

# American Literature in 1900

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Many of the prevailing ideas about literature in the late nineteenth century spilled over into the early twentieth century. Some major literary figures continued to write and publish: William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and Henry James among them. All three expressed misgivings about what the new century would bring and were joined in their unease by Henry Adams in the early years of the 1900s. All four writers were members of the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Letters by 1905. Yet its prevailing conservatism can be seen in the rather unadventurous election in 1908 of the Academy's first woman member, Julia Ward Howe, in her eighties, author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Edith Wharton was nominated at the same time but had to wait until 1930 to be elected, while election of the first black member, W. E. B. Du Bois, did not happen until 1944.

But things were changing. In prose fiction, realism and naturalism were the two prominent literary movements at the turn of the century, reflecting a shift away from the more sentimental and moralist writing of previous decades. Although Huckleberry Finn was enamored of Emmeline Grangerford's verse in Mark Twain's famous 1885 novel, Huck's creator saw it as fit only for satire. Realism resulted from a determination to write about the lives and conditions of ordinary people, not only those of the upper class around whom a novel of manners might be shaped, and also to write about the settings in which those

lives were lived—in the cities to which so many Americans were moving. The anonymity and vulnerability of those lives, especially for women, were captured by Stephen Crane in his *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893). Naturalism often kept the urban setting in describing the inexorable forces, the scientific determinism, that made for a predictable end, unless a character has the kind of ruthless instinct for self-preservation of Caroline Meeber in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) or the luck of Sam Lewiston in Frank Norris' "A Deal in Wheat" (1902). Naturalism reflected the ideas of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer in the philosophical foundation of its narratives, whether they took place in nature, as in some of Jack London's most famous stories, or the city, as with Dreiser's controversial novel. Another important development in the end-of-the-century novel, psychological realism, concerned itself more with the thoughts, reflections, and rationalizations of its central characters, and often, but not always, ran counter to the determinist ideas that minimized free will. Here some of the assumptions behind character in the early and mid-nineteenth century, assumptions that allowed broad generalizations about human behavior received more careful analysis, especially in relation to social convention. One of the greatest American exponents, Henry James, was still writing at the turn of the century, while another, Edith Wharton, was just beginning her literary career. The inner psychological explorations of Conrad, Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner were not far away.

Most American poetry at the turn of the century was still mired in the verse of late Romantic regret. The industrial world, such poets lamented, was no place for poetry, and lyric after lyric would sing of the loss or dream of an escape. However, Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost were writing poems that utilized psychological and narrative complexity learned from the novelists. Their work questioned romantic optimism while exploring the power, and danger, of its continuing appeal. A few years hence the major revolution in American poetry would begin with some Americans in London. That revolution would help shift America's literary center away from Boston to New York, Chicago, and other cities to the South and West.

Black writing in 1900 was still constrained by white publishers' sense of what white readers wanted to read from black authors, although some independent black publication venues began to appear. Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar were the most prominent black writers at the turn of the century. But the Harlem Renaissance was still

two decades away, and a Native American renaissance even further in the future. American drama was hobbled from early on by Puritan distrust of the theater. The commercialism that Van Wyck Brooks in his *Wine of the Puritans* (1908) identified as a major barrier to the appreciation of the arts in America was particularly true of American theater, where theater chain monopolies ensured a diet of formulaic melodramas and European imports well into the new century.

### Prose and Fiction: Taking on the New Century

The end of the century suggested images of a “corpse” and a “crypt” to English writer Thomas Hardy in his poem “The Darkling Thrush.” The anxiety in Hardy’s poem about the alienation of humankind from nature and the disappearance of religious faith is captured by Henry Adams’ reflections on the new century in suitably American terms of technology and faith.

Adams (1838–1918) came from a patrician Boston family that included two Presidents of the United States, a President of Harvard, and a prominent diplomat. Before the turn of the century, he had been a firsthand observer of the central figures in both English and American politics, had worked as a freelance journalist, written an important multi-volume work on the administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, published two novels, served as a professor of medieval history at Harvard, and edited the influential *North American Review*. But his major achievements came in the twentieth century with his *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (privately printed in 1904, published in 1913) and his autobiographical *The Education of Henry Adams* (privately printed in 1907 and published in 1918). In the preface to the latter, written by Adams but published under the name of his friend Henry Cabot Lodge, he refers to the earlier book as “A Study of Thirteenth-Century Unity” and the later as “A Study of Twentieth-Century Multiplicity.” Adams presents himself in the *Education* as a man with an eighteenth-century sensibility and a nineteenth-century Harvard education, both of which, along with his work as a historian, have failed to prepare him for the twentieth century, an inadequacy brought home to him by his visits to the Chicago Exposition of 1893 and the World’s Fair held in Paris in 1900. Man, for Adams in his *Education*, “had entered a supersensual world, in which he could measure nothing except by chance collisions of movements imperceptible to

his senses, perhaps even imperceptible to his instruments, but perceptible to each other, and so to some known ray at the end of the scale” (Adams 1068). Comparing the forces of faith that produced monuments such as Chartres Cathedral with the energy produced by the dynamos in the Paris Exposition’s Gallery of Machines, Adams observes that not only have the new century’s scientific advances completely broken with earlier continuities, and with the assumed sequences of cause and effect that govern historical narratives, but also that there are consequences for twentieth-century art: instead of the power that produced the great cathedrals, the artists “felt a railway train as power; yet they, and all other artists, constantly complained that the power embodied in a railway train could never be embodied in art. All the steam in the world could not, like the Virgin, build Chartres” (Adams 1074). Yet within a few years of Adams’ regret, William Carlos Williams wrote his celebratory poem “Overture to a Dance of Locomotives,” and Robert J. Coady published photographs of steam trains as American art in his little magazine *The Soil* (1916–1917).

Mark Twain (1835–1910), the first important American writer born West of the Mississippi, was by 1900 in great demand as a lecturer and an after-dinner speaker. He was probably the best-known American author in the world at the turn of the century. Twain’s America is always multi-layered, balancing humor with a vision sometimes uncompromisingly bleak. For example, the view of slavery and its aftermath is a complex one in *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1893), while the bloodbath that ends *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889) foretells mutual self-destruction as the inevitable outcome of bigger and better machines for warfare. And his view of humankind and human history became even darker in the last years of his life, as illustrated in his unfinished, posthumously published *44, The Mysterious Stranger* (1916, 1969). Set in a medieval Austrian village in 1490 at the dawn of printing and just before Columbus’ voyage to America, the Huckleberry Finn-like apprentice printer August Feldner is shown glimpses of the future by the mysterious, miracle-performing intruder named 44. The novel’s final vision is of the individual’s unredeemed isolation: “there is no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell . . . Nothing exists but You. And You are but a *Thought*—a vagrant Thought, a useless Thought, a homeless Thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!” (*Stranger* 187). Within the novel’s inventive, unpredictable series of adventures lie Twain’s late conclusions on the power of the subconscious and the role

of the imagination as well as his radical questioning of whether the human condition had benefited from five centuries of print and everything that had followed from Columbus' celebrated voyage. The list of writers who went on to learn from Twain's legacy of trenchant humor and self-revealing loquacious narrators is a distinguished one, among them Sherwood Anderson in some of his best stories, Will Rogers, Ring Lardner, Dorothy Parker, and James Thurber.

A truism of literary criticism is that Twain and Henry James (1843–1916) had little regard for each other's work, and certainly there is a major difference in their approach to writing. Twain's work on *Huckleberry Finn* stopped for three years after the chapter following Huck and Jim's raft being capsized by the steamboat, apparently for the author to consider where the narrative was to go next. Henry James, on the other hand, as his *Notebooks* reveal, generally had the narratives of his stories and novels carefully planned out, their central ideas carefully articulated, before beginning composition. James' literary roots lay in the novel of manners, while Twain's were closer to the Frontier tall-tale. The working classes are usually ciphers in James' fiction, while the social elite are invariably satirized in Twain. And yet both were interested, in their different ways, in the contrasts between European and American culture, and Twain's title *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) could equally apply to a number of Henry James' New World characters encountering European sophistication and its dangers, especially in his earlier novels.

James, the younger brother of distinguished philosopher William James, had by 1900 been publishing novels, stories, and travel writing for thirty years. He had tried, and failed, to establish a successful career as a dramatist, and since 1876 had lived in England becoming a citizen in 1915, with Prime Minister Herbert Asquith as one of his sponsors. In the first years of the century, James published three major late novels, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), in which his subtle, nuanced prose took on even greater complexity as he continued to explore the tension between convention and feeling, between what a character said or expressed physically and what that character actually thought. In these novels, he takes analysis of psychological and social nuances to new levels.

In some ways, the schemes of Kate Croy and Merton Densher to use the dying American Milly Theale's fortune for their own ends in *The Wings of the Dove* parallel the schemes of *Portrait of a Lady's* Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond in their manipulation of Isabel Archer. But

the complexities of class, money, morality, and sexual desire are much greater in the later novel, more fully explored by the omniscient Jamesian narrator moving in and out of the consciousness of the central characters. Isabel Archer finally understands and accepts the consequences of the trap forced on her, with some degree of choice, but Kate Croy's attempt to stage-manage events only results in everybody suffering and nobody getting what they wanted. The bitter Lord Mark is the direct source of her plans unravelling, but the unpredictability of human passion and the limited power of material wealth are the forces that really govern events.

Just as Kate Croy discovers a world more unpredictable than her plans accounted for, Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors* finds that his apparently straightforward mission to bring Chad Newsome back from Paris to the safety of Woollett becomes increasingly complex as he slowly learns more about the motives, desires, and secrets behind the relationships he uncovers. In this novel about many potential marriages, nobody actually gets married. Strether's gradual recognitions unravel through an objective narration strictly anchored in his point of view, a formal device that James had experimented with in his novel *What Masie Knew* published six years earlier and which arguably points the way to the stream-of-consciousness narratives in modernist writing. James was always interested in the ways in which reality is transformed by art (his well-known story "The Real Thing" [1892] explores the theme explicitly). But in a key moment of Strether's growing understanding, he experiences reality transforming art. As he enjoys an afternoon in the country, imagining himself in a painting by rural scene painter Émile Lambinet, Chad and Madame de Vionnet row into his vision, an encounter that reveals the true nature of their relationship and leaves Strether "supposing innumerable and wonderful things" (*Library of America, Novels 1903–1911*, 389).

In the last of James' trio of late masterpieces, *The Golden Bowl*, Maggie Verver is the character who must learn of deeper human mysteries than she had realized, but she succeeds with this knowledge where Kate Croy did not, sending the rival to her marriage back to the United States through a series of quiet, careful maneuvers. Thus, she finds "the golden fruit" of a new emotional intimacy with her husband, replacing the cracked golden bowl that had revealed the threatening earlier secrets: "she stood in the cool twilight and took in all about her where it lurked her reason for what she had done. She knew at last really why—and how she had been inspired and guided, how she

had been persistently able, how to her soul all the while it had been for the sake of this end" (*Library of America* 981).

James completed one more novel, the relatively slight *The Outcry*, revolves around wealthy Americans buying up English art treasures, but the main occupation of his last years was preparing, rewriting, and introducing the twenty-four-volume New York Edition of his works. In the Prefaces he describes his initial conception of the narratives and is quite ready to condemn what he concludes are mistakes—he argues, for example, that the impecunious French aristocrats from *The American* (1877) would have accepted, not rejected, suitor Christopher Newman's money despite its manufacturing origins.

James' death in 1916 came at a time when two younger expatriate Americans in London were changing the course of poetry in English. Both Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot thought James was in danger of neglect and saw James' achievement, together with the seriousness with which he took his craft, as important to their modernist cause and its refusal to make concessions to popular taste. Eliot, writing in *The Egoist* in January 1918, asserted, "there will always be a few intelligent people to understand James, and to be understood by a few intelligent people is all the influence a man requires." James was the touchstone by which Eliot wrote to F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925 praising *The Great Gatsby* as "the first step American fiction has taken since Henry James" (*Eliot Letters* 813). Pound, who wrote forty of the sixty-four pages in *The Little Review's* August 1918 issue dedicated to James, terms the novelist "the greatest writer of our time and of our own particular language" (*Literary Essays* 331). Pound and James met a few times casually, a memory that makes its way into Pound's *Canto VII* in 1921.

Although by 1900 William Dean Howells (1837–1920) had already published his major novels: *A Modern Instance* (1882), *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), he continued to hold an important position as a critic in his columns for *Harper's Monthly* and the *North American Review*. Across his career and for a large readership, Howells published essays on such writers as Twain, Zola, Tolstoy, Hawthorne, Ibsen, Longfellow, Hardy, and James as well as on the minority writers Charles W. Chesnutt and Abraham Cahan. He introduced readers to some of the major European authors and was the first major critic to recognize the importance of Emily Dickinson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Frost. A measure of his stature is that he served as the first President of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, being elected in 1908.

Howells had published both Twain and James in his role as editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and in his earlier essays like them he made the case for realism to replace the conventions of Romance, insisting: “The novel I take to be the sincere and conscientious endeavor to picture life just as it is, to deal with character as we witness it in living people, and to record the incidents that grow out of character” (Howells, *Selected Literary Criticism* 218). But in his later critical essays, as Ronald Gottesman points out, Howells had an “ambivalent response to the developments in realism, which opened up not only fresh subjects and styles, but fundamentally new ethical and social conceptions that would be reflected in both the darkening views of human existence and the indeterminateness of form that are at the root of modernism” (Gottesman xix). Even though his essays continued to recognize important new voices, Howells’ ambivalence about the new subject matter in fiction made him a convenient figure to mock for writers who saw themselves moving beyond such restrictions. “Respectable as a church and proper as a deacon” is how Frank Norris (1870–1902) described Howells’ novels in his “A Plea for Romantic Fiction” (1901), which argues the superficiality of realism (*Lib of America* 1166). Even thirty years later, for Sinclair Lewis in his 1930 Nobel Prize Speech, Howells was still the epitome of genteel literature against whom to rebel:

Mr. Howells was one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men, but he had the code of a pious old maid whose greatest delight was to have tea at the vicarage. He abhorred not only profanity and obscenity but all of what H. G. Wells has called “the jolly coarsenesses of life.” In his fantastic vision of life, which he innocently conceived to be realistic, farmers and seamen and factory hands might exist, but the farmer must never be covered with muck, the seaman must never roll out bawdy chanteys, the factory hand must be thankful to his good kind employer, and all of them must long for the opportunity to visit Florence and smile gently at the quaintness of the beggars (Frenz 287).

Lewis returns in his speech for another complaint about Howells in discussing Hamlin Garland (1860–1940). For Lewis, Garland “under Howells’ influence was changed from a harsh and magnificent realist into a genial and insignificant lecturer . . . he is [now] alarmed by all of the younger writers who are so lacking in taste as to suggest that men and women do not always love in accordance with the prayer-book,

and that common people sometimes use language which would be inappropriate at a women's literary club on Main Street. Yet this same Hamlin Garland, as a young man, before he had gone to Boston and become cultured and Howellsised, wrote two most valiant and revelatory works of realism, *Main-Traveled Roads* and *Rose of Dutcher's Coolie*" (Frenz 287).

In a broad review of Garland's work in 1912, Howells does express preference for the later books. These emphasize Romantic individualism rather than the oppressive conditions of Western farm life that are the subject of the earlier *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) for which, along with the autobiographical *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917), Garland is most remembered today. In his early fiction, Garland was interested in the economic and land reforms demanded by Western farmers, and in the most famous of the six stories making up the 1891 volume, "Under the Lion's Paw," a poor farmer with exhausting labor improves the farm on which he is a tenant, only to have the price of the farm that he improved, and hoped to buy, raised by the landlord because of the improvements. Between 1896 and 1916, Garland moved away from such controversial subjects and began a series of romantic adventure stories set in the far West, before undertaking the autobiographies of his later years.

*A Son of the Middle Border* covers Garland's life from 1865 to 1893, from his family's hard pioneering life in the mid-West to his becoming an established literary figure: "Going east had proved more profitable than going West!" (quoted in McCullough 111). His accounts of farm life, as Joseph McCullough has shown, reflect the strains of realism and romantic sentiment that his writing often struggles to integrate. On the one hand, Garland writes "most authors in writing of the 'merry, merry farmer' . . . omit the mud and the dust and the grime, they forget the armyworm, the flies, the heat, as well as the smells and drudgery of the barns." And yet shortly after this observation, he extolls the beauties of summer: "The flash and ripple and glimmer of the tall sunflowers, the myriad voices of gleeful bobolinks, the chirp and gurgle of red-winged blackbirds swaying on the willows, the meadowlarks piping from grassy bogs . . ." (quoted in McCullough 110). Howells, reviewing the autobiography, began "I should rank it with the very greatest of that kind in literature" (Garland, *Reception* 64), while H. L. Mencken, foreshadowing Lewis in regretting that Garland "fell under the spell of the Boston *aluminados* of 1885," finds it "a thoroughly third-rate piece of writing—amateurish, flat, banal, repellent" (Garland, *Reception* 74).

Of some interest are Garland's stories of Native American life. Traveling through the West in 1897, Garland lived on several Native American reservations, and in consequence, his stories in *The Book of the American Indian* (1923) move beyond many of the stereotypes of the time to show sympathy for a culture trying to adapt to an alien modern world. The stories, which had first appeared in periodicals twenty years earlier, show little sympathy for insensitive attempts to integrate Native Americans, attempts that showed little awareness of their way of life. However, unlike the preservationist focus of most Native American writers of the time or the more sensitive approach of 1920s writers like Mary Austin and Oliver La Farge, he was convinced of their eventual need to adapt.

