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American Literary Regionalism and the Sister Arts: Local Color Outside the Lines

A Dissertation Presented

by

Brandi So

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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American literary regionalism was partitioned off from literary realism in a manner that marginalized a movement dominated by women. The gendering of the genre stems in part from the unprecedented integration of women authors into the mainstream market. Conversely, the masculinization of literary ekphrasis still actively shapes its relative discourse. Traditional characterizations of ekphrasis imagine a masculine and aggressive act upon a disempowered, voiceless, feminized object. The timbre of this conversation is often sexual in its connotation, and relies on a theory of art epitomized by the female nude. This dissertation argues that ekphrasis is a formal trait of literary regionalism in that the genre recapitulates the visual impression of an author who found that impression artistically significant. I argue that regionalism and ekphrasis share a theoretical similarity that opens fruitful cross-interrogations. Holding that analyses of regionalist literature benefit from the theoretical lenses commonly applied to literary ekphrasis, I show that the visual roots of American literary regionalism run as deep as American history itself.

My work pursues the interpretations made possible by these ekphrastic associations. In a chapter about Sarah Orne Jewett and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's watercolor paintings, I find in Jewett a dialectization of the Victorian-era "language of flowers" that critiques the social restraints plaguing women's spiritual and reproductive health. In Gilman, a startling alternative reading, one of conversion and transcendence, emerges in "The Yellow Wall-paper" (1892) by applying the formal tenets of the artistic arabesque to the structure of her literary arabesque. The next chapter focuses on the epiphanic ekphraseis of modernist Willa Cather, which integrate her sense of region with her background as a theatre, opera, and art critic. In the closing chapter, I show how the works of Southern literary regionalists Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor both advance themes of "double vision" that emerge most clearly in their paintings. In analyzing ekphraseis outside of overly-simple traditions, that is, considering female authors who deploy ekphraseis of their own art, I show that such representations constitute a double voicing of the authorial self, rather than the masculinist appropriation of a feminized 'other.'

For my family: T.S. and L.J.

And for my mother, a poet-painter, a writer-crusader; she caught flies with honey and *vinegar, and no one was the wiser.*

Frontispiece

Winter Scene

by Judi Lynne Scoggins

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Prologue

Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible.
—*Paul Klee*

As with any major endeavor reflecting a lifelong interest, the focus of this literary research project traces its beginnings to a time before I was born. Circumstances beyond my control – circumstances of birth and geography – drew me continually toward the literary and visual arts, toward feminism and higher education, and eventually, toward a doctoral dissertation about regionalism and ekphrasis. Like me, the women I write about in this dissertation – Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sarah Orne Jewett, Willa Cather, Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty – each understood themselves, to varying degrees, in terms of geography and gender. A heightened sense of place, in my own living and writing, has shaped my questions about literature; the ways in which my personal experiences intersected with my relationship with the arts ultimately shaped the questions I pursue in this dissertation.

I've been an outsider to Southern and Northern communities all of my life. At the age of eight, I was too Southern, too Texan, to fit in immediately when my family moved to Nashville, Tennessee. After that, I was the city kid returning home to Texas, where a subtle authenticity test for readmission always awaited me, sometimes at the county line, when I would get pulled over for having out of state plates. Some years, I passed the test. But I remember the years, before we moved, when I simply *was.* I remember being an indigenous outcropping of the landscape, part of the clay dirt, in Omaha, Texas, population 1002. I remember more clearly returning from Nashville, and the new sign that read, "*Omaha Est. 1886 Pop. 998*." We had been gone for only three months.

I discovered literary regionalism as an undergraduate in Ohio; like most people, I had a curiosity about the habits and mores of places where *place mattered*, where the local culture discriminated between insiders and outsiders. But in a discussion with my English professor about Flannery O'Connor, I realized that my interest in this genre extended past the scope of the assignment. Like anyone who reads O'Connor, I was stunned, and, as I recall, altogether unhappy with how her story made me feel. I didn't know anything about Catholicism, and I didn't know how to read her literature, but I knew the world of her stories as though I had written them myself: the heavy air that gets caught between the trees; long car rides in the country past crumbling columns, rusty tin-roofed barns seeping back into the earth; train trestles over muddy rivers; and the way two words spoken from a porch immediately mark you as trespasser or a neighbor – "*Help* you?" I knew O'Connor's country, I knew the shape of her people, and I was shocked – no, outraged – at her behavior. O'Connor offended me in a way that I couldn't explain; as a southerner in a "northern" classroom (Ohio was very north for me), I could only say, at the time, that her South was a lie.

When I graduated with my bachelor's degree from Naropa University, below the imposing flatirons of the Rocky Mountain foothills in the thin but invigorating air of Boulder, Colorado, I had wholly reconsidered my position. My BA thesis focused on the works of Flannery O'Connor, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Susan Glaspell, and their use of visual frames to enact feminist critiques of patriarchy. In my masters program at the University of Colorado Denver, I discovered in a major authors class on Willa Cather that my critical interests returned once again to questions of frames – boundaries in literature that constructed a scene with implicitly or explicitly visual ramifications. In literature I saw moments that loomed out of the text as stopped time, as image – as literary portraits or landscapes that resembled paintings.

My faculty mentor at UCD, Philip Joseph, introduced me to a word that would fundamentally change how I understood my critical method: *ekphrasis*. I acquired the word with an inner revelation; everything that troubled me about literature could be traced back to this inescapable priority – ekphrasis, the cloaking of one art inside another. How to describe it? What did it do? What about ekphraseis of portraits of living characters, as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*? What about ekphraseis that critique ekphraseis, as in William Blake's *Laocoön*? These are the kinds of questions I explored in my master's program; I was committed to the question of ekphrasis, and I focused on traditional instances (representations of paintings in literature) throughout my coursework. As I turned toward my PhD, I knew *what* I wanted to look at – literary regionalism; I knew *how* – through ekphrasis; and I knew *why* – because I was a southerner and a feminist, and I cared about how regionalist women authors brought their voices and their art into being. What I did not know was what that relationship would look like, or even if it would have any literary merit. What began with a personal focus on literary regionalism grew into a scholarly certainty that the relationship between women and regionalism, women and the arts, and art and regionalism was an important academic question, and a relevant matter of history and feminism.

As a southerner, a feminist, and a writer, I had questions about what it meant for women, with community investments that dismantled any notion of protected individualism, to take on the public and individual act of writing. I wondered at how she wrote, submerged in the already troubled category of 'home,' amid the unmediated influx of reader-reception, and concomitant sensations of approval and celebration; accusations of audacity, trespass, or betrayal; bittersweet affection. I believe Flannery O'Connor, homebound from her mid-twenties with systemic lupus, felt this double-edged existence more acutely than the other authors I discuss this dissertation.

We see this careful negotiation in her letters and in her speeches: in her hesitance as she shyly built her life-long epistolary friendship with "A," in how she deployed her shrewd, incomparable wit to make light of a craft she took quite seriously, and in how she evinced her comparative inferiority to William Faulkner as her little "mule and wagon stalled on the same track" as Faulkner's "Dixie Limited" (O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 427). Beneath this dissertation's structure of inquiry, that is, the relationship between women's literary regionalism and the sister arts, is a celebration and curiosity about women's authorship.

In reading the women I write about in this dissertation – their letters, their diaries, their fiction, and their art – I've come to realize that in many ways, they are not so different from the women who raised me, the poet-painters, cooker-gardeners, and singer-songwriters of my life. One fickle, fateful, and critical difference, true then as now, is simple; it is Virginia Woolf's correction to historical conceptions of artistic genius: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved" (4). It has been a privilege to sit with these authors, who have made such important contributions to the "true nature of fiction." In the quiet of night, when most of this dissertation was written, I felt connected to these women as though they were dear friends from long ago.

I was delighted at the unexpected brashness and brightness of Jewett, the surprisingly vulnerability of Gilman, the formidable genius and brilliant youth of Cather, and the incredibly sarcastic, and wry humor, which I find to be a brand of Southern women's wisdom, in Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor. Although the history of women in the arts in no way suggests otherwise, it has nevertheless been an eye opening experience to see, in the letters and diaries of these authors, that the challenges facing women writers changed very little over the course of a

hundred years. It is no small coincidence to their success that Jewett, Cather, Welty and O'Connor all remained child-free, unmarried, and were privileged enough to pursue education and careers in the arts. Gilman shared in many of these privileges, although she very clearly struggled to balance her career and her family, ultimately choosing to allow her daughter Katherine to live with her ex-husband and his second wife.

It is also no small coincidence that these women were deeply versed in multiple art forms. The Victorian ideal of femininity foreclosed women from careers, but demanded that they be trained in the sister arts as a matter of genteel manners. Such social strictures would never condone women profiting from such training, but rather existed so that a husband might profit from it, through the angelic ambience of home filled with art, poetry and music. This Victorian practice lingers still, and for many decades played a measured role in the lives of all of the women I discuss in this dissertation. These women, of course, circumnavigated the cultural obstacles to attaining a career as a professional writer, but all of them, to a varying extent, settled upon writing only after failing as artists. Barriers for women, while significant in literature, are even more debilitating in the field of visual art. This fact is woefully apparent in museums, where only 3 to 5% of displayed artworks are signed by women, despite real-world figures that suggest, in any given time, women make up almost half of all professional artists.[1]

The literary chapters are first and foremost guided by the aesthetic and political statements made apparent in each author's relationship with the sister arts: painting for Gilman

[1] The 1890 U.S. census reveals some eleven thousand self-identified "professional" female artists make up 48.1% of all American artists. Only twenty years prior, four hundred and fourteen women – a mere 10% – self-report as "professional" painters (Swinth 35).

and Jewett; drawing, opera, and theatre for Willa Cather; painting and lino-cut cartoons for Flannery O'Connor; and photography for Eudora Welty. The method of each chapter, like the sister arts themselves, is idiosyncratic. My readings respond to the intuitive alliance that emerges between artwork and text; in some instances, the analysis leans heavily into formal ekphrasis, as in my discussion of Willa Cather's artistic synesthesia and epiphanic ekphraseis. In other instances, the link is aesthetic, where a painterly quality in their art is reproduced in their literature, such as in Flannery O'Connor's aesthetic of reversal, or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's geometric vision in her fictional worlds.

If anything, the time I have spent thinking about and writing about ekphrasis has only served to complicate my perspective about it. In the introductory chapter, which forms the theoretical basis of my dissertation, I liken the diachronic definition of ekphrasis to an hourglass, suggesting that the term's original expansive connotations are making a return, after a recent period of narrow interpretation. Indeed, a quick glance at the 2015 Northeast MLA convention schedule shows a remarkable spike in the usage of the term. I believe this is the case because, while traditional scholarship about ekphrasis explicitly addressed what an ekphrasis *is*, a new generation of scholarship is far more interested in how the critical structure of ekphrasis – inquiries of mediation, framing, perspective, appropriation, to name a few – can inform considerations of our increasingly inter-textual, multi-modal, and multiply-mediated encounters with art. I argue that regionalism is inseparable from ekphrasis because the regionalist author expresses in her works her artistic vision of a place in time, much like a landscape painting, and that the central critical concerns that we apply to visual art, and likewise ekphrasis, are the same ones we apply to works of literary regionalism. Moreover, the women authors I discuss are artists, and I read them as such.

If literary regionalism, in its authors' conceptions, is a work of visual art represented in text, it is an ekphrasis. But as I attend to the relationship between the literature and sister arts of my author subjects, this link becomes thin, or, I should say, less relevant. I find instead a more productive reading in looking at the hermeneutic of their art – the instructive element inhabiting its form, process, and vision – in terms of their literary style. Thus, while my introductory chapter delves deeply into the relationship between regionalism and ekphrasis, my literature chapters are more interested in how the art of each author can help us read their literature. In a sense, my dissertation tracks with the very shift that is happening in the broader critical field, moving from what is an ekphrasis to how ekphraseis can work more broadly as a mode of literary inquiry. If literary ekphrasis allows us to better understand the aesthetics, methods, and concomitant political concerns in a work of fiction, this dissertation often works to reverse this lens: in addition to looking through the literature to see the art, I look through the art to see the literature. In those instances, I am looking less at ekphrasis than I am looking at their artistic vision. Nonetheless, I feel these authors' visions, their literature, and their modes of expression are, for them, ekphrastic.

It is my belief in the ekphrastic nature of women's literary regionalism that underpins the feminist project I undertake in this dissertation. Women's history has been written and interpreted by men; what is masculine is considered universal, and what is feminine is considered particular. This is one of the reasons why literary regionalism has become feminized; not only as a broad cultural backlash to the success of women writers, but also because the particularity of region is a mode of storytelling that is undervalued by masculine literary traditions. When we read the literature of American women regionalists, we read it from a masculine tradition; that is, we read it only as text, only as literature. We are reluctant to step

away from our analytical tools, invested in us by that stultifying and domineering code: *discipline*. As academics, we read and analyze within the confines of our discipline as a matter of rigor, a matter of discourse. This is a mistake. We read these authors' works as if they, and we, are authors and readers and only that. But this is not *who* we are reading. Sarah Orne Jewett was also a *painter*. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a professional artist. O'Connor and Welty both tried desperately to find work through their art, and Cather was anything but one thing. As literary scholars, we read their stories from a textual point of view and cannot sense or see that if we read from their point of view, from the view of the artist, that an entirely different story exists on the same page. In reading these women's works from a different viewpoint, from their sense and proclivities as artists, I am adding to the historical record an additional perspective, a new mediation. Ekphrasis allows me this critical pathway, and thus I use ekphrasis in this dissertation as a mode of inquiry that expands the ways in which we can understand writers and their texts. In this sense, I use ekphrasis as a tool to enable recovery, partial though it may be.

This dissertation spans the 19th and 20th centuries, but opens with a discussion of the culture of arts and letters in early America, which I trace from the cartographic illustrations in John Smith's *A Generall Historie* (1624), to Washington Irving's anthropomorphic description of the Catskill Mountains in "Rip Van Winkle" (1819), to show that the roots of American literary regionalism reach as far back as its discovery and colonization. These roots, I explain, are inherently visual. Early America, as a literary region, is expressed repeatedly through maps, which are decorated with monsters, plants, and people that work as a visual corollary to the textual imaginings of American spaces. I argue that literary regionalism enacts a discourse of artistic practice and benefits from a shared lexicon with the sister arts. In framing the landscape and regionalism movements that came to define post-Civil War literature, I recount the

significant opposition women faced, and overcame, in regionalist literary and visual arts, and provide examples that illuminate the gender binds that have beset the academy's approach to literary classification.

In the case of literary regionalism, the feminization of the genre is at the core of its critical conundrum. American literary regionalism was partitioned off from literary realism in a manner that marginalized a movement dominated by women. The gendering of the genre stems in part from the unprecedented integration of women authors into the mainstream market. In a genre where marginalized voices often occupy a center of authority, subjectivity troubles the literature itself: the genre pivots on the remarkable 'difference' it implies between consumers of literary regionalism and the regional objects consumed. I extend the work done in this vein by theorists Richard Brodhead, Donna Campbell, Judith Fetterley, and Marjorie Pryse, among others. While my dissertation parses out the nuances of this problem, the compromised rural 'other' is most clearly indicated in regionalism's most adored 'local': the disenfranchised ex-slave of southern dialect tales.

Conversely, the masculinization of literary ekphrasis still actively shapes its discourse. Traditional characterizations of ekphrasis imagine a masculine and aggressive act upon a disempowered, voiceless, feminized object. The timbre of this conversation, "between the driving force of the narrating word and the stubborn resistance of the fixed image" is often sexual in its connotation, and relies on a theory of art epitomized by the female nude (Heffernan 6). I posit that the conventional focus on classical motifs undermines female interlocutors, and this imbalance results in a skewed sexualization of literary ekphrasis. My dissertation challenges ekphrasis theory to work nimbly in feminist projects. I analyze ekphraseis outside of these overly-simplistic traditions by considering female authors who deploy ekphrasis – of their *own*

art, no less – in their literary works. Such representations constitute a double voicing of the authorial self, rather than the masculinist appropriation of a feminized 'other.'

I follow this careful consideration of my key terms and their diachronic contexts with a literary analysis of Northeastern Gilded Age regionalist author Sarah Orne Jewett and *fin de siècle* author Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The regional underpinnings of Gilman's literary and visual concerns help to highlight the ways in which regionalism operates within a national literary tradition, and likewise, how supposedly national concerns are inevitably regional expressions. In this chapter, I discuss how Jewett and Gilman's partial rejection of Victorian gender norms is informed by New England rhetoric of self-sufficiency and a shared exposure to the ubiquitous Swedenborgian religious movement. Jewett writes of rural coastal landscapes where her female characters are also free to write. In contrast, remote landscapes signal danger and oppression for Gilman's characters, who instead find freedom and equality in urban centers. Both authors' paintings reveal important aesthetic undercurrents to their literary works: for Jewett, vague coastlines counter her exacting representations of plant life, and for Gilman, her cosmopolitan advertisements and designs reveal the uniquely feminist intersection between her activisms and anxieties about modern society. In pursuing the literary interpretations made possible by these ekphrastic associations, I find in Jewett a dialectization of the Victorian-era "language of flowers," which in Jewett's case is more aptly termed a "language of herbs," to show how *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) should be partly understood as a critique and expression of sympathy for the social binds plaguing women's spiritual and reproductive health. In Gilman, a startling alternative reading of "The Yellow Wall-paper" (1892) emerges from her fascination with Eastern cultures and arts, one in which we can read the orientalism in the short story as a literary expression of an artistic arabesque.

Regionalism came into its own during the American Modernist period, and Midwestern literary giant Willa Cather faced a different set of obstacles: "I have been becoming rather 'famous' lately," Cather wrote to her mother, "and it's very inconvenient" (*Selected Letters* 282). Indeed, Cather's renowned desire for privacy still frustrates scholars, whose investigative work has slowly uncovered the roots of Cather's literary and artistic influences. Cather's hundreds of opera and theatre reviews and her avid patronage of the visual arts underpin her patently ekphrastic works, particularly *The Song of the Lark* (1915). The extraordinary expertise she cultivated of both classical and cutting-edge art movements informs her sense of place and her literary methodologies.

Cather's painstaking and meticulous interactions with publishers and illustrators regarding the visual aesthetics of her books offer a way of understanding her aesthetic values. Further, her own early illustrations reveal an emergent sensibility that predicts the arguments in her artistic manifesto, "The Novel *Démeublé*" (1922)." In this chapter, I show how Cather's prolific dialogue about art in her journalism and her illustrations sets up a four-fold framework for her literary ekphraseis. In this framework, four elements – time, art, nature, and place – coalesce into a synesthetic ekphrasis, a metaphor I extend to describe Cather's blending of painting, music, poetry, sculpture, and the human senses. When all four elements coincide, as when Thea finds her artistic identity while bathing in Panther Canyon in *The Song of the Lark*, or when Ántonia and Jim see the shadow of the plough cast perfectly against the setting sun in *My Ántonia* (1918), Cather's ekphraseis achieve an epiphanic status that, I argue, is her own literary representation of an artistic masterpiece. Cather's ephiphanic ekphraseis, I conclude, are her versions of those Masterworks that she admired so much in art galleries.

My dissertation closes where many discussions of regionalism begin: with the literary descendants of the Southern Renaissance. Comparing the black and white artwork of Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor is a generative tool for considering the many binaries that emerge in comparing their literature, especially their drastically different conception of 'double vision' as a literary method. O'Connor's narratives present a double vision between the real and anagogical world of Catholic doctrine, while Welty's literary philosophy, holding "two pictures in a single frame," helps her to embed subtle critiques of patriarchy in narratives that otherwise re-inscribe those systems of power. Where one vision is religious, the other works to critique the single mindedness of religious doctrine. For Welty, I argue that a queer activism in her photography is realized via ekphrasis as a critique of organized religion in *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972). In contrast, the studied concreteness of O'Connor's art deploys a self-conscious disdain for the abstract art movements of American modernism.

In pursuing this theme of double vision, I trace an alternative artistic vision for Welty and O'Connor, arguing that recently-recovered artworks show a side to each author that has, until now, been in shadow. A 2014 acquisition by Emory University includes ten photographic slides of O'Connor paintings, which reveal that O'Connor was anything but provincial in her relationship to art, and a 2010 discovery of a state fair mural by Welty shows a celebration of the female body that, coupled with an oeuvre of photographs focused on homosocial communities, decisively clears a path for under-attended queer analyses of her works. These remarkable paintings, by both O'Connor and Welty, are experimental and intellectual; they show a fluency with modern art movements that, I argue, ultimately represents a secret manifestation of their artistic epistemologies.

In seeing through these hidden sides of Welty and O'Connor's artistic visions*,* I show how both women, through their art and their literature, are asking questions about their intellectual, spiritual, and social communities. Their questions, like their aesthetics, are opposite: O'Connor asks why humankind has abandoned religion, while Welty asks why religion has abandoned humankind. Their artistic processes also contradict one another: O'Connor's art is a practice of cutting, reversing, upending; Welty's is one of blending, interspersing, integrating. What unites Welty and O'Connor, besides their status as southern women writing in a literary genre known for its patriarchs, is that they shape their literature with an aesthetic that they first discovered, and arguably developed, in their visual art.

One quality that a multi-author dissertation enjoys is the opportunity to see how a literary investigation must discover its own methods, and that the method is discovered *to* us, rather than *by* us, by the literature itself. With Jewett, I encountered a method of companionship, in every sense of the word: the *Language of Flowers* is a companion text to *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. The Linnaeus flower, which launches my reading of Jewett's language of herbs, is also known as the *twin* flower; it is itself its own companion. In Jewett's novel there is a companion narrative embedded in every reference to flowers and herbs, and in that narrative lies a subversive, but affectionate, identification for the challenges in women's reproductive health.

For Gilman, I rediscovered the virtues of literary structure, something I had learned, but never fully appreciated, in my graduate coursework. There's very little I can say coherently about method with Cather, because her artistic simultaneities enact an incoherent intensity. The method for Cather is very much a matter of following this intensity in her literature, which ultimately becomes a method of cataloging bliss. Bliss inhabits Cather's art in a way that unites all the senses and all the arts: she asks readers to smell the grasses, feel the heat of the sun, mark

how the planet and the fabric of the landscape meet the height of dramatic romance to emit an eternal artistic symbol so essential that it is indistinguishable from survival. For Cather, such a cacophony of experience is the only way to characterize art that is, in the headiest sense of the word, sublime.

When I arrived at Welty and O'Connor, I was reminded again of the feminist obligations in this work through the startling realization that they both understood their literature in terms of seeing double. The declarative weight of this idea, that of doubleness, in the context of southern women writing in and about the South, represents an unsettling recognition of the risks certain populations face when speaking in a discourse governed by patriarchal tradition. Pressing on this question of doubleness returned the highest dividends in their art, because while their literature delicately balances two visions within a single frame, we see a more frank expression of these views in their art. These more private artistic expressions show, more clearly than in their literature, the divided nature of their artistic selves. O'Connor's rough-hewn cartoons do not reconcile with her collection of intellectually ambitious paintings. Welty's sympathetic photographs of the share-cropper South counter the boisterous spectacle she relates in her mural of the Mississippi State Fair.

Thus the doubling that Welty and O'Connor declare as a key to their literary prose was also part of their survival in Southern culture. High ambitions, they learned at a young age, must be pursued delicately, graciously; particularly, touting oneself as a female intellectual had consequences. Their efforts at navigating these consequences were inseparable from the intellectual pursuit, and this bind of region and gender shows in their art. Welty and O'Connor speak in two voices, code shifting between their intellectual registers and their hometown voice.

Southern scholar Robert Brinkmeyer writes that "[t]o be in constant motion is to experience only surfaces; to remain in place is to plumb depths" (15). This dissertation is one of motion; it makes discoveries; it suggests. Each chapter represents a brief stop that considers the ways in which the visual and literary conceive of one another, and what this means to the authors who create them. This project invites more patient genres, and an opportunity to "plumb depths." What follows this prologue is an account of the project's own discovery of critical objects of significance, which brushes away the first layer of debris to make preliminary observations, and starts a conversation I hope to carry forward into my future scholarly communities.

A Note on the Archival Research

The research in this dissertation is owing to the work of other scholars and some of my own discoveries as well. The artwork of Sarah Orne Jewett I discovered in her papers at the Houghton Library on the Harvard University Campus. This collection of paintings has recently been digitized and made available online. The leaf image and the yarrow plant image I use are signed. The landscapes are unsigned. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's artworks are found at the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute, and are also available online in their digitized special collections site. Scholars who work on Gilman's images include Denise Knight of SUNY Cortland, and experts in the trade card industry. The images I use of Gilman's orientalist paintings and arabesque design are either attributed to her by Gilman's daughter, Katharine Channing, or signed by Gilman herself; I am the first to publish most of those images.

The Willa Cather chapter features illustrations that were attributed to Cather by Polly Duryea and Timothy Bintrim, and are now available on the Willa Cather Archive at cather.unl.edu/. I discovered the newspaper article by Henry Charles Payne by searching microfilm of the *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, which is held by the Library of Congress. No one

has published or established the connection between Cather and Payne before. The cartoons of Flannery O'Connor are published, but the digitized photographic slides of her paintings from the Emory University Special Collections have never been published, save her self-portriat. Emory only recently acquired these images (at the time of this publication); they were digitized for this project. Eudora Welty's photographs are likewise published, and her mural is on public display at the Eudora Welty House.

Chapter 1: Visualizing American Literary Regionalism

Valentine Cunningham reminds us that the instantiation of art in literature, or ekphrasis, is "one of literature's oldest and longest-lasting effects and practices" (57). And while American literary regionalism has no such claims to longevity, its core premise – setting – is as old as literature itself. These two key terms – 'regionalism' and 'ekphrasis' – are situated in an embattled scholarly discourse that reveals how literary labels create or enforce hierarchy within literary genres. As I contend throughout this dissertation, the gendering of this discourse – that is, the feminization of literary regionalism and the masculinization of literary ekphrasis – imposes artificial limitations that materially detract from critical endeavors to evaluate artistic and literary genres. As I show below, the many definitions of each term often signal modes of dominance and appropriative relationships. These traits open upon a productive instability: on the one hand, any critical discussion of literary regionalism or ekphrasis must necessarily address the politics of appropriation and representation; on the other hand, these two key terms are *themselves* mired in the very issues of bias and appropriation that such discussions would seek to uncover. As a matter of practicality, these terms will have to do, but in order to perform, some of their most basic tenets must be discarded, and others modified to operate in a project that takes the artistic lives of literary regionalists as an object of critical inquiry. This chapter accomplishes that work, through a diachronic consideration of how the language and history surrounding its key terms have impacted the critical objects of this dissertation: regionalism, ekphrasis, and the centrality of women's contributions to the history of American arts and letters.

In the following pages, I will explore the literary field of regionalism and ekphrasis to arrive at the two primary claims that frame this dissertation[2]: first, that the formal traits of literary regionalism are so closely aligned with those of ekphrasis that we might see the genre *itself as an ekphrasis*, or at the very least, as inextricably linked with ekphrasis; and second, that rather than viewing ekphraseis as a literary aside, somehow partitioned off from narrative and plot, we should instead read the ekphrasis as a hermeneutic, or "didactic complement," to the text (Putnam *iv*). In the ensuing chapters, I show how the metaphors advanced in each author's relationship with the sister arts has profound implications for how we might interpret their works, and moreover, that these new interpretations point us toward exciting new directions in the critical field.[3]

In the visual recovery of regionalism's roots that follows, I argue that the first artistic impulses relating to American regional identity find their genesis in maps. The centrality of maps to early American literature suggests an inter-reliance, between the textual and visual, that persists in American literary regionalism. Early American literary anxieties include exploring and taming the continent, and thus maps in literature represent the ekphrastic precursor to literary regionalism. This section will narrate the rise of regionalism alongside its historical visual contexts to highlight the shared themes between literary regionalism and American art, as well the feminization of mass culture that has worked to denigrate its legacy. More importantly, I will

[2] The "literary field" surrounding a genre or text, as Pierre Bourdieu imagines it, interrelates the historical events, aesthetic assumptions, details of textual production, and political factors that surround and shape an author's works (Bourdieu). Approaching key terms in this fashion permit the analytical work of exposing the synchronic and diachronic aggregations of these terms.

[3] Definitions of the term "sister arts" varies widely, but originates from a Victorian adjective of the relationship between arts, most typically poetry and painting. Lisa Moore adds gardening to the list, Jean Hagstrum calls it "literary pictorialism," but as Stephanie Stambaugh explains, the term can "reference the old pastoral connections, yet it would also have to reflect the rise of our ever-expanding urban society" (*c. f.* Hagstrum; Moore; Stambaugh). Stambaugh gives the example of the relationship between 80s hip-hop music, break dancing, and graffiti as an example of sister arts.

offer a narrative that highlights and corrects the traditionally misrepresented impact that women had in the formation of American arts and letters. In the second section, I expose how the many dissenting critical definitions of literary regionalism reinscribe the damaging and misogynistic dismissal of the genre, as well as how feminist reclamation projects work to offset this trend. Last, I distill the post-colonial and feminist concerns that shape current criticism of regionalism, and propose my own contribution to regionalism theory: namely, a prepositional approach to literary regionalism that can allow us to describe the literary viewpoints that look upon, across, and from within a region.

Although I don't discuss ekphrasis explicitly until the very end of this chapter, it nonetheless inhabits the spirit of my inquiry throughout; my attention to the visuality of the genre, through readings of maps and artworks that exemplify the concerns of literary regionalism, gesture toward an ekphrastic method of reading literary regionalism that I build upon throughout the dissertation. By waiting to address ekphrasis until after I parse out the synchronic and diachronic elements of literary regionalism, I can leverage the many parallels between the two terms, and illustrate how current critical trends in literary regionalism share a conceptual framework with literary ekphrasis. Thus, I close the chapter by testing the traits of regionalism against the function and structure of literary ekphraseis. Ultimately, I propose that literary regionalism is a form of literary ekphrasis, one that enacts a global hermeneutic for reading and interpreting its texts.

Region, Writing, and Visual Art

The Roots of Regionalism

The roots of American literary regionalism run as deep as American history itself, and were guided by the literary traditions of early discoverers and immigrants. Cultural interests in

geographical representation, as Martin Brückner and Hsuan Hsu contend, shaped the bulk of America's earliest written texts, and have remained central to America's literary imagination (Brückner and Hsu). A cartographic anxiety, wherein maps reveal or articulate regional or national identity crises, emerges in works as early as Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in genres as diverse as Charles Brockden Brown's gothic *Edgar Huntley* and Henry David Thoreau's nonfiction treatise *Walden*. This anxiety spans literary eras; later examples include conflicts over land and ownership in Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. Maps inscribe possession and chart the movements that drive the American literary narrative. It thus comes as no surprise that the history of American literary regionalism is inescapably linked to the history of America's maps, and as I show below, even a brief consideration of the relationship reveals America's pervasive and omnipresent obsession with ideologies of place.

Figure 1.1: "Ould Virginia" (Smith 18a)

This early obsession with maps bears out in the illustrations of Captain John Smith's *A Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles*. Of the four illustrations in

the book, three are illustrated maps. The fourth illustration, titled “Ould Virginia” (Figure 1), also includes a map, and contains a series of images depicting “part of the adventures of Cap. Smith in Virginia” (18a). Illustrating Captain Smith in various quandaries with the Native Americans before his dramatic rescue by Pocahontas, the detail and interest rendered in the landscape rivals that of the portraits, and suggests that relating an accurate and authentic depiction of the land is as crucial to the narrative as the storyline itself. In the lower center panel, flanked on either side by English coats of arms, is a map described in the table of contents as “A Map of the old Virginia, with the figures of the Salvages” (*x*). The map reinforces what the individual renderings reveal: that Smith’s American adventure narrative is conflated with the character of the land itself, and that Smith’s tale of colonization is best expressed through visualizations of its characters interacting with that landscape. The illustrations in Smith’s *Historie* epitomize the equivalency between the conquering colonist and mapping, and suggest that the success of one begets the success of the other.

Figure 1.2: Arnoldo di Arnoldi Map of America (ca. 1600)

Courtesy Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Thus the character of early America in the Western imagination originated in the context of invasion, colonization, and intrusion, and these rhetorical positions manifest visually in maps that likewise compromise America "cartographically in relation to a global picture of exploration" (Giles 29). Arnoldo di Arnoldi's 1600 map (Figure 2) shows America in such contexts, encroached upon on all sides not only by potentially colonizing forces, but by sea monsters patrolling the deep. Arnoldi's map encapsulates several anxieties that inhabit American literature, one of which is an awareness of the difficult and dangerous (albeit literarily-rich) experience of carving out an existence on American soil. These visual reminders of America's relative barbarism and vulnerability to colonizing influences suggests another literary anxiety that will emerge in later works, which is that for early American authors, there is no indigenous literary or artistic tradition. Paul Giles remarks on this experiential gap to emphasize that the "cultural traditions of Britain and America from 1640 onward were much more closely intertwined than has usually been imagined," and indeed, British literary tradition shaped the works of authors such as Ann Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, Ebenezer Cook, Phyllis Wheatley, and Increase Mather (32). Moreover, troubled notions of transference and exchange suggest an overriding fear of Great Britain's control from afar; in Arnoldi's map, the sailing vessels are themselves icons of transference and exchange. Within this visual depiction exists a rhetoric that informs American literature for the next one hundred years: an America that is passively vulnerable to exploration, and epistemologically indebted to colonizing forces.

If early American maps reveal anything, it is that charting the topography is a mark of dominance; inevitably, each map tells a story about the ongoing negotiations inherent to claiming and maintaining such dominance. As the literature of America begins to take root and reflect the experiences of writers who have made a life in America, rather than those who have merely

journeyed to America, the maps also change. By the 1700s, maps focus more closely on interior distinctions *within* America, rather than global comparisons between America and the rest of the world. Nevertheless, the interior negotiations between the burgeoning communities continue to chart distinctions of dominance and power.

Aristocrat and graphophile William Byrd II's *History of the Dividing Line* (1728) offers an early example of emergent regional identity, and the incremental shift it represents in the procession toward an American tradition of letters. Like Smith, Byrd II's text is published in the form of an exploratory travel memoir, but the "dividing line" of his title lies not between England and America, but North Carolina and Virginia. A Virginian himself, Byrd casts himself in a superior light over his southern neighbors. Byrd proclaims that North Carolina "approaches nearer to the description of Lubberland than any other, by the great felicity of the climate, the easiness of raising provisions, and the slothfulness of the people," and thus Byrd II concludes that "it is a thorough aversion to labor that makes people file off to North Carolina, where plenty and a warm sun confirm them in their disposition to laziness for their whole lives" (28). Byrd's ur-text of literary regionalism not only assigns moral and temperamental characteristics to his northern and southern neighbors, but he also describes, in great detail, the unique plant-life and wildlife he encounters, the eating habits, rituals and religions of Native American populations that he meets in his travels.

Byrd II's travel narrative contains in it the seeds of literary regionalism; his authorial perspective is reminiscent of the condescending and dominant viewpoints that will emerge in many southern dialect tales of the 1800s. Most relevant in this early example of travel literature to literary regionalism, however, is Byrd II's attempt to mediate a perception of authenticity in the reader's imagination. While literary regionalism is a fictional genre, more important than the

distinction between fact and fiction is the balance between authenticity and falseness. During the 1700s, regional depictions remained the provenance of cartographers and exploration diaries like Byrd II's, where cultural idiosyncrasies are presented in a symbiotic, modifying, or otherwise constitutive relationship with a locale.[4] Byrd's travelogue contains all of these essential elements that come to structure literary regionalism. Byrd II's *Dividing Line* is titularly indebted to mapping, and his accounts of plant-life, religious customs, and geography find congruent representations in maps like those in Smith's *Historie*. Looking forward, the symbolic details inscribed upon the clothing, tools, and weapons of the locals he encounters, along with the attribution of geographic idiosyncrasy cast in a rhetoric of authenticity, foretells the arrival of the uniquely American literary tradition: the local sketch.

[4] Landscape painting was not in vogue in American art movements until the 1800s. The history paintings that closed the 18th century modified England's highly allegorical Grand Manner style. Allegorical figures for America's newly-formed democracy were particularly common; Gilbert Stuart's Lansdowne portrait of George Washington is an iconic example of this trait. Washington's dress sword symbolizes not battle but a governing body, books featured in the painting are titled *Federalist*, *Journal of Congress*, *General Orders*, *American Revolution*, and *Constitutional Bylaws*. The allegorical references in the painting that represent democracy comprise every detail of the painting. These detailed scenes, often didactic, reminded Americans that one must sometimes give their life in order to achieve glory. See Benjamin West's *The Death of General Wolfe* (1770), or John Trumbull's *The Death of General Montgomery in the Attack on Quebec* (1786) or *Sortie made by the British Garrison at Gibraltar*, (1789).

Figure 1.3: ***A New Map of North America According to the Newest Observations*** **(Moll, 1708)**

Figure 1.4: A New Map of North America, with the British, French, Spanish, Dutch & Danish dominions on that great continent; and the West India Islands (Sayer ca. 1750).

After the American Revolution, American identity sustains a deep psychic fracturing from the past, a "disjunctive defamiliarization" that "problematizes the conventional spatial and temporal circumference of U.S. cultural norms" (Giles 73). In cartography, America's maps range from the exacting accuracy of the northeast to unknowable western borders, as in Figures 3 and 4. In both Moll's 1703 and Sayer's 1750 maps, Eastern coastlines, cluttered with labels and

geographic detail, give way to the blank, immense canvas of the unconquered American West, labeled simply, starkly, as "Parts Unknown." The landscape, which is the font of regionalist literature to follow, has accumulated an identity steeped in sublime binaries – the seemingly infinite densities of culture and industry in urban centers, and the uncharted, unknowable West. The landscape of America's literary imagination is similarly warped by the enormity of the unexplored land, America's break with its English forebears, and all of the concomitant burdens of nation-building. These concerns reverberate in American literature, as later authors such as Emerson, Longfellow, Hawthorne, and Melville exhibit shared thematic anxieties about devolving and deterritorialized spaces, genealogy and paternity, and the recurring binaries of order and chaos, and normative and apocalyptic scenarios.[5]

These fundamental shifts in American art and literature hearken the inexorable arrival of regionalism: the landscape, at times a spectre of the vast unknown, begins to accrue its value as a metonymic sign for individual facets of national identity. As the proliferation of maps build toward the "cartographic explosion" (Short 209) following the Civil War, one question, increasingly frenetic, resounds: 'What *is* America?' The answer to this question may well lie in literary regionalism. If the imaginative landscapes of America are central to its literature, and charting its topography an enduring concern, then literary regionalism can be seen as the most American of all genres, itself grappling and negotiating with the very themes that help to explore, in a precise location, what it means to belong.

The Regional Sketch, Popular Fiction, and the Rise of Women in American Literature

[5] For the binary between order and chaos, wilderness and civility, Longfellow's "The Building of the Ship" and *Hiawatha*; Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables*, *The Scarlet Letter* and "Young Goodman Brown"; Melville's *Moby Dick*. For mapping in literature, see Thoreau's *Walden*.

It is in 1819 that Washington Irving introduces the literary tradition that responds to this crisis of belonging, with a tale that many critics identify as the source-text for the ubiquitous regional sketch genre that dominated fiction in the early 19th century. In "Rip van Winkle," Irving's landscape and its inhabitants work to ironize the tensions between Federalist and anti-Federalist sentiment, and between rural folkways and nascent industrializing urban centers. Irving's anthropomorphic description of the "magical" Catskill Mountains, "a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family . . . swelling up to a noble height, and lording it over the surrounding country," might well describe the curious denizens of the "old Dutch settlements" (83-4, 119-20). Inseparable from the folklore of its people, the "fairy" mountains are "haunted by strange beings" presumed to be the "primitive" early settlers (85, 116, 81). Leslie Fiedler remarks that Rip Van Winkle is "the figure [who] presides over the birth of the American imagination" (Fiedler *xx*). Winkle does so in the genre of the regional sketch, a form that author Mary Russel Mitford (herself a writer of regional sketches) deems in 1830 the most representative form of American literature (*c.f.* Fetterley and Pryse 67).

The regional sketch links a setting to the idiosyncrasies of its inhabitants; Irving's tale is the first of many local sketches to follow, and the template upon which ensuing regional works – many by women authors – improvise. In 1820, Harriet Cheney's *The Sunday School, or Village Sketches* is quickly followed by Catherine Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* (1822). Lydia Huntley Sigourney's *Sketch of Connecticut* arrives in 1824, and by the 1830s, a full complement of tales and sketches emerge from virtually every populated region in America.[6] These works include the Southwest humor sketches, which rehearse race and class inequities in 1830s

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[6] Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, characterize Southwest humor as comprised of "practical jokes, misogyny, cruelty to animals, and a certain amorality" (91). Also see Fetterley and Pryse pp. 66-104 for a comprehensive accounting of regional works stemming from Irving's template.

America. Southwestern humor sketches, while often too crude for broad endorsement from the reading public, have a direct lineage from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*: they commonly feature a local hero is usually a physical threat of local legend, a town bully, and a protagonist or antagonist who is a feminized, "castrated" character, like Crane's "headless" horseman (Fetterley and Pryse 80, 89-91).[7] Irving's Ichabod Crane represents an emasculated male in a position of learning, but this in no way elevates the women in Irving's stories; only male characters are authorized storytellers in Irving's collection. As his venerable storyteller Rip Van Winkle reminds us, when the death of Dame Van Winkle gives him a "drop of comfort," women in Irving's sketches are anything but reliable sources of history.[8]

Thus, while Irving may have set the *form* for what follows, the *mode* shifts as soon as women, who, as Lloyd Daigrepont reminds us, wrote "more than a third of the fiction published in America before 1820," begin to manipulate the form for their own literary interests (qtd. in Fetterley and Pryse 81). Although never completely resolved, the explicit anxiety about the lack of an American tradition in literature takes a back seat to what Wayne Craven describes as a "romance [that] grew out of the land, out of Americans' relationship to it, and their accomplishments within it" (198).[9] The industrial revolution transforms the ideological

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[7] While Ichabod Crane is popular with the women of Tarry Town, he ultimately is proven a fraud. For a more thorough discussion of Southwest humor's lineage from Irving's sketches, see Cohen and Dillingham's *Humor of the Old Southwest*.

[8] See Fetterley and Pryse for more on this argument (80-84).

[9] Here, Craven is referring to the early painters of the Hudson River School, and the subsequent Luminism movement in landscape painting; 'luminism' was meant to describe the divine infusion of a uniquely "American light" (*c.f.* Wilmerding and Andrus). Albert Bierstadt's *Emigrants Crossing the Plains* (1867) epitomizes the movement. It is through this newfound nostalgia for a landscape erased by industrial progress, evident in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Thomas Cole's1827 painting by the same name, that the moralizing landscape takes form. Simultaneously figuring God's providence in America's westward expansion through allegorical symbols and romanticizing the indigenous populations and the 'noble savage,' these Grand Manner landscapes reflect the sublimity and enormity

conception of American culture, and a nostalgia for the recent past gains increasing power in the creative arts, as themes such as westward expansion, the rise of mass culture and a dominant middle class, and even the inexorable progression toward a devastating civil war give rise to a multiplicity of American literary narratives. These many perspectives feed the narratives that constitute the first significant flourishing of American letters, one that, as I explain further below, increasingly makes way for the voices of female interlocuters.

Over the course of the 19th century, the role of women in the arts steadily gained, in literature throughout the 1800s, and in art toward the late 1800s. The Hudson River school had its share of women masters, although they've been all but anonymous until a recent gallery exhibit at the Thomas Cole Museum.[10] Leading up to the Civil War, women painters were typically banned from all artist guilds or clubs, and they were often prevented by their physicians, if not literally by their petticoats, from any strenuous outdoor explorations that were necessary for working *en plein air*. Any artistic pursuit beyond that of an amateur, to be sure, was frowned upon, if not outright forbidden, for women. Not so for women authors, whose local sketches, like Irving's, are welcomed in the literary marketplace. As the culturally assigned gatekeepers of American morality, northern women usher in the groundswell of self-

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preoccupying the maps of the late 1700s. Thomas Cole's series of paintings depicting Cooper's tale reach their apogee in the penultimate scene of the novel, where Cora pleads for her life at the feet of Chief Tamenund, just before Uncas leaps from a ledge in a futile attempt to save her. This new American nostalgia – it is, after all the fictionalized *last* of the Mohawk tribe – is representative of American landscape painting for the greater part of the 19th century. Cole renders his landscape with a romanticism bordering on the religious; the breathtaking backdrop of cliffs and precipices dwarfs the dramatic scene from the book.

[10] The Thomas Cole Museum's 2010 exhibit, "Remember the Ladies: Women of the Hudson River School," recovers the works of painters such as Julia Hart Beers, (sister to William and James Hart), Evelina Mount (niece to William Sidney Mount) Susie Barstow, Eliza Greatorex, Harriet Cany Peale, Josephine Walters, and Thomas Cole's own sister Sarah Cole. This exhibit celebrates these painters' talent, as well as their perseverance, in an era particularly unwelcoming to women artists. Like Washington Irving, these women painters of the Hudson Valley School explored their craft through depictions of the Catskill Mountains.

improvement in Americana. Between the domestic fiction emerging from the reform tradition and the thriving market for local sketches, literature and region increasingly becomes shaped by a discourse of gender. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which Jane Tompkins calls "the most important book of the century," sets a standard for sales that Hawthorne and Melville never achieve in their lifetime (124).

The driving force behind women's leadership in the literary marketplace is simple: they created the very market that they were serving. Nancy Woloch elaborates:

> Women readers were buying gift books such as Sarah Hale's *Flora's Interpreter* or *The Ladies Wreath*, at the rate of sixty new titles a year. By the 1850s, *Harper's Magazine* estimated that four-fifths of the reading public were women--to whom culture had been relegated, along with religion, morality, child care, and other nonprofit activities. Vast profits were available, however, to those who could capitalize on the female market. (131–2)

Thus, Hawthorne's enduring declaration, that "America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women" was entirely correct (*Centenary Edition* 304). Women's literary production far surpasses that of male authors because the market conditions that supported dominant modes of reform and regionalist literature granted access to otherwise marginalized authorial voices. Whether it is called "women's," "domestic," or "sentimental" fiction, as Susan K. Harris confirms, it was "the dominant novelist subgenre of the 1850s and 1860s" (qtd. in Campbell, "Domestic or Sentimental"). This trend continues into the latter half of the century; for example, between 1889 and 1901, 'local color' author Sarah Orne Jewett publishes fifteen

pieces in the *Atlantic*, while Frank Norris and Stephen Crane each published only one (Campbell, *Resisting Regionalism* 7).[11]

Hawthorne's misogynistic criticism aside, the term 'domestic fiction' glosses over important distinctions between works that uphold tradition and those that subvert it; worse, it implies that women were unwilling or unable to manipulate the traits of the genre. The gender-charged distinctions among literary genres are misleading: 'domestic' fiction undermines the breadth of progressive work being done in that line, while the 'masculinized' genre of 'romance' belies the domestic work at stake. The category of domestic fiction pivots from private into public through moral concerns, like slavery. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* operates well beyond the scope that the term 'domestic' might suggest, while Hawthorne's oeuvre, concerned with domestic interiors, "hostility toward the Puritan patriarch, and . . . imperiled womanhood" is precisely the stuff of domestic fiction (Fetterley and Pryse 131).[12] As Tompkins relates, *The House of the Seven Gables* was successful "*because* it was a sentimental novel" not because it "escaped or transcended the standards of judgment" accorded to domestic literature (18, emphasis added). Totalizing preconceptions about women's fiction in the 1800s have had a lasting negative effect on the potential of this genre to open new pathways to understanding the complexities in American literary movements.

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[11] Although Donna Campell is referencing Jewett's periodical publication, over the course of her career, Jewett was far more prolific than both Norris and Crane.

[12] Nina Baym says that Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does not qualify as domestic fiction because the "good women are not engaged in their own cause, either as individuals or in the interest of their sex, but in a cause where their own welfare is not directly involved or may even be endangered. When juxtaposed with woman's fiction, we see Stowe's work as pursuing a course that sometimes appears to go against the secular and self-fulfilling current of the popular genre, especially in its emphasis on self-sacrifice" (*Woman's Fiction* 233).

The generic partitioning along gendered lines between nineteenth-century 'domestic' and 'romantic' fictions means that feminist critics have had to work to reclaim and recover previously discarded texts, and argue for their inclusion in the literary canon as works of romantic or progressive literature. Tompkins establishes in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* that "a literary reputation could never be anything but a political matter"; and as Ann Douglas confirms, the "cult of motherhood was nearly as sacred in mid-nineteenth-century America as the belief in some version of democracy" (Tompkins 4; Douglas 74). Preserving the reputation of women authors, even prolific and successful ones like Stowe and Jewett, remains an uphill battle. Ann Douglas's (then) dramatic claim from her 1977 monograph explains why this has been necessary: "Twentieth-century critics have taught generations of students to equate popularity with debasement, emotionality with ineffectiveness, religiosity with fakery, domesticity with triviality, and all of these, implicitly, with womanly inferiority" (82–3). Even today, literary history is taught with women's contributions at the periphery, rather than the center, of the market and cultural forces shaping the arc of literary production.

Sharing the fate of domestic fiction, albeit to a smaller extent, literary regionalism has had similar challenges with public perception. Fetterley and Pryse point to Alice Cary's 1844 *Clovernook*, a play on a popular novel by Fannie Forester (Emily Chubbuck) titled *Alderbrook* (collected in 1847) as the moment when regional literature becomes regionalism. *Alderbrook*, according to Fetterley and Pryse, "reflect[s] a didacticism that enforces conventional understandings of gender" (103). Cary's *Clovernook* rejects Forester's "use of the village sketch tradition as a means for delivering the didactic and formulaic" conventions of region and gender, and instead creates a "regionalism that becomes a space for experimentation, less prescribed by

conventions of form and content . . . a place for imaginative play" (103). Subversion of patriarchal norms, critiques of the public domain, and the invention of new types of women characters increasingly inhabit the growing genre of literary regionalism, whose overwhelming popularity made the genre less separate from mainstream American literature than we might expect. As I contend throughout this chapter, the politics of marginalization, whether in resistance or enforcement, are always at stake in regionalist literature and its canonization. In the next section, I demonstrate how the rise of the genre, and the work of its interested scholars, have made this true.

Regionalism Proper: The Post-Civil War Bid for National Unity

The cultural work of national reunification following the Civil War gives rise to regionalism proper. The aftermath of the Civil War found Americans nostalgic for an idealized national unity, one supposedly dismantled by the acrimonious relationship between the North and the South. Regionalist writings of the 1860s -1890s are what Richard Brodhead terms a "cultural elegy," one that revels in an antebellum, pre-industrial America (120). Ironically, the Civil War ushers in the notion of America as a unified nation; after the war, the plural usage – 'the United States *are*' – is replaced by the singular 'the United States *is*,' implying that the conception of the U.S. as a single entity, rather than a coalition of states, was not a remnant of a more peaceful, unified past (Foster 23). Regional nostalgia was key to the task of nation-building, as Philip Joseph explains, because it helped Americans imagine "symbolic sites of national origin, crucial to the construction of a shared narrative" (16). This shared narrative underpins the consumer demand for literary regionalism; as urban sprawl encroaches upon the American landscape, rural locales become the imaginative site for propositions of shared national identity.

These imaginary rural origins offer a cohesive narrative to a nation beleaguered by disunity and loss of life. Amy Kaplan's 1991 essay "Nation, Region, and Empire" offers a still-relevant assessment of this period as one where a "timeless rural origin [symbolized] the 'common inheritance' of the clan" (256). Paradoxically, thinking of 'rural others' as an extension of industrialized urban centers, notes Kaplan, not only appeased the nostalgia for the "timeless rural origin," but also offered a static benchmark for urban progress (256, 251). The rural object simultaneously symbolizes the shared cultural roots of urban subjects, and the fixed point of origin enabling urban claims of comparative superiority, "nostalgic points of origin and a measure of cosmopolitan development" (251). Of course, Kaplan's description implies an authorial stance and reader reception that prefers urban industrialization to the traditions of rural America; while this positive association with urban progress is generally true for Gilded Age readers of regionalism, such is not the case for the regionalist literature of American Modernism.

It is nearly impossible to overstate the appeal literary regionalism had for American readers after the 1880s. Joseph and Brodhead both identify literary tourism as one of the forces driving the market for regionalist literature, and periodicals like *The Atlantic Monthly* were only too happy to be "the chief base for the new high literary professional writer" in order to sell copy to the burgeoning market of readers stemming from unparalleled economic growth in the second half of the nineteenth century (Brodhead 80). Brodhead concludes that regionalism "served as the principal place of literary access in America in the postbellum decades"; albeit not the "career vehicle" of Henry James and William Dean Howells, "virtually every other writer of this time who succeeded in establishing [herself] as a writer did so by the regional form" (116). Brodhead's comment reveals the retrospective gap that has emerged between the perception of

literary regionalism as a minor genre, and the reality that it was *the* preferred genre of readers and writers in late 19th-century America.

