

**The Mythology of the Small Community
in Eight American and Canadian Short Story Cycles**

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Abstract

Scholarship has firmly established that the short story cycle is well-suited to representations of community. This study considers eight North American examples of the genre: four by Canadian authors Stephen Leacock, Duncan Campbell Scott, George Elliott, and Alice Munro; and four by American authors Sarah Orne Jewett, Sherwood Anderson, John Cheever, and Joyce Carol Oates. My original idea was to discover whether there were significant differences between the Canadian and American cycles, but ultimately I became far more interested in the way that all of the cycles address community formation and disintegration. The focus of each cycle is a small community, whether a small town, a village, or a suburb. In all of the examples, the authors address the small community as the focus of anxiety, concern, criticism, and praise, with special attention to the way in which, despite its manifold failings, the small community continues to inspire longings for the ideal home and source of identity.

The narrative feature that ultimately provided the critical framework for the study is the recurring presence of the metropolis in all of the eight cycles. The city, set on the horizons of these small communities, consistently provides a backdrop against which author and characters seem to measure and understand their lives. Always an influence (whether for good or bad), the city's presence is constructed as the other against which the small community's identity is formulated and understood. The relationship between small community and city led me to an investigation into the mythology of the small community, a mythology that sets the small community in opposition to the city, portraying the former as the keeper of virtue and the latter as the disseminator of vice. The cycles themselves, as I

increasingly discovered, challenge the mythology by identifying how the small community depends, in large part, on the city for self-understanding. The small community, however, as an idea, and a mythic ideal, is never dismissed as obsolete or irrelevant.

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Chapter One

First-Person Narrators “At Home” in the Small Community: Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and Stephen Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*

Their publications separated by sixteen years and by a political border, Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (published in 1896 and set in coastal Maine) and Stephen Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (published in 1912 and set in Ontario) both project awareness of times changing for the communities they invest in literarily. Their respective serious interest in representing rural communities arises from contextual realities, namely the challenges posed by urban expansion and industrialization. Jewett’s representation of Dunnet Landing, the coastal village setting of the cycle, is a prescriptive offering to the author’s metropolitan readership. Her witnessing of the growing disparities between rural and urban America at the turn of the twentieth century speaks to her concern for those residing in the cities, that they risk forgetting their rural roots—the customs, traditions, and values that are their historical inheritance. Leacock’s narrator, on the other hand, is more ambiguous about Mariposa, the setting of *Sunshine Sketches*. Although his narrator champions the small town over anything city life might offer (namely, money and power), and even criticizes Mariposa’s residents for attempting to grasp at metropolitan luxuries and conveniences, Mariposa’s identity is inseparable from its desires for those luxuries and conveniences. The difficulty presented to the narrator himself, it would seem, is how to lay out convincingly to his readership Mariposa’s (and that of all Canadian small towns) essential goodness and healthfulness, its transcendent value, when that same town is

looking elsewhere and at different goods. Wishing to obstruct Mariposa's gaze towards the city, the narrator presents a complex picture of the small town: as he wishes it to be in conjunction with the realities of the town's changing identity in the face of "the metropolis" on its horizon. Simply stated, where *Country's* narrator wishes to remind the city of village life, a position that, arguably, presents a future-oriented narrative, *Sunshine Sketches'* narrator wishes to remind the small town of itself, and thus looks in all directions, past, present, and future, simultaneously.

I.

Widely accepted in Jewett scholarship is the conflicted role of the narrator in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Susan Gillman describes the narrator's relations to the book's setting, Dunnet Landing, thus: There is

on the one hand, her struggle to move from outside to 'near to feeling like a true [villager],' as she says she finally does at [a large village family] reunion, and, on the other hand, the conflict between her urbanized view of the village – as a retreat, mythic and timeless, but also ancient and somehow cramped [...]. (105-106)

Sandra Zagarell ("*Country's* Portrayal") also explains how difference plays a role in the narrator's presentation of the coastal village:

While appearing to present Dunnet Landing on its own terms, however, the narrator repeatedly locates it in relation to contemporary urban America.

Constantly subjecting her experiences to explanation and interpretation, she

grounds virtually all her reflections in cosmopolitan epistemological categories [...]. (49-50)

Stephanie Foote similarly concludes that

the narrator of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* solidifies the meaning of Dunnet Landing not only for a nation that seems to be moving away from the kind of community the village represents, but also to solidify Dunnet Landing's meaning to individuals who will carry it around, or at least carry around one *just like it*. (57)

To summarize, the narrator of Jewett's cycle finds pleasures imaginative and physical in Dunnet Landing, and she wishes to convey the experience to her intended readership: those residing in metropolitan America. Albeit herself brought up in a coastal village, Jewett is much less worried about Dunnet Landing's upkeep than she is about the "rest" of America, that is the modern urban part, in maintaining connection with what she presents as its rural roots regarding customs, traditions, and communal values. She wishes to provide metropolitan America, as it industrializes and urbanizes at unprecedented speeds, with a means to slow down to self-recollect via her book. Necessary to the accomplishment of this project are the narrator's utilization of her own personal affiliation with the city (she is a city-based writer) in addition to her writerly skills (as one able to convey sympathetically the different facets of Dunnet Landing and its forgotten inhabitants). The cycle establishes a tri-part relationship and line of communication—villagers to narrator to city-dwellers—which confirm the value and success of *Country*, the emphasis resting on reminding the city of the therapeutic usefulness of its rural roots.

Such interest in the narrator's representation of Dunnet Landing works out the significance of the village to the urban world, shedding light on the narrator's/Jewett's intentions and meaning as well as her contemporary historical context as a writer at the turn of the twentieth century. As a result of general and extensive critical inquiry into Jewett's metropolitan relationship to the village, analysis of Dunnet Landing's reception of the narrator has not been critically engaged. Of course, the village's attitude towards the visitor from the city—how it responds to her, why, and the significance of such questions—is an investigation that is necessarily bound up with the narrator's representation of the place. For, as a writer, she constructs her multiple visitations with inhabitants of the village. Her encounters with especially Captain Littlepage, Elijah Tilley, and William Todd are not strictly journalistic since she is after all a sympathetic observer¹ (Richard Cary's alternative term "redemptive scribe" is an excellent descriptor [10]). Her ability to illustrate on behalf of city folk the goodness of such places depends on her authority and acceptability both to her literary subject and her audience. By paying attention to how the narrator represents

¹ Paul John Eakin outlines the development of the narrator's relationship with her landlady Almira Todd, yet cautions that such an outlining "may create the impression that the author has shaped her narrative in an obvious, obtrusively schematic fashion, which is certainly not the case" (526). Recognizing that *Country* is not a novel, and hence not written as a more linear, plot-driven narrative, Eakin wishes to insist that the narrator's narrative structure is more a matter of repetition: "this friendship [between the narrator and Almira Todd] operates as a kind of recurring musical theme which informs the narrative with a principle of order as it acquires ever-deepening tones of meaning" (526). It is agreed by students of *Country* that the book works according to "patterns of recurrence and development" (Lynch, *One* 25). In response to Eakin, however, I would argue that the narrator's literary craftsmanship (Eakin's qualifiers "obvious" and "obtrusive" are unnecessarily hyperbolic), which is, after all, quite evident throughout *Country*, does not detract from the cyclical or repetitive nature of the book. Rather, the individual stories, if not "obtrusively schematic," are neither arbitrarily presented nor un-touched by the writer's hand. Rather, they are narratives that evince writerly control and representation of events.

Dunnet Landing particularly as a place readily receptive to her, we see how necessary such representation is to the narrator's intention in composing *Country*. Dunnet Landing's receptivity is good for the narrator and, by extension, to metropolitan America. What good it produces for Dunnet Landing itself is a question dependent on the first (and, for the narrator, primary) statement.

A note on Jewett's historical context is necessary here because it relates to her representation of Dunnet Landing. Writing in her Preface to the 1893 edition of another of her fictions, *Deephaven* (originally published in book form in 1877), she writes reflectively on her mind-frame at the time of writing the book:

The young writer of these Deephaven sketches was possessed by a dark fear that townspeople and country people would never understand one another, or learn to profit by their new relationship. She may have had the unconscious desire to make some sort of explanation to those who still expected to find the caricatured Yankee of fiction, striped trousers, bell-crowned hat, and all, driving his steady horses along the shady roads. (32)

Witness at the end of the nineteenth century to the major national migration from country to town, and the ensuing transformation of towns into large cities, Jewett, herself born in a maritime-rural town in Maine, admits she might have been overly concerned

by the sad discovery that certain phases of provincial life were fast waning in New England. Small and old-fashioned towns [...] were no longer almost self-subsistent [...]. Tradition and time-honoured custom were to be swept away together by the irresistible current. (33)

Sixteen years after composing *Deephaven*, she expresses greater hope that not all was lost: “That all individuality and quaint personal characteristics of rural New England were so easily swept away, or are even now dying out, we can refuse to believe. It appears, even, that they are better nourished and shine brighter by contrast than in former years” (33).

Critics apply the first quoted passage to Jewett’s fiction generally to point up her attitude to rural places facing urban and metropolitan changes in America. Indeed, despite the author’s seemingly optimistic reflections in the second passage, *Country*, published three years after the 1893 *Deephaven* Preface, nevertheless expresses apprehension that contemporary urban America was losing touch with its rural roots. The later Preface passage does not explicitly speak of places like Dunnet Landing as moving forward with the burgeoning cities. The narrator posits primarily that whatever values these places possess should be transferred forward (and, she hopes, will be) to the cities; she is not concerned about negative city-influence but instead with the separation of city from country (and not, we may note, country from city). *Country* works out a complex negotiation between village and city through the narrator—i.e. the village must be receptive to the narrator so that her readership is receptive to her representation of Dunnet Landing—in order for the cycle to work. Presenting Dunnet Landing as desirous of representation intensifies the immediacy and urgency of her message to her urban readership.

The narrator’s construction of her interactions with Dunnet Landing’s locals works into her self-presentation as one possessing the authority to so interact, an authority based on her identity as an urban author. Philip Joseph explains that

in the American literary sphere of the 1890s, the issue of the traveler's membership becomes not simply a social and political question—not simply, that is, a question about whether the traveling figure will belong and the conditions for that belonging—but an issue of knowledge and truthful representation as well. (*American Literary Regionalism* 24-25)

He further argues that Jewett's narrator

functions as a kind of model representative for the diversified nation, a well-traveled resident of the city who, in identifying with the inhabitants of Dunnet Landing and becoming one of them for a period of time, achieves the authority to represent local distinctiveness to Americans outside the locality. Jewett lets us know early on that the narrator has traveled a good deal and that her wide body of experience has made her more capable of valuing Dunnet for its particularity [...]. (27)

Per Joseph's analysis of the narrator's authority, *Country* suggests that the narrator can best penetrate the unconscious and private lives of Dunnet Landing and then, as an experienced writer, readably offer these to an urban public.

Joseph's analysis leaves open the question of upon whom, and at what point, is the narrator's authority exerted. I would answer that her role of sympathetic observer (or, recall Cary's "redemptive scribe") enacts a double performance of authority for both her subject and audience. Known as a city-based writer, the narrator is a person of interest to Dunnet Landing's villagers; her encounters take her into the stories of their lives as if to transcribe for the future their personal histories. As the narrator identifies herself as one from the city

still able to befriend those “left behind,” the metropolitan/urban readership is invited to turn to the narrator for sensitive and therapeutic insight into America’s rural places. At the centre of this village-city dynamic, the narrator pulls together the geographical interconnection not to a mediating place, but to a culturally healthful future in which the narrator offers rural America to the metropolis out of her representation of Dunnet Landing.

Through her interviews with two of Dunnet Landing’s oldest inhabitants, Captain Littlepage and Elijah Tilley, the narrator establishes her authority to write of them, and simultaneously invites her readers into the intimacy of her interactions with them. In an important way, she creates her readership. By setting up her interviewees as special individuals, she encloses her readers into the intimate spaces of her interviews, turning the readers into privileged eavesdroppers, trustees as it were, of the secrets of Dunnet Landing’s ancient men. Thus, she draws her readers into that special position of being inside and outside the coastal village and has them share it with her. Paul R. Petrie argues that *Country* merges “the reader with both the narrator and the narrated. [...] The insider/outsider tension inherent in regionalist narration [...]” is thereby maintained (102). Moreover, not simply is the narrator satisfying her desire for her city readers to be as intimate with Dunnet Landing’s locals as she is, she is constructing that desire in her readers by narrating (if “arranging” is too strong a term) her visits with the men such that the readers are placed into the private spaces and enabled to know how privileged their position is.

Initially, the narrator presents her acquaintanceship with the men as having been

unlikely, and then writes of the interviews as occurring through charmed circumstances. Each man is over 60 years old, lives alone, and is very much not garrulous. According to the narrator, acquaintanceship with either man should not have happened. Littlepage is “the one strange and unrelated person [...] who had always been mysterious” to her (20) and is even a kept-secret of locally popular Almira Todd: “Mrs. Todd always shook her head gravely when I asked a question [about the Captain], and said that he wasn’t what he had been once, and seemed to class him with her other secrets” (20). As for Elijah Tilley, he is introduced to the reader as “an old fisherman to whom [she] had never spoken.” “At first he had seemed to be one of those evasive and uncomfortable persons who are so suspicious of you that they make you almost suspicious of yourself. Mr. Elijah Tilley appeared to regard a stranger with scornful indifference” (101). Tilley, moreover, like his fellow long-time fishermen friends, is said not to hold “conversation:” “you would as soon have expected to hear small talk in a company of elephants” (102). The narrator then compounds the unlikelihood of Tilley speaking to her by describing the man’s very physical appearance as precluding acquaintanceship with her: He “was such an evasive, discouraging-looking person, heavy-headed, and stooping so that one could never look him in the face [...]” (103).

After setting up the unlikelihood of her ever becoming friendly with either man, the narrator then proceeds to dismantle the seeming implausibility by presenting her acquaintanceship with either as social gifts from them. For example, once having abandoned a funeral in order to return to her work, the narrator complains to herself that she had “made myself and my friends remember that I did not really belong to Dunnet

Landing” (21). Shortly following this self-realization, Littlepage approaches the narrator’s rented school-room to pay her a visit. The narrator describes the captain’s coming with anticipation as if she were caught in a momentous occasion:

I had lost myself completely in work, when I heard footsteps outside. [...] I wrote on, feeling like a besieged miser of time, while the footsteps came nearer, and the sheep-bell tinkled away in haste as if some one had shaken a stick in its wearer’s face. Then I looked, and saw Captain Littlepage passing the nearest window; the next moment he tapped politely on the door. (21-22)

The narrative hurry and suspense given to this scene (brought to an end by Littlepage’s polite tap) speak at first to the narrator’s desire not to be disturbed, but they also indicate that the narrator wishes the reader to understand the importance and specialness of this visit, the unexpected turn of events for this visitor who just previously complained that she was ultimately a stranger to Dunnet Landing. That Littlepage should choose, inexplicably, to spend his afternoon with her is intended by the narrator to undercut her concerns about her social distance from the community, thus establishing her actual connectedness with the community despite her lamentation to the contrary.

The narrator describes her encounter with Tilley as similarly fortuitous. She assures the reader that before meeting Tilley, she already appreciated the special group of old fishermen to which he belongs as possessing a significant value for the rest of the village: “I often wondered a great deal about the inner life and thought of these self-contained old fishermen; their minds seemed to be fixed upon nature and the elements rather than upon any contrivances of man, like politics and theology” (102). Her evaluation of this group of

men actually sets up her “worthiness” to become acquainted with one of them. She manipulates her introduction to Tilley such that it seems not only the satisfaction of simple curiosity but also the reward for properly understanding an otherwise impenetrable group. For no reason apparently, Tilley takes the narrator into his confidence, opening himself up to her in a way that actually transcends and is deeper than the relationship he shares with the other “ancient seafarers” (102)—“There were four of these large old men at the Landing, who were survivors of an earlier and more vigorous generation. There was an alliance and understanding between them, so close that it was apparently speechless” (101)—so close a relationship that not even the oldest fisherman’s nephew is accepted into their group: “My friend, Captain Bowden [...] regarded them with deference; but he did not belong to their secret companionship, though he was neither young nor talkative” (102). The narrator observes a gentlemanly gesture of Tilley’s (he moves away his catch of the day from her skirt), and from this act declares, “I knew that my company was accepted [...]” (103). She shortly after uses a naval metaphor to describe her new relationship with Tilley, one that suggests the narrator and he have connected since it points up her familiarity, now, with Tilley and his world: “I found that I had suddenly left the forbidding coast and come into a smooth little harbor of friendship” (103).

During the interviews, the narrator makes it clear that she is there to listen and later to record for the benefit of her readers. For instance, the narrator emphasizes, albeit implicitly, the private and hence privileged nature of the interviews. The places of interview are held in physical exclusion from the rest of the local community, situated in lonely personal spaces. Both locations enclose speaker and narrator into private settings

where they are not disturbed by passers-by. Moreover, as much as she enjoys her times with the two men, the narrator leaves all of the talking to them, giving them the entire time to describe significant events of their lives.

Before Littlepage joins the narrator in her rented-out school where she works, the narrator explains that her work-space, to which she escapes in order to hide from social temptations, is atop “a steep footpath,” likely “inaccessible” to older people like Almira Todd, and “abandoned” (21) (naturally, since it is summer, but her word choice is deliberate). Tilley’s interview is conducted in his home, which is situated alone in a field estate and which, after his wife’s death, he has turned into a private museum in her memory (105-110). The narrator’s description of her walk there emphasises its isolation:

I came to the foot of Mr. Tilley’s land, and found his rough track across the cobble-stones and rocks to the field edge, where there was a heavy piece of old wreck timber, like a ship’s bone, full of treenails. From this a little footpath, narrow with one man’s treading, led up across the small green field that made Mr. Tilley’s whole estate, except a stragging pasture that tilted on edge up the steep hillside beyond the house and road. (104)

The exclusionary nature of the interviews underline their intention, that the revelations shared between the narrator and the men are also to be shared between the narrator and the reader. That the narrator is relatively silent during the visits heightens the sense of intimacy of the setting, and the reader is prompted to “listen” attentively only to the voice of the man speaking. By what the narrator suggests is her exclusive privilege, her welcome into the lives of two reclusive and reticent men elevates their interest for the reader while

demonstrating how a metropolitan representative such as she can successfully enter Dunnet Landing at a personal level.

Further, what the men reveal is kept secret by the narrator and between narrator and reader. For, even upon the prompting of Almira Todd, the narrator keeps discreet the contents of the visitations. Almira wonders, for example, if Littlepage had indulged in his fantastical story-telling of ghost ships (which he does extensively during his visit with the narrator), but the narrator refuses to explain or provide any details of what the captain had shared with her: “[H]e has been telling me some old stories, but we talked about Mrs. Begg and the funeral beside, and Paradise Lost” (31). Again, following the narrator’s visit with Tilley, Almira assumes a very different experience was had by the narrator from the long and heart-felt story-telling given by Tilley about his much beloved wife: “I expect you had kind of a dull session; he ain’t the talkin’ kind; dwellin’ so much long o’ fish seems to make ‘em lose the gift o’ speech” (110). The narrator corrects her, and Almira, as if upset that she had been wrong, “interrupted [the narrator] quickly. ‘Then ’t was all about his wife, an’ he can’t say nothin’ too pleasant neither [...]’” (110). Even though Almira knows of Tilley’s enduring love for his dead wife, the preciousness of what he reveals to the narrator of their relationship is not disclosed by the narrator. Thus, not even local herbalist and much-loved Almira knows as much as the narrator, and the reader, now do of Almira’s own long-time neighbours. Dunnet Landing thereby becomes the city’s kept secret, a place of treasured memories it uniquely possesses. The narrator’s interviews, represented as fortuitous and charmed events offered to the city-visitor, suggest that the village is open and willing to be so possessed.

At the end of each interview, the narrator makes it clear that her relations with both men are permanently established. She seems to bond with them so securely that all barriers are overcome. For example, on parting from Littlepage, the narrator says, “we parted, the best of friends. ‘Step in some afternoon,’ [Littlepage] said, as affectionately as if I were a fellow-shipmaster wrecked on the lee shore of age like himself” (32). While Tilley describes his marriage, the narrator three times reports that she is able to place herself imaginatively back in time to when Mrs. Tilley ran the household: “I began to see her myself in her home – a delicate-looking, faded woman [...]” (107); “I could imagine the great day of certain purchases [the couple made for the house], [...] the aspiring anxious woman, the clumsy sea-tanned man in his best clothes, so eager to please, but at ease only when they were safe back in the sail-boat again [...]” (108); “I could read this history of Mrs. Tilley’s best room from its very beginning” (108). The narrator affirms that she and Tilley become “the best of friends” during their time together and on her departure, she uses the affectionate term repeatedly used by Tilley in reference to his wife: “‘Poor dear,’ I repeated to myself half aloud [...]” (111). Sex, age, absence of shared history become irrelevant in the narrator’s relationship with the men and only pure friendship, as the narrator seems to present it, exists between them, the result of these first and sole encounters.

When the men embrace the narrator into their personal histories and make fast friends with her, they stabilize the narrator’s (albeit temporary) residency in Dunnet Landing. If she becomes acquainted with the history of the place—and not just acquainted, but a part of its past, in her imaginative connection to it—as well as makes ties with the

still-living personages of that history, she can claim validity for her own position in the village. In turn, in a negotiation that might be described as paternalistic as well as patriotic, the village looks to Dunnet Landing's metropolitan representative for representation to stabilize its own identity. Similarly unknown to each other, Dunnet Landing's oldest inhabitants ultimately depend on the narrator for the future transference of their stories that she shapes into healing offerings to the rest of America. By allowing the narrator to transcend obstacles to acquire local status, Littlepage and Tilley enable her to know thoroughly well two otherwise unknowable Dunnet Landing locals and turn their life stories into narratives that explain the many dimensions of the village.

Country's narrator develops a more intimate relationship with another male member of the Dunnet Landing community, that is with the brother of her landlady, William Todd. Similarly private and reticent as are Captain Littlepage and Elijah Tilley, William attracts the narrator, in part, because of his quiet, even enigmatic, nature. However, unlike her relationships with the former men, the narrator does not penetrate William's reticence through a self-revealing interview. She guards him against scrutiny, an attitude significant to the narrator's development of their friendship: The intimacy of their relationship is suggested through a romance narrative, an element of the fiction that is missing in the rest of the cycle. Through the implied romance (it is never referred to directly, as we shall see), the narrator embarks on one of the deepest of her personal involvements in the village, pointing for the first time towards the possibility of permanent residency and membership. That she eventually diverts the love story's development towards what is revealed as the

actual romance narrative (which is between William and his long-time sweetheart Esther Hight), reassures the reader of her intentions to represent Dunnet Landing.²

The development of the narrator's relationship with William is unprecedentedly personal; yet, the narrator's unique response to William is only ever suggested, implied, or hinted at. In this section of the cycle, she participates in the romance narrative as a character, and much less as an observer and analyst, thereby creating a level of suspense in the story regarding her future role in Dunnet Landing. A literary consequence of her primary involvement in the story is a separation of herself (temporarily) from her connection to her readership via representation of the village. For once, the narrator places herself in the position of being directly observed by her readers, rather than of being a guide to her readers' observations of Dunnet Landing. *Country's* city/village negotiator uniquely submerges herself into the village in this section and gives the observational/analytical reins over to her city readers, drawing them with her more deeply into the village's life.

The romance story is embarked upon with little narrative set-up. The narrator presents herself as ready to enter into a relationship with her landlady's brother even before meeting him. She hints at her hopes for a close relationship with William when she confesses she imagined him younger than he is: "[I] saw an elderly man, bent in the shoulders as fishermen often are, gray-headed and clean-shaven, and with a timid air. [...] [S]trange to say, my fancy led me to picture him not far from thirty, and a little loutish" (44) (William is about sixty years old). Admitting he is "not young-looking for his years,"

² I have yet to discover any critical assessment of the narrator's relationship with William along the romantic lines I am suggesting here.

she still qualifies the observation with a positive rebuttal: He has an “undying [...] spirit of youth” that, she says, prompts her to feel young in his presence (45). Where she bonds with Tilley and Littlepage after their respective interviews, upon meeting William, the narrator describes her friendship with him as immediate. They greet each other for the first time “like old friends” and soon after go off together on a walk “not without a deep sense of pleasure” “as if both of us felt much younger than we looked. Such was the innocence and simplicity of the moment [...]” (45). During their walk, William plucks flowering sprigs for the narrator “and gave them to [her] without speaking, but he knew as well as [she] that one could not say half he wished about linnaea” (the name of the plant) (45).

The narrator’s presentation of her initial acquaintanceship with William paints a picture of at least more-than-friendly interest, and certainly romance (definitely not sexualized). Her feelings of youthfulness, the walk, and the spontaneous plucking of the flower are meant to prompt the reader to understand a connection between the narrator and William that involves more than platonic friendship and more interest than curiosity (journalistic especially). The sensitivity of such an adventure, one that strikes a note very different from the rest of her relationships, necessitates discretion on the part of the narrator. Respecting, as it were, her friend’s intensely private nature as well as the nature of a romance in a small community, the narrator takes a role apart from that of sympathetic observer. Avoiding any sort of “exposé” of William’s thoughts and feelings and writing from a distance respectful of even her own involvement with him (by saying less to the reader than the details imply), the narrator presents her potential romantic interlude in a genteel manner. Leaving her readers to understand the significance of the introductory

details she provides, she engages her readers such that they participate in the construction of the romance narrative.

The narrator does not conclude her relationship with William at the end of her meeting with him and their walk together. Unlike her summing up of her relationships with Littlepage and Tilley at the end of their respective interviews, the narrator suspends resolution of her relationship with William until later in the cycle, although she presents herself as ignorant of future events (hence reiterating her role as character and not observer). The delayed narrative of the William-narrator story points up again the special circumstances and intentions of this part of *Country*. In anticipation of the romantic fall-out, the narrator's private fishing excursion with William establishes for the reader the end of the couple's romantic possibility and saves the narrator from possible personal embarrassment when William's real love interest is later revealed. She sets to rest her involvement in the romance narrative and finally re-establishes herself as sympathetic observer.

At the introduction of the fishing expedition, the narrator's romantic suggestions are intensified before the denouement of their fulfillment. Working alone in her rented schoolhouse, she is approached by William:

I heard the unusual sound of wheels [...]. I saw William sitting in the open wagon, with a small expectant smile upon his face. 'I've got two lines,' he said. 'I was quite apiece up the road. I thought perhaps 't was so you'd feel like going'. (115)

The narrator's reaction complements the rendez-vous that William proposes:

There was enough excitement for most occasions in hearing William speak three sentences at once. Words seemed but vain to me at the bright moment. I stepped back from the schoolhouse window with a beating heart. [...] I went out into the happy world. (115)

Readily abandoning her work (note her different response here to when Captain Littlepage similarly approaches her while she works; then, she felt “besieged”), she departs with William, feeling her friend “were a growing boy; [and hoping] he felt much the same about [her]” (115). She observes that William is dressed like “an old beau” and remarks “he now appeared to feel as if everything had been explained between us, as if everything were quite understood” (116). On looking back to the schoolhouse, she describes their departure as a retreat from what now seems part of the past (almost ghostly): “The land breeze was blowing, and, as we turned away, I saw a flutter of white go past the window as I left the schoolhouse and my morning’s work to their neglected fate” (115).

What exactly is understood between narrator and William is not stated, but certainly more than mere friendship is felt. The intensity of the narrator’s emotions in her companionship with William reaches its climax here and undergoes an unexpected reversal during the fishing trip. As soon as the narrator steps into their designated fishing waters, she writes meditatively:

The moment I began to fish the brook, I had a sense of its emptiness; when my bait first touched the water and went lightly down the quick stream, I knew that there was nothing to lie in wait for it. It is the same certainty that comes when one knocks at the door of an empty house, a lack of answering

consciousness and of possible response; it is quite different if there is any life within. But it was a lovely brook, and I went a long way through woods and breezy open pastures, and found a forsaken house and over-grown farm, and laid up many pleasures for future joy and remembrance. At the end of the morning I came back to our meeting-place hungry and without any fish. William was already waiting, and we did not mention the matter of trout.

(118)

The meditative quality of the narrator's comments here cannot be read as mere descriptive distraction. The sober language metaphorically reflects upon her relationship with William. If friendly and warm, she seems to understand finally, it is not deeper than that. She takes solace, she says, in "many pleasures for future joy and remembrance"—much in the same way the reader might take pleasure in the story of *Country*—accepting, as it were, the level of friendship William is offering her: something "lovely," but not romantic after all.

Arguably, the termination of the romantic potential, described through the metaphor of the empty brook, might also be a parallel statement regarding the narrator's overall treatment of Dunnet Landing. (Indeed, William is an experienced fisherman, and his choice of this brook, which the narrator discovers is empty, does seem peculiar.) The scenario suggests, perhaps, that the brook, like the village as a whole, is worth visiting for storing up therapeutic memories; otherwise, one encounters there forsaken houses and over-grown farms. It is a place of fond memory, not for building new families and communities. This representation of Dunnet Landing through the termination of the romance narrative is reiterated in the revelation of the actual love-story between William and his long-time

sweetheart Esther, who are able to marry, so late in life, only when Esther's mother finally dies.

When William and the narrator reach Esther's home, the narrator makes it very clear that their own relationship is now one of acquaintanceship only. In contrast to their previously mutually youthful and spirited interactions, she remarks that "William helped me out of the wagon as carefully as if I had been his mother" (121). In turn, the narrator relaxes into the reportive style that portrays her skills in interpreting and analyzing the nature of Dunnet Landing's folk. On her first chance to look over Esther's figure, she is ready to characterize her according to a personal history that she seems immediately to understand:

I could only hold William in new reverence; this silent farmer-fisherman who knew, and he alone, the noble and patient heart that beat within her breast. [...] Esther was untouched by the fret and fury of life [...] and been refined instead of coarsened, while her touching patience with a ramping old mother [...] had given back a lovely self-possession, and habit of sweet temper. (127)

Then [Esther] smiled at me, a smile of noble patience, of uncomprehended sacrifice, which I can never forget. There was all the remembrance of disappointed hopes, the hardships of winter, the loneliness of single-handedness in her look, but I understood, and I love to remember her worn face and her young blue eyes. (128)

As with her immediate understanding and sympathy with Littlepage and Tilley, here a quick observation leads the narrator into a ready interpretation of William's sweetheart. She thus has returned to her city-writer role. Again now fulfilling her intention to portray Dunnet Landing as a place of urban imaginative retreat, she assumes a privileged third-party position, as if as a confidante, to the couple: "I believed I was the only one who knew their happy secret, and [Esther] blushed a little when we said good-by" (128). Although the narrator has stepped outside the love story as a primary character, she certainly inserts herself back into it as an empathetic and analytic reporter who shares with the reader a privileged and unique witnessing to Esther and William's love affair.

One of the most telling indications of the narrator's representation of Dunnet Landing as a place of the past is the wedding of William and Esther.³ The romance narrative that initially appeared to be between the narrator and William pointed toward the possibility of the narrator becoming a permanent resident of Dunnet Landing and a member of the well-established Todd clan. By removing herself from the love-plot and presenting the cycle's only love interest to be that between two elderly people, the narrator confirms that her Dunnet Landing does not participate actively in the future of America. When the true love story is revealed, the continuity of that tale as a part of the life of the village is in large part already ended.

"William's Wedding" returns to the love story, and Esther's mother, whose very life

³ The section "William's Wedding," as well as two others ("The Backward View" and "The Queen's Twin") were added to *Country* after the book's first publication in 1896. See Marco A. Portales for the cycle's publication history.

forbade the marriage because the woman demanded her daughter's constant care and service, has died. Almira Todd explains to the narrator that it is exactly the mother's death that has allowed the couple to be married: "Well, the Lord's seen reason at last an' removed Mis' Cap'n Hight up to the farm, an' I don't know but the weddin's goin' to be this week'" (149). Free now, and married, William and Esther, the narrator states, "were going to be young again now, she and William, to forget work and care in the spring weather" (151). True enough as that might be, and as much as one is inclined to forget, William and Esther are an old couple: The time left to them is not long, practically speaking, and children of course are inconceivable.⁴ The romance tale of *Country* involves two elderly people who have suffered long and quietly their separation (they have shared annual rendez-vous for the greater part of their lives) and are married on the occasion of a mother's death.

Furthermore, if we were to read the chapters that introduce the narrator to Esther ("A Dunnet Shepherdess") in ignorance of the latterly included section "William's Wedding," the marriage between the couple does not even occur (obviously) in the story-proper of *Country*. The final part of that section, and the last image, is of a war-scarred William who leaves his lover behind him following a rare and relatively brief visit. In this way, the story emphasizes that the ancient families of Dunnet Landing are already of the past; the narrator's Dunnet Landing, in both possible story endings, is concluded.

⁴ As Michael Davitt Bell points out, the only children in Jewett's book are those at the Bowden family reunion, in the section "The Bowden Reunion" (86-96). Bell argues that the presence of the children "is registered only as a brief intrusion [...]. [They are] linked not with Dunnet Landing but with the outside world [...]" (72).

Although *Country*'s narrator plays a dual role in her representation of Dunnet Landing, she is not ambiguous about the meaningfulness and value of a place like it, for the nation or the reader. Her presentation of the place is intended to advertise its therapeutic nature during a time when, she felt, such was being forgotten. However, because the narrator inevitably returns to metropolitan life at the end of the book, the last impression of her Dunnet Landing is that it is Other to the American life that is "out there" (i.e. in the city), and hence un-preservable after all, however sadly so. As Zagarell says, the narrator "inscribes the community's exemption from the turbulence and change prominent in the United States at large" ("*Country*'s Portrayal" 44).

Jewett's presentation of beloved Dunnet Landing is a passing glimpse of a place already changed and of the past; a narrative-become-artifact of the village. After her goodbye to Almira, the narrator reflects, "So we die before our own eyes; so we see some chapters of our lives come to their natural end" (159). Here she suggests the naturalness of the passing away of Dunnet Landing, as if the village were also an experience universally had and now turned over to a new one, that is the city. The following are lines from the last two paragraphs of *Country*, where the narrator sails away from Dunnet Landing:

The little town, with the tall masts of its disabled schooners in the inner bay, stood high above the flat sea for a few minutes, then it sank back into the uniformity of the coast, and became indistinguishable from the other towns that looked as if they were crumbled on the furzy-green stoniness of the shore. [...] Presently the wind began to blow, and we struck out seaward to double the long sheltering headland of the cape, and when I looked back

again, the islands and the headland had run together and Dunnet Landing and all its coasts were lost to sight. (160)

These lines associate Dunnet Landing with the rest of the islands, all passed in one moment. If the narrator's intention in *Country* is to introduce city folk to places like Dunnet Landing, then here at the end of the book, the narrator has said good-bye on behalf of her audience. Personally the narrator must leave for the city, which is implicitly presented as the real world. Having taken leisure on the island to write, the completion of her work can only, it seems, occur in the city, where "reality" can look back objectively upon these inspirational island towns. But of course only look "back." If the narrator ever wanted to be a genuine member of Dunnet Landing, that desire has become a non-issue in her parting with the place. It is the book and not the little town that provides the valuableness of the place; we turn to *Country* and not to the island which has already passed from sight, in order to come into contact with the therapeutic life there. As Zagarell explains, after all "Dunnet Landing is fictitious" ("*Country's* Portrayal" 51). The village comes to an end at the conclusion of the narrator's (Jewett's) book because it is the *story* of *Country*.

Perhaps we could say that it is literature, or writing more generally, which the narrator connects to the city (Dunnet Landing is an oral culture), that is celebrated in *Country* because it is the narrator's writerly work that gives us places like Dunnet Landing. As Richard H. Brodhead observes of the narrator, she takes with her the good of Dunnet Landing when she leaves (148); thus, Dunnet Landing the place is not necessary for one to have and keep. When the book is opened again at "The Return," Jewett's American urban readers know that they are immersing themselves in a healing history, and that the value of

the narrator's Dunnet Landing is most prized for providing an occasional return to a largely forgotten place and time.

II.

Tension and contradiction characterize Stephen Leacock's story cycle, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. As such, much of the cycle's scholarship is interested in Josh Smith, the hotel proprietor of small town Mariposa. Smith stands out from the narrative because he understands his small-town neighbours better than they know themselves—he manipulates them successfully for economic and political advantage—has unparalleled close associations with the city, the unnamed metropolis to the south of Mariposa, and has a contentious “relationship” with the narrator. These qualities mark him out as a character whose place in the story demands explanation. Moreover, out of Smith's role rise many of the cycle's narrative ambiguities, the resolving of which concerns the critics, prompting debate among scholars of *Sunshine Sketches*.

For example, Francis Zichy perceives Smith as a positive figure who, parallel with the narrator, sustains the status quo of Mariposa. According to Zichy, the narrator's overall intention for the story “[is] to convince himself and the reader [...] that with all its faults the world of Mariposa is, or was, the best world after all [...]” (52). Thus,

Smith plays a central role as the cunning, knowing (within limits) preserver of the ineffable Mariposa status quo. [...] Smith does from within Mariposa, as an actor in the story, what the narrator does by his special way of telling the story, and what the reader is invited to do by assenting to it as told; he

preserves it as it is. (54)

Gerald Lynch offers a cogent reading of Smith hand-in-hand with the narrator's relationship to the hotel proprietor and the rest of Mariposa. According to Lynch, Smith serves as the inverse parallel to the cycle's narrator, who is himself a manipulator of appearances and realities and, too, understands Mariposans better than they do themselves (*Stephen Leacock* 59). Unlike that of Smith, however, Lynch insists, the narrator's manipulation is "communally beneficial" and sympathetic to Mariposa (59). Lynch argues that the narrator's intent is to provide the reader with the proper perspective with which to view the small town towards which he is protective (65-66). As the antithesis of the narrator, Smith provides a function essential to the cycle's overall structure: the construction of the story's main source of conflict (in plot and meaning). Finally, Glenn Willmott responds, in large part, to Lynch, arguing that

Smith is a crook in [a] world whose justice is regulated by its collective imagination rather than by its law, and he belongs to that world as much as any other Mariposan. As such, he figures the incongruity of two institutions antithetical in any realist or political-economic perspective: the one plutocratic, the other utopian. (73)

Thus, according to Willmott, Smith's character is a conceptual one and

[w]hether Smith is a good or evil businessman in Leacock's political-economic vision is a false question if we think of the characters as abstract systems in which elements of this system are not mirrored such as they are but selected and shuffled into new forms. The same aesthetic transformation

may produce Mariposa itself, not as a realist model of a good, bad, or transitional society, but as a nonrealist social landscape governed by aesthetic principles. (56)

Even though Willmott makes strenuous attempts to place Smith comfortably within Mariposa and *Sunshine Sketches*, he nevertheless recognizes that the character requires theorizing and explanation.

Indeed, Smith figures large in Leacock's cycle, "casting a looming shadow" (Lynch, *Stephen Leacock* 69) over Mariposa and the story. His dominating figure and his parallel role to that of the narrator suggest a three-way structure to *Sunshine Sketches*: Mariposa to Josh Smith to the narrator. However, it would seem that Smith's figure (in tandem with the narrator's) looms so large that criticism has largely mis-seen another ubiquitous presence in the cycle: the ever-present and increasingly encroaching "city" whose influence on the small town the narrator laments, Smith uses, and Mariposa desires. An extensive study of the references to "the city" promises a new reading of *Sunshine Sketches*, an alternative to how Zichy, Lynch, and Willmott attempt to resolve the cycle's textual tensions and contradictions regarding the city. It is my belief that the representation of Mariposa is in relation to the city and that this relationship adds significantly to the story's ambivalent, sometimes ambiguous, representation of the small town.

The city in *Sunshine Sketches* is described as a place of mystery, visited occasionally by Mariposans, but always on the horizon.⁵ In the imaginations of Mariposans,

⁵ With the exception of the final chapter of the cycle, "L'Envoi," in which city life (versus life in the small town) is the subject.

the city is gilded as if it were the land of Oz: intriguing, sometimes incomprehensible, and bigger and grander than anything that a small town like Mariposa could hope to emulate. The city makes for a grand visit, but on returning to the small town, somehow whatever one brings home from the city loses its lustre, sophistication, or substance. For example, the luxurious furnishings of Smith's Caff are only props rented from the city (28-29); the land speculators who write to Thorpe from the city promising him prosperity are swindlers (51-52); the workings of a city university fundraising campaign are imitated mechanically by Mariposans (and thus their own effort to collect money to save their church fails utterly); the detectives investigating the supposed Mariposan bank robbery—"the two great brains" whose employment seems a "strange, dangerous calling" (145)—idle away their time drinking at Smith's hotel; Smith's great rise to the Conservative party is effected by his manipulation of Mariposan awe and belief in the greatness of "the city" (177). Yet, as consistently as the narrator appears to set the city negatively against the small town, in regards to community-minded business practices and sincere neighbourliness and trustworthiness, the metropolis' influence plays an important role in shaping Mariposa's identity. That is, the city's influence is not a one-way transference; rather, it is the result of a complex relationship between Mariposans (including the narrator) and the city. City influence in the small town is a meeting between the city's offerings and Mariposans's desires for these offerings. The narrator only further complicates the relationship by (what ultimately proves to be) his ambivalent attitude towards the city.

