Colony Writing: Creative Community in the Age of Revolt

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Abstract

This dissertation studies the impact of a form of literary patronage, domestic writers' colonies, on U.S. literary production in first half of the twentieth century. I discuss Provincetown, Massachusetts; Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico; the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire; and Yaddo in Saratoga Springs, New York. Hundreds of writers, artists, and composers lived and worked in these colonies, but I focus on writers whose relationship with a colony caused a significant shift in their career, including Eugene O'Neill, Willa Cather, Thornton Wilder, Carson McCullers, and Katherine Anne Porter. There have been many studies of literary patronage in this period—from little magazines and expatriate networks, to the Works Progress Administration, to university creative writing programs—but there is no literary-historical account of domestic writers' colonies as a distinctive set of institutions.

"Colony Writing" argues that domestic writers' colonies made a space for writers who were neither commercial bestsellers nor high modernists, but occupied an uncharted position in the literary field. These colony writers valued participation in creative community over personal profit or aesthetic experimentation. While their work spans many genres and styles, it shares a preoccupation with heterotopias: spaces outside of mainstream culture that have the power to reshape social life. Colonies placed writers on the margins of American society, and writers celebrated that marginality as an imaginative advantage, one that gave them an outsider's perspective on the culture at large.

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For Louise A. Roberts.

Introduction

This dissertation studies the impact of a form of literary patronage, domestic writers' colonies, on U.S. literary production in first half of the twentieth century. I discuss Provincetown, Massachusetts; Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico; the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire; and Yaddo in Saratoga Springs, New York. Hundreds of writers, artists, and composers lived and worked in these colonies, but I focus on writers whose relationship with a colony caused a significant shift in their career, including Eugene O'Neill, Willa Cather, Thornton Wilder, Carson McCullers, and Katherine Anne Porter. There have been many studies of literary patronage in this period—from little magazines and expatriate networks, to the Works Progress Administration, to university creative writing programs—but there is no literary-historical account of domestic writers' colonies as a distinctive set of institutions.

"Colony Writing" argues that domestic writers' colonies made a space for writers who were neither commercial bestsellers nor high modernists, but occupied an uncharted position in the literary field. These colony writers valued participation in creative community over personal profit or aesthetic experimentation. While their work spans many genres and styles, it shares a preoccupation with heterotopias: spaces outside of mainstream culture that have the power to reshape social life. Colonies placed writers on the margins of American society, and writers celebrated that marginality as an imaginative advantage, one that gave them an outsider's perspective on the culture at large.

I. Colony Writers and the Literary Situation

The year is 1926, you live in Connecticut, or Colorado, or Iowa, and you're a writer. You don't come from a wealthy family, or if you do, they refuse to subsidize your creative ambitions.

You've written for newspapers and magazines, but you've never received a salary from any organization. You could study for a Master's degree in literature, or teach in a boarding school, or work as a private tutor. If you're a woman, you could get married. But you don't want a day job, or a husband. You want to write. Lucky for you, 1926 was a watershed year in the history of literary patronage in the United States. The Guggenheim Foundation awarded its first creative fellowships in the previous year, allowing writers and artists to pursue their dreams overseas without the distraction of earning a living. If you are a young literary radical who mourned *The Little Review* and would do anything to drink where James Joyce drank, then the Guggenheim may be your passport to the capital of the republic of letters. The Book of the Month Club was also founded in 1926. This engine of the middlebrow was a boon to now-forgotten popular novelists like Booth Tarkington, but also to key figures in the multicultural canon like Richard Wright.[1] If you balance taste and kitsch, seriousness and scintillation, then your first novel might land on the subscription lists of the B.O.M.C., earning you a financial cushion and wider acclaim. 1926 was also the year that an organization called Yaddo opened in Saratoga Springs, New York, offering a temporary retreat for writers, artists, and composers. Yaddo would provide you more than just a month or two of good meals, a private studio, and freedom from rent. It also offered a life in close contact with other writers and artists, both successful ones and fellow aspirants. It gave instant access to the kind of creative community that neither the travel grant nor the literary marketplace could guarantee.

Yaddo was the last to open—though, as we will see in Chapter Four, the first dreamed up—of a wave of domestic writers' colonies founded in the early decades of the twentieth century. These included Marian MacDowell's colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire (1907);

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[1] On the history of the Book of the Month Club, see Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 93-147.

the group of radical journalists and experimental playwrights in Provincetown, Massachusetts (1912); and the Mabel Dodge circle in Taos, New Mexico (1917). Together, these colonies reshaped the U.S. literary field in the first half of the twentieth century by providing patronage to writers who considered themselves "artists," in the sense that their work had more than just commercial value, but, for reasons of temperament, talent, or timing, were never absorbed into the modernist coteries of Europe or New York.

Literary scholars have labeled many of these writers "regionalists," but my investigation of writers' colonies suggests a more complex story about the relationship between literary production and literary setting.[2] In the 1910s, Eugene O'Neill's early plays were first performed for the Provincetown colony; while living there, he wrote both his Pulitzer Prize-winning melodrama *Beyond the Horizon*—set on Cape Cod—and his Expressionist play *The Emperor Jones*—set on an unnamed Caribbean island. In 1925, Willa Cather took a trip to New Mexico and began *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, a novel about Catholic missionaries and Native Americans inspired by her visits to Taos with Mabel Dodge and Dodge's Pueblo husband Tony Lujan. Cather finished the novel in 1926 at the MacDowell Colony, where Thornton Wilder completed his bestselling novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, set in eighteenth-century Peru. In the 1930s, Wilder wrote his most famous play, *Our Town*, at MacDowell, and modeled Grover's Corners on the village of Peterborough, New Hampshire. In the 1940s, Yaddo hosted a whole generation of Southern writers, including Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Truman Capote, and Flannery O'Connor.

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[2] Alternatively, Susan Hegeman coins the term "peripheral modernists" to describe writers like Willa Cather, W.E.B. Dubois, William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston, and William Carlos Williams who "held the relationship between past and present, and center and periphery, in dialectic tension." *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 23-4. My project could be seen as offering an institutional history of peripheral modernism.

No writer thought more about colonies than Malcolm Cowley, who composed *Exile's Return*, a chronicle of expatriate life in Paris, at Yaddo in the early 1930s. A keen observer of his literary generation, Cowley was a longtime member of Yaddo's literary admissions committee and Board of Directors. For Cowley, looking back from the 1940s and 1950s, the colonies were part of a modern literary Golden Age in America when writers toiled in noble obscurity, unincorporated into mainstream cultural production. In a 1946 essay entitled "Limousines on Grub Street," he bewailed the newly "bureaucratic situation" of American letters, in which the collectivized authorship practices of big magazines and Hollywood "script factories" were leading to a star system: a world of large cash payouts for the lucky few, and specialized, anonymous toil for the many. Cowley contrasted "the most popular writers," who during the early 1940s "were earning money almost at the rate of war contractors," with the toiling majority who lived on "an irregular series of little windfalls"—a publisher's advance, a story sold to a magazine, a literary prize, or "an invitation to spend a month or two writing at Yaddo or the McDowell [*sic*] Colony."[3] Including the colonies in his sketch of the virtuous writer—those who "lack[ed] the art of salesmanship, or regard[ed] its use as a dangerous temptation"—Cowley suggested that artistic integrity had its signature institutional context. In the case of the colonies, integrity was more of a social and moral stance than a guarantee of literary distinction.

In *The Literary Situation*, Cowley's 1954 "natural history" of American writers from the 1920s through mid-century, he insisted that "each of the colonies is doing more for the arts in America, in a modest and practical fashion, than foundations that disburse much larger sums of money."[4] The promotional materials of colonies like MacDowell and Yaddo are full of lists—of colony "fellows," of the works they produced—as if to prove Cowley's claim about what

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[3] Malcolm Cowley, "Limousines on Grub Street," *The New Republic* (November 4, 1946): 589.

[4] Malcolm Cowley, *The Literary Situation* (New York: Viking, 1954), 190.

colonies have done for American artists. Rather than merely counting writers, I argue that colony writers complicate the story of literary professionalism in the first half of the twentieth century, revealing a strange doubleness in the social role of the writer. Colony discourse figures writers as both monk-like pariahs, cloistered away from the everyday world of family and work, and as "creative workers" with their own rules of the trade. Colony writing reflects this ambivalence between exception and typicality, alternately figuring the poet as a prophet, and as an exemplary modern subject.

The rejection of Victorian values and the longing for creative community were widespread in this period, and writers found community in places far afield from the modern city. Writers like Mary Austin honed their craft and developed a sense of vocation among the informal social arrangements of writers' colonies—not in universities. In her autobiography *Earth Horizon*, Austin looked back on her early life in Bakersfield, California as one of social and artistic privation. Remembering her "ignorance of the professional procedure of writing," Austin insisted that she "needed what all young creative workers need, communication, the firming pressure of shared technical certainties; the need taken for granted among farmers, bankers, educators, small business men, but assuming to the American mind, when it occurs in the Arts, a savor of improbity."[5] Austin's Harvard was a treetop perch in Carmel near the cabin of George Sterling, the poet who led a bohemian exodus from San Francisco. In this seaside village, she first found "the firming pressure of shared technical certainties"—or what Raymond Williams referred to in *The Politics of Modernism* as "a community of the medium; of their own practices."[6] Williams associated these literary communities with the metropolis, but Austin's

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[5] Mary Hunter Austin, *Earth Horizon, Autobiography* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), 228.

[6] Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989), 45. As early as the 1970s, Hugh Kenner noted the dispersed nature of modernism in the United States, a nation that lacked a true capital in the European sense. Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York:

Paris was an adobe-walled compound in New Mexico, home of Mabel Dodge, whose generous patronage and eclectic modernist home served as personal balm and aesthetic inspiration.

High-mindedness aside, the most obvious draw of colony life was economic. For young, poor writers like James T. Farrell, Henry Roth, and John Cheever, a residency at Yaddo offered "three hots and a cot," a chance to write (and eat) without having to resort to hack work or menial jobs.[7] Colonies also attracted writers looking for an escape, perhaps only temporary, from bourgeois gender roles and the family-based household. They drew women writers from all over the country, but were especially hospitable to those who grew up in the remote provinces and whose career paths bypassed Radcliffe, Bryn Mawr, Vassar, and the other Eastern women's colleges that served as gateways to the literary scene. The colony was a collective solution to the problem Virginia Woolf articulated in *A Room of One's Own*. Yaddo, MacDowell, and Taos offered not only an inviolable studio, but also the emotional support of generous colony managers like Marian MacDowell, Elizabeth Ames, and Mabel Dodge. The colony could serve as an institutional "wife" of sorts, outsourcing or collectivizing the domestic labor and caretaking that usually fell to women.

It was not just women who flocked to the colony as an alternative to family life. For single men like Thornton Wilder and the poet Edwin Arlington Robinson, as well as gay men like Witter Bynner, Truman Capote, the critic Newton Arvin, and the composer David Diamond, the colony provided not only community and a place to meet potential sexual partners, but also an identity: the "monkish" poet as a socially acceptable version of singledom. Even a heterosexual family man like Cowley, who settled down from his wild Paris days to a farm in

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Knopf, 1974), especially 160-1.

[7] Kevin Young, "Youngblood" in *A Place for the Arts: The MacDowell Colony, 1907-2007*, ed. Joan Ross Acocella (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2006), 40.

Connecticut and had a day job as an editor at *The New Republic*, continued to make annual writerly trips to Yaddo to escape the distractions of children, commuting, and his garden.[8]

The colony was an economic and social refuge, but also a distinctive form of patronage that some writers preferred. The three paths available to our young writer in 1926 were never mutually exclusive. Cather and Wilder both wrote bestselling novels that also became Book of the Month Club selections (in 1931, 1941, 1935 and 1948, respectively). Katherine Anne Porter took her first trip to Europe in 1931 with the help of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and she even made it into Gertrude Stein's *atelier*. But Porter's path is an instructive example of the life cycle of a colony writer. She was disgusted by the cliquishness and celebrity culture of Stein's Paris milieu, and when her fourth marriage collapsed in 1940, Porter took refuge at Yaddo, where she lived for long stretches over the next six years under the care and companionship of Elizabeth Ames, the colony's longtime executive director. For Porter and other provincial writers, colonies offered an intentionally pluralistic—and less exclusive—world than metropolitan Paris, London, and New York, which seemed to be more thoroughly governed by the rules of the market, celebrity, and elite social networks.[9]

Porter referred to Yaddo as a "monastery," an image that recurs in colony discourse.[10] It was precisely this literary monasticism that attracted Thornton Wilder to the MacDowell Colony. Wilder's biography is the closest to that of our anonymous patronage-seeker from 1926. His father, a practical and public service oriented New Englander, was dubious about young

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[8] In a typical letter, Cowley wrote to the Executive Director, "I miss Yaddo and can't tell you how much I enjoyed my month there. It seems to me that I have to get away from home in order to do any sustained thinking or writing." Cowley to Elizabeth Ames, 1 October 1941, Yaddo Records, Reel 2, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

[9] See Kathryn S. Roberts, "Writing 'Other Spaces': Katherine Anne Porter's Yaddo" *Modernism/modernity* 22, no. 4 (2015): 735–57.

[10] *Letters of Katherine Anne Porter*, ed. Isabel Bayley (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990), 179.

Thornton's literary ambitions and encouraged him to take a Masters degree in French Literature and a high school teaching job. But in 1924, Wilder spent his first residency at the MacDowell Colony, where would return more than a dozen times over the next three decades.[11] A few years later, he wrote to colony founder Marian MacDowell that he "bless[ed] the day" he applied to the Colony, where he "first saw in certain persons and in the spirit of the group an ideal of how to work and the dignity and concentration of art pursued single-mindedly."[12] Colonies were more than just collections of people: they were institutions that imposed spatial boundaries and temporal rhythms that some writers found to be enormously stimulating.

Some, but not all. Robert Lowell called Yaddo "a sort of Saint Elizabeths without bars," referring to the psychiatric hospital where Ezra Pound was being held at the time, and composer Ned Rorem joked in a letter that it was "a luxurious concentration camp where I can neither camp nor concentrate."[13] The colony's institutional space and spirit of collective endeavor were singularly unappealing to modernist writers of a certain type. Predictably, when it came to endorsing a model of literary patronage, Ezra Pound sung the praises of the Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1925, Pound wrote to John Simon Guggenheim to praise "the terms in which your Memorial Foundation is announced."[14] Pound believed the Guggenheim grants would help "make a civilization" by "exploit[ing] to the full those individuals who happen to be given by nature the aptitudes, *exceptional* aptitudes, for particular jobs." "You can no more get results in

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[11] See Penelope Niven, *Thornton Wilder: A Life* (New York: Harper, 2012).

[12] Wilder to Marian MacDowell, 12 June 1929, Marian MacDowell Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Box 4.

[13] *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), 112; Richard K. Parker, *A Digest and Bibliography of Writings About Yaddo* (Saratoga Springs, NY, 2004), 268.

[14] Thomas G. Tanselle, "Chronology" in *The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation 1925-2000: A Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Record* (New York: John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, 2001), 32.

art, literature, the amenities from minds organically mediocre," he insisted, "than you can get athletic records from bodies organically mediocre."

The Guggenheim awarded writers with "*exceptional* aptitude" an escape route from the democratic mediocrity of America to the cosmopolitan centers of Europe. Pound's sentiments exemplify the elite anti-provincialism of high modernism. Pound, as David Hollinger notes, would have dug a tunnel from London to Paris to bypass the cultural wasteland in between.[15] We can infer that Pound would condemn the colonies for tolerating mediocrity. Other writers objected to colonies for their inefficiency and stifling intimacy. In 1938, Slovenian-American writer Louis Adamic, who had spent several residencies at Yaddo in the early 1930s, published an exposé of the colony in *Esquire*. After lampooning Yaddo's whimsical mythology and its tolerance for "nonsensical and excited talk about The Revolution" around the dinner table, Adamic ended with praise for the Guggenheim. Asked by a wealthy friend if she should start a colony on the West Coast, he urged her instead to help writers and artists "in some such impersonal, tactful, and economic way as was practiced by, say, the Guggenheim Foundation, whose secretary, Henry Allen Moe, saw but few of the people to whom fellowships were awarded."[16]

The relationships between colony managers and their guests were often intensely personal, but for writers like Porter, Wilder, and Cowley, this was a feature, not a bug. Colonies seemed to solve a distinctly American problem: intellectual loneliness. Cowley noted that "many European visitors, among them Stephen Spender and Simone de Beauvoir, have been impressed or saddened by the loneliness of American writers, as contrasted with the busy literary life of

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[15] David A. Hollinger, *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 60.

[16] Louis Adamic, "Ingrates at Yaddo," *Esquire*, July 1, 1938, 183, 184.

Paris and London."[17] The point was not that writers were isolated from other people. After all, Wallace Stevens worked in insurance, and William Carlos Williams was a doctor in Patterson, New Jersey. The point was that they were isolated from each other, and Cowley used this fact to explain the eccentricity and provincialism of American letters, from Hawthorne to Faulkner. Often novelists chose "exceptional characters who, like themselves, were outside the current of American society" (227). Colonies offered a community of fellow eccentrics, an escape into solidarity with other creative people on the economic, familial, and geographical margins.

II. Creative Community, from Pound Era to Program Era

Colonies differed from the universities that would become, after 1945, the dominant institution of highbrow literary production. The writers and critics who led creative writing classrooms cultivated appreciation for "craft" and a well-curated tradition. By contrast, Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony tended to be agnostic on the specifics of technique and artistic lineage, welcoming a wide variety of highbrow, middlebrow, and pulp writers.[18] The writers of Provincetown and Taos were more likely to be interested in grand utopian projects or local political battles than in modernist aesthetics. What mattered most at colonies was a writer's willingness to participate "harmoniously" in the community's habits of daily work. Colony writers thus practiced a distinctive form of autonomy: one that embraced communal life, as well as aesthetic and political pluralism, in exchange for temporary shelter from the market.[19]

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[17] Cowley, *Literary Situation*, 200.

[18] Writers of genre fiction such as Chester Himes, Patricia Highsmith, and Mario Puzo enjoyed multiple residencies at Yaddo. For a detailed consideration of the local politics of distinction at Yaddo, see Marcelle Clements, "Crème de la Crème: Highbrows, Lowbrows, Voracious Omnivores, High, Low, and Hi-Lo," in *Yaddo: Making American Culture*, ed. Micki McGee (New York: The New York Public Library, 2008), 103-18.

[19] Andrew Goldstone argues that modernism entails a set of what he calls, after Pierre Bourdieu, "autonomy practices." See Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism From Wilde to De Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Writers' colonies construe autonomy not so much as a "practice," but rather, as we will see, as a function of place.

The temporariness of writers' colonies may be one reason they have thus far earned little systematic attention from literary historians. In *The Elephants Teach*, a history of the origins of university creative writing programs, D.G. Myers devotes one chapter to writers' colonies. But he insists that communities MacDowell were "mere stopgaps" for most writers, "temporary accommodations" that "attempt[ed] to subsidize and give sanction to the life of art."[20] Historians such as Warren Susman have described the rise of a culture of abundance in early twentieth-century America, as a newly dominant class of salaried workers with disposable income and time for leisure replaced the producer-oriented culture of previous centuries.[21] Creative writers had a complicated relationship to work, leisure, and class. Scholars of American modernism have shown that writers in this period imagined their social role in new ways: as salaried professionals, employed by a newspaper; or wageworkers, paid by the WPA; or as celebrities, participating in the new modern media landscape.[22] The sheer variety of these studies points to the awkward relationship between writing and the mainstream world of work. As Myers notes, "the search was less for a career, some kind of sustained and remunerative work, than for a situation. And thus the tendency was to think in terms of places rather than professions."[23] It was

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[20] D.G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006 [1996]), 77-8, 148.

[21] Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984 [1973]).

[22] On literary professionalism see Christopher P. Wilson, *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985); Louis Menand, *Discovering Modernism: T.S. Eliot and His Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Thomas F. Strychacz, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). On the WPA, see Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). On modernism and celebrity see Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Timothy W. Galow, *Writing Celebrity: Stein, Fitzgerald, and the Modern(Ist) Art of Self-Fashioning* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[23] Myers, *Elephants Teach*, 79.

not until after the Second World War that the research university became "the permanent center of artistic activity in America."[24]

Malcolm Cowley lamented the incorporation of writers into institutions like the university, while Myers and, more recently, Mark McGurl offer an optimistic account of the "rise" of what McGurl christens "the Program Era." But in a broader sense, all three tell a similar story about twentieth-century literary production in America: before 1945, during what Hugh Kenner called "the Pound Era," writers got by in a number of ways, chasing patronage and exchange rates and various employment opportunities. After 1945, universities took over the role of paying writers—and shaped a new generation of savvy readers—as part of a culture that worshiped creativity, self-expression, and expertise.[25] Though my study focuses on the first half of the twentieth century, it seems important to state at the outset that writers' colonies do not fit into this tidy before-and-after narrative.

For one thing, there are two types of writers' colonies, and they follow different historical patterns.[26] The first two chapters of my study explore the colonies in Provincetown and New Mexico, both of which emerged out of the loose constellation of people and ideas that the intellectual historian Henry May called the "Innocent Rebellion" of 1912 to 1917. Centered on Greenwich Village in New York, the rebels rejected Victorian beliefs in the mutually reinforcing

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[24] Ibid., 148.

[25] See Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[26] Art historian Karal Ann Marling traces two streams of the "Art Colonial Movement" in the early twentieth-century United States: informal vacation communities like Provincetown, frequented by painters who worked out-of-doors, and intentional communities like the Byrdcliffe Colony in Woodstock, New York, which derived from more utopian impulses. The writers of Provincetown and Taos benefitted from the infrastructure of existing art colonies. See Marling, "Introduction" in *Woodstock: An American Art Colony 1902-1977* (Poughkeepsie: Vassar College, 1977), unpaginated.

relationship among morality, progress, and culture.[27] Though these informal hotbeds of literary activity sometimes produced lasting institutions, the colonies themselves were highly dependent on individual personalities and close friendships, and rarely outlasted the people and relationships that drew them together in the first place. But it is not as if informal literary collectives died with the Great Depression. One could follow this story forward to postwar creative communities like the Beats, Black Mountain College, or the Women's Liberation Movement.[28]

The story of these informal collectives intersects with a more gradual rise of institutions like MacDowell and Yaddo. Less well known outside the small world of writers and artists, these colonies were founded around the turn of the century by members of an older cultural elite. In their rejection of urban life, the colonies were part of what cultural historian T.J. Jackson Lears has described as the widespread "antimodernism" of this period.[29] Like the Arts and Crafts communes founded in the United States in the late nineteenth-century, MacDowell and Yaddo owe an intellectual debt to the anti-industrial utopianism of John Ruskin and William Morris. These colonies preserved Victorian values like elite cultural stewardship, the cult of nature, and a philanthropic—sometimes patronizing—attitude toward new arrivals on the cultural scene,

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[27] Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992 [1959]).

[28] See for example Stephen Voyce, *Poetic Community: Avant-Garde Activism and Cold War Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). Nonetheless, there are important ideological continuities among the four colonies I study. For all their heterotopian potential, none of them ever really broke with the romanticism, idealism, and transcendentalism of nineteenth century thinking about the role of the artist.

[29] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 59-96. While formalized writers colonies like Yaddo shared some features of the antimodern ideology of Arts and Crafts, they had little interest in reforming labor practices, despite their frequent references to "creative workers." See also Marling, "Introduction."

especially young writers and artists who were the children of immigrants.[30] But they also proved remarkably flexible at accommodating the changing cultural values of the twentieth century.

Though they were inspired by late-Victorian ideas, MacDowell and Yaddo expanded in the second half of the twentieth century, thanks in part to major grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the MacArthur Foundation. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, similar institutions sprang up in their wake, including the Fine Arts Work Center (representing a return of writers to Provincetown in 1968); the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (1971); and the Millay Colony in Austerlitz, New York (1974). In our own age of "innovation incubators" and urban co-working spaces, Yaddo no longer seems so quixotic. Writers' colonies were both conservative institutions and oddly ahead of their time, helping to support the "creative class" a century before Richard Florida coined the term.[31]

If colonies point to the limitations of the usual pre/post-45 periodization of the American Literature field, they also demand a particular kind of narrative structure. "Colony Writing" is neither an in-depth institutional biography, like Martin Duberman's *Black Mountain: An Exploration of Community* (1972), nor a fully elaborated theory of an institutional form of literary production, like McGurl's *The Program Era* (2009). My approach has been conditioned by the nature of my subject.[32] Colonies are idiosyncratic communities, but they are also

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[30] Their almost monastic ordering of daily life could be seen as the production-side equivalent of the phenomenon described by Lawrence Levine: the attempt by cultural elites in the late nineteenth century to impose disciplined, orderly, "harmonious" practices of cultural consumption upon the unruly urban masses. See Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Harvard University Press, 1990), especially 177-96.

[31] Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

[32] I have found important models of institutional, sociological, and inductive historical approaches to modernist-era literature in Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University

recognizably part of a group of institutions with similar practices; thus it makes sense to think about four of them together. They do not, however, constitute a totalizing system in the way that universities did in the second half of the twentieth century, simultaneously shaping writers, publishers, and readers of literature. I treat the relationship between writer and colony as an encounter, to which both parties brought complicated assumptions about art and community, and through which both were changed. These encounters were overdetermined. Colonies attracted writers who were searching for "belonging" (O'Neill's term), for "communication" (Austin's), for "intimate" contact with new forms of aesthetic inspiration (Cather's). We tend to think of the early twentieth century as a period of innovation, individualism, and rebellion in American arts and letters. Even beyond the modernist avant-garde, Carl Van Doren identified a "revolt from the village" among realist novelists like Edith Wharton and Sinclair Lewis.[33] The writers and patrons I study participated in this revolt, but they created new forms of community to replace the old ones. Some of these communities were on paper, while others had walls and rituals, but all shaped what I call the Colony Imagination.

III. The Colony Imagination

The impact of colonies on American literature was simultaneously practical, thematic, and formal. Colonies allowed writers without independent means to pursue careers outside the marketplace; they fostered an interest in community that was neither regional nor ethnic; and they offered a new model for organizing life stories: not around the twin pillars of middleclass

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Press, 1999); Mark McGurl, *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Gordon Hutner, *What America Read: Taste, Class, and the Novel, 1920-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Much of this work takes inspiration from the cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. See for example *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[33] Carl Van Doren, "The Revolt from the Village" in *Contemporary American Novelists 1900-1920* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 146-57.

life—family and vocation—but rather around the confluence of strangers in alternative sites, from ships and hotels to monasteries and leper colonies. We can see the Colony Imagination at work in literary texts, but also in letters, memoirs, and institutional documents. It implies a certain optimism about the relationship between life and art: that the "ideal conditions" for creative production are attainable, and that the best way to go about producing those conditions is not to dole out grants or to satisfy readers, but to bring people together in scenic enclaves where they can have both privacy and intimacy, silence and serendipitous creative exchange. For writers, life in a colony also raised questions about the relationship between artistic community and broader regional, national, and global communities. The tensions endemic to colony life—between collectivity and individualism, separation and integration, asceticism and hedonism—structure the imagination of American literature in the first half of the twentieth century in ways that have yet to be fully articulated. Though the literary texts I explore conform to no single genre or aesthetic ideology, they share certain common features and strategies.

The first feature of the Colony Imagination has to do with setting. Colonies primed writers to think critically about how different spaces shape human behavior and relationships. The colony was both a privileged space, separated from the everyday world of work and family, and a space that invited comparison with other modern sites and institutions. On the one hand, colonies produced new social configurations—hence their attractiveness to queer, celibate, unmarried, and divorced writers, as well as those looking for a vacation from their official relationships. On the other hand, colonies could hardly escape from the social relations of the wider world, and they sometimes staged political and artistic conflicts in microcosm—as when Robert Lowell set off a Communist witch-hunt at Yaddo in 1949. Founders tended to insist on their colony's uniqueness: Katrina Trask proclaimed that Yaddo was not to be "an institution, a

school, a charity."[34] Nonetheless, its structural similarity to other institutions led to irreverent comparisons, from the asylum to the concentration camp.

In a lecture entitled "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault speculates about the existence of places in every culture that are outside of it, and yet bear a peculiar relationship to its everyday sites. (He mentions everything from ships and nursing homes to gardens and cemeteries.) To emphasize both the "otherness" and the "realness" of these places, and thus their contrast with utopias, he coins the term "heterotopia." These heterotopias or counter-sites function as "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which … all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."[35] The colony was an exemplary heterotopia—both a real space and one that referenced and reframed many other spaces. It was the heterotopian nature of early twentieth-century artistic enclaves that made them compelling modern social arrangements, but also imaginative models for rethinking modern social relations in literary form. Traces of the colony as a social and spatial form underpin such literary settings as Eugene O'Neill's crowded steamers and solitary islands, Willa Cather's missions and pueblos, Thornton Wilder's New England village, Carson McCullers' sad cafés, Katherine Anne Porter's hotels and ships.

The second feature of the Colony Imagination has to do with point of view. Many of the narratives, poems, and plays I discuss reach for wide vistas of historical and geographical distance, and or indulge in dramatic displays of omniscience. Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), Wilder's *The Woman of Argos* (1930), and Porter's "The Leaning Tower" (1941) all depend on a specifically historical kind of irony, in which reader and author understand events unanticipated by the characters. Wilder is also famous for incorporating a

[34] Katrina Trask, *Yaddo* (Saratoga Springs, NY: 1923), 98.

[35] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16 no. 1 (1986): 24.

narrator into a play. The Stage Manager in *Our Town* guides the audience through several years of events in the small New Hampshire town of Grover's Corners, zooming out to geologic and cosmic scales, and even moving between the living and the dead. These dramatic displays of perspective are intimately related to the colony's separation from the outside world.

Colonies were located outside the urban fray of cultural production and offered an alternative to modern norms of social organization. This positioning inspired critical reflection about the ways and means of the writing life. The term "creative workers" is not unique to Austin's autobiography, but appears frequently in the institutional documents of the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo. The term evokes older ideas about the artist as god-like shaper and marks the artist's distinctiveness from other kinds of workers. But it also begs the question, what kind of "work" is writing?

This brings me to the third feature of the Colony Imagination: writers who participated in colonies were unusually self-conscious—sometimes to the point of writers' block—about the status of their own creative labor. Thornton Wilder admired the "single-minded" concentration of Edwin Arlington Robinson, the MacDowell Colony's only "permanent resident."[36] But the biographies of Robinson and Katherine Anne Porter suggest that there is a dark side to the colony's idealized picture of creative community. At Yaddo, Porter experienced a kind of creative paralysis, such that completing her novel *Ship of Fools* took twenty years. The colony had the inverse effect on Robinson. Between 1923 and 1935, he published a new book of poems every year, averaging 2,200 lines annually in his last decade.[37] Many of these poems are lengthy re-workings of Arthurian legends in narrative verse, and few are read today. One critic compared

[36] Edward MacDowell Memorial Association, "In Memorium" *Colony News* (1935), Box 72, MacDowell Colony Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[37] Scott Donaldson, *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Poet's Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 420.

Robinson's over-production to "playing solitaire and hoping the game would last as long as possible."[38] We can understand what happened here as the creative version of what organizational sociologists call "goal displacement."[39] The term refers to the moment in an organization's life when the rules and procedures it developed to achieve its goals become the goals themselves. In the case of the art colony, creative production could become the price of membership in the community—art for art colony's sake. Robinson's poetic output came to be less like a vocation than a way of paying his dues.

For women writers, there were specific perils to participation in a writers' colony. In Provincetown, women like Mary Heaton Vorse who welcomed younger writers into their homes often found their own writing subordinated to the practical needs of the group. Individual members of writers' colonies were sometimes absorbed into the creative infrastructure that supported their writing and that of their peers. Conflicts between domestic labor and creative work are a recurring thematic concern in colony writing, from the memoirs of Provincetown's women writers, to Eugene O'Neill's early plays, to the novels of Mary Austin and Katherine Anne Porter.

These three elements—an interest in the social possibilities of heterotopian spaces, gestures of geographic and temporal distancing, and self-consciousness about creative labor—recur throughout the texts I explore in my study. "Colony Writing" names not a single genre or approach, but rather a common set of themes and strategies for organizing the social worlds of modern literature. Writers' colonies offered experiences in actual creative community, but also

[38] Hayatt H. Waggoner, "The Idealist *in Extremis*" in *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 94.

[39] "goal displacement," *A Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford Reference (2015), accessed February 22, 2016, doi: 10.1093/acref/9780199683581.001.0001.

the imaginative materials for rethinking both the writers' social role and the organization of modern social life in literary form.

In this dissertation, the encounters I explore between colony and writer unfold in roughly chronological order, beginning with Eugene O'Neill first trip to Provincetown in 1917 and ending with Katherine Anne Porter's resignation from Yaddo's Board of Directors in 1961, as she was editing the page proofs for *Ship of Fools*. But this is not the story of the evolution of the Colony Imagination; nor is it a taxonomy of its manifestation in four sites or historical moments. The methodology of each chapter differs slightly because the relationship among writer, text, and institution is determined by local factors. Channeling William James, I might have subtitled the project "The Varieties of Colony Experience."

Chapter One, "The Theater of Belonging," is about an encounter between a creative genius with rigorous professional standards and boundless personal ambition and a group of idealistic amateurs. Though initially the Provincetown Colony offered Eugene O'Neill an alternative home and an ideal setting to hone his craft, by the 1920s he began to treat it less as a community of mutual endeavor than as a colony of one. From magazine interviews to plays like *The Emperor Jones*, we can see O'Neill using Provincetown as a backdrop for staging his romantic persona for an expanding audience.

Chapter Two, "A Bridge Between Cultures," is about three women writers competing to produce an authoritative literary representation of New Mexico for an East Coast audience. In the 1920s, women like Mabel Dodge and Mary Austin relocated to New Mexico in order to start a renaissance of American culture from the Southwest. In a moment of uncharacteristic communal enthusiasm, Willa Cather briefly contemplated joining this porous, multiracial, female-dominated network of artists. Her 1927 novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop* registers

this enthusiasm, but locates the real story of the region firmly in the past—a move that infuriated Mary Austin, who saw in New Mexico the culture of the future.

The first two chapters document the ambivalent relationship between authorial genius and creative community. Chapters Three and Four turn to the institutionalized colonies where many so-called middlebrows and regionalists found a creative home. Chapter Three, "Community Men," shows how the MacDowell Colony used Edwin Arlington Robinson and Thornton Wilder to explain its institutional mission to a wider national audience. Robinson played the role of monk-like poet who would be destitute without the colony's support. Wilder went on the road to help raise money for Marian MacDowell's crusade to sustain a home for artists without an endowment. The publicity practices of the MacDowell Colony modeled a compromise between highbrow sophistication and mass participation, inspiring Wilder's middlebrow classic *Our Town*.

Chapter Four, "New Narratives of Community," is about two Southern writers who took refuge in a colony in a time of crisis. Katherine Anne Porter and Carson McCullers waited out the Second World War—and their divorces—at Yaddo. With opposing aesthetic and political convictions, Porter and McCullers were bitter rivals, but in 1949, they found themselves on the same side of an early Cold-War battle for the colony's soul. This alliance is anticipated in their fiction from this period, which explores the theme of spontaneous community as an alternative to the family. Reading these authors together generates a counterintuitive story about how place and community shape literature, based on institutional affiliation rather than regional origin.

There is a certain irony in identifying a "Colony Imagination" at all. Colonies presented themselves either in negative terms—as an escape from the everyday world of family and work—or in utopian ones: both the Provincetowners and the New Mexican expatriates believed

they were on the cusp of a cultural renaissance. Though none of these writers or patrons would have been able to point to the institutionally produced structural similarities I identify, the literary texts I analyze are often the best guides to what is going on in the colony. In the chapters that follow, I strive for a balance between following the actors and symptomatic reading, between tracing conscious intention and interpreting unconscious expression.[40] Middlebrow texts are rarely credited with the kind of self-reflexivity I find within *Our Town* or *Ship of Fools*.[41] Writers' colonies produced self-consciousness about creative practice that could result in paralysis, in preaching, or in something more radical: an understanding of how literature might create community, rather than merely representing it.

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[40] These methodologies find their classic articulation in Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). For recent methodological debates surrounding questions of "reading," see Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 1–21 and Heather Love, "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 371-91.

[41] An important exception to this is Tom Perrin, *The Aesthetics of Middlebrow Fiction: Popular US Novels, Modernism, and Form, 1945-75* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Chapter One

The Theater of Belonging

Eugene O'Neill and the Provincetown Colony

In November of 1940, Eugene O'Neill was thinking wistfully about the past. He had recently completed *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*, both set in 1912. *The Long Voyage Home*, a film adaptation of four of his early, one-act plays about the crew of a British tramp steamer, had just been released, directed by John Ford and starring John Wayne. O'Neill called the film "courageous" and was generally pleased by it. However, remembering these plays—which were among the first he mounted with the Provincetown Players in 1916 and 1917—moved him to "sad nostalgia." "There was a theatre then," O'Neill wrote to his longtime friend and collaborator Kenneth Macgowan, "in which I knew I belonged, one of guts and idealism."[1] Though *Iceman* and *Journey* would later be recognized as O'Neill's greatest works, at the time, he was feeling "out of the theatre," dreading the prospect of production, when he would be forced to work with people whose only standard was "Broadway success."

O'Neill's objection to the current state of theater was not, strictly, its commercialism—he had no objection to profiting from Hollywood. Nor was it aesthetic: he told Macgowan that he knew he "would again refuse" to make any compromises on his scripts, but that this was "no consolation." What was missing from current theater—the thing that had been redolently present among the Provincetown Players, the most important "little theater" group in U.S. history—was a shared ethos:

> The big fact is that any production [today] must be made on a plane, and in an atmosphere to which neither I nor my work belongs in spirit, nor want to belong; that it is a job, a business within the Showshop, a long, irritating, wearing, nervous, health-destroying ordeal, with no creative enthusiasm behind it, just another

[1] *The Theatre We Worked for": The Letters of Eugene O'Neill to Kenneth Macgowan*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 253.

> Broadway opening—the Old Game, the game we used to defy in the P.P. but which it is impossible for me to defy now, except in my writing, because there is no longer a theatre of true integrity and courage and high purpose and enthusiasm.[2]

The Provincetown Players are known for their theatrical experiments and their proudly amateurish administration, but their most important contribution to literary history was neither aesthetic nor economic. Rather, the theater was part of a broader experiment in creative community in Provincetown, a village on the tip of Cape Cod. Beginning around 1912, Provincetown was home to America's most storied literary colony. The colony was a collective effort to arrange life—spaces, relationships, temporal rhythms—in ways that were conducive to creative freedom, artistic productivity, and personal happiness. O'Neill's career-long obsession with "belonging" is consistent with the spirit of the Provincetown group, which their director George Cram ("Jig") Cook hoped would be a "Beloved Community of Life-Givers."[3]

The Provincetown Colony midwifed O'Neill's emergence as America's foremost playwright. His nostalgia for "the P.P." is thus understandable, though it is not without a certain irony, for the group's demise was, substantially, O'Neill's own doing. In 1916, the colony gave O'Neill his first staging. The next seven years, during which he lived primarily in Provincetown, were both extremely productive and extremely social. Provincetown attracted an eclectic group of creative people: radical journalists like Mary Heaton Vorse, Hutchins Hapgood, and John Reed; prolific and versatile writers like Susan Glaspell and Wilbur Daniel Steele; visual artists and designers like William and Marguerite Zorach and Robert Edmund Jones; as well as figures like Jig Cook and Mabel Dodge, whose contributions to literature had more to do with their talent for bringing people together than with their prowess on the page. After the dissolution of

[2] O'Neill, *Theater We Worked for*, 253-4.

[3] Susan Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple: A Biography of George Cram Cook*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 203.

the Provincetown Players in 1922, O'Neill would never again be part of a theater that was also—and perhaps primarily—a community, a site of "belonging" rather than one of professional transaction. O'Neill's demand for more professional production values alienated Cook, who was fundamentally a visionary and an amateur, and frequently a dictator. Without Jig's "integrity and courage and high purpose and enthusiasm," the Provincetown Players were nothing but an empty house on Greenwich Village's Macdougal Street.

O'Neill's relationship with the Provincetown Colony, and the theater group it produced, was marked by competing priorities in the making of art and the arrangement of life: on the one hand, he yearned for bohemian freedom and idealistic community; on the other, he sought professional aesthetic standards and middle-class stability in the form of marriage and home. In the early years of O'Neill's life in Provincetown, roughly from 1917 to 1920, he was able to strike the balance between these competing values. The writers and artists who converged on Provincetown were united by a feeling that creative people did not "belong" in an America where culture meant Broadway, pulp magazines, and Chautauquas. (Sinclair Lewis, satirist of American philistinism in *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, was also an early member of the Provincetown Colony.) Many of these writers participated in the "innocent rebellion" of Greenwich Village in the 1910s, when socialists, anarchists, feminists, Freudians, and avant-garde artists joined in common cause.[4] However, despite overlapping characters, Provincetown was not synonymous with the New York bohemia. Journalists at the time sometimes referred to it, derisively, as a "suburb" of Greenwich Village.[5] To some extent, the term suburb captures

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[4] May, *End of American Innocence*, especially 219-329.

[5] Floyd Dell qtd. in Robert Károly Sarlós, *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 245. One of the best histories of literary bohemianism in America is also the earliest. See Albert Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America* (New York: Covici, Friede, 1933).

accurately the compromise between bohemian freedom and domestic stability that writers sought on the end of the Cape. With his commercial success in the 1920s, O'Neill left the Provincetown colony and its little theater behind, which meant that by the 1940s, he could look back with longing to the lost collective ideal.

In the broadest sense, O'Neill's career can be understood as an exploration of the relationship between belonging and place. The Provincetown Colony was an episode in a lifelong quest that took O'Neill from the hotel where he was born, to the ships and bars and university classrooms where he found his friends and vocation, to the series of homes where he sought to establish himself as successful artist and family patriarch.[6] O'Neill's plays explore the longing for, and elusiveness of, home in its conventional sense, and the possibilities of finding home in alternative spaces like the ship and the sanatorium. In *Staging Place*, Una Chaudhuri has argued that modern drama, beginning perhaps with Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, tends to think about place as a problem or "tragic impasse": place is both "fate," determining and explaining people's destinies, as in naturalist theater, as well as a condition to be overcome by the heroic, self-determining subject.[7] If the family home is the privileged site of modern drama, then O'Neill is one of the most memorable practitioners of what Chaudhuri calls the drama of "geopathology," or the idea that life is a matter of "discrepancy between persons and places."[8] This theme extends from the pre-Provincetown plays to the end of O'Neill's career. But what emerges, more specifically, from a reading of the plays he wrote in Provincetown is that for O'Neill,

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[6] The failure of reality to live up to O'Neill's vision in this last regard was spectacular. His marriage to Boulton ended in 1928, and he disowned his daughter Oona in 1943 when she married actor Charlie Chaplin. (Oona was 18, Chaplin 54.) Tragically, both of O'Neill's sons would commit suicide, Eugene Jr. in 1950 and Shane, who became a heroin addict, in 1977.

[7] Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 1-15.

[8] Ibid., 59.

Provincetown was an ideal space of love and work because it was a heterotopia: a hybrid space that evoked simultaneously the family home, the ship, and the sanatorium.

The Provincetown Colony was the real life solution to the problem of "belonging" that O'Neill explored throughout his oeuvre. Between 1917 and 1922, his plays dramatize the self-isolation of the romantic idealist, and the corrosive force of desire for possession and power on community. I read the plays of this period as an "unconscious autobiography" of O'Neill's own ambivalent relationship with the creative community of Provincetown. In a 1936 essay, Lionel Trilling wrote that "For O'Neill, since as far back as *The Hairy Ape*, there has been only the individual and the universe. The social organism has meant nothing."[9] This chapter argues that O'Neill's early plays offer nuanced explorations on the ways that humans arrange their environments for social harmony, creative thriving, and imaginative stimulus. In this way, O'Neill is a quintessential colony writer. The unique constellation of space, community, and economic life in Provincetown gave O'Neill a grammar for exploring purpose and belonging, work and home, in his early plays.

I. The Infrastructure of Beloved Community

The story of Eugene O'Neill and Provincetown usually begins with the story of O'Neill's fateful encounter with the Provincetown Players' charismatic leader, Jig Cook. In 1916, O'Neill was looking for a father figure to replace his own problematic parent, the actor James O'Neill. James doled out money to keep his artistic son from starving, but did so capriciously. Eugene believed that his father had wasted his talent in endless (lucrative) performances as the Count of Monte Cristo. O'Neill, who had grown up going on the road with his father's acting troupe, spent his youth in various states of trouble: he flunked out of Princeton, got a young woman pregnant, and

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[9] Lionel Trilling, "Eugene O'Neill," *The New Republic*, September 23, 1936, 179.

fled the scene to work as a gold prospector in South America and an able-bodied seaman on a passenger liner. 1912 was his low point, commemorated in *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Days Journey into Night*: he spent the year drinking in seedy bars on New York's waterfront, nearly overdosed on Veronal, and ended up contracting tuberculosis. After six months in a Connecticut sanatorium, where undertook intensive reading in philosophy and modern drama, he began writing plays, participated in George Pierce Baker's English 47 playwriting seminar at Harvard University, and attempted to get his plays published in New York or produced with the Washington Square Players, a new little theater group. Several of his one-act plays were rejected, and in the summer of 1916, O'Neill landed in Provincetown with "a trunk full of plays" and was soon caught up in the orbit of Cook's enthusiasm.[10]

In his history of Greenwich Village, Ross Wetzsteon describes Cook as "a failed novelist, a failed critic, a failed professor, a failed farmer—indeed, a failed son, husband, and father […] As a playwright Jig was unimaginative, as a director incoherent, as an actor unmemorable. A crackpot visionary, a soulful charlatan, he had only talent—his genius."[11] Cook had a genius for making people do the seemingly impossible. He was a native of Davenport, Iowa, a cosmopolitan oasis that was also the hometown of two other notable Village characters, Cook's wife Susan Glaspell and the journalist Floyd Dell. Cook's enthusiasm for art and theater came from reading Nietzsche and the ancient Greeks, and he was a well-known figure in the literary-cultural renaissance of Chicago and New York in the 1910s. According to Wetzsteon, the Provincetown Players were born in 1915 "out of the inebriated energy and windy rhetoric of this one man" (98). "In thrall to an ideal of spiritual oneness," Wetzsteon continues, "and the concept

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[10] Arthur Gelb and Barbara Gelb, *O'Neill* (New York: Harper 1962), 309.

[11] Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village, the American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 98.

of communal drama with its members celebrants in primitive ritual, [Cook] believed not so much that the community would create theater as that the theater would create community" (107).

O'Neill and Cook shared "a religious, almost cosmic vision of the potential of theater," and their collaboration also met each man's psychic needs: O'Neill's for autonomy and recognition, Cook's for a great artist whose career he could support.[12] But this psychodrama of two male geniuses is only part of the story. Cook's beloved community would have been impossible without the physical and social infrastructure of the Provincetown writers' colony, which included many more "players" than those directly involved in writing for the theater in Greenwich Village. Of great significance was Provincetown itself, a place with a history and ethic that provided creative freedom, social support, and ample imaginative stimulus to the experimental writers.

When Henry David Thoreau visited Provincetown in the 1850s, he could look out across the harbor at a fleet of two hundred mackerel schooners. In *Cape Cod* (1865), he compared the impressive sight to a "city of canvas."[13] The town was a major fishing and whaling hub in the nineteenth century, due to its location at the in-curled tip of Cape Cod's crooked arm, sheltered in the palm of one of the largest natural harbors in the world. By 1890, its population peaked at 4,642, nearly half of its citizens descendants of Portuguese sailors and fishermen who had been settling in Provincetown for generations.[14] The Yankee residents of the town were anxious to establish its reputation as the first landing site of the Mayflower (though the Pilgrims later removed to Plymouth), and in 1910 a gothic tower was completed to commemorate that history.

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[12] Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams*, 123.

[13] Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, quoted in Leona Egan, *Provincetown as a Stage: Provincetown, the Provincetown Players, and the Discovery of Eugene O'Neill* (Orleans, MA: Parnassus Imprints, 1994), xiv.

[14] Egan, *Provincetown as a Stage*, 91.

(President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone, and President Taft dedicated the tower three years later.) Though known today as a resort town, in the early twentieth century, Provincetown retained some of its seafaring economy and much of its funk: cesspools were common, and beaches, due to the town's preferred method of waste disposal, were full of fish guts and trash.[15]

When Mary Heaton Vorse, a novelist and labor journalist, arrived in Provincetown for the first time in 1907, she compared her feelings to "falling in love at first sight." As she recalled in her part-memoir, part-lyrical local history *Time And the Town* (1942), "I knew that here was home, that I wanted to live here always."[16] To Vorse, the town's seafaring history made it romantically rugged: "Provincetown lives by skill and daring, by luck and chance, for fishing is an immense gamble—riches on the one hand and death on the other. […] A boy can see living heroes walk the streets, men who have been through hairbreadth rescues."[17] The next year, Vorse bought the house of a former whaling captain on Commercial Street, the town's main artery, and she proceeded to share her love for Provincetown with fellow writers. In 1911, she was joined by Hutchins Hapgood, Neith Boyce Hapgood, and their four children, followed by newlyweds Susan Glaspell and Jig Cook in 1913. Vorse, the Hapgoods, Glaspell, and Cook were the core of the group that would go on to form the Provincetown Players. All of them were writers active in the rebellion of pre-war Greenwich Village, who came to Provincetown seeking a quiet place to live and write during the summers. Hapgood described their life in the early years as a scene of domestic comfort that contrasts sharply with the usual account of the bohemian antics of these Greenwich Village "renegades": "We were living simply and happily, as writers, mothers and

[15] Mary Heaton Vorse, *Time and the Town: A Provincetown Chronicle* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 351-7.

[16] Ibid., 9-10.

[17] Ibid., 11.

fathers, husbands and wives, and friends, in a little community…things so…ordinary that they were almost indescribable."[18]

Writers prized Provincetown as a community, a vacation space, and a sleepy getaway from the social distractions of New York. But it was also home to America's first and largest art colony, which meant that when the Provincetown Players formed in 1915, they had a ready audience for their productions. Thoreau could not have predicted that by the first decade of the twentieth century, the tiny fishing village would be a "city of canvas" of a very different sort, as hundreds of women artists gathered on the beaches to paint waves and Portuguese children, part of Charles W. Hawthorne's famous summer painting school. Painters who worked out of doors were attracted to the end of the Cape for its beautiful light and for its local color; Hawthorne described it as having "kept its refreshingly primitive character, not having been rendered colorless by the inroads of summer excursionists."[19] Vorse's crowd found the town equally hospitable, both practically and creatively. Rent was cheap and many houses were available for purchase due to the declining fishing industry. As in Greenwich Village, where rowdy bohemians and Italian immigrants co-existed by a principle of mutual non-interference, the Portuguese citizens of Provincetown tended to turn a blind eye to wild drinking parties among the writers. (Vorse celebrated the town's lack of Puritanism and "Latin gaiety."[20]) Moreover, the seafaring villagers, with their romantic past, and the art schools, with their modernist versus traditionalist feuds, provided the writers with ample material, ranging from romance and tragedy to topical satire. Provincetown was a writer's paradise, accessible to New York City via the elegant Fall

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[18] Hapgood, *A Victorian in the Modern World*, quoted in Egan, *Provincetown as a Stage*, 28. On Greenwich Village bohemianism see Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991) and Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000).

[19] Egan, *Provincetown as a Stage*, 30.

[20] Vorse, *Time and the Town*, 11.

River Line steamer, but far enough to be a real "escape": the steamer took twelve hours to chug through Long Island Sound, and was followed by a snail-paced trip up the Cape by train.[21]

Beginning in 1914 with the war in Europe, the avant-garde colony at Provincetown boomed, setting the stage for the community that would support—and enact—the experimental theater company. Vorse, the Hapgoods, Glaspell, and Cook were joined by artists who could no longer travel to Paris. Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, Ethel Mars and Maud Squire, Marguerite and William Zorach—all regulars of Gertrude Stein's *atelier*—came to Provincetown between 1914 and 1916. Also on hand during those summers were Mabel Dodge, a wealthy patron of the arts famous for her Fifth Avenue salon, her support of the Armory Show, and for being the subject of one of Gertrude Stein's avant-garde word portraits, and John Reed, the radical journalist famous for covering the Mexican (and later the Russian) revolution, and for orchestrating a pageant for striking workers from Patterson, New Jersey. Though Mabel was still married to Edwin Dodge, in the summer of 1914 she rented a cottage on Commercial Street with Reed. Mabel Dodge and Mary Heaton Vorse were rivals: both had homes in New York City that became hubs of political and cultural activity. Vorse considered Dodge's involvement with politics and art a "shallow curiosit[y]," and Dodge thought Vorse "small and domestic."[22] Nevertheless, both women played important roles in creating the physical and social infrastructure to support America's most famous little theater, as well as its most important playwright.

The summer of 1914 shaped the story of the Provincetown Players for two reasons: first, the Reed-Dodge love affair was the subject of the ironically titled play *Constancy* by Neith Boyce, the first to be put on in Provincetown. Second, while Reed was busy writing about the

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[21] Egan, *Provincetown as a Stage*, 89.

[22] Ibid., 99.

Mexican War, a bored Mabel Dodge explored the Peaked Hill Bar lifesaving station, which the Coast Guard had abandoned due to beach erosion and was for sale. That winter, Dodge convinced Samuel Lewisohn, a millionaire friend, to buy the station and pay for its refurbishing, while she took on the project of directing the renovation and decoration of the space as a summer cottage. (The next summer, Dodge installed her new lover and soon-to-be third husband, painter Maurice Sterne, at Peaked Hill Bar while she ostensibly lived in a house on Commercial Street.[23]) O'Neill and his wife Agnes would move into Peaked Hill Bar in 1919. After listening to his son rhapsodize about the building, James O'Neill purchased the unusual house from Lewisohn as a wedding present. For the next five years, O'Neill and Boulton inhabited a space shaped by Mabel Dodge's imagination: luminous white walls, a vibrant blue floor, a two-story brick fireplace, and Italian pottery everywhere. O'Neill would have the distinction of being America's first professional highbrow playwright to live by his work; like other modernists, his early career depended on complex networks of patronage.

The group that would become the Provincetown Players staged their first play on the porch of the Hapgood's cottage in 1915.[24] Neith Boyce invited her friends over to watch the one-act farce she had written about her friend Mabel Dodge. Boyce played the Dodge character, and Vorse's husband Joe O'Brien played Reed. Robert Edmund Jones, the brilliant set designer who lived almost entirely on Dodge's patronage, set up a makeshift stage. The same night, Susan Glaspell and Jig Cook staged *Suppressed Desires*, a one-act play satirizing the Greenwich Village obsession with psychoanalysis. (Like O'Neill, Glaspell and Cook's had had their play rejected by the Washington Square Players.) For their next bill, the group reprised the first two

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[23] Ibid., 240-247, 140.

[24] The following account of the rise of the Provincetown Players draws from Egan, *Provincetown as a Stage*; Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams*; and Brenda Murphy, *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

plays and mounted two additional ones: Cook's *Change Your Style* (a satire of the feud between "modernist" and "traditionalist" painters) and *Contemporaries*, by the popular short-story writer Wilbur Daniel Steele (the play was a serious allegory about New York's homeless workers). For this performance, the group moved from the Hapgood cottage to Lewis Wharf, an old fishing structure with several outbuildings that Mary Heaton Vorse had recently purchased. The following summer, when O'Neill arrived in Provincetown, the group worked to turn the Wharf into a real theater, fitted with electric light, seating, and a movable stage. However, the best "effects" of the Wharf theater couldn't be engineered. When they staged *Bound East for Cardiff*, O'Neill's play about a sailor dying in the forecastle of a cramped steamer, the weather cooperated, filling the harbor with fog and the air with the sound of a fog bell, and sending spray through the floorboards.[25] Audience and cast alike felt like they were aboard ship.

In 1916, the group staged nine new plays, five of them authored by newcomers O'Neill, John Reed, and his lover Louise Bryant. Although O'Neill's affair with Bryant is well-known (for example, as a plot-line in Warren Beatty's 1981 film *Reds*), at the time, he was still writing letters to his New London sweetheart, urging her to join the artists in Provincetown. O'Neill offered the young lady "respectable" lodgings "at the house of Jack Reed, the author & war correspondent," where "his wife [Bryant and Reed were not in fact married] would act as chaperon as far as outsiders would know." The letter continues, "Or you could stay with Mary Heaton Vorse, or a dozen other households with females presiding."[26] At the time of the letter, the group was working to stage *Bound East for Cardiff*. O'Neill wrote favorably about the production: "The cast is good—several professionals are summering here and many of the

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[25] Glaspell, *Road to the Temple*, 204.

[26] *Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill*, eds. Travis Bogard and Jackson R. Bryer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 73.

Washington Square Players. The theatre is a delightfully quaint place—an old storehouse on the end of a long dock owned by Mary Heaton Vorse, the writer. Of course we make all our own scenery, music, costumes, etc. Have people in the Players who are up on all those things. It's very interesting." Jig did most of the carpentry, the Zorachs and other painters helped create abstract sets, and the writers acted in one another's plays. Perhaps most importantly, the colony of writers and artists formed an eager and intelligent audience. At the end of the successful Provincetown season, Jig's enthusiasm swept the group up into the difficult labor of bringing the little theater to New York: they drafted an official constitution, recruited subscribers from Provincetown and Greenwich Village, and found a space on Macdougal Street.