The role of women in the literary marketplace continues to grow, as the early local sketch comes into its own in the post-Civil War flourishing of literary regionalism. Of equal interest, however, is the rise of women's production in the visual arts, particularly at a time when they are making such significant contributions to a genre of literature that is itself concerned with authentic representation. Kirsten Swinth notes that "art virtually obsessed Gilded Age Americans" because they "placed extraordinary faith in the power of art (and high culture generally) to instill values and unify society" (2, 3).[13] It is also during this time that art becomes part of the public school curriculum, which provides access to a nation of women interested in creating and owning art. Coupled with the interest of women in writing literature, the resulting effect is that the authors I discuss in the second chapter of this dissertation – Sarah Orne Jewett and Charlotte Perkins Gilman – were in no way exceptional in having formal training in the visual arts. Many women studied art; indeed, an 1890 U.S. census reveals that eleven thousand women represented a full 48.1% of all self-identified "professional" artists. Twenty years prior, only 414 women – a mere 10% – self-report as "professional" painters (Swinth 35). Trained women populate the industry, and although many teach, a full one-third of the artists featured in galleries are women. Women artists begin to make real headlines in the art community, and in a competitive market (1883 saw as many professional artists as lawyers in cities like New York, Boston and Chicago), it was no small feat when French painter Rosa Bonheur garnered the second highest price ever paid for a painting at an American auction (Swinth 2, 8).

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[13] The Aesthetics movement of the 1870s dealt primarily with the enculturation of "good taste," and as individuals primarily in charge of overseeing decorative tastes of polite society, women made remarkable contributions to the visual content of the Aesthetics movement.

Female primacy in the artistic market does not last, and their role in the literary market soon follows suit. By 1890 women are perceived as a disruptive threat, and like Hawthorne and his "damned mob," critics "lamented 'the vast horde of disorderly females who daub[ed] over plush and paint[ed] lilies of the valley on guitars'" (qtd. in Swinth 8). These female painters are painting in the style that has as much currency with male painters overseas, namely the French flower painters Henri Fantin-Latour and Edouard Manet. But today, history records the Aesthetic movement as one led by male artists, such as James McNeill Whistler, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Aubrey Beardsley. For literature and painting, gendered political commitments become increasingly contentious. Darwinian notions popular in public discourse, works of photographers like Jacob Riis, and stories like Stephen Crane's *Maggie, Girl of the Streets* (1893) strike out against the aesthetics movement. Swinth confirms that "male artists and critics regroup, and the 'authentic self' that was by evolution restricted to white men" begins to push marginal contributors even further from the center (8). Anything appealing to mass culture is aggressively feminized, and vociferously condemned by the increasingly elite gatekeepers of American culture. The explicitly masculine 'high brow' standard of modernism and naturalism, with its shocking new forms, is well underway.

Literary regionalism quickly loses its mass appeal in a rhetorical shift toward the masculinized genre of naturalism, and the gendering of the genre takes hold in what is to be a permanent characterization. Closer consideration reveals that the dividing lines between regionalism and naturalism are blurred by a shared commitment to an idealized past and the powerful role of the environment. Campbell notes that regionalism "finds strength in looking to the past for its values, seeing in the dying economies and vanishing folkways of its pictured regions an America that never existed" (8), but the same might be said for naturalists like Norris

or Dreiser, who owe much of their dramatic effect to pivoting against traditional, past-oriented landscapes. Dreiser's Carrie finds herself in the unkind streets of Chicago, far away from the safe country roads of rural Wisconsin; when Norris's McTeagu*e* completely succumbs to the hardening forces of his environment, his downfall is played out against the backdrop of the California countryside, in a scene where he refuses to help an "Indian Buck." While the local color world resists change, and the naturalist world fixates on change, both rely on a highly idealized view of the past and of the various (even primitive) roots of civilization.

Regionalism's implicit awareness of environment echoes that of naturalism; Sherrie Inness and Diana Royer note, "focusing closely on the lives of people in a particular locale . . . allowed ambitious [regionalist] writers to create moving portraits of characters affected by their environment" (4). What differs, then, is the didactic role of the individual in each: regionalism asks that individuals show "reverence for the past, and above all endurance rather than defiance in the face of adversity"; naturalists prefer to relate the individual to the universal in the all-too-common struggle against socially-determined adversity (Campbell, *Resisting Regionalism* 8). Also different is the once more marginalized status of women authors, who are explicitly denied entry to the naturalist genre because of its patently masculine form. In this didactic transition to the highbrow distinction of self-consciously masculine literary naturalism, women move from the position of author to that of subject, as the determining role of the environment makes central the question of women's mobility.[14]

The transition of the female figure from subject in literary regionalism to object in literary naturalism calls forward the most important issue in current literary regionalism theory:

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[14] Dreiser's *Sister Carrie,* Lewis's *Main Street*, and Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* all moralize on the dangers of women who either abandon or are denied the traditional protections of a rural, domestic life.

empowerment on the subject-object continuum. Indeed, the departure point for most fundamental scholarly perspectives on regionalism is the feminization of the genre, wherein its differences from other strands of literary realism are articulated in terms of a generic inferiority. This feminization, note Amy Kaplan, Donna Campbell, Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, develops from a cultural reaction to the unprecedented integration of women authors into the mainstream market. Campbell suggests economic threat is primarily at stake: "this rejection [of literary regionalism] resulted from a backlash against what was perceived as feminine domination of audience and reader alike." Campbell confirms that historical materials reveal a "substantial component of antifeminine sentiment" and that the "alarm about female dominated literature spread by writers such as James Lane Allen and Frank Norris played a key part in ending the reign of local color as a serious literary movement" (*Resisting Regionalism* 47).

Literary regionalism, however, doesn't slip away into the history books, a mere artifact of the explosion of American periodicals and consumer culture. As the epistemological crisis of American identity continually resists a singular answer, the dispersed, often marginalized voices that come to the forefront in literary regionalism permit Americans to embrace several answers simultaneously. As the last two chapters of this dissertation will underscore, after the 1920s a reinvigorated tradition of literary regionalism emerges, as authors of the Southern Renaissance (such as Caroline Gordon, William Faulkner, Katherine Ann Porter and Jean Toomer) and Midwestern literary giant Willa Cather seek to reclaim the individual within the post-naturalist, modernist era,[15] and settle, once and for all, the question of literariness in regional writing.

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[15] The figure of the individual, after all, is what is most at stake in the tension between regionalism and naturalism. For both genres, the individual is still socially determined by their racial and social status, as we see the way in which the characters in *My Ántonia* may escape financial oppression only to find that racially determining factors prevent their moving out of the servant class. But for regionalism, the individual in their setting drives the plot in a way that

Literary modernism's prioritization of authenticity, which often borders on nativism and primitivism, revives the regionalist text. Modernist regionalism enacts a vehement resistance to feminization, evidenced by parallel artistic manifestos, such as Cather's "The Novel *Demuéble*," (1922) and the southern agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930). An important generic shift occurs as well: the balance tips from the 'minor' sketches of the 1800s toward the 'major' novels of Modernity.

What remains constant for literary regionalism, in both its post-Civil War and Modernist flourishings, is that it continues to exhibit an artistic, ekphrastic rendering of place, and hence rely on the techniques and vocabularies of visual art to relate literary landscapes. Just as America's early literary history, in the context of its cartography, established a fluency between region and visual, so too does literary regionalism. As I discuss in later chapters, Sarah Orne Jewett and Charlotte Perkins Gilman incorporate their visual art training and aesthetics into their representations of place, and Willa Cather, Eudora Welty, and Flannery O'Connor all demonstrate a deep connection with American art movements that informs their personal relationships with visual art and literary ekphrasis. Moreover, the gender culture in America, which alternatingly highlights and hides the contributions of women in the arts, underpins many of the central cruxes in literary regionalism: subjectivity, objectification, and the stance of author to region. In the following section, I lean into the heat of this conversation to map out the critical discourse, and to propose that this discourse is framed by the prepositional relationships with

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looks inward, and for naturalism, the setting is connected to an outward view. Norris's *McTeague* shows how an environment can call forward the primitive in all men; Cather's *My Ántonia* shows how an environment can create unique and memorable individuals. Maggie, girl of the streets, is a cry of all young women in the city tenements. Ántonia is a cry only of Ántonia.

region (writers who view upon a region, across regions, or from within a region) that mirrors the mediating stances governing literary ekphraseis: literary regionalism as an ekphrasis.

Regionalism Theory Today: Interestedness and the Subject-Object Continuum

As one might expect from a genre that is itself partially defined by spatial prepositions, the discourse of literary regionalism – its characters, its authors, and even its critics – is in all ways informed by *stance*. The position from which characters speak about and to region – from within, upon, or across regions – colors the regionalist product. As literary critics carefully parse out the distinctions between what is, and what is not, regionalist fiction, the question of stance comes to the fore. Annie Proulx's discussion of literary regionalism makes clear that every scholar must find her own bearing in the terms surrounding the literatures of place, and that there is a need to distinguish between works that use region. Proulx identifies three categories of regionalist influence: works that use region in a merely "decorative" sense, as "a kind of literary travel poster (or cultural signpost)," those that use region to "make a fictional world meaningful," and those that "draw all of their considerable power from an inextricable knit of character, plot, climate, weather, landscape, and culture" (9-10). Proulx employs "regional" over regionalist, and adds a superlative to the literary end of the spectrum: her terms range from local color (the "poor cousin of regionalism"), to "regional" (which she dubs the works of Faulkner, McMurtry, and even James Joyce), to what she deems "true landscape novels" (7-8).[16] While Proulx seems to be somewhat far afield in the conversation of other regionalist theorists – she awards the status of a "true landscape novel" to contemporary fiction writer of *romans policier* (crime fiction) novels Tony Hillerman – she joins the rank and file of those who would dismiss all nineteenth century regionalism as minor works of 'local color.'

[16] I concur with the scholars who reject the term 'regional,' because it implies a work's relevance is limited to that region.

It is this gesture by Proulx, describing 19th century literary regionalism as 'local color,' which best encapsulates the debates going on about literary regionalism in critical scholarship. If the term 'regional' is in any way problematic to scholars of the genre, 'local color' is downright derogatory, and the perceived stance of the author, which I contend exists on a prepositional spectrum spanning those who write *upon* a region (that is, from a dominant and condescending viewpoint) to those who write *from within* a region (from an indigenous and sympathetic position), determines its classification as regionalism or local color. Critics who distinguish between the two tend to find 'local color' a more masculinized (also crude, in the vein of Southwest humor sketches), less nuanced, and altogether less literary form. Many critics, however, including Richard Brodhead and Amy Kaplan, collapse the terms regionalism and local color; in doing so, they attempt to draw broader comparisons between other literary movements, most prominently realism. Ultimately, this glossing contributes to the misogynistic devaluing of women's contributions in the literary movement, by conflating the progressive and nuanced texts of women writing in the regionalist tradition with the regressive, conservative works of the humorous regional sketch.

Given the circumstances surrounding the canonization and the historical field of both reform and regionalist literatures, it's worth noting how the backformation of literary terms can serve to marginalize, rather than characterize, literary movements led by diverse voices. Domestic literature's masculinized counterpart is the literary romance, but they are not mutually exclusive categories. Likewise, late nineteenth-century regionalism is a strand of literary realism, not a separate entity. Continuing this theme, twentieth-century regionalism shares as many traits in common with naturalism as it has departures, and furthermore outlasts it, occupying a central place in literary modernism. American literary regionalism was partitioned off from literary

realism in a manner that marginalized a movement dominated by women. The consistent relegation of these works to the category of 'minor' literature, and thus outside of the canonical tradition of 'major' authors, merits closer consideration.

In the case of domestic fiction, theorists draw their authors and texts away from that damning term as fast as they can, sensing the denigration in the term 'domestic' has too strong a foothold in the critical debate. As Susan K. Harris points out, contemporary scholars have what "appears to be an unspoken agreement not to submit nineteenth-century American women's novels to extended analytical evaluation . . . because the evaluative modes most of us were taught devalue this literature *a priori*" (44). In the case of literary regionalism, 'local color' has had a similar effect, disappearing significant works from nineteenth-century canon. The masculinist traditions of the high-brow modernist era promptly classified local color as an artless remnant of mass culture, and erased the bulk of its literary history, save a few prolific white male authors gathered underneath the protective fold of "realism" (*c.f.* Sundquist). Feminist critics consider local color fiction a manifestation of patriarchal discourse, one that acts *upon* a region instead of speaking from within.

Most critics, however, do not collapse the terms local color and literary regionalism in order to make comparisons with realism. Marjorie Pryse asserts her definition of regionalism as "a particular body of texts produced primarily by women writers who wrote against the grain of the 'local color' fiction of their day" (Pryse 47–8). Nina Baym argues that western regionalism sets itself apart through its temporal view point: Baym suggests that in the 19th century, "the specialty of female writing was about dying communities and their traditional ways as they were threatened by the modern world with its industrializing, urban, and polyglot populations. Local color looked to the past, while western women's writing looked to the future" (*Women of the*

West 8). If both 'regionalism' and 'local color' carry the stigma of being a less serious form of realism, theorists are quick to clarify that local color is "the examination and presentation of exotics," and is "anathema to the aims of most serious writers. . . [l]ocal color is concerned mainly with the outside world – its surfaces" (Holman 14). These academic perspectives serve to remind that literary classifications very often mask the complex strands that cohere in a genre.

Scholars use many designations to identify works of regionalism; they consider gender, time period, geographic location, formal attributes like the inclusion of dialect or landscape details, or modal attributes like historical nostalgia or reflections on social or ethnic minorities. Most, however, recognize regionalism on the grounds of the author's relative sympathy for the region, and thus their fictional speaker's potential for progressive or regressive political discourse. Louis A. Renza does not blanket the early flourishing of regionalism with the term local color, and instead considers the issue in the context of nineteenth century author Sarah Orne Jewett, and asks whether her works "simply accede to sociological explanations which reduce them to transitory literary as well as historical significance; or whether they resist such reductions to the point where this resistance comes to inform their use of narrative conventions, themes, and stylistic practices" (45). Because Renza views literary regionalism as a genre wherein the authorial and narrative stance speaks from within a region, he identifies resistance as the central defining element in the discourse of literary regionalism.

This belief certainly holds true for Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, who argue that regionalism charts, first and foremost, the geography of gender. Their position that regionalists' politics of resistance "derive their identity less from their political subordination to nation-states and more from their rejection of imperialism" suggests that the political stakes are much higher than they may appear (qtd. in Joseph 17). This rejection of imperialism is made possible through

a form that permits women authors, to an extent heretofore unknown, to operate as perceived or authorized "expert interlocutors" on the subject of a region's landscape and cultural paradigms. Moreover, as women write female characters into these landscapes, they are "free to say" what they might about gender in the region (Fetterley and Pryse 15, 13). Such freedoms elicit the deeply cynical, subversive and progressive works of authors like Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, whose spinster character Louisa Ellis's "heart went up in thankfulness" when her long-lasting engagement is finally called off (17), or Kate Chopin, whose character Edna Pontillier views marriage as an "indescribable oppression" that "filled her whole being with a vague anguish" (8). Often, these women write about women who themselves write, like Sarah Orne Jewett's author-narrator in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. This geography of gender, as Fetterley and Pryse demonstrate, marks boundaries of transgression: these authors overreach the script of gender performance with unmanageable, self-driven characters.

And thus one of the most common elements that critics discern in literary regionalism is its accessibility to female or ethnic minority authors, which in turn contributes to the quality of subversion often found in regionalist texts, owing to a non-dominant literary perspective's negotiations with power and subjectivity. Eric Sundquist distinguishes literary regionalism from realism on the basis of empowerment and subjectivity: "Economic or political power can itself be seen to be definitive of a realist aesthetic, in that those in power (say, white urban males) have been more often judged 'realists,' while those removed from the seats of power (say, Midwesterners, blacks, immigrants, or women) have been categorized as regionalists" (503). Regionalism, recast in contemporary theory, rejects local color, southwest humor, and anything that is not doing dense cultural work in the realm of re-negotiating cultural norms that

traditionally under-privilege or oppress. And since regionalism is *the* genre for empowering marginalized voices, it is particularly adapted for this type of cultural work.

To wit, Charles Chesnutt's works are regionalist because he was an African American writing for a predominantly white readership. Chesnutt's works flip the script by reworking the plantation myth. Instead of rehearsing the image of the grateful ex-slave reminiscing about the good old days, Chesnutt presents tales wherein a native ex-slave outwits a northern foreigner. Richard Brodhead describes Chesnutt's form of regionalism as a "contest of domination and indigenous resistance played out on several planes" (200). Joel Chandler Harris, on the other hand, a white author who incorporates traditional African American tales within a literary frame, straddles the designation: the interior narrative meets Fetterley and Pryse's test for writing "against the grain" of local color fiction, while the exterior frame does not. Compared to works like Thomas Nelson Page's *Mars Chan*, which merely underscore the master narrative of the Southern plantation myth, Chesnutt and Harris's tales are easily distinguishable as works that challenge the stereotypes and cultural paradigms of their literary regions. This distinction, which not all theorists care to parse out, suggests that the author's point of view is equally as important as the text that she creates.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Yearling*, anticipated this problem in a speech that she gave to the National Council of Teachers of English in 1939:

> Regional writing may be done by either outsiders or by insiders . . . It may be done deliberately – may I say "perpetrated?" – solely because it is regional. . . . Regionalism written on purpose is perhaps as spurious a form of literary expression as ever reaches print. It is not even a decent bastard, for back [sic] of illegitimacy is

> usually a simple, if ill-timed, honesty. Regional writing done because the author thinks it will be salable is a betrayal of the people of that region. Their speech and customs are turned inside out for the gaze of the curious. They are held up naked, not as human beings, but as literary specimens. (qtd. in Magee 17)

Rawling's concerns were well-founded; there was no shortage of such "salable" "perpetrations," especially in the regionalist boom of the 1880s, where many regional sketches were inexcusably inaccurate, devoid of any true local context whatsoever. It is in this light – the capacity of local color to parody rather than represent – that scholars contrast regionalism's role in narrating an imaginary national unity to its capacity to enforce difference. In regionalist works that present an idealized vision of a nostalgic past, or of a timeless rural landscape, the foil against urban progress often becomes an aggregate site for discrimination.

That is, if we are to understand regionalism's work as making apparent the social and geographical borders between conflicting modalities of culture, inevitably, the heat of the debate in regionalism ultimately becomes a matter of where these authors find their own balancing point on the spectrum of subject and object – of speaking from inside a region as a subject within it, and looking upon a region as an appropriable object. These negotiations, the central task of a genre wherein marginalized voices can occupy a center of authority, inevitably lead to the politics of representation. Nevertheless, these politics cut both ways: no matter how sympathetic, how internal, how *indigenous* an authorial voice may be, in order to represent a regional object, one must appropriate it. As soon as the authorial voice succeeds in recasting the local dialect, landscape, or town, she automatically constructs an objectified "other," a self "different" from that object, and an audience that compounds the regional object's "otherness" through their identification with the gaze of the literary narrator. Even in instances where the narrator speaks

from within the regional community, the narrative voice and the reading audience imply an insurmountable distance.

It is the interestedness of the narrator that, first and foremost, composes this 'different' self, who seeks to use literariness to depict a non-literary subject, something that, in some cases, actively *defies* literariness. Flannery O'Connor once said, "I think the reason I like chickens is that they don't go to college," and the same could be said for O'Connor's least damnable (admitting that there is no such thing as "most likeable") characters (O'Connor et al. *xxv*). Hamlin Garland, an early theorizer of literary regionalism, certainly knew this fact; after publishing his semi-autobiographical *Main Travelled Roads* in 1891, his friends and family shunned him for critiquing the bitter hopelessness of prairie poverty. Garland learned that he must abandon his non-literary roots to truly speak about them in a literary medium, an issue Brodhead addresses directly: "The paradox of this genre," writes Brodhead, "is that it purports to value a culture for being intactly other at the very time that it is offering outsiders the chance to inhabit it and enjoy its special 'life'" (133).

This gap between the reader and the regionalist writer is most especially apparent in the post-Civil War era of literary regionalism, which coincided with a burgeoning upper middle class and a seemingly insatiable demand for literary tourism.[17] The Gilded Age's leisure class took to summer 'holidays' with gusto, and this was the same class creating the demand for literary regionalism. Literary tourism satisfied the demand of elite readers for exotic destinations in the farther reaches – cultural, as well as geographic – of the American landscape.[18] The consumer

[17] See Joseph, Kaplan, and Brodhead.

[18] This trend carried well into the 20th Century, as evidenced by Junius Elmore Dovell's oft-referenced dissertation thesis on the Florida Everglades. Dovell writes, "It may seem strange, in our day of Arctic and African exploration, for the general public to learn that in our very midst, as it were, in one of our Atlantic Coast States, we have a tract of land one hundred and thirty

relationship encoded in this model of literary regionalism presents the problem of appropriation. Granted, the unabashedly consumer-oriented sketches written and read in this era rarely garner much critical attention today, but it remains true that even the most empathetic regionalist literature is published because of a demand created by upper class readers, who stand in stark contrast to the regional object that is represented and consumed. Indeed, the genre pivots on the remarkable 'difference' and the compromised subjectivity of the regional, rural 'other.' For the 1800s, this disparity is most apparent in literary regionalism's most celebrated 'local': the disenfranchised ex-slave of southern dialect tales.

This incredibly precarious niche is what Jeff Karem identifies as the commodification of cultural authenticity. The question of authenticity, at once central to regionalist literature and productively de-centering the literary field as a whole, poses a formal conundrum: just as any static representation of the past is impossibly idealized, so too is cultural authenticity. Karem warns, "The commodification of difference under the banner of authenticity produces a number of risks for marginal cultures and writers" because the notion of cultural authenticity "all too often reifies essentialist paradigms of identity and literary production" (11, 15). Indeed, the extent to which regionalist literature succeeds is in direct proportion to its perceived authenticity, both with readers and critics alike. Scholars who differentiate regionalist literature from strands of local color, realism, or other categories do so on the basis of the work's perceived sympathy with the region from which it speaks. This is the very essentialization that allows, as Amy Kaplan claims, the "distended industrial nation" of the late 1800s to imagine itself as part of an "extended clan sharing a 'common inheritance' in its imagined rural origins" (251). Moreover,

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miles long and seventy miles wide that is as much unknown to the white man as the heart of Africa" (Dovell Ch. V, Pt. 1. Par. 1).

this synthetic basis of authenticity all but prohibits regionalist authors from publishing outside of the genre; the more experimental works of modernist regionalist authors such as Willa Cather, Ralph Ellison, William Faulkner, and Eudora Welty were all found guilty, at one point or another, of “violating the cultural pact of authenticity” (Karem 21).

Literary authenticity and regionalist authenticity, of course, are inextricably related to experience, and it is the extent to which an author’s first-hand experience appears to inform the text that determines its believability. First-hand experience, in the case of literary regionalism, is thus informed by the memories and on-going experiences of the author in her region. Such depictions of this regional world, rendered as they are in literary art, link the author’s physical vision with their artistic vision. As I turn to the last part of this chapter, it is in this relationship – between the regionalist author’s physical vision and her artistic vision – that I find the ekphrastic potential in literary regionalism. Below, I show that in theorizing literary regionalism as a literary ekphrasis, it is readily apparent that the analytical techniques common to literary ekphrasis scholarship represent a set of functional and useful tools, which we can use to probe, compare, and interpret literary regionalism in new and relevant ways.

Regionalism *as* Ekphrasis: Atemporality and the Nostalgia of the Fixed Image

Literary ekphrasis might not, at first blush, seem relevant to literary regionalism, but its growing popularity in current criticism shows that its theoretical implications reach far beyond its traditional instantiations. As Elizabeth Bearden confirms in her 2012 monograph, *The Emblematics of the Self: Ekphrasis and Identity in Renaissance Imitations of Greek Romance,* “ekphrasis has been defined as broadly as vivid description, and as narrowly as the description of an extant work of art” (3). Recent book-length publications on ekphrasis suggest that scholars are finding the ways in which ekphrasis interrelates literature and the arts, and its concomitant

critical concerns, to be productive avenues of inquiry; some of these texts include Andrew Miller's 2015 *Poetry, Photography, Ekphrasis: Lyrical Representations of Photographs from the 19th Century to the Present*, which expands poetic ekphraseis to include representations of modern photography, or Peter O'Connor and Michael Anderson's *Applied Theatre: Research: Radical Departures*, in which Esther Fitzpatrick's essay defines ekphrasis as the process of using "one art form to respond to another art form" (210). Likewise, session panels at the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the Northeast Modern Language Association evidence a growing interest in modern interpretations of ekphrasis.[19]

The term ekphrasis simply means speaking out, or speaking through, but its literary definition isn't nearly so concise. The original definition of ekphrasis, as Ruth Webb explains in *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, is "A speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes" (1). Webb translates this definition from Theon's *Progymnasmata*, the rhetorician handbook for rhetoric students of the Roman empire. Given this fluidity of meaning, it may come as a surprise that many critics working on ekphrasis theory find themselves mired in somewhat heated debates over what constitutes a bona fide instance of ekphrasis. As Jaś Elsner reminds, in "antiquity the term had a much broader meaning as a technical definition for all kinds of vivid description"; it is only in the last hundred years that ekphrasis has come to refer specifically to descriptions of works of art (Elsner 20).

The story of ekphrasis's definition, and its increasingly contentious role in literary critical theory, reads as a parallel chapter to the challenges besetting literary regionalism and the vanished history of women in the arts. The critical issues of literary regionalism I outlined above

[19] After intermittent appearances since 2005, the term "ekphrasis" has emerged in the past four consecutive years' of MLA convention programs (see http://www.mla.org/conv_listings_res); At NeMLA, "ekphrasis" appears in three session topics, and in five session papers (see http://www.buffalo.edu/nemla/convention/upcoming.html).

offer a surprisingly solid foundation for the critical issues surrounding literary ekphrasis. In this section, I will not only synthesize how the limited application of the term has served to reinforce paradigms that make non-dominant perspectives invisible, but I will show how the productive conundrums in ekphrasis theory can illuminate new ways of thinking about regionalism. Ultimately, I hope to show how the formal traits of regionalism and ekphrasis mirror one another, and likewise, how theoretical innovations, in *either* field, can operate in the other field to the same effect.

Ekphrasis begins with a relationship between arts: as we might read a painting's semiotics, so too we might read a novel's spatio-visual construction. There are lines of representation and signification linking together our world's art, drawing corollaries and expanding our experience of an artistic piece. The sister arts – literature, theatre, opera, music, painting, and sculpture, to name a few – share an expressive lexicon, a fluency among artistic registers, a tendency, as Goethe notes, to "even lose themselves in each other" (Goethe 11). We commonly draw on one art to lend expression to another, and this habit is a gesture toward ekphrasis. Ekphrasis itself, a term used in every artistic field, is perhaps best seen as the representation of one art form through another: musical ekphrasis might feature a symphony that incorporates a play or a poem; ekphrasis in paintings might include the image of a sculpture.[20] Because ekphrasis borrows from the registers of other artistic practices, it is in its heart a rhetorical device, one designed to bring before the mind's eye a vivid experience of an additional artistic medium.

Like ekphrasis, regionalist literature invokes an inter-arts relationship because it benefits from a shared lexicon with the sister arts. The local scene is often rendered through visual

[20] See Bruhn, "Concert of Paintings" and *Musical Ekphrasis*.

means: portrait close-ups, literary landscapes, and panning perspectives are central to the genre. A musicality inheres in its literary 'recordings' of dialect and wildlife. Regionalism relies on the convincing representation of dialect, landscape, and the idiosyncratic characteristics of cultural geographies. Critics often remark that the best literary regionalism features illustrative precision, like that of a photograph or recording.[21] Masterful regionalist literature surely, like its ekphrastic counterpart, "brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes" (Webb 1). The deeply sympathetic relationship between regionalist texts and art movements is central to its epistemology. In this sense, literary regionalism is anchored in a discourse of artistic practice, and particularly adapted to and often informed by ekphrasis.

The view that ekphrasis exists only when classic art inhabits a poem is a vestige of the masculinist tenor of ekphrasis theory, but it is no longer the norm.[22] Generally, it is safe to say that broader definitions of ekphrasis identify an event that brings artistic modes into

[21] Brodhead describes the "extensive written simulation of regional vernacular, a conspicuous effort to catch the nuance of local speech" (116); Fetterley and Pryse note the "visual zoom" effected in Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's short stories (179); Joseph remarks that regionalism "makes visible" various "forms of local community," at times through the "all-too-audible voices" of its characters (47); and Inness and Royer declare that the "naturalist impulse of the ornithologist to catalog and record corresponds to the regionalist impulse to preserve and curate" (113).

[22] Michael Davidson (1983) proposes ekphrasis as a principle, rather than an object, exemplified by the "painterly" poem that uses "strategies of composition equivalent to but not dependent on the painting itself" (72). Murray Kreiger argues that ekphrasis moves from "a classic genre" into a literary principle of poetics in the New Critical school, where a poem's own knowledge of its form constitutes a spatial representation of time, it is in a sense its own well-wrought urn (Heffernan 2). Michael Davidson objects to such a conservative view because it removes the human and historical context that is necessary to identify the author's intention of ekphrasis (71-3). Kreiger's view, remarks Heffernan, would leave us all "smouldering in the ashes of New Criticism, sealed away in its well wrought urn" (2). John Hollander (1988) theorizes "notional" ekphrasis, suggesting that the incorporation of an imaginary work of art may do as well as an actual work of art (211). James Heffernan's 2004 definition is widely endorsed: he proffers, quite simply, that ekphrasis is "the verbal representation of visual representation" (3). This blunt definition has limited functionality, however, because it omits literature about other forms of art, including music.

conversation, and consider what is signaled through this relationship. Narrower definitions focus on a structural determination of how the re-presentation, the embeddedness of one art form within another, should exist. The history of ekphrasis might be imagined as an hourglass, passing through its most narrow definition in the early twentieth century, and expanding once more toward the original spaciousness that its Greek etymology inscribed. Ekphrasis theory is expanding continually, rapidly, and inclusively toward Michael Putnam's formulation: when "art describes art" (Putnam *iv*). What remains constant, if anything, in ekphrasis theory is the requisite act of representation within a representation; as when language represents something that is *itself* representational, like a painting.

Besides formal similarities, regionalism and ekphrasis face a host of similar critical challenges, perhaps the most obvious being the issues surrounding gender politics. The term ekphrasis is hampered by an enduring masculinist tradition. Despite (or perhaps because of) its close relationship with the 'sister arts,' many arguments playing out in current scholarship ironically focus on limiting which *kinds* of art 'count' in literary ekphrasis, rather than exploring the potential of the inquiry itself. The most conventional literary referents to literary ekphrasis are Homer's depiction of Achilles's shield, Keats's Grecian urn, or Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts." The focus on classical modes does not bode well for women's arts, and as Adrian Rifkin admits, ekphrasis is "haunted by this ancient problem of aesthetic procedure": differentiating between representation and mimesis – between merely copying, and interpreting – defining, for the purpose of identifying an ekphrasis, what constitutes art (74). What Rifkin calls a "procedure" is in fact a discourse shaped by centralized cultural authority, and its interest in determining which artistic objects may qualify as ekphrastic subjects. This problem, of course, resonates with literary regionalism, which faces similar evaluative hurdles.

James Heffernon holds that literary ekphrasis entails prosopopeia, or giving a voice to an otherwise silent object (4); in that voicing, we are reminded of the tension of re-presentation in region. The bulk of critical voices frequently characterize ekphrasis as a masculine and aggressive act upon a disempowered, voiceless, feminized object. The timbre of this conversation, "between the driving force of the narrating word and the stubborn resistance of the fixed image" is often sexual in its connotation, and invokes an antiquated view of art as somehow epitomized by the female nude (6). W. J. T. Mitchell proclaims in *Picture Theory* that "female otherness is an overdetermined feature in a genre that tends to describe the object of visual pleasure and fascination from a masculine perspective, often to an audience understood to masculine as well" (168). This act of envoicing the feminized, powerless entity, imbuing the passive object with the *enargeia*, or vividness, attributed by Greek rhetoric to ekphrasis, is remarkably consonant with literary regionalism's work of envoicing a region or a culture. Literary regionalism is sometimes described as enacting a static, timeless representation of region, much like the "fixed image" of literary ekphrasis. More important, however, is the way in which the fixed image of ekphrasis aligns with the feminizations of literary regionalism. As a genre, literary regionalism is feminized, but more important, the folkways and cultural traits it preserves are ones that, as Amy Kaplan reminds, often "bracketed the [dialect] speaker as uneducated and inferior to the urban narrator" (253).

These issues no doubt sound familiar because they are issues surrounding the politics of representation and agency on the subject-object continuum. And like some theorists of regionalism, it seems that ekphrasis theorists cannot help but enact the very points they would critique. Simon Goldhill asks, in "What is Ekphrasis For?" whether or not a viewing subject marked as female, can overcome the tradition of masculine privilege to form a "positive

definition" of the female viewing subject. Goldhill ventures that the act may be too informed by "shared class, education, and cultural and intellectual expectations": "to what degree," he asks, "does anyone try to speak about viewing from a subject position that is not within the cultured poses of the educated . . . elite?" (10). However, Goldhill reinforces this perceived quandary when he comments in his opening paragraph, "There is a booming literature on ekphrasis outside classics, too, though it rarely knows the classical material adequately" (1). When Page duBois claims that she wants to consider "what it means for the ekphrastic narrator to place female viewers in front of a work of visual art, and thus to construct them even as *he* presents a work of art beyond them and through them," she fails to realize that perhaps the best question to ask is what happens when women aren't presented, but rather do the presenting – of both the female viewer and the art ekphrasis that she views (46).

Perhaps not knowing "the classical material adequately" was part of the fault-finding campaign against the women literary regionalists of the 1880s, whose authority in the fiction marketplace and the genre no doubt disturbed the status quo. In any case, changing the sex of the viewer, for regionalism or ekphrasis, does not do away with the critical contexts arising out of issues of mediation, distance, and appropriation. The visualization of otherness is inherent in *any* representation. What is possible, however, by disrupting these traditions, as duBois suggests, is an "elaboration of difference in these ekphraseis" informed by "a variety of viewing subjects that takes in questions of historical knowledge, of ethnic difference, of gender, and of class, as the narrators" (47). Simply put, interpreting ekphraseis by women, which of course would require *acknowledging* ekphraseis by women, can change how we interpret the mediation of subjectivities inherent to the device. My task, in the ensuing chapters, will be to perform exactly these kinds of interpretations.

The issue of the appropriative gaze is central to the subjectivity problems in both regionalism and ekphrasis. Just as an artwork is in its own way didactic, instructing the viewer to see an object in a certain way, so too is the mediating entity between an ekphrasis and its reader didactic, as is a representation of region and its reader. Goldhill argues that in ekphrasis, the critical gaze finds its "institutional origin" (2). This gaze is invested in a "value-laden view" that "regulates the viewing subject," and is in fact *instructing* its reader: *this* is how you look (2). The power of art to control and direct the critical gaze is equally at stake in regionalism and in ekphrasis because, "like a Rorschach blob, [their gazes] point to the subjectivity of the interpreter" (Bartsch and Elsner *ii*). If we think for a moment of a literary regionalist text as an act of ekphrasis, then its views of the cultural geographies, composed into an aestheticized landscape by a mediating narrator into an artistic object, can be read against the "value laden" agenda imposed by the interpreter/narrator.

Like visual art and like ekphrasis, literary regionalism asks first that its readers *see*, and see through the eyes of its interpreter-narrator. Nostalgia and critique are the domain of the interpreter-narrator who first presents a representation of a landscape that is, by virtue of its exceptional value to the genre, itself an aestheticized representation. And in the case of regionalist works with literary frames, we can begin to see how, like Shadi Bartsch and Jaś Elsner suggest for ekphrasis, "the enactment of multiple views within the space . . . may function as a space in which to challenge and rethink one's viewings, to refashion one's subjectivity" (Bartsch and Elsner *ii*). Refashioning subjectivity, in the context of literature, is especially apparent in literary frames.[23]

[23] No author exemplifies this issue as significantly as Samuel Clemens, whose entire oeuvre exists in the literary frame of his pen name, Mark Twain. Add to this the existence of structural frames in his fiction, as seen in "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," and the

If, as Amy Kaplan suggests, regionalism is informed by an atemporality of "timeless rural origins," one where a "willed amnesia about founding conflicts" often erases the historical contexts on either side of the regionalist moment (242, 256), and, as Francesco Loriggio contends, is a "narration directly by way of topology rather than chronology, in terms of space rather than time" (like a painting), then it might not be such a great stretch to think about regionalism *as* an ekphrasis (12). The common factor, of course, is that literary regionalism is like ekphrasis in that it is the "verbal equivalent of the 'pregnant moment' in art – the literary mode 'in which a poem aspires to the atemporal "eternity" of the stopped-action painting.'"[24] The moment before or after a painting's (or sculpture, or photograph, or opera for that matter) temporal space does not exist, and for regionalism this also holds true. For regionalism, the problem of the 'fixed image' of a region in time lends itself to the post-colonial and feminist readings that occupy much of the critical discourse. This type of critical inquiry is even more important to literary ekphrasis. Thus when Michael Putnam describes ekphrasis, it is evident that the terms are virtually interchangeable: "the ideal, but unrealizable, goal of ekphrasis is to stop time, to place narrative momentum in a subservient position to the object under scrutiny, which we are meant to grasp in a flash of comprehension, just as we would react when first seeing a painting or a piece of sculpture in a museum" (2).

While scholars commonly draw such comparisons between literary regionalism and other modes of artistic representation, they have not theorized the relationship of regionalism to ekphrasis, or to the imaginative landscapes of the sister arts. The need for such a theory is

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layers of representation create a complicated system of subjectivity and artistic interpretation. For a discussion of how literary frames license the speech act and lend authenticity in Twain and Chesnutt, see Andrew Newman and Brandi So, "'It couldn't be robbery to steal that': Artistic Appropriation and Twain's 'Jumping Frog,'" forthcoming in *College Literature.*

[24] This is Heffernan (5), quoting Wendy Steiner's *Pictures of Romance* (13-14).

warranted, because the questions that we ask of literary ekphrasis could very well reformulate how we read literary regionalism, and vice versa. As soon as the regionalist text finds its reader, we immediately encounter all of the identifiable marks of ekphrasis. The author has given voice to a region that is otherwise disempowered, voiceless, invisible, off the beaten path. An inescapable elitism is constructed through the rhetorical audience that would have an interest and ability to read the regionalist text. This audience's dominant position of *knowing* the regional object rendered through the text mirrors the invasive gaze of artistic appropriation. The viewing distance created by the mediating narrator, who stands between the reader and the region, operates to reveal the inner workings of the region to the outside through her own interpretation and politically-driven aesthetic. She is teaching us *how* to look at the region, *how* to interpret it. This interpretation reflects the subjectivity of the narrator/interpreter as well as the author, and appropriates the regional object for us in a way that manifests otherness through hierarchies of art. This "value-laden" reading of region imposed by the narrator poses opportunities for nostalgia and critique, and pauses time, in a space, to construct region as an image, as an *ekphrasis*. Like a picture, the region is stopped in a time; its before and its after are outside of the instructive view of the stopped moment, a nostalgic obliviousness to any real history that would move it from the status of an imagistic representation toward a traditional narrative.

I mentioned earlier that I believe theoretical innovations in either regionalism or ekphrasis would net the same effect. Applying ekphrasis theory to the lens of prepositional regionalism bears this out: an art object exists with its own situated gaze/viewpoint; when it is then rendered through the interpretive view of a narrator in a literary ekphrasis, which is created by the author's representation of the narrator, the same issues of authorial stance and mediation emerge that I argue exist in literary regionalism. We might imagine the masculinized gaze of a

male narrator describing a female nude through a subject viewing *upon* an object.[25] But there are other prepositional possibilities that we could formulate for literary ekphraseis. For example, what happens when these gendered literary terms are brought to bear on texts that challenge these traditions, specifically, works by professional women authors of regionalist literature who deploy ekphrastic renderings of their *own art*? Such representations, I argue, speak from within the artistic rendering, and do not construct a masculine gaze upon a feminized art object. Female regionalists writing ekphraseis of their own artworks constitute a double voicing of the authorial self, rather than the masculinist appropriation of a feminized 'other.' The view, upon *and* from within, is empathetic. And if the interpretation reveals as much about the stance and subjectivity of the viewer as Bartsch and Elsner suggest, we can look at this interpretation as a doubling also of the traditionally marginalized speaker's subjectivity – a doubling of self, in a way, that may very well approach the "positive" definition of the female viewing subject, which Goldhill seems to argue is a failed pursuit even before we begin.

Paige duBois's thinking about ekphrasis is consonant with the approach that I propose. Likewise concerned with how feminism and third wave theories intersect the traditionally – and unapologetically -- masculinized theorizations of ekphrasis, she points to the relationships created by the viewer, the reader, and hierarchies of art as sites for determining how gender, class, and ethnicity interact: "There is a productive triangulation here, or even a quadrangulation, the positing of object, viewer, and narrator, with the implied reader providing another point of view. And all these contribute to hierarchies of power and knowing that may be present in other sorts of ekphraseis" (47). duBois's geometric model is more properly ekphrastic because its very

[25] It is worth pointing out that just as museum holdings average a three percent representation of female artists (despite real-world figures of ten to sixty percent, depending on the time period), so too are scholarly discussions of ekphrasis overly represented by men. This over-representation results in a skewed feminization and sexualization of literary ekphrasis theory.

form is one of simultaneity, of intersections happening through "triangulation" and "quadrangulation." For my part, as I have attempted to do with the careful exploration of my key terms, I think American literary regions can also be traced diachronically and synchronically, through triangulation and quadrangulation.

In the ensuing chapters, the key terms that I have explored here will take on inflections particular to the authors and artworks that they will address. My decision to focus on female regionalist authors is driven in part by the absence of female representation in art galleries. Many of the authors I write about were themselves prevented from successful artistic careers because of institutionalized disadvantages for women in the arts. Of the five authors I look at in this dissertation – Sarah Orne Jewett, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Willa Cather, Flannery O'Connor, and Eudora Welty – all of them, at one point or another in their lives, actively pursued a career in art. Jewett and Gilman were both talented painters; Cather was an art, opera, and theatre critic; O'Connor created a large collection of linoleum-cut cartoon prints and a small collection of oil paintings, and Welty took many hundreds of photographs of the Southern share-cropper during her lifetime. These women add to their literary works elements of ekphrasis, some secret, some notional, some classic; in some cases, their ekphrastic traits and habits simply stem from their painterly, musical, or photographic sensibilities. Of course, such habits are naturally attuned to their literary genre of regionalism, and perhaps this is one of the qualities that has made their works so enduring, no small feat in a canon traditionally reluctant to preserve the contributions of women.

In these chapters, I will focus on the critical pathways opened up in their application – reading how literary regionalists' sister arts shape their fiction and inform their sense of place. Their ekphraseis, as I mentioned earlier, are opportunities "not to escape the story's flow but to

deepen our understanding of its meaning, to watch metaphor operating on a grand scale" (Putnam *iv*). Interpreting the ekphrastic qualities of their literature opens up new ways of experiencing their texts, and I take an up-close look at their ekphraseis and literary aesthetics to advance global claims about their work. The unique opportunity to view their literary ekphraseis alongside the visual art objects that they themselves made see art through their eyes in a way never before possible. Their ekphraseis operate as a hermeneutic for their texts, and for the symbols and themes that loom ever clearer through the juxtaposition of their multiple views on art. In the next chapter, I will begin this work, and show how Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Sarah Orne Jewett's manipulation of the ubiquitous Swedenborgian 'doctrine of use' allowed them to pursue careers in art and writing. Gilman and Jewett's ekphraseis reveal a subversive use of the Victorian-era "language of flowers," one that inspired Jewett to install a secret narrative in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and Gilman to create the hybridities (plant and woman, East and West, text and art) that epitomize the many tensions in "The Yellow Wall-paper."

Chapter 2: Feminism in its Place: Rural and Urban Resistance in the Literature and Art of Sarah Orne Jewett and Charlotte Perkins Gilman

American literary regionalism was the gold standard of literary realism in the decades following the Civil War. Magazines like *Scribners* and *The Atlantic Monthly* sought out stories about the farthest reaches of American geography for an audience increasingly infatuated with renditions of dialect, local custom, and remote landscapes. During this time, women occupied a commanding presence in the literary marketplace across a range of publications, particularly in the high brow literary magazines like the ones mentioned above (*c.f.* Campbell 1-47). Two such authors are Sarah Orne Jewett and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who were in many ways typical New England women, trained in the sister arts and Victorian aesthetics as a matter of cultural standing. Both avid painters, sewers, gardeners, and writers, they enjoyed theatre, music, and reading. Less conventionally, both Jewett and Gilman embraced their relationship with the sister arts as a means of leveraging opportunities to pursue and protect lifelong careers.

While scholars readily pursue these authors as subjects of literary, feminist, and social inquiry, they have not, for the most part, looked closely at how Gilman and Jewett's intimate relationship with art – particularly painting – informed their literary achievements. Mining archives overlooked by scholars who focus only on textual research, I begin the work of situating female literary regionalists within their artistic milieu. Indeed, the great bulk of the genius of American women authors has been boxed and carted away as items too trivial to study in any

depth; in the cases of Gilman and Jewett, their archives contain important evidence of how they understood themselves as artists.[26]

While Jewett's place at the forefront of literary regionalism has been undisputed, Gilman's place is not as obvious.[27] Recent scholarship on Charlotte Perkins Gilman has begun to situate the feminist author more firmly in the colonial revival movement popular in the late 1800s, and thus exploring how her works are "interested in excavating and laying claim to the historical legacies of those middle- and upper-class white women" with "roots firmly embedded in the soil of New England" (166). As Denise Knight cites, Gilman bristled if someone suggested she was not a New Englander, and she thought of the region as a source of genetic superiority; Gilman wrote to her friend Martha Luther Lane, "I don't know any better blood on earth than that pure New England stock" (qtd. in "Gilman and Identity" 28). Several of Gilman's stories are set in the Northeast, including "The Giant Wisteria" (set in a "haunted" colonial Mansion, like "The Yellow Wall-paper"), "The Unexpected" (a romance about a not-so-"prudish New England girl"), and *The Crux* (set in a small New England town).

My interest in reading Gilman in a chapter about regionalism – aside from her life as a female artist during the height of the literary movement – has more to do with how the cosmopolitan, urban sensibilities in her works represent a type of New England rhetoric that, although not traditionally considered regionalism, is nonetheless particular to the Northeast. This rhetoric, what J. Samaine Lockwood identifies as "representing New England as a metonym for

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[26] Denise Knight uses "world of art" to describe Gilman's extensive personal relationship with art and artists in "'I Could Paint Still Life as Well as Any One on Earth': Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the World of Art."

[27] Indeed, Jewett's place is so central that critics like Fetterley and Pryse question how Jewett's position at the fore of the canon reflects issues in the discourse of canoninzing "minor" writing. They prefer to think of regionalism as a "larger tradition" where Jewett is "a participant but not the 'queen'" (Fetterley and Pryse 14).

America and Anglo-Americans," is what prompts scholars like Lockwood, Knight, and others to consider Gilman's feminism in terms of cultural imperialism. But while Gilman professed her views and interests on a national scale, they inextricably tapped into Gilman's own experiences as a New Englander. As I discuss below, Jewett and Gilman came to embody the New England rhetoric of self-sufficiency through the Swedenborgian "doctrine of use," a ubiquitous northeastern religious movement whose followers included transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller. Gilman was a "Connecticutter by birth," as she explains in her autobiography, and her birth in Hartford, upbringing in Providence, and her later residence in New York City are inseparable from her literary and artistic creations.

By juxtaposing one argument, that Jewett's supposedly rural regional voice is actually speaking about and to a broader world, against another argument, that Gilman's self-consciously cosmopolitan concerns actually telescope into a northern metropolitan aesthetic, I join other scholars on regionalism in asserting that late 19th-century regionalism opens toward the weighty discourses of literary merit, national identity, modernity, and gender. By including Gilman in this chapter, I hope to make a small stride toward what Stuart Burrows calls for in reading Jewett, to place her among other authors "similarly engaged" in these varying discourses, and to contribute an example of "how to understand late nineteenth century regionalism as a whole, one that might [move] us beyond the museum model" (175). If Gilman considered the concerns of the northeast as a synecdoche for all of America, my premise is to reverse the direction of the synecdoche, and argue that Gilman's supposedly national concerns are an element of northeastern regionalism. Fetterley and Pryse argue that "regionalism marks that point where region becomes mobilized as a tool for critique of hierarchies," and Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," set as it is in a "hereditary estate" of the colonial era, does exactly that (14). Nevertheless, I do not feel that

Gilman's tale "take[s] up the question of what 'region' means or how it is deployed," something Fetterley and Pryse find true of Jewett and other regionalists (16). As much as anything else, Gilman's representation of place – stylized, exotic, and infusing the foreign into the local – highlights all the more Jewett's intensely isolated and indigenous view of place. For this reason, I offer these readings out of chronological order; I close the chapter with a reading of Jewett, rather than Gilman, to make all the clearer why the "museum model," as Burrows coins it, holds such a powerful place in our imagination.

In an apt twist of fate, both Jewett and Gilman can trace their particular brands of regionalism and rhetoric back to the same literary Godmother, Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe's introduction of literary regionalism, in a career marked by activism and public service, represents the confluence of the seemingly opposite literary aspirations of Gilman and Jewett. Stowe, whose unprecedented financial success with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* almost single-handedly sparked the crisis in designating "high" literature apart from "low," was Charlotte Perkins Gilman's aunt. She had a profound effect on Gilman's career choices as an activist, lecturer, and author. Gilman knew Stowe simply as "Aunt Hattie," and she attributed her success at lecturing to the Beecher family line: "I had plenty to say and the Beecher faculty for saying it" (*Living* 122).

Jewett also had an "Aunt Hattie," or at least, an "Aunt Harriet," in her short tale "A Guest at Home" (1882). Jewett acknowledged that Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (1852), a text that Fetterley and Pryse identify as one of the landmark texts for literary regionalism (12), was the impetus that "conspired to channel her esthetic energies" (Cary 27).[28] Josephine Donovan points out that "A Guest at Home" is an autobiographical work that "reveal[s] most poignantly [the]

[28] While Catherine Maria Sedgewick's *A New England Tale* (1822) is one of the earliest prototypes of literary regionalism, Beecher's *The Pearl of Orr's Island* was about an actual location off the Maine coast. Scholars often distinguish Beecher's novel as marking the beginning of literary regionalism because of its realism.

author's struggle to transcend the boredom and isolation of rural life"; it thus makes sense that the genealogy in Jewett's story reconnects to Stowe ("A Woman's Vision of Transcendence" 354). In "A Guest at Home," Jewett's heroine befriends the cantankerous Aunt Harriet, and their lasting friendship results in sewing projects that are said to "have reached the highest summit of art and beauty" (60). While many consider Stowe to be the matriarch of New England regionalism, it seems Jewett would have much preferred the honor to call her, as Gilman did, "Aunt."

Like Stowe, and many other New England writers, Jewett and Gilman were deeply impacted by Swedenborgianism, which bolstered their forays into the visual and literary arts. In the following section, I show how the seemingly inescapable influence of Swedenborg helped these authors advance unique feminisms, both of which evidence a Victorian obsession with floriography, or 'the language of flowers.' The readings I explore in this chapter show that Jewett and Gilman's imaginative visions pivot from regionalist to nationalist discourse, and vice-versa, to comment on emergent social and intellectual problems, particularly women's rights. Moreover, these readings demonstrate the value of reconnecting the visual aesthetics of each author to their textual aesthetics. As their literature and artwork reaffirm, the botanical sciences occupied the Victorian imagination, particularly in connection with conceptualizations of gender. Amy King's *Bloom* asserts that a metaphorical dependency on Carl Linnaeus's scientific taxonomy allowed the characterization of human sexuality in floral terms: "Linnaeus's system made sexual courtship – what Linnaeus called the marriage of plants – a legitimate subject for representation" (4). King states that throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, "conceptions of girlhood, maturation, and the social dispositions of marriage are buttressed by a botanical language strong and pervasive enough to uphold them – a language coming out of the wholesale cultural interest in the floral"

(3). Gilman and Jewett both shared in this cultural interest, and it is an interest that manifested, originally, not in their writing but in their works of visual art.

While both authors' paintings reveal important botanical undercurrents to their literary works, in this chapter I will show how their artistic applications spring from fundamentally different relationships with nature. Jewett writes of rural coastal landscapes where her female characters are also free to write. In contrast, remote landscapes signal danger and oppression for Gilman's characters, who instead find freedom and equality in urban centers.

Gilman's artworks are cosmopolitan, stylized, and intellectual. Her urban advertisements and designs reveal the intersection between her feminism and her anxieties about modern society. In addition to her many realistic floral paintings, Gilman created stylized floral patterns and architectural sketches that speak to her 'native' urban sensibilities, and an orientalist fascination with Eastern cultures.[29] Although her natural floral paintings are conversant with the French flower painters of the 1860s, and her orientalist designs reflect the influences of global exchange circulating in New York City, Gilman was equally drawn to her regional influences, as evidenced by her letters and memoirs describing her flower gardens in Rhode Island, California, and Connecticut. Gilman's artwork discloses some of these competing and contradictory influences, and emerges as a contemplation of opposites, in both her visual and literary works.[30] I explore this tension in my reading below of her iconic story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," where I argue that

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[29] Orientalism, while prevalent in the American cultural zeitgeist during Gilman's life, finds its genesis in European art traditions. Gilman's interest in orientalism is a direct consequence of her New England upbringing, and her experiences with the intense effects of immigration and cross-cultural exchange in the northeast. Central elements in 'oriental' design are flower motifs, and the vegetal patterns known as 'arabesques.'