A major complaint of *Sunshine Sketches*' narrator is Mariposan forgetfulness or

abandonment of the values exemplified by such a small town—conservative, humanist, communal—due to desire for metropolitan power and the luxuries that such power enables. Such is suggested in the narrator’s initial judgment of Jefferson Thorpe, Mariposa’s barber, whose stock investments skyrocket during a mining boom (Chapter II, “The Speculations of Jefferson Thorpe”):

Did I say that Jeff shaved in the same old way? Not quite. There was something even dreamier about it now, and a sort of new element in the way Jeff fell out of his monotone into lapses of thought that I, for one, misunderstood. I thought that perhaps getting so much money, – well, you know the way it acts on people in the larger cities. It seemed to spoil one’s idea of Jeff that copper and asbestos and banana lands should form the goal of his thought when, if he knew it, the little shop and the sunlight of Mariposa was so much better. In fact, I had perhaps borne him a grudge for what seemed to me his perpetual interest in the great capitalists. (49)

Here the narrator takes Thorpe’s change in behaviour personally, as if the barber’s apparent self-distancing from Mariposa were a direct affront to the narrator’s value system, embedded in the small town. The narrator suggests that Thorpe has betrayed Mariposa, if only in thought, to dreams of making more money outside of the small town. To move even imaginatively beyond the small town elicits angry dismay that Mariposa has somehow been threatened—treated with contempt— by such imaginings.⁶ Additionally, to move ahead a

⁶ Page Smith, in his historical account of American small towns, points out a common attitude towards capitalism and financial enhancement based on speculation against small-town values: “The rural town was only in a state of grace as long as industry

little, it is interesting to note that the narrator only assumes a change in Thorpe, when in fact, based on all outside appearances, nothing has changed. Take, for example, two descriptions of Thorpe's shaving style, (1) pre- and (2) post-stock success: (1) "[A]s Jeff leaned forward towards the customer and talked to him in a soft confidential monotone, like a portrait painter, the razor would go slower and slower, and pause and stop, move and pause again, till the shave died away into the mere drowse of conversation" (39); (2) "Did I say that Jeff shaved in the same old way? Not quite. There was something even dreamier about it now, and a sort of new element in the way Jeff fell out of his monotone into lapses of thought [...]" (49). The difference between how Thorpe shaves before and how he shaves after his stocks increase their worth is truly insignificant. Hence, the narrator's presentation of Thorpe's "moral fall" has much to do with the narrator's protective attitude towards Mariposa and his belief in the values that the small town is supposed to create and sustain (the accumulation of money not being one of them, at least not at the expense of community formation).

Thorpe is redeemed in the end, both in the eyes of the narrator and (it is suggested) morally, when the narrator comes to understand that Thorpe has not, after all, changed and, more significantly, when Thorpe loses his gains. The narrator stands corrected when it is revealed that Thorpe had always intended to share his wealth with the unfortunate (50-51) and he commends Thorpe's "return" to Mariposa after the barber is swindled out of his

and self-denial were its highest values. Prosperity, luxury, and ease were its enemies" (194). Of course, Smith is dealing with American history; but it is interesting that Leacock's narrator takes a similar stance and uses similar rhetoric in describing his disdain for Thorpe's stock market gains. Arguably, he too participates in a narrative of small-town mythology.

money by the fraudulent “Cuban Land Development Company” (51-52). It would seem that even with Thorpe’s potential positive contribution to society with his gains, city-based gains would never do for Mariposa and must be purged. Financial success through local capitalist ventures is much more in keeping with the Mariposa the narrator approves of:

Anyway, things are not so bad. You see it was just at this time that Mr. Smith’s caff opened, and Mr. Smith came to Jeff’s Woman and said he wanted seven dozen eggs a day, and wanted them handy, and so the hens are back, and more of them, and they exult so every morning over the eggs they lay that if you wanted to talk of Rockefeller in the barber shop you couldn’t hear his name for the cackling. (52)

Hence, the tension created by Thorpe’s financial aspirations is dissipated by the narrative return to “the way things were” in Mariposa. Effectively, Thorpe’s rise-and-fall story (or fall-and-return story, depending on one’s perspective) re-affirms the persistence of the status quo in Mariposa.⁷

Lynch puts into words what the narrator seems to imply about Thorpe’s financial adventures, by optimistically interpreting the conclusion to this chapter about Mariposa’s barber:

Jeff is much better off in his leisurely paced environment, where people are individuated. [...] [He] would not have lasted long or happily in the outside world [...]. Jeff ends where he began, poor though not significantly worse off. The conclusion [...] emphasizes the brave face with which Jeff and his

⁷ See especially Zichy.

family accept their lot. Jeff must work a longer day but he is accustomed to such work; his daughter Myra bravely and admirably relinquishes her affected ambition of becoming an actress (*SS*, 61). It is Jeff's work habits, his communal function, that save him from despair. (*Stephen Leacock* 75)

Though Lynch speaks, as it were, on behalf of the narrator/ Leacock, I find it difficult to read the final lines of this chapter without hearing a hint of disingenuousness: The narrator remonstrates that any display of pity for Thorpe and his family is unnecessary and misguided, exclaiming,

Pathetic? tut! tut! You don't know Mariposa. Jeff has to work pretty late, but that's nothing – nothing at all, if you've worked hard all your lifetime. And Myra [Thorpe's daughter who had hoped to go to dramatic school on her father's stock money] is back at the Telephone Exchange [...] and she says now that if there's one thing she hates, it's the stage [...]. (52)

Thorpe is a character that the narrator likes (approves of, in fact) and to dismiss the barber's new financial difficulties with a mere "tut! tut!" seems unduly dismissive. In other words, the author's closing commentary draws greater attention to Thorpe's unfortunate situation rather than assures the reader that all is well once more. For, now Thorpe is poorer than he was, works longer hours (11pm is a very late work hour to keep), and is in debt to others. He and his family have no choice but to return to their old jobs, and in more tentative financial conditions. Indeed Thorpe's work is communal and he is accustomed to hard work, as Lynch points out, but such optimism or stoicism cannot be sympathetic to Thorpe's frame of mind (which is not in fact explored by the narrator).

Therefore, if we read the final “tut! tut!” as not straightforward, the narrator’s presentation of Thorpe’s story can be read as an expression of uncertainty about the reign of the status quo in Mariposa and about the ambitions of those small-town residents who are able to rise above their stations. The narrator cannot allow himself or the reader to lament Thorpe’s financial loss because that loss means a return to whatever it was like at home before the barber’s meddlesome stock success. Yet, because the narrator is a Mariposan kin to Thorpe and loves the small town, his “tut! tut!” is a mixed expression of unresolved tension. It signals recognition of Thorpe’s real loss as well as the need to dismiss it as unimportant lest the reader (and the narrator) give it too much thought. Mariposan status is thereby maintained through the circumvented imagination of narrator and reader.

The representation of Thorpe’s experience reveals to us that Mariposans, as the narrator would suggest, (should) use money with community in mind; metropolitan attitudes towards money are manipulative, speculative, and individualistic. However, the narrator’s ironic narrative includes ambivalence to all things small town in relation to the world of the city. If the capitalist system can be criticized for being unscrupulous and destructive (consider the reference to young Fizzlechip in the same chapter, who shoots himself after losing his own stock investments [42]), the story also uses this aspect of the capitalist world to reveal the virtues of someone like Thorpe, who longs to benefit others with his new wealth. Simply and unavoidably, contrast is essential to characterization. The narrator might lament that the inhabitants of this small town wish to involve themselves with the luxuries and lifestyles of the metropolis, but Mariposan attraction to the city is part of the

small town's life. The narrator is therefore unable to draw a clear line between "what Mariposa should be like" and "what Mariposa is like." This is not to say that the narrator's concern about small-town eagerness for things of the city is unwarranted; for, his critique of the place is essential to understanding how *Sunshine Sketches* represents Mariposa. Rather, the narrator's perspective on what happens (or does not happen) to city-drawn Mariposans reveals that the cycle ultimately does not set the small town in opposition to the city. Its representation of Mariposa is in relation to the city.

The interplay between life in the city and life in the small town is more explicitly explored in Chapter V, "The Whirlwind Campaign in Mariposa." Mariposa's Henry Mullins brings a scheme back from a city visit that he hopes will save Mariposa's newly built stone church from financial bankruptcy (it arguably already suffers from religious flaccidity). In this chapter, ambivalence towards what distinguishes the small town from the metropolis is laid out not as a complaint against either city for being as it is or small town for wanting to emulate the city, but as an understanding that small-town identity is connected to the place's metropolitan aspirations and to what "the city" offers Mariposa.

During his stay at a major city, Mullins witnesses how professors, faculty deans, and businessmen raise money in order to support a university (individually they promise funding on the stipulation that the final sum raised equals a specific amount) and optimistically transports the program to Mariposa. Mullins's report on the city campaign signals belief and trust in the fundraising scheme because it originates from the city (as well as because it was successful there, of course):

It was Mullins, the banker, who told Mariposa all about the plan of a

Whirlwind Campaign and explained how it was to be done. He'd happened to be in one of the big cities when they were raising money by a Whirlwind Campaign for one of the universities, and he saw it all. (89)

In Mullins's description of the campaign, he focusses on the comradery and goodwill created by the occasion, rather than on the funds donated; he even neglects to mention the final amount raised:

He said he would never forget the scene on the last day of it, when the announcement was made that the total of the money raised was even more than what was needed. It was a splendid sight, – the business men of the town all cheering and laughing and shaking hands, and the professors with the tears streaming down their faces, and the Deans of Faculties, who had given money themselves, sobbing aloud. He said it was the most moving thing he ever saw. (89)

Similarly, when he outlines to his fellow Mariposans the practicalities of the fundraiser, his details are of the upcoming congenial gathering of Mariposa's bankers, lawyers, and businessmen:

Each day the crowd would all agree to meet at some stated place and each lunch together, - say at a restaurant or at a club or at some eating place. This would go on every day with the interest getting keener and keener, and everybody getting more and more excited, till presently the chairman would announce that the campaign had succeeded and there would be the kind of scene that Mullins had described. (90)

The greatest expectation for the campaign is the potential final scene of success and happy tears generated by the unity established by the communal effort.

As can be guessed, the campaign in Mariposa fails to generate funds since those involved spend all their energies (not their monies) on gathering for lunches over several days. Additionally, their individual promised donations are stipulated on outrageous expectations:

In less than no time there was such a crowd round Mullins trying to borrow his pen [to write cheques] all at once that his waistcoat was all stained with ink. Finally when they got order at last, and Mullins stood up and announced that the conditional fund had reached a quarter of a million, the whole place was a perfect babel of cheering. (94)

“Babel” is a key term of warning: Full of happy noise, they make no genuine progress. Nevertheless, the narrator wants to celebrate the Whirlwind Campaign: “Looking back on the Mariposa Whirlwind, I can never feel that it was a failure. After all, there is a sympathy and a brotherhood in these things when men work shoulder to shoulder” (94-95). Lynch agrees with the narrator, commenting that “the Whirlwind Campaign achieves a kind of success – all the success, in fact, that it is destined to attain. That success is in no sense financial. The Whirlwind Campaign promoted sociability and gregariousness [...]” (*Stephen Leacock* 94). Both evaluate the success of the campaign based on its (apparent) actualization of Mullins’s initial expectations of the campaign: comradeship and communal good will.

However, despite his positive final assessment, the narrator himself undercuts what

might be an all too easy way of forgiving the failure of the campaign for the sake of its promotion of community bonding. For example, in his evaluation of the good the campaign effected, he cautiously notes,

It was disappointing, yes. In spite of all the success and the sympathy, it was disappointing. I don't say it didn't do good. No doubt a lot of the men got to know one another better than ever they had before. I have myself heard Judge Pepperleigh say that after the campaign he knew all of Pete Glover that he wanted to. (96)

The narrator is surely being facetious here since Pepperleigh's appreciation of Glover is not to be taken without irony. Further, the daily fundraising lunches themselves, where the men do their so-called shoulder-to-shoulder work, last less than a week, and devolve into men eating lunch rather than making any serious effort to work together to eradicate their church's debt:

[A] good many of the Whirlwind Committee found that they had just time to hurry down and snatch their lunch and get back again. Still, they came, and snatched it. As long as the lunches lasted, they came. Even if they had simply to rush it and grab something to eat and drink without time to talk to anybody, they came. (95)

Cynically, we might understand that the campaign group never wanted to donate (i.e. to lose money) to the fundraiser after all.

In trying to make sense of the campaign's financial failure, the narrator turns to comparisons between small town and city. He wonders if "[i]t may be that there are

differences between Mariposa and the larger cities that one doesn't appreciate at first sight. Perhaps it would have been better to try some other plan" (90). He also suggests there is something incomprehensible—to Mariposans—about the fundraising program itself: "The real trouble about the Whirlwind Campaign was that they never clearly understood which of them were the whirlwind and who were to be the campaign" (96). The narrator's apologies propose two coinciding reasons that explicate the campaign's failure: (1) by nature of their origins, city-based ideas (especially financial) are doomed to failure in the small town and (2) Mariposans are ill-equipped for successfully carrying out complex engagements on a communal scale particularly when these are founded on metropolitan activities. The narrator's sympathetic excuses for the failure complement his desire to keep city influences out of Mariposa, but, of course, the excuses do not ring true. For one, efforts previous to the Whirlwind Campaign also failed to produce real funds for the recuperation of the church (85-86). Moreover, Mullins himself more stringently criticizes his fellow campaigners for the fundraising failure by directing responsibility at the men—and not at the campaign or its metropolitan origins:

I saw Mullins grit his teeth as he walked, and I know that he held in his coat pocket his own cheque for the hundred [which he had himself promised], with the condition taken off it, and he said that there were so many skunks in Mariposa that a man might as well be in the Head Office of the city. (96)

Here Mullins reveals his own belief in the "differences between Mariposa and the larger cities." More precisely, his comment suggests that Mariposans ought to behave

differently, even better, than those in the city; hence, his piqued reference.⁸ Evidently, Mullins also contradicts himself. According to his original report, the campaign in the city was successful; those involved in the university fundraiser had kept the promises of their stipulated cheques. Thus, on the one hand, he, like the rest of Mariposa (excluding the narrator), evokes the city as a promising place and exciting in its newness and bigness; at the same time, he throws the concept of “the city”—as symbolizing corruption and dishonesty—at his neighbours as an insult to their perceived virtue and integrity. The contradiction is unresolvable but works hand-in-hand with the narrator’s method of simultaneously excusing and exposing the campaign’s failure. The chapter ultimately throws doubt on the differences that are supposed to exist between city and small town, as both narrator and Mullins suggest.

Whether difference should exist is a theoretical question that *Sunshine Sketches* wants to answer in the affirmative; but whether the differences do exist is a question the chapter continually juggles. I would not agree entirely with Donald Spettigue, who argues that the differences between Mariposa and the city, as outlined by the narrator, are quantitative and not qualitative (173). For, it is clear that the small town remains the type of place that the narrator/ Leacock upholds as having a value worth maintaining. Therefore, the cycle expresses an understanding that small town Mariposa naturally is not a place free of big city problems, nor are those qualities visible in the town just the result of

⁸ Perhaps Mullins redeems the whole effort because he gives Dean Drone, pastor of the church, his promised cheque, and it is striking that the one man who does make good on his promise is one of few Mariposans who visit the city regularly and perceive of the place as worth visiting and learning from.

negative influence from the city. Mariposa's desires for metropolitan prestige, wealth, and grandness participate in its state and identity. The narrator's ironic presentation of the community bonding during the Whirlwind Campaign reveals his own conflicted feelings towards the small town: Mariposa should be different but "always already" isn't exactly as he would wish.

Chapters VII through IX of *Sunshine Sketches* comprise the heart of the cycle, literally and thematically. The cycle's one romance tale involves Peter Pupkin, the son of an out-of-town wealthy businessman, who falls in love with Zena, the daughter of Mariposa's Judge Pepperleigh. The story is mock-heroic: Pupkin faces laughable obstacles to the attainment of his love interest, although they are real enough to him. Moreover, these obstacles are metropolitan-based interferences. Even in a story in which Josh Smith uniquely makes next to no appearance,⁹ the city is represented as engaged even with the romantic goings-on of the small town. The narrator's interest in Mariposa's relationship to the city perpetuates the ubiquitous presence of the latter and, in these three romance chapters, further exposes the cycle's complex representation of the relationship.

Like Thorpe and Mullins before him, Pupkin is incapable of properly engaging with metropolitan influence. Although a newcomer to Mariposa, he is the son of Mariposan natives and thus shares the sense of childish awe that the small-town inhabitants express in the face of all things metropolitan. For example, on two specified occasions he discovers

⁹ "Josh Smith is central to [the business, religion, and politics] in Mariposa; he is peripheral only to the love interest" (Lynch, *Stephen Leacock* 61).

Zena's attention focussed on another man from "the city" and, expectedly, he is perturbed. In the first instance, on coming up to the Pepperleigh porch, Pupkin encounters a poet reading poetry to Zena. His initial reaction is not only dramatic, but defeatist:

[Pupkin] could see Zena with her eyes fixed on the poet as if she were hanging on to every syllable (she was; she needed to), and he stood it just about fifteen minutes and then slid off the side of the verandah and disappeared without even saying good-night. [...] There was only one purpose on his mind, - suicide. (136)

In the second instance, he watches Zena at the "Firemen's Ball" dance "four times with a visitor from the city, a man who was in the fourth year at the University and who knew everything. It was more than Peter Pupkin could bear" (140). He returns home and considers borrowing the gun from the bank (where he works) to "kill himself on the spot and let them find his body lying on the floor" (141). Pupkin is supposed to be Zena's knight in shining armour (an image taken from Zena's reading of romance novels), but he shows himself ill-equipped to do battle with these metropolitan anti-heroes.

The narrator is partial to Pupkin and, in the case of the poet, he is immediately hostile to the ostensible interloper. He describes him (even before Pupkin reacts suicidally) contemptuously and insults him with metropolitan association: "It was one of those regular poets with a solemn jackass face, and lank parted hair and eyes like puddles of molasses. I don't know how he came there - up from the city, probably [...]" (136). His introductory comment on the poet relays multiple messages. His choice words are empathetic to Pupkin's state of mind, creating sympathy between himself and the character, and thus

aligning the reader with Pupkin and the narrator against the poet. At the same time, he identifies the city as source of Pupkin's obstacles to courting Zena. The city reference in the slight has layered intentions: As the poet is undercut for his presumably metropolitan origins, the city is simultaneously characterized as menacingly disruptive of an event important to Mariposa (i.e. Pupkin's future betrothal to Zena). As for the narrator's presentation of the university student as someone "who knew everything," the comment addresses both Pupkin's quick intimidation by a learned man from the city as well as the narrator's undercutting of this man as likely a pretentious individual. Thus, the narrator is paternalistically protective of Pupkin, at the same time sympathizing with him and pointing out his failures.

These two occasions—metropolitan poet and university man—are highlights of what is a series of suicide attempts. The narrator explains to the reader that he doesn't "need to describe in full the later suicides of Mr. Pupkin, because they were all conducted on the same plan and rested on something the same reasons as above" (139). Therefore, the city is made to be the singular "other" in a seeming love-triangle comprising Zena, Pupkin, and a visitor from the city. Moreover, because of Pupkin's ineffectuality, the narrator casts the city as an interference that must be removed for the young lover's sake. For example, Pupkin's dilemma concerning the poet comes to an end only when Zena informs him that his competitor is a married man (139). His other romantic difficulties and coinciding suicide attempts each time conclude with Pupkin's decision that the suicide practically won't work after all (139-140). The narrator's focus is on the success of the love affair between Pupkin and Zena; he introduces the interfering metropolis to provide conflict

which is “done away with” so that the future marriage may ensue.

The romance story is indeed important to Mariposa as a whole; for, the marriage and ensuing child(ren) ensure the stability of the small town’s population and thus perpetuation. The narrator worries about negative influence and presents the city as a major source of conflict in the life of his Mariposa. At the same time, however, the negative overlapping association between interloper and city is forced after all. Without ever making it explicit, the narrator wants the reader to make the connection between the safety of Mariposa’s dearest and future and the central threat to that via the city. Nevertheless, Mariposa is represented as unable to purge itself of the influences, leaving the narrator’s desires for the small town to remain in tension with the place’s interconnection to “the city.”

The final story of *Sunshine Sketches*, titled “L’Envoi. The Train to Mariposa,” is a retrospective account of Mariposa and small-town life in general. Via an auditor, the narrator laments what he sees as the loss of Mariposan (conservative, community) values. Lacking the tongue-in-cheek irony used throughout the rest of the cycle, this chapter comments on and qualifies the cycle as a whole; for, here the narrator speaks to a former Mariposan, the auditor, in a manner that suggests Mariposa has been left behind—specifically by the auditor, but also more globally by the reader and by Canadians everywhere who have moved away, physically and spiritually, from this Canadian

“home.”¹⁰

The narrator implicitly critiques his auditor’s decision to live and remain in “the city,” conjointly creating a painful sense of forgetfulness of the small-town life left behind:

Do you remember how when you first began to make money you used to plan that just as soon as you were rich, really rich, you’d go back home again to the little town and build a great big house with a fine verandah, – no stint about it, the best that money could buy, planed lumber, every square foot of it, and a fine picket fence in front of it. It was to be one of the grandest and finest houses that thought could conceive; much finer, in true reality, than that vast palace of sandstone with the porte cochère and the sweeping conservatories that you afterwards built in the costlier part of the city. (182)

Similar to those of Mullins and Thorpe, the auditor’s plans to improve life at home involved bringing back an element of metropolitan sensibilities. The architectural dream also recalls Dean Drone’s desire for a building larger than what Mariposa can contain.¹¹ To point out the auditor’s grave mistake, the narrator focusses on the materiality of the latter’s long-ago plans to return home as well as his failure to return home at all. The narrator’s description of the house that never was is a chastisement of the auditor for his materialistic mind-set. This auditor’s original dreams of building a grand house in the town were already

¹⁰ Lynch insightfully argues that the narrator of “L’Envoi” is not the same as the narrator of all the preceding chapters (*Stephen Leacock* 57-58).

¹¹ See also Lynch, *Stephen Leacock* 113.

out of place with what the reader must now understand about Mariposa: Such metropolitan-based grandness does not function in the small town.

The auditor is now condemned merely to dream about Mariposa from his city residence. Accompanied by the auditor aboard a dream-vision train to Mariposa, the narrator suggests that the auditor himself has become too “grand” for the small town:

What? it feels nervous and strange to be coming here again after all these years? It must indeed. No, don't bother to look at the reflection of your face in the window-pane shadowed by the night outside. Nobody could tell you now after all these years. Your face has changed in these long years of money-getting in the city. Perhaps if you had come back now and again, just at odd times, it wouldn't have been so. (186)

The narrator's tone is insinuatingly accusatory as he jabs at a pained remembrance of home. He expresses the loss of something precious, something humane, to the vain luxuries of metropolitan life. As Lynch argues,

The auditor changed when he left Mariposa and lost a part of himself. A large part of the cause for his change and loss is that to which the narrator later refers in the central passage on self-identity - 'these long years of money-getting in the city.' The auditor's obsessive desire for material riches suggests further that he possesses something of a Smithian bent. (*Stephen Leacock* 113)

The sense of loss and the pain accompanied by that loss close the chapter and the cycle when the narrator “wakes” his auditor up from this imaginative train-ride to Mariposa:

You feel the sharp slackening of the train as it swings round the curve of the last embankment that brings it to the Mariposa station. [...] How vivid and plain it all is. Just as it used to be thirty years ago. [...] [Y]ou can hear above all other sounds the cry of the brakemen and the porters: ‘MARIPOSA! MARIPOSA!’ And as we listen, the cry grows fainter and fainter in our ears and we are sitting here again in the leather chairs of the Mausoleum Club, talking of the little Town in the Sunshine that once we knew. (186)

In my reading of the two long passages above, a couple of matters, at least, stand out that arguably qualify “L’Envoi” as a tale of regret. For one, it is not exactly clear what “wouldn’t have been so” had the auditor occasionally returned to Mariposa. Perhaps this seems trivial, but the ambiguity is important. Had the auditor occasionally returned home, would his fellow Mariposans be naturally acquainted over time with the man’s changing face? Or is the narrator suggesting that the man’s face would not have changed so dramatically since going home would have kept soft those money-getting lines? We are not certain, but in either case, it is the degree of change in the man’s appearance that is open to what-if-history inquiry (which cannot be answered). Lynch writes that “[a] physical and permanent return to Mariposa was never the Envoi narrator’s intention, either for himself or for his auditor. The auditor should have returned ‘now and again’ [...]” (119). If so, then change is presented as inevitable and can only be accommodated, not prevented. Through the narrator’s advice to visit Mariposa regularly, city influence, in this light and in this chapter, is thus given an off-hand reality and power.

Second, the dream-vision of the small town is presented through the narrator; it is

not the auditor's first-person reflection. The dream-vision then, if read literally, is the result of the narrator's imagination and is presented to the auditor as an object of meditation. Like a therapist/ hypnotist, the narrator encourages the auditor to remember and then he subtly evokes guilty feelings about the latter having left home. "See?" the narrator seems to be saying, "you have made a grave mistake and all you are left with now are these memories which can only leave you feeling cold because they serve as reminders of what you can never have again. I am here to remind you, but certainly not to alleviate the pain of loss that you must now feel after having gone with me on this imaginary trip back to Mariposa." But, as mentioned, these so-called memories are provided by the narrator, not the auditor. Why distance the act of remembering from the auditor and present the dream-vision as the narrator's castigation of the auditor? Why present the city obliquely in the cycle's only city-focussed tale, as well as throughout the cycle? The narrator clearly has trouble representing the city directly.

Throughout *Sunshine Sketches*, the narrator insists that the stuff of Mariposa—social, cultural, economic, political—suits him far better than what any of the larger cities might offer. In his representation of the small town, disjunction arises between Mariposan status quo and the locals' aspirations for metropolitan amenities, which the narrator cannot deny and so presents ambiguously. Hence, the negative consequences of city influence are never made explicit and I suspect this is because Leacock could not, in the end, imagine the small town without the city (the two places are contemporary realities, after all). The presence of the city provides the cycle with tension, but not as a purely negative, unwanted tension that needs to be cleansed from the tale. It is productive of the representation of

Mariposa. The narrator's criticisms of Mariposa, which go hand-in-hand with his celebration of the place, reflect the very ambivalence the cycle projects towards the city. There is desire and repugnance in the narrator's treatment of Mariposa, a conflicted attitude that is part of the irony in the cycle. And, as argued, such irony is in keeping with the narrator's inability to separate small town from city. What Lynch calls the narrator's "changeableness" (*Stephen Leacock* 65) is usefully understood as ambivalence as well as irony. In discussing the ambivalence of Leacock's text, Lynch observes that "Leacock's fictional characters can be understood as existing on a continuum between 'Mariposa' and 'Plutoria'" (*Stephen Leacock* 125) and I would argue not because Mariposans fail to uphold their small-town values but because the oscillation between city and small town reflects the narrator's/ Leacock's ambivalent response to both places. Leacock was uninterested, as Lynch argues, in writing a conventional pastoral idyll, a popular genre at the end of the nineteenth century,¹² and gives us instead a more complex story involving small-town life. The small town's relationship with the city is part of its identity, whether the narrator, or we, like it or not. And it is this ambivalence on the part of the narrator that makes *Sunshine Sketches* the rich text that it is.

Despite the conflict involved in assessing the city's influence on the small town, Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches* sees no positive future for the country at large without its grasping the values to be found (and only) in the small towns of its national history. And where Leacock reminds his readers what they likely have forgotten, Jewett urges her readers not to forget.

¹² See especially p.8-13 of *Stephen Leacock*.

Although she leaves Dunnet Landing in a past-tense representation amid the contemporary American situation, her overall assumption regarding history is conservative in nature. *Country* is no turning away from the past, but a sensitive reminder of the past for the sake of a more healthful future. Both cycles, then, testify to the needful blessings of memory imbedded in the small town. Because we are reading story cycles, the physical prompting of the books to re-read and to remember over again underscores these lessons.

Chapter Two

Small Town Darkness Revealed in City Lights: Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*

Close in publication dates to Jewett's (1896) and Leacock's (1912) cycles, Duncan Campbell Scott's Canadian cycle *In The Village of Viger* (1896) and Sherwood Anderson's American cycle *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) also take as matter of fact the metropolis' growing dominance. However, where Jewett's narrator is clearly a city-dweller come to visit Dunnet Landing, Scott's narrator remains with the villagers of Viger as an insider telling us the story of a place that must come to terms with city influence, but only after recognizing the tentativeness of its socio-cultural structure. Most problematic of all, Scott's Vigerians demonstrate an unworried loss of communal self-understanding in their concerns about themselves as individuals. The increasing physical proximity of the already not-so-distant city, and thus its influence and allure, draws out the village's inherent struggles to sustain itself communally. Anderson's cycle tells the story that Leacock's cycle tries to circumvent, that is the demise of the small town—but not at the hands of the city. For, metropolitan expectations fall through for Winesburg's exodus hopefuls. Anderson's characters fear each other and themselves when their individual journeys towards the city result in pathetic retreats back to the small town. Unlike the advisory to return periodically to the small town that we read in *Sunshine Sketches*, we find in *Winesburg* a strong challenge to the connective mythologies of the small town and the city and the failure of the American Dream embodied within them. As readers, we come to understand that dark internal forces,

personal and communal, place stresses on the two communities that are only further exposed by the lights of the city.

I.

If the opening paragraph to Scott's cycle sets the tone for the rest of the book (10 chapters), then "the city" might be read as an important theme, certainly an underlying reference point, to these stories about a small French town in Quebec at the turn of the nineteenth-century. The introductory paragraph reads thus:

It was too true that the city was growing rapidly. As yet its arms were not long enough to embrace the little village of Viger, but before long they would be, and it was not a time that the inhabitants looked forward to with any pleasure. It was not to be wondered at, for few places were more pleasant to live in. The houses, half-hidden amid the trees, clustered around the slim steeple of St. Joseph's, which flashed like a naked poniard in the sun. They were old, and the village was sleepy, almost dozing, since the mill, behind the rise of land, on the Blanche had shut down. The miller had died, and who would trouble to grind what little grist came to the mill, when flour was so cheap? But while the beech-groves lasted, and the Blanche continued to run, it seemed impossible that any change could come. The change was coming, however, rapidly enough. Even now, on still nights, above the noise of the frogs in the pools, you could hear the rumble of the street-cars and the faint tinkle of their bells, and when the air was moist the

whole southern sky was luminous with the reflection of thousands of gas-lamps. But when the time came for Viger to be mentioned in the city papers as one of the outlying wards, what a change there would be! There would be no unfenced fields, full of little inequalities and covered with short grass; there would be no deep pools, where the quarries had been, and where the boys pelted the frogs; there would be no more beech-groves, where the children could gather nuts; and the dread pool, which had filled the shaft where old Daigneau, years ago, mined for gold, would cease to exist. (19)

In these introductory lines, the cycle's narrator expresses regret for what appears to be the inevitable future loss of the natural landscape of Viger, which is already polluted by the nearby city: The latter's sounds and lights presently interfere with the village's starlight and natural noises.

Gerald Lynch offers a useful reading of Scott's opening paragraph:

Scott tellingly displays the disruption of traditional family and the destabilization of semi-rural community in *Viger* concurrent with the pressuring advances of modern metropolitanism, thereby suggesting one cause – and it may yet be a first cause – for those stress-fracturings. (*One* 34)

The influence of the city is indeed present in Viger, and although Lynch is careful to note that the cycle's "vision is neither naïvely hopeful nor parochial" (38) as its representation of Viger is not idyllic or idealistic, he nevertheless interprets infiltrating metropolitan sensibilities to be a prime cause for the illnesses of the Vigerians:

In *Viger* [the] theme of transitional times is expressed in the personal and

public displacements that result from, or at the least are accelerated by, *the confrontation between the swelling twentieth-century metropolis and the beleaguered nineteenth-century village*. [...] *Viger's* pre-dominant manifestation of the effects of this present confrontation between past and future is the destabilization of the traditional conception of family. Fractured families can be viewed as the most telling sounding board for the various themes played out in *Viger's* stories: crime, madness, dislocation, urban sprawl, New World versus Old World, failed romance, exploitation of labour, betrayal, and others. Repeatedly *Viger* portrays disrupted families or depicts the absence of what can be called the natural family – father, mother, children – as the chief threat to the survival of those humanistic, conservative values that Scott presents in *Viger* as threatened by modernity.

(39 emphasis mine)

Lynch makes a fine point here when he argues that it is the “confrontation between” city and village that expresses *Viger's* state of transition, and I would argue that it is this very confrontation that provides the small town with an important element of its identity. I believe that rather than a direct threat, the city's challenge to *Viger* highlights the village's lack of self-awareness and understanding. The cases of family madness, disease, greed, communal dissolution and indifference, xenophobia, and claustrophobia explored in *Viger* are local illnesses. Instead of interpreting these illnesses as the allegorical product of the meeting between metropolis and village, I suggest that these illnesses are associated directly with a fading village that has been unable to rejuvenate itself. Moreover, the city

functions as a background against which the small town is contrasted, not to show an opposition but to provide a clearer image of small-town life. To scapegoat the city is a tactic to deny internal problems, an exercise that I argue the narrator is not after all interested in performing—in fact, quite the reverse.

The first story, “The Little Milliner,” is about a mysterious woman who opens a hat shop in Viger, much to the chagrin of Madame Laroque, who runs her own local millinery:

Madame Laroque could scarcely believe her eyes when, one morning, a man came from the city with a small sign under his arm and nailed it above the [new] door. It bore these words: ‘Mademoiselle Viau, Milliner.’ ‘Ah!’ said Madame Laroque, ‘the bread is to be taken out of my mouth’. (20)

The new milliner guards her privacy jealously, again much to the consternation of her business competitor (who, it seems, is not much of a competitor to Viau since she brings updated, city fashions to her hat styling that the younger female Vigerians desire): “[T]here was a choice between [Viau and Laroque], and all the young girls of Viger chose Mademoiselle Viau. It was said she had such an eye [...]” (21). This newcomer from the city thus repels and attracts Vigerians; even Laroque’s attitude is a mixture of curiosity, envy, and fear. As with Leacock’s Mariposans, Scott’s Vigerians are not simply on the defensive against the nearby and in-coming metropolis but engaged in a dynamic relationship with it.

As a first instance of city influence, the story of Viau is a perplexing one. The little milliner is sympathetically portrayed by the narrator (even the diminutive adjective

assigned to her increases her appeal as non-aggressive), and Madame Laroque is presented as a disagreeable character hostile to Viau and her neighbours alike. Lynch sympathizes with Laroque and understands Viau as a negative force that deprives a local businesswoman of earnings, refuses Vigerian romance when a suitor visits her (*One* 44), and (allegorically) initiates deadening industrialism into this village (44-45). His reading is subtle because it looks beyond how attractively or unattractively the two women are represented. While coming to a different conclusion, I would also argue that the seeming polarity between the milliners says something about small town-city relations and about what the narrator/Scott might mean to convey about the two places.

At one point, the original milliner complains that “[i]t will not do! [...] Somebody builds a house, no one knows who; people come and go, no one knows how [...]” (26), which is a most thought-provoking statement about small-town life and the social expectations placed on newcomers. But other than for the little milliner’s enigmatic character, Viau is an unassuming woman who buys only one pound of beef and one pound of tea on a regular basis (21); she feeds the birds outside her door (20); is a conscientious milliner (20); is dependent on the friendship of only the village postmaster (20-21); and is committed to a troubled male relative (21). Her character compels sympathy because of her unassuming manner, her plight, loneliness, and mysteriousness. As for Laroque, she appears to be a negative presence in Viger. She is a gossip and suspicious; she makes no efforts to help the newcomer but torments the Viger postmaster for information about the milliner’s private life (24-25); she also instigates an embarrassing police search of Viau’s home because she suspects the newcomer of sexual scandal (23-24). Her general hostility

towards Viau stifles potential relationships and communal growth. Moreover, sexually speaking, she is a widow and childless; in another story, “The Wooing of Monsieur Cuerrier,” she prevents a young relative in her charge from marrying (34). Perhaps Laroque is a Cassandra figure and her vocalization of the village’s fears regarding the coming metropolis cannot be ignored. For, even the narrator, as we have seen in the cycle’s opening paragraph, appreciates that the city will negatively alter Viger (at least its natural landscape). Nevertheless, Laroque certainly cannot be used as a moral guide to evaluate Viau’s character even though Viau disrupts the sleeping village with her arguably unsocial presence.

Therefore, as I read this tale, the hostility of Laroque’s character and the appeal of Viau’s seem more than an easy reversal of appearances versus reality. Viau’s familial loyalty, her kindness to nature, and her respectable demeanor are virtues that complement the world of Viger (pointing it towards its ideal). Her rejection of the presumptuous suitor Monsieur Jourdain and her embarrassment over the constable’s search of her private belongings mark her out as an upright woman who should not, in the end, be so offensive to one such as Madame Laroque. In fact, the women share obvious commonalities: Both are single and childless, share a common trade, and are conservative in their attitude towards how people should behave and relate. In positioning Viau and Laroque as distorted mirror-images of each other, I am suggesting that the “confrontation between” city and small town reflects an understanding that Viger is not a place of rural goodness at the mercy of a hostile takeover. I would even suggest that the prime interest of “The Little Milliner” is the examination of Viger.

When Viau leaves Viger, her move away seems to be a permanent one. The final picture of her home is that of abandonment: “That was three years ago, and she has not come back. [...] In the meantime, in every corner of the house the spiders are weaving webs, and an enterprising caterpillar has blocked up the key-hole with his cocoon” (26). Lynch offers a multi-dimensional reading of the final image of the caterpillar, thus:

There is, to be sure, a sense here of the natural/organic order reclaiming the violated space of Viger. But there are also in these images suggestions of entrapment and portentous change. [...] [The] changes [...] signify that Viger will not be permitted to shut out the problematic influences of accelerating modernity. (*One* 45)

The images are hence productively ambiguous in their rendering of Viger’s relationship, present and future, with the modern world. To Lynch’s interpretation, I would add that the spiders and the cocooning caterpillar image also convey the feeling of Viau’s sadness, her loneliness at her relative’s tragic death, and the inhospitality of Vigerians such as Laroque, who did not give the little milliner reason to stay in the village (her business was doing well). I would therefore argue that the caterpillar’s blockage of the keyhole—entry into Viau’s world—figures Viger’s unfortunate closing of itself to Viau. Her home is an empty coffin, an image as much associated with the hardship of city life as it is with the coldness of Viger (in the figure of Laroque) towards outsiders and newcomers. As the proceeding stories give further evidence, the village’s emotional and psychological limitations create a madness in its own villagers as they edge towards feelings of abandonment and loss.

Two other of the ten chapters—“No. 68 Rue Alfred de Musset” and “Josephine Labrosse”—involve the city directly, and especially village women who make links to the city. Specifically, the women in these stories are associated with the metropolis through their relationships to men. In “No. 68,” Eloise Ruelle is desperate to leave the home that she shares with her brother, who is weakened by an unnamed illness: ““Maurice, Maurice, I am sick of life,”” she tells her brother, ““I will be an adventuress”” (43). When Maurice complains that it is unfortunate they haven’t enough money to send him to a hospital, Eloise insists ““[m]oney – money – it’s not altogether a matter of money; to me it’s a matter of life”” (43). This declaration, which distinguishes Eloise’s desire from materialism, is important because it qualifies her later plan to find herself a husband to escape her boredom. Lynch’s reading of the relationship between brother and sister marks out the latter as an exploiter whose design to marry herself out of her predicament is rather like prostitution (*One* 48). He compares the sister’s treatment of Maurice unfavourably to the sibling relationship in another story, “The Desjardins,” where a brother and sister give up their marital dreams in order to care for their mad brother (*One* 45-46)¹:

[...] Eloise’s overriding ambition to go to the city is but the present expression of an inhuman ruthlessness teased into the open, especially as that inhumanity affects none other than the last of her immediate family.
(49)

However, looked at from a different perspective, Eloise’s plight deserves sympathy

¹ Despite their selflessness, however, as I will later argue, the Desjardins suffer familial tyranny.

enough since as a vital young woman, she is emotionally confined by her convalescent brother, whose dependency on his sister is disturbing. His responses to Eloise's declaration that she wishes "to live" are self-pitying and hint at a jealousy that one might deem unhealthy:

‘Well, I have long ago ceased to wish; wishing was the only passion I ever had; I have given it up. But I have not wished for money; sometimes I have wished for health – ’ He did not finish his sentence; he only thought of what he had longed for more than anything else, the love of his beautiful, impulsive sister. (44)

His language is melodramatic and, I believe, manipulative because it seeks to elicit guilt from his sister. Certainly Eloise's own manipulation of her suitor-to-be, Pierre Pechito, deserves critique: She places a false furniture advertisement in the newspaper to attract what she hopes will be a suitable husband, and decides on this young man for his good looks (initially), and good connections (44-45). Moreover, in order to capture Picheto as a husband, Eloise asks Maurice to pretend rages so that Pechito will feel a calling to save this damsel in distress: “‘Mademoiselle, you are in distress. May I not help you? I am able to. You can command me’” (46). The plan works wonderfully and Eloise leaves her brother for, as the narrator puts it, “the beginning of her career” (49). No longer a damsel in distress, she has finally taken charge of her life.