Already in O'Neill's 1916 letter, the young playwright's desire to work with "professionals" is evident. But "professionalism" was hardly the group's priority. Cook's vision was utopian. In her biography of her husband, Glaspell relates the founding "code" of the Provincetown Players, based on her husband's conviction that "true drama is born only of one feeling animating all the members of a clan - a spirit shared by all and expressed by the few for the all."[27] As Wetzsteon puts it, "Jig developed a vaguely Arcadian theory of cultural anarchism, communal creativity, and national awakening based on a mysterious melange of Greek soul, Nietzschean philosophy, socialist doctrine, and bohemian whoopee."[28] In contrast to Cook's ideal of the theater as a "Beloved Community of Life-Givers," O'Neill was raised in the commercial theater and ultimately determined to reshape it, rather than eschew it. Provincetown appealed to him because talented people like Robert Edmund Jones were involved in the "quaint," self-made

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[27] Glaspell, *Road to the Temple*, 203.

[28] Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams*, 101.

productions. While amateurism and youthful rebellion were essential to Cook's vision, O'Neill aspired to be a professional playwright and to win wide recognition.[29]

Despite the tensions between Cook and O'Neill's respective visions for the theater, for several years O'Neill's relationship to the Players was, as Jeff Kennedy has termed it, "symbiotic."[30] In the spring of 1917, O'Neill stopped being involved with the day-to-day functioning of the Players. After passing part of the following winter in New York, much of it spent dangerously drunk, O'Neill returned to Provincetown in January of 1918, this time bringing Agnes Boulton, a young writer of magazine fiction who, like O'Neill, had a child from a previous relationship whom she rarely saw. The couple married in April, and that year O'Neill wrote five new plays, including *Beyond the Horizon*, which would give O'Neill his first Broadway success.

After 1917, Provincetown became a colony in the more narrowly economic sense: extracting the natural resources of time and leisure, the playwrights produced works for the group to stage in the "metropole" on Macdougal Street. O'Neill thrived in the quiet, work-oriented domestic spaces created by Agnes and by Susan Glaspell, who likewise stayed in Provincetown under Cook's injunction to write more plays. Meanwhile, when the Players were forced to move to a new space in the Village, Jig gave up his apartment and donated a month's rent, pitching a cot in the theater building.[31] The Provincetown Players worked through a cooperative division of labor, and Provincetown was their creative "factory."

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[29] See Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams*, 145.

[30] Jeff Kennedy, "Probing Legends in Bohemia: The Symbiotic Dance Between O'Neill and the Provincetown Players," in *Eugene O'Neill and His Early Contemporaries: Bohemians, Radicals, Progressives and the Avant Garde*, edited by Eileen J. Herrmann and Robert M. Dowling (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 160–193.

[31] Ibid., 185.

II. Heterotopias of Home and Work

O'Neill's experience of Provincetown after 1917 was, to echo his 1916 letter, structured by "households with females presiding." In her memoir of her marriage to O'Neill, Agnes Boulton describes his daily routine during the productive spring and summer of 1918: "After Gene was finished working he went across the street to Jig Cook's house, read the head-lines, talked to Susan Glaspell, who would be through her work by this time."[32] Glaspell, whose 1916 play *Trifles* was later revised into her best-known story, "A Jury of Her Peers," was recognized at the time as playwright of nearly the same caliber as O'Neill. According to Linda Ben-Zvi, the two read each other's work and likely influenced each other's choices of subject.[33] Recent O'Neill scholars have been anxious to dispel the myth of O'Neill as the genius loner who was merely "discovered"—and not significantly shaped—by the community of the Provincetown Players. Jeff Kennedy's research has shown that, contrary to the mythology surrounding the group's instant recognition of genius at the first reading of *Bound East for Cardiff*, some of O'Neill's early plays were rejected by the Players. Moreover, he points out that O'Neill's first two years in Provincetown included many "failed experiments"—plays he destroyed—made in an earnest attempt to get his work produced by the older and more experienced members of the Players.[34] In a different vein, Drew Eisenhauer argues that there are distinct thematic similarities between

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[32] Agnes Boulton, *Part of a Long Story: "Eugene O'Neill as a Young Man in Love"* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 148.

[33] Ben-Zvi also argues that there are important similarities in their experimental staging techniques in plays like O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922), and Glaspell's *The Verge* (1921). See Linda Ben-Zvi, "Susan Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill: The Imagery of Gender," *Eugene O'Neill Newsletter* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1986), http://eoneill.com/library/newsletter/x-1/x-1e.htm.

[34] Kennedy, "Probing Legends," 161, 190.

early plays of the Provincetown group and the ones O'Neill wrote during his first years with them.[35]

Though these recent studies of O'Neill and the Players are germane, O'Neill's engagement with Provincetown goes beyond direct influence from the work of other Provincetown writers. Rather, his early plays embrace a more general concern with what we might call the "infrastructure of creativity," which includes both the support networks on which the writer or artist depends, and the imaginative and affective charge produced by specific sites and landscapes. In these early plays, O'Neill shows interest in the practical construction of heterotopias—spaces that both conjure and critique the dominant spaces of the culture—and with the domestic labor that supports, and is overshadowed by, creative work. These concerns appear both in plays that are set all or partly in Provincetown and its environs—*Beyond the Horizon*, *"Anna Christie"*—and in plays like *The Straw*, set elsewhere but evoking nonetheless configurations specific to Provincetown and its writers' colony.

The themes of home and belonging explored in O'Neill's first hit Broadway melodrama, *Beyond the Horizon*, are most fully articulated in his most famous play, 1942's *Long Day's Journey into the Night*. That play is set in Monte Cristo cottage, the O'Neill family summer home in New London, Connecticut, and returns to scenes from the playwright's early life to explore the painful connection between the failure to make a home and the failure of a family. Ella, the mother in *Long Day's Journey*, insists repeatedly that the Tyrone house is "not a home." Though stuck for the entirety of the play in the claustrophobic confines of the house, the Tyrones go elsewhere in their monologues: Edmund, the younger son and O'Neill's surrogate, describes a

[35] Drew Eisenhauer, "'A Lot of Crazy Socialists and Anarchists': O'Neill and the Artist Social Problem Play," in *Eugene O'Neill and His Early Contemporaries*, 120.

version of “belonging” that is vertiginously the opposite of the four walls of the home. In an alcohol-stimulated monologue, he relates a “high spot” in his memory:

> When I was on the Squarehead square rigger, bound for Buenos Aires. Full moon in the trades. The old hooker driving fourteen knots. I lay on the bowsprit, facing astern, with the water foaming into spume under me, the masts with every sail white in the moonlight, towering high above me. I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it, and for a moment I lost myself—actually lost my life. I was set free! I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky! I belonged, without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of man, to Life itself.[36]

The speech, which prompts James Tyrone, Edmund’s father, to admit that his son has “the makings of a poet,” articulates the kind of experience that Robert Mayo, the doomed hero of *Beyond the Horizon*, longs for but never achieves.

Beyond the Horizon is a play about two brothers whose spiritual and vocational failures hinge on having chosen the wrong place. Robert, the romantic idealist with “a touch of the poet about him,” longs to go to sea, not for any practical purpose, but rather for the sake of “Beauty,” and “to keep on moving so that I won’t take root in any one place.”[37] His brother Andrew is shrewd, practical, and competent, and wants only to stay and work on the family farm like his father. Both men love the same girl, Ruth Atkins, and she chooses the wrong man: enchanted by Robert’s “poetry talk,” Ruth confesses her love for him, and Robert gives up his dream of going to sea. A heartsick Andy takes Rob’s place on the ship, and the rest of the play unfurls tragically, with Robert finally dying of tuberculosis.

Beyond the Horizon seems to fit Chaudhuri’s coinage, “geopathology,” with uncanny perfection. The misplaced brothers fail to exceed their circumstances—conceived of almost exclusively in terms of place—completely and in predictable ways. By Act III, Robert laments

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[36] Eugene O’Neill, *Complete Plays: 1932-1943* (New York: Library of America, 1988), 811-12 (hereafter cited in text as *CP3*).

[37] Eugene O’Neill, *Complete Plays: 1913-1920* (New York: Library of America, 1988), 573-4 (hereafter cited in text as *CP1*).

that his whole life has been spent “cooped up in a room” (*CP1* 652). Andrew is cursed by his father for “runnin’ against [his] own nature” (596), and later in the play, when he has lost a fortune to grain speculation, Robert makes the moral unnecessarily explicit:

> You—a farmer—to gamble in a wheat pit with scraps of paper. There’s a spiritual significance in that picture, Andy […] you’re the deepest-dyed failure of the three, Andy. You’ve spent eight years running away from yourself. Do you see what I mean? You used to be a creator when you loved the farm. You and life were in harmonious partnership. And now—(*He stops as if seeking vainly for the words*) My brain is muddled. But part of what I mean is that your gambling with the thing you used to love to create proves how far astray—So you’ll be punished. (646-7)

While the play seems to conform to the idea that place is destiny, it also puts much emphasis on “making,” or in Robert’s vaguely religious terminology, “creating.” The term “creator” draws a thematically important, if economically specious, line between Andrew’s farming and Robert’s own vocational failings: earlier in Act III, he has admitted that he “always wanted to write” (635). In other words, the play is interested not merely in the determining power of place, but also in questions of vocation and its integral relationship to place. “Belonging,” a charged term in O’Neill’s oeuvre, is almost always a question of both environment and work. Indeed, as Robert tells Andrew in Act I, farming is not just in Andy’s nature, it is his “life-work” (576), and the play constantly thinks home and work together as “harmonious partnerships” dependent on deliberately created spaces.

It was in the Provincetown Colony that O’Neill first found “harmonious partnerships” that sustained his work, with Boulton as wife, Glaspell as fellow writer, and Cook as promoter. The tragedy of *Beyond the Horizon* is that the brothers—two sides of O’Neill’s own divided persona—fail to find the ideal conditions for their own creative work, a place that balances domesticity and vocation. One of the few humorous moments of this otherwise ponderous play is generated from the masculine embarrassment that can accompany hybrid spaces of work and domesticity. In Act I, scene ii, Robert surprises his family with the news of his engagement to

Ruth. His uncle, Dick Scott, a ship's Captain and "typical old salt," has made arrangements for Robert to join him and learn navigation. Dick complains extensively about the change of plan:

> I've been countin' sure on havin' Robert for company on this vige—to sorta talk to and show things to, and teach, kinda, and I got my mind so set on havin' him I'm goin' to be double lonesome this vige. (*He pounds on the table, attempting to cover up this confession of weakness.*) Darn all this silly lovin' business, anyway. (*irritably*) But all this talk ain't tellin' me what I'm to do with the sta'b'd cabin I fixed up. It's all painted white, an' a bran new mattress on the bunk, 'n' sheets 'n' blankets 'n' things. And Chips built in a book-case so's Robert could take his books along—with a slidin' bar fixed across't it, mind, so's they couldn't fall out no matter how she rolled. (*with excited consternation*) What d'you suppose my officers is goin' to think when there's no one comes aboard to occupy that sta'b'd cabin? (593-4)[38]

Dick Scott's masculinity is vulnerable in the scene—he shows emotional "weakness," and associates himself with unmanly homemaking tasks—and thus his family members take the opportunity for some mild ribbing. The Captain is worried that his crew will think "it was a *woman* I'd planned to ship along," and worse, that she'd jilted him; James Mayo jokes that he should quickly go find himself a wife, poking fun at Dick's confirmed bachelorhood. Aside from the innuendo about male-male domestic companionship aboard ship—a joke at least as old as Ishmael and Queequeg—the moment is important because it signals that the ship, the space associated with Robert's idealistic dreaming about "the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell of the East […] the freedom of great wide spaces" (577), is also a real, physical space, carefully stocked with linens to accommodate specific, book-loving humans. Life onboard ship, in this brief vignette, offers not the opposite of land-bound domesticity, but rather an alternative, more humane, or at least nerdier, version of it. Robert Mayo may be spiritual kin to Edmund Tyrone, but in this early play, O'Neill is sufficiently interested in the idea that heterotopias of home and work are *created* spaces to devote a scene to their unromantic construction.

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[38] The scene is reminiscent of O'Neill's 1917 play *Ile*, in which a whaling captain brings his wife on a long voyage, fitting out the cabin with an organ to keep her entertained. The wife goes insane on the voyage. (The play was based on Provincetown lore.)

Dick Scott disapproves of "silly lovin' business," but his phrase points us to the way the play insistently throws together business and loving, or at least business and marriage. In the play's first minutes, Robert comments that Andrew is "wedded to the soil," and later the Mayo parents are quick to point out that the economic arrangement they desired in Andrew's marriage to Ruth—merger with the adjacent Atkins farm—will still occur if she marries Robert (576, 591). Despite the fact that the play takes place in the era of automobiles, it thinks about land and marriage in almost feudal terms. If marriage and economics are inseparable in the play, so are marriage and the soul: at the play's conclusion, the dying Robert insists that Andrew marry Ruth to save the farm ruined through Robert's mismanagement, but also to effect a spiritual settling of accounts: "Ruth has suffered double her share. […] Only through contact with suffering, Andy, will you—awaken" (647). The play *almost* ends on a hopeful note, pointing to a reconfiguration of the previous failed marriage in new and more auspicious terms. Andy—who has just called Ruth a "damn woman, [a] coward, [a] murderess!"—looks at her with "pity" and haltingly asks for her forgiveness: "I—you—we've both made a mess of things! We must try to help each other—and—in time—we'll come to know what's right— (*desperately*) And perhaps we—" (633). The last line of the play points to the possibility of a reconfigured collectivity. However, the stage directions deflate that gesture toward a restored "we," sounding a note of despair: "(*But Ruth, if she is aware of his words, gives no sign. She remains silent, gazing at him dully with the sad humility of exhaustion, her mind already sinking back into that spent calm beyond the further troubling of any hope.*)" The religious overtones in the play, including the message of salvation through suffering, would seem to confirm Trilling's reading that the meaning of O'Neill's work is ultimately spiritual.[39] However, the subtly "Provincetonian" elements of the play, especially those having to do with setting, anchor the play's meaning firmly in "the social."

[39] The diction of the final scene recalls the gospels; there is much talk of "remembering" Robert's injunctions, and

First, the play's implied geography affects its symbolic gestures in ways that might have confused observant playgoers, although not if they knew Provincetown. The play opens at sunset on "*a section of country highway*" near the Mayo farm. The stage set includes a road "*winding toward the horizon like a pale ribbon between the low, rolling hills*" (573). In the opening scene, as Robert recalls his childhood dreams of going to sea, he points repeatedly toward the road and hills, explaining (presumably for the audience's benefit) that "I knew the sea was over beyond those hills" (580). He also recalls how he used to stare out the window of his home dreaming the same dreams: "I got to know all the different kinds of sunsets by heart. And all those sunsets took place over there—(*he points*) beyond the horizon" (581). All this pointing seems redundant, except that it insists, oddly, that Robert can point to the road, the sea, and the sunset all at once, three iconic symbols of freedom and wandering, all vanishing into the horizon line. That means that going "to sea" means going West, which doesn't make much sense, for a New England play, unless your farm is located at the end of Cape Cod—west is toward the harbor. (Biographers assume that O'Neill based the setting for the play on a farm he had seen in Truro, the town adjacent to Provincetown.) The play ends with Robert "pointing" once again to "the edge of the sun's disc […] rising from the rim of the hills" as he speaks his dying words: "It's a free beginning—the start of my voyage!" (652). Having failed to sail off into the sunset, Robert insists on flying off into the East, achieving transcendence through death. Due to a joke of geographic particularity, he is still pointing toward the sea, an uncanny sameness that undercuts the play's symbolism of progression or change.

Closer to the issues affecting the writer community of Provincetown, the play contains, if not a feminist note, then one of clear female-oriented anxiety. Both Robert and Andrew strain for

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acting "for his sake," suggesting (heavy-handedly) that he is a Christ figure.

a redemptive ending at the close of the play, which is negated by Ruth's drear, her "*sad humility of exhaustion* […] *sinking back into that spent calm beyond the further troubling of any hope*." This is not the only suggestion in the play that married life—and more particularly housework—is a force that saps women dry. In conjunction with three scenes set out of doors, each Act contains a paired scene set inside the Mayo farmhouse, and the changes in that set over the course of the three acts indicate the house's deterioration from its original condition—the "*orderly comfort of a simple, hard-earned prosperity, enjoyed and maintained by the family as a unit*"—to its eventual state of "*decay, dissolution*," an atmosphere of "*habitual poverty too hopelessly resigned to be any longer ashamed or even conscious of itself*" (585, 631). The changes reflect the failure of Ruth and Robert's marriage, but even in Act One, we learn from the stage directions that Robert's mother, a "*rather prim-looking woman* […] *who had once been a school teacher*," is slightly out of place at home: "*The labors of a farmer's wife have bent but not broken her, and she retains a certain refinement of movement and expression foreign to the Mayo part of the family*." With the delicate balance of the family "unit" upset, both Mayo parents die within a few years.

Ruth's plight is more extreme. Act Two opens in domestic hell: a "*sun-baked day in midsummer*," in which "*the noon enervation of the sultry, scorching day seems to have penetrated indoors, causing even inanimate objects to wear an aspect of despondent exhaustion*" (602). Ruth is washing dishes in a sweltering kitchen; her child is whining, her invalid mother is nagging, and her husband is late for dinner, again. Later in the scene, Robert pleads with Ruth against the acrimony that has settled into their marriage: "Why can't we pull together? We used to. I know it's hard on you also. Then why can't we help each other instead of hindering?" (612). If the audience has any feminist inclinations, then the answer to Robert's question lies amply

apparent on the stage: Ruth's life is that of a drudge, and in a play about (male) vocation and the determining power of place, this is a problem. In the terrible husband-wife fight that ensues, a Strindbergian battle of the sexes, Ruth tells Robert to "Go and be a tramp like you've always wanted," while she marries Andy, the man she really loves. For this, Robert calls her a "slut" (616). Even marital decay is figured in terms of lack of vocation, or placeless "wandering" in the Steinian sense of sexual promiscuity. O'Neill's 1921 play *The First Man* reverses this trope, figuring ideal marriage as the companionship-in-wandering of an archeological researcher and his wife.

Despite the fact that O'Neill was surrounded by women writers like Glaspell, Vorse, Boyce, Bryant, and Boulton, all of whom treated feminist topics in their work, his plays of this period, so fascinated with the plight of the stifled poet or writer, never feature a woman artist. Instead, his female leads are housewives, mothers, companions, secretaries, governesses, prostitutes, rich ladies who go in for social service, or, at best, actresses. Though roles for women are circumscribed in O'Neill's plays, the family home is repeatedly staged as a site of domestic drudgery, exploitation, and misery, suggesting a peripheral uneasiness, on O'Neill's part, about the integral—and potentially unfulfilling—role women play in creating the social and physical infrastructure of creative work. Housework, or "homemaking" as it was called in vocational manuals,[40] was a conspicuous activity of the Provincetown writers' colony, composed as it was of "households with females presiding"; however, it was hardly a transcendent vocation, and tended to get in the way of writing itself. Christine Stansell has pointed out that though male and female literary bohemians of the period espoused sexual equality, the movement had a blind spot about domestic labor: the decline of domestic help in the North after 1910 resulted in increased

[40] For a contemporary example, see David Snedden, *Vocational Homemaking Education: Some Problems and Proposals* (Teachers College, Columbia University, 1919).

housework burdens on women, and yet there was little accompanying politicization of domestic arrangements.[41] As we will see in the coming chapters, Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony were attractive to women writers in part because they relieved them of domestic labor and family care work. The household-based community of Provincetown realized few of the domestic "efficiencies" of an institutionalized writers' colony; thus houses were, for Provincetowners, a problem as well as a sustaining space. This is evident in Mary Heaton Vorse's writings, for example in a chapter entitled "Tired to Death" in *Time and the Town*: "My house was now against me and fought against my uncertain hands. I was a sick soul poisoned by bewilderment and fatigue. Sick and well souls should not live together" (220).

Though O'Neill shows little interest in the sexual politics of housework, his obsessive focus on marriage in his plays means that issues of domestic labor inevitably creep in. Moreover, the endlessness and drudgery of housework might be conceived of as the "other" of Robert and Edmund's sublime, entropic visions of spiritual "oneness" in nature. The themes of domestic exploitation, creative support, and institutional space converge in O'Neill's lesser known play *The Straw* (1919), which begins with a saintly woman, Eileen Carmody, in another domestic hell, and has her "saved" from the men who exploit her—her father and her small-town fiancé—by a doctor who insists she be sent to a tuberculosis sanatorium. Once there, Eileen becomes friend, typist, and cheerleader to fellow patient Stephen Murray, a rakish newspaperman. (Murray is a harsh self-portrait of O'Neill in 1913, when he spent five months at Gaylord Farm Sanatorium in Wallingford, Connecticut.)[42] Eileen falls in love with Murray, who is too self-absorbed to notice that her feelings are anything more than friendship, and as she pines for him, her health

[41] Charlotte Perkins Gillman's experiments in collectivized housekeeping around 1900 were important exceptions. See Stansell, *American Moderns*, 258-9.

[42] Louis Sheaffer, *O'Neill, Son and Playwright* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968), 248.

deteriorates. Part of Act Two takes place during the all-important weekly weigh-in: Stephen has gained three pounds, while Eileen has lost three, an eerie detail symbolizing the vampiric dimensions of their relationship. When Murray is discharged healthy, Eileen confesses her love for him, knowing he doesn't return it. In the final scene, which takes place on an isolation porch, Murray visits Eileen after months away and learns from a nurse that Eileen is dying. He agrees to lie, telling Eileen he loves her, in order to give her a "hopeless hope" and support her last bits of strength (793). In a tragic moment of insight, Stephen realizes he does indeed love Eileen, and is struck by the terrible irony that the first person he has ever loved will soon die—and that she might have been saved had he come to this knowledge sooner.

With its melodramatic plot and taboo subject of tuberculosis, the play was neither popular nor critically acclaimed. However, it is notable as a further permutation in O'Neill's thinking about the relationship among love, work, and place. It also reverses the husband-wife dynamics of *Beyond the Horizon*: Eileen, saved from the exploitation of her home and family, becomes the ideal helpmeet to Stephen. During their first meeting upon Eileen's arrival at the sanatorium, Stephen complains of hating his job as a small-town reporter, a job that has "nothing to do with writing," though like Robert Mayo, he "always meant to have a stab at it" but "didn't have the time" (744). Eileen answers with the obvious—"Well, you've plenty of time now, haven't you?"—but Stephen, whose activities heretofore have been confined to flirting with nurses, treats it as an inspired suggestion: "Say! That is an idea! Thank you! I'd never have had sense enough to have thought of that myself." Stephen asks for Eileen's "help—to play critic for me," but the young lady demurs, offering instead to type his stories for clerical "practice."

In the final scene, we learn that Stephen has stopped writing since he has been in New York, where he complains, echoing the refrain of many a colony writer, that "there's so little time

to yourself once you get to know people" in the city (783). The play implies that a writer needs an optimal social environment to function well; too many people, and he is distracted, but with the right kind of sympathy and setup, he can flourish. Stephen confesses, "Darn it, do you know just talking about it makes me feel as if I could sit right down now and start in on [a new story]. Is it the fact I've worked here before—or is it seeing you, Eileen? (*gratefully*) I really believe it's you. I haven't forgotten how you helped me before" (784). Later, Stephen vows to take Eileen to "a better place," a small private sanatorium on a tranquil lake where he can live nearby and work on his writing. Though the ending suggests that both characters are blinded by a "pipe dream" (one of O'Neill's most pervasive motifs), it is interesting for our purposes that the shape of this "pipe dream" is a writers' colony for two.

Like a ship, with its clear hierarchy, daily routines, and unquestionable rules, Gaylord Sanatorium—and its fictional replica in *The Straw*—is what Erving Goffman calls a "total institution."[43] Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill's biographer, writes that "patients were housed in the infirmary for close surveillance and care, and allowed out of bed for meals […] in accordance with their condition." Though O'Neill "chaffed at his confinement, at rules and restrictions," the enforced rest and freedom from distraction were extraordinarily good for him. It was at Gaylord that O'Neill decided to begin his work as a playwright and put himself through a methodical course of preparation, reading Synge, Yeats, Lady Gregory, Brieuz, Hauptmann, Ibsen, and especially Strindberg. Years later, O'Neill wrote in gratitude to the chief doctor at Gaylord that the sanatorium had "saved him" for his work: "[the] recollections of my stay there are among the most pleasant of my memories."[44] When O'Neill and Boulton moved into the lifesaving station

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[43] On Goffman's use of ships, as described by Melville, as a model for understanding "total institutions" like asylums, see David Alworth, "Melville in the Asylum: Literature, Sociology, Reading," *American Literary History* 26, no. 2 (2014): 234-61.

[44] Sheaffer, *Son and Playwright*, 246-52.

at Peaked Hill Bar in May of 1919—while he was struggling to find a producer for *The Straw*—he would do his best to replicate the isolation, regularity, and routine of outdoor exercise that had been enforced at Gaylord. The "bohemian" freedom of Provincetown exists in a surprising relationship to a much more rigid institutional space. Peaked Hill Bar was a collectively authored heterotopia, an "other space" designed to replicate the enabling discipline of a ship or a sanatorium, on the smaller scale of the modern family.

O'Neill's daily routine at Peaked Hill Bar replicated the healthful regimentation of the tuberculosis sanatorium. But the space itself was decidedly ship-like. Mabel Dodge's decorative and functional improvements—including an indoor kitchen and bathroom—had left many traces of the building's former working identity in tact. It was these details that O'Neill relished as he described the space for an interviewer:

> The interiors of the buildings were left practically unchanged, however. They still preserve their old sea flavor. The stairs are like companionways of a ship. There are lockers everywhere. An immense open fireplace. The big boat room, now our living room, still has the steel fixtures in the ceiling from which one of the boats was slung. The look-out station on the roof is the same as when the coast guards spent their eternal two-hour vigils there. The exterior of the buildings are as weather-beaten as the bulwarks of a derelict. The glass in the windows is ground frosty by the flying sands of the winter storms.[45]

"The Atlantic is our front lawn, and a desert of sand dunes our back yard," wrote O'Neill about their "spring-summer-fall chateau" (in the winter they lived in town). In this hybrid space of domestic comfort, sublime isolation in nature, and rugged functionality (now mostly obsolete), the playwright felt "a true kinship and harmony with life":

> Sand and sun and sea and wind - you merge into them, and become as meaningless and as full of meaning as they are. There is always the monotone of surf on the bar - a background for silence - and you know that you are alone - so alone you wound't be ashamed to do any good action. You can walk or swim along the beach for miles, and meet only the dunes - Sphinxes muffled in their yellow robes with paws deep in the sea.

[45] Eugene O'Neill to Pierre Loving, 12 March 1921, Eugene O'Neill Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 2, Folder 33 (hereafter EOC).

Anticipating here the lyrical monologues of Edmund Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey*, O'Neill once again emphasizes solitude, quiet, and "merging" with nature in connection with his house at Peaked Hill Bar. The household was oriented almost completely around O'Neill's writing. Boulton's memoir describing the loneliness and difficulty of the years in this remote outpost offers a posthumous corrective to O'Neill's very partial picture.

O'Neill poured his spiritual kinship with the sea into the halting but lyrical speeches of Anna in *"Anna Christie,"* which takes its premise from the 1918 play *Chris Christopherson*, a play O'Neill revised extensively in the summer of 1919 at Peaked Hill Bar, then rewrote almost completely in 1920. (The revised play would win O'Neill his second Pulitzer.) Though its characters are working-class Swedes and Irishmen, rather than middle-class aspiring writers, *"Anna Christie"* stages the same dreamy, poetic sensibility and passion for self-erasure that unites Robert Mayo and Edmund Tyrone—only this time it is embodied in a woman and former prostitute. The play is about a barge captain (a former bo'sun on a sailing ship) and his buxom, world-weary daughter. In Act I, which takes place in a waterfront saloon in New York City, Anna arrives for a "rest cure" visit to Chris, whom she has not seen since she was a little girl. Once again, this play turns to the familiar O'Neill theme of geopathology. Chris is a paradox, a seaman who hates the sea, which he blames for all the ills in his life and refers to constantly as "dat ole davil." He hopes his daughter will marry a "good, steady land fallar here in East, have home all her own, have kits […] And Ay go visit den every time Ay gat in port near!" (967). Meanwhile Anna, who has grown up with relatives on a farm in Minnesota—where she was exploited both physically and sexually—falls instantly in love with the sea and, in Act Two, with a steamship stoker named Mat Burke. The multidimensional conflict between Chris and Mat that ensues—between father and lover, sailor and stoker, Swede and Irishman—is resolved (after death threats

and blows) with Chris relenting, Anna agreeing to marry Mat, and the two men signed up to work on the same ship. Though critics thought the ending comically sanguine, O'Neill intended to imply impending disaster through Chris's ominous warnings about the dangers of "dat ole davil sea": like many a Provincetown widow, Anna is poised to lose husband and father in a single storm.

The most important change from the older version of the play is the character of Anna. Whereas in *Chris Christopherson* she is a sheltered but romantic girl who has been carefully raised in England, in the play that bears her name, she is given an elaborate past: she worked like a slave on a farm; was raped at sixteen by a cousin; served as a governess, then a prostitute, in the city; and finally ended up in a jail, then a hospital. Like O'Neill, she recalls this last institution fondly: "It was nice there. I was sorry to leave it, honest!" (970). Though Anna is dubious about the idea of living with Chris on a coal barge, her father assures her that it is "like piece of land with house on it dat float" (975). Chris's description echoes the homely charms of Captain Scott's cabin in *Beyond the Horizon*, but also those of O'Neill's lifesaving station at Peaked Hill Bar:

> You don't know how nice it's on barge, Anna. Tug come and ve gat towed out on voyage—yust water all round, and sun, and fresh air, and good grub for make you strong, healthy gel. You see many tangs you don't see before. You gat moonlight at night, maybe; see steamer pass; see schooner make sail—see everytang dat's pooty. You need take rest like dat. You work too hard for young gel already. You need vacation, yes! (976-977)

Like O'Neill's cottage, Anna's tugboat is a space of both romance and recuperation, a retreat from everyday drudgery into the therapeutic simplicity of nature and solitude.

A more subtle change from the earlier play is the setting, which becomes the occasion for unfurling Anna's lyrical voice. In the older play, Chris's barge is run down by a steamship on a foggy night, and father and daughter end up on a journey to Buenos Aires. In *"Anna Christie,"* the journey is more circumscribed: Act II takes place on the barge "*at anchor in the harbor of*

Provincetown, Mass," where "*the doleful tolling of bells, on Long Point, on ships at anchor, breaks the silence at regular intervals*" (958). In ten days, Anna has been "transformed" by her rest cure on the water, and looks out into the fog in "*awed wonder*," declaring "(*with a trace of strange exultation*) I love this fog! Honest! It's so—(*she hesitates, groping for a word*)—funny and still. I feel as if I was—out of things altogether" (979). Later Anna elaborates on the feelings conjured by the strange conjunction of place and atmosphere:

> ANNA—(*after a pause—dreamily*) Funny! I do feel sort of—nutty, to-night. I feel old.
> CHRIS—(*mystified*) Ole?
> ANNA—Sure—like I'd been living a long, long time—out here in the fog. (*frowning perplexedly*) I don't know how to tell you yust what I mean. It's like I'd come home after a long visit away some place. It all seems like I'd been here before lots of times—on boats—in this same fog. (*with a short laugh*) You must think I'm off my base.
> CHRIS—(*gruffly*) Anybody feel funny dat vay in fog.
> ANNA—(*persistently*) But why d'you s'pose I feel so—so—like I'd found something I'd missed and been looking for—'s if this was the right place for me to fit in? And I seem to have forgot—everything that's happened—like it didn't matter no more. And I feel clean, somehow—like you feel yust after you've took a bath. And I feel happy for once—yes, honest!—happier than I ever been anywhere before! (982)

This moment of lyric calm and harmony between father, daughter, and place, in which "home" is found and Anna is momentarily purged of her past, is one of the most peaceful and contented in O'Neill's oeuvre, and it takes place, significantly I think, off the shores of Provincetown. The peaceful scene is interrupted by the intrusion of a love plot—like *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Straw*, *"Anna Christie"* was written for commercial venues, not for the Provincetown Players. However, the heart of the play is its lyrical evocation of home and belonging, and this is what makes it the culmination of a key period in O'Neill's career, during which he found creative inspiration, domestic stability, and personal happiness at the Provincetown Colony. In its working-class protagonist and tendency to view modern life as a journey through a series of restrictive institutional spaces, *"Anna Christie"* also anticipates the plays that marked the next phase of O'Neill's career: the radical formal experiments of *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1921).

III. Unconscious Autobiography

The year 1920 was a turning point in O'Neill's career: *Beyond the Horizon* debuted on Broadway and won the Pulitzer Prize for drama, and that summer, O'Neill wrote the play that would set him apart as a modernist playwright. When O'Neill read *The Emperor Jones* to Jig Cook and Susan Glaspell, they were astounded by the play's power and originality. Cook declared, "This is what I have been waiting for—a play to call forth the utmost each one can do, and fuse all into unity. This marks the success of the Provincetown Players! Gene…wrote it to compel us to the untried, to do the 'impossible.'"[46] Cook saw the play as a triumph of the "beloved community" he had envisioned in 1915, and he set about with characteristic energy to give the play the staging it deserved. Convinced the play's island setting required the construction of a dome, which would give the illusion of greater space than a standard cyclorama, Jig set about to build it single-handedly, ignoring the executive committee's protests against the expense (149). *The Emperor Jones* starred the African-American vaudeville actor Charles Gilpin as Brutus Jones, and it was a resounding success with audiences, who stood in long lines to buy tickets. In its wake, Jig declared O'Neill to be, at last, "an initiate of our community" (150).

If *The Emperor Jones* was a high point in the collaboration between O'Neill and the Provincetown Players, it also signaled the beginning of the group's demise. Before 1920, O'Neill wrote stark, one-act plays for the Players, and longer melodramas, like *Beyond the Horizon* and *"Anna Christie"*, for commercial theater. *The Emperor Jones* was the first play to make the leap from the little theater to Broadway. It ran for 204 performances, made Gilpin a star, earned O'Neill his first substantial income, and tripled the revenue of the Provincetown Players.[47] It also stoked the ambitions of other members of the group. Over the next two years, Cook and Glaspell

[46] Quoted in Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams*, 148.

[47] Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams*, 204.

sought Broadway staging for their own plays. According to Brenda Murphy, the Players "had come to be dominated by Cook, Glaspell, and O'Neill, three playwrights whose major drive was to write full-length plays and have them produced on Broadway."[48] However, neither of the older writers approached the success of *The Emperor Jones*. Envy sparked tension among the Players about the leadership and direction of the group, and in 1922, open conflict erupted around the production of *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill's second major expressionist drama. Jig Cook was directing, but O'Neill felt Jig's drinking hampered rehearsals, so the playwright took over direction himself and called in the help of Cook's rival, Jimmy Light. Before the play went live, Cook and Glaspell departed for Greece, frustrated with the direction of the group that had begun in the spirit of amateur collaboration, but had succeeded to become a professional institution. As numerous commentators on the Players have noted, Cook considered success a failure.[49]

The production of *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape* catalyzed the decline of the Provincetown Players. It is no exaggeration to say that the plays themselves were "actors," in the sense meant by Bruno Latour, in the unfolding drama of the organization.[50] But more interesting from a literary perspective is the way these plays stage the themes of community and vocation that were central to the group's evolving understanding of itself. In this way, they show continuity with O'Neill's earlier plays. However, there are also stark differences, both in terms of the experimental form of these plays, and in terms of the use to which they put the heterotopia. Indeed, I argue that *The Emperor Jones* both anticipates, and partially atones for, the dissolution of O'Neill's relationship with the creative community of the Provincetown Players.

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[48] Murphy, *Provincetown Players*, 179.

[49] See Linda Ben-Zvi, "The Provincetown Players: The Success That Failed," *Eugene O'Neill Review* 27 (2005): 9-21.

[50] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

The Emperor Jones and *The Hairy Ape* are famous for being among the first examples of Expressionist drama in America. Expressionism was a style associated with subjective, rather than realistic, presentation, and was influenced by the drama of O'Neill's hero, August Strindberg. But at the time, O'Neill's Expressionist plays provoked much commentary for their supposed political content. Both depict a defiant, lower-class protagonist who is ultimately crushed by social forces. In the 1920s, O'Neill objected both to the Expressionist label and to this "social" reading, calling *The Hairy Ape* an "unconscious autobiography."[51] This is a strange term: can we really take seriously an author's claim that a work could be both "autobiographical" and "unconscious"? Though psychobiographical readings of O'Neill's work are so common as to have become clichéd, in the case of *The Emperor Jones*, the "autobiographical" reading is essential to understanding its "social" imagination. Here I read the play not so much as a commentary on abstract "social forces," but rather as a reflection of the much more local conditions of its production.

Beginning in 1920, O'Neill's personal fame began to eclipse that of his fellows in the Provincetown Players. Broadway success attracted the attention of major newspapers and magazines. Profiles of the playwright from this period are remarkably consistent. Noting his unusual biography, they tend to emphasize O'Neill's itinerancy and adventurousness: his years on the road with his actor father; his brief stints in elite universities like Princeton and Harvard; and most of all, his manly labors as a gold prospector and able-bodied seaman. I have already mentioned O'Neill's quest to find the ideal place of home and work, a biography that makes him a typical colony writer, if not a paradigmatic modern hero. But there is a more obvious point to be made about media portrayals of O'Neill in this period: they were emphatically masculine. In

[51] Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, "O'Neill: The Man with a Mask," *New Republic*, March 16, 1927, 93.

an article entitled, "Playwright Finds His Inspiration on Lonely Sand Dunes by the Sea," Olin Downes presents O'Neill as a rebel against bourgeois success:

> New York's playwright find of the year lives obscurely in a clean little cottage, miles from nowhere on Cape Cod.
>
> He doesn't care for money.
>
> He laughs at fame.
>
> The story of Eugene O'Neill, son of James O'Neill, the veteran actor, who died only the other day, is a tale such as Jack London might have written.
>
> O'Neill virtually ran away from college. He has been an ordinary seaman, a prospector for gold, a newspaper man and an actor.
>
> Olin Downes discovered him on the sand dunes the past week, visited his home and leaned many things of the man whom critics proclaim a rising genius.[52]

Downes's O'Neill is both a modernist genius and "a man's man, an adventurer born, reasonably close-cropped spare, fit-looking and very brown, loathing roiled shirts, and regretting the passage of the 18th amendment" (10). This image is consistent with reviewers who treated the playwright as an almost mythic figure who infused American theater with a much-needed dose of virility, in the form of workingmen's speech and tragic seriousness. O'Neill cultivated this image: in the same interview with Downes, he claimed, "my real start as a dramatist was when I got out of an academy and among men, on the sea" (10). No mention here of the sanatorium, that institution full of nurses and caring labor. O'Neill's Provincetown home—the "clean little cottage, miles from nowhere"—reinforced the image of the man of the sea. Downes called it "a place which only those kin of the sea, and wary of the crowd, would inhabit" (7).

As we have seen, O'Neill constantly compared Peaked Hill Bar to a ship. But in interviews, he rarely mentions the communitarian and feminine features of the Provincetown Colony, where women writers like Vorse, Glaspell, and Boulton offered both professional companionship and domestic stability—features that initially attracted him to the group. Downes omits key details, like the fact that the cottage was originally the summer home of Mabel Dodge,

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[52] Olin Downes, "Playwright Finds His Inspiration on Lonely Sand Dunes by the Sea" in *Conversations with Eugene O'Neill*, ed. Mark W. Estrin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 6.

or that the O'Neills saw their friends over the dunes in Provincetown nearly every day. The erasure of O'Neill's reliance on female patronage and community reinforces the myth of the modernist genius who defies the tastes and conventions of "the crowd." This is especially relevant for O'Neill as a playwright, since theater at the time was seen as a popular and commercial form, rather than "high art." At the same moment when O'Neill was working to cross over from the modernist coterie of the little theater to the commercial stage, his self-presentation downplays the sociable, collaborative, feminine space of the colony, and plays up the image of Provincetown as an isolated retreat for a solitary, renegade artist. A similar shift can be seen in the plays themselves. *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Straw* juxtapose the drudgery of women's domestic labor with the male poet's desire to "create." By contrast, experimental dramas like *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*, with their working class male protagonists and non-domestic settings, seem on the surface to have nothing to do with the colony. This is where O'Neill's invocation of "unconscious autobiography" is helpful in pushing us beyond a thematic reading.

The Emperor Jones can help us understand two things: first, why the colony was such a rich aesthetic and personal resource for a modernist writer like O'Neill; and second, how O'Neill's modernist aesthetic was inseparable from his suppression of the social experience of creative community. In *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill explored another key feature of the heterotopian conditions of the colony: it was not just a real place, a practical solution to problems of vocation and belonging; it was also a richly imaginative site that could reflect, or conjure, other spaces. This way of thinking about the space allowed him the imaginative freedom to generalize from his own experience, and simultaneously to distance himself, at least symbolically, from the social attachments that threatened his modernist persona.

Brutus Jones is the self-proclaimed "Emperor" of an unnamed Caribbean island. Like O'Neill, his life up to this point has been a journey through a series of modern institutional spaces: before the island, it was the Pullman car, then the jail, and the ship, on which he escaped. Both Jones the protagonist and O'Neill the playwright are modern Everymen, buffeted between a series of socially conditioned spaces, in search of the utopia of "home" and "belonging." Instead of "belonging," Jones creates an empire, asserting his mastery over other black people. His exploitation of the islanders ironically recapitulates the racism and greed of the American shores he fled. The island is a "heterotopia" in the sense that a black Pullman porter is king, an inversion of sorts, but it is also a bleak microcosm of the U.S. racial order, internalized and redeployed by an African-American.

Jones's island is strangely analogous to O'Neill's Provincetown. Both spaces become "colonies" in a more sinister sense. If we think in broadly allegorical terms, parallels emerge between playwright and protagonist. O'Neill famously enthralled the Provincetowners with his yarns and shanties, his sea plays, and his darkly mysterious poet's persona. He was crowned their poet king, using the theater as a try-out space for plays like *The Emperor Jones*, which then became hits on Broadway, earning him fame and relative fortune. Jones enthralls the natives with the story that he can only be killed by a "silver bullet." He then levies heavy taxes on them, and stashes his ill-gotten gains in an offshore bank, ready to flee when his "game is up." Island and colony are supposedly communities—social bodies whose aim is the flourishing of all their members—but they are actually treated like a set of natural and human resources, ripe for extraction.

The Emperor Jones stages the revenge of the community against the tyrant. In the first scene, Jones finds out that the natives have abandoned his palace and are planning to assassinate

him. Unflustered, he flees for "the Dark Forest." (It's pretty clear this is an allegory of some kind.) Once there, the island becomes an interior landscape, dramatizing Jones's unconscious mind. In each scene, he confronts disturbing images from his former life and his ancestral past. First he sees the friend he stabbed in a dice game, then the prison guard he killed. Then the Forest morphs into an auction block, then a slave ship, then a jungle in Africa. Each time, Jones first becomes absorbed into the scene, then fires his gun to break the spell, wasting his precious bullets. With each successive scene, he sheds his "Emperor trappings" (*CP1* 1049), until he is nearly naked, a symbol of primitive man. In the end, the natives capture and kill him easily.

In *The Emperor Jones*, community is something sinister: a violent group that exacts revenge on the individual, or a primitive impulse that leads to death. When Jones is presented with the image of the slave ship, he is seized by "a shudder of terror" but then "his voice, as if under some uncanny compulsion" joins the voices of the singing slaves: "as their chorus lifts he rises to a sitting posture similar to the others, swaying back and forth" (1055-6). Jones tears himself away and runs screaming in terror from this compulsory performance of collective suffering, but his repeated gestures of "defiance" against this symbolic form of community only leave him more vulnerable to the "revenge" of his actual pursuers.

This is community as death trap. But the form of the play tells a different story. What is recognizably modernist about it is not its subject, the comic revenge of the community against a Pullman porter who thinks he is a king. This is really just the frame. The real drama is the drama in Jones's mind, the psychological journey into his own past and the collective unconscious. The playwright has found a way to dramatize the undramatic, the psychological. What the audience remembered most about the play was not the plot, but the drums: beginning in scene one, and ceasing only with Jones's death, the tom-toms get louder and faster as the play runs. The effect is

uncanny: the audience feels that they too are participating in some kind of primitive ritual, or descending into madness with Jones himself. The hero of this modernist fable is the playwright, the master maker who has found a way to display the protagonist's inner life and shape the inner experience of his audience.

In *Staging Depth*, Joel Pfister argues that O'Neill's universalizing humanism, his obsession with staging the tragic nature of "Life" in the abstract, was part of a wider interwar literary trend that depoliticized art by representing "life as static, not as a social formation that can be criticized and changed."[53] *The Emperor Jones* performs this act of de-politicizing abstraction in at least two ways: it removes Brutus Jones from the context of U.S. racial conflict by placing him on an unnamed island, and then turns that island into a psychological landscape, a journey into Jones's "racial" unconscious. This double act of abstraction made it possible for early critics to read the play as a parable about "primitive man." It also makes the autobiographical reading of the play more plausible: in *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill could both perform and erase, in a kind of racial drag, his own ambivalent relationship to community.

Both *The Emperor Jones* and O'Neill's self-presentation in his interviews from this period tell the same story: the colony, the heterotopia, is interesting only insofar as it offers a way of staging the biography and psychology of the artist. The actual dynamics of communal production, of female labor, of amateur collaboration, are suppressed in the myth of modernist authorship. While plays like *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Straw* show anxiety about, and perhaps a critical interest in, the gendered division of labor and the practical creation of ideal spaces of home and work, in plays like *Jones*, the playwright extracts the imaginative potential of the space itself. Jig Cook interpreted *The Emperor Jones* as O'Neill's initiation into the creative

[53] Joel Pfister, *Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 159.

community of the Provincetown Players, but in my reading, the play seems to prefigure the breach that followed in the wake of its production. At the same time, *The Emperor Jones* stages the community's revenge on the protagonist, which we could read as an at least partial attempt by the playwright to atone for the suppression of creative community.

The Emperor Jones can be read as both the apotheosis of the modernist hero, whose unconscious mind becomes the site of dramatic action, and as a self-indictment for the playwright's anticipated exploitation of and eventual exit from the amateur, communal experiment of the Provincetown Players. There is less ambivalence in *The Hairy Ape*, a story about the impossibility of "belonging" in a modern, industrial world. The play begins in the stokehold of a passenger liner, where the protagonist, a stoker named Yank, seems at first to be the perfect machine-age man. While the old man Paddy laments the lost days of the sailing ship, Yank heartily declares: "I belong […] I'm smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles…I'm steel-steel-steel!"[54] However, this sense of "belonging" to the speed and steel of the ship is abruptly shattered when a wealthy, white-gowned young woman named Mildred takes a tour of the stokehold and promptly faints in horror upon seeing the beastly Yank. In the scenes that follow, Yank searches for answers to the questions that Mildred's shock has raised. First he is ignored by wealthy churchgoers, who move like "gaudy marionettes" on a Manhattan street; then he is evicted from the I.W.W. offices by Wobblies skeptical of his violent denunciations of the ruling class; then he finds himself in prison, where even the prisoners fail to sympathize with him. Finally, he goes to the zoo, having internalized Mildred's perception that he is no better than a "hairy ape." In the highly symbolic final scene, a gorilla crushes him in a deadly embrace. The last line of the play is painfully ironic. Inverting the ambivalent embrace of collective hope at the

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[54] Eugene O'Neill, *Complete Plays: 1920-1931* (New York: Library of America, 1988), 129 (hereafter cited in text as *CP2*).

end of *Beyond the Horizon*, O'Neill's stage directions state, "*And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs*" (*CP2* 163).

On one level, *The Hairy Ape* is a play about work, and, given his later claim that the play is unconscious autobiography, we can draw parallels to O'Neill's complicated sense of his own vocation. In a 1922 interview after the play opened, O'Neill, like Paddy in *The Hairy Ape*, waxes nostalgic about the lost world of sailing ships, where discipline was "essentially voluntary" and men were controlled not by orders, but by "love of the ship."[55] Sounding like John Ruskin, O'Neill insists that the ethos aboard the sailing ships was "more like the spirit of medieval guilds than anything that survives in this mechanistic age—the spirit of craftsmanship, of giving one's heart as well as one's hands to one's work, of doing it for the inner satisfaction of carrying out one's own ideals, not merely as obedience to orders" (34-5). To be sure, this is an implausibly romantic picture of life on a ship, but for O'Neill the point is less about historical accuracy than about a felt "loss of the old spirit" of harmony with one's work brought about by modernity—whether in the form of steamships or labor unions or white collar specialization. The interview anticipates O'Neill's complaint to Kenneth Macgowan, nearly twenty years later, about the "ordeal" of doing "business within the Showshop" of Broadway and Hollywood.[56] The Provincetown Players were the sailing ships of the theater, perhaps inefficient and nostalgic, but at least a place where one could "carry out one's own ideals"—a lament much more plausible from a creative worker than a sailor. It seems extraordinary that just at the moment when the Players are falling apart, O'Neill is already, perhaps "unconsciously," mourning the loss of ideal conditions for creative labor.

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[55] Mary B. Mullett, "The Extraordinary Story of Eugene O'Neill," in *Conversations with Eugene O'Neill,* 34.

[56] O'Neill, *"The Theatre We Worked for"*, 253-4.

Lest we doubt the extent to which O'Neill identified with his own characters, it is important to note how frequently lines from his plays make their way into his personal reflections about his own life—often at moments of extreme irony. In April 1927, O'Neill wrote a rhapsodic letter to Agnes about their new home in Bermuda, which they called Spithead:

> Our Home! I feel that very much about Spithead, don't you? That this place is in some strange symbolical fashion our reward, that it is the permanent seat of our family—like some old English family estate. I already feel like entailing it in my will so that it must always be background for our children! [...] The thought of the place is indissolubly intermingled with my love for you, with our nine years of marriage that, after much struggle, have finally won to this haven, this ultimate island where we may rest and live toward our dreams with a sense of permanence and security that here we do belong. 'And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs.'[57]

At the time, O'Neill was carrying on a romance with the actress Carlotta Monterey, and he would leave Agnes and the children for Carlotta within the year. (Carlotta had played Mildred in *The Hairy Ape* five years before, and had reconnected with O'Neill in 1926.) The strangeness of the timing aside, it is fascinating how the themes that define O'Neill's life repeat themselves in both the letter and in the physical space of the new home. Like Peaked Hill Bar, Spithead was a ship-like retreat, located on an island, far from the commercial world of Broadway. O'Neill figures the house a haven of domestic happiness after a nine-year voyage of marriage—at the same time he is planning his exit. In 1953, when O'Neill was ill and dying, one of his last statements returned to the chronic theme of geopathology: "Born in a hotel room and, God dammit, died in a hotel room."[58] It is no wonder that O'Neill scholars have a hard time disentangling the tragedy of O'Neill's life from the tragedies he sent to the stage: like Yank, the playwright's quest for "belonging" was both obsessive and doomed.

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[57] *A Wind Is Rising: The Correspondence of Agnes Boulton and Eugene O'Neill* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 229. O'Neill's biographers explained his penchant for named estates: "All of O'Neill's houses had names—he was drawn to the manorial, his only snobbery, because he wanted to do what his father had failed to do, to carry on the proud tradition of his Irish ancestors and show the pretentious Yankees what noblesse oblige really meant." Gelb and Gelb, *O'Neill*, 624.

[58] Gelb and Gelb, *O'Neill*, 939.

The theme of belonging is pervasive in O'Neill's life and his work. Again and again we find the desire for community, for home, for a retreat from the complexities of commerce and culture, and the thwarting of that desire as O'Neill's heroes—and the playwright—find themselves in temporary, anonymous, impersonal sites like hotels, hospitals, and sanatoria. While in Chapter Four we will see in Katherine Anne Porter and Carson McCullers two writers who contemplate the communal, even utopian potential of sites like ships and hotels, for O'Neill, the idea of belonging was inextricable from the idea of the family home, despite the elusiveness of that space in reality.

The problem of belonging was not just a thematic concern; it was also a formal problem, one that O'Neill explored in *"Anna Christie"*, *The Emperor Jones*, and *The Hairy Ape*. All three plays feature underclass protagonists—a modern "Everyman" (or woman, as the case may be)—whose life is understood not as a single significant action—the subject of drama since the Renaissance—but rather as an episodic journey through a series of sites. While for Anna and Brutus Jones this life-structure is implied, or glimpsed in the background, for Yank, it becomes the structure of the play, as the eight scenes take him from ship to jail to zoo, a series of spaces of confinement and alienation. In *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill exploited a key Expressionist form: the station drama. Named for the stations of the cross, the station drama follows the presentational style of medieval mystery plays, and was associated in its modern form with the autobiographical dramaturgy of August Strindberg. In *Theory of the Modern Drama*, Peter Szondi argues that the station drama offered Strindberg and later Expressionists a way of staging "the confrontation between the isolated I and a world become strange."[59] For O'Neill, the "stations" were not merely dreams or psychological confrontations. They were a series of sites,

[59] Peter Szondi, *Theory of the Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), 64.

spaces, institutions in which the modern hero seeks, and fails to find, belonging: the harmony of family and friends, work and love, that, for a time at least, O'Neill thought he had found in the writers' colony of Provincetown.

The story of O'Neill and Provincetown is full of ironies. What should be clear from the literary and biographical narrative I have been unfolding in this chapter is that the success of O'Neill as a playwright and the failure of the Provincetown Players as a community are inextricably intertwined. The impossibility of community, the longing for home, the lament for a vocation that expresses one's inner being: these are the themes that O'Neill explored in his tragic dramas. Had Provincetown fulfilled its promise as a permanent home, rather than another stop on the tragic station drama of O'Neill's life, we might never have had a play like *Long Day's Journey into Night*. As we will see in the coming chapters, community was a perilous pursuit for ambitious U.S. writers in this period. At best, it fostered tremendous collective energy and creative expression. But it could also become a goal in its own right, one that made the literary project seem merely incidental to the social one.

Chapter Two

A Bridge Between Cultures
Willa Cather, Mary Austin, and the Art Colonies of New Mexico

In the previous chapter, we saw a contest between two men—Eugene O'Neill and Jig Cook—over a vision of the ideal creative community: was it to be a collective, utopian project among amateurs, or a professional operation, aesthetically innovative and commercially lucrative? This contest tended ignore, and at times actively suppress, the way both versions of community relied on a gendered division of labor, in which women supported creative work with patronage and domestic labor, but were not in themselves creative subjects. The writers' colonies of northern New Mexico represented a rebellion on multiple fronts: against male creative supremacy, against the traditions and values of New England, against the authority of the East Coast literary scene. Beginning in 1917, the writers, artists, and patrons who relocated there from cities like New York and Chicago tried to arrange their lives on new, more egalitarian terms, and to spark an American cultural renaissance from the Southwest.

The rhetoric of this renaissance was often strikingly similar to Cook's in Provincetown. Visionaries like Mabel Dodge and Mary Austin imagined new forms of creative production that would mystically reconstitute the national community, as they believed Greek theater had done in the ancient world. But the situation in New Mexico was far more complicated than in Cook and O'Neill's seaside suburb of Greenwich Village. Most importantly, New Mexico was a contact zone among cultures: indigenous tribes; Spanish-speakers (both recent immigrants from Mexico and descendants of the colonial ruling class); and Anglo-Americans with many different agendas for the future of the new state, only admitted to the union in 1912. Equally significant for our study of domestic writers' colonies, the creative enclaves of Northern New Mexico

lacked a single institutional center or leader, with major salons in both Santa Fe and Taos, towns seventy-five miles apart. Some writers saw this complexity as a threatening lack of coherence. When D.H. Lawrence arrived in Taos in 1922, he described the wild mix of cultures as frustratingly "incongruous" and lacking in any "common purpose" or "common sympathy."[1] But for many women writers and patrons, this cultural richness—and even confusion—offered exciting opportunities to experiment with new forms of art, new identities, and new kinds of relationships.

This chapter traces the Southwestern journeys of Mabel Dodge, Willa Cather, and Mary Austin, three writers whose relationship with the creative communities of northern New Mexico allowed them to remake themselves as creative subjects. In *Culture in the Marketplace*, anthropologist Molly Mullin explores the way women in the Southwest mobilized their social roles as consumers and philanthropists to become arbiters of authenticity for the marketing of Native American and Spanish Colonial art, and to engage in local political battles over Indian education and land rights. She argues that the educated white women who moved to this "relatively underdeveloped periphery and [found] value where others had not" commanded "greater public influence and authority than if they had remained in the Northeast."[2] For Dodge, Cather, and Austin, the most important arena of authority was literary, and, I will argue, the three competed to produce a narrative monument to New Mexico's cultural richness. This competition was sometimes explicit, as when Mary Austin wrote to her publisher that her new novel *Starry Adventure* would succeed as a "novel of New Mexico" where Cather's *The Professor's House*

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[1] Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos* (New York: Knopf, 1932), 52 (hereafter cited in text as *LT*).

[2] Molly H. Mullin, *Culture in the Marketplace: Gender, Art, and Value in the American Southwest* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 47.

had failed.[3] But more often, the New Mexico-themed works of these three writers were engaged in a complex conversation about what the Southwest meant to women, to artists, and to America.