[30] While I discuss this in terms of her publications below, this fascination also emerges in her trade-card and personal artwork. See Kevin MacDonnell, "Cards by Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Soapine and non-Soapine Trade Card Designs" for a discussion of her cards that feature opposite figures.

the story, meticulously crafted from the perspective of a trained artist, should be read in the context of Gilman's considerable familiarity with the conventions of Islamic art. Islamic art might seem an unlikely pairing for Gilman's feminist tale, indeed, even opposite in its attendant associations to her patent social aims, but I argue that Gilman uses this seeming binary to effect spiritual and philosophical alternatives to patriarchy; my reading permits a new interpretation of the narrator's final disposition: one of spiritual transcendence, made foreign by its reliance on an orientalist trope.

In contrast to Gilman's intellectual and commercial art, Jewett's representations are rural, natural, and romantic. A different sort of binary exists in her works: Jewett's impressionistic, hazy landscapes and coastlines are countered by exacting representations of plant life. Like her stories, Jewett's paintings are indigenous; a vignette quality inhabits her artwork, and a narrative or illustrative moment emerges in some pieces as clearly as in her short tales. I argue that Jewett's botanical realism in her watercolors of leaves, herbs, and flowers extends to her literary versions of the same in *The Country of the Pointed Firs.* Reading Jewett's artistic botanical realism into her novel suggests that her floral references are more than just literary ambience or decoration. Read in their scientific and floriographic discourse, these references ultimately reveal a deep familiarity with the healing properties of wide range of garden herbs; moreover, Jewett encodes puns, and hides, in plain sight, messages and subversive alternate narratives in her work. Because she incorporates Native American influences, local history, and native plants, Jewett's speaks the 'language of flowers' in her own register, in what I describe below as a floriographic dialect. By reading the early artworks of Gilman and Jewett for aesthetic commitments that echo in their later literary works, I reunite their sister arts to show a double voicing of their interests and viewpoints, which, taken separately, appear as rather solitary efforts, but taken together, impart a stronger

sense of their ekphrastic approach to region, and a confirmation of their unique perspectives about women and place. In short, the floral aesthetics in the works of Jewett and Gilman are regional; one is urban, the other rural. Both are rooted in a politics of resistance, and they each contribute to a feminism in its place.

"scrappy, imperfect, desperately earnest work": Usefulness in New England Rhetoric

The trope of the self-reliant New Englander, what Lawrence Spingarn called "the composite Yankee character type" was formally introduced in Catherine Maria Sedgwick's "A New England Tale" (1822) and was perfected in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (1862). The idiosyncratic "Yankee" of American literature, as Spingarn notes, was stoic, frugal, independent, hard working, educated – sometimes overly so – and possessed of a generous and compassionate character belied by an exterior roughened by hard work and harsh winters. Certainly Gilman and Jewett's female characters exhibit many of these independent and hard-working qualities, with little or no apology. However, the over-educated New England stock character is cast firmly as the province of men: Cap'n Littlepage in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* has "overset his mind with too much reading"; the narrator of "The Yellow Wall-paper" wonders if she doesn't recover *because* her husband is a physician (*Country* 22; *Yellow* 12). In contrast, Gilman and Jewett consistently characterize their lead female characters as intelligent, rather than over-educated. Sherrie Inness and Diana Royer comment on this trend in women's literary regionalism, and remark that women regionalist authors' use of the trope of the over-educated New Englander implicitly "establishes women's development and education as a contested site" (21). In linking formal education to masculinity, and making apparent that such opportunities aren't afforded to women of intelligence, Jewett and Gilman's regionalism doubles as a platform for disrupting or critiquing conservative traditions and culture.

Jewett and Gilman themselves, however, did not want for an education, or access to intellectual opportunities. Rebecca Harding Davis noted that while New Englanders had "given up the lofty Puritan faith," they "kept the objectionable Puritan temperament," which Davis argued was attributable to the "effect which a century of insufficient food, narrow interests, hard economy, and superfluous education has produced" (621). Despite widely disparate economic backgrounds, Jewett and Gilman were well educated New Englanders who understood themselves and their writing within the unique rhetoric of northeastern self-sufficiency.[31] Jewett and Gilman are inheritors of this legacy, Jewett by way of her unlikely community of self-employed, unmarried women in late nineteenth-century Maine, and Gilman through unfortunate and emotionally painful financial exigencies that drove her to be unflinchingly self-sufficient. Both storylines – the well-to-do denizen (usually female) searching for individuality, and the hardscrabble life of the New Englander born with status but not means – were proliferated in northeastern literature's cultural narrative by authors like Mary Wilkins Freeman, Rose Terry Cook, Alice Brown, and of course, Sarah Orne Jewett, who depicted independent women who were "generous, stingy, 'hard-worked' (to use her term), aristocratic, attractive, wizened, but mostly toughing it out" (Gale *ix*).

Jewett's hometown of South Berwick was affluent, but had remarkably fewer men than more urban New England locales. In addition to being drawn away by the shipping industry and the temptation of prospecting in the open West, men in South Berwick were particularly impacted

[31] Gilman had less formal education than Jewett, but aggressively pursued her self-education, participating in the *Society to Encourage Studies at Home* and reading voraciously throughout her life. Denise Knight and Gary Scharnhorst report that Gilman "is known to have owned, read, and/or reviewed nearly seven hundred books and serials" (Knight and Scharnhorst 181). In contrast, Jewett attended the private college preparatory school Berwick Academy, the oldest educational institution in Maine, after which she continued to take private lessons in German, music, and art (see *Diary*, 14 Aug 1864; 8, 11, and 15 Jan 1869).

by the Civil War, and of the many volunteers to meet the South in battle, few returned (Blanchard 55). Thus, remaining unmarried was in no way uncommon for Jewett or her peers, and many women found a vocation that they could leverage as entrepreneurs. As Paula Blanchard remarks, "on the Piscataqua from the 1870s to the 1890s, it was possible for a woman to stand on her own" (56). Blanchard's comment would just as well apply to the women in Jewett's literature; Jewett writes about women who themselves write, or paint, or have some other sustaining craft, and who do so in "matrifocal communities" (Joseph 181). In *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, Mrs. Todd points out that in the Bowden family graveyard "most of the home graves were those of women" (111). These woman-centered communities, so prevalent in Jewett's stories, are based on her real-world experiences in coastal Maine.

Gilman, who came of age as an industrious and career-oriented woman in 1880s Providence, Rhode Island, did not have such circumstances prompting her individualism. She was all too aware of the economic necessity of marriage for most women, especially because her impecunious father left the family when Gilman was a young girl. Gilman's mother was perennially at the mercy of her wealthier relatives, and as a child, Gilman herself rarely had a comfortable home to call her own. Gilman refused to endure a similar fate, and these experiences shaped her ambitious and entrepreneurial character. Thus, Gilman resisted marriage as a fiscal inevitability, though she nevertheless struggled throughout her life with her finances. But marriage did strike her as a social necessity, one that arguably did as much damage to her sense of well-being as her financially and emotionally troubled childhood. As a consequence, Gilman delayed her nuptials with Charles Stetson for over a year, gravely doubting whether she "ought to forego the more intimate personal happiness for complete devotion to [her] work" (Gilman, *Living* 83). Cynthia J. Davis writes that Gilman relied on "antitheses to make sense of her world,"

a list of which Gilman published in her self-run periodical *The Forerunner*. One antithesis on Gilman's list was "marriage/career": for Gilman, the calling to a career became the most untenable aspect of her first marriage (*xv*). The binary between marriage and career became the cornerstone of Gilman's most influential works, such as *Women and Economics*, *The Man-Made World*, and even her famous short story "The Yellow Wall-paper."

Both Jewett and Gilman partially rejected – and wholly manipulated – the expectations of Victorian mores of their times by embracing that "primary injunction to nineteenth-century womanhood, Be useful" (Blanchard 53). Being useful, as it turns out, wasn't merely a social obligation, but a spiritual one: as Josephine Donovan reports, "the mid-nineteenth century 'might well be called the Age of Swedenborg,'" and the first tenet of Swedenborg was the "doctrine of uses" ("Jewett and Swedenborg" 731).[32] As Donovan demonstrates, Jewett was deeply influenced by Swedenborgianism, which helped her "resolve certain painful personal contradictions that she experienced as a young writer," namely her emotional struggle with her romantic attachments to women and reluctance to marry ("Jewett and Swedenborg" 731). In pursuing wholeheartedly the Swedenborgian doctrine of use, Jewett was able to permanently delay a reckoning with the other doctrine of womanhood: marriage and procreation. Gilman likewise was immersed in Swedenborgianism; her mother was an acolyte of the movement and lived for two years with her daughter in a cooperative housing arrangement with fellow Swedenborgians. It is through the

[32] Swedenborgianism, or the New Church, was a religious movement sprung from the works of Swedish scientist Emanuel Swedenborg. Although Swedenborgianism existed in some form from the 1770s, it gained popular acceptance toward the end of the 19th Century. Josephine Donovan comments that Swedenborgianism was popular in the northeastern United States because it "provided a more cheerful and optimistic alternative to what had been New England's dominant faith. Instead of the inscrutable Calvinist deity, a *deus absconditus*, Swedenborgians saw the divine as manifest in daily life, a familiar friendly presence. People were not pawns in the hands of an angry god but were free to shape their own destinies. The after-life was not a place of eternal damnation but a pleasant world where old friends renewed their love and brought it to a greater intensity" ("Jewett and Swedenborg" 732)

premise that a body must find a use for the greater good that both Jewett and Gilman justified their investment of time in their careers, rather than in performing or pursuing other social doctrines – such as marriage.

Since pursuing versatility in the arts was a common trend in late Victorian America, it comes as no surprise that Gilman and Jewett's first vocational endeavors were in art – Gilman at the Rhode Island School of Design and Jewett in private drawing lessons. Although *en plein air* painting was generally shunned for women in the 1860s, indoor painting was quite common. Having some form of vocation was consonant with the habits of refinement and entertainment for women in the second half of the nineteenth century. But Gilman and Jewett embraced this work in ways that were anathema to late-Victorian femininity: Jewett crossed gender lines when she took her artwork outside (as in her June 2, 1869 diary entry, "In the afternoon went up in the woods sketching with Mary Hayes"), and she and Gilman both breached cultural norms by pursuing art as a means to a professional identity, and wanting to make a mark as women with careers. These efforts at painting were no passing fancy, especially for Gilman, who earned regular income with her paintings. Jewett, likewise, took two lessons a week while in Cincinnati visiting her aunt and uncle for four months in 1869; her sporadic diary entries reveal that five years later, she was still assiduously working at her craft (Jewett, *Diary* March 1874). Gilman began drawing as a child, and she painted throughout her life, for financial gain as well as personal enjoyment.

These choices were not without consequences, and Jewett understood this well at nineteen, when she hinted at the more daunting aspects of her bid for autonomy, as well as her desperation in finding her artistic vocation: "I began German lessons & music lessons & I kept my writing & painting as well as I could…God is trusting me with some of his best gifts & I hope

and pray I may live earnestly and fearlessly – & not be a shirk & a coward or a hypocrite" (*Diary* August 1874). As Blanchard's biography of Jewett makes clear, Jewett licensed her rejection of heterosexual marriage through her concept of vocation; without it, she would be forced to confront her "nonconforming" sexuality (54).[33] Hence, after high school, Jewett was anxious to locate a talent strong and genuine enough to rationalize her choice to remain unmarried and be self-sufficient. Fortunately for Jewett, she struck upon writing after successfully placing "Mr. Bruce" in *The Atlantic Monthly*, after a lengthy revision process that sparked a friendship and professional regard that she would keep for many years with editor William Dean Howells. And for Gilman, although she initially worked as an artist, she embarked on a notable career as an author, activist and lecturer on topics surrounding women's rights. Gilman certainly endured some censure for her separation and subsequent divorce from Charles Stetson four years after they married, but she was somewhat supported in the face of these challenges by Stetson himself, as well as by having a tepid, if not welcoming, community in the socialist labor reform movement of the late 1800s.[34]

The powerful cultural sway of Swedenborgian doctrine not only served to rationalize Jewett and Gilman's choices to become professional writers, it significantly influenced the content – and direction – of their literary careers. Gilman rejected her mother's zeal for the religion, and it translated into a ravenous interest in the history of world religions and cultures.

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[33] As her biographer Paula Blanchard notes, Jewett experienced all of her intense romantic emotions in relationships with females. Jewett lived with her long-time friend and companion, Annie Fields, for twenty-seven years until Jewett's death in 1909. Although Blanchard feels that Jewett was not "lesbian, in the strictest sense," the poetic manuscripts in her archive papers suggest that Jewett's romantic attachments were at least nominally physical. In an unpublished poem, a female poetic speaker ("Think what a fearless girl I am"), exclaims to the object of her affection "Julie," "dear Tiger Lily, come kiss me!" ("A Flower's Namesake," lines 5, 18, 28).
[34] Gilman reports in her autobiography that her "name became a football for all the papers on the coast," but that her "Socialist comrades were most sympathetic" (*Living* 143, 141).

Her Swedenborgian upbringing nevertheless instilled in her an ironclad commitment to usefulness, which steered her away from painting and toward lecturing and political writing because she could not justify the use of a career in art.[35] Gilman described her autobiography as "scrappy, imperfect, desperately earnest work" because, as Jennifer Tuttle and Carol Farley Kessler aver, Gilman "wanted her work remembered: more than that, she felt it could still change the world for the better" (14). Works of service were arguably more important to Gilman, who pioneered her brand of New England feminism under the banner of service to the human race. Jewett, who was more deeply engaged than Gilman with the Swedenborg movement, required no such political cause; she felt that through art, such as painting or creative writing, she could be of service to the world.[36] These specialized manifestations of 'use' weren't so segregated as they may seem; as June Howard points out, just because current literary scholarship sets apart female regionalist texts of this age does not mean that "the literary culture they describe was so thoroughly segregated" (15).[37] Jewett and Gilman clearly understood themselves in broader contexts, as both traveled widely and had a deep affection for the greater northeast region, and hence they also understood the 'use' of their works in a larger, Swedenborgian, culture.

In this sense, we can read Jewett's rhetoric of 'use' pivoting her from a rural, regional topic onto a national scene, in the same manner that the genre of regionalism itself commanded a national audience. Gilman and Jewett's concerns easily 'ramp up,' as it were, to national contexts.

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[35] Gilman includes literature as an unworthy career objective. She felt she had little talent for artful writing, but that what talent she did have for dramatic tension was best employed in her social and political treatises. See Heilmann, "Overwriting Decadence."

[36] Donovan claims through Swedenborgianism Jewett comes to "embrace writing fully as a worthy vocation for a woman because it entailed service to others" ("Jewett and Swedenborg" 735).

[37] Howard reminds that Rose Terry Cook and Harriet Beecher Stowe were each one of the thirteen authors featured in the first issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, a journal that Richard Brodhead identifies among those that instantiated the rise of highbrow literature in American letters (Howard 13; Brodhead).

For example, Louis A. Renza argues in his book-length study of Jewett's "The White Heron" that the text is "subliminally aware of its ability to entertain the critical hunter's quest for a 'major' literary object"; that is, Renza suggests that "A White Heron" was written in resistance to models of "major" literature (*xxix*). In Renza's formulation, the self-identification of the work as 'minor' intervenes in literary discourse through a negating semiotic: by reinvesting in what doesn't count as major literature we further invest in what *does* count as major literature. Conversely, while Gilman's participation in national and global discussions about labor weren't limited strictly to the northeast, they were nonetheless unmistakably born of the northeast. Gilman's rhetoric of 'use,' while national in its context of socialism, labor, and race, reveals points of contact with material culture that situate her concretely in a time and a place – specifically, as a New Englander speaking from and within an urban northeastern regionalism on national topics. Gilman's positions on labor issues and women's rights were uniquely informed by her region; certainly, she did not reflect the values and positions of the post-Reconstruction era American South.

Thus, however committed each author was to the Swedenborg ideal of usefulness, their cultural geographies could not be more distinct, with Jewett exploring national issues upon a deceptively regional stage, and Gilman presenting national issues in such a way that telescopes into her New England sensibilities. As I explore at length below, Jewett's hazy coastlines and precise botanies, in both her literature and her paintings, depict a rural New England that is a protected retreat, a safe haven in which women can speak, write, paint, and live alone. For Gilman, rural and remote geographies have ominous potential; there is nowhere to run for help. Her literature and paintings evoke an urban aesthetic, in which the press of modernity – seen in her themes of advertising, industrialization, population density, and even immigration – offers

alternatives to traditional modes of femininity that oppress. Jewett's fictive coastlines feature obsolescent marinas, and isolated residences scattered across the rugged countryside, while Gilman's nonfiction treatises rely on the burgeoning collective potential of the city, and her fictional towns are perfectly manicured, symmetrical achievements of architecture.

Plants take a central role in both authors' literary and artistic works, but Jewett embraces their power to heal, and tells the stories of the women who know how to compound them, while for Gilman, plants retreat into the stylized icons of decorative urban design, and sometimes operate as hybridized symbols for women's sexual oppression. Certainly their rhetorical audiences were different; Jewett deftly textured her feminist arguments into the fabric of her tales for a readership that likely would have found patent assertions unpalatable, publishing for genteel audiences in literary magazines like *The Atlantic*. In contrast, Gilman wrote primarily nonfiction treatises that she published in her self-run magazine *The Forerunner*, which had relatively more solid footing in the American socialist labor party movements of the late 1800s. What remains common to Gilman and Jewett is that they both wrote about women, that they both did so with a sense of place. Most revealing, however, is how they both conceived of 'place' as artists before they conceived of it as authors – Jewett through the coastlines and plants in her immediate surroundings, and Gilman through the international exchange of culture represented by the nexus of the urban northeast.

Re-Orienting "The Yellow Wall-paper": Gilman and Ekphrasis

Set in the "ancestral halls" of what the narrator describes as a "colonial mansion, a hereditary estate," "The Yellow Wallpaper" is the secret journal of an anxious new mother "absolutely forbidden to 'work'" as she undergoes treatment reminiscent of S. Weir Mitchell's infamous "rest cure" for neurasthenia (10). The inactivity, far from improving her sense of well-

being, forces the narrator to write in secret, where she chronicles her growing fixation with the yellow arabesque wallpaper in her nursery/bedroom/prison, and with a woman trapped behind its vines. The sensational climax of the tale is highly ambivalent: the narrator is found crawling in an unending path around the room, seemingly mad, but nonetheless dominant over her husband's prone body lying in the doorway. For Gilman scholars, this famous ending is a critical treasure-trove: there's no shortage of evidence to argue that the narrator has triumphed, empowered over the oppressive confines of her husband's treatment and her domestic trappings, or to argue that she is completely incapacitated by the madness caused by her inhumane treatment. The story provokes discussions, among scholars and students, about women's expression, mental health, patriarchy, paradigms of gender and domesticity, and, more recently, regional aesthetics and history.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman published her now famous short story in 1892, but four years earlier, she published her first book: *Gems of Art for the Home and Fireside* (1888). Easily her most obscure work, *Gems of Art* – which Denise D. Knight rightfully calls Gilman's "lost book" – collects forty-nine paintings from various artists alongside Gilman's own analysis and commentary ("Lost" 223).[38] *Gems of Art* points to the little-known fact that Gilman was a professionally trained artist, one who felt qualified to write about matters of art for her contemporary readers. A member of the "advanced class" during her studies at the Rhode Island School of Design, Gilman's recommendation from RISD Headmaster Charles Barry declared that she was "thoroughly well able to give instruction" (Barry).Throughout her art career,

[38] Although there is no clear indication of the book's popularity, a second version emerged in 1890 entitled: *Art Gems for the Home and Fireside*. Published only one year after Gilman's infamous "rest cure" treatment at the hands of Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, the book's existence draws into question many of the common assumptions about Gilman's life during those breakdown years. As Knight aptly notes, it "is difficult to reconcile the eloquent art enthusiast [in *Gems of Art*] with the helpless invalid whom she describes in her autobiography" ("Lost" 28).

Gilman designed advertising trade-cards, painted still-lifes and handcrafted stationary, and gave drawing lessons.[39] It is therefore not surprising that the magnitude of art-related items in the Gilman papers at Radcliffe shows, as Knight observes, a life "biographically, economically, and even therapeutically" defined by art ("World" 476). What *is* surprising, however, is the relative critical silence concerning the connection between Gilman's "world of art" and the explicitly visual, artistic theme of the "florid arabesque" in "The Yellow Wall-paper" (20).

Ever since "The Yellow Wall-paper" was recovered in 1973, the artistic and orientalist "florid arabesque" motif has fascinated readers and critics. Indecipherability is a common interpretive thread; Marty Roth writes that the "everlastingness" makes the wallpaper "unreadable by Western eyes" (145). Susan Gubar writes that the wallpaper "surrounds the narrator like an inexplicable text," until ultimately the narrator "revises it, projecting her own passion for escape into its otherwise incomprehensible hieroglyphics" (90). Gubar calls forward one of the most productive conundrums of "The Yellow Wallpaper," which is the significance, in a tale that is "openly preoccupied with questions of authorship, interpretation, and textuality," of the wallpaper's vegetal design to language itself (Lanser 418). Highlighting Gilman's artistic training sheds new light on this conundrum. "I know a little of the principle of design," writes the narrator, and if "The Yellow Wall-paper" is even loosely autobiographical, Gilman's narrator is being modest (20). As the narrator affirms, there *are* principles governing arabesque design, and these conventions can act as a key for decoding the "unreadable text" of the wallpaper itself. Contexts of Gilman's orientalist arabesque can include all of the northeastern discourses

[39] Denise Knight's "'I Could Paint Still Life as Well as Any One on Earth': Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the World of Art" analyzes Gilman's artistic career and characterizes the artistic materials in the Schlesinger Collection of Gilman's papers.

surrounding her work – immigration, language, empire, hieroglyphics, and patriarchy – but there is a reference that unites all of these themes: Gilman's biography as an artist and student.

Gilman's early artistic and academic pursuits reveal life-long interests that underpin the "The Yellow Wall-paper," namely language, writing, feminism, and art. Using Gilman's paintings, and to a lesser extent, her personal library and educational curricula, I show how Gilman's New England location is blended with the international contexts common to the urban centers she considered home, especially themes of orientalism stemming from the immigration crises of the late 1800s. Gilman's sustained visual interest in the floral themes central to "The Yellow Wall-paper" are all connected to her New England life; the emotions Gilman experienced about gardening resonate with the ones her narrator experiences: "[t]he psychology of gardening is interesting and varied; on the one hand there is an almost maternal tenderness for the little seedlings that grow so rewardingly; and on the other one may find expression for ferocious rage and cruelty in uprooting weeds" (*Living* 327). After showing how Gilman's early artwork aligns thematically with her most famous short story, I map her story along the conventions of traditional Islamic design, particularly the infinite repetition of vegetal forms. Symmetries in counts of four are particularly important in Islamic art, and this is a pattern that I build on to show that the geometric layout of the bedroom, the infinitely expanding countryside, and repetitious dialogue and syntax construct a literary version of an artistic arabesque scene. Once the "creeping" motif of the arabesque escapes into the three-dimensional world of the narrator, the rationality of the design is perfected. In short, I read Gilman's story as one might read a work of visual art, as an ekphrasis; in doing so, I expand the interpretive possibilities to include the philosophic principles governing Islamic art.

Gilman herself suggests the plausibility of such a reading: "Denied expression in one form, [art] flourishes the more luxuriously in others. Thus the Mohammedan law forbids painting and sculpture, and the love of beauty finds its vent in the velvet depths and somber gorgeousness of rugs, dainty miracles of cobweb silk and muslin, and shawls that are the wonder of the world" (Stetson).[40] The "dainty miracles" Gilman describes in her introduction to *Gems of Art* are aniconistic, that is, non-representational. Aniconism is the premise underlying the meditative intent of Islamic art; the non-representational, stylized pattern, known in European terms as an 'arabesque,' is designed "not to concentrate the attention upon any definite object . . . it is centrifugal [in order to] free . . . all connection with bodily and earthly things" (Briggs 175). Below, I describe how Gilman, from her real-life and educational experiences, was familiar with the philosophic premises surrounding Arabic art; she would have known that for Islamic, Arabic design conventions were intended to facilitate spiritual enlightenment.[41]

Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "Three Ages of Woman" (*Morning Glory*; *Buttercup*; *Moss Rose*: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)

[40] Here, Gilman is referencing aniconism, the Muslim tenet barring the worship of representational images. Aniconistic religions prohibit graphic representations of divine beings, prophets, or respected religious figures.
[41] See Denise Knight and Gary Scharnhorst, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Library: A Reconstruction."

Gilman described herself as "a frantic devotee of gardening" while living in Norwich, Connecticut, and this life-long love of gardening inhabits all of her creative endeavors (*Living xxxii*). The images above are known as Gilman's "Three Ages of Women," three of six total images in this series. Kevin Mac Donnell argues that these "should be viewed as Gilman's first published 'literary' work" (22).[42] Her avid interest in women, flowers, and the creative arts, so apparent in her "Three Ages of Women" cards, are no less at stake in her short tale. Gilman's paintings anticipate the conflation of women and plants in "The Yellow Wall-paper," wherein the narrator works to free a woman trapped behind the vines of the wallpaper. The narrator's room is apparently quite suited for plant-life, with "windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore" (12). The Colonial grandeur of the estate is decaying, and the greenhouses outside, "all broken now," no longer separate indoor and outdoor plants; the home is similarly compromised: the vines of the nursery wallpaper echo those growing around the house (11). Overrun with vines, the old mansion nonetheless still has the power to trap women; inside the bedroom ("a nursery first"), a woman is seen behind the wallpaper vines "where the sun is just so"; outside, the woman hides in the "long shaded lane," among the "dark grape arbors," "all around the garden," and "under the blackberry vines" (30–1). Echoing the narrator's own maternity, the vines throughout the tale are likewise reproducing; the yard is full of grapes and blackberries, and the vines on the wallpaper feature an "interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions" (11). The creeping women can be seen as themselves blossoming, bearing fruit, and ultimately re-seeding and reproducing their own image.

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[42] Several companies, including Kendall Manufacturing's Soaping, Curtis Soap, and Westland Light Company, published Gilman's stock trade cards.

Gilman's "three ages of woman" trade cards (Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3) rely on a similar vegetal sexualization, deploying what Mac Donnell describes as a "keen knowledge of the symbolic 'language of flowers'" and other Victorian "emblems of female sexuality (22).[43] According to Mac Donnell, Gilman's audience "could not have mistaken the intent of this symbolism" because the language of flowers was "virtually ubiquitous in Victorian era culture" (22).[44] In this series, the infant (Figure 2.1) is presented as a morning glory, which signals affectation: a nod to the trappings of "Victorian materialism" (Mac Donnell 23). Whether the adolescent girl in the second image is a poppy, as Mac Donnell contends, or, as I believe, a buttercup (which echoes the overflowing milk pail, and stands for "childishness, ingratitude"), she is literally blossoming into a young woman (Mac Donnell 24; Robinson 637). Gilman mentions buttercups in "The Yellow Wall-paper" when she is describing the yellow of the paper: "It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw – not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things" (28). The fertile connotations of the milk theme, combined with the language of flowers message about childishness and ingratitude, emphasize the transience of youth.

Of the three images above, none anticipate Gilman's short story so clearly as Gilman's eldest moss rose woman, "a symbol of voluptuous love and sexuality," whose vining tendrils, flower-bedecked garb, and markers of sexuality (the accentuated waistline and hips) seem conversant with the unchecked growth of the berry-filled vines and "riotous old-fashioned flowers" in the landscape of "The Yellow Wall-paper" (Mac Donnell 24). With her form-fitting

[43] Gilman created a parallel series of trade cards featuring a baby, young girl, and young woman marked by Christian iconography, drawing the tension between the contradictory roles of women in the "Cult of True Womanhood": simultaneously chaste and sexualized.

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bodice, the long train of lacey flowers, and clutch of leaves reminiscent of the "plantain" leaves at the end of the story, the moss rose figure may well be a bride (36). Gilman's narrator is no longer a blushing bride, but her references to roses, adjacent to references to her marital bed, are obliquely sexual: she asks John if they can't stay in the bedroom that "opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window," but he "would not hear of it" (12). Later, when the narrator's husband is increasingly "kept in town by serious cases," she sits on the "porch under the roses, and lie[s] down up here in bed a good deal" (19). If Victorian-era America's fluency in the language of flowers is to be believed, then on these points alone – like the trade card above – the references to the roses are making arguments about the narrator's disappointing romantic life.

Reading Arabesque: Gilman's Western Training in Eastern Art

Figure 2.4. A Collection of Gilman's Arabesque and Demi-arabesque Designs (*Original Design:* Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)

The term "arabesque" is a European word that Terry Allen deems a "Western approach to Islamic art" because "there is no premodern Arabic equivalent for the term" (n.p.). "Arabesque" can refer to a style of architecture, a ballet pose, or a musical application, like Debussy's piano arrangements. From an artist's standpoint, however, very particular categories of meaning are implied by arabesque. Gilman's own drawings, as shown in Figure 2.4, are perfect examples of

the enduring traits of the arabesque form: the arabesque is geometric, vegetal, and it is infinite.[45] An artistic arabesque has *unendliche rapport*, or "infinite correspondence," in all directions.[46] In Figure 5, the panels on either side are demi-arabesque: the half-complete design elements on each end imply its potential for infinite repetition along a single plane. The center image is a true arabesque, because the design insinuates contact points, or "infinite correspondence," in every direction. These designs are not so very different from the ancient designs at Grenada's Alhambra, or Istanbul's Blue Mosque.

It is not a very big leap to suggest that Gilman was aware of these contexts, or to suggest that they might play a role in how we can interpret "The Yellow Wall-paper." Besides her comment in the preface to *Gems of Art* about the "Mohammedan Law" of aniconism, her Rhode Island School of Design coursework included classes such as "Geometric Drawing," "Principles and Practice: Study of Historical Ornament," and "Historical Ornament and Plant Forms" (Rhode Island School of Design)[47] These courses almost definitely taught the history and theory of Islamic art, and thus Gilman very likely understood the artistic arabesque as the culmination of centuries-long cross-pollination of Islamic, Byzantine, and Western cultures and aesthetics. The papers at Radcliffe's Schlesinger Library archive show that Gilman studied Egyptian and Assyrian history through the *Society to Encourage Studies at Home*. She used maps to organize

[45] This reading obscures the very nuanced philosophical underpinnings that vary of the long history of Islamic art. My treatment of this subject is intended for broad literary analysis, not a nuanced exploration of religious or philosophical rigor.

[46] This is a term coined by Alois Reigl in his 1893 monograph *Stilfragen*.

[47] The United States Office of Education's 1885 publication, *Art and Industry: (1885) Drawing in the Public Schools*, documents show a national interest in geometrical ornament, arabesque design, and cultural referents to succeeding generations of Byzantine-inspired art. This trend exemplifies the ambivalence between the anti-Asian, anti-immigration, "Yellow Peril" movement and the fascination with orientalism generally, which contributed to a significant economy and consumer demand in America for "oriental" things.

her mastery of regional histories, and one of her last letters from the Society suggested that her next course would be in "Asiatic Histories" (Adams).[48]

In fact, it seems likely that America's orientalist fixation, which arguably reached its height during Gilman's lifetime, translated for Gilman into an ambitious intellectual undertaking.[49] As a result, I believe more than just the formal artistic theory used in Gilman's drawings above can be applied to the "The Yellow Wall-paper." In highlighting the formal premises of the artistic arabesque alongside the philosophical premises of Islamic art, I propose Gilman's construction of a literary arabesque makes possible an optimistic reading of the narrator's final disposition: one of meditative enlightenment, albeit orientalized and foreign to Western eyes. Such a reading makes full use of Gilman's unique New England perspective: her cosmopolitan familiarity with the explosion of racial and religious diversity in New York, her artistic training in Rhode Island and the Boston-based Society to Encourage Studies at Home, and her uniquely 'northeastern' feminism, with its concerns with issues of race, immigration, and labor.

"I never saw such a garden"

Easily the most prominent theme of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is the vegetal, vining motif of the "creeping" women and plants, and this motif is the best place to begin in outlining how Gilman's tale is structurally and thematically a literary arabesque. When we turn our attention to the ambient design elements that resonate with the arabesque motif, such as the insistent (and implicitly infinite) repetition of "creeping" vines and women, Gilman's artistic perspective

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[48] For more on Gilman's involvement and the Society's role in America, see Harriet Bergmann's "'The Silent University': The Society to Encourage Studies at Home, 1873-1897."

[49] Knight and Scharnhorst's recovery of Gilman's library documents a substantial collection of books on world religions, architectures, Egyptology, Chinese culture and tradition, the origins of civilization, "primitive" cultures and books on Eastern thought and histories (Knight and Scharnhorst).

begins to accumulate a startling clarity. Gilman's narrator declares the countryside beyond the garden a "lovely country" "full of great elms and velvet meadows" (18). The "velvet meadows" are reminiscent of the "velvet depths" of the Islamic textiles she praises in the introduction to *Gems of Art*. Adjacent to "elms," a shade tree often featured in Islamic gardens, "velvet" – an explicitly oriental textile – becomes another of many subtle signals in the text of a landscape marked by orientalist imagery. While the grounds may remind the narrator of "English places that you read about," the "hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people" are equally evocative of an Islamic garden (11).

As I noted above, the artistic arabesque has very specific categories of meaning; it is vegetal, geometric, and infinite. The Islamic garden is similarly prescriptive. The garden in "The Yellow Wall-paper," "large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them" adheres to the very letter of the Islamic garden design (11). While some critics argue that the "gates that lock" strike an ominous note, for Islamic gardens, the separation between the public and private world is physically as important as it is symbolically important.[50] Historians and scholars of Islam, including D. Fairchild Ruggles, who calls gardening culture of Muslims "a powerful artistic form," confirm that secure enclosure is one of the many key elements of an Islamic garden (10). With its "mysterious deepshaded arbors," "riotous old-fashioned flowers," "gnarly trees," gates and buildings, ample shade, and numerous places to sit and reflect, Gilman's garden sounds like what Safei El-Deen Hamed describes as the typical Islamic garden: "These gardens were planned in axial rectangular patterns of simplicity, clarity, discipline, and delicacy . . . Many traditional gardens were surrounded by walls and/or a cluster of buildings . . . Elms, willows, and oaks gave shade in

[50] On gothic interpretations of gates in Gilman's story, see Jürgen Wolter, 198.

summer and let the sun shine through in winter" (Gilman 11; Hamed par. 13). Jonas Benzion Lehrman lists that roses are "appreciated for their fragrance" in Islamic gardens, while "grape vines create shade if allowed to climb" (227). The Islamic garden is a cool place of repose and reflection, and Gilman's narrator does just that when she writes that she walks "a little in the garden," and sits "on the porch under the roses" (19). Gilman's "frantic" devotion to gardening, evident in her paintings and her autobiography, takes on a grand status in "The Yellow Wall-paper" as the garden comes to represent a crucial element of the narrator's search for freedom, identity, and refuge. Undergirded, as it is, by vaguely traditional structures of an inscrutable, unknowable past, Gilman's design of the gated garden adds to her orientalist motif.

The defining traits of an Islamic garden center upon the philosophic value of the number four – for the "four cardinal directions and the four elements"; the Kaaba, which "literally [means] 'cube', sums up this symbolism perfectly" ("Underneath Which Rivers Flow: The Symbolism of the Islamic Garden" par. 7).[51] In the nursery-turned-bedroom, which is wrapped in the creeping vines of the wallpaper, Gilman's narrator lists the four views available from "windows that look all ways," letting in "air and sunshine galore" (18). There are over one hundred and twenty references to gardens in the Qur'an, which explains the importance that they have in Islamic culture, as well as the extent of details prescribing their composition (Clark). One of these prescribed features is water, because "the sound of the water gradually drowns out all preoccupations of the mind and an overwhelming sense of tranquility descends" ("Underneath Which Rivers Flow: The Symbolism of the Islamic Garden" par. 17). Of the four windows in "The Yellow Wall-paper," one "commands the road," another "looks off over the country" (18), one looks over the garden, and the last offers a "lovely view of the bay " (15). Gilman's fictional

[51] The Kaaba is the sacred building in the center of Mecca, toward which Muslims pray five times a day as part of their *salat*, or daily prayers.

world, reminiscent of an Islamic garden, unites the four directions with four windows that “look all ways,” which in turn unites the four elements as they draw in the “air and sunshine galore,” and the views of the earth of the garden and the water of the bay.[52]

“I can almost fancy radiation after all”

Once you start ‘reading arabesque,’ as it were, “The Yellow Wall-paper” is transformed into an orientalist vision, a set-piece for the primary tenets of Islamic decoration and architecture. The interminable vegetal design is everywhere, as the wallpaper, plant life and women creep about the text, literally and figuratively. *Unendliche rapport* exists not only in the plantlife, but in the very diction and syntax of the tale, itself a repeating theme that layers pattern after overlapping pattern of symmetry and repetition. The story’s physical universe, the narrator’s mental universe, the plot, the dialogue, and its diction all repeat, with a mesmerizing symmetry that ultimately effects a literary arabesque that is like a visual chant. Catherine Golden notes that Gilman’s story is symmetrically bookended: “the positioning and four-fold use of ‘I’ [in the final journal entry] most noticeably recalls the four-fold use of John on the opening page” (300). In the first journal entry, the narrator asks repeatedly: “And what can one do?”; “—what is one to do?”; and “But What can one do?” (10). Of the notorious “smooch” on the wall (itself an obliquely symmetrical word), that alliteratively “runs round the room,” and looks to have “been rubbed *over* and *over*,” she writes: “Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!” (10, emphasis added). Syntactical symmetries such as these, achieved through the repetitive diction, pepper the journal entries: “*I don't know* why I should write this. *I don't want* to. *I don't feel* able” (21, emphasis added). When the narrator identifies a “front

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[52] Fittingly, as Vincent Cornell discusses, the role that the four elements play in traditional Islamic thought relates to Islamic medicine. The elements map onto the constitution of the patient, the symptoms of disease, and medical treatment in a way similar to the Greek tradition of medicine, and the persistent discourse of medical “humours” (Cornell 161–175).

pattern and a back pattern" in the arabesque design, she describes a technique unique to and originated in Islamic design (25).[53] The back pattern also repeats; it is "always the same shape, only very numerous" (22). Even the "wallowing seaweeds in full chase" imply an undulating, repeating and infinite repetition of a vegetal form (20).

Another theme of shared significance to the tale and Islamic tenets are the ways in which sunlight and moonlight circumscribe all of the narrator's activities. Islam abides by a lunar calendar, and daily prayers, or *salat*, are scheduled according to the location of the sun and the moon in the sky. Just as the narrator "always watches for that first long, straight ray" of the sun as it "shoots in through the east window," so too do Muslims watch for the first sign of dawn to perform the *Fajr salat*, or first morning prayer (26).[54] The marking the revolution and location of the sun and moon, so integral to Islamic mathematics and astronomy, is likewise implicit in the narrator's descriptions: the figure behind the top pattern of the wallpaper is strangely faded by "the slow-*turning* sunlight," when "the sun is *just so*" (13, emphasis mine). At night, the "moon shines in all around just as the sun does," but only "when there is a moon," implying an awareness of the waxing and waning phases that early Islamic mathematicians and astronomers relied on so heavily (21).

Gilman's narrator tells John that the "key is down by the front door, under a plantain leaf," but he can't – or won't – understand her, and so she must repeat herself "several times, very gently and slowly…so often that he had to go and see" (36). Susan Lanser's discussion of orientalism in "The Yellow Wall-paper" questions whether the plantain leaf isn't "evoking . . .

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[53] According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, interlacing a "pattern upon pattern serves to flatten the space," but Gilman uses this convention to attribute a living depth to the wallpaper that is missing from the "dead" paper of her journal (*Islamic Art and Geometric Design*).
[54] The names and times of Islamic prayer practices are ubiquitously published in news sources, on Wikipedia, and in daily prayer websites.

the tropical plant of [the] West Indies," but Gilman's choice resonates much more with the plantain weed native to the northeast (428). In either case, the plantain leaf figures yet another abstract vegetal pattern, the repetition of the key "by the front door" begins to call to mind the key-hole doorways so common in mosques. Such architectural references, albeit more difficult to distinguish, haunt the short story; iron bars, a common feature of ancient Islamic architecture, similarly frame the narrator's windows. Her "beautiful" bedroom door ("[i]t would be a shame to break down!") is loosely consonant with the ornate doors of Middle Eastern design. The resulting effect of these visual elements, repeated "over and over," suggests an exterior marked by exemplars of arabesque art and architecture.

The bedroom is the link between the arabesque design of the wallpaper and the arabesque world of the narrator. Nearly empty as the story draws to its sensational close, nothing remains in the bedroom save "the great bedstead nailed down, and the canvas mattress we found on it" (33). Gilman uses the word canvas – a word that no doubt resonated with her as an art term – to describe the mattress, another potential site of creation (of love, of life, of dreams); the proximity of this "canvas" to the "paint and paper" of the wall could serve as the entry point where the arabesque escapes from the wallpaper into the three dimensional world (12). Indeed, the narrator notices the wallpaper most when she is in bed, such as when she sees the "bars" trapping the woman inside the wallpaper, mirroring the bars on her own windows, trapping her in the room (23). The symmetry between the paper and the room is the first clue that the geometry of Gilman's literary arabesque is not to be found in the wallpaper, despite the narrator's efforts to analyze it in geometric terms. As Lanser notes, the wallpaper fails to cohere to any symmetry – although it is related in geometric terms: "it is marked vertically by 'bloated curves and flourishes,' diagonally by 'slanting waves' . . . and horizontally by an order she cannot even

figure out" (420). There *is* an order and reason to Gilman's arabesque – it's just not in the wallpaper. Gilman's narrator initially protests that the "florid arabesque" "was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of," but she partially recants: "I can almost fancy radiation after all" (20). The order, symmetry, and mathematic rationality are found in the language, the syntax, and in the setting of the story itself. These symmetries build toward the sensational close of the tale.

Shortly into the final journal entry is a chiasmus: "I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled" (32). As the narrator and the woman pull away the wallpaper, the syntactical symmetry is centrifugal, as each shakes and pulls away from the comma in the middle of the phrase. This moment marks the beginning of Gilman's literary arabesque. The narrator has succeeded in peeling away "yards" of paper, a homonymic reminder of the plant life proliferating unchecked throughout the estate, and especially on the wallpaper itself. She exposes a bare wall "about as high as my head and half around the room" (32–33). In removing the paper only partway up in the "big airy room," and halfway around, the narrator has bisected the room. This symmetrical removal of the wallpaper continues a geometric pattern already underway: the paper is missing "in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down" (12). The "long smooch around the wall," which Golden describes as the narrator's "palimpsest" overwriting the wallpaper's design, overlays the entire scene like the foreground pattern in the three dimensional arabesque; it marks the center of a revolving, infinite, geometric and vegetal arabesque design that expands from this location (35).[55]

[55] See Catherine Golden's "The Writing of 'The Yellow Wallpaper': A Double Palimpsest" for a detailed analysis of Gilman's visual and symmetrical use of syntax and grammar in "The Yellow Wall-paper."

The diminishing wallpaper, and the growing physicality of the woman trapped behind it, signals the living arabesque that is escaping from the wallpaper into the narrator's own three-dimensional world. Before the woman behind the wallpaper and the woman writing the journal entries seem to merge, the narrator watches "the moonlight on that undulating wall-paper" until she feels "creepy" (23). Peter Betjemann notes that the woman trapped inside is "*pre*-figured, as it were, as an anthropomorphic visual pattern," and that "via that pun alone, conflating the creepy design and a creepy feeling, the narrator begins to incarnate the paper" (396). Mary Jacobus argues that this transformation is part of what makes Gilman's tale so disturbing: the "story's stealthy uncanniness . . . emerges most clearly in the oscillation of the word 'creepy' from figurative to literal" (283). As Jacobus shows, the word "creep" takes on material reality as it ceases to describe the woman behind the wallpaper; and instead becomes part of the narrator's world, as she "creeps" around the room. The narrator's unending circuit around the room mirrors the form she first observes in the woman in the wallpaper, who was "stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern" (22). Likewise, the arabesque design, which originally served as the top pattern for the woman in the wallpaper, is now a pattern in the narrator's world.

The symmetry and the geometry of the arabesque design find a balance in the world of the narrator that it could not achieve in the wallpaper. The bedroom is surrounded by women: "I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once" (31). Whether it is one woman, or many, the symmetry is played out in her likenesses, their repetition, and their surrounding of the center through the four windows of the bedroom. As the figure escapes the bars of the wallpaper, she is instead viewed through the bars of the bedroom, where she "hides under the blackberry vines" outside, just as she hid under the wallpaper vines inside (31). The women "creep" alongside the plant vines, as the pattern expands outward: "I have watched her sometimes away

off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind" (31). As the design moves outward upon the "high wind," the meditative theme of the arabesque is the freedom of women. Recorded as it is in the diary entries of a woman looking for her own freedom, the image of the arabesque, combined with the text of the diary, is reminiscent of Arabic calligraphy. As the symmetrical inversions build throughout the story – the geometrically removed wallpaper, the linguistic, structural and syntactic symmetries, and the choreographed repetition of the women – the final scene shows an arabesque of *unendliche rapport*, that is, infinite correspondence. The final line of "The Yellow Wall-paper," "I had to creep over him every time!", is a perfect embodiment of Gilman's geometric, vegetal, and infinite arabesque (36).

A Feminist's Orientalism: Enlightenment and 'Truth'

Gilman's use of the arabesque form offers a new interpretation of the narrator's final disposition, one of linguistic transformation and meditative enlightenment. This argument emerges from the common interpretive stance that the arabesque design is either a symbol of language or an actual instance of language, and is organized by the modes of discourse circulating about Asian immigration and the aesthetics of 'the orient' the time of the story's production.[56] Roth and Lanser each discuss the ways in which the term 'arabesque' circulated in Gilman's time; Roth outlines compelling correlations between Gilman's tale, the aesthetic discourse of oriental design, and Edgar Allen Poe's use of those tropes in his gothic tales.[57] Readers readily recognized the Poe-like arabesque, which Jacob Rama Berman describes as a fascination with the art form combined with a fear of real-life Arabs in an "'Arabesque' [that] is

[56] The basis for interpreting the wallpaper's design as a text has been well-established among Gilman scholars. See Barabara Hochman's "The Reading Habit and 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" for a synopsis of the scholarship in this line.
[57] See also Jan Jennings's "Controlling Passion: The Turn-of-the-Century Wallpaper Dilemma" and Jacob Rama Berman's "Domestic Terror and Poe's Arabesque Interior."

not a product of Arab culture, per se, but rather the product of a European … interpretation of Arab culture" (130).

Lanser's provocative work situates Gilman's tale in the virulent Yellow Peril movement that gripped *fin de siècle* America, especially along the east and west coasts, which depicted Asian and other 'yellow' immigrants as sources of disease, spreaders of immorality, and as economic and workforce threats. Lanser asks, "In a cultural moment in which immigrant peoples and African Americans were being widely caricatured … through distorted facial and bodily images, might the 'interminable grotesques' of 'The Yellow Wall-paper'…figure the Asians and the Jews, the Italians and the Poles, the long list of 'aliens' whom the narrator might want at once to rescue and to flee?" (Lanser 429). Gilman's readers could not escape this point of reference; they were immersed in a cultural moment that found orientalist iconography both fascinating and repulsive.

But there is another strand of discourse that is particularly relevant to Gilman's text, which Roth gestures toward when she acknowledges that Gilman's wallpaper trope "articulated a complex of attitudes about the imaginary East," that "offers a unique terrain . . . where imperialist and feminist anxiety meet, where the abjection of the woman and the abjection of the Eastern other collide" (161). The fantasy of the orient played out not only in specters of disease and danger, but also through a benevolent racism particularly present in feminized discourses. The feminized, and in Gilman's case, feminist, appropriation of the 'orient' took form as a domestic ally – not in a national sense, but in a domestic labor sense. This discourse is coeval with, but not identical to, the Yellow Peril movement in America. Yuko Matsukawa explores this mode of orientalism through the incredibly popular laundry soap advertising industry, a genre in which Gilman was an expert. These optimistic orientalisms reflect the unique, if uncommon,

alignment between Chinese men and American women. Unlike other illustrations of the late 1800s, the laundry cards are startlingly different because the "overt anti-Chinese message…is not there" (200). Matsukawa explains that the "Chinese laundryman is an ally of sorts because he stands in for the housewife and so is considered good, benevolent, and useful" (201). The considerable representation of Asian immigrants in the 1880s laundering industry cemented this relationship. The resulting association between domestic labor and the imaginary orient manifested in essentializing representations of a conciliatory nature.

Figure 2.5: Gilman's Orientalist Amalgamation (*Wizard, Stars and Moon*: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)

In Gilman's trade card design (Figure 2.5), the alliance Matsukawa identifies is immediately apparent. The woman extends her palm as the wizard divines her good fortune: it is written in the stars that *Soapine*, her mystical ally against the burden of domestic toil, will make her laundry wishes come true. In this sweeping orientalist amalgamation, the wizard wears a Turkish Crescent and Star on his robe, a fez-like hat marked by what resembles an inverted Japanese flag, and sleeves that appear to be marked with Chinese iconography. Without a queue, the wizard himself is not marked as Chinese; indeed, his facial features might easily figure the "long list of 'aliens'" Lanser mentions that preoccupied late Victorian imagination in America

(429). The nativist anti-immigration message so common in trade cards of the era is markedly absent; the wizard is not posing a moral, sexual, or health threat to the woman on the card.

The political commitments of Gilman's advertising card, like her literature, spoke to a particular class of women whose domestic responsibilities were increasingly at odds with their public ambitions.[58] When we think of Gilman's orientalism in this light, as a feminist's application of a racist trope (if not a feminist application of a racist trope), the narrator's eventual alliance with the arabesque form can be viewed as the narrator's conscious choice, rather than an unfortunate inevitability. If, as Roth suggests, the arabesque aligns "the abjection of the woman" with the "abjection of the Eastern other," then Gilman's 'oriental other' is also the narrator herself; orientalism merely offers a third option within an oppressive binary (160).

Figures 2.6 and 2.7: Modes of Orientalism (*Man with Turban* and *Hookah Room:* Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)

The paintings in Figures 2.6 and 2.7 are examples of Gilman's non-commercial orientalist artwork that span the binary between domestic threat and domestic ally.[59] Both images

[58] Gilman's advertisements and her literature were directed at women with disposable income for domestic staff and personal advancement.
[59] These images are attributable to Gilman through signatures on the backs of the paintings or notes signed by her daughter, Katharine Beecher Stetson.

reveal her knowledge of the details of Arabic iconography, such as the key-hole window, the wallpaper designs, the furnishings, the robes and turbans, and weapons. In the first image, the diverse array of Middle Eastern weapons centered behind the turbaned head of the robed man strikes a sinister note. The placement of the weapons imply that he is thinking violent thoughts; his arms, crossed to his shoulders, make for an unwelcoming pose. In contrast, the second image proposes a positive intersection between Eastern and Western thought. The eyes of the man on the right are illuminated; perhaps he 'sees the light' as he joins in this cordial hookah ritual, palms resting on his knees in the meditative Lotus position. Together, these two images show not only that Gilman straddled a range of associations with Eastern iconography, but that her fascination with Islamic culture likewise straddled a broad range of material and spiritual interests.

"the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!"

For Gilman, the semantic weight of 'yellow' includes not only the attendant themes of empire and the venomous Yellow Peril movement, but the feminist orientalism apparent in her advertising and artwork. Gilman's contradictory orientalisms, the foreign threat and the domestic ally, map perfectly onto "The Yellow Wall-paper." The narrator discerns a "conspicuous front design" that obscures the "under one," which she eventually translates into an image of a woman yearning for freedom (18). The "front pattern" of the arabesque may well be linked to the nation-building anxiety around foreign threats, but the "back pattern" is one of orientalized escape. In this light, the narrator's supposed madness might instead be viewed as an orientalized representation of Eastern enlightenment, one facilitated by the meditative attributes of the Islamic arabesque design. I propose this possibility because Gilman's personal library documents a thorough-going fluency in Eastern cultures and histories, although, as Gail Bederman explains,

while Gilman "believed her studies of primitive history and anthropology gave her objective, scientific facts," she wasn't seeing a "pattern in the *facts*," but rather a "pattern provided by the *discourse*" (127). In other words, while Gilman's academic fascination with Eastern cultures stands apart from the fear-driven rhetoric of Yellow Peril, the Western discourse that informed her opinions was irredemiably racist.