Eloise's conniving evidently qualifies whatever sympathy she generates at the beginning of the story, and sympathy is then transferred onto Maurice, who suffers genuinely as he performs his best in order to help his sister leave home for greater things in

the city. His efforts exhaust him and his love for his sister is magnified by these efforts (48-49). One could even say that his efforts border on self-harm since his maddening performance exhausts him: “Eloise found Maurice almost fainting with his exertion” (48). And if the interchange of sympathy and characterization means anything, it points to the complexity that is human nature. Eloise’s life in Viger does not satisfy her, and her brother’s need for her is not reciprocated. The manner of Eloise’s flight is ethically if not morally reprehensible, but her desperation to live outside the confines of her ailing brother’s dependency also points up one form of stifling in the small town: familial tyranny. The city holds attractions and means that are unavailable in the small town. The state of Viger, paralleled to the ailing Maurice, who wants his sister to stay home, incites Eloise to find a viable means out of her home town. We should wonder and question why the atmosphere of Viger is conveyed as such by the narrator before we “blame” the city. For, in this case, the city offers freedom to a Vigerian.

It should be noted that city-dwellers who visit Viger—Mademoiselle Viau, Pierre Picheto, and Victor from “Josephine Labrosse”—are all positively portrayed in Scott’s cycle. They are figures of familial or romantic love who display naïveté or simplicity that one might perhaps not expect from such metropolitans. Viau sacrifices her own peace for a criminal relative. Picheto is taken with the lovely and distressed Eloise and falls quickly into the role of knight-to-the-rescue, without the least suspicion of her manipulations. In “Josephine Labrosse,” besides the “supercilious” clerk at the city bank (62), Victor Lucier is the only other metropolitan figure, and he is a positive, if “nebbish” (to use Lynch’s word, *One* 51) personality. It is Madame Labrosse’s cousin François Xavier Beaugrand de

Champagne who is the most troubling (and troublesome) character. He is invited to Labrosse's home as a rival to Victor to force finally an open engagement between the latter and her daughter (64). Ornately dressed, bold, and overbearing, François adds a discordant note to the romance at the end of the tale when he kidnaps Victor to a drunken orgy (66). As a negative outside influence, it is François who creates family conflict, but he is not a corruptor from the city. For, François is from the north, the narrator informs us; he is an outdoors labourer sojourning in a hotel in the suburbs of the city.² More to the point,

² In style and substance, François is a relative of Mariposa's Josh Smith, whose description in *Sunshine Sketches* presents a striking resemblance to that of François. It is worth quoting the two respective descriptive passages for the sake of comparison:

You do imagine that Mr. Smith is asleep merely because he closes his eyes as he stands. (*Sunshine Sketches* 15)

[...] You will feel as you draw near to [his hostelry] that it is no ordinary man that you approach. It is not alone the huge bulk of Mr. Smith (two hundred and eighty pounds as tested on Netley's scales). It is not merely his costume, though the chequered waistcoat of dark blue with a flowered pattern forms, with his shepherd's plaid trousers, his grey spats and patent-leather boots, a colour scheme of no mean order. Nor is it merely Mr. Smith's finely mottled face. [...]. It is more than that. It is the strange dominating personality of the man that somehow holds you captive. (18) When you meet Mr. Smith first you think he looks like an over-dressed pirate. (19)

Mr. Smith had come down from the lumber country of the Spanish River, where the divide is toward the Hudson Bay,—'back north' as they called it in Mariposa. (23)

His full name was François Xavier Beaugrand de Champagne. He had just come down from his winter's work up the river, and on the morning he was to dine with his cousin he stood leaning against the brick wall of a small hotel in the suburb. The sunlight was streaming down on him, reflected up from the pavement and back from the house, and he basked in the heat with his eyes half shut. His face was burned to a fiery-brown; but as he had just lost his full beard, his chin was a sort of whitish-blue. He was evidently dressed with great care, in a completely new outfit. He appeared as if forced into a suit of dark-brown cloth; on his feet he wore a tight pair of low shoes, with high heels, and red socks; his arms protruded from his coat-sleeves,

however, city-bred Victor is ill-equipped to deal with this challenge to his love-interest and to his own person. The unraveling of a fairy-tale story, such as that in which Peter Picheto of “No. 68 Rue Alfred de Musset” believes he is participating, is similarly explored in “Josephine Labrosse” as Victor believes he must protect his lady from a menace:

“‘Scoundrel! base one,’ calls out Victor, ‘leave the house, or I myself will put you out!’

François Xavier gazes for a moment on the little figure peering at him so fiercely through his spectacles” (66). The scene, which presents a David-figure confronting a more sophisticated Goliath, is perhaps amusing to an observer, but the confrontation’s end complicates what might otherwise be a conventional conclusion (i.e. hero or challenger winning the lady).

Instead of battering Victor and carrying off Josephine, François turns his attention to the fiancé:

[A] smile of childish tenderness mantles all of [François’s] face, and with the gesture of a father reclaiming his long-lost son he stretches his arms toward Victor. He folds him to his breast, and, lifting him from the floor,

showing a glimpse of white cuffs and a flash of red under-clothes. His necktie was a remarkable arrangement of red and blue silks mixed with brass rings. On his head he wore a large, gum-coloured, soft felt hat. He had little gold ear-rings in his ears, and a large ring on his finger. (*Viger* 64)

François, like Smith in *Mariposa*, is held in awe by his Vigerian relatives. They cannot control or contain him as he walks past his cousin Madame Labrosse to intimidate the newly engaged Victor and Josephine. Before them all, “François Xavier stands unimpressed” (65). In his association with the north he is identifiable as a masculine figure of virility. François is described as untouchable and larger-than-life, as impenetrable as the ever-thinking Josh Smith, whose charms are not to be resisted.

despite his struggles he carries him out into the night [...]. (66)

Victor is carried off to a late-night party and does not escape the bacchanal without some bruising:

It is late when Victor at last escapes, and hears them go roaring away as he flees, hatless, through the fields to his home. It is still later when he falls asleep, overcome by excitement and the stimulants which have been administered to him; and through his feverish dreams runs the sound of singing, of Josephine's voice, inexpressibly sweet and tender, like the voice of a happy angel, but the song that she sings is – 'C'est dans la vill' de Bytown.' (66)

The young man's heroic stand is forcibly undercut by the more worldly François, who kidnaps him as if Victor were a woman trying to ward off the advances of a brute. If Scott's *Viger* is not an idyll about an ideal place, then it is appropriate that this love story end not with Victor and Josephine in each other's arms, securely and happily engaged, but instead with disruption and uncertainty.

Lynch regards this story as a happy one and compares its conclusion to the final scene in "The Mariposa Bank Robbery" of *Sunshine Sketches*:

[T]he outcome in 'Josephine Labrosse' is unequivocally hopeful and Viger-enhancing. In fact, the full budding of love between Victor and Josephine [...] is to Viger what the meeting of Peter Pupkin and Zena Pepperleigh [...] is to Leacock's Mariposa [...]: a rapturously joyful and celebratory moment [...]. (*One* 52)

However, it is more likely the case that the ending to “Josephine Labrosse” is not unambiguously happy since the romance of the intoxicated and now “experienced” Victor is obviously tainted. His memory of the sweetness and tenderness of Josephine’s voice is mixed with his feverish recollections of the folk-tune of François’ revelrous gang.³ (We recall the city noise and light pollution that interfere with the frogs and stars of the opening paragraph to *Viger*). The final image in “Josephine Labrosse” is of a haunted Victor and a dream-spectral Josephine; ultimately the final impression, albeit unstated, is of François’ power and influence. Victor, similar to the ex-Mariposan of Leacock’s “L’Envoi,” visits the mythological origins of his nation’s roots—the small town, or village—but his visit is not rejuvenating (in the Leacockian sense) even though his intention was to seek out love. A Freudian reading might interpret Victor’s experience with François and his gang as a sexual awakening, much in line with Brown’s escapade in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown.”⁴ Hence, perhaps we might be inclined to critique Victor’s naïveté (he does take a long time to make any sort of romantic advance toward Josephine). The ideal that Victor might have expected in *Viger* is muddied with the very physical reality to which François introduces him. The reader’s hopes for at least one fairy-tale story in the disturbing collection of *Viger* is, too, undercut.

The theme of innocence to experience is a prevalent one in the three stories “The

³ Note as well that the narrator describes François’ face at the moment of his kidnapping of Victor as “tender” and that the spectral vision Victor experiences includes the “tender” voice of Josephine. There seems to be intentional overlapping of the two characters in Victor’s romantic adventure.

⁴ Lynch makes reference to Hawthorne’s influence on Scott’s writing of *Viger*. See *One* 201 n19.

Little Milliner,” “No. 68 Rue Alfred de Musset,” and “Josephine Labrosse” in which unexpectedly (perhaps) the city is symbolized not as the corrupting influence of small-town virtue. Instead, the idea of the loss of small-town innocence (or simplicity)—suggested in Madame Laroque’s complaint of Mlle Viau’s secrecy and business takeover, in Eloise’s “abandonment” of her ill brother for a city career, and Josephine’s witness to male sexual competition and prowess—is compounded with the cycle’s revelation of how Viger accommodates city influence. “The Little Milliner” exposes village desire (the women want Viau’s hats) and repulsion (Laroque’s hostility) towards the city; “No. 68” bears witness to a villager’s manipulation of a city man’s romantic impulses in order to secure her future; and “Josephine Labrosse” showcases a family’s attempts to play out a fairy-tale narrative with a city suitor, and their being forced into the dissolution of that dream by a family member. Since these tales are not celebratory expositions of small-town accommodation of the metropolis, what is to lament in these three stories is the dissolution of communal cohesion (Laroque exacerbates her relationships with her acquaintances; Maurice chooses apathy as a response to his sister’s future-planning activities; Josephine loses agency in the working out of her engagement) in the face of the challenges that the city, through its presence and influence, proposes.

Subsequent to each of the cycle’s short stories dealing with the city is a tale that works the Old World into the overall picture of Viger, showing how myth and folktale function in the modernizing world. Tracy Ware, in his Afterword to the 1996 M&S edition of *Viger*, warns that, although Scott integrates a theme of “the continuities and the discontinuities between

European culture and the life of a small village,” the author was uninterested in setting up an Old World versus New World dichotomy: Scott, Ware says, knew “it was neither possible nor desirable for the Canadian writer to break completely with European traditions” (120). And, Ware sums up, Scott did not think of Canada as the new world since the author recognized “the danger of colonial status [which view was] balanced by his belief that European traditions, when properly understood and adapted, can sustain Canadian culture” (120-121).

It seems to me that Ware’s attempts to acknowledge “continuities and discontinuities” but refuse Old World/New World tensions create an unclear distinction. I would counter-argue that the past, largely associated with the Old World in Viger, is in fact an important and inextricable part of the dilemmas presented in these stories, namely those of “The Desjardins,” “Sedan,” and “The Tragedy of the Seignior.” For they involve characters linked to France and, of all the *Viger* stories, present the most striking examples of madness. Although one could argue that a kind of mental fever takes over characters such as Eloise Ruelle and Victor Lucier, characters in these three tales suffer mental illnesses open to a postcolonial reading.⁵ Paul Arbiq (“Sedan”), Charles Desjardins (“The Desjardins”), and Louis Bois (“The Seignior”) demonstrate anxious separation from the Mother Country as well as the predicament of dislocation and displacement in the New World. As a place in transition—that is, one on the cusp of modernity and urbanization—Viger exhibits socio-cultural tensions and anxieties about its condition past,

⁵ Lynch briefly suggests the possibility of such a reading (*One* 40). Thanks to Janice Fiamengo whose personal notations in her copy of *One* encouraged carrying out this reading of the tales.

present, and future. Particularly in these Old World tales, mental debilities readily suggest psychic fracturing in the characters who live in Viger but out of the Old World. Moreover, as we shall see, the cessation of the Old World's participation in Viger's quotidian existence in the face of modernizing pressures becomes the process by which the past is turned into village folklore and myth.

Paul Arbique is owner of a hotel called The Turenne, named "after the renowned commander of that name" who shared Paul's birthplace in Sedan, France (37).⁶ Paul, once a soldier, identifies himself closely with old France, so much so that he and his family "considered themselves very much superior to the village people [...]" (37).⁷ Paul especially identifies himself with French military history and takes the 1870 Franco-Prussian war personally. He physically and psychologically suffers the experiences of the French army during this war, losing his health and his mental stability while the French army loses its battles until the final combat with the Prussian army in Sedan. During the war months, he is "wild with excitement; he could think of nothing but the war, and would talk of nothing else. [...] [T]he honour of his country was the thing dearest to him in all the world" (40). He

⁶ Vicomte de Turenne (1611-1675) was a famous marshal in the French army.

⁷ In line with Ware's argument, outlined above, Lynch states that Paul's obsession with France

had merely allowed him to express his own brand of inherited madness: alcoholism. This is important to stress with regard to the present reading's emphasis on fractured families, because it is hereditary alcoholism and not his inability to leave behind the Old World and commit to life in the New that is the first cause of Paul's downfall. (*One* 47)

Yet, Paul's obsession with the past is an integral part, I would argue, of the dilemma in "Sedan," as well as in the other Old World stories. Alcoholism does not cause Paul's dilemma; he turns to alcohol as a way of coping with his Old World anxieties and attachments.

even tries to bring the war into his own home by challenging a German customer to a duel (41). ““I know by the way he looks,”” Paul’s adopted daughter says, ““and he says now that France is beaten and crushed he does not want to live”” (41). Paul finally dies like a lover enthralled by an unattainable lady, whispering “her” name as his final words: ““Sedan.’ He sighed. ‘Sedan’” (42).

Charles Desjardin shares a similar obsession with France, this time with the original Napoleon. Born of an old Vigerian family that has been afflicted with insanity, Charles loses his mind at the dawn of a family renewal. Charles and his siblings’s father was “considered the wealthiest man in the parish” but “inhospitable [...]. His pride was excessive and kept him from associating with his neighbours, although he was in no way above them” (27). His children are similarly unsocial, but when of age, turn outwards to find lovers and plan marriages (28). However, when they discover that Charles has taken on the persona of “the Great Napoleon” (29) and annually lives the military glories and the Waterloo of that French general’s career, the Desjardins children decide that they must give up their dreams of love and resign themselves to being ““the last of our race”” (29).

Finally, in “The Seignior,” the Old World is obliquely referred to: The Rioux family is of an “ancient heritage” (54), and the last of its large estate is a farm house which seems to have “nothing to do with the street, or seemingly with any part of the town” (53). The last of the family is a restless young man who, while traveling abroad, leaves the remaining building of his inheritance in the care of a retainer who holds allegiance to the old family. The retainer, Louis Bois, is a suspicious, superstitious, and greedy fellow whose obsession with money leads him to betray his master’s bidding and accidentally kill him as

well. Louis Bois suffers heart-failure at the revelation of his crime, and dies (60).

The physical/mental decay and deaths that occur in the three stories above would suggest that the Old World is finally coming to the end of its existence in Viger; for, the Old World characters are no longer mundanely relevant to the village as a place whose primary reference is now the encroaching city. Klay Dyer, who argues that Viger's underlying problem is its lack of a centripetal spiritual reference, sees the passing of the Old World characters as negatively affecting the whole community:

The individuals or families of Viger [here Dyer is thinking specifically about the Desjardins and Rioux] who could facilitate the continuation of community — who could tell the stories of the mill, the gold mine, and the fields — either have no intimate personal history associated with the place or have been thrust into positions of isolation and silence on the margins of the village. (95)

Dyer also argues that “[t]he villagers remain [...] disconnected from the myths and stories of village history [...] unwilling or unable to acknowledge that their own stories are intimately connected with those of the village in which they live” (94). Thus, he says, “the historical past [is] stripped of its mythic potential” (95). I would agree that, since they are already distanced from the rest of Viger because of their primary and ossified association with the Old World, the Old World characters appear dis-empowered: They are physically separated from home yet mentally cling to it, a part of Viger (at least technically) but psychologically disassociated from the village. Thus this Bhabha-ian experience of being

in-between places⁸ is not a positive experience for Paul, the Desjardins, or the men of the Seigniory.

However, I would still argue the exact opposite to Dyer's overall proposition: The dying out of the Old World ultimately signifies the engendering of this part of the village's history and make-up into local legend that becomes part of Viger life. Dyer's evaluation of the village's mythic potential is slightly misconstrued because the Desjardins, Rioux, and Paul Arbique are not "thrust [by whom or what?] into positions of isolation and silence on the margins of the village." Rather, these characters choose to remove themselves from the rest of this village that no longer holds its connections to France as the defining characteristic of its identity. Furthermore, other than for the middle-aged Paul, the Old World characters are young adults and second or third generation; it is doubtful they would know more about Viger history than Madame Laroque or Monsieur Cuerrier. More to the point, it seems to me that the village's mythic potential is not lost, but rather that the village possesses mythic potential through its Old World history now integrated into folklore. That the villagers increasingly turn their attention to the metropolis does not equate to an abandonment of their Old World communal identity.

Note, first, the opening paragraph to *Viger*. The narrator describes a pit that once was the mining shaft of "old Daigneau," now filled by "the dread pool" and disturbed by local boys: "the boldest ventured to roll huge stones into Daigneau's pit, and only waited to see the green slime come working up to the surface before scampering away, their flesh

⁸ See Lynch's application of Homi K. Bhabha's theories (outlined in *The Location of Culture*) to Scott's *Viger* (*One* 34, 37-38).

creeping with the idea that it was old Daigneau himself who was stirring up the water in a rage” (19). Stan Dragland, in his introduction to the 1973 NCL edition of the cycle, uses this part of the narrative (as well as the description of the marsh in “The Desjardins”) to claim that “Swamp [...] motifs are part of the ironic underside of pastoral Viger [...]” (12), which implies, I believe, that Viger as a small country town prompts the reader to presume its idyllic qualities but that the reader should be wary of the little village’s darker, and sometimes corruptive, qualities.⁹ Dragland’s reading of the “swamp motif” can be clarified, I feel, as well as complicated, if we understand that the inclusion of these Old World stories is not simply a literary strategy to undercut idyllist renderings of Viger, nor is the seeming passing of the Old World a cutting-off of ancient roots. Instead, like the transformation of Daigneau’s pit, Old World Viger is transformed from personal quotidian irrelevancy to community folklore. Also, we read of no instances where contemporary Vigerians reject or deny their historical roots. It would thus be a mistake to read the occasions of the Old World dying out as indicative of village corruption. The villagers are interested in these old heritages; their curiosity in them breeds occasions for gossip, thereby turning, over time, local events into intrigue and mystery.

For example, the father of the Desjardin children is the subject of village interest.

He is remembered

as a tall, dark, forbidding-looking man, with long arms out of all proportion

⁹ John Metcalfe’s acerbic critique of Dragland’s—and every other critic’s—review of Scott’s *Viger*, in *What Is a Canadian Literature?*, is worth rereading (albeit with calmer tempers); for indeed, as Metcalfe makes very clear, there are no real swamps in Viger, only a mining shaft and a marsh.

to his body. [...] Very little was known about his manner of life, and there was a mystery about his father's death. For some time the old man had not been seen about the place, when one day he came from the city, dead, and in his coffin, which was thought strange. This gave rise to all sorts of rumour and gossip; but the generally accredited story was, that there was insanity in the family and that he had died crazy. (27)

As for the narrative of "Sedan," it is sprinkled with information about Paul and his French obsession that is derived from what "everyone" and "they" say. His inn is described as "famous in its way" (37), an ironic expression that foreshadows Paul's demise. His mental lapse is the topic of much conversation among the inn's customers as they listen to and observe Paul through the months of the Franco-Prussian war. The Seigniory is also famous in its way; the narrator says it makes "men remember days gone by" (53). It is the subject of village curiosity: Its retainer is said to be "guarding some secret and keeping at a proper distance the inquisitive and loquacious villagers," which gives "Louis also some distinction" (53). The conclusion to the tale sets up what the reader might easily imagine to be the foundation of another village ghost-story: "The people who broke open the house saw the unexplained tragedy of the Seigniory, but they did not find Fidele [a mysterious dog that haunts Louis], nor was he ever seen again" (60).¹⁰

¹⁰ "The Pedler," although not an Old World tale, contains the clearest transformation of village life into legend. A traveling salesman's seasonal peregrination into Viger is ended when someone tries to cheat the pedler with a false coin and the pedler's secret blindness is revealed in a scuffle that ensues (68). The story is imbued with the language of fable: "He used to come in the early spring-time [...]. He used to come with the awakening of life in the woods [...]. I speak of what has become tradition, for the pedler walks no more up the St. Valérie road, bearing those magical baskets of his" (67); although

Of course, it would be incorrect to interpret the transformation of the Old World into myth as primarily or solely a community-enhancing phenomenon since this aspect of Viger involves madness, darkness, and degrees of evil, physical and social. Indeed, Arbique's fatal patriotism for France is in vain; the decision that Charles Desjardin's brother and sister make not to marry for the sake of bringing the family degeneracy to an end is tragic and not an example of inspirational heroism (despite Lynch's edifying reading of the sibling loyalty); and the deaths in "The Seignior" are disturbing conclusions to a grotesque tale of greed and betrayal. Nevertheless, it is the haunting quality of these stories, their gothic elements and strange goings-on, that point to the staying power of the Old World in Viger. If there is a way to read how the village might counteract the deracinating aspects of urban modernity, we do well to look closely at the communal myth-making based on Old World history and lasting ties.

As the return story (to use Lynch's term and analysis of *Viger's* final tale [*One* 53-59]),

he never introduces himself, "the village people had christened him Jean-François" (67); the villagers are said to have felt "compelled" to buy one of the pedler's trinkets, and they exhibit both attraction to and fear of this man who becomes "a shape in memory" when he leaves Viger for good (67). Moreover, the tale is written in a style and manner that suggests the pedler has already taken on mythic proportions and the narrative is already imbued with what has become folklore of the strange salesman: "[T]here are yet people in Viger who, when the dust blows, and a sharp storm comes up from the south-east, see the figure of the enraged pedler, large upon the hills, striding violently along the fringes of the storm" (69). Although the pedler's rejection of Viger is a condemnation of it—Lynch reads the false coin as a sign of the village's absorption of metropolitan vice (*One* 50-51)—the tale is narratively pleasurable. For, it is an exciting tale that leaves us with an image of a giant pedler strutting amidst the storm, a figure that is source of imagination for many villagers. The tale suggests that Viger still possesses the ability to create myth, manifestation perhaps of a saving grace.

“Paul Farlotte” brings to thematic fulfilment the recurring images and concerns of the cycle as a whole. A bridging and encompassing tale, “Paul Farlotte” can be read as affirming finally the family unit over individual desires, thus bringing the familial fracturings of the rest of the cycle to a more or less comforting conclusion; that is, there is hope yet for Viger. The story’s plot can be quickly outlined as such: An old gardener sacrifices a lifelong dream to visit his mother in France in order to care for the orphaned St Denis family, one of whose brothers has taken on the fanatical obsession of their late father with a match-box making machine that was never likely to work. Paul’s character is easily celebrated because he is associated with the organic world (he is a skilled gardener) and is the selfless caretaker of the orphans. Lynch sees him as the “saviour” of the *Viger* cycle for exactly these two reasons (55), and Lyle P. Weis interprets Paul’s decision to leave off permanently his visit to France as one that finally and appropriately situates the man in Viger: “Paul’s [...] preoccupation with the dream-image of France and mother [shifts] to concern with the realities of his new-found manhood and ‘fatherhood’” (51).

Nevertheless, and despite Paul’s care for the St Denis family, distance between Paul and Viger remains. For example, his cottage (as well as the St Denis house which its neighbours) is found “Near the outskirts of Viger, to the west, far away from the Blanche [...]” (70).¹¹ It is also significant that although Paul maintains the most beautiful garden in

¹¹ All of the buildings of the Old World stories are situated away from central Viger. Paul Arbique’s inn is located outside of Viger proper; the Desjardins home is one of Viger’s oldest and is located at “the foot of the hill, where the bridge crossed the Blanche” (27); and the Seignior is on the “outskirts of Viger” (53). However, as Dyer astutely observes, “Scott systematically locates [each of] the individual Viger stories in settings that are progressively distanced, physically and psychologically [...]” (93). Dyer’s argument is concerned with the absence of a communal centre, such as the conspicuously absent St.

Viger, his flowers are grown from imported seeds (70) and his skills are not transferred by this impatient teacher (73). He also fails as the village school teacher (70-71). Although he experiences remarkable visions—of his mother predominantly—his spirituality sets the man apart from others. It is perhaps ironic that there exists this distance between Paul and Viger, despite his centrality to it (and to *Viger*). Yet, the irony fittingly corresponds with the sadness, or compromised happiness, that pervades the entire collection. Indeed, even Paul's exceptional self-sacrifice does not resolve the cycle's tensions.

Lynch's argument for the semi-recuperation of the orphans—"The St Denis family is holy at the end of 'Paul Farlotte' not because it is divinely sanctioned but because it constitutes that rarity in modernizing Viger – a functioning family" (*One* 57-58)—puts a positive spin to the story, but how much can one imagine beyond the world of the text to believe that Paul ultimately rescues this family? An elderly man without much income himself, Paul too is now caught in the family's demise. And what sort of family is composed here that would allow one to celebrate this conclusion to *Viger* as a hopeful one? Like Eloise Ruelle, perhaps the children will marry well, or marry at all, and Paul may gain satisfaction in the knowledge that his adopted family is not the last of its family, as in the case of the Desjardins children. Yet, without this imagining of the world beyond the text, "Paul Farlotte" stresses loss, sadness, and uncertainty. As its final impression, the story leaves us with the death of Paul's mother and a burdened Paul: "Gradually the vision [of

Joseph's church (i.e. it is not a narrative focal point in any of the stories) around which Vigerians could congregate. However, he also points out the fact that the homes of characters not directly associated with the Old World are also located apart from central Viger (see "Paul Farlotte," "The Bobolink," and "No. 68 Rue Alfred de Musset"). Thus, Paul Farlotte's home is not uniquely located.

his dying mother] faded away, and Paul Farlotte found himself leaning against his pear-tree, which was almost too young as yet to support his weight” (77). Certainly the final image is not completely tragic—the pear tree’s present weakness points to future growth—but neither can we come to the cycle’s conclusion feeling relieved that all will be well with Viger.

“Paul Farlotte” includes Old and New World, the world of the metropolis and small-town life, the organic world and materialism and industry, community (family)-minded individuals and the loss of the same, the elderly and younger generations, and mingles them all. Paul’s organicism, his surrogate fatherhood, his maternal and loving connections to France, and his visions (no clinical insanity here) provide a positive counter to the fascinating quality of the match-box machine that absorbs its victims, who wish to perfect it in order to lift the family out of its poverty. Indeed the narrator approves of Paul, this modern-day saint whose role in Viger is a complicated mixture of paternal care and spiritual distance. Perhaps Paul’s character chastises the rest of the village by setting an example that critiques the other Vigerians, who fail to create or maintain community. What his character does not imply, it seems to me, is that the city is at fault for Viger’s corruptions, mental and moral. Guy and his father’s utter absorption into their machine testifies to the seductions of industry: its promise of convenience, ease, and escape from a poverty that seems attached to the St Denis family, for reasons unexplained. Poverty, stress, mental fever, and family fracturings occur in Viger without the help of the metropolis, but the city, its influence just brimming on the horizon of the village, highlights Viger’s problems by its very presence. As Viger’s mirror, the city is relief to psychic frustrations;

heightens the tragedy of hostile attitudes towards difference; and draws attention to the conventions of village sexuality. Scott's *Viger* is a tale that demonstrates the writer's profound understanding of the small town as a complex place of dilemma, tension, and conflict well revealed in the light of the metropolis.

II.

Scholarship from about 1960 on Sherwood Anderson's best-known work, *Winesburg, Ohio*, has rejuvenated the book by analyzing it as more than "merely" an example of early twentieth-century American "revolt from the village" literature.¹² As Glen A. Love states in his introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *Winesburg* (2008), "today it seems apparent that Anderson turned back to the cornfields and the village of his youth because they represented the sort of ordered, natural world where love and communication were possible" (xii). Hence, as Benjamin T. Spencer states, not hateful of the small town but rather regretful of the negative consequences of industrialization, Anderson's

¹² Abigail Tilley provides a very useful questioning of the entire theme of the "revolt from the village," as originally proposed by Carl Van Doren's 1922 book, *American Contemporary Novelists 1900-1920*, as a viable theory for the literature that was thought to be such:

While my initial objective was to determine the validity of Anderson's involvement in the 'revolt,' I began to formulate doubts as to whether this revolt actually took place. If the critics resolutely continued to wave the banner of the 'revolt,' they apparently did so at the expense of the voiced intentions of the authors. (48)

She argues,

[t]hough Anderson uses the small town of Winesburg to serve as the backdrop of his stories, the town remains a mere platform from which Anderson felt best qualified to stage his examples of American life (Ferres 15). The 'revolt' position confuses Anderson's familiarity with small-town life with a rejection of it. (50)

works—*Winesburg* and subsequent titles—“trace the confusion and vulgarity of his age to the displacement of the agrarian base of American society” (7). For Anderson, the small town was “the clearest repository of archetypal emotions and situations [...]” (Spencer 10) because it lay between the country—the ‘soil’ or foundation of American virtue and ideals—and the city, “which breeds ideas” (10). As Clarence Lindsay states, for Anderson, “the small town, home, is where [the] essential American drama of identity is most intensely felt” (“I Belong” 83).

Besides extensive critical focus on Anderson’s small town representation, David D. Anderson, in his outline of the whole of the author’s literary career, details how the author’s pursuit of American identity is a larger theme also to be found in his fiction set in the city (“Anderson and Myth”). Thus, if it is American identity that is at the heart of Anderson’s literature, then we can agree with Spencer that, although Anderson was never an urban writer or a sociologist (but rather a general “mythopoeist” [2]), “[t]he consequent dehumanization of the old communities [because of the nation’s technological and industrial revolution] could be seen in both city and village” of the author’s writings” (8). It is appropriate then, as Irving Howe had already observed in 1951, that the cities mentioned in *Winesburg, Ohio* (Cleveland, New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, Dayton) have problems that are as complicated and disturbing as are to be found in small town Winesburg (97). Hence, understanding that Anderson’s larger and more central concerns are the loss of the “older American values” and “the redemptive agency of some new mythic force which would bring unity out of multiplicity in American life” (Spencer 5), it would be simplistic to evaluate the author’s representation of the “city” in the manner that Love does in his

Introduction: “Balanced against [the] green world [of Winesburg’s setting] are threatening, disintegrative forces. Implicitly, there is the city, which stands on the horizon of Winesburg’s scenes and events, and sometimes intrudes in episodes of the characters’ lives” (xiii). Even though Love echoes general critical reading of the country setting as the source “of the book’s evocation of lost worth,” drawing such a strict distinction between small town and city over-simplifies Anderson’s representation of the relationship between the two places.

Despite five decades of renewed and new interest in *Winesburg*, the metropolitan element in the cycle has not been given comprehensive attention. That is, the cities have been consistently treated only as a background to Anderson’s small town. Kenny J. Williams puts it more bluntly: “Because it is so often associated with the nation’s fading small towns, *Winesburg, Ohio*’s display of urban elements has been overlooked and totally neglected” (183). And even Williams’s analysis of the cities in *Winesburg* is short (8 pages long [182-190]). Furthermore, his conclusion regarding metropolitan representation in the cycle is relatively uncomplicated (echoing, as it does, Howe’s earlier observation): Life in the city as well as in the small town is oppressive (189).

However, in his cataloguing of characters’s attitudes towards the city and the small town, Williams reveals a most enlightening aspect of Anderson’s book: that the author critically scrutinizes both the desire of small-town residents to “move to the city” and the desire of city dwellers to “return to the small town:” “Those in the village want to go to the city. Many of those in the city want to get back to Winesburg. And, happiness eludes them all” (184). Similarly, D. Anderson describes the cycle’s characters as (predominantly) either

wanderers or sojourners (“Wanderers and Sojourners”). He categorizes the wanderers as “those who still harbor some vestige of hope—of escape, of life, of possible ultimate fulfillment” and the sojourners as “those who for some reason [...] have come to the end of a line that stretches far behind them in time, in space, or in psychological torment” (92).¹³ Thus, in *Winesburg*, characters either *go to* the city or *go back to* the small town. As simple as this observation might be, it is significant that Anderson represents the two major lines of movement in the book as such; for, in doing so, he points up these movements as larger, socio-cultural narratives that his contemporary Americans were participating within. It is my assertion that these two narratives are themselves products of an even greater overarching plot, that of the myth of “the American as Adam” (Lewis 5).

In *The American Adam*, R. W. B. Lewis discusses the dialogue conducted in American letters, between 1820 and 1860, about “a native American mythology” (1). This myth, Lewis clarifies,

saw life and history as just beginning. It described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening Old World. [...] America, it was said insistently from the 1820’s

¹³ D. Anderson principally explores the emotional and psychological transience of Winesburg’s folk:

[E]ach, in turn, becomes a wanderer who seeks fulfillment in escape, in perpetual movement as much away from something or somewhere as it is to something or somewhere else, or a sojourner who, almost inevitably for worse, finds his or her destiny in the town, itself a fate that precludes both escape and fulfillment. And those who apparently escape are often as imprisoned by the fact of their flight as are those who remain in the town. (93)

onward, was not the end-product of a long historical process [...]; it was something entirely new. (5)

Lewis then explains what sort of individual was this new species of American man:

The new habits to be engendered on the new American scene were suggested by the image of a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources. It was not surprising, in a Bible-reading generation, that the new hero (in praise or disapproval) was most easily identified with Adam before the Fall. (5)

Taken into the nineteenth century, this myth of America undergoes a transformation with the development of the industrialized city. Jennifer Carol Cook, in *Machine and Metaphor: The Ethics of Language in American Realism*, explains that the “tremendous technological innovation” of the nineteenth century “had profound ramifications for social life in America [...]” (1, 2). She quotes various contemporaries of the age:

Along with his fellow communitarians, who emphasized the power of communication to unite peoples, John Dewey saw in the new technology the potential to ‘break down the barriers of ignorance,’ to ‘make the nation a neighborhood’ (qtd. in Quandt 26, 30) by encouraging mutual sympathy that, for the first time in history, could transcend the boundaries of space,

time, and locale. Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley concurred, believing that the increased circulation of language would essentially replicate familial bonds on a much grander scale. And William Allen White espoused the belief that ‘the people, through the telegraph [sic], the telephone and the rural free delivery...and all sorts of organs of communication and understanding, are getting ready for another step in evolution’ (qtd. in Quandt 72). (2)

When we conceive of the myth of the American Adam together with the technological revolution, the industrial city takes on metaphoric proportions. It is the new place (from rural America) to which the American must travel if he is to continue re-making himself. Albeit not a part of any natural landscape, and a move away from the country and the small town, the metropolis for the nineteenth-century American Adam is the new point of direction, offers yet unknown experiences, and provides an opportunity to shed old (small-town) skin for new (urban) clothes. At least, such is the presumed case for Anderson’s small-town characters in *Winesburg*. References to the city by the small-town inhabitants suggest that the metropolis holds for them particular promises of rejuvenating change, increased wealth, and most importantly, of full and free self-expression. They go there “to meet the adventure of life” (*Winesburg* 232).

The reverse suggestion, of course, is that in the small town, the self is crushed beneath social and moral conventions that disallow individual expression outside the conventions. *Winesburg* scholarship has thoroughly explained how the book’s grotesques are self- and externally inhibited from communicating their thoughts, desires, and the

meaningfulness of their lives (for example, see Howe, Spencer, Cook, and Robert Dunne). Thus, it seems that Winesburg's inhabitants must leave behind the small town as part of an unwanted past for whatever newness the city (i.e. the future) might hold. However, the promises that Winesburg's inhabitants imagine that the city makes are presented as false, not in the sense that the city is a place of illusions, but that the notion of the city as a place of greater promise is illusory. As we shall see, while the cycle reveals the internal problems of Winesburg, it also illustrates deep confusion in the American psyche, as Anderson presents it, regarding the Adamic myth as it was transformed in relation to the nation's new cities.

Reading mythology into Anderson's work is not new, but neither is it common in criticism. For example, Spencer's comprehensive essay reveals Anderson's "mythopoeic imagination" (14) and D. Anderson discusses how the author's creation of "the myth of escape and fulfillment" "dominated much of his work over nearly all of his literary career" ("Anderson and Myth" 122). What I hope to contribute to this only partially explored area of Anderson criticism is a focused study of how the Adamic myth, which is incorporated into Anderson's idea of the American Dream, informs the author's representation of the relationship between the city and small town in *Winesburg, Ohio*. The small-town residents' hopeful expectations of the city are infused with the transformed American Dream of personal renewal from the gains of industrial development; but the failure of that dream results in a reversal of direction, back to the small town, and an imaginative transmutation of the small town to the place of national Edenic, virtuous origins. The small town rejected and now returned to, in Anderson's cycle, ultimately becomes a depot for

losers who have experienced the corruption of the American Dream.

In my reading of the three *Winesburg* stories that involve characters leaving the small town (“The Thinker,” “Queer,” and “Loneliness”), the narrator’s perspective seems to be significantly informed by the direction in which these wanderers look. That is, the wanderers’ plans to leave Winesburg are manifold in meaning: a rejection of the small town instigated by anger and resentment, and a pledge of revenge against those who have hurt them at home. For these small-town folk, the city (for indeed that is where they inevitably travel) represents the means to superiority over their Winesburg neighbours; it is the place where the self not only can be renewed but improved, made greater than those back home. In this way, the small town, along with its inhabitants, is transformed into that detestable “past” that must be overcome physically and psychologically. “Home” as identified in the small town certainly does not have the same connotations as we find in Jewett’s or Leacock’s representations of national roots in rural places. And it is this assumption, this mythic narrative that Winesburg’s characters feel they have embarked upon, that is a critical concern of *Winesburg*.

In “The Thinker,” Seth Richmond determines to ““get out of here [...]. I’m going to some city and go to work”” (119). Frustrated with the lives of his neighbours, he feels that he does not belong in Winesburg—““It’s different with me”” (120)—and discerns for himself that he has to ““strike out. I’ve got to get to work. It’s what I am good for”” (124). His ultimate rejection of Winesburg occurs when he undercuts George Willard, the cycle’s main protagonist and Winesburg’s local hero, and imaginatively condemns the local belle,

Helen White, to a conventionally stagnant life in the small town: “‘She’ll be like the rest. [...] When it comes to loving someone, it won’t never be me. It’ll be someone else—some fool—someone who talks a lot—someone like that George Willard’” (125-126). For Seth, leaving Winesburg is critical to leading a life that is more special than the petty lives of the small-town folk.

Yet, his awakening to a desire to leave Winesburg is spurred by the town’s own constant gazing towards the metropolis as the place to be great. The narrator describes Seth’s reputation in town as such:

In Winesburg, Seth Richmond was called the ‘deep one.’ [...] ‘He’ll break out some of these days. You wait and see.’ The talk of the town and the respect with which the men and boys instinctively greeted him, as all men greet silent people, had affected Seth Richmond’s outlook on life and on himself. He, like most boys, was deeper than boys are given credit for, but he was not what the men of the town, and even his mother, thought him to be. No great underlying purpose lay back of his habitual silence, and he had no definite plan for his life. [...] He wasn’t particularly interested in what was going on, and sometimes wondered if he would ever be particularly interested in anything. (116-117)

Seth’s taciturn and reticent life in Winesburg is perceived, by the small-town inhabitants initially and then by Seth himself (despite his self-knowledge to the contrary), as the quiet before an eruption of some sort, a waiting period before productivity. These Winesburg folk tend to perceive their place their place as limited in its ability to nurture the mind and soul,

and thus merely a stepping stone to growth and maturity in the city. Their perception of Seth involves a belief that elevated industriousness and productivity, possible only in the city, must follow from these years of great mental activity in which Seth is supposed to be engaged.¹⁴

Hence, Seth's decision to "strike out," which he imagines can only mean moving to "some city," is in keeping with the vision of the city as the place for personal change and improvement. Moving from the small town to a city figures Seth's life as a metaphor of necessary and inevitable transition. Therefore, when Seth decides to move to some city to work, his plan is located within the mythic narrative of the move to the city, the journey to strike out in a new place, alone, and in rejection of what he leaves behind. For his contemporaries, he is a promising model of the American Adam upon whom Winesburg writes the story of the American Dream, and Seth accepts such an interpretation of himself.

However, in addition to being influenced by the talk of a town he despises, Seth's plans are very vague: "I'll do something, get into some kind of work where talk don't count. Maybe I'll just be a mechanic in a shop. I don't know. I guess I don't care much. I just want to work and keep quiet. That's all I've got in my mind" (125). His dream of what will constitute a good life in the city is also not much different from the life he presently lives in the small town. It ultimately involves leading a similar life, but in the city, as if there the quality and meaningfulness of his life will magically be different. Apparently,

¹⁴ Arguably, Seth's "deepness", as the narrator indicates, is not necessarily a matter of potential yet unrealized. It might be that Seth, as a boy, is yet untethered to the conventions, responsibilities and expectations with which his elders are burdened. In this light, Seth's "deepness" might be an indication of his youthful innocence still not "filled" with the social worries of adults.

merely going to the city—Seth can only picture productivity in a mechanic’s shop as an example of living the American Dream—entails positive change, regardless of the individual and of what he plans to do there.