The most important feature of the literary production of New Mexico's art colonies was that it tended to focus almost exclusively on the landscape and people of New Mexico. Other colonies sought to provide a neutral space where writers would pursue their individual literary projects. If a O'Neill set a play in Provincetown, or if Robinson wrote a poem about Marian MacDowell's house, this was an exceptional occasion—and perhaps even a sign of creative drought, as in the case of writers at Yaddo who, in periods of writers' block, wrote potboilers set in art enclaves.[4] In New Mexico, writers were recruited to the region for the explicit purpose of writing about it for a wider national audience, and several Southwestern-themed anthologies and literary magazines sought to put New Mexico on the cultural map. Dodge, Cather, and Austin participated in this project of New Mexico boosterism, but their approach to the region differed in subtle ways. For Dodge, New Mexico was a therapeutic space where both the individual and, less clearly, modern Anglo-American culture at large, might find spiritual rejuvenation. For Cather, it was an archaic space where the sensitive literary artist could excavate and revivify older forms of culture and community. For Austin, it was an emergent space where women could reshape their lives and foment a cultural revolution based on indigenous art and ritual. These differences in emphasis are most apparent in Dodge's memoirs *Lorenzo in Taos* (1932) and *Edge of Taos Desert* (1937), Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), and Austin's *Starry Adventure* (1932).

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[3] Mary Austin to Ferris Greenslet, 6 December 1930 (AU 1115) Box 58, Mary Hunter Austin papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA (hereafter MHAP).

[4] Examples include Kenneth Fearing's *Dagger of the Mind* (1941) and Clifton Cuthbert's *Art Colony* (1951).

Scholars tend to address these texts—especially the novels of Cather and Austin—under the rubric of regionalism, attending to the ecological, political, and cultural work done by representations of place and people of the Southwest.[5] It is my contention that tracing this literary conversation among Dodge, Cather, and Austin tells us more about New Mexico's writers' colonies—the form of social and institutional life writers participated in there—than it does about New Mexico. The relationships of patronage, friendship, and competition among these three women produced compelling—and sometimes conflicting—literary representations of New Mexico as an ideal site for creative work. All three women shared a desire to orient life around creative activity, and, during the 1920s, all three settled on New Mexico as the place where that new form of life would be possible. In this chapter, I describe the patronage relationships and deliberate arrangements of space and time that made New Mexico so hospitable to writers. This creative infrastructure shaped the way colony writers imagined the relationship between the literary artist and the wider community. It also served as thematic and formal inspiration for the literary works produced in New Mexico's art colonies.

I. Creative Community at the Edge of Taos Desert

When Mabel Dodge redecorated the old coastguard station at Peaked Hill Bar in 1915—the place where Eugene O'Neill would later write his most famous early plays—she was continuing a pattern domestic creativity that would make her one of the most important modernist patrons in America. Dodge obsessively arranged her living spaces—and her social circle—to satisfy her

[5] See for example Mark Schlenz, "Rhetorics of Region in *Starry Adventure* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*" in *Regionalism Reconsidered: New Approaches to the Field*, ed. David Jordan (New York: Garland, 1994), 65-85; John N. Swift and Joseph R. Urgo, *Willa Cather and the American Southwest* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Heike Schaefer, *Mary Austin's Regionalism: Reflections on Gender, Genre, and Geography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); and Philip Joseph, *American Literary Regionalism in a Global Age* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

eclectic tastes and reflect her ever-changing enthusiasms: Renaissance and Modern art, radical politics and feminism, psychoanalysis and the mysticism of George Gurdjieff. Born in Buffalo, New York, the daughter of a family of wealthy bankers, Dodge had spent several years entertaining European modernists and American expatriates at her Villa Curonia outside Florence. In 1913, she created one of the most successful salons of the modernist period at her home at 23 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, bringing writers, artists, and political activists into conversation around a common theme. Dodge's brief association with the Provincetown colony ended with the collapse of her affair with John Reed, and in 1917, she made her first trip to New Mexico. Over the next two decades, the Taos estate she called "Los Gallos" would attract some of the most important artists, writers, and intellectuals of the time, including Marsden Hartley, Mary Austin, D.H. Lawrence, Willa Cather, Jean Toomer, Georgia O'Keefe, Carl Jung, and Martha Graham.

Mabel Dodge could be a generous patron, a sensitive listener, and a tactful hostess who allowed her guests the freedom to create in peaceful solitude. At Los Gallos, she adhered to many of the same principles that sustained the more institutionalized writers' colonies at Peterborough and Saratoga, offering potential guests uninterrupted days of work in one of her several studios or guest houses, and insisting they would meet her only at meals in the evening. In a letter from the late 1920s, Dodge reaffirmed her commitment to her "original ideal of having this place a creative centre - not just a place for people to retreat into - as in to go to sleep in - or to barge in for a good time. I want people to use it freely but for creative purposes."[6] In many ways, New Mexico's writers' colonies resembled the expatriate circles of Paris, familiar subjects of modernist myth and cultural history. Like her friend Gertrude Stein, Mabel Dodge gathered

[6] Pressed for funds, Dodge had briefly considered turning her home into a "dude ranch" for vacationing tourists. Mabel Dodge Luhan to Mary Austin, undated, Box 95, MHAP.

around her an eclectic group of modernist artists and writers, and the relationships that resulted were often marked by sexual tension and open conflict. Unlike Stein, whose primary focus was her own literary practice, Dodge saw herself as a patron, muse, and medium, a "bridge between cultures" who would connect Anglo-American writers to the native traditions of New Mexico. Beginning in 1918 and continuing through the 1930s, Dodge launched an aggressive campaign in the press and in her private correspondence to draw writers to Taos, hoping that one of them would capture in literary form the beauty, strangeness, and mystical power that she perceived to be the essence of the region's landscape and people.

Dodge did more than any other figure of her time to promote the myth of New Mexico as an untouched, primitive, multicultural Eden with mystical, regenerative powers. Dodge was part of a circle of artists and intellectuals—which included Provincetown and Greenwich Village regulars like Hutchins Hapgood and Max Eastman—who promulgated what some scholars have termed a "transcendental modernism." These writers were in search of spiritual and cultural solutions to the social, moral, and political disorder of modern urban-industrial civilization. According to this line of thinking, Anglo-American culture, with its Eurocentric bias, was marred by individualism and materialism and plagued by the dualistic separation of nature and culture. "Believing that cultural vision was central to social revolution," Dodge biographer and cultural historian Lois Rudnick has claimed, "they advocated the preservation of the world's relatively pristine natural environments and the native peoples who inhabited them as necessary to the well-being of modern society."[7] Dodge's many marriages and changes of scene—from Buffalo, to Florence, to Manhattan, to Provincetown, to Croton-on-Hudson, and finally to Taos—were

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[7] Lois Palken Rudnick, *Utopian Vistas: The Mabel Dodge Luhan House and the American Counterculture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 8. Rudnick borrows the term "transcendental modernism" from music historian Judith Tick.

part of her search for personal fulfillment, and for essential truths that would transform the society that had produced what she recognized to be her own pathologically restless personality. The fact that she settled permanently in Taos, and remained married to Tony Lujan until her death in 1962, is a testament to the unusual strength of her conviction that in New Mexico she had finally found a culture in which everyday life, art, and nature were organically integrated.

In *The Edge of Taos Desert* (evocatively subtitled "Escape to Reality"), the last volume of her four-book memoir *Intimate Memories*, Dodge portrays herself as an intrepid pioneer who put Taos on the cultural map. In fact, Taos was already the site of a flourishing colony of academically trained commercial painters by 1917, and Santa Fe, the first stop for most Easterners arriving in the state, was quickly becoming a literary mecca.[8] The old Governor's Palace, an adobe colonial-era building in Santa Fe's central plaza, was home to both the Museum of New Mexico and the School of American Archaeology (later known as the School of American Research). Founded in 1907, these institutions provided studio and exhibition space to the artists who began to flock to New Mexico in the early twentieth century, eager to capture the local color, from sublime desert landscapes to Native American and Hispanic populations in their everyday and ceremonial guises. The region also attracted health seekers: in 1916, Alice Corbin Henderson, a Chicago poet and co-founder of the little magazine *Poetry*, traveled to Santa Fe's Sunmount Sanatorium to recover from tuberculosis. She was soon joined by her husband William Penhallow Henderson, a prominent portraitist, architect, and furniture maker who taught at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. The Hendersons became central figures in Santa Fe's art and literary colonies. Alice drew literary friends to Santa Fe to visit or settle, and William helped

[8] For the early history of the art and literary colonies in Santa Fe and Taos see Arrell Morgan Gibson, *The Santa Fe and Taos Colonies: Age of the Muses, 1900-1942* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983).

codify and promote the "Santa Fe Style" of architecture to preserve the town's historic flavor.[9] The house they built on Telegraph Road (they quickly lobbied to have the name changed to the more picturesque "Camino del Monte Sol") was a gathering place for creative people throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The literary colony in Santa Fe was diffuse, gregarious, and multifaceted. The writers who settled there were as interested in shaping the town as they were in discussing the revolution in verse form. They founded literary magazines and discussion clubs and an independent press, held an annual fundraiser called the Poets' Roundup (featuring poets in blue jeans and bandanas dashing out of makeshift chutes to declaim their verses), and, during the 1930s, raised money for destitute writers. They were key players in the establishment of the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs, a group formed to improve the lives of Native Americas through political channels. As one observer put it,

> other towns in this country have artists and writers, but no other town has them taking such active part in town life. In Provincetown, Carmel, and such places, they keep to themselves. In Santa Fe they run for office, decorate the public buildings, restaurants, and bars; they clamp down on builders who want to erect buildings out of keeping with the prevailing style of architecture; and they start most of the local movements to improve the town.[10]

A local resident made a similar observation—"They are as interested in paving and sewers, elections and talkies as the business men"—and hinted at the source of their surprising political power: "Being articulate, their opinions are sometimes more effective than their number."[11]

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[9] Alice Henderson's guests included fellow poets Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, Witter Bynner, and Harriet Monroe. Like Mabel Dodge, she promoted New Mexico as a literary mecca by placing articles in magazines such as *Scribner's*, *House Beautiful*, and *Sunset.* See Marta Weigle and Kyle Fiore, *Santa Fe and Taos: The Writer's Era, 1916-1941* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1982), 12-14.

[10] Jo H. Chamberlin, "Santa Fe Fiesta," *Scribner's Magazine*, September 1937, 84, quoted in Gibson, *Santa Fe and Taos Colonies*, 248.

[11] Ruth Laughlin Barker, *Caballeros: The Romance of Santa Fe and the Southwest* (1931), 114, quoted in Weigle and Fiore, *Santa Fe and Taos*, 35.

Dodge arrived in Santa Fe in 1917, joining her new husband Maurice Sterne and her teenage son John Evans, who had been living in the town for several weeks. Sterne, a modernist painter and admirer of Rodin and Cézanne, was in search of an Edenic place and the beauty of essential forms. His quest had take him as far as Bali, and New Mexico was another chapter in the search.[12] Rather than being impressed by the vibrant community of artists and prominent literary figures in Santa Fe, Dodge was annoyed by Alice Corbin Henderson's polite tea parties and the fact that everyone seemed "too eager and cordial."[13] Committed to the idea that New Mexico was a land of primitive difference, Dodge decided to explore Taos, a town seventy-five miles to the northeast via frightening mountain roads. In her memoirs, Dodge distinguishes her own settlement in Taos from that of the Anglo literary types in Santa Fe. She recalls saying to Sterne, "here it's more real. People here live here. They're not just sitting on the surface like those friends of yours down there. Why, those people don't belong there, and we would never really belong there, either. I want to be in a place where I can sink in and be a part of the life" (44). The decision also had an aesthetic component. Dodge insisted that in Taos "life could come to one more concretely than in other places, and that meanings that were shut up in words and phrases out in the world could incorporate themselves in living forms and move before one. Ideas here might clothe themselves in form and flesh, and word-symbols change into pictured, living realities" (60). Dodge's New Mexico offers itself as model for modernist aesthetics, as if imagist poetry and cubist forms were the natural outgrowth of its pared down landscape.

[12] Lois Palken Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 126. While biographers generally refer to their subject informally as "Mabel," I've chosen "Dodge" as the surname familiar to most readers.

[13] Mabel Dodge Luhan, *The Edge of Taos Desert: Escape to Reality* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987 [1937]), 19-20 (hereafter cited in text as *ETD*).

As communities founded on the need for solitary time and space for creative work—but communities nonetheless—writers' colonies confront the competing impulses of monastic withdrawal and civic engagement. Eugene O'Neill fled the "Art Colony" of Provincetown proper, with its costume balls and literary gossip, for the majestic isolation of Peaked Hill Bar, crossing the dunes to join in the social round when the mood struck him.[14] In New Mexico, the two-town structure of the art colonies allowed individuals to sort themselves based on temperament, or according to their needs at the time. Writers looking for a vibrant literary "scene" could head to Santa Fe, while those hoping to withdraw into more intimate friendships and solitary work could spend time with Mabel Dodge at Los Gallos. Beginning in 1918, Mary Austin would do just that, fleeing to Taos every few months to recuperate and work after exhausting herself with lectures, social engagements, and organizing for local and national associations based in Santa Fe. Likewise, in 1925 and 1926, Willa Cather split her time between Mary Austin's home in Santa Fe and Mabel Dodge's in Taos. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I turn to the relationships among these three women and how they affected one another's literary work. But it is a striking fact that Mabel Dodge's memoirs never mention Austin or Cather at all. Focusing only on her own writings, one would be forgiven for assuming that Mabel Dodge's experience of Taos was almost exclusively structured by a series of relationships with powerful and charismatic men.

The first of those men was not Dodge's current husband Maurice Sterne, but a Taos Indian by the name of Tony Lujan. (When she marriage Tony in 1923, Dodge changed the spelling to Luhan in order to extract the correct pronunciation from her Anglo friends. I've chosen to maintain the original spelling here.) Tony Lujan had an important position in the

[14] As we will see in the following chapter, these twin impulses of monastic isolation and civic engagement were more explicitly elaborated by the MacDowell Colony.

Pueblo as a drummer in religious rituals, but he was also friendly with local artists, serving as a model for the Anglo painters of Taos. After meeting Dodge, he attended gatherings at her home, guided her and her friends on trips to nearby towns and into the mountains, and even took a trip to New York. Biographers speculate that love and mutual exploitation both factored into the relationship between Mabel and Tony.[15] Regardless of its realities, Dodge's literary representation of that relationship in her memoirs was shaped by the assumptions about primitivism and patronage that she brought with her to the Southwest. In *The Edge of Taos Desert*, Dodge described her first arrival in Taos as an embrace, as if the land itself were welcoming and beaconing her.

> Over towards the north, a crescent-shaped mountain range curved like an arm around the smooth valley. At its loftiest portion, a mountain shaped along the snowy heights like an Indian bow, rested with a vast and eternal composure. The rays of the sinking sun threw its forms into relief and deep indentations and the shapes of pyramids were shadowed forth in a rosy glow. The mountain sat there beaming—spread out in the bliss of effortless being. The lesser peaks linked themselves to join it; shoulder to shoulder they supported the central, massive curves. There they all waited, snow-capped, glowing like unearthly flowers, a garland of mystery beyond the known world. Not a house in sight! Not a human being! The wide, soft desert sweeping away to the half-circle of mountains whose central curve was twenty miles away, its right hand reaching the canyon rim. (*ETD* 36)

Paradoxically empty of human life and imbued by human features—arms, shoulders, hands, and an Indian bow—the landscape of Dodge's conflates the land and people of New Mexico. Like other modernists, Dodge preferred myth of timeless Indian wholeness to the struggles in time of actual Indian communities. Dodge would go on to describe her decision to settle in Taos as somewhere between a love affair and a religious experience: "Taos took me that dark winter night and has held me ever since. I am glad I capitulated in the dark, blindly but full of faith. It was a real conversion, and something accepted on trust—recognized as home" (41).

The town of Taos itself was nothing to boast of; visiting artists at the time remembered it as "a sordid little mud village," where electricity and plumbing came late to the population of

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[15] See Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 153-6 and Flannery Burke, *From Greenwich Village to Taos: Primitivism and Place at Mabel Dodge Luhan's* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 115-29.

1,500 people.[16] However, the nearby community of Taos Pueblo imparted a sense of grand continuity. The pueblo was one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites in the United States. With its distinctive architecture—twin stacks of tiered adobe dwellings on either side of a gurgling stream, echoing the shapes of the mountains in the distance—it had attracted Anglo painters since the 1890s. Though the people of Taos Pueblo tolerated artists and visitors, theirs was a conservative and secretive culture, mixing much less with the Hispanic and Anglo communities than had other Northern New Mexican pueblos. (Indeed, marriage outside the Pueblo was prohibited, a fact that would introduce difficulties in the relationship between Dodge and Lujan.) Taos Pueblo also had a history of violent resistance to Spanish and U.S. colonization. In 1680, the Pueblo Rebellion, headquartered in Taos, expelled the Spanish from Northern New Mexico. In 1847 when New Mexico officially became a United States territory, an alliance of Mexican and Pueblo forces marched from Taos to Santa Fe to oppose the U.S. takeover, killing Governor Bent.

In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, the protagonist, Bishop Latour, learns the history of Taos from a renegade Mexican priest named Father Martinez. It is clear from the context that Martinez is using the story of Taos' violent resistance to intimidate his would-be superior, the French priest appointed by Rome to enforce orthodoxy among New Mexico's Catholic community. One can imagine Mabel Dodge identifying in a similar way with the fierce independence of Taos Pueblo, recognizing in their story her own refusal to integrate into the existing art colony of Santa Fe. But the appeal of the Pueblo went far deeper than it's actual history. For Dodge, it offered an example of an integrated culture of communal harmony that was the opposite of the individualistic, alienated late-Victorian culture into which she was born.

[16] Edgar Lee Hewett, Introduction to "Artists and Writers: A List of Prominent Artists and Writers of New Mexico," *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 26, 1940, quoted in Weigle and Fiore, *Santa Fe and Taos*, 49.

Leaving the Pueblo with her son after an early visit, she looked back wistfully: "all about us, out there in the Pueblo, there was a free and easy mode of life that we could see and smell and almost touch, that we might emulate, only we did not know how, for we did not know what elements it was made of" (*ETD* 96). Throughout her memoir, Dodge yearns for a transformative intimacy with the land and with Pueblo culture, an intimacy that she eventually achieves through her sexual union with Tony Lujan.

It was Lujan who convinced her to buy property in Taos, showing her a small adobe house with an orchard and alfalfa field that bordered the Pueblo lands. In May 1918, he helped her purchase the estate from its Mexican owner, then supervised the renovation and expansion of the house, while Dodge designed the interior. The adobe building combined Pueblo and Spanish elements, featuring thick, whitewashed adobe walls and heavy ceiling beams, covered by piñon branches and earth, and conical fireplaces with carved wooden mantels. Deliberately echoing the double pyramids of Taos Pueblo, Lujan built two additional stories on top of the main building. Inside, Dodge displayed her eclectic collection of Italian pottery, modernist art, and New Mexican religious and Indian objects, integrating the phases of her life into a single harmonious space.[17] In her memoir, Dodge reflected on the significance of purchasing a house in Taos:

> Of course acquiring a piece of this land here was a symbolic move, a picture of what was happening inside me. I had to have a place of my own to live on where I could take root and make a life in a home. This earth and Tony were identical in my imagination and his, and I wanted to become a part of them, and the day the place became mine, it was as though I had been accepted by the universe. In that day I became centered and ceased the lonesome pilgrimage forever. (*ETD* 232)

By the summer, it was clear that Dodge and Lujan were in love, and Sterne left Taos for New York. After living together for a number of years, the two married in 1923.[18] Dodge saw in Lujan

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[17] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 156.

[18] The marriage was in part an effort to avoid a scandal that would jeopardize legislative efforts on behalf of Pueblo land rights that Lujan, Dodge, and their friend John Collier were leading in Washington. The union partially alienated Lujan from the Pueblo, since he was already married to a Pueblo woman. Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 155.

as a spiritual guide for her own rebirth: "There was dignity and generosity in him, and always from that moment to this the faint air of a teacher's authority, to which I have submitted with recognition and gratitude" (220-1). She wrote that for the first time in Taos she had "an experience of location, and of being where I belonged. Tony seemed to give me the earth; that is to say, he gave me what I had always missed, a relatedness with my surroundings and I could breathe in peace with no need to struggle" (228). The second half of *The Edge of Taos Desert* is an idealized portrait of "Tony," and of Dodge's gradual conversion to a new way of being, in which she puts off her old identity of "competitive, restless go-getter" (273) and embraces Lujan's model of kindness, which she finds inseparable from Taos as an alternative place and experience of time: "it takes time to be kind and my other friends and I had never had that, just as we had never had any culture in the real sense of the word and for the same reason, for kindness and culture are closely related and require the same soil" (274). Comparing Lujan's way of being to "sunshine falling… disinterested, involuntary, and unceasing," Dodge represented her lover as the mirror image of herself and her friends, the over-civilized, frenzied East Coast elites whom she pictured joining her in Taos to find a similar peace.

Through her marriage to Lujan, Dodge cultivated a new identity as a mediating figure between Anglo and Pueblo culture, performing the work of interpretation and translation. Later in the memoir, she remembers being at the Pueblo when the elders were holding an all-night meeting to decide on a seemingly trivial matter: whether one member could move the door to his house from the east side to the north. Dodge is struck by the beauty of the men's voices, which, in the Tiwa language, seem to her like music.

> Again that cosmic murmur filled the air and passed into one's consciousness and did something good for one. Then all at once I had a realization. ["]It's not that door that it's all about," I said to myself. "That's only a point of focus. But there's something else underlying what they are doing. This is a tribal expression, they are making something, continuing something that is alive. They themselves live by their creation. This

> is their kind of 'creative work.' Altogether they are projecting some essential life-giving energy and each one gives and each one receives of it. (*ETD* 259)

In a further act of translation, she goes on to contrast this harmonious, integrated culture with "our council meetings, our committee meetings, our Leagues of Nations," wondering why "our meetings don't animate us and refresh us." Inspired by this integrated culture, in which beauty is part of the tribe's collective self-making, Dodge would seek to promote new forms of "creative work" to revitalize the culture she had fled.

During her first few years living in Taos, Mabel Dodge interested herself in the political affairs of the Pueblo and other Southwestern tribes, and recruited her guests to support their efforts. John Collier, who would eventually become Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, was initially drawn to Taos by Dodge's letters celebrating the harmonious culture of the Pueblos.[19] Before leaving New York for the West, Collier had worked at the People's Institute at Cooper Union, promoting cultural pluralism. One of his jobs involved helping to stage elaborate pageants showcasing the cultures of the recent immigrant communities of Manhattan's Lower East Side. Like many of the seekers who came to New Mexico, Collier had been looking all his life to create a community that would integrate art with spiritual values. From Taos, Dodge took Collier to see Indian religious dances, where Collier experienced an epiphany similar to the one Dodge had had a few years earlier, seeing "a whole race of men […] as near to the day of first creation as it had been in the prime."[20]

Over the next few years, Collier advocated for better medical care on reservations and investigated the abuses of Indian boarding schools. In 1922, Senator Bursum of New Mexico filed a bill that would seriously endanger Pueblo land holdings. Collier swung into action to

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[19] Ibid., 172.

[20] Ibid., 172-3.

defeat the bill. Tony Lujan helped organize the Pueblos for the political fight, while Dodge gave her "time, energy, and money" to the movement and offered her home as a headquarters. Dodge recruited an army of friends from Santa Fe to New York to write articles against the bill. Mary Austin, Alice Corbin Henderson, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, and even a reluctant D.H. Lawrence, who arrived at Los Gallos amid the furor in the winter of 1922, wrote about the fight in the national press. *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Survey*, *The New York Times*, and *The New York World* carried pieces on the Indians' plight, bringing the issue to the attention of both sympathetic liberal and broad popular audiences. This effort was successful in killing the Bursum Bill by January of 1923.[21]

As Flannery Burke argues in her book about Dodge's primitivism, the campaign against the Bursum Bill was a melding of art and politics. Every article produced by the Mabel Dodge circle mentioned the artistry and communal culture of the Pueblo Indians. Collier was gravely concerned with the health and economic status of the Pueblos, believing that their cultural power was dependent on their material flourishing. Dodge, by contrast, expressed boredom with the "reform" efforts of Indian rights work, but was excited by the mythic visions that appeared in her friends' writings about the Bursum Bill. She wrote to Collier about plans to turn Los Gallos into a center of social experimentation based on Indian life, which would provide a "new world plan" for American civilization. Her intimacy with Tony Lujan allowed Dodge to claim special authority to interpret Indian culture for white audiences.[22]

After 1923, Dodge turned away from politics and renewed her campaign for a spiritual-artistic revolution from Taos. In 1925, she published an essay in *Theatre Arts Monthly* entitled "A Bridge Between Cultures." The essay, prophetic in tone, called for the creative geniuses of

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[21] Ibid., 176-80.

[22] Burke, *From Greenwich Village to Taos*, 52-4.

America to save civilization and themselves from the taint of commercialism by looking to New Mexico as a source of Spartan truth. In the Southwest, she wrote:

> the land is still a source of inspiration. Out of a reverence for the soil and the wonder of fertility have grown the great rituals of the American Indian. . . . And linked with these, the mysteries of propagation and of the fiery energies of the human soul and its transformable power have blended and fused into the pattern of existence that is at the same time both life and art. For with the Indians life is art—and religion is its testimony.[23]

Dodge concluded the essay with a vision that echoed Jig Cook's plan for Provincetown ten years earlier: an outdoor theater at the foot of the Sacred Mountain, a return to the religious theater of the Greeks. This "theatre of the new culture," a fusion of Anglo artistry and Pueblo ritual, would signal the rebirth of American culture from the wasteland of the early twentieth century—a rebirth that was presumably to be midwifed by Dodge's patronage from Los Gallos.

Dodge's turn away from politics was partly influenced by D.H. Lawrence, who relationship with Dodge from 1922 to 1924 profoundly affected her personal philosophy and sense of mission. In 1921, Dodge began writing letters to Lawrence, whose work shared the primitivist and anti-modern impulses that motivated her move to Taos. As Rudnick has put it, "Lawrence was trying to achieve through language what Mabel believed the Pueblos had achieved through their ceremonial practices: to arouse modern men and women from their worship of false icons of money and mechanisms and to restore them to a non-exploitive relationship with nature and their own bodies."[24] Dodge tried to convince a skeptical Tony that Lawrence could "bring power for the Indians by his writing" as John Collier had done through his political advocacy (*LT* 35).

Though Lawrence and his wife Frieda promised to come to Taos, they delayed elaborately when they left Europe, traveling as far as Ceylon and Australia. Dodge enlisted

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[23] Quoted in Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 184.

[24] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 193.

friends to put pressure on Lawrence. Leo Stein (Gertrude Stein's brother) wrote convincingly of the beauty of the New Mexico landscape, the wonders of the Pueblo Indian dances, and most of all, about Mabel Dodge, "the all but perfect hostess."

> She'll take you everywhere and show you everything. She has immense energy, and capacity to make things happen without any irritating restlessness. She's a kind of reposeful hurricane. She is completely at home in N. M., and is the only educated, cultivated woman that I know of who has broken through the barrier between red and white and keeps it open in both directions. […] she is a delightful and appreciative companion, and at Taos you can have society or solitude in such measure and forms as you prefer (*LT* 20-1).

Anticipating Dodge's self-characterization as a cultural "bridge," Stein insisted that Dodge could provide access to indigenous culture as well as the perfect "society or solitude" of a writers' colony. He also invoked the region's therapeutic properties—"It's good medicine, that country"—appealing to Lawrence's long search for a climate that would support his ailing lungs. However, Stein's confidence in Dodge's perfect hostessing was misplaced; with Lawrence, she was more hurricane than repose. In *Lorenzo in Taos*, her memoir of that period, Dodge confesses in a moment of unsparing self-analysis that what she wanted from Lawrence was not physical love, but "to seduce his spirit so that I could make him carry out certain things. […] It was his soul I needed for my purpose, his soul, his will, his creative imagination, and his lighted vision. […] I wanted Lawrence to understand things for me. To take *my* experience, *my* material, *my* Taos, and to formulate it all into a magnificent creation" (*LT* 69-70). In the ensuing months, Dodge competed with Frieda for intimacy with Lawrence, and Lawrence played the two women off each other as it suited his purposes.

For a time, the Lawrences lived in relative peace in an adobe guest house that Dodge had meticulously prepared for them during the long anticipation of their arrival. Lawrence acceded enthusiastically to Dodge's wishes to have her experience formed into art. He asked for detailed notes about her early days in Taos, declaring his intention to write his "American book" about Mabel Dodge herself. The two even collaborated until Frieda's jealousy put a stop to the work

(*LT* 52, 64-6). Though Dodge had high hopes for Lawrence's ability to render articulate the people and the landscape of Taos, the famous novelist shared his hostess's enthusiasms only sporadically. In Lawrence's letters to Dodge before their meeting, he expressed ambivalence and even trepidation toward the "Indians." On the one hand, he looked forward to experiencing the beauty of their ancient religion and artistic expression: "I do hope I shall get from your Indian something that this wearily external white world can't give," he wrote in June 1922 from Sydney, in one of the many letters Dodge included in *Lorenzo in Taos* (23). However, he also expressed worry about how to be "sure that they are not jeering at one. I find all dark people have a fixed desire to jeer at us" (19). Despite the racist overtones of Lawrence's statements about Native Americans, many of his perceptions about the tensions between Anglo and native communities would prove more accurate than Dodge's utopian, but ultimately patronizing, vision of tribal life in the Southwest.

Soon after Lawrence arrived, Dodge sent him with Tony Lujan on a trip to see an Apache festival. Dodge included in her memoir the fragment of an article Lawrence wrote after the trip, in which he describes the Southwestern milieu as hostile and alien, as if "one fell on to the moon, and found them talking English." The contact zone of cultures that Dodge and Mary Austin found so invigorating, Lawrence found disjointed and lacking in "common purpose"; "it is a farce, and everybody knows it," he complained, "but they refuse to play it as farce":

> The wild and woolly section insists on being heavily dramatic, bold and bad on purpose; the art insists on being real American and artistic; motor-cars insist on being thrilled, moved to the marrow; high-brows insist on being ecstatic, Mexicans insist on being Mexicans, squeezing the last black drop of macabre joy out of life, and Indians wind themselves in white cotton sheets like Hamlet's father's ghost, with a lurking smile. […] And so everybody smirks at everybody else, and says, tacitly: 'Go on. You do your little stunt, and I'll do mine'—and they're like the various troupes in a circus, all performing at once, with nobody for Master of Ceremonies. (*LT* 52-3)

This was hardly the picture of an ancient, dignified, life-giving culture that Dodge hoped Lawrence would realize in his writing. Though Lawrence grudgingly agreed to write an article

denouncing the Bursum Bill, he had little interest in the Indians as a "cause" and belittled Dodge's attempt to "save" them. In one letter he warned, "somewhere, the Indians know that you and Collier would, with your salvationist but poisonous white consciousness, destroy them" (*LT* 120).

Though Lawrence wrote a few essays during his Taos years that echoed Dodge's view of the Indians, his major works simultaneously pilloried Mabel Dodge personally and camouflaged his connection to the landscape and life of New. Mabel Dodge's presence is obvious in the fiction and criticism Lawrence produced after coming to Taos, from the figure of the hated woman "redeemer" in *Studies in Classic American Literature* who appropriates "the task of the male as world-builder," to the heroines of *St. Mawr*, *The Plumed Serpent*, and "The Woman Who Rode Away" (*LT* 209, 219-224). The latter story reads like a revenge fantasy: a nameless woman, an unflattering portrait of Dodge, is killed in sacrifice in an Indian ritual, and the narrator blames her "half-childish, half-arrogant confidence in her own female power" for getting her into the predicament" (*LT* 222). Moreover, though the landscape of the story resembles New Mexico, it is set, like *The Plumed Serpent* and *St. Mawr*, in Mexico proper. As Dodge put it, "He simply transposed Taos and took it down there to Old Mexico. What I had wanted him to do for Taos, he did do, but he gave it away to the mother country of Montezuma" (*LT* 114). Dodge would take revenge on what she referred to as Lawrence's "sadism" by publishing *Lorenzo in Taos*—a singularly unflattering portrait of the novelist—soon after his death.[25]

Over the next ten years, Dodge would continue to search for writers and artists to fill the role that Lawrence had abdicated when he left New Mexico in 1924. In 1929, she wrote to Thornton Wilder out of the blue, asking him to come to New Mexico to attempt, where Lawrence

[25] Burke, *From Greenwich Village to Taos*, 166.

had failed, to convey "the spirit of this place" in a novel.[26] Though Wilder visited several times, he never wrote about the Southwest; nonetheless, his relationship with Dodge remained unusually cordial. This could hardly be said of Dodge's other conquests. *Lorenzo in Taos* began as a long letter to Robinson Jeffers, a poet whom Dodge was attempting to lure to Taos in a similar way. Dodge assured him that she had learned from the experience with Lawrence, and that this time things would be different: "Perhaps you are the one who will, after all, do what I wanted him to do: give a voice to this speechless land" (*LT* 280). Despite her promises, the relationship between Dodge and the Jeffers family was even more disastrous than the Lawrence episode, eventually resulting in a (fortunately unsuccessful) suicide attempt by Jeffers' wife Una.[27] Dodge's patronage was a gift that could generate as much harm as help, and the literary results of her efforts to recruit a bard to the "speechless land" of New Mexico were sadly fruitless. Dodge's dream of a life that was continuous with the creative impulse—a pattern she saw as endemic to the "primitive" society of the Pueblos—tended to produce ironic effects, as other writers converted *her* life into literary material in acts of fictional revenge. Myron Brinig's novel *All of Their Lives* features a Mabel Dodge surrogate who dies in an apocalyptic flash: as horse and rider gallop down the side of a mountain, both are struck by a bolt of lightning. Dodge's biographer claims that she was "imagined dead in a greater variety of ways than any other woman in American literary history."[28]

This is not to say that Dodge's patronage resulted in no great works. Visual artists like Maurice Sterne, Marsden Hartley, Andrew Dasburg, Robert Edmund Jones, and later Georgia

[26] Mabel Dodge Luhan to Thornton Wilder, 6 April 1929, Box 47, folder 1255, Thornton Wilder Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

[27] See Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 286-301.

[28] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 302.

O'Keeffe produced some of their most memorable work as members of Dodge's colony. Moreover, the space and personal connections she made available at Los Gallos had a major impact on the work Willa Cather and Mary Austin. In what follows, I explore two contrasting attempts to capture the "spirit" of New Mexico in the form of a novel, from women writers who moved in the orbit of Dodge's colony, but escaped her attempts to appropriate another artist's creative imagination for the expression of her own story. While Willa Cather evades the cultural politics of contemporary New Mexico by setting her novel in the past, Mary Austin explicitly repudiates Dodge's model of East Coast modernist patronage.

II. A Form of Living: Willa Cather's Colony Era

Lorenzo in Taos is an account of the daily lives and conflicts between Dodge and the Lawrences. It is also, implicitly, the story of how Dodge stopped relying on men to "formulate" her experience and found her own voice, culminating in her highly acclaimed memoirs, *Intimate Memories*, which she began writing in 1924 and published between 1933 and 1937. Writing the memoirs began as a therapeutic exercise recommended by her analyst A.A. Brill, and they tend to vacillate between self-exposure and self-analysis.[29] Their *telos* is toward Taos and Tony: in the final volume, Dodge puts to rest her "neurotic" impulses through intimate contact with Pueblo culture. The first person "I" of Dodge's testimony is the locus of her authority on Taos and its people. She treats herself as a case study, someone who has been transformed by the environment of New Mexico, and she interprets the local culture for an East Coast, Anglo-American ear, comparing Pueblo rituals to the League of Nations, or labeling her act of buying property in Taos as a "symbolic" gesture of consummation.

[29] Ibid., 254-6.

The first-person testimony, sexual explicitness, and heavy-handed analysis of Dodge's writing could not be further from Willa Cather's New Mexico novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, with its heterodiegetic narration focalized through the perspective of a French priest in the mid-nineteenth century. And yet, Cather compared the two, praising Dodge's account of Taos for capturing something she could not achieve in her novel. After reading the manuscript of *Lorenzo in Taos* in 1931, Cather wrote Dodge a glowing letter:

> I simply love the way you do the Taos country and the weather. When I was writing about it in a very formal and severe manner, as befits the eye of a priest and the pen of a stranger, I kept thinking that I would love to see it done intimately, as part and parcel of somebody's personal life—not a background! […] When a country like the Taos country is really a part of your life, and when your life is a form of living and not a little camera,—well, then it all works up very stunningly together.[30]

Considering the content and tenor of Dodge's first memoir, Cather's compliment seems evasive. Most of Dodge's book focuses not on the "Taos country and […] weather," but on the interpersonal storms among Mabel, Tony, and the Lawrences. It is tempting to read in Cather's emphasis on the "intimacy" of Dodge's congress with the region an oblique, perhaps embarrassed reference to memoir's sordid content: the real life jealousies and bickering that Dodge exposes to her readers in unabashed detail, accompanied by obsessive self-analysis in the most up-to-date psychoanalytic vocabulary. But we can also read the letter as an acknowledgement of Dodge's claim to be a "bridge between cultures," a form of authority based on her sexual relationship with Tony Lujan and the accumulated experiences of building a life in an alien landscape.

Despite their formal differences, Cather's novel and Dodge's memoir make similar assumptions about how New Mexico might be captured in literary form. Both posit the perspective of a sensitive, newly arrived "stranger" as the ideal medium for making the silent

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[30] *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, eds. Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 439.

country "speak." But Cather's interest in the region went beyond an anthropological curiosity about vanished cultures. Whereas on her previous trips to New Mexico, Cather's travels had been mostly confined to visiting archeological sites and exploring the landscape on horseback, Dodge gave her access to living, breathing Native Americans and a taste of what it would mean to make a life in Taos. Though Cather called it a "historical narrative," *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is less a novel about history than it is an exploration of the social and spatial arrangements that made New Mexico the ideal environment for the artist. Though it has long held the status of the most important novel of New Mexico, I believe the novel is best read not as a work of literary regionalism, but as an exemplary form of colony writing.

Cather is an unlikely colony writer because she was unusually fastidious about the space in which she lived and wrote; moreover, she was unusually successful at recruiting others to protect her time and privacy. From 1913 until 1927, she lived with Edith Lewis, a friend who worked in publishing, in an apartment on Banks Street in Greenwich Village. In the summer, Cather and Lewis usually left the city to work in quiet isolation in a scenic enclave, where Cather inevitably found "a room of her own" and the protection of companions who understood her need for solitude.[31] Cather's quest for privacy, and tendency to orient her life completely around her art, was extreme: friends described her renunciation of the ties of family and children in religious terms. Nonetheless, the elements she deemed essential for writing—what Lewis termed the "ideal arrangement"[32]—are the same elements that writers' colonies sought to produce for many writers at a time: privacy (an inviolable space for creative work); sociability (choice company of other artistic and literary figures); and proximity to natural beauty. She would find

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[31] The attic rooms that were so important for Cather find their fictional echo in *The Professor's House*, in which Professor St. Peter refuses to leave the old study where he wrote his magnum opus. See James Leslie Woodress, *Willa Cather: Her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 369.

[32] Edith Lewis, *Willa Cather Living: A Personal Record* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 104.

these elements in a uniquely compelling form in the homes of Mable Dodge in Taos and Mary Austin in Santa Fe.

In the summer of 1925, Cather and Lewis were touring the towns and pueblos of Northern New Mexico and gathering material for Cather's new novel.[33] On one of their stopovers in Santa Fe, Dodge called on Cather and asked her to visit Los Gallos. Lewis writes in her memoir that Cather "never visited anyone" and wanted perfect freedom to travel on this trip. However, as with Lawrence, Dodge "was very persistent, in a quiet, persuasive way," offering Cather and Lewis a guest house to stay in (the Pink House, where the Lawrences had stayed the previous spring); moreover, she "promised that [Cather] should never be bothered by anyone, need never see anyone, except when she came over for meals." Cather intended to stay for two days, but remained for two weeks, and returned the next summer to Los Gallos when the novel was fully underway. In contrast to the storms of conflict that surrounded Lawrence's visit, Cather received the light touch of perfect hospitality that Leo Stein had advertised. Dodge left her guests the freedom they craved, appearing only at meals. Lewis wrote that Cather's two visits to Los Gallos were "rewarding," and praised Dodge in terms that must have made her glow: "Mabel Luhan—essentially an artist herself—knew the conditions that contribute to an artist's work, and was able to create them. She had, too, a large, ungrudging generosity toward people she admired; one felt that she enjoyed helping them toward their aim and seeing them realize their desires."[34]

Though Dodge could not interest Cather in the political battles for Indian rights, Cather did incorporate her experiences in Taos that summer into a novel of New Mexico. Dodge and Tony

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[33] The idea for the novel came when Cather found a copy of *The Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf* by Father Howlett in a bookstore in Santa Fe. Machebeuf was the friend and deputy of Archbishop Lamy, on whom Cather's protagonist Father Latour is based. See Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, *Willa Cather: A Memoir* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1953), 223.

[34] Lewis, *Willa Cather Living*, 143.

Lujan provided Cather with valuable material for the novel, both ethnographic and characterological. Lewis wrote that "although Eusabio [the friend of Archbishop Latour] in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is a Navaho Indian, I think his character was essentially drawn from Tony Luhan [sic]":

> Willa Cather was very much impressed by Tony Luhan, and felt an instant liking and admiration for him. He was a splendid figure, over six feet tall, with a noble head and dignified carriage; there was great simplicity and kindness in his voice and manner. […] Mabel Luhan […] sent us off on long drives about the country with Tony. Tony would sit in the driver's seat, in his silver bracelets and purple blanket, often singing softly to himself; while we sat behind. He took us to some of the almost inaccessible Mexican villages hidden in the Cimmaron mountains, where the Penitentes still followed their old fierce customs; and from Tony, Willa Cather learned many things about the country and the people that she could not have learned otherwise. He talked very little, but what he said was always illuminating and curiously poetic.[35]

When someone asked Cather why Dodge had married an Indian, Cather reportedly replied, "How could she help it?"[36] To Cather, Dodge's privileged relationship with Tony Lujan meant intimacy not just with an admirable person, but with a whole environment and way of life that was otherwise "inaccessible."

The actual writing of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was a unique experience of creative joy for Cather. Her letters from 1925 and 1926 abound with references to how much she "loved doing it," and Lewis writes that Cather worked on this novel "with unusual happiness and serenity."[37] We can speculate that this sense of wellbeing had something to do with the content of the novel itself and something to do with the conditions under which it was written. It is clear that Cather was attracted to the lifestyle Mabel Dodge and Mary Austin had made for themselves in New Mexico. Her letters from the summer of 1926 express gratitude and admiration for the hospitality she experienced in the homes of these two women. She declared Mary Austin's

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[35] Ibid., 142. The Penitential Brotherhood were a fraternity of Catholic laymen in the Taos area whose religious practices—especially around the Easter holiday—sometimes included self-flagellation or crucifixion. They attracted curiosity, sensationalism, and sometimes serious study in the early twentieth century. Mary Austin spent time studying the Brotherhood and wrote about them in magazines and several books.

[36] Sergeant, *Willa Cather*, 206.

[37] Cather, *Selected Letters*, 389 and Lewis, *Willa Cather Living*, 144.

library to be “the most restful, quiet, sympathetic place to work in.”[38] Writing to her brother, she mused, “Maybe I’ll have a little house [in Taos] some day, where the children can visit me.”[39] That September, she wrote in a similar vein to Mabel Dodge, expressing a wish to purchase a simple “hut” in Taos, “almost as empty and naked within as the Indian homes at Isleta [another nearby pueblo].”[40]

Cather’s fantasy about relocating to Taos places her among a larger group of New York writers in the teens and twenties who contemplated “escape” to the Southwest. In 1922, Cather’s close friend and biographer, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, bought an adobe house in Tesuque, a town a few miles north of Santa Fe, and documented her impressions of the country and the ordeal of renovation in a four-part piece for *Harper’s*. As in Lawrence’s unpublished piece about the Apache races, Sergeant’s “Journal of a Mud House” mentions the comic juxtapositions of 1920s New Mexico that Lawrence found so striking: Ford cars and genteel poets vying for space in The Plaza with mule carts and Mexican-American women in black lace mantillas, on the way to the Cathedral for mass.[41] But the balance of Sergeant’s reflections on New Mexico emphasize the gorgeous, singular landscape—“never twice alike”—and the quaint picturesqueness of the local populations, who still prefer drinking water dipped from the *acequia madre*—the irrigation ditch that runs around most properties in northern New Mexico—to the modern convenience of wells (587). For Sergeant, this sometimes dissonant world is a space of promise and freedom. Her observations about a family of Anglo-American farmers are typical:

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[38] Cather, *Selected Letters*, 382-3.

[39] Ibid., 382.

[40] Willa Cather to Mabel Dodge Luhan, 26 September [1926], Beinecke Library, Yale Univ. Quoted in Janis P. Stout, “Modernist by Association: Willa Cather’s New York / New Mexico Circle,” *American Literary Realism* 47, no. 2 (2014): 130.

[41] Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, “The Journal of a Mud House (Part II),” *Harper’s Magazine*, April 1922, 585-6.

> It seemed to me at first that farm life in the Southwest did not differ greatly from farm life in New England. Yet it differs in one essential at least. It is founded on hope, not on despair; on action, not on inhibition. No setting your teeth to meet the hard and grim in Tesuque; the world looks sunny. The children's faces show it. Edith's —a lovely, fresh young face below a crown of brown-gold hair—somehow reveals that at nineteen she can fully and freely choose her woman's destiny in this underfeminized land. (588)

Sergeant, born to a wealthy and prominent New England family, figures New Mexico as an escape from the "hard and grim" traditions of the East, a place with a "sunnier" outlook. To be sure, this passage tells us more about the desires and prejudices of Sergeant and her readers than it does about New Mexican farmers. But it also offers an implicit critique of the stereotypical image of the West as a space of rugged male individualism. And it introduces the idea, shared by Sergeant, Mabel Dodge, Mary Austin, and Willa Cather alike, that the Southwest's "underfeminized" frontier landscape offers a unique opportunity for women to remake their lives—and create their homes—free of old patterns of "inhibition."

Sergeant's article cracks a window onto the alternative lifestyles that New Mexico made possible during this period. She moved to Tesuque with her friend Gertrude Ely, a fellow Bryn Mawr graduate and political writer who breezes in and out of "Journal of a Mud House," overseeing their domestic arrangements and arguing with a matronly Republican neighbor about the upcoming elections. The article hints at the living arrangement of these two "New Women"—they have only one bedroom in the house, for instance—but its blithe tone insists there is nothing extraordinary going on here. No one in Tesuque seemed to look askance at two women writers setting up housekeeping together. Cather was notoriously reticent about her private life (she insisted that her friends burn her letters and forbid quotation from them in published work), and it is thus difficult to track her personal beliefs about love and sexuality. Nonetheless, we can speculate that this tolerance of same-sex domestic partnership may have added to the appeal of the New Mexican writers' colonies for Cather and her companion Edith

Lewis. After all, the two chose to live for decades in the middle of Greenwich Village, despite their distaste for most of the trappings of bohemianism.[42]

Cather found in Taos and Santa Fe a lifestyle that appealed to her tremendously, combining privacy and seclusion for creative work, a stimulating and tolerant social scene, and access to natural environments and local populations that satisfied her taste for adventure and her appreciation for distinctive folk cultures. It is also clear that she understood how this lifestyle, far from being a natural or spontaneous phenomenon, was a work of art in its own right, carefully orchestrated through the creative powers of the salon women like Dodge and Austin who made their homes in New Mexico. Cather's 1931 letter to Dodge proposes, rather cryptically, that Dodge's literary rendering of Taos is good because her life is "a form of living and not a little camera" (*SL* 439). The phrase suggests that Dodge's life is ongoing and embodied, unlike the transient and superficial experience of the visitor to the Southwest with camera in hand. It also implies that Dodge's life, like a work of art, has a "form" or shape, suggesting intention, craft, and stability. If Dodge was an "artist" of sorts, her materials were not words or pigments, but rooms, objects, people, connections.

Like Dodge, Jean Marie Latour, the protagonist of Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, is an artist of spatial and social arrangements. The Prologue to the novel opens in Rome, where three cardinals and a missionary Bishop from the United States discuss the fate of the territory newly acquired from Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago in 1948. The Bishop recommends a young Frenchman, and the Cardinal concurs, declaring the French to be

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[42] Scholarly debate over Cather's sexuality has been heated. See for example Sharon O'Brien, "'The Thing Not Named': Willa Cather as a Lesbian Writer," *Signs* 9, no. 4 (1984): 576–99 and Joan Acocella's indignant response to feminist and multiculturalist criticism of Cather in "Cather and the Academy," *New Yorker*, November 27, 1995, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1995/11/27/cather-and-the-academy.

"the great organizers."[43] He continues, "the Germans classify, but the French arrange! The French missionaries have a sense of proportion and rational adjustment. They are always trying to discover the logical relation of things. It is a passion with them" (*DCA* 9). Despite his civilizing mission, Latour is less a top-down reformer than a man with an almost feminine "passion" for arranging, who devotes his spare hours in New Mexico to enjoying French cuisine and table customs with his companion Father Vaillant, tending flowers in his garden, and imagining a new cathedral for Santa Fe. Elizabeth Ammons notes how novels like *Death Comes for the Archbishop* "secretly celebrate same-sex love, placing against backdrops of heterosexual jealousy and violence loving relationships between highly domesticated, nonviolent men, who clearly could be or are, under the skin, women."[44] Latour's aesthetic sensitivity and exquisite manners make him an exemplary figure, an artist of everyday life who, like Mabel Dodge, creates in New Mexico a "form of living" that the narrative voice inhabits with obvious pleasure.

Suppressing conflict and event in favor of static description, the novel is full of rooms and landscapes. Like Cather in Mary Austin's library, the narrator describes Latour's study—the room that becomes his sanctuary through his years of wandering and administration—with tender appreciation:

> It was a long room of an agreeable shape. The thick clay walls had been finished on the inside by the deft palms of Indian women, and had that irregular and intimate quality of things made entirely by the human hand. There was a reassuring solidity and depth about those walls, rounded at door-sills and window-sills, rounded in wide wings about the corner fireplace. The interior had been newly whitewashed in the Bishop's absence, and the flicker of the fire threw a rosy glow over the wavy surfaces, never quite evenly flat, never a dead white, for the ruddy colour of the clay underneath gave a warm tone to the lime wash. The ceiling was made of heavy cedar beams, overlaid by aspen saplings, all of one size, lying close together like the ribs in corduroy and clad in their ruddy inner skins. The earth floor was covered with thick Indian blankets; two blankets, very old, and beautiful in design and colour, were hung on the walls like tapestries. (33-4)

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[43] Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 8 (hereafter cited in text as *DCA*).

[44] Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 133.

Like other visitors to New Mexico, Latour appreciates the lively, "intimate quality" of the walls in adobe buildings, which bear the traces of the hands that worked to smooth them into place.[45] The study is a hybrid space, combining elements of different cultures and confusing the boundaries of inside and outside: aspen saplings line the ceiling but look like "corduroy," Indian blankets are hung like "tapestries," plastered recesses in the wall bear Latour's "rare and beautiful books," and his desk—"of American make"—bears the "silver candlesticks he had brought from France long ago" (34, 35). Even the walls, with their "rosy glow," "ruddy colour," and "warm tone," suggest a distinctly dermatological hybridity. It is like an image out of Mabel Dodge's memoirs: "intimacy" with Indian bodies and materials banishes the "dead white" of an enervated European culture.

Combining French, American, and indigenous elements, Latour's study, like Dodge's home Los Gallos, brings together the creative individual's old world with the new milieu in a harmonious synthesis. The novel moves toward a more monumental version of this synthetic harmony in the Santa Fe cathedral, Latour's ultimate aesthetic and social project, a space of worship that will represent the accommodation of his European cultural ideals to the hard facts of New Mexican life. Built by a French architect in the "Midi Romanesque" style, the cathedral should be incongruous in the adobe city center of Santa Fe, but Latour finds it otherwise. Riding into Santa Fe for the last time, he finally composes the New Mexican scene into a proper aesthetic whole, with building and mountain bound in a peaceful embrace:

> From the end of the street where the Bishop's buggy stood, the tawny church seemed to start directly out of those rose-coloured hills—with a purpose so strong that it was like action. Seen from this distance, the Cathedral lay against the pine-splashed slopes as against a curtain. When Bernard drove slowly nearer, the backbone of the hills sank gradually, and the towers rose clear into the blue air, while the body of the church still lay against the mountain. (269-70)

[45] Mabel Dodge also emphasized the way adobe construction, made of bricks of earth, disappeared into the landscape, while the ceilings brought the outdoors inside. See Burke, *From Greenwich Village to Taos*, 25.

The description anticipates Dodge's anthropomorphic language as she recounts her first view of Taos in her memoir. Like Dodge looking back on 1917 from the 1930s, by the end of his life, Latour knows New Mexico "intimately, as part and parcel of [his] personal life." Writing through Latour's perspective, Cather can view New Mexico as both "stranger" and "intimate," someone whose life has been shaped and changed by the intensely beautiful environment and intercultural milieu.

Because the novel tracks so closely to Latour's thoughts and reactions, its interpreters have struggled to disentangle author from protagonist. In a 1927 review, Mary Austin's niece and protégé Mary Hunter opined that Cather "has entered so completely into the detachment of her character that only the detachment remains when the book is closed."[46] Biographer Hermione Lee finds this detachment to be integral to the text's meaning: the novel is "secure, ritualized, and impersonal," suggesting a correspondence between the vocation of the priest and the achieved assurance of the novelist at this point in her career.[47] More recently, scholars have seen more distance between narrator and protagonist, eager to find evidence that Cather diagnoses—rather than merely recapitulating—the ideology of conquest in the character of Latour.[48] To some extent, my reading is continuous with this latter approach. Cather indeed diagnoses something about what happens when the European imagination comes in contact with the alien environment and cultures of New Mexico. Through Latour, we can notice a tendency to vacillate among three

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[46] Mary Hunter, "Two Southwestern Novels," *The Laughing Horse*, Autumn 1927, 25.

[47] Hermione Lee, *Willa Cather: A Life Saved Up* (London: Virago, 1989), 260.

[48] For example, Audrey Goodman claims that the novel records, through its protagonists, "how ideological frameworks limit acts of perception; through its composite narrative, it defines the Southwest as a region of cultural conflict." Audrey Goodman, "The Immeasurable Possession of Air: Willa Cather and Southwestern Romance" *Arizona Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 62. T. Austin Graham claims that "it is precisely Latour's inability to conceive of himself as a political actor that makes the novel such a telling study of the nation's imperial past." T. Austin Graham, "Blood on the Rock: Cather's Southwestern History," *American Literary History* 28, no. 1 (2016): 60.

distinct possibilities: New Mexico is either the locus of autonomous, self-contained cultures, to which outsiders have no access; or it is full of raw material for artistic creation; or it threatens radical self-erasure, in the form of absorption into other cultures or the natural environment itself. While these three reactions may be endemic to Western encounters with "the other," the particular forms they take in Cather's novel are tied to the experiences of a writer who knew the Southwest through its art colonies, and specifically, through Mabel Dodge's circle in Taos.

As we have already seen, the novel's built spaces point to Latour's longing to achieve a harmonious synthesis between old world and new, France and New Mexico. Like the study and the cathedral, Latour's garden is a hybrid space where he grows "the peerless pears of France" and "domesticate[s] and develop[s] the native wild flowers" so that they produce "the true Episcopal color" (*DCA* 265). But Latour's encounters with the landscape and people of New Mexico suggest the difficulties of achieving this synthesis on a grander scale. Initially, he finds the landscape deeply alienating, a "geometrical nightmare." The hills are not like French "haycocks"—a reassuring pastoral image—but rather like

> Mexican ovens, red as brick-dust, and naked of vegetation except for small juniper trees. And the junipers, too, were the shape of Mexican ovens. Every conical hill was spotted with smaller cones of juniper, a uniform yellowish green, as the hills were a uniform red. The hills thrust out of the ground so thickly that they seemed to be pushing each other, elbowing each other aside, tipping each other over. (17-18)

Latour, "sensitive to the shape of things," experiences the landscape as hostile, belligerent, unmannered, suggesting an unconscious connection between the landscape and his frontier parishioners (18). In contrast to the more gregarious and adaptable Father Vaillant, who declares later in the novel that he has "almost become a Mexican!" (208), Latour continues to find the local populations disturbingly "heathen." Despite many years of missionary work, he fears that the Indians were still "battling with evil omens and ancient shadows. The Mexicans were children who played with their religion" (211). On a trip with his guide Jacinto, a Pecos Indian,

we learn that Latour thinks it "useless" to question the young man about his "thoughts or beliefs": "There was no way in which he could transfer his own memories of European civilization into the Indian mind, and he was quite willing to believe that behind Jacinto there was a long tradition, a story of experience, which no language could translate to him" (92). Later, Father Martinez warns Latour against attempting to introduce "French fashions" among "barbarous people": "If you try to introduce European civilization here and change our old ways, to interfere with the secret dances of the Indians, let us say, or abolish the bloody rites of the Penitentes, I foretell an early death for you" (147).

These moments anticipate those in Dodge's memoir when she feels locked outside of Pueblo culture, unable to understand its "elements." At other points in the novel, Cather explicitly contrasts European modes of thinking about landscape with indigenous ones. On a journey to Ácoma, a pueblo west of Albuquerque that was also the oldest continuously inhabited site in what is now the United States, Latour interprets the bizarre landscape—a "flat red sea of sand" punctuated by "great rock mesas"—as both ancient and "incomplete": "as if, with all the materials for world-making assembled, the Creator had desisted, gone away and left everything on the point of being brought together, on the eve of being arranged into mountain, plain, plateau" (94-5). For Latour, who symptomatically sees "cathedrals" in the giant rock formations, "the country was still waiting to be made into a landscape"—a colonial fantasy par excellence.