Writing in 1900, Howells had only praise for the short stories of Charles Chesnutt (1858–1932), who went on to become the first important black American novelist (although seven-eighths white, Chesnutt identified as African American). His well-regarded short fiction began to appear in the *Atlantic Monthly* in the late 1880s—where Howells' review also appeared—and they were successfully collected as *The Conjure Woman* and *The Wife of his Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line*, both in 1899. But whereas Garland's Western romances had taken his fiction away from his earlier radical interests, Chesnutt's next three novels took the opposite direction, exploring controversial topics central to the black experience.

*The House Behind the Cedars* (1900) was the first African American novel published by a major American press when put out by Houghton, Mifflin. In a sometimes rather contrived narrative, but one that complicated genre stereotypes, mixed-race siblings Rena and John Walden pass successfully in the white world of the Carolinas until Rena's aristocratic fiancé rejects her when he discovers her black heritage—to his later regret. The novel is original in its approval of the siblings' act of passing and of their reasons for doing so and condemns racial barriers for the pain that they cause both blacks and whites. Chesnutt's purposeful foregrounding of passing and treatment of miscegenation inevitably caused controversy and hurt the book's financial success.

*The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) is based directly on a historical event, the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina, riots in which a 2000 strong white supremacist mob overthrew an elected Populist and Republican government, in the process destroying the property and businesses of black citizens and killing an estimated twenty African

Americans. One of Chesnutt's intentions was to refute the sensationalized and celebratory versions of the incident that had appeared in the white press.

He tells the story of the coup through a series of interwoven subplots, summarized in an essay he published in the *Cleveland World*, the year of the novel's publication, "There is a crime, followed by a threatened lynching. There is an episode of injury and revenge, another of wrong and forgiveness . . . . There is a love story with a happy ending." Soon after the event, prominent black citizens were forcibly exiled, and North Carolina began passing a series of Jim Crow laws that for decades to come restricted black voting and black participation in local government, but Chesnutt remained an optimist. Although the novel, he wrote in the same essay, "involves . . . the course and the underlying motives of the recent and temporarily successful movement for the disfranchisement of the colored race in the South . . . . it is the writer's belief that the forces of progress will in the end prevail" (*Library of America*, Chesnutt 873). Nevertheless, in his next novel, *The Colonel's Dream* (1905), the efforts of Colonel Henry French to reform the racist and corrupt southern town of Clarendon, North Carolina, meet with no success.

Following the poor sales of *The Colonel's Dream*, Chesnutt published no further novels in his lifetime (two posthumously published novels appeared in 1999: *Paul Marchand, F. M. C.*, completed in 1921, and *The Quarry*, completed in 1928; the former set in early nineteenth-century New Orleans, and the latter in the Harlem Renaissance). Chesnutt relied for a livelihood on his successful stenography business in Cleveland, while publishing the occasional short story, and continuing his activism on racial issues. He was still a presence in the Harlem Renaissance, where Carl Van Vechten in the controversial novel *Nigger Heaven* (1926) praised his work, although calling him "an author strangely unfamiliar to most of the new generation" (176) and the NAACP awarded Chesnutt its Spingarn Medal in 1928 "for his pioneer work as a literary artist, depicting the life and struggle of Americans of Negro descent."

Frank Norris (1870–1902), who published seven novels in his short career, most importantly *McTeague* (1899), *The Octopus* (1901), and *The Pit* (1903), argued against the kind of realism advocated by Howells. In his famous essay "A Plea for Romantic Fiction" (1901) after insisting that "Romance" is not "cloaks and daggers, or moonlight and golden hair," (*Lib of America* 1165), but that "Romance . . . is

sitting among the rags and wretchedness, the dirt and despair of the tenements of New York (1168), Norris goes on to characterize realism as “minute, it is the drama of a broken teacup . . . the adventure of an invitation to dinner” (1166). Not surprisingly, Howells, while generally praising *McTeague*, criticized its view of reality: “His true picture of life is not true because it leaves beauty out. Life is squalid and cruel and vile and hateful, but it is noble and tender and pure and lovely, too. By and by he will put these traits in, and then his powerful scene will be a reflection of reality.” Howells warns “Polite readers of the sort who do not like to meet in fiction people of the sort they never meet in society will not have a good time in *McTeague*,” adding: “there is really not a society person in the book” (*Selected Literary Criticism* 12–13).

Howell’s comments could equally apply to all three of Norris’ late novels. The narratives either depict the impact that heredity, environment, and large industrial and economic forces have on individual lives, lives that can see those forces only as oppressive, anonymous powers impossible to control, or they describe the brutal, selfish, actions of those at the top who try to manipulate those forces. *McTeague* leaves its once successful hero handcuffed to a dead body in Death Valley, *The Octopus* depicts a predatory railroad trust battling the ranchers who farm its land, while at the center of *The Pit* is Curtis Jadwin’s attempt to corner the whole American wheat market and his wife Laura’s eventually chastened Romantic idealism.

Norris’ method in these narratives is Naturalism, a literary technique associated with the French novelist Émile Zola, the subject of Norris’ 1896 essay “Zola as a Romantic Writer.” As Donald Pizer has pointed out, Norris’ interest is not so much in “the philosophical orientation . . . of Zola’s discussions of naturalism,” which emphasize material determinism and lack of free will, as in “some fundamental truth of life within a detailed presentation of the sensational and low” (Pizer 410). Norris wants to expand the subject matter of James’ and Howells’ realism, taking it beyond the minutiae of manners, of people who know the rights and wrongs of how to hold a teacup. His naturalism blends the accumulated detail of realism with the broad sweep of romance, exposing the powerful forces in nature and human nature rarely if ever foregrounded in the novel of manners.

Norris, generally considered the first major American naturalist writer, had a hand in starting the literary career of his successor, Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945), when as a reader at Doubleday, Page

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and Company, he recommended publication of *Sister Carrie* (1900). Dreiser (1871–1945) began as a newspaper reporter in Chicago, later working in Pittsburgh and New York City. Dreiser used his experience as a journalist in telling the story of Carrie Meeber's rise to Broadway stardom as her lover George Hurstwood falls from his social position and drifts into his eventual suicide. Dreiser had earlier written of strikes, urban homelessness, and the theater, and all find their way into the novel. Like the heroine of Dreiser's later *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), Carrie goes unpunished while the sexual relationships that bring her increasing material success challenged the period's conventions of morality. Senior member of the publishing house, Frank N. Doubleday, was one of the offended, and despite Norris' enthusiasm, after trying to get out of the contract made sure that a minimum number of copies were printed and that publicity was minimal. As a result, only 456 copies were sold. Dreiser purchased the plates himself and arranged for a successful reissue in 1907.

Within this narrative of seduction, theft, adultery, and bigamy, the narrator offers an unusual degree of commentary on the forces at play in Hurstwood and Carrie's different trajectories. This almost continuous commentary, which has drawn mixed reactions from readers and critics, reflects Dreiser's general interest in Social Darwinism and particularly the ideas of Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer. An oft-cited example occurs when Carrie leaves her sister and husband to move in with her first lover, Drouet, a point at which Carrie "was as yet more drawn than she drew." The narrator opens the chapter with: "Among the forces which sweep and play throughout the universe, untutored man is but a wisp in the wind. Our civilization is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast, in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct . . . [but] not yet wholly guided by reason . . . . He is even as a wisp in the wind, moved by every breath of passion, acting now by his will and now by his instincts, erring with one, only to retrieve with the other, falling by one, only to rise by the other." For Dreiser, man will eventually reach "a perfect understanding," and "we have the consolation of knowing that evolution is ever in action, that the ideal is a light that cannot fail" (*Library of America* 70). This detached narrative voice, together with such chapter titles as "The Magnet Attracting: A Waif Amid Forces" and "The Lure of the Material" suggest the language of scientific process, even though chance is also an important factor as events unfold.

The narrator's many philosophical comments might have doomed the novel to becoming a record of the psychological musings from a

bygone age, but the very human drama of Carrie and Hurstwood's contrasting fates, their richly drawn characters, together with such authentic urban detail supplied by Dreiser's journalism experience in the accounts of Hurstwood's saloon, the shoe factory, and the new department stores, keep the narrative firmly at the center of the novel. Hurstwood is doomed by a combination of economic and social forces and by his despair, but Carrie, despite her success, does not achieve her "ideal," represented in the novel by the values of the inventor Robert Ames. She is herself doomed, as the narrator directly tells her, to be caught between opposing forces, "for you is neither surfeit nor content . . . in your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel" (455).

Dreiser's next novel, *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911) also ran into trouble with his publishers, this time Harper & Brothers, who agreed to publish only after censoring the criticism of organized religion and wealthy social elites, and toning down much of the book's discussion of sexuality. (The 1992 Pennsylvania Dreiser Edition of the novel prints the version that Dreiser originally submitted to Harper's.) As published in 1911, the novel centers on the story of Lester Kane, a wealthy Cleveland businessman, who is forced by the provisions of his father's will to give up his out-of-wedlock relationship with Jennie and her child from an earlier relationship with the late Senator Brander. His subsequent marriage to a woman of his own class brings him no happiness. Jennie is by his bedside at his death, but she must watch his funeral from "a seat in an inconspicuous corner . . . so much a part of this solemn ritual, and yet infinitely removed from it all" (818–819).

A career-long interest in the dynamics of power is behind Dreiser's trilogy based on the life of Chicago financier and transportation baron Charles T. Yerkes, named Frank Cowperwood in the novels: *The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914), and the posthumously published *The Stoic* (1947). Despite financial defeats in Chicago and London, and most of his wealth disappearing after his death, Cowperwood, unlike most Dreiser characters, uses his power to maintain control of his environment. In his pursuit of young women and his interest in art, Cowperwood, like Yerkes himself, distains Victorian values, and for all his monopolistic motives, his philanthropy and transportation schemes benefit the cities in which he operates.

The third volume of the Cowperwood trilogy was initially delayed by Dreiser's interest in publishing the semi-autobiographical *The Genius* (1915), the controversial reception of which, because of its

frank treatment of sexual matters, involved the author in litigation for some years. He then turned his attention to the book for which he is probably best known, *An American Tragedy* (1925). The novel is based closely on a 1906 murder case and narrated through a mixture of psychological analysis and objective reportage. Again social class, desire, and the lure of materialist success play a large part in protagonist Clyde Griffiths' downfall, and inasmuch as Clyde is a victim of these forces, Dreiser makes him a sympathetic figure. But also contributing to this sympathy, and the complexity of Clyde's fate, is that Clyde's motives and actions in the murder scene itself remain ambiguous. He plans a murder, but the boat's capsizing is accidental. Yet he does nothing to save from drowning the pregnant lover who stands in the way of his hopes for social and financial success. As in all of Dreiser's major novels, the role of chance complicates his naturalism.

With *An American Tragedy*, Dreiser was at the height of his fame and seriously considered for the Nobel Prize that went to Lewis. But he published no further novels in his lifetime, concentrating mainly on nonfiction, short stories, and autobiography, apart from his work on the third Cowperwood novel and the posthumously published *The Bulwark* (1946).

Lewis was generous to Dreiser in his Nobel speech, while Howells had declined the opportunity to review *Sister Carrie* in 1900. However, Edith Wharton (1862–1937) was a writer both could respect. Howells had published five poems by the eighteen-year-old Edith Jones in the *Atlantic Monthly* and in 1901, reviewed favorably her second book of short stories, *Crucial Instances* (1901). In 1911, the two lobbied unsuccessfully for Henry James to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, and in 1920, Howells included Wharton's 1902 story "The Mission of Jane" in his anthology *The Great American Short Stories* (1920). As for Lewis, although Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* was awarded the 1921 Pulitzer over his *Main Street* despite the recommendation of the selection committee, he dedicated his next novel, *Babbitt* (1922), to her, and in his Nobel speech included Wharton in his list of "several first-rate writers." Nevertheless, she chided Lewis in a February 9, 1931 letter for his attack on Howells in the speech, arguing that in *A Modern Instance* (1882), Howells "gave the first honestly realistic picture of the American mediocracy" and paved the way for the next two generations of realists, including her own and that of Lewis himself (Nettels 165).

Wharton came from a cultivated, wealthy New York background—as an illustration of the social circle, those poems in the *Atlantic Monthly*

were sent to editor Howells by Longfellow. She started publishing short stories in the leading magazines in the 1890s, collecting most of them in three volumes between 1899 and 1904. Her early nonfiction includes *The Decoration of Houses* (1897), and *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904), both showing her sophisticated taste. Critics early noted the influence of Henry James on the short fiction, although as Margaret McDowell has pointed out, Wharton's stories "are more direct than James' stories . . . and they develop a dramatically compressed situation rather than a meticulously elaborated one" (27), while Elsa Nettels among others has argued that Howells rather than James is the more direct influence. Nettels adds the important proviso that in Wharton's fiction, "seemingly chance events" are actually part of "a view of human life according to which characters themselves, whether driven by inward passion or inescapable fate, are predestined to a certain end." Howells, in contrast, "so far as possible . . . sought to free his characters from a plot leading them to predetermined fate" (Nettels 160, 171). On this point, Nettels' observation puts Wharton closer to Dreiser than to Howells.

The "inescapable fate" suffered by Wharton's central characters is usually brought about by the rigid, at times amoral, conventions of an elite, wealthy social order wary of outsiders. This is the case with Lily Bart in Wharton's first important novel, *The House of Mirth* (1905), as she graces and then is expelled from wealthy New York society. Lily has the taste, beauty, and social connections to succeed in this world of New York mansions, visits to Newport, and occasional trips to Europe, but with little money of her own she is vulnerable to the predatory designs of married men who see her as a desirable mistress, although she has more than one opportunity to make a loveless marriage that would secure her financial position. But her affections lie with the less well-off Lawrence Selden, who, at a key moment in this novel of the social importance of keeping up appearances whatever the reality, assumes that appearance *is* reality. The love between the two exists outside of the conventions that expel socially compromised Lily and that mislead Selden's judgment of her, and only in their final meeting, too late, has "the external aspect of the situation . . . vanished for him as completely as for her" (*Library of America* 326). The novel is also the richer for the range of its social world, particularly as it displays the position of women across social classes. This range includes, as well as Lily's vulnerability, the near poverty of Nellie Struther, whose husband accepts her regardless of her past, the world of the working girls who

sew the finery so important to display and appearance at the opulent parties, and even the selfish Bertha Dorset, obliged for her social position to marry a dull man, and resorting to duplicity in order to retain any sexual vitality.

The rural New England of *Ethan Frome* (1911) is quite different from the glittering New York and Newport social world of *The House of Mirth*, as the name of the town, Starkfield, where Ethan has spent “too many winters,” makes clear. Nevertheless, the conflict between passion and social obligation, and the complex ways in which both can be a trap, are similar in both novels, with the difference that the rural setting gives a greater role to nature. Family obligations to his elderly parents initially thwart Ethan’s ambitions, and then emotional and domestic needs drive him to marry Zeena. When he meets Matte Silver, a combination of chance and the conflicting roles of husband and lover bring about the moral and physical punishment that forces him to fulfill his obligations to both women.

After 1907, Wharton made her home in France, where she would live for the rest of her life. European society as well as that of New York is the setting for *The Custom of the Country* (1913), although in this novel the old aristocratic New York of *The House of Mirth* is giving way to the more energetic and vital world of the newly rich. The central character, Undine Spragg, has none of Lily Bart’s qualms about using marriage for her social ambitions. She marries and divorces as it suits her needs and regards emotional commitment as a weakness and motherhood as an inconvenience. Although Undine winds up married to something of a kindred spirit in Elmer Moffatt, the success of her manipulations is never enough to satisfy her. Her social ambitions remain unsatisfied and her calculations continue. Although Undine is undeniably unsympathetic (“an ideal monster,” “not a single redeeming feature,” “greed personified,” to quote three of the reviewers), her manipulations indicate a degree of greater freedom for women to maneuver in the America of the capitalist robber barons.

*Summer* (1917), like *Ethan Frome*, is set in a bleak, rural New England community. Class and social mores limit the socially unformed, imaginative, independent-minded Charity Royall, her name suggesting the two forces that shape her life, her dependence upon the kindness of charity, in the person of lawyer Royall who rescued her from a bestial, poverty-stricken life on the Mountain, and the authority she assumes but cannot exercise suggested by her surname. She is rescued by the morally complex Royall three times, each time reduced to a

passive figure barely aware of her surroundings. Social convention, represented by her lover Harney's obligations to his distant engagement and the social opprobrium of pregnancy out of wedlock, defeats the love between Harney and Charity. Wharton leaves open, however, the degree to which lawyer Royall is right about Harney's motives toward a woman he purports to love but sees outside of his own world of social convention. Certainly, he never tells her of his engagement. This ambiguity about Harney is achieved by Wharton's feat of telling a richly detailed story entirely from Charity's point of view despite her limited, only slowly growing understanding of her own sexual awakening, and of the events that play out through the pleasures of summer and into the life-threatening cold of New England's coming winter.

Wharton's last major work, *The Age of Innocence*, appeared in 1920. Like *The Custom of the Country*, the novel begins with the old New York of the 1870s and ends with the changing world of a generation later. Newland Archer enjoys a comfortable life within the old conventions but is forced to confront its restrictions when he falls in love with Countess Olenska and is defeated in his attempts to escape his now loveless marriage and flee with her. Years later, he settles for memories rather than meet her again when the chance arises. Archer's "restless and curious" architect son, baffled at his father's decision, sums up the world of his father's youth, and perhaps unknowingly the novel of manners that recorded it: "You never did ask each other anything, did you? And you never told each other anything. You just sat and watched each other, and guessed at what was going on underneath. A deaf-and-dumb asylum in fact! Well I back your generation for knowing more about each other's private thoughts than we ever have time to find out about our own" (*Library of America* 1290, 1298). The code of the 1870s world within which the novel's Lawrence Lefferts unfailingly passed his judgments has given way to one that values the energy and imagination that attracted Newland to Countess Olenska. At the end, however, he rationalizes what has been on the whole a narrow, virtuous life. He knows that he has missed "the flower of life," but tells himself "that it did not so much matter if marriage was a dull duty, as long as it kept the dignity of a duty." "After all," he reflects, "there was good in the old ways" (1291).

