; and *Home Town* achieves a thoughtful yet cautious outlook for the future. What is consistent in these works is Anderson's tenacious re-evaluation of the myth of the American Dream: a re-evaluation which takes to task the popular versions of the rags-to-respectability and rags-to-riches formulas and which offers Americans a fresh vision, one that hearkens backward yet is nevertheless informed by the pressures of the "new age."

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON, *THE DOUBLE DEALER*, AND THE NEW ORLEANS LITERARY RENAISSANCE

DAVID D. ANDERSON

When Sherwood Anderson came to New Orleans for the second time in July, 1924, with a new wife, a substantial literary reputation, and a suitcase full of manuscripts, he came to stay. Behind him were his aborted business career, two shattered marriages, a successful advertising career that he could no longer abide, the Chicago Literary Renaissance which he had come to despise, eight published volumes of fiction and verse, and more than a year in Reno before finally dissolving his second marriage to Tennessee Mitchell.

In April of 1924, he had married Elizabeth Prall; his first volume of autobiography, *A Story Teller's Story*, was in page proofs; and his writing plans were ambitious: to write the novel that would be finished late that Fall and published the next year as *Dark Laughter*, his only best-seller, and to write the fictional memoir that would become *Tar: A Midwest Childhood*, part of which would be serialized as sketches in the *Woman's Home Companion* in 1926 and then published in book form later that year.

Anderson had come to New Orleans in 1924 to begin a new life, the third such beginning in his adult life, and his decision to make that new life there was no accident; in early 1922 he had spent several months in New Orleans in a initial unsuccessful attempt to escape Chicago, Tennessee Mitchell, and advertising. Flushed with the discovery that there was a place at once foreign and American (he had loved France the previous year but could never become an expatriate) he described New Orleans to his brother Karl as "surely the most civilized spot in America" (M, 29).

During those few months in 1922, Anderson worked on *Many Marriages*, the novel which was to be serialized in the *Dial* in late 1922 and early 1923 and published in book form later that year; he wandered the streets and docks, excited by the sounds, smells, scenes, buildings, and people, the elements that to Anderson were the substance of place. "Where else in all American," he wrote his brother Karl, "could one spend a day, as I did yesterday,"

> working steadily all morning, going to see the oyster opening championship of the world settled after lunch, walking on the wharfs among singing Negro laborers in the late afternoon and seeing Panama Joe Gains whip his man in an out of doors arena in the evening. And at that I missed the horse races. Do you not suffer of envy (M. 29).

Important, too, was Anderson's discovery of the people and the sounds that were to give a measure of substance to *Dark Laughter* when he returned to New Orleans in 1924 to write it. To Jerome Blum, an artist friend, he wrote:

> . . . Have been going like a house afire ever since I hit town. . . . My room is on the third floor of an old house in the French Creole section. . . . Not a bad lot of fellows down here. There is one, a Memphis newspaper man who is a good loafer and likes the niggers as I do. We spend a lot of time together loafing on the wharfs. . . .
>
> My new book—if I write it through as I feel it—the gods be good and permit me this—will be something anyway. But I guess I'd better not be bragging about that (M. 31).

Important to Anderson was his discovery of two quite different groups of people who helped fill those hours when he was not working on *Many Marriages*—which he was beginning to see as a multi-volume work, which it did not become. The first was the group surrounding *The Double Dealer*, a literary magazine founded in New Orleans in 1920 and edited by Julius Weiss Friend. In its first issue, published in 1921, the magazine declared the literary independence of the New South when it asserted that "It is high time, we believe, for some doughty, clear-visioned penman to emerge from the sodden marshes of Southern literature. We are sick to death of the treackly sentimentalities with which our well-intentioned lady fictioneers regale us" (I, 214).

The journal, to be published from 1921 through 1926 from a building at 204 Baronne Street owned by Friend's uncle, Sam Weiss, until it went the way of both flesh and literary magazines, was initially dedicated to a new Southern literature created by new Southern writers, and during its brief lifetime it did attract the attention, the presence, and the work of Lyle Saxon, William Faulkner, Roark Bradford, Hamilton Basso, and E. P. O'Donnell, each of whom was to achieve a greater or lesser measure of literary fame in the future, and it also published the Fugitive writers, including Robert Penn Warren, Allan Tate, John Crowe Ransom and Donald Davidson but it quickly adopted and published others, including Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, Hart Crane, and Arthur Symons. From its beginning it recognized the curious affinity between Southern and Midwestern writers when it commented in its initial editorial discussion in the first issue of the new and eternal dimensions of contemporary American writing that "The best work of Sherwood Anderson and Willa Cather seems exotic—it, too, partakes of the eternal moods" (I, 172).

Anderson's initial arrival in New Orleans in 1922 was seen by both himself and the editorial staff and hangers-on of the *Double Dealer* as propitious. To Anderson it was an opportunity to talk, to listen, and to weave the tales of fact and fancy in which he delighted and which so many participants in the Chicago Renaissance—Susan Glaspell, Margaret Anderson, Ben Hecht, and others—found fascinating. The editors and friends of the *Double Dealer*—Friend, Basil Thompson, John McClure, Lilian Friend Marcus, and others from time to time—had captured, at least momentarily, an authentic literary star.

The staff of the *Double Dealer* had continued its critical courting of Anderson in its second issue in July, 1921, in which they published an essay, "Sherwood Anderson," by Hart Crane, a young Ohio poet whom Anderson had already befriended, as he was in later months and years to befriend Hemingway, Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and dozens of others, and with whom, as with the others, he would inevitably break, partially, at least, because Crane, like Hemingway, Faulkner, and the others, could not or would not recognize his literary and personal debts to Anderson.

In the article Crane wrote that Anderson had accomplished a distinctive "aesthetic achievement, an example of synthetic form," and a "lyricism, deliberate and light, as a curl of mild weed seeds drawn toward the sun;" . . . with "a great sincerity," he "excels as artist by having no philosophy of life or literature to impose on his stories that are told from sophisticated realism. . . ." (II, 42-45).

Anderson was delighted with the essay, which he read when he first arrived in New Orleans in 1921. He wrote to Crane almost immediately that ". . . I went to see the *Double Dealer* crowd and found them delightful men" (M, 28), and yet two weeks later he wrote Jerome Blum that

> There is a little magazine down here called the *Double Dealer,* run by the sons of several rich men, and I have played with them some but now have rather cut them out. Their playing is largely with society women. Never got in touch with that crew before so thought I would play with them a little and see how I liked them. Now I've seen and I know and I don't have to [do] that again (M, 31).

What follows in the letter is a curious hint of heterosexual frustration and perhaps latent homosexuality, but it is clear the Anderson finds the group lacking and that his only interests are in his work and in the mysterious richness of black American life that he found in the ghetto and on the docks. Of the blacks, a group of people with whom he had had little earlier contact and who became the second important group of people he met in New Orleans he wrote:

> Don't know whether or not I'm romancing but I've a notion they know I have a somewhat different attitude toward them than most of the whites. There is a kind of something in their eyes, both men and women, something like surprise and pleasure.
>
> Well, it's big shooting whether I get anything or not and in the meantime I like being right where I am and doing just what I am. Can't beat that much (M, 31).

The extent to which Anderson rejected a relationship with the editors of the *Double Dealer* is, of course, impossible to determine, but his stay there was short. In late March he returned to Chicago, or, more properly, to the suburb of Palos Park, and in July he moved to New York by way of Elyria and Cleveland. Chicago, he wrote Paul Rosenfeld from Cleveland, had become too ugly; "It has lowered over me like a great beast ever since I

came from New Orleans" (M, 39). But his stay in New York was short also; there he met Elizabeth Prall, and in February he was on the train to Reno, to a final break with Tennessee Mitchell and a new beginning.

But behind him in New Orleans he left two pieces of work, both to be published in the *Double Dealer* as he left. The first was "A Thinker," one of the many prose poems he had been writing in the manner of *Mid-American Chants*, and which he thought of as his "New Testament," a collection which, somewhat revised, was to be published as a collection in 1927. In "A Thinker" as in so many of Anderson's other poems, the narrator, clearly a grotesque, speaks out of his loneliness and frustration, seeking an understanding and acceptance that can never come. (*NT*, 64-71; *DD* III, 64-67)

The second work, "New Orleans, the *Double Dealer*, and the Modern Movement in American," is an essay that purports to examine the intricate relationship between the city and the movement, with the journal occupying the center, the link between the two. It appeared in the *Double Dealer* in March, 1922 (III, 119-126). But the essay passed quickly over the journal and the movement to celebrate the city as the most cultural city in America, making possible the enjoyment of life and leisure. The tone, the celebration, and the mood of the essay are largely those of "New Orleans: a prose poem in the expressionist manner," in which Anderson celebrated his feeling for the city. It was published in *Vanity Fair* in March, 1922.

By that time Anderson was on his way back to Chicago, to advertising, and to Tennessee, knowing that he had to terminate his relationship with all three. In late March he wrote Lewis Galantiers in Paris that "It's a god-forsaken time in Chicago. I don't like the damn town much—have been hopelessly vamped by New Orleans, the sweetest town on this continent. Am going to live there sometime and be an old son of a bitch . . . (M, 34). By Fall he had shed Chicago and advertising and in New York had found his new love, Elizabeth Prall. By February he had made up his mind to seek a six-week's-residency divorce in Reno.

While he sought his divorce, *Many Marriages* and *Horses and Men* were published, the former serially at first (October 1922-March 1923) in *The Dial* then later in book form in February, 1923, to good reviews, a substantial measure of notoriety—

it was banned in Boston—and sparse sales. *Horses and Men*, published to good reviews in the Fall, experienced slow sales also, and he felt the effects of them, writing not entirely tongue-in-cheek to his publisher Ben Huebach to ". . . sell a lot of Horses and Men—10000 anyway. I'll need the money. Am not broke but pretty badly bent. Did hope the Feb. check would go to $2000 but hell, I've no kick coming" (M, 52).

In Reno weeks became months and then a year as Anderson waited for Tennessee to give her consent to the divorce. Anderson tolerated Reno, wrote countless letters, made a few friends, wandered the countryside, slipped over to Berkeley to see Elizabeth who was staying with her family, and worked on what was to become *A Story Teller's Story* for most of 1923. But it was a long wait. In December 1923 he wrote Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keefe that "I have been in a state—horrible depression . . ." (L, 113) and to Ferdinand Scheville that "I shall likely never live in Chicago again . . ." (L, 114). To Roger Sergel he wrote that "Between ourselves, I shall in the end live in New Orleans, a really lovely, leisurely American city . . ." (L, 117).