My interpretation of orientalized enlightenment and transcendence, like many other interpretations of "The Yellow Wall-paper," hinges on the contexts of discourse, language, and communication surrounding the story and its author. And it is discourse, after all, that Gilman's narrator misses so desperately; she admits that if she were "well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas," but it is a daunting prospect because it "is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about [her] work" (16). Lacking her own discourse community, the narrator is forced to write in secret, and the effort of hiding it also takes its toll – "it *does* exhaust me a good deal – having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition" (10). The opposition amounts to an enforced intellectual solitude, and represents the core violence of the tale: patriarchy's abusive suppression of women.

The language barriers that initially prevent the narrator from deciphering the yellow wallpaper apparently do not apply to the decorative patterns in the downstairs bedroom: she "wanted [the bedroom] downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings!" (12). "Chintz" falls in the same family as Gilman's "florid" arabesque; traditionally an Indian commodity, these floral-patterned cloths were associated with the same design elements and Eastern origins as the yellow textile upstairs ("Chintz, N."). Thus the narrator really never had an orient-free option for her sleeping quarters, but the markers of the downstairs bedroom are more easily translated into white, patriarchal

norms: “piazza” is a New England usage of an Italian word connoting porch, the roses are just as likely a European reference as any other, and “old-fashioned” décor is somehow a safer environment than the overwhelmingly “foul, bad yellow” of the room upstairs (“Piazza, N”; Gilman, *Yellow* 28). The word piazza, also, has a place in American literature, and was no doubt recognizable to some as a potential reference to Herman Melville’s *Piazza Tales*.

The central location of the tale, then, is in the inescapably yellow room, whose eternally-erupting “new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow” echoe the imperialist anxieties of race, parentage and economic supremacy surrounding the immigration panic of the Yellow Peril (28). As the patriarchal figure in the text, John is no innocent by-stander; the illegibility of the pattern on the wall is a sign of his dominance, whether it is the anti-Asian discourse that Susan Lanser identifies that inscribes the message of foreign threat onto the wallpaper, or his diagnostic “sentence” that justifies his treatment methods, as Paula Treichler argues, or any other formulation of linguistic patriarchy.[60] As his blood relative, Jennie is an extension of John, endorsing the rest cure and John’s imperialistic discourse. As the rest cure becomes more and more untenable, the narrator begins to see the complicity that both John and his sister have in upholding systemic patriarchy. John and Jennie appear as imperial watchdogs, whose efforts to cordon off the narrator and limit her textual discourse imitate the nationalist tools of immigration and population control.

John’s ability to spread his whiteness translates into a deadly power; his white discourse, figured by the “silly and conspicuous front design,” “strangles” the women behind the wallpaper, “turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!” (30). When the figural women

[60] Gilbert and Gubar call the wallpaper “the façade of the patriarchal text” (90) Jürgen Wolter notes that the wallpaper is a “multivalent symbol,” standing in for “both husband and wife, power and victim, patriarchy and female protest because it is predominantly a metaphor for a discourse that was changing” (200).

‘see’ white, they die, a risk the narrator herself must assume in embracing the living arabesque emanating from the wallpaper. The “dead paper” of the diary is no less risky; presumably also white, it is isolating, stifling, lacks a discourse community, and prompts “heavy opposition” (10). John eventually offers to move their bedroom “down to the cellar, if [she] wished, and have it whitewashed in the bargain,” but the narrator comes to prefer the yellow environment over John’s “whitewashed” one (15). The narrator determines that it is “*because* of the [yellow] wall-paper” that she feels better, and as the diary progresses, anti-Asian anxieties are increasingly displaced into the realm of John (27). Rejecting the “silly and conspicuous front design” of the threatening orientalism, the narrator inherits a spiritual enlightenment made possible by bottom pattern’s benign alliance between women and the orient.

When John arrives at the bedroom door in the final journal entry, the narrator has assumed her place in the radiating arabesque. John’s intrusion creates a linguistic rupture; prior to his arrival, almost every paragraph begins with an empowered “I.” This new sense of agency is momentarily disrupted as she tells him the key is “under a plantain leaf” (36). John cannot understand her, not because “she is too mad to speak proper English,” as Paula Treichler confirms, but because “he simply is unable to accept a statement of fact from her” (205). She repeats herself “so often that he had to go and see,” because he can only believe what he can see (36) The narrator discloses in her first journal entry that John “has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen” (9). Aptly, the narrator is now part of a three-dimensional arabesque that can be “felt and seen”; her circuit around the room is an outward, visual message of her internal transformation.

In a gradual reversal of dominant discourses, the narrator’s objections become more vigorous; her transformation releases her from John’s threatening discourse and provides her

with a new means of representation. When John returns and opens the “beautiful door,” he cannot reconcile himself with his transformed wife (35). She patrols the space that previously entrapped her, and as she addresses him condescendingly – now “young man,” and “that man” – she reverses his earlier infantilizing familiarity – “little girl,” and “blessed little goose” (36, 35). Linguistic distance dissolves his intimate power over her, and *she* directs the reader’s gaze: “I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder” (36). Catherine Golden proposes that the syntactic markers in the story “convey an emerging sense of self and conviction precisely when she begins to have delusions,” which suggests that she “is not completely ‘destroyed’ by her patriarchal society” (301, 296). She may just be “angry, rather than insane,” as Denise Knight suggests (“Angry” 82).

As some critics note, the rationality of the narrator’s final journal entries and her observance of literary decorum defuse some of the direness of her fate. The explosion of active verb phrases – “I kept on creeping”; “I looked at him”; “I’ve pulled off most of the paper” – confirm a power reversal that has taken place (36). Despite her physical lowness, her symmetry and balance in the living arabesque afford the narrator a linguistic independence, and when John intrudes into the pattern it is he who cannot fit into the “language” of the arabesque; it is he who cannot understand the “sentence” of his wife. In her transcendence she is humble, but nonetheless powerful, as she revokes John’s agency – “you can’t open it!”; “you can’t put me back! (35–6). The linguistic breakdown renders Gilman’s narrator foreign to John. As Gilman’s narrator transcends completely into the arabesque design, her body is both image and message, a living hieroglyph.

For Muslims, reading and writing Arabic calligraphy is a meditative process, signifying “the aesthetic manifestation of Islam’s *kalām Allāh* (Divine Word of God)”; for Gilman’s

narrator, reading and writing 'arabesque' is an aesthetic manifestation of truth, freedom, and enlightenment (Longhurst 9). David Wade remarks that through Islamic patterns, the "decorated pages of a Qur'an can become windows onto the infinite," and "the Word, expressed in endless calligraphic variations, always conveys the impression that it is more enduring than the objects on which it is inscribed" (par. 3). The narrator's own inscription on the wall, the "smooch" over the wallpaper, allows her to transcend her confines and take part in her own "endless," "enduring" calligraphy. Gilman's structural appropriation of an explicitly rational, formulaic, and mathematical art form suggests an orientalized alternative to simple madness; as the narrator "creeps" around the room, bowed as in prayer, her transformation has the mystical quality and weight of a religious conversion. David Wade writes that the goal of Arabic design "is never merely to ornament, but rather to transfigure," and Gilman's narrator certainly seems transfigured, possibly converted, as in her humble trek around the room she lays claim to a newfound subjectivity (par. 3).

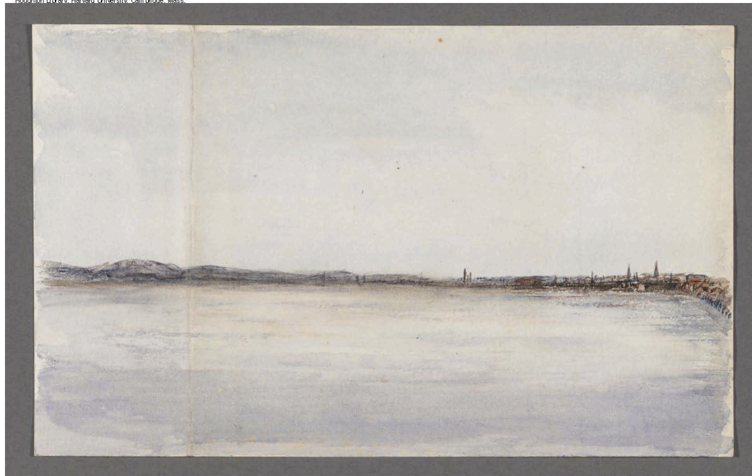
Gilman's article, "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wall-paper'?" explains her trial with "melancholia" and S. Weir Mitchell's infamous "rest cure." The tale "was not intended to drive people crazy," wrote Gilman, "but to save them from being driven crazy, and it worked" ("Why I Wrote"). Certainly, the Swedenborgian "doctrine of use" applies to the role Gilman felt the story played on a national stage. But where Gilman's broad interests in gender and oppression connect to her visual art, a more localized aesthetic emerges. The stage of her tale, organized around an art trope she learned about while studying in Rhode Island, is part of her regional memory: "ancestral halls," a "hereditary estate," a "colonial mansion." The decorations, which ultimately prove so vexing for the narrator, are directly owing to the cultural exchange of goods and textiles, an influx of perspectives that Gilman experienced in the Northeast. Like her formal

training in artistic design, Gilman's aesthetic is more artificial, exotic, and appropriative than it is native, genuine, or indigenous. But it is nonetheless her style of art, steeped in an international aesthetic garnered from her New England upbringing. These influences filled her real and literary worlds – her New England gardens, her impressions about immigration and race, her admiration for the ancient artistic techniques that she discovered in her rapacious self-education. It may not be regionalism, but it is *of* a region, and it's worthwhile to consider how some of the shared impulses – in this case, Jewett's Swedenborgianism, the fascination with the "language of flowers," and how landscape can frame the tenor of a story – reveal the places where nineteenth-century literary regionalism and Gilman's technique touch, and where they depart.

"nature was her best teacher": Jewett's Language of Herbs

If Gilman infused artistic representations to advance metaphors about feminism, Jewett might be said to do the same, albeit from a fundamentally different perspective. Where Gilman's relationship with the northeast is vexed by confinement and influenced by international cultural and material exchange, Jewett's decaying Colonial social-scapes translate into freedom for women, who occupy places of authority in the remote and peaceful expanses of the New England coast. Whereas Gilman's representations of plant-life in "The Yellow Wall-paper" are centered on issues of illness, Jewett finds in the landscape a healing force. In fact, Gilman's ekphrastic tendencies – mathematical, structured, and academic – are virtually antithetical to Jewett's natural aesthetic sensibilities: where Jewett's plants are natural, Gilman's are stylized; where Jewett's are organic and wild, Gilman's are cultivated. For Jewett, region is a character, an actor in her tales with a poetic biodiversity, while for Gilman, region is the backdrop for her literary interests, which in addition to her feminist and socialist agendas, include issues of cultural cross-pollination, world religions, human sociology, and, of course, art.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Sarah Orne Jewett Compositions and other papers, 1847-1909; Series: III. Diaries, financial agreements, and miscellany; [131 pencil, charcoal and water color drawings]. bMS Am 1743.26, item pf 12. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.



Harvard University - Houghton Library / Sarah Orne Jewett Compositions and other papers, 1847-1909; Series: III. Diaries, financial agreements, and miscellany; [131 pencil, charcoal and water color drawings]. bMS Am 1743.26, item pf 12. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Figures 2.8 and 2.9: Jewett, Seascape/Landscape Paintings, ca. 1867 (*Seascape I*; *Landscape I*: MS Am 1743.26, item pf 12, seq. 168 and 165, Houghton Library, Harvard University)

Among Jewett's many watercolors are these two landscapes, which communicate dramatically different concepts of place. The first watercolor (Figure 2.8) views a distant town at sunrise, from the vantage point of a warm, grassy bank. The second (Figure 2.9) also shows a hints of civilization on a sparse horizon on a dreary day, with a foreground that could as easily be a snow covered field as a glassy bay reflecting the cold grey sky. Despite these differences, both landscapes have a particularly indistinct composition that opens its viewer upon the imaginative potential of place by asking the viewer to look *over there*; both paintings gaze at what becomes

‘not here,’ which in turn reinforces the presence of ‘here,’ and what ‘here’ means. The first seascape offers a concrete vantage point situated on a grassy shore, but the focus of the painting is clearly invested in the hazy specter of the town across the water. The brightening sunrise behind the town offers a kind of hopefulness that evokes feelings of optimism, and imparts to the town an aesthetic of opportunity and potential. The rooftops lend a warm, homey feeling to the port town, and the lighthouse beckons with a glimmer of tradition that strikes a comforting balance between the possibilities of a city and the comforts of home.

The balance between home and away resonates with Jewett’s own biography, and her personal challenges between making the most of her environment and yet wanting more than the limiting, and at times isolating, realities of living in rural Maine. The painting foregrounds the near bank with a detailed affection, while the view afield accords the town only half of the frame; the other half embraces the endless horizon of the blue ocean. If the gaze upon the town is wistful, the warmth of the near bank and the infinite space beckoning from the upper left horizon mute such emotion. The painting’s moment is as much about the expansive ocean is it is the town, and thus it instructs us about the edge of the nation – the coastline view from the farthest reach of America. Though local, and indigenous, the painting’s ocean view imparts the sense that it is also national, even global. The painting’s balance between town and home, nation and divide, and the gravitational draw of land and the boundless freedom of the sea, forecasts many of the qualities that critics and readers will come to celebrate about her literature.

In Jewett’s earliest works, the balance between home and away reveals the vague tension that we see in Figure 2.9. For example, in an autobiographical short story “A Guest at Home” (1882), the narrator Annie Hollis, herself a painter, reminds herself repeatedly that a life of service to her hometown is more rewarding than a self-centered life lived in the city. Like Jewett,

Annie preferred to paint outdoors over "sit[ting] at an easel in the crowded studio"; unlike Jewett, she was selling her watercolors "as fast as she could send them" to a dealer in New York (57). The story holds a romantic view of urban and rural life intact, in apparent but not outright tension with one another: "when Annie Hollis went back to the city . . . she found that everybody was fonder of her than ever, and that, while the town life was in some ways pleasanter than ever before, still she missed some of the pleasures that she had at home" (58). When it comes to her art, however, Annie finds her inspiration better met at home: "her painting-master . . . told her over and over again that . . . she had been gaining steadily, and nature was her best teacher – he was proud to have only directed her to that great school" (58).

As in Jewett's seascape painting, "A Guest at Home" casts an envying glance toward the city, but remains inconclusive about where final loyalties lie: the closing frame asks "whether Annie Hollis's life is to be spent in town or country, by and by, who can tell?" (58). "A Guest at Home" is unique in Jewett's oeuvre for its centering on the life of a local character who remains at home, despite the relevance of its theme to Jewett's life. Much more common to Jewett's narrative structure, as Donovan confirms, is a "relatively sophisticated urban woman, usually a Jewett persona, traveling to the country where she experiences an epiphany – where she learns something – before returning to her urban home" ("Sarah Orne Jewett's Critical Theory" 219). As the wistful, mildly conflicted persona of Jewett's early literature shifts toward the more cosmopolitan persona of her later literature, one thing remains the same: artistic inspiration, in its various forms, is a rural proposition.

In the second landscape, the tiny, faraway details are at once intimate and inscrutable. The viewer of the painting must squint to see what the painter knows intuitively, she must look intently to discern the structures in the distance, which include trees, a house, possibly church

spires, other miniature marks that only the painter could identify. Jewett makes the process of looking closely imperative to this landscape, and dynamic but minute marks interact in a way that tells that the painter found such deep attention was worthwhile. Paradoxically, the casual rendering of the painting allows the viewer to share in this familiarity, rather than being disoriented by its uncertainties. The painting's moment feels fundamental – as though we looked at that view from our kitchen window every day. These images, rough and simple as they are, engage faraway horizons that heighten the sensation and message of looking, and, viewed alongside Jewett's literature, accentuate the way she constantly urges her readers to *look*. Jewett's watercolor and literary landscapes together depict a horizon that feels familiar, yet is still mysterious, and suggest a kindly gaze that looks from within, and upon, with equal measures of fascination.

These early landscape paintings can teach us a lot about how to read Jewett's literary landscapes, especially in terms of the ways we might understand her own persona as one who straddled both urban and rural ideologies. As a literary figure and a regular visitor to Boston and New York, Jewett nonetheless found, like Annie in a "Guest at Home," a life worth "making" in her fictional depictions of coastal Maine. In the first painting, we see a relationship established between the rural and urban in which the local site is in no way eclipsed or threatened by the view to the outside. Indeed, there is a confidence in the details of the local bank that is absent in the faraway town, making the grassy bank seem all the more sure-footed and native a place from which to view. Jewett's stories and novels, which so often feature an urban visitor to a remote Maine locale, strike just this balance; the female visitors are in no way denigrated for their urban roots, but instead they represent a benevolent 'view into a town,' as it were, that serves to reaffirm that "nature [is] her best teacher" ("A Guest" 58). In this sense, Jewett's literature and

its narrators are quite satisfied to stay at home, and catalogue, up close, the elements of a landscape that to an outside viewer are merely hazy, pleasant, evocations. This literary challenge, first discovered to Jewett via her visual art, is perfectly captured in the second landscape above. Only a native eye can know, in detail, what Jewett has drawn on that cold horizon, but she has done so in such a way that piques her viewers' curiosity, and challenges their own ways of constructing knowledge. The painting not only tells the viewer that she must become a local to know its meaning, but that doing so is a worthwhile, and even welcoming, endeavor.

Figures 2.10 and 2.11: Jewett, Paintings of Maple Leaves, Oct. 19, 1867, Dec. 8 1867 (*Maple I*; *Maple II*: MS Am 1743.26, item pf 12, seq. 94 and 96, Houghton Library, Harvard University)

As the daughter of South Berwick's own 'country doctor,' Jewett spent a substantial amount of time in the countryside, making house calls with her father and taking hikes to alleviate her rheumatoid arthritis.[61] This profound relationship with nature translated into a powerful artistic outlet for Jewett. While her familiarity with New England flora undergirds much of her literary oeuvre, her visual representations offer a more visceral path to

[61] Jewett's father is the basis for the character Dr. Leslie, in her most successful novel *The Country Doctor*.

understanding how these countryside trees and plants existed in her mind's eye. If Jewett's landscape painting above suggests an intimate familiarity, her paintings of leaves and herbs are the product of that deep knowledge. The connection between this knowledge and Jewett's own identity is drawn into the painting itself, where Jewett creates a personalized monogram by inscribing her initials into a small maple leaf in the lower right corner of Figure 2.10. Jewett painted this collection of leaves (there are others in her archive) in 1867, one year before her first published short story.[62]

These images reveal more than just her remarkable attention to realistic detail; they reveal Jewett's particular fascination with the decay that accompanies the changing of seasons. In short, they lament and mark the passing of time, as her diary of the same year confirms: "Oh dear I cannot believe I am grown up. It doesn't seem as if I was at all I do believe that if anyone should ask me how old I am and I didn't think I should say ten. And then this summer has gone so fast or perhaps that is only another proof that I am getting into the 'sere and yellow leaf'" (*Sept. 29, 1867*). Here, Jewett is paraphrasing Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and as she mourns the impending marriage of her "darling cousin Nelly" ("I hate to have her married for which I can give no definite reason"), she understands this loss, and the changing of lives, through the aging of the seasons (*Sept. 21, 1867*). The paintings are themselves showing signs of age, but even when they were freshly drawn, Jewett captured the blackening edges of leaves well past their autumn prime. The leaves are gnawed, and in some places ragged, showing the signs of surviving a season and all its elements: sun, wind, rain – even insects. This illustrative realism, committed as it is to a waning temporality, constitutes an arboreal elegy that Jewett articulates in

[62] "Jenny Garrow's Lovers," a tragic tale about two brothers vying for the affections of the same girl, was first published in *The Flag of Our Union* (23:46) on Saturday, January 18, 1868 under the pseudonym of A. C. Eliot.

The Country of the Pointed Firs: "It was not the first time that I was full of wonder at the waste of human ability in this world, as a botanist wonders at the wastefulness of nature, the thousand seeds that die, the unused provision of every sort" (174).[63] It is apparent, from both her elegaic watercolors and her melancholic views on nature, that plants carried an uncommon rhetorical power, steeped in personal significance. Thus it comes as no surprise, but is nonetheless worth noting, that for Jewett, the plant-life of coastal Maine is doing important and complicated work.

The seeming aesthetic contradiction between Jewett's hazy, romantic landscapes, and her realistic paintings of flowers, leaves, and herbs (as in her Figure 2.12 yarrow painting below), suggests that we look for a similarly diverse aesthetic in her literary works. In combining these positions into a single lens, we can approach Jewett's literary landscapes as not only a sensory and evocative experience of her regionalist ambience, but as one with an underlying botanical realism that is almost proto-naturalist in its scientific base. Moreover, given Jewett's historical era's ubiquitous engagement with Swedenborgian doctrine and the Victorian floriography craze, there is a way to imagine this botanical realism as connected to her contemporary associations with the language of flowers, and her interests in women's vocational lives.

[63] Donovan connects Jewett's elegaic tone not solely with the diminishing successes of New England industry, as do some critics, but with the "absence or failure of community" a modernist concern with alienation due to the "emotional strait-jacket forced upon unmarried women" (Donovan, "Vision of Transcendence" 365).

Figure 2.12. Jewett, Yarrow Plant, 1865 (MS Am 1743.26, item pf 12, seq. 98, Houghton Library, Harvard University)

The complicated work that plants and flowers achieve is never more apparent than in Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, a tale about a cosmopolitan writer returning for a summer to sleepy Dunnet Landing, a coastal village with a "determined floweriness" to the homes on its "unchanged shores" (1, 2). When the narrator visits her landlady Almira Todd's family on Green Island, she takes a walk with Mrs. Todd's brother William. Jewett's narrator recounts: "He picked a few sprigs of late-blooming linnaea . . . and gave them to me without speaking, but he knew as well as I that one could not say half he wished about linnaea" (70). Jewett's narrator is telling a joke; she knew that William could not say "half" as much as he might, because to talk of linnaea at all would be to speak of it twice: the linnaea is better known as the twinflower.[64] Moreover, the genus of the flower is named after Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish Botanist who invented the scientific classification conventions still in use today. This is the classification system that Amy King references in her work on gender and botany in *Bloom*, and if we take King's assertion as true, that Linnaeus's taxonomy became a "vernacularization" for

[64] Ted Eden notes that a "description of linnaea by Herbert Durand, a contemporary of Sarah Orne Jewett, might be a description of William himself: 'this delicate trailing vine does not take kindly to cultivation unless the conditions to which it is accustomed in its native haunts are closely approximated'" (141).

literary representations of gender and sex in the 19th century, then Jewett is also telling us to pay closer attention to her botanical references – hinting that every reference "could not say half" as much as she "wished" (70).[65] The encoded exchange with William implies an underlying discourse in Jewett's novel, which is the mode of communication made possible by the symbolic and practical significance of plants.

Read in this light, that is, not merely a hidden pun about a flower, but a hidden pun *about* hiding puns – and messages – in references to flowers, we find a store of untapped significations in Jewett's text. In *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and its corollary stories ("A Dunnet Shepherdess," "The Foreigner," "The Queen's Twin," and "William's Wedding"), Jewett identifies over *thirty* herbs and flowers. If the Victorian era was known for its "language of flowers," Jewett's contribution to its lexicon could be said to be the language of herbs, spoken in a Maine dialect that is as old as the compounding recipes that Mrs. Todd provides to the town of Dunnet Landing.[66] And just as the "language of flowers" offered a means of communicating secretively during a historical era known for its stringent codes of conduct, so too might Jewett's dialectized language of herbs offer a more frank sense of her imaginative intent. For example, in Kate Greenaway's 1884 illustrated edition of *The Language of Flowers*, "fir" stands for "time," and "fir tree" stands for "elevation"; in the context of Victorian floriography, Jewett's title is

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[65] Jewett's reference also brings to mind her relationship with Swedenborgianism, which originates from Linnaeus's homeland of Sweden. Josephine Donovan argues that Jewett's *The Country of Pointed Firs* "may be understood as a symbolist novel" informed by Swedenborgian doctrine (731).

[66] Catharine Waterman's 1842 *Flora's Lexicon* declares that a familiarity with the language of flowers, or "those meanings commonly attached to flowers," "if not an essential part of polite education, [is] at least a graceful and elegant accomplishment," and that a book detailing these meanings "has therefore become desirable, if not an essential part of a gentleman's or lady's library" (Waterman 3). Waterman's claim seems accurate. The 19th Century saw a proliferation of floriographic encyclopedias and articles in the United States, which became popular in the 1840s and continued well into the 1880s. [I am sure Jewett was extremely well versed in this practice, but haven't yet found a reference to her personal library.]

laden with geographic sentiment – “the country of time,” or, the “elevated country” (17). Either term could frame a worthwhile discussion about Jewett’s landscapes in the context of national ideologies, regionalism, and Jewett’s literary aesthetic.

As in her paintings, Jewett’s novel enacts a botanical realism; flowers and herbs are not mere decorative flourish; they exist in the novel as they do in the real world, with each their own history, mythological life, physical properties, and cultural relevance. For Jewett, the herbal healing arts are what she records in every reference, an herbal ekphrasis that is implied by the dual discourse cleverly signaled in the unassuming twinflower. Jewett’s unwavering realism in her paintings of dying leaves manifests in her literature: a form of undeclared realism that requires the reader to go beyond the printed word.[67] In a letter to author Thomas Bailey Aldrish, Jewett asserted, “the trouble with most realism is that it isn't seen from any point of view at all, and so its shadows fall in every direction and it fails of being art” (*Letters* 79). Jewett’s point of view, as she explained to friend and artist Sarah Wyman Whitman, held that it is “those unwritable things that the story holds in its heart, if it has any, that make the true soul of it, and these must be understood, and yet how many a story goes lame for lack of that understanding” (*Letters* 112).[68]

What are some of the “unwritable things” that *The Country of the Pointed Firs* “holds in its heart”? The answer, as per Jewett’s intent, depends on the reader. If we imagine the active reader that Jewett describes, a contemporary reader who “must” understand what is between the lines or else the “story goes lame” – perhaps a woman in late Victorian America who is unmarried, or gay – the “unwritable things” become clear. Theresa de Lauretis’s *Figures of*

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[67] Dead leaves, in the language of flowers, means “melancholy” and “sadness” (Greenaway 15)
[68] Greta Claire Gaard and Patrick Murphy liken Jewett’s comment to feminist Helene Cixous’s comment in *On Reading*: “one has to listen to what is said between the lines, to the silences, the breathing” (82).

Resistance makes a claim about Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* that is useful here; like Woolf, Jewett's text "performs another practice of language: it speaks both the language of men and the silence of women; or better, it speaks the silence of women in, through, and against the language of men" (245). In this case, this language is inherently non-textual – through Jewett's appropriation of a floriographic lexicon – and at times visual – through her descriptive references to the nature of these herbs themselves; moreover, it is regionalist: her novel advances a dialect of the language of flowers, uniquely Jewett's, that is committed to herbal healing. In an oblique fashion, this dialect is made possible through the Swedenborgian doctrine of use; that is, Mrs. Todd is a professional herbalist, serving the residents of Dunnet landing. It is through her vocational knowledge that we know Jewett's references to the herbs are more than just relevant to the language of flowers, and that they are additionally relevant to the field of herbal science. Below, the readings I draw from Jewett's language of herbs – which narrate the "silence of women in, through, and against the language of men" – tell the secrets of Dunnet Landing: romantic tragedies, religious critiques, repressed queer narratives, and the silent ways in which women sought to control their reproductive lives.

***"I wound to heal," Complicated "simples" in the* Pointed Firs**

If Jewett's pun on the term linnaea invites us to assume that every botanical reference is intentionally imbued with a coded sentiment, then she is inviting us to experience a different narrative within her novel. A brief consideration proves this effort worthwhile: Mrs. Todd tells of a local family, prone to temperamental "fits" ("You can see it right in their expressions," cautioned Mrs. Todd), to whom she brings catnip and yarrow for their calming effects (110). What Jewett doesn't articulate, which Mrs. Todd surely knows, is that the yarrow plant, featured above in Jewett's own illustration, is emblematic of war in the language of flowers, and that the

root of the catnip is known to make "the most gentle person fierce and quarrelsome" (Fernie 344). Jewett's association of plants with bellicose connotations with the fit-prone Evinses adds an imaginative characterization to their disposition – the subtext proposes an anecdote of catnip-crazed Evins on the yarrow war-path. And there are more puns: Mrs. Todd commented that "nothing made any *weight* on her mind except not to forget to turn a few late mullein leaves"; the narrator promised to remind her of this "*heavy* responsibility": as Jewett likely knew, mullein tea works as an anti-inflammatory agent, a decongestant, and a diuretic, all of which assist with weight loss.[69]

Jewett places herbs adjacent to the populations or ailments that they might treat: Mrs. Todd insists that there is "no tansy in the neighborhood with such snap to it as some that grew about the schoolhouse lot" because "[b]eing scuffed down all the spring made it grow so much the better, like some folks that had it hard in their youth, and were bound to make the most of themselves before they died" (15). Wild tansy means "I declare war against you," but unlike yarrow, tansy is specifically known to protect children; it prevents miscarriages and aids with childbirth.[70] Growing around a schoolhouse harboring youths "bound to make the most of themselves," this wild tansy can be seen as armor – as a fortification for children doing battle with the hardships of their youth.

And so it goes throughout the novel, a range of herbal remedies and language of flower references that deepen our experience of the characters, their concerns, and their form within the narrative. Mrs. Todd's herb garden is a "rustic pharmacopoeia," and she lives in a "house laden

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[69] This fact is well documented in modern sources, but I have been unable to confirm a contemporary source for Jewett.

[70] Fernie's *Herbal Simples Approved for Modern Uses of Cure* states, "Formerly this was one of the native plants dedicated to the Virgin Mary; and the 'good wives' used to take a syrup of Tansy for preventing miscarriage. 'The Laplanders,' says Linnoeus, 'use Tansy in their baths to facilitate parturition'" (554).

with not only sweet-brier and sweet-mary, but balm and sage and borage and mint, wormwood and southernwood" (3). This collection of herbs might as well be characteristics of Mrs. Todd herself: in the language of flowers, sweet-brier means "I wound to heal"; balm means "sympathy"; sage, "domestic virtue"; borage, "bluntness"; mint, "virtue"; wormwood, "absence"; southernwood, "jest, bantering" (Greenaway).[71] "I wound to heal" might be a humorous adjunct to the narrator's wry observation that the "village doctor and this learned herbalist were upon the best of terms. The good man may have counted upon the unfavorable effect of certain potions which he should find his opportunity in counteracting" (5). In this light, some of Mrs. Todd's less successful potions might serve such an exact purpose, and thus direct the patient to seek more urgently the country doctor's care.

But there is a more poignant sense to sweetbrier's "I wound to heal," seen adjacent to wormwood's reminder of "absence," and there is denser work than mere puns operating in Jewett's language of herbs (3). Mrs. Todd's tragic romantic history – a true love never realized, and a young marriage cut short by her husband's untimely death – "'T was but a dream with us" (77). *Herbal Simples Approved for Modern Uses of Cure*, first published in 1895 by W.T. Fernie, MD, notes that wormwood has "special medicinal use in certain female derangements," and can help a "sensitive nervous temperament, especially in young females" (356).[72] Mrs. Todd is no longer young, but wormwood's herbal properties hint at her anguished past, and its floral symbol, "absence," memorializes her lost lovers. What the lost lovers memorialize, however, is

[71] Ted Eden makes a similar argument in his three-page essay, "A Jewett Pharmacopoeia," but he does not use historical references; instead, he points out that the typical connotations (balm as soothing, wormwood as a bitter reminder) offer an insight into Mrs. Todd's personality. Also, several language of flowers list sweetbier as "I wound to heal," so that seems the likeliest reference for Jewett. Greenaway's text lists several kinds of sweetbrier, which signal "simplicity," "I wound to heal," and "decrease of love" (39).

[72] Apparently, Fernie's resource is still relevant to today's herbalist; it has been reprinted as recently as 2010.

the fundamentally impossible standards of Victorian romantic comportment, and the mental anguish and “female derangements” that accompany its social paradoxes. Mrs. Todd’s first true love was publicly forbidden; he “was above bein’ a seafarin’ man,” while her “lot was plain an’ hardworkin’” (10). By the time she met her husband-to-be Nathan, her “heart was gone out o’ [her] keepin’” (77). For better or worse, though Nathan “died before he ever knew what he'd had to know” otherwise, the implication is that women rarely marry the one they love: “There's more women likes to be loved than there is of those that loves” (77).

In the chapter titled “Poor Joanna,” Jewett uses her language of herbs to critique the religious doctrine still casting its long shadow on New England, which Donovan says “lingered in the New England mind-set long after the sect itself had declined” (“Jewett and Swedenborg” 732). Joanna Todd, rather than being star-crossed by immobile class barriers, like Mrs. Todd, is jilted one month before her wedding when her fiancé “got bewitched with a girl ’way up the bay, and married her, and went off to Massachusetts” (104).[73] Joanna is devastated, and chooses to live out the reminder of her days on stark and lonely Shell-heap Island as penance for committing “the unpardonable sin” (121). “I was in great wrath and trouble, and my thoughts was so wicked towards God that I can't expect ever to be forgiven” she explained (121). Mrs. Fosdick remarks that Joanna was “one o’ them poor things that talked about the great sin; we don’t seem to hear nothing about the unpardonable sin now, but you may say ’twas not uncommon then” (123). Jewett is referencing a well-known paradox in Calvinist doctrine, which is that if the elect are pre-destined not to commit this sin, and the non-elect do not have the

[73] Other references to witchcraft in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* relate to Mrs. Todd’s herbal remedies, which posits an ironic rejoinder that many of the Puritan women put on trial for witchcraft were merely herbalists.

presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, then the sin is technically impossible.[74] Indeed, Jewett makes clear what she thinks of this cultural relic; it is steeped in the same superstition that darkens Joanna's fiancé path, "bewitched" by a woman with whom he moves to Massachusetts.

Joanna's mental health is gravely compromised as she comes to believe that her blasphemy makes her permanently unfit for society. Mrs. Todd's visit with the inept Parson/Reverend/Mr. Dimmick, who cannot safely navigate a sailboat, much less bring comfort or enlightenment to one of his flock, makes clear that his outmoded religion is to blame. Mrs. Todd brings a "bunch of fresh lemon balm," an herb known to treat melancholia, to the "melancholy" Joanna (*c.f.* Waterman 33 and Fernie 41). As Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick recount the sad tale, the lover's absence is again signaled by wormwood, this time explicitly: "Yes, I recall the wormwood … A growin' bush makes the best gravestone; I expect that wormwood always stood for somebody's solemn monument" (109). As the narrator explains, the men of Dunnet Landing are buried abroad: "some lost at sea, and some out West, and some who died in the war" (159). Thus the "solemn monument" does not only foreshadow Joanna's own demise on the island while marking the absence of love from her fiancé and her God; it also suggests that Joanna was not the first woman exiled on that inhospitable island. Women in exile, in Jewett's imagined Puritan New England, were an inevitable fact of life.

Joanna's trials are steeped in herbal and floral references that make explicit Jewett's barely-concealed contempt for the constrictive religious ideologies of the northeast. Mrs. Fosdick, Mrs. Todd and the narrator find her "Poor Joanna" blameless; the portulacas (also

[74] The unpardonable sin is blaspheming: "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." (*Holy Bible*, *Matthew* 12:22). This is a hot topic for Puritan buffs. See http://www.puritanboard.com/f15/unforgivable-sin-actually-possible-calvinist-55596/

known as moss roses) under Joanna's window, which symbolize a "confession of love," imply that her rejection of God was not heartfelt, and offer a floral exoneration of her sins (Greenaway 37). When the narrator visits Shell-heap Island, now twenty-two years after Joanna's death, nothing remains of Johanna's garden but a "single faded sprig of much-enduring French pinks" (132). In Greenaway's *Language of Flowers*, there are nine entries for various colors and varietals of pinks, including an entry for "Pink, single." Its meaning is "pure love" (33). Jewett's herbal references make clear that Joanna's religion had caused an unfair exile, and that her romantic anguish was innocently born of pure love.

There's no shortage interpretive opportunities regarding Jewett's floriographic dialect in *The Country of Pointed Firs*, but there is one in particular that poses a significant prospect for how we should interpret Jewett's novel. Chapter Ten is named "Where the Pennyroyal Grew," a place that Elizabeth Ammons points out is "silent, sacred, lush, female space where past and present, self and other, myth and reality merge" (89). Early in the novel, the narrator introduces pennyroyal as one of the mysterious herbs Mrs. Todd is carrying when she "came home late, with both hands full and a heavily laden apron" (14). Ammons describes the pennyroyal field as the "dramatic core" of Jewett's work because it is the place where "the two women know each other fully" (91). Ammons attributes this deep knowledge of one another, in part, to the role pennyroyal plays in women's reproductive health; that is, that pennyroyal is an "emmenagogue, an agent used to induce or increase menstrual flow" (91). In Ammons's formulation, the increasing intensity of the maternal signifiers near the pasture of pennyroyal construct the emotional and spiritual center of Dunnet Landing.

There's an important modification to be made to Ammons's argument that begins with a revision of pennyroyal's general purpose in women's health. Fernie's *Herb Simples* is a

historical source documenting that pennyroyal's popular use was for abortion. Fernie writes that "Many married women of intelligence and close observation, assert as a positive fact, that Pennyroyal will bring on the periodical flow when suppressed." Fernie admits that because not all physicians agree on this point, chemists supply it freely, even though "they know it is not wanted for 'catarrh of the chest,' as alleged. The purchaser keeps her secret to herself, and does not communicate her experience to anyone" (336). In the language of flowers, pennyroyal means "flee away," which certainly implies some measure of avoidance, possibly pregnancy, in its sentiment. As it turns out, pennyroyal is a well-known abortifacient in herbal folklore, and this fundamentally changes how we might read Jewett's work.[75] Critics have been skirting around this issue for decades; Laurie Crumpacker's 1983 article "The Art of the Healer: Women in the Fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett" notes that "because herbalists were often visited by women seeking abortions, the whispered directions may indicate that an abortifacient was the drug prescribed," but she identifies pennyroyal as an herb "hung in sleeping rooms as an air freshener and disinfectant" (158). Arguably, such herbs may have also hung in sleeping rooms for other purposes, such as birth control.

It isn't until 1994 that a small essay by Ron Welburn points out what my application of Jewett's intentional semantic doubling makes obvious: that Almira Todd's emotional recollection of "the other one" in the pennyroyal field implies that Almira and "'the other one' were lovers and not platonically," a relationship that "assumably [sic] resulted in her pregnancy

[75] Although many sources list pennyroyal as an abortifacient, reputable sources caution that the consequences of consuming such amounts as to effect an abortion are deadly: "Ingestion of pennyroyal oil in adults or tea in children causes severe toxicity, including hepatic failure, acute renal failure, coagulopathies, metabolic acidosis, GI hemorrhage, pulmonary congestion with consolidation, cerebral edema, seizures, disseminated intravascular coagulation, and death"("Pennyroyal | Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center")

and resorting to abortion" (77).[76] Mrs. Todd confesses that while she and her husband Nathan "spent some happy hours right here" in the pennyroyal field, the "pennyr'yal always reminded me, as I'd sit and gather it and hear him talkin'— it always would remind me of— the other one" (78). As to the seemingly wide-spread oversight by critics on this topic, Welburn proposes that the herb, also known as squaw's balm, and squaw's mint, was subjected to "white acculturation: hints from the Indian doctors evolved to become a domestic pharmacopoeia handed down to succeeding generations" (76). Jewett likely had no such obfuscation; Welburn asks, "Is this the 'Indian remedy' Mrs. Todd dispenses to her neighbors with 'whispered directions'?" (77).

When Mrs. Todd points to the place where Nathan died, she is standing among the pennyroyal. She whispers that he "was tryin' to get in by the short channel out there between Squaw Islands, right in sight o' this headland" (77). Jewett's naming of the pennyroyal field as the "headland" of the island embeds a connotation of an intellectual, and not emotional, space. It may be the "dramatic core" of the novel, as Ammons suggests, but it is not the heart-land, it is the headland. Mrs. Todd's choice to have the secret abortion was not an emotional, but rather practical, choice. The metaphorical geography of a woman's body is written onto the land itself as Mrs. Todd points to the "short channel" "between Squaw islands" where her husband died (77). Nathan's death at sea while navigating – unsuccessfully – the feminized channel south of the headlands reiterates the hidden abortion narrative in Mrs. Todd's reminiscences, remembered as it is among the squaw's balm, the pennyroyal, which she associated so strongly with "the other one" (78).

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[76] Welburn remarks on the surprising oversight, "It is surprising that feminist criticism in the aftermath of Rowe [*sic*] versus Wade continued to neglect bringing into the open the likely secret abortion implied in this novel" (75).

As the narrator prepares to leave Dunnet Landing, possibly forever, she sees Mrs. Todd in the distant fields, disappearing down a path. She reflects, "At such a distance one can feel the large, positive qualities that control a character … her distant figure looked mateless and appealing, with something about it that was strangely self-possessed and mysterious" (211). This closing view of Mrs. Todd is reminiscent of Jewett's seascape and landscape paintings above, cast as it is in its "large, positive qualities," like Figure 2.8, and nonetheless "strangely self-possessed and mysterious," like Figure 2.9. As in Jewett's second landscape painting, wherein the tiny details can only be known to a familiar eye, the secrets that Almira Todd keeps are not her own, but the community's, which is rendered more and more solitary as the distance between the narrator and Mrs. Todd grows. The narrator finds Mrs. Todd's solitariness "appealing," and likewise Dunnet Landing's singularity is appealing, and as she sees the herbalist bending down to pick what "might have been her favorite pennyroyal," this solitariness is cast as a virtue (211). Alone, mysterious, offering aid in the time of need, Mrs. Todd keeps the secrets of Dunnet Landing, which she protects from the cover of the plant-life itself. In this final scene, Jewett's Maine coast is evocative, ambient, and atmospheric, but nonetheless maintains a botanical realism to the end: as Mrs. Todd "disappeared again behind a dark clump of juniper," she is cloaked in the values central to the "Indian remedy" pennyroyal: juniper's language of flowers role offers "succour" and "protection" (24).

These private, yet universal, issues – the social binds of class, the paralyzing vestiges of Puritan culture in New England, the secret traditions of reproductive choice – show that Jewett's far-flung criticisms are anything but local, and 'minor' does not adequately describe the scope of her work. Jewett's language of herbs entered a discourse of women for women readers. As Gwen Nagel shows, Jewett "explicitly identifies the New England front yard garden with women: 'It

was not man-like to think of the front yard, since it was the special domain of the women'" (45, qtg. Jewett). Nagel reads the significance of Jewett's gardens as one of inheritance, citing stories and letters that show Jewett's belief that flowers represented a continuation of culture, and her belief that plants somehow capture cultural identity. For Jewett's literary practice, then, gardens operate as a means of communicating lineage or relationships among and to women, and their significance depends on the effective interpretive strategies of her reader to get at their meaning. For those within the discourse community of gardens – essentially, her contemporary female readers – or willing to translate her many botanical references, a semi-private subtext emerges that provokes a variety of critical analyses.

Jewett's works are thus complicated by a connotative system of meaning that rivals the intertextual referentiality of Modernist poetry. Her seemingly simple, regional form belies the intellectual density of her works; her incorporation of Greek mythological references, English and Irish cultural references, poetic, literary, and lyrical allusions place Jewett among the likes of Eliot and Pound in terms of her intertextuality, while her realism placed her among the best of her age. Certainly the modernist Willa Cather thought so, and one wonders if, during her friendship with Jewett, Cather became aware of these hidden references, which would cast a new light on her comments to publisher Ferris Greenslet that "[t]he language in which [Jewett] was such an artist has almost ceased to be" (*Selected Letters* 514). Indeed, Cather's 1925 preface to *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, read anachronistically against my own reading here of Jewett's novel, seems to outright tease its reading audience with just such a challenge:

> I like to think with what pleasure, with what a sense of rich discovery, the young student of American literature in far distant years to come will take up this book and say: "A masterpiece!" as proudly as if he himself had made it. It will be a

> message to the future, a message in a universal language, like the tuft of meadow flowers in Robert Frost's fine poem, which the mower abroad in the early morning left standing, just skirted by the scythe, for the mower of the afternoon to gaze upon and wonder at — the one message that even the scythe of Time spares. (*On Writing* 59)

Most literary analyses of Jewett's botanical imagery center upon defining the role of health, and healing, in her works.[77] Certainly Jewett's character Mrs. Todd, the country healer who was "an ardent lover of herbs, both wild and tame," occasions this interpretive work (3). While critics take note of the formal relationship her works establish with the landscape and the plant life, they have never considered that her incorporation of such a large variety of botanical species might merit a scientific analysis. Jewett's considerable knowledge on the subject of plants rivaled and imitated the level of expertise that was lauded about her physician father, who she recapitulates in *A Country Doctor* as Dr. Leslie, "who had shown her all the fatherliness she had ever known" (221). This oversight beckons the question of whether Jewett's gender or genre has dissuaded scholars from pursuing readings of a scientific nature, or taking seriously the incredibly layered quality of allusion her works display.

In the case of Gilman, critics generally do not consider the structural influence her artistic practice has upon her textual works, but her fascination with symmetry and geometry appears in all of her major literary compositions. Those who do discuss her artistic career deem it minor, but the abundance of references to her artistic practice prove otherwise. Of particular note is that

[77] See Laurie Crumpacker, "The Art of the Healer: Women in the Fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett," CLQ 19.3 (Sept. 1983): 155-66; Michael Holstein, "Writing as a Healing Art in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*," *Studies in American Fiction* 16.1 (Spring 1988):39-49 and Gwen Nagel, "'This prim corner of land where she was queen': Sarah Orne Jewett's New England Gardens," CLQ 22.1(March 1986): 43-62.

anthologies of author-artists, to the extent that they exist, seem to all exclude Gilman, despite her prolific professional career in art. More deplorable is the fact that no one has discussed Gilman's artwork specifically in terms of her feminisms, or her social and political standpoints. These items are, to my mind, unexplored "texts," the consequence of which deprives us from a unique yet much-needed view of how commercial visual culture in *fin de siècle* America has a potential for resistance, subversion, and critique.

My next chapter moves westward and forward, toward literary modernism's regionalist icon Willa Cather. Cather recognized Jewett's genius, and emulated it in many ways. It is not mere felicity that Jewett and Cather should meet; Jewett's formidable and prolific career outstripped many realists and naturalists of her time, and Cather recognized that Jewett's mode and presence in the critical field were admirable traits. Moreover, and as Nina Baym demonstrates, the open west represented a free creative space that inspired nearly three hundred and fifty women like Willa Cather to write professionally from 1833 to 1927, but in the end, "professional literary reputations were made in the East" (1). Thus "ambitious western women with literary ambitions went east," and Cather too made her way east, and in doing so became a friend of Sarah Orne Jewett (5). On the next page, I'll begin discussing a new region in a new historical time period, but the feminist project underlying my analysis will remain the same: what sister arts of these authors remain unconsidered, and why?

Chapter 3: From "her very fingertips": Epiphany, Senesthesia, and Ekphrasis in Willa Cather's Fiction

"How she sings!": The Song of the Lark *and the* Daily Inter-Ocean

THE SUNDAY

MERIT IN BRETON PICTURES.

We have settled some things. It may be stated with assurance that two and two are four, and one may assert that the earth moves round itself and round the sun, without becoming a subject of inquisition. In the realm of physics, of biology, and of social science, there is also a great deal that we actually know and may properly advance without anything tentative in tone or bearing. There are some things, however, about which there are still opinions, and that, while seeming indisputable to one mind, appear unproven, or even untrue, to another.

I joined issue the other day with a friend whose views differ from mine about one of these matters that are still open to question. Out opposite opinions were advanced with equal and warm assurance in the inviolability of the position taken. The conflict deepened; reserves were brought up; it was an earnest affair—and, lo! when the dust had cleared away there was my friend, the enemy, holding the same opinion still, only a little more firmly, while my own views about what was in dispute seemed to me more than ever the only proper ones. Now, while this result was disappointing, I do not find it in the least surprising when I recall the air of authority with which we spoke, each advancing our merely individual cial thought, and which makes them seem so entirely proper and fit, is what should most give us pause in approving them, for, as truth is timeless, so truth in art will be found to lie in something not special to the thought of the time, or to the circumstance of the place that has produced it. A work may—nay, it must be—outwardly in the mode; its thought must be put into proper terms of its day. But while its language must be such as is taught in its own schools, and neither archaic nor overnew, it must have in it something that is not taught or learned in its schools, something that is not alone today's or yesterday's, but constant to the human spirit as proved in every mature expression of its life and thought.

Jules Breton's Three Pictures.

In the Henry Field bequest at the Art institute there are three works by Jules Breton that, while their treatment is such as clearly marks them of our own time, seem so deeply informed with the spirit of the larger art that we do not first think of them as having been painted today. I like these pictures better than I do "The Millet," the one with the new-born calf, in the same room. In fact, I think that this artist, measured by the sum of his work, is truer to universal art concepts than the other, and chiefly for this reason, that most of his pictures are pleasanter to look at than most of Millet's.

that he paints, an allegiance two unswerving to the harsh facts of an almost animal existence. There is too little glamour—fiction if you will—of art about his people. They are too categorically true by half to the gross, bare, unrelieved ugliness of unspiritualized toil.

Now, in this figure of Breton's, the life that it illustrates is raised beyond its own plane, not so far as to destroy life-likeness, but so far as to make its first impression one of beauty. Really, it is so complete in itself, so satisfying in its own way, that I believe no sermon has been preached about it. Nor do I recall that any poet has labored to carry on its suggestion, which would look as though it had reached its own conclusions.

The figure of the one who is filling her water vessel is equally idyllic, and equally and refreshingly bad as a text for preachments upon the brotherhood of man, or the dignity of labor.

Comes Nearer to Life.

"The Song of the Lark" has a touch less of that purely impersonal beauty that distinguishes this other. It comes a little nearer to life as it actually is—not so near as "The Angelus" or "The Gleaners," but witnessing more closely to the real facts of its subject. The illusion of the scene is more complete, too. We can tell with greater certainty how far off its distance is, and can read the features of the intermediate country in a fuller and clearer way. The figure and head of the girl are also more objectively convincing and such as identify the individual more perfectly. It is because it is so specifically true to the facts of its subject, so concrete an illustration of its general theme, that it is so instantly impressive.

Yet there is much here as in the picture of the girls at the spring that carries the interest beyond the incident. While this is quite clearly a particular person and a particular place and a particular morning, there is a clear note of some universal gladness in it. In the commonness of type of the girl who is singing there is a suggestion of something that may be shared by many. The joy that is hers seems dependent upon no condition of life or accident of personality, but "for whosoever will.' How she sings! this healthy young peasant girl; not from her throat alone, but with her whole strong young body, even from toes to finger tips.

Note how, without any infidelity to a life remote from ours, the picture excites our immediate sympathy, so that what is far off comes very near. If we should see the person who posed for this picture we should be quite uninterested in her. The things about her that separated her from ourselves would be altogether too conspicuous in the impression that we should receive to give us a chance to realize what was in common between us. Here, while the face and costume and the whole physique belong to a life widely different from our own, the em-

Figure 3.1: Henry Charles Payne's 1901 spread on Breton's painting (Payne).

On December 8, 1901, the Chicago *Daily Inter-Ocean* art critic Henry Charles Payne wrote of Jules Breton's painting, *The Song of the Lark* (1884), "How she sings! this healthy young peasant girl; not from her throat alone, but with her whole strong young body, even from toes to finger tips" (Payne). Nearly fifteen years later, Willa Cather mentions the art column of *The Daily Inter-Ocean* in *The Song of the Lark*. This *Künstlerroman* traces the professional arc of the "healthy and powerful" Thea Kronberg, prairie immigrant-turned-opera diva (189). Cather's novel and its heroine are remarkably reminiscent of Payne's review: Thea "sang from the bottom of herself. Her breath came from down where her laugh came from, the deep laugh which Mrs. Harsanyi had once called 'the laugh of the people.' A relaxed throat, a voice that lay

on the breath . . . All that deep-rooted vitality flowered in her voice, her face, in her very finger-tips" (478).