In “‘Queer,’” Elmer Cowley suffers local mockery because he is from a socially awkward family. As with Seth Richmond, Elmer believes he is meant for a more significant life:

‘With me it’s different. Look how it has always been with me. Father is queer and mother was queer, too. [...] Father doesn’t know and when mother was alive she didn’t know either. Mabel [my sister] is different. She knows but she won’t say anything. I will, though. I’m not going to be stared at any longer. [...] I know too well. I can’t stand it. [...] I’m not made to stand it.’
(180-181)

Unlike Seth, however (whose statement “‘It’s different with me’” (120) is one of confidence), Elmer desires inclusion because his difference is stressed in Winesburg and he believes that moving to the city would “put an end to all of his unhappiness” (183-184): “‘I’ll be like other people’” (178). He envisions that once there, he will find satisfaction in an anonymity he believes he can only find in a city: In Cleveland, he “would be indistinguishable. Then he could talk and laugh. He would no longer be queer and would make friends. Life would begin to have warmth and meaning for him as it had for others” (184). However, his understanding of the city is ambiguous: Either those in the city will treat him normally, or else his oddity (which itself is ambiguously defined: is it imposed or “natural”?) will not be noticed. In either case, the city clearly stands apart from the small

town as permitting individual freedom from family inheritance and reputation.

Before he leaves the small town, Elmer wishes to make a stand against Winesburg for its cruelty towards him and his family. In effect, he physically attacks the innocent George Willard (185) who, for Elmer, represents the entire town of Winesburg:

The reporter had merely come [...] to stand for something in [Elmer's] mind. He thought [George] [...] must be thinking of him and perhaps laughing at him. George Willard, he felt, belonged to the town, typified the town, represented in his person the spirit of the town. (178)

Elmer's final words in the story seem heroic and self-satisfying; for, he feels he has conquered Winesburg. But as a first and parting act of revenge against the small town, Elmer's violence against George is truly pathetic:

Like one struggling for release from hands that held him he struck out, hitting George Willard blow after blow on the breast, the neck, the mouth. The young reporter rolled over on the platform half unconscious, stunned by the terrific force of the blows. Springing aboard the passing train and running over the tops of cars, Elmer sprang down to a flat car and lying on his face looked back, trying to see the fallen man in the darkness. Pride surged up in him. 'I showed him,' he cried. 'I guess I showed him. I ain't so queer. I guess I showed him I ain't so queer.' (185)

His aggression is petty and ineffective because it changes nothing about how others have treated him. Further, that he sneaks onto his train at midnight, riding illegally on a flatbed, demonstrates that his leave-taking is actually a running-away, and not the brave exit he

imagines he has executed. The story thus concludes on a discomfoting note. One can doubt that Elmer will find success in Cleveland based on the pettiness of his revenge on Winesburg for a lifetime of ostracization. There has been no internal transformation, and Elmer's dependence on the dream of the city to alter his life's situation seems destined to turn dream into self-delusion.

In "Loneliness," the main character is the only one whom we actually follow outside the small town to a city. A silent, reticent individual, Enoch Robinson moves to New York City (for fifteen years from the age of twenty-one [151]) expecting to realize the ability to express himself without inhibition, artistically at first, but then generally towards his friends and acquaintances. His first comments about his life in the city reflect his overall desires in relation to the place: "I'm getting to be of some moment, a real part of things, of the state and the city and all that', he told himself with an amusing miniature air of dignity" (156). However, the success story that Enoch expects for himself in New York is perverted into a tale of a half-mad man who envisions his life in the city as an opportunity to be "a kind of tiny blue-eyed king [...] in a six-dollar room facing Washington Square in the city of New York" (155). His attempts at being a chic artist, then at being a dutiful and properly opinionated citizen, then a respectable husband, all fail because each state does not give him a strong enough sense of being in command of his situation and of other people. Thus, he retreats psychologically back into his reticence, even coming "to doubt his own mind" (154). Afraid that he is not expressing himself as he wants to, "he stopped inviting people into his room and presently got into the habit of locking the door. He began to think that enough people had visited him, that he did not need people any more" (154).

When all of his friendships and his marriage fail, Enoch, a “boy-man” as the narrator describes him (161), creates imaginary people with whom he finally enjoys superiority and authority: “And so Enoch Robinson stayed in the New York room among the people of his fancy, playing with them, talking to them, happy as a child is happy. [...] With an absurd air of importance he talked aloud, giving instructions, making comments on life” (157). But his play at life is brought to an end when a mysterious woman exposes to him the lie of his fantastic life and Enoch is “[driven] out of the city to live out his life alone and defeated in Winesburg” (159).¹⁵ The story leaves us with a broken old man: “‘I’m alone, all alone here,’ said the voice. ‘It was warm and friendly in my room but now I’m all alone’” (162). No lesson is learnt in this story on the part of the protagonist, whose life concludes with disillusionment and self-pity. In this sense the city fails to bless Enoch with the fulfillment of his dreams, but his expectation of the city to provide him with special status that others would celebrate proves possible only in fantasy.

The vision of the small town as an end-point is part of Enoch Robinson’s story since he

¹⁵ Sally Adair Rigsbee studies Anderson’s representation of women in the cycle: The meaning Sherwood Anderson gives to the characters of women and to the qualities of the feminine is an important source of unity in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Anderson identifies the feminine with a pervasive presence of a fragile, hidden ‘something’ that corresponds both to the lost potential of each of the grotesques and to the secret knowledge that each story is structured to reveal. The themes most frequently identified as the unifying forces of *Winesburg, Ohio*, the failure of communication and the development of the artist, are closely related to Anderson’s focus on the meaning of the feminine. In *Winesburg, Ohio* communication is blocked because of the devaluation of the feminine qualities of vulnerability and tenderness even though the artist’s creativity springs from deep feelings of vitality which Anderson associates with the feminine. (233)

returns to Winesburg permanently after his city plan fails. For this character, the small town is his final option, however sad an ending he has. Winesburg might be his only option because it is his original home; yet, the concept of the small town as an end-point is presented as such again and more strongly in the stories of original city folk who move to Winesburg when their city lives fail. In these stories, the vision of Winesburg as a place to which city folk go “back” is a dark one; for, the vision projects the small town as a point of beginning to which one must never return. In light of the myth of the American Adam, once the city is approached, even if only imaginatively, the “return” to Winesburg is regressive, a sign of despair of the American Dream. In “The Philosopher,” “Respectability,” “Tandy,” and “Drink,” moving to Winesburg marks personal failure in the city, and thus failure to be the new American Adam. The small town is represented as the resting spot for losers, regardless of whether or not the city characters move to Winesburg or are driven there.

Perversion of the American Dream, as Anderson presents it, informs the cycle’s depiction of losers returning “home.” Love remarks that “Anderson’s pastoral vision [of the small town was] valid after all. Winesburg was the right place for love, the proper setting for human communication although, as the stories reveal, it may not occur there” (xxiii-xxiv). The critic’s qualification of Anderson’s small town as *potential* Eden follows what Spencer reads into a comment Anderson makes in his *Memoirs*:

In a disconsolate mood of acceptance Anderson conceded [...] that ‘it may just be that America had promised men too much, that it had always promised men too much.’ In effect he was conceding the subversion of a major myth [...]. (8)

If America promised too much, then it failed to uphold the Dream carried from small-town origins to the future in the big city. The displacement of (Anderson's definition of) American identity effects an abandonment of the original purity of the American Dream and creates wandering and lost souls out of desiring American Adams. The ultimate corruption of the Dream is in the return to the small town as a place of original safety.

In "The Philosopher," Doctor Parcival moves from Chicago to Winesburg to hide from a murder he committed. His failure in the city and refuge in the small town suggest a number of ideas pertaining to Anderson's interpretation of the American Dream and what has happened to it. Parcival's corrupt city life is no surprise to the reader whose exposure to "the city" throughout *Winesburg* is habitually negative: lost hopes, corrupt dreams, and disillusionment. The doctor's retreat to Winesburg as a haven indicates his attitude towards the idea of the small town as a safe place to hide from one's life lived elsewhere. In moving to the small town, Parcival hopes to efface his identity, thereby refiguring the city from a symbolic embodiment of the future to a discardable and detestable (and, hopefully, irretrievable) past.

Such reshaping of the mythology based on the experience of failure in living the American Dream causes intense paranoia in Parcival, so much so that his very body betrays him: "The lid of the left eye twitched; it fell down and snapped up; it was exactly as though the lid of the eye were a window shade and someone stood inside the doctor's head playing with the cord" (31). The doctor's sense of self suffers disruption as he struggles to save face in the knowledge of his corruption. In addition, Parcival is distracted with the desire to be considered special and important in Winesburg. Taking George Willard as his audience, he

mixes stories of himself with truth and falsehood in an effort to create a superior self-image—"The tales that Doctor Parcival told George Willard began nowhere and ended nowhere. Sometimes the boy thought they must all be inventions, a pack of lies. And then again he was convinced that they contained the very essence of truth" (33-34)—confessing he wants to "get more credit" in George's estimation of him: "I have a desire to make you admire me, that's a fact" (33). His concern with public recognition is a mirror-image of the concerns of the city-going characters Seth Richmond, Elmer Cowley, and Enoch Robinson, who foresee self-exposure in the metropolis as the means to promotion. Having failed in the city, Parcival does not want to be known as a loser backtracking, as it were, to Winesburg. He is desperate to appear as the independent self-maker that the American Dream demands of its adventurers, but he is in a place from which one ought to begin rather than conclude that adventure, according to the mythology.

Wash Williams of "Respectability" leaves Columbus, Ohio for Winesburg after he discovers his wife's adultery and is repulsed by his mother-in-law's crude attempt at reconciling them (she places her daughter naked before her estranged husband in order to tempt him back into his marriage) (109). Williams becomes a hardened misogynist, not only hating women but also deriding men for loving women (104). As it is with Doctor Parcival, Wash's personal wretchedness is entrenched and worsened in Winesburg, which he detests as a retrograde place (reflecting his own condition). Once "the best telegraph operator in the state" (104), he becomes "the ugliest thing" in Winesburg: obese, dirty, and hateful (104). As a man who had been "there" and is now "back," Wash's move to a small town is certainly no retreat in a therapeutic sense, as we find to be the case in Jewett's

Country and Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches*; it is rather fatal. Winesburg, in this story as in "The Philosopher," is represented as a depot for despairing characters.

Furthermore, despite his general contempt for everyone, Wash is admired by men of the small town for what they consider to be his "courage" to "hate life, and [hate] it wholeheartedly, with the abandon of a poet" (104):

Here and there a man respected the operator. Instinctively the man felt in him a glowing resentment of something he had not the courage to resent.

When Wash walked through the streets such a one had an instinct to pay him homage, to raise his hat or to bow before him. (104-105)¹⁶

Winesburg's tolerance of and even admiration for Wash's gross hatred suggests a distortion of the myth of the American Adam. For, Wash's "courage" to hate other people is misunderstood as an example of an individual who has shaken off the bonds of the past and become a superior being, more and better than his forefathers. Of course, Wash's courage is in fact a personal degradation, but the form of hero-worship he (perhaps) enjoys presents a darkened vision of the American Dream gone wrong but still believed in.

In "Tandy" and "Drink," the city folk protagonists envision the small town in an ostensibly more positive light, as a refuge rather than an end-point following disappointment. Their "returns" to Winesburg are untainted by the hostility and aggression that we find in the stories of Doctor Parcival and Wash Williams because they hope to satisfy the dream of the American Adam by re-living small-town life. But, because their

¹⁶ Doctor Parcival makes the same connection between hatred for others and superiority: "I want to fill you with hatred and contempt [he says to George Willard] so that you will be a superior being" (25).

returns are premised on the reverted mythic narrative of the small town, thus figuring the place as one for renewed beginnings, their journeys to Winesburg are presented as inevitably fruitless. Having discovered that the city is not, after all, the place of personal success and improvement, they re-envision the small town as Eden before the Fall, that is, before the “corruption” of the city. Hence, for nineteenth-century characters who have witnessed and experienced the industrial and technological revolution that was supposed to speed up American Man’s evolutionary process, the re-figuring of the small town as the place for improvement and success reveals their sense of confusion and hopelessness about the American Dream in general.

In “Drink,” a grandmother returns with her grandson to Winesburg, her hometown, in order to escape poverty in Cincinnati. Widowed and having lost her children (her son-in-law died in a police-shooting during a strike and her daughter died shortly thereafter), the grandmother “became a half worn-out old woman worker” spending the last five years of her city life as an office cleaner and a restaurant dish-washer (195). It is made implicit that the grandmother’s return to the town of her childhood is a desire and plan of hers of some time, at least since the change in her fortunes for the worst: “The old woman came back to Winesburg as soon as she got the chance” (195). Since the grandmother grew up in Winesburg, the phrase “came back” is appropriate; but the term of return, echoed through the cycle, nevertheless carries with it a sense of retreat.

It is also poignantly ironic that the woman’s opportunity to leave the city comes from her finding a lost wallet:

One evening as she was coming home from work she found a pocket-book

containing thirty-seven dollars, and that opened the way. [...] She insisted on leaving Cincinnati that night, saying that if they stayed until morning the owner of the money would be sure to find them out and make trouble. (195)

Her chance to leave the city is provided in the form of a kind of theft, thus based on the misfortune of another in a place that is supposed to be full of promise, but where such things as loss and theft often occur and are not rectified. The grandmother might understand her find as her good fortune, but it is certainly a perverted form of the good fortune she had earlier understood and enjoyed as a city-dweller:

What a life the old woman led since she went away from the frontier settlement and what a strong, capable little old thing she was! She had been in Kansas, in Canada, and in New York City, traveling about with her husband, a mechanic, before he died. (194)

The best the city offers her, in the end, is opportunistic use of another's misfortune to get out of the city.

On the train home, the grandmother excitedly shares with her grandson her childhood memories of Winesburg. She tells “tales of Winesburg”—“of how he would enjoy his life working in the fields and shooting wild things in the woods there” (196)—certainly in a vein of nostalgia in which she has placed all of her hopes for herself and for her grandson's future. Reminiscent of the *Sunshine Sketches* narrator who, in “L'Envoi,” imaginatively boards a train back to Mariposa with a long-time city-dweller from the small town, the grandmother, in arousing girlhood memories of a happier and more robust time, means to instill not only confidence but similar desire in her grandson,

who was born in the city, for supposed small-town naturalness and well-being. In ignorance, of course, of what authors such as Leacock and Jewett acknowledge as the real loss of rural places/small towns, both in fact and in the cultural imagination of their respective nations, the grandmother yet believes in the “returnability” of her Winesburg.

Inevitably, her expectations of her hometown, based on these memories, are immediately and sharply undercut when she and her grandson finally arrive:

[I]n the morning when the train came to Winesburg [she] did not want to get off. ‘It isn’t what I thought. It may be hard for you here,’ she said, and then the train went on its way and the two stood confused, not knowing where to turn [...]. (196)

The narrator does not explain what exactly the grandmother sees (or does not see) at the Winesburg train station that changes her hopefulness so abruptly, but whatever it is, it is not welcoming or promising, based on her feeling lost at “home.” The narrator preempts the grandmother’s disappointment with foreknowledge of what she is to see: “She could not believe that the tiny village of fifty years before had grown into a thriving town in her absence” (196), so it is likely the fact that the small town is no longer the place of her (hopeful) memories that disappoints the grandmother. As a thriving town, perhaps it too closely resembles the city they left behind.

More painfully, coincident with the grandmother’s disappointment is the lack of improvement in her life in Winesburg. She continues her work as a cleaner as she had done in the city, does not connect with any other family (they have either died or gone), and remains friendless (196). Obviously, especially for the grandmother, a remarkable

difference was expected back home, an expectation that points up how radically she had altered her conceptions of city and small town: The place left behind was to be the saving grace for those who have come to understand that the promises of the city are impermanent and illusory. She is simultaneously confronted with the realization that home as well as the American Dream are nowhere to be found.

In “Tandy,” an unnamed alcoholic from Cleveland sojourns in Winesburg in the hope that the place will cure him of his habit: “[He] thought that by escaping from his city associates and living in a rural community he would have a better chance in the struggle with the appetite that was destroying him” (128). Yet, Winesburg prohibits his recovery from alcoholism: “His sojourn in Winesburg was not a success. The dullness of the passing hours led to his drinking harder than ever” (128). Indeed, these lines speak directly to the small-town myth constructed in response to the failure of the metropolitan narrative of success and improvement. The stranger, as a believer in the American Adam story, is thus, much like the grandmother of “Drink,” a product of the myth-making and a representative of someone whom the myths did not satisfy.

The stranger also participates in the construction and enhancement of the grand myth when he analyses his particular situation as one in search of personal success:

I ran away to the country to be cured, but I am not cured. There is a reason. [...] Drink is not the only thing to which I am addicted [...]. There is something else. I am a lover and have not found my thing to love. That is a big point if you know enough to realize what I mean. It makes my destruction inevitable, you see. [...] I have not lost faith. I proclaim that. I

have only been brought to the place where I know my faith will not be realized [...]. There is a woman coming [...]. I have missed her, you see. She did not come in my time. (128-129)

The stranger again displaces the fulfillment that has eluded him in Cleveland and in Winesburg onto a future vision of “a woman coming.” But the vision, as he himself claims, will elude him his whole life because he has already “missed her.” The stranger’s sojourn in Winesburg points him towards death since it is in the small town that he realizes he will never find fulfillment, especially since he found failure in the city first, then failure in the small town, his last hope. In *Winesburg*, those who dejectedly go out of the city and back to the small town, whether with hope or out of despair, have fallen out of the story of the American Dream and are lost.

In the final story of *Winesburg, Ohio*, the main protagonist of the cycle, George Willard, leaves Winesburg by train for city life (232). Throughout the cycle, Winesburg locals turn to George to share with him their secret desires, and they hope for George that he might succeed where they have failed. They encourage him to leave Winesburg as they believe that he is special, that he has gifts and abilities he will only waste in the small town. If he stays, they warn him (sometimes with conflicting messages), he will turn out as badly as the rest of them: “‘You must try to forget all you have learned,’ said the old man. ‘You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices’” (11-12); “‘You may end by becoming just such another fool. I want to warn you and keep on warning you. That’s why I seek you out’” (37); “‘What happened to me may next

happen to you. I want to put you on your guard. Already you may be having dreams in your head [about marrying and living in Winesburg]. I want to destroy them” (107). George seems to be *Winesburg*'s and Winesburg's real hope for positive change, for the dream of the American Adam to be realized finally and truly.¹⁷

Yet, the narrative of George's journey out of the small town to some city is full of ambiguities and qualifications: “[W]hen he aroused himself and again looked out of the car window the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood” (232). Cook summarizes one kind of critical response to “Departure:”

Some critics have read this tale as a rather unproblematic and paradigmatic coming of age scene, but there is certainly nothing blithely hopeful in Anderson's representation. The possibility that George Willard will become a key component of the iterative machine himself is very real. (120)

Besides Cook's focus on the technological influence in *Winesburg*, more generally we do not know if George sheds his small town or is its heir, if indeed he should leave it behind because of the stories he has heard or if, with the wisdom of those he leaves behind, he can at last succeed where they had failed. For, Winesburg becomes “but a background” to his future, a turn of phrase that suggests (especially in the “but”) that its influence on George's future will be downplayed somehow. Moreover, it is arguable, too, that the downplay might

¹⁷ In Chapter XI of *As A City Upon A Hill*, entitled “Small-Town Boy,” Smith outlines the development of “the idyllic picture of town and boy” in American mythology: “It remains one constant thread through many changing visions [of the small town]. [...] [T]he effect of the small town on the small boy is, presumably, of some significance in the development of ‘the American character’” (213-214).

be a positive diminishing of a small town that stunts the soul. Ultimately, there is nothing substantially offered in the lines describing George's departure that might dispel (possible) readerly worry about his successful future. The train conductor, the narrator makes it a point to say, "had seen a thousand George Willards go out of their towns to the city. It was a commonplace enough incident with him" (231).

Although George leaves with the private wisdoms of those who have failed as well as with communal encouragement and approval (an entourage of the small town gathers at the train station to see him off [231]), the advice is negative, warnings against themselves and the choices they made. Indeed, disconnection, or lostness, is a recurring condition in *Wineburg, Ohio*, an extension, I would argue, of this myth of the American Adam.¹⁸ As Lewis explains in *The American Adam*, the myth (especially post-1812) presents a "Case against the Past" (the title to Lewis's first chapter) (13). For nineteenth-century Americans, rejection of the Old World meant "escape from every existing mode of organizing and explaining experience, in order to confront life in entirely original terms" (14). The rejection undermines the concept of inheritance, privileges the activities of new generations over the habits of elders, and advocates constant renewal (Thomas Jefferson advised every nineteen years [Lewis 16]) of anything institutional (13-20). Thus, the myth of the American Adam impels.

As explained, the act of moving to the city is conceived of as an original, linear

¹⁸ "From Anderson's instinctively right placement of the book's central actions at twilight and night comes some of its frequently noticed aura of 'lostness'—as if the most sustaining and fruitful human activities can no longer be performed in public communion but must be grasped in secret" (Howe 98).

movement towards something new, towards the future. And as for the small town in Anderson's work, it is figured as a discarded past, abandoned and left behind. The representation of how Anderson's characters leave Winesburg does not even allow for the suggestion that Winesburg, as home, constitutes a character's roots, through which he thrives in the city. The rejection is adamant: Winesburg's folk feel the urge to break from their small town. As a result, the up-rooting of the past produces and reinforces that feeling of lostness that abounds in *Winesburg*. For, even for those whose understanding of the American Dream has been perverted (i.e. they return to the small town), the nomadism that the American Adam myth encourages is as much spiritual as it is physical. Although *Winesburg, Ohio* certainly depicts a suffocating Midwestern small town from which its locals (seemingly) reasonably run away, the book's individual metropolitan failures and unsuccessful returns point to a greater problem with the larger world depicted in *Winesburg*: that of disconnection in the American psyche. The cycle probes the absence of generational inheritance especially. It analyzes the detrimental rupture between past and future, the old and the young, as a critical problem of Anderson's contemporary America.

If disconnection, the past from the present (and hence future), underlines the problems in Winesburg, Scott's Vigerians seem collectively unconscious of threats to their communal future. The attractive nature of the city, of industrialism and machinery and prospects for material improvement, are powerful lures unequalled by the staidness of small-town life. And the narrator seems understanding of that. What seems lacking in Viger is communal self-understanding in the face of change, and positive adaptation (not thoughtless

absorption) to change. The atmosphere of Anderson's cycle, on the other hand, seems to be one of hope all but lost. Anderson's portrayal of Winesburg is certainly more tortured than Scott's portrait of Viger. Arguably, we read an acceleration and darkening of concern regarding the small town's dissolution from Jewett to Anderson, and a call to re-collect echoed from Scott to Leacock. In the next chapter, again in an American and a Canadian cycle, the re-appearance of communal health in the small town mid-twentieth century is diagnosed as sign of a final gasp for survival.

Chapter Three

Unraveling Bonds That Undo Community: John Cheever's *The Housebreaker of Shady Hill* and George Elliott's *The Kissing Man*

In his historical account of the American town, Page Smith explains a process that might at first sound counter-intuitive: that as religious doctrine and values became less foundational to the community, other “standards of conformity” were practised with increasing harshness and rigidity. He writes,

As the earlier core of religious orthodoxy softened, the community enforced other standards of conformity which were, if anything, harsher than the biblical canons. Because they were often without a mechanism of redemption, they bore cruelly on the dissenters and nonconformists. Individualism, such as it was, was only accepted within the patten of the community's specific symbols of unity. The stronger and more specific the central orthodoxy, the greater the variations that could be permitted outside of it. The town without a dominant orthodoxy was often more tyrannical in its insistence on a total pattern of conformity than the community bound to a specific ‘covenant.’ (198)

Easily applicable to the mid-twentieth-century experience of John Cheever's American suburbanites in *The Housebreaker of Shady Hill and Other Stories* (1958), Smith's analysis also provides an interesting gloss on the experience of George Elliott's Canadian town in *The Kissing Man*. In both cycles, the community has transformed secular practices into

community-binding rituals that must be followed religiously. Characters have little choice but to conform to these rituals, or suffer harmful rejection from the community. In *Housebreaker*, Cheever's characters cling desperately to their communal bonds to the destruction of their moral autonomy. Elliott's small-town inhabitants are divided between adhering to the rituals or suffering various forms of harm by the attempt to "out-live" the demands made on them. Both communities are profoundly under threat, at risk of dissolution through modern alienation, atomization, and moral decay.

In these cycles, we have come a long way from Jewett warning her urban readers not to forget the past as they move forward, and Leacock warning his readers about the dangers of thoughtlessly de-valuing the small town's virtues. Cheever's suburb and Elliott's small town exhibit none of the hopeful trust their earlier counterparts display in the value of the small community as generator and custodian of national virtue. Quite the opposite: As updated versions of the earlier turn-of-the-century small communities, their communities represent the perversion of such virtue, firmly maintaining all the trappings of the small-town mythology without moral substance. Thus, in these stories, we come to an intensification of the small-town worlds of Scott and of Anderson: The decay set in then has been dangerously covered over with superficial re-embrace of the traditions and customs of their forebears.

John Cheever's story cycle¹ is ostensibly an anomaly to this study because the setting of *The Housebreaker of Shady Hill and Other Stories* is that of a suburb, and not a small town in the manner we have accustomed ourselves to understanding so far. Yet *Housebreaker* possesses qualities that do not disqualify it from taking its place among the other six small community cycles of this study. The manner in which the suburban inhabitants relate to their home town, identify and describe it, and compare it to the city—New York in this case—where all the men of Shady Hill work, mark out this “*banlieu*” (*Housebreaker*14) as a mid-century update on the small towns of Scott, Leacock, and Anderson. For Shady Hill is an enclosed and close community that understands itself as different from the city, possessing qualities that it believes are virtuous in comparison to those of the city; it is a tightly-knit community whose individual households are dependent on each other's social graces to sustain the functionality of the community.

Housebreaker outlines the American urban shift of the 1950s during which city dwellers, urged to move outside the major metropolitan areas that became too big and too unaccommodating for families, moved far enough from the city to be distinguished from it, but not so far as to be disconnected from it. They had gone to the city to partake of the American Dream, but then moved out of it again in order to raise children, escape poverty (they are the middle class), and continue the search for Eden. The historical update to Anderson's returning characters (whose returns to the small town are always damaging, sometimes fatal), Cheever's characters wish to remain tied to “city rhythms” (Waldeland

¹ The first edition was published by Harper (New York). I am using the 1961 Hillman/Macfadden edition.

27) without living in the city. They do not, therefore, try to escape metropolitan life by moving as far away as rural towns. In sum, the suburb styles itself as more accommodating than a small town, a retreat from the stresses of the city, yet meanwhile possessing both the luxuries of metropolitan life and the pleasures of lawns and landscapes. As middling as the small town was at one time (i.e. a place in-between the city and country), Shady Hill, in the middle of the twentieth century, settles itself particularly and peculiarly between the country's nostalgic memories of Eden and the city's dreams of the American Adam.² Paradoxically, Shady Hill's dilemma is also this middling position dependent on unstable social commitments that are in fact glosses over the significant troubles of life in the suburbs.

It is frequently said by critics of *Housebreaker* that Cheever is ambivalent (and/or ambiguous) towards the suburban phenomenon. Keith Wilhite asserts that

[t]he ambivalence Cheever brings to his suburban representations and his social trespassers offers something far more telling than a reiteration of the popular critical discourse about suburban alienation and superficiality.

Cheever's hesitancy to pass judgment complements the ambiguity of the spaces and behaviors within his fictional suburb. (222)

² Robert Beuka writes:

While the beginning of the twentieth century saw increasing urbanization across the land, the second half of the century witnesses the massive development of the suburban landscape, a new type of terrain that dissolved the urban/rural place distinctions that had, until that point, largely characterized American topography. (1)

Indeed, the narrator of *Housebreaker*, much like *Sunshine Sketches*'s savvy narrator, adopts a role that allows him to critique sympathetically ("hesitancy to pass judgment" on) the inhabitants of Shady Hill. Timothy Aubry explains the ambivalence by analyzing how Cheever's narrator equivocates between his identity within and outside of the suburb:

[H]e is as much a part of [Shady Hill] as anyone he ridicules. Given that the very essence of suburban experience is to be included/excluded, Cheever is in a difficult position as a satirist. To critique or mock suburbia, to feel or pretend to be outside suburbia, is the essence of what it means to be a suburbanite, so the more he jabs, the more he implicates himself as a part of the company he is critiquing. (69)

(I do not see Cheever's ambivalence towards American suburbia to be the problem Aubry seems to make of it in his rhetoric. He mistakes Cheever's "pretence" of being outside suburbia with the ambivalence created by the mixture of critique and sympathy projected throughout *Housebreaker*. I do not believe Cheever at all jabs). Cheever's ambivalence has also been understood to reflect the writer's assessment of the American psyche. Alfred Kazin writes that for Cheever,

America was still a dream, a fantasy; America did not look lived in. Americans were not really settled in. In their own minds they were still on their way to the Promised Land. In story after story Cheever's characters, guiltily, secretly disillusioned and disabused with their famous 'way of life' [...] suddenly acted out their inner subversion. They became 'eccentrics,' crazily swimming from pool to pool, good husbands who fell in love with

the baby sitter. (122-123)

If the metropolitan American Dream has not fulfilled its promise for *Housebreaker's* characters (who are predominantly men), these Americans still do not know who they are, and their search for Eden continues.³ Thus, Shady Hill's inhabitants—meaning, Cheever's representation of middle-class Americans of the 1950s—are lost in their Edenic search, and are, as we shall see, morally blinded by the confines of their searching in a most serious way.

The self-delusion exhibited by the characters is the result of a confusion about their place in American mid-twentieth-century life. Although they believe that life in the suburb is an improvement over city life, they are unable to find lasting meaning in their lifestyles. Their failings as spouses, parents, employees, and as individuals are troubles that are only differently framed from troubles to be had in the city. The opposition that we might read between Shady Hill inhabitants—“us in Shady Hill”—and the metropolitan world—“them in New York”—is structured by dinner parties, social proprieties, adherence to community expectations of involvement, property upkeep, and a style of conversation that depends on maintaining the image of stability and happiness. In other words, the sins of the city—thrift, betrayal, exploitation, exclusion, isolation, dishonesty, hypocrisy—are also found in Shady

³ Cheever's representation of mid-century suburban Americans still searching for Eden (despite believing they have found it) makes for an interesting contrast to Sherwood Anderson's turn-of-the-century lament that America “promised too much.” It would appear that between 1919 and 1958, what Anderson's Americans envisioned the American Dream as promising had since altered: It was not metropolitan life, after all, but a sophisticated life-style that imitated rurality aesthetically via the wealth accumulated by city work.

Hill but framed by the suburban sinners in such a way that they seem nonexistent.⁴ Thus, the search for Eden in the suburb is not only a lost cause for Shady Hill's inhabitants, the very search reveals the failure and failings that they found in the city.

In the eight short stories that compose *Housebreaker*, the appearance of stability and contentment (personal, financial, social) is disrupted by dilemmas that draw individual characters out of their cohesion, or attachment, to the rest of the suburban community. What interlinks the inhabitants, such as respectable financial standing, moral etiquette, likeability by social equals and/or superiors, is ruptured by not much more than fate and the weaknesses of human nature. But the disruption places them outside Shady Hill psychologically and physically. Finding themselves outside the bonds of their suburban community, they become peripheral to it and then investigate and discover how untenable the original bonds were. They relate to Shady Hill as observers of experience (fallen from social grace), and no longer as "mere" characters in the story of Shady Hill.

For instance, in the first story, "The Housebreaker of Shady Hill," Johnny Hake decides to steal money from his neighbours after losing his job (13-14), selecting the homes

⁴ Lynne Waldeland writes,

The stories in *The Way Some People Live* [published in 1943; Cheever's first collection of short stories] almost all employed urban settings, and most involved characters whose lives ran on city rhythms. In fact, those critics who simplistically refer to Cheever as a chronicler of the suburbs are overlooking the degree to which the city, especially New York, dominates his first collection and continues to be important in a number of stories in his second volume [*The Enormous Radio and Other Stories*, published in 1953]. (27)

We can certainly say the same for *The Housebreaker of Shady Hill*.

of richer neighbours whose hospitality he enjoys on weekends. The morning of his first theft, Hake's darkened self-perception intensifies what he describes as a disjunction between himself and the suburb:

Had I looked, the next morning, from my bathroom window into the evil-smelling ruin of some great city, the shock of recalling what I had done might not have been so violent, but the moral bottom had dropped out of my world without changing a mote of sunlight. I dressed stealthily—for what child of darkness would want to hear the merry voices of his family?—and caught an early train. My gabardine suit was meant to express cleanliness and probity, but I was a miserable creature whose footsteps had been mistaken for the noise of the wind. (14-15)

Hake reveals his continuing belief in the virtuous difference between city and suburb even as we understand that such difference is questionable. Appropriately then, Hake's guilt exacerbates his sensitivity to other people's city crimes as if his own crime gives him a perspicaciousness for particularly metropolitan crime and criminals: He is more aware of newspaper headlines about bank robberies and large-scale thefts, and he notices with disgust when a restaurant customer steals the waitress' tip (15).

In the cycle's third story, "The Country Husband," Francis Weed finds himself on the emotional periphery of his family and neighbours when, following a near-death airplane accident, no one he knows is seriously interested in his experience (42-43). Unable to "recreate a brush with death" for those he knows best (42), Weed is so discomforted with the lack of attention and care, that he expresses his feelings of being "outside" his normal

attachments by attempting an affair with his children's babysitter (50). He also interprets his sense of exclusion as heightened self-awareness and mental sophistication:

Among his friends and neighbors, there were brilliant and gifted people—he saw that—but many of them, also, were bores and fools, and he had made the mistake of listening to them all with equal attention. He had confused a lack of discrimination with Christian love, and the confusion seemed general and destructive. He was grateful to the girl [the babysitter Anne] for this bracing sensation of independence. (53)

Weed then turns his critical eye to his neighbours and finds ways to rupture further his closest social ties (60-61).

According to some critics, the male characters (particularly) of Cheever's work⁵ serendipitously transgress the norms of their suburban lives as a means of escaping that which undermines the sort of masculinity that the mythology and precepts of the American Dream delineated. For example, Aubry reads queer theory into Cheever's cycle, explaining that "the sphere of labour" in 1950s America was

no longer a secure source of masculine affirmation. [...] In the postwar period, many more Americans were suddenly working in jobs that had nothing to do with producing goods and everything to do with selling them [...]. Nonetheless, ingrained ideas that posited shaping and making material objects as the purpose of life persisted, leaving many workers with the

⁵ Cheever's main characters in *Housebreaker*, as they tend to be in much of his fiction, are predominantly male. See James E. O'Hara's discussion of the matter (65-67).

uneasy sense that their jobs were pointless. [...] If work suddenly felt as purposeless and desultory as leisure time, then leisure time suddenly felt as labored and goal-directed as work. The collapse of a clear distinction between work and leisure contributed to the male worker's sense of emasculation. The skills that were now the most important to cultivate—dealing with people, getting along with others—were those considered traditionally feminine. (70)

For Aubry, queerness in Cheever's fiction indicates a celebration of masculinity, a breaking out of conformity to re-discover and exercise traditional maleness:

[P]opular mythology holds that the true man is a nonconformist, but the entrepreneurial age is past, and the work-world seems to offer fewer chances for individual initiative. He who wants to be a nonconformist, who wants to strike out on his own, must search for other contexts, other modes of action, and one hazard is that doing so may convict you of precisely the 'queerness' you were trying to evade. Or, to put it differently, one of Cheever's insights is that in a homogeneous suburban community behaving 'queerly' is one of the only means available to affirm one's masculinity. (70)

Similarly, Timothy Dow Adams, in his assessment of religion in the suburban fiction of Cheever, uses David Reisman's term "Suburban Sadness"⁶ to describe the "characteristic

⁶ Reisman opens his essay in this way:

I speak in this paper from the perspective of one who loves city and country, but not the suburbs; one who feels that the suburban styles of life tend increasingly to become *the* American styles, with ensuing loss of certain kinds of diversity, complexity, and gained by the move to the suburbs. (375)

sense of alienation and inauthenticity,” the “malaise” of suburban living (52) from out of which the inhabitants of Shady Hill “break” (54), with positive connotations, and find themselves behaving queerly.⁷

The concern such readings prompt is in their interpretation of what I’ll call the fallings-out-of-grace experienced by the characters. The fallings-out-of-grace are moments of potential epiphany in which the characters, in finding themselves outside of Shady Hill’s normative structures, are propelled by a moral trajectory that forces them to face their unhappiness(es), an unhappiness that they seem ready to realize lies just beneath the thinness of their social platform. By means of their fallings-out, they articulate to themselves (or it is articulated by the narrator on their behalf) that life in Shady Hill is not the Eden they have tried to create and believe. They then perceive, to a degree, that the

⁷ Adams’ overall argument concerning Cheever’s fiction (as well as that of John Updike and Percy Walker) is that the author’s suburban characters express “unconscious awareness of the loss of both religious and civic concern [which] most often manifest[] [themselves] in the motif of adultery” (54). He explains further that “Cheever’s suburbanites sense the separation of the sacred and the profane that by definition their suburban life forces on them” (56). Even though

Cheever’s suburban couples [are] constantly surrounded by religious terms—divine, Christ, Lord, adoration—[they are] seldom concerned with religion, just as the suburbs so often are surrounded by churches that serve as day-care centers, teenage counseling houses, meeting places, and other functions seldom connected with religion. (57)

He concludes from these observations that Cheever thinks that his characters, “the real people they represent—should be turning instead to traditional religion, the family unit, and either the city or the country” (69). I disagree with Adams that Cheever/the narrator offers traditional religion and the family unit as solutions to the suburbanites’ problems (Cheever seems uninterested in problem-solving). Adams’ argument is further enlightened by Smith’s outline of the socialization of the town churches due to their original democratic nature and the influence of the modern cities (76); church-going became less a spiritual orientation and more a communal activity. Thus, to clarify Adams’ point, Cheever’s suburbanites are religiously oriented according to the historical socialization of their churches.

Edenic potential of the suburb is predominantly artifice, which perception includes the artifice of relationships and personal contentment. The falls promise transformation through enlightenment during the moments of darkness—as Aubry and Adams instruct us. However, their experience of being cast out is not actually liberating in the manner we might expect.

The potential or the consummation of those fallings-out into actual epiphany and transformation is never in fact permanent or fulfilled. Narratively, it is when the characters return to social grace and comfort that we find the rhetoric of epiphany and transformation used by the character or narrator. These end-of-story “epiphanies” signal the return to the façade of Shady Hill living. Moreover, between the falls and the “epiphanies,” the characters are drawn towards the city to mull over their situation. They embark on a physical trajectory out of the suburb and into the city where they explore their identity crisis, as it were, and use the metropolis as a point of self-reference. These “outside” characters utilize the city as a place of origins from which to begin again the move to (return to) social cohesion and structure. The city is not a place of revelation and genuine change, but a space for renewing and reaffirming self-identity within the suburb. As Cheever presents the suburb’s relationship to the city, the latter has (conceptually) become an extension of the former, useful for re-affirming suburban cohesion.

Three methods of transportation dominate the whole *Housebreaker* cycle: the car, which is used to drive around Shady Hill; the train, which is used to get to New York for work; and walking, which occurs most conspicuously when a character has lost his normal

attachments to the community of the suburb. Peregrination is also the primary method of mobility in the metropolis. As a suburban marker of falling-out-of-grace, walking connects the city with loss of suburban “innocence.” As a form of movement that is potentially metaphorical, walking, perversely, is also the method of return to that façade of suburban experience.

In “The Housebreaker,” Hake, having been laid off from work, walks to his neighbours’ homes at nights to steal money from them. Driving would have been less conspicuous, the method that is in keeping with the expected manner of getting around Shady Hill. (For instance, in the final scene of the story, a patrolman, driving around the community late at night, stops Hake on the latter’s way back from returning money to a house from which he had stolen. The patrolman is curious that Hake should be out so late on foot: “What are you doing out at this time of night, Mr. Hake?” [28]).⁸ The physicality of his walking is, in contrast, strenuous and self-conscious. Narrating in the first person, Hake details his steps towards and into the house of his first robbery: “I went downstairs and out of the house;” “I went around the Trenholmes’ garden then, gumshoeing over the grass, down the lawn to the Warburtons’ house;” “I went up the front steps [...] and started across the floor;” “I first put my foot on one of the threads to see if it creaked;” “I started up the stairs;” “I stood in the doorway;” “Moving swiftly, I stepped into the room;” “whatever the juices were that kept my legs upright were going;” “I clung to the banister on my way

⁸ Wilhite discusses the same scene with emphasis on the blurred boundary between private and public spaces in the suburb: “Shady Hill’s roving police car signals a pervasive insecurity about suburbia’s private geographies, necessitating surveillance tactics that elide the distinction between insiders and outsiders” (226).

down the stairs, and staggered out of the house” (13-14). Additionally, at a moment of crisis with his wife, Hake walks from his home to the train station: He packs a suitcase and “marched out. I even thought, for a minute, of taking the car, and I went into the garage and looked it over. [...] I walked to the station. It’s about a mile” (25). That he “even” considers driving to the train station stresses the abnormality of Hake’s personal condition.