This European fantasy of remaking the world is both labeled as such in the novel and contrasted with indigenous ways of inhabiting the environment. The novel bears the traces of Cather's contact with Native Americans like Tony Lujan, who, as Lewis noted, provided a model for Latour's Navajo friend Eusabio. On a ride from the Navajo lands to Santa Fe, we learn that "[t]ravelling [sic] with Eusabio was like travelling with the landscape made human. He accepted

chance and weather as the country did, with a sort of grave enjoyment" (232). Latour's friend embodies a radically different attitude toward the land: "When they left the rock or tree or sand dune that had sheltered them for the night, the Navajo was careful to obliterate every trace of their temporary occupation." Based on his other experience with other Indians, Latour "judged that, just as it was the white man's way to assert himself in any landscape, to change it, make it over a little (at least to leave some mark of memorial of his sojourn), it was the Indian's way to pass through a country without disturbing anything; to pass and leave no trace, like fish through the water, or birds through the air" (232-3). Latour acknowledges that this practice was "not so much from indolence […] as from an inherited caution and respect," and describes the spiritual and ecological significance of this way of life: "It was as if the great country were asleep, and they wished to carry on their lives without awakening it; or as if the spirits of earth and air and water were things not to antagonize and arouse. […] The land and all that it bore they treated with consideration; not attempting to improve it, they never desecrated it" (233-4). This (admittedly romanticized) way of being is not only strikingly different from Latour's, it calls into question his core identity as an institution builder and artist, whose greatest achievement is the construction of his cathedral.

Though Latour achieves his artistic legacy—and the apotheosis of his French sensibility—in the cathedral, the novel also ventures alternate versions of fulfillment and belonging. Latour's sensitivity to people and environments models an openness to alternative modes of being, and, in particular, the possibility of cross-cultural affection and affinity, especially between men. By the end of the novel, Latour, who once found the desert environment existentially terrifying, has come to prefer it to Europe. On his last trip to France, he finds himself homesick for the Southwest: "In New Mexico he always awoke a young man" (272). At the end of his life,

European culture—"the charm of noble women, the graces of art"—matters less to him than "those light-hearted mornings of the desert":

> He had noticed that this peculiar quality in the air of new countries vanished after they were tamed by man and made to bear harvests. Parts of Texas and Kansas that he had first known as open range had since been made into rich farming districts, and the air had quite lost that lightness, that dry aromatic odour. The moisture of plowed land, the heaviness of labour and growth and grain-bearing, utterly destroyed it; one could breathe that only on the bright edges of the world, on the great grass plains or the sage-brush desert. (272)

This transfer of affection from France to New Mexico is a true reversal for Latour, the home-loving Frenchman. Moreover, his focus on New Mexican "air" recalls Eusabio's way of moving through the landscape and leaving it unmarked by human intervention. This identification is even stronger when Eusabio hosts Latour for a period of reflective solitude.

Cather's description of Eusabio's hospitality recalls the ideal patronage Cather received from Luhan at Los Gallos: "Navajo hospitality is not intrusive. Eusabio made the Bishop understand that he was glad to have him there, and let him alone. Father Latour lived for three days in an almost perpetual sandstorm—cut off from even this remote little Indian camp by moving walls and tapestries of sand" (222).[49] Once again, Cather's metaphoric language accommodates the alien landscape to the European imagination—a sandstorm is like a "tapestry." But it also recalls Latour's other sanctuary, his adobe-walled study hung with Indian blankets, suggesting that the priest has come a long way toward embracing the once alienating natural world of New Mexico. We learn that "[h]e either sat in his house and listened to the wind, or walked abroad under those aged, wind-distorted trees, muffled in an Indian blanket, which he kept drawn up over his mouth and nose" (222). In habit and dress, Latour has become nearly indistinguishable from his host, suggesting a blending of identity that reinforces Latour's self-

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[49] Goodman offers a reading of *Archbishop*, centered on this passage, at once affirmative and skeptical. On the one hand, she suggests that the scene "imagines a space at once spiritual and aesthetic through the opening of the body to the environment." On the other hand, she notes that "as a therapeutic substance for tubercular patients Southwestern air itself had become a commodity." Goodman, "Immeasurable Possession of Air," 72.

contained, spiritual temperament, just as Father Vaillant's embrace of Mexican culture underlines his openhearted gregariousness. Though it stages the unbridgeable gulfs between groups, the novel also leaves open the possibility for personal evolution and hybrid identities.

In Cather's earlier novel *The Professor's House* (1925), the orphan Tom Outland is fascinated by the long-dead cliff dwellers of the Blue Mesa (based on the actual Mesa Verde), and imagines a mystical communion in which they are his "ancestors." This appropriation of Native American culture shores up Tom's "Americanness" in a novel that reflects the period's anxiety about assimilating new cultures—specifically, Jews—into the American family and nation.[50] By contrast, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* presents Native Americans as living characters with distinctive modes of being and—more surprisingly—with political agendas in the present. At the very end of the novel, we learn that "[t]he Bishop's middle years in New Mexico had been clouded by the persecution of the Navajos and their expulsion from their own country" (290).[51] When their leader implores Latour to "go to Washington" and explain the importance of ancestral lands to his people, Latour professes his powerlessness to "interfere in matters of Government" in "a Protestant country" (294). Whether Cather endorses the separation of politics from culture, or is critical of Latour's refusal to intervene, the priest's actions mirror her own refusal to join the campaign against the Bursum Bill. In the novel, five years and the death of

[50] Walter Benn Michaels has influentially argued that Cather (and other 1920s modernists) celebrated Indians as "ancestors" to Anglo-Americans precisely because they conceived of them as a "vanished" race, and therefore less threatening to Anglo-American hegemony than African Americans or more recently arrived immigrant populations. See Walter Benn Michaels, "The Vanishing American," *American Literary History* 2, no. 2 (1990): 220–41. For responses to Michaels, see Christopher Nealon, "Affect-Genealogy: Feeling and Affiliation in Willa Cather," *American Literature* 69, no. 1 (March 1997): 5–37 and Julianne Newmark, "An Introduction to Neonativist Collectives: Place, Not Race, in Cather's *The Professor's House* and Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*," *Arizona Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2010): 89–120.

[51] Despite the cross-cultural identification and co-existence made possible by a shared code of manners and hospitality, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* acknowledges that the various communities of New Mexico often have opposing interests. It is none other than Latour's close friend, the ranger Kit Carson, who "subdue[s]" the Navajo and thus facilitates their deportation (291).

hundreds of Navajos are followed by reversal of Indian policy that allows the remaining Navajos to return to their land. Whatever her view of Indian politics, Latour's last line of dialogue suggests that Cather, after the experience of living among the intercultural community at Taos, atoned for her earlier appropriation of Native Americans as a "vanished" race: "I do not believe, as I once did, that the Indian will perish. I believe that God will preserve him" (296). Though Dodge never successfully recruited Cather to her campaigns for Indian land rights, the novel suggests that her "intimacy" with Native Americans reshaped Cather's view of indigenous peoples.

It seems clear that Cather was drawn to New Mexico for the freedoms it promised: the freedom from rigid gender roles, and the freedom to form cross-racial and same-sex intimacies. Christopher Nealon points out "the desires of nearly all of Cather's protagonists to escape familial bonds."[52] In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, this theme recurs continually. Latour and Vaillant leave their families in France to pursue missionary work in the New World and live in a tender domestic partnership. Then there is Magdalena, a Mexican woman who married the American murderer Buck Scales; the priests rescue her, securing her a position "housekeeper and manager" in the kitchen of Sisters of Loretto. Years later, Latour wonders if she should marry again, but Vaillant responds, "No, no! She has had enough of the storms of this world. Here she is safe and happy" (210). In perhaps the most extreme case, there is the episode of Sada, a Mexican slave who is held in bondage by an American Protestant family. One night she escapes to the church, where Latour prays with her and finds his own faith renewed:

> "O Sacred Heart of Mary!" she murmured by his side, and he felt how that name was food and raiment, friend and mother to her. He received the miracle in her heart into his own, saw through her eyes, knew that his poverty was as bleak as hers. When the Kingdom of Heaven had first come into the world, into a cruel world of torture and slaves and masters, He who brought it had said, "And whosoever is least among you,

[52] Nealon, "Affect-Genealogy," 30.

the same shall be first in the Kingdom of Heaven." This church was Sada's house, and he was a servant in it. (217)

If "the family" is literally a house of bondage, the church becomes the house of bondswomen, and Mary the benevolent "friend and mother" of all. Philip Joseph notes how Marian worship in the novel allows characters like Magdalena and Sada to be included in an "open family" of prayer, sociability, and comfort.[53] Like Latour's relationships with a network of powerful men—including Eusebio and the ranger Kit Carson—this open family suggests the porous forms of community made possible, and necessary, by the frontier. It also suggests the porous, shifting sociability of New Mexico's art colonies, where hospitality and the mutual recognition of a shared vocation—devotion to the religion of art—gave Cather a "home" to complete her novel.

Death Comes for the Archbishop is a striking example of the Colony Imagination. It figures New Mexico as a heterotopia, an alternative home that allows for queer intimacies and creative freedom. It cultivates the distanced perspective of the colony writer at various levels: characterologically, in the unworldly "detachment" of the protagonist; narratologically, in the "stranger's" perspective of the diegesis; and temporally, in the mid-nineteenth century setting. And it is concerned with the social and spatial arrangements that allow for artistic production. Cather's authority to speak for New Mexico derives from her Latour-like "sensitiv[ity] to the shape of things" and the intimacy with indigenous people she gained through her friendship with Dodge. Building on Dodge's self-designation as a "bridge between cultures," Cather's novel idealizes hybridity: in built environments like the study, cathedral, and garden, but also in the region's mixed marriages and open families. Magdalena, saved from her disastrous marriage to a murderer, spends a year recovering in the home of Kit Carson and his (unnamed) Mexican wife before she moves to the religious household of Latour and Vaillant. We can thus read the novel's

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[53] Joseph, *American Literary Regionalism*, 118.

famous “detachment” as a cultivated stance for exploring the concerns closest to Cather’s heart. Through the eyes of a historical person—and a celibate priest no less—Cather could tell her own story about queer relationality and creative purpose.

Cather imagines New Mexico as the ultimate retreat, a place for the birth of a new artistic monasticism that would be, as Bishop Latour reflects towards the end of the novel, “not a solitude of atrophy, of negation, but of perpetual flowering” (254). The mostly male world of nineteenth-century New Mexico that Cather depicts in her novel is an inverted mirror the female-dominated world of creative work, patronage, and hospitality that Cather participated in in the 1920s. While Cather’s narrative of New Mexico can be read as an appreciative reflection on Mabel Dodge’s patronage, it also has implications less flattering to Dodge, Austin, and the other creative boosters of the Taos and Santa Fe colonies. In choosing two missionary priests as the main characters of her novel, Cather suggests that the “story of New Mexico” is the story of outsiders who come to the region with a civilizing mission. To draw an analogy between these nineteenth century newcomers and the invading artists and writers of the twentieth century is to contradict the narrative of indigenous cultural renaissance preferred by its participants. Moreover, setting the novel in the nineteenth century located the region’s golden age firmly in the past. The success of Cather’s novel did more than lodge New Mexico in America’s cultural memory as a site of imaginative fascination: it solidified the region’s associations with the primitive, the archaic, the nobility of a lost civilization.

III. Mary Austin’s Pattern for America

In the wake of the publication of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Mary Austin explicitly rejected the therapeutic and archaic visions of New Mexico that she associated with Cather and Dodge and launched a literary campaign to lay claim to the region as an emerging community

oriented toward the future. Like Dodge and Cather, Austin was an outsider who came to New Mexico in search of personal and creative freedom, as well as inspiration for rejuvenating American art and culture. Born in the small town of Carlinville, Illinois, she moved with her family to California's San Joaquin Valley in 1888, at the age of twenty. For more than a decade, Austin, who had felt herself to be destined for greatness from a young age, lived a life of stifling obscurity: she taught school in small desert towns, married a man who lacked her imagination and ambition, and gave birth to a daughter with severe mental disabilities. In 1903, she published her most famous work, *The Land of Little Rain*, a series of sketches about the desert environment and its people. The same year, she left her husband and daughter to embark on a literary career, first among the vagabond poets of Carmel, California, then in New York and Europe.

Austin's biography would seem to place her naturally among the diffuse movement of early twentieth-century writers, like Sinclair Lewis and Edith Wharton, that critic Carl Van Doren dubbed "the Revolt from the Village" for their rejection of the nineteenth century's approving image of small town life.[54] But as her friend and biographer T.M. Pearce noted, Austin was "essentially a small town woman" who saw in small communities—whether a Pueblo village or the artist's community of Santa Fe—"the design for living, the ground chart of the social structure which had grown so tall."[55] Austin's 1920 novel *No. 26 Jayne Street*, set in New York City, documents the protagonist's confusion at the ugliness and randomness of urban life, with its unnavigable clash of languages, traditions, and races. Through its love plot, it also registers Austin's frustration with men whose utopian politics fail to translate to their personal

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[54] Van Doren, "The Revolt from the Village," 146-57. See also Harilaos Stecopolous, "Regionalism in the American Modernist Novel" in *The Cambridge Companion to the American Modernist Novel*, ed. Joshua L. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 21-34.

[55] T.M. Pearce, *The Beloved House* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1940), 44, 42.

relationships with women.[56] After writing the novel, Austin would give up on trying to make herself heard in the New York literary scene, and instead devote her energies to promoting New Mexico as a cultural mecca. “I have a genius for beginnings,” Austin wrote, “for the origins of art and culture and social organization. I find these things stimulating, informative, providing the key to an intensive understanding of the whole pattern of civilized society.”[57] Unlike Cather, who, once she embarked on her career as a novelist, subordinated everything to her art, Austin was temperamentally an institution builder who saw her art as a tool to inspire social change. This temperamental and philosophical difference is reflected in her writings about New Mexico and in the way she participated in New Mexico’s art colonies.

Austin did not settle permanently in New Mexico until 1924, although she was a frequent visitor and active participant in the Taos and Santa Fe art colonies from 1918 onwards. When she arrived in Santa Fe, Dr. Edgar Hewett of the School of American Research gave her space to work in the school’s offices. She was soon on a campaign to expand the town’s cultural life: giving teas where she expounded her ideas, organizing a community theater, and offering her expertise as a lecturer on literary craftsmanship. In typical fashion, her biographer notes, she dissipated her energies through these para-literary activities, and her writing suffered. In March of 1919, she fled to Taos to rest and recuperate under Dodge’s hospitality.[58]

That summer, Austin was commissioned to complete a survey of the conditions of the New Mexico Pueblos for the Carnegie Institution, and she used Taos as a home base for her tour. This trip, along with a similar undertaking in Arizona later that year, gave her the material she

[56] On Austin’s cultural feminism and cultural pluralism, which included a nativist distaste for recent immigrants and African Americans, see Mullin, *Culture in the Marketplace*, 22-7.

[57] Quoted in Pearce, *Beloved House*, 42.

[58] Augusta Fink, *I-Mary: A Biography of Mary Austin* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1983), 185-7.

needed for a series of sketches that she called *The Land of Journeys' Ending*, written in the mode of *The Land of Little Rain*. In the solitude of Los Gallos, she also completed a long-deferred novel. For the next ten years, Dodge's financial and emotional support would be critical for Austin, who tended to alternate between bursts of frenetic cultural activity and community building, and periods of depression and illness. Biographers of both women have marveled that two strong and difficult personalities could have maintained such an intense and vibrant friendship over two decades. Austin clearly considered herself the real artist, and though it is possible she resented Dodge's dabbling in what was, for her, a profession requiring daily discipline, her need for Dodge's support and financial assistance outweighed petty jealousies. As Esther Lanigan put it, Dodge was "known to her friends as a one-woman granting agency of literary sabbaticals."[59]

In 1923, Austin took a second long tour through Arizona and New Mexico to gather more material for *The Land of Journeys' Ending* and worked on the manuscript in Santa Fe and Taos. Discouraged by the failure of her recent books to find an audience or make enough money to cover her advances, Austin resolved to leave New York for good and concentrate her energies on the Southwest. That year, she purchased a small piece of land on Camino del Monte Sol in Santa Fe, planning to build a house that would become her permanent home.[60]

Like Dodge and Cather, Austin prized New Mexico for its ancient, "primitive" cultures. In 1922, Dodge convinced Austin to go to Washington and speak out against the Bursum Bill, which she did eloquently, declaring the Pueblos to be "the last that is left to us of the beauty and strangeness of primitive life, the last that is left to the world." She went on to claim that the tribes possessed "a secret which our more complex civilization has lost, a secret without which we

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[59] Esther F. Lanigan, *Mary Austin: Song of a Maverick* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 169.

[60] Fink, *I-Mary*, 214-9.

shall never achieve the ideal democracy."[61] But Austin was also attracted to Santa Fe's cosmopolitan social scene, which drew "individuals of the rank of. . . John Galsworthy, Carl Sandburg, Willa Cather, Witter Bynner, John Sloan . . . William Allen White, Paul Kellogg, Sinclair Lewis, and other scores of welcome names."[62] For Austin, New Mexico was a vibrant artistic capital with far-reaching social potential: it possessed nothing less than the building blocks for reimagining democracy. All that lacked was a prophet, and Austin, of a mystical temperament, was glad to take on that mantle. Pearce wrote that Austin "believed there was a pattern of perfection for human life" and used her home in New Mexico as "a small laboratory of America from which she could view a larger America to which her loyalty was passionate and yet censorious."[63] Austin's house, which she named "Casa Querida"—the Beloved House—was finished in 1925, establishing her in the midst of the Santa Fe literary colony: her neighbors included the Hendersons and Frank Applegate, a ceramist with a passion for Indian pottery and crafts with whom Austin would collaborate on initiative to preserve and promote Southwestern artistic traditions.[64] During the second half of the 1920s, Austin became involved in the Indian Arts Fund, a group to encourage and preserve Pueblo arts. She also organized a group of writers, called the Genius Club, to meet regularly in her home for criticism of their manuscripts. In 1927, she met the brilliant young photographer Ansel Adams; the two went on to collaborate on the art book *Taos Pueblo*, a volume that secured Adams' reputation as a serious photographer.[65]

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[61] Ibid., 211.

[62] Mary Austin, "Why I Live in Santa Fe," *The Golden Book Magazine*, October 1932, 306-7, quoted in Lanigan, *Mary Austin*, 154.

[63] Pearce, *Beloved House*, 14-5.

[64] Fink, *I-Mary*, 226.

[65] Lanigan*, Mary Austin*, 194.

Austin's authority to write about the Southwest was based on her extensive ethnographic study of its environment and people, and on her mystical conviction that she could commune with nature. She was wary of any rivals to her authority, whether they came in the form of local institutions or other novelists.[66] Cather and Austin, perhaps the two most celebrated regionalist writers of their era, were almost mirror images of each other in terms of the arrangement of their lives and their approach to a literary career. Whereas Cather severely limited her social and professional contacts, focusing on novel writing with something like a religious devotion, Austin spread her talents among a dizzying array of cultural and political activities. For Cather, the retreats she found in the homes of Mary Austin and Mabel Dodge were familiar to a life structured by a series of protected spaces for creative work. For Austin, Dodge's home was a rare sanctuary for isolation and recovery, while her own home doubled as a center for intense creative work and varied community activity.[67] Moreover, Austin considered herself the real authority on the Southwest, despite Cather's staking her claim to the region in the milieu of her novels *Song of the Lark*, *The Professor's House*, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*—texts whose popularity and critical acclaim dwarfed Austin's literary achievements. In a 1930 letter to her publisher Ferris Greenslet, Austin contrasted her approach in *Starry Adventure* with Cather's in *The Professor's House*: "Miss Cather does not know the country so well as I do, and so failed to graft her story on to the living tree of life in New Mexico. The best she could do was to split her

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[66] In 1926, Edgar Hewett and the Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce proposed to establish the Center of Creative Arts and Culture, a Chautauqua-like organization for adult learning, cultural entertainment, and recreation. Austin led the Old Santa Fe Association, an organization composed mostly of local artists that fought to stop the Culture Center. Though Hewett and his followers dismissed the Old Santa Fe Association as "a fanatical group of would-be highbrows" who did not "represent the town," the Women's Clubs eventually withdrew their support for the Center, and the plan was reluctantly abandoned. See Mary Austin, "The Town That Doesn't Want a Chautauqua" in *Beyond Borders: The Selected Essays of Mary Austin* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 107; Gibson, *Santa Fe and Taos Colonies*, 255-8; and Burke, *From Greenwich Village to Taos*, 149-50.

[67] Perhaps unconsciously, the main characters of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* echo the traits of Cather and Austin: Latour the reserved, contemplative connoisseur of European culture, and Vaillant the organizer and "promoter."

story wide open in the middle and insert a green bough of New Mexico in such a fashion that I suppose nobody but myself really knew what she was trying to do."[68]

Starry Adventure was written in part to contest Cather's authority as the literary interpreter of the Southwest. It is more manifesto than novel, and though it was neither a critical nor a commercial success—in fact, it was never reprinted—it is useful to the literary historian for clearly delineating the central tenets of Austin's cultural crusade: regionalism and feminism. These two agendas have their aesthetic corollaries in the novel's confusingly mixed form. *Starry Adventure* is recognizably a Bildungsroman, the story of a young man's coming of age and discovery of his vocation. It is also, somewhat bizarrely, a novel of marriage, culminating in not one but four nuptial arrangements. Why would Austin resort to the conservative genres of the nineteenth-century novel for her novel documenting New Mexico's emergence as a cultural incubator and feminist utopia? The answer has something to do with the way Austin imagined social change: older forms could serve as the building blocks for radically new social arrangements.

Regionalism and *Bildung* are not obvious allies (no more so than feminism and marriage). After all, Austin is best known for her sketches of desert life in *The Land of Little Rain*. But Austin was attracted to the novel for its monumental status, its exemplary power, and as a terrain where she could joust with major figures like Cather and Sinclair Lewis. In 1932, Austin published an essay in *English Journal* declaring that the literary world should stop anticipating a Great American Novel, and instead start recognizing the existing greatness of Regional fiction. According to Austin, it was not writers like Willian Dean Howells or Lewis, who focus on "the most widely distributed of American story incidents" who would be read and

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[68] Mary Austin to Ferris Greenslet, 6 December 1930 (AU 1115) Box 58, MHAP.

remembered, but those who portray life as it is "most intensely experienced."[69] For Austin, "shared language and a common political arrangement" were "lesser influences" on art (131), while region shaped every aspect of human experience:

> It orders and determines all the direct, practical ways of his getting up and lying down, of staying in and going out, of housing and clothing and food-getting; it arranges by its progressions of seed times and harvest, its rain and wind and burning suns, the rhythms of his work and amusements. It is the thing always before his eye, always at his ear, always underfoot. Slowly or sharply it forces upon him behavior patterns such as earliest become the habit of his blood, the unconscious factor of adjustment in all his mechanisms. Of all the responses of his psyche, none pass so soon and surely as these into that field of consciousness from which all invention and creative effort of every sort proceed. (130)

Austin's conviction that real art must give adequate expression to this shaping force of environment explains in part her interest in Native Americans, whom she idealizes as enacting a culture continuously shaped by the land for thousands of years. Behind this conviction is a palpable anxiety about the relatively short history of European peoples in North America, as well as more pointed anxieties about recent immigration.[70] But we can also read in Austin's definition of regionalism an anxiety about her own status as an interpreter of New Mexico. She laments the dearth of fiction that is "genuinely representative" of the Southwest, "unless you will accept the present writer's *Starry Adventure*."[71] Near the end of the essay, she puts forward her friend Frank Applegate's *Indian Stories from the Pueblos* as an authentic version of Southwestern regionalism: "These are native tales which he tells in the manner in which the natives would tell them. Work of this kind comes on slowly. Time is the essence of the undertaking, time to live into the land and absorb it" (140). Austin's emphasis on long dwelling and native material suggests obvious difficulties for her attempt to write a novel of New Mexico, a state she had lived in for only five years. But it does go some way towards explaining why *Starry Adventure* is

[69] Mary Austin, "Regionalism in American Fiction," in *Beyond Borders*, 134-5.

[70] See Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). Given Austin's lifelong work to keep Indian culture alive *among* Native Americans, Michaels' argument deserves qualification in relation to Austin.

[71] Austin, "Regionalism," 134.

a Bildungsroman. Unlike Cather, who was content to focalize her New Mexican novel "through the eye of a priest and the pen of a stranger," Austin's regionalism committed her to the authenticity that comes with "absorbing" the land over time.

Starry Adventure offers a portrait of the artist as a young New Mexican. Gard and Laura Sitwell are young children when their family moves to New Mexico from the East. Like many members of the New Mexican art colonies, the Sitwells seek the Southwest for the climate: the father, an aspiring writer, is suffering from tuberculosis. In the first chapter, five-year-old Gard has an extraordinary and incommunicable experience. One evening he sees "a golden wing of light" flying toward him out of the clouds: "Gard saw it come, grow invisible with nearness, and take shape again in the tops of the yellowing aspens in the ciénaga below the house, almost on a level with his round-eyed staring; a golden glowing brightness like hot brass, like molten ends of rainbows, and in the midst… in the midst…"[72] When his sister questions him, he declares "I saw God." In chapters that follow, Gard struggles to make sense of this mystical experience of the natural world, which convinces him of his "unique human destiny," a "Starry Adventure," waiting to be revealed (*SA* 284).

Gard's journey out of childhood is structured by his relationships with three other characters, each of whom teaches him something about his destiny. But these relationships also allow Austin to fight ideological battles with the literary world. Gard's first key relationship is his friendship with David Arvold, a boy Gard's age who moves to the neighborhood. Mr. Arnold, David's father, is a defrocked priest and active socialist. David is crucial to Gard's political education, belittling the "bourgeois" values of the Sitwell family and encouraging Gard to study mathematics and engineering, rather than nurturing his vague artistic ambitions. Gard and David

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[72] Mary Austin, *Starry Adventure* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931), 4-5. Hereafter cited parenthetically in text as "*SA*."

spend a pre-college summer driving to distant pueblos, where they experience the agricultural rhythm of the Indian dances for the first time, and visiting the art colonies in Taos and Santa Fe (*SA* 128, 132-33). They talk of going into business together as architect and builder, but their paths diverge sharply: Gard gives up college after one year so that his father can afford to go to a sanitarium in Arizona, while David joins the war effort as a bomber pilot. While David, Laura, and even Gard's grandfather are abroad serving in the war, Gard is stuck at home hoeing corn on the family ranch.

Nevertheless, Gard's experience turns out to be formative for his aesthetic education as a native artist. In one of several passages in which an ambiguous second-person address disrupts the third-person narration, Gard has a vision that blurs the landscape with his own swirling consciousness:

> It was hot and still in the field; not until about two in the afternoon would the cool airs begin to move down from Monte Piedra. The earth was red here and the knee-high corn was a lush, dark green. The broad blades crossed and recrossed blackly against the glistening light, the midribs made a high, white streak. Like the pattern on an Indian jar in Mr. Phipps's studio. You hadn't thought about it before, but that was it. Black blades on light; crossing swords — no, not swords; struts and stays of an aeroplane. Here and there among the corn blades, insects whirred. Planes roaring overhead. David there adventuring in the blue, in the Middle Heaven. Planes thundering. What was it they told you at Santo Domingo, about the Corn Dance Song? 'People of the Middle Heaven, People of the Thunder!' Planes flaring and crashing. No. No! Not David! Not David writhing down in flames. Serpent darting arrows… cloud shield over David! David soaring and alighting deftly as a grasshopper on the corn blades. Indians knew a lot. Indians had made corn out of grass, like this, hoeing and sweating. Thousands of years of hoeing and sweating. (159-60)

Using abrupt, fragmentary phrases and imagistic evocation of the First World War, Austin quotes both the style and content of high modernism at the same time that she is attempting to relocate American literature to the Southwest. Following Austin's requirements for regional literature, Gard's experience of agricultural labor, of intensive work with the soil, is precisely what qualifies him for the position of native artist. While the other members of his generation have their aesthetic imagination shaped in the crucible of the Great War, Gard understands the present

through the patterns of Indian songs and pottery, and through the images made by corn and mountains.

Gard's friendship with David allows Austin to articulate the emergence of regionalism out of disillusionment with socialism and exclusion from the primal scenes of modernism. Meanwhile, his affair with Eudora Ballantin lets her satirize an important patron and rival. Eudora shares many characteristics with Mabel Dodge Luhan: a wealthy woman from the East Coast, twice divorced and with many lovers, she who moves to New Mexico to find a more exotic setting for her hyper-modern lifestyle. Eudora "patters art and the new psychology" (354), as Laura puts it—using terms like "vibrations" and "The Life Force" and the "Oedipus complex" (285, 342)—and attempts to buy her way to local authenticity. The novel is unsparing on this point: "[Eudora] was seeing herself as newcomers in New Mexico often did see themselves in its glamorous light, collateral branches of its expressiveness, missing heirs, to whose belated recognition of their obligations a welcoming attitude was due" (245). Eudora has purchased the ancestral home of the now poor Cardenas family, once ruling-class Spaniards who have been in New Mexico for many generations. Gard, working for a local architect, has been tasked with restoring and expanding the estate. Gard falls for Eudora's glamour, mistaking her "sensitivity" to the landscape and architecture of New Mexico for true artistic sensibility, someone who can "explain us to ourselves" (286). Infatuated, Gard becomes convinced that Eudora is his "Starry Adventure."

After Gard becomes Eudora's lover, he gradually realizes that he is merely "a set piece to be shifted" on the New Mexican stage she has set for herself (334). Gard bitterly condemns Eudora and her friends for their superficiality:

> He would have known them as New Yorkers by that; they'd no knowledge of human backgrounds produced out of the soil and the souls of men; no criterions of indigenous cultures which would have enabled them to

> know that they had come in contact with one. They thought it was good stuff got up for their approval and they looked with avidity for more props to lighten for them the sense of entertainment. (334)

Though Austin was grateful for Dodge's patronage in life, she skewers Dodge's aesthetic and social strategies in fiction. Like Dodge, Eudora uses her home as a setting for her "imported possessions […] bronzes, Italian brocades, unframed modernist sketches, old Mexican glass." We learn that Eudora has "a gift for effects, for producing, out of essential confusion, intriguing juxtapositions which she called amusing" (280). In contrast, Austin was a purist, filling her home with objects "native" to the Southwest.[73] This purity extends to sexual relationships: though *Starry Adventure* seeks a rapprochement between the ancient cultures of New Mexico and white Anglos from the East Coast, the marriages at the novel's center are endogamous, and Eudora's conversion to Catholicism and showy wedding to a Spanish Colonial are treated with satire. The novel shows contempt for the *ricos* of the former ruling class, who "are losing the old way the quickest" and have "intermarried with the McMannuses and the Smiths, and the Rosenfelds and the Warrenders" (*SA* 286). Unlike Cather in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, who celebrates the hybridity of the art, people, and spaces of New Mexico, Austin's cultural pluralism prized the purity of distinct, authentic cultures.[74]

Austin's regionalism required not the intermarriage represented by Dodge and Eudora, but rather the mystical communion represented by Gard's series of epiphanies in the natural world. That doesn't mean marriage had no place in her vision of cultural renewal: quite the contrary. In her letters from the 1930s, Austin often bewailed the state of American literature,

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[73] Lanigan, *Mary Austin*, 155. Lanigan calls the passage describing Eudora's home in *Starry Adventure* "a visual inventory of the *objets d'art* that filled Luhan's home in Taos" (162).

[74] Philip Joseph contrasts Austin's cultural pluralism with Cather's interest in the cosmopolitan impurity of art and in "nomadic" subjects like Latour. Joseph, *American Literary Regionalism*, 93, 110, 101. Christopher Schedler traces Cather's changing attitude toward the Southwest, from the "cultural evolutionism" of *Song of the Lark* to the "cultural relativism" of *The Professor's House* to the "dialogic representation of a cultural borderlands" in *Death Comes for the Archbishop.* Christopher Schedler, "Writing Culture: Willa Cather's Southwest," in Swift and Urgo, *Willa Cather and the American Southwest*, 108, 118.

reserving special scorn for Naturalists like Theodore Dreiser who focused on “low social types” rather than the inhabitants of their own midwestern towns. In one letter, she asked why “good manners no longer interest us in books,” and wondered about “the relation between the modern formlessness of the novel and our worse than formless society; our genuine antagonism toward social form in all its phases.”[75] For Austin, marriage was one of these “social forms,” a pattern that shaped the lives of those who undertook it, and an “adventure” in its own right, more interesting than popular forms of “sexual revolt.” Austin’s ideas about marriage were hardly rosy. To be married was to “engage in all the possibilities and risks of having a family, of losing your life perhaps, and still more terrible, of losing your chance of ecstasy.”[76] *Starry Adventure* uses traditional literary forms and traditional social forms—heterosexual marriage—but makes them containers for feminist politics and a regionalist cultural renaissance.

It is through Gard’s third major relationship that Austin voiced her most polemical arguments about female autonomy and creativity. Jane Hetherington is the daughter of the Sitwells’ wealthy neighbors who grew up alongside them. From childhood, Jane has been Gard’s confidant—she is the only person who understood his ideas about the Starry Adventure, because she has a similar conviction about her own destiny. Before the Eudora episode, Jane and Gard are brought together in a strange situation: Jane is engaged to a young executive whom her father, a Standard Oil man, hopes to groom as a surrogate son. Fearful that in becoming a wife she will loose her independence—her own unique capacity for adventure—Jane flees back to New Mexico. Gard realizes that Jane needs his help to extricate herself from the marriage, and he offers to marry her instead. Their arrangement is purely practical: Jane believes her mother will accept the broken engagement if her marriage to Gard is an accomplished fact. Determined to

[75] Mary Austin to Henry Chester Tracy, 8 August 1930 (AU 1257) Box 60, MHAP.

[76] Ibid.

eschew the sentimentalism around love and marriage that characterizes her parents' generation, she proposes a partnership that will compromise the autonomy of neither party.

The resolution of the novel braids together the story of Gard's destiny with two strands of Austin's polemic: the destiny of New Mexico and the status of women. Titled "The Book of Marriage," Book VIII culminates in a series of unions worthy of a Shakespeare comedy or a Jane Austen novel: Eudora marries Eugenio Cardenas y Barrenuevo, Gard's mother marries an Arizona businessman named Steve Claflin, Gard and Jane's marriage is finally consummated, and it is implied that Laura will marry David. Austin portrays Gard as a somewhat hapless hero, slow to understand the realities around him, while the women in the novel are almost clairvoyant, and are quick to point out Gard's shortcomings. When Laura returns home from her war work in Europe, she upbraids her brother for failing to see their mother as an autonomous subject with her own destiny: "I suppose you never thought of Mother as a person in your life. You never thought whether she was happy, or fulfilled; or whether she mightn't have liked or made good use of another kind of a life. Men don't. To most men, women are just background, like the weather" (369). Later, Jane suggests that Gard's special destiny may be less like a male crusade, and more like a woman's pregnancy: "'How do you know your adventure isn't going on in you this minute? If it's anything important, it might have to go on a long time… the way a child does. […] when a woman has her great adventure, it's likely to be painful and there aren't any flags waved, nor bands playing. And I don't see why you should think there isn't any adventure for you because you don't feel or hear something all the time'" (417-8). Gard replies, "'Because I'm a sentimental ass" (418).

At the close of the novel, Gard and Jane are prepared to leave for a honeymoon research trip across New Mexico that parallels the trips Austin took from Taos in the mid-1920s. They are

on “the trail of the House,” planning to trace the evolution of human dwellings “from the grass-lined pit to the seven-story communal heap of the pueblos and the wide-winged haciendas of the Spanish occupation, the whole open story of the building impulse, the outer shell of the inner and otherwise incommunicable life of man” (*SA* 414). The couple will take this amateur anthropological journey before “beginning the shaping of roof and walls of their own,” as they remodel the Sitwells’ Rancho Arríba with the Hetheringtons’ money. Gard’s journey is thus circular, returning to his childhood home with his childhood friend as his wife, remaking the house with the intensive knowledge of regional architectural traditions, and thus becoming a “native artist” in his own right, succeeding where his father, the East Coast émigré, had failed. We can surmise that Gard is the native artist that Austin would have been, had she grown up in New Mexico rather than Carlinville, Illinois.

Austin’s novel portrays New Mexico as a feminist heterotopia, where a woman’s need for autonomy and creative expression set the pattern for life. Crucially, is a world that inverts the priorities of the New York cultural scene of the 1920s: rather than celebrating sexual liberation and the dominance of youth, *Starry Adventure* features young people who take on marriage before love, and older people embracing second lives. While Gard’s mother is bound for Mexico with Claflin, his grandfather, a former minister, has decided to embark on missionary work. Gard wonders if old age is a thing of the past, or if this phenomenon of life after forty is “something that went on only in New Mexico?” (375). Overwhelmed by this reversal of values and expectations, Gard feels that life is “too swift” for him, the changes in his family forcing him to “revise [his] whole scheme of living” (371, 375). We can read Austin’s repeated recourse to second-person voice as a direct solicitation to the reader, an attempt to “revise” her scheme of living alongside the protagonist’s.

Austin's novel of New Mexico tells the story of the native artist on the cusp of cultural achievement, bound to complete a project that looks very much like Austin's own book, *The Land of Journeys' Ending*. While *Starry Adventure* imagines what a native artist would look like, its failure as a novel suggests that the novel of New Mexico, as a form, might be a dead end for the members of the Taos and Santa Fe writers' colonies. Anglos seeking to capture "the spirit of the place" would turn other forms in lieu of fiction, including photography, ethnography, memoir, and the regional sketch. Even with the successes of these genres, the regional renaissance of 1920s New Mexico was relatively short-lived, and it struck many observers as the work of outsiders. A 1933 letter in *New Mexico Quarterly* bewailed the failure of the art colonies to nurture local artistic talent: "our best novel was written by a stranger, Willa Cather, our poetry by a Harvard graduate [Witter Bynner], our painting is done by anyone but people suckled at the teats of our local bi-lingual culture. And who fosters (i.e. buys) our local cultural goods? Easterners and strangers. It is only an incident [sic] that Santa Fe is the residence of artists in paint, poetry or prose."[77] During the 1930s, organizers of the New Mexico Federal Writers' Project complained about the difficulty of finding qualified writers for the relief program in a state so sparsely populated, which also had the second-lowest rate of literacy in the nation.[78] By the middle of the decade, the Colony was suffering: several prominent figures, including Mary Austin, had died, and others felt that real artistic achievement had eluded them. Paul Horgan's 1935 novel *No Quarter Given* portrays a Santa Fe full of "second rate artists and parasitic hangers-on," while Lynn Rigg's play *Russet Mantle* follows a group of New Yorkers who move

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[77] David L. Neuman, "Smoke Talk—A Commentary Re: 'Santa Fe, A study in Integrity,'" *New Mexico Quarterly* 3 (1933), 249-51 quoted in Weigle and Fiore, *Santa Fe and Taos*, 43

[78] Weigle and Fiore, *Santa Fe and Taos*, 50.

to the Southwest to get away from it all, only to re-encounter their old demons.[79] These works suggest that far from being a real escape and a center for reimagining civilization, New Mexico was looking to the East (and the programs of the New Deal) for its salvation.

The literary conversation among Mabel Dodge, Willa Cather, and Mary Austin helps us understand the uniqueness of New Mexico's writers' colonies. Unlike the other colonies explored in this dissertation, the New Mexican colonies were a decentralized network of artists, writers, households, institutions, patronage relationships, and creative collaborations. They had no clear leader or unified collective vision. Dodge, Cather, and Austin put forward competing representations of the region, drawing on different sources of authority—intimacy with natives, artistic sensitivity, ethnographic study, mystical insight—to act as translators for the "inarticulate" land and its people. Cather and Austin also betray a longing for leadership and unity of purpose located outside of their own efforts, exactly what the New Mexican colonies lacked. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, the "patroness" who allows Magdalena and Sada to become part of the "open family" that includes Bishop Latour and Father Vaillant is not an earthly woman like Mabel Dodge or Mary Austin. Rather, it is the Virgin Mary, the divine mother whose impersonal benevolence makes a community out of New Mexico's unruly cultural diversity.

The hegemony of French Catholicism in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was precisely what annoyed Austin. But on a deeper level, she was equally interested in articulating an external source of authority and power. In her autobiography *Earth Horizon*, written on the heels of *Starry Adventure*, Austin criticizes Cather's novel at the conclusion of a chapter describing

[79] Ibid.

Austin's efforts to revive Indian and Spanish Colonial arts in New Mexico with the help of other members of the Santa Fe literary and artistic community:

> Miss Cather used my house to write in, but she did not tell me what she was doing. When it was finished, I was very much distressed to find that she had given her allegiance to the French blood of the Archbishop; she had sympathized with his desire to build a French cathedral in a Spanish town. It was a calamity to the local culture. We have never got over it. It dropped the local mystery plays almost out of use, and many other far-derived Spanish customs. It was in the rebuilding of that shattered culture that the Society for the Revival of the Spanish Arts was concerned. It goes on; it broadens and extends itself; it penetrates the educational system. It gathers up sustenance for itself and supporters who will carry it on when I am no longer here. It has reached across the border and made liaison with kindred movements in Mexico. It touches the kindred arts of music, dancing, and poesy. And it has kept me going with it. I live largely by the living stream of creative artistry which it pours into New Mexico.[80]

Austin both claims a debt from Cather and distances herself from the content of the novel written in her library ("she did not tell me what she was doing"). She also insists on her superior knowledge of the "local culture." But instead of focusing on her own literary achievements, Austin's autobiography lauds the impersonal efficacy of the institutions she helped to found. The paragraph, with its bizarre diction (ten sentences beginning with "it"), plays out a mini-drama of cultural loss and reassertion: the French cathedral, and by extension, Cather's misguided novel, are the villains, the Society for the Revival of the Spanish Arts is the hero, continuing, extending, penetrating, gathering sustenance, reaching across borders, and, ultimately, keeping the author alive through a "living stream of creative artistry." Austin's strange grammar decenters the autobiographical subject and makes the institution the active agent.

Like many other active members of America's writers' colonies, Austin found more success and fulfillment in the making of creative community than in any solitary efforts on the page. Even Cather, who, like Eugene O'Neill, generally preferred to inhabit a colony of one, was intrigued for a time by the prospect of a more recognizably "communal" version of creative community. Cather finished *Death Comes for the Archbishop* not in Dodge's cottage or in

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[80] Austin, *Earth Horizon*, 359. Cather was sufficiently irked by this passage that she later denied working on the novel in Austin's library, and Lewis and Sergeant's memoirs confirm Cather's revised version of events.

Austin’s library, but at the MacDowell Colony, an institution with its own benevolent patroness, the energetic widow Marian MacDowell. It is tempting to read Cather’s celebration of Marian patronage as an allegory of the fate of writers’ colonies more generally: the institutionalized colonies like MacDowell and Yaddo, with their non-artist female managers, would outlast the charismatic patrons of Provincetown and Taos by many decades.

Chapter Three

Community Men

Edwin Arlington Robinson, Thornton Wilder, and the MacDowell Colony

If the MacDowell Colony was Edward MacDowell's idea, it was Marian MacDowell's baby. Edward was a famous composer (the first U.S.-born composer to win international acclaim), as well as a beloved teacher and a prominent institution builder. After achieving celebrity status in Boston in the late 1880s with his compositions and virtuoso performances at the piano, Edward joined a circle of New York-based elites endeavoring to promote the arts in the United States: he served on the Boards of the American Academy in Rome and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and he founded the music department at Columbia University. During the summers, the MacDowells lived on an old farm in the rural village of Peterborough, New Hampshire, where Marian kept house while Edward wrote music in the log cabin she had had built for him in the woods. Edward was a polymath: an amateur poet, sketch artist, photographer, and architect, who designed most of the additions to Hillcrest, the couple's home. Though he taught at a university, he believed strongly in the essential "affiliation" of the arts, and he was critical of the ethos professionalism he encountered there; he once wrote that "one art can learn more from another in a year than in a decade of delving into hidden causes and abstruse technic that belong in the domain of science."[1] Edward's career was cut short by illness—he died at forty-eight—and on his deathbed he told his wife of his dream to turn their Peterborough property into a place where "creative workers from all the arts could come and work as he had worked."[2]

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[1] Edward MacDowell quoted in Bridget Falconer-Salkeld, *The MacDowell Colony: A Musical History* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 22.

[2] Marian MacDowell Day, 15 August 1952, Transcript of MM's Talk, on Hillcrest Lawn, 95th birthday. Box 77, MacDowell Colony Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter MCR.[Box #]).

From 1907 until 1945 (when she was eighty-eight years old), Marian MacDowell made the Colony her life's work. During the summer she managed the four hundred acre estate of woods, farm buildings, dormitories, and studios for artists in residence, and during the off-season she raised most of the funds to meet annual expenses, construct new work and living spaces, and add to the endowment. Unlike Yaddo, which ran off the interest of a million-dollar endowment bequeathed by the wealthy Trask family, the MacDowell Colony relied on small donations from many individuals. Mrs. MacDowell raised the money for the Colony by going on the road. For twenty-five years, she travelled around the country telling the story of "the Peterborough Idea" and playing her husband's music for amateur music clubs and women's groups. (Before she was Edward's wife and gave up her career to promote his, Marian had studied piano with him in Frankfurt.)[3] Mrs. MacDowell survived her husband by forty-four years, and she kept his vision and his music alive in her work for the MacDowell Colony. Nor would she take much credit for the venture: when the Board attempted to change her title to "Founder and President" on Colony stationary, Marian demurred, insisting they designate Edward "Founder, 1907" and reserving for herself the more humble title of "Manager, 1907-1945."[4]

When she died in 1952, the Board of Directors of the Edward MacDowell Memorial Association (the official governing body of the Colony) paid tribute to "The Lady of Peterborough" and attempted to summarize the nature of her life's work: "Some people are born to create, others are born to give. Mrs. Edward MacDowell, who died on Thursday in her ninety-eighth year, gave all her life and she will continue giving after her death. For the MacDowell

[3] The couple lived for several years off the $5,000 legacy Mrs. MacDowell had inherited from her mother, so that Edward could focus on composition. Falconer-Salkeld, *MacDowell Colony*, 66 and 81 n.7.

[4] Marian MacDowell to Louise Fillmore, 1 January 1948, MCR.1. However, the copious correspondence between Mrs. MacDowell and her successors in the late 1940s makes it clear just how difficult it was for her to give up control of the colony.

Colony in Peterborough, N.H. will remain as a permanent testimonial."[5] The tribute concludes in terms that The Lady herself would have surely objected to, for the way they minimize her husband's role in the enterprise: "Her husband had endowed music with a permanent legacy. But Mrs. MacDowell, not herself directly a creator, has endowed all the arts with a permanent legacy - and it may be that her contribution is just as important."[6] This chapter confirms the Board's speculation about Marian MacDowell's legacy, arguing that her colony helped shape the work of at least two of the writers who grew to depend on it for both sustenance and inspiration.

Mrs. MacDowell had a habit of mentioning Edwin Arlington Robinson and Thornton Wilder in the same breath as her husband in her speeches and letters, reflecting both their centrality to MacDowell Colony life and their prominence as writers. Robinson was the Colony's only "permanent resident," living there every summer from 1911 until his death in 1935; Wilder spent six summers at MacDowell between 1924 and 1937, and several more afterwards, meanwhile serving on the admissions committee and helping Mrs. MacDowell raise funds. In a 1936 lecture to a meeting of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Mrs. MacDowell offered a typical account of the Colony's importance and the difficulty of justifying it to those with powerful purse strings:

> It has been difficult to convince the hard-headed man of business with a great deal of money of the value of this idea. He is inclined to believe that if a man or woman has something of great importance to say or do it will be accomplished under any conditions. We have many examples to prove this a mistaken idea. MacDowell, Robinson, Thornton Wilder—I could go on indefinitely giving you names of great men who have known too well that their work, which constitutes a large and valuable portion of our American arts and letters, could never have been done except for the uninterrupted and unharassed days spent in the quiet of their studios.[7]

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[5] *The MacDowell Colony News,* December 1956, MCR.78. The tribute was reprinted from the *New York Times* of August 25, 1956.

[6] The repetition of the verb "endow" rings strangely here, given that Association managers were constantly worried in this period about the colony's lack of sufficient endowment funding to support the annual functioning of the colony. Indeed, the fact that Mrs. MacDowell "gave all her life," or more precisely, her labor, to fundraising for the colony left it in a precarious financial situation after she retired in 1945.

[7] Mrs. MacDowell, Speaker at DAR Meeting, 15 October 1936. MCR.77.

Over and over again in letters to donors, official publications, and most of all in the colony newsletter, Mrs. MacDowell used the names of famous writers—but almost always Robinson and Wilder—to justify the existence of the Colony. The material struggles they faced in the quest to make literature their vocation made a very good story, and their continued literary output, both widely read and critically acclaimed, proved the value of Mrs. MacDowell's life's work and "the Peterborough Idea."

The MacDowell Colony was not just a highly idiosyncratic and improbable form of art patronage, though it was that. The Colony was predicated on—and tended to enforce through a set of rules known as "Colony policy"[8] —a mode of artistic production that might be described as a modern form of monasticism: a community of solitary (hence the Greek root "*monos*") "creative workers," individually and single-mindedly devoted to the pursuit of their art, at least for the duration of their residency. The defining features of monasticism include "membership in a special religious category of persons, a status which is deliberate and extraordinary" and "a specific program or discipline of life."[9] By analogy, the MacDowell Colony can be understood as an intervention in both the status of the artist in society at large and in the organization of artistic life specifically. The MacDowell Colony shared other features with religious monasticism, such as an emphasis on contemplation and reflection; "simplicity of lifestyle" verging on asceticism (there was no plumbing or electricity in studios until the 1950s)[10]; and the renunciation of family

[8] The Colony had only three official "rules": no smoking outside (due to the risk of fire); no visiting studios without the artist's permission; and no working in studios after dinner (ostensibly due to the risk of fire, since the studios had no electricity, but some felt this rules was to prevent "scandals" in the form of trysting colonists). Other "policies" had to do with punctuality at meal times, noise levels, and the conduct of guests. Mrs. MacDowell insisted that colonists, and not she, set "Colony Policy." Marian MacDowell to Mrs. Fillmore, "Colony Rules," 1947, MCR.77.

[9] George Weckman, "Monasticism: an Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, vol. 9, 2nd ed., (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 6121.

[10] Weckman, "Monasticism," 6122-3.

life (many frequent Colonists were, like Robinson and Wilder, lifelong bachelors or "spinsters," or else recently divorced). Robinson was the model for the idealization of the poet-as-monk, and his example set the tone for life at the colony for twenty-four years, while the narrative that grew up around him helped to sustain the Colony financially.[11]

Paradoxically, this monastic ideal of creative production detached from "the world" was sustained only by a massive outreach campaign.[12] Aside from her lecture recitals, Mrs. MacDowell produced musical festivals at the Colony and published an annual newsletter that tabulated the results of each colony season: new works created, studios built, and contributions generated. The newsletter included an envelope to encourage more donations. If the Colony was monastic, the process of sustaining it was something closer to evangelism, or at least a highly sophisticated form of "passing the hat," using performance, solicitation, and publicity to drum up enthusiasm for the colony's mission and money for its continued growth. Thornton Wilder was as gregarious and peripatetic as Robinson was reticent and sedentary, and his skill as a "networker" proved essential to supporting the Colony's endowment campaigns and admissions processes. The MacDowell Colony combined an anti-modern vision of the practice of art—monastic isolation and devotion to "craft"—with thoroughly modern fundraising practices.

It is clear that the MacDowell Colony benefitted *from* Robinson and Wilder, its most prominent residents. And while the Colony certainly aided them materially, in terms of the books

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[11] The monastic myth did as much to hurt Robinson's reputation as help it. In a 1948 review of a Robinson biography, Malcolm Cowley attributed the poor quality of Robinson's late poetry to the fact that he "cut off from any functional relationship with the community, as husband, father, employer or employed; he wasn't even a taxpayer until the success of *Tristram* in 1927 earned him a small fortune and enabled him to pay his old debts with New England scrupulosity." Malcolm Cowley, "Edwin Arlington Robinson: Defeat and Triumph," *New Republic*, Dec. 6, 1948, 29. Cowley's analysis assumes that debt, patronage, and charity are insignificant social ties—that the opposite is true is part of the argument of this chapter.

[12] In fact, communities of monastics are frequently sustained by the lay community. Moreover, monastic traditions are divided between "contemplative" and "active"—the MacDowell Colony can be seen as combining elements of both. Weckman, "Monasticism: an Overview," 6121.

they were able to write in its subsidized and interruption-free environment, Peterborough also found its way into their literary works, which in both form and ethos are prime examples of the Colony Imagination. When Robinson took "Hillcrest" or "Mount Monadnock" as the subject of a poem, he did more than preserve the Colony's landscape in literature; he also framed an argument for the value of withdrawing into nature from the "roar" of a speeded-up modernity in the wake of World War I. Wilder's novels feature characters that seem to refer obliquely to the woman he jokingly addressed as "Commander-in-chief MacDowell" for her tireless fundraising campaigns.[13] The institution-building Abbess in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is described with a "plain red face [that] had great kindliness, and more idealism than kindliness, and more generalship than idealism."[14] But Wilder's novels of the 1920s and 1930s are also about "charity," both in the theological and the practical sense, and they model values of love and care that extend beyond "the American Home."[15] This effort to create an extended sense of community is even more explicit in *Our Town*, Wilder's most famous (and notorious) work. Though the fact that the play is set in Peterborough, New Hampshire has been noted frequently, scholars have yet to acknowledge the extent to which the communitarian values promoted in the play are in fact "Peterborovian" values, originating in the outreach practices of the MacDowell Colony. Like Robinson's poems, Wilder's novels make a case for the value of the artist in modern life, and they define a supporting role for the public. The Colony offered Robinson and Wilder both imaginative material and a model of sustaining the arts as a *spiritually* elite vocation in which the public might have a stake.

[13] Thornton Wilder to Marian MacDowell, undated, Box 4, Marian MacDowell Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter MMP.[Box #]).

[14] Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey and Other Novels, 1926-1948*, ed. J. D. McClatchy (New York: Library of America, 2009), 130 (hereafter cited in text as *BON*).

[15] "The American Home" is the primary object of desire for Wilder's blundering prophet George Brush in the picaresque novel *Heaven's My Destination* (1934).

Robinson and Wilder's writing is both materially and imaginatively implicated in an under-recognized system of art patronage. Animated by the context of the MacDowell Colony, their works appear remarkably self-reflexive, incorporating concerns about artistic retreat and charitable outreach into their textual fabric. This institutional approach represents a new way of reading both writers: Robinson and Wilder received enormous critical and popular attention in the 1920s, but have since been relatively ignored by professional critics, if not by the reading and play-going public at large.[16] Both writers have failed to appear relevant to a succession of critical concerns: their sanguine faith in the values of contemplation and charity looked quietist in the economic and political storms of the 1930s; their failure to live up to the formal standards of high modernism injured their reputations at midcentury; and there has been little room for these two preachy male Yankees in the reconstituted feminist, multi-ethnic, and postcolonial canons. Although I hope this new context will reanimate interest in the historical specificity—as well as the transhistorical value—of Robinson and Wilder's work, it is also important to acknowledge that the conditions of the art colony help explain the most problematic features of each writer's career: Robinson's excessive overproduction late in life and Wilder's "middlebrowness."

I. The Peterborough Idea

Traces of Idealism

Retreat into nature from the pressures of urban life—the scramble for money, the overwork, the social distractions, the dirt and ugliness and lack of space—was a persistent note sounded in the

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[16] In 1927, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* was a bestseller, and Robinson's long, blank verse poem *Tristram* sold 57,000 copies in a few months. Both books also won the Pulitzer that year. Donaldson, *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, 419. In the 1930s, Robinson and Wilder were rebuked by critics on the left for their failure to engage social and economic questions. Michael Gold accused Wilder of being a proponent of "that newly fashionable literary religion that centers around Jesus Christ, the First British Gentleman"; upon Robinson's death, Cowley called the poet's late verse "a drama of scruple, not of purpose […] tragedies played in the twilight of a closed room." Michael Gold, "Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ," *New Republic*, Oct. 22, 1930, 266, 267 and [Malcolm Cowley], "This Week," *New Republic,* April 17, 1935, 269.

founding mythos of the MacDowell Colony. The MacDowells first began spending summers in Peterborough in the early 1890s, when Edward was teaching and performing music in Boston. A friend and Peterborough native recommended the town as "a simple quiet little place in lovely country," one not yet invaded by "the summer people."[17] In 1896, the same year MacDowell took the post at Columbia University, Mrs. MacDowell purchased an abandoned eighty-acre farm outside of town, and they became permanent summer residents. Marian hoped to give Edward a quiet place to work away from the demands of his university job. In 1898, she surprised him with a new workspace, a log cabin far away from the noise of her housework.[18] MacDowell spent the days working on his music in his cabin in the woods, and when he didn't return for lunch, Marian placed a basket lunch on the cabin porch—this amenity became a tradition for all the Colonists. There is evidence that as early as 1891, Edward was already showing symptoms of the condition that killed him in 1908.[19] One scholar described the cabin aptly as both "an outward expression of the art and nature leitmotif and Marian MacDowell's pragmatic response to early symptoms of her husband's condition."[20]

Edward's decline received ample attention in the New York newspapers, due in part to his status as "America's foremost composer" and in part to his high profile resignation from Columbia in 1904.[21] Edward resigned over a conflict with Nicholas Murray Butler, who had

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[17] Marian MacDowell, "Writings" qtd. in Acocella, *Place for the Arts*, 56.

[18] "[A]nd yet after two years he heard me rolling the lawn mower or doing some cooking and dropping some pans…so I knew immediately that it wasn't quite right, so we build the cabin in the woods…" "Marian MacDowell's Talk," 15 August 1952, MCR.77.