In one of Wharton's finest short stories, "Roman Fever," published just three years before her death, Alida Slade is the Newman Archer figure, adhering to convention and resisting her sense of its dull rewards. She is one of "two American ladies of ripe but well-cared-for

middle age” reflecting on their different associations with Rome as they pass a slow afternoon looking out over the city. The somewhat bitter Mrs. Slade recalls, “what different things Rome stands for to each generation of travellers. To our grandmothers, Roman fever; to our mothers, sentimental dangers—how we used to be guarded!—to our daughters, no more dangers than the middle of Main Street” (*Library of America* 749, 754). The memory echoes two of Henry James’ late nineteenth-century heroines: Daisy Miller died of the “Roman fever” (1878) and the unguarded Isabel Archer was beset by “sentimental dangers” in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). In “Roman Fever,” Jenny Slade is as dull as her mother, while the more adventurous Grace Ansley and her illegitimate daughter are rewarded through Barbara’s engagement to the dashing Marchese Campolieri—an aviator quite at home with the machines that so troubled Henry Adams in his *Education*. The story makes quite clear where its author’s sympathies lie.

Edith Wharton was born into a world of wealth. In contrast, naturalist author Jack London (1876–1916), born John Griffith Chaney, is reputedly the first American prose writer to become a millionaire solely from his writings. London’s eleven months of experience during the Klondike Gold rush of 1897 brought him no riches but provided him with material for much of his finest writing. His greatest strength was probably in his shorter fiction, although in his relatively brief career he published in many genres, in all some fifty books, including almost two hundred stories and twenty novels. He published his first book of stories, *The Son of the Wolf*, in 1900, and his subsequent novels include *The Call of the Wild* (1903), *The Sea Wolf* (1904), *White Fang* (1906), and the semiautobiographical *Martin Eden* (1909). *The Iron Heel* (1908) arguably foreshadows the rise of fascism in the coming decades and has been seen as a forerunner of George Orwell’s *1984*.

In London’s fiction, influenced like Dreiser’s by the ideas of Darwin and Herbert Spencer, nature is not concerned with the individual but with the species. Those best adapted to an environment are most likely to survive in it. Thus, in “The Law of Life” (1901), the aged Native American chief waits to die, being too old to survive, and the wolves that come for him recognize their superiority to a weakened human. In the famous story “To Build a Fire” (1902), the man’s death comes from instincts and knowledge less attuned to the harsh conditions that kill him than are those of the dog who survives. *The Call of the Wild* is the story of Buck, a domesticated dog who out in the wild follows his

instincts to join a pack of wolves. The story explores the similarities as well as the differences between man and dog in a narrative told almost entirely from the point of view of Buck. The slightly archaic vocabulary and word order bring a mythic quality to the tale.

As fine as London's work is at its best, his fiction reflects a conflict in his thinking between the Social Darwinism of Spencer—which he compounded with his interest in the idealized Nietzschean superman—and his socialist confidence in the strength of group power. Martin Eden, the eponymous writer hero of London's 1909 novel reflects his creator's contradictions. Martin is interested enough in socialism to speak at a socialist meeting but argues against it in conversation with others. Similarly, London's writing reflects both his admiration for the strong individualism that produced such Gilded Age figures as Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller, and also his sympathy for the incipient labor movements that through group activity sought to improve industrial working conditions. Moreover, although the dogs at the center of the two books that made London famous, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, are both strong individuals, there are times in each story when the combined force of the pack is more likely to succeed. Additionally, for London, the individual is most vulnerable when alone, as in "To Light a Fire."

Despite London's early financial and critical success, in *Martin Eden* he illustrates the emptiness and isolation that he felt such success brought. Martin becomes cut off from his working-class roots and has only contempt for those who now seek his company because of his success and fame. London himself was always trying to leave civilization behind either through travel or by retreating to his 1500-acre ranch in Sonoma County, California. However, not all of London's travel was to escape. One of his most enduring nonfiction books, *The People of the Abyss* (1903), records the appalling conditions he encountered in London's East End on a visit in 1902. London also took the haunting photographs of poverty, drunkenness, and destitution that accompany his riveting account.

The naturalism that London's fiction shared with Dreiser, Crane, and Norris led to similar generalizations about human motivation and actions and a similar kind of pseudo-scientific narrator. But even more than with the others, this has the effect of making his characterizations somewhat reductive; his characters, whether human or animal, operate more by instinct than thought. Whereas Dreiser in his finest novels, *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*, brings in

enough of the outside world to complicate such generalizations, London is not at his best in such accounts. The social world of *Martin Eden* is thinly sketched and the characters are too often just mouth-pieces for the author's views. Even the novel's more successful accounts of working life, such as the laundry scene, are more set pieces than integrated with the novel. However, when the settings are harsh primitive conditions, as in the stories of *The Sea Wolf* and others set in the frozen wastes of the Northwest, and some of the later tales set in the Pacific islands, his narratives achieve more drama. Here humans are reduced to the instincts of animal life in order to survive, and the stories can be about either animals or humans as far as the view of life and its surroundings is concerned. The interchangeability is illustrated at the end of *White Fang*, when Jim Hall, the human who has been reduced by wrongful imprisonment and harsh treatment to the condition of a wild dog, is contrasted with White Fang, the part wolf whose instincts of trust and affection come to the fore thanks to his kind treatment by Weedon Scott.

London did not sustain his success in his later novels, stories, and nonfiction. Mary Austin observes in her autobiography *Earth Horizon* (1932): "Jack . . . was, when I came to know him, sagging a little with the surfeit of success" (Austin 302). London's excessive drinking contributed to his increasingly poor health (in 1913, he published a frank alcoholic memoir, *John Barleycorn*), and his expenditures never matched his income, causing him sometimes to rush materials into print. Both factors contributed to the declining quality of his writing. In his need to keep publishing to meet his debts, at one point, London even purchased plots from the young Sinclair Lewis. Upton Sinclair, a lifelong admirer of London's work, writes in *The Cup of Fury* (1956), "his last novels, *Burning Daylight* and the *Valley of the Moon* are so poor in quality that you can scarcely believe you are reading books by London" (164). After London's death, his Northland stories became undeservedly classified as children's literature, but he remains one of the most widely read and translated American authors. The international reputation that his earliest works brought him continues into the present.

London's fellow Socialist Party colleague, Upton Sinclair (1878–1968)—London resigned from the party in 1916, Sinclair in 1933—had a long and successful publishing career. By the 1940s, he was amongst the most widely read American authors. His most influential book, *The Jungle* (1906), with its revelations about practices in

the Chicago cattle slaughterhouses, brought about important improvements in food protection laws, but not the reforms in the exploitative labor practices that had been Sinclair's prime target. His 1906 *Autobiography* describes being called to the White House upon the novel's publication, after which President Theodore Roosevelt dispatched the labor commissioner Charles P. Neill and a settlement worker to check on the author's facts. The result was the Meat Inspection Act and the Food and Drug Act, both passed in 1906. (Congress finally took action against the monopoly practices of the Beef Trust in 1917.) Sinclair lived long enough to be present in the East Room of the White House on December 15, 1967, for *The Jungle* and its author to be acknowledged upon President Johnson's signing of a Meat Inspection Act that further strengthened earlier laws.

Sinclair's novel was one of several books that took aim at the power of mass industries and monopoly industrialists around the turn of the century. Henry Demarest Lloyd wrote on the abuses of monopolies and trusts in *Wealth Against Commonwealth* (1894), Ida Tarbell wrote a *History of the Standard Oil Company* (1904), and Lincoln Steffens authored *The Shame of the Cities* (1904). Before any of these books were published, President Benjamin Harrison signed the anti-monopoly Sherman Anti-Trust Act into law in 1890; however, it was not enforced until the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt over a decade later. Sinclair's career-long contribution to the voices of reform covers almost 90 books and pamphlets. The best known after *The Jungle* are probably *Oil* (1927), an exposure of practices in the California oil fields, *Boston* (1928) centered upon the Sacco and Vanzetti case, and his Pulitzer-Prize winning *Dragon's Teeth* (1942) about the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany.

*The Jungle* ran serially in a leading Socialist magazine, *Appeal to Reason*, after Sinclair had spent seven weeks in Chicago's Packingtown investigating the living and working conditions of the largely immigrant workforce. The stockyards and associated industries at the time employed 40,000 workers. As the novel's chapters began to appear in the magazine, Sinclair recalled in a 1965 preface that he received further information and stories from readers about the industry. When publishers were initially reluctant to accept the work, Sinclair made plans to publish it by subscription, although eventually Doubleday and Co. agreed to issue the book once its allegations were verified.

The novel exposes the living and working conditions of the immigrant families employed by the stockyards and preyed upon by corrupt

landlords and politicians. The central character, the Lithuanian immigrant Jurgis Rudkus, loses his father, wife, and son to these conditions, and is himself brutalized. He turns to crime and then becomes a contributor to the political corruption himself, but his values are restored when he discovers the community of socialists. The final chapters of the novel, its weakest part, are devoted to speeches and rather artlessly contrived discussions outlining a socialist analysis of labor and capital relations, along with the socialist remedy for such ills as experienced by Jurgis and his family. Jurgis virtually disappears from the narrative as the arguments are taken up by characters more sophisticated and articulate than he ever is. But Sinclair made no excuses for what he felt was an important presentation of the remedy for what he had exposed, and a sympathetic reader might argue that Jurgis becoming absorbed into the political argument mirrors the party's arguments for unity and communal strength.

The novel has a more complex structure than acknowledged by those critics who separate the expose of the slaughterhouse conditions and the human story. The assembly line that controls the slaughtering and disposing of the animals is paralleled by the factory's treatment of its labor force, who are worked until no longer useful to the plant and then replaced once injured or exhausted. What can also be said for *The Jungle* as a work of fiction is that it features characters and describes conditions comparatively rare in American fiction. Jack London appears in the last pages of the book, although not explicitly named, when the narrator describes "a young author who came from California," had varied experiences, and "All these things he pictured in his books, and because he was a man of genius he forced the world to hear him. Now he was famous, but wherever he went he still preached the gospel of the poor" (Sinclair 321). London himself predicted in a review, "it is a book that may well make history" (London, *Library of America* 1144–1145). As for the Chicago stockyards, they went into years of decline after their heyday in the 1920s, and the last cattle pens were demolished in 1971.

### Regional Fictions: Austin, Glasgow, Cather, and Roberts

Mary Austin (1868–1934) at one point in her career belonged to an artist's colony in Carmel, California, that included Jack London, and later the two kept up a lively correspondence, but she is remembered

more as an environmentalist and early feminist than as a socialist writer. An often-reproduced photograph shows her lounging on the beach with London and writers George Sterling and James Hopper in 1906. Although Austin grew up in Illinois, she moved to California at the age of twenty and her writing on the Southwest, its deserts and its Native American and Hispanic people, would bring her most fame. She began publishing stories in the late 1890s but became well-known with her fourteen sketches, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903), a book that she described as encompassing country “between the high Sierras south from Yosemite—East and South over a very great assemblage of broken ranges beyond Death Valley, and on illimitably into the Mojave Desert” (Austin, *Rain* ix). She had a similar success with *Lost Borders* (1909) on similar landscapes and desert dwellers. Austin’s most notable novel is the semi-autobiographical *A Woman of Genius* (1912, revised 1917), written while she spent some years in New York. The novel explores the conflicts in a talented woman between career, love, and family.

The two books of desert sketches have been of recent interest to scholars of ecocriticism, and the early feminist themes in her writing have also attracted attention—particularly her accounts of strong women, often abandoned by men, who discover qualities of tough-minded independence in their determination to survive. Three of the sketches that best illustrate this latter quality are “The Basket Maker” from *The Land of Little Rain*, and “The Return of Mr. Wills” and “The Walking Woman” from *Lost Borders*. Seyavi, the basket maker of the first story, is old, blind, and too crippled by age to any longer make the baskets which provided a living for her and her son. The Paiute Indians have fought and lost their last battle against the whites, their territory lost, and Seyavi can no longer believe the old myths of her ancestors. However, although the larger culture of the Paiutes is being destroyed, it lives on through the tribal women’s collective basket making and through their connection to the land which for Austin is all-important.

The desert is a central feature of “The Return of Mr. Wills.” “Desertness” attacks the home and even the personality of Mrs. Wills as her husband loses his money investing in futile searches for lost mines, and eventually leaves her in order to make his searches alone. She discovers the pleasures of independence, recovers some of the “prettiness” that life with Mr. Wills had worn away, and becomes part of a social life that she had never known in her married isolation.

However, oppression returns when after three years Mr. Wills returns. Mrs. Wills can only hope that the dream of lost, rich mines will send him away again.

These two stories, like “The Walking Woman”—and many of the other sketches—are told in the first person, the narrator being an observer who either knows the central character or seeks her out to discover her story. This perspective works particularly well in “The Walking Woman,” where the central figure, known only as Mrs. Walker, remains a figure of mystery even as she tells something of her story to the narrator. Mrs. Walker “had begun by walking off an illness” and subsequently “had walked off all sense of society-made values” (*Borders* 199, 208). The story illustrates what Austin said of her work in *Earth Horizon* (1932) that she wrote of “the quality of experience called Folk, and . . . the frame of behavior known as Mystical” (Austin vii).

Austin’s several stories and sketches about Native American life, particularly the Paiute and Shoshone tribes, led her during her lifetime to be regarded as something of an expert. Her most successful play, *The Arrow Maker*, staged in New York’s New Theatre in 1911, is set among the Paiute tribe, and featured costumes and artifacts modeled on items in the American Museum of Natural History collections, with songs and chants taken from recordings of Native American music. But Austin herself knew none of the Native American languages that she writes about, and this aspect of her work has come in for criticism from those who feel that such writing appropriates the voice of a minority in the service of a dominant culture. However, Mark Schlenz in his introduction to the reissue of Austin’s *The Basket Woman: A Book of Indian Tales* (1999), a collection that Austin put together for children and first published in 1904 (when she subtitled them “A Book of Fanciful Tales”) cites Austin’s sensitivity to the deprivations suffered by the Paiutes, noting the important ways in which her work challenges the stereotypes of Native Americans and their lives that were held at that time.

Austin’s 1932 essay “Regionalism in American Fiction” is an attempt to counter the somewhat dismissive attitude toward regional fiction held by many critics of the time, and to separate “local color” from a more sophisticated treatment of place. For Austin, genuine regional fiction, as opposed to fiction in which region served only as background, required “two indispensable conditions of the environment entering constructively into the story, and the story reflecting in some fashion the essential qualities of the land” (Austin, “Regionalism” 106)

Using such criteria, Austin applies “the regional test of [the story] not being possible to have happened elsewhere” (100) to affirm Hawthorne’s *The House of Seven Gables*, Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, James’ *Washington Square* and Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* as meeting the requirement. Willa Cather’s *My Antonia* does, but not her *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (New Mexico is “an interesting backdrop” nor Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “its moral and intellectual outlook is New England from the ground up” [105, 106]) Despite Sinclair Lewis wanting to define himself against Howells, Austin blames both of them “for the thinning out of American fiction by a deliberate choice of the most usual, the most widely distributed of American story incidents, rather than the most intensively experienced” (101).

Austin does not specifically mention the fiction of Ellen Glasgow (1873–1945) in her essay, although she does note Glasgow’s major theme, “The Old South has given rise to the New South” (104). In the first years of the century, literature set in the American South was usually the literature of period nostalgia, with stories focused upon old Southern gentry and the genteel conventions of aristocratic plantation life. The market was supplied by such writers as Thomas Nelson Page, and with more racist elements by Thomas Dixon Jr., whose *The Clansman* (1905) was adapted for D. W. Griffith’s controversial 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*. Glasgow is an important figure in the transition from such period narratives to novels using realist modes to explore the clash of tradition and modernity. She particularly examines the impact of industrialism and class conflict upon the South and the resistance by some women to the roles traditionally assigned to them by cultural assumptions and Romantic myth. Her own essay on regional writing, her 1928 “The Novel in the South,” announces, perhaps a little prematurely, a Southern Literary Renaissance. Of the nineteen writers discussed, there is no place for William Faulkner. That particular modernist contribution to the literature of the South was about to come. Within two years of the article, both *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* would be published.

Glasgow was born in Richmond, Virginia, and lived there except for spending the years 1911–1916 in New York. Most of her fiction centers upon her home state. Self-educated and well-read in the radical thinkers of the day, she published twenty novels over her long career as well as collections of literary criticism, poetry, and short stories. Her first two novels, *The Descendant* (1897) and *Phases of an Inferior Planet* (1900) are apprentice work but show her early interest in characters

who rebel against convention. The trilogy that followed, which she conceived as a social history of the South in fiction, begins with *The Voice of the People* (1900) set in a version of Williamsburg that she calls Kingsborough. Covering 1870–1898, the novel expands the usual range of characters in Southern fiction of the time to include the lives of poor farmers and small-town merchants. The following novel, *The Battle-Ground* (1902), set in the Civil War, dramatizes the end of the Virginia aristocracy, while the third is *The Deliverance* (1904), looking at the post-war world that the devastated South must now face. This 1904 volume is usually considered the best of Glasgow's early novels, dramatizing the social and romantic complications of the formerly rich and aristocratic Blake family being dispossessed of their estate now owned by their former manager Bill Fletcher. The South is in flux: the characters' attitudes to the past vary from a stubborn refusal to recognize any change in the old patterns of gentility to finding the old codes onerous and oppressive.