Parallel to Hake’s suburban peregrinations, his metropolitan walking is morbidly self-conscious: “I was a miserable creature whose footsteps had been mistaken for the noise of the wind;” “I went to the bank [with the stolen money]. Leaving the bank, I was nearly hit by a taxi. My anxiety was not for my bones but for the fact that Carl Warburton’s wallet might be found in my pocket;” “I thought coffee might make me feel better, and went into a restaurant” and on seeing someone steal the waitress’ tip, “I got up and left the restaurant;” “I walked to my cubicle [...]” (15); “The sky was dark when I came out on the street;” walking the streets, he notices beggars who pretend to be blind (19); “I walked around the streets, wondering how I would shape up as a pickpocket and bag snatcher, and all the arches and spires of St. Patrick’s only reminded me of poor boxes” (20). His perspective, of course, is based on his guilt and dread. And although he commits his crimes in the suburb, he identifies himself, within his current mental agitation, with corrupt city life. For example, he reflects on his newly acquired city observation skills: “What frightened me was that by becoming a thief I seemed to have surrounded myself with thieves and operators” (17). After work, he meditates on his separation from rural virtuousness:

I took the regular train home, looking out of the window at a peaceable landscape and a spring evening, and it seemed to me fishermen and lone

bathers and grade-crossing watchmen and sand-lot ballplayers and lovers unashamed of their sport and the owners of small sailing craft and old men playing pinocle in firehouses were the people who stitched up the big holes in the world that were made by men like me. (20)

Outside suburban social graces, and as a way to put himself in focus, to relate to something to which he can compare and identify, Hake situates himself in a metropolitan framework that complements his guilt. Recall that he turns directly to the city, after work hours too, when even his marriage is threatened by his alienating behaviour (25). Needing an alternative physical location to self-identify,⁹ and as if the city were the obvious and sole alternative, he uses the city conceptually to find a structure or a means to exist outside his usual psychological suburban comfort. Crime, but especially theft, says Hake, is metropolitan, even though he misses the irony that he has stolen only from his neighbours:

I had committed adultery, and the word ‘adultery’ has no force for me;¹⁰ I had been drunk, and the word ‘drunkenness’ had no extraordinary power.¹¹ It was only ‘steal’ and all its allied nouns, verbs, and adverbs that had the power to tyrannize over my nervous system, as if I had evolved, unconsciously, some doctrine wherein the act of theft took precedence over

⁹ Northrop Frye’s assessment of the linkage between identity and place (see “Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*” in *The Bush Garden*) is applicable not only here, but to the experiences of each major character of the eight story cycles of this study.

¹⁰ We will later take note of the commonplaceness of Blake’s adulterous behaviour in “The Five-Forty-Eight.”

¹¹ Drunkenness is commonplace in Shady Hill, occurring as often as there are parties.

all the other sins in the Decalogue and was a sign of moral death. (18-19)

Because it is money that allows Hake and his fellow suburbanites to upkeep their lifestyles in Shady Hill, Hake's thieving morally resonates more strongly with him than, as he says, adultery and drunkenness. Not good marriages or healthy relationships but wealth sustains families in this suburb. The reference to the Decalogue points to a re-writing of the Old Testament commandments such that wealth and its props are prioritized.

In the middle of attempting more thefts on his neighbours, Hake experiences an epiphanic moment in which his darkened vision of Shady Hill dissipates and he finds himself psychologically normalized back into his community. The change is illogical, certainly not possessing the sort of reason that his fall-from-grace provides:

While I was walking toward the Pewters' [to steal from them], there was a harsh stirring in all the trees and gardens, like a draft on a bed of fire, and I wondered what it was until I felt the rain on my hands and face, and then I began to laugh. I wish I could say that a kindly lion had set me straight, or an innocent child, or the strains of distant music from some church, but it was no more than the rain on my head [...] that showed me the extent of my freedom from [...] the works of a thief. (27)

The deliberate mundaneness of Hake's transformation draws attention to the lack of mythology that we might expect in such a tale of redemption. Rained upon in a manner no more special than that experienced by his neighbours, Hake feels himself brought back again into the framework of his community, but no more. As for his metropolitan

experiences, the city continues to reflect his suburban life, and now his renewed happiness in it: “What I did not understand, as I walked down Fifth Avenue [in the city, on the way home from work] that afternoon, was how a world that had seemed so dark could, in a few minutes, become so sweet. The sidewalk seemed to shine [...]” (28). He is also serendipitously re-employed by his previous city-based job, describing his good fortune thus: “I was glad to come *home* to parablendeum” (28 emphasis mine).

Hake’s happy questioning of his new condition is the fullest marker of the end of his fallen experience. Lynn Waldeland objects that the character’s return, as with the returns of other Shady Hill inhabitants, comes “so abruptly and [...] with so little plausibility, that it may be hard for the reader to feel [the] seriousness” of his fall (77). The illogical nature of Hake’s return to acceptance and acceptability might be frustrating for the reader, but in its very illogicality it reveals what is lacking in Hake’s world: a framework that would encapsulate a means of socio-moral survival truly outside the suburb, and not just an extendable one that draws the individual back in. Having no other than the limited (and limiting) structure provided by Shady Hill, Hake apparently is left with lostness accompanied by wandering in the city, which activity becomes the way back to the structure of the suburban world, however meaningless.¹² Represented as the sole alternative

¹² Wilhite makes the intriguing point that Hake’s thefts actually support his position in Shady Hill by giving him the monetary means to maintain his life (life-style) in the suburb (225). Thus, he argues, Hake’s moral transgression is not the character’s real problem; rather, it is the revelation that such behaviour—alongside “adultery, drunkenness, burglary, occasional violence, and other trespasses” (225)—is normal to Shady Hill. Such revelation exposes the supposed dichotomy between city and suburb as lacking substance; however, as it would appear, the comfort of familiarity is too seductive to bring Hake into firmer and permanent conviction about his and his neighbours’ suburban lives.

to life in the suburb, the city is, for characters like Hake, also the catalyst for (re)affirming the “virtues” of suburban living.

Distress-induced peregrination occurs again in Blake’s story, “The Five-Forty-Eight.” The occasion involves enforced walking around the city and disorientation in a once-familiar environment. We are introduced to Blake¹³ as one who already sets himself apart from his family as well as from Shady Hill neighbours who do not conform to his sense of suburban propriety. For example, he breaks up his son’s friendship with the Watkins’ son because that family “rented [and] broke the sumptuary laws day after day—[Mr. Watkins] once went to the eight-fourteen in a pair of sandals—and he made his living as a commercial artist” (96). Blake is also emotionally cold towards his no-longer pretty or young wife (95). Apparently, this character upholds suburban ideals to the extent of excluding other suburbanites.

However, when Blake’s former secretary and one-time lover returns to avenge herself for his crime against her (he fired her after having had sex with her [94]; adultery and betrayal, apparently, are not part of the sumptuary laws, especially if they occur out of Shady Hill), his self-made stability is for once disturbed. By the end of the tale, both his arrogant maintenance of suburban standards and his comfort level with the city (as a place of work and pleasure) are undercut by someone unconnected to either place. Blake’s private territorialization of the suburb extended into the metropolis results in his own disconnection from both places at once via this outsider.

¹³ Blake is given no other name.

Miss Dent¹⁴ stalks Blake one day after work hours, forcing him to take unaccustomed routes around the city as he tries to evade her (91). As with Hake, Blake's sense of being out of synch with his routine makes him extraordinarily self-conscious and heightens his awareness of his surroundings. Walking through the crowds of New York, hoping to escape Miss Dent, he observes details of the city for the first time: he looks "ahead of him on the other side of the street, [and notices] a break in the wall of buildings" (90); stopping at a store window, he observes the details of the display within: "There were cups on the coffee table, magazines to read, and flowers in the vases, but the flowers were dead and the cups were empty" (91); "He could see ahead of him the corner of Madison Avenue, where the lights were brighter" (91); he enters a bakery shop and "bought a coffee ring, like any other commuter," the ordinariness in doing so actually accentuating his feelings of being at odds with himself and his surroundings (91). His heightened visual sensitivity to the city might register a sense of his being part of the world that he treats so cynically. For, while stalked, Blake develops "a morbid consciousness of his own physicalness and of the ease with which he could be hurt" (91). But Blake proves implacable in the face of potential transformation.

While finding himself more aware of the city, Blake imaginatively alters metropolitan amenities into means of escape. He mentally surveys the city's options for shaking a stalker:

He could get into a taxi by one door and leave by the other. He could speak

¹⁴ Miss Dent's last name works as an aptonym for the impact she has on Blake's comfortable self-assurance.

to a policeman. He could run—although he was afraid that if he did run, it might precipitate the violence he now felt sure she had planned. He was approaching a part of the city that he knew well and where the maze of street-level and underground passages, elevator banks, and crowded lobbies made it easy for a man to lose a pursuer. The thought of this [...] cheered him. It was absurd to imagine being harmed on a crowded street. [...] Then he saw ahead of him the door of a men's bar. Oh, it was so simple! (91-92)

The relief Blake finds in re-defining what he newly sees of New York is a stubborn refusal to be subject to any experience. Furthermore, the reassurances he tries to give himself by means of re-assessing the city as a place of security are ironically set against his own metropolitan behaviour. After he has taken advantage of the needy Miss Dent (as he has of other women [94]), unconsciously firing her, then avoiding her by having others at his employment ward her off, Blake's confidence in the seeming inconsequentiality of his actions morally endangers others in the city on many levels. And, apparently, since his actions do not immediately affect the social structure he enjoys (and self-constructs) in the suburb, he is in fact unconcerned with what he does while away at work. On the other hand, Miss Dent, unstructured by suburban sumptuary laws and drawn by the city into her sad situation, utilizes her lack of connection to transgress Blake's expectations of her (especially in regards to class differences). Untethered, as it were, by the suburb's socio-moral standards and being inconsequential to the city, she has the means to intercept Blake in his territorialization.

Blake loses confidence when he leaves the men's bar—"He looked carefully up and

down the street and saw that the poor woman had gone. Once or twice, he looked over his shoulder, walking to the station, but he seemed to be safe. He was still not quite himself, he realized, because he had left his coffee ring at the bar, and he was not a man who forgot things. This lapse of memory pained him” (94)—and feels safe again only when aboard his train home to Shady Hill. Despite being seated with other suburbanites whom he has ostracized, he takes comfort in the familiarity of the train and in its certain destination back to Shady Hill :

Mrs. Compton’s dying smile and Mr. Watkins’ dirty hair did not lessen the pleasure Blake took in setting himself in an uncomfortable seat on the fifty-eight deep underground. [...] [I]t was a scene that meant to Blake that he was on a safe path, and after his brush with danger he even felt a little warmth toward Mrs. Compton and Mr. Watkins. (96)

Blake’s sense of safety and renewed ease with his surroundings are based on his assumption that he has crossed a border over which his pursuer will not follow. He believes almost subconsciously that the means to move between city and suburb is an exclusionary one from which Miss Dent is shut out because she is unwelcome.

But Miss Dent does trespass all of Blake’s assumptions, by boarding the train and holding him at gunpoint until the train reaches Shady Hill (96-102). She crosses not necessarily as a mere transgressor (although Blake might interpret her behaviour that way), but as one whose unfamiliarity with such assumptions opens up the seemingly firm structure. Her strangeness is highlighted by Blake’s comparative observations of Miss Dent to everyone else on the train (which also expose his exclusionary frame of mind):

She had begun to cry. He turned his head to see if anyone in the car was looking, but no one was. He had sat beside a thousand passengers on the evening train. He had noticed their clothes, the holes in their gloves; and if they fell asleep and mumbled he had wondered what their worries were. He had classified almost all of them briefly before he buried his nose in the paper. He had marked them as rich, poor, brilliant or dull, neighbors or strangers, but no one of the thousand had ever wept. (97)

Furthermore, when they reach the Shady Hill train stop, Miss Dent keeps him until the station clears. Once there, she makes an observation about the station that, in a sharply ironic phrase, undercuts supposed suburban superiority: “I have never been here before [...]. I thought it would look different. I didn’t think it would look so shabby” (103). Moreover, after attempting to humble him—“*Kneel down! Kneel down! Do what I say. Kneel down! [...] Put your face in the dirt! Do what I say. Put your face in the dirt*” (104-105)—she makes a stronger and more significant distinction between herself and Blake along moral lines:

I really don’t want to harm you, I want to help you, but when I see your face it sometimes seems to me that if I were good and loving and sane—oh, much better than I am—sometimes it seems to me that if I were all these things and young and beautiful, too, and if I called to show you the right way, you wouldn’t heed me. Oh, I’m better than you, I’m better than you, and I shouldn’t waste my time or spoil my life like this. (104-105)

In the final scenes, watching Miss Dent walk away from him, Blake observes her

body language: “he saw by her attitude, her looks, that she had forgotten him; that she had completed what she had wanted to do, and that he was safe” (105). In forcing Blake to lie in the dust and leaving him thus but sparing his life, Miss Dent has reversed the man’s tendency to objectify others at the expense of his needs and expectations. Ultimately, their relationship has been controlled and defined by her. Blake is, for once, dependent on another and merely for his life.

According to Aubry, Blake has become involved with queerness, or otherness, in the form of his former secretary, his attraction to whom “demonstrates the need for those in his position to make contact with marginalized groups in order to affirm their positivity, their ascendancy, and their ability to confer upon themselves a universal status” (75). Aubry argues that in Blake’s case, he fails such universality because he learns “nothing” (75) from his experience with the “dark” (*Housebreaker* 93) woman he betrayed. Along similar lines, Waldeland sees Blake as uniquely problematic of all the other characters in *Housebreaker*:

The last line of the story, ‘He got to his feet and picked up his hat from the ground where it had fallen and walked home’ (p. 134), in its flat matter-of-factness leaves us believing that no rude awakening into an enlarged humanity has taken place for Blake. [...] Fictionally, it is a good story, but thematically it is rather out of phase with the rest of the Shady Hill stories.

(71)

Indeed, Blake’s conclusion about what finally transpires in his interactions with Miss Dent—“that he was safe”—suggests that he seems either to have missed the significance of his experience or else has chosen to ignore it, having been long accustomed

to being in control of his relationships. However, Aubry and Waldeland, it seems to me, assume that the other characters of the cycle do learn some positive lesson from their fallings-out-of-grace and are thus redeemed or at least forgivable for their sins. But already we can say that a character such as Johnny Hake does not learn anything lasting and significantly new following his “epiphany.”

Another example of such suburban recovery occurs in the resolution to Weed’s dilemma in “The Country Husband.” Weed comes to a moment of personal crisis in his temptation to engage his children’s babysitter in a sexual relationship, and describing himself as “lost,” he realizes “that he had reached the point where he would have to make a choice” (65-66). Weed’s choice, inevitably, is Shady Hill, and he makes an appointment with a psychiatrist—“[He] said hoarsely, with tears in his eyes, ‘I’m in love, Dr. Herzog’” (67)—whose recommendation is woodwork as therapy: “Francis finds some true consolation in the simple arithmetic involved and in the holy smell of new wood. Francis is happy” (67). The narrator suggests that Weed’s happiness is an illusion (and an abiding one, considering the unexpected shift to the present tense in the story), however necessary the illusion is for the man’s happiness. And how much Weed learns from his experience, besides the painfulness of exclusion, is debatable.

The narrator uses Weed’s son as a metaphor to explain the delusional nature of the man’s return to happiness. The boy is climbing out of his cowboy outfit, crying because he is tired, and works himself into his space suit:

It is a struggle for him to get into the long tights, but he succeeds. He loops the magic cape over his shoulders and, climbing onto the footboard of his

bed, he spreads his arms and flies the short distance to the floor, landing with a thump [...]. (67-68)

We might see the “fallen” Weed in the costume of the cowboy, posing in his independence that deepens his sadness as it carries him further from the comforts of social cohesion. His resolution, like the space-boy’s jump, is a desperate leap back into the community, and a fantastical one that merely points up Weed’s recent dilemma. Hence, it would be a mistake, I believe, to isolate Blake critically because he is an unlikeable character. Thematically, he is a different version of Hake and Weed, whose own sinfulness, albeit undiscovered by their neighbours, is not any more forgivable for their likeability.

Reflecting on the stress Miss Dent creates for him, we can argue that Blake experiences some change after all. At the end of the story, when Miss Dent forces Blake to kneel on the ground of the Shady Hill train station and put his face in the dirt, we are confronted with mixed images: “He fell forward in the filth. The coal skinned his face. He stretched out on the ground, weeping” (105). In Blake’s prostration, we imagine a blackened middle-class white male whose body, likely, is stretched like Christ crucified’s.¹⁵ Miss Dent also poignantly proclaims to the prostrate Blake, in words echoing those of Pontius Pilate, ““Now I can wash my hands of you, I can wash my hands of all this, because you see there is some kindness, some saneness in me that I can find again and use. I can

¹⁵ Aubry provides a postcolonial reading of the scene:

As Blake falls, he immerses himself in the stuff of the working class—coal—and he puts on blackface, a connotation underscored by the use of the word ‘skinned,’ which means, in this case, to cover with a new skin. Blake becomes for an instant black and working-class, and he is feminized by Miss Dent’s phallic gun. (75)

wash my hands” (105). At this point, the narrator steps outside of Blake’s mind, and we are given no indication of what lasting (if any) effect this experience has had on him. These are the narrator’s final words: “He got to his feet and picked up his hat from the ground where it had fallen and walked home” (105). In continuing the biblical parallelism, I wonder if Blake’s return to Shady Hill following Miss Dent’s dismissal of him suggests that Blake has been given over to some sort of death in the suburb. (I am not suggesting, however, that we read Blake as a Christ-figure).

Blake’s retreating figure—he *walks* alone from the station to home in Shady Hill—makes the point that his reintroduction into Shady Hill’s normative structure is not without some painful alteration because, unlike in the other stories of the cycle where a character fallen out of social grace returns to his normal position in the suburban community, Blake enjoys no (delusional) epiphany. He remains out of synch with his character-self. That he gets up from the ground safely is no indication that he has returned to equilibrium; he has been permanently altered by Miss Dent even if we do not know how.

It would be well to remember that, in his cutting out of people from his circle of acceptable acquaintances, Blake merely puts into practise the exclusionary nature of the suburb (albeit extremely). Robert Beuka theorises 1950s American suburbia in this way:

[H]omogeneity of architectural and landscape styles bespoke a desire to elide the very notion of difference among suburban residents [...] suggesting the utopian ideal of perfect community not only through similar experience and social stature, but also through a sense of shared, communal space. (5-6)

The exclusions Shady Hill makes are complex, constant, and if inconsistent, then revelatory of constant change. Aubry's positive reading of queerness in *Housebreaker* understands the members of Shady Hill as both anomalies to that community and representatives of it:

Almost every character in Cheever's stories feels excluded from the state of contentment he believes, as an average suburbanite, he ought to be enjoying. The ubiquity of exclusion is significant; exclusion, after all, is the principle upon which many suburbs are founded [for] suburbia doesn't just exclude those outside its boundaries; it also excludes everyone living with the suburb. (68)

As individual characters continually decide who is acceptable and who is not in their private social spheres—as they themselves shift in and out of the place—Shady Hill's boundaries shift to accommodate what appears to be actual uncertainty about its own demands and expectations.

The Crutchman family, whose lives are detailed in the story “The Worm in the Apple,” is an example of a representative Shady Hill household that adheres to the precepts and expectations of a suburban family but simultaneously seems to fall outside stable social cohesion. The narrator, in adopting the representative voice of a cynical and gossipy suburbanite neighbour, endlessly worries about this family's seeming “normalcy:” “What was at the bottom of this [family's] appearance of happiness?” (87). The neighbour-narrator questions the appearance of the family's stability and contentment at its every familial development, which investigation comprises the entire short story, until the couple's retirement, which ends the story. In the final line, the narrator seems forced to concede,

almost hysterically, that the Crutchmans' happiness is genuine: "[T]hey got richer and richer and richer and lived happily, happily, happily, happily" (89).

In the final paragraph of the story, the narrator of the cycle sheds this representative neighbour's voice to draw a conclusion for us about this kind of corruption-seeking obsession: "[O]ne might wonder if the worm was not in the eye of the observer who, through timidity or moral cowardice, could not embrace the broad range of [the Crutchmans'] natural enthusiasms [...]" (89). Waldeland relies on the narrator's commentary above to understand the meaning of the tale, and many other critics of the story have offered similar conclusions. Waldeland writes:

The story functions in the collection as an antidote to what could be the reader's tendency [...] to suspect that all the homes in the suburb of Shady Hill conceal some deep sadness or debilitating moral weakness and thus to miss the point of some of those same stories — that the moral balance can be restored, that a meaningful life can be lived, in the suburbs as well as anywhere else. (72)

This is likely, but it is good to observe as well that the Crutchmans are not the only family under scrutiny in this tale, nor in the rest of the cycle. The gossipy neighbour-narrator admits that the Crutchmans are proper "conformists" for they "are punctilious in their observance of the sumptuary laws," are active community volunteers, and attend Sunday service (86); yet clearly, their conformity also makes them conspicuous. Similarly, the

Witchell family,¹⁶ whose daughter once dates the Crutchman boy, is subject to gossip:

Carrie Witchell [...] is the most conspicuous dish in Shady Hill. Everyone knows about the Witchells and their pretty, high-spirited daughter. They drink too much and live in one of those frame houses in Maple Dell. The girl is really beautiful and everyone knows how her shrewd old parents are planning to climb out of Maple Dell on the strength of her white, white skin. What a perfect situation! They will know about Helen[] [Crutchman's] wealth. In the darkness of their bedroom they will calculate the settlement they can demand and in the malodorous kitchen where they take all their meals they will tell their pretty daughter to let the boy go as far as he wants.

(88)

The grotesqueness of this interpretation of the Witchell family alongside the whole story's obsession with the Crutchmans points up not only the catholicity of Shady Hill gossip but the impossibility of being true and acceptable conformists to the suburb and its expectations. If relative outsiders such as the Witchells (they live in an extension to Shady Hill, called Maple Dell) as well as relative insiders such as the Crutchmans are exposed willy-nilly to such cruel scrutiny, then the suburb excludes *as* it includes (or "elides difference"). Hence, the suburb really is a no-place, not only because, as Beuka says, of the "homogeneity of its architecture and landscape" (20) but because no one belongs there as an unequivocal member.

¹⁶ As with Miss Dent's name, those of the Crutchmans and Witchells connote their experiences.

In the final short story of *Housebreaker*, “The Trouble of Marcie Flint,” another character leaves Shady Hill to escape, in effect, the suburb’s sumptuary laws and sins (moral and social). Learning through his wife’s confession of her extra-marital affair, Charlie Flint abandons his family and boards a cruise ship to Torino (northern Italy) (127). Flint hopes to live out what we might perceive as a version of the American Dream pertaining to masculinity and individuality: “I’m off to Torino, where the girls love peanut butter [his suitcase is filled with jars of it] and the world is a man’s castle [...]” (127). Although, as James Eugene O’Hara observes, this tale of all the stories in the cycle is “rarely given serious critical attention perhaps because its plot and structure seem so idiosyncratic” (49), it in fact corresponds with Gerald Lynch’s criteria for a return story in a short story cycle: “Concluding stories of pure story cycles bring to fulfilment the recurrent patterns, frequently reintroducing many of the preceding stories’ [...] central images, and restating in a refrain-like manner the main thematic concerns” (*One* 26). We return, for one, to a first-person narrative, which is the narrative style of the first and only other such story “The Housebreaker,”¹⁷ in the form of Flint’s unaddressed letter (which opens and closes the cycle’s concluding tale). More significantly, “Marcie Flint” introduces the possibility of fulfilment in bringing the concerns of the rest of the cycle to an extreme. We are confronted with an actual adultery (and not merely attempts at adultery or the rumour of one); Flint speaks the most extensively and bluntly of all of *Housebreaker*’s characters of his disgust with suburban life; he also commits to an actual exodus by leaving not only Shady Hill and

¹⁷ That is, the story is “spoken” by the character and not the meta-narrator.

New York, but even the United States of America.

The story also points towards urban development at the outskirts of upper-middle class Shady Hill: Maple Hill, a lower-middle class suburban neighbourhood, is a part of the larger area of Shady Hill where, according to the narrator,

the houses stand cheek by jowl, all of them white frame, all of them built twenty years ago, and parked beside each was a car that seemed more substantial than the house itself, as if this were a fragment of some nomadic culture [...]. (130)

As a sub-standard to Shady Hill, and possibly the place of suburban “losers” who could not keep up with the Jones’ (e.g. they kept their good cars but could not afford the Shady Hill real estate), the place threatens Shady Hill’s sense of standard of living:

The colorless, hard-pressed people of the Carsen Park project, with their flocks of children, and their monthly interest payments, and their picture windows, and their view of identical houses and treeless, muddy unpaved streets seemed to threaten [Shady Hill’s] most cherished concepts—[their] lawns, [their] pleasures, [their] property rights, even [their] self-esteem. (136-137)

In the language used to describe Maple Dell, the place is a regression from what Shady Hill has established in its middling position between the aesthetics of the natural world and the luxuries of the city, and the social power such luxuries afford. (It is perhaps worth noting that Flint’s wife, Marcie, takes up an affair with someone from Maple Dell.) The representation of Maple Dell also puts Shady Hill into the position of the apex of urban

development. In the cycle's psychological account of the movement of Americans according to the narrative of the American Dream, Shady Hill is projected as an endpoint in itself, capable only of self-perpetuation. As complains the fiancé of the babysitter Anne in "The Country Husband:"

I've thought about it a lot, and what seems to me to be really wrong with Shady Hill is that it doesn't have any future. So much energy is spent in perpetuating the place—in keeping out undesirables, and so forth—that the only idea of the future anyone has is just more and more commuting trains [to the city] and more parties. I don't think that's healthy. I think people ought to be able to dream big dreams about the future. I think people ought to be able to dream great dreams. (59)

Apparently, there cannot be any "more" than Shady Hill as the fulfilment of the American Dream.

In the passages comparing Maple Dell to Shady Hill, the mentality exhibited by the latter's inhabitants is that of us versus them. If ever Shady Hill feels imposed upon by another place, it is never the city but certainly this new urban development. Flint, aboard the ship to Italy, sums up Shady Hill's definitive socio-moral and materialistic make-up:

I am a fugitive from the suburbs of all large cities. What holes! The suburbs, I mean. God preserve me from the camaraderie of commuting trains, and even from the lovely ladies taking in their asters and their roses at dusk lest the frost kill them, and from ladies with their heads whirling with civil zeal. [...] God preserve me [...] from women who dress like *toreros* to go to the

supermarket, and from cowhide dispatch cases, and from flannels and gabardines. Preserve me from word games and adulterers, from basset hounds and swimming pools and frozen canapés and Bloody Marys and smugness and syringa bushes and P.T.A. meetings. (127)

His need to clarify which geographical location he is referring to—“The suburbs, I mean”—reflects, I think, his understanding that the suburb is easily aligned with “all large cities.” Its identity, as we’ve seen, is more usefully understood according to what it is not and what it does not want, as well as on its self-projection as *Paradise Regained*. Moreover, now that we understand that “Shady Hill versus City” is a false opposition, the narrator blurs demarcations between Maple Dell and Shady Hill in his description of the former as “a place for bearing and raising the young and for nothing else” (130), a passage that directly echoes Johnny Hake’s assessment of upper-middle class Shady Hill in the first story, “The Housebreaker:” “Shady Hill, as I say, a *banlieu* and open to criticism by city planners, adventurers, and lyric poets, but if you work in the city and have children to raise, I can’t think of a better place” (14).¹⁸ We come full circle then, and also move forward into the future history of Shady Hill in the construction of Maple Dell, which is not an inspiring

¹⁸ Hake continues:

My neighbors are rich, it is true, but riches in this case mean leisure, and they use their time wisely. They travel around the world, listen to good music, and, given a choice of paper books at the airport, will pick Thucydides, and sometimes Aquinas. Urged to build bomb shelters, they plant trees and roses, and their gardens are splendid and bright. (14)

His assessment of how Shady Hill’s inhabitants use their money challenges the criticism of city planners, adventurers, and lyric poets, at least to the degree that the suburb engages politically (its choice of literature), seeks adventure (travel), and emulates lyrical themes (gardens).

portrait.

“The Trouble of Marcie Flint” ends typically on a seemingly positive note. Flint rescinds his decision to leave his family:

[H]e has told his story, but he does not stop writing [his letter]. [...] ‘Ants, poison, peanut butter, foghorns,’ he writes, ‘love, blood pressure, business trips, inscrutability. I know that I will go back.’ The foghorn blasts again, and in the held note he sees a vision of his family running toward him up some steps [...]. ‘I will catch a plane in Genoa,’ he writes. ‘I will go back. I will see my children grow and take up their lives, and I will gentle Marcie—sweet Marcie, dear Marcie, Marcie my love. I will shelter her with the curve of my body from all the harms of the dark.’ (143)

O’Hara writes of this concluding scene:

The almost biblical, incantatory ring of this pledge leaves little doubt that Cheever wants us to take it seriously, and its position determines the centrality of its message. Unbending sternness and retribution may be the dictates of a Puritan emphasis on Old Testament values, but the new dispensation gives equal emphasis to love and forgiveness. (52)

O’Hara’s interpretation is hopeful, but the concluding story remains part of *Housebreaker*. Although Flint’s reversal occurs in the manner of personal transformation, it is not one that should comfort the reader (little in Shady Hill is comforting). Firstly, that Flint imagines he is able to “shelter” Marcie from “all the harms of the dark” is questionable since nothing preceding his story establishes the tenability of this kind of male moral protectionism

against the troubles that comprise Shady Hill. Moreover, as the cycle's summing up and return story, it echoes and reiterates the whole book's critique of Shady Hill. Flint's return to Shady Hill is not only appropriate structurally for re-instating the cyclical nature of the book, it is so thematically for underscoring the need Shady Hill inhabitants have for their "home" as the place of structure and stability, as fragile and complicated and unsound as that structure and stability are. The encapsulation of *Housebreaker* through "Marcie Flint" gives us a vision of Shady Hill as a place situated on high and apart from other places, perhaps geographically but surely, in its own self-conception, spiritually—more than the country, better than the city, the epitome of American dreams—although it is no beacon on the hill. The manner in which the suburb shades its problematic dispositions is revelatory of its dispositions.

II.

At the end of the last short story of George Elliott's cycle *The Kissing Man*, cyclically titled "The way back," Dan reconciles himself and his family to his small town's "grinder man," whose ambiguous role at childbirths was denied at his—Dan's—own birth, due to his father's hostility towards this inexplicable custom: "'Stuff like that grinder man gives me the pip. He's nothing better than a bogeyman women are scared of'" (128). For Dan's father, the grinder man myth, which involved merely the grinder man's presence at the birth of a child, had been "a story, mystery, something concealed, a feeling. That was bad" (128); thus, he had refused his wife's request for the grinder man at the birth of their third and last child. Eventually, for the sake of communal re-connection and reconciliation with the

grinder man, grown-up Dan has the grinder man sharpen all of the knives and blades in his home. At the end of the story, Dan and his wife are reconciled to the grinder man:

They smiled to each other [Dan and his wife]. They went out the front door and onto the porch and looked down the street. Then they heard the bell and the grinder man walked up their street and stopped on their path and put his grinding machine down. He [...] looked up at them at last and smiled back.

(136)

The conclusion to this tale suggests, in the words of Lynch, that

Dan re-establishes connection with his town by choosing to participate in communal life as it is ritualized in the inexplicable grinder man tradition. By so choosing he contributes to the strength of his family and the whole community, town and farming districts alike. (*One* 156)

Lynch argues for all of the *The Kissing Man* stories that they “repeatedly and variously portray attempts to create personal and public symbols and rituals which enable [...] cultural continuities [...]” (136); the cycle’s dominant theme is thus “memorial transference” (137). Denis Duffy’s study of Elliott’s cycle also analyses the theme of ritual, although he comes to a conclusion opposite to Lynch’s: “The more they [the locals] immerse themselves in codes or manners [such as the grinder man observation], the further they get from what ritual is really about” (62). Despite their contradicting arguments, clearly, Lynch and Duffy see ritual as a dominant theme in Elliott’s cycle.¹⁹

¹⁹ There is precious little *The Kissing Man* criticism as of 2010. Besides the work of Lynch and Duffy, Clara Thomas’ “The Roads Back: *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* and George Elliott’s *The Kissing Man*” (1986) and Dieter Meindl’s “Modernism and the

It should be noted that the critics are generalizing somewhat when they speak of *The Kissing Man*'s ritual theme; for, of the cycle's eleven chapters, only three involve actual rituals. In "You'll get the rest of him soon," Doctor Fletcher buries the foreskin²⁰ of each boy he delivers, offering it up to an unnamed power (44). In "A room, a light for love," Alison Kennedy smashes a crystal from her wonderful hotel chandelier before the death of each small-town inhabitant (65). And, as mentioned, in "The way back," the grinder man performs a birthing rite of standing outside the home of a mother in labour (129). As for the other stories, as we shall see, they contain expressions of religiosity that possess magical/mystical qualities, but are not rituals *per se*.

Furthermore, and more importantly, I believe that the ritual practises quite evident in the cycle's unnamed small town do not, after all, embrace and cohere individuals into a community. They are in fact isolating. Ritual, simply defined, is "a prescribed order of performing rites." The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (2004), from which this definition is taken, does not mention the purpose of ritual, such as community formation and cohesion, although these effects would appear to be consequences of ritual, naturally enough. If we read *The Kissing Man*'s portrayal of ritual without the presumption that communal cohesion is a natural result, we can see how the dictionary's stark definition complements the exclusionary nature of ritual in this small town. It is my contention that the cycle subtly exposes the town's rituals as sublimations of power structures and relations that influence

English Canadian Short Story Cycle" (1987) are the only other substantial essays on the cycle.

²⁰ Thanks to Lynch's acute interpretation of the "pink skin" (*One* 153).

individual behaviour and outcome rarely unproblematically and always disturbingly. I propose that the lay-out of ritualization in Elliott's small town is not a communal structure of affirmation but a rendering of ritual rooted in ancient customs performed in a modernist context, and made irrational and tyrannical when it becomes an end unto itself.

Of the other non-ritual stories, again only three make reference to "the city." With evidence taken from the non-community enhancing quality of the small town's rituals, we understand that the place is internally conflicted, and not in any way threatened by external metropolitan influences. In the stories that involve the city—"When Jacob Fletcher was a boy," "The listeners," and "The man who lived out loud"—even the briefest of introductions of the metropolis to the small town brings into greater tragic relief the former's limitations in heart and mind. The relationship between the "ritual stories" and "city stories" paints a portrait of a town desperately clinging to its rituals and somehow, strangely and eerily, isolated from the outside world.²¹

The failure to commune, and/or communal exclusion, are themes touched upon in each of the short stories in *The Kissing Man*. As Lynch states, the cycle's focus "on the pain of frustration and denial" (*One* 158) is conveyed as a universal condition for the members of the small town. In the following three stories, individuals face obstacles to integrating and bonding with the whole community because of their failure personally to affirm inexplicable customs and expectations. Such failure not redressed is permanently damaging as the already comfortably initiated thwart difference.

²¹ Although the cycle was published in 1962, the town, at times, seems much older.

In “When Jacob Fletcher was a boy,” a set of twins, Jacob and Esau, given up at birth by their unmarried mother, grows up in the city orphanage (the Aid) under the care of Doctor Fletcher and the doctor’s secretary. When the time comes for them to leave the orphanage, their move “back to the town where they were born” (14) is wrought with ironies and tensions that foreshadow the listless and sad lives that they live back “home:”

They had to [return to town], because there came the day of their sixteenth birthday and the people at the orphanage in the city and the people at the Aid in town had no alternative. And there was a wedding going on in the Anglican church the day the twins, Jacob and Esau, came back to the town where they were born. [...] The twins walked away from the Aid office towards the sound of the bell [one-noting it unevenly over the ceremony below]. As they turned onto the side street where the church was they heard the organist matching each bong on the bell with a solemn chord. Esau saw some people he knew from the city on their way to the church. He kept his head down so they wouldn’t have to speak to him if they didn’t want to. (14-15)

This coming-of-age moment of turning sixteen, in this case a forced transference to adulthood, is worked into an intertwining image of new life and death: The church bells, to which the twins walk in tempo—“they walked on slowly, two steps for each lonely bong of the bell [...]” (15)—ring in a solemn toll identifiable with funerals. The atmosphere is reminiscent of the morbidity that pervades the lives of Anderson’s returning characters in *Winesburg, Ohio*.

The otherwise socially momentous instance of turning sixteen (in North American culture at least) is for these boys an occasion of sadness simply, a return to the place where they were originally unwanted, but also of being in-between places. Products of town and raised in the city, Jacob and Esau are nowhere home. Social alienation is a permanent status for them, exacerbated by their lost parentage. “Institute kids” (19), they suffer isolation similar to that which Dan suffers for not being a grinder-man kid. Where Dan inherits his social burden from his father, the twins lack inheritance and hence connection to the town. Regardless, it is rather shocking that these teenage boys move into a drafty carriage shed by the town’s Queen’s Hotel and that their presence there is only tolerated: “The Kennedy’s [...] let them stay. What else could they have done? The twins were quiet and clean-talking as far as anybody knew” (15). Although they live in the centre of the town (26), they are socially outside the small town and remain for all intents and purposes aliens. Their return from the city to the small town is no return home.

In “You’ll get the rest of him soon,” Fletcher’s ritual is a private performance that ultimately engenders misunderstanding, alienation, and death. He buries the foreskins of newborns and prays about them to an unidentified deity (44). Lynch regards the doctor as a character who

needs to achieve and maintain connection with [“a realm beyond the material and practical”] through a private and idiosyncratic ritual that simultaneously subsumes the private and personal in the communal and, indeed, connects these to larger Judeo-Christian traditions. (*One* 152)

However, Fletcher’s pagan ritual is firstly and lastly personal and remains private,

occasioning as well his fall outside social inclusion.

No one joins the doctor in his rite; for, none are welcomed by the anti-social doctor. The story strongly suggests that the doctor dislikes his fellow small-town residents and that he would want no connection to them:

That was the thing about Doctor Fletcher. He kept to himself. He played a lone hand. [...] After hours he was sometimes a hard man to deal with. [...] He had things on his mind and things didn't include the people of the town or what they did. (45)

His championing of males over females and the burying of their foreskins are also disturbing because his ritual does not include the families attached to the babies. Parents do not give him permission to hide away the foreskins and they are, in a sense, with their sons at the mercy of this doctor's prayers.²² He offers up these boys in prayerful words that remind one of sacrifice: "Nourish him the way you do all of us. Be patient with him because you'll get the rest of him soon. There is no question of reward" (44). Benign or malignant, the offering is not a comfortable read for the uninitiated. Of course, the offering, the ritual, and the doctor do not have to be comfortable to the reader, but they are not community-forming elements to the unnamed small town. The doctor's ritual promises the deaths of newborn males (inevitably) in return for unexplained nurturing from a pagan god. The ritual is strictly exclusive, and leads to its one priest's demise.

²² In "When Jacob Fletcher was a boy," it is Doctor Fletcher who names the twins before they are born. He rejects the Aid secretary's suggestion that the babies be given names from their father's family, and instead chooses names of his own preference (i.e. Biblical) (13-14). Family connections, it would seem, are not critical to the doctor.

Fletcher's ritual has no positive impact on the community, although it does instigate the doctor's ostracization. He is spied upon by two children who witness him praying over a buried foreskin and they (innocently) spread the rumour that the doctor has gone mad:

It was like any story that spreads. Froody heard about it, so she told Annie
Somebody-or-other what happened [...]. Annie told her father who worked
for Mr. Steever. Mrs. Steever whispered it to Froody's mother [...]. Poor old
Doctor Fletcher was queer. (44)

The communal gossip reminds us of similar instances of rumour-spreading leading to local myth-making in Scott's *Viger* ("Sedan" and "The Tragedy of the Seigniori"). However, in this story, Fletcher's unwillingness to share in regular communal activities, such as joining the local Lodge and participating in the town's community fairs and other events (45), exacerbates the community's impatience with this loner. His newly-discovered odd behaviour worries the town and, effectively, Fletcher loses his position at the hospital. He is later found dead in his garden (48). If we are to lament the doctor's loneliness and death as instances of how this place is destructive to itself, then the tale invites us to do so along with an understanding of ritual as a disruptive force that also excludes, alienates, and breaks bonds.

When Fletcher's body is discovered, its prone position suggests that he ultimately became a sacrifice himself: "He was face down in the wet grass at the back of the yard. [His housekeeper] put her arms up and out to show how he was" (48). The image suggests many things: a pagan sacrifice (willing? victim?) prostrate before his god; a scapegoat for the community's fears; and perhaps even Christ crucified. The multiple meaningfulness might

lend itself to a reading of Fletcher's death as an instance of the pagan world being replaced by the Christian world of which the Lodge men are participants and militant crusaders. But the community-consciousness of the Lodge leaders, which is narratively paralleled by the doctor's communion between local males and his deity, is tyrannical. The men do not abide non-membership and persist in harassing the doctor until he is removed from the hospital (47). Therefore, it bodes ill that the doctor's death is a tragedy of communal discord and that his paganism, his ritual, disappears without a satisfactory replacement or transference from one to another. Thus, Fletcher is a positive character because he is at variance with his small town's social conventions, but only in comparison to the Lodge men. Otherwise, how exactly the doctor's ritual is "for communal-spiritual purposes" (Lynch, *One* 153) is a mystery.

As opposed to the tales of rejection of at least the two previous ritual stories, "The way back" seems to celebrate one family's return to a tradition practised by all of the small town. Such re-integration is a hopeful sign for the place. As the story is concerned with children and their future, physically and spiritually connected to the greater community, it seems to be a promise of the story cycle's opening quotation taken from T.S. Eliot's *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*: "But when I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces... a piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote"²³ If the cycle as a whole revolves around the theme

²³ Here are more lines from the passage:

But by far the most important channel of transmission of culture remains the family: and when family life fails to play its part, we must expect our culture to deteriorate. Now the family is an institution of which nearly everybody speaks well: but it is advisable to remember that this is a term that may vary

of family (and community) bonding, then there appears to be a clear connection between the opening story, “An act of piety,” with this final one. In “An act of piety,” Honey actively remembers his grandparents, and on learning more intimate details from a neighbour about his recently dead grandmother, wants “only to keep what was good and pass it on” (12). The cycle would seem to come full circle then, from death and desire for sustaining familial ties in the first story to enlivened familial and communal integration in Dan’s re-initiation of the grinder man ritual in the last story.