By February, 1924, the first part of *A Story Teller's Story* appeared in *American Mercury* as "Caught," but a new novel Anderson was attempting simply wouldn't come, and his depression returned. But suddenly Tennessee consented to the divorce, and on April 2, 1924, he was free. He and Elizabeth were married in a small town outside of Berkeley on April 5, and after a month in Berkeley they set off for New Orleans. They arrived in July and Anderson was convinced that he had come to stay. They rented a flat on the second floor of the Lower Pontalba Building overlooking Jackson Square, and in September they moved to a house at 540B Saint Peter Street. *A Story Teller's Story* was published in October, but, again, sales were slow. Discouraged but determined to stay in New Orleans, he switched publishers, signing with Horace Liveright; he also signed with the Leigh Lecture Bureau of New York to lecture across the country that Fall and Winter of 1924-25 and the next, 1925-26, for a fee of as much as $500.00 per lecture. He liked and hated the lecture circuit, as he recounted in "When the Writer Talks," published in the *New York Evening Post Literary Review* on April 18, 1925, and later in *Sherwood Anderson's Notebook* (1926).

Lecturing, he found, alternately excited him, appealing to the showman in him, and repulsed him as he knew how little he knew, but the showman and the continued need for money won out. By early March he was back in New Orleans to continue his work on what was to become *Dark Laughter*, wandering the streets and docks, and becoming again to a much greater degree than before, part of the literary life of the city. This time he found himself a celebrity, the city's only literary success, called later by Hamilton Basso, "our Royal Personage." He hoped to have enough money from lecturing, sales, and royalties to buy an old house on Governor Nichols Street, near the docks that he loved.

The New Orleans to which he returned to stay was on the verge of a short-lived literary renaissance: the *Double Dealer* continued to publish, and Anderson became once again part of the group, together with such promising young writers as Hamilton Basso, William Faulkner, Oliver La Farge, Roark Bradford, as well as William Spratling, an architect from Tulane University. Elizabeth started a small decorating shop, and the group gathered as the long evenings began. Elizabeth later recalled in her memoir, *Miss Elizabeth,* that

> It was a social and congenial time, with clusters of people meeting to eat at one of the less expensive restaurants such as Gallatoire's, dining on hot, spicy foods which were complemented by cold wine. Later, everyone would move over to a place called Max in the Alley, a newspaper hangout, with a large ceiling fan that languorously revolved, stirring flies into brief action and casting moving shadows on the walls. . . . Sherwood was the only one of them who had an established literary reputation in those days and the younger writers gravitated to him and usually deferred to him, even in the matter of seating, for he was the center of conversation, always (83-89)..

Sherwood, she recalled, would rise early, work until noon, and then socialize. He continued sustained work on *Dark Laughter* in the mornings; they took long walks on the docks and through the markets in the afternoons, and then in the late afternoons and evenings they socialized. They became close to William Faulkner, whom Elizabeth knew in New York when, as manager of the Doubleday Doran Book Store, she hired him as a clerk on Stark Young's recommendation. In early November,

1924, he turned up in New Orleans, a poet,with a collection, *The Marble Faun,* scheduled for publication. He stayed with Elizabeth while Sherwood lectured, and then moved in with William Spratling at 264 Pirate's Alley, just down the street from the Andersons.

In retrospect, it becomes clear not only that Anderson, the forty-eight-year-old success and Faulkner, the twenty-seven-year-old apprentice had much in common, but that together they made up much of the short-lived New Orleans literary renaissance. Both published in the *Double Dealer,* Faulkner contributing literary sketches to that journal and to the *Times-Picayune,* and Anderson contributing an additional six testaments; they created a fictional character, Al Jackson, swamp-dwelling descendent of Andrew Jackson, and collaborated and competed in telling the tales of his adventures; they worked regularly, and, Elizabeth remembered, they often helped put the *Double Dealer* together. The Andersons ran what amounted to a salon, entertaining Horace Liveright, Anita Loos, Ferdinand and Clara Scheville, Carl Sandburg, Edmund Wilson, and other literary celebrities who came to town. To Wilson Anderson delighted in telling stories straight out of *Huck Finn* and *Life on the Mississippi* by way of Freud and Kraft-Ebing that purported to be his own youthful adventures on the river. Wilson accepted them as fact, remembered them in detail, and recounted them as truth in his *The American Earthquake* (1958).

Anderson and Faulkner became quite close, Faulkner recalling in a *Paris Review* interview in 1956 on "The Art of Fiction" that Anderson had been responsible for his becoming a novelist by sending him back to Mississippi to write about what he knew, that Anderson was responsible for Liveright's publication of *Soldier's Pay,* that, indeed, Anderson was ". . . the father of my generation of American writers and the tradition of American writing which our successors will carry on" (PR, 46).

Anderson commemorated his friendship with Faulkner in a touching but daring story called "A Meeting South," published in *The Dial* in April, 1925; Faulkner collaborated with Spratling in *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles,* Spratling supplying the cartoons and Faulkner a parody of Anderson's prose. The subsequent break between the two men is frequently attributed to the fact that Anderson didn't find it funny. I suspect

that a more likely reason is that Faulkner, like Hemingway, gave himself an heroic combat military career that never happened, and Anderson resented being lied to when he learned the truth about both of them.

Perhaps this break was the impetus for Anderson's decision to leave New Orleans for a place that he and Elizabeth had discovered in the summer of 1925. To escape that heat they had gone to the mountains of Western Virginia where again he discovered a place where he could work and where he felt he belonged. He described the new discovery to Alfred Stieglitz; not only was he able to average more than two thousand words a day there on "a childhood thing" that was to become *Tar: A Midwestern Childhood,* but, more importantly,

> The mountain people are sweet. No books, little false education, real humbleness. It does so beat talking to pretentious half-artists. We may try to acquire a few acres and a cabin. . . . People live in isolated cabins far apart. Everyone wants you to come in, to drink moonshine, to eat, to spend the night. . . .
>
> Its sweet to see the rains over the hills, hear the sounds at night. . . . Cowbells in the distance, the soft whisper of the corn. It all fits my theme (L, 145).

Although Anderson was unaware of it, he had returned in fact as well as in the fancy that was creating *Tar* to the rural closeness to life, to people, and to nature that he had known in his Ohio boyhood. In 1926, after the best-selling success of *Dark Laughter* and a profitable lecture tour, Anderson and Elizabeth returned to the hills of western Virginia to build the house they didn't buy in New Orleans, a magnificent stone and wood structure designed by Spratling, for a site at the junction of Ripshin and Laurel Creeks near Troutdale.

With Anderson's departure from New Orleans, the death of the *Double Dealer,* and Faulkner's departure to Europe, the New Orleans literary renaissance ran its course. But two footnotes remain: Faulkner's second novel *Mosquitoes* is a satire based on an actual expedition by boat on Lake Ponchartrain; it quickly became a literary farce as well as a literary cartoon book; the characters again are drawn from life: in it, Lillian Marcus is Mrs. Maurier, a dowager madly in pursuit of culture; Anderson is Dawson Fairchild, a successful Midwestern novelist

and literary lion and Mrs. Maurier's prey; Spratling is a poet, Mark Frost; Julius Weiss Friend is the enigmatic "Semitic" man; Ernest Talliaferro is both J. Alfred Prufrock and Faulkner himself; Al Jackson is created and re-created by Dawson as the voyage of the *Narisikka* goes its confused and confusing way and then comes to its inevitable end.

Whether or not Anderson enjoyed the novel and the satire is unknown, although his portrait is as admiring as it is funny, and the novel, never republished, remains at the bottom of the Faulkner creative heap. But the second footnote is both touching and deserved. The dedication to *Sartoris* reads

> To Sherwood Anderson
> through whose kindness
> I was first published with the belief
> that this book will give him no reason
> to regret that fact

With that inscription, as much epitaph as celebration, the New Orleans literary renaissance was complete, even as its members passed into other fields and dimensions.

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THE RADICAL TRADITION OF ALGREN'S *CHICAGO: CITY ON THE MAKE*

JAMES A. LEWIN

When he was still around, they banned his books from the Chicago Public Library and sent the FBI to investigate. Now that he is gone, except for a small cult of enthusiasts who have made his old apartment on Evergreen Street a literary shrine, it is even easier for the establishment to ignore Algren. But his Ghost lurks yet around the 3-way intersection where Milwaukee Avenue meets North and Damen, whispering a dire warning against all the latest trends. For the writer and for the fighter, for the artist as for the bum, Algren reminds us that the individual, however exceptional, cannot survive in splendid isolation. Thus, our society bears a collective responsibility for extolling bland mediocrity while destroying the exceptional—talented and talentless alike. Any of us may be defined, Algren reminds us, by those we would choose not to see. And because we have forgotten the nameless nobodies that nobody knows, Algren says, we as citizens are collectively unable to become the somebodies we might have been.

In *Chicago: City on the Make,* Nelson Algren made his most incisive statement about his own ideological development as part of a great radical American tradition. Following the triumph of his masterpiece, *The Man with the Golden Arm,* Algren sat down and wrote an essay which defined the writer as representative for the unrepresented, articulator for the inarticulate, and defiant literary rebel against the legal system in the name of a "conscience in touch with humanity" (81). The book-length prose-poem presents Chicago history as told by Uncle Nelson. But the underlying thesis of the whole cryptic essay is a passionate argument for the homeless, more relevant than ever, now, forty-plus years after the work first appeared.

While the exuberant Cold Warriors congratulate themselves on their triumph over the Communist menace, Algren recalls that that menace was overblown in the first place. And that the real danger of losing our own souls is at least as real as ever. There is no time for complacent self-congratulation, the Ghost of Algren warns. Nor is it enough to keep one wary eye over our self-satisfied shoulder to make sure the hordes of homeless misfits aren't gaining on us. For the souls of the homeless, like the ghosts of the past, will come back to haunt the victorious society unless we remember the lessons they would have us learn.

Chicago, Algren insists, "had its big chance and fluffed it" by long ago deciding to be a town that specialized not in writers and musicians, but in what are known as " 'professional informants' formerly just 'informers' "(55). Recalling the Chicago Renaissance as more than a nostalgic moment of the past, Algren argues that the city that could have been a cultural leader chose to sacrifice its best talent for the sake of security at any price. Weaving references to the Haymarket Square Incident of May, 1886, (long remembered around the world and long forgotten in Chicago), with the Black Sox Scandal of 1919, (which Algren himself experiences as a nine year old baseball fan), Algren explains why Chicago is "the place built out of Man's ceaseless failure to overcome himself" (73). His bittersweet attachment to the city finds expression in one of his most memorable metaphors:

> Yet once you've come to be part of this particular patch, you'll never love another. Like loving a woman with a broken nose, you may well find lovelier lovelies. But never a lovely so real. (23)

Chicago's failure to provide a home for its most talented is the same failure, according to Algren, as the failure to provide any home for the city's most untalented and underprivileged losers, loners and troops-lost-in-action. Algren considers the wars for the "Salvation of importers' investments" (59) from a perspective going all the way back to World War I up through the Korean War, which was in the headlines as Algren wrote this essay in 1951. All the wars to save democracy and world peace. Algren concludes, have left us with a society based on the "Big Bluff" (58). And for the army of disillusioned veterans and unregenerate rejects who cannot get their lives to keep up with

the lives of the people on the billboards, there remain only "the forgotten battlegrounds":

> on the other side of the billboards, on the other side of the TV commercials, the other side of the headlines. . . . These are the pavement-colored thousands of the great city's nighttime streets, a separate race with no place to go and the whole long night to kill. (60)

In the *film noir* shadows of Algren's world, all the heroes are doomed to the endless life-or-death struggle. That is why, for Algren, "Every day is D-day under the El" (59). And that is also why it is simply not enough to build expressways to avoid the slums and always take out-of-town visitors only on the drive up Sheridan Road to the North Shore, "where the beat of the city's enormous heart, at the forge in the forest behind the towers, is unheard. . . ."(26). We need not wonder, Algren insists, why the picturesque estates of the high and mighty are so far removed from the actual heart of the city.