*Barren Ground* (1925) marks her literary maturity. This novel, which Glasgow considered her best—the one “I might select . . . for the double-edged blessing of immortality” (*Ground* vii)—takes Dorinda Oakley from a lovelorn twenty-year-old to a woman of fifty. She is a survivor who lives through the betrayal and death of her lover, the deaths of her father, mother, child, and husband, and years of grinding farm work. There is a determinist element in the fates of Glasgow's range of characters, the tenant farmers, landowners, storekeepers, decadent aristocrats, black farmworkers, and even Dorinda herself—a determinism played out within the roles of class, opportunity, and heredity—that gives the narrative inevitability without sacrificing complexity or emotional range. Dorinda's serenity of soul and material success, for example, come at a loss. As she breathes in the beauty of the rural countryside, the fifty-year-old Dorinda reflects: “Though in a measure destiny had defeated her, for it had given her none of the gifts she had asked of it, still her failure was one of those defeats, she realized, which are victories. At middle age, she faced the future without romantic glamour, but she faced it with integrity of vision” (525).

Glasgow's novels over the next few years were ironic comedies of manners, *The Romantic Comedians* (1926), *They Stooped to Folly* (1929), and what is generally considered her finest novel, *The Sheltered Life* (1932). The 1932 novel tells the story of two neighboring Virginia families in Queenborough (clearly Richmond), filtered through the point of view of General Archibald at seventy-five and

Jenny Blair at almost ten, then the same pair at eighty-three and seventeen, giving the book a design both focused and ranging. The shelter of the title is the façade of propriety and innocence behind which the realities of duplicity, passion, and tragedy are played out within the Archibald and Birdsong families. The novel's three section titles suggest the three ways in which the family, particularly the General, deal with modern challenges to the old traditions: "The Age of Make-Believe," "The Deep Past," and "The Illusion." In "The Deep Past" section, Glasgow demonstrates the development of a stream-of-consciousness mode that she had first brought into *Barren Ground*. Henry Seidel Canby, in reviewing the novel, summed up Glasgow's career-long achievement well, calling her "one of the very few writers upon the old and the modern South who understands tradition, who comprehends the intricate values of the life of a 'gentleman' or a 'lady,' and yet never writes sentiment when satire is called for, never perfumes the 'bad smell' of decaying gentility, never neglects either the significance of surface or the contradictions of desire and act" (Scura 328–329).

Glasgow's last published novel, *In This Our Life* (1941), which takes her fiction up to the years just before World War II, won the author her only Pulitzer Prize, perhaps more a belated recognition of her work as a whole than for the novel itself. Glasgow wrote of the book, "the problem I had set myself was an analysis in fiction of the modern temper; and the modern temper, as it pressed round me, in a single community, appeared confused, vacillating, uncertain, and distracted from permanent values" (*Measure* 249). In retrospect, she felt that declining strength had not allowed her to fully complete her intentions.

When the novel was filmed in 1942 at Warner Brothers it marked John Huston's second directing credit, following his remarkable debut with *The Maltese Falcon*, while Bette Davis and Olivia de Havilland took the leading roles and Howard Koch (co-writer of *Casablanca*) wrote the screenplay. The quality of these collaborators indicates the high profile of Glasgow's fiction, but the film itself—bringing the minor theme of the two sisters Stanley and Roy into the foreground—indicates how little control an author had once screen rights were sold. Glasgow wrote to a friend, "No I did not see the movie . . . The advertisements were enough to make me understand that Hollywood had filmed a different book, not mine at all, and had entirely missed the point of my novel" (*Letters* 302). In the heyday of the studios, many a novelist must have had the same response!

Like Glasgow, Willa Cather (1873–1947) was born in Virginia, but the settings of her major novels are the Midwest, her family having moved to Nebraska when she was ten, and the Southwest, which fascinated her following her first visit there in 1912. There are similarities in Glasgow and Cather’s exploration of a romanticized past’s appeal to characters uncomfortable with the modern world, although Cather’s fiction generally shows more sympathy for such characters. With Glasgow, class-bound convention and the fact of slavery complicate any escapist fantasies of Virginia’s past, while in Cather’s fiction, a further dimension, in her pioneer stories, is the geographical as well as temporal division, the world that the immigrants leave behind, and the uncompromising physical demands of the New World they find themselves in. In her best-known statement on the novel, “The Novel D $\acute{e}$ meubl $\acute{e}$ ” (1922), Cather rejected the kind of “realism” that offers “a vivid and brilliant form of journalism,” and “the cataloguing of a great number of material objects” while “minutely and unsparingly describing physical sensations.” She argued instead for selection, the “unfurnished novel” of the essay’s title, “to interpret imaginatively the material and social investiture of [the] characters; to present . . . by suggestion rather than by enumeration” (“Cather 1992 834-836”).

Cather was very successful in what was at that time usually a male world, that of magazine editing. Although she began her career in Pittsburgh, where she published her first two books, *April Twilights* (1903), a book of verse, and a collection of stories *The Troll Garden* (1905), the stories caught the attention of S. S. McClure, the owner of *McClure’s*, who brought Cather to New York in 1906 as staff writer and managing editor of the prominent magazine. The position made her an important figure in the literary world of New York, Boston, and London, but necessarily limited her own writing. With the publication of her first novel, the Henry James’ influenced *Alexander’s Bridge* (1912), she left *McClure’s* to become a full-time fiction writer.

*O Pioneers!* (1913), set in the Nebraska of her childhood, is generally considered the novel in which Cather first finds her own voice and subject. Here and in a number of subsequent novels, she conveys the harsh life of the pioneers, whether from Sweden, Eastern Europe, or Russia, as they work the unforgiving land and are variously exhausted, hopeful, or homesick. The most famous of these novels, *My Ántonia* (1918), tells the story of Bohemian hired girl Ántonia Shimerda from the limited but affectionate and nostalgic perspective of childhood friend Jim Burden, now outwardly successful as a New York City

railroad lawyer, but inwardly disappointed with his success and his loveless marriage. In the novel's introduction, Jim and a fellow railroad traveler who also knew the charismatic *Ántonia* find that "our talk kept returning to [her] . . . More than any other person we remembered, this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood" (x). A combination of Jim Burden's memories, disappointments, and dissatisfaction brings him back to make the pioneer girl he watched growing up in his own youth again a part of his life, sharing "together the precious, the incommunicable past" (371).

The story is as much Jim's as it is *Ántonia's*—his loss amidst material comfort, and her hard and difficult struggles. The novel's richly ambiguous title, also the title of the manuscript Jim brings months later to his companion from the train journey, might suggest a recognition by him of a limited perspective, or of the subject interpreted "imaginatively" as Cather's 1922 essay on the novel requires. However, it might also suggest an almost desperate attempt to reclaim, even possess her, even if just in language. Certainly, in other novels, particularly *A Lost Lady*, Cather is interested in the restrictions that male projection attempts to impose upon women. The most famous of the earlier novel's images, a plough left standing in a field on an upland farm, "heroic in size" as it fills the setting sun, suggests the unending cycle of plains farm labor that defines the pioneer lives. However, it could also suggest the rootedness of *Ántonia's* life that is part of her appeal for Jim, disconnected as he is from his childhood and living a life circumscribed in ways legal and marital.

In *A Lost Lady* (1923), the pioneers are the wealthy railroad builders who open the ways to the West. Marian Forrester enjoys her role as hostess and glamorous appendage to a much older wealthy railroad pioneer and is idealistically admired by the youthful Niel Herbert. But holding on to his youthful ideal of her as he grows older, he resents her ability to adapt to the more materialist times once her husband dies and leaves her penniless. The pioneers are honorable but flawed dreamers whose very success ensures the end of their era. Captain Forrester is associated with an image of the mountains, the very geographical features that the railroad conquers. By contrast, the current generation, represented by the aptly named Ivy Peters, is openly ruthless and prosaically practical. Niel himself is torn between the two, between his unrealized infatuation for the Marian of the pioneer years, and the practicality of his MIT degree. Ivy Peters' exploitive dealings are finally

of more use to Marian than Niel's romantic nostalgia. The novel's occasional departure from Niel's point of view invites a more complex judgment of the pioneer age than his, as well as a more sympathetic perspective on Marian.

*The Song of the Lark* (1915) is the first of Cather's novels set in the Southwest, but more complex are the later novels *The Professor's House* (1925) and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927). *The Professor's House* combines Cather's interest in both the Mid-West and the Southwest. Geoffrey St. Peter is a history scholar at a Midwest college in which the curriculum is becoming increasingly commercial and narrowly practical in its focus. St. Peter's wife and daughters enjoy this new materialist world and move enthusiastically into a new house that represents their values. St. Peter, however, delays joining them in the move. He feels a greater affinity with the spiritual values of the Catholic housekeeper who remains in the old house and continues to feel the deep loss of his finest pupil, Tom Outland, killed in the First World War. In this novel, the past is considered irrelevant by St. Peter's family, by the college he teaches at, and by the Washington D.C. Smithsonian Institution whom Tom Outland tries to interest in his mesa cliff dwellings find. St. Peter remains marooned in a present that he despises.

*Death Comes for the Archbishop* is set entirely in the Southwest and is loosely based on the nineteenth-century missionary work of Archbishop Lamy and Father Machebeuf to set up the new diocese of New Mexico in a territory of corrupt Spanish priests and wary Mexicans and Native Americans. Cather presents the priests as men of integrity and genuine faith, although they are sometimes very human in their occasional pleasure in material comforts, and in Latour's case, his occasional spiritual crises. Here Cather abandons the narrative of figures displaced by temporal or technological changes and the story is set entirely in the nineteenth century. For some, who see Cather as never resolving an ambiguity in her fiction between nostalgia for the past and confronting the values of the present, this shift is a significant retreat. Her following three novels are all set in the past: *Shadows on the Rock* (1931) in seventeenth-century Quebec; much of *Lucy Gayheart* (1935) in the early twentieth century on the Nebraska plains; and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), her last novel, in the Virginia of the years before and following the Civil War.

*Death Comes for the Archbishop* takes Father Latour's story up to the coming of the railroad, by which time his once arduous missionary journeys on muleback are a distant memory. But unlike Marian Forrester,

Jim Burden, or Geoffrey St. Peter, Father Latour dies before he has to face the modern age. The question is left for Latour's friend the old Navajo Eusabio to pose about the coming century: "Men travel faster now, but I do not know if they go to better things" (*Later Novels* 454).

Elizabeth Madox Roberts (1881–1941) set her major fiction in the area around her home town of Springfield in central Kentucky. Her first major novel, *The Time of Man* (1926) describes the inner life of Ellen Chesser, the daughter of an itinerant farmer, from her early childhood, to sexual discoveries, poverty, shiftless wanderings, a difficult marriage, and motherhood. The novel is particularly successful in pairing Ellen's inner life with concrete details of tobacco farming and tenant life, of injustice, and of the violence suffered by her husband Jasper. The novel ends with Ellen's sense of the unity of generations and the land, from her mother, to herself, and to her children, as the family sets out on another journey, to "some better country. Our own place maybe" (396). In a later introduction, Robert Penn Warren makes the large claim that her language is the equal of William Faulkner and Eudora Welty, "the language of a person, and a society, which is realized in the novel with a sober actuality" (xvi).

*The Time of Man* brought Roberts national and international fame, which continued with her subsequent novels but did not last beyond her lifetime. *The Great Meadow* (1930), her other major work, is a historical novel set in the years 1774–1781, incorporating such historical figures as Daniel Boone, as well as some of Roberts' own pioneer ancestors. The story of the journey from Tidewater Virginia to the wilderness of Kentucky is told through another tough heroine, Diony Jarvis. As with the earlier novel, this is finally a celebration of human triumph over adversity. Of these two novels, Harry Modean Campbell and Ruel E. Foster comment that they "set forth in a major key her great conviction that through the power of spirit, man conquers all. These are positive, unqualified affirmations on a grand, almost heroic, scale" (153). Ellen Glasgow, not so inclined to the heroic, but aware of the challenges in writing a historical novel, wrote to a friend in 1934 that she usually found Roberts' portrayal of her "poor white" characters unconvincing, confessed that *The Time of Man* "left me cold," but declared *The Great Meadow* "impressive" (*Letters* 151). However, Glasgow had been a little more positive in writing of *The Time of Man* and Roberts' second novel *My Heart and My Flesh* (1927) in her "The Novel in the South" essay, detecting "a Southern warmth and exuberance beneath the veracious Middle Western method" of the two novels (99).

## Black Writing: The Washington and Du Bois Debate

In her 1928 essay, Glasgow notes that when it came to plantation life, readers and writers of late nineteenth-century Southern literature preferred descriptions of “the more picturesque aspects of slavery” (98). Not surprisingly, it was the realities of slavery, and its continuing legacy, that concerned the two most important black leaders in the early years of the century, Booker T. Washington (1865–1916) and W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963).

In 1860, at the start of the Civil War, America’s black population numbered 4.4 million. The number had doubled to 8.8 million by 1900, with about 90% living in the South, although a decades-long migration North would begin around 1910 as many sought better living conditions, more employment opportunities, and an escape from racial violence and discriminatory laws. The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, adopted July 9, 1868, had sought to bring equal rights before the law to all citizens regardless of color, an amendment designed to set aside the Supreme Court’s 1857 *Dred Scott vs. Sandford* decision which had denied U.S. Citizenship to American descendants of African slaves. Nevertheless, almost all Southern states resisted the Amendment, agreeing only because to oppose it would mean the loss of congressional representation. In the ensuing decades, these states found many ways to circumvent the law’s intent. It would take legislation in the 1950s and 1960s, and the Civil Rights Movement of those decades, to turn the intent of the Amendment into practice.

In their writing and activism, Washington and Du Bois responded in different ways to these and other challenges faced by America’s black population at the turn of the century. Born a slave, Booker T. Washington, went on to be the founder and first President of what is now Tuskegee University, starting with “a broken-down shanty and an old hen-house” (Washington 311) and finishing his work with over a hundred buildings and an endowment of two million dollars. Donations to the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute came from some major financial barons, including Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Collis P. Huntington. Carnegie, for example, gave \$20,000 to the Institute to pay for a campus library. In 1903, he donated \$600,000 to the college’s endowment, and in addition, provided Washington and his wife Margaret with a salary for life. In 1896, Washington became the first African American to receive an honorary

degree from Harvard University. On December 16, 1898, President McKinley visited Tuskegee along with his family and members of his cabinet, and contemporary accounts put the attending crowd at around 6000. McKinley's speech, according to *The New York Times*, praised the Institute as a "unique educational experiment" that "exalted the race for which it was established" (McKinley 1).

The philosophy guiding Tuskegee was Washington's argument that the practical solution to the prejudice and inequalities between the races was for the black population to learn useful trades, while not at present insisting on the social and political equality granted by a law almost universally ignored, and even legislated against, in the South. With this approach, argued Washington, both races and the region, would benefit. Thus, the curriculum at Tuskegee emphasized the learning of a trade in addition to academic subjects for all students. The students themselves erected almost all the campus buildings, while the college's surrounding land gave opportunities to learn agricultural trades and other vocational skills.

Washington's story and philosophy are laid out in his autobiography *Up From Slavery* (1901), the most important of the fourteen books that he published in his lifetime. The previous year Washington had published *The Story of My Life and Work*, written for a black, Southern audience, and consisting largely of previously published speeches, newspaper reports, and letters. This earlier book, ghostwritten by young black journalist Edgar Webber, received poor reviews, whereas *Up From Slavery* was an immediate success and went on to become one of the best-known American autobiographies of the century.

Charlotte D. Fitzgerald in *The Black Scholar* (1991) has usefully identified the three audiences that Washington had in mind for *Up From Slavery*: the former slave, the former slaveholder, and the Northern activist. Washington softens or omits some details of slaveholder brutality toward slaves in order to emphasize a former slave's need to focus on self-improvement and useful skills and to create a climate devoid as much as possible of recriminations and slaveholder guilt. Although Washington does give examples of continuing discrimination in his narrative, his response is always one of quiet tolerance, keeping always in mind his larger purposes. His narrative also contains many examples of being treated civilly by Southern whites and of their approval and support of Tuskegee's growth and of Washington personally. He presents Southern whites as themselves victims of an abhorrent system, and the two races as needing to help each other move toward

a community of mutual dependence that would benefit all. Washington's famous, and for many black leaders controversial, symbol, used in his 1895 "Atlanta Exposition Speech" (reprinted as part of the book), is of "the hand": "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." In this speech, he reiterates: "the wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing." This conciliatory position argues that the "severe and constant struggle" is to focus upon the individual's self-discipline and practical hard work, as evidenced by the story of Washington's own accomplishments, rather than on a struggle against the Jim Crow laws then being passed across the South (Washington 136-137).

Washington presents himself in the book as a humble everyman figure, thus not a threat to the white ex-slaveholders' economic or political power, and at the same time a figure completely at the service of and identified with an institution that has its aims laid out publicly and is openly dependent upon white philanthropy. This everyman persona also allows Washington to make *Up From Slavery* mirror the quality of the Horatio Alger tales of rags to riches so popular in the Gilded Age, as well as—to cite an earlier model—*The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. Hard work, self-discipline, clean living and a clear goal: these could be achieved by anyone. Racial issues are present but as background to the primary narrative. Race was sufficiently in the background that Howells could almost set it aside in his 1901 comment: "Except for the race ignominy and social outlawry to which he was born, the story of Booker T. Washington does not differ so very widely from that of many another eminent American. His origin was not much more obscure, his circumstances not much more squalid, than Abraham Lincoln's" (Howells 192).