[19] Some friends called it "a nervous disorder." The vague diagnosis on the death certificate—"paresis (dementia paralytica)"—is consistent with tertiary syphilis. See Falconer-Salkeld, *MacDowell Colony*, 13n.6 and Acocella, *A Place for the Arts*, 127 n.15.

[20] Falconer-Salkeld, *MacDowell Colony*, 32.

[21] "PROF. MACDOWELL DIES AT FORTY-SIX: Foremost of American Composers Had Suffered Long Illness," *New York Times*, January 24, 1908, 7. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed 5/23/13.

taken over as president of Columbia in 1901, about the place of the fine arts in the university. MacDowell cited as his reason for resigning Butler's failure to devote to the university's music and other arts departments the financial and human resources necessary for growth.[22] On a philosophical level, Edward charged the university leaders with an overly materialistic outlook, declaring Professor Woodberry, the recently resigned chair of Comparative Literature, "the only spark of the ideal left at the university." In an editorial in the *Times* ten days later, Edward outlined concrete suggestions for boosting the role of the arts in the college curriculum, such as including the fine arts on college entrance examinations and requiring fine arts courses for the Bachelors of Arts degree. He also made a plea for a worldview that considered college more than a training camp for "the material battle of life":

> The aims and purposes of the fine arts in the university are to bring something into men's lives which is apart from materialism. Unless the students leave their colleges—and in this I include those for women—with some trace of idealism and some love for art, the university is not complete, and the higher education is lamentably lacking in one thing that is very important in the world, and that is idealism.[23]

"Idealism" was Edward MacDowell's term for vaguely spiritual aspirations pervasive among early-twentieth century art colonies in the United States. Like Jig Cook, Mabel Dodge, and Katrina Trask, MacDowell was convinced that commercial culture was damaging to artists, and that temporary withdrawal from commerce was both possible and good for art. In MacDowell's case, the art colony impulse was inspired in part by disillusionment with the university, where the pressures of technical knowledge and professionalism were crowding out the arts.[24]

Amid rumors of a nervous breakdown and poor treatment by the administration, Edward was championed as a martyr in the New York media. The *Herald Tribune* announced the end of

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[22] "Criticizes Butler and Quits Columbia: Prof. MacDowell Follows Prof. Woodberry in Resigning," *New York Times*, February 4, 1904, 16.

[23] Edward A. MacDowell, "What Prof. MacDowell Says," *New York Times*, February 14, 1904, 22.

[24] For a discussion of the history of liberal arts education at Columbia, and its relationship to an emerging "middlebrow" culture, see Rubin, *Making of Middlebrow Culture*, especially 154-64.

his teaching and music career with a sensational headline: "E.A. MacDowell a Wreck - His Days of Work Over - Columbia Trouble and Overwork Blamed for Composer's Illness."[25] Quoting Edward's physician, the *Times* portrayed the composer as a man motivated not by money or fame, but rather "driven by some restless creative inner force" to be "prodigal of labor": "As a teacher he gave the best of himself. As a professor of music he delved deep, and the very intensity of his genius as a composer has caused him to run his brilliant course swiftly."[26] A few years later, an article about the colony in Peterborough compared the composer to Wagner, only to use the comparison to browbeat America as "curiously apathetic in its attitude toward home talent in the fine arts":

> [Edward MacDowell's] failure to realize his ideal in art education was followed by the obscuring and finally the obliteration of one of the brightest, most progressive minds of the century, and death followed soon after. While Wagner was enabled to carry out his theories in Germany and died seeing his life's dream almost wholly accomplished, MacDowell's death was that of a martyr to a cause, his task uncompleted, and his genius only partially recognized by his countrymen.[27]

Both Colony documents and the sympathetic coverage of the founders by the press consistently link the vision of the nascent Colony with a national agenda, despite the seeming grandiosity of this claim. What began as a private summer home for Edward's therapeutic rejuvenation in nature was soon conceived of as a nursery for "American" forms of art.

An example from the archive makes this association clear. In the 1940s, when Mrs. MacDowell was passing on her managerial wisdom and recollections, she wrote a brief document describing the circumstances surrounding the composition of some of her husband's celebrated songs, including one called "The Water Lily." I quote the story at length for the way it sets in motion, in the form of a parable, various elements of MacDowell Colony mythology,

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[25] Acocella, *A Place for the Arts*, 58.

[26] "MacDowell's Career Ended By Overwork: His Physicians Say Composer Will Write No More. Nervous system shattered," *New York Times*, November 28, 1905, 7.

[27] "An American Pageant At An American Bayreuth: Remarkable Historical Production to be Given by a Little Town that Holds MacDowell's Memory Dear," *New York Times*, August 7, 1910, SM 11.

including the Romantic idea of inspiration in nature, progressive optimism for the assimilation of new immigrants, and an enlightened nationalism that overrides class-tinged nostalgia for childhood neighborhoods.

> MacDowell had lived in Europe for over twenty years and knew almost nothing of his own country outside of New York. He found great delight in our home in New Hampshire, and in wandering over the hills, passed deserted tumbled down houses left long ago by the people who went West when they heard of the splendid farming land to be had in contrast to the rocky soil of New England. Suddenly one hot day an actual stream of perfume seemed to come from nowhere. MacDowell turned and said, "What is that?" I laughed and said, "Have you never seen a water lily?" He said, "No." We turned a corner of the old road and there was a muddy, ugly black pool, but entirely covered with water lilies. MacDowell who seldom expressed his feeling in words did so, however, this time. He had been born in one of the quiet streets in East New York in those days when there were no tenements, just rows of little houses. When he came back and went down to find his old home, all had been swept away and great ugly tenement houses covered the ground, filled with swarms of people from the other side of the water, and it looked very hopeless and sordid. As MacDowell looked at the black pool covered with lilies his face brightened, and he said, "you know that reminds me of the East Side of New York, an ugly community, but out of it will spring some of the best men and women in our country. When I think of these lilies, their stems starting down in that black mud, and going up through the water, bursting into bloom in the sunlight, it symbolizes my belief in our great nation." Could he have lived to see our Colony in its fruition he would have found there more than one genius born in just the conditions he had described.[28]

Committed to a program of "elevation," extending the privileges of genteel leisure and contemplation to new potential artists from "the other side of the water," the MacDowells' scheme was in line with other Progressive Era efforts to expand access to high cultural institutions for communities without a tradition of participation.[29] It is notable, too, that from the very beginning, the vision for the Colony included both monastic isolation and outreach into a broader community.

"An Island in a Sea of Trees"

If Edward MacDowell was the artist-saint on whose myth the Colony was founded, new figures were needed to rally around as the Colony grew. Mrs. MacDowell found her champion in Edwin Arlington Robinson, a poet known for locating "heroic dignity and tragic passion and ambition

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[28] MCR.77.

[29] See for example Lisa Szefel, *The Gospel of Beauty in the Progressive Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

lurking in the shadows of America," from New England villages to the Greenwich Village underworld.[30] Robinson's life continued the themes of rebirth in nature and vehement anti-materialism that had been central to Edward's. Moreover, as a permanent fixture in the Colony, Robinson became a stabilizing male principle, almost a Platonic consort to Mrs. MacDowell's role as "Elizabethan" manager of the Colony.[31] But the Colony's second "E.A." differed greatly from the first in both personal temperament and public reception: Robinson was neither an institution builder nor a star performer, preferring to avoid the limelight and focus on his poetry. Thus Robinson came to stand for the artistic seriousness of the Colony, playing an important role in shoring up its legitimacy as a cultural institution.

In his 1935 remembrance of Robinson in *The New Republic*, Malcolm Cowley wrote, "There is a sense in which Edwin Arlington Robinson was not only the most distinguished but also the only American poet of his generation."[32] Cowley meant that in an age when writing verse was, in America, primarily a "parlor game for the wealthy," Robinson had devoted his entire career to being a poet, and had also "refused every opportunity to capitalize his reputation [...] never wrote magazine articles or mystery novels or memoirs, or edited anthologies, or went on lecture tours, or gave university courses in Creative Appreciation." Robinson admitted as much, but with characteristic self-deprecation, he attributed his single-minded pursuit of the muse to comprehensive ineptitude: "If I could have done anything else on God's green earth, I would never have written poetry. There was nothing else I could do, and I had to justify my

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[30] Robert Faggen, "Introduction" in Edwin Arlington Robinson, *Selected Poems* (New York: Penguin 1997), xi.

[31] Donaldson, *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, 280. Wilder remarked on "the rather formal splendors of my friendships (sic) with Mrs. MacDowell and Mr. Robinson," corroborating the "courtly" motif. Wilder to "family," 23 June 1929, Thornton Wilder Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Box 11 (hereafter TWP.[Box #]).

[32] [Cowley] "This Week," 268.

existence."[33] Robinson's ironic disavowal of the vocation of poetry is partly modesty, and partly an accurate reflection of the prevailing view of "the artist" in the town of Gardiner, Maine where he grew up. Robinson's most recent biographer described Gardiner's creed as "a devout materialism, a strict Victorian morality, and a Puritan work ethic."[34] Robinson's devotion to poetry, combined with his allergy to self-promotion and celebrity, made him a perfect candidate for canonization by the MacDowell Colony, an institution predicated on the idea that real art was rarely rewarded in a commercialized society.

Robinson was born in 1869 to a middle-class Maine family; Irving Howe compared his family life to the atmosphere of a late Eugene O'Neill play.[35] The third of three sons, Robinson had decided by the time he graduated from high school that he wanted to be a poet, but the disintegration of each of his family members, beginning in 1888, delayed his escape from Maine for a decade. First his father fell into a protracted physical and mental decline, dying in 1892. Around the same time, his eldest brother Dean, a physician, developed a crippling morphine addiction and spent the remainder of his life a walking ghost in the Robinson house. Robinson's mother died suddenly of diphtheria in 1896, and the family was quarantined. Herman, the handsome and confident middle brother, meanwhile married the beautiful Emma Shepherd, with whom Robinson was hopelessly in love. Within a few years of his marriage, Herman squandered most of the family money on bad real estate investments in the Midwest and returned home to become an alcoholic. Shy, lanky "Uncle Win" became a surrogate father for Emma's three children, but Herman's jealousy caused a family rift. In 1898, Robinson left Maine for Boston

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[33] Donaldson, *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, 192.

[34] Ibid., 106. Donaldson also notes that Robinson largely accepted the last two, objecting primarily to the town's materialism.

[35] Ibid., 59.

and then New York City.[36]

During what he called his “season in hell,” Robinson managed to spend two years at Harvard as a special student and to accumulate a number of friends who would support his poetry and his person for much of his life. His first three books of poems (1896, 1897, and 1902) were either self-published or financed by friends like Laura Richards, one of Gardiner’s most prominent citizens. Many of these early poems, including the frequently anthologized “Richard Cory,” are set in fictitious “Tilbury Town,” a version of Gardiner. Robinson combined traditional verse forms—blank verse, sonnets, villanelles—with stripped down “Yankee speech” and grim, psychological portraiture.

> Withal a meagre man was Aaron Stark,
> Cursed and unkempt, shrewd, shrivelled, and morose.
> A miser was he, with a miser's nose,
> And eyes like little dollars in the dark.
> […]
> Glad for the murmur of his hard renown,
> Year after year he shambled through the town,
> A loveless exile moving with a staff;
> And oftentimes there crept into his ears
> A sound of alien pity, touched with tears,--
> And then (and only then) did Aaron laugh.[37]

Robinson’s poetry attacked both conventional ideas of poetic beauty and the widespread materialism he saw as characterizing his age. Few magazines were interested in publishing his work, and from 1902 to 1905, he was destitute and dependent on alcohol. To cover his rent, he borrowed from friends and worked as a timekeeper for a subway construction gang for twenty cents an hour.[38] Like other critics before him, Cowley latched onto the romance of the overlooked genius, praising Robinson for both his asceticism and his hubris: “The gifts he received […] didn't wound his Yankee pride because he felt that they were being given, not to

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[36] Ibid., 154.

[37] Edwin Arlington Robinson, *Collected Poems by Edwin Arlington Robinson* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 86.

[38] Cowley, “Edwin Arlington Robinson,” 27.

him as a person, but through him to poetry. Having taken vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to his art, he could accept charity as if he were a whole monastic order."[39]

The MacDowell Colony had every reason to make the claim that they "saved" Robinson. Despite a four year, 2,000 dollar per annum sinecure at the New York Custom House secured for him by President Theodore Roosevelt (one of Robinson's few admirers) in 1905, the poet produced only a slim volume between 1902 and 1910. During most of that period, he attempted to write plays and novels, hoping to find a readership in prose where poetry had failed. Peterborough helped restore his muse. Despite initial skepticism toward the idea of an artists' community (he arrived in the summer of 1911 with a prepared excuse to depart, a fake telegram announcing a "family emergency"), Robinson thrived in the combination of scenic solitude and respectful sociability.[40] He returned year after year, and by 1913 he had stopped drinking, partly out of devotion to Mrs. MacDowell, and was writing poetry again.[41] His 1916 collection *The Man Against The Sky* was widely and favorably reviewed by newly vocal advocates of a modernized poetry, including Amy Lowell, who called Robinson's poems "dynamic with experience and knowledge of life."[42] With the launch of Harriet Monroe's magazine *Poetry* in 1912, alongside Ezra Pound's declarations about the dawn of "Imagism," American verse was in revolt. And with two decades of poetry writing behind him, Robinson became, retroactively, a

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[39] Ibid., 29.

[40] Not to mention regular meals. A friend recalled Robinson's alarming appearance in his first year at the Colony: "E A arrived presently—a quiet, shabbily dressed, discouraged looking man, neither young nor old, not interested apparently either in himself of any one else. Polite enough if you spoke to him but much preferring not to be bothered. He cared nothing for the country or the woods as such, or for the village either. He smoked Sweet Caporals [sic] incessantly and he was hungry. Indeed, if the meat was to his linking, he was almost wolfish." Parker Fillmore to Herman Hagedorn, "First Year at Peteborough [sic]," 10 January 1937, MCR.77.

[41] Donaldson, *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, 277.

[42] Amy Lowell, "E.A. Robinson's Verse," *New Republic*, May 27, 1916, 96-7.

progenitor of this modernity, and was for the first time hailed "America's Foremost Poet."[43]

For the rest of his life, Robinson did the majority of his writing during his four-month residencies at the MacDowell Colony. In the early days, there were few colonists, and conditions were Spartan: the men shaved with cold water and bathed in a nearby river.[44] But the studios, scattered far enough apart in the woods that few colonists could see or hear one another, had their own fireplaces, and Robinson's, the Veltin Studio, offered a view of Mount Monadnock. Friend and fellow colonist Parker Fillmore speculated that the "natural beauty" that appears in Robinson's later volumes of poetry has much to do with the Colony; he recalled that Robinson seemed utterly immune to his surroundings when he arrived, but insisted that "E A was born anew at Peterborough."[45] Robinson became a fixture at the colony, advising Mrs. MacDowell on invitations to poets and serving as a "stabilizing factor" among young and new colonists. His first biographer, Hermann Hagedorn, summarized Robinson's central role in the Colony in reverential terms:

> He had become the presiding genius of [Mrs. MacDowell's] great project, something more than a rich and profound personality, a spiritual entity which would endure after he himself was gone, a part of the enterprise of which he was both beneficiary and shaper. His industry had set a standard which would not vanish with him; his integrity challenged alike loose thinking and loose living; his equable temper deflated the temperamental. He judged no one and interfered with nobody, but his gentleness and a certain aristocracy in him had their effect. His name took on authority, which even young rebels-against-everything accepted.[46]

In a more cynical vein, poet and novelist Margaret Widdemer recalled that Mrs. MacDowell appeared to favor the male colonists, who in turn regarded her with "a single-hearted platonic worship which kept their minds off anybody else. I must say they got a lot more work done that

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[43] Donaldson, *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, 296.

[44] Ibid., 278.

[45] Parker Fillmore to Hermann Hagedorn, MCR.77.

[46] Hermann Hagedorn, *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 350.

way."[47]

Among the best poems in Robinson's 1916 volume is one called "Hillcrest," named for Mrs. MacDowell's house and dedicated to her. Unsurprising given Robinson's turbulent career before coming to Peterborough, the poem figures the Colony as an island of peace in a storm of historical change and personal turmoil.

> No sound of any storm that shakes
> Old island walls with older seas
> Comes here where now September makes
> An island in a sea of trees.
>
> Between the sunlight and the shade
> A man may learn till he forgets
> The roaring of a world remade,
> And all his ruins and regrets; (1-8)[48]

As the thirteen-stanza poem continues, we learn that the woods of Hillcrest reward "contemplation," and the patience to "listen well,/Through twilight and the silence here," with the achievement of intellectual humility and peace. "[G]reat oaks return/To acorns out of which they grew," and the contemplative mind finds comfort in a newly distanced perspective on personal loss: "Love builds of what Time takes away,/Till Death itself is less than Change." But withdrawal into the peace of the woods does not guarantee wisdom. The last stanzas rebuke the type of naive egotism that would project the poet's newfound happiness—a temporary state dependent on the "island" of peace in the colony—onto the world at large, which has not changed:[49]

> Who sees unchastened here the soul

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[47] Margaret Widdemer, *Golden Friends I Had: Unrevised Memories of Margaret Widdemer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 68.

[48] Robinson, *Collected Poems*, 15.

[49] My reading of "Hillcrest" up to this point is similar to that of Ivor Winters and D.G. Myers. See Winters, *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1946) and Myers, *Elephants Teach*, 81-2. Robinson's zen-like spirituality was not universally celebrated. Cowley objected to the poverty of ideas in poems like "The Man Against the Sky" (from the same collection), which offered in place of the "materialism" Robinson so deplored only "a sort of Buddho-Christianity too vague to be intellectually respectable." Cowley, "Edwin Arlington Robinson," 30.

> Triumphant has no other sight
> Than has a child who sees the whole
> World radiant with his own delight.
>
> Far journeys and hard wandering
> Await him in whose crude surmise
> Peace, like a mask, hides everything
> That is and has been from his eyes;
>
> And all his wisdom is unfound,
> Or like a web that error weaves
> On airy looms that have a sound
> No louder now than falling leaves. (41-52)

The emphatic "here" (repeated four times) and the "now" of the first and final stanzas insist on the immediate occasion of the poem, the annual residency at the colony ("September" at Hillcrest marks the end of the regular colony season, when guests return to the city). In addition to praising contemplative detachment, the poem is also about re-entering the world after a season of peace. The poet has found temporary personal solace and gained perspective on a world that "roars" on; thus the value of contemplation is dialectically related to the chaos of the outer world.

In a tribute to the passing of the poet in their 1935 newsletter, the Board of Directors of the MacDowell Colony published a statement that reflected as much on the Colony as it did on Robinson.

> That Mr. Robinson after years of experience continued to believe heart and soul in what he called the Peterborough Idea confirms us all in our conviction of the soundness of those principles upon which the Colony is founded. Moreover, it seems to us that Mr. Robinson's work alone, more than justifies the founding of the Colony and its maintenance all these years. It comforts us today in our grief that the MacDowell association was responsible to some extent for the long and triumphant list of Mr. Robinson's books and for the quiet happiness of his life at Peterborough.[50]

Perhaps the most significant effect of the Colony for Robinson, as is true for many residents, was the massive surge in productivity (the "long and triumphant list"): between 1923 and 1935, Robinson published a new book of poems every year, averaging 2,200 lines annually in his last

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[50] *The MacDowell Colony News* (Peterborough, 1935), 6. MCR.72.

decade.[51] Even his friends and most appreciative critics agreed that the bulk of his late, long narrative poems, many of them re-workings of Arthurian legends, were unreadable.[52] A particularly damning appraisal compared writing the poems to "playing solitaire and hoping the game would last as long as possible."[53] The security and regularity of life at MacDowell, while initially inspiring some of his best poems, sustained Robinson in intensive writing arguably past his time of greatest poetic energy.

One could regard Robinson's career as a story of decline, in which the writing of poetry became a mechanical—or perhaps a devotional—exercise. But it is also true that Robinson's social role in the colony became even more important as the years went on. Robinson remained the presiding spirit of the Colony throughout its heyday in the 1920s. When Thornton Wilder arrived at Peterborough for the first time in 1924, he was a struggling part-time novelist and playwright and a full-time teacher of French at a New Jersey boarding school. Other guests that year included Tennessee Mitchell Anderson, a prominent figure in the Chicago Renaissance (and recently divorced from Sherwood Anderson), and the beautiful, scandalous, multiply divorced poet Elinor Wylie. Despite seemingly more entrancing company, Wilder wrote to his mother that his favorite Colonist was Robinson, whom he described as a man of "few graces," "difficult, austere, an infinitely conscientious workman, as yet little known of the casual public" despite having won the 1922 Pulitzer for his *Collected Poems*.[54] For years Wilder identified Robinson

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[51] Donaldson, *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, 420.

[52] See for example Hayatt H. Waggoner, "The Idealist *in Extremis*" in *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 94.

[53] Ibid., 94.

[54] Niven, *Thornton Wilder*, 237. The admiration persisted on both sides. In 1926 Wilder wrote to his brother, "I'm at Mr. Robinson's elbow about one meal a day and love him more and more." TWP.1. In 1931 he wrote his sister Isabel that Robinson "sent me his book inscribed, an unheard of demonstration." TWP.4. Wilder ended a lecture on "The Future of American Literature" (TWP.135) with a prophetic stanza from Robinson's poem "The White Lights (Broadway, 1906)."

with the Colony and the work ethic it inspired, one the globetrotting multi-tasker could not always sustain. After Robinson's death, Wilder paid tribute the older poet in a letter to Mrs. MacDowell: "May his single-minded dedication enter my very bones as it has long since influenced my poor willful mind."[55] Like Robinson, Wilder was attracted by the MacDowell Colony's practical benefits: he recognized there the "ideal conditions" for work. In 1929, he wrote his father that his third novel had "come to life again" in the "ideal studio among live trees and birds and uninterrupted day from 9 until 5."[56] But on a more abstract level, the Colony reconciled two principles that were central to Wilder's life but seemingly in conflict: the intensive, individualistic devotion to his art and the strong impulse toward community.

In 1937, Wilder recalled close friend Gertrude Stein's frustrated assessment of him: "what puzzles me about you, -- is why, oh why, are you a Community Man?"[57] For a self-described creative genius like Stein, "Community Man" was clearly a term of abuse. Wilder's relationship to community was more ambivalent. From an early age, Wilder tended to associate the communitarian impulse with New England—both its morality and its geography, an association forced on him by a domineering father with roots in Maine.[58] However, even young Thornton was not a thorough rebel; as he joked to his parents in a 1921 letter, "Your queer

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[55] Thornton Wilder to Marian MacDowell, 3 May 1935, MMP.4. Already in 1927 Wilder conceived of himself in the monastic terms that mirrored Cowley's descriptions of Robinson: "I don't marry. In fact all I'm supposed to do is to make books as a cow gives milk and to live as little as a person as possible." TWP.1.

[56] TWP.11. Later in life, Wilder sounded more like Robinson, relishing the uninterrupted studio time but resenting the socializing: "Colonies like this are funny places. I'm hard put to it to sustain the breakfast and supper conversation…. so cultured…. The young poets who want to talk T.S. Eliot, and the neurotic divorcées who are in competition with one another for our benignant attention. […] But the hours in the studio in the deep green woods, under Monadnock are wonderful. I wish we could work in the studio in the evening; because its the passing of the evening here (inevitably in Colony company) that is distracting." TW to Amos Wilder, 4 August 1953, TWP.2.

[57] TW to Isabel Wilder, 23 September 1937, TWP.4.

[58] Letters from Wilder's father—and about their father among the Wilder children—document the father's concerted attempts to micromanage their lives as well as the alternating frustration, derision, and submission of the children. See TWP.11 and Niven, *Thornton Wilder*, 187-8 and passim.

‘aesthetic’ over-cerebral son may turn out to be your most fundamental New Englander and most appreciative of the sentiment of group; when Amos and Charlotte [his oldest brother and sister] have set up independent, self-centered institutions, I shall turn out to be a sort of male Cordelia!”[59] A cadre of artists nested in a small New Hampshire town and supported by a nation-wide network of interested contributors, the MacDowell Colony participated in several types of community simultaneously: the New England village, the artistic coterie, and a wider “world” community of arts and letters. Wilder’s novels and plays of the 1920s and 1930s, the period of his greatest involvement with the MacDowell Colony, can be read as a succession of attempts to represent and reconcile these three types of community.

II. Impecunious Experiments

On the Road with Leftenant Wilder

By the time *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* was published in late 1927, Wilder had enjoyed three residencies at the MacDowell Colony and seemed to feel that he owed a debt to the place where he wrote “long sections” of the novel that made him a literary celebrity and, for a novelist, rich.[60] He wrote to Marian MacDowell declaring himself “a Peterborovian for good” and promised “to be a real soldier for you in more practical fields.”[61] To be “a soldier” for Mrs. MacDowell meant begging for money from potential donors around the country.[62] Wilder’s letters from the road are

[59] TW to “Family,” 1 February 1921, TWP.11.

[60] The financial windfall of *The Bridge* turned Wilder into a small charitable institution in his own right: he used the bulk of the royalties to build a house in Hamden, Connecticut for his parents and whichever sisters where still at home. Wilder would support his parents and his sisters Isabel and Charlotte for the remainder of their lives. Niven, *Thornton Wilder*, 328. This did not stop him from dispensing largess elsewhere: a 1929 letter shows Wilder flouting his father’s warnings about frugality in favor of liberality: “Contrary to your warnings no one ever asks me for money for their interests. So I just offer. I just pulled wonderful Mrs. MacDowell out of a tight hole. All her colonists are terribly poor this year and cannot even pay their 12 dollars a week, and in addition are having appendectomies and tonsillectomies galore.” TWP.11.

[61] TW to Marian MacDowell, 30 August 1928, MMP.4.

[62] Only a handful of Wilder’s letters to Marian MacDowell survive, and none of her letters to him were saved.

playful and obliging: “Leftenant [sic] Wilder sends his duty, obedience and affection to Commander-in-chief MacDowell and says that he has arranged to see the MacDowellian Garrison stationed at Salt Lake City. Leftenant Wilder intends to give them so patriotic a discourse on The Colony that they will become dizzy with admiration and loyalty to that work.”[63] Though a letter about fundraising, Wilder’s note conspicuously never mentions money, instead cataloging a list of subjective states and values—duty, obedience, affection, admiration, loyalty, even “dizziness”—that might eventually result in donations. He signed the note “Thornton ‘Latter Day Saint’ Wilder,” no doubt a joke about Utah, but one that underscores the religious tone of the Colony enterprise. In a letter to Gertrude Stein, Wilder was more frank about the slightly seedy affective labor that fundraising entailed: “Ladies ‘open their houses’ for these things and we colonists make veiled pleas for money […] As I ‘use’ the Colony and very gladly, it’s only right I do this, but it’s a soiling saddening business.”[64]

Wilder’s ambivalence toward his fundraising work for the MacDowell Colony reveals something important about the type of patronage on offer there. Unlike the comparatively straightforward largess of a fellowship from a well-endowed foundation like the Guggenheim, a residency at the MacDowell Colony involved the artist in a community, one with its own elaborate mythology, norms, and obligations. Moreover, the source of the benevolence was dispersed. Each year the Colony Newsletter contained the names of hundreds of individual

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However, letters to his family from Peterborough indicate that Wilder offered Mrs. MacDowell both direct and indirect financial assistance. In a 1929 letter to his father, he mentions an appearance at a “MacDowell benefit concert at Keene,” but also a gift or loan of money to Mrs. MacDowell. Late in life Wilder no longer made public appearances, but a 1964 letter acknowledges a gift to the Colony of shares of IBM stock. TWP.11 and TWP.48.

[63] Thornton Wilder to Marian MacDowell, undated, MMP.4. Wilder’s lecture trip in 1936 put him in Salt Lake City, so it is possible the letter comes from that year. See Niven, *Thornton Wilder*, 412. Mrs. MacDowell also occasionally compared her fundraising with military activities, joking in a 1944 letter, “I’m glad the [war] bond sellers never heard of me or I would be asked to solicit for bonds, and my hands are quite full enough with the Association!” Marian MacDowell to Mrs. Willets, 14 February 1944, MCR.1.

[64] Edward Burns and Ulla E. Dydo, eds., *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Thornton Wilder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 141.

donors and groups of donors, many of them offering as little as ten dollars to the Association. The studios themselves were generally named not for their donors but in tribute to a deceased family member—in the case of the John W. Alexander Studio, funded by his wife and son for the painter and former Colony Director—or for a club—as with the New Jersey Federation of Women's Clubs Studio.[65] Nor was stumping for the Colony quite like being a dutiful alumnus of a university. Mrs. MacDowell expected no actual money from former Colonists; rather, she invited them to join the Association as "Allied Members." This group, which included Robinson, Wilder, and other frequent users of the Colony, was invited to annual meetings, where they helped set "Colony Policy." Mrs. MacDowell expressed the hope they would speak favorably about the Colony to potential donors, and she used their names to add prestige in Colony documents. None of these relationships was straightforwardly transactional; rather, they relied on softer forms of social obligation like gratitude, a sense of duty, and probably more than a little guilt. In short, the MacDowell Colony operated on what Lewis Hyde has described as a gift economy, a form of commerce designed to increase social bonds rather than cancel them out.[66]

Allying oneself with the MacDowell Colony meant becoming a node in a network that included artists, wealthy art patrons, amateur musicians and teachers of the arts, enthusiasts of Edward MacDowell's music, and members of social clubs or fraternities with an interest in culture and philanthropy. But this network was hardly self-sustaining, a fact that became clear to the Executive Board of the Edward MacDowell Memorial Association when Mrs. MacDowell was ill and no longer able to perform her tour of lecture recitals.[67] To a great extent, fundraising

[65] *The MacDowell Colony: A History of Its Development and Architecture* (Peterborough: 1981), 38-40.

[66] Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage, 2007), Kindle Edition, especially KL 2893 and passim.

[67] The 1940s and 1950s were a period of crisis and transition for the Colony, as the loss of Mrs. MacDowell's informal fundraising necessitated that the Association transform itself into a modern non-profit organization, one

for the Colony depended on the physical presence of Marian MacDowell, whose frailty and resilience—she had injured her back trying to lift her husband during his illness, and thus went about on crutches for years—inspired pity, admiration, and donations. Marian MacDowell was also the link with Edward, whose network of students and admirers provided much of the financial support for the Colony in the early years.

From a practical perspective, Edward's illness had as much to do with the founding of the Colony as his "dream." The public outcry at the Columbia scandal—and the accompanying publicity in the papers—had helped sustain a massive fundraising campaign by the Mendelssohn Glee Club, an organization MacDowell had founded years earlier in New York. Organizations around the country held benefit concerts for the ailing musician, and donations poured in, accumulating to more than $30,000 for his care during what was predicted to be a long illness. When Edward died sooner than expected, Mrs. MacDowell convinced the Association to use the large sum of money remaining toward the maintenance and growth of the Colony—she had already deeded the Peterborough property to the newly formed Edward MacDowell Memorial Association in 1905. It is part of Colony lore that the financier J.P. Morgan threatened to withdraw his donation unless Mrs. MacDowell gave up "that damn, foolish scheme in the country."[68] Morgan was not the only skeptic; many of the Board members would have been content with a more traditional memorial, and Mrs. MacDowell frequently came into conflict with the more cautious members by plunging forward with major financial and organizational decisions to ensure the continuation of the Colony scheme. In 1907, before Edward died, Mrs. MacDowell invited Mary and Helen Mears (one a sculptor, the other a writer) to spend the

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with proper business practices and financial records that could appeal for support to both private foundations and the U.S. government.

[68] Acocella, *A Place for the Arts*, 63.

summer at the farm, hoping their presence would make the still-notional Colony seem like a reality.[69] In 1912, Mrs. MacDowell bypassed the Board and purchased a neighboring farm to expand the Colony and protect the studios from encroachment by developers, thus adding to the already large mortgage.[70] In retrospect, the decision proved auspicious—the New Hampshire Federation of Women's Clubs raised the money to pay off the mortgage in 1930—but at the time, Mrs. MacDowell's financial risk-taking added to the sense that the Colony was, as she termed it, an "impecunious experiment."[71]

Marian MacDowell tended to excuse her precipitate decision making by reminding the Board of her years of generosity to the Association. Because she lived comfortably off of the royalties from her husband's music, she could allocate all of her earnings on the road to the Colony.[72] In 1923 Mrs. MacDowell won *Pictorial Review*'s Annual Achievement Award for "The American woman who makes the most valuable contribution to American life during the year."[73] She donated the entire $5,000 cash prize to the Colony. Mrs. MacDowell's model of management was one in which all of her energy, and any earnings or windfall, fed back into the maintenance and growth of the Colony. It is little wonder that she expected others to spend some energy raising money for the Colony they "used." Writing in the spring of 1928, Wilder urged Mrs. MacDowell (then in the hospital and unable to fundraise normally) to take comfort in "the consciousness of your creative life, and passing over all distance and through all walls, the

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[69] ibid.

[70] Falconer-Salkeld, *MacDowell* Colony, 69. Similarly, in 1938, in the wake of a hurricane that destroyed much of the forest in Peterborough, Mrs. MacDowell purchased a sawmill without obtaining permission of the Board, on the logic that "by the time I had permission someone else would have had the sawmill" (69-70).

[71] Ibid., 5.

[72] Ibid., 81 n.8.

[73] Acocella, *A Place for the Arts*, 82.

devotion of scores of us."[74] The writer Edward Dahlberg paid tribute to Mrs. MacDowell in his memoirs in similar terms: "Mrs. MacDowell did more for the American artist than anyone else. She had a deep religious feeling for the arts, and as I now finish this all too small portrait of a great person I bow and kiss her hand again."[75]

"Impulses of Love"

Edward MacDowell and E.A. Robinson served in the Colony mythology as martyr and monk, respectively; Marian MacDowell and Thornton Wilder were its traveling evangelists. Wilder's mobility and gregariousness made him useful to the MacDowell Colony in a completely different way from Robinson. In comparison with Robinson's annual four-month stay, Wilder's residencies were more sporadic and rarely lasted more than a few weeks. The Colony served Wilder well for brief periods of intense writing in an unusually busy life that included full-time teaching at a boarding school and later the University of Chicago, several short stints screenwriting in Hollywood, annual lecture tours across the country and nearly annual leisure trips to Europe, and a frenetic social calendar that bounced him between family in Connecticut and friends in New York, New Mexico, and California. Though Wilder praised the Colony as "the place when I first saw in certain persons and in the spirit of the group an ideal of how to work and the dignity and concentration of art pursued single-mindedly," his own career was extraordinarily diverse, and his novels tended to reflect this vast learning and wide experience.[76]

Set among the aristocratic society of eighteenth-century Lima, Peru, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* seems an unlikely place to look for allegories of the writers' colony. Indeed, Wilder's

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[74] Thornton Wilder to Marian MacDowell, 12 May 1928. MMP.4.

[75] Edward Dahlberg, *The Confessions of Edward Dahlberg* (New York: G. Braziller, 1971), 242.

[76] Wilder to M. MacDowell, 12 June 1929, MMP.4.

tendency to set his novels in the distant past contributed to charges of historical irrelevancy and escapism from critics like Edmund Wilson, and recent scholars have done little to revise this assessment.[77] As Malcolm Cowley put it, Wilder was unique among the major writers of his generation in that he was less interested in manners—the historically contingent and changing modes of interaction between groups—than he was in morals—the "relatively universal" principles that govern relationships between individuals (or between an individual and God).[78] But the "abstraction" of Wilder's novels, when read in context, offers a more nuanced representation of the MacDowell Colony than do, for example, Robinson's poems set concretely in the Peterborough landscape. Wilder's novels go beyond recapitulating the value of contemplation, articulating instead a model of creative and charitable work that is intensely social. This chapter understands Thornton Wilder as a highly "networked" individual whose ideas about human interdependence owe much to his varied traffic with the MacDowell Colony. *The Bridge* is a meditation on literary genius and legacy—inspired by the life of eighteenth-century French letter writer Madame de Sévigné—that gives unusual visibility to other forms of work, including patronage, philanthropy, and affective labor, such as begging for money and managing a charitable institution.

The action of the novel begins when an ancient bridge collapses, hurling five people to their deaths. A Franciscan friar witnesses the collapse and sets out to learn everything he can about the lives of each of the victims, hoping to discover in this "Act of God" the traces of divine intention. Brother Juniper is eventually burned as a heretic, but the narrator takes over the task of

[77] For an overview of Wilder criticism (and critical neglect) see Martin Joseph Blank, ed., *Thornton Wilder: New Essays* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1999), xii. An exception is Melanie Ho's unpublished dissertation, "Useful Fictions: Why Universities Need Middlebrow Literature" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2008), with a chapter entitled "Wilder's Belief in Institutions" on Wilder's late novels and theories of Progressive education.

[78] Malcolm Cowley, "The Man Who Abolished Time," *Saturday Review*, Oct. 1956, reprinted in Martin Joseph Blank, *Critical Essays on Thornton Wilder* (New York: Prentice Hall International, 1996), 35.

retelling the stories of the victims and the loved ones they left on earth. Though the lives of all the characters interconnect, the figure at the "hub" of this network is the benevolent-but-commanding Abbess. Like "Commander-in-chief MacDowell," the Abbess is an exemplum of the woman whose ideas jar with the accepted notions of her society (she is a feminist and a reformer stuck in eighteenth-century Peru), but whose work is of necessity practical: "All her work, her hospitals, her orphanage, her convent, her sudden journeys of rescue, depended upon money." We learn of the Abbess's "dreadful [...] struggles to obtain her subsidies from her superiors in the church," especially the Archbishop of Lima, an epicurean and connoisseur with no sympathy for the poor, who "hated her with what he called a Vatinian hate and counted the cessation of her visits among the compensations for dying" (*BON* 130).[79] The Abbess's faith is tested in the bridge collapse, which kills Pepita, the young girl she has groomed to be her successor. However, the accident also turns out to be an act of grace: two other women, who have also lost loved ones on the bridge, appear at her convent, and the ending of the novel implies that they will carry on her work. Robinson's lines from "Hillcrest" might be used to gloss the outcome of the novel: "Love builds of what Time takes away,/Till Death itself is less than Change."

The novel ends with the Abbess's consoling thoughts about the meaning of the accident:

> "Even now," she thought, "almost no one remembers Esteban and Pepita, but myself. Camila alone remembers her Uncle Pio and her son; this woman [Doña Clara], her mother. But soon we shall die and all memory of those five will have left the earth, and we ourselves shall be loved for a while and forgotten. But the love will have been enough; all those impulses of love return to the love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning." (192)

[79] The Archbishop is a figure for ecclesiastical power without charity, as well as anti-progressivism and snobbery: "The Archbishop knew that most of the priests of Peru were scoundrels. It required all his delicate Epicurean education to prevent his doing something about it; he had to repeat over to himself his favorite notions: that the injustice and unhappiness in the world is a constant; that the theory of progress is a delusion; that the poor, never having known happiness, are insensible to misfortune. Like all the rich he could not bring himself to believe that the poor (look at their houses, look at their clothes) could really suffer. Like all the cultivated he believed that only the widely-read could be said to know that they were unhappy" (171).

The most obvious interpretation of these lines is a religious one: though human consciousness is fleeting, the acts of "love" that express their divine nature ultimately link one with the creator and eternity. Thus the "meaning" of Abbess's numerous acts of charity—her orphanage, her hospital, her plans for helping the blind and the insane—is the honor and glory of God. But the novel also authorizes a second, more secular interpretation of these lines. "All those impulses of love return to the love that made them" may also describe the circulation of the gift economy, in which charitable energy tends to return to its originator, with increase rather than loss. If Marian MacDowell's work taught Wilder anything, it was that the memory of a loved one could fire a mission of seemingly selfless service—and that the positive responses of hundreds of supporters might sustain their originator in nearly mystical ways. The novel's final chapter finds Camila, the miserable, cynical former actress, and Doña Clara, the wealthy patron of bad art, drawn magnetically into the presence of the Abbess. The first becomes a social worker, and the second becomes a philanthropist; thus the novel is in part about converting culture workers into more direct helpers of their fellow men.

However, the novel is not merely a gospel of good works; it is also a meditation on the nature of art and the "work" it might do through its circulation. Thus it is possible to interpret the novel's ending not as a metaphysical statement, but as a metafictional one. If "the bridge is love," it takes only a little imagination to read instead "*The Bridge* is love." The novel points to itself in its last lines, and in ending with the phrase "the only meaning," makes a bid to circumscribe its own interpretation. If the meaning of the novel is "love," then this reading would seem to trump, or at the very least enclose, the novel's religious and secular reform messages. There is ample evidence to suggest that the novel has metafictional intentions; aside from the framing device of the Franciscan friar's "book" about the collapse of the bridge, one of

the central characters in the novel is Doña María, the Marquesa de Montemayor, whose collection of letters goes on to become "one of the monuments of Spanish literature" (117).

Doña María's letters are an occasion for the novel to satirize both myopic literary criticism and inept artistic patronage. The preservation of the letters owes not to their intended audience, Doña María's cold, intellectual daughter who "barely glanced" at them, but rather to her son-in-law (119). However, even he misinterprets the letters, thinking "that when he had enjoyed the style he had extracted all their richness and intention, missing (as most readers do) the whole purport of literature, which is the notation of the heart" (120). The narrator, clearly preaching now, goes on to insist, "Style is but the faintly contemptible vessel in which the bitter liquid is recommended to the world." The "intention" of the letters, to command the love of their addressee, fails to meet its aim. Doña Clara channels the generous allowance and gifts from her mother into a "grandiose" lifestyle and patronage of the most patronizing kind: "she regarded her friends, her servants and all the interesting people in the capital, as her children" (119). However, all of the daughter's patronage is for naught: "For a decade the Condesa literally sustained all the arts and sciences of Spain; it was not her fault that nothing memorable was produced during that time." The novel implies that Doña Clara fails to recognize the one real artist of her time, her mother.

Like the Abbess, who is described as "[tearing] an idol from her heart" when Pepita dies (187), Doña María is also redeemed from an "idolatrous" love. Though her letters are "miracles of wit and grace," the Marquesa knows that there is "tyranny" in her love, that she loves her daughter "not for her daughter's sake, but for her own" (119, 121). Her redemption from this narcissistic paralysis occurs when she surreptitiously reads one of Pepita's letters to the Abbess—the young girl is serving as a companion to the Marquesa as part of the Abbess's plan

for her "worldly" education. Doña María is struck by the "simplicity of love" in evidence in the letter, so much so that she undergoes a drastic change of heart. This event, two days before the bridge collapse, inspires Doña María to write "the famous letter LVI, known to the Encylopedists as her Second Corinthians because of its immortal paragraph about love" (138).

Wilder's novel imagines a closed system with "impulses of love" undergoing changes of state as they pass between characters. The Abbess's concern for the continuance of her charitable work drives her to cultivate Pepita as a successor, and Pepita takes on the "crazy duties" of Doña María's companion as part of her "education for greatness" (131). When Pepita's life ends suddenly in the accident, only the reader knows that her love for the Abbess has been converted into literary immortality through Doña María's letters. Likewise, the death of her mother brings Doña Clara to the feet of the Abbess to infuse her work with new funds. Despite her newfound humility, the Abbess is comically prepared when she hears that a noblewoman is at the door: "Oh, it is some money, Inez, some money for my house for the blind. Quick, bid her come in" (190). When she reads Doña María's final letter, the Abbess is "filled with happiness like a girl at this new proof that the traits she lived for were everywhere, that the world was ready" (190). The circle is closed, the Abbess re-confirmed in her belief that "anywhere you may expect grace," and her work resumes.

As much as *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is a parable about divine love (as numerous critics have pointed out),[80] it is also a parable about the relationship between artistic work and charitable work: both circulate in a gift economy. Thus the implied fulfillment of the novel's "intimations" (185) is a world in which benevolent institutions care for the socially marginalized, great art is recognized when created, and the patronage of vicious and myopic aristocrats is no

[80] On Camila's life as a "progress of grace" see Lincoln Konkle, "Judgment Day in the Jazz Age: American Puritanism in Wilder's Early Plays and Novels" in Blank, *New Essays*, 87.

longer necessary. Though he could not have predicted the enormous success of the novel, writing from the MacDowell Colony in 1927, Wilder had reason for optimism. The novel's social vision is grounded in the realities of a particular form of patronage.

III. The Colony and the World

From Local Politics to Planetary Consciousness

Though writers like Wilder and Robinson, who benefited from the Colony directly, may have been true believers in the "Peterborough Idea," the model of the art colony as a modern monastery for poet-saints, or even as a self-sustaining network of amateur art enthusiasts and grateful artists, presented something of a public relations problem. The MacDowell Colony, like other early twentieth century artist communities, was vulnerable to charges of escapism and elitism, especially when it invoked the trope of the wilting artist, too sensitive for the harshness of "the world," or the ideal of a closed circle of patronage and production, one that mysteriously bypassed the marketplace. These myths also tended to avoid the fact that the MacDowell Colony was situated in a small New Hampshire town, one with very little obvious stake in a self-isolating and non-taxpaying retreat for artists from the city. Peterborough originally attracted Marian MacDowell in the 1890s because it had not yet been invaded by "summer people": city-dwellers with enough disposable income to relocate for the season to New Hampshire's quaint farms and picturesque mountains.[81] In the early days of her venture, Mrs. MacDowell and her supporting cast of Colonists and Directors developed various strategies for avoiding antagonistic town-colony relations by demonstrating the "usefulness" of their work.

MacDowell was not the only, nor was it the first art colony in New Hampshire, though a brief description of the colonies in Dublin and Cornish will be enough to differentiate the

[81] Acocella, *A Place for the Arts*, 56.

Peterborough experiment from these earlier communities. Dublin Lake, less than ten miles from Peterborough, was the site of a thriving art colony beginning in 1888. Drawn to the scenic views of the lake and of Mount Monadnock, Abbott Thayer and other painters settled in Dublin with their families, either permanently or for the summer.[82] Similarly, Cornish Colony was founded by the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens in 1885. The Saint-Gaudens family summered in Cornish for fifteen years before making it their permanent home in 1900. Meanwhile, the sculptor's friends and associates built homes and gardens in the area, forming an "upper-class Bohemia."[83] Residents of Dublin and Cornish tended to be prosperous and respectable: they purchased property, built homes, raised families, contributed to the town's "cultural life," and perhaps most importantly, they paid taxes. In other words, the residents of these art colonies participated in the usual transactions of a capitalist economy like good bourgeois citizens. This was not true of the colony at Peterborough.[84] The MacDowells had no children, and the decision to deed the property to the Edward MacDowell Memorial Association gave their farm non-profit status. Spouses were unwelcome at the colony unless they were doing "very important creative work."[85] Though she used the name "Colony" emphatically, Mrs. MacDowell's colonists were for the most part single ladies and bachelors living in separate dormitories and taking communal meals. The MacDowell Colony worked more like a monastery than like a conventional suburban housing development, and thus depended on the public regarding its artists as something like

[82] The original impetus for an art colony in Cornish was Mrs. John Singleton Copley Greene, a wealthy Bostonian who purchased much of the land on Lake Dublin in the 1880s, parceling it out to friends in Boston's intellectual and artistic circles. In addition to Thayer, notable Dublin painters included George de Forest Brush and Alec James, son of William. Edie Clark, "Inspired by God: The Artists of Mount Monadnock, 1888-1950," *Monadnock Art*, 2008, http://www.monadnockart.org/index.php/artists-past.

[83] Falconer-Salkeld, *MacDowell Colony*, 7.

[84] In 2004, the town of Peterborough took the Colony to court in order to challenge its tax-exempt status. Press Release, "MacDowell Prevails in Legal Battle," March 2007, http://www.macdowellcolony.org.

[85] Marian MacDowell to Mr. Langs, 11 January 1935, MCR.1.

monks.

One of the most effective means of broadcasting their respectability and legitimacy to the public (beyond the national network of MacDowell Music Clubs) involved publishing articles about the Colony in magazines, which happened readily given the large numbers of professional writers who worked there each year. A 1921 article in *The Outlook* by writer and frequent Colonist Hermann Hagedorn praised the Colony in terms that made it look like one of the few bright spots in a world of "turmoil and discord and blatant vulgarity."[86] The essay is directed at a public presumed to consider artists' colonies bevies of unserious, free-love bohemians; it describes Peterborough as "the complete antithesis of the Greenwich Village type of artistic community."[87] Quoting his friend Edwin Arlington Robinson, Hagedorn declares Peterborough to be "beyond a doubt the worst loafing place in the world." Hagedorn elaborates: "The impulsion to work is in the air. It is easier to work than to resist its persuasive influence. What the MacDowell Association has, in fact, established for the workers in the seven arts is a practical workshop where each can 'do his job' to the best of his ability, free from distractions and worry."

Hagedorn defends the colony as both a "workshop" of industrious artists and as a "wonderland" of natural beauty where "the mind is, for once, set free to meditate, to dream, to arrange and coordinate experience." He reprints Robinson's poem "Monadnock through the Trees," as a testament to the efficacy of the colony's combination of nature and routine. Hagedorn depicts Mrs. MacDowell not as a visionary, but rather a practical woman who managed to "translat[e] an artist's passionate hope [her husband's] into dollars and acres and

[86] Hermann Hagedorn, "The Peterborough Colony: 'A Workshop, with a Wonderland Thrown In,' for Creative Workers in the Seven Arts," *Outlook*, Dec. 28, 1921. Google Books. Retrieved 2013-05-13.

[87] Ibid., 688.

buildings and by-laws and boards of directors." The article ends with the claim that "Peterborough constitutes a new idea in altruism," and, anticipating Pound's claim about the Guggenheim, compares Mrs. MacDowell's colony with the Nobel Prize for supporting "the vanguard of civilization" rather than the "stunted members of the race." Combining Protestant work ethic, romantic nature worship, Victorian idealism, and social Darwinism, the article is a rhetorically varied defense of the colony as a practical, hard-working, meritocratic enterprise.[88] Hagedorn sought to prove to the public that Colonists were "creative workers" and not bohemian loafers.

Members of the MacDowell Colony community articulated different pieces of the Peterborough Idea at different times. While Hagedorn and Robinson both depict the colony as what T.J. Jackson Lears has called, in reference to late-nineteenth-century communal experiments, an "island[ ] of wholeness in a fragmented capitalist society," they appealed to the Protestant work ethic to defend the legitimacy of the artists who lived there.[89] Nor was Robinson particularly comfortable accepting patronage. Cowley notes that "the success of *Tristram* in 1927 earned [Robinson] a small fortune and enabled him to pay his old debts with New England scrupulosity."[90] Though Robinson's poems clearly articulate the value of contemplation for the poet, it would be left to Wilder to synthesize the monastic ideal with a broader understanding of the gift economy as a model for social life.

This is not to say that Robinson's poetry lacks an understanding of collective life beyond

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[88] The final paragraph reads: "Art is the expression of the nation's highest thought. The men and women who give their lives to it constitute the vanguard of civilization. They are the true physicians, healing with beauty the perplexity and pain of men; they are the torch-bearers, fitfully illuminating the darkness that is tomorrow; they are the trail-blazers, winning new worlds; they are the interpreters of the pent-up idealism of the inarticulate millions. Through them humanity speaks and moves and achieves. To give them the opportunity to express the vision that is in them is to strike a blow at all that is base and materialistic in the national life." Ibid.

[89] Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 64.

[90] Cowley, "Edwin Arlington Robinson," 29.

the colony. “Monadnock through the Trees,” a sonnet about the mountain visible from the Veltin Studio, is more than a nature poem, though Hagedorn probably had this aspect in mind when he reprinted it in *The Outlook,* as well as the technical control of the sonnet as an apt example of the MacDowell artist “arranging and coordinating experience.” Like “Hillcrest,” it is a poem that meditates on nature as a corrective to human hubris; but its strategy is quite different. “Monadnock” sets the geologic time of the mountain against the relatively short history of human civilization:

> Before there was in Egypt any sound
> Of those who reared a more prodigious means
> For the self-heavy sleep of kings and queens
> Than hitherto had mocked the most renowned,—
> Unvisioned here and waiting to be found,
> Alone, amid remote and older scenes,
> You loomed above ancestral evergreens
> Before there were the first of us around.
>
> And when the last of us, if we know how,
> See farther from ourselves than we do now,
> Assured with other sight than heretofore
> That we have done our mortal best and worst,—
> Your calm will be the same as when the first
> Assyrians went howling south to war.[91]

The last line of the octave features a jarring shift in diction from the elevated language—“prodigious means,” “envisioned here,” “ancestral evergreens”—of the previous lines. “Before there were the first of us around” sounds oddly colloquial, marking the distance between “them” (Egyptian royalty) and the “us,” presumably Americans, or New Hampshire mountain-gazers, or perhaps more locally, the mountain-gazing and wisdom-seeking Colonists. The scale invoked by the tiny sonnet is vertiginous, referring to the cradle of civilization only to contemplate the end of civilization as such, against the backdrop of the mountain’s indifferent calm. Yet despite its geologic timeframe, the sestet manages to hold fast to a grain of progressive optimism: there is hope that “we,” having gained a measure of enlightenment from the “self-heavy sleep” and

[91] Robinson, *Collected Poems,* 580.

"howling," war-like collectivity of the past, might "see farther from ourselves than we do now" in some distant future.

Robinson's sonnet compresses three characteristically Peterborovian gestures that Wilder will pick up on and refine in both *The Woman of Andros* (1930) and *Our Town* (1938), his most "communitarian" works of this period. The first move is the vertiginous leap into deep time and planetary perspective. Already visible in "Hillcrest," the move into timelessness is connected to the colony's remoteness from the metropolitan "roar" of commerce, politics, and extremely bad news (this is, after all, a chapter about interwar literature). The second characteristic gesture is the performative, if slippery, naming of a collective "we," one that seems larger than the insular colony, and perhaps larger than the nation. The third is the mood of tentative optimism, a hope sustained, against much evidence to the contrary, that humanity is getting wiser, more just, and more loving. When asked in a 1938 interview about the darkness of his contemporary world, Wilder replied with a statement about the essentially affirmative nature of art: "In the slow education of the human race to living side by side with one another in understanding and peace there are two forces. The force of those that are endowed for a practical, immediate activity in the correction of injustices. And the force of those who feel the only thing they can do is to compose as best they can works which, through the attempt to present illustrations of harmony and of law, are affirmations about mankind and his ends."[92] Biographers have attributed Wilder's optimism to temperament or personal philosophy, but this optimism was sustained by Wilder's participation in an institution that convinced the public to care for artists.

Wilder's third novel, *The Woman of Andros*, which he worked on at the MacDowell Colony in the summer of 1929, is set in a historical lull between the great civilizations of the past

[92] *Conversations with Thornton Wilder*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 25.

(Greece, Egypt) and the birth of Christ. Its opening vantage point is planetary.

> The Earth sighed as it turned in its course; the shadow of night crept gradually along the Mediterranean, and Asia was left in darkness. The great cliff that was one day to be called Gibraltar held for a long time a gleam of red and orange, while across from it the mountains of Atlas showed deep blue pockets in their shining sides […] Triumph had passed from Greece and wisdom from Egypt, but with the coming on of night they seemed to regain their lost honors, and the land that was soon to be called Holy prepared in the dark its wonderful burden. (*BON* 195)

The narrator then zooms in on sleeping Brynos, "the happiest, and one of the least famous of the islands" in Greece. What unfolds is a domestic melodrama: a father, Simo, has promised his son, Pamphilus, in marriage to the daughter of his friend, a fellow prominent citizen; Pamphilus falls for an outsider and gets her pregnant; his father finally accepts the formerly unacceptable match, but the girl and baby die from nervous strain. The opening frame primes the reader to look for mythic or metaphysical significance in the mundane details of a family squabble.

The conflict over Pamphilus's marriage hinges on the question of whether life is about endless replication through the family line or whether there is something greater to strive for and understand. We learn early on that Pamphilus has "something of the priest" in him (200). Near the end of his ordeal, after a day of fasting and silence, Pamphilus looks down over the island in the moonlight from its "highest point" and has a vision that connects the action of the novel with the narrator's omniscient perspective:

> It seemed to him that the whole world did not consist of rocks and trees and water nor were human beings garments and flesh, but all burned, like the hillside of olive trees, with the perpetual flames of love,—a sad love that was half hope, often rebuked and waiting to be reassured of its truth. But why then a love so defeated, as though it were waiting for a voice to come from the skies, declaring that therein lay the secret of the world. The moonlight is intermittent and veiled, and it was under such a light that they lived; but his heart suddenly declared to him that a sun would rise and before that sun the timidity and the hesitation would disappear. (243)

The novel sets up parallels among visionary characters like Pamphilus, Chrysis (the Andrian woman of the title), and the priest of the temple of Aesculapius and Apollo, all of whom display habits or intuitions associated (so we assume from the novel's Christological frame) with the advent of Christianity. Leagued against these characters are more materialistic, no-nonsense

individuals like Simo's wife Sostrata and his friend Chremes, defenders of traditional family structures and the sanctity of "the Greek HOME."

Despite the fact that the novel is set in an Adriatic island well before the common era, it plays out conflicts between invading cosmopolitanism and proud, beleaguered provincialism that suggest obvious parallels with American cultural politics, and more specifically, with the politics of the writers' colony. Pamphilus' planned marriage is threatened because he attends evening banquet-salons at the home of Chrysis, a *hetaira* or educated courtesan. The Andrian woman is objectionable because she has brought the cosmopolitan "air of Alexandria" with her, and the aggrieved Chremes, a good cultural pluralist, launches into a defense of his island's particularity: "As for me, Alexandria is Alexandria and Brynos is Brynos. A few more imported notions and our island will be spoiled forever. It will become a mass of poor undigested imitations. All the girls will want to read and write and declaim. What becomes of the home life, Simo, if women can read and write?" (198).[93] The stakes of the threat rise when Pamphilus falls in love with Chrysis's younger sister Gycerium: they make love on a hillside, and Glycerium is very quickly pregnant. When Chrisis, her guardian and protector, dies, Pamphilus is faced with the choice of disrupting his respectable family by marrying Glycerium—an orphan and non-citizen, whose social status, Chrysis explains, is little above that of a slave—or going against his conscience.