Yet that heart of Chicago, Algren staunchly maintains, continues to beat, though long broken and long abandoned, among the anonymous legions of nomads wandering the trails of the old neon wilderness from which the Indians and other potentially creative elements have traditionally been, first, systematically exploited, then expelled. "Out of the Twisted Twenties flowered the promise of Chicago as the homeland and heartland of an American renaissance," Algren laments (54). Yet, in the dire tones of the angry prophet, Algren invokes the authority of "the white-haired poet" Carl Sandburg, who "warned us thirty-two American League seasons and Lord-Knows-How-Many-Swindles-Ago" that "the slums take their revenge" (67):

> And you can take your pick of the avengers among the fast international set at any district-station lockup on any Saturday night. The lockups are always open and there are always new faces. Always someone you never met before, and where they all come from nobody knows and where they'll go from here nobody cares. (67)

Confirmation of this observation is as near as the latest *Sun-Times* expose of Juvenile Court. What makes Algren's essay unique is his claim that it is because of what happens in Juvenile Court that the writers and artists of the glorious half-remembered

past have given way to today's FBI Moles. In the Twenties, Algren suggests, Chicago came to a fork in the road and chose the more travelled path.

The essay begins with Biblical solemnity in its description of the Genesis of Chicago:

> To the east were the moving waters as far as the eye could follow. To the west a sea of grass as far as the wind might reach. Waters restlessly, with every motion, slipping out of used colors for new. (10)

Back when the Spirit of Creation hovered over the surface of Lake Michigan, the original port-of-Chicago, Algren reminds us, began as an Indian trading post—in the same spot there the automobiles on Lake Shore Drive now zoom along beneath the fabulous skyline of world-class architecture. The mystical separation of the elements, the higher and the lower, the water and the wind, the brand-new and the second hand, preceded the arrival of the first real Chicagoans, "the marked down derelicts with dollar signs for eyes" (10), known variously as "Founding Fathers" and "Dauntless Pioneers" and "Far-Visioned Conquerors," all of whom Algren lumps together in one all-embracing category: The Hustlers (12). As a city, Chicago itself began with the wise-guys on the make who arrived firstest with the mostest and got away with almost anything. Only belatedly, and with dim chances of success, did reform-minded "Do-Gooders" appear on the scene in Chicago history a la Algren (13).

Comparing Chicago politics to the national pastime, Algren identifies the opposing teams as the Hustlers, led by mayor Big Bill Thompson, who turned the town over, once and for all, to Al Capone, versus the line-up of Do-Gooders, beginning with Jane Addams, who founded Hull House in 1889 and drove her horse-and-buggy around the neighborhood now dominated by the University of Illinois at Chicago, organizing garbage collection and fighting for the right to indoor plumbing for all (14). The reason the reformers, moralists and prohibitionists could never catch up with the Hustlers, according to Algren, was simply that the ball-game was fixed, rigged in advance.

As far back as 1835, even before the city's incorporation, the Do-Gooders declared a "season of prayer" only to discover that the Hustlers had already rooted the devil too deeply in the

midst of the populace to ever be removed by an evangelical crusade. Having lost a referendum for closing saloons on Sunday, groups of praying women, as independently described by Emmett Dedmon in *Fabulous Chicago,* "began tours of the city saloons, kneeling in the sawdust and alternately weeping, singing and praying" for the souls of the bartenders and their patrons. When all appeals to divine assistance proved futile, the demonstrators moved to City Hall, only to serve as an embarrassment to the mayor who was actually nothing but a figure-head for Mike Macdonald, the "boss gambler" of the time (Dedmon 138). With gleeful malice, Algren describes the prohibitionists as a "horde of horrified Ohio spinsters" whose appeal to the whiskey and beer drinkers to kneel in prayer left "no record of anyone getting sawdust in his cuffs. . . ." (15).

For the Wets consistently won the vote of the working man, to the bewilderment of the prohibitionists. Then, the Great Panic of 1873 forced wages to fall below subsistence (Dedmon 149). Eventually, the contest between the Drys and the Wets was subsumed in class-conflict over the messianic dream of an eight-hour day. As a result, Algren points out, the streets thronged with demonstrators of another sort:

> . . . thousands who had come to rebuild the ruins of the great fire were carrying ragged banners crying BREAD OR BLOOD in the streets. Sunday was the one day of the week the working stiff who was still working had to himself. So he just dipped his kisser deeply into his stein, wiped his moustache tidily and ordered another. He knew be wasn't getting any eight-hour day by kneeling for it. (15)

Ever since, Algren explains, Chicago has remained "an infidel's capital six days a week" (16) where brightly lit billboards advertising various brands of whiskey still "reveal our backstreets to the indifferent stars" (16).

The sound materialistic foundation of machine politics, Algren assures us, goes back at least to the advent of Hinky Dink Kenna and Bathhouse John Coughlin, original tribal chieftains of the First Ward. Was it any worse, Hinky Dink wondered, for him to buy votes with free lunches than for the religious missions to try to save souls with the offer of coffee and doughnuts? And why, Algren asks, did the moralists who denounced the

First Ward most vociferously always also seem to turn out to be the landlords of the real estate, legally collecting the rent on illegal establishments they consistently condemned without ever having to visit the neighborhood (20-21)?

In a section called "The Silver-Colored Yesterday" Algren describes—in terms of an allegory corresponding to the experience of a hostile witness caught in the clutches of a House Un-American Activities Committee investigation—the sense of betrayal he experienced during the Black Sox Scandal, from the point of view of a young kid those family had just moved from a neighborhood on the South Side, where the White Sox reigned, to the alien National League Cubs' territory of the North Side. "The Black Sox were the Reds of that October and mine was the guilt of association" Algren confesses (36). Even though nine-year old Algren tries to defend himself for picking Swede Risberg, one of those accused of throwing the World Series of 1919, as his "all-time All-American fayvrut player," he finds he is confronted by a question he cannot easily answer. When the sandlot gang of neighborhood kids confront him, the self-appointed chairman of "The Committee" is a young entrepreneur who specializes in a primitive form of baseball cards in the shape of "colored paper picture strips of major league players" which he trades at a profit "as high as a dollar a week, of which fifty cents went to his Sunday-school collection plate" (37). It is this juvenile senator who poses the question Algren dreads:

> "What kind of American *are* you anyhow?" he wanted to know. He had me. I didn't know what kind I was.
>
> "No wonder you're always in right-field where nothin' ever comes—nobody could trust you in center!" (37)

The inevitable outcome, Algren recounts, was a sound thrashing administered "to ringing applause" by the Junior Senator himself:

> his Sunday-school change jingling righteously with his footwork. Leaving me at last with two chipped teeth, an orchid-colored shiner and no heart left, even for right field, for days.
>
> However do senators get so close to God? (39)

However unjust his punishment, Algren concludes, he learned an important lesson about the reality of Chicago, "what Hustlertown, sooner or later, teaches all sandlot sprouts. 'Everybody's out for the Buck. Even big-leaguers' " (39).

Algren would never in his life have wanted to be politically correct. He would have recalled, of course, that the term "ideologically correct" began as a species of Stalinist jargon, used to attempt to stamp out anyone suspected of being a Trotskyite, Anarchist or Social Democrat. Yet Algren wasn't any of those things either. He was simply an American writer who worked consciously within a well-defined native tradition, identifying his own position with:

> the great Lincolnian liberals, the ones who stuck out their stubborn necks in the ceaseless battle between the rights of the Owners and the rights of Man, the stiff-necked wonders who could be broken but couldn't be bent: Dreiser, Altgeld, Debs. (66)

Algren's political heroes were novelist Theodore Dreiser, author of *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy,* Governor Peter Altgeld who committed political suicide by pardoning the Haymarket Square convicts who had not already been hung, and Eugene V. Debs who ran for President of the United States from a jail-cell and stated that "While there is a soul in prison, I am not free (95)."

In terms of literary influence, Algren seems to embrace and yet go a crucial step beyond what has been defined as the Chicago School of literary realism. From Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Dreiser and others, Algren adapted the central tenet that social context is the determining factor of individual development. From Sherwood Anderson, he inherited the notion that "It is the most unbelievably difficult task to catch, understand and record your own mood" (qtd. in Dedmon 274). He built on the foundation of the muckrakers and literary journalists who crafted their style with a "strong tone of social protest" which grew out of "the reporter's traditional disrespect for authority and a skill in dealing with raw materials of the drama to be found in ordinary life" (Dedmon 274).

There is no doubt that Algren would have endorsed Sandburg's brief definition of the Chicago school:

> Here's the difference between us and Dante: He wrote a lot about Hell and never saw the place. We're writing about Chicago after looking the town over. (qtd. in Dedmon 276)

But Algren went through and beyond materialistic realism to invent a new kind of literary mirror to reflect social reality

from the bottom of the social heirarchy. Algren committed himself, as a writer, to continuing the fight of Dreiser, Altgeld and Debs. And he discovered a new vein of inspiration in the old mine-shaft of the city's dead-end streets. It is not the elite of society that represents its true face and reveals its true values, Algren consistently argues. Rather, it is the downtrodden, the outcast, the despised and forgotten that really represent Chicago, America, and the Western world.

Those who accused him of sentimentalizing social rejects and romanticizing the down-and-out underworld miss the point. It is not the soul of the disreputable that Algren glorifies, but the phony complacency of the comfortable and well-respected that he would purge of all that its established mediocrity has oppressed, suppressed and repressed. Through the marginal elements of society, Algren insists, we see the clearest representation of who we, as the literate and cultured elite, really are. *We* are the homeless. *We* are the rootless and anonymous faces lost in the crowd. For when we turn our back on the losers of American society, it is *we* who get lost. Algren believed in the exceptional, the outstanding, the superb, not the boring idol worship of the masses. He declared war on the charade of political correctness whether that lame excuse for mediocre fraudulence masquerades as the moral majority or a clique of pseudo-nonconformists. Algren was not a follower of any movement other than his own.