Although Washington accepted that temporarily tolerating social and political inequality was a necessary compromise, he secretly funded a number of civil rights cases. Moreover, in the later years of his life, he protested the treatment of blacks in the South, drawing attention to the barbarity of lynching, and to the inequalities in education and general treatment under the law. In an article in *The Century* in 1912, for example, he pointed out that Alabama spent almost five times as much on educating a white child as on educating a black child, that

eighty-five percent of the convicts in Alabama jails were negroes, that railroad companies charged black travelers just as much as white travelers without feeling obliged to provide the same conditions for travel, and that negroes were taxed to support public libraries that they were not allowed to use. He pointed out, too, that because of inequities in jail sentences, many negroes labored under conditions similar to slavery once sentenced, and thus continued to serve whites as a free source of labor. Washington was also careful to acknowledge that some improvements had taken place, although those acknowledgments remained generalized in an article whose purpose was clearly to point out specific injustices.

The concept of Tuskegee itself and Washington's methods in running it came in for strong condemnation in one of the most important American novels of the century, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). The Washington figure, Dr. Bledsoe, is determined to allow the college's white patrons to see only the side of black life that flatters their sense of paternalist philanthropy, even if it means ruining any chance of success for one of its students. In a less high-profile criticism, Langston Hughes, writing an introduction to a reprint of *Up From Slavery* in 1965, termed Tuskegee "a splendid achievement" (vi) and concedes "The South and its Negroes at the end of Reconstruction needed a man like Booker T. Washington" (vii). However, he concludes that the program of compromise in the South "had completely and clearly failed" (x). "In 1965," he points out tellingly, "the students of Tuskegee itself were picketing the Alabama State Capitol at Montgomery on behalf of the simple right to vote" (x).

W. E. B. Du Bois had more of a direct impact on black writing, as H. G. Wells foresaw when on his first visit to the United States, he met both Washington and Du Bois. He describes Washington in *The Future in America* (1906) as having "statecraft. He looks before and after, and plans and keeps his counsel with the scope and range of a statesman." Contrasting Du Bois, Wells observed "the other great spokesman color has found in our time . . . is more of the artist, less of the statesman" and generally a more passionate man (197–198). In 1943, Du Bois became the first African American elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

Du Bois grew up in the racially tolerant town of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. After attending Fisk and Harvard Universities (where in 1895, he became the first African American to earn a PhD), Du Bois undertook the first important sociological study of African Americans,

looking at the black population of Philadelphia's seventh ward. He continued these studies more broadly when he took up a position as Professor of Economics and History at Atlanta University, one of the South's black colleges.

Du Bois became increasingly critical of what he termed Washington's 1895 "Atlanta Compromise," arguing instead that blacks should insist upon full social and political rights, as well as the opportunity for those with ability to go beyond the industrial and vocational training represented by the curriculum at Tuskegee. This disagreement was laid out most influentially in Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), where he praised Washington for advocating "Thrift, Patience, and Industrial training for the masses" (59), but deplored the acceptance of segregation that accompanied his program. The criticism is largely respectful, a disagreement about what is given up and with what consequences, although at one point he writes of "Mr. Washington's cult" and its "unquestioning followers" (43).

*The Souls of Black Folk* was the third of what would be over twenty books Du Bois published in his lifetime, books that include sociology, history, novels, and autobiography. Henry James in *The American Scene* cited the book as "the only 'Southern' book of any distinction published for many a year" (418). In addition to its disagreement with Washington, *The Souls of Black Folk* laid out the influential concept of black "double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unrecconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (3). Much African American writing about identity can be viewed alongside Du Bois' perception, which remains an important concept in scholarly discussions of race in America.

Other chapters in the book cover autobiographical details, such as teaching school in rural Tennessee and the death of his first-born child. Others include discussion of what kind of institution a university should be, the history of black religion in the South, an examination of the consequences of race separation in social, economic, political, and educational development, a biography of African nationalist priest Alexander Crummell, and an analysis and description of slave songs, "the sole American music" (251). Thus, the book both explores the spirituality, music, poetry, and poetic prose of the African American

experience and also lays out objectively the history of economic, social, and political opportunities afforded and denied to the black population following the Civil War. In an early chapter, this history is national or regional, but later in the book, Du Bois discusses specifically the cotton-focused Dougherty County, Georgia, and how it has fared. The description has the authority of Du Bois' personal observation as he travels the area. His clear, factual analysis illustrates why so few black laborers are able to improve their economic status or get free of their burdens of debt. The labor conditions, he concludes, are similar to those in the "England of the early nineteenth century, before the factory acts" (169).

Du Bois was central to the formation of the Niagara Movement in 1905, an all-black protest movement that focused on higher education and equal citizenship rights for African Americans. He also helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1910, where he served as director of publicity and research. In the same year, he helped found the NAACP's magazine *The Crisis*, which reported on all aspects of African American life, from uplifting accounts of African American achievements to reports of discrimination, racial violence, and lynchings. The journal was an important source for writers who would later become part of the Harlem Renaissance; among the writers who appeared there were Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Jean Toomer. Du Bois' views of literature were somewhat conservative, however, for he viewed negative portrayals of black life as likely only to reinforce prejudice.

In his editorials in *The Crisis* on race in the Depression-era 1930s, Du Bois began arguing for "self-segregation" and economic self-sufficiency rather than integration, although still insisting upon full civil rights. These views were in opposition to the policy of the NAACP and he left the organization in 1934 when they began to censor his articles. He continued to publish regularly elsewhere and for ten years chaired the Sociology Department at Atlanta University. He returned to the NAACP for a short period but left again in 1948 following a dispute over the NAACP's support of Harry Truman. Du Bois' sympathies were with the Henry Wallace/Glen Taylor Progressive Party ticket. In the 1950s, he inevitably came in for scrutiny for his alleged Communist sympathies. Even though, by this time, he was an internationally known figure, the government withheld his passport from 1952–1956. This figure so central to African American politics and literature died in exile, having renounced his United States citizenship

in 1963 to become a citizen of Ghana, where he received a state funeral. His death came the day before Martin Luther King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, where Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, announced Du Bois' death to the crowd from the same platform.

### American Theater in the First Decades

In the late nineteenth century, European theatergoers could see plays that explored profound social and psychological issues that still resonate with audiences today, plays by Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw, Gorki, Synge, and Chekhov. In the United States, however, few American plays strayed from a fare of spectacle, melodrama, and heavily costumed period pieces. However, a growing audience for plays that were not foreign imports, and the needs of the expanding U.S. motion picture industry, produced two important changes in copyright law in the new century. American playwrights were assisted by new protections in the Copyright Law of 1909 signed by President Theodore Roosevelt that gave them more control of their work once it was published. Then August 1912 brought revised copyright protection for filmmakers. The 1912 law also eased the process. Before that date, copyright owners had to register motion pictures as a series of still photographs.

The few more ambitious plays that started to appear in the new century took on such issues as determinism, the changing role of women, and the contradictions in some long-held American ideals. An indication of the problems facing playwrights who wanted to address complex social issues came with the play generally considered the first modern American drama, James A. Herne's *Margaret Fleming* (1890, 1891). In the play, recently married businessman Philip Fleming is revealed as the father of an illegitimate child whose mother dies. Fleming's wife takes in the child alongside the couple's own new baby and the play ends with the possibility that Fleming might be able to save his marriage, although in the first-produced version of the play, the wife refused him forgiveness. The play first ran in Lynn, Massachusetts, an event that Hamlin Garland described as "a substantial triumph," writing of the last scene that "the action and thought move on to a height as well as a depth unparalleled in few American plays" (Garland 6).

Nevertheless, the play was initially refused production by New York theaters, and when it was eventually staged in the city in December 1891, the major critics ravaged it: "The life it portrays is sordid and mean," wrote the *New York Herald* critic, continuing, "its effect upon a sensitive mind was depressing" (Perry 170). On the occasion of a two-week revival in 1894, the *New York Times* reviewer commented, "just so far as 'Margaret Fleming' is realistic, it is sordid and cheap" (*Times* 4).

One early development that helped the cause of serious drama for decades to come was George Pierce Baker (1866–1935) founding his pioneer Workshop 47 graduate playwriting class at Harvard in 1905. Among Baker's students were Edward Sheldon, Eugene O'Neill, S. N. Behrman, and Thomas Wolfe (although Wolfe's literary career would be in prose, not drama). Other American universities subsequently began offering playwriting classes, a development that not only improved the quality of the plays being written but also encouraged the ambitions of some writers beyond purely commercial considerations. Baker's influence extended to Yale University when he moved there in 1924 to help found the important Yale School of Drama.

Nevertheless, at the turn of the century, American drama and dramatists remained conservative and commercial. Innovation was stifled by a business structure controlled by a few individuals who did not want to risk losing the considerable cost of putting on a play by producing something beyond the familiar material that had worked so often before. Several production cartels arose controlling the kinds of plays that could be produced, the most powerful being the Theatrical Syndicate, which by some counts controlled around 700 theaters nationwide. The rival Shubert brothers eventually broke the Syndicate's power in the early 1910s, aided by the rise of such successful independent producers as David Belasco.

When they were not staging vaudeville or minstrel shows, many provincial theaters hosted the touring companies of New York shows, the improvements in rail transportation making easier the task of conveying from town to town the equipment of a large-scale production. James O'Neill, Eugene O'Neill's father, formed his own touring company, making a fortune appearing in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, exactly the kind of melodramatic costume drama that filled late nineteenth-century provincial theaters. However, despite these touring outlets, by the turn of the century, most new plays, and most employment for people in theater, centered on the commercial theater of New York's

Broadway. There some plays were harbingers of the important drama to come, and some plays took on, however tentatively, important social issues.

One of the successful domestic dramas of the era on Broadway was Landon Mitchell's (1862–1935) *The New York Idea* (1906), a comedy about a divorced couple who reconcile after a series of farcical events. Although the ending is sentimental, the play deals thoughtfully with divorce, a controversial issue of that time. Mitchell had first come to prominence with *Becky Sharp* in 1899, an adaptation of William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, and which became the source of the first full-length Technicolor film in 1935.

The first American playwright to achieve an international reputation, to become a millionaire, and one of the first to publish his plays, was Clyde Fitch (1865–1909). In 1901, Fitch had four plays running at the same time on Broadway, while his *The Truth* (1906), a comedy of manners, was among his many successes in England. He became good friends with Edith Wharton when the two collaborated on a dramatization of *The House of Mirth* in 1906, although the play managed only fourteen performances (“What the American public always wants is a tragedy with a happy ending,” Howells reportedly told Wharton as they left the theater together after the first night [*A Backward Glance* 147]). His best-known play is *The City* (1909), a conventional tale of moral laxity and redemption featuring incest, murder, and drug addiction. As often occurs in such plays, love is an important source of the central character's change. This is also the case in Edward Sheldon's (1886–1946) *The Boss* (1911), although here and in two of his earlier plays, *Salvation Nell* (1908) and *The Nigger* (1909), Sheldon also treats some of the social problems of the day: business issues, the urban poor, race, and post-Civil War Reconstruction. These issues are not, however, the main focus of the plays, which reflect the romantic and melodramatic tastes of the time. Sheldon had many of his plays made into films, including some early silent films. *Salvation Nell* was filmed three times, in 1915, 1921, and 1931, *Romance* (1913), which had a London run of over 1000 performances, was filmed in 1930 starring Greta Garbo, and *Song of Songs* (1914) in 1933 with Marlene Dietrich.

William Vaughn Moody (1869–1910) had established a solid reputation as a poet before his greatest success on the stage, *The Great Divide* (1906). He wrote some poetic dramas which never saw the stage, but the two plays for which he is most remembered are both

prose works. The “divide” of the 1906 play is the conflict between a New England repressed by its Puritan heritage, and the independence of spirit represented by the West. This conflict is dramatized through the choices of Easterner Ruth Jordan and Westerner Stephen Ghent as their marriage develops from a violent beginning toward happiness and mutual acceptance. Less successful on the New York stage, running for only six performances in 1910, was his other major prose play *The Faith Healer*. Like the earlier play, *The Faith Healer* argues for an essential unity between spiritual and earthly love: “By the mystery that is man, and the mercy that is God,” as Ulrich Michaelis puts it at the end of the play, releasing invalid Mary Beeler from the scientific skepticism of her husband and the pictures of Darwin and Spencer on his wall (Moody 334).

A playwright who had some success in dramatizing the changing role of women in the new century, Rachel Crothers (1878–1958) raised important issues, even while the plays relied upon conventional plot lines. With a play appearing almost every season for more than thirty years following *The Three of Us* (1906), Crothers was the most commercially successful woman playwright up to the Second World War. The plays usually cited as her most interesting, apart from the 1906 play, are *A Man’s World* (1910) which attacks the different moral standards applied to men and women, and *He and She* (1911) in which a number of alternative futures are suggested for women. In this play, the female character who sets aside a promising career for family responsibilities does so regretfully, fully aware of what she is giving up. The play had to wait until 1920 for its New York staging when Crothers herself played the lead role. Many of her later plays were social comedies that explored the mutual obligations of marriage. The most notable of them, *Susan and God* (1937), ran for almost 300 performances on Broadway, reaching a wider audience when filmed by George Cukor in 1940 with Joan Crawford and Fredric March in the leading roles.

Also of note in this period were two plays among those that did not follow the realist trend. Many of David Belasco’s (1853–1931) plays in his long career were in the tradition of melodrama, and he is most remembered now for his *Madame Butterfly* (1900) and *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905), both the basis of operas by Giacomo Puccini that have had a popularity and a stage life well beyond their sources. However, his *The Return of Peter Grimm* (1911) is notable for its treatment of the supernatural, which allowed Belasco to show off some of the recent technical innovations in stagecraft. A much more substantial play is Percy MacKaye’s (1875–1956) *The Scarecrow* (1908),

based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Feathertop." This story of a scarecrow that comes to life in seventeenth-century New England, concocted by witchcraft and tutored by a devil, illustrates behaviors ranging from revenge, hypocrisy, foolishness, and love, before, in rejecting his tutor, the inhuman creation comes to display the best qualities of what it is to be human.

### Native American Literature in the Early 1900s

Of the seventy-six million population of the United States in 1900, 237,000 were Native American. The defeat of the Lakota at the 1890 Massacre at Wounded Knee in South Dakota became the final episode in the American Indian Wars, while earlier, in the twenty years following the Civil War, many Native Americans had been subjected to forceful removal West from their native lands. White author Helen Hunt Jackson's (1830–1885) *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) and her novel *Ramona* (1885) brought wide public attention to the devastating effects upon tribal life of these forced marches.

Government policy was to try assimilating the Native American population into mainstream culture. In particular, the Dawes Act/General Allotment Act of 1877 (repealed in 1934) tried to turn Native Americans into white homesteaders by dissolving collective tribal titles to property, giving families individual allotments within tribal lands, and then granting citizenship to those granted the allotments. The soil was often of poor quality for farming. Furthermore, this kind of division of land went against centuries of Native American agricultural practices and land ownership, as well as failing to provide access to modern agricultural skills and necessary capital for the farms to have any chance of success. The tribes' lack of legal knowledge contributed to over two-thirds of the allotted lands being lost over the lifetime of the Act. Another major aspect of the assimilation policy was the setting up of Indian boarding schools, away from the reservations, with the intention of distancing the younger generation from traditional Native American languages, culture and customs—instead instilling Christian instruction along with vocational training. One result was that many more Native Americans learned to read and write English than in the previous century, and some began to write and publish autobiographies, fiction, poetry, and essays that dealt with Native American issues.

Understandably, the threat to cultural identity and the relationship of history to the land became central topics in much of the Native American writing that followed. A number of Native American writers collected and published oral tales and legends in an attempt to preserve or recover something of the traditions. Sometimes they found a national audience. A version of the same sentimental nostalgia about the West that made Owen Wister's novel *The Virginian* the bestselling novel of 1902, and a fascination with what was deemed "exotic," was behind the turn of the century reading public's interest in the fast-fading Native American traditions and narratives.

In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and into the twentieth centuries, most published Native American writing was autobiographical. The first novel published by a Native American was *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854) by John Rollin Ridge, a Cherokee. Although the central figure, Murieta, is Mexican American, the events of the novel generally parallel Native American experiences of displacement. Ridge was also the first Native American to publish a book of poetry, *Poems* (1868). The first novel published by a Native American woman was the sentimental romance *Wynema: A Child of the Forest* (1891) by the Muscogee-Creek Sophia Alice Callahan (1868–1894) while another early novel centered upon Indian life is *Queen of the Woods* (1899) by Potawatomi tribe member Simon Pokagon (1830–1899) (although the extent of his authorship is disputed and he probably collaborated with Mrs. C. H. Engle the wife of his publisher). The novel describes the destruction of Native American life caused by the introduction of alcohol and the impossibility of a return to the earlier affinities with nature—a narrative to be mirrored in a good deal of Native American writing later in the century, and even into the twenty-first in the work of a writer like Sherman Alexie.