Such a reading of Elliott’s cycle is possible. Yet, taking it as a whole, I find it implausible that after revealing the dark side of ritual practiced in this small town, the cycle redeems the community just at the end. In this light, perhaps the Eliot epigraph might be read more ambiguously, then, and be more ambivalently applied to *The Kissing Man*. From the perspective I am taking on the cycle, one might read something treacherous in the bonding that Eliot uses to define the family. If being a member of a family, in Eliot’s corrective sense of the term, necessitates reverence for all the dead members as well as all

in extension. In the present age it means little more than the living members. Even of living members, it is a rare exception when an advertisement depicts a large family of three generations: the usual family on the boardings consists of two parents and one or two young children. What is held up for admiration is not devotion to a family, but personal affection between the members of it: and the smaller the family the more easily can this personal affection be sentimentalised. But when I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces a longer period of time than this: a piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote.

Unless this reverence for past and future is cultivated in the home, it can never be more than a verbal convention in the community. Such an interest in the past is different from the vanities and pretensions of genealogy; such a responsibility for the future is different from that of the builder of social programmes. (116)

possible future ones, one might feel tethered to inheritances and traditions for the sake of people unknown, however related. “The grinder man,” I would argue, is a tense story about social alienation and ostracization, of a ritual’s ambiguous meaningfulness for the babies for whom it is performed, of social exclusion so strenuous it threatens family unity. Its hold on the imagination of the community highlights its role not just to bind but to set apart, to distinguish between insiders and outsiders, and to alienate non-initiates. Hence, “The way back” intensifies the communal dissipation of the previous stories because it portrays communal and familial re-bonding into a structure that threatens healthy relationships between individuals.

Dan is born “a healthy gurgling child,” but because of his father’s decision against the grinder man, “the [town’s] people were ashamed for his father and were full of pity for his mother [who] was ashamed too” (126-27). Dan’s childhood seems normal, from a discerning reader’s perspective, but Dan cannot escape the dominating social identity of his lack of “baptism” via the grinder man. Anything and everything of his childhood that might be interpreted as odd is placed under intense (and ridiculous) scrutiny. For example, when he refuses to show his father a gift he receives in the mail from his aunt (127), when he keeps a dead bug and screams when his father tries to remove it from his bed (127), the events become substance for community gossip about Dan’s personal well-being. Later as an adolescent, Dan cannot date a girl because of the stigma he carries (131) and he is treated contemptuously by the other young men: “I said it wasn’t my fault, but that didn’t matter” (130). The sin of the father lies on the son, but the burden is a social one imposed on Dan by the other small-town inhabitants.

In trying to figure out for himself the meaning of the grinder man ritual, Dan decides, based on his own experience growing up, that

[t]he grinder man is there, outside the door to a birth-giving so that the father and the child can love. He is there so that the father and the mother will assert the child's adulthood at the right times. He wasn't there when I was born, Dan thought, so I see the difference between the life of my father and the life of the heart. I want the life of the heart [...]. (134)

A "life of the heart" sounds like a good thing in comparison to whatever Dan understands was the life of his father and, as a consequence, his own. So, in wanting finally to free himself from the burden, Dan has all of the blades in his home sharpened (135), and none too soon since his wife meanwhile has been contemplating leaving him: "she would have left Dan that day and gone to the farm to live with her brother, for good. [...] Maybe this is the way," she considers (135). Lynch agrees with Dan that the life of the heart leads to the "good," and especially communal good:

The result of Dan's reverential participation in the domestic grinder man ritual is the re-establishment of familial harmony, the ascription of primary importance to the emotional and the intuitive, and the recognition of a nurturing interdependence of the individual and the community. (*One* 157)

However, "The way back" is overall a troubling story, and no more positive in its portrayal of small-town life in this place than in "When Jacob Fletcher was a boy" and "You'll get the rest of him soon." Even Lynch concedes that the small town is "a community whose cohesiveness is at times double-hooked by an unattractive exclusivity

and repressiveness” (he does not dwell on this reality) (*One* 157). Thus, how one wishes to read especially the final scene of this last story of the cycle, and how much one is persuaded by it as a focal point for the whole cycle, affect one’s ultimate reading of the story and thus of the cycle.

To recapitulate, Dan and his wife look out from their home towards the grinder man, who has accepted Dan’s reconciliatory offer (the sharpening of all the blades in their home). Everyone seems content:

They smiled to each other [Dan and his wife]. They went down out the front door and onto the porch and looked down the street. Then they heard the bell and the grinder man walked up their street and stopped on their path and put his grinding machine down. He [...] looked up at them at last and smiled back. (136)

Only at face value, and, truly, if one forgets Dan’s life-long ostracization, is the conclusion affirming of the individual (Lynch says that the story “priorizes the community over the individual” [*One* 157]; one could say, at the expense of the individual). If this story, as the return story, sums up the cycle’s themes and motifs, it must reiterate the cycle’s disturbing portrayal of small-town life at the hands of restricting conventions that devalue the individual over piety towards obscure traditions and remote possible futures. Therefore, Dan’s “way back” might very well be the way backwards to the inexplicable cruelty that the grinder man tradition engenders. I believe that Elliott’s portrayal of the small town through this final story allows the reader to consider Dan’s return to the traditions of his grandfather and ancestors as a positive act, but only superficially. It is the meaning of the act that

qualifies the practice of it. The treacherous ambiguity associated with the tradition should make the reader wary of celebrating *The Kissing Man* as a collection of life-affirming tales.

The following stories are tales of familial/communal ceremonies performed by women of the unnamed town, and are meant to strengthen the bonds between individuals and the past to the future. However, failure in the transference of the meaningfulness of their ceremonies taints any hope that the past strengthens the future or finds itself healthfully rehearsed by it.

For Audie's mother of "The listeners" and for Alison of "A room, a light for love," strategies for coping with lives less than fulfilling do not readily overcome what they are intended to. Threatened with emotional and spiritual dryness, these women place uncertain hope in ceremonious artefacts as a means towards sustaining whatever good they yet possess within themselves. However, their hopefulness, as sign too of their desperation, breaks down in the absence of mutual communal/familial understanding and reciprocity.

In "The listeners," "Audie's mother" (her only name in the story) promises herself to "marry right, and have good children, and she'd pass on her driven way of the world to them and they'd turn out all right" (33). As a young girl, she seems to place high value on her small town: "If the land goes on in all directions from this town, she said, and there are more towns, bigger and smaller, it doesn't make any difference because the whole world is in this town" (32). Lynch feels that Audie's mother has a "xenophobic inclination" because she believes her town is a "self-sufficient entity" and has no need "for contact with the outside world" (*One* 150). His interpretation is true, but to a point; for, the young woman actually speaks about there existing no difference between her small town and the outside

world to which she vaguely refers. For example, at another instance when yet a girl, she says to the telegraph operator in town,

‘You waste a lot of time [...] sitting in there taking all that stuff down, bringing it all in when it’s all here already. There’s no need for any more. [...] You took down a hurting telegram from an angry man in the city to an angry man in town. You took down a lonely telegram from outside to a lonely woman in town. You took down some lies about business from a liar in the city to a liar in town. You took down a sympathetic telegram from a man in the city afraid to come out to the funeral of his dead friend.’ (33)

The girl advises the operator to leave off taking down telegrams, all of which, her list suggests, are heart-sore stories told by bitter city folk to bitter small-town residents. In light of this speech, Audie’s mother’s feeling that her small town contains the whole world is not, after all, a celebratory (or xenophobic) proclamation about the place. Rather, her conviction that she might as well stay where she is more precisely hints at apathy regarding her small town’s condition, or perhaps a resigned wisdom that life elsewhere would possess the same troubles. Her hope in her marriage to produce a happy home for herself and her children is thus a strike against conventionality, against the whole world that is, after all, her town.

Unfortunately for Audie’s mother, her hope fails her as she grows more distant from her husband and finally breaks all emotional ties to him: “She just knew she’d lost big Audie for good” (36). Turning then to her children for redemption of her failed dreams, and wanting to warn them from the sadness of her life, she has them perform a metaphorical

ceremony with her. She has them blow out raw eggs which she then hides away as keepsake reminders of her own hollowed-out life (38-39). The transference of the act's meaningfulness is short-circuited, apparently, since whatever message she intended her children to understand and learn is not relayed as she would have wished; whatever hope she imagined she had placed in her sons to live "the old driven way of the world of hers" fails (39).

In the egg-blowing ceremony, Audie's mother believed "she had timed it just right with Audie's two little brothers" but "had put it off too long" in Audie's case (29). However, we discover at the woman's funeral that the youngest boys had moved to the city but that they grew "white and city-looking, as though the light would go right through them" (31). They are as fragile and hollow as the blown eggs, arguably in part for having drifted away from home and memory. Audie, on the other hand, who was already attached to his father at the time of the egg-blowing, had stayed on the farm (likely not as his mother would have wished). He grows up along with the memories of his childhood:

It came on Audie all of a sudden that he had nobody. [...] All this and the memory [of the blown out eggs] no one could explain. No one. Big Audie [his father]? Too busy fixing his fence [...]. His brothers? Strangers that didn't speak up and the sun could shine through. A bare, hurting memory.

(31)

The son for whom the ceremony came "too late" experiences his mother's loneliness and remains alone with it. It would seem that he learnt his mother's lesson after all, and too

well.²⁴

In “A room, a light for love,” another secret rite brings to light the disturbing nature of rituals in this small town. A great chandelier hung in the Queen’s Hotel is central to Alison Kennedy’s private ritual that, ostensibly, “acknowledges the existence and importance of the emotional life of the individuals who make up [this] community” (Lynch, *One* 148). Alison privately dedicates individual glasses of her hotel chandelier to her fellow small-town inhabitants and smashes them (or has her husband smash them) a short time before the death of each glass’s dedicatee. According to Lynch, the chandelier

functions as container and cue for the communal good that should be passed on. It suggests that such memorial objects are not simply invested with symbolic significance: they are extensions in space and time of the spiritual and emotional life that partakes of the mysterious realm [...]. (*One* 147)

That Alison should know when someone is soon going to die suggests her communal interest and is part of the story’s mystery. However, I would argue that her pleasure in controlling her environment undermines the neighbourliness that she strives for through her hotel, her parties, and her chandelier. In collecting her neighbours’ identities into the chandelier, Alison seems to be drawing individuals into a collective whole. Yet, any

²⁴ Lynch, in *One*, invents the nomenclature “Mrs Seaton” when he talks about the woman of this story. I think Elliott’s use of “Audie’s mother” (or “his mother”) draws interesting connections between the mother, her desires and failed hopes, and her relationship with her sons. “Audie’s mother” especially (to make a distinction from her motherhood to the younger boys) points up that son’s absorption of his mother’s emotional distress more deeply; he grows to adopt her aching loneliness. He inherits her remembrance, in the hollowed eggs, but in a manner she did not intend. Moreover, not given a first or maiden name with which to identify Audie’s mother, the reader understands to an even greater degree the personal loss that Audie’s mother suffers.

communal good that should be passed on is not, as we shall see, as Alison equates love with control, pride, and self-confidence.

A number of men in this small town are sexually attracted to Alison, an attention that Alison steels herself against. But she realizes as well that she finds pleasure in the tension: “Alison felt the strange old fear of Jeth [one of her admirers] she had felt before: the fear of a wanting man and the something else underneath, as though she liked the fear” (51). Alison likes the fear because it signifies her ability to captivate Jeth and the other men who long for her: “she felt a sense of control—yes, that was it—control, knowing that he wanted her” (51). Her life generally is an exercise in self-control and in reigning over the inner workings of people close to her. For example, after inspecting the major renovations done to the hotel following her husband’s departure to war, Alison enjoys the feeling of “pride in herself, the confidence, and the idea of control was new and compelling” (53-54). The new place, arranged by her, “was big enough for everybody. A ceiling like that would hold a lot of love” (54), meaning that she is able to contain everyone in her space. So controlling is Alison that she refuses to accept a telegram from her returning husband except “in the usual way.” She would not go to the telegram office but instead waits for its delivery (54). Then when her husband returns, her reception of him is an exercise in self-control. The described emotional reaction is entirely Gerald’s: It is Gerald who gets excited, crying aloud “Oh God, Allie, God” and weeping when he sees her (54-55). The husband indirectly gives us evidence of his wife’s calm reunion: ““This is the way to come home. Just come. That’s all”” (55).

Alison’s chandelier is central to the woman’s love for her small town. As an

extension of her own physical beauty, the chandelier is a containment vessel for Alison's own controlling desires. The narrator recalls that, after he declared his love for her, Alison dedicated the chandelier's first glass to him: "This one will be yours, Doug. Remember, it's one of the longest ones" (59). The slightly comical phallic reference is nonetheless significant because it emphasizes the pleasure Alison experiences in being the object of desire. By mysteriously transforming a crystal glass into a holding unit for Doug's sexual desires, Alison acknowledges and accepts the male solicitation, but without having to indulge it. When Doug later asks Alison what love means to her, she only laughs and glances at the chandelier (60) but the narrator guesses her meaning more accurately than he is aware of: "At least I thought I had the idea that love for Allie was all tied up in her parties and with the chandelier glistening over them and one of the beads in the chandelier was mine. That was enough. That's as far as I ever got with it anyway" (60). I think it no coincidence that "tied up" is used to create an image of Alison's form of love.

The bonding that Alison attempts to construct eventually fails because the chandelier magic does not draw people together; its intention and act are Alison's only. Mainly because this chandelier brightens Alison's seasonal parties, which are described as unusual communal gatherings for this small town, Alison's chandelier at first implies her sense of community, her love for her neighbours and their love for her, all absorbed into the glasses. The narrator mentions that at these parties, everyone

was a little stiff and shy at first because there were families held together in the room who never had anything to do with each other outside. As the night grew on, though, they had to have something to do with each other. (57)

Lynch interprets this scene positively, as evidence that the parties “function as [...] communal catalyst[s], strengthening bonds: families ‘who never had anything to do with each other outside’ are drawn together” (*One* 148). Yet, we mustn’t overlook the phrase’s wording that “they *had to have* something to do with each other.” The phrase is similar to Leacock’s narrator who (humorously) undercuts the neighbourliness of Mariposa’s men during the Whirlwind Campaign: “No doubt a lot of the men got to know one another better than ever they had before. I have myself heard Judge Pepperleigh say that after the campaign he knew all of Pete Glover that he wanted to” (*Sunshine Sketches* 94-96). Both narrators are being ironic. We can understand that Alison’s chandelier, the embodiment of her love, is a predatory object. Its central purpose is to enable Alison to captivate her entire audience for her own sake. We can only presume that drawing her small-town neighbours into her parties, and then her chandelier, creates community. However, the life of the chandelier’s magic is temporary, dependent on Alison’s life and useful, as we shall see, only to her.

After Alison’s death, Gerald reflects that “[t]hings happened to the people around town” that effected a decrease in the quantity and quality of their hotel parties (64). He feels his wife ““was going against the way the world was”” (61) which was turning ““grey,”” ““sad and cold”” (63). Alison’s dying request is that her husband store away the chandelier because she ““can’t bear to let anybody have it that doesn’t know. I don’t know what I’d have done without it”” (66). (Besides her husband she had told the narrator, both of whom she seems not to consider worthy trustees). These parting words suggest that Alison’s “love” and her chandelier had been coping tools for her small-town life. Hence, a more

sympathetic reading of Alison's character—as with my more sympathetic reading of the calculating Eloise in Scott's "No. 68 Rue Alfred de Musset"—might see her as needing that control she insisted on exerting in order to avoid "the isolation of small-town repressiveness" (Lynch, *One* 148), the greyness, sadness, and coldness of small-town life. And perhaps both readings are necessary to understand the complexity of the story, of a woman's desire for communal bonding, for a life that is "fresh and warm" (*The Kissing Man* 63), and her exertion of control over those who feel bonded with her in order simultaneously to withstand that bonding which might have turned her grey.

The cycle's last reference to the city occurs in chapter 8, "The man who lived out loud." A newcomer to the small town come "out from the city, or wherever" (89), "John something" (89) expresses sincere exuberance over the place, an optimism not shared by anyone else there: "'ain't this the best by our lady town in the world? I've never seen anything like it in all my born days'" (90). Although he is persistently rebuffed by all he meets in town, he believes the town has "'things [that] are just there'" and he wants to understand its mysterious goodness (good to him) (91). He merges himself most deeply into the town's secret sorrows when he meets Janey, a lonely woman desirous of male companionship. Thirty-nine years old, unattached, and apparently a homebody (if we are to believe her brother's sympathetic description of her as "'a good cook. Not bad looking. Her legs aren't fat or anything. She still has ankles. Her bust's flat, I guess, but that don't mean be-all. Finished high school. She's smart'" [94]), Janey fantasizes a secret lover until her imagination becomes tangible in John. John attempts to displace Janey's dreams into action

by daily kissing goodbye a train that Janey can see from her backyard. As an unknown romantic figure, he supplies the woman with imaginative possibility. Watching the man blow kisses at the parting train, Janey says to herself, ““And when he does that, a part of it all seems to go with the train”” (98).

But the game comes to an end when Janey accidentally learns that her unknown romantic train-kisser is John, friend to her brother. The spell, as John says, is broken. He explains to Janey’s brother,

‘She thought she was doing it all by herself, but you connected her life with mine too early. That took the mystery away and everything went ordinary again. She was on to the way I do it, but you crossed the tracks from me to her and that broke the direction. That was when she wanted to put her troubles directly on me. But that’s out of the question, the way I’ve been feeling the last year.’ (99)

Thereafter, Janey returns to her former self. John himself feels the tragedy of this story’s end and dies of a broken heart. His death note reads, “The frailities got too much for me. I didn’t think it would be time to start dying so early. I guess the ones that live like me just can’t keep it up” (100).

The story subtly condemns the small town for its narrowness of affections and inhumanity. Janey’s heartache and the fragility of her temporary optimism point up the depressive nature of her life in the small town. John’s exuberance, hitherto un-dampened by all rebuffs to his loud attitude to life, is sorely tested too, and fails. Although an outsider, John is unable to utilize his difference in order to evaluate objectively the small town for

what even its locals feel it is: *not* this great place of freshness and warmth for which this visiting city-dweller celebrates it. His distance draws him into the town and his attraction to and pleasure in the place kills him; his love is not reciprocated. Perhaps, although regretful, Janey's fantasy life should keep her alive since she has not dedicated her heart to any "real" lover that might break it. Mean survival seems the best mode of life for those who can dream of better things.

Unlike Janey, who desperately and futilely longs for love, the girl Froody, in "The kissing man," exercises an emotional distance from the small town that parallels Alison's of "A room, a light for love." Also beautiful—she is said to be "proper beauty and proper beauty was becoming rare in town these days" (69)—she unintentionally attracts the sexual attention of men (67-68), but enjoys the feeling that she is above everyone else:

‘I’m not very tall,’ she said, ‘but I get this feeling I’m high up and the customers [of her place of employment] move along in the aisles away down out of reach. And sometimes I’m so thankful for it because that’s where I want them to stay.’ (68)

The Kissing Man, who approaches saddened women shopping in Froody's store and embraces them with words that articulate their loneliness, might be read as a softened Jeremiah, who is also known as the "broken-hearted prophet." His words bring to the surface the secret sorrows of the women, but, although his words are painful because they verbally manifest the reality of the women's lives, they are also comforting because the articulation is sympathetically conveyed (the Kissing Man is "all compassion" [69] and "pity" [70]). The women are thus painfully blessed with the Kissing Man's embrace, and

Froody is a catechumen in waiting.

Froody witnesses the Kissing Man's mysterious interactions with women in the store and, inexplicably, her witnessing draws Froody down from her loftiness, forcing her to recognize the sadness of everyone around her:

Froody reached out for the faces in the crowded store because a change had come over everything. It was now a barren orderliness: everything in place, everyone concentrating on their purchases, no more voices of excitement or welcoming happiness as people met in the crowded aisles. The warmth had gone. (71)

Froody's own confrontation with the Kissing Man ends the story on a sober note. Stopping him after he had embraced another sad woman, Froody asks him, "Why didn't you come to me?" (73). He replies, "You've been one of the lucky ones. [...] You haven't needed me yet" (73). His message is both hopeful, because it suggests she is still innocent of the kind of suffering experienced by the older women, and foreboding since it gives Froody "more than than she wanted to know, ever" (73).

As a coming-of-age tale, the story gives the reader a picture of youth before and after it realizes that its privileged disconnection from the sorrows of experience and adulthood will come to an end. Lynch's final assessment of Froody's coming-down-to-earth is that the girl finally becomes affirmatively self-conscious:

She sees that she too will grow old, that she too may be left with the loneliness after living and loving [...]. This is the painful, mature knowledge that Froody acquires, the increase of knowledge involving an increase of

sorrow. But this passage into maturity also connects Froody to her community, and to none more so than her communal sister women. (*One* 142)

Although mortality is a knowledge born of maturity, I question whether gaining knowledge of what drudgery lies before her in her small town affords Froody sorority with the other lonely women, or that even if she does connect finally with them, that this is a positive action, for the girl and for the meaning of the text. Echoing “A light, a room for love,” “The kissing man” seems more interested in exploring disconnection (from self and community) experienced by individuals both fresh like Froody and wounded like the other women.

In addition, how the embraced women react to the Kissing Man’s solicitations suggests that they come to a conscious and clear(er) understanding of some overarching misery that is their lives. Mrs. Muncey leaves the store in a huff, slamming the door behind herself after muttering a few words about “it” being ““not fair at all”” (69); Miss Corvill is scared of whatever the Kissing Man realizes for her; she behaves as if overwhelmed by everything and everyone around her (70-71); Mrs. Lalling cries into the Kissing Man’s arms (72). If Froody connects with these women, then the vision she is afforded of her small town is one of sadness, greyness, and coldness. There is something tragic about “The kissing man” in its double portrayal of lonely and sad women as well as a young girl who, enjoying the freshness and warmth that is her youthful right, unwittingly gains insight into a future she must now await with dread. The new fear that Froody feels is shared by Janey’s despairing sense of a sad future and a death occasioned by emotional suffocation. The women in this small town do not fare well, or if they do, they must, like Alison, do so

through their own kind of narrowness and tightness.

“A leaf for everything good” is the cycle’s seventh tale. A mirror tale to “A room, a light for love,” and echoing as well “The listeners,”²⁵ it involves an object that is said to absorb the thoughts and feelings of the locals—in this case, a tree. The old willow by the pond of the small town plays the central role in a folktale involving the community. The story of the willow is told by an old man who sits daily by the willow, and who befriends a lonely schoolboy named Finn. The tree, which, according to the old man, “was here before the town was” (77),

‘is busy taking from the air, taking from the earth, taking what it needs, taking all the things we don’t know but that travel in the earth and in the air. The love that’s in an up-country man that can’t be expressed. It’s got to go somewhere. Maybe it goes in the air and is taken by this willow. The tears of a lonely girl who wants a friend. She might come and sit under this tree and cry her tears into the roots. What about the regrets of a father who never got to love a son who went away to die in a war? He’d come here to be alone. These leaves hold that. The remorse of a boy here in the dark with his girl. The compassion of an old man who knows he is going to outlive his wife. [...] A leaf of love, a leaf

²⁵ From the centre tale “The kissing man” (chapter 6), the stories can be patterned according to pairs, in reverse order in which they appear: “A room, a light for love” (5) and “A leaf for everything good” (7); “You’ll get the rest of him soon” (4) and “The man who lived out loud” (8); “The listeners” (3) and “What do the children mean?” (9); “When Jacob Fletcher was a boy” (2) and “The commonplace” (10); “An act of piety” (1) and “The way back (11). Of course, this pattern is one of many that a reader might find working through the entire collection.

of loneliness, a leaf of regret, a leaf of remorse, a leaf of compassion, a leaf for everything good and forgotten, for everything bad and always here. They fall into the pond and the trout eat them.’ (77-78)

Lynch expresses particular affection for this story which he brilliantly relates to the Irish legend of Finn (*One* 143-144). More generally, he associates “the trout in ‘A leaf for everything good’ [with] the spiritual-emotional well-being of the community [...]” (144). He sees the story as tracing “the complicated process by which the wider community’s compassion, understanding, and faith become submerged, embodied symbolically in trout, and retrieved by Finn” (142).

Lynch’s conservative-humanistic reading of the cycle as a whole focuses on how community is formed and bound by its individuals. As with many of the cycle’s stories, this one too relates how community can “bond” through an “embrace” (to use again T.S. Eliot’s terms) of tradition and inheritance for the sake of the future. For example, the old man teaches Finn about his town’s past, part of his own family’s. However, the lesson the boy learns conveys to him little that is hopeful about the future, especially his own, in the small town (Froody from “The kissing man” learns just as much). For, truly, what the willow tree absorbs, as described by the old man, is emotional distress experienced by individual small-town locals. As if in combination of Alison’s chandelier glasses (each dedicated to a small town neighbour) with the hollowed eggs of Audie’s mother (containers of an individual’s grief), the willow’s leaves are full of the community’s forgotten goodness and sustained badness. Of the kinds of people who visit the willow tree, they are small-town folk that need to unburden themselves of tears of regret, shame, and loneliness. The willow is an

inanimate priest who listens silently to the secret sorrows of the locals, but, as far as we can tell, it provides no consolation beyond its mysterious receptivity.

When Finn finally catches one of the elusive and legendary trout said to eat the willow's fallen leaves (and thus consume the town's secret sorrows), he boards a passing cargo boat, presumably never to return. Learning something from the old man's story about the willow and the trout, and acting on his education, Finn abandons his abusive father specifically, and the town generally. (We are reminded of *Winesburg, Ohio's* George Willard in this case, whose small-town neighbours repeatedly and insistently encourage him to leave Winesburg). The sorrows embodied in the huge trout that he catches (and lets die on the ground for his father to find) are enough to chase him away. Perhaps wisest of all, Finn and the old man form a relationship that ironically accedes to an interpretation of Eliot's (and Lynch's) prescription for communal bonding, that is by taking the often mysterious good and passing it on. For, Finn becomes a willing and attentive student to an old man who possesses knowledge that is not reasonable or logical (he therefore imitates, in reverse manner, Dan's "way back" to the grinder man tradition). Yet ultimately, if Finn's education propels him away from home and community, "A leaf for everything good" leaves us with little to celebrate about such things in this small town. The story is, strangely enough, the most hopeful in this boy's abandonment of the place.

In sum, Elliott's small town is not a place where the community binds its individuals together with charity. Examples of actual ritual are private rites that for their exclusive priests maintain their distance from the rest of the town. Only the tradition of the grinder man is a form of initiation necessary to full socialization; to refuse it is to

experience separation. The characters that choose to exercise independence from one form of social cohesion or another do not stand to escape ambiguous and constricting traditions. The city references, at a simple level, stress the small town's need for intellectual and emotional diversity. The cycle's opening epigraph is surely meant to point to something healthy, regenerative, and connective within families which, as groups, formulate communities that bond in spiritually and emotionally productive ways, enhancing the lives of individuals simultaneously. However, twisted as it is in Elliott's small town, such bonding produces the tightness we read in these tales of communal collapse and suffocation.

The victimization of community members works out differently in *Housebreaker* and *The Kissing Man*. In the former, the suburbanites take to heart, willy-nilly, the socio-moral standards expected of them, standards created and sustained for the sake of solidarity. Communally they embrace these questionable bonds because of the familiarity and ease they provide. Their situation is thus, for the reader, arguably all the more frustrating than are the tragedies outlined in Elliott's small town. In the background to Elliot's world, a congregation of "traditionalists" enforce communal patterns and expectations for the sake of all. But the communion generated by such enforcement is fatally restrictive. No one is permitted, ultimately, to choose differently for fear that different choices will destroy communal cohesion. The irony, of course, is that this sort of cohesion itself unravels cohesion. In the end, generally speaking, Cheever's suburban world sustains itself with deception; Elliot presents his small town as at the end of its sustenance. Both cycles pose

challenging questions about the formation and strength of small communities, and how they might fail through the repetition of empty social rites.

Chapter Four

Through the City and Back Home Again: Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* and Joyce Carol Oates' *Marya: A Life*

The last two cycles of this survey, Alice Munro's 1978 Canadian *Who Do You Think You Are?* and Joyce Carol Oates' 1986 American *Marya: A Life*, provide unique representations of the small town because, for one, each focusses on the experiences of a single small-town character who ventures to the city; two, these characters are women; and three, Rose of *Who?* and Marya of *Marya* return to their small-town homes in order better to understand themselves. In these late-twentieth-century cycles, the small town is directly connected to the idea of home, and the cycles depict the place's permanent hold even on those who (try to) escape the ties. Not so much reminders of small-town values (i.e. *Country* and *Sunshine Sketches*), these stories emphasize that though violent and destabilizing, the small town is unforgettable and essential to self-enlightenment (versus the distress experienced by *Winesburg's* returning losers). Although their small-town communities do not explicitly demand anything of them (as we find to be the case in *The Kissing Man*), Rose and Marya are nonetheless compelled to re-situate themselves in the small town after many years of experiencing the city as a point of comparison and contrast (the emphasis being utilization of the city rather than adaptation to the city, the latter being a thematic concern in *Viger*). The city provides Rose and Marya with a place and means for an honest coming to terms with their selves (in contrast to the experiences of *Housebreaker's* deluded suburbanites). In many ways, the city is represented in neutral terms; neither villanized nor glorified, it is

yet important to solidifying the small town's enduring power to inspire stories about identity, place, and nation.

I.

Beverly Jean Rasporich briefly touches upon the metropolitan settings of *Who Do You Think You Are?* She argues for “the city” therein as a circus: intrusive, comical, and bizarre, but a place that, Rasporich believes, Rose is well-suited to negotiate successfully (146). Furthermore, Rasporich concludes that place, which is “the source of identity” (148), is a psychological one; thus,

[w]ith Rose, outside moves in—and place, as townscape and landscape, becomes little more than backdrop for house, apartment, train, hospital, library, legion, nursing home, which, appropriate to the heroine's calling, become theatrical sets for the scenes of modern manners played out within them. (146)

Hence, in Rasporich's reading, the city is ultimately irrelevant:

In *Who Do You Think You Are?* the invitation to a contemporary circus is extended, accepted and played out with some pleasure by Rose; but after the final act, when the tent comes down, there is only empty space and the return trip back—home to Wawanash County. (147)

Additionally, wherever she might be, in hometown or city, Rasporich contends, Rose carries in her psyche that place which makes her who she is, a place that is based on her childhood memories of Hanratty: “[P]lace becomes the memory of those people whom

Rose comes to understand constitute her Self [...]” (148). The physical Hanratty, much like Jewett’s treatment of Dunnet Landing in *Country*, altered through time, is no longer a component of that psychological place.

It is indeed her memories of Hanratty that Rose carries with her during her excursions outside her hometown and which are part and parcel of Rose’s self-revelation in the last story of the cycle, “Who Do You Think You Are?” However, Rose’s physical return to Hanratty and her discovery there of the meaningfulness of her self are intertwined. According to the layout of the book’s cyclical form, her self-discovery is substantiated not just by a return to memories—as occurs in the final story of Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches*, where the narrator and his audience take an imaginative trip back to Mariposa—which she may have conducted anywhere, but by a physical home-coming. As fictional as Hanratty is, not only as the imaginative place in Munro’s book but also as a construction that Rose represents through her memories of the small town, its “real-ness” as a place to visit and experience *in person* is undeniably incorporated into the formulation and formation of Rose’s self-identity.

The stories that make up Hanratty, which Rose re-shapes and tells to the friends and acquaintances of her city life/lives, are used by her to construct a place of personal identity. It is where the stories, and thus Rose, originate and to which she returns to re-discover those roots. And, as I claim, her return to Hanratty is conditioned by her excursions to and through the city/cities. Rose’s Hanratty—thus, that of her childhood and that of her story-making and -telling—makes her outside excursions meaningful and in turn, these metropolitan excursions facilitate her return. Place, in Munro’s cycle, is not singularly

psychological; it formulates and shapes one's psyche.

Throughout *Who?*, stories, story-making and -telling play important roles in Rose's searching and revelations. Ajay Heble states that with this fourth book, Munro displays an "increasing involvement with a poetics of uncertainty and a rhetoric of mistrust" (96) in her efforts

to show us that real life (by which I mean both the real-seeming world of her texts *and* the world of material reality) operates not only according to the principles of rationality that we impose on it, but also according to the kinds of principles which govern the reading and writing of texts. (11)

Robert McGill refines Heble's account of Munro's use of realism thus:

Munro's stories generate meaning by shifting the boundary between fiction and non-fiction. Indeed, they *must* shift the boundary, as the real itself moves and what was fiction is recognized as truth, and vice-versa. (22)

Therefore, generally speaking, Munro's much-writ about literary realism,¹ in this cycle, equivocates about the "real" and "truth," especially in regards to understanding who and what one is in relation to one's history and memories of the past.

The "reality" of Rose's stories—her own, of her relations, of her hometown Hanratty, of her life in Toronto and Vancouver, and her return home—is appropriately and necessarily questionable and qualifiable because the stories "come out of the process of sharing and interpreting narratives" (Heble 97). Rose's stories about her childhood in rural West Hanratty (Ontario) and about life in the small town are a mingling of what Rose

¹ See Cindy Lou Daniels.

remembers, what she remembers hearing from her stepmother Flo, and what Flo tells her stepdaughter about what *she* remembers of others' Hanratty stories. As Gerald Lynch succinctly puts it, *Who Do You Think You Are?* presents

characters who are reflections of reflections of reflections [...]. In the mirror in a mirror image, as in the *regressus ad infinitum* and the literary *mise en abîme*, Munro recognizes the difficulties of ultimately condensing, grounding, and centring an ideal of self. (*One* 161)

Rose's identity-quest also illustrates, of course, that even *an idea* of self is created by and subject to the stories one makes, tells, and hears about one's own life.

The emphasis on stories and story-making/-telling, particularly in the first three chapters of *Who?*—"Royal Beatings," "Privilege," and "Half a Grapefruit"—foregrounds the cycle's intentional difficulty. Because these are tales remembered by an older Rose who is trying to recall significant moments of her childhood while simultaneously illustrating the multi-narratorial nature of her memories, their intention seems less to do with what actually happens and more with how things happened, how these events were recorded in memory, and how they were later retold with hindsight. Coral Ann Howells writes that Munro's fiction "focuses not so much on space as on time and how the past is remembered and reconstructed" (*Alice Munro* 51). McGill similarly understands that

Munro is preoccupied with the question of how we learn, maintaining a concern with epistemology that is evident in titles like 'Who Do You Think You Are?' and 'What Do You Want to Know For?' [a short story in Munro's 2006 collection, *The View From Castle Rock*]. (16)

Writing about Munro's fictional style, Heble remarks that Munro "disrupts the traditional discourse of realism in order to show us that we cannot take everything we read for granted" (9). And this disruption, of course, reveals itself in Rose's attempts and struggles to articulate a story about herself that would make sense of her life since leaving Hanratty.

Furthermore, McGill and Lynch both point up the relationship between place and identity that shapes Munro's cycle as a whole: "Munro's fiction reveals a concern with the implications of space for identity formation and knowledge acquisition, especially insofar as fiction informs these processes" (McGill 10); *Who?* "is in fact a supreme example of a contemporary story cycle of character wherein place as small town, Hanratty, is recovered to play a definitive role in the formation of character and, later, the affirmation of identity" (Lynch, *One* 160). Identity of place and identity of self are inextricably intertwined in Munro's fiction and as such together, do not allow for straightforward narrative, for "literary realism."²

In regards to the different and shifting settings of the cycle, there are ten stories to *Who?*, the middle stories set, at different times, in Toronto and Vancouver,³ and the first four and final two set in Hanratty. W. R. Martin has this to say about the structure of the cycle: "This seems to me to be an uneven volume. The beginning and the end are as brilliant as anything she has written, but, although there are very good things in the middle section, some

² Again, as we find to be the case in Cheever's *Housebreaker*, we recall Northrop Frye's assessment of the link between identity and place.

³ Also in a country town (in the eighth short story "Simon's Luck"), but I want to focus on the metropolitan settings.

stretches in it are relatively a falling off” (*Alice Munro* 98-99). He refines his complaint thus: The middle stories—“The Beggar Maid,” “Mischief,” “Providence,” and “Simon’s Luck”—

are almost entirely lacking in [...] actual and implied interplay between the old and the new, the strange and the familiar, the genially coarse country habits and speech of a Billy Pope, Flo’s cousin, and the refinements glimpsed at high school and university, and as a consequence they seem in comparison rather thin for want of these social, historical and psychological dimensions, which elsewhere contribute to the dramatic effect. (100)

Lynch responds directly to Martin: “With the exception of Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches*, I can think of no other story cycle so carefully shaped to its purpose. Most obviously, the stories follow Rose’s growth from childhood to adolescence to middle age [...]” and are each related to and disrupted by each other (*One* 162). Finally, Brad Hooper offers a third opinion:

From the opening stories, a sense of repetitiveness arises, a pall of redundancy hanging over them. The early Rose too closely resembles her precocious adolescent predecessors in previous stories. A couple of stories in the middle of the cycle, however, are masterpieces, some of the finest fiction Munro has written. Unfortunately, the collection’s stamina, highly reached by the masterpiece stories, is not sustained throughout; the final two stories in particular have little strength, and seem only to serve to bring the story of Rose to a conclusion. (49-50).

Lynch's assessment of *Who?* as a cycle, it seems to me, answers best the aesthetic concerns Martin and Hooper have about the book's structure. Lynch understands that

[t]he stories of Rose are experienced by the reader more in stroboscopic flashes and flashbacks than in a steadily growing light, in piled reminiscences of memories in hindsight, with time sometimes looping back on itself like a claustrophobic Möbius strip [...]. Thus is a life constructed and narrative time manipulated in the contemporary story cycle of character, in a way that ideally marries form and function for the postmodern sensibility. (162)

Once we perceive the cycle's narrative repetition as indeed a varying of what Rose experiences and understands about her journey towards answering the question "who do you think you are?" then the cycle's apparent inconsistencies or unevenness can be satisfyingly understood as intentional and productive in its representation of identity-quest.

It is worth noting that Hooper's and Martin's critiques respecting the (unfortunate, to them) aesthetic or narrative differences between *Who?*'s middle stories and its beginning and ending stories, do point up an interesting aspect of Munro's book. That is, the phenomena of story-making and -telling that are analysed in the opening Hanratty chapters are not then altered (varied) in the middle chapters to accommodate their different settings, i.e. of the city, or, as Heble describes it, "the world" outside "the country" (i.e. Hanratty) (11); not in the way, as Lynch explains, different themes of the cycle are interplayed within each of its chapters (see chapter 5, "No Honey, I'm Home: Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?*" in *One*). Rose transports the Hanratty stories, story-making and -telling of

her childhood to the world that she explores outside her hometown; she utilizes them to fit herself into her new environment, in which she always feels out of place, estranged, as well as transitional and nomadic. In other words, it is the story world of Hanratty that Rose uses to make sense of Rose-in-the-city, her experiences in the middle chapters constantly reflected against and through her hometown memories. Thus, even in *Who?*'s middle chapters, Rose the character is always "Rose of Hanratty."

In other words, Rose utilizes the story world of Hanratty during her city-life in order to come to terms with her small-town life through comparison and contrast. There are no purely "city stories," finally, that Rose makes or uses reflectively to structure her understanding of Hanratty. Hence, if there is confusion about who Rose is to Rose, there is as much confusion about who Rose is to the friends, colleagues, and acquaintances she makes away from home. This is why, I would venture, the middle stories do not share with the beginning and ending stories the same thematic and eventful interplay between old and new, familiar and strange. In these middle stories, Rose applies the story world of Hanratty to her life in the cities as a framework to make sense of herself there. The story of Hanratty is the continuum that infiltrates Rose's outside experiences and to which she returns to discover the meaning of her self.

Of course then, this line of argument presumes that as strong as the link is between identity and place, that is between Rose's self-identity and her hometown Hanratty, the importance of "the world" in *Who?* is substantial since it becomes necessary to Rose's return to Hanratty and her reassessment of what she remembers and thus understood/understands of her hometown and her life linked to it. I aim to look at Rose's

transportation of Hanratty stories to the cities she lives in, to showcase the relationship the cycle explores between small town, city, and identity formation. Reading how Rose, within her role as Hanratty story-teller, approaches the city and manages her life there is a critical approach yet unexplored by other students of the book,⁴ which, as suggested above, likely has to do with the way these stories stand out (weakly?) from the Hanratty chapters, and likely because Hanratty itself and Rose's return to Hanratty at the end of the cycle are predominant to the whole cycle's meaning. As I intend to show, Rose's productive return to Hanratty would be impossible if not for the time she spends outside Hanratty and in places like Toronto and Vancouver. To reiterate my project's overall thesis, Rose's attitude towards the small town of her childhood and her identity as formulated by Hanratty depend on its other, the city.