From the wide expanse of Whitman's vision, he selected a narrow, indeed microscopic focus on the universalism that reached out to the condemned and the accused, whatever their crimes. For as Whitman first wrote, and as Algren duly quoted:

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

Algren implies that the only political correctness possible is that of the Haymarket Martyrs "standing in white muslin robes, hands cuffed behind, at the gallows' head" (62). And the only possible politically correct attitude in Algren's view is that of the youngest of those sacrificial lambs on the altar of the eight-hour day:

> "I despise your order, your law, your force propped authority," the twenty-two year old defied the ancient remaindered judge. "Hang me for it!" (44)

In effect, Algren presents himself as the last genuine American radical, the lonely descendent of a great native-born tradition. In the Foreword to the 1961 re-publication of *Chicago: City on the Make,* printed as an Afterword in the most recent 1987 edition, Algren emphasized his sense of bitterness, as of one who has been been wholly trusting and sincere only to be betrayed. Even his old friend Richard Wright, Algren suggests, sold his birthright by becoming an expatriate in Paris (97). It is not multi-culturalism that would have disturbed Algren, but pseudo-culturalism in all its multitude of forms.

His criticism of Chicago is devastating and can be summed up in a single word: mediocrity. Further, Algren warns, the frightened herd of the silent majority are not merely content with abandoning their most rare and exceptional compatriots; they must stampede and stomp everyone who is really talented, unusual, or merely different, into the dust of the pavement. For, as Algren warns us, "Mediocrity is never a passive lack of originality: it avenges its deprivation" (87). Given the burden of Algren's complaint, it is no wonder, surely, that he was not well-received as a prophet in his own hometown. Viewed in retrospect, Algren claimed, a decade after his prose-poem was first published, that it had only grown more significant through the Fifties. And, from our own perspective of the Nineties, we can see that his central point is even more valid than ever, at the same time that it seems all the more likely to be suppressed and forgotten.

> This essay carried the implication that the castaways of Western civilization were not restless through instruction from the devils in the Kremlin; but from the instruction of the hearts of men everywhere where men wish to own their own lives. (106)

And even now, still wandering along the trails of Chicago's neon wilderness, the "great city's troubled heart," long-lost-and-long-forgotten, continues to beat among the anonymous legions of nomads, those without any name or standing among established and respectable society:

> The useless, helpless nobodies nobody knows: that go as the snow goes, where the wind blows, there and there and there, down any old can-and-ashcan alley at all . . . there where they sleep the all-night movies through and wait for rain or peace or snow: there, there, beats Chicago's heart.

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VISUAL ARTISTRY IN WRIGHT MORRIS'S *PLAINS SONG FOR FEMALE VOICES*

JOSEPH J. WYDEVEN

Plains Song for Female Voices, published by Wright Morris just before his seventieth birthday, is a wise and generous book; perhaps sensing it would be his final novel, Morris appears to clarify his view of women in a prose which is both remarkably dense and conciliatory: it is at once one of his most complex books and his most compassionate. *Plains Song* is a work of fiction, sometimes quite subtle, and though it is given to us through words, it is indebted to other arts as well—to the music suggested by its title, and more importantly, if less obviously, to photography, as suggested by Morris's repeated use of one of his most haunting photographs.

Plains Song for Female Voices tells the story of three generations of women in the Atkins family, focusing most carefully on the trio of Cora, the mother; Madge, her daughter; and Sharon Rose, Cora's niece. The novel begins—reminiscent of Katherine Anne Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall"—with Cora on her deathbed, nudged to memories of her past. In her review of that past Cora marries Emerson Atkins (to please her father) and finds herself removed from the East to the Nebraska plains. Cora is an unlikely matriarch, having little experience in the world and a culturally stifled consciousness. One of the key events in the novel is Cora's one and only sexual experience, with her husband, "likened to an operation without the anesthesia" (14),[1] during which she bites her hand to the bone in horrified protest, and the next morning has to endure Emerson's excuse to the doctor: "Horse bit her." The child born from this "nightmare" is Madge, who grows into contentment with her lot on the farm.

In contrast to Madge is Sharon Rose, the daughter of Emerson's brother Orion and his wife Belle Rooney. When Belle Rooney dies, Cora takes over the care of her children. The relationship between Madge and Sharon Rose is very close, until the day Sharon protests Madge's spooning with a boy; when Sharon screams out for all to hear, "Is he looking for a wife or a housemaid?" Cora hits Sharon's hand with a hairbrush. This scene reverberates throughout the novel, a symbol both of the psychological gulf between Cora and Sharon and of the guilt both women experience when they remember the incident in years to come.

Madge marries her man, Ned Kibbee, and Sharon leaves for the university, then for Chicago and a career in music. Madge finds satisfaction in her role as wife and mother, although she is reluctant to admit her pleasure in sex; Sharon, on the other hand, never marries, finding her emotional satisfactions in music, and overcoming loneliness in friendships with women. In time she brings Blanche, Madge's oldest daughter, to live with her in Chicago, but then sends her back when it becomes clear that Blanche carries too much of the half-submerged farm environment which causes Sharon such discomfort. During her lifetime, Sharon returns three times to Nebraska, the last time for Cora's funeral, by which time the home place has been bulldozed under, and the Atkins family is into its fourth generation.

In the final scene, Sharon returns from the funeral to her motel, where she shares a sunrise with a new acquaintance, Alexandra Selkirk, an outspoken, self-assured feminist. This ritual of rebirth supports the theme of continuity of female presence in the world, modified now not only by the intelligence and energy of the feminist movement (as represented by Alexandra's program), but also by the womanly strength of character (as represented by Cora and carried into Morris's presentation of Alexandra's assured self-mockery). With Sharon, the reader comes to acknowledge the force of Cora's example—what she has made of her tenure in the world, despite the cultural limitations imposed on her. Morris seems to say that fidelity to one's nature is essential to overcome the excessively rationalized and privileged forces of culture. If this is a feminist novel, as many have argued, its feminism must be seen essentially as a corrective to cultural arrogance.

As always when describing Morris's novels, however, synopsis is inadequate. For as readers of Morris know, it is the author's narrative style which carries much of his meaning. Indeed, as Morris says, "I discovered that a narrative could be sustained without plotting, and I have held to that practice." It is important also that he ties his "profoundly oral" narrative method to his perception of time. For Morris, the "old-style linear narration" is inappropriate. "That is not the way I comprehended time. My time is cyclical—abstract, yet keenly felt" (*Paris Review* 56-7). The style he devised for *Plains Song* makes room both for necessary chronology and a paradoxical timelessness based on the mind as receptor, processor, and reviser of images.

As Ellen Serlin Uffen writes, in *Plains Song* Morris "chooses to suggest depths, but not to plumb them. The result is a book of nuances" (102).[2] The narrative presentation of *Plains Song* is thus problematic. While we must read it as a novel about people in the flow of time, it is also very important to be attentive to Morris's emphasis on how events from the past are recycled in memory, where they receive new interpretation and come to carry new meaning. This idea of the mind as a selective repository of "raw materials" has supported Morris's major themes since his discovery in the 1940s that he could in fact reconstruct the past he did not know he had.

Plains Song is a novel about pioneer and post-frontier experience on the Plains, told from the multiple (female) perspectives suggested by the plainsong of Christian music history. But more important than music, because more closely related to narrative method, is photography. I have argued elsewhere that Morris's characteristic mannerisms as a writer were forged in relation to his involvement with photography in the years of his apprenticeship; his experiments with combined photo-text possibilities led him to think "photographically" in some of his major fiction (Wydeven, "Focus and Frame"). From the photo-texts *The Inhabitants* (1946) and *The Home Place* (1948), Morris moved on to *The Works of Love* (1952), a novel (*without* actual photographs) taking him six years of trial and error effort, and written finally in a prose style stressing visual perception and "photographic" processes. As Morris has said, "I do not give up the camera eye when I am writing—merely the camera" (*Structures and Artifacts* 120). I believe the modification of this camera eye to prose is largely responsible for the obliquity of Morris's style—a style designed to encourage readers to further reflections on their own. David Madden speaks of Morris's rhetoric of meditation to account for such effects (102).

This stylistic obliquity is carried fully into *Plains Song*, in a narrative method which necessarily adheres to essential human time *but also* employs an emphasis on time stopped, then reviewed and revised in memory. Its emphasis is on objects and events snipped from time for special focus; two particular events are continually reiterated in fresh circumstances: Cora's sexual experience resulting in her scarred hand and the time when she strikes Sharon's hand with the hairbrush.

That photography is important to the conception of *Plains Song* is obvious from the actual photo Morris employs to separate the fourteen "chapters."[3] In the original photograph, taken by Morris in 1947 and entitled "Reflection in Oval Mirror, Home Place" (*Photographs & Words*, Plate 4), the oval is framed within a rectangle. As the photo is used in the novel, however, this frame is gone, causing ambiguity: readers must pause to study what they see: is it a window, a mirror, or merely a photograph similar to those pictured within the image itself?

Beginning with this photograph and its obvious ambiguities, *Plains Song* is insistently visual. Morris almost always zooms in on the eye, the immediate agent of visual perception: Madge's eyes are like buttons or "raisins stuck into the dough of a raw sugar cookie" (51); Sharon Rose's eyes are large, unblinking, direct, intense (65); Cora's are "luminous," "lustrous" (200-203), and perceived by Sharon Rose as "[t]he intense staring eyes . . . of icons" (88). Belle Rooney has "darting blackberry eyes" (47); Blanche has eyes "like lanterns" (139: "If a lighted candle could be placed in her mouth, would she glow with an inner light?" [147]). In addition, there are ubiquitous references to "lidded" or "averted" eyes, signifying knowledge refused or social collusion denied, offset by "knowing glances" between people, signifying the sharing of "secret" knowledge. It is characteristic of Morris that sometimes he even informs us when these glances are *not* exchanged.

At the core of this visual approach, then, the act of perception is itself central, with Morris often placing his characters into attitudes of visual reception and intersubjective visual exchange.

A particularly involved example of this exchange, with Morris's typical humor, occurs during a meal during Sharon's second return to Nebraska. Appalled by what she sees as animal-like behavior everywhere about her, Sharon observes Avery Dickel, Fayrene's beau who plans to be a "veter-ary": "The way he stared at her, as he chewed, upset her less than his unawareness that she was gazing at him" (127). Morris here presents a revealing case of a critic of bad manners behaving badly! He often uses such explicit visual means to show the complexity of even the simplest human interactions—which are shown to be not quite so simple after all.