Charles A. Eastman (1858–1939), a Santee Sioux educated at Dartmouth College and Boston Medical School, and one of the first Native American doctors, was the most widely read Native American author in the early part of the century, often collaborating with his Anglo-American wife Elaine, and writing around eighteen books of fiction and nonfiction, some for younger readers. His autobiographies *Indian Boyhood* (1902) and *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916), along with *Old Indian Days* (1907), stories depicting the life and customs of the Sioux in Minnesota and the Dakotas from the 1700s through the 1860s, and *The Soul of the Indian* (1911), describing Sioux religion, are among his better-known titles. The stories in

*Old Indian Days* are often based on actual events in Sioux history, on the exploits of particular individuals, or on events during wars with whites or neighboring tribes. Divided into two sections, "The Warrior" and "The Women," the stories rarely focus on character, and sometimes lapse into noble stereotypes and purple prose, but their strength is in the ethnography. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff points to "their careful delineation of Sioux rituals, customs, and camp life; use of oral history; and incorporation of Sioux phrases." The section on women, Ruoff notes, "is particularly significant because few contemporary ethnographies of American Indians and autobiographers dealt with women" (Ruoff xviii, xvi).

Sioux writer Gertrude Bonnin/Zitkála-Šá (1876–1938) had a prominent literary career in the earliest years of the century, and continued to publish essays and some fiction and nonfiction in later years, although her subsequent career was as an advocate and lobbyist for Native American causes. Growing up on a South Dakota reservation but later receiving a boarding school education and attending Earlham College (she had a white father), Zitkála-Šá devoted her public career to advocating for Native American citizenship and improvement in reservation living conditions, "using the language of one to translate the needs of another" (Fisher xiii). Before her marriage in 1902, she published in *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly* three autobiographical sketches, taking her life from childhood to student to teacher, as well as several short stories. Her collection, *Old Indian Legends*, appeared in 1901, and the stories and autobiographical sketches in 1921 as *American Indian Stories*. Many of her stories reflect her opposition to the assimilation program, as well as her own sense of living between two cultures but fully within neither. "The Soft-Hearted Sioux" (1901), which appeared in *Harpers*, is an example. The narrator leaves his tribe to attend mission school for nine years, returning when charged to convert the tribe to Christianity. Not only is he unsuccessful but the "nine winters I hunted for the soft heart of Christ" have left him without the hunting skills to feed his dying, starving father. When his desperation results in his being sentenced to death for killing a white man, he is torn as to which of the cultures will receive his soul: "Will the loving Jesus grant me pardon and give my soul a soothing sleep? or will my warrior father greet me and receive me as his son?" (Davidson 125).

Zitkála-Šá is also credited with writing the first opera by a Native American. In 1899, she studied music and violin at the New England

Conservatory of Music in Boston, Massachusetts. *The Sun Dance* (1913), written in collaboration with composer William Hanson, melds “Native American ritual with the standard European operatic tradition,” its music incorporating “oral musical Indian traditions into a highly organized and acculturated Western musical form” (Davidson xx, xxi). The opera had its successful premiere in Utah in 1913 and was also performed by the New York Light Opera Guild in 1938.

Francis La Flesche, (Omaha 1857–1932) was the first Native American ethnologist, writing *The Omaha Tribe* (1905–1906) with Alice Fletcher and several works on the Osage Tribe, including the posthumously published *Dictionary of the Osage Language* (1932) and *War Ceremony and Peace Ceremony of the Osage Indians* (1939). In his short literary career, he published an autobiography, *The Middle Five* (1900), about his upbringing and life as a student in a Presbyterian mission school in Northeastern Nebraska, and two short stories from an uncompleted project for young male readers. Flesche’s dedication in *The Middle Five* was “To The Universal Boy”—as part of combating, as his “Preface” puts it, “the misconception of Indian life and character so common among the white people . . . largely due to an ignorance of the Indian’s language, his mode of thought, his beliefs, his ideals, and his native institutions” (xviii). Publishers Doubleday and McClure, in rejecting the manuscript, asked La Flesche to consider adding “something which would show the actual life of the Indian in his wilder state” (Parins xii). La Flesche declined the suggestion and published elsewhere. The practices described in the book include the common ones of prohibiting “our own language” in order to force students to learn English, and giving students such names as Ulysses S. Grant, Alexander, and Isaac because “their Indian names were difficult for the teachers to pronounce” and “considered by the missionaries as heathenish” (xvii—xviii). However, the literary career that La Flesche attempted after *The Middle Five*, as James W. Parins and Daniel F. Littlefield point out in their edition of his unpublished fiction, represents “only an interlude” in his work as an eminent ethnologist (xxiv). His career put him at the center of ethnology in America, working at the Office of Indian Affairs in Washington D.C., and from 1910 at the Smithsonian’s Bureau of American Ethnology.

Two early century Native American poets whose work still receives attention are Alexander Posey (Creek 1873–1908) and the Canadian E. Pauline Johnson (Mohawk 1861–1913). Both poets, Posey in *The Poems of Alexander Posey* (1910) and Johnson in *The White Wampum*

(1895) and *Flint and Feather* (1917) tended to romanticize the landscape and Native American lore of their poems. Politics entered Posey's poems at times, and he is also known for his dialect satires *The Fus Fixico Letters*, which he had begun writing in 1902 (collected in 1993), which comment on the exploitation suffered in the Indian Territories. Fus Fixico (in English "Heartless Bird") shares his views on various Indian topics with two friends "Hotgun" and "Toofpafka Micco." Posey published the seventy-two letters in his own newspaper, the *Eufaula Indian Journal*, which he had purchased in 1902.

By the time Johnson died, five years after Posey, she was famous in Canada and the United States for the public performances of her work for which she was billed as "The Mohawk Princess." (Her father was a Mohawk Chief, and her mother an English cousin of William Dean Howells.) From 1904, she devoted most of her literary work to prose, rewriting the Chinook stories told to her by Chief Joe Capilano before his death in 1910 for *The Legends of Vancouver* (1911). Her later stories are collected in the posthumously published *The Moccasin Maker* and *The Shagganappi*, the latter written for children, both published in 1913. In the eleven stories of the former, mainly focused on women, "her heroines inevitably triumph over difficulties" whether from life in the wilderness or from temporary or permanent separation from husbands (Ruoff, *Moccasin Maker* 22). The heroines are frequently Native American women, and a theme in three of the stories is the difficulties caused when a Native American woman falls in love with a white man, part of a wider theme in the stories of "the traumatic consequences of white contact on Indian Life" (Ruoff 25).

### Poetry Before the Modernists

The two figures now recognized as the major American poets writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, had little influence on most poetry being published around 1900. Walt Whitman was a controversial figure. Even fifty years later, undergraduate student Allen Ginsberg was asking his Columbia University professors why they were not teaching Whitman. In Emily Dickinson's case, in the early 1900s her poems appeared in "improved" versions that "corrected" the fragmentary form and broken rhythms that parallel the hesitations and doubts of her speakers. Meanwhile, the conservative taste of Boston publishers, commercial magazine editors,

and academics dictated most of the poetry that got into print. This situation contributed to the exodus of major poets Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and Hilda Doolittle (H. D.) to Europe in these years in order to find publishers and an audience. Of these exiles, only Frost would return to the United States to take up residence.

The poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906) gained wide notice when positively reviewed by William Dean Howells, but Dunbar felt pressure to publish poems that reproduced plantation stereotypes and dialect, even though Ohio-born Dunbar knew little of the South. His more serious protest verse, along with his fiction and essays, have only recently begun to receive the attention they deserve. Stephen Crane (1871–1900), like Dunbar and William Vaughn Moody, had his career cut short by an early death. His poems, written in free verse, have the unsettling directness of statement that characterizes such stories of his as “The Open Boat,” and his novels *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) and *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). This directness makes them appear more modern than those of most of his contemporaries and has been seen by some critics as foreshadowing the economy of imagist poetry. These lines are from his *War is Kind* (1899), the sentiments could be Thomas Hardy’s:

A man said to the universe:  
 “Sir, I exist!”  
 “However,” replied the universe,  
 “The fact has not created in me  
 “A sense of obligation.”

Harvard-educated Moody was one of the leading poets of the first decade, his poems being collected in 1901 and again in 1909. His verse dramas, as noted earlier, still receive attention, and his poetry exhibits a similar mix to the dramas—nature description, attempts to fuse natural and divine origins, and social commentary. Moody’s mildly feminist “I Am the Woman” received its posthumous publication in the first issue of *Poetry* in October 1912, three years after his death. Editor Harriet Monroe observed in her “Notes” to the issue, “the lamentable death of this poet two years ago [*sic*] in the early prime of his great powers was a calamity to literature” (*Poetry* 1, 1 [30–31]). However, despite this glance back to the earlier years of the century, the Chicago journal would soon feature more radical fare, regularly publishing the work of Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, Eliot, William Carlos

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Williams, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, H. D. and Pound—whose two poems in this first issue foreshadowed what was to come.

### ***The Chicago Renaissance: Masters, Lindsay, and Sandburg***

Chicago, as well as being the home of *Poetry*, the pioneer journal that starting in 1912 took American poetry into the twentieth century, was also the first home of the even more radical *The Little Review* (1914–1929). Both introduced their readers to the first works by many of the now most important names in English and American modernism. Yet *Poetry* and *The Little Review* are just two examples of a remarkable period of literary productivity associated with the city a few years into the new century. In 1890 Chicago had become the second largest city in the United States, the population doubling from one million to two million between 1890 and 1910. In 1893 it hosted a successful World's Fair to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus' voyage. The city's manufacturing industries, including meat packing, tool making, and wheat stacking, contributed to its growing wealth. Architects Frank Lloyd Wright and his mentor Louis Sullivan received international fame.

The city's increasing importance challenged the hegemony of the East Coast literary establishment. As early as 1898 Howells, using the examples of Robert Herrick (1868–1938) and Henry B. Fuller (1857–1929), argued that contemporary Chicago had been more fully presented in fiction than had New York (*Selected Literary Criticism* 3-6). Fuller's *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1893) is one of the first novels to engage the skyscraper and business culture of the growing city, while Herrick's *The Web of Life* (1900) is the best known of his Chicago novels. In the new century would emerge Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Floyd Dell (1887–1969) and playwright Ben Hecht (1893–1964), to note four of the best-known prose writers associated with the city, while Chicago's Edgar Lee Masters (1868–1950) produced one of the most famous poetry volumes of the century with his *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) set in a fictional small town in Illinois, although he was never able to repeat this success.

Masters, an attorney by profession, was for a few years, 1903–1911, in partnership with Clarence Darrow. Masters had written several undistinguished books of poetry and drama before he submitted the first of the Spoon River poems, "The Unknown," to *Reedy's Mirror* in

1914. The collection that followed, *Spoon River Anthology*, brought him national and international fame, but nothing he published after this volume, with the exception of parts of *The New Spoon River* (1924) and his biography of Vachel Lindsay (1935), came anywhere near the 1915 volume in quality or reader interest.

The book is composed of around 200 short epitaphs in free verse spoken by the dead in Spoon River Cemetery. The 1916 reissue added thirty-two new poems. The speakers and their lives are often based on individuals from the Illinois communities of Petersburg and Lewiston, where the poet grew up. The confessions of their greed, lusts, adulteries, crimes, callousness, suicides, abortions, hatreds, rapes, murders, crooked business dealings and regrets appalled those who thought such material not a suitable subject matter for poetry, or were opposed to the free verse that recorded the speakers' stories.

William Dean Howells called the book "shredded prose" in *Harper's* in September 1915 ("Easy Chair" 634). But for others the book represented an exciting break with outmoded ideas of form and subject matter. Ezra Pound declared in the pages of *The Egoist* in January 1915, "At last America has discovered a poet. Capable of dealing with life directly, without circumlocution, without resonant meaningless phrases. Ready to say what he has to say, and shut up when he has said it" (Ford 1).

Masters initially published the poems under the pseudonym "Webster Ford," the speaker of the last poem, a caution that appeared justified when, once his authorship became known, his law practice suffered because of the controversy over the poems. By the early 1920s, he decided to put most of his energies into his literary career and published frequently, eventually having around fifty books to his name.

In discussing the anthology, Masters pointed out that nineteen stories run through the individual epitaphs. "The fools, the drunkards, and the failures came first," he noted of the order, "and the heroes and the enlightened spirits came last" (Masters 50). Some figures recur more than others in the poems. The central villain of the *Anthology*, the banker Thomas Rhodes, for example, is mentioned in twenty. Sometimes the intertwined stories are alongside one another, as with the early poems "Ollie McGee" and "Fletcher McGee." The poem "Lydia Puckett" gives another perspective on the motives of the speaker immediately before, "Knowlt Hoheimer." Occasionally, in the more conventional poems, the speaker's story just illustrates a moral platitude. But on the whole, the series gains from Masters' personal

knowledge of many of the figures, or his recollection of figures discussed by his lawyer father or his grandmother. The sequence reflects many of Masters' own liberal positions as a Jeffersonian Democrat and religious skeptic, a tendency somewhat muted here but one which mars *The New Spoon River* (1924), and much of his subsequent work, which too often becomes polemical.

The speakers have various concerns. Sometimes there is bleak humor in a speaker's complaints, perhaps about how a surviving spouse has behaved since the funeral, or about the poor quality of a gravestone, or about the location of the grave in the cemetery. Stonecutter "Richard Bone" confesses that when he first came to Spoon River, he did not know whether the praise he was asked to cut into an individual's gravestone was true or false; although he later came to know the truth, "still I chiseled whatever they paid me to chisel/And made myself party to the false chronicles/Of the stones." The series achieves variety in that some of the speakers address the reader, some rail generally against the community or mankind, and others have particular complaints to make against other inhabitants of the graveyard. Masters ends the *Anthology* with two less successful pieces, "The Spooniad," a derivative mock-heroic blank verse poem alluding to Pope's *Dunciad* that includes some of the characters from the earlier verses, and an "Epilogue," which is a play that attempts to give a cosmic/mythic dimension to the voices in the graveyard. Both are generally seen as unsuccessful additions.

Part of the impact of the *Anthology* came from its apparent exposure of what lay behind the pieties and conventions of nineteenth-century small-town life. This aspect of Masters' book foreshadows Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* (1920) which have similar targets. Masters' poems also illustrate, more immediately and obviously than in the work of Robinson and Frost, what some poets were learning from novelists about bringing narrative, character, subject matter, and other aspects of realism into modern poetry. The free verse provides the flexibility and directness for the speakers to tell their stories, although the poetry retains a formal quality in that there are few runovers, and the lines are usually end-stopped. The author himself makes no overt comments, which contributes to the modern quality of the book. Its lack of judgment on the sexual mores of some of the characters suggests a sympathetic attitude, especially where the speaker is a target of the community's hypocritical prudery.

The anthology was an enormous success nationally and internationally and is still read and taught. Although anthologist Louis Untermeyer declared in his *Modern American Poetry* (1921) that “With *Spoon River Anthology*, Masters arrived—and left” (120), some recent critics have argued for the additional value of his four biographies for their stripping away of nineteenth-century sentimental pieties. In addition to Lindsay, Masters wrote biographies of Lincoln, Whitman, and Twain. What is not disputed is the importance of the *Anthology* in bringing a wide audience to the then-controversial medium of free verse.

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay (1879–1931) is mostly remembered for a handful of long poems that he performed on his reading tours across the country, performances that were very popular at the height of his fame around 1920. He came to prominence when Harriet Monroe published his “General William Booth Enters into Heaven” in the January 1913 issue of *Poetry* (the poem directs that it be sung, accompanied by bass drum, banjos, flutes, and tambourines). That year marked the first trade publication of his verse, but Lindsay had been writing poetry for fifteen years before this appearance in the Chicago magazine. He had studied art in Chicago and New York, and his drawings often accompanied the poems in the self-published books and pamphlets from the early part of his career. These early works, often just broadsheets, he would try to sell on the streets, or give away if he was unable to sell them. In 1906 in Florida, he began a series of tramping journeys that became part of the folklore of his biography and the subject matter of his poems, journeys in which he would sometimes sell his pamphlets for a meal or a night’s lodging. On his last tramp, for example, in 1912, he walked the Santa Fe Trail to Colorado and then down to New Mexico. He took a collection of poems with him titled “Rhymes to be Traded for Bread,” and his later poem “The Santa Fe Trail” is one of those for which he is still remembered (it was published in *Poetry* July 1914). Like many of his poems, it comes with directions on how it should be performed. The opening lines are “To be sung or read delicately to an improvised tune,” while the next stanza directs “To be sung or read at great speed.”

Lindsay wrote many conventional nature poems that have their roots in the sentimental pieties of late nineteenth-century verse. In general, he is a poet of nature, the “village,” and the small town rather than the growing urban centers, but his importance to the Chicago Renaissance was the performative aspect of his less conventional poetry, its repetitions, and the directness of language that accompanied it—moving

away from the formal conventions of genteel verse and its academic conception of audience. Important too were the new rhythms borrowed from musical forms that Lindsay brought into some of his poems. He called some “jazz” poems, while others were close to the syncopation of ragtime music. In his poem “The Congo,” the sounds and rhythms match Lindsay’s ideas of African music. Lindsay read this poem in front of an approving W. B. Yeats in 1914 when the famous Irish poet visited Chicago. But the poem is, understandably, controversial. Lindsay sometimes performed the poem in blackface. Critics from W. E. B. Du Bois at the time of its publication, to Susan Gubar and Rachel Du Plessis more recently, have criticized its narrow view of African Americans and its racist language.

As the title “General William Booth Enters Into Heaven” indicates, Lindsay’s poems had a visionary and messianic side. His early tramping with his pamphlets as much as the intent of his later performances were motivated by his desire to bring readers and audiences to an ecstatic appreciation of poetry, and thus to move American culture away from what he saw as its overly materialist values. In his poem “Why I Voted the Socialist Ticket,” Lindsay declares:

I am unjust, but I can strive for justice.  
My life’s unkind, but I can vote for kindness.  
I, the unloving, say life should be lovely.  
I, that am blind, cry out against my blindness.

Man is a curious brute—he pets his fancies—  
Fighting mankind, to win sweet luxury.  
So he will be, tho’ law be clear as crystal,  
Tho’ all men plan to live in harmony.