The novel figures the opposition between family life and its disreputable Other in terms of the respective spaces they occupy. Pamphilus's mother is enraged at the prospect of his marriage to Glycerium, and her inner monologue unfurls an image of the life that she thinks is threatened by this outsider:

> A Greek HOME, she knew, was the only breakwater against the tide of oriental manners, of financial

[93] Chremes' professed misogyny is treated ironically in the novel; Simo muses to himself that Chremes' wife not only rules her husband, but "tried to rule the whole island, using her harassed husband as her legislative and punitive arm" (198).

> fluctuation, and of political chaos. The highest point towards which any existence could aspire was to be a member of an island family, living and dying on one farm, respected, cautious, and secretly wealthy; of a family stretching into the past as far as the mossy funerary urns could record, and into the future as far as the imagination could reach, that is to one's grandchildren. Society was similarity. (240-241)

Against this static, self-replicating image of family life, we have the model of Chrysis's home, which is both a salon of epicurean enjoyment and a refuge for "stray human beings" (207); her home is a "colony" of the destitute, crippled, and insane (219). Like Pamphilus, Chrysis is a soul-searching figure, and both her literary banquets (the novel minimizes the fact that her "profession" is technically that of prostitute) and her heterogeneous home are construed as ways of satisfying "a wild tenderness for this or that passerby, brief and humiliating approaches to love" (206). This porous and general—perhaps even "queer"—love for humanity, and especially for those whom society deems unproductive or pariah, is in the novel's cosmology a Christian one. As Chrysis thinks in a visionary moment, "This is something new in the world, this concern for the unfit and the broken. […] Pamphilus, you are another herald from the future. Someday men will be like you" (219).

In case we are tempted to overlook the connection between Wilder's summer writers' retreat and Chrysis's salon of cultural sociability and extra-familial charity, Wilder refers to the latter as a "colony" a second time (240). And it is not the only "colony" on the island—the other is the temple where the priest of Aesculapius and Apollo heals the sick and possessed (236). Simo and Sostrata, who "had passed their lives without ailments," regard both sickness and poverty as "mere bad citizenship," but the priest cures their daughter's earache more, it is implied, with acceptance and understanding than with medicine or magic. Simo's encounter with the priest leads him to conclude that "people like that," and like Pamphilus and Chrysis, "have some secret about living" (237); the revelation softens his attitude toward Pamphilus's union with Glycerium, leading him to accept the ill-fated girl into his home. Thus the rigidly structured

Greek Home becomes, for a few days, a species of "colony," a community that accepts outcasts for the sake of proto-Christian charity.

The most "Robinsonian" move of *The Woman of Andros* is the way it includes the reader in its vision of reconfigured community. Like Simo and Sostrata, the reader is pressed into sympathy with a version of Christian charity that extends to those whose lives fail to contribute directly to the Home—here construed as the basic unit of both economic productivity and citizenship.[94] Though he admitted to creating works with "religious" designs, Wilder was conscious of the need to avoid "repellent didacticism."[95] As in "Monadnock through the Trees," Wilder displaces his parable in time and space. The resulting historical irony grants the reader a degree of omniscience: while the characters fumble after spiritual answers, the readers, citizens of an enlightened nation, would ideally recognize their own values in Pamphilus's hopes and Chrysis's maxims.[96] Wilder appropriated the move into deep time and a planetary perspective for the purpose of meditating on collective hopes and values, but translated Robinson's abstraction into a more concrete parable about the kind of charity, and the model of community, the "colony" inspires.

Communities of Scale

Wilder completed work on *The Woman of Andros* in October of 1929, mere weeks before Black

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[94] As Chrysis explains to the distraught and pregnant Glycerium, "We are not Greek citizens. We are not people with homes. We are considered strange, only a little above the slaves. All those others live in homes and everyone knows their fathers and their mothers; they marry one another. They think we would never fit into their lives" (225).

[95] Thornton Wilder, "Forward to *The Angel that Troubled the Waters and Other Plays*" (1928) in *Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, ed. D. J. McClatchy (New York: Library of America, 2007), 654 (hereafter cited in text as *CPWT*).

[96] This approach appears more explicitly in *The Bridge*: "At midnight when she had finished adding up the accounts of the House she would fall into insane vision of an age when women could be organized to protect women, women traveling, women as servants, women when they are old or ill, the women she had discovered in the mines of Potosí, or in the workrooms of the cloth-merchants, the girls she had collected out of doorways on rainy nights. […] Looking back from our century we can see the whole folly of her hope" (*BON* 129).

Tuesday, the epoch-ending Wall Street crash. Beginning in 1930, Wilder's work was attacked as not merely whimsical or irrelevant, but actually pernicious. *New Masses* founding editor Michael Gold declared Wilder's art an opiate for the American bourgeoisie, "help[ing] the parvenu class forget its lowly origins in American industrialism. It yields them a short cut to the aristocratic emotions. It disguises the barbaric sources of their income, the billions wrung from American workers and foreign peasants and coolies. It lets them feel spiritually worthy of that income."[97] Edmund Wilson, responding to Gold's essay, was more moderate in tone, but nevertheless concurred that Wilder's early novels, in which "the pathos and the beauty [are] derived from exotic lands of the imagination," are "a sedative for sick Americans."[98] Both the malady and its artistic cure are, in Wilson's terms, the result of "a race of people disposed to idealism, but deprived of their original ideals and now making themselves neurotic in the attempt to introduce idealism into the activities—advertising, salesmanship, manufacturing—of a precarious economic system the condition for whose success is that they must swindle their neighbors and each other." The tone of American intellectual life changed dramatically during the Great Depression, and projects of high cultural elevation—like Wilder's and like the MacDowell Colony's more generally—seemed much less tenable.

Perhaps in response to the controversy in *The New Republic* (though more likely due to the fact that he spent the early 1930s lecturing across the country, thus experiencing Depression-era America first hand), Wilder's work of the 1930s turned away from aristocrats and ancients, focusing instead on homelier American characters and scenes.[99] But Wilder's continued

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[97] Gold, "Wilder," 267.

[98] [Edmund Wilson] "The Economic Interpretation of Wilder," *New Republic*, November 26, 1930, 32.

[99] Wilson praised Wilder's 1934 novel *Heaven's My Destination*, a picaresque account of the traveling textbook salesman and bumbling saint George Brush, for its comic portrait of "an American variety of religious experience," though he still faulted Wilder for not clarifying his hero's political beliefs. Edmund Wilson, "Wilder in the Middle

popularity among an international postwar middle class attracted criticism of a more sophisticated and lastingly damaging type. In his now classic 1960 essay "Masscult and Midcult," Dwight Macdonald combined Frankfurt School critical theory and devastating irony to effect Wilder's virtual banishment from the high-cultural and academic canon, using *Our Town* as an object lesson on the middlebrow. For Macdonald, Wilder, like his friends Ernest Hemingway, Stephen Vincent Benét, and Archibald MacLeish, was no longer a member of the modernist avant-garde, but rather a purveyor of *Kitsch* masquerading as art—albeit the "cleverest" member of that fallen generation. *Our Town* serves as the centerpiece of the essay's taxonomy of "Midcult," exemplary for combining "quaintness, earthiness, humor, pathos and sublimity (all mild)" with advanced formal devices: a bare, prop-less, curtain-less stage and fourth-wall-breaking Stage Manager.[100] Whereas Brecht used similar techniques to "alienate" his viewers from the theatrical illusion, Wilder's play is as "hypnotic" as standard Broadway fare: it borrows the techniques of the avant-garde without their subversive intention. For Macdonald, Wilder was to Midcult what Norman Rockwell was to Masscult, making, in *Our Town*, "the final statement of the midbrows' nostalgia for small-town life."

Macdonald saw Wilder as pandering to middlebrow "nostalgia" and passing off modernistic effects as signs of sophistication, comparable to "Bauhaus modernism" appropriated for the design of "vacuum cleaners [and] pop-up toasters."[101] But Macdonald's criticism of *Our Town* merits a second look in the context of the type of creative community Wilder represented.

West," *New Republic*, January 16, 1935, 282-3.

[100] Dwight Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult: Essays Against the American Grain*, ed. John Summers (New York: NYRB Classics, 2011), 41. Louis Menand points out that Macdonald's attacks on the middlebrow largely began in 1952, when he was writing for—and paid well by—*The New Yorker*. These essays delighted the magazine's editors, since they "inoculated *The New Yorker* against accusations of being middlebrow." Louis Menand, "Browbeaten" *New Yorker*, September 5, 2011, 77.

[101] Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult*, 53.

In fact, "Masscult and Midcult"—which bewails the lack of a viable "cultural community" for new and authentic art—can be read as a critical and despairing version of Wilder's more positive and optimistic project in *Our Town*: the formation, through repeated performance, of an audience for the arts.[102] The full extent of Wilder's communitarian project becomes visible only in relation to the play's genesis in Peterborough and connection to the outreach techniques of the MacDowell Colony.

As explored previously in this chapter, the MacDowell Colony's lack of financial security complicated its model of monastic separation for the artist, forcing Marian MacDowell to seek support from contributors across the country, as well as locally. A rapprochement between "creative workers" and "the public" (or at least a broad spectrum of art enthusiasts) was fundamental to its survival as a community. For a person of Wilder's combination of deep learning and democratic temperament, the Colony offered an appealing balance between contemplative withdrawal and active social engagement—a balance that is then reflected in his work as an ideal, if not an easily achievable one.[103] *The Woman of Andros* attempts to solve the problem of the marginality of the sage—whether the sensitive young man, the woman of letters, or the priest—through the symbolic terms of comedy: the union of Pamphilus and Glycerium incorporates the latter into the "Greek HOME." The limitations of this model are evident from the novel's conclusion: Glyerium and her child die, and the fulfillment of the novel's vision must

[102] For Macdonald, the decay of high culture is a problem of audience: to make great art, artists need a community of consumers with common standards, like the modernist coterie in interwar Europe, or the aristocratic societies of previous eras, "which both encouraged creativity by (informed) enthusiasm and disciplined it by (informed) criticism." Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult*, 53. Given Macdonald's leading role in intellectual journals like *Politics* and *Partisan Review,* it is not surprising that his solution to the problem of cultural community is to create new avenues of distribution—magazines, television channels, movie studios—that target selective audiences of well-informed cultural consumers, without consulting the taste of the mass public.

[103] Wilder's most explicit statement of democratic optimism and anti-elitism (he deemed the belief of T.S. Eliot and others that "only elites can produce anything excellent" "the feudal lie") comes in "Culture in a Democracy," an address given in German in 1957 upon reception of the Peace Prize of the Association of German Publishers and Booksellers. Thornton Wilder, *American Characteristics and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 70.

wait for a messianic future. *Our Town* engages the theme of *The Woman of Andros*—human blindness to the deeper, spiritual meaning of everyday life—but does so through performance rather than parable. Whether through the direct address of the Stage Manager, the ritualistic scenes (a wedding in Act II, a funeral in Act III), or the much-deprecated "folksiness" of the idiom, *Our Town* attempts to engage and implicate its audience. Its aesthetic encourages *participation* rather than Brechtian "alienation."[104]

Macdonald joked that *Our Town* "is practically actor-proof, which is why it is so often given by local dramatic societies."[105] Wilder himself played the Stage Manager role numerous times, both in its initial Broadway run and in regional productions.[106] The play's enormous popularity with high school and community theaters, if not highbrow critics, probably has something to do with the "timelessness" of its themes.[107] If its content is "banal," it also translates well to audiences who have little knowledge or interest in Grover's Corners, the fictional New Hampshire town where the play it set. (The play's popularity in Europe, and especially postwar Germany, is often cited as evidence of this appealing "universality.") But the critical emphasis on the play's "universality" has tended to distract from its very local origins in Peterborough. Wilder worked on *Our Town* at the MacDowell Colony in June of 1937, but the play was conceived much earlier, reportedly on his many walks through the New Hampshire mountains during previous summer residencies. Wilder wrote that "it sprang from a deep

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[104] In its emphasis on institutional incorporation rather than avant-garde alienation, *Our Town* shows affinities with what Lisi Schoenbach terms "pragmatic modernism." See Lisi Schoenbach, "'Peaceful and Exciting': Habit, Shock, and Gertrude Stein's Pragmatic Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity* 11, no. 2 (2004): 239-59 and *Pragmatic Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[105] Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult*, 41.

[106] Niven, *Thornton Wilder*, 465, 477.

[107] Ho, "Useful Fictions," 123.

admiration for those little white towns in the hills."[108] Though the play moves freely back and forth in time, the main action takes place between 1899 and 1913, roughly around the time of the founding of the MacDowell Colony; an early manuscript has Act I set in 1907, the year the Colony opened.[109] But the connection with the MacDowell Colony goes beyond setting and dates: *Our Town* is an updated version of a theatrical event staged by Marian MacDowell in 1910 to publicize the Colony. The connection to the Peterborough Pageant shows that Wilder's best-known work emerged out of, and in some sense continued, the MacDowell Colony's outreach campaigns.

In early 1910, Marian MacDowell approached George Pierce Baker, Professor of Dramatic Literature at Harvard, about the idea of producing a pageant based on Peterborough's history. She suggested he might take advantage of a local choir that had been established in her husband's memory, and perhaps use some of MacDowell's music. (Baker is famous for being the pioneer of creative writing instruction in U.S. universities—Eugene O'Neill and Thomas Wolfe took his "English 47" workshop.) Baker embraced the challenge wholeheartedly as an opportunity to test out some of his ideas about "Civic Theatre." He drafted two former English 47 students to orchestrate the MacDowell pieces and write lyrics, and recruited nearly two hundred residents of Peterborough to take part in the pageant. Baker recalled the dedication of the town's citizens, some of whom "came for an afternoon rehearsal, drove home four miles, milked and returned for an evening rehearsal."[110] The pageant was also a national event, drawing as many as 1,500 people per day, not only from New Hampshire and Boston, but also from across the country and as far as Europe.

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[108] Thornton Wilder, "A Preface for *Our Town,*" in *CPWT*, 659.

[109] TWP.78.

[110] Acocella, *A Place for the Arts*, 70.

The pageant left the Colony with a $2,000 deficit, and Mrs. MacDowell was at some pains in later years to justify “the elaborate and expensive” project. Looking back from 1954, she explained that in the early days, with only one permanent studio and a few temporary buildings, “There wasn't anything to go on to tell the world, but this vague scheme which to the artist sounded most desirable but to everyone else, perfectly impossible.”[111] As a result of the “enthusiasm” generated by the pageant, a Mrs. Prince gave $25,000 for the transformation of an old barn into “Colony Hall,” a sleeping and recreational facility, and Mrs. Savidge gave “our beautiful Library,” subsequently named after the donor. The Pageant was one of Mrs. MacDowell’s many successful gambles: it endeared the Colony to local Peterborough residents, generated immediate donations, and became a central part of the colony mythology. (Mrs. MacDowell also reproduced the pageant in 1919, without Baker’s help.) Though Wilder never commented on the pageant (at least in existing letters), it is impossible to believe that he wasn’t familiar with it. The pageant was an integral part of the Colony’s founding lore, and Mrs. MacDowell reportedly reminisced about it at the Colony’s weekly Sunday teas. Moreover, Wilder admired Baker, declaring as early as high school his intention to pursue post-graduate work in dramatic composition with Baker at Harvard. (Wilder did not study with Baker, but his sister Isabella did.[112]) Interested in theatrical innovation, Wilder would have surely been told about the Pageant (even if he hadn’t asked.)

For its time, the Peterborough Pageant was indeed innovative. Like many historical pageants of the era, it dramatized a series of scenes from local history, suggesting a narrative of progress. These included an Indian wedding, the harsh conditions of Northern Ireland before

[111] Marian MacDowell, “An explanation of why I gave the elaborate and expensive pageant in 1910, and as a result of it came to the association Colony Hall, the Library, etc.,” 2 August 1954, MCR.77.

[112] Niven, *Thornton Wilder*, 239.

emigration, the hardships of settlement (with another wedding), the burial of an Indian chieftain (in which "the Indians foresee the passing of their race"), mustering troops for the Revolution, the rise of the local weaving industry, troops returning from the Civil War, and "the coming of new races to Peterborough."[113] Despite the conventionality of these scenes, Baker insisted that his aim was "something new in the history of pageantry," a break with the realist representational conventions that dominated drama of the time. In the program note, Baker explains, "the spirit of MacDowell dominated the work. Poetic, dreamy, suggestive, it forbade pure realism in most of the pageant; suggestion, as in the music, must replace that."[114]

The innovation of the Pageant was formal rather than thematic. In contrast to elaborately staged city pageants of the time, the Peterborough Pageant had no scenery. The setting was an outdoor amphitheater on Colony grounds. (This was really more of a clearing, with wooden benches fronting a backdrop of tall pine trees, and Mount Monadnock looming in the distance.) But most importantly, the pageant had a unifying artistic conceit. The opening invocation was set to a MacDowell composition entitled "From a Log Cabin." An actress representing the muse of history called forth the other muses and figures representing the composer's "dreams." It was the composer's imagination, working from his cabin, that created the aestheticized journey through time and space that the audience witnessed. Recalling Hagedorn's 1921 article, the artist seeks isolation in order "to meditate, to dream, to arrange and coordinate experience"—and this arrangement of experience turns out to have a public function, organizing Peterborough's history into a neat progressive narrative. In other words, the pageant presented an implicit argument about the civic function of the artist—and by extension, the Colony.

While for Marian MacDowell, the Pageant became an effective fundraising tool, Baker

[113] Edward MacDowell Memorial Association, "The Peterborough Pageant" (Peterborough, 1910).

[114] George Pierce Baker, "The Peterborough Pageant As the Producer Saw It," *New Boston*, October 1910, 256.

proclaimed it a model for future dramatic work. In 1910, Baker lectured across New England about his vision of a "Civic Theatre." He declared that pageants could be a venue for both civic and artistic education, stimulating "local pride in past achievement, strengthen[ing] community spirit, and reveal[ing] unexpected artistic resources." Elsewhere, Baker claimed that "Peterborough provided an admirable chance to test [his] theories," demonstrating that "pageantry need not be confined to great centers, need not necessitate vast expense, but is perfectly possible for small communities." With its minimal staging and volunteer spirit, the pageant suggested that other towns, given will and enthusiasm, might stage a similar event. (This was of course more true in theory than practice—the pageant put the Association into debt, and many towns don't have a bevy of artists and Harvard professors standing by to produce local theatricals.) But the more important point here is that the formal properties of the pageant were exciting to the most sophisticated participants, and one could see how, with a few alterations, similar productions might be reproduced in towns across America, or the indeed across the world.

Wilder's play covers much of the same ground as the 1910 pageant: traversing the bare, curtain-less stage, the Stage Manager offers the audience a "tour" of Grover's Corners, its Main Street with car-free roads, its numerous churches, and its topography of Indian names. The graveyard scene in Act III offers the occasion for a meditation on town history, from the first settlers—"Strong-minded people that come a long way to be independent"—to Civil War veterans: "had a notion that the Union ought to be kept together, though they'd never seen more than fifty miles of it themselves" (*CPWT* 196).[115] And like the Peterborough Pageant, the play is obsessed with the framing vision of the artist, which allows for the telescopic leap from

[115] The text of *Our Town* in the Library of America edition is taken from Wilder's revised 1957 version.

particular to universal.

The action of the play follows the Gibbs and Webb families through daily life (Act I), love and marriage (Act II), and death (Act III). But it is the Stage Manager who keeps the play from dissolving into a litany of trivial particulars, through his constant contextualizing or distancing gestures. These include the geographic ("just across the Massachusetts line: latitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; longitude 70 degrees 37 minutes"); the demographic ("eighty-six per cent Republicans; six per cent Democrats; four per cent Socialists; rest, indifferent"); and the geological (149, 160). This last mode of contextualization threatens to render meaningless the picture of everyday life represented in the play: a pedantic local professor reports that the town "lies on the old Pleistocene granite of the Appalachian range…A shelf of Devonian basalt crosses it with vestiges of Mesozoic shale, and some sandstone outcroppings; but that's all more recent: two hundred, three hundred million years old" (159). What are love and marriage in a hundred-million-year time scale? As in *The Woman of Andros,* where the shift into a planetary perspective worked to place the people of Brynos in a Christian teleology ending with the reader, *Our Town* recuperates the abstraction for humanistic ends.

At the end of Act II, Rebecca Gibbs recounts with amazement the story of a letter her friend received from her minister, addressed to "Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America […] Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God" (173). As critics have noted, Wilder borrowed this telescopic self-orienting conceit from James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man* (1916). Young Stephen contemplates a similar series ("Stephen Dedalus/Class of Elements/Clongowes Wood College/Sallins/County Kildare/Ireland/Europe/The World/The Universe") scrawled in his

geography book when he is supposed to be learning “the names of places in America.”[116] But whereas Stephen only feels “tired” by the attempt to imagine what is bigger than the universe, the Grover’s Corners children still live in a world reassuringly confident about cosmic geography. If an audience member understands the reference to the great modernist *Künstlerroman*, then likely it will only reinforce the fact that Wilder’s play is operating in a different moral and aesthetic universe from that of Joyce. However, Wilder’s consoling optimism obscures the deeper conviction that he shares with Joyce and other modernists: the redemptive power of the artist to arrange and compose the fragments of experience into meaningful wholes. The Stage Manager is omniscient and omnipotent, moving audience and characters freely in time, foretelling death and even defeating it. Tracing the similarities to Baker’s Peterborough pageant helps us recognize that *Our Town*’s dominant theme is neither the pathos of everyday life nor nostalgia for a more innocent era, but rather the creative power of the artist to present living scenes to tell a story.

As Macdonald is quick to point out, *Our Town* preempts its critics from the political left and the cultural elite by caricaturing and dismissing them: a “Belligerent Man at the Back of the Auditorium” asks Editor Webb, local newspaperman, if anyone in the town is “aware of social injustice and industrial inequality?” while a “Lady in a Box” asks “is there any culture or love of beauty in Grover’s Corners?” (*CPWT* 161). Editor Webb’s responses to both are equally banal, and the marginal position of the questioners in the auditorium suggests that they are peripheral to

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[116] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 13. Wilder repeatedly borrowed from Joyce during his career—the 1942 play *The Skin of our Teeth* is substantially a re-writing of *Finnegans Wake*. Wilder consistently adapts Joyce to produce works that are more affirmative and more accessible than the original. Though some accused Wilder of plagiarism in the case of *The Skin of Our Teeth*, Macdonald offered a more devastating assessment: “I think one should rather admire the author’s ability to transmute into Midcult such an impenetrably avant-garde work. There seems to be no limit to this kind of alchemy in reverse, given a certain amount of brass.” Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult*, 50.

the communal ritual that is being performed.[117] Macdonald reads *Our Town* as a celebration of a Norman Rockwell version of small town life, uncritical of the overwhelming whiteness and provincialism of Grover's Corners. In an interview, Wilder objected to this reading: "What is there so rosy-hued […] about the maladjusted choir-master or the girl's belated realization that life was nothing but a series of trivialities?"[118] The maladjusted choir master is Simon Stimson, an alcoholic whose "troubles" are mentioned but never explained, and who, we learn in Act III, commits suicide. Dr. Gibbs reflects that "some people ain't made for small town life" (170). A recent scholar reads Stimpson as the archetypal "Small Town Closet Queen," a covert reference to homosexuality, which could not be presented on stage.[119] Whether we read Stimson as a closeted queer person or, as one critic did, as the cliché of the "romantic artist, dissatisfied and critical of ordinary living,"[120] Stimson's suicide makes it clear that not everyone is at home in a town with contempt for "culture and love of beauty," which takes for granted, as the Stage Manage says, that "most everybody in the world climbs into their graves married" (174).

The greatest difference between Grover's Corners and Peterborough is that the latter possessed an intimate and reciprocal relationship with an art colony, a point of contact with a cosmopolitan world of arts and letters. In Act III, two men from the town are puzzled by the

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[117] To the man: "I guess we're all hunting like everybody else for a way the diligent and sensible can rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome can sink to the bottom. But it ain't easy to find. Meanwhile, we do all we can to help those that can't help themselves and those that can we leave alone." To the lady: "No, ma'am, there isn't much culture; but maybe this is the place to tell you that we've got a lot of pleasures of a kind here: we like the sun comin' up over the mountain in the morning, and we all notice a good deal about the birds. We pay a lot of attention to them. And we watch the change of the seasons; yes, everybody knows about them. But those other things--you're right, ma'am,--there ain't much.--*Robinson Crusoe* and the Bible; and Handel's "Largo," we all know that; and Whistler's "Mother"--those are just about as far as we go." *CPWT*, 161-162.

[118] *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1938, quoted in Kenneth Elliott, "The Outsider: Contextualizing Simon Stimson in *Our Town*," in *Thornton Wilder: New Perspectives*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer and Lincoln Konkle (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 123.

[119] Elliott, "The Outsider," 124.

[120] Donald Haberman, *"Our Town": An American Play* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 32, quoted in Elliott, "The Outsider," 123.

epitaph on Simon Stimson's grave, which they say are "just some notes of music"—but we also learn that "It was wrote up in the Boston papers at the time" (199). The MacDowell Colony was a haven for at least some forms of heterogeneity, welcoming gay composers like Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, many women writers, and life-long bachelors like Robinson and Wilder.[121] If Grover's Corners is a "dark" play rather than a rosy-hued one, then perhaps we can read it as a hymn to the fate of a New England town without an art colony.

Despite this seeming hostility to "culture," *Our Town* recuperates the place of the artist in Act III, the emotional climax of the play. When Emily Webb appears in the town cemetery, we learn that she has died giving birth to her second child. In a scene that echoes *The Woman of Andros*,[122] Emily asks to re-live a day from her life, but quickly finds the experience too painful, leading to the play's emotional climax:

> Good-by, Good-by, world. Good-by, Grover's Corners…Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking…and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths…and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you. (*She looks toward the stage manager and asks abruptly, through her tears:*) Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?
> STAGE MANAGER: No. (*Pause.*) The saints and poets, maybe—they do some. (207)

Like Wilder's other works, and like the MacDowell Colony more generally, *Our Town* insists that the artist's function is intellectual and spiritual rather than political or economic, dismissing the members of the audience who are committed to culture solely as an expression of politics ("industrial inequality") or cultural capital (a socially prestigious "love of beauty"). The end of

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[121] Wilder was notoriously silent about his sexuality, though there is evidence he had a six-year sexual relationship with a man, and he is generally included among anthologies of gay and lesbian dramatists. Elliott, "The Outsider," 127. The example of Robinson seemed to give Wilder a model for a monk-like version of artistic bachelorhood. In a 1927 letter he wrote: "I don't marry. In fact all I'm supposed to do is to make books as a cow gives milk and to live as little as a person as possible." TWP.1.

[122] In earlier novel, Pamphilus recalls one of Chrysis's stories about a hero whom Zeus let return to earth for an uneventful day as a participant and onlooker: "Suddenly the hero saw that the living too are dead and that we can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasure; for our hearts are not strong enough to love every moment. And not an hour had gone by before the hero who was both watching life and living it called on Zeus to release him from so terrible a dream. The gods heard him, but before he left he fell upon the ground and kissed the soil of the world that is too dear to be realized." *BON,* 205.

the play is a manual on "how to die": the characters in the graveyard gaze up at the stars in wonder, awed by the "millions of years" it takes for their light to reach the earth (208). Meanwhile George Gibbs, Emily's husband, prostrates himself before her grave in grief. Emily's communion with the heavens shows that she is gradually being "weaned away from earth," until, in the Stage Manager's terms, "the eternal part [comes] out clear" (197). At one point, the Stage Manager turns to the audience to ask a pointed rhetorical question: "what's left when memory's gone, and your identity, Mrs. Smith?" With its actual singing choir and colloquially sermonizing Stage Manager, *Our Town* was a participatory pageant of collective values that could be performed anywhere in the world. By simplifying and abstracting, Wilder created a version of the 1910 Peterborough Pageant that allowed for endlessly repeated performances, in 1938 and beyond. The "middlebrowness" of *Our Town*, with its modernist formal techniques made accessible and mobilized for emotional effect, might also be read as a strategic compromise between high art and a public of potential art patrons.

Macdonald ends "Masscult and Midcult" with long quotations from Søren Kierkegaard and Walt Whitman, calling on two of modernity's most perspicacious spiritual diagnosticians to support his argument about the need of a "community" of cultural elites rather than a cult of the "mass" (what Kierkegaard calls "the public" and Whitman "the popular superficial suffrage").[123] In 1871, Whitman waxed prophetic: "Our fundamental want today in the United States is of a class, and the clear idea of a class, of native authors, literatures, far different, far higher in grade than any yet known, sacerdotal, modern, fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new life […] the priest departs, the divine literatus comes." In 1960, Macdonald replied with arch frustration: "The

[123] Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult*, 68, 71.

divine literatus is behind schedule." Macdonald's turn to the "divine" in what is largely a historical and economic analysis of art consumption is mostly ironic, a juxtaposition that emphasizes the debased nature of the present, in which "Masscult and Midcult have so pervaded the land that Whitman's hope for a democratic culture shaped by a sacerdotal class at once so sublime and so popular that they can swing elections […] now seems absurd."[124] Macdonald savages Wilder's play for its naive folksiness and abuse of avant-garde form, failing to acknowledge that Wilder is, at least in intent, the heir of Whitman, a democratic optimist who saw his literary project as the creation a cultural community. Nor is Wilder's optimism as anachronistic as it appears from Macdonald's perspective: like Macdonald and his comrades at *Partisan Review* and *Politics*, the MacDowell Colony and its supporters were working toward a practical solution to the problem of cultural community, creating a network of art enthusiasts to finance "creative workers" to live and work in a circle of peers. If, in Macdonald's terms, that model failed to balance "enthusiasm" with the "discipline" of common standards, it nonetheless empowered Americans to support the arts as something other than consumers. In a 1938 interview, Wilder characterized "great ages" as those in which "the work of art by tacit assumption is, with the religious life, one of the few absolute human values."[125] This was the standard the MacDowell Colony sought to uphold.

[124] Ibid., 68.

[125] Wilder, *Conversations*, 23.

Chapter Four

New Narratives of Community

Katherine Anne Porter, Carson McCullers, and Yaddo

Yaddo has always provoked colorful and contradictory language from its guests. A 1938 article in *Time* dubbed the art colony a "swanky monastery," while composer Ned Rorem wrote in 1960, "Yaddo's a luxurious concentration camp where I can neither camp nor concentrate."[1] Robert Lowell compared it variously to a church, a museum, and, in a letter to Ezra Pound, to "a sort of St. Elizabeths without bars—regular hours, communal meals, grounds, big old buildings, etc."[2] Yaddo is a four hundred acre estate in Saratoga Springs, New York. Since opening in 1926, its wooded grounds and neo-gothic manor house ("The Mansion") has hosted thousands of writers, artists, and composers.[3] Combining an antimodern utopian vision with a bureaucratic modern institution, the colony supported and regularized the creative process for a generation of artists and intellectuals that included Malcolm Cowley, James T. Farrell, John Cheever, Langston Hughes, and, the subjects of this chapter, Southern fiction writers Katherine Anne Porter and Carson McCullers.

Previous chapters have explored the conflict between a creative genius and creative community; a contest among three writers about how to represent a remote region and primitive culture; and collaboration among a patron, a poet, and novelist/playwright that kept a colony alive. Yaddo's institutional archive is vast, and versions of each of these stories might be told about the colony. But in this chapter, I focus on a period of institutional crisis. In the early 1940s,

[1] "Books: Yaddo and Substance," *Time*, September 5, 1938, 50; Parker, *Digest*, 268.

[2] Lowell, *Letters*, 112-4.

[3] For a brief overview of Yaddo's history see Micki McGee, *Yaddo: Making American Culture* (New York: The New York Public Library, 2008), 119-35. For a comprehensive history see Ben Alexander, "Yaddo: A Creative History" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2005).

Yaddo was an obscure institution with a tiny guest list, where an intimate group of friends—mostly women—hunkered down through an economic depression and World War. Though nominally run by a Board of Directors and a group of Confidential Advisors who recommended guests, long-time Executive Director Elizabeth Ames wielded enormous power over day-to-day life at the colony. After the war, the secluded colony sought more publicity, even allowing a full-page photo spread in *Life*. In the winter of 1949, the colony became embroiled in a Red Scare when Robert Lowell attempted to have Ames fired for harboring Agnes Smedley, a communist spy. This intensely factional moment at Yaddo, though seemingly a tempest in a literary teapot, points to significant shifts in the U.S. cultural climate during the early years of the Cold War, when overtly "political" art of all kinds became not only dangerous, but aesthetically suspect. Before 1949, Yaddo considered politics to be an integral part of the diversity of its creative community; after 1949, this attitude seemed dangerously naïve. Malcolm Cowley once referred to Yaddo as a "barometer" for cultural change, but "The Lowell Affair" was more than a sign of the times.[4] It was also a symptom of institutional growing pains, as the colony transitioned from an idiosyncratic private endeavor to a bureaucratic postwar institution.

Carson McCullers and Katherine Anne Porter lived at Yaddo for an unusually extended period of time in the 1940s, and though both were devoted to Elizabeth Ames, the rivalry between them was notoriously sharp. Yaddo changed the way both wrote about community in their fiction, so much so that their work of this period is difficult to interpret outside the context of the experiences and affects generated by Yaddo's unique environment. These "affects" included not only social hope inspired by involvement with a utopian community, but also irritation, competitive anxiety and, at least for Porter, disillusionment in the wake of the

[4] Hortense Calisher, et al. *A Century at Yaddo* (Saratoga Springs: Corporation of Yaddo, 2000), 19.

ideological conflicts of 1949. "The Lowell Affair" had the ironic effect of aligning Porter and McCullers on the same side in defense of the colony. Though McCullers' association with Yaddo left her optimistic about the utopian possibilities of creative community, Porter's much longer and more administrative relationship with the colony between 1940 and 1961 (when she finally resigned from the Board of Directors) left her disillusioned with the very idea of artistic collectivity. McCullers and Porter both employed the grammar of what I call the "new narrative of community," but the stories they told gestured in opposite directions. Drawing on letters and administrative documents as well as the fiction, this chapter traces collisions among people, ideas, and forms specific to this Northeastern writers' colony and essential to the artistic development of two "Southern" writers.

Critical explorations of community in fiction by Southern writers (and especially Southern women writers) tend to conceive of community in terms of literary regionalism: fiction that lovingly traces the everyday life—sights, sounds, smells, feelings, and little tragedies—of *traditional* communities, especially the farm and the small town.[5] Katherine Anne Porter's "Old Order" sketches from the 1930s fit this paradigm well: focalized through a young girl named Miranda, they recount plantation stories from mythic days past and the antics of eccentric relatives, overlaid with Miranda's coming of age in a world in which family traditions have been eroded. Regional narratives feature communities of "strong ties" (often reinforced by blood or marriage), in which people have dwelt long in a place and feel attached to the land, and in which social capital circulates via longstanding relationships and rigid social hierarchies.[6]

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[5] For a taxonomy of literary Regionalism's representation of community see Sandra A Zagarell, "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre," *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 498–527.

[6] In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida argues that traditional communities of strong ties and high social capital and are less conducive to creativity and social mobility than urban communities where weak ties predominate.

The Yaddo-era fiction of Katherine Anne Porter and Carson McCullers defies literary regionalism's preoccupation with traditional community. Rather, works like Porter's "The Leaning Tower" (*Southern Review*, 1941) and *Ship of Fools* (1962), or McCullers' "The Ballad of the Sad Café" (*Harper's Bazaar*, 1943) and *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), contemplate the form of community the authors found at Yaddo: constantly shifting, radically diverse in terms of race, nationality, sexual inclinations, political convictions, and artistic preoccupations; and contained within a space that produced distinctly modern forms of sociability. This chapter argues that the neglected context of the writers' colony shaped the texts that Porter and McCullers wrote at Yaddo: narratives of cosmopolitan, creative community. While both writers resorted to similar narrative structures in their Yaddo-era fiction, they came to wildly divergent conclusions about the prospects for community—in terms of mutual understanding, individual flourishing, and material sustenance—offered by modern spaces like the café, the hotel, and the art colony.

Yaddo was compelling to writers for many reasons, not the least of which was economic. Throughout the Great Depression and the rationed war years, it housed creative people rent-free in a luxurious mansion with extensive gardens and wooded grounds, within walking distance of the bars and racetracks of Saratoga Springs. For Southern writers in particular, who often found New York City over-stimulating, Yaddo offered a hybrid between rural peace and cosmopolitan vibrancy. If Yaddo boasted the "ideal conditions for sustained work,"[7] as Elizabeth Ames wrote to potential guests, it also threw into relief the stark absence of those conditions outside of the colony, and especially in the segregated South and Nazi Europe, the two worlds that preoccupied McCullers and Porter during this period. From Yaddo, where "everything is sylvan beauty," as

[7] Elizabeth Ames to Granville Hicks, 19 February 1930, Yaddo Records, Reel 2, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library (hereafter YR).

Porter wrote in June of 1940, pre-war Berlin and Columbus, Georgia looked like a nightmare. Porter and McCullers' narratives of creative community are lucid and historically poignant, in part because they unfold in environments more likely to crush the human spirit than to help it flower. Their fiction is part of a broader intellectual tradition in the first half of the twentieth century committed to offering a "non-partisan" critique of modern social organization.[8]

I. Creative Community and its Discontents

A Swanky Monastery for Creative Workers

Yaddo began as a space for convalescence and spiritual renewal through nature, art, and sociability. Spencer and Katrina Trask purchased their estate in 1881, soon after the loss of their first son, Alanson. Before the real estate deal was closed, their four-year-old daughter Christina suggested that they name the place "Yaddo," a fanciful word that, the child insisted, "meant light."[9] For Spencer, Yaddo was also a refuge from the competitive world of Wall Street, where he led the investment bank Spencer Trask & Company to pursue far-sighted and lucrative investments in Western railroads, the Edison Electric and Illuminating Companies, and *The New York Times*.[10] Despite their secure membership among the Gilded Age elite, the Trasks enjoyed flouting the social wisdom of the leisure-class in their private lives. Saratoga Springs was a resort

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[8] See Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank & Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 288. Blake claims that the utopian theories of interwar cultural critics like Waldo Frank and Lewis Mumford tended to veer toward "transcendentalist withdrawal or barracks socialism." Neither Frank's quasi-therapeutic visions of mystical "wholeness" nor Mumford's technocratic programs of cultural and social planning offered much space for actual politics; that is, the consensual participation of people with a diversity of needs and interests in collective action. One could argue that the advantage of Yaddo, and of the fictional explorations of creative utopian ideas that Porter and McCullers' produced there, is that art colonies and narrative fictions are both in a sense human experiments, venues in which theory can be tested against the data of experience.

[9] Mrs. Trask recalled that Christina had heard the adults talking about a "shadow" descending over the family in the wake of Alanson's death. The child insisted that "Yaddo sounds like shadow but it's not going to be shadow." McGee, *Yaddo*, 119.

[10] Alexander, "Creative History," 48-9.

town for wealthy New Yorkers, but the Trasks had no interest in building a conspicuous mansion on fashionable North Broadway: Yaddo was separated by a four hundred acre park from the town's racetracks, hotels, and social gaze. Katrina proudly recalled how the Trasks' neighbors considered them to have "taken leave of their senses" for building their estate in the woods.[11]

The Trasks' estate condensed a number of late nineteenth-century values that Jackson Lears defines under the concept of "antimodernism."[12] Hearkening back to pre-industrial social and economic arrangements, the couple strove to make Yaddo a self-sufficient country manor, complete with a herd of cows, extensive gardens, and its own ice cutting operation. Katrina boasted that "no landscape architect, no consulting engineer, no clever person with a big diploma, interfered with the working out of our plan."[13] Therapeutic leisure, withdrawal from society, and creative freedom were principles that animated Yaddo from its earliest days as the Trasks' private estate and imaginative playground.

The Trasks' combination of modern business acumen and quasi-bohemian worship of creative freedom proved potent and effective: they managed to maintain their marriage and mental stability in the face of the deaths of all four of their children in the 1880s, multiple financial panics, and an 1891 fire at Yaddo that reduced the original mansion to a heap of smoldering ash. In characteristic style, the Trasks incorporated the fire into Yaddo's elaborate mythology, rebuilding the house on an even grander scale and commissioning Louis Comfort Tiffany to design a huge mosaic for the mantle, a phoenix rising from his ashes with the inscription "Flammis Invecta Per Ignem / Yaddo, Resurgo Ad Pacem" ("Unconquered by flame,

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[11] Trask, *Yaddo*, 14.

[12] Lears, *No Place of Grace*. Alexander points out the parallel in "Creative History," 58-59.

[13] Trask, *Yaddo*, 16.

I Yaddo, am reborn for peace").[14] Though neither Spencer nor Katrina would survive to see the official opening of Yaddo as a colony in 1926, they left a powerful legacy both in the construction of the estate and in print, and their executors carried forward the spirit of decorous hospitality and eclectic experimentation.

The idea for turning Yaddo into an art colony came in 1899. Katrina Trask recalled the initial moment of inspiration in terms that emphasized Yaddo's difference from analogous spaces:

> Yaddo is not to be an institution, a school, a charity. It is to be always a place of inspiration, a delightful, hospitable home where guests may come and find welcome. Here will be a perpetual series of house parties - of literary men, literary women, and other artists. Those who are city weary, who are thirsting for the country and for beauty, who are hemmed in by circumstances and have no opportunity to make for themselves an harmonious environment, shall seek it here. At Yaddo they will find the Sacred Fire, and light there torches at its flame. Look Spencer! They are walking in the woods, wandering in the garden, sitting under the pine trees - men and women - creating, creating, creating![15]

When Katrina Trask died in 1922, her second husband—Spencer's business partner and longtime family friend George Foster Peabody—was on the lookout for someone to carry forward the Trask legacy as hostess for artists and to administer the day-to-day functioning of the colony.[16] He found that person in Elizabeth Ames, a young widow from Minnesota who came to Yaddo to help catalogue the contents of the mansion.[17] The transfer of power was solemnized through a ceremony that recalled the Trask's courtly pageants—Spencer had crowned Katrina "Queen of

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[14] Alexander, "Creative History," 65.

[15] Trask, *Yaddo*, 98.

[16] Peabody had been in love with Katrina since before the couple married, but the Trasks were apparently able to tolerate the ambiguity of the relationship. When Spencer died in a train crash in 1909, Peabody took over the business of establishing the Yaddo Corporation, eventually marrying Katrina a year before her death, probably as much for legal as for sentimental reasons. *The New York Times* touched the strange circumstances lightly: "While the announcement may arouse some public surprise, it will be received by those who know the circumstances, as a happy culmination of a life-long friendship in which romance and chivalry have had a large part." *New York Times*, February 5, 1921, qtd. in Alexander, "Creative History," 86.

[17] Little is known about Ames' life before Yaddo. She arrived there in 1923, joining her sister Marjorie Knappen Wait, who was working at the mansion as Peabody's research assistant. Three years later, Peabody legally adopted the twenty-one-year-old Wait; Yaddo historians speculate that theirs was a romantic relationship. Alexander, "Creative History," 88-9.

Yaddo" in 1882. John Cheever, a guest and supporter of Yaddo for more than five decades, imagined the "high minded" Peabody presenting Mrs. Ames with "The Trask Pearls," "a fat cable of small beads with an enormous diamond saddle-buckle and a pair of diamond tassels," thus sealing Ames' daunting contract: "to channel the income from a million-dollar portfolio into the maintenance of a turn-of-the-century castle for the benefit of artist, writers and composers."[18]

The story of Yaddo's beginnings was alternately tragic and absurd, but Ames recruited guests into sympathy with the founders of the estate that offered them such gracious hospitality. During Katherine Anne Porter's first winter at Yaddo in 1940, she was steeped in the colony's mythology through conversations with Ames. Porter had volunteered to write a sympathetic profile of Yaddo for *Harper's Bazaar*, and Ames offered her a copy of Mrs. Trask's "Chronicles."[19] In a letter to Ames, Porter reflected on the founders' values: "a remarkable blend of practical good sense, generous impulses, natural human vanity in their own beauty and good fortune, extraordinary sense of the dramatic, a feeling for liberal and social-humanitarian ideas" of the nineteenth century.[20] Porter went on to say that she would "go very lightly on the Queen of Yaddo, the pageants and such: they were the frosting on the cake in any case, they have been too much stressed to the loss of the good solid foundation beneath."

Like the Arts and Crafts communes of the late nineteenth century, Yaddo was a quixotic utopia, an attempt to create an "island[ ] of wholeness in a fragmented capitalist society."[21] Katrina Trask was thoughtful about the moral implications of her own wealth:

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[18] Calisher, *Century at Yaddo*, 9.

[19] The article, though sent to *Harper's Bazaar*, would never appear due to confusion over the idea that it duplicated the *Vogue* piece about Porter's house outside Saratoga. Porter to Ames, 15 May 1942, YR Reel 2.

[20] Porter to Ames, 27 January 1941, YR Reel 3.

[21] Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 64.

> What right have I to an income that enables me to live a life of ease and luxury, whilst my fellow-men can wrest by their toil only the merest pittance? It is all wrong. The time will come when the distribution of wealth will be very different. In the meantime, however, no one alone can change the established order: we can only go on working and doing our best to make new laws and to help on a new order: and during the waiting for the coming of these economic changes great homes and great houses will still have their place: and our first individual duty is to make, in that waiting time, at least a new spiritual order.[22]

Mrs. Trask's vision extended to every member of her household, not merely the artistic guests, and her writings describe her attempt to foster an "an esprit de corps." "Yaddo is home and opportunity to all those who live and serve here," she wrote. "Every woman-servant is treated like and expected to be a gentlewoman: and every man-servant is treated like and expected to be a gentleman. . . . The servants are a part of Yaddo; it is their home; their pride is here, their interest and their joy."[23] Mrs. Trask tried to preserve the humanizing function of the Country House, a space that Lewis Mumford characterized as promoting liberal conduct, stimulating conversation, the enjoyment of arts for their own sake, and the preservation of the best in human life.[24] In *The Story of Utopias*, Mumford's first monograph, he nonetheless describes the Country House as a pernicious "social myth" that promoted the values of consumerism and connoisseurship in addition to leisure, thus separating the enjoyment of art from the making of it.[25] Mrs. Trask attempted to ameliorate the parasitic quality of country house life by converting her estate from a space of consumption into a space of production, a workshop for creative people of all stripes.

Hospitality at Yaddo took the form of a mildly regimented routine of daily work and sociability that was taken over almost wholesale from the MacDowell Colony, which George Foster Peabody had visited in the early 1920s. In the early days, guests were invited for at least a

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[22] Trask, *Yaddo,* 93.

[23] Trask, *Yaddo,* 95. It was difficult to sustain the idealism of this vision, especially in the socially conscious 1930s.

[24] Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), 207.

[25] Mumford, *Story of Utopias*, 193.

month, but often much longer, depending on their needs. Ames took pains to inform newcomers about the "traditions" they were expected to observe: breakfast at 8:15, boxed lunches delivered to the doors of the private studios scattered throughout the grounds—no visiting until four without special permission—and formal dinners in the mansion's ornate dining room. In a 1930 letter, Ames boasted, "Yaddo affords ideal conditions for sustained work, and for the rest and recreation necessary to it."[26] "Ideal conditions," for Ames, had to do with establishing the proper balance between privacy and sociability, and Yaddo's greatest strength was the non-coercive form of community she strove to foster. Ames insisted that guests had "no social obligations," could choose to be "as seclusive [sic] and solitary" as they wished, but were free to participate in "a social life noted for its simplicity and spontaneity." Ames' letters promoted the Yaddo lifestyle as "an experience in real living," and many were grateful for the opportunity. Sylvia Plath's letter of thanks for her two-month residency is typical: "I have never in my life felt so peaceful and as if I can read and think and write for about seven hours a day." Alfred Kazin became as superstitious as a baseball player about the Yaddo magic: "So much of my real work forward in writing is associated with Yaddo that I […] like to put a little bit of its earth inside each book I write."[27]

But Yaddo had plenty of critics. A 1938 article in *Time* mocked Ames' high-toned hospitality, calling the director a "dynamic, partly deaf, pleasant-featured puritan," adept at "smelling out incipient romances, nipping them with subtle but insistent notes."[28] Styling Yaddo a "swanky monastery," the anonymous article emphasized the colony's most obvious irony: by

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[26] Elizabeth Ames to Granville Hicks, 19 February 1930, YR Reel 2.

[27] Ben Alexander, "The Yaddo Records: How an Institutional Archive Reveals Creative Insights," *English Studies in Canada* 30, no. 1 (March 2004): 99.

[28] "Yaddo and Substance," 50.

the late 1930s, the American literary scene had moved away from the gilded-age decorousness of Katrina Trask's salon. Mrs. Trask considered herself to be practicing "mental bohemianism" in allowing her young daughter to read modern poets like Tennyson and eavesdrop on adult literary conversations.[29] After World War I, the Russian Revolution, the modernist assault on aesthetic decorum, and the Wall Street crash, the "aristocratic Katrina and the elegant capitalistic surroundings she provided" clashed with the guests, many of them shabby, struggling Greenwich Villagers (actual bohemians) like Henry Roth and Malcolm Cowley, who was "poor as a church mouse" when he applied to Yaddo in 1928.[30]

Louis Adamic's essay in *Esquire* also noted the incongruity of shabby leftists indulging in gilded-age comforts. Adamic reproduced whole sections from Mrs. Trask's memoirs and compared Mrs. Ames' commitment to the Trask legend to a child believing in Santa Claus.[31] Adamic also ridiculed the guests of 1933 for their "nonsensical and excited talk about The Revolution," but his real target was the mysticism and inefficiency of the colony model. (He calculated that Yaddo spent a thousand dollars per month per guest—nearly as much as he could live on in a year.) Adamic concludes his exposé of the cloistered estate by calling it "one of the saddest spots in America" and warning wealthy would-be art patrons to avoid the messy colony model and follow the example of the "impersonal, tactful, and economic way" of the Guggenheim Foundation.[32] Unlike the laissez-faire patronage of grant-based institutions like Guggenheim, Yaddo was a community with strong traditions, architectural limitations, and oversized personalities that could be as irritating as they were inspiring.

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[29] Alexander, "Creative History," 72.

[30] Irita Van Doren to Elizabeth Ames, n.d. 1928, YR Reel 1.

[31] Adamic, "Ingrates," 183.

[32] Ibid., 182-4.

Much of the commentary on Yaddo, whether in letters, magazine articles, or scholarly essays, dwells on the colony's contradictions: aristocratic setting versus proletarian guests, boarding-school regimentation versus creative anarchy. But pointing to the ironies of the place misses the fact that it synthesized quite effectively a number of values drawn from different social strata, including aristocratic leisure, bohemian informality and spontaneity, and bourgeois professionalism and organization. Ames very deliberately called her guests "creative workers," a term that encompassed "those working in the plastic arts, those engaged in scholarship, in musical composition as well as workers in imaginative prose and poetry."[33] Though the "worker" label suggests tempting parallels with the world of proletarian labor or white-collar professionalism, Yaddo's actual institutional practices more closely track the values of what urban theorist Richard Florida refers to as the "creative class": individualism, diversity, and meritocracy.[34] Though Florida's research refers primarily to contemporary knowledge workers, his project of identifying and promoting the ideal conditions for creative work aligns him with earlier theorists and practitioners of the social engineering of creativity; namely, the founders and managers of art colonies.

Yaddo's emphasis on meritocracy is apparent from its reliance on an admissions committee of experts in each field. The Yaddo Records contain copious correspondence between Malcolm Cowley, Newton Arvin, Granville Hicks, Morton Zabel and Elizabeth Ames debating the quality and potential of prospective invitation recipients.[35] Also apparent in these letters is

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[33] YR 311.4 qtd. in Alexander, "Creative History," 93.

[34] Florida, *Creative Class*, 77-80. Florida argues for the existence, and the economic dominance, of a group he terms the "creative class" in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The creative class includes artists, scientists, and other professionals who "add economic value through their creativity," that is, their ability to "create meaningful new forms." Florida's description of creative class values contrasts with the values that Ben Alexander describes as particular to Yaddo, namely, exclusivity, separation, and intimacy. See Alexander, "Creative History," 1-8.

[35] Cowley was a longtime literary editor for *The New Republic,* Arvin was a professor of English at Smith College

Ames' concern for diversity in terms of age, race, gender, geographic origin, class background, and especially political commitments. A 1933 letter to Arvin insists on the need for balance in this area: "We of course have to take into consideration that Yaddo accepts all shades of opinion. I think it has been bruited about a good deal that Yaddo is a gathering place for extreme radicals. It is therefore better to have it known that it does not belong to them officially, but that we invite all shades of opinion and representatives of all schools provided one's work qualifies."[36] Ames was not merely a responsible administrator policing the harmony of her dinner tables (though she was that, too). Yaddo's Executive Director intuited something important about the priorities of her guests. The 1931 Director's Report makes the point explicitly:

> Yaddo brings together naturally and in amity a wide range of backgrounds and personalities, minds and interests. Probably nowhere else is this diversity of minds and experience to be found coming together, not for a purpose common to all, but each for its especial achievements, the contribution to the whole being a by-product. The important contributions which our guests make to each other are spontaneous and occur because of Yaddo's un-programmed leisure.[37]

For Ames, the radical politics of many of her guests were justified—even sought after—under the banner of inclusiveness. "Diversity of minds and experience" might be valuable for fostering creative insight.

Ames' description of "un-programmed leisure" resonates with Florida's description of creative spaces: "creativity flourishes best in a unique kind of social environment: one that is stable enough to allow continuity of effort, yet diverse and broad-minded enough to nourish creativity in all its subversive forms."[38] Though creativity is a social process that requires a conducive environment, there is always a tension between creativity and organization, which has

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and the author of respected monographs on Hawthorne and Melville, Hicks edited *The New Masses*, and Zabel edited *Poetry.*

[36] Ames to Arvin, 23 January 1933, YR Reel 1.

[37] "Executive Director's Report 1931: Yaddo in 1931 and Otherwise," YR 343; qtd in McGee, *Making American Culture*, 8.

[38] Florida, *Creative Class,* 35.

the potential to stifle individuality, diversity, and meritocracy in the interests of other priorities, such as fairness and efficiency. Malcolm Cowley praised Ames' extraordinary success at getting artists to live and work together (this after his involvement in a series of short-lived avant-garde collaborations on little magazines like *Broom* and *Secession*):

> I wrote a paragraph [in the manuscript that would become *Exile's Return*] that suddenly reminded me of your difficult task. "In the midst of the most unified civilization existing in the world today," I said, "American writers are, by reaction, ferocious individualists. They fear collective action of any sort: it reminds them of the Y.M.C.A., the Elks, the Shriners, the Rotarians; they will neither lead not follow, and 'the only club I belong to,' they often say, 'is the ancient society of Non-Joiners.' … They are bent on preserving the anarchy of their individual lives," etc., etc. It's all true, and it reminded me of the astounding success you have had in imposing order on these essential anarchists – not too much of it, but enough so that a dozen of them can live together in the collectivity of one household, and work there.[39]

"Organizing" creative people into a working community did not look like a trade union, nor like the socialist utopianism of Hawthorne's Brook Farm or a 1960s commune. Rather, the creative community at Yaddo respected the eccentricities of ferocious individualists, cultivated the diversity that generated new ideas, and encouraged mutual respect and basic cohesion through a meritocratic admissions policy.

Though Yaddo was an intentional community supported by a robust endowment and continuity of administration, it attempted to incorporate the kinds of spontaneous social interactions that are more characteristic of what once urban sociologist termed "third places," such as cafés, bars, and coffee shops.[40] Florida notes the importance of these spaces of sociability for creative people, who spend much of their working lives in intensive solitude. Yaddo was an almost monstrously hybrid "third place," a heterotopia that combined the functions of the studio, the café, the hotel bar, the boarding house, and the literary salon, all in a physical plant that conjured up traditional spaces like the manor house and the monastery. The utopian ideal—to

[39] Cowley to Ames, n.d., YR 238.2, qtd. in Alexander, "Creative History," 125-6.

[40] The "first" and "second" places being home and work. Florida takes the term "third place" from Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place* (New York: Paragon House, 1989).

organize a society, albeit a small and exclusive one, based on more "humane" principles than the ones on which the broader society operates—was predictably bumpy in its implementation. Institutions that attempt to organize themselves around individualism, diversity, and meritocracy (say, a university or a technology start-up) are bound to discover that these values are centripetal: they push against the organizing forces of community and collective enterprise. Individualists chafe at efforts to organize them, diversity leads to conflict, and the definition of merit is infinitely contestable. The "creative community" is in some fundamental sense a contradiction, or at least contains the seeds of its own destruction.