Rose becomes painfully conscious of the nature of her Hanratty story-telling in *Who?*'s penultimate chapter, "Spelling." In the story, Rose recalls having received a letter from her stepmother and reading it at a dinner party. Objecting to Rose's bare-breasted appearance in

⁴ With the exception of Rasporich's minor treatment in *Dance of the Sexes*; see above. In discussing Munro's *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*, McGill avers the importance of the rural/urban relationship in this 1974 story collection:

Munro's fiction reveals a concern with the implications of space for identity formation and knowledge acquisition, especially insofar as fiction informs these processes. 'Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You' is an examination of rural-urban relations and the performance of place which also has implications for the acts of reading and writing place, and ramifications in the struggle to achieve what Edward Relph calls 'the geographic[al] [sic] imagination': 'a way of thinking that seeks to grasp the connections between one's own experiences of particular landscapes and the larger processes of society and environment, and then seeks to interpret these in a manner that makes sense for others.' (10)

a televised play (The Trojan Women) as shameful, Flo had written to her stepdaughter: “[I]f [your] father had not been dead long ago he would now wish that he was” (186). Rose initially reads the letter to her guests “for comic effect, and dramatic effect, to show the gulf that lay behind her [...]” but

[h]alfway through, she had to stop reading. It wasn’t that she thought how shabby it was, to be exposing and making fun of Flo this way. She had done it often enough before; it was no news to her that it was shabby. What stopped her was, in fact, that gulf; she had a fresh and overwhelming realization of it, and it was nothing to laugh about. These reproaches of Flo’s made as much sense as a protest about raising umbrellas, a warning against eating raisins. But they were painfully, truly, meant; they were all a hard life had to offer. Shame on a bare breast. (186)

Rose here, in an epiphanic moment, comes to realize that Hanratty is not the unbelievable world, deservedly subject to mockery and tragicomic effect, that she has made it out to be for her city audiences. Her hometown, she seems to understand at this point, is neither in disjunction with the other world, that is the city, nor is the city the “real world” against which a place like Hanratty appears fantastical:

[Rose] did realize, if she thought about it, that such a gulf [between herself and Hanratty] was nothing special. Most of her friends, who seemed to her ordinarily hard-working, anxious, and hopeful, people, could lay claim to being disowned or prayed for, in some disappointed home [as she was].
(186)

Hence, in lieu of Flo's shame-letter (thematically speaking), Rose returns to Hanratty⁵ in the cycle's last story "Who Do You Think You Are?" as an inquirer or tourist rather than as a knowing native. During this critical visit, she paradoxically moves away from her long-time objectification of Hanratty as a story of her own past and moves toward a distanced perception of the place as one of which she has always been a subject, in fact. The event involves a momentous understanding of herself as a performer and imitator of Hanratty in the form of a character of the place, and not really its critic. Her return and enlightenment complicate the meaningfulness of Rose's compulsion to tell stories of Hanratty by illustrating how her need for these stories to fit herself in the city is combined with her realization that her story-telling is a formulation of self-identity via Hanratty.

For example, during this visit in the final chapter, Rose finds herself "*taken to the Legion [Hall, where veterans and the elderly gather socially] by Flo's neighbors, who thought she must be lonely on a Saturday night*" (202 emphasis mine). There, Rose surveys the walls covered with framed photographs, and reflects on her own curiosity:

Visitors, outsiders, are always looking at things, always taking an interest, asking who was this, when was that, trying to liven up the conversation.

They put too much in; they want too much out. Also, it could have looked as if she was parading around the room, asking for attention. (203)

In her reflections, Rose aligns herself—albeit uncomfortably, signalled by the use of the third plural pronoun—with the group of visitors and outsiders. Rose's now personally

⁵ Rose visits Flo, periodically and briefly, prior to the last visit she makes in *Who?* The difference this time is in the nature of this transformative return.

estranged relationship to her hometown is again suggested when a woman originally from Sarnia addresses Rose as if the latter were the outsider and the stranger more familiar with Hanratty and its locals: “A woman sat down and introduced herself. She was the wife of one of the men playing cards. ‘I’ve seen you on television,’ she said” (203). The stranger here aligns Rose with her out-of-town identity though the former “did not belong to Hanratty” (203). She also addresses another Hanratty local with an ease and intimacy—“Well, here’s old Ralph” (203)—that contrasts the more formal approach and treatment that Rose receives from the locals at the Hall. Overall, Rose certainly takes a secondary role in this scene, waiting to be introduced to and solicited with conversation, in comparison to her more active socializing with people at city dinner parties.

Rose’s estrangement, or her sense of estrangement, becomes especially significant when it facilitates her re-acquaintance with “old Ralph” Gillespie, who is in fact a former high school friend of hers. Recalling their temporary closeness at school, lost when Ralph became socially acceptable to their classmates due to his skilled comical imitations of Hanratty inhabitants (199-200), Rose displays a strong desire to re-connect intimately with someone from her past: At the Hall, she talks to Ralph in “an amusing, confidential, recognizably and meaninglessly flirtatious style” (205). Her solicitation however, is not reciprocated—“She did not get much response from Ralph Gillespie, though he seemed attentive, even welcoming” (205)—although she is eager to interpret a desire in Ralph to respond to her from the deeper level that she tries to evoke from him:

All the time she talked, she was wondering what he wanted her to say. He did want something. But he would not make any move to get it. Her first

impression of him, as boyishly shy and ingratiating, had to change. That was his surface. Underneath he was self-sufficient, resigned to living in bafflement, perhaps proud. She wished that he would speak to her from that level, and she thought he wished it, too, but they were prevented. (205)

Because the Ralph she knew as a boy does not speak with her now in their adult years, Rose receives further confirmation of the meaningfulness of that gulf she had come to acknowledge in its real-ness through Flo's shame-letter. She concedes that "[h]er first impression of [Ralph], as boyishly shy and ingratiating, had to change. That was his surface. Underneath he was self-sufficient, resigned to living in bafflement, perhaps proud" (205). In extension, in Ralph's presence, Rose feels a heightened sense of shame (205), that in her story-telling, "she might have been paying attention to the wrong things, reporting antics, when there was always something further, a tone, a depth, a light, that she couldn't get and wouldn't get. [...]. Everything she had done could sometimes be seen as a mistake" (205).

Lynch appraises Rose's closing meditations:

What a monumental self-confession this is, linking her whole life to the falsifications of bad acting, entertaining the idea that her life has been poor entertainment, confronting her with the possibility that she has never had an authentic life. (*One* 180)

Positioned outside the familiarity of Hanratty that she had taken for granted, Rose demonstrates a personal vulnerability by allowing herself to perceive of Hanratty as a place unknown to her after all. Rose's recognition of possibly never having had an authentic life

involves her understanding that Hanratty was never and could never be properly (authentically) represented in her stories of it.⁶ The gulf that lay between her and the small town, she sees now, was not something she created, but a reality of the unknowableness of others. Rose gains intellectual sensitivity to the nature of self-formation and identity, confirmed by her re-acquaintance with Ralph, and seems moved by the enlightenment rather than depressed by the realization of her self founded by Hanratty and her history there. As the story, and the cycle, end, Rose begins her most important personal turning point.

In retrospection then, or on a re-reading of the whole text, the reader of Munro's story cycle might see irony in Rose's presentation of Hanratty to her city friends as a scandalous and shocking story. In order to create for herself a unique personality, an individual niche in the metropolitan artsy and elitist circles in which she moves, Rose's stories make marked distinctions between the small town and the metropolitan life she leads there: "[S]he [learnt] how to use [her knowledge of Hanratty], she would be able to amuse or intimidate right-thinking people at dinner parties with glimpses of her early home" (88). Moreover, Rose's attempts at making these socio-cultural distinctions involve as well her desire to distinguish herself from Hanratty while maintaining her small-town identity. She wishes to project an image of herself as a survivor of this apparently backwards place while simultaneously presenting herself as a small-town original, and a supposedly freed and

⁶ Further concerning identity, Lynch concedes that Hanratty "is itself quite unstable, always changing, and perhaps it will eventually threaten such a subject as Rose [...]" (*One* 181).

unlikely one (not a stereotypical red-neck, let's say). All this meanwhile believing she had placed the distance between herself and Hanratty, only to understand at the "end" that the distance was always there and for reasons beyond herself.

Rose's story-teller's role can be traced back to her stepmother who, during Rose's girlhood, indulged in the local gossip of the poorer half of Hanratty (West Hanratty), where she and her family lived: "Flo telling a story [...] would incline her head and let her face go soft, and thoughtful, tantalizing, warning" (7). Rose's initiation, as it were, into small town/metropolitan distinctions begins as well with Flo's mock-performances of the personalities of the "uptown" (10) part of Hanratty: "She came home [from Hanratty] and imitated them at supper: their high-flown remarks, their flibberty voices. Monsters, she made them seem; of foolishness, and showiness, and self-approbation" (10). Not the kind of scandalous stories such as the ones she tells of West Hanratty, Flo's renditions of Hanratty inhabitants are prideful caricatures which point up Flo's sense of class differences in the one town.

Through Flo's narrative upkeep of the socio-cultural dissection of upper and lower Hanratty, Rose becomes sharply aware of these differences and later adopts the role of mock-performer when she attends the uptown high school. Here she yearns to be associated with the more well-to-do students:

West Hanratty was not represented [in her class], except by her. She was wanting badly to align herself with towners, against her place of origin, to attach herself to those waffle-eating coffee-drinking aloof and knowledgeable possessors of breakfast nooks. (38)

Out of the angst Rose suffers over the differences between herself and the rest of the classmates, she brings home grotesque gossip about her classmates:

Every day when Rose got home she would tell Flo about what went on in school. Flo enjoyed the episode of the [discovered sullied] Kotex [at school], and would ask about fresh developments. [...] Rose would not have told her anything in which she did not play a superior, an onlooker's part. Pitfalls were for others, Flo and Rose agreed. The change in Rose, once she left the scene, crossed the bridge, changed herself into chronicler, was remarkable. No nerves any more. A loud skeptical voice, some hip-swinging in a red and yellow plaid skirt, more than a hint of swaggering. (40)

These lines tell of the sense of power, however cowardly or hypocritically, that story-telling affords Rose.

Later in life, as an adult, Rose takes advantage of the socio-cultural differences between the two worlds she knows, offering up Hanratty, as it were, in sacrifice for the power that she longs for in the presence of those she feels are somehow superior to her. As Howells explains, “[Rose] presents herself as a marginalised figure living in the poorest part of Hanratty, yet with intelligence and ambition and the desire for a life closer to the scandalous flamboyancy of Flo’s stories” (*Alice Munro* 56). Her need for this power is elucidated in the story “Who Do You Think You Are?” in which Rose recalls her reaction to Ralph Gillespie’s high school imitations of Hanratty locals: “She had [a] feeling [...] not envy but a shaky sort of longing. She wanted to do the same. [...] She wanted to fill up in that magical, releasing way, transform herself; she wanted the courage and the power”

(200). Later, in her role of Hanratty story-teller to her city acquaintances, Rose blends Flo's class-sensitivity, which exposes Flo's (and her stepdaughter's) anxious sense of inferiority, with Ralph's commandment over his hovering classmates. The desired courage and power are therefore needed *to imitate* and *to perform* as well as discovered out of performing and imitating: "Rose knew a lot of people who wished they had been born poor, and hadn't been. So she would queen it over them, offering various scandals and bits of squalor from her childhood" (23). Rose simultaneously "queens it" over her city acquaintances and presents herself as queen of Hanratty.

Analysing Rose's metropolitan queening, Rasporich argues that "Rose is admirably suited for [the demands of city life]:"

[S]he blossoms into an independent, modern professional actress who spends her gypsy life moving in and out of towns, cities and country places. [...] Rose learns to take charge, becoming in the process a contemporary, urban heroine, an active participant in the modern circus, to whom all life, whether in country or city place, is legitimate theatre. (146)

The critic interprets Rose's responses to the metropolitan world to be equal to her girlhood fascination with the grotesqueries of small-town life:

[T]he enchantment of the earlier discoveries of country and town is transferred to the new material of modern drawing room interiors—to exotic foods and clothing and interior designs. Detailed landscape portraits are no more; in their place are extravagant surfaces of taste (the acquiring of taste is a theme of the novel) and color which express, with a kind of Keatsian

glamor, Rose's sugar plum vision as she experiences the extravagances of aspirant and actual middle-class life. (147)

With a rather different focus—on theme, rather than on character description—Lynch describes Rose's time spent away from home as a “cycling/spiralling away from the original site of self-formation constituted by Flo and Hanratty, reaching an apex of self-willed explorations [...]” (*One* 165). Lynch, who distinguishes the middle chapters from the final ones, reads change between Rose's time in the city and her return to Hanratty: After spiralling away in the cities, Rose “drop[s] back to the place of origin [...] which is seen now through Rose as affirmingly definitive and forgivingly redemptive” (165). Whereas Rasporich's reading of the connections between Rose's outside adventures and her return home emphasizes similitude between city and small town, Lynch's focus on the cyclical nature of *Who?* argues that Rose's metropolitan excursions propel her homeward towards revelation.

Georgeann Murphy, addressing Munro's fictions in general, seems to agree with Lynch since she sees

[two] kinds of connection [that] are especially important to the Munro *Weltanschauung*: travel, the connection of one place to another in a journey replete with metaphorical meaning; [and] change, the connection between past and present [...]. (16)⁷

She moreover points out an important link between these two major themes:

⁷ Murphy actually writes that she sees three kinds of connection, the third being “sexual love, probably the most fundamental and highly problematic of human connections” (16).

[T]he process of travel, involving as it does removal from quotidian obligations and attachments, focuses attention on the essential. A journey can thus be made toward a revelation [i.e. change] as much as toward a destination, and not infrequently, Munro's characters make those journeys simultaneously. (16)

Thus, the confidence that Rasporich assigns to Rose as a successful metropolitan who is able to negotiate the difficulties she experiences there is at variance with the altering character that Lynch and Murphy see in Rose during her outbound excursions. In other words, where Rasporich visualizes Rose as independent, in fact, of physical place, city or small town, the latter critics perceive Rose tied to Hanratty while she tries to pull herself away from her hometown and is eventually drawn back.

There is, I believe, ample evidence in *Who?* to support the interpretations given by Lynch and Murphy that qualify Rasporich's claims about Rose's metropolitan confidence and independence from physical place (versus her memories). In the third short story, "Half a Grapefruit," Rose makes pretences of being like her uptown classmates, but suffers for it. Having lied about what she ate for breakfast—half a grapefruit, when it was porridge instead—Rose is haunted by the ghost of the false image she had presented of herself: Initially,

Rose was pleased with herself for thinking of the grapefruit and with the way she had said it, in so bold, yet natural, a voice. [But later, walking home, Rose hears a voice repeating her lie, "half a grapefruit," and she] would hear that called, now and again, for years, called out from an alley or

a dark window. She would never let on she heard, but would soon have to touch her face, wipe the moisture away from her upper lip. We sweat for our pretensions. (39)

That fear of inauthentic presentation for the sake of upper-class, and metropolitan, desires remains with Rose up until the end of the cycle, where, as we have seen, she confesses her guilt that she feels “she might have been paying attention to the wrong things” (205).

For example, when she moves to London to attend college, Rose becomes more painfully aware of such differences, especially after meeting her future husband, Patrick Blatchford. She is “flattered, but nervous” around Patrick (65), unable to defend her less-refined friends to him or to provide an honest depiction of her familial background: “Rashly, she had presented her father to Patrick as a reader of history, an amateur scholar. That was not exactly a lie, but it did not give a truthful picture of the circumstances” (68). Desirous yet for Patrick’s worshipful attentions as well as for the aura of grace and elegance—“*class*” (71)—that she understands goes hand-in-hand with wealth, Rose utilizes her background, such as it is, to solidify her lover’s attachment to her. She repetitively reminds him that they ““come from two different worlds. [...] My people are poor people. You would think the place I lived in was a dump”” (75); but she knows “she was the one who was being dishonest, pretending to throw herself on his mercy [...]” (75). Even as she despises what she does, Rose knows that emphasizing her background poverty as unequal to Patrick’s only encourages her lover’s efforts.

The son of a wealthy department store owner, Patrick certainly responds by trying to separate Rose from her background, confirming in some ways Rose’s own sense of

difference between herself and the rest of Hanratty. He imagines assertively, for example, that her biological parents were refined folk living under unfortunate circumstances unequal to their supposedly natural superiority to Hanratty:

‘Your real parents can’t have been like [anyone else in Hanratty].’ [...] [Rose] saw that he was trying to provide for her a more genteel background, perhaps something like the homes of his poor friends: a few books about, a tea tray, and mended linen, worn good taste; proud, tired, educated people. What a coward he was, she thought angrily, but she knew that she herself was the coward, not knowing any way to be comfortable with her own people or [Flo’s] kitchen or any of it. (87-88)

Yet, Rose never does grow comfortable with her “own people.” The gap between herself and Hanratty that she learns to depend on during her metropolitan excursions becomes a complicated space which, for Rose, both defines her roots in the small town and provides the distance she needs to fit herself into her city life.

For Patrick, in regards to altering his fiancée, “his hopes were high. [Rose’s] accent could be eliminated, her friends could be discredited and removed, her vulgarity could be discouraged” (82), and all these changes do occur, but in ways unintended by Patrick. Newly and uncomfortably aware of what Hanratty looks like in city lights, Rose becomes frustrated with her acculturation into the differences between small-town poverty and big-city “class.” When she first takes Patrick to Hanratty, she

felt ashamed on more levels than she could count. She was ashamed of the food and the swan and the plastic tablecloth [on Flo’s kitchen table];

ashamed for Patrick, the gloomy snob [...]; ashamed for Flo with her timidity and hypocrisy and pretensions; most of all ashamed for herself. She didn't even have any way that she could talk, and sound natural. With Patrick there, she couldn't slip back into an accent closer to Flo's [...]. That accent jarred on her ears now, anyway. It seemed to involve not just a different pronunciation but a whole different approach to talking. [...] Seeing [Flo] through Patrick's eyes, hearing [her] through his ears, Rose too had to be amazed. (86-87)

Even before she meets Patrick, when she is invited to board during her college years in a retired professor's home, Rose already begins to lose her sense of "home" as a comforting and assumed familiarity. Hanratty and Flo's house become charged with signifiers of class and financial standing:

To go back there [to Hanratty] was to go quite literally into a crude light. [...] In Dr. Henshawe's charming rooms there was always for Rose the raw knowledge of home, an indigestible lump, and at home, now, her sense of order and modulation elsewhere exposed such embarrassing sad poverty, in people who never thought themselves poor. (67)

In both situations, as a boarder with and fiancée to more classy persons, Rose finds herself unbalanced. Ashamed of her shame for Flo and Hanratty, she resents the world to which Patrick and Dr. Henshawe introduce her; yet, her resentment falls most heavily on herself for feeling that shame and that resentment since she wants to be a part of that more elegant world.

And to assuage her emotional and psychological distress, Rose facilitates her entry into the desired artsy and well-to-do atmosphere by channelling her discomfort with home into a complicated loyalty to the place that ironically also betrays it. Stemming from her visit with Patrick to Hanratty, Rose, we read,

[y]ears later [...] would learn how to use [Hanratty], she would be able to amuse or intimidate right-thinking people at dinner parties with glimpses of her early home. [...] Nevertheless her loyalty was starting. Now that she was sure of getting away, a layer of loyalty and protectiveness was hardening around every memory she had, around the store and the town, the flat, somewhat scrubby, unremarkable countryside. She would oppose this secretly to Patrick's views of mountains and ocean, his stone and timbered mansion. (88)

Not an earnest declaration of alliance to Hanratty, Rose's thought-processes above anticipate that her future story-telling will objectify her small town for the sake of her metropolitan desires, as bitterly as she feels about her desires. Nor a sycophantic tactic to appease the more elegant social circles, the same statements anticipate that Rose's story-telling shall force the story-teller into a nomadic state which, as long as she narrates Hanratty in a performance of the place, keeps her apart from both worlds. Simply, she would use Hanratty to offend the people whose lives she envies, and thus keep her hometown always forefront, but undercut, in her self-presentation.

Rose's story-telling tactic to position herself, albeit ironically, in city life proves to be

doubly problematic when she encounters her city acquaintances' urban-based perspectives of her as a small-town original. Dependent as she is on her small-town heritage for social ease, the manner in which she is perceived in turn by, for example, her husband and closest friends Clifford and Jocelyn, disturbs her supposedly insular performances of Hanratty. In other words, her encounter with these characters further destabilizes Rose's sense of privileged distance from her surroundings. In her relations with Patrick and her friends, Rose finds herself looking at her self as perceived by the city and the reversed image is a disturbing one.

Rose's grotesque story-telling of Hanratty as a "backward" small town is complemented, in a strange way, by Patrick's attempts to provide Rose with a genteel background (as described above). His courtship suggests a pastoral story of a young man's yearning for a country rose plucked from a dump and cultivated by his finesse—saved, as it were, from the inferiority of her background. It is thus appropriate that he, at one point, exclaims that he sees in her a figure of the Beggar Maid: "I'm glad you're poor. You're so lovely. You're like the Beggar Maid" (75), who in the painting by Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1883),⁸ according to Rose, looks

meek and voluptuous, with her shy white feet. The milky surrender of her, the helplessness and gratitude [...]. [The] king, sharp and swarthy as he looked, even in his trance of passion, clever and barbaric. He could make a

⁸ I take the suggestion of Howells that Munro had this painting in mind (*Alice Munro* 60), which is titled King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid. Two other paintings might be plausible: King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid (1869) by David Maclise and Edmund Blair Leighton's The King and the Beggar Maid (1898).

puddle of her, with his fierce desire. (77)

Patrick's admission here is that Rose is not truly of Hanratty and can be replanted into the elite world that he inhabits; her roots, for Patrick, assume no resistance, and she will be grateful and amenable. In turn, although Rose is embarrassed by Patrick's unsophisticated sincerity and thus vulnerability (75), and does not see within herself anything resembling the Beggar Maid, she recognizes that his courtship responds to her desires for the wealth (financial and social) that would come with Patrick, as well as the worship: "The size, the weight, the shine, of what he said was love (and she did not doubt him) had to impress her, even though she had never asked for it. [...] Patrick himself, though worshipful, did in some oblique way acknowledge her luck" (77).⁹ Thus, though Patrick's version of Rose's exceptionalism does not correspond with Rose's sense of self, based on her desires for the glamour of social elitism, Rose sees in the package that her fiancé offers her a semblance of what she wishes to attain.

Rose encounters a different set of city folk in the sixth short story "Mischief," in Jocelyn and Clifford, who seek the attentions of and rise into upper-middle-class circles. Her involvement with this couple provides another exposition of Rose's wanderings in the metropolis and her discovery of how she is differentiated by those with whom she longs to be associated. When Rose first tells her friend Jocelyn about Hanratty—" [Rose] delivered Flo and the store in broad strokes. She played up the poverty. She didn't really have to. The true facts of her childhood were exotic enough to Jocelyn, and of all things, enviable"

⁹ Rose's description of Patrick's love is immersed in the language of materialism and commodity, almost as if she were describing a diamond.

(103)—the latter’s response speaks to the difference between small town and city that the myths of the small town and city evoke. Jocelyn remarks, “‘It seems more real’ [...] I know that’s a romantic notion’” (103).

The crudity of Rose’s Hanratty, as the story-teller presents it to her friend, suggests to Jocelyn that Hanratty, as a “backward” place and closer to the country than to the city, functions at a level closer to nature, and thus more closely resembles “natural” human behaviour. This estimation of hers, of course, is set against what Jocelyn and her husband understand and revel in: the fussiness and artificiality of city life. To this couple, Rose is an interesting friend because of her small-town background and the associations they make with such a background: “Jocelyn had said to her, much later in their friendship, that one of the reasons she found it so interesting to talk to Rose, from the start, was that Rose had ideas but was uneducated” (104). Albeit such a statement might not be entirely complimentary, it does satisfy Rose’s self-presentation as a somewhat eccentric woman from an even stranger background that she has lifted herself out of. Jocelyn’s statement confirms that it is exactly that eccentric persona that has provided Rose with friendships in metropolitan social circles.

However, this friendship needs qualification; for, throughout their relationship, Rose is always the other, the listener, the observer. The narration of this short story is in fact uncharacteristically mute about Clifford and Jocelyn. Unlike the continual critiques and assessments Rose provides regarding Patrick, in this chapter Rose is silent about the implications of her friends’ behaviour and actions, which are morally questionable at least.

For example, while they are still relatively poor, struggling to rise socially and

economically through Clifford's musical career (he is a violinist), the couple emulates class snobbery and hypocrisy by ridiculing those things that they in fact desire:

Jocelyn became spectacularly unkempt. She dressed exclusively in old clothes of Clifford's. [...] Apparently Jocelyn thought the whole business of keeping your figure and wearing makeup and trying to look in any way seductive was sourly amusing, beneath contempt; it was like vacuuming curtains. She said that Clifford felt the same way. (119)

In reverse order to Rose's mockeries of Hanratty, the couple mocks that which they are, in fact, very attached to. The pretence of their then life-style is exposed, and disturbingly so, when they gain wealth and embrace the materialism of their new-found class status. For one, Jocelyn cleans up her act: "They are not poor anymore. Clifford is successful. [...] Jocelyn has dieted and become slender, has had her hair cut and styled; it is parted in the middle and curves away from her face, with a wing of pure white rising from each temple" (125). Their house also speaks of an embracing of the materialism they had once declared demeaning:

'I'm spending a fortune [Jocelyn tells Rose]. What I would once have thought was a fortune. It took me so long. It took us both so long, just to be able to spend money. We could not bring ourselves to do it. We despised people who had color television. And you know something—color television is great! [...] You know what we are, we say to each other? We're Consumers! And it's Okay!' (131)

The moral decrepitude of this couple is further exposed in two episodes especially: when

they quibble over whether they should stop their son from raping a girl in their basement (126) and when they use Rose for a rather ugly (Lynch would say “barbaric /consumerist” [*One* 170]) sexual encounter.

Rose’s silence in “Mischief”—which chapter Lynch calls “easily the ugliest story of the cycle” (*One* 170) and Martin describes as “a rather sad comedy” (*Alice Munro* 112)—can be read as guilt that is linked to her complicity with Clifford and Jocelyn’s lives and her partaking of whatever such friendship affords her.¹⁰ For one thing, the two are an ideal audience for her story-telling and, as friends (not mere acquaintances), they provide Rose with a tangible position in the artsy, upper-middle-class glamour of city life. As Martin explains,

Rose is fascinated by Jocelyn [...]. She represents for Rose all the imagined world of sophisticated art and intellect that she feels the want of [...]. [And] Clifford is only one slot over from his wife, and he has moreover the glamorous aura of a violinist in the orchestra. (*Alice Munro* 113)

Parallels between the couple and Rose suggest that the latter cannot take a hard look at the former without seeing herself recreated in a social background and lifestyle that she seeks to some degree.

¹⁰ Hooper interprets Rose’s silence in “Mischief” as “detachment:” “obvious, and certainly strik[ing] a chord of authenticity in attitude” (55). Furthermore, in regards to Rose’s decision to continue her relationship with Clifford and Jocelyn, the critic asserts that “[a] practicality has enclosed her vulnerability, and Rose is all the stronger for it, without any of Flo’s closed-minded, unworldly cynicism impeding her movement toward new horizons” (56). Hooper’s interpretation baffles me, particularly since it seems to present “Mischief” on a superficial level, as if the story were written without moral insight or even narrative subtlety.

Jocelyn and Clifford's lives are narratively similar to Rose's. They begin relatively poor, but feel they are exceptional. Their snobbish dismissal of richer things indicates their self-exceptionalism ironically much in the same way that Rose's mockery of Hanratty is an ironic doubling of her self-identification. Rose's social hypocrisy is not much different from Clifford and Jocelyn's, illustrated in the following short story, "Providence." Here she participates in a similar class snobbery when she deliberately moves into a shabby country setting:

Rose had thought that once she got out of Patrick's house [following their divorce] she would live in a bare room, some place stained and shabby. She would not care, she would not bother making a setting for herself, she disliked all that. The apartment she found—the upstairs of a brown brick house halfway up mountainside—was stained and shabby [...]. (135)

Yet, her choice is a façade for desiring the appearance of class-nonchalance when in fact she wishes something else: After refurbishing her apartment, "[w]hat she had, when all this was finished, was a place which belonged quite recognizably to a woman, living alone, probably no longer young, who was connected, or hoped to be connected, with a college or the arts" (136).

Additionally, at one point, the couple re-enacts a part of Rose's past. As mentioned, Jocelyn confesses to Rose that they had scrupled over whether or not to interrupt their son's raping of a girlfriend: "So, I kept hearing the poor unknown girl bleating and protesting, and I didn't know what to do" (126). The event echoes Rose's girlhood observations of Franny McGill's rape by her brother, in the earlier story "Privilege:" "Rose was interested

but not alarmed. An act performed on Franny had no general significance, no bearing on what could happen to anyone else. It was only further abuse” (25). This is not to say that the couple’s flaccid morality (to put it mildly) parallels Rose’s childhood witnessing, but that Jocelyn’s observational/narratorial relating of the son’s raping of his girlfriend would remind Rose of her own narrating of similarly sordid events.

Finally, the story as a whole seems most critical of Rose at the end of “Mischief” which concludes the Jocelyn and Clifford episode, when, following the night of threesome sex—“Though Clifford paid preliminary homage to them both, she was the one he finally made love to, rather quickly on the nubby hooked rug. Jocelyn seemed to hover above them making comforting noises of assent” (132)—Rose illustrates her own moral equivalency at a level of personal degradation:

She began to get very angry. She was angry at Clifford and Jocelyn. She felt that they had made a fool of her, cheated her, shown her a glaring lack, that otherwise she would not have been aware of. She resolved never to see them again and to write them a letter in which she would comment on their selfishness, obtuseness, and moral degeneracy. [...] Sometime later she decided to go on being friends with Clifford and Jocelyn, because she needed such friends occasionally, at that stage of her life. (132)

Rose, as perversely as her friends need and use her, needs and uses them. Due to the ambivalent use of the un-associated article “a,” the “glaring lack” that offends her so much is as linked to Rose’s own lack “that otherwise she would not have been aware of” as to the couple’s. Clifford and Jocelyn are bitter reflections of Rose’s own metropolitan excursions.

During the last two years before Rose returns to Hanratty, she experiences a breakdown.

During these months, her acting career blossoms, but

sometimes Rose was deeply, unaccountably ashamed. She did not let her confusion show. [...] Back in her hotel room, she often shivered and moaned, as if she were having an attack of fever. She blamed it on exhaustion, or her approaching menopause. She couldn't remember any of the people she had met, the charming, interesting people who had invited her to dinner and to whom, over drinks in various cities, she had told intimate things about her life. (177)

Caught, it would seem, in a whirlwind of professional acting as well as public performances of the scandalous parts of her life, Rose's breakdown parallels the growing disarray of her stepmother's life:

Neglect in Flo's house had turned a final corner, since Rose last saw it. The rooms were plugged up with rags and papers and dirt. Pull a blind to let some light in, and the blind comes apart in your hand. Shake a curtain and the curtain falls to rags, letting loose a choking dust. (177)

Rose's return, then, to put into order Flo's disordered home and life becomes a personal return home to order her own life.

During this visit, Rose faces an important question that Flo obliquely puts to her about having left Hanratty for city life: "If you stay in Hanratty and do not get rich it is all right because you are living out your life as was intended, but if you go away and do not get rich, or, like Rose, do not remain rich, then what was the point?" (180). The question,

which borders on accusation, draws on the dream of the city as a place of positive transformation. For Rose, however, such transformation is effected back home, in Hanratty, and particularly when she meets again her high school classmate Ralph Gillespie. “What was the point?” is a question linked to the obviously dominant question of the entire cycle: “Who do you think you are?” The point of her excursions was to find an answer, or answers, to that very question which “had often struck [Rose from childhood] like a monotonous gong [...]” (196). Both questions are also readable in hostile, rhetorical tones, which fact implies that Rose’s outbound excursions, in one light, were inappropriate and ineffectual.

And on the surface, they were. She doesn’t get rich in the city, continuously chases her self through her relationships and affairs and career choices, and returns, it would appear, empty-handed and self-unsure. Of course, the questions themselves, connected as they are, reflect the nature of Rose’s cyclical movement towards her closing self-epiphany, and the answers she is provided during her final return home are an understanding of the importance of the questions themselves. Rose’s thinking about who she thinks she is, and journeying towards an attempt at answering that investigation, is what’s of value: She discovers the roots of her performative self-identity, and of course the “truth” of performative identity as well as the inevitability of making “a mistake” (205) in performing others. Rose derives comfort from this clarification, as Lynch says: “[Rose’s] obvious contentment at the end of the cycle, her sense of forgiveness and well-being, *can* be traced back to her relation to Hanratty as a suggestively reifying place of origin” (*One* 181). But such comfort and forgiveness come out of her wanderings in the city, to find her way back

to her self in and as a part of Hanratty.

II.

Joyce Carol Oates has said of her 1986 story cycle, *Marya: A Life*, that it is perhaps the most personal of her fictions.¹¹ Since its publication, however, the cycle¹² has received no

¹¹ In her Preface to the cycle, she writes:

Marya: A Life will very likely remain the most ‘personal’ of my novels (along with a novel-in-progress called *The Green Island*) though it is not, in the strictest sense, autobiographical. It contains some autobiographical material, particularly in its opening sections, and it is set, for the most part, in places identical with or closely resembling places I have lived—Innisfail and its surrounding countryside are akin to Lockport, New York, and its surrounding countryside, where I grew up; Port Oriskany shares some characteristics with Syracuse, New York, where I went to college—but I am not Marya Knauer (who stopped writing fiction because it disturbed her too deeply) and Marya is surely not I (who have been spared Marya’s grimmer experiences with men). Though her author’s feelings toward her are sisterly, if at times ambivalent, I don’t believe that Marya represents me any more than do several of my female characters of recent novels—Sheila Trask, for instance, of *Solstice*, or Deirdre of the *Spirits of A Bloodmoor Romance*; or even the unregenerate murderess Perdita of *Mysteries of Winterthurn*. What we have in common, I’d guess, is that we aren’t always easy to like. Our femaleness seems to exclude femininity.

Marya was an extremely difficult novel to write, perhaps because it is both ‘personal’ and ‘fictional.’ Many of Marya’s thoughts and impressions parallel my own at her approximate age but the circumstances that provoke them have been altered, as have most of the characters. To the author, Marya’s mixture of intimacy and strangeness suggests a dream in which the domestic features of one’s life appear side by side with unrecognizable elements; yet, evidently, all constitute a pattern. What is most autobiographical about the novel is its inner kernel of emotion—Marya’s half-conscious and often despairing quest for her own elusive self. Of all my novels *Marya* is the only one I could not approach head-on. I had to write it in self-contained sections, each dealing with a specific phase of

substantial critical attention and next to no minor critical attention, with the only exceptions being Joanne V. Creighton's eight page overview of the work as "essentially a portrait of the artist as a young woman [...]" (*Joyce Carol Oates* 63) and Brenda O. Daly's five page feminist reading of the cycle (130-134). Moreover, *Marya* seems to fall outside the major critical interests applied to Oates' oeuvre—feminist theories, the use and meaningfulness of violence, contemporary American culture, and otherness—as if the cycle does not possess enough of such thematic possibilities for exploration and assessment. In addition, it is my sense that Oates' admission of the greater autobiographical/personal nature of *Marya: A*

Marya's life, and after finishing each of these sections I was determined not to write another—the tension was too great. I worried that I might be trespassing—transgressing?—in some undefined way venturing onto forbidden ground. At least one family secret I had not known, or had not, in any case, known that I knew, was explored in fictional form before it was revealed to me in life, by a relative. But it was not until I wrote the sentence 'Marya, this will cut your life in two' on the novel's final page that I fully understood Marya's story, and was then in a position to begin again and to recast it as a single work of prose fiction. Recalling now how obsessively certain pages of the novel were written and rewritten it seems to me miraculous that the novel was ever completed at all. (Oates, Preface)

¹² As quoted in footnote 11, Oates does indeed call her book a novel. However, the process of writing *Marya*, as the author describes it, points directly to the structure and formula of a story cycle:

I had to write it in *self-contained sections, each dealing with a specific phase of Marya's life [...]*. [I]t was not until I wrote the sentence 'Marya, this will cut your life in two' on the novel's final page that I fully understood Marya's story, and was then in a position *to begin again and to recast it as a single work of prose fiction*. (emphasis mine)

According to Forrest L. Ingram's definitions of the cycle genre, this type of cycle is an "arranged cycle," that is one whose stories the author brings together after they are written in order to juxtapose and associate stories with loose connections (19). Lynch cites Scott's *In the Village of Viger* as another such example of arranged cycle (*One*, 20). Ingram details two other kinds of story cycle, the "composed" (Lynch cites *Sunshine Sketches* to be one such [20]) and the "completed" (19) (Lynch cites *Who Do You Think You Are?* as an example [20]).

Life has (unintentionally) isolated the work as exceptional to her other fictions, the implication being that it might be read for its representation of the author's childhood and artistic/scholarly development as an interesting *Bildungsroman*, but does not lend itself to similar weighty criticism.¹³

Of course, practically speaking, Oates has written so much (many of her critics have complained she writes too much), that it is nearly impossible for everything she has written to be looked at with equal or similar attention. What intrigues me, nevertheless, is that all the major thematic considerations explored by scholars of Oates' fictions (feminist identity, violence, contemporary American culture, otherness) are very much applicable to *Marya*, and that this cycle explores such considerations within two interrelated frameworks: 1. A geographic framework of small town in relation to city and 2. A thematic framework of the American mythos of self-advancement beyond one's home and in the metropolis.¹⁴

Oates' *Marya*, like Munro's *Rose*, escapes from the small town because it is a place that inflicts violence on those it "knows." *Marya* presents the myth of the small town—as the home where one is anchored—in a darkened vision, where one is known in an invasive and threatening way. Hence, *Marya*'s retreat from Innisfail, most inevitably, leads to city life, the centre of anonymity and newness that *Marya* seeks and will use to confirm personal

¹³ Especially for the very popular story *Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?* (originally published in *Epoch* in 1966, then re-published twice thereafter, in Oates' 1970 collection *The Wheel of Love* and in the 1974 collection *Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?: Stories of Young America*).

¹⁴ Which is always an ambiguous experience, as we have seen especially in Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Cheever's *Housebreaker*, but as well as in the Canadian cycles *Who Do You Think You Are?* by Munro and *Sunshine Sketches* by Leacock.

success. And although she fits into the new environment, metropolitan and academic, her acceptance into this environment requires a parallel submersion of her self. Marya is rewarded for her unstinting studiousness and scholarly drive, which go unappreciated and misunderstood at home; yet, she stands out as an anomaly in the masculine and male-dominated arena of the university. She does not flourish as she might have expected after leaving home. As she discovers only at the end, her successful flight from home is one that carries her through her metropolitan life, which she and we come to understand as an excursion: Marya never “lands” in the city but travels through it until she returns home again to rediscover the roots of her self-effacement. In *Marya*, the city is a transitory place to retreat to embryonically and to gestate within until re-birth back home.

Pre-*Marya* criticism relates how the cities of Oates’ fictions (novels and short stories) “are the settings for death, riots, and the violent wreckage of human lives. Her women are victims, raped physically and psychically by both men and the world” (Grant 15). These cities of Oates’ works (which are also said to be one and the same, in each pre-1986 story [24-25]) are

dark, dirty, menacing. Only those too simple or too strong to be destroyed by it can survive; the sensitive, the gentle, the weak are destroyed. Yet there is a strange attraction about the city; people return to it again and again searching for, hoping for community. There is about the depictions of cities in Joyce Carol Oates’ works the subtle but unmistakable suggestion that ultimately the city cannot be escaped. (80)

Pre-*Marya* criticism also emphasizes conflict between Oates' protagonists and patriarchy:

Repeatedly, Oates's people crave an order associated with 'home' and the loving protection of the father. Repeatedly, this conflicts with a yearning for the 'road' and freedom from the father. And both are expressions of a struggle to control their own lives against the forces of 'accident,' circumstances, other people. (Fossum 286)

Thus, the violence portrayed in the author's oeuvre (an aspect of her fiction once much-lamented by her readers and critics,¹⁵ has been read as tightly entangled in the complexities of the relationships between home, the father, and the city. And, in sum, these three symbolic structures have been understood as elemental aspects of the dream and myth of America as illustrated throughout the nation's history (literary, cultural, political):

For most contemporary fictionalists, Americans remain stubbornly caught up in dreams of identity and place;¹⁶ for Oates, ours remains a generation which still seeks "the absolute dream" ([Oates, *The Edge of Impossibility*] 3), and as with the Puritans forsaking their history to journey to a wilderness, our dream must survive within an environment so aggressively materialistic that to assert the primacy of the unquantifiable seems necessarily to end in the Manicheism which has constantly characterized American experience. This

¹⁵ See Oates' "Why Is Your Writing So Violent?" for her response to this critique.

¹⁶ Compare this to Lynch's explication that "the enduring achievements of Canadian writers in the [story cycle] form can be shown to say much about our [Canada's] relations to place and identity, and about the interdependence of the two in Canadian literature culture" (*One* 4).

tension between materialism and dream is crucial to the mythos of Oates's work. (Waller 28)

For most of Oates' work, America is a nation fraught with the turmoil and violence with which it strives to discover and establish its dream. In *Marya*, the city, with *Marya* in it, performs a role slightly and significantly different.