Come, let us vote against our human nature,  
Crying to God in all the polling places  
To heal our everlasting sinfulness  
And make us sages with transfigured faces.

In Lindsay’s poems, this mix of religion, social reform, patriotism and politics—he also wrote poems in praise of William Jennings Bryan (“Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan”), reformist Illinois governor John Altgeld (“The Eagle That is Forgotten”) and Lincoln (“Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight”)—is combined with what Lindsay called “A Gospel of Beauty,” a vision of a utopian “village” community of “Lincoln-hearted men” that he identified with the potential of

Springfield, Illinois, his home town. Present in his poems, too, are the influences of Blake, Poe, vaudeville, minstrel shows, and revivalist preaching. But John Gould Fletcher, writing in 1920, expressed a view held by quite a few fellow writers at the time that Lindsay “is a reformer first and a poet afterwards” (Fletcher *Essays* 125).

Lindsay offered his audiences a choice of four kinds of programs, identified by Denis Camp as: the “‘Gospel of Beauty’ lecture; theories on the ‘Art of the Moving Picture’; ‘An Evening of Higher Vaudeville and Orthodox Verse’; and ‘The Chinese Nightingale and Dramas for Impromptu Actors’” (Camp 234). The program on “the Moving Picture” evolved from Lindsay’s interest in pictorial design and performance in what was then still silent cinema, and which led him to publish in 1915 *The Art of the Moving Picture*, the first study of cinema as an art form, a volume well received and respected upon its appearance. The “Higher Vaudeville” program, in which Lindsay performed his most famous poems, became to his dismay what audiences mostly wanted to hear—he came to feel that he had failed to communicate the moral and idealistic purposes that were most central to his art. However, Lindsay had to continue his performances as the only way in which he could have an income. His sense of failure, problems in his six-year marriage to Elizabeth Connor, and a declining sometimes even hostile response to his performances by audiences, all appear to have contributed to his suicide on December 5, 1931, when he swallowed a bottle of lye.

Edgar Lee Masters wrote of Lindsay in his 1935 biography that his poems “constitute the most considerable body of imaginative lyricism that any American has produced” (*Poet in America* 314–315) and Sinclair Lewis said of him, he was “one of our few *great* poets, a power and a glory in the land” (quoted in Daniel, *The Crisis* 291). Although posterity has not endorsed these judgments, Lindsay invited broader ways of thinking about poetry in his performance art, his versatility, his role in keeping the oral tradition of poetry alive, and his use of the American vernacular. For some critics, he was a forerunner of what would become important features of the performance characteristics of the Beat poets some two decades after his death. Listeners can gain some sense of his performances, for Lindsay was recorded in the 1920s reading some of his most famous poems, including “The Congo,” “General William Booth Enters Into Heaven,” “The Flower-Fed Buffaloes,” “The Mysterious Cat,” “The Moon’s The North Wind’s Cooky,” and “The Chinese Nightingale.”

Carl Sandburg (1878–1967), like Masters and Lindsay, was born in Illinois, and like Lindsay became well known after appearing in the pages of *Poetry*. Sandburg had the longest career of the three writers, becoming something of a national celebrity in the 1950s, a fame due largely to his six-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln (1926 and 1939), which won Sandburg a Pulitzer Prize in History in 1940. His *Complete Poems* appeared in 1950 and the volume was awarded the Pulitzer for Poetry the following year, even though he had not published a volume of verse since 1936 and most of his important poems had appeared much earlier in his first two books.

Sandburg's parents were Swedish immigrants and his education was interrupted at thirteen by the need to find work to help his family. His praise of democracy, his sympathy with working people, and the mythologizing of Lincoln in the biography have all been traced back by commentators to his immigrant background and early years. He worked for the Socialist Party in Milwaukee, and then for various newspapers in Chicago, not leaving his last, at the *Chicago Daily News*, until 1932.

Harriet Monroe published eight of Sandburg's poems in the March 1914 issue of *Poetry*, poems that would, except for "The Hammer," subsequently appear in his *Chicago Poems* (1916). The opening poem, "Chicago," celebrates the city in free verse derived from Whitman but in the language of everyday speech and the imagery of a journalist. The city and its industry are personified as a strong, "husky," emotional laborer:

Hog Butcher for the World,  
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,  
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;  
Stormy, husky, brawling,  
City of the Big Shoulders.

In the poem, the violence, immorality, crime, and suffering are embraced as part of what the city is: "Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning." Allen Ginsberg would use much the same rhythms for a bleaker national vision in "Howl" forty years later.

The titles of other poems in the March 1914 *Poetry* tell of Sandburg's subjects: "Jan Kubelik" is an immigrant violinist, "The Harbor" contrasts the "ugly" docklands with the "sudden" vista of the lake, "At a

Window” is also based upon a contrast—here of “hunger, pain and want” with the far-off beauty of a “Western star.” “Who am I?” is a poem of Whitmanesque expansion while “Lost” is a poem about feeling isolated within the sounds of the harbor and its fog and mist.

A poem that did not appear in *Poetry*, “Fog,” but is in the 1916 volume shows another side of Sandburg’s poetry. His Whitmanesque poems contain catalogs of images, but a short poem like “Fog” is closer to the imagist verse of Ezra Pound and the other imagists then being published in the magazine, who demanded economy of expression and avoidance of abstraction:

The fog comes  
on little cat feet.  
  
It sits looking  
over harbor and city  
on silent haunches  
and then moves on.

Other poems in the 1916 volume similarly show Sandburg reading the imagists, poems such as “Choose,” “Whitelight,” “Flux,” and “White Shoulders.” In the February 1916 issue of *Poetry* he published a generous, informed, if somewhat guarded essay in support of Pound’s work. Pound himself had a much more ambivalent view of Whitman than did Sandburg (as in Pound’s poem “A Pact”) but Sandburg appreciated Pound’s “Guts and Efficiency” (*Poetry* 1916, 251) and his forthright support of free verse in what was then still a hostile climate. In keeping with Sandburg’s own poetics of spontaneity and emotion, he finds little help in Pound’s modernist critical pronouncements on poetry.

*Chicago Poems* focuses mainly on the city, while Sandburg’s next book, *Cornhuskers* (1918), mainly concerns the prairie. In the latter, the opening poem’s identification with the land is representative of Sandburg’s writing generally, whether the subject be the cornfields, working people, the city, or Abraham Lincoln. That common thread is the democratic populism that made him one of the most widely read American poets of the first half of the century. Titled “Prairie,” the poem begins “I was born on the prairie, and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a slogan.” The claim is Romantic, that the land offered the gift and through the poet finds expression. Reviewing the book in *Poetry* (December 1918), Alfred Kreyborg noted the continuing combination of Whitman and

the imagists behind different poems, seeing "Interior" as deliberately "after the manner of William Carlos Williams," for example ("New Book" 159). Williams himself, reviewing the *Complete Poems* in the September 1951 *Poetry*, echoed the general modernist judgment that while Sandburg was modern, his poems were formless, often too close to propaganda, and over the years showed little development after *Cornhuskers*. Sandburg is a figure who cannot be ignored, Williams concedes, but he continues, somewhat harshly, "'Chicago', his first brilliantly successful poem should have been his last" (*Selected Essays* 274). However that may be, a poem like "Grass," from *Cornhuskers*, illustrates the frequent perspective in Sandburg's work: the battlefields of Austerlitz, Waterloo, Gettysburg, Ypres, and Verdun are all one in the poem, to be covered by the inexorable grass. The two inevitabilities, of human violence and of nature are contrasted, but there is no examination of detail or historical or geographical difference in the poem. Time, Man, and Nature are large, unexamined categories in Sandburg's poetry in this and subsequent volumes.

Sandburg was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964. Contributing to his lasting popularity, along with the Lincoln volumes, were his two books of "American Fairy Tales" for children, *Rootabaga Stories* (1922) and *Rootabaga Pigeons* (1923), and his collection of folk tunes and harmonies, *The American Songbag* (1927). Somewhat in the tradition of Lindsay, Sandburg for many years traveled the country with a guitar performing traditional songs and his own poetry at recitals and readings. At his memorial service, held at the Lincoln Memorial in September 1967, where President Johnson spoke, historian Mark Van Doren eulogized Sandburg as a biographer of Lincoln, and fellow poet Archibald MacLeish termed him "A touchstone of America" (*Congressional Record* 26426).

### ***The Poetry of Feeling: Teasdale, Millay, Wiley, and Bogan***

Modernism and the critical approaches that explained it were inclined to be suspicious of poetry that centered upon feelings and that used conventional poetic form. Such suspicion impacted the reputations of Sarah Teasdale, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Elinor Wiley, each of them prominent in the early decades of the century but somewhat forgotten by the 1950s. However, their work has received closer attention in recent years and has brought some recognition of their particular achievements. To various degrees, all three poets explore nineteenth-century

ideas of fulfillment in romantic love. In contrast, Louise Bogan had a long and influential career as poet, editor, and critic, in a publishing history that began in 1920s Greenwich Village and continued into the 1960s.

St. Louis-born Sara Teasdale (1884–1933) was passionately courted by Vachel Lindsay among others before she married Ernst Filsinger in 1914. After some time living in Chicago, the couple moved to New York in 1916. Teasdale's suicide in 1933 came after a difficult bout of pneumonia which impaired her already delicate health.

Teasdale made the first of her many appearances in *Poetry* in March 1914 with three 'Love Songs.' "Old Love and New," the first of the group (retitled later "New Love and Old"), is representative in its lyrical form and subject matter of the themes in her early work: the pain of loving and of not being loved, loneliness, death, time, and loss. The emotions are directly stated so as not to lessen their emotional impact.

In my heart the old love  
 Struggled with the new;  
 It was ghostly waking  
 All night through.

Dear things, kind things,  
 That my old love said,  
 Ranged themselves reproachfully  
 Round my bed.

But I could not heed them,  
 For I seemed to see  
 Dark eyes of my new love  
 Fixed on me.

Old love, old love,  
 How can I be true?  
 Shall I be faithless to myself  
 Or to you?

Teasdale published seven volumes of poetry in her lifetime, while the posthumously published *Strange Victory* appeared in 1933. Her fourth book, *Love Songs* (1917), won the Columbia Poetry Prize, the forerunner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Louis Untermeyer, introducing a selection of her poems in 1921 in his *Modern American Poetry* anthology, praised this 1917 volume as leaving behind her earlier "love lyrics . . . written in a mood of literary romance, of artificial moonlit roses,

languishing lutes, balconies, passionate guitars” (294). In the introduction to her own anthology, *The Answering Voice: One Hundred Love Lyrics by Women* (1917), Teasdale identified the mid-nineteenth century as “the first time in the history of English literature [that] the work of women has compared favorably with that of men.” She added, characteristically, that “in most cases, the finest utterance by women poets has been on love” (ix). The term “utterance” also describes the isolated, often moody speaking voice of many of Teasdale’s own poems. Her formal preferences in poetry, and probably those of publisher Houghton, Mifflin too, meant that such modernists as H. D. and Mina Loy were not among her selections. She published an enlarged edition in 1928 adding fifty poems, but still did not include either of these two important figures.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950) also wrote formal, well-crafted verses, including many sonnets, sometimes on topics that exhibited a new frankness in poetry beyond that of Teasdale. But before these poems of the 1920s, she had become well-known for the long poem “Renaissance” published in *The Lyric Year* in 1912. In rhyming tetrameter couplets, the poem records the speaker looking across at a mountain view that evokes the conventional Romantic abstractions of Infinity and Eternity. But as in much early twentieth-century verse in traditional meters, the Romantic vision is qualified by earthly realities, here of death and suffering, and thus the idea of Infinity becomes oppressive: “And so beneath the weight lay I/And suffered death but could not die.” This is the kind of qualification of Romantic longing that Thomas Hardy in England and Robinson and Frost in American poetry could make more dramatic and take beyond such abstractions. However, the poem sufficiently impressed a patron who then helped pay for Millay’s education at Vassar. Upon graduation, Millay published her first volume, *Renascence and Other Poems* (1917) in which several of the poems foreshadow the frank portrayal of an independent woman’s point of view, poems for which she would become even better known.

Millay moved to New York’s bohemian Greenwich Village after Vassar, becoming associated with the experimental drama group The Provincetown Players, for whom she wrote the successful one-act verse play *Aria da Capo* for the 1919–1920 season. Publication of her poems in *Vanity Fair* brought her a readership beyond the readers of the Greenwich Village magazines, and her second book of verse, *A Few Figs from Thistles* (1920), caught the spirit of the new post-war sexual freedom, especially for women, that F. Scott Fitzgerald would famously

dramatize in his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, published the same year. For example, the suggestiveness of “First Fig”:

My candle burns at both ends;  
 It will not last the night;  
 But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—  
 It gives a lovely light!

And of “Thursday”:

And if I loved you Wednesday,  
 Well, what is that to you?  
 I do not love you Thursday—  
 So much is true.

And why you come complaining  
 Is more than I can see.  
 I loved you Wednesday,—yes—but what  
 Is that to me?

This was expression of a fresh, passionate, independent, and contemporary voice, unorthodox in spirit. Millay also published a number of short stories at this time, under the pseudonym “Nancy Boyd,” about the unconventional Greenwich Village life of which she was part.

*Second April* (1921) and *The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver* (1922) continued familiar themes, although some readers recognized a disenchantment with Greenwich Village life in the former. The latter was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1923 and contains many of her best-known sonnets, including XIX, a haunting poem of loss “What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why/I have forgotten.” Following her marriage in 1923 and further into the decade, Millay became more involved in social issues. Her “Justice Denied in Massachusetts” records her joining the many poets and artists who protested the executions of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in 1927, and Millay was among those arrested during the protests. *Fatal Interview* (1931) is a fifty-two-sonnet sequence of a failed love affair, usually identified as Millay’s relationship with George Dillon, who would take over as editor of *Poetry* in 1937 upon Harriet Monroe’s death.

*Wine from These Grapes* (1934) continued Millay’s move into more broadly social issues in her work, a shift common to many poets in the 1930s, although a number of her poems at this time also reflect the

death of her mother who had been a strong supporter of her talents since childhood, and to whom she had dedicated *The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver*. Millay had lost some of her 1920s readership by the time of *Huntsman, What Quarry?* (1939). *Make Bright the Arrows* (1940) like much of her early 1940s work is mainly concerned with the war and is generally judged as little more than propaganda. *Mine the Harvest* (1954) is a posthumously issued volume.

Louise Bogan in her *Achievement in American Poetry* (1951) offers this assessment of Millay, who had died the previous year: she “formulated for a new generation of young women a standard of sexual defiance and ‘heroism.’ ” However, “a certain hampering nihilism, as well as a close attachment to literary fashion . . . prevented her from breaking through to impressive maturity” (Collins 148). Millay could be a learned, skillful, and wide-ranging writer of both poetry and drama, particularly skilled in the sonnet form. However, she remained in her lifetime associated in the minds of many readers with a modern, rebellious, sexually frank feminine voice of the 1920s. Nevertheless, this voice foreshadowed the even franker poems of Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath three decades later.

Millay was a close friend of Elinor Wylie (1885–1928), her *Huntsman, What Quarry?* including a sequence, written over more than ten years, expressing her appreciation of her fellow poet “Shaken from the bough, and the pure song half-way through” (*Collected Poems* 375).

Wylie had appeared to be fulfilling the promise of her earlier work when she died in her early forties. Wylie came from an aristocratic background, but rejected the conventions intended to shape her future social position, going on to have something of a scandalous reputation. She married three times, eloped with her future second husband, and fell in love with a married man in her last years to whom she wrote a nineteen-sonnet sequence. Wylie’s formal verse was initially much influenced by her admiration for Shelley, and in the third of her four novels, *The Orphan Angel* (1926), she imagines the poet being rescued from drowning off the Italian coast and traveling to the American frontier. Where Millay’s poetry was often passionate, Wylie sought a more concentrated polished surface; its subject matter was often the inadequacy of an inferior world to match the higher qualities of art. The enduring appeal of beauty, and her sense of her own limitations as a poet, are other recurring themes. Her praise in a 1923 essay of “a small jeweled receptacle of two or three well-polished stanzas” like “an

enameled snuff-box” is often taken as representing her own ideal in poetry (Hively 228).

After a privately printed volume of early poems in 1912, in 1921, she published the first of her four major books of verse, *Nets to Catch the Wind*. “The Eagle and the Mole,” “Wild Peaches”—consisting of four Petrarchan sonnets—and “Velvet Shoes” are among the best-known poems in the volume. “Velvet Shoes” particularly captures the formal, quiet elegance of her poetry:

Let us walk in the white snow  
 In a soundless space;  
 With footsteps quiet and slow,  
 At a tranquil pace,  
 Under veils of white lace.

I shall go shod in silk,  
 And you in wool,  
 White as a white cow's milk,  
 More beautiful  
 Than the breast of a gull.

We shall walk through the still town  
 In a windless peace;  
 We shall step upon white down,  
 Upon silver fleece,  
 Upon softer than these.

We shall walk in velvet shoes:  
 Wherever we go  
 Silence will fall like dews  
 On white silence below.  
 We shall walk in the snow.

*Black Armour* (1923) was both a popular and a critical success. In the same year, Wylie became poetry editor of the popular *Vanity Fair*, a role that she filled until 1925. Her *Trivial Breath* (1928) is dedicated to Shelley. In “A Red Carpet for Shelley,” she depreciates her ability to celebrate him:

The little sum of my experience  
 Remains the sole contrivance I produce  
 To weave this mesh, to colour and confuse  
 These ragged syllables with soul and sense.