It may be useful here to suggest that what Morris does in the prose of *Plains Song* is similar to what John Berger and Jean Mohr attempt almost entirely through a sequence of 150 photographs in *Another Way of Telling:* to "follow, for a few minutes, the mind of an old woman considering her life" (133). Just as Berger and Mohr wish to encourage readers to deeper contemplation of the interior realities of French peasant life, so does Morris ask us to get inside the lives of these archetypal American women. *Plains Song,* though not a book of photographs, is indeed "photographic" in its emphasis on knowledge gained through perception. Reading this book is often, indeed, similar to viewing photographic sequences—"extended, sustained bodies of work, where single images refer to others and alter their visual and cognitive weight and significance . . . ," in patterns sometimes so demanding "they can wear you out with their subtle intricacies" (Searle 10, 19). Morris, too, makes enormous demands of us, giving us a great deal of information to remember and to *reconsider* when he alludes to pieces of it without warning and in fresh context.

Some idea of this difficulty can be seen by examining and comparing two passages, one at the beginning, the other at the end of the novel: both involve Morris's use of mirrors and thus serve to frame the tale—and to connect Cora firmly to Alexandra Selkirk. Early in the novel Morris links Cora's "religious nature" to her feelings about mirrors:

> She never lacked for self-knowledge in the matter of vanity. Mirrors impressed her as suspect by nature in the way they presented a graven image. She keenly and truly felt the deception of her reflected glance. . . . She had never held a mirror in such a manner that she might see [herself from behind]. . . . Neither had she (since a child) gazed with open eyes on what the Lord had created below her neck. (4)

Clearly Cora's sense of self is not derived from self-conscious visual evidence. Her reluctance before the mirror is another way of averting her eyes, to support her belief that reflection on the body is indecent. She rejects the insights which Jenijoy La Belle says mirrors may provide "into the reciprocal interchanges between interiority and exteriority as these create what a woman is to herself and to her culture" (9). Indeed, what Sharon gradually comes to accept in Cora is her ability to maintain her self-identity without need of social validation.

The mirror image which ends the book is linked to the earlier passage regarding Cora. The image reflected is that of Sharon's new acquaintance, Alexandra Selkirk:

> Against the light of the bathroom her flat, skeletal figure appears to be a resurrection of Cora. She faced the mirror to draw a comb through her short coarse hair. As if hallucinating, Sharon seemed to see a wire-handled syrup pail dangling from her hand, weighted with eggs. . . .
>
> Still facing the mirror, Alexandra said, "I'm going for a walk. I want to see the sunrise. Do you know the sun is perpetually rising? Every moment somewhere. Isn't that awesome? What she saw in the mirror led her to smile. She turned to say, "You want to join me?"
>
> What expression did she surprise on Sharon's face? For a moment it shamed her, it was so open, betraying her customary independence.
>
> Alexandra said, "Do I look a sight? Who is there to see me but God?"
>
> Sharon had already moved to rise from the bed. "I'm coming," she said. "I've not seen a sunrise since I was a child." (228-29)

The mirror is the most obvious link between the two passages: what the private (and socially invisible) Cora and the very public (hence highly visible) Alexandra Selkirk see reflected back to them is not so very dissimilar, at least from Sharon's viewpoint. But what they make of what they see is intensely different, marking a kind of evolution of social and political consciousness which is the point of the book. Cora's tacit role in this evolution

is essential, for carried through her is a strength of character which Sharon must recognize and cherish; Sharon's "evolution" is concluded when she relinquishes her pity of Cora and accepts the lesson of Cora's life. Her success is marked by her observation of the similarities between Cora and Alexandra, when she seems to see, "as if hallucinating," Alexandra carrying Cora's egg pail.

Much of this meaning is carried through religious imagery. Cora's reluctance before her mirror is represented by her fear of "graven images": to focus on the human body would be to worship a false god, deflecting from the non-denominational God she appears never to question. Alexandra, on the other hand, has been liberated from exterior social and religious interpretations of her body: she simply accepts her body with self-assured humor. When she says to Sharon, "Do I look a sight? Who is there to see me but God?" she puts God into context with the "same old tyrant" rooster who has been crowing outside the window "with young male assurance" (227-28)—that is, she believes the meanings of both God and the rooster have been culturally coded—and are hence open to humorous critique. At the same time, however, her allusion to the rising sun of Ecclesiastes supports the inter generational theme of the book, and it connects her thoroughly to Cora.

But what of Sharon Rose's liberation? At the funeral service for Cora, Sharon had listened to "Abide with Me" and brooded on the hymn's meaning: "But what, indeed, had abided? The liberation from her burdens, the works and meager effects of Cora had been erased from the earth." In the church Sharon thinks of this erasure as a "violation" and an "ultimate rejection" (214-15)—but this is a view which she must overcome. Morris's use of symbolism is found everywhere in *Plains Song*, but it is particularly significant in the concluding chapter in which Sharon transcends mere independence and appears to achieve release from guilt into a state of freedom, centered in the rebirth-sunrise. Marilyn Arnold writes that in *Plains Song* "the language and imagery of redemption proliferate. Morris not only provides the suggestion of the crucifixion in the name of the motel [The Crossways], but also interjects a 'cock's crow' into the scene, restoring a myriad of details from Sharon's past 'to the glow of life'"; Arnold also draws attention to Morris's emphatic "resurrection of Cora" in Alexandra (61).

It should be noted as well that when the two women approach the dawn, Sharon says she has "not seen a sunrise since I was a child." This appears to deliberately echo the passage quoted earlier, when we read that "since a child" Cora had not gazed at her naked body. What the novel completes is a journey through Cora's life, then her death and "resurrection" in Sharon's perception of Alexandra; the novel carries a message of evolutionary continuity which links Cora's strong-willed and nearly celibate asceticism to Alexandra's unconcern for debilitating cultural codings. As the book links generations, so it connects deaths to births. Thus, when Sharon sees the sunrise, she accepts both Cora's "resurrection" and enters into freedom from a self-abnegation she had criticized in Cora but failed earlier to see in herself.

Finally, it is useful to ask how Sharon's change of consciousness is brought about in *Plains Song:* how, that is, is her mind readied for such transformation? This is pertinent because in many of his novels Morris inserts a "thrust from behind" which impels his protagonists to seek life-affirming change. Often his characters undergo some ritual of initiation whereby their senses are "drugged" and rational thought is suspended. Such an event occurs, for example, to Floyd Warner in *A Life* to prepare him to accept the rightness of his death from the hands of Blackbird. Such an event occurs as well in *Plains Song,* when Sharon is concluding her second visit. She had been extremely critical, to the point of rudeness, of the "animal-like" existence of those remaining in Nebraska. As she sits in the car after the family meal, she experiences a "drugged," "drowsing," "confused" condition: "The heat drone of the insects, the stupor of the food, and the jostle of the car seemed to blur the distinction between herself and the swarming life around her. Morris adds: "Her soul (what else could it be") experienced a sense of liberation in its loss of self" (135). This event prepares her for her final visit, when her liberation through full acceptance truly occurs. She is being prepared for transformation.

But there is yet another way Morris suggests preparation for knowledge in *Plains Song,* one very much in keeping with Morris's deliberate use of visual imagery to suggest conceptual interpretations—and one too which suggests a more crucial role for Blanche in the evolution of consciousness portrayed in the book. When the book ends, Blanche's future remains unknown,

but she is described as having Cora's "wraith-like figure" and her "lustrous eyes" (203). Earlier, Sharon had sought to "save" her by bringing her to the city, and the scene in which she recognizes her folly is worth recalling. Blanche is supposed to meet Sharon at the zoo, but Blanche fails to appear. When Sharon finds her, she is with a boy who has given her "some sort of exotic chicken"; the boy slips away on Sharon's approach, but Blanche continues to stroke the chicken's "plumed, brightly hued topknot" (159). The scene, with all its phallic suggestion, horrifies Sharon: she sends Blanche home. Later, when Sharon returns for Cora's funeral, she is given Blanche's room, where drawn and painted directly on the wall are Blanche's artistic efforts, including "an exotic-looking bird, with a dishevelled topknot" and eyes "open, and bright as hatpins" (205).

But the crucial bird event, written so as to occur directly before the family's departure for Cora's funeral service, takes place during one of Morris's inimitable family meal scenes, additional table leaves inevitably installed. Sharon looks up to see a bird fluttering above:

> The bird, a parakeet or canary, hovered as if it intended to nest in Sharon's hair. Did she gasp? The startled bird rose toward the ceiling, then in a faltering, bobbing flight it moved from head to head, circling the table, pausing as if confused over the head of Caroline. (212)

The bird is Blanche's, but it finds Blanche's place at the table occupied by Sharon, and thus it circles "from head to head."

Is it pushing an interpretation of *Plains Song* too hard to suggest that Morris has extended his religious imagery to incorporate a veiled image of the Holy Ghost, intended to bestow enlightenment on the assembled before they make their final farewell to Cora? This is a book, after all, in which God the Father is exposed by Alexandra Selkirk as a cultural concept supporting the male status quo: Alexandra asks, "Who said let them have dominion over the whole shebang? *He* did. We've been living under him all of these goddam centuries" (224). Those words—the "He" in charge of the shebang—are loaded with meaning.

Is it conceivable, too, that there is a new member in the Trinity? Alexandra believes there is a new world coming, and

Sharon is led, too, to question the original creation. Indeed, as Sharon makes her way to join Alexandra at the Crossways Inn, her attention is drawn to "the cave-like gloom" inside "a dark, grotto-like entrance." Inside a young man with a "corpse-like pallor" entertains an audience by singing an obscene song and simulating an orgasm with the shaft of a microphone extended from his crotch. Sharon is horrified by his "crouching, cringing manner, . . . the corruption of his nature" (218-19). Is this "gargoyle" Yeats's new rough beast, slouching towards Bethlehem to be born? Just as the males of *Man and Boy* (1951) and *The Deep Sleep* (1953) had defaulted on their responsibilities (Morris, "Letter" 99), so this young man may represent the onanistic narcissism of a culture based only on appetite, heedless of values carried from the past. Turning her back, Sharon is led away towards Alexandra and the sunrise—towards a ritual of reconciliation marking the birth of a new incarnation, the Son of God replaced by daughters capable of carrying the past into the present: the Alexandras, Sharons, and Blanches of the New World.

I said at the beginning that *Plains Song* is a wise and generous book; it seems to me an archive of Morris's experience and judgment, as well as a repository of visual images for his readers to examine. Much of what we find there is offered through images emphasizing the process of seeing as a means of making meaning. In such an effort the Holy Ghost remains necessary: in *Plains Song for Female Voices* Morris adds a new element to his epistemology, a bird offering a hard-won wisdom.

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NOTES

1. References to *Plains Song for Female Voices* are to the first edition from Harper and Row. Page numbers are provided in the text.
2. In addition to those studies of *Plains Song* specifically cited in the text, see Roy K. Bird, *Wright Morris: Memory and Imagination* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985); Reginald Dyck, "Revisiting and Revising the West: Willa Gather's *My Antonia* and Wright Morris' *Plains Song*" (*Modern Fiction Studies* 36 [1990], 25-37; Linda Lewis, "*Plains Song*: Wright Morris's New Melody for Audacious Female Voices" (*Great Plains Quarterly* 8 [Winter 1988], 29-37); Lynne Waldeland, "*Plains Song:* Women's Voices in the Fiction of Wright Morris" (*Critiaue* 24 [1982], 7-19); and Joseph J. Wydeven, "Wright Morris, Women, and American Culture" (*Women and Western Literature*, ed. Helen Stauffer and Susan Rosowski [Troy, NY: Whitston Press, 1982, pp. 212-229]).