Although *Marya* arguably "yearns for the road" and leaves her hometown to find something apart from Innisfail in the city, the cycle turns the standard reading of Oates' other works of fiction on its head. For one, *Marya*'s small-town home is the setting for much of the blunt violence in the cycle. Their father dead before *Marya* is nine years old (he is beaten to death, apparently for his involvement in union activity at the local mine [12, 29-30]), *Marya* and her brother are subsequently abandoned by their hard and neglectful mother to be raised by their paternal uncle and his wife (Chapter 12). Treated throughout her adolescence as a nuisance in their household, *Marya* is subject to her aunt's constant nagging and emotional coldness. Further, she is habitually sexually assaulted by their son, her older male cousin, until he grows old enough to engage in sexual relations with girls his age (17-18, 23); his mother refuses to acknowledge the severity of her son's abusive behaviour (17). In addition, outside the family sphere, in grade school the older children harass and beat up on her "because she was one of the younger children and a girl" (24, 25-26). In high school, she is nearly group-raped by the same classmates who also forcibly cut her long hair during a farewell party hosted in her honour (128-129).

Evidently, the small town as *Marya*'s place of origins suggests little that is homey. Innisfail is not the small town that the national mythology of such a place paints;

dysfunction, betrayal, and abandonment are its hallmarks.¹⁷ More specifically, from the multi-faceted violence of the hometown directed towards Marya, Oates draws particular association between the small town and female weakness and failure: The offenses against her protagonist can be categorized under hurtful and neglectful mother-figures, misogyny, rape and sexual abuse, and distrust and dislike of independent (“unfeminine”) women such as Marya. We might be led to view Innisfail as representative, in part, of an (abusive) male-dominated environment, but I would argue that *Marya* is actually focussed on the failure of the maternal home and family. It is the failure and weakness of women in the face of male abuse that most deeply wounds Marya as a child and adolescent.¹⁸ And later, as we shall see, Marya’s venture to the city is not a search for the protection of the father, as we might be led to suspect, but a search for the absent mother. Her city journey is indeed marked predominantly by male relationships (that do not last); however, her story represents a circle around home and the failed mother, a search for the mother, and a final return to her.¹⁹

¹⁷ At least to me, it seems that Oates intentionally included “fail” in her name for this fictional town.

¹⁸ Marya’s one strike against her cousin Lee occurs in Chapter 2, when she furtively knocks out the jack elevating a vehicle which Lee is repairing; he suffers a leg-break (40-43). Marya is only temporarily, and pathetically, revenged: “*How do you like it now pig pig pig pig pig pig*. Marya backed away slowly. She didn’t want Lee to open his eyes and see her. [...] *Pig pig pig pig pig pig*” (43). Instead of affording her retributive triumph (and the reader catharsis), the revengeful act more deeply depicts the young girl’s psychological trauma.

¹⁹ Daly makes similar comments regarding Oates’ female protagonists and their relationships with their mothers:

Oates creates unusual communal narrators, women who speak for a feminist ‘we.’ In these novels of the 1980s [...] many of these daughters return, usually in midlife, to establish relationships with their devalued mothers. In

At one level, perverse and abusive familial relations in Marya's life deprive the small town of the virtues its national mythological identity constructs. On another, Marya's experiences illustrate these same constructs, but in a dark light. That is, Innisfail has a stubbornly lasting influence on Marya because, as Marya herself comes to realize, the Innisfail-as-home-as-mother dynamic is one she longs for. Through Marya's projected journey from small town to city and back again, the story assumes for the reader the importance and significance of home-as-mother, drawing that equation against the backdrop of the city, of Marya's city life. Her move to the city as a method of physical retreat from Innisfail seems a "natural" decision for Marya since Oates contextualizes her character in the failure of home. Thus, evidently, Marya's retreat to the city is in direct response to her small-town upbringing, is shaped by it, and ultimately brings her back home. Of course, Marya is not aware at the onset of her journey of the circular movement it will take. Nor is she aware of the fruitful implications of her emotional/mental coping strategy for protecting herself against the violence of her home.

almost every novel of this decade, a female protagonist finds that in order to redefine herself in relationship to a community, she must return to the past, especially her maternal past. (125)

Because daughters associate mothers with the vulnerabilities of the body, during adolescence they often disavow them, choosing to ally themselves with fathers who are associated with the supposedly superior aspects of 'culture.' Inevitably, however, these same daughters discover the need to reclaim their matrilineal inheritance. (126)

Daly's literary analysis corresponds with historian Page Smith's investigation into the "maternalization" of the twentieth-century American small town:

If the mother was the central, loving, inspiring, life-giving figure of the home, mother and town merged in the depths of the psyche. The yearning for the security and the love of the mother was part of and fused with the search for the meaning of the town. (216-217)

Marya's coping strategy for protecting herself against the violence (even before she leaves for the city) speaks to those things that matter most to her—mother, family, home—but are not provided. Wounded by those closest to her by virtue of relation, Marya retreats emotionally and mentally by learning to find comfort in being “*not-there*.”

She slipped away, she was there but not there, *not-there* became a place familiar to her. [...] Sometimes it had actual space like a hollow space she could curve into. [...] She couldn't be surprised and she couldn't be hurt [...].
[...] [S]he could do anything in safety being *not-there*. (24)

Indeed, removing herself from her environment to avoid further emotional and mental damage is, if an alarming state of mind, a natural and expected reaction, especially for a young girl. Marya also links her not-there state to what she perceives city life might offer her. For example, one late afternoon, off to see a movie in downtown Innisfail, Marya is excited by her walk alone on Main Street:

This is the afternoon she decides to skip supper, goes to the Royalton to see a movie. Her senses are aroused, her mood so jangled—what else can she do? She wants something extreme. Glamorous, garish. Fated. Cruel. [...] No one knows her and she knows no one; by chance she doesn't even glimpse a familiar face; she might be in a distant city and not Innisfail at all—a place of infinite possibility, of unguessed-at riches. It is so simple, Marya thinks, her heart swelling with certitude, she *is* happy; she *is* blessed. But she will be required to leave Innisfail to realize it. (91-92)

Similar to the anonymity that Elmer Cowley of “Queer” (in Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*)

longs for in his understanding of the myth of the metropolis,²⁰ Marya sees potential in anonymity, which for her is associated more closely with a condition of being personally unknown to others than with merely being anonymous. As she sees it, anonymity allows for new beginnings—“of infinite possibility, of unguessed-at riches”—detached from the personal violence of home, where those who know her best consistently abuse their knowledge of her.²¹

Just as her positive image of the city as an expansive and freeing place is a response to the condition of her hometown and in keeping with the myth of the American Dream, her naiveté and drama point up well her vulnerability to the rude awakenings that city life will present to her. Creighton reports that the “characteristic Oatesian woman” as the unliberated heroine “sits around waiting for something to happen, or builds an impenetrable wall around the self so that nothing can happen [...]” (“Unliberated Women” 156). But, with the knowledge of how Marya’s story plays out—and since we are dealing here with a story cycle that plays with and enhances images and themes from one story to the next—we recognize the not-there state as an image of the womb. Marya’s psychological hiding place is an evocative maternal space in which she is “there” yet unseen in a space “she could

²⁰ “‘I’ll be like other people’” (*Winesburg* 178); in the city, he “would be indistinguishable. Then he could laugh and talk. He would no longer be queer and would make friends. Life would begin to have warmth and meaning for him as it had for others” (184).

²¹The central question to Munro’s cycle, “who do you think you are?” compares well to the statement “I know you” of Oates’ cycle. Oates has reviewed a number of Munro’s own works of fiction and the parallels between *Marya* and *Who?* are many; a future study worth pursuing.

curve into.”²² Her self-effacement, although it speaks first of serious psychological distress, becomes more clearly and strongly (as the story progresses) a desire to return to the security of her mother, to re-establish her sense of home after having lost the original. Upon high school graduation, she sets herself on a future path that would encourage the development of an unemotional, unsentimental, and detached personality: “Since the day after the [high school] going-away party, Marya had declared herself inviolable—autonomous—entirely self-sufficient” (207). Yet, she (as with the reader, likely) mistakenly identifies her desire to be not-there with (questionable) self-sufficiency when, as we learn progressively through the cycle’s chapters, she is in fact returning to the mother upon whom her self-identity greatly depends and by whom she is defined.

To illustrate further the ambiguities of the long passage quoted above that introduces Marya’s not-there-ness (pages 91-92), it is worth parsing briefly the narrative voices used. Within the lines, the narrator’s voice intermingles with Marya’s in indirect discourse. Thus, who speaks the final sentence can be doubly understood. It might be Marya or the narrator. If it is Marya who claims confidently “she *is* happy, she *is* blessed,” then the term “realize” refers to future fulfilment: Marya understands she must leave Innisfail in order to fulfill her potential. If it is the narrator who assures the reader of Marya’s giftedness, then the final words of that paragraph are prophetic ones suggesting that moving to the city is a necessary move and escape: She must leave her hometown to

²² Although *Marya*’s publication date follows the United States Supreme Court’s 1973 decision in *Roe vs Wade*, the image of the womb in the cycle is nonetheless one that evokes safety. Given the millions of abortions that followed *Roe vs Wade*, it is now perhaps a poignant image of safety decisively lost.

understand her giftedness. Furthermore, depending on whether one is a first-time or serial reader of *Marya*, the meaningfulness of Marya's move to the city is differently understood. That is, the first-time reader understands it is within metropolitan borders that Marya will find happiness. For the second- (or third-) time reader, it becomes clear that the city is the catalyst for Marya's recovery of her self and home. Marya's city life, in this dynamic, provides the temporal and physical distance helpful to Marya's recovery—an interpretation that best fits Marya's situation if we understand her not-there state as fetal. In any case, the total multi-levelled ambiguity of these lines confirms the complexity of the small town/city construct in *Marya* as a cycle about the self and home.

As we have discerned about *Marya*, the cycle links mother with home, and thus we understand the small town as a necessary connector for self-understanding and -articulation. It is hence fitting that, not knowing any home or family as centres of meaningful self-acknowledgment while growing up, for Marya, being “known” is threatening. The phrase “I know you!” is reiterated throughout the cycle, and is often used as an accusation against Marya's attempt to have an un-knowable self. It originates (naturally enough) with her mother Vera, who threatens her daughter with the phrase: ““You *do* love me—you're just the same as me—I know you!”” (8). At face value, her mother's “I know you!” would offer, in another context, security during a deeply troubling period in Marya's young life. But instead, its purpose is to destabilize Marya's sense of autonomy, ringing as it does with accusations and assumptions. Moreover, Marya learns from Vera that being known is associated with possessive and obligatory love forced upon the self; thus, knowing is

strongly attached to loss of self. Traumatized by her mother's abandonment of her, Marya thereafter perceives relationships that propose familiarity to mean betrayal. Made manifest by her mother, the phrase "I know you" becomes a ghost that haunts Marya throughout her city life and chases her back home.²³

If Marya's life in the city is a return-trip home, then it is a long one that takes over two decades and involves a series of relationships, each of which finishes painfully. Metaphorically, Marya's (re)birth takes time as the painful end of each personal relationship brings her closer to her mother. Her mental and physical collapse at the end of her final relationship is a medical breakdown, at one level, but also metaphorically it is the birthing that brings her to realize her long-felt need to find her mother and the maternal home. In the small town/city pairing of this cycle, the city is arguably an appropriate site for breakdown, given its actual distance from home as well as the opportunity it provides Marya for living "anonymously." *Marya* is in keeping, in part, with the American myth that identifies the city as the place for self-advancement, but reveals the city as the transient yet unaltering place, the small town as the permanent yet malleable place. In regards to the gendering of the two places, the cycle suggests that if the small town is the maternal home (albeit a failed one), the city is the paternal zone that provides passage and transformation by failing, paradoxically, to take in and sustain the individual.

²³ Vera Knauer's first name, in Latin as well as in Hebrew, means "truth;" in Russian, it means "faith" or "belief." Vera's married name, Knauer, might also be sounded out as "know her." The etymologies of Vera's name play well into her role of absent mother and into Marya's association of Innisfail as home and its strong connection to her mother. Later, we will learn that Marya finds her mother in a town called New Canaan (309), a name that is evocative of Marya's self-understanding at the end of the cycle.

When Marya enters graduate studies (at the fictional state University of New York at Port Oriskany), she becomes the focus of her graduate director's attention. Marya is surprised and intimidated by Maximilian Fein's advances; for, at this time, she in fact considers herself "genderless, just as knowledge itself was genderless; just as the scholarly life was genderless. In truth she had learned in graduate school to think of *herself* scarcely at all—she was too absorbed in her work" (186). Her school setting seems like an ideal environment for her genderless acquisition because it "sheltered persons like herself: brilliant, she might have boasted, and genderless [...]" (191). Before discovering Maximilian's affection for her, she projects herself, especially to men, as "a nun in her own way," "being shrewd as well as puritanical" (207). At first routinely singled out by her supervisor in class and in group discussions, their affair begins when Maximilian asks Marya to house-sit while he and his wife are away, and leaves a notes for her to find. It reads:

If you hold this in your hand, if you have ventured so far [she finds the note in their bedroom bureau], I think it futile for us to keep up certain pretenses. I know you—I seem to have recognized you from the first—do not be frightened, my dear (do not be less brazen) if I shortly make my claim upon you. (201)

Later, frightened and unsure, Marya asks Maximilian what he wants of her, to which he gives an ominous reply: "“Oh—everything!”" (207).

Speaking, as it were, those magic words "I know you," and coupling them with emotional and physical affection, Maximilian creates a concoction irresistible to the

abandoned child Marya. By isolating her as his special student and consequently imposing personal obligations on her, Maximilian taps into the needs that originally created Marya's not-there-ness. But he mistakes her embryonic condition for something else. Frustrated by her reticence to speak about herself—in her emotional craving and confusion, she says to him, “Apart from you, [...] there is nothing” (214)—he asks her, ““Are you ageless, then? [...] You sometimes behave as if you were. As if your own self, your human self, were temporarily in abeyance”” (214). He misidentifies her “abeyance” as unchangeableness when it is more appropriately her fetal condition that Marya is exhibiting. Marya, in her city career, has not entered a state of timelessness in her escape and detachment from home; instead, as we know, she has returned to a state of yet-unknown-ness in order to find herself—her home and her mother—again.

Mixed with Marya's self-abnegation in her affair with Maximilian is her state of not-there-ness, although Marya, too, seems to confuse the latter with the former, as if the second were merely a continuation or version of the first state. She is aware that Maximilian “worship[s] if not precisely love[s]” “a Marya not herself, a fictitious Marya” (210). The figure that he sees in her is not one she herself recognizes: He “charts an iconography [onto her body] altogether new to Marya herself;” “She reminds him, he says, of certain baroque madonnas [...]” (210). His Marya-madonna is a figure of service and meekness, qualities of a different vision of nun-like virtues that do not correspond with Marya's independence and ambitious drive. Yet, the experience of being worshipped (if not exactly loved) while still maintaining an unknown self is (at first) an ideal situation for Marya. She initially takes “delight” in “being confronted with a Marya not herself [...]”

(210) because it affords her the affection she craves without having to abandon her “real” self to a lover who wants “everything” from her (we are strongly reminded of Rose’s attachment to her fiancé’s worshipfulness).

However, Marya eventually and painfully confronts the obvious difficulty arising from trying to keep up such a personal disjunction between two Maryas. In the middle of their relationship, Marya experiences serious psychological distress: “These days, these weeks,” she says to herself, “I am in control of the situation. I am in control, in control, of the situation” (219). The repetition of “in control,” of course, points up a loss of control as she finds herself collapsing under the pressure, losing mental lucidity and succumbing to nightmarish visions (229). Interestingly, as Marya caves under the impossible task of satisfying both Maximilian’s and her own desires, she turns her emotional craving towards Mrs. Else Fein. Her interest is sparked by curiosity (Else is a sort of recluse) and guilt (because of her adultery), but also, we might infer, by the fact of Else’s potential motherly role. When Marya first becomes seriously anxious about the bond between herself and Maximilian, she composes an imaginative letter to Else that demonstrates some confusion of desire and object:

Dear Else Fein, Marya composes, You must know by now that your husband no longer loves you, you must know that ... he loves... Marya begins again:
Dear Mrs. Fein, you must know.... Her breath catches in her throat, she turns her head, tries to force herself awake. Dear Mrs. Fein, Don’t you know how he loves me...adores *me*... don’t you know me, Marya...am I not beautiful to you too...am I not your Marya, your Marya... (221)

As her relationship with her supervisor becomes more strained, she increasingly and obsessively composes letters to Else (either imaginatively or on paper, though Else never receives the messages) until she transfers her infatuation with Maximilian over to Else. She contemplates at one point, “[o]ne day Else Fein will come to me and make her own claim,” a phrase that, even within the sardonic tone, echoes her lover’s hidden letter in the bedroom bureau (222).

Marya demonstrates a desire to be understood by Else, whose first name might suggest the idea of an “other.”²⁴ In the final stages of her interaction with the Feins, Marya comes closer to realizing her need for maternal connection in the figure of Else. At the conclusion of Chapter 7, as Else drives her to the hospital where Maximilian is dying (he suffers a fatal cerebral haemorrhage), Marya takes childlike comfort in being with Else, who is implicitly portrayed as a protective, guiding figure:

None of this could be happening, yet it was happening with the
effortlessness of a dream. Or was it in fact far less strenuous than a dream....
The two of them making their way through the twilight of a winter morning,
in a sleigh of some kind, or was it a boat, a little blue boat, pushing its way
bravely forward. She didn’t know their destination. She had not been told.
She shut her eyes and made her secret wish: that their journey would never
end. (231-232)

²⁴ Her name is Hebrew for “God’s promise,” a definition which complements Marya’s name association with Mary which means “wished-for child.” Maximilian and Else had lost their first and only daughter in an accident when the girl was 3 years old. There is suggestion that Maximilian might have been attracted to Marya initially because of her physical resemblance to his dead daughter (199, 222).

Her dream in Else's car hints at her longing for maternal care and security, characterized in a child's story of a little girl being taken away by a mother-figure to a better place. We note as well that it is the journey with Else that pleases Marya. Being Maximilian's lover was not a satisfying end-point in her city life venture; it was a distraction that "cracked" her in two, a splitting of herself which Else, as a maternally healing and self-recalling figure, offers to rejoin.

Marya seems to reach a moment of epiphany at this stage of her life, having lost a lover for whom she was ready to abandon her self and then finding re-direction when she realizes her yearning for mother, through her open-hearted feelings of need when she is comforted by Else. Thereafter, Marya's academic success increases dramatically in the last three chapters of the cycle. She gains employment at a good college, being a rare female assigned an assistant professorship there. Her academic fame grows as her teaching and teacher-student rapport are positively established, all before she is thirty years old. Nevertheless, Marya strives to coordinate her image of success and confidence with her concerns and misgivings about her internal self-image. Feeling as if her outer self (as she supposes others to perceive of her) is in disjunction with her inner self, she worries why the two do not work in equilibrium. The purpose of these last few stories before her trip home is to give Marya the opportunity to return to Innisfail not from metropolitan failure but through rebirth from unknownness to Vera.²⁵

²⁵ I will move rather quickly through these stories. Marya's relationship with Maximilian takes up the greater part of "part two" of *Marya: A Life*, which includes her city and academic life, and resonates most strongly with the protagonist's struggles

For example, in Chapter 8, as a new professor happy in her role and work, wanting to understand herself as a successful academic, Marya makes efforts to perceive herself as such:

regarding her relationship with Vera. Of the other chapters, Mary Gordon, in her 1986 review of the cycle, writes of possible literary reasons for focussing on the first and second parts of the cycle:

When Marya's life materially improves [(post-Innisfail)], the novel grows weaker. This is because its strength emanates from the brilliance of Miss Oates's descriptions of objects and place. Her instinct for the telling physical detail is unerring [...]. But when Marya prospers, Miss Oates grows abstract. Her moving away from the strongly observed physical detail occurs, I believe, for two reasons. The first is that the objects of middle-class and academic life don't tell the way the objects of the working class do, and are therefore of less use to a writer. They are things, merely, and not portents. [...] Or perhaps it is that all readers of serious novels are, by the very fact of their reading, middle class; even if we, like the child Marya and her brother, are eating chocolate-covered peanut sticks, we like to think of them as exotica; their potency as symbols increases as our distance from them grows.

But the second reason for Miss Oates's shift of vision is more serious in its consequences for the novel. Marya's life is marked by the presence in it of [...] rescuing men, all of whom die while she is involved with them. [...] In all other contexts cynical, resentful, punitive and closed, Marya blossoms inexplicably in the presence of mentors, and Miss Oates's prose falters. [...] Women with Marya's history of being sexually abused do not fall happily into the arms of treasuring, appreciative lovers, and as if Miss Oates knows that, she races through the sections of the novel having to do with the men, unbalancing her structure. This is particularly true in the section that has to do with Marya's life as a journalist after her lover's death. We experience another lurch when Marya suddenly decides to find her mother. This decision is a wise one on Miss Oates's part, but she should have prepared her ground more carefully. The book's ending, however, is a marvelous, elliptical return to her hometown, Innisfail, transformed now by shopping-mall chic. (n.p)

I take a small exception to Gordon's critique here, namely that the supposed "weakness" of the city chapters, and especially in Chapter 10, might very well be intentional. That is (as we find in the middle chapters of Munro's *Who?*), the abstraction and lurching of these middle chapters might be part of Oates' literary technique to emphasize how Marya's not-thereness, exercised during her city-life, removes her self from even readerly closeness.

She was no madonna now, no somber *mater dolorosa* waiting inside a gilt frame to be adored; she was an Amazon of a sort, a warrior woman, making her own way, confident and assured... or so it seemed. She regarded herself in the mirror with critical satisfaction. Yes. Good. That was her *self*—the way she was turning out—the way in which her fleshly destiny led. (248)

The qualifier “or so it seemed” as well as the adverbial “fleshly destiny” collapse Marya’s confidence into appearances, both in terms of “seems to be” as well as Marya’s outward image and style.

The qualification of Marya’s confidence is highlighted by her experiences of the harassment by her office building’s janitor, Sylvester. By making crooked her wall hangings, leaving cigarette ashes in her plant pots, neglecting to flush the toilet in her office washroom after using it, by shuffling and rearranging her desk papers, Sylvester successfully disturbs Marya’s contentment. Continually discovering new signs of Sylvester’s “mark” (235) in her office, Marya wonders “like any victim,” “why me, why *me?*—why *me* at this time in my life?” (235). Later she asks herself, “Had she come so far (from Innisfail, from the Canal Road, from the tarpaper shanty of a house near Shaheen Falls) to be persecuted by a stranger...? She was incredulous, baffled. Then she was angry. Then frightened” (237). Her turmoil over Sylvester’s incomprehensible harassment confirms for the reader that “that” is not her “self,” not as she wishes to enjoy such condition and status, since she identifies her academic position against her Innisfail past. At the conclusion of the chapter, the narrator suggests that already, even as Marya is just offered a three-year extension of her teaching contract as well as a raise, the young

woman's stability is not as assured as Marya would like:

Sylvester with his blood-threaded gaze, his puckered smile, the caressing lilt to his voice. Marya's colleagues, Marya's many students. She feels how they are watching her, observing closely, waiting. For she was a woman, she *must* weaken under the strain.... (250)

Commingle with the feminist interests of the story, Marya's paranoia points up not only the sexual (and racial) politics of her generation but also the enduring burden of the past that she carries with her.

In Chapter 9, Marya befriends a colleague, Gregory, during a time when the department for which they both work is considering hiring one of many assistant professors. During a shared bike-ride taken while they await news regarding their department's decision, Marya risks physically more than she is capable of, losing control of her bike and finally falling off:

With a thrill of satisfaction she knew she was speeding faster than she'd ever sped before; and accelerating every second. Certain childhood presences observed her, forced to marvel. Her cousin Lee. The boys at the country school. [...] she'd been so frightened of them at one time, and now.... Now you can all go to hell, she thought. How wild this ride, this long downhill plunge! Marya had never experienced anything quite like it. [...] I can't stop, Marya thought. This speed. This flight. I can't stop except to die. [...] Then it was over. The flight was over. Marya crawled away from the overturned bicycle amid old beer cans, broken glass, tall oil-stained grasses. (264-265)

Marya's wild downhill bike-ride and injurious fall are also appropriately read metaphorically: She cannot stop "this wild ride" of her life away from Innisfail until she is stopped by the "deadweight" of her mother, who waits ahead of her. The bike-ride foreshadows her personal collapse at the end of Chapter 10 and return home. What's more, the debris she careens into is reminiscent of the major road in Innisfail—Canal Road—that is segmented by patches of wildlife as well as garbage (18), and perhaps of even the junk-car lot kept by her uncle where she was sexually assaulted by her cousin Lee (21-23). That she at all imaginatively recalls childhood bullies during this prideful moment already points up Marya's constant struggle to force herself to believe in the outward image of confidence and success that she has constructed even as her internal struggles chip away at that image. Losing control during an emotionally elated moment of pride and confidence only to be wounded amidst the kind of refuse she is proud to have escaped is not only a blow to Marya's pride but undermines any sense she might have of being above and beyond her small-town roots. And finally, Marya's feeling of elation during a bike-ride, imaginatively placing herself in the admiring gazes of her childhood bullies, and finally falling shamefacedly, sum up a rather childish scenario: Marya has yet to grow up into the image of the woman she has long dreamed of. Her successes to date have not provided it.

Chapter 10 leaps from Marya's tenured professorship at the college (she was granted the permanent position) to her rather quick move into other professional, non-academic work, following in the footsteps of her last lover, Eric Nichols. The penultimate chapter accomplishes many things in its treatment of the development of Marya's personal and professional interests, often intermingled. Through its "lurching" method (see the quote

from Mary Gordon's review in the last footnote, above), frequent flashbacks, and disjointed chronology, we are to understand that Marya faces a turning point here. In present-tense, Chapter 10 revolves around Marya's attendance at a conference on torture; in past-tense, the chapter moves away from and back again to the story of her relationship with Eric. Intermingled with these two narratives are many alternating paragraphs on Marya's "hysterical [psychosomatic] pregnanc[y]" (275), her philosophical musings, re-acquaintanceship with an old college friend, cottage retreats, and a growing awareness that all is not right with her.

It is during this period of her life that, for the first time, she confesses to herself that "[s]he only thought of her mother (even the expression "mother" was forced) in weak moods when she clearly wasn't herself. These days, Marya thought, she often wasn't herself" (293). The reader might understand more about Marya than she herself understands: When she feels most unlike herself, she is closest to understanding her embryonic state. After Eric's death (280-281), her physical fall of the previous chapter escalates into a real physical and mental breakdown:

She was beginning to feel ill. It was futile to think otherwise. Her skin felt clammy, her heart beat erratically, waves of dizziness rose and fell and rose again.... I can't break down, Marya thought, knowing she was breaking down [...]. (284)

Shortly after admitting that she is often not herself, Marya contemplates the philosophical question of being versus doing, thus:

In classic habits of thinking, essence preceded existence: what one *does*

follows from what one *is*. In America, however, the reverse seemed more likely, and more rewarding: what one *is* follows directly from what one *does* [...]. So Marya immersed herself in activities. (293-294)

Yet, both considerations are true of herself. Where, and who, Marya comes from, as we have thoroughly seen, largely explains and defines what Marya has done in her city life. Busying herself with activities might be a means of distraction from the thoughts of her mother that are disrupting her supposed stability. But the method is temporary, even damaging, leading to a total disruption of her efforts to be from what she does, ignoring the self that comes from her past.

Marya's return to Innisfail in Chapter 11 seems like the natural consequence of her breakdown. For, it instigates her break through her not-there-ness into acknowledgment of her need to find Vera. Yet, ten pages follow the breakdown, a spacing that creates an anti-climactic feel to the event and, more significantly, disconnects the breakdown from her trip back home. Oates' decision not to plot the breakdown of Chapter 10 in a chronologically linear movement towards Marya's return to Innisfail fits the overall story's cyclical structure. Chapter 10 reads as a short story that has echoes in and connections to Chapter 11, but their separation allows each to stand on its own. Furthermore, the narrative upheaval of Chapter 10 accentuates how focussed the last chapter is on Marya's relationship with mother and home. In this story (which can be divided in three parts), Marya makes independent concerted (yet unsuccessful) efforts to locate her mother, returns to Innisfail for an extended visit (for the first time since leaving for university), and then

locates her mother with the help of her Aunt Wilma. By framing Marya's visit to Innisfail with her attempts to find Vera, Oates places strong connections between Vera, Innisfail, and Marya's attachment to both mother and home.

Arguably, Marya's breakdown gives fuel to her search since her search is described as having urgency, as if Marya has come to a critical point in her life:

Casually, betraying no emotion, as if she were merely assembling ideas and theories and 'interesting' stories, Marya made inquiries about adoption [...] among people she knew. [...] The subject was painful, disagreeable, why was Marya so curious...? 'I suppose because time is running out,' Marya said. (300)

Although the reason for Marya's worry about time running out might be practical—her mother is getting old—generally it suggests that her ability to re-connect with the truth(s) of her childhood is a passing opportunity she fears she might miss. The issue of time, but particularly of the past's relationship to the present, becomes a thematic reference for all of Marya's activities in Chapter 11. For example, expecting a response from the personal ads she places in newspapers, asking for information regarding Vera, Marya reflects, “[p]erhaps she was only eight years old after all—perhaps not that much time had elapsed” (302). At the beginning of her extended visit to Innisfail (her first since leaving twenty-eight years ago), she tells herself “that nothing had greatly changed [in the town]. And she did belong here, as much as she belonged anywhere” (304). Later, however, after observing the modern changes to the small town, she wonders “now [that] everything was so jumbled, so comically rearranged, how could she locate herself in it...?” (306); “Marya felt herself a

time traveler, being driven along Innisfail's almost unrecognizable Main Street" (307); she contemplates, "Already the past is lost territory, it can't be entered" (307). Marya's sense of belonging at the beginning of her visit is in response to the new familiarity she immediately feels with her family, until then estranged. Her subsequent sense of alienation is in response to the physical changes of the landscape that have altered her childhood environment.

It might seem ironic that Marya would express distress regarding her inability to recognize the landmarks of her childhood in the face of the new landscape but be more at ease within the family circle, itself altered almost beyond recognition: "Wilma wasn't the right person. Wilma stood in her place but she wasn't the right person" (304). However, the apparent confusion indicates that Marya has come out of her not-there-ness state in opening herself to such feelings associated with "home." She is pleased by the new treatment she receives from her aunt and uncle, by her easeful entry into the family gossip and goings-on, because that is what she has always wanted; she is made to feel "at home." She feels distress over the newness of the town because it does not resemble home. Despite her musing about the impenetrability of the past, this homecoming establishes for Marya a re-beginning into the territory of the past, not just physical, although it begins at that level, but personal as well. She conducts a close-up observation of the place that she believed she had escaped, and ironically confirms that she had not during all the years in the city: She was and continues to be affected by Innisfail, unpleasantly and shockingly, still at odds with the place, still needing it in order to understand herself.

Notably, it is Wilma who tells Marya where Vera lives, and she is able to tell Marya because her niece extends her visit home long enough for them to find time to discuss the

past (309). Moreover, and strikingly, Marya composes and sends her letter to Vera from New York, not from Innisfail. Oates writes quite deliberately that, after learning from Wilma of Vera's whereabouts, Marya "went *home*, back to her apartment in New York City and waited a few days...and composed a letter..." (309 emphasis mine). It is to the city, again, that Marya retreats to work out matters of self and discovery. The city provides Marya with safety in distance from home, that place of pain and of longing. Furthermore, on reading her own address on the envelope, Marya notes that the penmanship was "a handwriting that belonged to her mother, a handwriting she did not recognize" (310). The observation denotes, at long last, difference between mother and daughter. Marya is not "just like" her mother, after all, and as the daughter does not know the mother, nor can the mother know (any longer) the daughter. The physical resemblances Marya does recognize in the photograph that Vera sends her—"the snapshot showed a middle-aged woman with stiff gray hair, shadowed eyes, a taut suspicious expression, strong facial bones. Marya's own cheekbones and nose. Her eyes" (310)—reflects the strangeness of home for Marya. The face is familiar, but the person is not: "Marya went to the window, holding the snapshot to the light, and stared and stared, waiting for the face to shift into perfect focus" (310). Marya won't see the face in right focus until she meets Vera in person, but her ocular effort to "see" Vera through this photograph signifies Marya's personal struggles to understand this woman who has marked the daughter's entire life career since her abandonment. The blurry photograph itself signifies the impossibility of fully knowing "self," one's own or an other's.

It is no wonder that Vera's letter occasions Marya's feeling that "a dream secret and

prized in her soul had blossomed outward, taking its place, asserting its integrity, in the world....” (310). Creighton mildly worries that “Oates’s understanding of Marya perhaps exceeds the reader’s. The novel trails off at the end without providing a clear final portrait of Marya” (*Joyce Carol Oates* 69). Creighton’s readerly concern actually speaks to the cycle’s central interest, just as in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, in the creation of self and in the self’s relationship to others, especially in relation to home. Oates is not concerned with providing a clear portrait of Marya because the protagonist’s story, as carried through the eleven chapters of *Marya: A Life*, revolves around a constant querying of the self and the selves of others as they take part in formulating one’s own. “*A Life*” might refer to Marya as one person, but it might also refer to this one life of Marya. In the final paragraphs of the cycle, after she opens her mother’s letter, Marya tells herself, “Marya, this is going to change your life [...]. Marya, this is going to cut your life in two” (310). *Marya: Another Life*, one can muse, follows thereafter.

Munro’s *Who?* and Oates’ *Marya* project post-modernist attitudes towards the nature of identity, how it is formulated and layered, and sometimes how it even eludes the self as it develops. As cycles, their generic make-up complements their multi-dimensional approach to creating character and place, as well as their exploration of how the two are connected. As *Bildungsromane* about women who try to escape their small towns and the associated personal inheritances, the cycles directly and thoroughly explore city life (in comparison to the more referential or partial explorations we find in the earlier cycles studied). The significance of this narrative extension of the city experience is not so much the focus on

the metropolis but the rendering of how the influence of the small town finds its way into the city and pulls its children back home. The metropolises of these cycles are necessary to the fulfilment of the small town's representation but it is the small town that continues to take centre stage.

Conclusion

This study proposes that an investigation into how eight canonical story cycles parse the small-community mythology ultimately brings to light the small community/city dynamic. Further, as we now understand, the small community/city relationship is the foundation of the mythology. However, at least for these cycles, it is the small community that is of first interest, and arguably primary. Thus, since the city is used to understand the small community, my focus in this dissertation has been on the small community and my perspective has been from that place, looking towards the city as it affects the former. One might therefore argue that the dynamism has been lost in my presentation, leaving the city; ~~as it were~~, in the distance and in a manner similarly pursued by previous critics of these cycles. However, the significance I place on the city's role as highlighter of small-community life marks an important difference on how these cycles have been critically treated, that is as "merely" about the small communities in question.

Although the city indeed makes its mark on the small-community characters, its hold on the individual is not stable or stabilizing. The city is the place in which the individual might search for meanings of home, but it remains the small town that has the permanent hold on one's homey identity/identities. Of course, the cycles are not focussed on revamping the small-community mythology. Although we certainly can read levels of regret and anxiety regarding the small community/city relationship—from the perspective of the small community—sometimes deemed too close or uneven (such as in *Sunshine Sketches*), haphazardly approached (in *Viger*, for example), or blindly embraced (in *Winesburg*), the small community, variously represented in these cycles through the

twentieth century, is never the site or source for amending supposedly negative metropolitan realities. And yet, to add to this very complex outline as presented by the literature, personal attachment to small-community life is not a matter of concern in any of the cycles, either. However problematic or contentious in fact, the small community as a concept seems to evade criticism. The tenets of the small-community mythology, presented as questionable and even foregone, seem to be celebrated, however mildly, as encompassing an ideal after all. None of the authors worries about community-enhancing behaviours that respect individuality and promote family links from the past to the future—basically, what we do to create home. Surely, such are to be sought, sustained and maintained. It is the popular belief in the small community as uniquely and exclusively possessing and promoting these behaviours and values—what the mythology ultimately professes—that has inspired these American and Canadian writers.

Thus, because the topic of the small community in the form of the short story cycle has so endured (for example, Robert Eady's *The Octave of All Souls*, published in 2009, is a rendition of the fictional Ontario town of Strathearn), I am persuaded that the small-community mythology—debunked, undercut, questioned, and perhaps always a “straw-man” mythology used to speculate about the value of small communities in the first place—is a formula for exploring a basic human desire for connection among members willing and able to share space, ideology, and goals. That the living embodiment of such idealism in the literature is non-existent (in the time-frame of this study) speaks to the longing for something that is an ideal always in reach, never grasped firmly in hand. Perhaps these cycles are therefore tales of regret that the precepts of the small-community

mythology are not tenable, despite the strong desire for such.

One of the original purposes of this project was to produce a comparative analysis of American and Canadian small-community cycles, to see if there are important differences between their representations of the small community and its relationship to the city. One significant difference stands out: if there is a “returning” to the small community. In the Canadian set, the final stories involve characters physically returning home—Munro’s Rose—or imaginatively—Leacock’s auditor—or psychologically—Scott’s Paul Farlotte and Elliott’s Dan. (Gerald Lynch points out this central aspect of Canadian cycles in his seminal study of the genre, in *One*). In the American set, and especially in the final stories of the cycles, characters do not return home: Jewett’s narrator of *Country* makes it clear that she must return to the city; *Winesburg*’s central character George leaves town by train; and although Marya returns to Innisfail eventually to relocate her mother, it is in the city that she writes her letter and receives her mother’s reply. Cheever’s *Housebreaker*, of course, would be the exception to this standard.

The difference between the two sets might be more apparent in a larger case study, especially since the limited sampling of small-community story cycles of this study does not provide a comprehensive investigation. And, indeed, a more thorough immersion into the small-community mythology within the genre might provide different conclusions. Another consideration would be including small-community story cycles of more diverse representations; for example, more cycles by and about women, by and about other ethnic and religious backgrounds (Thomas King’s *Medicine River* and Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* come readily to mind; I had originally planned to include them in a fifth chapter).

Moreover, I am currently interested in exploring city-based story cycles, to see if and how they might carry over and re-address the concerns expressed in the eight cycles of this project. It is also very possible that city cycles deal with entirely different anxieties unconnected to the lessons we've learnt through these small-community texts. What they might say about the city's identity within the construction of "nation" would also be very interesting.

Having now completed this project, small-community (though predominantly small-town) representations in various media—newspapers, commercials, television sitcoms, movies, and books—attract my attention. It appears to me that the small community as a concept continues to generate a kind of cultural hopefulness for the country at large, American and Canadian. For example, the blurbs on the backside and first page of Stuart McLean's 1992 *Welcome Home: Travels in Smalltown Canada*¹ contain the following words of praise:

Welcome Home is a faithful and often moving depiction of a way of life that once formed the soul of Canadian society...What McLean finds in those widely scattered towns is a common thread, making *Welcome Home* one of the best arguments for national unity yet delivered [...].

MacLeans

Welcome Home is a travel book with a difference. It goes right to the heart of

¹ It's intriguing that McLean writes "Smalltown Canada" without the hyphen I've used throughout the dissertation. However questionably, it more strongly identifies the existence of a kind of Canada to be found therein.

a community [...]. [...] *Welcome Home* makes us realize that no matter where we live we are all smalltown folks at heart.

Gleaner (Fredericton)

Like a tonic for our national ills...as penetrating as the wind on a cold Prairie day.

— *The Vancouver Sun*

Welcome Home brings Canada to life....McLean goes down below the topsoil to show us what feeds the surface. By teaching us to value what we are, where we come from, he ensures our survival [...].

Books in Canada

In the introduction to his book, which is a report of his travels to small towns in select provinces, McLean does something of an about-face:

Once most Canadians lived in small towns. We were a nation of villages. Now nearly all of us [...] live in cities. [...] These days some people are moving back to small towns [...]. [O]ur towns and villages endure. In their 1983 study of small towns and villages in Canada, G. D. Hodge and M. A. Qadeer reported that there were about 9,500 small towns in Canada [...]. [They] also reported that between 1961 and 1981 the population of towns and villages actually increased by one million people [...].

I could happily live in any of the seven places I visited. Yet more than once

in my travels I found myself defending big cities. I'd never want to live in Toronto, people used to say to me. I wouldn't want to live in a place where you don't know your neighbour. But we do know our neighbours, I heard myself saying. Marta who lives next door is from Lithuania. At Christmas she brings things over for my boys. When it snows we try to do her walk before she gets to it. And Sandy on the corner joking with the kids. Bill and Elly phoning to say they have a strawberry pie they want us to have. [...] Eventually I decided that we all live in small towns. Mine happens to be in the heart of a big city. [...] My neighbours, my haunts, my family, my home town. (xvi-xvii)

McLean seems to want to link the experience of small-townness, whatever that might be, with life anywhere in Canada, as if this experience is a universal desire and reality to be found wherever one lives, should one seek it out and create it. Although McLean's accounts of how people live in a small town are not idyllic, and are sometimes dismal, the blurbs express a conviction that McLean's book provides evidence for the value of small-town life for the sake of the nation. I don't know if such blurbs are to be found on the sleeves of metropolitan story cycles—does the city inspire hope for the nation?—but McLean makes the point that small-townness is connecting more or less intimately with people who live closest in proximity, making efforts to generate bonds (via snow-shovelling, food-sharing, and friendly conversation), regardless of the geopolitical mapping of areas as country, or small town, or city. Thus, if we push the logic, this small-townness is geographically unrestricted, more a feeling about place. It is certainly not particularly Canadian, but

believing that it is (as some of the blurbs demonstrate) somehow is supposed to make us feel better about our concerns and anxieties regarding the country at large. But, I believe, we must continue to question why and how that is so if we are better to understand our ideas of home.

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