Yaddo's emphasis on tolerance would only increase as European politics went in the other direction. Ames' 1934 visit to Germany impressed her with the urgency of cultivating intellectual openness and creative freedom in the face of "the horror, the mad-house" that the Nazis were making of Europe.[41] Ames wrote to Newton Arvin that her trip seemed a mere "night-mare" upon returning to "the peace and constancy of Yaddo." But Ames did more than lament the collapse of Western civilization and the peril of artists in wartime. As the influential leader of a wealthy institution, she could make a difference in individual lives, and despite wartime shortages, Ames lobbied to transform the colony into a haven for persecuted artists. Calling the colony's new mission "rescue work," Ames reasoned in her 1938 annual report that "with their need of temporary protection from the more disturbing manifestations of the zeit-geist, many gifted men and women will fail to make their full contribution to our culture and its art unless they have the kind of sustaining help which Yaddo so uniquely offers through its all year service. To an impressive degree Yaddo is rendering emergency aid to the culture of our

[41] Ames to Arvin, 10 March 1934, YR Reel 1.

time in America."[42] Guests in the 1939 season included writer Hermann Broch and artist Rudolph von Ripper, as well as four other "refugee workers all of whom were well known in Austria and Germany, but now outcast and almost penniless either because of their anti-Nazi activities or because of the accident of race."[43] In a concurrent inclusive trend, by 1941 Ames had prevailed on the Board to open Yaddo's doors to African American writers and artists, a move that put the colony, in Ames' words, "in the good society of those who are fighting against racial discrimination."[44] From its earliest days, Yaddo had functioned as a refuge for "the city-weary" and those "hemmed in by circumstance"—that is, creative people in need of spiritual recuperation and economic relief. Extending this privilege to political dissidents was a logical next step. But Ames' policy of offering refuge to intellectuals—including apologists and agitators for communist revolution—would ultimately threaten her position at Yaddo.

Wartime Collisions

Ames' insistence on political tolerance in her admissions policies had the effect of producing a community of conflicting commitments, especially during the 1940s, when many former fellow travelers and communist sympathizers turned vehemently against the Soviet Union in the wake of Stalin's persecution of intellectuals and alliance with Hitler. Katherine Anne Porter, a prominent short story writer from Texas who by this time enjoyed minor celebrity status on the writers' conference circuit, arrived at Yaddo in June of 1940. Throughout her residency, the dining table was a primary venue for political conflict. Friend and fellow Southerner Eudora Welty recalled the formal dinners a Yaddo as operatic affairs:

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[42] "Report of the Executive Director," 1938 and 1940, YR 346.13.

[43] YR 346.30.

[44] YR 346.13.

> If I supposed our opera would be one about the arts, or artists, something like *La Bohème,* I wasn't on the right track. This was 1941. The company was in great part European. Elizabeth Ames had come to the aid of many artists who no longer had homes and were seeking refuge and a place to carry on their work. Our evening was indeed operatic, but it wasn't about the arts; it was about politics. Katherine Anne rose to the occasion—her clear voice would enter as if on cue with cries of '*Au contraire!*'[45]

Porter was notoriously opinionated and bore no love for the German and Eastern European exiles that crowded Yaddo and the New York literary scene in those days. "American writers [ ] are going to be in for a horrible period of wrangling by all the émigré writers and the weight of stampeded Europe suddenly on our necks," she wrote in a 1941 letter to friend and fellow fiction writer Glenway Wescott.[46] She went on to call the recent number of *Decision,* an avant-garde, anti-fascist magazine headed by Klaus Mann that drew contributions from many exiled European writers, "utterly abominable."[47] Porter had another reason to feel embattled at Yaddo in 1941. The arrival of Carson McCullers in June meant that Porter was forced to share space with another Southerner who was conscious of rivaling Porter for national literary preeminence. "She might be the greatest female writer in America now," declared McCullers to Newton Arvin one day at Yaddo, "but just wait until next year."[48]

Though Porter was born in 1890 and McCullers in 1917, the two women came to Yaddo for similar reasons, and after overlapping trajectories. Both grew up in the South in relative obscurity. Porter's father farmed unsuccessfully in West-Central Texas, and McCullers' father

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[45] Darlene Harbour Unrue, ed., *Katherine Anne Porter Remembered* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 89.

[46] *Letters of Katherine Anne Porter*, ed. Isabel Bayley (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990), 199.

[47] Porter's nativism would only increase with time: "Truly, the South and the West and other faraway places have made and are making American literature. We are in the direct, legitimate line; we are people based in English as our mother tongue, and we do not abuse it or misuse it, and when we speak a word, we know what it means. These others haven fallen into a curious kind of argot, more or less originating in New York, a deadly mixture of academic, guttersnipe, gangster, fake-Yiddish, and dull old worn-out dirty words—an appalling bankruptcy in language, as if they hate English and are trying to destroy it along with all other living things they touch." "A Country and some people I love: An Interview by Hank Lopez with Porter," *Harper's*, September 1965, in *Katherine Anne Porter: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Penn Warren (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 35.

[48] Virginia Spencer Carr, *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 157.

was a moderately successful watchmaker and small business owner in the mill-and-army base town of Columbus, Georgia. Both left their families for the vibrant art and intellectual scene in New York City to launch their writing careers. Nonetheless, with a generation between them, Porter and McCullers' experiences also diverged significantly.

With almost no formal education and after an unfortunate marriage at the age of sixteen, Katherine Anne, born Callie Russell Porter, got a late start on her literary career as a theater critic in smaller western cities. Her experiences typified the historical trauma of "the Generation of 1914"; in an episode like something out of Hemingway, she fell in love with a young soldier while working for a Denver newspaper, only to see him die after he nursed her through the 1918 Influenza epidemic. She commemorated the experience in one of her most famous stories, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." In the 1920s, Porter lived in bohemian Greenwich Village and revolutionary Mexico, and she spent much of the early 1930s in Paris, a late arrival to the expatriate literary scene. Her return to the United States in 1936 marked a period of intense literary activity, culminating in her celebrated 1939 collection of three "short novels" (she despised the term "novella") and a brief, unsuccessful marriage (her fourth and final) to Albert Erskine, a graduate student and editor for *The Southern Review* who was twenty years her junior. By the summer of 1940 when Porter arrived at Yaddo, she had published two critically acclaimed short story collections and was in a position to offer support to younger writers like Eudora Welty, whom she helped to obtain a Guggenheim Fellowship and Yaddo residency.[49]

The scope of McCullers' experience was comparatively small. As a sickly teenager in Georgia, Lula Carson Smith (as she was then known) devoured the works of Marx, Freud, and the literary moderns, from Chekov and Dostoyevsky to Joyce and Stein. At seventeen, she

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[49] See Joan Givner, *Katherine Anne Porter: A Life* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 37-324,

moved to New York to take creative writing classes at Columbia and New York University. She finished her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, by age twenty-two during the first two years of her marriage to Reeves McCullers, a soldier and aspiring writer who worked various jobs to support them while she wrote.[50] In the wake of the success of *Hunter*, the couple moved to New York, where the excessive drinking and sexual ambivalence of both parties strained their marriage. When McCullers came to Yaddo in the summer of 1941, it was in part to escape Reeves, whom she divorced later that year with support from Ames and her other Yaddo friends.[51]

The two Southerners had divergent attitudes toward their native land, and looked to different traditions to shore up their cultural authority. Porter's Southern stories conceived of the "Old Order"—the antebellum landed establishment—as an era of cultural richness and economic stability. Though she acknowledged the authoritarianism of that traditional culture and the need to break away from it to achieve personal and artistic integrity (Miranda, the autobiographical persona in "Old Mortality" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," is continually in flight), Porter feared the loss of cultural "roots" and fought deracination by fashioning the public persona of a Southern belle.[52] Among Porter's closest friends were Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Penn Warren, the architects of the "Agrarian" movement in the early 1930s. Allen Tate numbered Porter, along with Faulkner, among the "traditionalist" Southern novelists, that is,

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[50] Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 78, 83.

[51] Ibid., 181.

[52] Porter tended to obscure the relative poverty of her upbringing later in life. See Givner, *Katherine Anne Porter*, 12; and Janis P. Stout, *Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 167-8.

creators of “a literature conscious of the past in the present,” specifically, a past of European cultural values fusing Christianity with Classicism.[53]

By contrast, McCullers embraced the identity of “exiled” Southerner, analogizing her feelings of estrangement from her native land with those of European refugees.[54] When she arrived in New York in 1940, McCullers was immediately enchanted with Klaus and Erika Mann. In a July 1941 essay for *Decision* about “The Russian Realists and Southern Literature,” McCullers articulated her theory of Southern fiction in starkly material terms. She argued that the “Gothic” nature of Southern literature stemmed from the economic conditions of the South, and was actually “a peculiar and intense realism” that combined “a bold and outwardly callous juxtaposition of the tragic with the humorous, the immense with the trivial, the sacred with the bawdy, the whole soul of man with a materialistic detail.”[55] She compared the South to “old Russia”: “a section apart from the rest of the United States,” used economically as “a sort of colony to the rest of the nation” where “poverty is unlike anything known in other parts” of the country.[56] McCullers’ South was a “New South,” devastated by uneven modernization and cultural backwardness. Her characters in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* have no aristocratic cultural memories; rather, they are plagued by existential meaninglessness and violent impulses.

Porter’s antipathy for McCullers was multifaceted. Aside from professional rivalry, there were stark differences in temperament and self-presentation. Porter met the younger writer the previous summer at the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference in Vermont, where Porter was an

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[53] Allen Tate, “The New Provincialism,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 21, no. 2 (1945): 272. Tate also decries the “sociological” impulse in Southern fiction, which he associates with writers like Erskine Caldwell, as a naive materialism that ignores the South’s cultural heritage.

[54] Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 100.

[55] Carson McCullers, “The Russian Realists and Southern Literature,” *Decision*, July 1941, 15.

[56] Ibid., 16

invited speaker and McCullers a fellow, and found her to be "eccentric, heavy drinking, overtly bisexual" and "rotten to the bone already."[57] Porter—glamorous, extroverted, and intensely feminine—was repulsed rather than intrigued, though many people found McCullers' fey manner charming.[58] At Yaddo, McCullers pursued intimacy with Porter so doggedly that Porter, exasperated, requested that Ames move her from the mansion to North Farm, a smaller outbuilding where she lived out the summer in the congenial company of Eudora Welty and David Diamond, a charismatic composer. Guests from that summer recall the "camps" that formed around each writer; McCullers was relegated to a smaller table away from her rival (dubbed the "Table of the Sensitives") and joined by her friends Newton Arvin and Edward Newhouse.[59]

Like her character Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*, McCullers was prone to serial infatuations; over the years, she transferred her adoration to a succession of Yaddo guests including David Diamond, Alfred Kantorowicz, and Alfred Kazin.[60] These infatuations did not interfere with McCullers' writing; rather, the intense, ambiguous friendships offered a space to share work, talk through technical problems, and revel in mutual creativity. For a queer writer like McCullers, Yaddo's heterotopian environment was truly ideal. For Porter, suffering from writers' block and feeling pressed by social obligations, McCullers' continued productivity must have been grating.

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[57] Quoted in Darlene Harbour Unrue, *Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of an Artist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 180. Porter initially admired McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* when she read it in Baton Rouge in early 1940, defending it against her husband Albert Erskine's charge that the author was a "lesbian."

[58] Wallace Stegner, on the faculty at Bread Loaf, recalled McCullers as being "very interesting" but also "bizarre," and "a confirmed devotee of the grotesque." Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 113.

[59] Ibid., 156.

[60] Ibid., 146, 217, 234.

The early sections of Porter's massive novel *Ship of Fools*, which she began writing at Yaddo in 1941, register the claustrophobia and irritation of living in close quarters with strangers. On the ship, Mrs. Treadwell, an American divorcee, shrinks from "the threat of human nearness, of feeling," when Herr Freytag, a German businessman, confesses to her that his wife is Jewish.[61] Her impulse is to ward off compromising human connections: "No, don't tell me any more about yourself," she thinks, "I don't want to know you, and I will not know you. Don't try to come nearer." Dr. Schumann finds the press of La Condesa's iconoclastic speech equally menacing: "nettles, poisoned barbs, fishhooks, her words clawed at his mind with the terrible malignancy of the devil-possessed, the soul estranged from its kind" (122). While in McCullers' fiction human connection is elusive and longed for, in *Ship of Fools* the threat of vampiric relationships inspires disgust and the constant self-policing of emotion. We can infer that living at Yaddo amplified each writer's natural reactions to human closeness.

Porter's letters to Ames over the next few years make clear her continuing animosity for McCullers.[62] Later she extended the personal antagonism to a slight on McCullers' writing, insisting the novelist possessed "a peculiarly corrupt, perverted mind, a small stunted talent incapable of growth" and belonged to "a bad school."[63] Porter also resented the copious assistance McCullers received from friends and, implicitly, Yaddo, personal misfortunes aside: "There must be splendid young writers who need help worse than she does: she has had a

[61] Katherine Anne Porter, *Ship of Fools* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1984), 142 (hereafter cited in text as *SF*).

[62] "Elizabeth, I simply have no defense except flight from such complete insensibility, such a mean and calculating little will. When she spoke to me and I looked her in the eye, I saw her pleasant little plan to make a nasty little scene before an audience, as usual; and I do hope you will agree with me that there is no good reason why I should allow myself to be exploited so […] She has managed to get her name associated with mine by the basest kind of means, and I am afraid she will have to be contented with that. I cannot be engaged in one of her famous publicity staged heart-to-heart talks." Porter to Ames, 21 August n.d., YR Reel 3.

[63] Porter, *Letters*, 286. Later she would add Truman Capote, a friend of McCullers' whom Porter met at Yaddo in 1946, to this "bad school" of Southern writers. By contrast, she admired the work of Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor.

Guggenheim and a National Arts and Letters prize, she has a home to go to, and she is a rotten writer…Its a bad combination."[64] Nonetheless, Porter refrained from using her position as a member of Yaddo's Admissions Committee and Board of Directors to veto McCullers' repeated residencies.[65] Though she resented McCullers personally and artistically, she never went so far as to insist the younger writer be cut off. Yaddo may have been a small world, but the colony was ultimately big enough to contain them both.

Despite their antagonism, Porter and McCullers both lived at Yaddo for extended periods in the early 1940s.[66] McCullers adapted to the rhythms of the writers' colony seamlessly. "[In Columbus, Georgia] and at Yaddo, I am not constantly deflected by a multiplicity of facile emotions," she wrote Ames, adding, "In the city I was tormented by the feeling of transience and improvisation that life seems to have."[67] At Yaddo she woke early, wrote in the mornings, and went for long walks or socialized with other guests in the evening. Until *The Member of the Wedding* was finished, McCullers spent each spring and summer at Yaddo and returned each winter to her family home in Georgia. Though occasionally distracted by severe illness, McCullers had little trouble structuring her life around the rhythms of creative work—and recruiting the help of figures like her mother, Reeves, and Elizabeth Ames to take care of her domestic and emotional needs. McCullers, who saw herself as an "artist" even before she took up writing (as a child she hoped to be a famous pianist, a dream documented in her first

[64] Porter to Ames, 29 May 1943, YR Reel 2.

[65] "As to Carson and Rebecca, from a realistic point of view it is just as well they were brought back this year, or they might have thought I had something to do with keeping them away. They should know better, but likely they wouldn't… You know well, Elizabeth, I do not begrudge them Yaddo and all the good they can have there, even if I had been consulted I would have voted for them, not because I think their work is good, I don't—I think it is worthless—but because I see no point at all in adding anything to the miseries and confusions of this world […]" Porter, *Letters*, 167.

[66] See Parker, *Digest*, 419-20.

[67] YR Reel 2.

published story "Wunderkind"), took instantly to Yaddo's mission. Throughout her life she was continually attracted to "alternative" living situations: in 1940 she left Reeves to inhabit a Brooklyn townhouse owned by *Harper's Bazaar* editor George Davis, where housemates included W.H. Auden, Richard Wright, Benjamin Britten, as well as an endless stream of famous visitors.[68] In 1946, she left Yaddo to live in Nantucket for a month with friend Tennessee Williams; she wrote the stage version of *Member* sitting at a table across from the famous playwright. McCullers' creativity fed on the creative energy of other working artists. She completed the novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café* at Yaddo and struggled through her second major novel, *The Member of the Wedding*, finishing it there in 1945. Ames midwifed the novel, reading each draft and finally declaring it complete.[69]

Porter, on the other hand, was easily distracted by social life and wrote best in isolation, usually taking refuge in an isolated country inn to complete her stories. Thus Yaddo was a mixed blessing. When Porter arrived there in June 1940, she compared the estate to "a real monastery": "I had not imagined anything so severely cloistered and delimited."[70] Porter would continue to live at the colony for nearly two years, with occasional trips to speak at writers' conferences and a longer stint in Reno to obtain a divorce from Erskine. While living at Yaddo, she purchased a small farmhouse close by, overseeing renovations on the old colonial (which she christened "South Hill") from the comfort of Yaddo until she moved in finally in the fall of 1942. Porter completed her novella "The Leaning Tower" at Yaddo during her first season there, then began *Ship of Fools*, which she would not complete until 1961. In 1943, Porter left the Saratoga area

[68] Arvin wrote to Ames in 1942 urging her to admit McCullers to Yaddo for a second summer to get her away from both "that (psychically) incestuous life in Columbia, Ga., [sic] and the highly ambiguous Bohemia (or Cosmopolis) she is likely to make a dash for, in New York." Arvin to Ames, 20 March 1942, YR Reel 2.

[69] Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 259.

[70] Porter, *Letters,* 179.

after only thirteen months in her house, frustrated by her failure to finish her novel and distracted by the financial and physical strain caused by her attempt to become a homeowner at age fifty-two, for the first time in an unusually peripatetic life.

Many years later, Porter would insist to an interviewer, "You cannot be an artist and work collectively."[71] In 1941, Porter was more optimistic about the prospects of artistic community. She wrote to Ames with great warmth: "I feel a great community of interest with you, as if now the work I have done in this year and three months as it will be, is a kind of partnership affair, at least on my side."[72] Dedicating her upcoming volume of short stories (which included "The Leaning Tower") to Ames for the support Yaddo had provided her, Porter wrote effusively in thanks, anticipating a lifetime of supportive friendship not as a Yaddo guest, but rather as a neighbor and equal: "I love you devotedly, and once in a while I would like to tell you so, for it seems to me that good words about our feelings are the living waters of friendship […] we will be near each other for the rest of our lives, and there are always going to be comparatively free and quiet winters for us.[73]

Part of Porter's optimism was economic. Becoming associated with Yaddo was a "strange accident" that, she believed, would allow her to achieve unprecedented independence and stability.[74] In the distraction-free (and rent-free) environment of the writers' colony, she

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[71] *Katherine Anne Porter: Conversations*, ed. Joan Givner (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 114.

[72] Porter to Ames, 17 August 1941, YR Reel 2.

[73] ibid.

[74] "What a strange accident, after all. Think if Morton Zabel hadn't written that letter about Yaddo last spring. I remember how my heart sank at the whole prospect, with what bitterness I made up my mind to come here, only because it was the least evil of so many choices, all of them evil to me then… And here I am, really happy in some way that I never was before; really life is changed; if only I can have my place to stay and be able to work to keep it pleasant and to care for it properly, I want nothing more… And everything I lost before in this world will come back to me there. Just think, when I plant a tree now I can stay to see it grow, when I work and spend what I have on the house, I do not have to leave it just when it is becoming pleasant to live in. Just think, never again do I have to depend upon any one else for anything, and I can make what plans I like, then carry them out in my own time and

planned to save up money from lectures and writing brief magazine pieces, and to finish the long novel, thus justifying the cash advances from her publisher. Borrowing money from Elizabeth Ames allowed Porter to purchase South Hill, which she described to friends as signaling the end of her "placeless" existence: "It is to be my pastime and my pleasure, my investment and the place I shall live in. Just having a painful and insecure existence has until now cost me everything I made and more; it seems a good bargain, to me, no matter what it costs."[75] If Yaddo inspired in Porter visions of creative independence through homeownership, it also led her to reflect on her own—and other artists'—precarious *de*pendence on either patronage or the market to make a living. One letter from early 1941 shows Porter mulling over F. Scott Fitzgerald's recent death (she considered him a sellout to Hollywood), and declaring her intention to pull "The Leaning Tower" from *Harper's Bazaar* because an editor there asked her to tone down its anti-German sentiment.[76] Though Porter was desperate for cash to purchase her dream home, she was not willing to sacrifice her artistic integrity or control in order to place her story in a magazine that paid well; instead, she sent the story to her friends at *The Southern Review.*[77] The scuffle over publication venues shows Porter negotiating her status as a professional writer enabled by the patronage of the writers' colony; saying "no" to *Harper's Bazaar* would have been more difficult without Yaddo. For Porter, Yaddo promised to be more than the gift of time and space to write; it was a solution to the problems of the market and a community beyond marital domesticity.

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way, and the house and the whole landscape around it will look as I would like them too, little by little, year after year…." Porter to Albert Erskine, 29 January 1941, in Porter, *Letters,* 192-193.

[75] Ibid., 194.

[76] Ibid., 189-91

[77] "I am going to have it [the house]. But not at the price of letting Carmel Snow edit my stories. I can manage the affair without that…" Ibid., 191.

II. New Narratives of Community

While biographers generally note the antagonism between Porter and McCullers that began at Yaddo in the summer of 1941, few critics have raised the question of literary influence. Structurally, "The Leaning Tower" shows little continuity with Porter's early fiction; however, it has many affinities with Carson McCullers' first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter.* Though McCullers' debut novel is set in a Georgia mill town much like the author's native Columbus, it is hardly a piece of nostalgic local color. McCullers is most interested in encounters between strangers, and thus Biff Brannon's "New York Café" is the central space of the novel. It is there that the oddball cast comes together: a teenage girl who dreams of being a famous musician, a wandering labor agitator on a hopeless alcoholic bender, a respectable African American physician humiliated by segregation, and a deaf mute with the ironic name "Singer," a cypher on whom the other characters project their desire and "loneliness."

McCullers' was an ambitious first novel, and it made her a literary star at twenty-three.[78] When Porter read the novel in 1940, she must have realized that the younger writer had accomplished what had eluded Porter in two decades of writing. However, she also learned something about structuring a long narrative. McCullers fully exploited the structuring power of the café to yoke together portraits of otherwise unconnected characters, each caught up in his own head and plot. If the café provided structure in her first novel, she took it on more explicitly as a theme in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, a story that had been brewing for years but that she finished at Yaddo in 1943. Porter's Yaddo-era fiction picks up on the idea of organizing a story

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[78] Several critics in the 1960s criticized *Hunter* in terms close those that were used against *Ship of Fools* in 1961. One saw "an overabundance of material" in the novel and argued, "The richness of the novel is both the source of its continuing appeal and its basic weakness; the ultimate effect is that of a profusion that cannot be contained." Dale Edmonds, *Carson McCullers* (1969), 9; qtd. in Nancy B. Rich, *The Flowering Dream: The Historical Saga of Carson McCullers* (Chapel Hill, NC: Chapel Hill Press, 1999), 11.

around the cosmopolitan sociability that erupts in spaces like cafés, but also explores more lived-in temporary communities: the boarding house and the passenger ship.

Critics tend to find Porter and McCullers' fiction of the 1940s peculiar, especially in its departure from their earlier, more popular works and in its tendency to ignore the plot and character rules of conventional novels. Edmund Wilson claimed that *The Member of the Wedding* had "no element of drama at all,"[79] while Porter's New Critical commentators preferred (and anthologized) her regional stories of the 1920s and 1930s.[80] As M.M. Liberman commented as far back as 1966, this critical neglect proceeds in part from normative assumptions about the novel as a form. The Yaddo-era novels of both writers share enough similarities to justify the articulation of a new genre, which I am calling the new narrative of community.

As Sandra Zagarell argued in a 1988 study, the characteristics of the *traditional* narrative of community—as practiced by writers like Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and Sarah Orne Jewett—include nonlinear narration, a sense of timelessness, and a focus on interdependent networks of people and everyday activities that are "collective, continuous, and undramatic," the activities through which communities constitute and maintain themselves.[81] Feminist critics read the narrative of community as a counter-tradition to the individualistic tradition of the novel focused on the centered self, often in conflict with society.[82] *New* narratives of community, the kinds of texts Porter and McCullers were producing during their Yaddo days, also tend to be de-

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[79] Edmund Wilson, "Two Books That Leave You Blank: Carson McCullers and Sigfried Sassoon," *New Yorker*, March 30, 1946, 87. McCullers was devastated by the review according to her biographer. See Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 268. Though she vowed never to read reviews again, she arguably had the last laugh, turning the novel with "no element of drama at all" into an award-winning Broadway play starring Bessie Smith.

[80] Brooks and Warren included "Old Mortality" in the first edition of *Understanding Fiction* (New York: F.S. Crofts, 1943). See Warren, ed., *Katherine Anne Porter*, 112-6.

[81] Zagarell, "Narrative of Community," 503.

[82] Zagarell cites Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Frederic Jameson *The Political Unconscious,* and J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction* as influential theories of the novel's individualistic tradition (503-4).

centered, often containing multiple protagonists. (*Ship of Fools*, with nearly fifty centers of consciousness and no clear protagonist, must set some sort of record.) But in contrast to their earlier cousins, new narratives of community are characterized by topicality or "timeliness," achieve coherence through uncanny repetitions (an experiential "echo" effect), and often introduce action through random-seeming collisions between strangers. While these are fairly typical properties of urban narratives (James Joyce's *Ulysses* springs to mind), the innovation of Porter and McCullers was to transplant these dynamics onto relatively static and bounded settings: the café, hotel, and ship stage charged interactions that challenge and elucidate the fluctuations of consciousness.

Like the traditional narrative of community, these new narratives developed at a time when traditional communities had been eroded by industrialization and urban migration. However, traditional regional narratives like *Cranford* or *The Country of the Pointed Firs* tend to be nostalgic, seeking to preserve (and therefore tending to reify) bygone pre-industrial places. The impulse that animates new narratives of community is different; writers like McCullers and Porter (and their precursors in the genre, including Herman Melville—especially in *The Confidence Man*—Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway) use fiction to explore the creative potential—and the mechanics—of the non-traditional communities that form around sites like cafés, hotel bars, boarding houses, literary salons, and passenger ships. Correlated with human mobility—specifically, with tourism—these sites tend to produce interactions that architectural theorist Rem Koolhaas describes as "cybernetic." Koolhaas points out that the hotel became Hollywood's favorite film setting in the 1930s, and speculates about the narrative utility of the space:

> In a sense, it relieves the scriptwriter of the obligation of inventing a plot. A Hotel *is* a plot—a cybernetic universe with its own laws generating random but fortuitous collisions between human beings who would never have met elsewhere. It offers a fertile cross section through the population, a richly textured interface

> between social castes, a field for the comedy of clashing manners and a neutral background of routine operations to give every incident dramatic relief.[83]

Ship of Fools resembles Koolhaas' cybernetic hotel-scape most closely: nearly fifty main characters of various classes and national backgrounds quite literally "collide" on their journey from Mexico to Germany. But even *The Member of the Wedding*, a novel whose action takes place almost entirely in Frankie Addams' kitchen in a small town in Georgia, explores the manners, affects, and encounters associated with cosmopolitan travel.[84]

The remainder of this chapter explores the threads of commonality among Porter and McCullers' Yaddo-era fiction. Both writers maintain the balance between the outward, individualistic momentum of cosmopolitanism and the inward, collective pull of community by oscillating between themes that appear to be unrelated: tourism and music. As a consumer of serial, unfamiliar experiences, the tourist is the prototypical subject of a cosmopolitan (and highly privileged) modernity.[85] She is also an alienated subject, always separated from the communities she tours.[86] Tourism, a mode that involves encountering the unfamiliar, is a proxy

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[83] Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1994), 148-50. Partially quoted in Mark Goble, "Cameo Appearances: or, When Gertrude Stein Checks Into Grand Hotel," *Modern Language Quarterly* 62, vol. 2 (2001): 120. Goble calls both the film and the autobiography narratives of "cosmopolitan sociability amid a stylized modernity" and notes the "disorienting democracy of attention" that the hundreds of names in Stein's *Autobiography* forces on the reader (127). The same might be said for *Ship of Fools*, though Porter is committed to novelistic interiority rather than avant-garde "flatness."

[84] As Goble points out, narratives structured around cosmopolitan forms of sociability tend to be more interested in "society" (and, specifically, *high* society) than they are in "community." See "Cameo Appearances," 138-9. Moreover, there is a theoretical tradition that insists cosmopolitanism of all kinds is the enemy of commitment, solidarity, or indeed any "community principles." See Tom Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 49. Lutz points to later Marxists like Antonio Gramsci and Franz Fanon in particular, but also commentators with very different commitments, including Robert Reich (53-4).

[85] See Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), especially 23-4. MacCannell draws an analogy between certain kinds of elite tourism and Southern novels: "the resulting itineraries rarely penetrate lovingly into the precious details of a society as a Southern novelist might, peeling back layer after layer of local historical, cultural and social facts, although this is the ideal of a certain type of snobbish tourism" (51).

[86] It is tempting to read Porter's unusual bid to make the temporary community of Yaddo a permanent home as an attempt to convert a fundamentally touristic experience into a traditionally communal one.

for the disorganized data of experience, the world as "almost pure chaos," in Porter's terms.[87] (Or as Frankie Addams puts it, in Part One of *The Member of the Wedding*, "the world is certainly a sudden place.")[88]

But Porter and McCullers' narratives of modern alienation are punctuated by moments of solidarity, inclusion, and melding, often figured as collective musical performances. Music has both artistic and social implications. On the one hand, it offered a way of conceptualizing the literary artist's formal organization of raw experience into the aesthetic experience of the novel. It is no coincidence that when the two writers discussed the compositional challenges of their novels, both resorted to musical analogies: McCullers referred to *The Member of the Wedding* as an experiment in "counterpoint," and Porter compared *Ship of Fools* to "a symphony." On the other hand, music was a way of talking about forms of collective action, both the highly orchestrated and the voluntary and spontaneous. Katrina Trask's "harmonious environment" at Yaddo offered the writers a model (and a metaphor) for a working community of "ferocious individualists."

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Porter and McCullers' first Yaddo stories—the novellas "The Leaning Tower" (1941) and "The Ballad of The Sad Café" (1943)—are both legible as parables about living in an art colony, though the allegory operates differently in each. Both explore spontaneous communities that spring up in modern, semi-public spaces (the boarding house and the café, respectively) and both feature prominently a female patron. In each case, the relationship between the patroness and artist is touchy and complicated.

[87] Porter, *Conversations*, 97.

[88] McCullers, *Collected Stories*, 260.

“The Leaning Tower” is unusual in Porter’s oeuvre, both formally and thematically. Charles Upton, a young painter from Texas, finds himself in Berlin in the winter of 1931. Depressed by his squalid, expensive hotel, he searches for cheaper quarters and eventually settles on the *pension* of Rosa Reichl, a genteel Austrian woman. The living arrangement is a bad version of the art colony: Charles finds his work constantly interrupted by his overly solicitous landlady, repeatedly offends his fellow inhabitants with his bumbling American naiveté, and resents being drawn into their personal miseries. The story represents Porter’s most concerted attempt to describe the mechanics and affects of a community of artists.

The landlady Rosa Reichl is a dominant presence in “The Leaning Tower”; her fussy attentions to Charles induce shame and annoyance in the young artist, and her story of former wealth and happiness is the locus for Charles’ dawning understanding of the sources of Germany’s current atmosphere of fear and scarcity. Despite the negative feelings she produces, Rosa’s house is a refuge for Charles from cheating hotel proprietors, unfriendly streets, and police harassment. Moreover, her home provides a site for the friendship of four young men from vastly different backgrounds (a wealthy student from Heidelberg; a shabby, *Plattdeutsch*-speaking mathematician; and a Polish pianist, in addition to Charles the Texan). Rosa’s motherly authority serves as a rallying point, as the young men prove “they were still men, masters of themselves,” by staying up late into the night talking and drinking brandy after Rosa fusses at them to go to bed.[89] By the end of the story, Rosa feels a proprietary pride in “her household who knew how to celebrate an occasion” as the drunk, tottering revelers return from New Year’s festivities at the cabaret (494). The narration is ironically attentive to the way Rosa’s authority, whether sanctioning or opposing, provides focus to the young men’s nascent collectivity.

[89] Katherine Anne Porter, *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1979), 467 (hereafter cited in text as *CSKAP*).

At the center of McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* is the rich, "contrary" Miss Amelia, an anti-social figure who turns her home into a café, inspired by her love for Cousin Lymon, a hunchback stranger newly arrived to the town. The café transforms the mill town, where there is "nothing whatsoever to do," into a genial community. The narrator comments on the transformation of the town, and the augmented pride of its residents, with treatise-like explicitness and in terms that echo McCullers' claims in her earlier essay on Russian and Southern literature:

> To understand this new pride the cheapness of human life must be kept in mind. There were always plenty of people clustered around a mill – but it was seldom that every family had enough meal, garments, and fat back to go the rounds. Life could become one long dim scramble just to get the things needed to keep alive. And the confusing point is this: All useful things have a price, and are bought only with money, as that is the way the world is run. You know without having to reason about it the price of a bale of cotton, or a quart of molasses. But no value has been put on human life; it is given to us free and taken without being paid for. What is it worth? If you look around, at times the value may seem to be little or nothing at all. Often after you have sweated and tried and things are not better for you, there comes a feeling deep down in the soul that you are not worth much.[90]

Despite its whimsical stock characters and ironic, idiomatic tone, "Ballad" is a savvy fictional exploration of a "third place," a space outside of home and work that serves as a focal point of community. Amelia is a strange figure—both folk healer and whiskey distiller, she also transacts more dubious functions in the community, including lending on interest and bringing frequent law suits against her fellow residents. The café flourishes for a few years while Uncle Lymon lives in her home. When he runs off with Amelia's former husband, the café's doors close and Amelia shuts herself up in her house once more; the fate of the café demonstrates the fragility of community when the institutions that catalyze it are so thoroughly dependent on individual whims.[91]

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[90] Carson McCullers, *The Collected Stories of Carson McCullers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 239-240 (hereafter cited in text as *CSCM*).

[91] Read as allegory, "The Ballad of the Sad Café" could be an argument for foundation-based patronage of cultural institutions, in which endowments and administrative continuity ensure the viability of "third places" beyond the scope of individual human lifetimes or energies.

Whereas McCullers theorizes the "third place" in her new narrative of community, Porter thinks more directly about the way patronage can compromise personal independence. At one point, the wise but cynical Polish pianist, Tadeusz Mey, warns Charles, the idealistic-but-naive American, against trying to make friends through charity:

> "If you set yourself up as a benefactor," said Tadeusz, "you must expect to be hated. Let me tell you something. A very rich man I know wished to give good sums of money to help young musicians. But he went to his lawyer and insisted that the gift must be anonymous; under no circumstances must the giver be known. Well, the lawyer said of course it would be arranged, but it would make work, mystery, why did his client want that? And this very wise man said, 'I am superstitious and I do not want them to be able to curse me by name.'"
>
> "Good God," said Charles, sincerely horrified. (*CSKAP* 475-476)

Charles pities the poor, hapless, and at this point pathetically food-poisoned German student Otto Bussen, and wants to lend him a coat against the Berlin winter, but Tadeusz warns Charles against his misguided benevolence, which the character dismisses as an odd American notion. (The irony here is rich, given that the story was published soon before the United States' entry into World War II.)

Neither Rosa Reichl nor Miss Amelia much resemble Elizabeth Ames, the soft-spoken Quaker who served as sympathetic friend to artists, administrative executive, and hostess-in-chief at Yaddo for more than four decades. The relationship of these stories to the colony is more abstract; both make an argument for the importance of "culture" over bare material existence as giving meaning to human life; both connect culture to concrete spaces where people gather in conviviality and conversation; and both suggest that women's traditional care-taking and hostessing roles have an essential *public* function in the creation of non-familial community.

If the horizon of Porter's early stories was regional, confined to the farms and families of the Southwest (on both sides of the border), her first Yaddo story represented a new direction. The setting is urban, the milieu cosmopolitan, and the environment threateningly alien to the protagonist. The "portrait of the artist" theme is nothing new for Porter; she arranged her most

famous stories ("Old Mortality," "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," and the "Old Order" sequence) around the hopes and disillusionments of Miranda, an alter ego. Rather, Porter's innovation in "The Leaning Tower" is structural and has to do with her insight into the way urban spaces produce certain kinds of human interactions. The story moves quite schematically from the street, to a boarding house, to its carnivalesque climax in a cabaret; each space produces different relations between characters, and the story traces these contrasts in vivid detail.

On the street, an anonymous space of passing encounters, startling juxtapositions of emaciated beggars and fleshy, window-shopping Burghers offer Charles a cross section of pre-war German society. He channels his reactions of sympathy and repulsion into sketches, material to be used later to make a more definitive artistic statement. In contrast to the cold, jarring streets, Rosa Reichl's *pension* is a space of feminine plushness and desperate gentility, and Charles finds himself drawn uncomfortably into the sufferings of his landlady and fellow boarders. Again, he expresses his annoyance for the self-compromising situation by drawing lurid caricatures of his new "friends." Finally, a New Years celebration in a cabaret produces heightened emotions. Though the four young men nearly erupt into violence after a discussion tainted by national prejudices, they eventually join with the crowd in a boozy, heart-felt sing along, Charles wordlessly incorporated into the scene. Porter would employ essentially the same structure, though dilated to 500-pages, for *Ship of Fools*.[92] Yaddo primed Porter to think about

[92] The novel begins in Veracruz, where the harried, suspicious passengers are eager to board the ship to escape the cheating functionaries, deformed beggars, and contemptuous, linen-suited ruling class of the port town. On the ship itself, single characters are pulled unwillingly into sympathy and conflict with one another, while family groups are forced to play out their sordid melodramas in cramped, semi-public conditions. Like Charles in "The Leaning Tower," Jenny in *Ship of Fools* is a young painter whose intermittent efforts to work aboard the ship suggest connections to the author's actual creative struggle at Yaddo and elsewhere. Finally, the novel climaxes in a wild party for the Captain, though unlike the moment of precarious unity that coalesces in the earlier story, *Ship of Fools* erupts into actual violence. By the end of the novel, characters are recovering from head wounds and bruised egos, glad to disembark separately in Bremerhaven.

the shaping power of certain environments on human community, and the consequences of these modern spaces for people trying to do creative work.

Cosmopolitan Variations

In her relentless efforts towards greater inclusivity in admissions, Elizabeth Ames was a force for what Tom Lutz calls the "cosmopolitan ethos," which values "political openness to multiplicity" and the search for the widest perspective, but also the drawing of aesthetic distinctions. [93] Cosmopolitanism is simultaneously egalitarian and elitist, and thus a fair proxy for the values of the art colony. While McCullers felt perfectly at home in Yaddo's cosmopolitan milieu, Porter's reaction was more ambivalent. As Southerners who relocated to the metropolitan North, Porter and McCullers had cause to be anxious about their own cosmopolitan credentials, and they had different strategies for shoring them up. McCullers, who traveled little before the 1950s, identified her diasporic experience with that of European exiles like Klaus Mann and Alfred Kantorowicz, a German, Jewish, Communist journalist she met and befriended at Yaddo in 1942. Kantorowicz remembered McCullers as particularly wide-eyed, voraciously lapping up his stories of escape from the Gestapo and other European wartime adventures.[94] By contrast, Porter's stance was one of wide experience, even jadedness. By the time she arrived at Yaddo, Porter had lived in Colorado, Greenwich Village, Bermuda, Mexico, Berlin, Paris, Switzerland, and Baton Rouge; moreover, she resented deeply the "expatriate" epithet and typically described her native Texas as an already-cosmopolitan meeting ground of cultures: Mexican, Spanish,

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[93] Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas*, 47. At Yaddo, the price of admission is of course artistic merit or potential, which would become a major locus of controversy when Ames was accused of prioritizing political inclusiveness over aesthetic merit.

[94] Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 217.

German, African-American, and Anglo-Irish transplants from Tennessee.[95] The cosmopolitan scenes in each writer's Yaddo-era fiction reflect their differing relationships to the freedom and mobility represented by travel.

Like "The Leaning Tower," which conveys the oppressive political climate of pre-war Germany through ambient description, *The Member of the Wedding* describes summer in the small Georgia town as "a green sick dream, or like a silent crazy jungle under glass" (*CSCM* 257). At the novel's center are three social outcasts: Frankie Addams, a twelve-year-old tomboy who dreams of escaping from the town; John Henry West, her six-year-old cousin with a penchant for cross-dressing; and Berenice Sadie Brown, the black cook with a blue glass eye who cares for them both.[96] The odd trio spends the summer in the Addams' kitchen playing three-handed bridge with missing cards and "saying the same thing over and over, so that by August the words began to rhyme with each other and sound strange" (257). The kitchen is "a sad and ugly room"; John Henry has covered the walls "with queer, child drawings" of "Christmas trees, airplanes, freak soldiers, flowers," giving it "a crazy look, like that of a room in the crazy-house" (259, 262).

Though the kitchen is a space of entrapment and frustration, it is also a safe space for occasional solidarity and collaborative imagining. Besides eating meals and playing bridge there, Berenice, Frankie, and John Henry sometimes "criticize the Creator," a collective ritual in which they imagine a world re-made according to the personal vision of each. John Henry's vision

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[95] Porter, *Conversations*, 120-121. See also Robert H. Brinkmeyer, *Katherine Anne Porter's Artistic Development: Primitivism, Traditionalism, and Totalitarianism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 29, 33.

[96] The collection of queer or freakish types is typical of McCullers fiction. Noah Mass argues that the freakishness of Miss Amelia (a mannish giantess) and Cousin Lymon (a dwarf hunchback) in "The Ballad of the Sad Café" is essential to the cosmopolitan politics of the café space, which opens up room for difference in the small, conservative town and forces encounters between townsfolk and queer "others." Noah Mass, "'Caught and Loose': Southern Cosmopolitanism in Carson McCullers's *The Ballad of the Sad Café* And *The Member of the Wedding*," *Studies in American Fiction* 37, no. 2 (2010): 235.

reflects the narcissism of a child: "the sudden long arm that could stretch from here to California, chocolate dirt and rains of lemonade" (337). Berenice's world is "round and just and reasonable": "no killed Jews and no hurt colored people. No war and no hunger in the world." It is also disturbingly homogeneous:

> First, there would be no separate colored people in the world, but all human beings would be light brown color with blues eyes and black hair. There would be no colored people and no white people to make the colored people feel cheap and sorry all through their lives. No colored people, but all men and ladies and children as one loving family on earth. [...] There would be free food for every human mouth, free meals and two pounds of fatback a week, and after that each able-bodied person would work for whatever else he wished to eat or own. (337-8)

Berenice's just, reasonable universe is predicated on the absence of differences rather than tolerance for them, a premise understandable given her experience of Southern racism, but with disturbing totalitarian implications. Frankie agrees with Berenice's basic principles but allows more scope for the diversity of human desires:

> an aeroplane and a motorcycle to each person, a world club with certificates and badges, and a better law of gravity. She did not completely agree with Berenice about the war; and sometimes she said she would have one War Island in the world where those who wanted to could go, and fight or donate blood, and she might go for a while as a WAC in the Air Corps. She also changed the seasons, leaving out summer altogether, and adding much snow. She planned it so that people could instantly change back and forth from boys to girls, whichever way they felt like and wanted. (338)

The streak of sexual utopianism in passages like this has made McCullers' fiction interesting to scholars of the literature of queer experience.[97] But Frankie wants more than to be liberated from gender conventions. In her imagined utopia, everyone is a "member" of the world community, and freedom means the ability to move quickly over air or land. It is the vision of a cosmopolitan traveller. Throughout the novel, Frankie desires a different relationship to the world, one that seems impossible in the small Southern town where conformity, stasis, and arbitrary racial hierarchies (enforced by violence) reign.

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[97] See especially Rachel Adams, "'A Mixture of Delicious and Freak': The Queer Fiction of Carson McCullers," *American Literature* 71, no. 3 (1999): 551-83.

Set near the end of World War II, the novel reveals early on that the war has inspired Frankie to "think about the world" and given her adolescent restlessness direction (274). First she dreams of being a soldier, then fastens onto an equally unrealistic but, to her inexperienced mind, entirely practical prospect: she will "join" the marriage of her brother Jarvis, a soldier, and his wife Janice. The novel construes Frankie's outlandish idea of joining the wedding as a somewhat arbitrary—or perhaps "creative"—solution to a universal collective impulse, a need to be part of a "we":

> Yesterday, and all the twelve years of her life, she had only been Frankie. She was an *I* person who had to walk around and do things by herself. All other people had a *we* to claim, all others except her. When Berenice said *we*, she meant Honey and Big Mama, her lodge, or her church. The *we* of her father was the store. All members of clubs have a *we* to belong to and to talk about. The soldiers in the army can say *we*, and even the criminals on chain-gangs. But the old Frankie had had no *we* to claim, unless it would be the terrible summer *we* of her and John Henry and Berenice—and that was the last *we* in the world she wanted. Now all this was suddenly over with and changed. There was her brother and the bride, and it was as though when first she saw them something she had known inside of her: *They are the we of me.* (291)

Frankie has no use for conventional collectives like churches, lodges, or businesses, the everyday institutions of the adult world, nor will she settle for the improvised "family" she finds in her own queer kitchen.

Part Two tracks Frankie's attempt to perform her new cosmopolitan sensibility in her own "regional" setting. She fashions herself a new name—"F. Jasmine," to sync with the "J A" names of Jarvis and Janice—and she strolls through the dusty downtown like a child *flaneur*: "Under the fresh blue early sky the feeling as she walked along was one of newly risen lightness, power, entitlement" (301). On the street, Frankie feels "a new unnamable connection" with strangers and people she knows, and she tells everyone she meets about her wedding plan. Frankie's jaunty approximation of adult cosmopolitanism contrasts sharply with the alienated paranoia of Charles Upton in the street scenes of "The Leaning Tower." In Porter's novella, Charles in unable to comprehend the social and historical forces that have produced the poverty, paranoia, and indifference of Berlin, which he knows only from the stories of a childhood friend

who had lived in Germany. Charles' experience is that of slow disillusionment and dawning awareness of historical reality; Frankie's naive imaginings are all incipience. For McCullers, the value of utopian imagination is its ability, according to Darren Millar, to "volatize rather than reify the conditions of the present."[98]

Frankie's day of performing cosmopolitan community culminates, predictably in the grammar of new narratives of community, in a hotel. The hotel is an unfamiliar space for Frankie (her closest contact with hotel culture thus far is the two cakes of soap her father once brought her from a hotel in Montgomery), and she conforms her body to what she imagines to be hotel manners: she "carefully smoothed down her dress, as she did when at a party or in church, so as not to sit the pleats out of the skirt"; she sits up straight and forms her face into "a proper expression"; she even changes her voice into one "absolutely new to her—a high voice spoken through the nose, dainty and dignified" (315). Her conversation attempts to convey her aspirations to mobility and worldliness: "Don't you think it is mighty exciting? Here we are sitting here at this table and in a month from now there's no telling where on earth we'll be. […] They say that Paris has been liberated. In my opinion the war will be over next month."

Of course, Frankie's fantasy is ultimately unsustainable. She quickly realizes that the "Blue Moon" is "more like a kind of café than a real hotel"—in fact, it appears to be a sleazy bar with rooms in the back for soldiers on furlough (315). Her companion is a drunk, redheaded soldier whose insinuating "double talk" gives Frankie an "uneasy feeling" (316). The comedy of the scene proceeds from the fact that the two are working off of wildly different social scripts, one seduction, the other an inept approximation of how broad-minded adult strangers must talk. Later that evening, Frankie will meet the soldier for a "date" in his shabby room, and she too will

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[98] Darren Millar, "The Utopian Function of Affect in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* and *The Ballad of the Sad Café*," *The Southern Literary Journal* 41, no. 2 (2009): 90.

experience disillusionment: "The soldier sat on the bed, and now she was seeing him altogether as a single person, not as a member of the loud free gangs who for a season roamed the streets of town and then went out into the world together. In the silent room he seemed to her unjoined and ugly. She could not see him any more in Burma, Africa, or Iceland, [places Frankie knows from photographs in *Life*] or even for that matter in Arkansas" (371). The soldier tries to take Frankie to bed, and Frankie cracks him over the head with a pitcher, a slapstick climax to her attempt to imagine herself "a member of the whole world." The next day at the wedding in "Winter Hill"—a town south of her own and bereft of the snowy romance she'd imagined there—Frankie is dragged screaming, "Take me! Take me!" from the newlywed's car, another humiliating reality check (379).

The novel works dialectically throughout, juxtaposing Frankie's flights of fancy with the hard facts of her environment. The end of the novel flashes forward to November, when Frankie is thirteen and the wedding forgotten. In a few economical sentences, we learn that Berenice has lost her job (the Addams' are moving to the suburbs), that Berenice's foster brother "Honey" is "out on the road" with the chain gang (sentenced to eight years for breaking into the store of a white man who sold him drugs), and that John Henry died of meningitis (he "had been screaming for three days and his eyeballs were walled up in a corner, stuck and blind") (389-91). Frankie's dreams remain substantially the same. Though she has transferred her affection to a schoolmate named Mary Littlejohn (who has "lived abroad") and has developed a new mania (now she is "just mad about Michelangelo"), she still insists that she and her new friend are "going around the world together" as soon as they come of age.[99] Mary will be "a great painter" and Frankie, now referring to herself as "Frances," will be "a great poet—or else the foremost authority on

[99] Berenice is "narrow minded" about the fact that the Littlejohns are Catholics, while for Frankie "this difference was a final touch of strangeness, silent terror, that completed the wonder of her love" (389).

radar" (389). Though Frankie/F. Jasmine/Frances is sometimes haunted by nightmares of her dead cousin, we are left in little doubt that her itinerary is outbound, and that her capacity for dreaming and self-fashioning is a necessary adaptation for the kind of modernity to which she is determined to belong.

Despite the ironic juxtaposition of character fates at the end of *The Member of the Wedding*, I think it is a misreading to confuse the novel's antiracist politics with a condemnation of the dreaming done by queer white children.[100] The novel is articulate about the differences between Frankie's prospects and Honey's, for example. In one of Frankie's more adult moments, she tells Honey, who is well educated and deeply angry, that he ought to go to Cuba and "change into a Cuban" (367). Frankie is convinced that leaving town for a place with more auspicious conditions and values is the best way for individuals to deal with Southern intolerance, though Honey calls the idea of escape "fantastic." Later, his alternative "escape" through drugs only lands him more "caught" than before, this time in jail and on the chain gang. Frankie may underestimate the material difficulties of various escape routes—money, language, and documentation come to mind—but she is fully aware of how dangerous the town is for a young, intelligent, light-skinned African-American male like Honey.[101]

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[100] Several recent critics have read the final pages of *Member* as signaling Frankie's callousness to racial injustice at home and her tragic conformity to a normative, white, middle-class identity. See Patricia Yaeger, "Politics in the Kitchen: Carson McCullers, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Surrealist History," in *Reflections in a Critical Eye: Essays on Carson McCullers*, edited by Jan Whitt (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 131-2; and Harry Stecopoulos, *Reconstructing the World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 104-9. Noah Mass reads in *Member* a more nuanced relationship between cosmopolitan and regional identities, arguing that the ending depicts not "Frankie's accommodation to southern social conventions or postwar American imperial fantasies," but rather "a portrait of a southern cosmopolitan identity as McCullers imagined it, where freakish outsiders who dream of escaping beyond their southern geographical boundaries find a place for themselves within a peculiar regionalism that they now view from a global perspective." Mass, "Southern Cosmopolitanism," 242.

[101] McCullers was generally lauded at the time for her treatment of African-Americans in fiction. Her some-time Brooklyn housemate Richard Wright praised *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* in a *New Republic* review for demonstrating "the astonishing humanity that enables a white writer, for the first time in Southern fiction, to handle Negro characters with as much ease and justice as those of her own race." qtd. in Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 147. Wright and his wife and infant daughter moved into the house at 7 Middagh Street in the summer of 1941; McCullers lived there intermittently from 1940 to 1943 (127-9).

Porter's novel *Ship of Fools* is likewise hyper-aware of the different prospects for mobility allowed by the accidents of birth, especially nation and class. Though McCullers' novel features numerous moments of recognition and solidarity across differences of race, class, gender, and age, Porter's novel tends to juxtapose scenes and conversations in ways that emphasize the myopia or self-centeredness of the characters, in spite of their best efforts at self-analysis. Early on in the novel, David Scott, an American painter with proletarian sympathies, diagnoses the privilege of his fellow first-class passengers: "These people aren't typical […] and neither are we. Just roaming around foreign countries, changing money and language at every border. We do the same. Look at me, even learning Russian—" (*SF* 41). David's political consciousness is often no more than a stick that he uses to bully his lover, Jenny Brown, another American painter. The latter is usually equal to the challenge. In the next scene, when the ship stops at a port, Jenny cries, "Let's be real tourists for once," gleefully turning the tables on David's morose demystification and accepting the privilege that traveling on a large passenger ship implies (52). After a testy conversation about indigenous art (David accuses Jenny of "fake primitive" sentimentalism), the two return to the ship in their "cool-looking linen" and pass through a massive crowd of people waiting to board the ship: "There were men and women of all ages, in every state of decay, children of all sizes and babies in arms. They were all unbelievably ragged and dirty, hunched over, silent, miserable" (57). The new passengers are Spanish sugar workers, imported to Cuba in a boom time and now being shipped back home due to the fall of sugar prices and fears of riots provoked by labor agitators. Porter juxtaposes the free travel of tourism with forced travel, existential "homelessness" with the contingencies and violence of the market economy.[102] But the scene reads like a game of ironic one-upmanship: the characters are

[102] Herr Reiber, a repulsive character who spouts Nazi racial ideology, remarks that his solution to the ship's overcrowding would be to "put them all in a big oven and turn on the gas," a transparent nod to the impending

sophisticated and self-aware; nonetheless, the disorienting conditions of travel place them in ironic positions that are perfectly legible from the birds-eye view of narration.

Both *The Member of the Wedding* and *Ship of Fools* exhibit the strategies of what Tom Lutz calls "*literary cosmopolitanism*," which yokes "an ethos of representational inclusiveness, of the widest possible affiliation" with aspirations to the highest aesthetic distinction.[103] Like other American regionalist texts that are considered highly "literary," these two novels include many characters whose cosmopolitanism is incomplete; that this is obvious to a certain class of interpreter confirms the more "worldly" status of implied author and implied reader.[104] But Porter and McCullers' commitment to representational inclusiveness was vigorous enough to present serious aesthetic problems, as critics were keen to point out. Juggling multiple perspectives requires a deft hand if the text is to avoid dissolving into a series of either oversimplified caricatures or idiosyncratic portraits. Porter was accused of the former—that her characters were mere types—while McCullers was accused of the latter—that her characters were too strange to resonate "universally." In puzzling through the formal difficulties of their multi-perspectival narratives, both writers resorted to the formal and thematic vocabularies of a non-referential medium, that is, music.

Musical Gestures

Though McCullers' struggle to complete *The Member of the Wedding* pales in comparison to the twenty-year compositional odyssey that was *Ship of Fools*, the younger writer nonetheless experienced the writing of the novel as grueling. Her biographer reports that fellow Yaddonians (especially Elizabeth Ames and David Diamond) were enlisted to read the many, changing drafts

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Holocaust (*SF* 59).

[103] Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas*, 3.

[104] Ibid., 30.

of the novel.[105] As new characters introduced themselves and the shape of the novel shifted, McCullers described the process to Ames as analogous to "changing a piece of music from harmony to counterpoint."[106] McCullers' recourse to musical language was nothing new; music had always been both a personal obsession and a central theme in her fiction. Like Mick Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter,* Frankie Addams in *Member* is hypersensitive to music in her environment. At the end of Part One, we get the long description of Frankie listening to a distant horn playing the blues:

> The tune was grieving and low. It was the sad horn of some colored boy, but who he was she did not know. Frankie stood stiff, her head bent and her eyes closed, listening. There was something about the tune that brought back to her all of the spring: flowers, the eyes of strangers, rain.
>
> The tune was low and dark and sad. Then all at once, as Frankie listened, the horn danced into a wild jazz spangle that zigzagged upward with sassy nigger trickiness. At the end of the jazz spangle the music rattled thin and far away. Then the tune returned to the first blues song, and it was like the telling of that long season of trouble. She stood there on the dark sidewalk and the drawn tightness of her heart made her knees lock and her throat feel stiffened. (*CSCM* 293)

Without warning, the horn cuts off, and Frankie is left feeling "lost," until a sudden revelation hits her: "At last she knew just who she was and understood where she was going. She loved her brother and the bride and she was a member of the wedding. The three of them would go into the world and they would always be together. And finally, after the scared spring and the crazy summer, she was no more afraid" (295). The open-ended nature of the horn's song leaves space for Frankie to take up the tune, metaphorically, and improvise her own cosmopolitan story. When she communicates her story to the townspeople the next day, she realizes that "the telling of the wedding had an end and a beginning, a shape like a song" (307). Singing and horn playing are vernacular forms of expression that "teach" Frankie how to articulate her cosmopolitan longings.

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[105] Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 214-5.

[106] McCullers to Ames, Friday, undated, YR Reel 2.

The moment is similar to scenes in Porter's story "The Leaning Tower," in which Charles is interrupted in his work by Tadeusz, the gentlemanly Pole, at his piano:

> He listened with pleasure, sitting back at ease. That fellow really could play. Charles had heard a great many famous pianists, by radio, who didn't, it seemed to him, sound so much better than that. Tadeusz knew what he was doing. He drew Tadeusz sitting over the piano, bird head, little stiff wrinkles at the corners of his mouth, fingers like bird claws. 'Hell, maybe I'm a caricaturist,' he thought, but he did not really worry about it. He settled down again and forgot to listen. (*CSKAP* 471)

Porter captures the particular joy of being an aspiring artist from Texas and hearing a real pianist for the first time, casually, and not in the concert hall or on the radio. Part of the experience of living with other artists, the story implies, is the way their personalities and creations drift into one's artistic consciousness, sometimes catalyzing self-revelation ("Hell, maybe I'm a caricaturist") and sometimes working more incalculably.[107] Music gives both Porter and McCullers a way of talking about creative "inspiration" as a social process, something triggered by certain configurations of people in space and time, rather than something mystical.[108]

For both Porter and McCullers, music offered a way of talking about not only individual inspiration, but also collective activity. "The Ballad of the Sad Café" ends with an odd pronouncement: now that the café has closed and the mill town is once again a place where "the soul rots with boredom," the narrator suggests, "You might as well go down to the Forks Falls and listen to the chain gang" (*CSCM* 253). On the chain gang, "twelve mortal men" make a

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[107] Unlike *Member*, "The Leaning Tower" endlessly defers Charles' "epiphany," leaving him at the end of the story with only "an infernal desolation of the spirit, the chill and the knowledge of death in him" (495). One way to interpret this deferral would be to say that the story points to itself: its culmination is not in the space of narrative, but in the act of narrating, a feat the author could accomplish only with the ten years and thousands of miles of distance—not from the "oppressive" atmosphere of pre-war Berlin, but from the "sylvan beauty" of Yaddo, the consummation of creative community towards which the story can only furtively gesture.