The thematic and structural similarities between Payne's newspaper article and Cather's *The Song of the Lark* are striking. Payne and Cather describe a common peasant girl possessed of an uncommon voice, both conceive of that voice as bridging the distance between human souls, and both do so by offering a visual description of the health and physicality of the singer.[78] Payne describes how the peasant girl's singing offers a "clear note of universal gladness," that the "wide chasm that separates our types and our interests and conditions is bridged over, so that as we look at this girl, it seems our very selves who are singing." Cather concludes that Thea's voice unites her listeners because it "can't go wrong in interpretation, because it has in it the thing that makes all interpretation" (420). Payne's narrative interpretation of the painting *The Song of the Lark* is singularly odd. No art critic, including Cather herself, before or since, has *ever* characterized the woman in Breton's painting as singing. The title, *The Song of the Lark*, should preclude such an interpretation; in the painting, the woman stands at daybreak, gazing upward, arrested by a moment of awe and reflection before a long day's work, marveling at the song of the larks flying overhead. The traditional association with the lark was one of optimism and comfort; larks are one of only a few birds that can sing while flying, and their most common symbolism is as a messenger of gladness, contentment, and blessing.[79]

Cather hints that there's more to the painting than meets the eye: Thea declares it "her picture" because it is simply "'right,'" but "Just what she meant by this, it would take a clever

[78] Cecilia Björkén-Nyberg argues that Thea "has no autonomy at all" because she is first and foremost a physical specimen, played out through the "acute, almost scientific, interest in Thea Kronborg's throat" (23).
[79] Period newspapers feature "the song of the lark" as an advertising turn of phrase that signifies a peaceful and blessed existence; this most often appears in advertisements for land and house sales within developing communities.

person to explain" (197). Julie Olin-Ammentorp remarks that here Cather "throws down the gauntlet . . . inviting the reader to speculate about why Thea feels so strongly" (192). Diane Prenatt agrees that Cather's ekphrasis "challenges the reader to be 'a clever person,' a competent interpreter, in order to discern the relation of Breton's painting to the novel" (207). And while Olin-Ammentorp ultimately argues that Cather is emphasizing the intersection of visual and musical arts in the moment of the painting, and Prenatt suggests it is an "early iteration of the Virgilian theme" so common to classical ekphrasis and Cather's pastoral novels, Payne's interpretation, if not first in Cather's mind, certainly could have been read in its contemporary reception context as an "Easter egg," a term indicating a secret meaning purposefully encoded in a text.[80] Indeed, Payne's and Cather's journalistic treatises on art in 1901 seem nearly conversant, a public banter.[81] But it would take a clever person indeed, one versed in the circle of critics writing about Breton's painting and the Henry Field Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago, to make such a connection.

Though Cather makes little mention of it in her interviews and biographical statements, she was an established and prolific journalist, one who reviewed opera, theatre, literature, and

[80] "Easter egg" is a term that originated in video game design, wherein game coders would incorporate secret messages or content to be discovered by more ambitious gamers. The Wikipedia page for "Easter Egg" remarks that this practice imitates the habits of artists incorporating secret content or signatures, such as Diego Rivera hiding his own personage in his murals.

[81] Read alongside one another, Payne and Cather advance treatises on art in what might have otherwise been a lively exchange; in August of 1901, Cather writes in *The Courier* that the "real fault of popular taste" is that "people prefer the pretty to the true" (*WP* 844). She concludes, "Do we not all admit that . . . the peasant folk of Millet are worthier a man of genius than the ballet dancers of Degas?" In December of 1901, Payne disagrees, devaluing Millet's art because his peasants "are not agreeable to the eye. They are true to life, even typically true, but they are not beautiful. In Breton's pictures people are . . . true to an ideal of art that charms. Oh! I know that this is heresy" (Payne). On other issues, Payne and Cather clearly agree; "truth is timeless," reports Payne, "so truth in art will be found to lie in something not special to the thought of the time."

occasionally art.[82] She traveled in the same circles as Payne, and may have even met him during a one of her many visits to Chicago, particularly during a visit two years before he published his review titled "Merit in Breton's Pictures."[83] As a fellow critic, one connected both to Cather's favorite art gallery and the ubiquitous *Chicago Tribune*, Payne was a very relevant figure in Cather's journalistic circuit.[84] As a newspaper woman herself, and one interested in writing for Chicago papers, Cather would have had Payne on her radar as possible competition, or at the very least as someone publishing about her beloved Chicago Institute of Art.[85] Cather's novel confirms this knowledge: just before discovering Breton's painting at the Chicago Art Institute, Thea admits that, unlike her well-intending boarder Mrs. Anderson (who encourages her to see the "old masters," "Carots," and "such examples of the Barbizon school!"), she is not familiar with "the art columns of the Sunday *Inter-Ocean*" (195).[86] Thea might not have read them, but

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[82] See *The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather's Cather's First Principles and Critical Statements, 1893-1896*, for a comprehensive collection of Cather's early journalistic writings; also *The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893-1902* (*KA*, *WP*).

[83] She certainly knew of his colleague, Elywn A. Barron, drama critic for the *Daily Inter-Ocean*. Cather lambasted Barron in an 1895 review of his unsuccessful attempt at becoming a playwright (*KA* 209). In 1899, Cather returned for one of her many lifetime visits to Chicago, during which she had dinner with fiction writers and newspaper columnists, Elia Peattie and Filey Peter Dunne. Both figures were active in the Chicago journalism scene, and encouraged Cather to come to Chicago in the spring of 1900. Cather seriously considered it, especially after confirming with Dunne that "there is no woman doing newspaper work there now that I need be afraid of" (*Letters* 52). It's quite possible that Cather may have met Payne on this trip via an introduction from Peattie or Dunne; all three had loose or direct connections with the *Chicago Tribune*. Payne was not only a fellow critic, but also he was also a painter, and his particular bent of aestheticism was one that Cather would have undoubtedly found stimulating. Like Cather, Payne's brother, William Morton Payne, was also a well-known literary critic and journalist ("Henry Charles Payne").

[84] Cather was a friend to at least two critics at the *Tribune* (Fanny Butcher and Elia Peattie), the newspaper that eventually bought the *Inter-Ocean* in 1914 (See *Letters* 46, 52, 162, 304).

[85] Cather mentions the Chicago Institute of Art in three of her novels: *The Song of the Lark* (1915), *The Professor's House* (1925), and *Lucy Gayheart* (1935).

[86] In 1900, Chicago's *Inter-Ocean* had the "largest circulation of any political weekly in the west" (Blanchard 240).

Cather certainly did, and her allusion to Payne's review intersects her own history as a journalist, and of course, the ekphrastic subject, Breton's *The Song of the Lark*.

Payne's description is ekphrastic: it describes and interprets Breton's painting in a journalism piece read by a national audience. Similarly, Cather constructs an ekphrasis when Thea describes the painting inside the novel, its "flat country, the early morning light, the wet fields, the look in the girl's heavy face" (197). In naming the *book* after the painting, however, Cather introduces a new layer of ekphrasis, by suggesting that the novel itself might represent an ekphrasis of the painting. In naming her book after a painting, she blends genres; she asks us to see the book *as* a painting. However, Payne's characterizations resonate so broadly with Cather's own that it raises the possibility that it was Payne's work, and not the painting itself, that inspired Cather to name her novel *The Song of the Lark*. If we take Payne's interpretation, which more closely mirrors the novel's exegesis than the painting does, as part of Cather's source material, then it can be seen as an ekphrasis of an ekphrasis, recasting Payne's own ekphrastic interpretation. In such a light, Cather's novel simultaneously operates as both a visual and textual ekphrasis: recasting Payne's text, which recasts an image.

The historical facts do nothing to contradict this theory; besides the evidence that suggests that Cather read Payne's review, her letters in 1915, the year she published *The Song of the Lark*, seem to reconnect her with Payne's earlier claims about modern art.[87] Cather's

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[87] In a 1915 fan letter to poet Robert Frost, Cather disparages other modern poets, including Pound and Masters, and congratulates Frost for writing poetry that is "'new' enough and which yet contains so many of the oldest elements of poetry" (*Letters* 213). In doing so, Cather recapitulates Payne's own approach: "while its language must be such as is taught in its own schools, and neither archaic nor overnew, it must have something . . . that is not alone in today's or yesterday's, but constant to the human spirit" (Payne). In general, Payne's views on the continuum between art and beauty, his thoughts on the timelessness and universality of "truth" in art, and the "newness" of modernism all read as possible touchstones for Cather's own theoretical demarcations.

relationship with the painting quickly sours after publishing her novel; she describes Breton's work as "beautiful" in 1901, but by 1917 she has nothing so nice to say, and she begins distancing her novel from its artistic counterpart (*WP* 843). She requests that new issues of the book have "quite a different jacket"; the original featured a silhouette of Breton's painting (*Letters* 238). Letters from 1935 reveal Cather still requesting Houghton Mifflin to print new covers "minus the Breton picture" (460). In a 1916 letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Cather agrees with one of her negative critics: "He is quite right about the title – its [*sic*] trashy and poor" (*Letters* 218).

By 1937, when Cather writes an updated introduction to *The Song of the Lark*, she declares her title an "unfortunate choice," and deems the artwork now "a rather second-rate French painting in the Chicago Art Institute" (*v*). In this introduction, Cather doesn't deign to identify Breton by name. She instead laments, "many readers take it for granted that the 'lark song' refers to the vocal accomplishment of the heroine, which is altogether a mistake" (*v*). Ironically, Cather criticizes her readers for making the very mistake that she likely faulted in Payne's interpretation. Thus, if the ekphrastic conceit was meant as a corrective to Payne's review by recapitulating his narrative in opposition to his improper interpretation, it failed. Payne's place outside of the text grew increasingly distant with time, and regrets notwithstanding, the association between Cather's novel and Breton's painting was unshakable.

Cather's oblique reference to Payne's unexpected interpretation suggests the rich triangulations that exist between her journalism, her literary ekphraseis, and the sister arts with which she was familiar. Her early artistic manifestos, dispersed across hundreds of theatre, opera, and literature reviews, predict the formal practice of her literature. Few authors rival Cather in terms of intra-artistic referentiality; the breadth of artistic allusions in her fiction,

which span ekphraseis of opera, theatre, paintings, and landscapes-turned-visual-art, point to the inextricable and crucial role that the sister arts play in Cather's literary works. Furthermore, her multi-artistic imagination underpins the metaphor I develop throughout this chapter to describe Cather's continual blending of artistic genres: artistic synesthesia. Cather *is* synesthetic in her works – she blends sight, sense, and sound regularly. But in this chapter, I extend this metaphor to describe the way that Cather conceives of art; instead of asking her viewers to see color in terms of sound, she is asking that they see a painting as a piece of music, a poem as a sculpture, a short story as a perfume. As I show below, however, no artistic genre is as important to Cather's literary technique as that of painting, which she viewed as commensurate and interchangeable with writing.

This chapter is about *The Song of the Lark* and *My Antonia*, "The Novel *Démeublé*," and "On the Divide." It is also about *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *The Professor's House*, and *O Pioneers!* But really what this chapter is about is Cather's journalism and illustrations, and how they allow us to see further into her ekphrastic literary works. In the following pages, I will excavate Cather's journalistic manifestos to show how they lay the foundation for her Romantic view of art, which she conceives through a synesthetic simultaneity of art forms that hearkens back to Romantic expressions of the sublime. However, and as her journalism and works of fiction reveal, Cather's Romantic vision is inherently Modernist, exhibiting a dislike for industrial processes that impinge on artistic authenticity, and a fascination with rural immigrant populations. Moreover, Cather's increasing reliance on Modern art movements as a structure for her writing drew her ineluctably toward a literary cubism that, while forecast in her early ruminations, nonetheless has proven a surprising twist in her development as an artist. By showing the painterly techniques Cather incorporates into her fiction, particularly impressionism,

juxtaposition, absence, and erasure, and the enduring themes that govern her own illustrations, I argue that Cather's technical approach to literature is mostly Modern, while her thematic approach is mostly Romantic.

Scholars have confirmed that Cather published at least nine illustrations with her early writing, and I use these images to demonstrate how the themes apparent in her literary ekphrasis inhabit her visual work as well, further securing the bond between Cather's textual and visual imagination. From these close readings of her drawings, and their respective short stories "On the Divide" and "An Affair at Grover Station," a pattern emerges that coheres into a governing structure for her literary ekphraseis. For Cather, the permanence of the land finds its temporal match in 'true' art, which is likewise constituted and informed by conceptualizations of nature. Whether arts of antiquity, early modern woodcuts, turn-of-the-century tintypes, or the ancient potsherds of Panther Valley, Cather's conception of true art is inextricably linked to indigeneity, the land, and its specific milieu.

This revelation leads to the final section of the chapter, which analyzes how this pattern, over the course of her novels *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia*, coalesces into epiphanic ekphraseis. I explore two of Cather's most famous epiphanic ekphraseis – Thea's transcendent realization in the river at Panther Canyon, and Jim's defining image-memory of the plough in the setting sun – to show that Cather's ekphraseis are made epiphanic with a four-fold structure that exists, to some degree, in all of her literary ekphraseis. These elements make up what Cather deems "the eternal material of art," and include human passion (or emotion, best captured through art), meditations on the passage of time, nature (including plants, animals, and celestial bodies), and a concrete sense of place (such as Black Hawk, NE, and Moonstone, CO); together these elements shape what I describe as Cather's masterpiece ekphraseis. These ekphraseis

embody all of the qualities that Cather celebrates in the 'Old Masters' of painting, and thus they can be read as her own literary, ekphrastic masterpieces, notional ekphraseis that Cather invests with the full complement of her artistic identity.

Broad Strokes: The Foundations of Cather's Art

"Perfect art is truth": Cather's Journalistic Manifestos

In my first chapter I made the argument that ekphrastic aspects of literature can operate as a hermeneutic for a text, and if Payne's review is an ekphrastic element of the novel, the hermeneutic for *The Song of the Lark* is one of artistic inter-relationality. The book instantiates a simultaneity of artistic forms: Payne's review narrates a painting he believes represents someone singing; Cather incorporates Payne's journalistic plot (and thus creates a literary ekphrasis of a literary ekphrasis) into a work of fiction that, in turn, depicts this singer encountering the very artwork that inspired Payne – which she terms "her picture" (197). If ekphrasis enacts, as Simon Goldhill concludes, a "value-laden view" that "regulates the viewing subject," and is furthermore "like a Rorschach blob" that discloses something of "the subjectivity of the interpreter," as Bartsch and Elsner argue, then Cather's ekphraseis in *The Song of the Lark* are instructing us to test her formulations of art against their journalistic discourse and to embrace a simultaneity of artistic modes. In the case of *The Song of the Lark,* some of these modes include literature, opera, painting, poetry, and, less obviously, journalism (Goldhill 2; Bartsch and Elsner *ii*).

Tellingly, Cather denigrated the work of most journalists, and did so regularly in her later works as means of setting apart the fundamentally different purpose of "art."[88] However, Cather's rejection of journalism as an artistic force belies the artistic merit in her own, which the Lincoln *Courier* described as possessed of a "piquant literary flavor" (qtd. in *KA* 23).

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[88] See "On the Art of Fiction" (1920) and "The Novel *Démeublé*" (1921).

Much can be gained by highlighting Cather's journalism career within the constellation of experiences informing her use of ekphrasis. Her articles reveal an investment in classical and modern art that forecast a life-long, intense engagement with Modernist art movements tempered by a Romantic disposition toward art. These early journalistic works emerge as touchstones for her literary career; very often published under a pseudonym, Cather's articles were nonetheless testing grounds for her artistic theses. Bernice Slote remarks on this overlooked trove of material: "as early as 1896 Willa Cather had written nearly a half a million words of criticism, self analysis, and explorations into the principles of art and the work of the artist. The fact is, she had said it all so many times in the beginning that the 1920 and 1930 essays seem like afterthoughts or absentminded repetitions of the obvious" (*KA* 4–5). Cather's bold claims about art loom large in her brief, journalistic manifestos, rehearsing the ideals that she would put into practice in her fiction.

One distinction Cather explored ardently in her reviews was truth in art, as when she declared in an 1895 review of the Haydon Art Club Exhibit, "In literature and painting there is no such thing as sacrificing art for truth. Perfect art is truth, truer than any science" (*KA* 218). In a time when "truth" and authenticity in literature and art was hotly contested, Cather made clear that "perfect art" outstrips the scientific discourse so dominant in the artistic milieu of her time. When Cather reports that perfect art is "truer than any science," she refutes naturalist and realist movements in art and literature, a position that she continues to reinforce until she articulates it precisely in her 1922 artistic manifesto "The Novel *Démeublé*." Thus, while Cather may have felt that journalism lacked the "eternal material of art," she was nonetheless determined to explore that very topic in her own (*OW* 40).

The mechanical aspects of journalism, so central to her professional life as the managing editor of *The Home Monthly* and *McClure's,* also emerge as ekphrastic influences for Cather. Cather imposed regularly upon her literary publishers about issues such as typographical fonts, illustrations, binding, and cover design. And, while she never insinuated that she was experienced in these matters, she also never shied away from making her criticisms known. Janis P. Stout and Andrew Jewell remark in their introduction to *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* that Cather "specified her margin preferences for *My Ántonia*, had ideas about the font type for *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and thwarted most efforts to create paperback editions during her lifetime" (*viii*). Her publisher Alfred Knopf confirms that Cather "continued, as always, to take an interest in the design of her books – typography, binding and wrapper . . . She wanted 'Death Comes for the Archbishop' to look a little as if it had been printed on a country press" (qtd. in Duryea 294). In fact, one of the reasons that Cather favored Alfred A. Knopf's publishing house over Houghton Mifflin is that Knopf used a typographical font reminiscent of the hand-set letter presses from Cather's youth. These opinions, many developed during her time writing literally thousands of articles and reviews and drafting and reviewing the final copy for *The Home Monthly* and *McClure's*, speak to Cather's expansive commitment to visual aesthetics.

As Cather's preference for the hand-set lettering style implies, her valuation of aesthetic merit was deeply linked to its relative worth in human labor. Edith Lewis writes that Cather "did not care for old things because they were old or curious or rare – she cared for them only as they expressed the human spirit and the human lot on earth" (120). Lewis's observation makes clear why Cather's high regard for hand-hewn and rustic artifacts extends so readily to modern art forms. The key, for Cather, is an artwork's perceived incorporation of human passion and emotion – the extent to which it "expressed the human spirit" which was timeless, an essential

aspect of the "human lot on earth." Jean Schwind points out that "fine and folk art combine" in *The Song of the Lark* "to suggest the dual sources for Cather's pictorial art" (90). Such timeless tropes of human passion are the primary ekphrastic meditations in *The Song of the Lark*, which may also help explain what she liked about her title initially: "Isn't it queer: there are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before; like the larks in this country, that have been singing the same five notes over for thousands of years" (*OP* 119). As I discuss at length below, Cather's understanding of human passion is inextricably connected to the sister arts. This connection, however, so apparent in her literary works, was forged first in her journalism.

The Story of the Man-eating Tiger: Romantic Modernism in Cather's Ekphraseis

Cather's traditional use of ekphrasis reveals an untraditional aesthetic: one that deploys one sister art to describe another, *within* yet another: an artistic synesthesia. Whereas in classical texts we might think of ekphrasis as stopping time, blending a moment of art and literature, for Cather, these ekphraseis very often juxtapose multiple artistic perspectives at once. By combining the diverse affects of the sister arts, Cather's ekphraseis accrue an intensity and simultaneity reminiscent of the Romantic sublime. Polly Duryea argues that Cather encountered artistic synesthesia through the painter Thomas Whistler, whose artworks formulated within musical modes "no doubt influenced Cather's own correspondances [sic] between the arts" (301). However, Cather first began using the language of the symbolists and impressionists, the color- and light-infused words that the *Symboliste* movement termed "correspondances," not in regard to Whistler, but the French symbolist poet Paul Verlaine.[89] Duryea herself acknowledges

[89] Moreover, Cather was not exactly enamored with his works, as evidenced by her guarded approval in a 1897 review: "Mr. Whistler's nocturnes in color are ravishingly beautiful things, but they have not the power or the greatness of the old faded frescoes that told roughly of hell

Cather's "artistically-freighted" language in her 1896 review of Verlaine, which argues that "every poem of his is a set with gleaming jewels . . . from which all the colors of the changeful skies shimmer: warm lights of morning, high lights of noon, sad lights of evening, cold lights of windy days. They are more like jewels than anything else, emeralds that are green as stormy seas, rubies that are red as heart's blood . . . He created a new verbal art of communicating sensations not only by the meaning of words, but of their relation, harmony and sound (*NSJ* 2 Feb. 1896: 9; *Kingdom of Art* 395). In this review, Cather speaks of "verbal art" while exhibiting it, and in doing so, she unites metaphors of music and nature through a painterly technique. While Cather's conflation of the visual and the literary may have found an early attraction to the image poets of France, it is more productive to think of her as a multi-disciplined artist who already thought in terms of musical, visual, and poetic modes of production. Although her ekphrastic renderings are synesthetic and multimodal, Cather no doubt encountered the technique of ekphrasis via conventional means – through her rigorous academic preparation and her Romantic view on the edifying nature of art in human culture.[90] As I discussed in my first chapter, the literary roots of ekphrasis stem from classical art and literature, which in turn stem from the rhetorical training in the *progymnasmata* for Greek and Roman writers. Dianne Prenatt explains that ekphrasis "was summarily defined in Horace's dictum *ut pictura poesis* ('as the picture, so the poetry')," and that its most common instantiation is in pastoral poetry, from as early as 300 BCE (205). Cather was perfectly prepared to join this long tradition: she read five

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and heaven and death and judgment" Fittingly, Cather is using this criticism of Whistler's paintings as a means of describing a similar downfall—lack of artistic passion – in the dramatic actress Julia Marlowe, once again blending artistic genres (*NSJ* 4 Mar. 1897: 13; *KA* 53; see also *KA* 186, 404).

[90] Although this became less true as Cather aged, Cather drew many of her opinions about the significance of art in human culture from the writings of John Ruskin. In this regard, Cather felt art must be true to nature, and sentiment she extended in her own representations of region and culture in her literature.

languages, including Latin and Greek, and as Bernice Slote remarks in her biographical introduction to *The Kingdom of Art*, Cather "knew the great epics so well that all the seas and islands of the ancients were living and real" (*KA* 35). Thus when Simon Goldhill concludes that any given instance of literary ekphrasis is "viewing from a subject position" located "within the cultured poses of the educated . . . elite," he may as well have been describing Willa Cather's academic and cultural training (10).

Cather's status as an educated elite is tempered by a modernist fascination with and a political commitment to the roughened and impoverished working class immigrant communities of late 19th- and early 20th-Century America. For Cather, this was true both for the creation and reception of art: in a 1901 *Courier* article titled simply "Observations," Cather writes that "[s]ome of the most appreciative art criticisms I ever heard were made by two sunbrowned Kansas boys as they looked at George Inness' 'Prairie Fire.'" In the same column, she asks her readers, "Do we not all admit that the man who can make these homely subjects into art is the greatest of all artists, and that the peasant folk of Millet are worthier a man of genius than the ballet dancers of Degas?"(2). Much like her preference for hand-worked art with a human cost, such as the hand-set letter presses of earlier times, Cather makes clear that the more art-worthy topics for a genius mind are not the noble heroes and warriors of the classics, or the refined and polished artistic gems of a cultured society, but the visceral representations of a life and land infused with a passion out of necessity, rather than cultivation – infused with, as Edith Lewis describes, the "human lot on earth" (120).

In one of her earlier interviews following the favorable reception of her first prairie novel, *O Pioneers!*, Cather acknowledged that she wrote about Midwestern immigrant communities "because nobody had ever tried to write about the Swedish settlers seriously" (*KA*

449). In this 1913 interview, she describes the transformative effect of growing up among "Swedes and Danes, Norwegians and Bohemians," who were "the first people who ever gave me the real feeling of an older world across the sea"; she treasured their stories, and "felt as if every word they said . . . counted for twenty" (*KA* 448, 449). In a revelatory comment during the interview, Cather reveals the extent to which her artistic impulses are fundamentally linked to the earliest, and broadest, conceptions of ekphrasis, and what it meant for her artistic journey as a writer:

> I have never found any intellectual excitement any more intense than I used to feel when I spent a morning with one of those old women at her baking or butter making. I used to ride home in the most unreasonable state of excitement; I always felt as if they told me so much more than they said – as if I had actually got inside another person's skin. If one begins that early, it is the story of the man-eating tiger over again – no other adventure ever carries one quite so far. (*KA* 449)

Cather experienced the stories of these women settlers as though they had happened to her personally – she "got inside another person's skin." The intensity of this experience was as electrifying and, in some regards, as dangerous as meeting the "man-eating tiger." This response makes clear that Cather placed incredible value on embodied knowledge—knowledge sprung from experience, either lived or culturally inherited, as well as the value she placed on women's narrative history, the tradition of which the old women bakers imparted into her. Ruth Webb describes this kind of exhilarating storytelling as a "type of speech that worked an immediate impact on the mind of the listener, sparking mental images of the subjects it 'placed before the eyes'" (193). What Webb is describing, of course, is *ekphrasis* not in its current iteration within

the sister arts, but in its original rhetorical intent described in the *progymnasmata* training manual for orators.

As this emphasis on embodied knowledge might indicate, Cather's Modernist fascination with cultural authenticity was structured by her Romantic views about art. Bernice Slote writes that to "understand Willa Cather we will have to study the French Romantics" (*KA* 85). Cather's particular combination of these two artistic aesthetics is best described by Jonathan Freedman as "an austere or flamboyant Romantic fervor and social alienation" (qtd. in Watson and Moseley 2). That is, Cather championed and believed in the individual's artistic genius with a "flamboyant Romantic fervor." Like the Romantics, she idealized childhood as a source of the purest poetic inspiration; she privileged the sublimity of landscape; she advocated a profound theological return to nature along with a celebration of the poetic imagination; and she embraced the many other binaries that defined the Romantic era: nature over culture, rural over urban, individual over collective, imagination over reason, and private over public. However, Cather does so with a uniquely modernist "social alienation," best seen through her aversion for technology and the negative effects it had on the artistic proliferations of her age. Cather experienced the sense of alienation and disorientation that Leo Marx articulates in *Machine in the Garden* (1964). At the same time, Cather held fast to the value system Meyer Abrams explains in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1971) that for Romantics, "[t]he first test any poem must pass is no longer, 'Is it true to nature?' . . . but . . . 'Is it sincere? Is it genuine?'" (23). Such questions readily express Cather's own literary era: in an age where books and magazines are suddenly mass-produced, the emotions they contained often felt similarly mass-produced.

Cather condemns this unfortunate mediation of experience in an 1895 comment on the invention of a "machine which will register on paper an entire performance" of theatre or opera (*KA* 224). "This is becoming such a terribly mechanical age that pretty soon we will have a little ticker that will keep correct count of our deeds done in the body and estimate the exact state of our souls and save St. Peter the trouble" (*Journal,* May 26, 1895, 12; *KA* 225). By 1922, Cather couches her views about soulless, artistic artificiality explicitly in terms of industry, asserting that "The novel manufactured to entertain great multitudes of people must be considered exactly like a cheap soap or a cheap perfume, or cheap furniture" ("The Novel *Démeublé*," *OW* 36). In that same year, she describes her new novel *The Lost Lady* to Alfred A. Knopf as "a little, lawless un-machine made thing—not very good construction, but the woman lives—that's all I want" (*Letters* 329). In naming her art as an "*un-machine* made thing" (emphasis mine), and as something that "lives," Cather's distaste for massively produced literature finds its expression in her equal distaste for machine-made arts. Romantic in its idealization of 'authoritative' individual experience, Cather's resistance to mechanical processes informs her taste and aesthetic priorities in modern art.

We can see all of these traits – her romantic idealization of youth as the source of artistic inspiration, the distaste for massively produced and machine-made art, the preference for narratives stemming from the "peasant folk" of her own childhood, particularly its women, and even the strange and intense metaphor of the man-eating tiger – in *The Song of the Lark*. Thea's inspirational fount is her hometown of Moonstone, which Cather readily admits was based on her own town of Red Cloud.[91] Her childhood memories are the foundation of her genius, the source material of her artistic imagination. Central to these memories, apart from the landscape

[91] See *Letters,* page 218.

itself, are Thea's younger brothers, especially her baby brother Thor. The opposite of his mythological namesake, Thor is a "blissfully lazy child" but nonetheless intelligent, and Thea carries him with her everywhere as she explores Moonstone. As they both grow up, Thor comes to represent another storytelling source, and every Saturday Thea sets aside time to be with Thor and "hear him tell one of his rambling stories" (104). These stories, encountered in Thea's childhood and in her native culture, represent the highest possible artistic value; once Thea becomes a successful opera singer, her love interest Fred Ottenburg explains: "none of us who came later can ever hope to rival Moonstone in the impression we make. Her scale of values will always be the Moonstone scale. And, with an artist, that *is* an advantage" (369).

Cather embeds another ekphrastic allusion to the stories that the old Swedish women told her, and the "intellectual excitement" they represent, by insinuating the story of the man-eating tiger into the themes of childhood, family, and home in *The Song of the Lark*. Thea buys "a rifle for Gunner and Axel, and an imitation tiger-skin coat and cap for Thor" (103). Later in the novel, in the ekphrasis of Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Grief of the Pasha* (1882), Thea reflects that the painting "always made her wish for Gunner and Axel. The Pasha was seated on a rug . . . and before him was stretched his dead tiger, a splendid beast, and there were pink roses scattered about him" (197). Cather's thematic recapitulation of the story of the man-eating tiger – Gunner's rifle, the Pasha's dead tiger, and Thor's "tiger-skin coat and cap" (albeit "imitation") – coincides with Thea's compassion and longing for her childhood and her home. While not a formal ekphrasis, Thea's brothers are in a way ekphrastic, as symbols of a story that Cather associated with the artistic inspirations of childhood. In adding the structure of the man-eating tiger story to Gunner and Axel, Cather drives home the intense artistic association between Thea and her childhood inspirations in Moonstone.

The final appearance of the tiger in *The Song of the Lark* arrives when Thea is unexpectedly offered the role of *Sieglinde*. Distressed at the artistic reach asked of her in so short a time, Thea "clenched her hands and opened them despairingly, looking out of the open window. 'It's inaccessibly beautiful!' she brought out sharply" (453). Thea is gesturing to a manner of artistic sublime: the piece "would be one of the most beautiful things in the world" if it were "sung well," but she declares it "never will be" (453). The beauty of the music exceeds human ability, lies beyond comprehension. Fred consoles her, and counsels Thea: "Now walk, sleep, play with Archie, keep your tiger hungry, and she'll spring all right on Friday" (454). Thea is now in full possession of her artistic inspiration, and what was originally associated with Gunner and Axel becomes her own. Thea's tiger, which she must keep sharp and on edge in order to recapture the inspiration she found so easily in her youth, is the Romantic ideal of poetic art.

The way in which Cather links the Swedish Thea's artistic genius to the small town of Moonstone clearly resonates with Cather's own description of the "Swedes and Danes, Norwegians and Bohemians" of her own Red Cloud. Cather writes to Dorothy Canfield Fisher in March 1916, "I wasn't trying to put something over on Red Cloud. I was writing it from their point of view" (*Letters* 219). These traits are immediately apparent. But the way Cather conflates Thea's reminiscence of her younger siblings with an ekphrasis of *The Greif of the Pasha* offers a markedly more personal interpretation of *The Song of the Lark*. Cather's singer embeds in her description of a work of art a reference to a story, which further relates to the immigrant women's tales that sparked and illuminated her childhood creativity. Romantic in its idealization of childhood, yet modern in its fascination with immigrant populations in the American

prairieland, Cather's personal point of reference for ineffability is inescapably, simultaneously, ekphrastic, sublime, Romantic, and Modern.

Fine Lines: Cather's Modern Art Ekphraseis

In the first part of this chapter, I laid out how Willa Cather's journalism sketched the beginnings of her artistic synesthesia, the ekphraseis of which limn a remarkably Romantic aesthetic within the discourse of Modernist alienation. For what remains of this chapter, I will explore how Cather's unabated interest in the sister arts influenced her approach to writing. This exploration is governed somewhat by a diminutive essay with nonetheless sizeable claims, Cather's literary manifesto-in-miniature "The Novel *Démeublé*," wherein she repeatedly turns to themes and techniques inherent to visual art to discuss her literary art. Cather's artistic education, albeit at times difficult to document, was nonetheless a thorough one, as evidenced by her fluent characterizations of composers, playwrights, actors, and artists and their aesthetics not only in her journalism, but in her fiction as well.[92] Her relationship with the visual arts spurred her own experimentations with form, color, and composition.[93] Indeed, there's evidence to suggest that Cather thought of writing *as* a form of visual art, as either informed by or commensurate to the act of painting. And while many critics characterize Cather's works as owing to impressionist art – Impressionism was in fact one of her favorite schools of art – Cather followed and admired an

[92] Beginning in 1899, Cather started planning her trips to Europe, and in 1902 she spent four months travelling Europe, spending a significant amount of time in France. In 1908, she spent four months in Italy, in all of those travels, she took in the art and visited the museums (see Woodress 49, 83, 159, 162, 199, 209, and 224).
[93] As Polly Duryea notes, Cather deeply admired Henry James and likely read James's essay "Our Artists in Europe," which concludes that "style for one art is style for another, so blessed is the fraternity that binds them together, and the worker in words may take a lesson from the picture-maker" (James 7; Duryea 17).

incredible range of artists.[94] As she begins to theorize the methods of writing in concrete terms, as in "The Novel *Démeublé*," the impressionist prose that colors the landscape of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* gives way to what Polly Duryea deems "the language of *cubisme*" (np). Despite her Romantic leanings and penchant for the Impressionists, Cather's literary experimentations are rooted in modern schools of aesthetics, particularly ones that manipulate themes of absence, juxtaposition, and multiple perspectives.

In showing how Cather viewed writing as painting, and then demonstrating how her writing evidences these painterly techniques, a pattern begins to emerge in her ekphrastic literary moments that suggests a re-visioning of how we understand the structure of Cather's ekphraseis. I've suggested already and will continue to show how Cather's ekphraseis embody a unique brand of artistic synesthesia that is reminiscent of the Romantic sublime. However, over the remainder of this chapter, I will show how the same elemental forces emerge, time and time again, in Cather's ekphrastic moments that direct us toward a structural consideration of her literary epiphanies. Aside from her trademark artistic synesthesia, within the seemingly endless examples of ekphraseis, a pattern exists, one that I use to build toward my final discussion of epiphany in Cather's ekphraseis. In these juxtaposed ekphraseis, past is superimposed onto the present, the future is projected as already part of the present, and of course, artistic genres are fused.

"Nobody can paint the sun, or sunlight. He can only paint the tricks that shadows play with it"

[94] Edward Piacentino notes that impressionism is "an important dimension" of Cather's art that "lies primarily in her power to create with words vivid pictorial images that are imbued with an ineffable quality of felt reality" (106). It is this "felt reality" that is at the heart of impressionism, one of the earliest artistic movements that acknowledged the wide range of influences affecting our visual and emotional perception.

In Cather's short artistic manifesto "The Novel *Démeublé*," she identifies herself as a realist opposed to the "cataloguing of a great number of material objects," and rather as one who "accepts, rather than chooses, his theme" with "sympathy and candour" (45). Cather also reveals in that essay, as well as in her essay "On the Art of Fiction," that her literary theorizations bear a technical relationship with the premises of Modern art movements. Cather decries the state of realism among her literary counterparts, but takes consolation in "hopeful signs that some of the younger writers are trying to break away from mere verisimilitude, and, following the development of modern painting, to interpret imaginatively the material and social investiture of their characters; to present their scene by suggestion rather than by enumeration" ("Novel Démeublé" 48). In suggesting that verisimilitude is a literary possibility, Cather reveals her romantic notions of modernism, which, unlike some of her literary counterparts, still uphold the artist's ability to communicate its intended subject. Artistic and literary representations that are suggestive, rather than descriptively detailed, are more artful in Cather's view; and this suggestive potential is something that she marks in the innovations in visual art.

Cather perpetually cast the writing process in terms of visual art, particularly the drafting and revision process. Cather once remarked to a group of Bowdoin College students that while an actor or musician may hone a technique, "the writer cannot. What he did yesterday counts nothing. He must not repeat. . . There is no technique, for him" (W. Cather, *In Person* 163).[95] However, Cather did practice her technique – in her journalism – and when the time came to hone her craft as a fiction writer, she had no shortage of ideas about how to create literary art. Cather describes this process as one of simplification ("Art, it seems to me, should simplify," she declares), which she conceives of in terms of painting:

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[95] These words are the paraphrase from a 1926 article written by Arthur Staples in *Institute of Modern Literature*.

> Millet had done hundreds of sketches of peasants sowing grain, some of them very complicated and interesting, but when he came to paint the spirit of them all into one picture, "The Sower," the composition is so simple that it seems inevitable. All the discarded sketches that went before made the picture what it finally became, and the process was all the time one of simplifying, of sacrificing many conceptions good in themselves for one that was better and more universal. (*OW* 103)

This comment is from Cather's 1920 essay "On the Art of Fiction." She recapitulates almost verbatim a discussion of Millet in a 1913 interview with the *Philadelphia Record*. In the *Record*, Cather adds that Millet's simplifications were "all the time getting closer to the one thing – It" (*KA* 447). It is the elusive "It" Cather presumes to explain in her 1922 essay, "The Novel *Démeublé*," where she goes even further to liken the process of writing to painting: "The novelist must learn to write, and then he must unlearn it, just as the modern painter learns to draw, and then learns when to utterly disregard his accomplishment, when to subordinate it to a higher and truer effect. In this direction only . . . can the novel develop into anything more varied and perfect than all the many novels that have gone before" (49). By 1931, when Cather writes "My First Novels [There Were Two]," she sees her works *as* paintings, not merely developed *like* paintings. She proclaims, "My first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, was very like what painters call a studio picture" (*OW 91*).

Cather's first artistic love was with the Impressionists, who ushered in the Modern era of painting in an 1874 art exhibit in Paris, where they discarded the principles (but importantly, not the training) of academic painting. The Impressionists – artists like Monet, Degas, and Mary Cassatt – reconsidered the role of perspective in art and focused on the reality of light

interplaying with the artistic subject.[96] They also rejected the demand that the surface of a painting be perfectly flat, and instead explored the effects of small, three-dimensional brushstrokes of heavy paint. Impressionists trusted that the eye would naturally bring together the entire image made of small strokes into a coherent image. They were right. While the Impressionists no doubt caused a stir in the 1870s, by the time Cather was following them in the mid 1890s their theoretical premise was considered sound, and in an unpublished fragment titled "Light on Adobe Walls." Cather conceives of literary art in terms of the Impressionist aesthetic of reflecting light, and the central role of individual experience and perspective:

> Nobody can paint the sun, or sunlight. He can only paint the tricks that shadows play with it, or what it does to forms. He cannot even paint those relations of light and shade – he can only paint some emotion they give him, some man-made arrangement of them that happens to give him personal delight – a conception of clouds over distant mesas (or over the towers of St. Sulpice) that makes one nerve in him thrill and tremble. At bottom all he can give you is the thrill of his own poor little nerve . . . No art can do anything at all with great natural forces or great elemental emotions. No poet can write of love, hate, jealousy. He can only touch these things as they affect the people in his drama and his story. (*OW* 124)

In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* Cather puts this technique on display: the opening scene describes a vista in Rome where "the light was full of action and had a peculiar quality of climax – of splendid finish. It was both intense and soft, with a ruddiness as of much-multiplied candlelight, an aura of red in its flames. It bored into the ilex trees, illuminating their mahogany trunks and blurring their dark foliage; it warmed the bright green of the orange trees and the rose

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[96] Monet's paintings are most typical of the movement, including his *Haystacks* series (1890-1891) and *Water Lilies* series (1890-1920) being the most immediately recognizable.

of the oleander blooms to gold; sent congested spiral patterns quivering over the damask and plate and crystal" (4). Cather's words are like a proliferation of brushstrokes, "much-multiplied" and "quivering" light, "both intense and soft," throughout the scene. The blurred "dark foliage" and the "bright green of the orange trees," call to mind the play of light and color in one of Monet's *Water Lilies* installations.

As Cather grew increasingly reliant on the lexicon of painting to formulate her own conception of writing technique, she shifted her focus from Impressionism to the tenets of Modern and abstract art, maybe even to the extent that her friend Annie Fields did, who told her "the Cubists weren't any queerer than Manet and the Impressionists were when they first came to Boston" ("The House on Charles Street" 172). Cather's approach to literature became centered on themes common to the Modern art movements: simplification, omission, absence, and juxtaposition. Cather found in Modern art a vagueness that translated into broadened possibilities; similarly, she felt that by incorporating these techniques into her literature, she expanded the interpretive and experiential potential for her readers.

Central to this approach, for Cather, is the theme of simplification; in "The Novel *Démeublé*," Cather laments that the "novel, for a long while, has been over-furnished" (43). These "artificial elements of composition," for Cather, were the unnecessary adornments of "too much detail" (qtd. in Stout 113). Essentially, Cather became increasingly committed to the reduction of the "tasteless amplitude" infecting literature (51). Jo Ann Middleton points out that "much has been made of the differences between her early, rather ornate, style and the later, much acclaimed, simple style" (25). Rightfully so. In a 1913 interview with the *Philadelphia Record*, Cather stated, "[W]riters try to multiply their ideas instead of trying to simplify them . . . [w]hether it is a pianist, or a singer, or a writer, art ought to simplify – that seems to me to be the

whole process" (*In Person* 8). Like the "modern painter" who must "utterly disregard" her training in order to create new ways of representing how we see the world, Cather's own technique became increasingly distilled into purer and purer renditions of what she deemed the elemental components of art.

Cather coined her own modern phrasing for her collection of modern art tenets turned literary principle: "Since I first saw the Puvis de Chevannes frescoes of the life of Saint Genevieve in my student days, I have wished that I could try something a little like that in prose, something without *accent*, with none of the artificial elements of composition" ("Letter to the Editor of *The Commonweal*" 1927; emphasis mine).[97] Cather was searching for an art without "accent," an art that revealed nothing of its construction and everything about its subject. Clinging to any specific school was counterintuitive to this goal, and thus Cather "smoothed off the mental distinctions between specific 'isms' in Modern Art . . . [and] preferred a vagueness associated with Symbolists" (Duryea 13). Vagueness holds the key to Cather's progression toward prose without accent. Middleton coins this reader experience as Cather's "vacuole. . . the various ways in which Cather manipulates the reader through absences" (11). Accent robs the reader of her own perspective; as soon as accent occurs, the text is personalized so as to be exclusionary. Thus what Middleton argues is that the "vacuoles" of Cather's work, the gaps, as it were, become the site of the reader's experience. Effusion of details becomes the very thing that silences the potential of the reader.

In the opening to *My Àntonia*, Cather introduces a landscape and a narrator imbued with this quality of vagueness. Jim Burden, the epistolary narrator and *Àntonia*'s childhood friend, describes the midnight wagon ride to his grandparent's house after an exhausting journey from

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[97] Many of Puvis de Chavannes's paintings feature indistinct, if not outright blank, facial details; for a typical example of this trait see *The River* (1865).

Virginia to Nebraska; “There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made . . . Between that earth and that sky I felt erased, blotted out” (8).[98] Jim and the countryside he is travelling are both empty, blank, absent any substantive detail; they await the experiences that will inscribe character and identity, rather than being scripted by the narrative voice. The wind-swept plains of Nebraska provide a perfect backdrop for Cather’s images; in *My Àntonia* in particular, her literary tableaux loom from the landscape with arresting clarity. Nebraska is a blank canvas in this opening, and Jim exhibits the traits of erasure seen in Chavannes’s tableaux, and in the works of the cubists, who remove connective details.

On this immense, blank landscape canvas, Cather paints simple, solitary notes to great effect; at the first December snowfall, Jim sees the “old figure” of the “great circle where the Indians used to ride” “with wonderful distinctness, like strokes of Chinese white on canvas” (41). In a *Cubisme* style of drastically disorienting the reader’s perspective, Cather juxtaposes Chinese ideography with the ghostly remnants of Native American trail markings. The troubled history of Native Americans is captured in “Chinese white,” and “stirred [Jim] as it had never done before” (41). At once a conflation of art symbol, text symbol, and juxtaposition of cultures and time, this ekphrastic moment is typical of Cather’s synesthetic, highly referential technique. Cather’s image nonetheless draws a stark and simple stroke, almost abstract in its visual simplicity, within which she embeds the archetypal significance of time, culture, and the land.

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[98] This isn’t the first time Cather had described the Nebraska landscape as one of erasure; she first did so in the 1913 interview: “I shall never forget my introduction to [Nebraska]. We drove out from Red Cloud to my grandfather’s homestead one day in April. I was sitting on the hay in the bottom of a Studebaker wagon, holding on the side of the wagon box to steady myself – the roads were mostly faint trails over the bunch grass in those days. The land was open range and there was almost no fencing. As we drove further and further out into the country I felt a good deal as if we had come to the end of everything – it was kind of erasure of personality” (*KA* 448).

In 1921 Cather gave an interview where she explained her artistic impulse of juxtaposition: "I'm trying to cut out all analysis, observation, description, even the picture-making quality, in order to make things and people tell their own story simply by juxtaposition … Just as if I put here on the table a green vase, and beside it a yellow orange . . . Side by side, they produce a reaction which neither of them will produce alone . . . I want the reader to see the orange and the vase – beyond that, I am out of it. Mere cleverness must go" (*In Person* 24).[99] In equating descriptive juxtaposition (placing the orange next to the vase) with narrative juxtaposition (making "things and people tell their own story), Cather essentially describes a form of literary cubism, using a visual approach to juxtaposition and adjacency that mirrors the effect of cubist paintings. Cubism dismantles the parts of an image, and rejoins them only to find that the parts no longer fit together as they did before. The incoherency now demands that the image be taken on its own, that shapes and colors within the image can only be recognized through their relation to the other shapes and colors on the canvas. Cubism presents several vantage points simultaneously, rather than the traditional, singular perspective. For Cather, those multiple points of view are best seen in her artistic synesthesia, and conflation of the senses that combine to lend expression to her art.

Cather once explained to her new publisher Alfred Knopf that "[w]hat I want to do is to find a few qualities, a few perfumes, that haven't been exactly named and defined yet. And if I have a publisher who is interested in new tastes and smells, I can go a good way toward finding them" (*Letters* 329). Cather's truly synesthetic literary thought process goes well beyond

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[99] Cather realizes in the interview that her artistic metaphor might not necessarily resonate with all of her readers, but she plunges forward: "One must choose one's audience, and the audience I try to write for is the one interested in the effect the green vase brings out in the orange, and orange in the green vase" (*In Person* 24). Cather may be speaking to her contemporary authors in this interview, making explicit that, to some extent, she is writing not only for those who are interested in *what* she writes, but for those who are interested in *how* she writes.

character or plot; she thought synesthetically, in terms of taste and smell, of visual arrangement, color, and spatial relationships. Cather's interest in juxtaposition is literary, but it is rooted in the broad artistic habits of her mind and the tenets of modern and abstract art. Thus, it is not surprising to find that the most dramatic and memorable moments of juxtaposition in Cather's novels emerge, quite naturally, as combinations of literature and the sister arts; that is, synesthetic ekphraseis.

One exception to Cather's "unfurnished" and uncluttered aesthetic, of course, is *The Professor's House*, where Cather intentionally designed Professor St. Peter's home "rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies — until one got rather stifled." She did so based on an exhibition of "old and modern Dutch paintings" in Paris, which consistently featured homey warm interiors with a window view of the ocean (*OW* 31). In St. Peter's home Cather thus "wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities" (*OW* 32). Cather explains this ekphrastic experiment in terms of music, noting that the structure she was striving for was somewhat "vague," and "akin to the arrangement followed in sonatas in which the academic sonata form was handled somewhat freely" (*OW* 31).

In any case, the experiment is patently related to painting, as the airy view from the overstuffed room that caught Cather's fancy in Paris is recreated in Professor St. Peter's home. The juxtaposition of interior and exterior setting is echoed in St. Peter himself; when he "was tired and dull" he would gaze out of the "single square window" at the "long, blue, hazy smear – Lake Michigan, the inland sea of his childhood" (*PH* 30, 16, 30). St. Peter's view is structurally like the Dutch painting, yet again we see, as in the "Chinese white" character that makes up the impression left in the landscape by Native Americans, that Cather's ekphrasis transports him

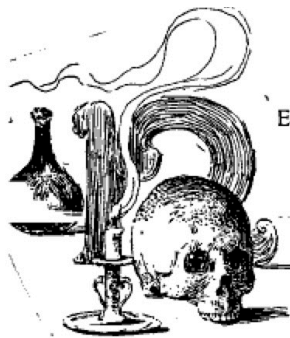
through time. St. Peter recalls his childhood as he gazes on the view, and he muses that "[w]hen he remembered his childhood, he remembered blue water" (*PH* 31). As Stephen Tennant fondly relates, "Willa Cather's art is essentially one of gazing beyond the immediate scene to a timeless sky or a timeless room, in which the future and the past, the unspoken and the unknown, forever beckon the happy reader" ("The Room Beyond," *OW v*). Tennant picks up on a key element to Cather's visual sensibility, which is that while her techniques in fiction borrowed from modern painters, Cather's visual imagination was Romantic in nature. That is, while she valued the intellectual premise of abstract art, she preferred representational art, and as a Modern Romanticist, no representational art struck a chord with her as strongly as the long history of woodcut art prints.

"Out of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present it must select the eternal material of art"

Cather's reliance on juxtaposition is a hallmark of her literary style, but of much more literary interest is the consistent way in which she uses this technique to deepen the association between themes that are central to her Romantic vision of art. Of the central themes that emerge in her literary ekphraseis, no element is as crucial, definitive, or pervasive as that of time. Time immemorial, timelessness, time lost, time stopped, brevity, and pre-history inhabit all of her ekphraseis through temporal juxtapositions, distortions, and simultaneities. Structurally similar to the simultaneity within her artistic synesthesia, Cather's overlapping temporalities reveal an organizing premise of her definition of art. Art is eternal, she confirms in "The Novel *Démeublé*," and "[o]ut of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present [the novel] must select the eternal material of art" ("The Novel Démeublé," *OW* 40). Cather's awe for what she considered the sacred, eternal elements of art is for her an inherently visual prospect, because the indelibility

of image, both as example and as metaphor, models the multiple temporalities and meditation on timelessness are the hallmark of her definition of art.

Abstract painter Mark Rothko wrote that “A painting is not about experience, it is experience,” and this captures the temporal essence that fascinated Cather; a work of art represents stopped time, a specific moment, that is conflated with the present of the viewer. Cather’s ekphraseis reflect on the passage of time; thus, as the stopped moment of the image is described by a viewer thinking about time, the temporalities accumulate: that of the image, the image’s relationship to time separate from its moment of being, the narrator/viewer’s temporality, and the reader’s temporality, which grows increasingly distant as we move further away from Cather’s own moment of production. If ever ekphrasis was a means by which to deepen our understanding of an entire text, Cather’s fixation on time can be seen as the key to her most fundamental and deeply-held beliefs about art. By showing how elements of time intersect the other elemental themes of Cather’s ekphraseis – namely passion, nature, and place – in her early illustrations, I set the foundation for a consideration of how time operates as a visual and ekphrastic element. The visuality of time, for Cather, is tied to visual art’s enduring nature, and thus manifests in a avid preference for old artistic techniques, such as woodcuts, in ekphrastic representations of memory, in nostalgic meditations on the industrial intrusion on the otherwise unchanging landscape, and of course, the eternal essence of human passion closely linked to memory and history, the “two or three human stories” that “go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before” (*OP* 119).



ON THE DIVIDE.

EAR Rattlesnake
Creek, on the
side of a little
draw stood Ca-
nute's shanty.
North, east,
south, stretched
the level Ne-
braska plain of

and bound tog
work. In one
stove, rusted a
a bed made of
It was fully e
was a heap of
was a chair an
portions. The
cupboard with

Figures 3.2 and 3.3: Illuminated Initial for "On the Divide"; "The Preacher" from Holbein's *Dance of Death*

In the January 1896 issue of the *Overland Monthly*, Cather illustrated the beginning initial of a short story named "On the Divide." The short story is a dark piece about a fierce, giant Norwegian immigrant facing another daunting stark winter along the remote reaches of the Nebraska plains. Suicide for these early immigrants was common, Cather suggests; "it causes no great sensation there when a Dane is found swinging to his own windmill tower, and most of the Poles after they have become too careless and discouraged to shave themselves keep their razors to cut their throat with" (67). The narrator, Canute Canuteson, is planning a similar fate for himself when new neighbors prove to be good company, especially the young daughter Lena. When Lena's increasing fascination with the material temptations in town draw her affections away from Canute, he kidnaps Lena in a brutal fashion and forces her to marry him, after which she realizes quickly that she prefers him after all. Canute is last seen weeping at his own doorstep, his giant form quaking in the snow as he is overcome with emotion at hearing his new wife say, "I'd rather have you" (74).

In his article "Cather as Illustrator," Timothy Bintrim confirms the authenticity of nine illustrations by Cather, which Polly Duryea speculated about in her oft-cited 1993 dissertation

Paintings and Drawings in Willa Cather's Prose. Among them is the illuminated initial from "On the Divide" (Figure 3.2). Bintrim suggests that Cather's illustrations imitate artist Elihu Vedder in Edward FitzGerald's ubiquitous *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* because of the "clear (if parodic) reference to the 'haunting, Oriental, S-curve illustrations'" in Vedder's own work (66). Cather did indeed own this text, and in fact gave a copy of it in 1892 to her girlhood crush Louise Pound with an ardent letter describing how she "just loved the book through and through as much as it is possible to love another persons work" [*sic*] (*Letters* 17). Bintrim argues that the motifs in Cather's drawing "illustrate Canute's medieval visions of torment and his rude carvings of men praying with skulls grinning above their heads," and that the elements of the illustration feature "classical expressions of memento mori found throughout the *Rubáiyát*" (74).