For some readers, Wylie's near obsession with Shelley hampered the expression of her own voice and craft here and earlier. However, others see the poems on suffering and lost love in this volume as reflecting greater maturity than in her previous work, a maturity continued in the volume that she was preparing at the time of her death, *Angels and Earthly Creatures* (1929). This volume contains the nineteen-sonnet sequence to Henry de Clifford Woodhouse with whom she had fallen in love, a sequence first published privately in 1928. For some commentators, the sequence represents Wylie's most important work. Her *Collected Poems* (1932) were put together by her third husband, poet and critic William Rose Benét, while another posthumous volume, *Last Poems of Elinor Wylie*, appeared in 1943. Wylie enjoyed a high critical reputation in her lifetime both for her prose and poetry, but after her death her work suffered a decline in interest. Recent attention to her work has left critics divided in their overall assessments.

The longest-lived of these four poets, Louise Bogan (1897–1970), left Boston University after her freshman year, spent some time in Vienna, and moved to Greenwich Village where she published her first book, *Body of This Death* in 1923. Her poetry is formal, but lyrical, with love and grief as frequent themes. *Dark Summer* (1929) included some of the poems from the earlier volume, *Sleeping Fury* followed in 1937, and *Poems and New Poems* in 1941. Most of her poetry was written in the earlier part of her life and therefore makes up most of a late collection, *The Blue Estuaries: Poems 1923–1968* (1968).

Bogan was “largely unknown to the public but esteemed by her peers” as one of her biographers puts it (Limmer xv). She held an influential position as poetry reviewer at *The New Yorker* for almost forty years. Marianne Moore, reviewing *Poems and New Poems* (1941), noted the same qualities that she strove for in her own work: “compactness compacted . . . restraint” (Collins 61). W. H. Auden, in *Partisan Review* (July 1942) noted her “steady growth of wisdom and technical mastery . . . the achievement of an objectivity about personal experience which is sought by many but found only by the few who dare face the Furies” (Collins 57). Theodore Roethke wrote of her work in 1961, “Her poems create their own reality, and demand not just attention, but the emotional and spiritual response of the whole man. Such a poet will never be popular, but can and should be a true model for the young” (Collins 96). “Memory,” an earlier poem, shows

something of the qualities discussed in these three comments—compact, technically skilled, demanding attention:

Do not guard this as rich stuff without mark  
 Closed in a cedarn dark,  
 Nor lay it down with tragic masks and greaves,  
 Licked by the tongues of leaves.

Nor let it be as eggs under the wings  
 Of helpless, startled things,  
 Nor encompassed by song, nor any glory  
 Perverse and transitory.

Rather, like shards and straw upon coarse ground,  
 Of little worth when found,—  
 Rubble in gardens, it and stones alike,  
 That any spade may strike.

In 1945, Bogan served as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, the first woman to hold this position. Her concise *Achievement in American Poetry* (1951) acknowledges the work of Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Moore, but the discussion clearly reveals her greater admiration of Rilke, Auden, and the Eliot of *Four Quartets*. Her embrace of modernism was a qualified one, mainly, as Elizabeth Frank argues, a “commitment to reducing the lyric to its essentials, and to redefining its sources in emotion” (Collins 128).

### ***The Poetry of Place: Jeffers, Robinson, and Frost***

Robinson Jeffers, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and Robert Frost, all chose to work outside of modernist modes. The poetry of all three is associated with a particular place, and invokes, even as it qualifies, Romantic ways of writing about nature and man’s relationship to the natural world. Nature is capable of great violence in Jeffers, is quite indifferent in the community of Robinson’s work, and is often mysterious, even dangerous in the work of Frost.

Over a career of fifty years, Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962) published more than four hundred poems and twenty volumes of poetry. Born in Pittsburgh, he moved to California in 1904, where, after an education that included boarding schools in Europe and graduate study at the University of Zurich, he would spend the rest of his life in the town of Carmel. One critic has aptly termed him a poet who “lived a Thoreauvian existence” (Shucard 213). Together with his wife Una Kuster, Jeffers

designed and helped build Tor House on Carmel Point for his family residence. Between 1920 and 1924, Jeffers added the forty-foot Hawk Tower. In a late (1953) poem, "Carmel Point," Jeffers notes the intrusion of new buildings upon the surrounding landscape, "This beautiful place defaced with a crop of suburban houses—/How beautiful when we first beheld it." But he calls upon himself to have the patience that nature has with passing humanity: "Now the spoiler has come: does it care?//Not faintly. It has all time." "We must uncenter our minds from ourselves," he declares. "We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident/As the rock and ocean that we were made from." Rocks and hawks are frequent symbols in Jeffers' work, the hawks epitomizing the world of beauty and violence of which humans, despite their pretensions, are such a small part. "Hurt Hawks" (1928) dramatizes the closeness of the narrator and a bird that returns asking to be delivered from its wounds by death, "Not like a beggar, still eyed with the old/Implacable arrogance." And in the late poem "Vulture," he imagines being devoured by a soaring bird, "What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment; what a life after death."

Jeffers found his own voice with the 1924 *Tamar, and Other Poems*, after two earlier books of derivative verse. He paid for the publication himself but after several strong reviews, the book appeared commercially as *Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems* in 1925 and in England from Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press in 1928. Many of the themes in this and later books are associated with Greek tragedy. In a development of this interest, Jeffers had great success in New York with his adaptation of Euripides' *Medea* (1946), with Judith Anderson taking the title role. Biblical sources are another common feature of Jeffers' poetry. "Tamar," for example, retells chapter thirteen of the second book of Samuel, setting the story on the California coast, while the Crucifixion is at the center of "Dear Judas" in *Dear Judas and Other Poems* (1929). Teutonic legend and Scottish ballads are further sources in his poems, additionally the influence of Nietzsche, Buddhism, and Taoism have often been noted in commentary on the poet.

Jeffers had little time for governments and politics, although he castigated the results of their actions on the natural world. In "Shine, Perishing Republic" (1925), he criticizes America's "heavily thickening to Empire," where he warns his sons "be in nothing so moderate as in love of man." One of his best-known short poems, "The Purse-Seine" (1937), describes the difficult, "beautiful . . . and a little terrible" actions of the sardine fishermen working Northward from Monterey, and contrasts the glow of the trapped fish to that of a cityscape, itself a

“colored splendor” but one that has trapped its human inhabitants, “insulated//From the strong earth.” They are victims of government manipulation, “inevitable mass disasters” a dying culture, and “mere hysteria.” Jeffers’ poem appears to allude to the horrific 1930s events in Europe and the worse to come. He was opposed to the United States’ involvement in both World Wars, seeing them as examples of man’s propensity for self-destruction as well as evidence of Europe’s decadence. He came in for criticism for some of the resulting poems, collected in *Be Angry at the Sun* (1941) and *The Double Axe and Other Poems* (1948). The latter appeared with a disclaimer from publisher Random House, “compelled to go on record with its disagreement over some of the political views pronounced by the poet in this volume.” Praising the unspoiled coastal darkness of the blackout after “the fireworks” of Pearl Harbor (“Pearl Harbor”), and equating the “little men” Roosevelt, Hitler, Stalin, and Churchill (“Greater Grandeur”) are two poems the publisher probably had in mind. For Jeffers, nature endures—the acts of war “cancel out. But the beauty stands” (“Invasion”).

Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869–1935) grew up in Gardiner, Maine, which he later recreated in the stories and characters of his “Tilbury Town.” These short, frequently anthologized poems describing the isolated, desperate lives of the inhabitants are the poems for which he is most remembered now. Robinson always remained more formal and literary in his verse than Frost, and thus lacks the inventiveness with which Frost can counterpoint rhythm and the speaking voice in his own New England poems. Nevertheless, Robinson is an important figure for breaking away from the sentimental generalities of such popular poets at the time as Trumbull Stickney (1874–1904), William Vaughn Moody, Bliss Carmen (1861–1929), Edwin Markham (1852–1940), and James Whitcomb Riley (1849–1916), as well as being more psychologically penetrating in his portraits than Edgar Lee Masters. The themes of failure, loss, despair, and the crisis of faith are more likely to appear in Robinson’s work than in Frost’s, as are the kind of Romantic rhetoric and abstractions that govern many of Robinson’s 1920s narratives.

Robinson published a few largely unnoticed books of verse before the two volumes that made his reputation, *The Man Against the Sky* (1916), and *Collected Poems* (1921). The dramatic situation in the title poem has the narrator looking at a figure some distance ahead of him; both are on a journey toward “the sunset” of death. The narrator speculates upon the life and character of the unknown figure ahead, coming up

with questions and speculations rather than answers: "Where was he going, this man against the sky?/You know not, nor do I." He concludes that stoic endurance is the best attitude to hold in a life that may well be "without a meaning," and after which nothing may happen beyond oblivion. Robinson explained to Amy Lowell that in the poem, he meant "to carry materialism to its logical end and to indicate its futility as an explanation or a justification of existence" (*Letters* 93).

The characters who populate the Tilbury Town poems find various ways to deal, or fail to deal, with loneliness and meaninglessness: sometimes in isolation, and sometimes living amidst their fellow townspeople who suspect little of the inner torment that the poems record. The stories are told from the perspective of a narrator who is understood to be a fellow member of the town, and whose emotional distance from the lives he records is itself an aspect of the poems' complexity. As Lawrence Thompson argues, "the poet-as-observer, standing apart from the Tilbury Town group, on the one hand, and from the isolated individuals, on the other hand, shows an open hostility toward the Tilbury Town group and shows sympathetic compassion for the misfits, the failures, the disappointed" (Thompson x). To note some of the best-known poems: "Luke Havergal" is tempted toward suicide by the memory of a lost love, "Richard Cory" does commit suicide for reasons incomprehensible to the townspeople, "Rueben Bright" gives up his livelihood as a butcher in response to his wife's death, "Miniver Cheevy" lives in a fantasized past, his imagination fueled by alcohol, and Old Eben Flood of "Mr. Flood's Party" invents imaginary companions to people his alcoholic solace and old age. As well as such sharp individual character sketches, Robinson could dramatize a marriage scene of twisted emotional and psychological dependence as he does in the horrifying relationship of the couple in "Eros Turannos," which Yvor Winters observed contained "the substance of a short novel or of a tragic drama" (Donaldson 315). The first stanza introduces the dependence:

She fears him, and will always ask  
What fated her to choose him;  
She meets in his engaging mask  
All reasons to refuse him;  
But what she meets and what she fears  
Are less than are the downward years,  
Drawn slowly to the foamless weirs  
Of age, were she to lose him.

This marriage, “where passion lived and died,” continues to be associated with water and drowning until the inevitable final stanza, where it is compared to “a stairway to the sea/Where down the blind are driven.”

The 1920s saw Robinson at the height of his popularity. In this second half of his career he produced more than a dozen book-length narratives in blank verse, including an Arthurian trilogy set in the modern world that began with *Merlin* in 1917, and continued with *Lancelot* (1920) and *Tristram* (1928). However, as even a sympathetic biographer concedes, the long poems of these later years “contribute little to Robinson’s reputation as a poet” (Franchere 6).

Robert Frost (1874–1963) in his introduction to Robinson’s posthumously published *King Jasper* in 1935, later used as an introduction to Robinson’s *Collected Poems* (1937), praises Robinson for staying “content with the old-fashioned way to be new” (*Collected Prose* 116). As part of this appreciation of the older poet, Frost takes issue with what he calls the “new ways to be new,” ways that are characterized by “subtraction,” eliminating what he considered essential in poetry. For Frost, these essentials include punctuation, capital letters, “metric frame,” content, and “without any images but those to the eye” (116). This list marks his rejection of some key characteristics of modernist verse, and underscores his difference from such writers as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, H. D., and Marianne Moore, and his closer affinity to England’s Georgian poets and to the work of Masters, Lindsay, and Robinson. Yet it was Pound who helped Frost get his first two books, *A Boy’s Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914) published in London when Frost could find no publisher in the United States for his work. It was Pound who Frost remembered was “the first poet I ever sat down with to talk about poetry” (119). And they talked about Robinson.

Frost, six years younger than Robinson, shared with the latter “years of neglect before beginning to achieve recognition” (Donaldson 310). The poetic style and sensibility of both had been formed in the 1890s, and Frost writes, like Robinson (and their older contemporary in England, Thomas Hardy), within the framework of Romantic tradition while questioning some of its central assumptions.

For Frost, poetry had its formal rules, but he was a master of working within them. Boundaries were necessary in poetry, as his praise of “bondage” in the sonnet “The Silken Tent” argues, and these formal boundaries mirror those between man’s powers and those of nature. In

“There are Roughly Zones,” man has transgressed those boundaries. Nature can be tamed in this poem by the house, which has long withstood nature’s forces, but the same is not true of the peach tree planted too far to the north and probably killed by the forces of nature indifferent to man’s optimistic hopes—to “this limitless trait in the hearts of men.” The thrush singing at dusk in “Come In,” the narrator knows, has not invited him into the alien woods, woods which in “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” have a threatening and inviting beauty which must be resisted: a danger that the horse, representing the limited range of domesticated nature, recognizes as it shakes its “harness bells” in warning. In “Desert Places” snow, here representing “it,” a force and pronoun with no antecedent, threatens a suffocating annihilation of individual identity and “home”:

The woods around it have it—it is theirs.  
 All animals are smothered in their lairs.  
 I am too absent-spirited to count;  
 The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness  
 Will be more lonely ere it will be less—  
 A blanker whiteness of benighted snow  
 With no expression, nothing to express.

The earthly and spiritual worlds also have their mutual boundaries in Frost’s poetry. The speaker of “Birches” wants to swing “*Toward* heaven,” while wanting to land back in the world of time and human memory, for “Earth’s the right place for love.” In “After Apple-Picking,” the “long two-pointed” ladder sticks through a tree “toward heaven”; the right direction, but its reach constrained by the natural world. In this poem, whether the promise of heaven offered by the first apple picking in Paradise is spiritual truth or an earth-bound myth remains an open question.

Boundaries are also the subject of “Mending Wall.” The mending provides the only occasion, an annual one initiated by the narrator, when the two neighbors can perform a communal act, mending the stonewall boundary that nature tries to undermine. For the neighbor, “Good fences make good neighbors” because they emphasize separation, but for the speaker they emphasize community—a recognition of limitation, yes, but also an acknowledgment of a shared human condition. Boundaries can be crossed to a limited extent, as in “Acquainted with the Night,” but here the speaker moves dangerously beyond “the

furthest city light” to enter the light and time of the unearthly: “at an unearthly height,/One luminary clock against the sky/Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.” The boundary between death and the communal struggle for survival is acknowledged by the village community in “Out, Out—” for the preparations to counter nature’s coming winter threat must continue despite a horrific accident. Similarly, the boundary between nature and man must be recognized in “The Need of Being Versed in Country Things” to avoid the sentimental belief that the “phoebes” care anything about the story behind the fire-ravaged family farm in which they build their nests. In “The Road Not Taken,” the narrator must accept limitation, and find a rationale that moves him forward, though he undermines the rationale even as he makes it. He must take one path or the other. The alternative is not to move at all.

Four longer poems focused upon definitions of home and marriage show Frost’s skill in building dramatic elements into his verse. In “The Death of the Hired Man,” the wife has a definition of home that extends beyond family obligation, while her husband, returning appropriately from a market, takes a purely commercial view of his commitments to the dying, seasonally hired Silas. The wife’s sense of human connection is related to nature and to tenderness not exclusive to the marriage bed:

She put out her hand  
 Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,  
 Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,  
 As if she played unheard some tenderness  
 That wrought on him beside her in the night.

The understanding that this couple eventually reach in their conflict over definitions of love and home is not possible for the husband and wife in “Home Burial.” The latter couple have different ways of grieving over the death of their first baby, the father’s way associated with the continuities of death represented by the buried generations in the family graveyard. For him, the grief can be contained within the home. Thus, he physically traps his wife within his boundaries, refusing to let her talk her grief over with others, while she is desperate to escape. Each fails to understand the other’s emotional need for a way to cope with the loss.

Sexual tensions are even more central to the narrative of “The Witch of Coos.” This supernatural tale of a former lover’s skeleton supposedly

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trapped in the attic, still active at times just a thin wall away from the marriage bed, reveals a wife's fears of intimacy, and her late husband's sensitive understanding of her way of expressing them. The melodrama of the wife's story contrasts with the understated response of the narrator, who will confirm only the name on the mailbox. The last and least successful of these four, "West Running Brook" is a more abstract, less immediately dramatic presentation of the different understanding a husband and wife have of a brook that runs contrary to the others; their love is able to accept difference, as they reconcile their individual concepts of imagination, time, and origins.

While there are many fine poems in Frost's later volumes, *West Running Brook* (1928), *A Further Range* (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942), *Steeple Bush* (1947), and *In the Clearing* (1962), a more didactic tone creeps into some of the poetry where earlier it had expressed a more complex balance of possibilities. Nevertheless, a later poem such as "Directive" (from *Steeple Bush*) is as rich as anything Frost wrote.

Frost lived long enough to see his dismissive view of modernist verse endorsed by a prominent 1957 anthology for which he wrote the introduction. *New Poets of England and America*, edited by Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson, as good as implied that modernist innovation had been an ill-founded interruption to the progress of American poetry, its legacy now rightly consigned to history. (The anthology produced a famous riposte, *The New American Poetry [1945-1960]* edited by Donald Allen). Such anthology battles did nothing to affect the stature of Frost or his wide readership. In a long and distinguished career, he produced some of the most famous and frequently taught poems of the twentieth century. To date, Frost is the only poet to receive the Congressional Gold Medal: in recognition of his poetry which, as the 1960 citation puts it, "has enriched the culture of the United States and the philosophy of the world" (Stathis 45).