3. The photograph is found only in the Harper hardcover edition; the paperback edition from Penguin replaces it with a drawn sketch; the Godine edition leaves the fourteen spaces blank.

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"THE GLEAMING OBSIDIAN SHARD": JANE SMILEY'S *A THOUSAND ACRES*

JANE S. BAKERMAN

The dustjacket of Jane Smiley's fine new novel, *A Thousand Acres*, features a beautiful Amish quilt done in red, tan, and black horizontal stripes, its main decoration the neat, disciplined patterns stitched into the plain fabrics.[1] A color publicity still depicts Smiley standing before a vivid, multi-hued Iowa quilt of intricate design and construction.[2] This quilt's exploitation of depth and its strong vertical and horizontal statements capture the viewer's attention initially. Closer examination, however, reveals that pinwheels also swirl across its surface.

In their varying ways, both quilts make wonderful symbols for *A Thousand Acres*. The Amish quilt suggests simplicity, beauty, and order, the fabled surface serenity of the agricultural society which is Smiley's topic. The Iowa quilt is much more overtly complex. Certainly, its pattern reveals order and design, but serenity is not the goal of its construction. This quilt depicts controlled tumult. Many colors, four separate directional patterns, and the construction of individual blocks vie for attention. It is only the great skill of the quilt-maker which brings a thrilling unity to the variety of her materials.

Reading *A Thousand Acres* is very like carefully examining a wonderful quilt, for Smiley has constructed her novel much as one designs good quilt patterns. She combines individual pieces—observations, incidents, memories, realizations—into blocks which steadily reveal more and more about the families she depicts. Connected into sections, these family blocks make acute comments about the American heartland, for Midwestern agriculture and attitudes are the subject here, emblematic of the agrarian American Dream as traditionally perceived. Indeed,

Smiley creates "an exact and exhilarating sense of place" (Duffy 92) by evoking,

> the unrelenting, insular world of farm life, the symbiotic relationships between a farmer and his land as well as those among other members of the rural community. She contrasts the stringencies of nature with those of human nature: the sting of sibling rivalry, the tensions of marriage, the psychological burdens of children, the passion of lovers. (*PW* 44)

Ultimately, as the all-over pattern of the novel is finally revealed, the assembled sections make a commanding statement about American culture; indeed, it is "sheer Americanness that gives [*A Thousand Acres*] . . . its soul and roots" (Duffy 92). By probing the heart of the Heartland, Smiley challenges Americans to redeem their nation from its current problems. Central to those problems, she suggests, is the public assumption that if all looks well, all *is* well and the private determination that surface propriety and prosperity substitute adequately for familial health and personal integrity.

In fact, it's almost impossible to overemphasize the importance of "appearances," of "surface," to this novel because Smiley argues that communities rely upon surface images in order to function just as many assume that the peace and beauty of the agrarian American Dream are necessary to our national well-being. People are judged by the way they, their homes, and their farms look. In a period of extreme crisis, Ginny, the protagonist, is warned that "appearances are everything" (284), and she goes on to say,

> I was so remarkably comfortable with the discipline of making a good appearance! It was like going back to school or church after a long absence. It had ritual and measure. Tasks proliferated . . . for the great open invisible eye of The Neighbors to judge and enjoy. . . . That Eye was always looking, day and night, even when there were no neighbors in sight. (285-286)

This "self-induced illusion that everything would turn out fine, when we had all kinds of evidence that it wouldn't" (154) may fool the neighbors and delude oneself, but it is no substitute for redemptive, healthful action, and thus, Jane Smiley's vision of American life is discomforting. Moreover, Smiley is very open about the fact that *A Thousand Acres* is a message novel.

In accepting the 1992 National Book Critics Circle award for fiction, Smiley,

> stressed that the book was a 'complex argument against a certain kind of farming and land use, that is leading us towards an environmental disaster, the destruction of the lives of people and of the moral life of our country.' Iowa, she said, was 'turning into El Salvador.' ("17th NBCC Awards," 10)

Furthermore, *Time* identifies Jane Smiley as "a believer in the radical agriculture movement," who,

> sees an inescapable link between the exploitation of land and that of women. . . .
>
> 'Women, just like nature or the land, have been seen as something to be used,' says Smiley. 'Feminists insist that women have intrinsic value, just as environmentalists believe that nature has its own worth, independent of its use to man.' (Duffy, 92)

Such open admission of the political themes of any novel is dangerous. At the very least, it could limit a book's popularity. Here, however, Smiley's "tightly controlled prose propels tension to nearly unbearable extremes" (*PW* 44), and she raises,

> profound questions about human conduct and moral responsibility, especially about family relationships and the guilt and bitterness they can foster. (*PW* 44)

Smiley, never one to avoid a challenge, has taken further authorial risks. *A Thousand Acres* is a modern American treatment of *King Lear* as the titles of several reviews indicate: "The Case for Goneril and Regan" *(Time)*, "Lear in Iowa: Family Farm, Family Trouble" *(The Wall Street Journal)*, and "Lear in Zebulon County" *(The New York Times Book Review)*. Inviting comparisons to *Lear* and to Akira Kurosawa's *Ran*, which also inspired Smiley (Duffy, 92), is more dangerous business. However, Jane Smiley, whose previous works include *Duplicate Keys* and *Ordinary Love and Good Will*, triumphs over this challenge as well:

> this powerful and poignant book doesn't lean against Lear for support. Jane Smiley takes the truths therein and lights them up her way, making the perils of family and property and being a daughter real and personal and new and honest and hurtful all over again. (Carlson 12)

What this novel does do, Carlson goes on to say, "is to remind us again of why *King Lear* has lasted" (12). And Julia Just, in a partially unsympathetic review—she finds, for instance, that "the characters' motivations sometimes hover on the outer edges of plausibility" (A14)—declares that, nevertheless,

> the novel's center holds firm. Its narrative momentum is undeniable, as is the psychological truth . . . underlying the mortal combat between Larry Cook and his daughters and among the newly estranged sisters. (A14)

The unraveling of the Cook dynasty forms the plot of *A Thousand Acres*. Things fall apart when the Cooks openly begin operating as individuals rather than as a unit. None of them is capable of functioning as an independent adult, and their incapacity springs directly from practicing denial. While the Cooks kept the surface of their lives in good trim—ignoring such problems as self-abasement, cruelty, and drunkenness—each individual's wellbeing corroded.

Just before the great farm crisis of the eighties, Larry Cook, the leading farmer in Zebulon County, Iowa, suddenly announces plans to retire from farming and to divide his assets among his three daughters: Ginny and Rose, who, with their husbands work Cook land, and Caroline, a Des Moines attorney. Only Caroline resists this change. For various reasons, her sisters and their spouses find the plan both appealing and logical. By years of hard work and good production, they feel, they have earned rights to the property and, perhaps even more importantly, to freedom from the subservience Larry Cook has exacted. In a very real sense, neither Ginny, Rose, Ty, or Pete has ever been recognized as an adult. Larry has controlled everything.

What none of the Cooks realizes is that this decision will shatter the family; no two of them will ever again be really close to one another, though initially, they appear to be fully and warmly united. "Appear," of course, is the key word here, for from the outset, Smiley sounds notes of apprehension and warning. Ginny, the narrator, says of her father, for instance:

> My earliest memories of him are of being afraid to look him in the eye, to look at him at all. He was too big and his voice was too deep. If I had to speak to him, I addressed his overalls, his shirt, his boots. . . . If he kissed me, I endured it, offered a little hug in return. (19)

In a parallel plot, Harold Clark, Larry's friendly neighborhood rival, toys with the lives and expectations of his sons—stolid, faithful Loren, who has always helped his father on their farm, and Jess, back in Zebulon County after thirteen years of absence, having deserted from the army during the Viet Nam War. The central action begins at a party celebrating Harold's purchase of a "brand-new, enclosed, air-conditioned International Harvester tractor with a tape cassette player" (17). But even before the party is well launched, Ginny notes that Larry teases Harold pretty sharply about the tractor, and she tells us,

> the real bone of contention was not that Harold had pulled ahead of my father in the machinery competition, but that he hadn't divulged how he'd financed the purchase, whether cold, out of savings and last year's profits (in which case, he was doing better than my father thought, and better than my father), or by going to the bank. . . . My father didn't know and that annoyed him. (17)

Harold and Larry may be best friends, but they are also competitors, and the power to sting one another lies beneath the friendly surface:

> Jane Smiley knows that the forces at play in any rural society are powerful and not unsophisticated. There is nature to contend with. There's the housewives' constant struggle to keep the farm out of the house. And there is the rivalry of farmer against farmer, the competition for success with the crops, with machinery and with the bank—which ends sometimes in vying for one another's farms. (Carlson 12)

Just as Ginny suggests the covert tension between her and her father and between her father and his friend early in the narrative, so she soon reveals that there are problems within her own marriage and within that of her sister, Rose. Rose's husband, Pete, is ambitious, tempestuous, even violent—he once broke her arm. Rose does not take these traits lightly, sometimes almost goading Pete. Thus, early on, readers speculate that perhaps the cancer attacking Rose's body is a symbol of her troubled personal life.

Ginny and Ty also operate under considerable stress. Ty is often the peace-maker between his father- and brother-in-law, and Ginny, also a conciliator, at times races about cooking breakfast in separate houses: her own, her father's (because he prefers not to eat elsewhere), and Rose and Pete's (because Rose is recovering from surgery). Though both are peaceable by nature, Ty and Ginny do not always agree. Though Ginny has suffered five miscarriages, Ty knows about only three. Disregarding her husband's insistence that they stop trying to conceive, Ginny has refused to give up, keeping her further attempts a secret from him. And in a brilliant bit of foreshadowing, Smiley uses Ginny's secrecy to show how badly she misses the autonomy, the full adulthood, denied her by her father. Ginny says,

> One of the many benefits of this private project, thought at the time, was that it showed me a whole secret world, a way to have two lives, to be two selves. I felt larger and more various than I had in years, full of unknowns, and also of untapped possibilities. (26)

One such possibility which Ginny explores is adultery. She begins an affair with Jess Clark who is both physically attractive and emotionally intriguing—simultaneously familiar and strange. Jess is a satisfying lover, but their affair is doomed, a fact Smiley symbolizes with typical sophistication. For instance, early on, Ginny realizes:

> that some of the worst things I had feared and imagined had happened to [Jess] . . . hadn't he been damned and repudiated, worse than abandoned—cast out—by his father as the opening event of his adult life? (69)

Secondly, Ginny and Jess's most intimate moments—both physically and emotionally—take place at "the little dump . . . in a cleft behind a wild rose thicket that we [formerly] used for refuse" (122). Like Jess, the dump is both familiar and strange, for though no one else uses it, Ginny doesn't " 'recognize anything here' " (122). Moreover, the dump itself is deceptive. In 1979, the year of the novel's primary action, the dump seems to be a natural "bit of prairie"; yet, as Ginny reminds Jess, " 'When the pioneers got here, [it] was all under water' " (124). An odd blend of junk and beauty, of nature and artifice, the dump is an ironic symbol of Ginny's new "freedom," and clearly signifies the instability of her affair.