Cather's inclusion of the skull as a memento mori is a visual indicator of the themes she sustains in her word pictures and literary ekphraseis – not images of death, but reminders of time immemorial, of the human passions that outlive humans, and the brevity of our own role in these timeless pursuits. Bintrim's assessment of Cather's admiration for illustrator Elihu Vedder is accurate, but I believe his interpretation of the design itself is off, by some four hundred years. That is, Cather isn't paying homage to Vedder as patently as she is to Hans Holbein the Younger, the famous early modern woodcut printmaker who published the macabre collection of woodcut prints *Dances of Death* in 1538. Cather named her novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) after Holbein's *Dances With Death* illustration "The Bishop" (See *OW* 11). And while a visual allusion to the *Rubáiyát* isn't out of the question, all of the clues suggest that Cather's primary influence rests with Holbein.

In fact, the textual reference is unmistakable, when the narrative voice describes the carvings in Canute's wooden windowsill (literally woodcut art, like Holbein's): "At first glance

[the windowsills] looked as though they had been ruthlessly hacked and mutilated with a hatchet, but on closer inspection . . . [t]here seemed to be a series of pictures. There were men plowing with little horned imps sitting on their shoulders and on their horses' heads. There were men praying with a skull hanging over their heads and little demons behind them mocking their attitudes . . . It was a veritable Dance of Death by one who had felt its sting" (65-66). While Cather's literary allusion could not be more clear – she recites Holbein's title in her story – the illuminated initial also bears Holbein's influence. Memento mori were common not only to the *Rubáiyát*, as Bintrim suggests; they also found their genesis in early modern carvings like the ones of Holbein's.[100] The scenes she describes in her story are images taken directly from Holbein's collection; the ploughman with Death on his horse, a preacher with a skeleton just behind him, mocking him as he prays over his congregation. Cather writes that it "would sometimes have been hard to distinguish the men from their evil geniuses but for one fact, the men were always grave and were either toiling or praying, while the devils were always smiling and dancing" (65-66). This is precisely the scene in Figure 3.3, where the grinning skeleton wears the preacher's mantel and waves a jawbone over his head (*c.f.* Hagstrøm).

Cather's drawing *looks* like a wood cut, with its roughhewn lines and clear demarcations, albeit quite rudimentary compared to Holbein's. As Bintrim notes, Cather writes this shortcoming into the story itself: "Sometimes the work was very rude and careless . . . [s]everal of these boards had been split for kindling and it was evident that the artist did not value his work highly" (66). Vedder's artwork in the *Rubáiyát*, taken as a whole, is altogether thematically and aesthetically inconsistent with Cather's illustration in "On the Divide." Holbein's work not

[100] While the *OED* references the term first appearing in Shakespeare, it's earliest visual instantiations appear in medieval architecture and art; the *Dances of Death* series, which date from the mid 1400s, are in fact some of the earliest examples of the theme ("Memento Mori").

only suits the story in terms of its aesthetic qualities, but it is also referenced in the story itself, indicating that her drawing is also paying homage to his work. Duryea acknowledges that Holbein's "drawings may have influenced" Cather's short story, but given Cather's repeated incorporation of Holbein's images and themes into her works, I contend this is an established fact.

Distinguishing the correct source of Cather's ekphrastic representation of the memento mori at the front of "On the Divide" is significant because of what it reveals about her ekphrastic habits. Cather's ekphraseis juxtapose not only artistic genres, but also temporalities. And if Cather holds her literature to such a standard as the "eternal material of art," her artistic ekphraseis are doubly bound to be such exemplars. Thus Cather's literary ekphrasis of Holbein's *Dance of Death* coincides with a parallel illustration that imitates the most talented woodcutter of early modern history, a distinction that Cather would have valued, and not likely overlooked, in her artistic allusions. Charles Mignon points out that the artistic references in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, including the Hans Holbein woodcut, "all point to a world Cather valued, one in which innocence, authenticity, earnest faith, and natural values found important places" (par. 6). Cather's ekphrasis of Holbein highlights the timeless and elemental nature of death in a way that a contemporary reference never could. Like the hand-set lettering style she liked so much at Alfred Knopf's publishing house, wood cuttings carried a certain aesthetic premium for Cather. Quality work, which Cather knew well as a staunch revisionist and careful writer, takes time. And since time is at the heart of Cather's ekphraseis, no massively produced product like Vedder's *Rubáiyát* would do.

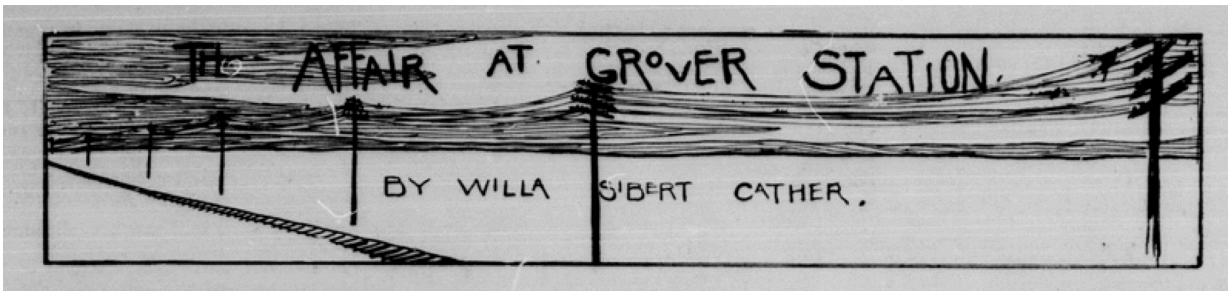


Figure 3.4. Headpiece to "The Affair at Grover Station": (Courtesy of *The Willa Cather Archive*)

Cather's title artwork for her 1900 short story "The Affair at Grover Station" shows how her affinity for woodcut drawings nevertheless advances a modernist nostalgia for the meaning of time in an industrial age. The short story, a rather sensational plot about a murderous romantic rivalry between two railway employees, begins with a description of the "brown, sun-dried wilderness between Grover Station and Cheyenne" (3). In Cather's drawing, the flat, featureless plain is unbroken by any natural characteristics. The horizon bisects the frame exactly between land and sky, but the telegraph wires and rail tracks disrupt an otherwise simple and expansive landscape. The imposing role of progress and industry is evident in the story as well; the unnamed narrator remarks that "[t]he telegraph poles scored the sky like a musical staff as they flashed by, and the stars, seen between the wires, looked like the notes of some erratic symphony" (3). Cather fuses nature to a musical metaphor in this description, but the presence of the telephone wires makes the analogy unsettling: the "symphony" is "erratic," the wires "scored" the sky with a cutting, almost disfiguring, connotation. The stars are unsuited to this man-made clef, and the unnatural pairing of nature and industry is repeated across the dark, foreboding landscape. The inhospitable "barren," "naked, grey plains," the unnamed narrator decides, is "conducive to an uncanny train of thought" (3). Cather's design, with its discrete lines, simple geometries, and linear pen stroke shadings, hearkens back to a woodcut aesthetic while introducing a more anxious sentiment about the passage of time; rail-tracks extend beyond

the horizon into an unknowable future, while the ancient and unchanging landscape is compromised by industrial progress.

Cather's modernist nostalgia for woodcut art was also a reaction to photography. In *O Pioneers!*, Carl Linstrum complains to Alexandra, "wood-engraving is the only thing I care about, and that had gone out before I began. Everything's cheap metal work nowadays, touching up miserable photographs, forcing up poor drawings, and spoiling good ones. I'm absolutely sick of it all" (122). This sentiment resonates with Cather's own perspective about photography, as when she wrote her friend Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant in 1915 about her trip to the Southwest, "I got a lot of glorious photographs in the Southwest . . . [t]hey are the pick of hundreds of attempts; in that light, and before such heights and depths the camera becomes inarticulate— it stutters and it raves. What that country waits for is a painter, but he'll have to be a big one, with an egotism as big as the Cliff Dwellers' was. Otherwise he'll only do colored photographs" (*Letters* 209). For Cather, the beauty of the Southwest could never be captured with something so automatic and mechanical as a camera.

The difference between the time-tested woodcuts and photography, as *My Ántonia* demonstrates, is that photography cannot capture the artful essence of a subject. When Jim sees Ántonia for the last time, his reverie of his childhood with her is "a succession of such pictures, fixed there like the old woodcuts of one's first primer: Ántonia kicking her bare legs against the sides of my pony when we came home in triumph with our snake; Antonia in her black shawl and fur cap, as she stood by her father's grave in the snowstorm; Ántonia coming in with her work-team along the evening sky-line" (188). Wladyslaw T. Benda, who illustrated the novel under Cather's close supervision and produced images that Cather directed "should be printed small on a liberal page, to give the effect of old woodcuts, and without captions" (*Letters* 250).

Jim's woodcut recollection of Antonia resembles these illustrations. Given that Ántonia herself is full of "immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true," she takes shape as an elemental force of art, one possessed of "immemorial human attitudes" and rendered in the time-honored tradition of woodcuts (*MA* 188).

When Antonia proudly brings forward a treasured collection of photographs and tintypes, her many children "contemplated the photographs with pleased recognition" (186). The photographs are the physical accompaniments of a family history, corollaries to an oral storytelling tradition. When Antonia shows an old tintype of Jim with farm hands Jake and Otto, the "young Cuzaks knew all about them" (187). Similarly, when Jim encounters Ántonia's first-born child Martha via a "crayon enlargement" in a "great gilt frame," proudly on display at the local photography store, Jim is amused by Ántonia's refusal to hide her daughter, scandalously born out of wedlock (164). These photographs haven't the "immemorial human attitudes," "universal and true," that the woodcuts of Antonia have; they aren't art. But they have a preserving quality, they document the existence of relationships, and thus Antonia's children knew Jim and his family members "as if the characters in their mother's girlhood had been remarkable people" (186).

In Cather's fiction, memory is often rendered as visual art in the mind's eye of her characters, who refer to their reflections of the past as "pictures." The affinity between memory and image is a natural one, and this is a trait that suits Cather's own Romantic values of memory, the past, and childhood supplying the fertile grounds for artistic inspiration.[101] Because memory is rendered into a picture, the hallmarks of Cather's synesthetic ekphraseis – casting art in terms

[101] David Stouck argues that Cather is "primarily a romantic writer who, like Cooper, Hawthorne, or F. Scott Fitzgerald, gave powerful expression to the American dream of individual freedom and power, and to the artist's struggle to transcend the world through his art" (433).

of music, for example – commonly appear. In *The Song of the Lark*, as Thea's childhood piano teacher Wunsch prepares to leave Moonstone, he considers how to inscribe a gift – Glück's operatic arrangement of *Orpheus* – for Thea.[102] He has revived his travel-worn copy, binding it handsomely and cleaning every page until the musical score is transformed into a "fine book" (94). While the book of music rests on his knee, Wunsch debates what to write to Thea;[103] his "thoughts wandered over a wide territory; over many countries and years . . . Pictures came and went without reason. Faces, mountains, rivers, autumn days in other vineyards far away. He thought of a *fuszreise* he had made through the Hartz Mountains in his student days; of the innkeeper's pretty daughter who had lighted his pipe for him . . . The roundhouse whistle woke him from his reveries. Ah, yes, he was in Moonstone, Colorado" (94). Wunsch is leaving Thea, his most treasured pupil, and the psychic pain of his departure is juxtaposed with various pleasant images from his past. These images put Thea into that context, as one among the best experiences of his life. Abruptly, Wunsch snaps to the present, but his recollection of delightful things proposes a future reflection, one in which Thea joins the list of "emotion recollected," to quote Wordsworth (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Mason 82).

This isn't the only time Thea is converted into a multi-temporal image through memory and reverie. As she leaves Moonstone for Chicago and bids farewell to her family, "Thea looked down at them as from a frame. . . Mrs. Kronborg reflected that she would never see just that same picture again . . . 'She won't come back a little girl'" (156). Framed in a living portrait through the rail car window, Mrs. Kronborg sees the present moment as one already a memory of

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[102] This reference is yet another ekphrastic layer to the scene; Orpheus, a musician poet, is a classical reference suited for a traditional ekphrasis; adding that the reference is to the operatic rendition of his tale, Cather folds in a broad array of artistic reference.

[103] Wunsch, (whose name fittingly means wish, or desire) inscribed "*Einst – O wunder*!," a line from a poem by Friedrich von Matthisson called "Adelaide," that was famously composed into a song by Ludwig von Beethoven. The words mean, "One day, o, marvel!"

the past. Her experience of this image-moment causes her to think of a future version of Thea, who will return to Moonstone a woman. Past, present, and future versions of Thea, all captured in the framing window of the train, suggest that Thea has, like Ántonia, the timeless artfulness that Cather celebrates in her literary ekphraseis. Unlike the photographs or tintypes of *My Ántonia*, Thea is described as a "picture," the same word Cather uses to describe the paintings hanging in the Art Institute of Chicago that Thea discovers while studying in Chicago. By situating Thea as a framed picture so early in the novel, as readers we can interpret this ekphrasis as the first sign in Cather's *Künstlerroman* that Thea has the attributes necessary to become a real artist.

Throughout *The Song of the Lark*, Cather incorporates paintings in every place where Thea sings, which gives rise to the elements of time and artistic synesthesia typically surrounding her ekphraseis. These spaces essentially amount to Thea having "a room of one's own" for her artistic growth, a necessity that Cather emphasizes throughout the novel (Woolf 4) When Thea auditions for the wealthy Nathanmeyers, "there were pictures there . . . Rousseaus and Corots, very fine ones . . . [i]n the hall Ottenburg had stopped Thea before a painting of a woman eating grapes out of a paper bag, and had told her gravely that there was the most beautiful Manet in the world" (276). The Manet that Fred describes is *The Street Singer*, controversial in its time for its casual subject matter, and hearkened as one of the paintings that "invented Modernity" (Musée d'Orsay). While at the audition, Thea tells a family story from Norway – one involving the death of a newly married couple at a festive dance – in order to explain how she feels while performing a particular song, and at the end of the song, "Old Mr. Nathanmeyer" has joined them and is applauding her performance. The "doorway made a frame for him, and he looked like a man in a picture, with the long, shadowy room behind him" (280).

Thea leaves the room, and Mr. Nathanmeyer "smiled softly, as if he were thinking about something very agreeable. '*Svensk sommar*,' he murmured. 'She is like a Swedish summer. I spent nearly a year there when I was a young man'" (280). Once more, Cather's romantic vision of artistic inspiration is captured in a framed, pictured moment. Transported to his youth, like Herr Wunsch, Mr. Nathanmeyer is moreover *seen* as a work of art. Reverie, recognition of youth's brevity and joy, is possibly Cather's favorite timeless, art-worthy theme. Thea experiences the musical piece through the re-telling of a childhood tale, and sings the operatic piece after telling the tale to her audience, and the "accompaniment sounded more than ever like the thumping and scraping of heavy feet" dancing (279). Combined with the fine art in the Nathanmeyer's home, Mr. Nathanmeyer's wistful reverie, the accumulation of artistic themes create a synesthetic ekphrasis.

In some instances, the absence of artwork is as telling as its presence. Thea's first teacher in Chicago is Andor Harsanyi, who trains her in piano until he discovers that Thea's natural talent lies in her voice. Mrs. Harsanyi is the one who describes Thea's laugh as "the laugh of the people," which I recounted above. Like every place where Thea has a significant artistic experience, the Harsanyis have paintings in their home. When Thea discovers that the Harsanyis are moving to New York, she is crushed; she is no longer Harsansyi's student, but she still had visited regularly to see their family, and sometimes sing. Mr. Harsanyi himself is desperate to leave Chicago, where his disappointments and discouragements were ceaselessly mounting. The space Harsanyi and Thea both had studied was no longer one of artistic inspiration. As Thea looks around the parlor room, she notes that the pictures have been stacked in a corner, and her "eyes travelled over the faint discolourations on the walls where the pictures had hung" (256). Knowing that Cather's ekphraseis in *The Song of the Lark* enact a global argument about the

inspiration and development of an artist's genius, the outlines of paintings hint at the artistic successes achieved in the Harsanyi studio in the past, and their absence forecloses any possibility of artistic creation in the future.

All of Cather's works are similarly infused with her synesthetic ekphraseis. In *My Ántonia*, Blind D'Arnault's piano playing is interspersed with a childhood reverie of how he learned to play on a plantation, opening a time warp into slavery while he approached "the highly artificial instrument through a mere instinct," striking a "crashing waltz" that as "piano playing, it was perhaps abominable, but as music it was something real, vitalized by a sense of rhythm that was stronger than the other senses" (106). When Jim visits Ántonia in town at the Harlings' home full of "gay pictures on the walls," Mrs. Harling plays "the old operas for [them] – 'Martha,' 'Norma,' 'Rigoletto,'" while telling the opera stories (99). In a grand ekphrasis of the dramatic production of Alexandre Dumas's *Camille*, Cather describes how incredibly moved Jim and Lena are by their experience of the tragic drama. Lena "wept unceasingly," during one scene, Jim "wept unrestrainedly" at the play's close, both were heartbroken at Marguerite's "sudden illness, when the gaiety was at its height, her pallor, the handkerchief she crushed against her lips, the cough she smothered under the laughter while Gaston kept playing the piano lightly" (150, 151, 150). In this lengthy re-telling of the drama's raw emotion, Cather closes the ekphrasis with her usual temporal distortion: Jim walked through the streets "mourning Marguerite Gauthier as if she had died only yesterday, sighing with the spirit of 1840," which had reached him "across long years and several languages" (151).

However, Cather adds to this reverie an important new element – nature. When Jim says good night to Lena, he is carrying with him Mrs. Harling's graduation present, an engraved silk umbrella. He then walks "out into the country part of town," where the scent of lilacs "blew into

[his] face with a sort of bitter sweetness" (87, 151). Jim is deep in reflection, and the chapter closes with Jim reflecting that "whenever that piece is put on, it is April" (151-2). The ekphrasis of *Camille* has the air of a major statement within the novel, and an epiphanic quality that links his ardent accounting of the play with his subsequent grief over the romantic tragedy, "the idea" of which "no circumstances can frustrate" (151). The shape of Cather's epiphanic ekphraseis, of what she might have considered an ekphr/asis masterpiece, begins to emerge. Everything seems present: multiple temporalities exist in Jim's present time, the 1840s of the drama, and the future Jim who remembers April whenever *Camille* is staged. Multiple arts exist in the play's "incidental music," which is noted on the program as "from the opera *Traviata*, which was made from the same story as the play" (149). The raw passion of the play is the occasion for the ekphrasis. But more importantly, nature takes form in the lilacs "blooming in the yards," the "the new leaves and blossoms together" manufacturing the "bitter sweetness" in the air (151). The ekphrasis is an indeterminate revelation, but there is a "bitter sweet(ness)" tenor, and the tragic actress, despite her moving performance, is "infirm," possibly "lame," with a "ravaged countenance" (151, 150). These details suggest that despite their emotional power, some aspects of the moment are off note, and could bear replacing. An actress better fit for the part, perhaps; sweet flowers instead of a "bitter sweetness." The tragic revelation, which is Jim's bittersweet epiphany, is that what is truly wrong about the experience is that his date for the event, hometown girl though she was, was Lena Lingard, and not Ántonia Shimerda.

In the next, and final, part of this chapter, I will look at how Cather uses ekphrasis to denote transcendence, and mark within these epiphanic ekphraseis four constant elements. Rather than incorporating earth, air, fire, and water, Cather's ekphrastic epiphanies feature nature (usually in terms of plant, animal, or celestial body), passion (in the vein of the Romantic

Wordsworth's "emotion recollected" as a constitutive element of art), time (elements of memory, timelessness, time immemorial, or ephemerality), and, fittingly, a Catherian sense of region and place. These elements, compounded with Cather's already synesthetic approach to art and ekphrasis, incorporate all of the traits I've discussed throughout this chapter, and structure the most memorable Catherian ekphraseis: Thea's epiphany among the cliff dwellings at Panther Canyon, and the illuminated/illuminating plough at sunset in *My Ántonia*.

Awakening the "historic imagination": Epiphanic Ekphraseis and the Artist

Thus far, I've discussed the ways Cather's literary ekphraseis enact a synesthetic representation of art. These ekphraseis, and the "picture-making quality" of her literature in general, fuse together a constellation of artistic fascinations: time, music, poetry, literature, love, and death, to name a few. Nevertheless, these categories pale in comparison to the power Cather invests in her literary landscapes and indigenous peoples. The addition of this vital component to her artistic synesthesia is the link between what we might consider Cather's picture-making and her place-making. If meditations on time and human passion are central to her literary ekphraseis, Cather's epiphanic ekphraseis incorporate regionalism as the elevating factor. Literary epiphanies often feature the four elements – earth, air, wind and fire; Martin Bidney describes them as the "chief activators of our reverie world" (12). In Bidney's study of epiphany, the "most expansive, mysterious, and intense moments" are achieved through "absorptive, encompassing, fluxile, or explosive elements" (13). Cather's epiphanies are no less elemental; Thea describes art as a "sheath" to hold the "shining, elusive element which is life itself" (304). Literary epiphanies, perhaps most memorably present in the works of James Joyce or Annie Dillard, recount an experience of a realization that ushers in some form of change. In the case of Willa Cather, her literary epiphanies represent a spiritual transcendence, which for Thea means

attaining the sublimity of operatic art, and for Jim Burden means attaining a genuine communion with the elemental artistic experiences of time, passion and the land.

Two of Cather's epiphanic elements are fundamental to human culture: the human passions captured in the "eternal material of art" and time, in its various themes, such as death, childhood, age, and timelessness. The other two elements are fundamental to individual human experience, and the world as it is experienced from a particular place. Cather's sense of region begins with nature (particularly plants and animals), but finds its rhetorical power in her nuanced sense of place. Altogether, these four elements – passion, time, nature, and place – offer a closer look into what Manuel Broncano sees in Cather's literary epiphanies: the "perfect communion of land and self, which is the source of artistic inspiration" (385). As I explain below, through this four-fold epiphanic ekphraseis, Cather's heroines Thea Kronborg and Ántonia Shimerda are each figured as timeless vessels of art, both come into possession of all four elements through different paths. The global hermeneutic of Thea's ekphrastic epiphany might be seen as the message, "*Art* is time." In *My Ántonia*, perhaps the message is "*Time* is art." That is, while Antonia embodies the characteristics of a timeless work of art, Jim's ekphrastic epiphany advances a simpler message than that of *The Song of the Lark*; Jim's memoir is about youth recollected, about time fled. Thea's is about possessing a "historic imagination" that unleashes her formidable capacity as an artist (*Letters* 205).

In *The Song of the Lark*, the tamarisk plant and the yucca plant each come to represent, respectively, Moonstone, Colorado and northern Arizona's Ottenburg Ranch. Cather's selection of these plants is probably owing to their biological traits; both grow extraordinarily deep roots (up to sixty feet), and live as long as one hundred years. The tamarisk plants provide natural hedges to the unmanicured lawns of Kohlers, where Thea studied piano, and the "Mexican

houses" that she loved to visit; the Ancient People of the Panther Canyon cliff dwellings used the yucca plants to make their shoes and clothing. In *My Ántonia*, the unique flora identifier for the Nebraska prairie is the red grasses. Jim is in awe when he first takes in the prairie: he "felt motion in the landscape . . . and in the earth itself, as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it herds of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping..." (17). These signature plants are temporal and emotional touchstones for Cather's characters. They exemplify not only the way landscape commands a place of character in Cather's novels, but also the way that landscape is an integral part of their human experience. Jim Burden finds his own America in the red prairie grasses: "As I looked about me I felt that the grass was the country, as the water is the sea . . . And there was so much motion in it; the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running" (17). Similarly, Thea finds her sustaining inspiration in the plants of Moonstone: "They save me: the old things, things like the Kohlers' garden. They are in everything I do" (460). In *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia*, the landscape is inseparable from and constitutive of Cather's formulation of real 'Art.'

On the wagon trail through the forest leading to Ottenburg ranch, Thea's personality is "lost in the thrilling blue of the new sky and the song of the thin wind in the *pinons*. The old, fretted lines which marked one off, which defined her . . . were all erased" (296). Like Jim in his first wagon ride to Black Hawk, Nebraska, Thea's communion with the landscape of Arizona has a washing effect on her personality and psyche. Panther Canyon is where, as Cather wrote to her publisher, Thea "first awoke her historic imagination – so necessary to a great Wagnerian singer – and that there . . . she really grew, all at once" (*Letters* 205). Simple though it is, this is Cather's definition of epiphany; among the cliff dwelling ruins, Thea encounters the artistic potsherds of the "Ancient people," "beautifully decorated," and as she comes to understand this

ancient culture through its enduring artifacts, Thea is fundamentally changed (302, 305). She is stricken at how the core elements of life – true now as then – include a human need to express its condition in art: “Food, fire, water, and something else—even here, in this crack in the world, so far back in the night of the past! Down here at the beginning that painful thing was already stirring; the seed of sorrow, and of so much delight” (305). The “something else,” that “painful thing” Thea is describing is the kernel force of life that is best expressed in art, a concept that Cather sought to express as ardently as Thea sought to possess.

Cather foreshadows this pending revelation when Thea first sees a symphony orchestra perform; the visceral reaction that the performance alights in Thea is cast in terms of land, animal, memory, and art, but it’s missing a vital element – a knowledge of its history, a link to time immemorial: “Here were the sand hills, the grasshoppers and locusts,” “the reaching and reaching of high plains, the immeasurable yearning of all flat lands”; “[t]here was home in it, too; first memories, first mornings long ago”; a soul “that had dreamed something despairing, something glorious, in the dark before it was born; a soul obsessed by what it did not know, under the cloud of a *past it could not recall*” (199; emphasis mine). Thea intuits the historical significance of the timeless human passion conveyed in the symphony performance, but she hasn’t yet laid claim to her part in that history. Once in Panther Canyon, Thea’s comes closer to this history through the artistic works by the “ancient potters” of the cliff dwellers: “jars done in a delicate overlay, like pine cones,” “patterns in a low relief, like basket-work,” some “decorated in color, red and brown, black and white, in graceful geometrical patterns,” all of which “brought her centuries nearer to these people” (305). This pottery ekphrasis is the gateway to Thea’s own ancient inheritances, which are conflated with themes of survival and necessity in Thea’s consideration of the cliff dwellers’ art.

The cliff-dwellings ultimately come to provide Thea with an artistic refuge that enables her transformation. Thea first gets a room of her own when she is quite young, when she uses the income from her three piano students to outfit a tiny room in the “half-story” upstairs (56). She describes her first private bedroom as “one of the most important things that ever happened to her” because, “separated from the other upstairs sleeping-rooms . . . her mind worked better. She thought things out more clearly” (58). Thea has various rooms of her own, so to speak, throughout her life, but it isn’t until she builds her own room in the cliff dwellings that she achieves the artistic epiphany that defines her future existence.

After furnishing a room in the ruins, Thea spends countless hours there alone in thought, “holding pleasant and incomplete conceptions in her mind—almost in her hands.” (299). These ideas, though “scarcely clear enough to be called ideas,” are synesthetic: they “had something to do with fragrance and color and sound, but almost nothing to do with words” (299). The creative process Thea had in her childhood has returned in this idyllic setting: “Here everything was simple and definite, as things had been in childhood” (306). The ideas Thea discovers in Panther Canyon, however, change her radically; she “could become a mere receptacle for heat, or become a color, like the bright lizards that darted about on the hot stones outside her door; or she could become a continuous repetition of sound, like the cicadas” (300). Like the potsherds, which symbolized “fetters that bound one to a long chain of human endeavor,” Thea begins to understand that her music is part of a timeless tradition, one bound up with nature, “fragrance and color and sound,” that is deposited in her through her elemental connection with the world’s own history of art (306, 299). “Not only did the world seem older and richer,” Thea reflects, but “she herself seemed older” (306). This synesthetic experience matures Thea as an artist; she feels “united and strong” (306).

The themes in this epiphany, which include animals, ideas placed in her hand, and the image of Thea as a receptacle or vessel, continue throughout her stay at Ottenburg Ranch. Thea bathes every day in the river at the bottom of Panther Canyon, a ritual that "came to have a ceremonial gravity" (304). The river, "the only living thing left of the drama that had been played out in the canyon centuries ago," is where she imagines the lives of the cliff dweller women, especially the "cleverer ones [who] made the vessels" (304, 303). The art of the pottery, which "expressed the strongest Indian need" in "graceful jars," represented their "most direct appeal to water, the envelope and sheath of the precious element itself" (303). As Thea reflects on the ways that art intersected the very fabric of survival for the Ancient People, she experiences an epiphany: "what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself, – life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose?" (304). Thea suddenly recalls seeing this passion contained in art everywhere: "[t]he Indian women had held it in their jars. In the sculpture she had seen in the Art Institute, it had been caught in a flash of arrested motion. In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals" (304). The "something else" has finally occurred to Thea, and it is as simple as the elements themselves; it is as simple as survival (305). For Thea, it is earth, animal, and timelessness held and expressed in art.

On Thea's last visit to the canyon before Fred arrives, a large eagle flies across the canyon skyline, dives down and then flies up into the sun "until his plumage was so steeped in light that he looked like a golden bird" (321). Thea "sprang to her feet as if she had been thrown up from the rock by volcanic action" (321). Compelled by the very land to acknowledge the symbolic force of the eagle, "from a cleft in the heart of the world [Thea] saluted it": "O eagle of

eagles! Endeavor, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art!" (321). Upon Thea's return to the Ottenburg ranch, she is of a new mind. She will no longer wait on providence or permission to devote her life entirely to art; she will no longer look for validation or support from her family. A "persistent affirmation," "like the tapping of the woodpecker in the one tall pine tree across the chasm," inhabits her mind after her ekphrastic epiphany in Panther Canyon (307). Thea determines that without further delay, she will go to Germany to study. Mentally, Thea lets go of her family, and even lets go of Moonstone, with resolute determination: "[t]he Cliff-Dwellers had lengthened her past. She had older and higher obligations" (308). Before she leaves for Germany, Thea repeats Harsanyi's advice to Fred: "if one became an artist one had to be born again, and that one owed nothing to anybody" (378). Thea sees herself as "born again," like the phoenix or spiritually redeemed; for Cather, the birth of an artist is a sacred matter (378).

When the novel returns to Thea, she is a fully formed artist, and an accomplished opera diva performing in New York. Fred, Dr. Archie, Harsanyi, her childhood muse Spanish Johnny, and an unnamed stranger who is likely her first teacher Herr Wunsch, have all made their way to New York City for her debut as *Sieglinde*. In this triumphant finale, Thea "came into full possession" of the "inheritance that she herself had laid up" (477). The passions awakened in her during her time in Arizona culminate with her years of training and she becomes a perfected artist; full of the vital elements that Cather coalesces around the ekphrastic Thea. In a dramatic operatic ekphrasis, Cather stages the performance for the reader through the intensely critical eyes of Mr. Harsanyi, now himself a rather famous musician. Thea is rendered in terms of plants, temporalities, and her passionate artistry: Her voice was "[l]ike the spring, indeed, it blossomed into memories and prophecies, it recounted and it foretold," "her body was absolutely the

instrument of her idea"; as "[a]ll that deep-rooted vitality flowered in her voice, her face, in her very finger-tips," Thea "felt like a tree bursting into bloom" (475, 478).

Thea is consumed by her own art until nothing remains but her art. Her personal life long since sacrificed in exchange for creating herself into a living masterpiece, Thea explains to Dr. Archie that her life is "like being woven into a big web. You can't pull away, because all your little tendrils are woven into the picture. It takes you up, and uses you, and spins you out, and that is your life. Not much else can happen to you" (455-6). Thea doesn't age like others do, and she no longer belongs to herself. Her performances are enmeshed in the very society that adores her, spun out into a web "picture" that belongs to her fans. She is herself a temporal juxtaposition, her past, present and future consigned to the "tendrils" that are "woven into the picture." She is suspended in this image, portrayed as an image, and her artistic passions and the image of her as a work of art are timeless. In this light, Thea is herself an ekphrasis, a public work of art.

Figure 3.5: ***Cather Country, Nebraska*** **(Photo Courtesy of Mary Caperton Morton)**

If Thea needed an epiphany to lay claim to the ancient inheritance of art, Ántonia is the living breathing, inspirational source. In the introduction, Jim explains that "To speak her name

was to call up pictures of people and places, to set a quiet drama going in one's brain" (8). Ántonia is pre-figured as an ekphrasis before the narrative even starts, not as an artist like Thea, but as a pure element of art. Thea becomes art as her singing comes to represent the very essence of that art form, she is the image – stopped in time by making history, memorialized for an age – *of* singing. Antonia begins life as an already elemental force of earth and time, which Jim tries to recapture in his memoir. Jim returns to Ántonia's farm at the end of the novel, and remarks that Ántonia "had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade—that grew stronger with time" (188). Despite the many years passed, the changes in the culture and land, Jim finds himself marveling that "[w]hatever else was gone, Antonia had not lost the fire of life" (179). Her "identity stronger," she has reared a large family and a successful farm and is still part of the country Jim left; upon his return she "was there, in the full vigour of her personality, battered but not diminished" (177). The "fire of life" in Antonia, so closely connected to her own hardworking relationship with the land, is something that doesn't age (179).

In addition to time, Antonia represents the landscape; she may as well be one of the cliff dwellers in *The Song of the Lark*, whose very existence is inseparable from the landscape itself. Where the cliff dwellers embody the river at the bottom of the canyon, Ántonia embodies the vast prairie, turning up the soil and converting prairie to farmland from the time she was barely a teenager until the last pages of the novel. And hence when Jim reflects upon Antonia, "fixed there like the old woodcuts of one's first primer" the lesson he is learning is about life in art, the brevity and yet indelibility of such a life remembered (188). These are lessons he learns from Ántonia, which he experiences as visual art: Ántonia "kicking her bare legs" against Jim's pony, or stoic in a bitter winter storm as she mourns at her father's grave, Antonia pictured on the horizon with her plough-team (188). The woodcut pictures that Jim imagines depict Ántonia in

terms of farm animals, the dire winter weather of Nebraska, death and inconsolable grief, and finally, as a silhouette against the open sky above the farmland. Through these elements, Jim apprehends that Antonia is composed of the "eternal material of art," the essence of life and art that Cather tasks every literary artist to create (*OW* 40).

Antonia doesn't need to re-connect in communion with the land to enter her own role as living human art, but Jim must experience an epiphany to recognize that passing time is the foundation of the world's art. By the time Jim has his own "mental awakening" in college, he is studying Dante and Virgil under the influence of a friend and scholar he admires very much, Gaston Cleric (141). Whenever Jim studies the classics, he is transported into his "own infinitesimal past" (143). Like Thea when she has her revelation in the canyon, Jim's ideas "stood out strengthened and simplified now, like the image of the plough against the sun" (143). As Cleric trains Jim in the classics, "whenever [Jim's] consciousness was quickened, all those early friends were quickened within it," brought forward in his mind "so much alive" that he "scarcely stopped to wonder whether they were alive anywhere else, or how" (143, 144). The ekphraseis of Dante and Virgil, for Jim, call forward his own history, and his own memories of "places and people" as they pertain to the landscape of his youth (143). Later, Jim relates a lesson from Cleric Gaston wherein Virgil has "decreed that the great canvas [*The Aeneid*], crowded with figures of gods and men, should be burned rather than survive him unperfected" (145). Virgil's literary work, cast as a painting, is then transposed into an image of the land for Jim: he reflects on the "perfect utterance" of Virgil's *Georgics*, "where the pen was fitted to the matter as the plough is to the furrow"; this phrase, inscribed on the dedication page of the novel, is "optima dies… prima fugit" (145; Cather's ellipses). Virgil's adage, true two thousand years ago and true today, Jim knows only too well: "the best days are the first to flee" (144). Jim's

college enlightenment is situated around a textual ekphrasis of Virgil colliding with his vivid childhood memories; Cather's synesthetic ekphraseis, it seems, are the only means for her characters to experience an epiphany.

Of course, Jim's memories all anchor into the most famous ekphrasis in *My Ántonia*, although few people call it as such: the plough against the sun that Jim, Antonia, Tiny, and Lena see after a hazy summer picnic in the country. This trademark moment in Cather's novel has come to stand for Cather's Nebraska, and thus Cather herself; it is on the cover of a few editions of *My Ántonia*, is the design element for the Willa Cather Foundation, and, as above, placed on the welcome sign to Willa Cather's Red Cloud, Nebraska (Figure 3.5). The plough represents the height of her "picture-making" quality, one burned into the minds of her readers forever (*KA* 45). But if we pan backwards, the details surrounding this moment make it paradigmatically ekphrastic, and the themes I have developed throughout this chapter – Cather's synesthetic blending of sight, scent, and sound, her thematic blending of animal, land, time, and art – are all powerfully present. Ultimately, the scene comes to represent the ekphrastic epiphany that Jim returns to emotionally, over and over, throughout his life.

Just before sunset, Jim, Antonia, Lena and Tiny are caught up in the scintillating prospect of Coronado and his comrades, over three hundred years before, exploring Black Hawk, Nebraska. Jim relates that a farmer had "turned up a metal stirrup of fine workmanship, and a sword with a Spanish inscription on the blade" that linked the sword's craftsmanship to Cordova (133). In their wonderment, Jim reveals that at school he learned Coronado had "'died in the wilderness of a broken heart,'" a fate that Ántonia concurs has taken many lives before (133). As they muse about history, love, and death, the landscape comes alive with color: the "curly grass" was "on fire," the "bark of the oaks turned red as copper" (135). The river is cast in a "shimmer

of gold," while the "sandbars glittered like glass, and the light trembled in the willow thickets as if little flames were leaping among them" (135). Birds begin to call out; the "ringdove mourned plaintively" and "somewhere off in the bushes an owl hooted" (135). As Jim and his childhood friends see the day come to an end, the epiphanic elements of Cather's ekphraseis set the stage for the visual culmination to a heavily symbolic day. As a "great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun," everyone jumps up to take in the startling image (135). The plough is "magnified across the distance by the horizontal light" just as it is magnified across time throughout Jim's life, and is "exactly contained" in the sun's circumference as if framed (135). The image, "a picture writing on the sun" disappears as quickly as it emerged and as the sun sets the plough becomes "forgotten," and has "sunk back to its own littleness" (135).

Like a painting, the image of the plough is framed, but it is framed in the very symbol of passing time: the setting sun. It has all the elements so central to Cather's other artistic renderings, but its very meditation is on time: the ephemerality of one element – youth – juxtaposed to the timelessness of another – landscape and human survival. The overall impression in Jim's mind is permanent, however, and as he expresses his love to Antonia on a return visit home, telling her "the idea of you is part of my mind," Jim is once more captured in the light of the setting sun, which "lay like a great golden globe in the low west" (173). Instead of a plough superimposed on its surface, the sun faces the moon in the east, "as big as a cart-wheel" (173).[104] All the flora – "every little tree and shock of wheat, every sunflower stalk and clump of snow-on-the-mountain" – is accentuated in the light of the sun and moon facing one another across the "level land, resting on opposite edges of the world" (173). Jim feels the "old

[104] Unlike the imagery of the plough, which exemplified the spirit of their childhood, intimately linked with the land, the cartwheel implies progress, travel, and that is exactly what lies ahead of Jim, who will not come back to Black Hawk for some twenty years.

pull of the earth," the "solemn magic" of sunset in the Nebraska countryside. Jim cherishes his last look at Ántonia's face, as "the closest, realest face, under all the shadows of women's faces, at the very bottom of [his] memory" (173). There is no dusk; only a few moments where sun and moon face off, and then it is night. Jim wishes he "could be a little boy again," when the setting sun held the exciting possibilities of unknown tomorrows (173). There is no such anticipation as he leaves Antonia, only a steady satisfaction that she, and the countryside, remain unchanged.

Thea, Antonia, and even Jim have already in them the elemental sources of art – emotion, timelessness, the landscape and their region. As Thea remarks, "there is no work of art so big or so beautiful that it was not once all contained in some youthful body" and to create her art, as "old Dumas" explained to the Romanticists, she "needed but one passion and four walls" (140). Cather's Romantic vision, expressed through her paraphrasing of Wagner in her journalism and in *The Song of the Lark*, is particularly relevant to *My Ántonia*: "art is only a way of remembering youth" (*Lark* 460). At its root, art for Cather is about memory; it is a sheath to contain the emotional quicksilver fleeting time. Through living, Thea, Antonia, and Jim discover these elements, this passion. Because Cather ultimately renders human passion into a tangible art, it is something that they can hold in their hands. Harsanyi's child Andor remarks that "Miss Kronborg's hands are every kind of animal there is" after she entertains him with shadow puppets (181). Fred Ottenburg lovingly whispers, "[e]very kind of stringed instrument there is plays in your hands, Thea" (379). The ideas she encounters in Panther Canyon are "almost in her hands," and when she gives her final master performance, her ideas all "lay under her hand" (299, 478). Ántonia holds the abundance of the earth in her hands; she had "only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last" (188). When Jim recalls his childhood

journey to Black Hawk, his introduction into "that obliterating strangeness" that was to become the fabric of his life, he realizes that the "feelings of that night were so near that [he] could reach out and touch them with [his] hand" (175). Hands can create art, hold art, and are the metonym for humankind's endeavors and labor on earth. In repeatedly making concrete the elements of her ekphraseis, and placing them in her character's hands, the final product of their experiences is, in a sense, hand-hewn.

In a letter to the editor of the Commonweal about *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather described her awe for the old mission churches in the Southwest: "the hand-carved beams and joists, the utterly unconventional frescoes, the countless fanciful figures of the saints, no two of them alike, seemed a direct expression of some very real and lively human feeling" (*OW* 5). The mission art is inseparable from its history, it is a time capsule: "I soon felt that no record of them could be as real as they are themselves. They are their own story, and it is foolish convention that we must have everything interpreted for us in written language. There are other ways of telling what one feels, and the people who built and decorated those many, many little churches found their way and left their message" (5). Thea, Ántonia, and Jim are themselves time capsules. They are vessels, containing the life force of human emotion and passion, which has been carved out, like the early modern woodcuts and the cliff dweller potsherds, with their hands. Like the "people who built and decorated those many, many little churches," Cather uses visual art to share what she feels, to grapple with the themes that powered her existence, and to – earnestly, passionately, insistently – leave her message (6).

Chapter 4: Reading below the (Bible) Belt: Double Vision in Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor's "Christ-haunted" South

"a small history in a universal light"

Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, a photographer and painter respectively, complement and contradict one another in a way that bookends the arguments that I made earlier about Gilman and Jewett's drastically different interpretations of the northeast. Critics often group O'Connor and Welty together as two of the leading voices in Southern literary regionalism, placing their names alongside authors such as William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, Alice Walker, and Robert Penn Warren. Very few critics, however, have considered Welty or O'Connor in the context of their art. Such an endeavor is worthwhile, for if O'Connor and Welty are of the south, they are not of the *same* south. Despite their many similarities – both unwed, both called back from a career in the north to return home permanently, both known for the powerful themes of vision (and, oddly, birds) throughout their works – in many ways, Welty and O'Connor are nearly opposite, in both their fiction and their modes of artistic expression.

O'Connor once remarked that "[t]he best American fiction has always been regional . . . wherever there has been a shared past, a sense of alikeness, and the possibility of reading a small history in a universal light."[105] While critics might trouble such a claim, they nonetheless agree that Welty and O'Connor both speak to issues far beyond their regional scope; indeed, Louise Westling claims that Welty and O'Connor are both writing counter-narratives to "the patriarchal version of Southern life" (24). However, Welty and O'Connor, from Mississippi and Georgia, respectively, recognized that region did little to unite their literary style; as O'Connor wrote, "I am not one of the subtle sensitive writers like Eudora Welty. I see only what is outside and what

[105] (qtd. in Chronaki 37).

sticks out a mile" (O'Connor and Fitzgerald 141). Welty's reaction to O'Connor was no less extreme, as when she mailed a copy of O'Connor's short story "A Good Man is Hard to Find" to her publisher; in the letter, she declares "it terrified me so, it was ages before I read any others – and before I knew too well what she was doing. I still feel terrified by it." Welty nonetheless admired O'Connor's work, which she reveals in her next sentence: "Isn't the car trip wonderful?" (*What There Is to Say* 181). The works of Welty and O'Connor side by side produce very little in common, and it is clear that though they are of the same region, they are not of the same universe.

What unites Welty and O'Connor, besides both writing from and about their own Souths (and about how women fit into these respective Souths), is that they are exploring an aesthetic and a political perspective in their literature that began in their art. Both women, through their art and their literature, are asking questions about their respective intellectual, spiritual, and social communities. Their questions, however, are different: O'Connor asks why humankind has abandoned religion, while Welty, as I will demonstrate below, asks why religion has abandoned humankind. They ask these questions using their process of artistic creation as a mode of literary exploration: O'Connor's art is a practice of cutting, reversing, upending; Welty's is one of blending, interspersing, integrating. Where O'Connor's work is cartoonlike, black and white, and satirical, Welty's is photorealistic, greyscale by virtue of its medium, and sympathetic. O'Connor's southern characters are constantly brushing up against the moral and social detriments of industrialization, and "every poisonous breath from Hollywood or Madison Avenue"; Welty's cosmopolitan characters return home, because "the home tie is the blood tie," to navigate the moral and social detriments of a decaying and static south (O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 200; Welty, *On Writing* 57).

In their own way, both authors also take up the motif of the "godless intellectual," which is the central foil in many of O'Connor's tales, as a means of grappling with their own questions about belonging, faith, and even what it means to be a regionalist author. In my first chapter, I argued that literary regions denote cultural, and not merely geographical, difference. In no place are cultural demarcations – be they race, class, or gender – more explicitly linked to religion than in the American south. This chapter will explore how the artistic aesthetics of O'Connor and Welty inform their literature, and how the arguments emerging in their visual art relate to their representations of the South and its Christians in their literary works. Moreover, I will show how Welty and O'Connor engage themes of religion in the south to question whether or not they themselves belong. O'Connor believed that the "vaporization of religion in America" began with Emerson, and that "the dissolution of belief is eventually inevitable" (O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 161). In contrast, Welty's ambivalence on the subject is telling: the words "religion" and "Christ" never appear, even once, in her essay collection *On Writing* (2002), while her photographs reveal a near-obsession with the traditions of southern Christianity.[106] These aesthetic traits and thematic habits, memorialized in O'Connor and Welty's artwork, encourage us to see more in their literature, to expand our own field of vision to include their artwork as part of their oeuvre and their overall contribution to Southern letters.

Julius Rowan Raper writes that "[l]oyalty to place is a double-edged sword, all blade, without a hilt to hold, as sure to wound the wielder as anyone," and such risks are particularly palpable for women authors writing in what Flannery O'Connor termed the "Christ-haunted" South (Raper 6; O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 44). Especially revealing, and a subtle

[106] I suggest this is the case based on the large percentage of her published photographs capturing churches (albeit most abandoned), graveyards, and many of the African American traditions of worship in the communities she documented.

reminder of the risks that both authors were taking in their own communities, is that Welty and O'Connor both relate to their artistic vision in terms of double vision. As I explain below, O'Connor sees double through the anagogical vision of Catholic doctrine operating in the physical realm of her fictional worlds, while Welty's artistic metaphor of "two pictures at once" describes how she blends multiple perspectives in her artistic and literary representations. For Welty, I argue that a queer activism in her photography is realized via ekphrasis to critique organized religion in *The Optimist's Daughter*, while for O'Connor, her self-conscious disdain for the abstract art movements of American modernism, apparent in the studied concreteness of her art, can be read as an ekphrastic metaphor for her own interpretations of Catholic doctrine.

The theme of double vision is not only a productive way to look at the visual nature of their fiction, and its relationship to art, but is also helpful in terms of understanding how Welty and O'Connor navigated the challenges of being women writers in a masculine literary tradition. The images I discuss in this chapter include recently acquired and recently discovered paintings by O'Connor and Welty that reveal an unexpected side to each author. O'Connor's paintings confess an artist who was ambitious, intellectual, and experimental – the antithesis of her cartoons and her self-professed artistic provincialism. Welty's mural, titled *Mississippi State Fair*, shows a frank, direct fascination with the female body that underscores a latent queer aesthetic in her photographs and literature. Both of these discoveries permit new ways of discussing these women artists in terms of their gender, their region, and their art. In the following pages, I attend to some of these readings in Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and *Wise Blood*, and Eudora Welty's *The Optimist's Daughter*.

Artistic Epistemologies: The Artist's Shadow in Literary Form

Figure 4.1: *Ruins of Windsor*, 1937-1940: © Eudora Welty, LLC; Courtesy Eudora Welty Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

In Welty's photograph of the Windsor ruins above, the geometry of the construction contrasts the wild overgrowth of the Mississippi countryside: a broken down fence, trees among the pillars, encroaching grasses and vines. There are many photographs of Windsor, a Civil War-era mansion in Alcorn, Mississippi, that burned to the ground in 1890, but Welty's composition is unique; its triangular relief against the landscape and sky highlights the tension between nature and the human-made ruins. In this photograph, Welty's female gaze is part of its formal composition: her shadow, patently feminine in her a-line skirt, stretches across the lower third of the image, a reminder that the view, and its attendant emotions, are specifically hers. Welty's shadow in a photograph of decaying southern architecture reinforces one of my central claims about literary regionalism and ekphrasis: that visual art and literary regionalism share the same critical cruxes. Like her literature, Welty's photographs attain toward representing a real location, but in recasting the local object for an outside viewer via visual or textual means, the representations are inescapably cast from her unique gaze, and skewed by her commitments as an artist. In a way, this photograph is a self-portrait, but as a mere shadow, it matches Welty's reluctance, in her fiction, to be overtly persuasive. In "Must the Novelist Crusade?", Welty

writes that “[t]he ordinary novelist has only one message: ‘I submit that this is one way we are’ . . . [t]he ordinary novelist does not argue; he hopes to show, to disclose” (*On Writing* 77–8). Like the *Ruins of Windsor*, which captures a structure of southern patriarchy long since burned to the ground, Welty casts her shadow into her literary frames, to an often surprisingly subversive effect.

Figures 4.2 and 4.3: O’Connor, *Self-Portrait* and Cimabue’s portrait of St. Francis of Assisi (reprinted in Jørgensen 299)

O’Connor had no such delicacy about intruding upon her texts, a trait that we also see in her shameless promotion of this 1953 “cutter” (i.e., accurate) of a self-portrait (Figure 4.3). O’Connor sent snapshots of this painting, sometimes posing with it, to friends, publishers, and whomever needed her image for publicity. Of course, her publishers preferred actual photographs for the book jackets to this painting, but O’Connor nevertheless pressed them to consider the painting, as she generally despised most photographs of herself.[107] As she explained to her long-time pen pal known for many years to scholars as “A,” the portrait “is not exactly the

[107] In a letter to her lifelong friends Sally and Robert Fitzgerald, she described a series of photographs for Harcout thus: “I had to go have my picture taken for the purposes of Harcourt, Brace. They were all bad. (The pictures.) The one I sent looked as if I had just bitten my grandmother and that this was one of my few pleasures, but all the rest were worse” (O’Connor and Fitzgerald 31).

way I look but it's the way I feel" (O'Connor and Fitzgerald 110).[108] O'Connor painted the portrait after an acute flare-up of lupus, the disease that brought her home abruptly from her fledgling career as a writer in the northeast, landed her permanently on a remote family farm, and claimed her life prematurely at the age of 39. But another context to this painting, possibly, is the adjacent image of Saint Francis of Assisi, which was reproduced in a biography that O'Connor herself had read (*c.f. HB* 133). O'Connor's asymmetrical positioning of her eyes, the shading on her temples,[109] and the short hair sticking away from her hairline are all vaguely reminiscent of this Byzantine-era portrait.[110] The halo/hat in O'Connor's self-portrait, immediately recognizable from that medieval tradition, is the most striking similarity, and on closer consideration, the similarities multiply, enough to question how seriously O'Connor herself might have perceived the connection with St. Francis, especially given her familiarity with his biography and this image reproduced in it.

Saint Francis is the patron saint of animals, particularly birds, and the lore surrounding his ministry includes episodes of preaching to birds, birds following his instructions to be silent during a sermon, and having a pheasant pet, who followed him around for a year (Jørgensen 312). O'Connor's self-portrait, posed with her own pheasant pet whom she also calls a "friend," is a visual reminder of her personal and literary obsession with birds, which scholars such as David Meyer point out was also connected to O'Connor's Catholic faith (O'Connor and

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[108] "A"'s identity has been discovered in recent years, but disclosing it does not advance any of my purposes. I refer to O'Connor's pen-pal as "A" throughout this chapter, because this has been the habit of scholars, even since the discovery of "A"'s identity.

[109] The shading at the temples is even more apparent in better, color, reproductions of Cimabue's portrait. The portrait I have included is the one that O'Connor would have seen in Jørgensen's biography, but it's likely O'Connor saw other reproductions of this famous portrait, and in those, the shading at the temples is remarkably similar in color and appearance.

[110] This is a style that O'Connor mentions in her short story, "Parker's Back": Parker has tattooed on him "the haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ with all-demanding eyes" (*Complete Stories* 522).