[108] Both Porter and McCullers would have been familiar with the experience of working near the studio of a piano-playing fellow artist from their time at Yaddo. Moreover, both developed an intimate relationship with composer David Diamond at Yaddo. McCullers wrote to Diamond that "The Ballad of the Sad Café" was "for him." In turn, Diamond set her poem "The Twisted Trinity" to music. McCullers played the score to Diamond's ballet *The Dream of Audubon* over and over when she was home in Columbus during the spring of 1942. Carr, *Lonely Hunter,* 208. Porter's letters indicate that Diamond also dedicated songs to her. YR Reel 2. Porter's resentment of McCullers seems to have been exacerbated by her rivalry for Diamond's (platonic) affection.

"music that causes the heart to broaden and the listener to grow cold with ecstasy and fright." McCullers' coda implies that even in the most impoverished and unpromising of circumstances, the power of collective human expression is infectious, leaving open the possibility for change.

Music functions in a similar way at the end of "The Leaning Tower," when Charles is swept up momentarily into the crowd of celebrating Germans in the cabaret:

> A disordered circle formed, arms interlocked, and a ragged singing began which smoothed out almost at once into a deep chorus, the fine voices swinging along together in frolicsome tunes Charles did not know. He swayed with the circle, woven into it, he opened his mouth and sang tunelessly without words. Real joy, warm and careless, swept him away; this was a place to be, these were wonderful people, he liked absolutely everybody there. The circle broke up, ran together, whirled, loosened, fell apart. (*CSKAP* 493)

The measured flatness of the narration here signals that Charles' moment of collective belonging will be just that, momentary. The main action of the cabaret scene has been a combative conversation in which the four young men draw stark lines between American, German, and Polish culture and political aims. Near the end, Hans declares ominously, "We Germans were beaten in the last war, thanks partly to your great country"—a sarcastic dig at Charles' American naiveté—"but we shall win in the next" (486). Tadeusz dissipates the tension by turning to the thing that binds them together: "Oh, come now, dear Hans, I never felt less bloodthirsty in my life. I only want to play the piano" (487). While the others concur—Charles wants to paint, Otto wants to teach mathematics—Hans refuses to let the question of the next war drop immediately. In Porter's story, café conviviality and the bonds between young creative people are an insufficient stay against nationalism. A pre-war story about a young artists' disillusionment, written in the middle of the Second World War, "The Leaning Tower" suggests that the peaceful human passions—memory, creativity, curiosity—are extremely fragile.[109]

[109] Fragility inheres in the novella's central symbol, the tiny plaster replica of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, a cherished memento from Rosa's honeymoon that Charles thoughtlessly crushes.

Music was a powerful medium for articulating the power (or fragility) of creative collectivity, but the precision of the metaphor mattered. McCullers' insight about "counterpoint" has consequences for her novel that go beyond theme and even structure. While harmony deals with chords (the simultaneous sounding of two or more notes), counterpoint refers to melody set against melody.[110] Thus, "counterpoint" implies an embrace of difference rather than homogeneity. The novel juxtaposes black with white characters, service workers with nascent members of the "creative class," and does so in such a way as to acknowledge their very different levels of access to cosmopolitan mobility, if not creative expression. McCullers literalizes the idea of a triple melody in the long conversation between Frankie, Berenice, and John Henry the evening before the wedding.

With the eerie sound of a piano being tuned in the background, the characters begin a "queer conversation": "It was the first time ever they had talked about love, with F. Jasmine included in the conversation as a person who understood and had worthwhile opinions" (*CSCM* 340). Frankie begins the conversation by describing an uncanny experience from earlier in the day (she thought she saw her brother and his bride out of the corner of her eye, but it turned out to be "two colored boys" in an alley). She has to "study just for the right words to tell of a feeling that she had never heard named before" (339). Berenice is shocked to hear a familiar experience articulated ("Listen at me! Can you see through them bones in my forehead? Have you, Frankie Addams, been reading my mind?"), and declares, "that is the way when you are in love" (340). Then Berenice begins her own story; she "raised her chin and drew in her breath in the way of a singer who is beginning a song" (341). In her "dark gold voice," she describes her four husbands

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[110] *The Oxford Dictionary of Music* defines "counterpoint" suggestively as "The ability, unique to music, to say two things at once comprehensibly." Klaus-Jürgen Sachs and Carl Dahlhaus, "Counterpoint," *Grove Music Online* (New York: Oxford University Press), accessed April 27, 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/06690.

(she married three men in an attempt to recapture the happiness she found with her first, true love). Berenice's voice is the voice of experience, offered as a warning to Frankie about the danger of her "mania" for the wedding in Winter Hill (347):

> "Boyoman! Manoboy!" she said. "When we leave Winter Hill we're going to more places than you ever thought about or even knew existed. Just where we will go first I don't know, and it don't matter. Because after we go to that place we're going on to another. We mean to keep moving, the three of us. Here today and gone tomorrow. Alaska, China, Iceland, South America. Traveling on trains. Letting her rip on motorcycles. Flying around all over the world in airplanes. Here today and gone tomorrow. All over the world. It's the damn truth. Boyoman!" (355)

Frankie's "song" is closer to the bombastic voice of a radio advertiser than it is to Berenice's rich, golden tones, but the kitchen contains them both. Like discordant sounds that filter into the kitchen that night—snatches of melodies from the piano tuner, children playing baseball down the street—the voices of Frankie and Berenice are contrapuntal, singing separate, simultaneous melodies.

The scene ends in concord. Berenice finally grabs the feverish, raving adolescent and cradles her like a child: "She had been breathing very fast, but after a minute her breath slowed down so that she breathed in time with Berenice; the two of them were close together as one body, and Berenice's stiffened hands were clasped around F. Jasmine's chest" (357). Berenice sums up their conversation with the word "caught": "We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow. I born Berenice. You born Frankie. John Henry born John Henry. And maybe we wants to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught" (357). She goes on to explain that she is "caught worse" than Frankie and John Henry (Frankie understands immediately, but John Henry asks "Why?" in "his child voice"):

> "Because I am black," said Berenice. "Because I am colored. Everybody is caught one way or another. But they done squeezed us off in one corner by ourself. So we caught that first way I was telling you, as all human beings is caught. And we caught as colored people also. Sometimes a boy like Honey feel like he just can't breathe no more. He feel like he got to break something or break himself. Sometimes it just about more than we can stand."

Frankie suggests the opposite term: that people are in fact "loose": "I mean you don't see what joins them up together. You don't know where they all came from, or where they're going to. For instance, what made anybody ever come to this town in the first place? Where did all these people come from and what are they going to do?" (358) Finding no solution to the conundrum of why people are "caught and loose," and finding little comfort in Berenice's platitudes ("We know just so much" and "Nobody requires you to solve the riddles of the world") the three suddenly begin to cry:

> They started at exactly the same moment, in the way that often on these summer evenings they would suddenly start a song. Often in the dark, that August, they would all at once begin to sing a Christmas carol, or a song like the Slitbelly Blues. Sometimes they knew in advance that they would sing, and they would agree on the tune among themselves.
>
> Or again, they would disagree and start off on three different songs at once, until at last the tunes began to merge and they sang a special music that the three of them made up together. John Henry sang in a high wailing voice, and no matter what he named his tune, it sounded always just the same: one high trembling note that hung like a musical ceiling over the rest of the song. Berenice's voice was dark and definite and deep, and she rapped the offbeats with her heel. The old Frankie sang up and down the middle space between John Henry and Berenice, so that their three voices were joined, and the parts of the song were woven together. (359)

The crying, like the singing, literalizes the alternation between counterpoint and harmony that governs this section of the novel. The characters cry for "three different reasons," and the moment manages to be comic rather than maudlin, a signal of open-ended emotional catharsis: "John Henry was crying because he was jealous, though later he tried to say he cried because of the rat behind the wall. Berenice was crying because of their talk about colored people, or because of Ludie [her first husband], or perhaps because F. Jasmine's bones were really sharp. F. Jasmine did not know why she cried, but the reason she claimed was the crew-cut and the fact that her elbows were so rusty" (359-60). The ending of the novel makes it clear that Berenice is right—some people are more "caught" than others. But Frankie is right too: it is the "looseness" of people, especially highly mobile, cosmopolitan ones, that allows for open-ended narratives,

for change, and for utopian potentialities.[111] For Frankie, the war is more inspiration than tragedy, an off-site adventure that prompts her to dream about romance beyond the conventional script of "having a beau." Berenice's story of compulsive, repetitive marriage is one more prompt to chase bigger dreams. The concept of counterpoint allows McCullers to tell a story that is both critical of the social politics of the South and optimistic about the fact that not every place is so reactionary and constrained.[112]

§

McCullers finished *The Member of the Wedding* at Yaddo in August of 1945, just as the war was ending in Japan.[113] Though there were few guests at Yaddo that summer due to wartime cutbacks, McCullers had every reason to be thankful for the support of the colony over the past four years and optimistic about the future. Her "cursed book" was finally done, and she and Reeves had reconciled, remarrying in March.[114] The novel's idealization of cosmopolitan community as a snowy, distant, but still invigorating "elsewhere" makes sense given the optimism of the moment.

It is possible that *Ship of Fools* would have been a very different novel, had Porter finished it in the winter of 1943 as she had hoped rather than leaving Yaddo for yet another series of wanderings. Despite her initial enthusiasm for the colony ethos and the lifestyle it promised her, in the end Yaddo failed Porter, both materially and creatively. In purchasing South

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[111] I am indebted Darren Millar for this reading of Frankie and Berenice's versions of "utopia." Millar, "Utopian Function," 92.

[112] *The Member of the Wedding* is notably less pessimistic than *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, which she finished in 1939. In that novel, the adolescent protagonist ends up curtailing her dreams to work at a department store, while other characters end in death and suicide. Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000 [1940]).

[113] Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 257.

[114] Reeves had pulled out of his depression and alcoholism and become a decorated solider, fighting in the Normandy invasion and suffering multiple injuries. Ibid., 254.

Hill, Porter drove herself into crippling debt, not to mention the exhaustion of caring for an old house alone through upstate New York winters. With the novel unfinished, she had no choice but to find work elsewhere, first in Washington at the Library of Congress, then in Hollywood, and eventually at a dozen universities, where she taught literature and creative writing. Though Porter would visit Yaddo occasionally over the next two decades and maintain a robust personal correspondence with Ames, most of her interactions with the colony were administrative: she recommended guests, judged applications, and kept up with gossip.[115] The scandals that rocked Yaddo in the late 1940s would leave Porter bitter and disillusioned about the prospects of creative community.

Like McCullers, Porter framed the structural challenge of her novel—weaving together the experiences and voices of a huge cast of unconnected characters—in musical terms. In a 1963 interview, Porter described the novel that took her twenty years to finish as a "symphony": "It was a question of keeping everything moving at once. There are about forty-five main characters, all taking part in each other's lives, and then there was a steerage of sugar workers, deportees. It was all a matter of deciding which should come first, in order to keep the harmonious moving forward [sic]."[116] Porter describes a fictional practice that has obvious parallels to the art colony: the human symphony is an apt metaphor for the challenge of mobilizing numerous individuals for creative purposes, a challenge shared by a place like Yaddo and a narrative of creative community. If McCullers conceived of the problem through the concept of counterpoint, or simultaneous melody, Porter achieved coherence by creating a novel in which each character "plays" a variation on a single theme: "the criminal collusion between

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[115] That "gossip" included the ousting of Agnes Smedley in 1948 and Lowell's persecution of Ames in 1949, both of which Porter responded to at length in letters.

[116] Interview with Barbara Thompson, 1963. Porter, *Conversations*, 97-8.

people of average, conventional virtue and good will, with people whose aims are evil, and who live by manipulation of the apathy, indifference, or tacit assent of 'good' people."[117]

Ship of Fools is a strange hybrid in its sensibility, at once medieval (the headnote cites its debt to Sebastian Brant's fifteenth-century moral allegory *Das Narrenschiff*) and intensely modern, as Porter's post-publication reflections on the novel's theme make clear:

> Betrayal and treachery, but also self-betrayal and self-deception—the way that all human beings deceive themselves about the way they operate…There seems to be a kind of order in the universe, in the movement of the stars and the turning of the earth and the changing of the seasons, and even in the cycle of human life. But human life itself is almost pure chaos. Everyone takes his stance, asserts his own rights and feelings, mistaking the motives of others, and his own…. Now, nobody knows the end of the life he's living, and neither do I. Don't forget I am a passenger on that ship; it's not the other people altogether who are the fools! We don't really know what is going to happen to us, and we don't know why. Quite often the best we can do is to keep our heads, and to try to keep at least one line unbroken and unobstructed. Misunderstanding and separation are the natural conditions of man. We come together only at these pre-arranged meeting grounds; we were all passengers on that ship, yet at his destination, each one was alone.[118]

If life is "almost pure chaos," if our relations to each other are random rather than necessary ("loose" in McCullers' terminology), then the task of the artist is to create a temporary coherence out of the madness. And if *Ship of Fools* is a fictional shadow of Yaddo, then unlike the colony, it was a symphony Porter could conduct with utter precision.

The contrast between *Ship* and Porter's first "Yaddo" story, "The Leaning Tower," is instructive. While the novella has an unusual number of adult characters for Porter's fiction, the presence of Charles Upton as an artist alter ego ties it to the approach of Porter's popular "Miranda" stories of the 1930s. In "Tower," Porter tackles the theme of "found community" among artists and intellectuals directly, and the meddlesome landlady Rosa Reichl can be read as

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[117] Katherine Anne Porter, No Safe Harbor Synopsis (1942), Series 2, Box 16, Katherine Anne Porter Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries. Qtd. in Beth Alvarez, "'Before the Voyage Ended': An Examination of the Serial Publication of *Ship of Fools*, 1944-1959," in *Katherine Anne Porter's* Ship of Fools*: New Interpretations and Transatlantic Contexts*, ed. Thomas Austenfeld (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press), 88. In a letter in the mid-1950s, Porter wrote that the novel had "no plot: there is only a theme which is illustrated from every point of view I am able to command, over and over and over, in a series of subplots or incidents which keep the characters in movement and the theme developing as we go." Porter, *Letters*, 489.

[118] Porter, *Conversations,* 97.

an incompetent version of the expert administrator and hostess Elizabeth Ames. In 1940, Yaddo still felt like a "sylvan" paradise to Porter, the "green and growing world" where art could flourish; living there allowed her to portray pre-war Germany as a uniform "nightmare" of scarcity, despair, and belligerent nationalism.[119]

Ship of Fools was a different beast. In multiplying the number of characters granted consciousness by the narrator's omniscient gaze, Porter diluted any sense of a protagonist. Several critics have attempted to recuperate a central narrative focus in *Ship of Fools* and to counter the novel's most common criticism: that its characters do not develop or change.[120] However, the fact that the "protagonist" of the novel is up for debate suggests that "protagonism" was not a high priority for the author.[121] *Ship of Fools* is a cybernetic—and intensely satirical—universe predicated on comic and often violent collisions. Porter seems to revel in pairing characters whose desires trump their political convictions, class biases, or sense of physical decorum. The courtship plots throw together short, fat Herr Reiber with wiry, stork-legged Fraulein Spockenkieker; Communist Arne Hansen with Nationalist dancer Amparo; bourgeois Herr Freytag with bohemian Jenny Brown; and upright, respectable Doctor Schumann with La Condesa, a drug-addicted noblewoman.

After five hundred pages of comic collisions, ironic juxtapositions, and moments of self-consciousness that fail to translate into moral action, the reader tends to agree with Porter's later

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[119] The phrase "green and growing world" comes from a brief piece Porter composed at Yaddo during her first season there, the preface for the re-issue of her first short story collection. In it she describes the 1920s and early 1930s as "a period of grotesque dislocations in a whole society when the world was heaving in the sickness of a millennial change." Porter, *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* (New York: The Modern Library, 1940), un-paginated.

[120] Nicholas Solotaroff, "*Ship of Fool* and the Critics," in *Katherine Anne Porter*, ed. Warren, 142; and Wayne Booth, "Yes, but Are They Really Novels?" *The Yale Review* 2, no. 51 (1962): 632-4. The most successful of the recuperative readings is that of Darlene Unrue, who argues that Jenny Brown and Doctor Schumann both undergo a moral journey. Unrue, *Life of an Artist*, 256 and passim.

[121] As Zagarell points out, "protagonist hunting" is a common critical response to the de-centered nature of narratives of community. "Narrative of Community," 505.

assessment that "human life is almost pure chaos." The main events of the novel are bathetic: Herr Freytag is banished from the Captain's table, the ship's petty inner circle, when the rumor spreads that his wife is Jewish. Two malicious children throw overboard the beloved Bébé, a white bulldog belonging to the pompous Professor Hutten and his frumpy wife; a steerage passenger (a folk artist who carves tiny, expert animal figurines) saves the bulldog but dies in the act, a pointless sacrifice. During the anarchic farewell party for the Captain, the Spanish dancers swindle the other passengers in a rigged lottery for stolen goods, and Mrs. Treadwell bludgeons the vulgar Texan engineer William Denny in the face with her sandal heel. In the end, the passengers arrive in Bremerhaven essentially unchanged, "their only common hope being to leave that ship and end that voyage and to take up their real and separate lives once more" (493). Because the novel is set so precisely in 1931, the final irony is strong: though the mostly German passengers are grateful "to set their feet once more upon the holy earth of their Fatherland," the reader knows that their nation, and indeed the globe, is headed for total war and mass death (494). It is a gesture not merely of cosmopolitan knowingness, but of historical hindsight that makes the blindness and bumbling of the characters, finally, tragic, in sharp contrast with the complacent historical irony of Wilder's *The Woman of Andros*.

Ship of Fools is not a novel about collective action, or about community in any traditional sense. On a structural level, the novel demonstrates how a space like a ship throws human personalities into sometimes shocking relief through contrast and decontextualization. The novel performs its polemic about the sanctity of individual lives through an extreme democracy of narrative attention: it is not only the "forty-five main characters" who are granted novelistic consciousness, but also an Indian nurse, an embittered cabin boy, and various members of the crew. Where collectivity exists it is mostly in pernicious forms of nationalism, racism, male

chauvinism, and class snobbery. Even further, the novel suggests that the "collective" is a category imposed by those in power on populations they seek to control or, at the extreme, exterminate. The omniscient narrator is careful to remark that the steerage passengers, all "eight hundred and seventy-six souls," are "not faceless," and that "the reek of poverty" is not essential, but rather a property of their condition of "complete enslavement" (57). When the destitute passengers joyfully disembark to their homeland, a German officer regards the mass with "nausea," comparing them with "vermin" (366). But it is the authority-worshiping Captain Thiele who provides the starkest example of "herd" thinking when he dreams of "turning one of those really elegant portable machine guns on a riotous mob"; the novel dismisses the human impulse to lump other humans together as dire moral sloth (426). *Ship of Fools* documents failure after failure of each character to understand and sympathize with one another as individuals. Meanwhile, the reader is allowed unmediated access to each character's fears and desires.

The characters in *Ship of Fools* lack the love for self or others that would allow them to join in free and voluntary associations; collectivity is coercive in the novel's world, an attempt of one group to gain power over another. Porter was intensely wary of such attempts. In 1941, she wrote to her war-bound nephew Paul from Yaddo: "The individual is all that matters, and the evil of war, as of Fascism, is precisely this destruction of identity, this notion of herd life and mass death…"[122] Porter's individualism would ossify into a conservative politics later in life; in a 1956 letter, she ranted that "the crown of civilization is the pure liberty to choose what one needs of silence, solitude, long uninterrupted hours for work, for reading, for study" bound up with "the right to choose one's own society as well as to be chosen by it: the blessed liberty of

[122] Porter, *Letters*, 215.

keeping the company of one's own kind, and the right to defend ones privacy against the invasive, the prying, the dull, on the one hand, and quite simply—and this is the real point—any one at all, that one doesn't care for and doesn't want around!"[123] But *Ship of Fools* is not primarily a political statement, and if it is marred by the monotony of its theme of human self-deception and separation, it nonetheless makes a compelling (if conservative) argument about modern community: that purely contingent pluralism, the kind that a ship or a hotel produces, may offer interesting social panoramas, but it will not necessarily inspire spontaneous sympathy or solidarity. The contrast with McCullers' optimism is stark.

Porter's novel elicited divergent reactions when it finally appeared, with much hype from publishers and the press, on April 1, 1962. The most damning review, by Theodore Solotaroff in *Commentary*, charged Porter with collapsing moral and political distinctions into a story of "man's inhumanity to man," a move that he saw as paralleling the intellectually flabby reactions by some American journalists to the Adolf Eichmann trial.[124] The novel's most sophisticated early defender was M.M. Liberman, an academic rather than a magazine critic, and his defense made reference to Porter's participation in the long literary tradition of "romance":

> When Miss Porter, who could have put her cast of characters anywhere she wanted, elected to put them aboard ship, she made as if to free them, in the manner of a romance, for a moral quest; that is, they are ostensibly liberated, as if by magic, precisely because they *are* aboard ship—liberated from the conventions of family background, domestic responsibility, national custom, and race consciousness. Theoretically, they can now emerge triumphant at the end of the journey, over duplicity, cruelty, selfishness and bigotry. But they do not."[125]

Thinking back to Henry James' version of modern romance, Liberman argues that Porter's characters cannot make use of their freedom (even if it is only the Jamesian freedom of a "lucky

[123] quoted in Brinkmeyer, *Artistic Development*, 203-4. As Brinkmeyer and others have pointed out, Porter's obsession with privacy and freedom of association dovetailed with sometimes-vehement opposition to integration and the Civil Rights Movement, at least in her published commentary on those events.

[124] Solotaroff, "*Ship of Fools* and the Critics," 143.

[125] Liberman, "Responsibility of the Novelist," 189.

accident") for "humane ends," because scientific modernity has caught up with them: "psychology has stripped their spiritual and emotional lives of all mystery" and the future holds only "the destruction of Isabel Archer's Europe of infinite possibilities."[126] Porter's botched romance of modern community is a bleak final statement about the dream of the art colony, a utopian space that turned out to be as bureaucratic and petty as other pluralistic institutions. The strength of Porter's disillusionment was commensurate with her investment in Yaddo's utopian experiment in the early 1940s. Late in life, Porter styled herself as an uncompromising individualist: "I have never been drawn into a group; I cannot join a circle, a crowd, the thing I call a 'huddle.'"[127] Porter's lapse in memory marks a shift in her perception (if not an outright erasure) of the practicability of Yaddo's determination to offer a stable, pluralistic version of creative community.

III. The Colony and the Cold War

At its most utopian, Yaddo was a paradise that liberated guests from economic worries, gave them time and space to focus on current creative project, and threw them into contact with fascinating artists and intellectuals. Most guests experienced an initial phase of euphoria and optimism upon arrival. However, living at Yaddo could also activate numerous anxieties; aside from professional rivalry and personal irritation, there was the stir-crazy feeling that attended artists struggling through creative droughts, especially in the quiet winter months. Finally, there was the insecurity of depending on uncertain patronage. From 1926 until 1949, Elizabeth Ames was left solely in charge of orchestrating the delicate balance of inclusiveness and distinction that

[126] Ibid.

[127] Porter, *Conversations*, 86-7, 114.

governed colony admissions. Moreover, she had the power to extend residences indefinitely—or terminate them. Some guests thus saw her reign as a form of tyranny.

Porter and McCullers experienced little tension in this area: each developed an intense friendship with Ames based on mutual admiration and care, and Ames accommodated their needs for years at a time without hesitation. For Agnes Smedley, a journalist, novelist, and revolutionary, the situation was more complicated. After her initial residency in the summer of 1943, Ames allowed Smedley to stay on at Yaddo indefinitely. In part, this was due to friendship and because Ames understood Smedley's need for a home base while she lectured and wrote. But in part it was because Smedley stepped in to help Ames nurse her sister Marjorie, who had been incapacitated by a stroke and was dying very slowly. If Ames touted Yaddo's "strictly private and personal hospitality," it was also true that its hospitality sometimes entailed sacrifices of autonomy. Yaddo could shift quickly from an obligation-free "third place" to a pseudo-family, rife with all the complexities of dependency, care taking, and guilt that family life entails.

Assimilating into the Yaddo "family" had its drawbacks, but so did lack of intimacy with the Executive Director. While guests often experienced frustration at their lack of productivity and the uncertainty of receiving "more time" at the colony, Robert Lowell was the only guest in history to try to have the Executive Director fired. Lowell's crusade against Ames brought to a head accusations about Yaddo that had been building for two decades: that Ames exercised favoritism in doling out invitations and extensions, and that the atmosphere of the colony was distinctly left wing and hostile to dissenters.

In the middle of the scandal know as "The Lowell Affair," Malcolm Cowley mused in a letter to Ames that several groups had long wanted to rule Yaddo: "the Communists, the fanatical

anti-Communists, the homosexuals, the alcoholics, [and] the Catholic converts."[128] Balancing the factions was essential, and he attributed the outbreak of the Red Scare to disequilibrium, an overabundance of Catholic righteousness and anti-communist enthusiasm by Lowell, Elizabeth Hardwick, and a very young Flannery O'Connor. As Cowley put it, "two or three sensible guests with no political religion would have changed the situation."

Lowell's first experience with Yaddo came in the summer of 1943 through the letters of his then-wife Jean Stafford, a novelist. That was also Agnes Smedley's first summer at Yaddo. Smedley had traveled with Mao's Red Army in China and published a novel, *Battle Hymn for China*, glorifying their struggle. At Yaddo, she was working on a play and a biography about Chinese generals; but as the war ended, she became more interested in influencing U.S. China policy toward a pro-Communist stance. Also in residence that summer were Langston Hughes, whom had met Smedley on trips to Russia and China, and Alfred Kantorowicz, who had reported on the Spanish Civil War and escaped from interment by the Gestapo in Paris. The tone at Yaddo in the later war years was vehemently anti-racist and anti-fascist, and moderately pro-war, in the sense that most residents acknowledged the necessity of U.S. intervention to defeat the evils of Nazism.

McCullers was at home in this mix, and Hughes, Kantorowicz, and Smedley became here close friends and drinking buddies. Their informed politics added fire to her already well-developed critique of Southern crypto-fascism. Counterintuitively, given her Southern pride and increasingly vehement anti-Communism, Porter also felt at home in this crowd. Smedley and Porter developed a close friendship, dancing a "drunken ballet" together at the Mansion over the

[128] qtd. in McGee, *Yaddo,* 87.

Christmas holiday.[129] The following summer, Smedley and Porter campaigned together in upstate New York for Roosevelt's reelection. Years later, Porter wrote of her friend, "There is something so touchingly warm and good in Agnes, her heart is so tender and her thoughts so wild…it makes very little difference to me what she says or does politically: her feelings are right no matter how misled her acts, some of them."[130] Like Porter, Smedley was an adventurous, well-traveled autodidact from the far West, and the friendship was more important to Porter than politics in this case.

But Jean Stafford felt out of place. Though she was impressed with the luxury of the mansion, she was disturbed by the guests.[131] She wrote that McCullers, with whom she shared a bathroom, was "strange," though "by no means the consumptive dipsomaniac" she was rumored to be.[132] She was especially annoyed by Smedley (she commented on her "masculine haircut" and found her too talkative) and by Margaret Walker, an African-American novelist who made "cantankerous" comments about the South, about Stafford's friends John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate, and about racial prejudice.[133] They were all "half-baked communists," she decided, and felt that her Catholicism and her close friendship with the conservative Southern Agrarians isolated her from Yaddo's mainstream.

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[129] Ruth Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 370.

[130] Porter to Toni Willison, May 1949, qtd. in Price, *Agnes Smedley*, 370.

[131] "This place surpasses the Biltmore for luxury. The Mansion is full of three cornered Spanish chairs and tremendous gold plush sofas. The grounds are vast and perfectly beautiful. Full of innumerable lakes and pools and gardens and woodland walks…The food is superb. The only trouble is the people." Jean Stafford to Peter Taylor, 7 July 1943, qtd. in Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell* (New York: Random House, 1982), 127.

[132] Charlotte Margolis Goodman, *Jean Stafford* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 129.

[133] Ibid. 129-30. Ransom was Lowell's mentor at Kenyon College, and Allen Tate was a sort of surrogate father to both Lowell and Stafford during their early marriage. The couple lived with Tate and his wife, novelist Caroline Gordon, at their Tennessee home for nearly a year in 1942 and 1943. Hamilton, *Robert Lowell*, 82.

When Stafford returned to New York that fall, her husband's actions would further isolate them from those with leftist sympathies at Yaddo. On September 8, 1943, Robert Lowell sent a letter to President Roosevelt and hundreds of others declaring his intention to refuse military service and outlining his objections to the war in detail. The story made the front page of *The New York Times* and left Stafford facing the prospect of coping with her own poor health and lack of income while her husband served up to three years in prison. Though the statement mentioned a Catholic's concern for civilian casualties, its primary objection was that the war would leave China and Europe "at the mercy of the USSR, totalitarian tyranny committed to world revolution and total global domination through propaganda and violence."[134] Lowell framed his objections in terms of the lesson in history he had learned from the Southern Agrarians: "Americans cannot plead ignorance of the lasting consequences of a war carried through to unconditional surrender—our Southern States three quarters of a century after their terrible battering down and occupation, are still far from having recovered even their material prosperity."[135] In a letter to Alfred Kantorowicz from the same time, McCullers mentioned "sinster [sic] political developments" and "the J. situation" (according to Stafford's biographer, Kantorowicz had been infatuated with Stafford at Yaddo), and lumped Lowell in with general Southern insanity: "Her husband is mad in the typical and general way of all Southerners. It is the kind of madness I am now trying to write about, and general everywhere down here. It only takes different forms. Some of them lynch Negroes and cut off their testicles—just a plain sort of home-grown crime. Others go dotty in more individual ways—as did J's husband."[136] *The*

[134] Hamilton, *Robert Lowell*, 89.

[135] Ibid.

[136] McCullers to Kantorowicz, n.d., Virginia Spencer Carr Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Duke University. Though Lowell was a Bostonian, not a Southerner, he had apprenticed himself to Southern Agrarians Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom in 1937, and had lived in Tennessee and Louisiana for much of the previous six

Member of The Wedding would offer compelling testimony to the "madness" of the South in terms that McCullers had refined in conversations with anti-fascist liberals (like Ames) and radicals (like Smedley, Kantorowicz, and Hughes) at Yaddo. If Robert Lowell and Jean Stafford were adopted Southerners, Carson McCullers was an adopted Northerner, and her politics followed suit.

Stafford was not the only one who felt uncomfortable about the atmosphere at Yaddo. Beginning in 1946, Ames' secretary Mary Townsend, a devout Catholic, began passing information about the "red" talk of Yaddo's guests to the FBI.[137] In the spring of 1948, guests complained to Ames about Smedley's long tenure at Yaddo, and about a party at the colony in which Smedley had proselytized to Skidmore College co-eds about the Communist cause.[138] Ames responded by giving Smedley an ultimatum: focus exclusively on literary pursuits and remain living at the colony, or continue her political activities and depart. The Smedley dilemma spoke to a broader change in the works at Yaddo. By 1947, Smedley felt unwelcome at a Yaddo dominated by poets like Lowell and Theodore Roethke, where dinner conversation had shifted away from world politics to debate the relative greatness of Joyce, Kafka, and Sartre.[139] She added in a letter to Cowley that current guests spent "endless evenings splitting hairs about writing and writers, tossing lesser mortals into the burning pit."[140] When Porter learned that Smedley had been asked to leave Yaddo, she wrote to bolster her friend with the suggestion that

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years. Like Tate's wife Caroline Gordon, Lowell converted to strict Catholicism in the early 1940s. Tate would convert in 1950. See Hamilton, *Robert Lowell*, 79.

[137] McGee, *Yaddo*, 83.

[138] Price, *Agnes Smedley*, 385.

[139] Ibid., 384.

[140] Quoted in Ben Alexander, "The Lowell Affair," *New England Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2007): 568.

Agnes would be happier to have done with that "stupid, pretentious place."[141] Clearly Porter's love of Yaddo had tarnished somewhat since her long residence there in the early 1940s.

With the old guard guests like Porter, McCullers, and Smedley no longer dominating the Yaddo scene, Robert Lowell made a bid to turn the colony into his own version of creative utopia. Lowell arrived at Yaddo for his second residency in September of 1948, hoping to take advantage of the free time to make headway on his long, difficult poem "The Mills of the Kavanaughs."[142] Unfortunately, this was a time of personal instability and creative drought for Lowell. As his close friend and mentor Allen Tate reflected in the aftermath of the scandal at Yaddo and Lowell's subsequent breakdown, the writer had given up the three things that kept him stable, "the Church, his marriage and his poetry."[143] The intense isolation of off-season Yaddo exacerbated his precarious mental state. Despite cultivating friendships with the critic and novelist Elizabeth Hardwick and the young, Catholic Southerner Flannery O'Connor, Lowell wrote constantly to his numerous correspondents that he was lonely and miserable.

Pressing Elizabeth Bishop to apply to Yaddo for a residency, he wrote, "There are times of dry loneliness at Yaddo. I'm a bit aghast when I think of how long I'll be on this damned poem. Is anything worth so much work and isolation? Anyhow I wish you weren't so far away."[144] In his desperation to collect his friends at Yaddo, Lowell became frustrated with Ames' "reign." (He joked that she was "like a well-meaning early Hanoverian king—but she's a

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[141] Price, *Agnes Smedley*, 386.

[142] He had just completed a year long term as Consultant in Poetry for the Library of Congress, during which he had had little time to write. He wrote to Caroline Gordon (Tate), "I liked Washington, but what a delight to be done with it; and back to work. With what I've saved from the library and Yaddo and my Guggenheim, I can easily last two years before I have to think of teaching." Hamilton, *Robert Lowell*, 138. As Hamilton points out, it is indicative of the rapid changes of political winds in this time that Lowell, a Conscientious Objector who had served time in prison, was offered a government position (124).

[143] Hamilton, *Robert Lowell*, 141.

[144] Lowell, *Letters*, 120.

liberal and doesn't approve of kings. One of her subjects is how many people King George's income would feed."[145]) To the philosopher George Santayana he wrote in January that he was "gently urging the 'directress' to invite [his] friends."[146] A few days later, he wrote to T. S. Eliot:

> I'm just back from an 'audience' with Mrs. Ames—my first. One of the peculiarities of Yaddo is the uncertainty of the tenure—people are told they can stay a month or two months (I guess it makes sense, but it's tough on those who dangle) so I've spoken up for the flowers, and said nothing of the woods. (I see I have *flowers dangling*, but there's a parenthesis). It went O.K. (an expression she detests) the visit.[147]

When *The New York Times* published a front-page story on February 11, 1949 calling Agnes Smedley "one of the most energetic workers for the Soviet cause in China for the past 20-odd years," Lowell found an outlet for his frustrated energies.[148] Two FBI agents visited Yaddo on February 14 and questioned Elizabeth Hardwick and novelist Edward Maisel, who discussed the experience with Lowell and O'Connor.[149] The guests decided that Mrs. Ames' response to the situation was evasive and insufficiently energetic, and Lowell proceeded to contact several members of Yaddo's Board of Directors to arrange secret meetings. In these meetings, the guests discussed Smedley's long residency, as well as their concerns that Ames' personal and political biases were influencing her administrative decisions. Yaddo Corporation President John Slade decided it would be best to allow the guests to vent their concerns publicly before the Board. A meeting was convened on the morning of February 26, 1949.[150]

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[145] Ibid., 115. Lowell had written the previous summer of Ames that one could "cut her liberalism with a knife." Hamilton, *Robert Lowell,* 127.

[146] Lowell, *Letters*, 126.

[147] Ibid., 128.

[148] Hamilton, *Robert Lowell,* 144. The *Times* article was entitled "Tokyo war secrets stolen by Soviet spy ring in 1941."

[149] For excellent accounts of the Lowell Affair see Hamilton, *Robert Lowell*, 144-53; Alexander, "Lowell Affair," 575-85; and McGee, *Yaddo,* 83-94.

[150] Alexander, "Lowell Affair," 575-8.

Board Members were aware that Yaddo had been under FBI investigation since 1942, and several had been interviewed personally. Newton Arvin and Granville Hicks, longtime Board Members and advisors to Ames on the literary admissions committee, had been harboring their own dissatisfaction with Ames' administration and were receptive to Lowell's charges. Arvin even suggested that Lowell should join the Board of Directors.[151] Lowell was reasonably confident that his charges would be received seriously, perhaps even favorably.

Lowell took charge of the meeting, stating succinctly his belief that Ames was "somehow deeply and mysteriously involved in Miss Smedley's political activities," and that "Mrs. Ames personality is such that she is totally unfitted for the position of executive director."[152] He proposed that Ames be "fired; that this action be absolute, final and prompt." If action was not taken, he threatened to confer with his New York literary friends, including "[Lionel] Trilling, [Philip] Rahv, [Sidney] Hook, and [B.H.] Haggin," and to call a meeting of former Yaddo guests.[153] He drew on Jean Stafford's experiences at Yaddo in 1943 and charged that Ames had a reputation for being "capricious" and "erratic," especially among "the wives." Called as a "witness," Hardwick stated her opinion that Ames showed favoritism to radicals like Smedley and Kantorowicz, whose literary activities were dwarfed by their activism. Lowell even appealed to the legacy of the founders: "I think of the Trasks and I think it showed a touching innocent

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[151] Arvin's biographer speculates that his support of Lowell's charges against Ames have something to do with his fear of political persecution on his own behalf, given his support of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Barry Werth, *The Scarlet Professor: Newton Arvin, a Literary Life Shattered by Scandal* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2001), 115-6. Arvin was the subject of a second scandal that touched Yaddo in 1960, when police raided Arvin's Northampton, Massachusetts apartment and confiscated homosexual pornography. McGee, *Yaddo*, 25-6.

[152] Alexander, "Lowell Affair," 579.

[153] Ibid. 580.

faith in the arts that they should have endowed Yaddo, and this faith has suffered hideous perversion, and I think the institution is faced with ruin."[154]

Ames' calm counter-testimony revealed that she was most troubled by the suddenness of her guests' accusations, given the "harmony" of their life at Yaddo. Until the FBI visit, she insisted, "they frequently came to my house for music or cocktails, a harmonious life, and now and then with little affectionate notes."[155] Moreover, they had all asked for their residencies to be extended and had been accommodated. Ames attributed the accusations to "hysteria" and a symptom of the times. Malcolm Cowley wrote that he left Yaddo "feeling as if I had been at a meeting of the Russian Writers' Union during a big purge. Elizabeth went to a nursing home. Her secretary resigned. Yaddo was like a stricken battlefield."[156]

The Board resolved to defer its judgment to late March, when it could convene in the city. Meanwhile, irate Ames supporters including John Cheever, Alfred Kazin, Eleanor Clark, and Kappo Phelan (a theater critic for the progressive Catholic journal *Commonweal*) circulated a letter in defense of Ames to seventy-five former guests. Fifty-one endorsements returned, and Lowell felt "deeply wounded" by the failure of the literary community to rally to his cause, especially Delmore Schwartz and Katherine Anne Porter, whom he counted among his friends. McCullers wrote to Ames offering to return to New York "to be on the scene for battle."[157]

At the March 26th meeting, Board Members were roughly divided in their opinions. According to Ben Alexander, the archivist of the Yaddo Records, a group of "lawyers and prominent businessmen" were inclined to accept the charges and dismiss Ames, if only to save

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[154] Ibid. 581.

[155] Hamilton, *Robert Lowell*, 147-8.

[156] Ibid., 148.

[157] YR Reel 2.

the colony from scandal.[158] The writers and artists most familiar with her success in fostering creativity supported her wholeheartedly. Following the advice of Hicks and Arvin, the Board took a middle ground in their decision. Lowell would be censured and his accusations denied, but Ames' administration would be thoroughly reviewed. Ames remained Executive Director until 1969, but after the Lowell Affair a formal committee made all admissions decisions, and the length of guests' stays was fixed.[159] The kind of personal accommodation that had been granted to numerous writers—including Porter, McCullers, Smedley, and Lowell himself—would be a thing of the past.

Historical distance provides some clarity on the events of February and March of 1949. Investigations into Smedley's activities in China by Ruth Price revealed that Smedley did indeed pass information about Chinese Communists to the Russian Comintern in the early 1930s, well before U.S. entry into the war. As Price put it, "She was a spy, but not a traitor."[160] However, FBI and army investigations into Smedley's activities were inconclusive in 1949, and she was never prosecuted: a February 19 article in the *Times* called the army's espionage charges a "faux pas." Smedley had concealed from her friends the extent of her involvement with the Soviet cause, emphasizing instead her defense of civil liberties and criticism of Chinese nationalists. Her Yaddo friends had indeed "harbored a spy," but they had done so unwittingly. While Lowell's suspicions were in part justified, his subsequent behavior—a bout of violent insanity in which he briefly believed himself to be an instrument of divine retribution—rendered suspect his crusade against Ames.[161] Lowell spent much of 1949 in psychiatric hospitals, and he and

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[158] Alexander, "Lowell Affair," 583.

[159] Ibid., 586.

[160] McGee, *Yaddo*, 94.

[161] See Hamilton, *Robert Lowell,* 148-63.

Hardwick severed all ties with Yaddo. Almost a decade later, he reflected back on the events with self-directed irony: "Yaddo! Ah me, it's nine years now since Elizabeth [Hardwick] and I blew our lids there and tried to blow the roof off. The results were fortunate. Elizabeth Ames stands where she has always stood and [Hardwick and I] ended up married."[162]

The Lowell Affair made manifest two of the darker aspects of life in a writers' colony. The first was contagious hysteria. As Malcolm Cowley put it in a letter to Ernest Hemingway, "What we had been living through was paranoia that had been passed from mind to mind like measles running through a school."[163] The other was factionalism. Cowley dismissed the crusade of Lowell and his fellow "passionate anti-Stalinists" as a witch-hunt. But other members of the American literary community took the situation more seriously. Lowell had intimate friends in two influential and divergent "camps" in the cultural scene. On the conservative side, there were Agrarians like Tate and Catholics like Robert and Sally Fitzgerald. But Lowell also had supporters on the Left. Hardwick was a critic for the *Partisan Review*, the voice of the new anti-Stalinist Left, and Lowell's charges against Yaddo found a ready ear among the New York Intellectuals.

In early March, Dwight Macdonald, then editor of the journal *Politics*, wrote an impassioned letter to Ames turning down an invitation to Yaddo. Good friends with Hardwick, Macdonald fully credited the charges that "the Communists have had, and still do have, a strategic behind-the-scenes position at Yaddo."[164] His letter chided Ames in terms that must have stung deeply, given her decades-long investment in keeping the colony non-partisan: "Yaddo is supposed to be a refuge for writers and artists, not a center for pro-Soviet propaganda," he wrote.

[162] Lowell, *Letters*, 291.

[163] Quoted in Alexander, "Creative History," 240-1.

[164] Letter reproduced in McGee, *Yaddo*, 92.

Echoing Lowell, he further charged that Yaddo had been "perverted from the intentions of its founders." Macdonald drew a distinction between political pluralism and political influence:

> The objection, of course, is not to pro-Communist writers and artists being invited to Yaddo, but to persons like Smedley, who have no connection with cultural life and activity, making Yaddo their base of operations. I know how the Communists work, and I know that once they get the kind of hold that they apparently have over your administration, they will use it ruthlessly to reward the faithful and knife the heterodox. The details Hardwick told me confirm this generalization.

Like Lowell and Hardwick, Macdonald gestured not only to the dangers of Communism, but also to the lack of literary legitimacy of journalists like Smedley and Kantorowicz.[165] Ames' quest for inclusiveness and tolerance of guests with radical politics, especially since World War II, had threatened the colony's meritocratic ideal.

Katherine Anne Porter's response to news of the Ames' troubles took direct aim at the new gang of "literary dictators" headed by Lowell. Her letter to John Slade was particularly sarcastic: "Since some of the freest and happiest moments of my life have been spent at Yaddo, I am astonished to learn that four people have categorically decided that my very real experience at Yaddo, and with the personal administration of Mrs. Ames, has been an illusion, bordering on the criminal."[166] Porter interpreted the attack on Ames as a personal slight against artists like her who had benefitted from Ames' hospitality during the war years. The letter went on to describe the conflict in terms that made Yaddo both independent republic and microcosm of the world at large:

> I learn that while I had the democratic good fortune to reside at Yaddo, I was actually living in a feudal state. I learn that a minimum of supervision for the sake of all concerned is not an adult necessity, but tyranny, pure and simple. It has also been forcibly brought to my attention that I am no less than an utter fool if I do not realize that every human act today represents a struggle for power, that the suppression of civil liberties, and the expression of political intolerance, is now the fashion, that, in short, I must conform

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[165] During the same period, Lowell was leading the crusade to award Ezra Pound the Bollingen Prize for *The Pisan Cantos*. Pound's poetic achievement made Fascist politics irrelevant, at least according to Lowell and Allen Tate. Conversely, Smedley's explicitly radical politics made her novels not art but propaganda, thus disqualifying her from Yaddo.

[166] Porter to John Slade, n.d., YR Reel 3.

> to this iron heel of a 'new look' which is transparently designed for the aggrandizement of a self-selected few, and the further trampling down of the as-always poor stupid many.[167]

Porter frames the conflict as generational, a coup by a self-appointed committee of young literary elites against an older generation of tolerant adults. While she had previously contended with the crush of "émigré writers" and upstart Southerners of the "gothic" school like McCullers and Capote, Porter now had to worry about a group with which she had much more sympathy. Porter first met Lowell when the aspiring poet pitched a tent on Allen Tate's Tennessee lawn in 1937, and she later entertained Lowell and Stafford at her Baton Rouge home when Lowell was studying at LSU and Stafford was working as a secretary at the *Southern Review*. Apparently the older generation had been nursing vipers in their midst. If Porter learned a lesson from the Lowell Affair, it was that the liberality of a creative community like Yaddo—welcoming people of diverse experiences, temperaments, and convictions—could destroy it.

Porter, McCullers, and Smedley met at Yaddo near the end of the colony's heyday as a harmonious heterotopia, where shabby proletarians, radical agitators, lyric poets, Harvard professors, and queer composers lived and worked together in the "swanky monastery." Porter wrote in March 1959 that Ames' delay in dismissing Agnes from the colony was explicable given her philosophy.

> It is very important to remember that Elizabeth's prime article of faith on which she based her whole directorship of Yaddo, was that no one should be discriminated against because of race, color, religious or political beliefs and you remember how carefully she invited Chinese, Negroes, Jews, Hindus, all nationalities in fact, and she never inquired as to religion or politics. And if Yaddo was to have any meaning at all in the terms of its own charter, she was right. And that she is being assailed on the very grounds of her virtuous and serious attempt to direct a working democracy is, I think, much to her credit.[168]

Porter's celebration of diversity would sound naive to someone like Macdonald, and given Porter's frequent paranoia in the postwar years about Communist and Fascist infiltration into

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[167] Ibid.

[168] Porter, *Letters*, 368-9.

every sector of American life, it appears to be inconsistent.[169] Whereas Lowell and Macdonald were anxious to keep Stalinist cultural politics out of United States cultural institutions, Porter seemed complacent with Yaddo's former tolerance of radicals. Once again, we have community membership and institutional loyalty taking precedence over exceptional talent, aesthetic standards, and political skepticism—the values most associated with modernism in the mid-century United States. If Yaddo was to be a "working democracy," then there was little ground for exclusion from the republic of letters.

Porter's novel, too, tends to flatten politics into one of so many features that define a character, like hair color or accent or place of birth. In *Ship of Fools*, characters have moments of insight into the determining structures of their situation that could as easily serve as reflections on the situation of art colony guests. At one point, Herr Freytag notes, "people on the voyage mostly went on behaving as if they were on dry land, and there is simply no room for it on a ship. Every smallest act shows up more clearly and looks worse, because it has lost its background. The train of events leading up to and explaining it is not there; you can't refer it back and set it in its proper size and place" (132). In the cybernetic suspension of the art colony, where all traits are decontextualized, it makes sense that Porter would come to see the colliding personalities as a ship of fools. Though Porter was accused of displaying in her novel a misanthropic view of humanity, one could as easily invert the analysis and say that the protagonist of the novel is the ship, and that it is merely typical of the heterotopia to make ordinary human behaviors appear extraordinary. If Porter over-generalized the lessons she learned at Yaddo, she nonetheless articulated something important about the shaping—or distorting—power of institutions on human character.

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[169] See Brinkmeyer, *Artistic Development*, 190-208.

The fiction Katherine Anne Porter and Carson McCullers created at Yaddo during the 1940s tries to reconcile the freedom and dislocation of a highly mobile modernity with a longing for human connection and community. Inspired by the structure and the themes suggested by Yaddo's strangely hybrid environment, these writers looked beyond the horizon of their native South and tried to include the world. Yaddo was a stage where political battles played out, a home to be defended, and a utopian experiment in cosmopolitan, creative community in which the writers actually participated. Perhaps the relevant "region" of Porter and McCullers' community-minded fiction was not the South, but rather the art colony.

Coda

> I know what you're thinking: Sex! Drugs! Egos! Art! In all those respects, yes and no. A certain number of people turn up at the colonies with an indecorous agenda, but the majority come to work, in an atmosphere of intense privacy and concentration, without spouses, kids, students, commuting, cooking, cleaning, or hustling. For most artists at a colony, this is the only place to get away from all that.[1]
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> I had organized my life so that writing was most important—but it wasn't enough. I needed a particle accelerator, a mystical device I could use to step inside another world and finish the novel and return.
> I needed a colony.[2]

"Colony Writing" has attempted to demonstrate how Eugene O'Neill, Willa Cather, Thornton Wilder, Katherine Anne Porter, Carson McCullers, and others were influenced by the domestic writers' colonies through which they passed. Each of these writers saw in the colony, at least for a time, the utopian possibility of reorganizing life around creative activity and personal happiness, outside of the strictures of middle class family and paid work. Their experiences in these colonies changed the way they thought about community and authorship, and suggested new ways of organizing literary texts: around collisions of individuals in counter-sites, rather than around family dramas or individual development or the impressions of the *flâneur* in the urban landscape.

My study ends in 1949, but as the epigraphs from composer Jan Swafford and novelist Alexander Chee suggest, colonies, colony writers, and colony writing—at least in its auto-ethnographic form—persist well into the twenty-first century. The most remarkable feature of recent writing about art colonies is its similarity to 1920s writing about art colonies. Replace Chee's comparison of the colony to a "particle accelerator" with a homelier term—"workshop"

[1] Jan Swafford, "Life in the Colonies," *Slate*, December 19, 2011, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2011/12/macdowell_and_yaddo_reflections_on_my_years_at_various_artists_colonies_.html#.

[2] Alexander Chee, "Go Away," *The Morning News*, August 13, 2012, http://www.themorningnews.org/article/go-away.

or “wonderland”—and you have Herman Hagedorn’s defensive insistence in *The Outlook* that the MacDowell Colony was a place for hard work and not bohemian antics.[3] Similar, too, is the self-flattering tendency to think of writers as an alien species. Chee claims that one of the chief benefits of colony life is relief from the burden of being “a normal person,” something apparently impossible when one enters “the fugue state required for making art.”[4] But the utopian note is largely missing from these essays. While colony discourse has changed little over time, it is difficult to imagine a contemporary colony writer claiming that the revolution will begin in Provincetown, or, for that matter, to imagine a writer with the stature of Porter or McCullers becoming quite so dependent on an institution like Yaddo. At the close of this study, it seems important to reflect on the colony’s afterlives, as well as the limitations of my own literary-historical approach.

There is a good case to be made that colonies in the first half of the century, in their embryonic and adolescent phase, were different from their later manifestations. By the 1940s, major changes had come to America’s domestic writers’ colonies. The original Provincetown group broke apart in the 1920s, and the Taos and Santa Fe colonies suffered with the Great Depression. The Second World War delivered a deathblow, as young writers and the servant class on which people like Mabel Dodge depended were drawn away from the small towns of New Mexico and into war work.[5] When Marian MacDowell fell ill in 1946, the leadership of the Peterborough colony went through a period of infighting. Eventually, new leaders like George Kendall (Colony Manager from 1951 to 1970) and Aaron Copland (President of the Edward

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[3] Hermann Hagedorn, “The Peterborough Colony: ‘A Workshop, with a Wonderland Thrown In,’ for Creative Workers in the Seven Arts,” *Outlook*, Dec. 28, 1921, 686.

[4] Chee, “Go Away.”

[5] Gibson, *Santa Fe and Taos Colonies*, 267.

MacDowell Memorial Association from 1962 to 1968) transformed the Colony into a modern institution with an endowment, admissions committees, and electric lighting.[6] Lowell's charges caused a sudden shift in Yaddo's admissions policies—Elizabeth Ames could no longer extend residencies indefinitely—but this crisis obscures what was in fact a more mundane evolution. Like the MacDowell Colony, by mid-century Yaddo was transitioning from a highly idiosyncratic endeavor dominated by the quiet, Quaker charisma of Elizabeth Ames, to a venerable cultural institution.

Outside the colonies, the landscape of literary patronage was changing as well. A boom in the postwar culture industries meant that more writers earned salaries from big magazines and Hollywood. In the 1960s, the National Endowment for the Arts began offering fellowships to individual writers and grants to cultural institutions (including Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony). And the rise of the research university and the creative writing classroom meant that more writers were employed to teach others their craft.[7] Katherine Anne Porter's life after 1945 reads like the progress of a literary Everyman: she worked as a screenwriter in Hollywood, taught at a dozen universities, and when *Ship of Fools* was finally published in 1962, achieved the financial security and celebrity that had eluded her throughout her career. In what can only be read as a symbolic gesture, she resigned from Yaddo's Board of Directors in 1961, just as she was "reading the galley proofs" on the novel she had begun at Yaddo twenty years earlier.[8] Her resignation signaled the end of Porter's long tenure as a colony writer, a period marked off from

[6] See Acocella, *Place for the Arts*, 100-13. Colony president Russell Lynes credited Kendall with making the colony "a genuine force in the community of arts, famed throughout the world." "George Kendall, 96, Force Behind Arts Colony," *New York Times*, April 18, 1998, sec. Arts, http://www.nytimes.com/1998/04/18/arts/george-kendall-96-force-behind-arts-colony.html.

[7] See Nicholas Donofrio, "The Vanishing Freelancer: A Literary History of the Postwar Culture Industries," PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014; Margaret Doherty, "State-Funded Fictions: The NEA and the Making of American Literature After 1965," PhD diss., Harvard University, 2015; and McGurl, *Program Era*.

[8] Porter to John Slade, 1961, YR Reel 3.

her earlier work by its exploration of non-familial spaces of communal living, making *Ship of Fools* one of the most compelling artifacts of the colony era, both for its content and its tortured composition history. After 1945 or so, writers' colonies would remain an important node in the ecosystem of literary patronage in the United States, but given how robust this system had become, it was no longer so plausible for writers to conceive of themselves as renegades and outsiders.

Creative community hardly disappeared with the institutionalization of writers' colonies and the literary field more broadly. But it looked very different in the second half of the twentieth century. In *Poetic Community*, Stephen Voyce describes the avant-garde poetry collectives that emerged at mid-century in response to "new identities, subcultures, and social movements" such as Civil Rights, the anti-war movement, Women's Liberation, environmentalism, and gay rights.[9] Writers' colonies became more racially diverse in this period, and it may be fruitful to extend this study forward to explore tensions between the official pluralism of colonies like Yaddo and MacDowell and identity-based political movements. James Baldwin, although known as an expatriate writer, spent time at Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony in the 1950s. Though I can only speculate at this juncture, Baldwin's "outsider" stance and thematic recurrence to queer domestic spaces suggest promising continuities with the Colony Imagination.[10]

Baldwin's case also points to the most serious gap in this dissertation. This project began from my interest in identifying aesthetic parallels among African American, "regionalist," and

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[9] Voyce, *Poetic Community*, 10.

[10] One might also trace the relationship between the institutional patronage of the colony and the group of writers increasingly referred to as "late modernists." See Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) and closer to my own approach, Elspeth Healey, "Writing Communities: Aesthetics, Politics, and Late Modernist Literary Consolidation" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008).

“ethnic” writers in the early twentieth-century. But the seven writers whose work I have explored in these chapters are white, and, with the exception of O’Neill, born into Anglo-Saxon, Protestant families. I went into the archives committed to an inductive discipline: I would follow the actors, tracing their stories from letters and institutional documents to literary works. Textual networks reflect social ones, and I suspect that the richly emotional relationships among colony administrators like Ames and writers like Porter and McCullers reflect unconscious racial affinities. Moreover, the lack of correspondence from black writers in these archives likely indexes the fact that these writers were a tiny minority at both institutional and informal colonies in this period. They were often invited in a gesture of inclusiveness that, while well intentioned, may have done more to flatter the liberal politics of administrators than to disrupt the racial homogeneity of American cultural networks. Every methodology has its limitations, and telling the story of domestic writers’ colonies in the first-half of the twentieth century may require a more concerted effort to read the archive’s absences, an act that seems promisingly imaginative, creative, and political.

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