It is also ironic that Ginny finds deception invigorating, for actually, instead of possibilities, Ginny's excitement indicates great naivete. Though she is the oldest of the three sisters, she is the most trusting and the most immature, maintaining her innocence by concentrating on smoothing family relationships. Once she opens herself to the exciting possibilities of duplicity, however, she also opens to ugly memories long suppressed. Once she scratches that seemingly placid, harmonious surface, shocking depths gape beneath her feet.

When Larry Cook, whose mental health deteriorates rapidly, decides to reclaim his gift, Ginny must finally confront his erratic behavior, his drinking, his almost constant fury. Franker, pricklier, extremely angry, Rose intensifies antagonism against their father by forcing painful memories back into Ginny's consciousness. This is the deadliest secret, a key to Jane Smiley's vision of the Lear/daughters relationship, for she was forcibly struck by an observation in Kurosawa's film; "one son tells the old man that his children are what he made them" (Duffy 92). Gradually, Ginny realizes that she and Rose *have* been shaped by Larry's battering, by his sexual abuse, by the consequent secrecy and isolation it imposed, and by his refusal to allow her—or anyone in her generation—autonomy.

Initially, Ginny sees herself as wholly united with Rose, a comradeship strengthened, she supposes, by their mother's early death and by their joint responsibility for Caroline. Confident that she and Rose share a sustaining practicality and an understanding of themselves and of life, Ginny relies upon their,

> ongoing narrative and commentary about what was happening that grew out of our conversations, our rolled eyes, our sighs and jokes and irritated remarks. The result for us was that we found ourselves more or less prepared for the blows that fell—we could at least make that oddly comforting remark, 'I knew all along something like this was going to happen.' (113)

Even this "odd" comfort is false, however, for Ginny actually understands little about the relationships around her. Having locked away her past, Ginny now misapprehends the present, comforting herself with "closeness" to Rose and with the stubborn belief in the viability of their relationship:

> All my life I had identified with Rose. I'd looked to her, waited a split second to divine her reaction to something, then made up my own mind. My deepest-held habit was assuming that differences between Rose and me were just on the surface, that beneath, . . . we were more than twinlike, that somehow we were each other's real selves, together forever on this thousand acres. (307)

Though it is Rose who has raided against the unfairness of the sisters' lot—"This person who beats and fucks his own daughters can go out into the community and get respect and power, and take it for granted that he deserves it" (302)—it is also Rose who most closely resembles their father. She is a predator who goes after what she wants: " 'I *want* what was Daddy's. I want it. I feel like I've paid for it . . .' " (p. 303).

Having attempted to submerge her father's abuse in a series of affairs, Rose now turns to Jess, knowing full well that he is Ginny's lover. Worse, perhaps, she regards this behavior as her right:

> 'He loves me, Ginny. You don't think I would let him have anything private with my own sister, Do you? . . . Don't you remember how Mommy said I was the most jealous child she ever knew? . . . I mean, I control it better now . . . but I'm always jealous. That was how Jess got me to sleep with him. He talked about what a sweet person you are and how much he loved you. . .'
>
> I said, 'I guess you want everything for yourself, huh?'
>
> 'Well shit, yeah. I always have. It's been my besetting sin. I'm grabby and jealous and selfish and Mommy said it would drive people away so I've been good at hiding it.' (303-304)

Another carefully maintained facade disintegrates, and Ginny admits that, "It hurt more than I had expected" (303), because "all my swirling thoughts had narrowed to . . . the knowledge that Rose had been too much for me, had done me in." (304) Hurt and disenchanted, she feels "drenched with insight, swollen with it like a wet sponge" (304). But,

> The strongest feeling was that now I knew them all. That whereas for thirty-six years they had swum around me in complicated patterns that I had at best dimly perceived through murky water, now all was clear. I saw all of them [Rose, Pete, Ty, Larry] from all sides at once. (305)

Because Rose "answered my foolish love with jealousy and grasping selfishness" (308), the veil over Ginny's past dissolves, her self-deluding grasp of "reality" dissipates, and, above all, her hope for the future disintegrates. She believes that "a whole new life could bloom for Rose" (307) but that, "The future seemed to clamp down upon me like an iron lid" (308). A hopeless person is a dangerous person, and suddenly rage supplants Ginny's grief (310-11). She puts her farm-wife's experience to use in a deadly scheme against her sister. Disillusioned and disenchanted, Ginny now also feels "intensely, newly, more myself than ever before" (305). This ugly new self truly reflects Larry Cook's bitter heritage.

Further revelations frame these family conflicts. Ginny comes to believe that she and Rose were "shaped" in yet another dreadful fashion. Jess Clark, who sees the area with the eye of an outsider because of his long absence, maintains that her miscarriages and Rose's cancer are consequences of local farming practices. Jess believes, and Ginny (and Rose) accept that fertilizer runoff has drained into the aquifer and that the well water they drink is responsible for their physical ills, just as their father's abuse and their mother's reserve are responsible for their psychological problems. Larry's success has caused their suffering.

And here, irony compounds irony, for rich and fertile as it may be, Zebulon County was never meant to be farmed as the Cooks and their neighbors have farmed it, for when the Cook ancestors first arrived, they found that the land they had purchased sight unseen "was under two feet of water part of the year and another quarter of it was spongy" (14). For ninety years, the family has buried tile, "reclaiming" ever more acres:

> Tile 'drew' the water, warmed the soil, and made it easy to work, enabled [Larry] to get into the fields with his machinery a mere twenty-four hours after the heaviest storm. . . . However much these acres looked like a gift of nature or of God, they were not. We went to church to pay our respects, not to give thanks. (15)

In Smiley's view, land abuse, like child abuse, is as poisonous to relationships as it is to water. Lust for power and for ownership motivates both activities, she suggests. But in his arrogance

and pride, Larry Cook has erred even further. He has acquired his even thousand acres by benefiting by the ignorance and inexperience of others and by working it with a kind of forced labor. His sons-in-law and his daughters, in thrall to blood, marriage, and hope of future ownership, have been his servants, almost his slaves.

The power of a dreadful temper and of a tightly controlled purse is great, and thus Larry Cook has owned and demeaned them. When finally Ginny, Rose, Ty, and Pete rebel, they follow Larry's example. When they break their word, they emulate him. When they indulge in the bitter luxury of hatred, they, like Larry, are very good haters. And this, of course, is the final Cook harvest, an almost Dickensian furor of death, destruction, heart break, despair. Though her voice and her achievement are entirely her own, Jane Smiley continues the vein of social criticism which often surfaces in great fiction and which binds her to other major writers.

Still another literary echo rings effectively through Smiley's work. One must acknowledge the fact that her vision of property acquisition, of supplanting human values with greed, of freewheeling abuse of both land and people is strikingly similar to William Faulkner's view of the curse invoked upon the South by similar practices. A family cannot thrive with its roots in poisoned soil. The agrarian dream turns nightmare when exploitation replaces nurture. This sad message seems, in the hands of skilled writers such as Faulkner and now Smiley, powerfully true, convincingly American.

Though *A Thousand Acres* clearly dramatizes Jane Smiley's grave concern about American culture and American agricultural practices, it does not deny all hope for the future. Certainly, the surviving Cooks have been scarred by suffering and loss. Materially, they are much less well off, and, in that sense, they live "smaller" lives. Ginny actively works to expiate the sins of her forbears, determined to protect her nieces from further harm.

But despite this enormous undertaking, Ginny is personally rather better off than before. She may not be happier, but she is certainly stronger and certainly more independent. Supportive but not controlling of others, Ginny now earns wages for work no harder than that she did on the Cook farm. Her plans for the future are neither grandiose nor exploitative; instead they sug-

gest that she will now lead an examined life, a life she's freely chosen. Doubtless, she will err, but Ginny's developing ability to take charge of her life suggests a quiet echo of Faulkner's declaration that humankind will "prevail."

In *A Thousand Acres,* then, Jane Smiley issues a warning and makes a hopeful recommendation in favor of the modest, non-exploitative, self-defined life, free of others' control, yet benefiting from communal support. Both her caveat and the hope should be stitched into the fabric of American life.

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NOTES

1. Quilt: "Bars," Amish artist unknown, c: 1923; from the Esprit Quilt Collection, San Francisco. Photo by Sharon Reisdorph and Lynn Kellner. Jacket design by Carol Devine Carson.
2. See *Time,* Nov. 11, 1991, p. 92. Photo by Jeffrey Foss.

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THE MIDWEST AS METAPHOR: FOUR ASIAN WRITERS

ROGER J. BRESNAHAN

The most salient characteristic of Asian writers in the American Midwest is alienation. For Bharati Mukherjee it is a brutalizing milieu where the human spirit is trodden down until the only means of survival becomes rejection of traditional values; for Bienveniodo N. Santos, it is a cold, lonely place where one triumphs, but only barely, by adopting that kind of minimalism of the human spirit which seems to be the hallmark of Anglo-American culture; for A. K. Ramanujan and Li-Young Lee it is a place empty of cultural consciousness that serves, in its very vacuity, to elicit memories of places and people long ago and far away who nevertheless continue to recede farther into the past.

Santos came to the United States as a graduate student at the University of Illinois when the Philippines was still a U.S. possession. For a person of his generation, educated in an American-style school system, in English and largely by American teachers, coming to the States for graduate work was the normal reward for superior academic achievement. In short, Santos was a colonial—a person whose emotional responses remained Filipino while his intellect was given to understand that the metropolitan culture existed at a higher level than his own.

Santos was in the U.S. when the Empire of Japan invaded the Philippine Commonwealth on December 9,1941. With the defeat of Filipino and American forces on Bataan and the withdrawal of the remaining American guardians and the president and vice-president of the Commonwealth to Corregidor Island and ultimately to Australia and the U.S., Santos was in fact stranded here for four years while his wife and daughters remained in Occupied Philippines. After the Bataan Death March

he was employed by the Commonwealth government to travel around the United States giving lectures on the Philippines, largely to reassure American moms and dads that their sons, though prisoners of the Empire of Japan, were among people friendly to them. This is the context of one of Santos's best loved stories, "The Scent of Apples."