Fitzgerald 252).[111] Saint Francis connected birds to his doctrine of poverty, and of allowing the world of god to meet earthly needs (Jørgensen 179-81). Poverty was also a powerful concept to O'Connor, who wrote to her friend "A," "I work from such a basis of poverty that everything I do is a miracle to me" (O'Connor and Fitzgerald 127). The extent to which O'Connor felt that she embodied the traits of Saint Francis, at this point in time, is an unexplored question. If, as she suggests, the portrait captures the way she "feels," perhaps part of that feeling was one of martyrdom, or even devout sainthood. If nothing else, she might have humorously regarded herself as the savior of her "boarders," what she called her feathered charges (O'Connor and Fitzgerald 223).[112] As I show below, gestures of self-denigration, and even martyrdom, are regular occurrences for O'Connor; thinking of this habit in the context of her and her birds' patron saint makes the similarities between the paintings all the more striking.

In the following sections, I will show how the visual aesthetics of Flannery O'Connor's early artworks, much like those of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, predict the structural and thematic scope of her stories. As in my earlier chapter on Gilman and Jewett, I read O'Connor and Welty asynchronously, in order to make the contrasting nature of Welty's progressivism all the more apparent. This chapter will show how O'Connor's artistic reversals find their verbal counterpart in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," and how this aesthetic relates to the paradoxical strain of anti-intellectualism in her art and her first novel, *Wise Blood*. I close the section on O'Connor with a selection of her paintings that demonstrate a decidedly intellectual aesthetic, one that contradicts

[111] O'Connor kept a number of birds, most memorably peacocks, but also exotic chickens, pheasants, and other fowl. In her fiction and non-fiction, she aligned the peacock's ostentatious display "with the Catholic veneration of the Eucharist placed in a monstrance" (Meyer 2).
[112] In a 1961 article in *Holiday*, O'Connor humorously relates: "Although I had a pen of pheasants and a pen of quail, a flock of turkeys, seventeen geese, a tribe of mallard ducks, three Japanese silky bantams, two Polish Crested ones, and several chickens of a cross between these last and the Rhode Island Red, I felt a lack" ("Living with a Peacock").

her normal demeanor, and in doing to I propose that we can understand more about O'Connor, as a woman, a Catholic, and a writer, when we integrate her artwork into her oeuvre. In turning from O'Connor to Welty, I continue the strand of religious interpretation but find instead an expansive theological position best considered through the queer aesthetics apparent in her mural. Reading the burial rites in Welty's *The Optimist's Daughter* alongside her churchyard and Mardi Gras photography, I argue that Welty's progressivism is best understood through an aesthetic of confluence and blending, which is a productive metaphor for how Welty "queers" organized religions of the South. Throughout, I return to the metaphor of 'seeing double' to explore how Welty and O'Connor's artworks illuminate their literature, particularly on issues of gender and sexuality in their Christ-haunted South.

Anagogical Vision and the Godly Intellectual: Flanner O'Connor's Aesthetic of Humility

Cutting, Reversing, Flipping Upside Down: O'Connor's Aesthetics of Negative Space

Figures 4.4 and 4.5: Flannery O'Connor Cartoons: "Boy Crazy" and Un-captioned (O'Connor and Gerald)

According to Chris Roberts, when Flannery O'Connor was invited to contribute to her high school newspaper the *Peabody Palladium* she responded that while she couldn't write, she

knew how to draw (see Gerald 105). Presumably later, O'Connor was featured in the *Palladium* in an article titled "Peabodite Reveals Strange Hobby"; in it, O'Connor is described as an author, painter, cartoonist, and musician (qtd. in Gerald 106). Her secret hobby, ironically, was collecting publishers' rejection slips; her oddest hobby was collecting animals – real ones, and, as the author notes, "a hundred and fifty replicas of them in china and glass" (Gerald 106). Three years later, O'Connor would again make headlines in the *Macon Telegraph and News*; in an article titled "Mary O'Connor Shows Talent as Cartoonist," O'Connor confesses her career ambition is to find a job where her "satiric essays and cartoons will fit to good advantage" (see Gerald 110).[113] Labeling O'Connor a "female Ogden Nash" because of her illustrated, humorous rhymes, the newspaper blurb reveals a different O'Connor than we are used to seeing, one attuned to the visual arts and news media.[114] She would focus on literature during her graduate work in Iowa, but not before she studies art and marketing, takes up painting with a seriousness that lasts her lifetime, applies for a job at *The New Yorker* ("I can also draw like Mr. Thurber, in case he goes off the deep end"), and, according to her letters, "sen[ds] a batch [of her cartoons] every week to the New Yorker, all rejected of course" (qtd. in Gerald 115; O'Connor and Fitzgerald 536).[115]

These news clippings forecast the quirky literary style, and its ever-present fascination with animals and birds, that O'Connor would hone as an adult. They also point to the fact that

[113] O'Connor's full name is Mary Flannery O'Connor.

[114] As Kelly Gerald explains, O'Connor likely modeled her ambitions after writer/artist James Thurber, who wrote for *The New Yorker* and exhibited a "similarity people recognized early on" in O'Connor (Gerald 113).

[115] Kelly Gerald reports that in 1945, one of O'Connor's paintings was "selected for a statewide exhibit that would tour Georgia" (116). In her collected letters, O'Connor reveals she is still taking painting lessons in 1952, and there are dozens of references in her letters to painting, whether she herself is painting, or is describing a painting she likes, or is reading about painting and aesthetics.

O'Connor's satirical impulse and cartoonish sensibility, which inhabits all of her fiction, takes its ekphrastic genesis in her cartoon art. Patricia Smith Yeager comments that the comic element is so prominent throughout O'Connor's writing that any "profundity or humanity become acts of excess that seem surreal or supranatural" by contrast (109). The effect is notoriously unsettling, but nonetheless comically visual, as in the cartoons pictured above. This cartoonishness persists in her literature: Mrs. Hitchcock in *Wise Blood* has "pear shaped legs that slanted off the train seat and didn't reach the floor"; in "The River," the potential moment of beauty is comically undone when "A fluttering figure had begun to move forward with kind of a butterfly movement – an old woman with flapping arms whose head wobbled as if it might fall off any second" (*Wise Blood* 4; *Complete Stories* 166). Hazel of *Wise Blood* has a "nose like a shrike's bill and a long vertical crease on either side of his mouth" (4). These animalistic descriptions of people come to represent a literary menagerie; be they monkey, dog, goat, chicken, spider, or frog, their cartoonish ugliness is central to O'Connor's brand of literary grotesque.

O'Connor's earliest published works were black and white linoleum-cut cartoons, designed for her high school and college newspapers. As in her fiction, her cartoons portray realistic gestures from unrealistic bodies, marked with dramatic features much like the grotesque forms in her fiction. Barry Moser, in his introduction to *Flannery O'Connor: The Cartoons*, praises O'Connor's "innate comprehension of *gesture*" (*viii*, italics in original). Their vivid and rough-hewn approach predicts the stark, unsettling character of her prose. Cut in reverse, like a film negative, these images preview the absurd characterizations that O'Connor builds on throughout her writing career. As Moser relates, in linoleum prints, "whatever is cut away receives no ink"; and like O'Connor's writing, "[n]othing could be more direct or fundamental" (*vii*). Like Moser, I am reminded that O'Connor's earliest claim to fame was when *Pathé* news

recorded a short film feature of then-five-year old Mary Flannery and her Cochin Bantam chicken, whom she had taught to walk backwards.[116] O'Connor's life history tells us that humorous reversals (like her backwards-walking chicken), and conceptualizing art through negative space, cutting, upending, and inverting, were second nature to her, and that it is an aesthetic that we can productively trace in her fiction as one originally, and most clearly, evidenced in her art. Her cartoons encourage us to see how her literary descriptions exist in her fictional worlds, and her concrete literary comparisons are ekphrastic, in a painterly way, when read alongside her cartoons.

In Figure 4.4, the constraints of physical anatomy are defied as what should stay inside is found outside: the young girl's eyes protrude like snakes from her head. Unable to control where her eyes wander, her inner temptation manifests physiologically; her wandering eyes chase after the boys walking past, and cause her head to whip around her body. We see similar body contortions in *Wise Blood*, where Hazel Motes's skin poorly masks musculature and tissue that also seems bent on escaping its shell: his train companion, Mrs. Hitchcock, notes early in the novel that the "outline of a skull under [Hazel's] skin was plain and insistent" (4).[117] The caption, "Isn't it fortunate that Genevieve has completely escaped that boy crazy stage?", trades its humor upon reversal; Genevieve's eyes have "completely escaped" her body, while her boy-crazy state completely escapes the woman speaking. As I explain in more detail below, *Wise Blood*'s narrative premise trades on reversals; the most obvious being Hazel's denial of Christ through creating The Church Without Christ, inverting southern Christian tradition to create a

[116] O'Connor recalled that she was "just there to assist the chicken but it was the high point in my life. Everything since has been an anticlimax" (*Conversations* 38).
[117] Hazel's is not the only body protruding inside out; when the porter for the train taking Hazel to Taulkinham denies being from Eastrod, Tennessee, he leans over to straighten a seat and "the back of his neck came out in three bulges" (6).

denomination without God. Unlike Genevieve, whose eyes are merely out of place, at the end of *Wise Blood* Hazel's eyes are gone entirely, burned away with quicklime in a feat of self-mutilation. However, Hazel's inner turmoil, like Genevieve's, contorts his outward appearance; O'Connor writes his spiritual blindness toward God upon his physical being.

The reversals that O'Connor makes in her caption rhetoric appear just as often in her visual depictions. In the second image above, O'Connor upends the central character head-first into a sinkhole. Only her feet remain visible to her three mourning friends. Other cartoons with similarly upended bodies include "Points of Interest," in which students participating in various extra-curricular activities include an upside down gymnast, and "Coming Back Affects Some People Worse Than Others," which depicts a student reading a book while fully upside down (O'Connor and Gerald 32). In these cartoons, the mental orientation of the character once again manifests in their physical rendering; the aptly-titled "Points of Interest" links an interest in gymnastics to the inverted body of the character, and the cognitive dissonance of returning to school is shown by a student flipped upon her head. Although the caption for Figure 4.5 is cut off, and presumed unknown, we can gather from O'Connor's habit of hyperbolic imagery that the humor is cast via a reversal of cognitive orientation that is visually apparent.

As in her linoleum cutting process, which is also done in reverse, O'Connor mechanically reversed the literary creative process, which she recounted in a letter to a graduate student asking for writing advice: "Try rearranging it backwards and see what you see. I thought this stunt up from my art classes, where we always turn the picture upside down, on its two sides, to see what lines need to be added. A lot of excess stuff will drop off this way" (O'Connor and Fitzgerald 67). O'Connor encourages the student to think, as she does, about her writing as a work of visual art, one that can be re-positioned, re-oriented, and refashioned from a visual standpoint. Her

reverse aesthetic, as this quote shows, is one situated firmly in O'Connor's experience and perspective as an artist, and not a writer.

Perhaps the most well-known O'Connor story is "A Good Man is Hard to Find," which is widely held as exemplary of O'Connor's use of negative space. However, these inversions, as I discuss below, are consistently cast in terms of visual art. The Grandmother in sees the world in frames and containers much like the cartoon panels above: the Negro child on a country porch is framed twice, described as "standing in the door [frame] of a shack," and viewed through the rear window of the family car. The grandmother recognizes the framing too: "'Wouldn't that make a picture, now?' she asked . . . 'If I could paint, I'd paint that picture'" (*Complete Stories* 119). The grandmother's view of the child is mediated, like an artwork, by frames and by her own limited perspective. Likewise, the Misfit, a tormented serial killer, is first introduced through mediated perspectives of the square newspaper article and, once again, the Grandmother's interpretation of that view. O'Connor sets up these enclosures and frameworks, as in her art, in order to invert, upend, and undo them. Even Pitty Sing the cat is put away into a container, and when the newspaper that covers his basket "rose with a snarl," O'Connor sets off the series of events that will recast her fictional world into its alternate, negative space reality. The newspaper rising foreshadows the Misfit's arrival, and Pitty Sing and the Grandmother go flying from the back seat into the front, and the car rolls down the embankment.

The car's revolution mirrors the psychic upheaval the Grandmother will undergo; as in the upended figures in her cartoons, the grandmother's reorientation to the front seat is likewise a harbinger of her changed perspective. After her entire family dies at the hands of the Misfit, she still clings to shreds of her precious script: "I know you wouldn't shoot a lady," she says, "I know you come from nice people! Pray!" (132). Her revelation, that the Misfit is plagued by the

same spiritual doubts that she's faced in her own life, dawns on her, and she is finally possessed with real compassion: "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" (132). Her heartfelt touch causes the Misfit to recoil "as if a snake had bitten him," and he fires three righteous shots, in quick succession, into her chest (132). As the story closes, the band of three criminals "stood over the ditch, looking down at the grandmother who half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood" (132). "'She would of been a good woman,' The Misfit said, 'if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life'" (133). In O'Connor's grotesque, cartoonish, world, the Misfit's pithy statement could well be read as one of her cartoon captions, even as the caption of Figure 4.5 above, whose three mourning figures look down upon their companion much as the Misfit, Bobby Lee, and Hiram look down upon the grandmother, who has died with a "face smiling up at the cloudless sky" (132).

Scenes like the one above cut, not just the characters but the reader as well, in what Patricia Smith Yeager calls "mind-numbing reversals" (92). These reversals leave a reader sharply taken aback by misidentifications and misaligned allegiances, and impart a deeply unsettling culpability that is not easily shaken. This 1995 essay, written before O'Connor's cartoons were made public, is almost prophetic in its claim: "[t]he traumatic cuts that O'Connor's characters endure find their objective correlative in twentieth-century animation," which similarly relies on the "deployment of dramatic protrusions, the traumatic cuts riddling her characters' bodies and her thematics of carnival" (106). Yeager describes the bodies in modern animation as a "flat-bodied approximation of the pleasures and the horrors of the traumatized bodies," but she may as well be describing the contorted bodies in O'Connor's cartoons. And just as O'Connor's cartoons are brought into being by cutting, so too does O'Connor cut in her literature, figuratively and literally: Hazel Motes's face "might have been cut out of the side of a

rock"; the prostitute Mrs. Watts "cut the top of [Hazel's] hat out in an obscene shape"; and when Hazel returns from the war to find his childhood home abandoned and in decay, a "board fell on his head out of the roof and cut his face" as he slept (84, 106, 20). These cuts to Hazel's head reflect his mental and emotional struggles with his faith. Ultimately, his blindness, which cuts off his vision of the material world, is the cut that instantiates the inversion building throughout the novel, which is Hazel's progression from spiritual blindness to spiritual vision through his progression from physical vision to physical blindness.

In "The Fiction Writer and His Country," O'Connor relates the ostensible foundation for her grotesque style and violent literary narratives as inherently connected to being a devout writer in an age of disbelief:

> The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make them appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience . . . you have to make your vision apparent by shock – to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures. (*MM* 34)

Although O'Connor aligns her grotesque literary characters and storylines to her goal of communicating a stark message, her cartoons reveal that, well before she formalized her literary persona as "The Catholic Novelist Writing in the Protestant South," she relied on visual grotesques to achieve her artistic effects. The truth is, O'Connor imaginatively flipped bodies upside down, modified, maimed and mutilated them well before she came into her identity as a fiction writer, and thus her creative process asks that we first understand her characters as visual, possibly even ekphrastic representations. Her "recurring fascination with mutilation and

corporeal trauma" manifests everywhere in her works—it exists in her stories' structures, themes, plots, and characters (Yeager 100). These reversals catch us off guard, as in the deadly self-baptism of Bevel in "The River," which O'Connor radically contends should be seen as a happy ending, and as in the dishonest bible salesman Manley Pointer stealing Joy Hulga's wooden leg in "Good Country People."[118] Religion, too, is unexpectedly characterized, as in when Hazel's "waspish" grandfather "had ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger" (14). Jesus is not a peaceful savior, but rather comes about in a white-hot sting of pain.

O'Connor cautioned writers not to be "too lazy or highfalutin to descend to the concrete where fiction operates" (*MM* 92). O'Connor's inversions, particularly her use of negative space, work in such a concrete fashion; like the cuts of her cartoons, they are as much about what is present as they are about what is missing. The negative reveals the positive: the lack of Christ reveals Christ. In its concrete medium, there is no ambiguity – there is paint, and there is not paint. For O'Connor, her approach is concrete, technical: "My preoccupation is how am I going to get this bull's horns into this woman's ribs?" (*O'Connor and Fitzgerald* 149). These tensions forecast in O'Connor's early cartoons only intensify throughout her life and literature. Indeed, seeing that O'Connor's penchant for inversions and reversals originated in her visual, and not literary, art, disrupts some of the traditional scholarship about O'Connor's use of vision, which has relied almost entirely on a Catholic, rather than artistic, interpretation.

Anagogical Vision, Belonging, and the Paradox of the Intellectual

[118] O'Connor remarks that Harry/Bevel "comes to a good end. He's been saved from those nutty parents, a fate worse than death. He's been baptized and so he goes to his Maker; this is a good end" (*Conversations* 58).

"I don't enjoy looking at these old pictures either, but it doesn't hurt my reputation for people to think I'm a lover of fine arts."

"Oh, well, I can always be a Ph.D."

Figures 4.6 and 4.7: "I don't enjoy looking at these old pictures either…" and "Oh, well, I can always be a Ph.D." (O'Connor and Gerald)

The cartoon in Figure 4.6 above coincides with a 1943 exhibit at the Georgia State College for Women (GSCW) that featured works by Van Gogh, Daumier, Carot, and Cézanne.[119] The caption reads, "I don't enjoy looking at these old pictures either, but it doesn't hurt my reputation for people to think I'm a lover of fine arts."[120] Even at a young age, O'Connor evinced a disdain for intellectual pursuits, but this disdain was by no means simple; in Figure 4.7, the young woman who whispers conspiratorially to her readers, "Oh, well, I can always be a

[119] Michael Putnam writes that "as art describes art, we linger," and that is exactly what O'Connor's cartoon in Figure 4.6 asks us to do via the artistic representation, however crude, in the frame in her cartoon. Frankly, O'Connor's linocut artwork resembles less the works of Cézanne, Daumier, Van Gogh or Carot, the artists featured at the GSCW exhibit, than it does the more modern works of Picasso and Braque. The figures in the painting could very well be O'Connor's linocut rendition of cubist chickens. If O'Connor was putting the kind of art she found laughable in her cartoon, it was *not* the work of the Barbizon School and the post-Impressionists, but rather the work of cubists and abstract artists of the early 20th century.

[120] O'Connor's tongue in cheek tone about formal education and the arts is everywhere present in her cartoons; one cartoon, showing a figure in the back row at a symphony concert, reads, "Wake me up in time to clap!" Another shows a student with a stack of books remarking to a friend, "Do you really think we need teachers?" And yet another laments, "Understand, I got nothing against getting educated, but it just looks like there ought to be an easier way to do it" (O'Connor and Gerald).

Ph.D," is likely a representation of O'Connor herself (*c.f.* Gerald 109). Within these cartoons is a double bind that bedeviled O'Connor her entire life: her derisive contempt for the pretensions of artistic and academic intellectual communities, and the natural affinity her own creative and intellectual aspirations had with that very community.[121] On the one hand, her favorite literary scapegoat was the godless intellectual, a character type she identified strongly with the North.[122] On the other hand, O'Connor felt at odds within her own Southern community, a fact evidenced in her letters and lectures and encompassing issues such as her community's anti-educational values, its overwhelming Protestantism, and what she perceived as a degradation of its character due to the diluting influences of modern society and the "poisonous breath" of Hollywood and New York (O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 200).[123]

However, instead of viewing this epistemological paradox as a double bind, I suggest that O'Connor's own metaphor for her literary technique – that of the anagogical vision – might allow us to reconcile these counter-currents into a holistic view of O'Connor's artistry, literary and otherwise. Anagogical vision, according to O'Connor, is the "kind of vision that is able to see different levels of reality in one image or one situation" (O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and

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[121] Ultimately, O'Connor regarded the MFA as a defensible compromise: Brad Gooch recounts in his biography that when she asked, "'of what use graduate work?'," O'Connor responded that her MFA program "saved a few authentic writers from becoming one of the scholarly 'dead birds' in 'the literary woods': 'Some of these were laid away with Ph.D.' s and doubtless all with an excellent knowledge of Beowulf'" (Gooch k.l. 1716-8).
[122] See John McCarthy's "Human Intelligence versus Divine Truth: The Intellectual in Flannery O'Connor's Works" for a discussion of all of O'Connor's godless intellectual figures (McCarthy).
[123] O'Connor's ambivalence is pervasive. With some, she shared her anti-intellectual humor, joking about her many public talks that "I think the reason I like chickens is that they don't go to college" and declaring to her friend "A," "I am going to be the World Authority on Peafowl, and I hope to be offered a chair some day at the Chicken College" (O'Connor et al. *xxv*; O'Connor and Fitzgerald 57). To others, she poked fun at anti-educational values of her own educational community, as when she told Elizabeth Bishop that a one of the teachers at the college in her town found the May Sarton poetry reading to be "a complete waste of time" – "she was a Doctor of Education and was only slumming that night," quips O'Connor (O'Connor and Fitzgerald 265).

Fitzgerald 72). It is the view of the divine narrative as it exists in a "concrete, observable reality," and for the Catholic writer, it exists on a "level which has to do with the Divine life and our participation in it" (111). Below, I will look at how O'Connor's *Wise Blood* traces the same arc of anxiety and insecurity that O'Connor had about her own intellectual communities, but instead of viewing this crisis as a double bind, I propose that we see it as a double *vision*, one that O'Connor intentionally placed in her art, both cartoon and fiction. Fittingly, I believe the resolution to this paradox lies in her paintings, which lay to rest some of the identificatory politics plaguing O'Connor's "regional" idiom, and her status as a regionalist author, rather than in her literary corpus. As one seeing double, embracing her double vision of the world, O'Connor was freer in her art to lay claim to an ambition that she shielded from her literature and her friends.

Hazel Motes of *Wise Blood* knew only two things at the age of twelve: that he wanted to be a preacher, and that he wanted to stay in his hometown of Eastrod, Tennessee, with "his two eyes open" (16). At eighteen, Hazel is drafted into the army to fight a war that he regards as "a trick to lead him into temptation," but he has a "strong confidence in his power to resist evil; it was something he had inherited, like his face, from his grandfather" (17). Because Hazel refuses to admit that he is susceptible to temptation, when he does fall into sin during his Army service, he cannot accept it; instead, Hazel revises his theological beliefs to accommodate his behavior. Hazel decides that Jesus does not exist, and therefore, sin does not exist. Seeing his opportunity to be "converted to nothing instead of to evil," Hazel invents a new ministry; he is now the preacher of the "Church without Christ," and in his effort to demonstrate his conviction to his newly-formed church, he sets about committing sins that his Christ-less doctrine now condones (18).

The plot of O’Connor’s tale is one of absence: godliness is defined by ungodliness; the Church of Christ is the negative of Motes’s Church Without Christ. Kimberley Greene Angle likens O’Connor’s use of negative space to the “exercise artists use to locate the creative act more completely in the right side of the brain” (158). O’Connor, notes Angle, “often used her knowledge of visual art to describe the writing process,” and the reversals in her stories represent an application of this knowledge. Thus, a character “void of spirituality,” such as the godless intellectual prototyped in Hazel Motes, “simultaneously creates an ‘inner sketch’ of the nature of redemption and grace that is the fulfillment of that void” (159-60). Like her practice of cutting linoleum away from around her cartoon images, O’Connor uses absence to define Hazel’s atheist ministry.

O’Connor reflects that Hazel’s predicament is a reminder that “belief in Christ to some is a matter of life and death,” and that his “nihilism leads him back to the fact of his Redemption” (O’Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 114; O’Connor and Fitzgerald 70). O’Connor admired Hazel deeply – “I think of Haze Motes [*sic*] as a kind of saint,” she wrote, “His overwhelming virtue is integrity” (O’Connor and Fitzgerald 89). O’Connor, too, had an all-or-nothing take on Redemption; she wrote to “A” that she believed the “Host is actually the body and blood of Christ, not a symbol,” at which point she recounts an anecdote that would become famous: she said to author Mary McCarthy (“who departed the Church at the age of 15 and is a Big Intellectual,” according to O’Connor) that if the Eucharist is just “a symbol, to hell with it” (O’Connor and Fitzgerald 125). To O’Connor, as she avers to her friend “A,” the Eucharist “is the center of existence for me; all the rest of life is expendable” (124-5). O’Connor’s own religious absolutism, evident here, underpins the literary and visual production of her hyperbolic characters, their grotesque physiognomies, and their fanatic dispositions.

Just as O'Connor describes her Catholic faith inside her literary art as one of vision, so too is Hazel's faith symbolized by vision. His spiritual inheritance includes his preacher-grandfather's face and his "power to resist evil," as well as his mother's glasses, which safeguard him lest his "vision should ever become dim" (19). When he leaves Eastrod for World War II, the glasses and a Bible are the "only things" he brings from home; Hazel reads his Bible while wearing the "silver-rimmed spectacles that had belonged to his mother" (17). When Hazel faces temptation, he dons the glasses, as when his army friends attempt to coax him into a brothel. As they wear him down, his pious and dramatic speech falters, and his religious vision metaphorically fades; his "voice cracked and he didn't finish" (18). At that moment, Hazel leaves off the Bible, and his glasses, until the very end of the novel.

As readers, we can see what Hazel cannot, which is that his denial of Christ is so tortured that it only confirms his faith. As he is drawn inexorably toward a reconfirmation of his Christian beliefs, his self-inflicted physical blindness at the end of the novel represents a sacraficial act of faith. When his acolyte Enoch Emery delivers the "new jesus," a shrunken mummified body stolen from the museum, Hazel is wearing his mother's glasses for the first time since that fateful day in the Army when he lost his faith. In this climactic scene with Emery, Hazel recognizes that the "new jesus" is blasphemous. Hazel's recognition of blasphemy marks the devastating return of his Christian faith, and of the spiritual vision that has caused him so much psychic pain. By the close of the next chapter, Hazel has burned out his eyes with quicklime; as in O'Connor's cartoons, his mental orientation is represented by a physical alteration. As his mental torture converts into physical torture, Hazel links the self-harm back to the theme of vision, and his quest for seeing God: "If there's no bottom in your eyes," says Motes, "they hold more" (226). Indeed, in his blindness Hazel does hold more: more faith, more peace, and more spirituality. At

the end of the novel, Hazel is lying dead in his room, while the greedy landlady Mrs. Flood, who has also been brought to grace, through her love for Hazel, “sat staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes” (235). In this closing scene, O’Connor repeats in Mrs. Flood what she proposes in Hazel, which is that divine vision requires blindness to the material world.

It’s not difficult to understand why O’Connor thinks Hazel is a saint. Like Saint Francis, Hazel dies blind but redeemed, seeing at the last only anagogically. His participation in the divine narrative is related through physical blindness, and O’Connor’s commitment to represent the divine within the concrete. If the novelist is to “show the supernatural taking place, he has nowhere to do it except on the literal level,” declared O’Connor, and like her cartoons, O’Connor’s depictions of the literal are caricatured, cartoonish, and very often informed by textual aesthetics similar to her visual aesthetics, particularly through various modes of ‘cutting’ out the shape of Hazel Motes (O’Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 176). As in her novel, O’Connor felt that Catholic doctrine and her fictional worlds were inseparable: “dogma” she said “Catholic Novelists and Their Readers,” “is an instrument for penetrating reality” (O’Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 178). Nonetheless, she experienced this relationship as one of stopped time, and of image: the “artist penetrates the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality” (O’Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 157). As with Hazel’s divine vision, which he achieves concurrently with and as a result of his physical blindness, and as in her reverse-cut linoleum prints, O’Connor’s use of absence indicates presence.

O’Connor once famously claimed that fiction has “its testing point in the eye” – literature, for O’Connor, by nature is ekphrastic – and scholars often refer to this comment in discussions about her visual literary aesthetic. But the eye is also the testing point in Catholic

doctrine: if you cannot see double, that is, see spiritual and physical realms at once, then you cannot be redeemed. Like her cartoons, the central premises of her anagogical art rely on visuality and absence, or negative space: either you see the divine, despite its invisibility and apparent absence, or you do not see the invisible divine, and that absence signals your spiritual downfall. Hazel learns this lesson painfully, even violently, and O'Connor identifies with his sacrifice. As O'Connor's letters reveal, Hazel is O'Connor's kind of spiritual "people," someone she identified with, and the kind of religious equal she seemed to be searching for in her real life.

Hazel's religious fervor is not the only thing that makes him one of O'Connor's people; his distrust of intellectualism is perhaps his most laudable qualities. He "had gone to a country school where he had learned to read and write but that it was wiser not to," which resonates with O'Connor's views on the corrupting influence of over-education: "competence by itself is deadly. What is needed is the vision to go with it, and you do not get this from a writing class" (*WB* 17; O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 86). There are many false prophets in *Wise Blood,* such as Asa Hawks, who pretends to be a blind preacher but hides his perfectly working eyes behind dark glasses, and Hoover Shoats, who becomes rich charging membership fees to his "*Holy* Church Without Christ." Likewise, the museum doesn't represent a source of history and knowledge, but instead stands for godlessness. Between each of the museum columns is an "eyeless stone woman"; their lack of vision is a symbol for the godless history contained inside: the pre-historic animals and the mummies that terrify and fascinate Enoch and Hazel (92). When O'Connor says that the Catholic writer must have a double vision to explore the supernatural in the physical world, the museum mummy, which represents the divide between Biblical and secular history, literally embodies this test.

Negative Space and the Godless Intellectual: O'Connor's Artistic Double Vision

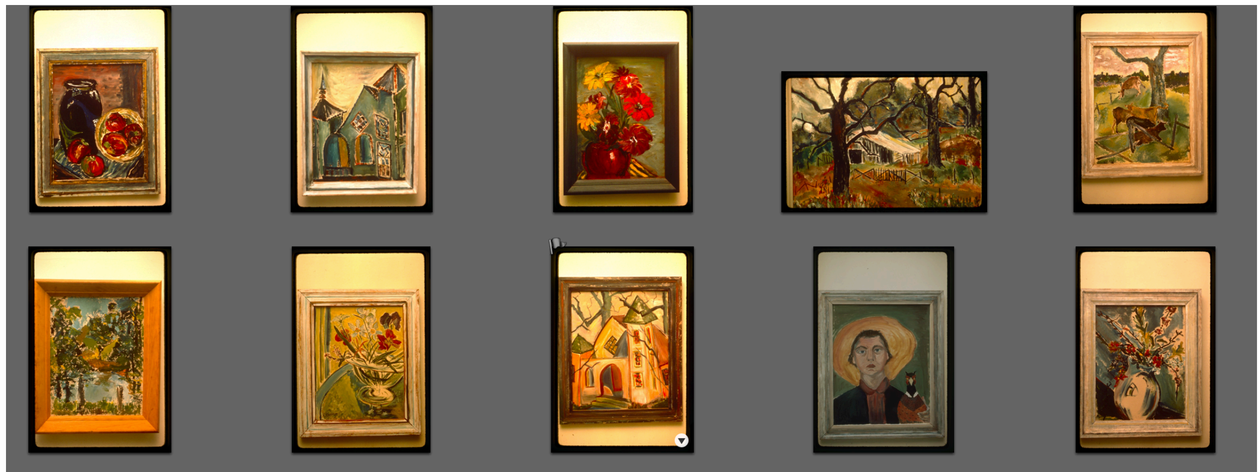

Figure 4.8: Screenshot of Photographic Slides of Flannery O'Connor Paintings (O'Connor and Becham)

Hazel Motes may have been the least educated of O'Connor's fictional scapegoats, but he set the stage for those that followed. *Wise Blood* is only the first of many O'Connor stories to pivot on the form of the godless intellectual, the person who has outsmarted religion, or bought into modern and consumerist temptations, at their own peril.[124] This troublesome character, simply put, represents the ills of society. In her fiction, O'Connor condemns these figures, often fatally; she cannot, or will not, strike a balance, disrupting the traditional bildungsroman narrative with characters that Katherine Hemple Prown claims are "feminized," "forced to conform to the will of a power greater than their own" (10). For these figures, there is no resolution, only a violent and inevitable spiritual annihilation. As John McCarthy contended in 1966, these characters "are incomplete as human beings and cannot act successfully in the real world outside of their minds; for . . . they have abused God's most generous gift to man – rational intelligence – and have committed the most heinous of sins – intellectual pride (McCarthy 1144).

But how is O'Connor, confined to a small town in Georgia by a debilitating disease, to reconcile the unease she experiences within her own, real-life, intellectual communities? If

[124] See Jon Lance Bacon's "A Fondness for Supermarkets" for a recap of these figures and a reading of the way they interact with consumerism and modernity (Kreyling and Bacon).

intellect could be mapped, for O'Connor, its zip code would be in the American North. She was extraordinarily daunted by a request to speak to a convening of AAUW members in Lansing, Michigan, and she wrote several of her friends about her anxiety; to "A," she confessed, "My current problem is: are Northern ladies more intelligent than Southern ladies?" (127). When she wrote the Chapter Head, Mrs. Rumsey Haynes, she declared: "I have made a good many talks in the past year but all in the South, which is like talking to a large gathering of your aunts and cousins— I know exactly what they don't know— but talking to Northern ladies is a different thing. I can't imagine that there's anything they don't know" (136). Northerners were well read to her mind ("Southern people don't know anything about the literature of the South unless they have gone to Northern colleges") but lacking entirely in faith: "I don't believe that our present society is one whose basic beliefs are religious, except in the South" (O'Connor and Fitzgerald 69; O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 166). This insecurity extended to her literary colleagues, especially Faulkner, whom she imagined as an engulfing, overpowering force: "Faulkner in our midst," said O'Connor in one of her talks on Southern fiction, "makes a great difference in what the writer can and cannot permit himself to do. Nobody wants his mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down" (O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 45). To "A," O'Connor remarked, "I keep clear of Faulkner so my own little boat won't get swamped" (273).

The "contradictory subject position" that Catherine Belsey describes as O'Connor's role in southern literary regionalism – that is, speaking as a native of southern culture, but as a foreigner in the male-dominated literary scene – mirrors the many contradictions we see embodied in her artistic identity. In public, her work is but a "mule and wagon," stranded on the "Dixie limited," while to her friend "A," she remarks, "don't think I write for purgation. I write

because I write well" (127). We can theorize the resolution to this contradiction – her public self-deprecation and her private, nearly silent, self-surety – through her inherently ekphrastic literary vision: that "everything has its testing point in the eye" (O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 144). O'Connor saw double in her fiction – the anagogical and the concrete world, but she also had two artistic visions: that of her fiction, and that of her painting. O'Connor's letters reveal that she was significantly invested in painting. She writes about taking lessons, about purchases of oil paints, brushes, and even how she stores her materials.[125] She occasionally made a gift of one of her paintings, as she mentions in her letters, but with rare exception, she discusses only her self-portrait and paintings of birds, "mostly chickens and guineas and pheasants" (35).[126] The story she tells people about her painting, it seems, is as colloquial and regional as the story she tells about her literature.

But in Figure 4.8 above, part of Emory University's recently-acquired materials on Flannery O'Connor, the photographic slides taken by George Becham show no birds at all, save the pheasant cock so proudly described by O'Connor to her friends. Indeed, on closer consideration, we encounter in these paintings an O'Connor that has never been discussed, one un-reconciled with the regional self-consciousness she evinced about her literature. What we see in her artwork, collected above, is an artist keenly interested in modern experimentation, whose art is unabashedly intellectual. If her fiction lambasts the over-educated elite, her artwork reaches toward it, and in a medium more dominated by males than even literature. O'Connor's letters reveal that she was a fan of Daumier, and liked the artistic theories of the abstract cubist Braque,

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[125] See *Habit of Being* 35, 60, 110, 223, 376, 378, and 392; "With two green-stamp books I got myself a fishing tackle box to keep my paints in. It has two trays in it and is very elegant and pretty soon I am going to start painting" (392).

[126] O'Connor mentions wanting to paint a "snow scene," which is reminiscent of another snow scene painting that she did in high school, which was selected for inclusion in a touring gallery of Georgia painters.

and some scholars feel her self-portrait is done in the style of Vincent Van Gogh (*c.f.* footnote 21; *c.f.* Barry). These paintings confirm that she had a broad academic interest in art; the first image (top left) features a still life reminiscent of Cézanne, one of the featured artists at the GSCW show that her cartoon above (Figure 4.6) supposedly parodied.[127]

Thus, we begin to see an O'Connor who fancied herself an actual painter. She read books about art, and evidenced a familiarity with historical and modern art.[128] She experimented with technique. But to her friends, she sent only paintings of birds, casting her habit as colloquial, regional, and minor. While at home, her more ambitious, intellectual art – "hifalutin," to use her term – reveals a dramatically different aesthetic. In O'Connor's short story "The River," she describes a watercolor painting with "black lines crossing into broken planes of violent color" (*Complete Stories* 157). "I wouldn't have paid for that," remarks Mrs. Connin, who has arrived to take Harry/Bevel to a river healing. "I would have drew it myself," she says (158). This is very much the attitude that O'Connor herself had about painting, and the disdain that Mrs. Connin expresses for the abstract painting is one that O'Connor teasingly attributes to her mother. Unlike typical instances of literary ekphrasis, which often serve to idealize art, O'Connor's use of the technique derides art's tendency toward cultural elitism. O'Connor recounts humorously to "A" that Regina O'Connor was offended when someone suggested that Flannery's paintings were "modern" because they wasn't "smoothed down." O'Connor writes, "mama says it's *not* modern art (insulted), it's very true to nature and there's no use spending

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[127] If her cartoon obliquely parodies Cézanne, O'Connor later reclaims him in her lecture "The Nature and Aim of Fiction" when she uses Cézanne's work to exemplify the singular existence of works of art: "'As the late John Peale Bishop said,'" remarks O'Connor, "'You can't say Cézanne painted apples and a tablecloth and have said what Cézanne painted.'" (O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 75).
[128] See *Habit of Being*, 35, 279, 354, 468, 486, 494, 495, and 536.

five hours on a painting you can do in two. This refers to the fact that I have been painting with a palette knife because I don't like to wash the brushes" (60).

Of course, O'Connor is describing techniques that were part of the modernist theory of art at the time, fast painting and painting with a palette knife (best shown in paintings five [top right] and six [bottom left]). And while she quotes Braque, a cubist painter of the early 20th century, in her letters, she too seems to prefer representational painting.[129] Regina O'Connor approved ("Well now I like that. That's my kind of painting. I can tell exactly what that is."), but that was little comfort to O'Connor; she quipped, "I make Grandma Moses look like an abstractionist" (O'Connor and Fitzgerald 376).[130] But when her New York editor at Harcourt, Brace Denver Lindley, wants to buy her paintings, her tone is less sarcastic: she declines to sell them, citing her mother's wish that they "are not to leave her walls," but she is nonetheless flattered, explaining, "I am glad you liked my pictures, as I feel you know something about it" " (O'Connor and Fitzgerald 148).

In 1955, O'Connor wrote to "A," "to know oneself is to know one's region, it is also to know the world, and it is also, paradoxically, a form of exile from that world, to know oneself is above all to know what one lacks" (125). As in her reverse-cut lino prints, O'Connor was all too aware of the lacks, or the negatives, in her own life. She never hesitated to point them out. And she was straddled with the very conundrum that defines literary regionalism – how to represent a community that resists literariness *through* literariness, and doubly bound by finding and developing a voice in an overwhelmingly masculine tradition. She keenly felt this exile: from the

[129] O'Connor wrote to Cecil Dawkins, "I admire a saying of Braque's that he made about painting— 'I like the rule that corrects the emotion'" (486).
[130] Anna Mary Robertson Moses, or Grandma Moses, as she was known, was an American fold artists who began her career in her 70s. She painted farmland scenes, was completely untrained, but suddenly gained a startling foothold in the American art scene in the 1940s. Her most famous painting, *Sugaring Off*, sold for 1.2 million dollars in 2006 ("Grandma Moses").

protestant south, from the region she loved and wrote about, and from the community of writers who were so very different from her. But she had another identity – one best understood through her own premise of the anagogical vision. In "The Church and the Fiction Writer," O'Connor makes clear her religious obligation to her crafts: "When people have told me that because I am a Catholic, I cannot be an artist, I have had to reply, ruefully, that because I am a Catholic, I cannot afford to be less than an artist" (O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 146). As an exile in her own region, O'Connor was participating in a form of double consciousness akin to DuBois's formulation; she had a double vision – not just of the supernatural world of God and the realistic world in her fiction, but of the artistic seriousness and the worldly humility that she felt spiritually compelled to pursue. She evinced nothing about her art, but tried everything in her art. This relationship between the spiritual and the artistic, so troubled in her fiction, is resolved in her art. That is, if we consider the problem in terms of negative space, and the inversions so common to her fiction and her cartoons, O'Connor's aesthetic is called into being by her fixation on the Godless intellectual. The opposite of the Godless intellectual is O'Connor herself: the Godly intellectual that we see in her self-portrait: suffering, haloed, and posed with her pheasant cock ("He has horns and a face like the Devil") (O'Connor and Fitzgerald 525). She cannot *not* attain toward high art, but her endeavor must, by Catholic necessity, be covert, humble, and, as she was in her fiction and in her life, open to miracles.

Queering Double Vision: Eudora Welty's "two pictures at once in his frame"

If O'Connor was open to the miracle of divine inspiration, Eudora Welty found her miracles outside of the church, specifically in the function of memory, and the way memory works to make sacred the human relationships we forge while living. Like Flannery O'Connor, Welty's literature finds its synergistic force in the theme of vision, and within this theme an

entryway to discussions of spirituality. Where O'Connor sees double narratives between the real world and the anagogical realm, Welty proposes that the fiction writer is "always seeing double, two pictures at once in his frame, his and the world's," which she must then work to "combine," and "superimpose upon" (*On Writing* 49-50). As in her photography, Welty's conception of artistic vision is inextricably linked to the human and emotional connections between the artist and the world, a relationship that "has the power inherent to loom like a genie – to become vocative at the last" (*On Writing* 37-8). For Welty, the voice that emerges "at the last" is memory.

In *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty links the theme of memory to her formal visual techniques: "it was not until I began to write . . . that I found the world out there revealing [itself to me], because . . . *memory* had become attached to seeing" (*One* 76). The double vision that Welty describes, which combines her own gaze with those of the world around her, asks that we read her works with multiplicity in mind. Such a practice, as I contend throughout the remainder of this chapter, is best served by queer theory. In what constitutes a dramatic departure from the cutting, inverting aesthetics of O'Connor's artistic vision, in the remainder of this chapter I show and explore how the subtle, gentle voice of Eudora Welty makes cuts of a different kind – cuts into the fabric of Southern tradition, and into the currents of American sexual politics.

Figure 4.9: Welty, *At the Fair,* 1937-1940: © Eudora Welty, LLC; Courtesy Eudora Welty Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Welty's photographs represent a considerable career, and while she did paint, very few of her works seem to have been preserved.[131] The image above, taken at the Mississippi State Fair (Figure 4.9), seems innocuous enough. Her photographs have a candid quality, and capture people in un-staged expressions of character. But taken altogether, Welty's portrait photography reveals a surprising subjectivity that plays out in her literature: Welty was extremely interested in homosocial bonds and, possibly, homoerotic relationships. In her largest published collection of images, titled simply *Photographs*, of the eighty-seven photographs that feature adults, over half of them focus *only* on women, either in single, double, or multiple portraits. Another third of the photographs feature men in same-sex groups, which means that eighty percent of the photographs are capture single-sex subjects. Of the single portraits, twenty-four are of women, versus only eight of men. Only fifteen snapshots depict women and men together. Considering these figures, that majority of Welty's photographs in this collection look in on the homosocial communities of her native Mississippi, and most of those look at communities of women, I think it is a worthwhile enterprise to ask if there isn't something 'queer' about Welty's gaze.

Of course, there are a lot of reasons why this imbalance may have been a natural occurrence in Jackson, particularly in the 1930s when many of her photographs were taken. It is thus important to return to the interpretive cruxes in the photos themselves for the full picture. Welty's photographs are instructive – it is not merely what she looks at, but *how* she looks. In

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[131] Welty had two gallery showings in New York, and proposed several photograph book projects in her lifetime; several of her projects were accepted and published, including *Some Notes on River Country* (2003) and *Country Churchyards* (2000). Welty studied painting with Jackson's resident painter Marie Hull; Welty's niece and erstwhile director of the Eudora Welty House remarked that "we were surprised when we didn't find more paintings" ("Welty Painting Installed at Visitor Center").

her photographs we find an intimate, sympathetic gaze, especially upon the women she snaps with her lens. She captures her subjects, as in *At the Fair* (Figure 4.9) above, in affectionate stances that often depict the communities of sisterhood, or brotherhood, that seem to fascinate Welty time and time again. The fair was particularly inspiring for Welty, and the collection includes images of women in beauty contests, as were Mardi Gras celebrations (she went to at least one in New Orleans and one in Nice, Italy).[132] In her fair photographs, and in her sharecropper portraits, Welty's gaze is curious, and scintillated, by the possibilities of homosocial communities.

Although the biographical record of Welty's ambivalence toward both sexuality and religion remains sparse, one thing is certain: Welty's young adult life was densely populated by what Axel Nissen termed "a loving circle of gay men" (209). And since Welty "clearly found a spiritual home in New York City, where in 1930 . . . [t]he city was then alive with theater and music, some of the best of the latter being played in the jazz clubs of Harlem," it is apparent that Welty is not the sheltered southern belle that captured the American imagination (Tolson 76). This vision of Welty – cosmopolitan, progressive, immersed in the imaginative potential of the cityscape – doesn't quite square with the impeccably genteel version preferred by her publicists, and many of her biographers. Welty was a more recognizable picture in her wicker rocking chair on her front porch, or reclining below glossy magnolia trees (Moss).

Perhaps Welty's exceeding politeness, easily her most well known trait, discouraged scholars from pressing too firmly on issues that might disrupt their vision of her as a daughter of the South. As Dawn Trouard notes, "[i]n loving Eudora Welty – not always wisely, but too well – we have often insisted she be the Eudora Welty we want her to be" (239). As a result, Walker

[132] See Waldron's *Eudora: A Writer's Life*, p. 204.

Percy's proclamation that what is most important about Welty's literature is its sense of place is only now being revised (37). It is not an exaggeration to say that Welty has been granted diplomatic immunity from less "ladylike" lines of inquiry, particularly in terms of religion and sexuality. While this avoidance remains possible for scholars who focus on her literature alone, her art will not so easily allow us to do. Most damning may be Welty's reluctance to take up her views on civil rights within her literature; her relative silence on the topic has been interpreted, at times, as supporting rather than condemning social injustice.[133] Most underexplored, however, is how Welty's personal relationships with homosexual men (and likewise the possibility that Welty herself was bisexual) color her representations of religion and sex in both her artwork and her fiction. The dearth of readings about religion, and to a lesser extent, sexuality, misconstrues the abundance of source material in her oeuvre. Especially when we consider how Welty's photographic aesthetics exist in her literature, we find that the activisms apparently missing from her works – activisms about race, religion, and sexuality – are present, after all. Pearl Amelia McHaney comments on this in her review of the groundbreaking collection of essays on this very topic, *Eudora Welty and Politics: Did the Writer Crusade?*: "to attend a political rally or to photograph people sitting on courthouse steps or to snap a shot of two young African American girls with their white dolls, or to stand on the sidewalk waiting for a clear moment to catch a man buying a ticket at the colored entrance to the cinema are all unabashedly political" (176). In context with her photographs, Welty's literature inherits some of the force of her photographic critique, as well as their queer potential.

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[133] The LSU Press blurb on *Eudora Welty and Politics: Did the Writer Crusade?* contests this trend, stating that "Welty has been inaccurately assessed by critics from Diana Trilling in*The Nation* (1943) to Claudia Roth Pierpont in *The New Yorker* (1998) as a writer who avoids political, historical, or cultural engagement in her fiction" ("LSU Press: Books - Eudora Welty and Politics").

Figure 4.10: Welty, *Mississippi State Fair*, ca. 1930-1940 © Eudora Welty, LLC; Courtesy Eudora Welty Museum

Figure 4.10, Welty's painting titled *Mississippi State Fair*, demonstrates why using a queer theoretical lens is appropriate. Discovered in the basement coal bin of the Welty house 2004, some eighty years after it was created, this 7'x 8' double panel mural painting is a celebration of the female form. Apparently intended as fuel for a cold winter, Welty's painting has instead been meticulously restored and, in 2010, incorporated into her body of artistic works dealing with the Mississippi State Fair. This painting is an unexpected find and is indeed a marvel, full of modernist influences, particularly those of cubism and expressionism, which manipulate color and scale to imitate the inner experience of an event.[134] Museum curators accurately note that the mural "offers viewers vivid, colorful evidence of Miss Welty's keen wit and humor that are typically found in her writing," but the painting offers much more to consider in terms of the many gazes, or visions, caricatured throughout the scene (qtd. in "Welty Painting Installed at Visitor Center"). Welty's painting replicates the double vision apparent in her

[134] Francis V. O'Connor finds that Welty's photography is informed by the cubist movement of abstract expressionism, a movement that "distorted outer experience through the unnatural deployment of color, anatomy, and overall factum to demonstrate the perilous aspects of the human condition" (80). Welty's mural shows a disintegration and distortion of female anatomy that suggests the spectacle of the State Fair is at once objectifying and disassociating.

photographs, which Francis V. O'Connor perceives as "divided between a certain empathy for her subjects and a genteel voyeurism that she left essentially to her imagination" (20). What O'Connor identifies as a division, however, Welty viewed as an act of merging or blending, of "two pictures at once." The act of merging multiple subject positions into a single frame is the very subject of *Mississippi State Fair*.

What is of most interest about vision in Welty's painting is its patent fixation on the female body as an object of multiple gazes and subjectivities: the heavy woman on the right frowns as her weight tops the scale at 500 pounds, while her exposed breasts bring a delighted smile to the face of a male to her lower right. The beauty contest women in the middle draw the eye toward a center that is at once vaginal and breast-like, as it funnels the procession of fair-goers into the tunnel-shaped entrance, a round, cross-hatched entryway that echoes the wagon wheels to the left. On closer inspection, the wagon wheels are themselves the breasts of a larger-than-life female body that dissipates into the landscape. If Welty's double vision combines her gaze and the gaze of the world around her, her painting demonstrates how such an approach is integrative, exponential, and multiplied with each additional gaze. In this painting, women's bodies are everywhere, and viewed from a variety of gazes; they are at once a spectacle (as in the beauty contestants), part of nature (as in the female figure drawn into the landscape), sources of shame (as in the frowning woman on the scale), and sources of joy (in the dance-line of women in the distance, top left). Welty's painting is a meditation on roundness, and full of the identification with, sympathy for, and voyeurism of the female form, an aesthetic we readily find in her photography.[135]

[135] The abundance of evidence that Welty was heterosexual does little to account for her artistic fascination with homosocial relationships, but the sustained interest reflected in her artistic gaze suggests that she is nonetheless in possession of a non-hetero-normative perspective.

The patent attention that Welty pays to iterations of female sexuality in this mural permits a more suggestive queer reading of her literature. Using as a guide Welty's photographic aesthetics, which include traits of blending, integrating, realism, a sympathetic eye for individual plight, and a keen interest in womanhood in the South, I read *The Optimist's Daughter* for its queer, subversive, and progressive potential. Attending to issues of spirituality, morality, and race, I show how her literary themes of memory and vision employ the candid and sympathetic aesthetics that are so apparent in her photography. While her writing's embodiment of her visual sensibility is indeed ekphrastic, Welty's incorporation of actual photographic ekphraseis cement the relationship between the double vision of her literature and what Pearl Amelia McHaney deems her "unabashedly political," i.e. queer, photography. And while I refer to some of the methodologies proposed by queer theorists Jose Muñoz, Eve Sedgwick, Lee Edelman, and others, my use of the term 'queer' has a broad interpretive sense, akin to Michael Warner's claim in his introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993) that it is a "resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner *xxvi*). Since Welty's photographs and painting urge us to do so, I want to read against the grain for the latent queer potential, so apparent in her visual art, in her literary art. In doing so, I will fold in the ways Welty's photography and visual aesthetics shape her literary vision, sometimes ekphrastically, and sometimes as corollary 'texts,' which can illuminate interpretive undercurrents that expand and improve our understanding of Welty's art.

Figure 4.11: Welty, *Sunday School*, *Holiness Church, Jackson* 1937-1940: © Eudora Welty, LLC; Courtesy Eudora Welty Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

It may come as a surprise to some that the "First Lady of Southern Literature" wasn't an especially religious person. "I painlessly came to realize," Welty said in an interview with Jan Nordby Gretlund, "that the reverence I felt for the holiness of life is not ever likely to be entirely at home in organized religion."[136] Welty never elaborates on how her "reverence" for the "holiness of life" contradicts religious doctrine, but in distinguishing her "reverence" from that of organized religion, she tells us two important things: first, that Welty's own beliefs do not have a "home" in Southern Christian traditions, and second, that these traditions fail to adequately steward the "holiness" of human life. Welty claims that this realization was "painless," but her literary characters, who also find little comfort in God, must battle their inner demons without divine assistance. This is a troubling proposition indeed from the nation's most genteel Southern literary icon.