The narrator of the story is a Commonwealth *pensionado,* a government scholarship holder as Santos himself was, delegated by the government-in-exile to give public lectures on the Philippines. But here the question from the audience comes from a Filipino who operates an apple orchard in Michigan. And his question, whether the women of the Philippines are the same as they were when he left the Islands twenty years before, carries a double-edged sword for the narrator. His American education suggests an answer complicated by ratiocination. Instead, he rejects that sort of answer and tells Celestino Fabia, yes, most certainly the Filipina has changed but only on the outside, that in their hearts they were the same as always. Though the conditions of colonial labor exploitation had irrevocably robbed him of any chance of return, Celestino Fabia's fears that time had irrevocably robbed him of his memories of his homeland are assuaged.

This is the aesthetic heart of the story for it speaks to cultural differences in perception. Most American readers, culture-bound by their own categories of perception, pass by that passage to fasten upon the visit of the narrator to Fabia's home, his American wife, and Roger, his American son. That there hangs everywhere over this scene the scent of apples is an imagistic testimony both to Celestino Fabia's triumph in making it in America and to the desperate alienation that he feels in this wholly alien culture. The title, "Scent of Apples," is heavily laden with meaning for Filipinos in a way that Americans do not generally perceive, for the American books from which they had learned English began, "A is for Apple." I never understood the difference until one day in 1977, in the city of Cagayan de Oro, a fervently nationalist lawyer, the rage fairly bursting from his mouth, added the all-important coda: "A is for Apple, a tree that does not grow in my country."

The "old-timers," displaced Filipino laborers who immigrated here in the '20s, and '30s, too poor to return home or too used to

the comforts of their yet meagre existence in the U.S., have become the special province of Santos, from Celestino Fabia in "Scent of Apples" to Fil Acayan in "The Day the Dancers Came" to Solomon King in *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor.* Like Celestino Fabia, Fil Acayan is also one who takes pride in having survived in the cold Chicago climate that is America: he loves to plow his feet through drifts of snow and glories in the feel of the wind off the lake. So exultant is he in this victory of the human spirit that when a band of young people sent by the Philippine government to perform indigenous folk-dances arrives in Chicago, Fil seems to imagine himself an unofficial Philippine ambassador who will bring the dancers to his shabby apartment in his car, feed them food from home, and drive them all over Chicago. Because he has succeeded in America, albeit in menial positions, what he doesn't reckon with is class. He realizes only too late that the kindly advances of a Pinoy oldtimer would naturally be rebuffed by these beautiful young people whose very presence in this dance group would indicate they were from privileged families. Fil's anguish is palpable when he recounts the ordeal to his roommate, Tony: "They looked through me. I didn't exist. Or worse, I was unclean. *Basura.* Garbage." Though Santos translates the word, *basura* conveys something much more unclean than garbage for one who handles garbage, a *basurero,* is not thereby soiled. It is inconceivable in a Philippine language that a human being, however lowly, could be garbage.

In another of Santos's Chicago stories, "My Most Memorable Christmas is America" three exiles spend the cold holidays together as the only inhabitants of the Southside Y—a Jew about to be shipped overseas to fight the Nazi menance, the Negro janitor, and a Filipino student brought up from Champaign by American friends on their way home to Muncie. When I interviewed Santos in 1980 I queried him on this seeming geographical inaccuracy for Muncie is nearly due east of Champaign. A similar isolation is found in the 1983 novel, *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor.* Here Solomon King has isolated himself geographically from other Filipinos, choosing to live in a Polish neighborhood. Though there have been affairs with a number of American women over the years, that is all in memory now. And at work as a manager in the stock-

yards he has isolated himself from his fellow workers by regaling them with stories of the places he has visited on his annual vacations—though, in fact, he has only stayed in his apartment reading the travel brochures.

Now, as the novel opens, he suddenly retires because his alter ego, Robert Taylor, has died. Such a complex and sophisticated novel cannot really be encapsulated in a summary, yet it is apparent that Solomon King has succeeded in living his life in Chicago by a kind of deracination. What impels him to action, besides the death of Robert Taylor, is the need for food, shelter, and nurture of a young mother and her infant son whom Solomon King finds stranded in a blizzard at the Greyhound bus station at Clark and Randolph. Days later, when he sends them on their way to Dowagiac, there has been a subtle change in his outlook. In the delicate frailty of this modern-day madonna, Solomon King has achieved an epiphany. Now he actually will travel in his retirement—not in brochures but rather by revisiting the barber-shops and pool halls and nursing homes where the yet unwritten history of the oldtimers remains. In the epigraph that precedes this section Santos writes: "You leave home and country, seek sanctuary in an alien land, refuge in another idiom, but you remain on the outside. . . ." (152)

That is a sentiment very poignantly conveyed by Bharati Mukherjee in the novel, *Jasmine,* as well as in the collection, *The Middleman and Other Stories.* Jasmine comes to America an illegal alien, and almost from the beginning she learns how inhospitable this climate can be, and how one must fight to survive. She is raped by one of those who make their living off the hopes of illegals. And in the shower afterward, she slices open her tongue with a small knife and prepares to kill herself for shame. Instead, she slits the throat of her ravisher. Each succeeding adventure teaches her that she has no place, until she has begun to live with Bud Ripplemayer, an Iowa banker. But even in this man's embrace, she doesn't exist. He won't try to pronounce her Punjabi name, and so he just calls her Jane. Nor is anyone in this farm community interested in hearing of Hasnapuri, the village of her youth.

Bud and Jasmine have adopted Du, a Vietnamese refugee. As the identity-denying events of Jasmine's life come to a head, Du—still in high school—suddenly leaves Iowa for California

where he can join his sister. Jasmine reflects the American dream has not worked out, for Du or for her. In another story, Mukherjee provides this wry coda to a scene in a play by David Mamet that's rife with tasteless ethnic humor: "It's the tyranny of the American dream that scares me. First you don't exist. Then you're invisible. Then you're funny. Then you're disgusting." ("A Wife's Story," in *The Middleman and Other Stories,* 24)

In the short story "Jasmine," in *The Middleman and Other Stories,* not the novel of the same title, the title character is a Trinidadian woman of Indian parentage. Much like Jasmine of the novel, this young woman comes to America through immigrant smugglers, but in this case the landing is made in Detroit by way of Canada, rather than New York and Iowa by way of Florida. From Detroit, where she keeps the books for a motel operated by other Trinidadian Indians, Jasmine finds a position in Ann Arbor as an *au pair* with Bill Moffit, a biologist at University of Michigan, and Lara Hatch-Moffit, a performance artist. In the novel a similar scenario takes place in New York. There Jasmine takes an *au pair* position, though she is known by the yuppy title of care-giver, to escape the household in Queens of her dead husband's mentor, who is not teaching engineering at Queens College, as he claims, but sorting human hair. In this family the husband, Taylor, teaches subparticle physics at Columbia and the wife, Wylie, is an editor at a publishing house. The Detroit-Ann Arbor story seems to be a run-up for the novel, for both Jasmines become romantically involved with the husbands. In the novel it is happens after Wylie leaves Taylor and her daughter, Duff, to move in with an economist. In the short story, Jasmine makes love with Bill Moffit while his wife is on an extended roadshow in Nebraska. The love-making on the living room floor after the child has been put to bed is the culmination of the short story. This Jasmine "was a girl rushing wildly into the future." (135)

Jasmine in the novel has a keen eye for contemporary discordances in American and Midwestern life: "I see a way of life coming to an end," she says. "Baseball loyalties, farming, small town innocence. . . . In the brave new world of Elsa County, Karin Ripplemeyer [Bud's ex-wife] runs a suicide hot line. Bud Ripplemeyer has adopted a Vietnamese and is shacked up with a Punjabi girl. . . . There are Hmong, with a church of their

own, turning out quilts for Lutheran relief." (229) Given this discordant universe and the sufferings Jasmine has endured while trying to keep her identity, it should come as no surprise to the reader that, despite her feeling of duty to Bud who has been shot and crippled by a son of the Aryan Nation, despite her being 6 months pregnant with their child, despite her effort to fit into a community that describes itself as "puritan," when Taylor and Duff show up on her doorstep, Jasmine leaves for California with no more explanation to Bud than a phone call to his ex.

In "The Tenant" from *The Middleman and Other Stories,* Maya is a professor of comparative literature at the University of Northern Iowa. Her adaptation to her new surroundings involves the complete jettison of traditional values. She picks up strange men in bars and discos in a seeming attempt to be more American than the Americans, more secular and more liberated. She is forced by manners and familial ties from Calcutta to endure tea with an Indian physics professor and his wife, in a home that preserves Indian customs in a way that Maya detests. He outrages her sensibilities on the drive home by masturbating in the car, pleading the loneliness of marriage. Yet despite Maya's adaptive lifeways, she finds her true love in the most traditionally Indian way—in the classified ads of an overseas Indian newspaper, albeit a jet-set adaptation since they arrange their first meeting in a transit lounge at O'Hare.

The poetry of A. K. Ramanujan, who holds a named professorship at the University of Chicago, contains only fleeting and occasional references to Chicago and the Midwest. Yet there is a sense that this cold place impels him to memory of India, just as the poetry of Li-Young Lee, which even more obliquely looks to this city in which he, too, lives, is also concerned with memory. Ramanujan's memories are wistful, largely peaceful, and often wryly humorous. In "Saturdays," Ramanujan speaks of being

> at home in a foreign place
> where you jog,
> as golden needles of rain
> scatter the Art Fair in the park.

Later in the same poem the concept of living in an alien land is brought home as the narrator sees himself in the mirror. "left foot wronged in a right-foot shoe, imprisoned in reverse. . . ." Perhaps the most explicitly Chicago poems are "Looking for

the Centre" and "Chicago Zen." In the former Ramanujan weaves a philosophical meditation on stability, or rather its absence in modern life, around the paradox that the Center for Missing Children is no longer where it used to be. "Chicago Zen" provides a guide for life between Chicago and India, or the Earth and the moon, or time and eternity ending with a final bit of advice about descending a, staircase or living a life:

> . . . and watch
> for the last
> step that's never there.

Time-present is always evident in the poetry of Li-Young Lee, and it often serves as a solace or bulwark against unnamed fears or as a tool with which to plumb the past. The search for the sternly loving father of the past is a repeated theme, and because that father brought his family across the sea, there are references to America. Knowing where he lives and works, we can infer references to Chicago, yet there is not in his poems what may be termed local geography. Lee's poems are hauntingly beautiful lyrics about searingly painful events. They harken to other times and places—China, Indonesia, Hong Kong, America in general. "The City in Which I Love You" is a poem in which the pain of massive human suffering is only abated by the memory of love, and none of the unnamed cities in the poem are Chicago. Still a young man, Lee may yet come to terms with his past and with this place enough to evoke the "the solidity of specifica-tion" that James wrote of or the "local knowledge" of which Geertz has spoken. Or yet he may accept this city for what it is—"hog butcher to the world"—and continue to draw memories from diverse regions to its cosmopolitan center.

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