However, Welty's ambivalence about organized religion does not indicate disinterest. Figure 4.11 above is typical of Welty's many photographs focused on religious cultures in the

[136] (qtd. in Montgomery 22)

South. The Sunday school teacher is surrounded by her young students, her hand reaching out affectionately to one of her charges in a scene of ethereal lighting, which O'Connor remarks is "just enough glare . . . to suggest something approaching glory" (F. V. O'Connor 73). This photograph's genuine regard for religious observances, its kind and accepting gaze, suggests that no matter what her own religious beliefs may be, Welty valued the religious traditions of others. Her largest published collection, *Photographs*, collects many images of church-goers, churchyards, and graveyards. In *One Time, One Place*: *Mississippi in the Depression – A Snapshot Album*, Welty divides the photographs into three chapters: "Workday," "Saturday," and finally "Sunday," which focuses on depression-era African Americans in their Christian practices. Another of her published photographic albums is titled *Country Churchyards*, and collects her photographs of churchyards from all over Mississippi.

While religious themes are a mainstay of Southern scholarship, questions about religion in Welty's works are remarkably absent. Contrary to what the critical silence about Welty and religion suggests, Welty does *not* break with tradition and abandon Christianity as a stock Southern character; as I show below, her works are rife with Biblical allusion and allegory. What is disruptive about Welty's use of religion – where she eschews tradition – is that her literary works, like her photographic works, show no particular loyalty to a single code of religious doctrine. Until recently, suggesting that the First Lady of Southern Literature might be a religious subversive was perhaps too radical, and her artistic critiques on this front have flown under the radar, as it were. Critics have subordinated her oblique (and sometimes direct), critiques of religion as merely part of her regionalist flavor, and her non-denominational and multi-denominational representations, which criticize religion and yet applaud spirituality, are altogether ignored. Despite the dearth of critical commentary, Welty displays an obvious interest

in the diversity of expression found in religious observance. Moreover, the latent queerness of her religion-centered collections, read into her literary treatment of religion, amplifies her gentle criticisms of organized religion into more pointed political statements.

Welty's secret painting *Mississippi State Fair* and her corpus of photographs together advance a queer gaze that we can productively apply to her works, and, as I turn toward *The Optimist's Daughter* to discuss Welty's thematic development of vision and memory, I rely on this potential to argue that the Biblical allusions and religious rituals in *The Optimist's Daughter* are, simply put, queer. That is, I extend the queer potential in Welty's candid photography and visual art into her literary representations of religion, and argue that her Christian ideology is best understood as a queer theology, and best read through queer theory.

***Cardinal Sins: Queering the Bible in* The Optimist's Daughter**

The Optimist's Daughter opens in a hospital in New Orleans, where the main characters, Judge Clinton McKelva, his brash young wife Fay, and his devoted daughter Laurel are gathered to hear Dr. Courtland's assessment of Judge McKelva's recent episodes of blindness. McKelva explains that just after he had pruned the rose bush (known among everyone present as "Becky's Climber") in the front yard, he saw before him the bird scarers that his deceased wife, Becky, had placed to deter scavenging birds from their fig tree (*Optimist's* 3). Dr. Courtland and Judge McKelva share a knowing smile, because "those little homemade reflectors, rounds of tin, did not halfway keep the birds from the figs" (5). The problem for Judge McKelva, as the family doctor knows well, is that the fig tree is not in the front yard where McKelva was standing, but in the back yard behind his family home. McKelva concludes that he had "started seeing behind" himself. At this, McKelva's new wife Fay, some thirty years his junior, laughed "a single, high note, as derisive as a jay's" (5). Becky's ineffective bird-scarers cannot deter the likes of the

bird-like Fay, and Fay's unkind laugh that Judge McKelva is "seeing behind" himself suggests that his blindness, his current marriage, and his romantic past are somehow related. When McKelva recants that he was seeing backward, he explains, "Of course, my *memory* had slipped" [5].

In this opening scene, the fig tree, a Biblical allusion to Adam and Eve's fall from grace, coincides with McKelva's first episode of blindness, The fig tree is the third tree mentioned in the Bible; after eating from the Tree of Knowledge, "the eyes of both [Adam and Eve] were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings" (*The Holy Bible*, Gen. 3:7). Ironically, Judge McKelva has left his own Edenic Mount Salus, not because his eyes are opened, but rather because they *can't* see; there is "something wrong with [his] *eyes*" (3, 4). In relocating the fig tree to the front yard, its symbolic virtue of privacy – of covering genitalia – is compromised. McKelva believes his fig tree is on public display, and he has good reason to be anxious; the rose bush, also the legacy of his deceased wife and indicative of their sexual relationship, has been pruned too soon: "Becky would say it served me right. Before blooming is the wrong time to prune a climber" (5). Thus this novel, which is about the death of a man who has forgotten his first wife, opens with a complex and allusive series of plant references that intertwine sexuality, religion, and memory.

McKelva's lost vision reflects his inability to perceive the difference between the love of his former wife, Becky, and that of her trashy and evil replacement, Fay.[137] Rebecca Mark explains that the roses "tell the story of Becky's life, a story which Judge McKelva does not understand," and that the rose bush scratched Judge McKelva's eyes because he "has forgotten,

[137] In a 1978 interview with Jan Nordby Gretlund. Eudora Welty said, "I do feel there is 'evil' in the world and in people, very really and truly. I recognize its power and value. I do! I thought there was 'evil' in Fay in *The Optimist's Daughter*" (Welty, "Interview JNG" 227).

if he ever knew, how to make love to her" (332–3). In thwarting the fig tree's correlation to sexual knowledge and seeing, Welty queers the theological formulation of the fall: instead of acquiring vision and knowledge, McKelva incurs blindness and forgetfulness; his "memory had *slipped*" (3). Welty inverts both the fictional tree and the Biblical narrative here; McKelva thinks he sees the family fig tree in the front yard, and the Biblical allusion marks the loss of McKelva's knowledge and sight.

As McKelva admits his failure to Dr. Courtland, a counter-narrative emerges in their conversation, one in which Becky's roses, and by extension her love, is safer in a homosocial context:

> "But Becky's Climber I've found will hardly take a setback."
>
> "Hardly," the doctor murmured. "I believe my sister still grows one now from a cutting of Miss Becky's Climber." His face, however, went very still as he leaned over to put out the lights.
>
> "It's dark!" Fay gave a little cry. "Why did he have to go back there anyway and get mixed up in those brambles? Because I was out of the house a minute?"
>
> "Because George Washington's Birthday is the time-honored day to prune roses back home," said the Doctor's amicable voice. "You should've asked Adele to step over and prune 'em for you."
>
> "Oh, she offered," said Judge McKelva, and dismissed her case with the slightest move of the hand. "I think by this point I ought to be about able to get the hang of it." (6)

The heterosexual relationships in *The Optimist's Daughter* all lack a reproductive future, and McKelva's inability to properly nurture "Becky's Climber," the sprawling rose bush of his late

wife, highlights this fact. The plants that symbolize love and sexuality are poorly attended, and Laurel is herself a widow without children. Where Laura's marriage is pre-empted by her husband's untimely death, Fay and Judge McKelva's marriage is indecorous, and lacks the cultural currency that his first marriage to Becky had in the watchful eyes of Mount Salus. Love, in *The Optimist's Daughter*, is queer, at least in the light of Judith Rosen-Berry's broad definition of queer, as "referring not only to homosexuality and lesbianism but to everything that diverges from the 'norm'" (138). In setting these nontraditional family structures within traditional southern communities, Welty renders their strangeness all the more visible through comparative relief.

The characters in Welty's novel, with their foreclosed relationships, raise the question of interrupted futurity, which José Muñoz describes as "potentiality" or "a certain mode of nonbeing that is imminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense" (9). This mode of nonbeing, in queer theory, intensifies the significance of the ever-diminishing present, made scarcer by its limited futurity. Lloyd Pratt explains this aspect of queer theory as a process of reading and re-reading "the empirical to the extent that its latent possibilities come more sharply into focus. Queer theory has put the world on pause. In doing so, it has laid the foundation for a future worth living" (Pratt 183). Muñoz and Pratt encourage readings of non-reproductive futures and queer transgression for its potentiality, its hopeful essence of "not yet," wherein the subtexts of resistance and critique are given the fullest possible reading to help limn "a future worth living." For Welty, reading her non-normative representations of sexuality and religion through queer theory lenses like Muñoz and Pratt's capitalizes on the queerness that she herself introduces in her novel. By investing queer possibilities into these readings, the "future

worth living" that Welty imagines is made apparent through queer disruptions of Southern traditions of marriage, burial, and religion, and through those disruptions' embedded critiques.

If Becky's Climber symbolizes feminine sexuality, it's not surprising to see it represented in terms of needing control, or pruning, but the persistence with which it endures among communities of women is note-worthy. Dr. Courtland reveals his sister has an offshoot of the plant just as he turns off the light, implying that he, like Judge McKelva, is blind to the significance of Becky's Climber. Pruning is linked to paternity, as its "time honored day" is the birthday of the nation's forefather George Washington, but Becky's sexuality has more currency among the women of Mount Salus than its patriarchs; Dr. Courtland's sister "still grows one now," many years after Becky's death, Fay fears the competition it represents, and even Dr. Courtland admits that his own wife Adele is better suited to prune Becky's Climber. Reproductive futurity,[138] figured through the hardy and expanding blossoms of Becky's Climber, lies with women, whose homosocial economy bears more promise than heterosexual unions. Becky's Climber unites the women of Mount Salus while blinding its patriarchs, which suggests a more meaningful and satisfying sexual life is possible in women-centered communities.

Fay, of course, is not a woman of Mount Salus, nor is she part of Becky's Climber's homosocial network. Rather, the bird-like Fay represents the sins of Judge McKelva, of his sexual transgressions and failure to honor the memory of his first wife. Welty implies as much

[138] Reproductive futurity, or "reproductive futurism," is a term introduced by Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2007) as a negating definition of queer as a refusal of the mandate to invest in the figure of the child as future's promise. In Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman's "queer negativity," queer refers to the death drive and to the refusal of futurity in its radical embrace of *jouissance*. While I find the term useful in raising the question of queerness in Welty's novel in terms of a reproductive futurity, I find that, for Welty at least, a homosocial and homosexual futurity exists that contradicts the queer critique that Edelman intends with his formulation. That is, while the main characters have no reproductive future, there are nonetheless various modes of futurity (via other people's children, through plants, through redemption) at stake.

when Becky's "homemade reflectors" cannot "halfway keep the birds" away from the fig tree, the Christian symbol of heteronormative sexuality (3).[139] Becky's efforts cannot halfway protect the family fig tree, but Judge McKelva's proportional efforts are missing altogether, and his failure to protect the tree ultimately causes the compromise. Fay reinforces this association between the fig tree, the rose bush, and McKelva's sexual infidelity when she snivels that if she had only remained at home, McKelva would not have needed to go "pruning" elsewhere, and thus would have never received the physical wound that made his spiritual exigency so apparent. Fay lodges her complaint just as Dr. Courtland turns out the light; she, too, is in the dark, and unable to appreciate the significance of Clinton and Becky McKelva's marriage.

Indeed, McKelva's pruning is unmistakably sexual: "[h]olding the shears in both hands, he performed a sort of weighty saraband, with a lop for this side, then a lop for the other side, as though he were bowing to his partner, and left the bush looking like a puzzle" (4). The saraband, however, is a dance for two, not three, and thus the implication is that the "jay" bird Fay might be the impediment that leaves Becky's Climber "looking like a puzzle."[140] Near the end of the novel, after Judge McKelva's funeral, Laurel and Adele hear "a softer sound than the singing from the dogwood tree" in the back yard of the McKelva home (115). The sound is the crashing of Becky's bird-frighteners, suddenly under siege by "redbirds, all rival cocks . . . flying at their tantalizing reflections" (115). The McKelva fig tree is now open season for the birds; Adele watches as one "cardinal took his dipping flight into the fig tree and brushed wings with a bird frightener . . . Another cardinal followed, then a small band of them" (115). As the "rival

[139] More specifically, the fig tree is a symbol of sexual knowledge; Alva Steffler identifies the fig as symbolic of lust, shame, fertility, and "spiritual fruitfulness and good works" (Steffler 108-9).

[140] The sarabande has its own interesting history; banned in Spain several times for being too obscene, and yet iterations that survived were performed by clerics during mass. Its final variation was a slow courtly dance version; a sensual court dance set to music in triple time ("Sarabande").

cocks" "tilt in again, and again," Adele cries out, "Oh it's a game, isn't it! Nothing but a game!" (115). If Becky was unable to protect the tree from rival hens, McKelva's death results in the tree becoming vulnerable to rival cocks, and the lusty behavior of the cardinals offends Adele. Male sexual desire is thus figured as unwittingly fruitless, and the sanctity of marriage, at least the McKelva marriage, is just "a game."

As Welty casts heterosexual relationships in a negative light, the overt homosocial and oblique homosexual ones emerge as innocuous, if not gratifying, alternatives. Ken Stone notes that for queer theologians, "It is a striking fact . . . and one too often ignored, that the first explicit reference to female heterosexual desire in the Bible appears in God's description of the negative consequences of Eve's transgression" (Stone 23).[141] Where the Biblical consequences relate to women and childbirth, i.e., the future, Welty's inversion of the moral relates to men and memory, i.e., the past. Becky's Climber lashes out, and enacts the negative consequence for Judge McKelva's transgressions, which are manifested as the stolen fruit of the family fig tree. Thus, heterosexual formulations of Biblical plant imagery ultimately cannot reproduce; they have no future, as we see when the cardinal cocks cannot resist their own "tantalizing reflection" in the McKelva fig tree, which has already lost its physical and metaphorical fruit to scavenging birds and the bird-like Fay. As Adele and Laurel watch the birds' frenzy amid the press of Christian allusion (the Biblical fig tree, the legendary and non-denominational dogwood tree, and the Catholic "cardinal" birds), the heterosexual signifier of the fig tree is rendered inconsequential, infertile even, through the birds' failed mating attempts with Becky's reflective bird scarers. Everything that the tree represents, such as the memory of Becky, Judge McKelva's

[141] In Genesis 3:16, God says to Eve, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for [a] husband, and he shall rule over you."

marriages, and sexual knowledge and reproduction, is queered; all that remains is "[n]othing but a game." Even the threat that Fay posed to Judge McKelva's judgement, in retrospect, is moot.

In this section, I used Welty's mural of the Mississippi State Fair to open upon a queer reading of Biblical allusion and heterosexual partnerships in *The Optimist's Daughter*. In what follows, I continue to explore the underlying ways in which Welty's double vision, itself an ekphrastic metaphor, invites queer readings of her appropriation of Southern culture. Welty's blending of religious doctrine, best understood through her repeated use of the word "confluence," queers the monolithic epistemologies of Christian doctrine. In the following pages, I show how this subversive impulse, apparent first in her photographic ekphraseis, not only enacts a queer theology that governs the moral grounding of her novel, but also disrupts the burial ritual of Judge McKelva with subtle critiques, also apparent in her photographs, of the two "queerest" paradigms of Southern culture: patriarchy and racism.

Dying Protestant on a Catholic Holiday: Welty's "confluence" of Christian Doctrine

Figure 4.11: Welty, *Mardi Gras*, ca. 1930: © Eudora Welty, LLC; Courtesy Eudora Welty Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Welty's photography plays a strong role in *The Optimist's Daughter* as an ekphrastic counterpart to her themes of memory and vision, one that isn't immediately apparent to her

reader. In “A Memory,” Welty writes, “Ever since I had begun taking painting lessons, I had made small frames with my fingers, to look out at everything” (*Collected Stories* 75). In this short story about an indelible nature of an incredibly brief childhood moment, Welty’s narrator looks out upon the world very much as Welty herself looked through her camera. Francis V. O’Connor remarks that Welty “loved her Rolleiflex [camera], with its ground-glass viewfinder, over the box cameras she had first used, because it allowed her to frame her view as her fingers had earlier” (69). A “frame is fundamental,” Welty declares, and though this photographic aesthetic obviously influences her literature, she asserts that a “memory is far better” (qtd. in F. V. O’Connor 69). Such a claim aligns with the exegesis of *The Optimist’s Daughter*, wherein the photographic ekphraseis work to reinvest and reinforce the qualities in her literature that speak to preserving, sharing, and honoring moments past, and time itself.

The shock-value of the Mardi Gras picture above is likely not one that Welty would forget. This experience, and the image, are recast in *The Optimist’s Daughter* through Fay’s visceral reaction to the encounter: “‘I saw a man – I saw a man and he was dressed up like a skeleton and his date was in a long white dress, with snakes for hair, holding up a bunch of lilies! Coming down the steps of that house like they’re just starting out!’ Then she cried out again, the longing, or the anger, of her whole life all in her voice at one time, ‘Is it the Carnival?’” (43). The couple, described as a man and his “date” in the novel, might well be a same-sex couple; Welty identifies the skeleton as a man, while his “date,” dressed as Medusa, is androgynous, both in the photograph and in the ekphrasis. Fay’s response defies categorization, as emotions she cannot name overcome her in this intense collision of cultural paradigms. Fay is herself a conservative Baptist, and her unexpected confrontation with the sexually indeterminate couple during Mardi Gras implies an eye-opening clash with a transgressive and progressive Catholic

event. Laurel's inability to translate Fay's cry as either "longing," or "anger," for the carnival is at once contradictory and deeply indeterminate, a sensation that is echoed across the entire scene. The "thematically full 'homosexual' meaning" of this moment, wherein the Protestant Laurel cannot translate the Baptist Fay's emotional reaction to the sexually-ambiguous couple of Welty's photograph celebrating a Catholic holiday, queers religion, Laurel, and Fay (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 166).

Judge McKelva's death, which occurs almost immediately after the surgery on his "slipped cornea" (which is consonant with his "slipped" memory), is likewise situated in a confluence of multi-denominational religious imagery. Welty's appreciation for religious diversity, so apparent in her photographs, shapes the stream of sympathetic characters attending to McKelva in his final days. The Presbyterian McKelva shares a room with the blind madman/prophet Mr. Dalzell, who hails from the same part of Mississippi as Fay's Baptist family. As Laurel and Fay anxiously await McKelva's convalescence, broad themes about life and vision, reminiscent of various non-denominational religious adages, punctuate their stay: fire as the breath of life ("Don't let the fire go out, son!" Mr. Dalzell calls repeatedly), and light as truth, darkness as blindness, and vision as a holy signifier of spiritual redemption coalesce upon his passing (29).

Judge McKelva may have been a Presbyterian deacon, but he died on a Catholic holiday. Shrove Tuesday, also known as Fat Tuesday, Pancake Tuesday, or in French, *Mardi Gras* is both a repentance day for Catholics and a day of indulgence. Catholics go to confession in preparation for Lent, a forty-day period of self-denial and repentance. The significance of the forty days of Lent is anchored in the stories of the Bible: the forty days of flooding in Genesis, the forty years the Hebrews spent in the wilderness, Moses's forty-day fast before receiving the ten

commandments and Jesus's forty days of fasting before beginning his ministry.[142] So too is the number forty important to McKelva's unclaimed repentance: "Perhaps she was forty, and so younger than Laurel. There was little even of forty in her looks except the line of her neck and the backs of her square, idle hands" (26). *Fay* is McKelva's indulgence; *she* is what he should give up for Lent. Her "idle hands" connote the proverbial "Devil's workshop," and she represents the very sin, the evil, for which Judge McKelva should atone: 'marrying down' after the death of his wife, failing to realize that his lust for the Baptist Fay is not as honorable as his love for Becky, and upending the class distinctions enforced through his Presbyterian peers in Mount Salus. After symbolically committing adultery by attempting to prune Becky's Climber and displaying the family fig tree for the public eye, Judge Clinton McKelva dies of blindness in New Orleans, far away from his Edenic Mount Salus home, unshriven on Shrovetide Tuesday, amid a confluence of religious themes.

Sins of the Father: Reading Below the Belt in **The Optimist's Daughter**

'Queering' literature is a process of determining that which is most unsettling, or that which remains unsettled; reading for repressed content is the act of looking for unsettled, or unsettling, moments. In Eve Sedgwick's words, queer is "a continuing moment, movement, motive, recurrent, eddying, troublant" (*Tendencies* xii). And although, as Donald Hall notes, the term's "shock value" has subsided in recent years, "'queer' still demands a confrontation with issues of discursive power: it will always be an epithet reclaimed and can continue to signal normalcy challenged" (3). In the following paragraphs, I'll look at how the rites of Judge McKelva's funeral exposes queered moments in which an underlying critique of race, class and gender inequities plague McKelva's beloved Mount Salus community.

[142] See Exodus 24:18, 34:1 – 28; Numbers 13:25, 14:34; Deuteronomy 1; Matthew 24:1 – 2; and Mark 13:1 - 2.

Welty's literary technique all but demands this approach, for while she claims in a letter to her editor Diarmuid Russell about the civil unrest in Mississippi that "all I ever had to say about anything was expressed only in fiction," critics nonetheless find her style to exhibit a "preference for the complex and indirect" complaining that "her point, left so cryptic, gets lost" (Pollack 4; quoting Dean Flowers 4). Christina Neckles paves the way for broad critical inferences from *The Optimist's Daughter*, noting that the novel "cultivates a sense of Kristevan intertextuality" whose "patterns of literary reference and allusion are figures for a more comprehensive method of understanding the world" (Neckles 162). Reading religious allusion in *The Optimist's Daughter* for repressed content about Southern "peculiarities" refocuses on Welty's intertextuality. Welty deemed overt messaging in fiction as "character-killing," as heavy-handed politics that "distorts a work of passion for the sake of a cause."[143] The mere fact that Welty acknowledges her distaste for moralizing in fiction prompts a different approach; we must look for what is buried, and what lies between the lines of text. A writer's frame, as Welty acknowledges, was "[n]ot and empty frame, [but] a brimming one" (*On Writing* 49). This brimming quality is owing to the writer's task of bringing the views of the world into the frame of the text. But Welty's personal viewpoint, which was so delicately "combined" with the world's, is more hidden, and queerer in every sense.

Inside Welty's candid literary aesthetic, and within her characters who are as un-posed as her photographs, dwell commentary and critiques of gender, religion, and race. Of particular interest is the way in which Welty deals with issues of race and racism. Suzanne Marrs confirms that Welty's "stories focusing upon black characters show the empathy that was present in the photographs," and this is certainly true in "A Worn Path," a short story about an African

[143] (qtd. in Pollack and Marrs 2)

American grandmother who makes a long, arduous journey to collect medicine for her grandson, who, with his grandmother, make "the only two left in the world" of their family (Marrs 15; *Collected Stories* 148). Toni Morrison has observed that Welty wrote "about black people in a way that few white men have ever been able to write. It's not patronizing, not romanticizing – it's the way they should be written about."[144] In the case of *The Optimist's Daughter*, black people are frequently rendered invisible in a way that subtly indicts racism, and the moments where they do become visible evoke associations of miscegenation, incest, and the "peculiar institution" of the American South (Stampp). On first blush, Welty's works may seem unsensational in terms of gender, race, and religion, but throughout, her delicate progressive touch, barely shaded into the text, underpins the stories and characters she lovingly develops.

Laurel McKelva arrives in Mount Salus the evening before her father's funeral to find "half a dozen – a dozen – old family friends had been waiting . . . in the house. . . there was nobody who seemed to be taken by surprise at what had happened" (51). Laurel "seemed to remember that Presbyterians were good at things like this" (51). The presence of family friends makes sense, but before the reader can turn the page, she must ask: what does it mean that no one seemed surprised? *What* are Presbyterians good at? Are they good at preparing funerals, or at expecting death? Laurel only "seemed" to remember; as an outsider returned home, she is thus outside of the innermost circle of what is clearly a feminine rite, and Laurel's uncertain comment about Presbyterians alerts the reader that Laurel's "old family friends" might not be the trustworthy group they seem. Laurel's sideways criticism against her own denomination somewhat dismantles the sanctity of religious fervor and tradition, and disrupts the conventional wisdom that Southern religions has devout, pious adherents.

[144] (qtd. in Marrs, "Enduring Images" 15)

The gendered aspects of the funeral rites for Judge McKelva show an ambivalence toward organized religion and the role of the male as a spiritual leader. As the scene unfolds, one character *is* surprised at McKelva's death: "I'm not going to *have* it, I say," Major Bullock exclaims (52). Everyone else, "out of some sense of delicacy," had left their male counterparts at home, possibly to prevent the very scene that Bullock is causing (52). Bullock nearly collapses when asked to deliver Judge McKelva's suit to the funeral home, and he spends the remainder of the funeral events in a maudlin, emotional state: "[H]is arm gave at the elbow, and the suit for a moment sagged; the trousers folded to the floor. He stood there in the middle of the women and cried. He said, 'I just can't believe it yet!' . . . 'All right, I'll believe it for you,' said Miss Tennyson . . . She rescued the suit and hung it over his arm for him, so that it was less clumsy for him and looked less like a man" (55). Standing in the "middle of the women," Bullock is rendered inert as a patriarch and spiritual leader.

Thus Welty's Mount Salus funeral begins with a clear message: stoic efficiency is female territory, while the men are emasculated; Bullock breaks into tears, submits to his wife's admonishing rescue, and looks "less like a man" himself next to McKelva's winter suit. Moreover, despite the fact that Judge McKelva's colleagues, affectionately called the "bar," are all deacons in the Presbyterian church – spiritual leaders – it is Miss Tennyson who must believe it "for" Major Bullock, and when his disbelief remains, she exerts her authority over him: "'I still can't believe it!' the major loudly said . . . 'Rupert,' said Miss Tennyson, 'now listen to me. Believe it. Now you get busy and believe it. Do you hear what I say?'" (101-102). Miss Tennyson, along with the other female elders of Mount Salus, are the acting spiritual leaders of the community.

The spiritual leaders in fact, but not in practice, are all men, who are invested with the authority of storytelling at the funeral. At the funeral, Judge McKelva's patriarchal crowd, "the County Bar, the elders of the church, the Hunting and Fishing Club cronies," shared stories about Judge McKelva. The *most* important people shared them in private: Laurel "saw that most of the Bar . . . retired into her father's library and were talking among themselves back there" (78). However, the men seem to suffer from the same issues plaguing McKelva's vision and memory, and thus Welty implies the power of storytelling is misplaced. The library houses Judge McKelva's "civic papers," which constitute the "official record" of his life. As the storytelling progresses, Laurel realizes that they are chronicling Judge McKelva incorrectly, rewriting history, and tampering with the official record. She is outraged. But when she complains, her "bridesmaid" best friend Tish hushes her: "Bless his heart," Tish remarks of her father, Major Bullock; to Laurel she says, "Don't ruin it for Daddy" (80). Tish's comment drives home the outrageous accommodations made for men in Mount Salus – Major Bullock's storytelling, insensitive and inaccurate, is permitted as a consolation for his grief, while Laurel's grief is not.

"Don't ruin it for Daddy" may as well be the hometown motto for the patriarchy of Mount Salus. While the white males oversee the official record, they are ill-suited for the job. Laurel's status as an outsider-returned-home is too precarious to intervene, and she's not authorized to complain: As old Miss Pease bluntly relates the story of Laurel's widowhood in front of all the guests, Major Bullock quiets Laurel's protests, "Honey, what do you mean? Honey you were away. You were sitting up yonder in Chicago, drawing pictures" (80). Bullock's patriarchal condescension reveals that his power is unjust; Miss Tennyson may have the surprising role of spiritual leadership, but as these power relationships play out, the "queer" truth is that the least able are given the most power. Jione Havea points out in "Is There a Home for

the Bible in a Postmodern World?", that a postmodern reading of the Bible "reminds us that we occupy both real and ideological spaces that continually unravel (crumple and disintegrate) and thus we need to find meanings in the fray" (8). *The Optimist's Daughter* is an accounting of Laurel's search for meaning, between the "real and ideological spaces" of her memories of those of the 'daddies' in Mount Salus.

Renae Applegate House explains roles of a storyteller in Welty's fiction: "she interrogates the past, challenges the present, and brings to bear issues of memory and how those memories are cast and retold . . . [s]torytelling, in turn, becomes a powerful tool, a way to access the past and give meaning to the present, and often is a source of liberation" (95). For Welty, memory and story-telling are re-framed inside the text as idiosyncratic and multiple; the stories circulating about McKelva at the funeral contradict Laurel's memory, and ultimately force her to achieve a reckoning with her own past. The multiplicity of narratives coinciding with the religious funeral rites once more beckons the tenets of queer theology, which, in the lines of queer theologists Robert Goss, Marcella Althu-Reid, and others, turns the lens of queer theory toward the Bible and religious doctrine to expose the radical but integrative possibilities of multiplying the interpretations of the Bible. Queer theology's deconstruction of the unified message of religion, and lesbian/gay theory's alternative "liberation" narrative of the Bible, while unpalatable to traditional lines of literary theology, more accurately describe Welty's refusal to commit to a centralized Christian doctrine. In privileging multiple narratives, most obviously revealed in the theme of story-telling throughout the novel, she undermines the denominational hierarchies seemingly at play in her work. Her view of religion is not "unified,"

and the redemptive “liberations” of her characters occur, much like in gay and lesbian theology, through storytelling.[145]

As in her photographs, Welty’s literary approach to religion enacts a queer sensibility; it celebrates multiple narratives, and portrays a sympathetic identification with the spiritual possibilities within homosocial relationships. Welty makes much of Fay’s outrageous antics at McKelva’s casket, and the inappropriate behavior of her relatives, the Chisoms, who arrive from Texas. These class distinctions, absurdly drawn, are linked back to religious denomination. “Well, you couldn’t expect her to stop being a Baptist,” old Mrs. Pease remarks afterward, and the Chisom family truck, with “tin sign on its bumper. ‘Do Unto Others Before They Do Unto You,’” captures this absurdity perfectly (90, 108). Religion, foreignness, and class are conflated here in an apparent recapitulation of typical social strata hierarchies. The out-of-state Chisom’s have the audacity to “walk in on” the funeral, while Grandpa Chisom, a native Mississippian who never moved away, is “shown in,” he “carefully dusts his hands” before approaching the coffin, and he arrives with a gift of local significance: “Lady, I carried you some Bigbee pecans” (77).

However, after the funeral guests have departed, Adele Courtland defuses denominational hierarchies when she comes to the defense of Fay: “‘I think that carrying-on was Fay’s idea of giving a sad occasion its due. She was rising to it, splendidly’ . . . ‘As a matter of fact,’ said Miss Adele, ‘Fay stuck to her guns longer than the rest of us, the ones who knew Judge McKelva better, and knew everything better. Major Bullock got outright tipsy, and everybody that opened

[145] Ken Stone’s “Bibles that Matter: Biblical Theology and Queer Performativity” argues that close reading of Biblical stories, and the act of “doing” Bible production (akin to Judith Butler’s thesis on gender performativity) is at the heart of queer theology, that is, it is the practice of storytelling that introduces the multiple narrative threads within which Biblical queerness and non-heteronormative sexuality emerges (14).

their mouths said as near the wrong thing as they could possibly manage'" (180-9). Adele, as it turns out, is herself Baptist, and in this surprising reversal, in which Mount Salus's most respected and reserved female leader is Baptist, Welty redirects her criticism from distinctions of religious class to one of those who would make such distinctions.

Race, by comparison, is rendered invisible, but pointedly so, and in a manner that condemns racism as much as replicating it. Missouri, a McKelva family friend and domestic worker, is at the funeral when, behind a screen in the library, Major Bullock boisterously recounts McKelva facing off with the Klu Klux Klan after sentencing a man for murder. Laurel is incensed; Major Bullock paints McKelva as a hero, inventing grand details that remind Laurel more of her mother than her father. As Bullock wraps up the tale, he blithely describes a witness who referred to herself as a "got-shot witness" (79). McKelva reckoned there are two kinds of witnesses, and that he would take the "got-shot witness" in every case: "He could see the funny side to everything," closed Bullock (79). The witness who had been shot was Missouri, the black woman who had lived with the McKelvas during the trial and had remained employed by them ever since. To almost everyone in the room, save Laurel and Adele, the black Missouri is invisible.

"Black Mount Salus" also attended Judge McKelva's funeral, and "the black had dressed themselves in black"; theirs are the shadows that likely "darkened the colored glass of the windows" at the church service (89). Welty continues to cast African Americans in terms of invisibility and shadow: Sis notes to Fay that she had a good turnout without "having to count those Negroes" (95). Thus blacks are invisible except for their clothing, when Laurel's gaze cavalierly travels uninvited over the lower-class bodies of her father's funeral. Danielle Fuller suggests that *The Optimist's Daughter* can be seen as a "plantation discourse that confirms the

social and economic power of white males of the middle and upper classes" (294). In queering this paradigm, and looking for disruptions in the power discourses attached to whiteness, such as Major Bullock's embarrassingly inaccurate accountings of Judge McKelva and Missouri, what emerges instead is a condemnation of white privilege, and by extension, its historical tendency toward abuse, miscegenation, and incest. Such criticisms are readily apparent in Welty's photography, which we see in the divine lighting cast on the black members of Jackson's Holiness Church (Figure 4.11), and in her photograph of two small black girls carrying white dolls, or of a man standing at the "colored entrance" of a cinema (Welty, *Photographs* 51, 82).

When Laurel remarks that Fay "glistened in black satin," she invites a gaze onto Fay's body similar to the appropriative gaze she casts on the black people of Mount Salus, a view that reminds us of the latent homoeroticism in Welty's photography (84). Given that Judge McKelva's blindness prevented him from seeing Fay's class, and that Laurel's fashion critique marks her with a condescension similar to how she looks at the otherwise invisible blacks, Fay takes on commonalities with Welty's representation of Mount Salus's African American population. Read further, Judge McKelva, whose own colonizing habits include blending race and home when he takes in Missouri, as well as the foreign Fay, who hails from exotic "Madrid," Texas, can be seen as the culpable Southern patriarch. Fay's role as social transgressor, glistening in "black satin" is thus obliquely indicative of the transgressed body, particularly the one of slavery and miscegenation.

A subtext of incest also runs through the undercurrent of the funeral. As Laurel looks at her father in his coffin, she observes that the "lid had been raised only by half-section . . . below the waist he lay cut off from any eyes. He was still not to be mistaken for any other man" (62). In death, McKelva has what he lacked in life, that is, sexual privacy, but Laurel's observation

implies that she too could identify him sexually, and that her recognition lie below the waist (62). Adjacent to this reflection is the introduction of Mount Salus's "blind man" Tom Farris, who arrives at the funeral and advances to the piano ("'He's so happy,' said Miss Tennyson approvingly") (76). Tom is an African American said to attend all of Mount Salus's funerals, and yet "Laurel thought he had never been in the house before except to tune the piano, ages ago. He sat down on the same stool now" (79). Laurel's recollection here seems inordinately insecure, considering that her own mother had a funeral in the very same parlor. Like Judge McKelva, Tom is blind, but whereas McKelva's groin is hidden from sight, Tom's is on display: his "fly had not been buttoned up quite straight" (77). Laurel's uncertainty as to the date of Tom's last visit, juxtaposed with the specific confirmation that "He sat down on the same stool now," introduces a troubling semantic vibration. Her memory, incomplete and lapsing, coincides with issues of vision: of what she can't see, but would apparently recognize, below her father's belt, and what she *can* see, but does not recognize, below Tom's.

Gail Mortimer discusses Welty's use of image and meaning-making in a way that coincides with the argument I am suggesting: "By creating an explicit structure of relationships *between* images, Welty generates a particularly intricate network of meanings in which no single image stands alone, for each is modified by the simultaneous presence of others" remarks Mortimer, and the structure of Welty's references – that of McKelva's groin and recognition, and that of Farris's groin and a lack thereof, suggest that both references modify one another. Mortimer continues that "insisting on the interdependence of her images . . . enable[s] Welty to express more fully the subtlety and complexity of her view of how understanding itself takes place and of how we – ostensible seekers of knowledge – manage so often to evade it (Mortimer

618). Within this interdependence, between the groin of the patriarch father and the African American, there are layers of knowledge that both the reader and Laurel easily evade.

Like her photographic collections, whose juxtaposition of images stage progressive critiques about racism and patriarchy, and like her painting and portraits, which affirm a preference for homosociality, the images that Welty collects in *The Optimist's Daughter* are themselves subversive through incremental gradations of allusion, association, and referentiality. Associating Laurel's recognition of her father with what is hidden "below the waist," while she notices also the groin of blind piano player Tom Farris is certainly referential enough to be troubling. Gathered in that relationship are themes of incest and patriarchy, and even slavery as Laurel once again allows her gaze to travel uninvited, this time into Tom's sexual privacy. Welty's fiction, like her visual work, is never rigidly structured but rather fluid and inclusive, and this fluidity makes adjacent connections possible, but not static, in her imagery. As in the multiple modes of dominance and submission hinted at in the scene between Laurel, McKelva, and Farris, Welty's aesthetic is sometimes overwhelmingly open-ended, and epitomizes the infinite nature of referentiality. Given Welty's own breadth of experiences and her expansive appreciation for the countless iterations of the "holiness of life," such an approach is appropriately inexhaustible, as well as appropriately indeterminate. Like Flannery O'Connor, Welty's double vision cloaks a surprising perspective, one that would seem to contradict the prevailing sentiments about her works. By applying this visual metaphor to her literary practice, Welty opens to scholars the occasion to press more firmly on non-traditional and seemingly unlikely analyses. Indeed, it is to our great advantage, for such readings, as I've begun to explore here, validate a queerness to Welty that will change how we read the public and private "pictures at once in [her] frame" (*On Writing* 49).

Seeing Double: Envisioning Women's Writing in the South

As Susan Marrs's authoritative biography confirms, Welty was a staunch Democrat dedicated to liberal ideals, and her political commitments were "well known in conservative Mississippi" (*Eudora Welty xvii*). Welty was, as Marrs reveals, "not provincial"; she "traveled widely, frequently, and for extended periods, being entertained by such notables as Bernard Berenson and David Rockefeller but also enjoying third-class shipboard accommodations, Parisian left-bank cafés, and the company of bohemian sorts" (*xviii*). When Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus interfered with integrating Little Rock High School in 1958, prompting the arrival of Federal armed troops, Welty wrote to her editor, "Such awful things happening, I feel like emigrating from the whole country. Bayonets!" (qtd. in Marrs 268). For Welty, double vision involved "two pictures" in the same frame: the writer's picture, and how the rest of the world saw that picture. Such a trope seems self-defeating when we consider that the world's view in her literature was nonetheless inescapably her own representation of that world view. But in highlighting her personal progressivism and queer tendencies, the two frames become more distinct: that which Welty felt the world believed, and that which she believed. Welty was careful to hide her political indictments, and as a result, she cast her critical objects *into* the flow of cultural paradigms and not against it. Welty's fiction introduces tiny counter currents that, accumulated over the course of her career, amount to a sizeable protest against the moral failings of her community. If Southern politics during Welty's lifetime were in any way "queer" to the national discourse on civil rights, then Welty was "queer" to the South, and her queerness is traced across the inner picture of the double frame.

For Welty, memory is the gold standard of morality. She explains this in the context of her photography; "the photographer may capture – rescue from oblivion – fellow human beings

caught in the act of living. He is devoted to the human quality of transience" (qtd. in Marrs, "Enduring Images" 17). Reminiscent of her "reverence . . . for the holiness of life," Welty's piety emerges in her devotion to art that preserves memory. Her characters' appreciation of the "human quality of transience," through memory, becomes the moral arbiter of her works. Another ekphrasis-memory in *The Optimist's Daughter* expresses this commitment across Welty's artistic visions – as photographer, author, and the feeling voice of Laurel. Judge McKelva's "procession passed between ironwork gates whose kneeling angels and looping vines shone black as licorice," which replicates a photograph from the 1930s published in Welty's *Country Churchyards* (*Optimist's* 87; *CC* 68). Welty's memory of the cemetery gate's "kneeling angels" in her novel is itself a reminder of the "holiness of human life" she finds in Southern funeral rites, and of the "human quality of transience" captured in the iron, marble, and stone art of cemeteries.

Eudora Welty writes of and within a community that, while deeply flawed, nonetheless inspires her sympathy. Flannery O'Connor, by comparison, tells stories of individuals on singular spiritual journeys. O'Connor's characters embark on internal journeys sparked by a divine encounter, never by a personal will or collective experience. O'Connor's social and physical limitations due to her illness no doubt contributed to her conservative politics, and her commitment to Catholic doctrine was a profound intellectual pursuit that must first define her aesthetic and worldview. This worldview, for O'Connor, was inseparable from faith; "to try to disconnect faith from vision," writes O'Connor, "is to do violence to the whole personality, and the whole personality participates in the act of writing" (O'Connor, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald 181). O'Connor and Welty both understood their fiction in terms of double vision, but the similarity ends there; nothing divides the two authors more than their disparate conceptions of

double vision. While Welty was reluctant to take up political causes directly in her literature, O'Connor saw no reason to write literature without a razor-sharp religious intent. These distinct goals marshal diverse analytical approaches: O'Connor's works flourish under structural considerations that imitate the clear, bold patterns of her artwork, and the logical and hierarchical architecture of Catholic doctrine. Welty's works ask for a more delicate and probing approach, and call forward the destabilizing and multiplying cruxes of queer theory. As with her photographic film, which produces images whose contrast, greyscale, and interspersion of shadow and light depend infinitely on external processes of exposure and development, Welty's works, full of ambiguity, semiotic slippage, and allusion, depend on external processes, like queer theory, brought to bear by her critics. O'Connor asks that we embrace the concrete world of her fiction, while Welty asks us to read between the lines.

What is less apparent in their fiction, and more apparent in their art, is that O'Connor is concerned with *place*, while Welty is concerned with *people*. O'Connor writes about characters who die just as they see the invisible and mysterious world of God; her fiction relies on place to pivot the concrete to the spiritual. Likewise, O'Connor's paintings confirm this intention; all of the slides in the George Becham collection, save the self-portrait, depict non-human subjects in a place. Because of her poor health, O'Connor lived cheek to jowl with her region in a way that Welty did not, and thus O'Connor's sense of place has an uncomfortable closeness that she experienced in her own life within a limited community sphere. Welty, well-traveled and partial to extended jaunts in New York, San Francisco, and abroad, found her fascination with place lie in Mississippi's decaying churches and graveyards, in the moss-covered architecture of a culture, and history, slipping out of memory before her very eyes. Her characters are brought alive through memory, and their recovery of memories reinscribe Welty's belief that in the fleeting

nature of love, life and relationship lies the greatest spiritual good. Her photographs share this belief, and exhibit an incredible sympathy for the world of expression found in individual human souls. Where O'Connor uses people to construct a unique place, Welty uses place to reveal her unique people.

Seeing double, in women's Southern fiction, is about more than just the artistic lenses that Welty and O'Connor adopt. In each literary life, there is a doubling of their narrative against its patriarchal context, a double consciousness that exists in committing to a speech act, of any kind, inside a tradition overwhelmingly dictated by an authoritative culture controlled first by God, and then by men. While Welty and O'Connor, as upper class white women, were by no means placed on the lowest common denominator of social privilege and access, they were nonetheless conscious of the ways in which their speech might be censored, truncated or overwritten. Diane Roberts explains: "Southerners who don't behave themselves always get in trouble for putting Dixie's business in the street . . . Kate Chopin, Ellen Glasgow, Frances Newman, and Lillian Smith, whose work dismantled the cult of ladyhood, pearl by pearl, got called 'unwomanly'" (Roberts 127). O'Connor responded to this pressure, as Katherine Hemple Prown shows, by revising her style toward an increasingly masculine tone, while self-deprecatingly distancing herself rhetorically from those in possession of the cultural capital of Southern letters.[146] In contrast, Welty hid behind a demure, genteel persona that made her virtually unassailable, and fiercely protected her private, progressive views from a prying public. Malcolm Cowley commented that Welty was "[g]entle, unassuming, kind . . . an unusual figure .

[146] Katherine Hemple Prown argues that O'Connor worked hard to distance and alienate herself from female intellectuals in order to appear more masculine, and this argument bears out in O'Connor's letters and in her literary revisions, which entailed substantially removing female characters of consequence in order to effect the more popular male fictional perspective (Prown 11).

. . 'Isn't she nice!' other writers always say of her. Her writing is nice, too, but in the older sense of the word, . . . fastidious, scrupulous, marked by delicate discrimination, but never weak or paltering" (36). Welty and O'Connor both learned, through experience and observation, that a career in writing is not without consequences. These consequences informed, and in many ways, enhanced their art; they opted to speak through visual and literary genres, and they worked triply hard to ensure that their artistic double visions reflected a craftsmanship that could hold its own.

Scholars often critique works of literary regionalism through the elements that reveal or compromise an author's subjectivity; so too should we critique these author's artistic works, acknowledging that such pieces of artistic expression carry the same subjectivity. My expanded notion of literary ekphrasis moves beyond merely a literary description of an artistic work or object to descriptions that incorporate an author's memory of an artistic moment, as with Welty, or that respond to an artwork that remains completely beyond the text, as in O'Connor. Such a diverse and open understanding of ekphrasis allows us to employ its traditional tools to new territories, in order to reveal new interpretive keys. Inside these authors' artwork exists a more patent, insistent, and intentional artistic identity made more possible, or more obvious, in its visual form. These identities covertly inhabit their literary ekphraseis, but nonetheless constitute a double voicing of an otherwise marginalized subjectivity. Perhaps because it was nearly impossible for women to break into the visual arts during Welty and O'Connor's lifetime they felt freer to express themselves, knowing the likelihood that they would bear no judgment. Much riskier was writing, for they had found an entryway into the public discourse and were thus at the whim and mercy of its misogynistic paradigms. Like their literature, O'Connor and Welty's artworks were intentionally crafted, and communicate facets of their artistic epistemologies. But the epistemological qualities revealed in their artwork are different from those of their literature,

and reading their literature for the ekphrastic potential, whether it is direct, notional, temporal, or otherwise, gives us new instructions: this is *how* to look; this is *how* to see.

Epilogue

The question, “What is this dissertation about: literature, art, or regionalism?” was one that my committee pressed in the earliest planning stages of this project. At the time, I wondered what, if anything, might be said about such a vexed literary genre that could hold true across the many vectors of this loaded literary term. My committee’s questions probed at this problem, and the breadth of their inquiries revealed, early on, that I would have to be selective about which issues to take forward. Some of their questions included, “What is the opposite of regionalism?”, to which I might currently answer, *Literature that does not in some way center on issues of a place-aware community*. “Are Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*, or later works by Anzia Yezierska regionalist?”, to which I would now say, *Yes, I think so*. Other questions included “How is regionalism different from travel writing?”, “What about books that wed prose and photography from the Great Depression?”, and “Where does cosmopolitanism fit into literary regionalism?” To these questions, I can confidently respond: *I don’t know.*

Yet.

I don’t know the answers to some of these questions yet because when my committee asked me what this dissertation was about, I answered simply, but with certainty, “Literature.” Throughout this dissertation, I have allowed the regionalist author’s relationship to visual art to shape the critical path of each chapter. Despite my observations about the marginalization of literary regionalism, and the ongoing negotiations among theorists about the term’s significance, and despite the similar issues troubling literary ekphrasis and those who would restrict its application, this dissertation prioritizes the under-attended and important work of integrating women authors’ contributions to the sister arts into our understanding of their literary art. For

these authors at least, doing so has invested into the interpretive process a stronger and more complete expression of who they were, how they saw, and what they were expressing in their art.

It is only in completing this project that I can definitively say what it does, and thus it is likewise true that, in its completion, I can now confirm what it is does not do. This dissertation is not an argument for a singular theory or application of regionalism, ekphrasis, or the sister arts. This dissertation argues that ekphrasis is a formal trait of literary regionalism in that the genre recapitulates the visual impression of an author who found that impression artistically significant. I argue that regionalism and ekphrasis share a theoretical similarity and thus that analyses of regionalist literature benefit from the theoretical lenses commonly applied to literary ekphrasis, and vice-versa. I show that the roots of American literary regionalism are steeped in visual representations because of its initial status as an unexplored site of colonization. Exploratory accounts relied heavily on maps and illustrations to convey to readers abroad the first literary representations of America – first through maps, then through travelogue descriptions of plant-life and geography. Ultimately, the lines of belonging – and not belonging – shift from visual maps to the fictional and imaginative boundaries described by American authors.

While this dissertation is about literary regionalism, it stops well short of articulating what regionalism *is*. I argue that each individual regionalist voice inhabits a specific stance toward the region it describes. Because of that stance, I suggest we might think of region as relational, merely prepositional, where one voice speaks upon a region, another from within, still another across, and some even from inside and outside at the same time. This dissertation posits and explores regionalism as multiple, as relational, rather than offering a reified, singular definition in order to draw attention to my central claim: women artists have been systematically

barred from the cultural access points necessary to be canonized. Because of this incredibly disadvantageous climate for female visual artists, many of the artists in this dissertation became authors. Thus, I assert that we do a great disservice to literature when we sever it from its artistic milieu, for that is one historical context whose political aims are so similar to that of literature that we risk losing valuable insight into the structure and technique of the texts we read. And since women's relationship with the visual arts is particularly beset with canonization issues, it is doubly important to search for, identify, and recover not only single genre artists, but multi-modal artists such as those I discuss in this work. I advance this thesis through the practice of the dissertation itself, by training my attention on the instructive relevance of the sister arts for each individual author whose works – both literary and artistic – I take up.

What does regionalism, set free, look like? If regionalism is of an era, then Charlotte Perkins Gilman may provide such an example, as her freedom of movement, culturally and geographically, draws in threads that are prompting new and expanded conceptions of literary regionalism. Is it more properly housed in post-colonial studies? The central crux of post-colonial studies is not so far afield of literary regionalism to dismiss this idea; both, after all, concern themselves with the tempering of voices by dominant influences; both work to move traditionally marginalized voices toward the center. If regionalism knows no temporal bind, then its focus of home-ness and belonging is different from the traditional questions of hybridity and exchange in post-colonial studies, and thus offers still-relevant critical methods that might open new lines of inquiry to an ever-expanding corpus. There are many unexplored aspects of region in literature that I think may be relevant to regionalism as a genre and method, particularly as regionalism applies to nomadic, or place-deprived communities. Standing outside of region must, in some way, work to limn and construct region, and in such populations, explicitly cultural

claims to authenticity, rather than geographic claims, license the content of fiction or ethnography. I am interested ways of thinking about regionalism as a method of inquiry, one unmoored from its historical trappings, not only for its potential to reframe current conversations about contemporary literature, but also for its potential to return some of the cultural capital once granted the literary genre – for its potential as a rising tide to, as John F. Kennedy phrased it, "lift all boats."

The future of this project does lie, in part, in these unexplored avenues of regionalist theory. But this project's future is much more firmly rooted in its literary interventions via the sister arts. Sarah Orne Jewett and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's seemingly antithetical aesthetics emerge from shared historical coordinates that represent a new and refreshing look at women's vocation in the arts. Licensed by the Swedenborgian doctrine of use, both authors leveraged that rhetoric into their respective artistic careers. What bears further investigation is how the artistic movements, especially the aesthetics movement and the flower-painting movement, intersected in the simultaneous and far-reaching fad of communicating via the language of flowers. I see a similarly stand-alone project potential for the other two literary chapters; Willa Cather's epiphanic ekphraseis have never been investigated in terms of her artistic breadth, nor have they been theorized as a formal component of her ekphraseis. Similarly, I have just scratched the surface of the potential readings of Welty and O'Connor's ekphrastic literary visions, particularly O'Connor, whose paintings have been so shielded from scholarly inquiry that they have become almost a holy grail for her critics.

The idealistic impulse to think of each of my chapters – the first one on regionalism and ekphrasis, the second on Jewett and Gilman, the third on Cather, and the fourth on Welty and O'Connor – as potentially standalone, book-length projects, is indicative of the most

fundamental element of this dissertation, which is the joy with which I discovered and explored these revelatory windows into the lives and minds of authors I admire. I am very fortunate in that this project, from its most nascent to its most formalized iterations, has been a pleasure to research and write. The query of this project, that is, the sister arts, began with a conference-style seminar presentation in an American literature class taught by this dissertation's advisor, Andrew Newman. I discovered Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Gems of Art*, the art anthology that she put together during her supposed "breakdown" years, and one whose overt interest in orientalist iconography transformed my understanding of the author and her short story "The Yellow Wall-paper." From that moment, this project has had a life of its own, and, in my endeavor to select the best examples for this work, this project is still evolving toward a hypothesis that literary regionalists, perhaps even more so than other kinds of authors, are partial to visual art.

Instead of trying to 'solve' literary regionalism, I pursued the elements of my dissertation that, fortunately for me, themselves imitate the experience and pleasure of reading. For at its most basic level, my dissertation conducts the work of finding art inside art, and thus this has been a scholarly pursuit full of rewarding and joyful work. I knew that writing this dissertation would present an opportunity to return to the original pleasure that brought me to the English major as an undergraduate, and in that regard, the process of writing this work did not disappoint. The discoveries and epiphanies I have encountered in reading these authors through their sister arts has been an experience that I can only describe as exhilarating. In this project's future form, whatever that may be, it is this exhilaration, this sense of discovery and illumination, that will give it life.

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